By Talon and By Tooth: Disaster Culture, American Literary Naturalism, and the Aesthetics of (Dis)integration

Vincent M. Basso
University of New Mexico

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Vincent M. Basso
Candidate

English Language and Literature
Department

This dissertation is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication:

Approved by the Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Jesse Alemán, Chairperson

Dr. Scarlett Higgins

Dr. Jesus Costantino

Dr. Daniel Worden
BY TALON AND BY TOOTH: DISASTER CULTURE, AMERICAN LITERARY NATURALISM, AND THE AESTHETICS OF (DIS)INTEGRATION

by

VINCENT M. BASSO

BA, Creative Writing, College of Santa Fe, 2004
MA, Education, College of Santa Fe, 2005
MFA, University of Southern Maine, 2010
MA, English, University of New Mexico, 2013

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MA English Language and Literature, University of New Mexico, 2013
PhD, English Language and Literature, University of New Mexico, 2019

Abstract

This study demonstrates how American literary naturalism, roughly between 1870-1910, and U.S. print culture more generally, projected an aesthetics of (dis)integration. The term (dis)integration is particularly useful in thinking through the ways traumatic and disintegrative episodes coordinate and integrate U.S. publics. I periodize this work in the turn-of-the-century because it was then that realist literature coincides with the expansion of the national press and new media technologies like photography and film, all of which facilitated the widespread dissemination of crisis narratives, marking the period as the advent of what is popularly referred to as disaster culture in the United States. Through these technologies, I further argue that social and environmental crises underwent a widespread cultural sublimation into entertainment commodities and thereby normalized statist socioeconomic control. I apply the logic of social ecology to critique how U.S. literary naturalism and print culture responded to the issues of poverty, addiction, racial violence, and natural disasters. I contend that literatures oriented to social activism only persevere beyond their own ideological constraints when they resist utopian visions and instead effectuate traumatic ambiguities that allow for the creative re-imagining of social futures. I examine social Darwinism’s influence on societal belief and analyze poverty’s
naturalization and spectacle. I show how realist authors represent what I term negative ecologies, diegetic worlds characterized by replicative systems of social and environmental violence. Turning from impoverishment to addiction, I examine how literary realism and temperance narratives respectively aestheticize negative ecologies and intervene to level social critique against the formation of the addict and the poor as objects of spectatorial derision. I then shift to U.S. lynching atrocities, which provided public violence’s most visualizable expression in an era of developing visual culture. I analyze several lynching case studies and further explore racialized integration and disintegration in African American literature as well as political cartoons, western dime novels, and photography. Lastly, I critique the ways literary naturalism treats natural disasters and how events traditionally accepted as disasters conflate with other social crises to affect the sense of a society in perpetual (dis)integration.
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Introduction

The Aesthetics of (Dis)integration

“By Talon and By Tooth: Disaster Culture, American Literary Naturalism, and the Aesthetics of (Dis)integration” analyzes Progressive Era social formations of dispossession and deviance. Throughout this study, I demonstrate how American literary naturalism, roughly between 1870-1910, and U.S. print culture, generated an aesthetics of (dis)integration. The term (dis)integration helps us think through the ways traumatic and disintegrative episodes coordinate and integrate U.S. publics. I periodize this analysis in the turn-of-the-century because it was then that realist literature coincides with the expansion of the national press and new media technologies like photography and film, all of which facilitated the more widespread dissemination of crisis narratives, marking the period as the advent of what is popularly referred to as disaster culture in the United States. Through these technologies, I further contend that social and environmental crises underwent a widespread cultural sublimation and transformation into entertainment commodities. Working from the conjecture that marginalized groups were often discursively configured as the very subjects used to discipline society and legitimize state power, I interrogate the ways traumatic narratives stage the subject’s disintegration as a means to integrate U.S. publics.

I began this dissertation in a place very different than where I ended up. My prospectus defense, which seems now ages ago, focused exclusively on addiction studies and what I tentatively called an aesthetics of (dis)integration. I have no doubt that if my focus had remained there, I would have completed an adequate study of addiction’s place in U.S. literature. As it turns out, I chose instead to broaden my inquiry and see where it led. I chose this forking path because I wanted to better understand the concept of
(dis)integration that I was playing at and because I wanted my scholarship to better explain my own experience.

I have spent twenty years working in the not-for-profit sector, a career really, in the field of community mental health. The people I served over that time have rarely been, in the parlance of mental health, “the working well.” I’ve seen a lot of poverty, a lot of trauma, and a lot of addiction. No matter the crisis, disorder, or dysfunction, a mental health case manager (I hold degrees neither in counseling nor social work) needs to hold the space for his clients and find the resources and means to stabilize those who, however conditionally, have placed in him their trust. So, in many ways, this project became a means to question what value might lie in our losses and our pain.

Right about here is where my aesthetics of (dis)integration comes in. This term contextualizes the affect of traumatic scenes in which subjects seemingly disintegrate and signifies the integration of the publics who witness such scenes. Shifting my focus to an aesthetic argument helped me find a way to discuss the correlation between subjective and communal experience and how witnessing crises effectuate the structural conditions that either ameliorate or exacerbate social problems. The danger in my shift from a singular thematic focus like addiction is the threat of the project becoming too unwieldy and unfocused. It is a concern I have felt acutely. But, as they say, without risk there is no reward. Having set my course, I worked to bridge theoretical and historical study. I also multiplied my research of one social problem (addiction) times four and set my analysis upon (dis)integration as an aesthetic feature in American literary naturalist depictions of poverty, addiction, racial violence, and disaster.

It is one thing to talk about the culture of fear that seems to drive U.S. society and another thing to live it. About the time I was conducting research into Frank Norris’ *Vandover and the Brute*, I was also working with an individual whose extreme anxiety
seemed to all but paralyze her. The unfounded fear that no matter the day yet another calamity was set to befall her brought disaster culture squarely into focus. I recognized that disaster’s systematization and our saturation in crisis narratives did not emerge in the 1980s, but the 1890s. That connection helped cement my period focus in the Progressive Era United States and in that most crisis laden of forms, the naturalist novel. As I thought through the discursive formations of crises I found my task required analysis of other genre forms, a step allowing me to still place literary naturalism’s exigencies at the fore of my study while further integrating other literary forms like comics, newspapers, and period-specific social theory.

My dissertation then became a means to trace American crisis culture’s origins at the turn-of-the-century and analyze the ways that literary realism used scenes of abjection and violence to effectuate the formation of U.S. publics. One of the fundamental problems that kept resurfacing is how even those works meant to be somehow emancipatory, say, like Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle*, are essentially textual commodities bought and sold as entertainment. Others may disagree with me as to what counts as entertainment, but in my estimation, whether the text is a realist novel, or a temperance narrative, or a newspaper article extolling the virtues of lynching, I assess these forms, whether their intent is the speculation of social futures, didacticism, or coordinating political identity, as trafficking in entertainment.

To return to my central thesis that realist depictions of human precarity bring social conflicts to light and, for better or worse, present counterpoints within the cyclicality of crisis culture, I would underscore that realism often represents utopian democratic visions through tales of suffering and reconstitution. These idealistic texts still cycle crisis, but I argue that it is only through its anti-resolution that realism provides a diegetic departure and opportunity to reimagine the crisis at hand before it resolves and
It is more in moments of crisis than in tidy resolutions that realism gleans the truth it seeks to establish. Working from the Lacanian supposition that even the unconscious is structured like a language, we acknowledge that language constructs much of our individual consciousness and social reality. Part of my project then has been to parse the stories and narrative forms that intersect, refract, and recur within the domains of specific social problems in order to give a sense of the integrative social ecologies that these discursive practices generate.

(Dis)integration is negative, but in the Foucauldian sense of power it is also productive. Scenes of (dis)integration are traumatic and to encounter them is to limn the imaginaries of trauma. How we cope with tragedy determines who we are and the curvatures of our consciousness just as much as it does the political scope of our world. I ask what we can learn from the ontological reformations that pour forth from scenes of (dis)integration? How can suffering help us to recall our love of self and others and in some way repel the anxieties of disaster culture? What social futures do (dis)integrative aesthetics curtail and which does it uphold and how can we tell the difference? How can the contradictions of (dis)integration help us to reimagine our reality and gesture towards a somehow more egalitarian and moral social future?

Realism and (Dis)integration

On March 30th, 1908, the State of New York executed Chester Gillette by electric chair in Auburn Prison. For many, Gillette’s death was justice served. It was Gillette, a young and would be social climber, who on July 11th, 1906 bludgeoned to death Grace Brown, pregnant with his child, on a holiday excursion to Big Moose Lake. The heinousness of Gillette’s crime shocked the northeast and Gillette’s 1906 trial, notable for the prosecution’s recitation of Brown’s love letters to him as well as public
threats to lynch Gillette, drew national attention. Behind the scaled confines of prison walls, the state executes Gillette. The state conceals its execution of Gillette and this concealment reifies the state as the sole arbiter governing life and death. The spectacle of the state’s murder of Gillette is then communicated by the press throughout the United States. Media extends state sovereignty.

Seventeen years later, Theodore Dreiser concluded his greatest novel, *An American Tragedy* (1925), with the death of Clyde Griffith, who, like Gillette, is executed by the State of New York via electric chair. The Gillette-Brown incident provided Dreiser a model for Clyde Griffith and the tale of *An American Tragedy*. In Dreiser’s hands, literary realism illustrates the reality that authenticates it. If we conceive of the real, as Lacan suggest, as existing exterior to the symbolic order, then the narratological constructions at which the realist plays are only another permutation of the imaginary forces constructing what we take for reality. That is to say that our perception of hard facts and truth depends on the stories we believe. The narratives producing the story of Chester Gillette and Grace Brown are located in the same symbolic matrix that gives us the saga of Clyde Griffith and Roberta Alden.

Realism aestheticizes the perceptual real and thereby conditions our responses to it. Early American literary realism, and by that I refer to the preponderance of realist texts produced prior to the 1890s, exerted an idealism and democratizing spirit appropriate to the postbellum United States. Even as the title of this dissertation emphasizes literary naturalism, and the majority of the literary works I evaluate are decidedly naturalistic, I do not limit myself to what are arguably permeable genre distinctions within literary realism. I consider literary realism and literary naturalism as tending to operate with somewhat different aesthetic curvatures, but I treat both, as
Daniel Borus suggests, as operating within a shared realist paradigm.¹ Turn-of-the-century realism’s shift to a far bleaker naturalism questions what happens when moral aptitude and a generous spirit cannot ameliorate social problems. I use the story of Chester Gillette’s execution and the tale of Clyde Griffith’s demise as a means to illustrate realism’s crisis aesthetics, what I term (dis)integration, in which the violation of the subject generates social alignment and the concretization of ideological positions through trauma’s aestheticization.

In the examples of Gillette and Griffith, we see narratives of disintegration that in turn integrate the publics responding to them. Regardless of one’s view as to the adequacy of state violence to sanction social crimes, ultimately the reader faces the absolute disintegration, the social and material death, of Gillette and Griffith both. The erasure of the subject reifies the actuality of the witness. According to this logic of differentiation and inversion, destruction effectuates substantiation and disempowerment empowers. Violation’s aestheticization drives to the heart of the naturalist project and late realism’s characteristic dread is generated through the genre’s gesture towards the actuality of the real. As Lacan suggests, the real lies outside of the human capacity to mitigate its traumatic presence. Stripped of the symbolic grammar instantiating our reality, trauma compels the individual to suffer the irreconcilability of the real.

Dreiser spares the reader the graphic details of Clyde Griffith’s execution, but what is omitted remains implied. In a Derridean sense, Griffith’s death remains a trace, an absent presence realized despite its exclusion. Dreiser constrains Clyde Griffith’s death scene to his stifled walk to “the chair he had so often seen in his dreams” and his passage “through the door which was now open—to receive him” (Dreiser 930). The

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rhetoric of legal power and religious penance actively construct the execution chamber that literally entombs Clyde Griffith. Revered McMillan’s final perturbations recalls Griffith’s absent presence by revealing Griffith’s final moments. Specifically, McMillan remembers Griffith’s “eyes fixed nervously and, as he thought, appealingly and dazedly upon him and the group surrounding him” (Dreiser 931). From the Reverend McMillan to Elvira Griffith, Clyde’s mother, the execution scene integrates society vis-à-vis moral and legal justifications of expiatory violence and reifies the state’s authority over life and death. Disintegration effectuates integration.

The Gillette-Brown incident and Dreiser’s fictionalization of it further demonstrates how closely realism intertwines sentimentality and sensationalism. The reader assuredly feels sympathy for Clyde Griffith and his bereft mother. At the same time, the actual and fictional tales provide the nation high drama and entertainment. The public realizes its moral compass by virtue of Gillette and Griffith’s depravity. Society knows its strength by virtue of their destruction. The Gillette-Brown case and Dreiser’s novel provide one example of a (dis)integrative aesthetic. Through it, we see how the event and the novel induce morally defined publics. But what happens when the anxiety a crisis induces becomes detached from its original event? What is the influence on psychological experience and social formation when news and entertainment medias exponentially disseminate narratives of (dis)integration?

Lauren Berlant writes in *Cruel Optimism* that “the present moment increasingly imposes itself on consciousness as a moment in extended crisis, with one happening piling on another” (7). While Berlant refers to U.S. culture today, the crisis state that she sees perpetuated by disaster news and popular medias that inscribe socioeconomic unrealities over the crisis-present originates a century prior. Berlant’s contention that “[a] traumatic event is simply an event that has the capacity to induce trauma” and “that most
such happenings that force people to adapt to an unfolding change are better described by a notion of systemic crisis or ‘crisis ordinariness’” (10) suggests that crises are indeed ubiquitous and so ingrained in American life that much of our entertainments, as Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer discuss, are simply devices used to mask the ongoing narrative of social precarity that exists beneath the glare and spectacle of such entertainments.

What compels my interest are the ways crisis narratives excite the tides of social unease. Teresa Brennan’s work on affect theory is particularly helpful in thinking through the problems of affective boundaries and their implications to social life. Considering the self as actively calibrating its place in the world, Brennan writes that “while this imaginary positioning is a product of fantasy…such positioning becomes material and physical when it is constructed in external reality” (22). Not only do we share our feelings, but, because affect is a biologized and physical expression transmissible through our encounters with one another, we transmit our responses to feeling. Brennan writes that “[t]here is no secure distinction between the ‘individual’ and the ‘environment’” (6), and her position holds critical implications for the ideological borders we erect and the ways we conceive of our physical, emotional, and political sovereignty.

The idea of the permeable self suggests an integrative logic and a means to see the mutually constructive forces operating between the self, society, and environment, what we might call an ecology. This core integrative criteria is a value housed in (dis)integrative aesthetics whose negative ecologies make clear the heteroglossic formations and interrelated dialogues extending across the narrative’s diegesis. Approaching U.S. naturalism from a Bakhtinian perspective, and acknowledging the intersections of genre, I ask how the permutations of (dis)integration in literary culture
discipline perceptions of social reality? How did realism’s representational strategies influence lived imaginaries at the turn-of-the-century? How does our immersion in these seemingly perpetual narratives of crisis and threat affect a sense of cultural fatalism?

Realism steadfastly attempts to represent the actualities of social life and I think it not unreasonable to consider realism a genre of exposure that if nothing else seeks to reveal the value in experiential truths. We also cannot forget that realism’s observational techniques are active. Realism seeks out and manufactures scenes of social life. It does not passively reproduce what is already there. This is to say that intention drives realist techniques to depict reality as it is through the dramas of knowable characters. Nineteenth-century realism produced a decidedly democratic genre that was accessible and expressive of the expanding middle-class literary market it helped to advance. Amid a modernity marked by technological progress, urbanization, demographic shifts, and increasingly global wars, realism presented, as Amy Kaplan suggests, “a strategy for imagining and managing the threats of social change” (10). Realist texts grounded drama in everyday life and provided sites for cultural intervention and a forum to address the narratives constructing social experience. Heavily influenced by evolutionary theories and advances in psychology and sociology, late realists at the turn-of-the-century made an aesthetic shift and took up the mantle of literary naturalism. While American literary realism is characteristically idealist, literary naturalism shares little of its progenitor’s hopefulness for self and society.

A genre that also sought to depict fiction in real terms, literary naturalism maintains a trenchant pessimism often depicting its characters abused and destroyed by harsh and impersonal social and environmental forces. Turn-of-the-century naturalist writers worked from within the realist paradigm to recover a romance seemingly hardened by evolutionary determinism, but their studied pessimism and portrayals of
human life stripped of its transient protections articulated the exigencies of a seemingly bleak new era at the steps of modernism. It was the naturalists, who, shunning the idealism that still permeated the realist canon, began to aestheticize social brutalities in ways that placed social determinism and human vulnerability at the center of literary art and cultural politics.

Naturalism tended to represent human life in extreme precarity. It inverted the romance and did so through supplementing its symbolism and emotional tenor with realism’s journalistic content and observational techniques. Stark historical actualities replaced nostalgic histories and nature’s glorifications transformed into threatening environments. Literary naturalism provided a conduit through which its readership could question fundamental social beliefs about morality, economic power, and the permanence of self, family, and society and its Darwinian inflected tragedies of everyday life sensationalized stories of grand adventure and social abjection. A literature of extremes, naturalism’s late realist mode manifested harsh worlds of illusory stability that undercut the deceptions of social permanence in favor of a near constant disintegration.

American naturalist writers staged what they deemed empirically informed explorations of human thought and behavior and in light of advances in psychology and evolutionary theory, human nature provided fertile ground, but so too did environmental nature. Visions of an idealized non-human world, whether channeled via the woodlands of Maine or the mountains of the Sierra Nevada, afforded naturalists the bedrock romantic notions of environmental beauty they sought to revise. The naturalists presented nature as no longer objectified and subordinate to subjective human presence. They dove headfirst into reworking environmental sublimity, an alteration of non-human nature perhaps most apparent in novels like Jack London’s *Call of the Wild* (1903) or *White Fang* (1906), where men struggle against the unyielding environmental forces of the
Yukon or Stephen Crane’s *The Open Boat* (1897) in which the ocean’s tides determine life and death.

At other turns, biological drives and behavior were interrogated as the contingencies of human nature. The evolutionary theses asserted by Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer, themselves working from evolutionary theories already promulgated by Jean Baptiste Lamarck and others, provided the scientific basis for the naturalist’s studies in psychological, physical, and social adaptation. The behavior of persons in distress, often rendered disempowered through the callous interplay of social forces, is part and parcel to the naturalist novel, but crucial to naturalist visions of social disorder and violence are episodes that emphasize the human struggle to manage passion and mediate behavior. Frank Norris’ *Vandover and the Brute* (1914) and Harold Frederic’s *The Damnation of Theron Ware* (1896) are cases in point, as both Norris and Frederic run their protagonists through an evolving sequence of hardships that consistently test how societal pressures produce either an ideal or animalistic self that must traverse a moral evolutionary spectrum.

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2 Jean Baptiste Lamarck’s (1744-1829) evolutionary theory asserts that just as organisms develop towards greater complexity, so too can an organism pass on hereditable environmental adaptations to its offspring within its own lifetime. Lamarck’s work, while important, drew from a well-established western intellectual history that stretches from Erasmus Darwin to Hippocrates. Still, Lamarck’s prominence and continued studies of adaptation was important. He proposed that biological forces drive complexity and that environmental pressures trigger adaptation and the use or disuse of particular physical characteristics. Charles Darwin (1809-1882) departs from Lamarckism with his theory of natural selection, which posited that inheritable variation over time leads to biologic adaptation. Natural selection does not view heritability as occurring within the span of a single generation as does Lamarck’s position, but argues that organisms best adapted to their particular environments are most likely to survive and reproduce, passing on inheritable traits. Darwin viewed environment as conditioning speciation, which occurs as particular qualities gain biological distinction and dominance within an organism type eventually differentiating it from its ancestors. Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) viewed evolution as the process through which an organism changed from simple homogeneity to more complex forms. Spencer viewed evolutionary complexity as organic and inorganic, which is to suggest a process that affects both body and mind. Spencer believed that knowledge as gained individually and unconsciously by the species and his conception of “survival of the fittest,” a distillation of Darwinian adaptation theory, was applied to both physical evolution and social evolution. Spencer, more in line with Lamarck than he was Darwin, believed that the degree of evolution affected objectively higher and lower aptitudes and performance in human beings. Spencer’s work attempted to blend concepts of biological evolution with ideas of social evolution and contributed to the concept, which would later be defined as social darwinism.
Concerns governing human and environmental natures led naturalists to incorporate the environmental and human into the social. Social nature connects psychodynamics to social action and coordinates social behavior with biological and environmental domains. Social writings like Jacob Riis’ *How the Other Half Lives* (1890) and Jane Addams’ *Twenty Years at Hull House* (1910) showed the urban squalor of tenements and slums, effectively documenting how social dynamics produced social space. Stephen Crane’s *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (1893) focuses the naturalist’s lens on this same urban locale and charts the downfall of Maggie, a girl seemingly incarcerated within the predatory society of the New York bowery. Crane captures the social continuum between Maggie and her environment, demonstrating how a particular social nature, and in Maggie’s case a profoundly negative one, influences experience. This co-emergence of the subject and her environment effectuate the ecological reading emphasized within (dis)integrative aesthetics.

Compellingly, literary naturalism produces narratives of interconnectivity that undertake analyses of the interplay between psychological, social, and environmental forces. Despite the genre’s bleak forecasts, it presents a decidedly ecological vision of human social experience. Still, the worlds literary naturalism depicts are typically in free-fall: desire turns men into predators, business magnates stomp out the working class, and nature kills you where you stand. I view this rampant negativity animating the naturalist form as responding directly to a society in which crises have become the norm.

**Disaster as Everyday Life**

The perpetuation of seemingly ubiquitous crises that generally lack a discernible endpoint characterize what is popularly referred to as disaster culture. With disasters everywhere one looks, crisis becomes the normative condition of daily life and roving
threats the glue holding society together. A singular event can debilitate a community, but more commonly, it is prolonged stressors, especially those affected by ongoing social inequities, that break down social health and communities.

As I proceed to delineate the features of disaster culture some distinctions should be drawn between natural and man-made disasters. To call a disaster man-made assesses human responsibility, but not explicit culpability. The 1984 Union Carbide disaster in Bhopal, India that killed between 4,000 and 16,000 people and injured as many as a half million resulted from poor management and a deteriorated infrastructure.\(^3\) Human action directly produced the disaster, making human beings both responsible and culpable for the event. Conversely, responsibility for the destruction of Pompeii in 79 BCE cannot be attributed to the people of Pompeii. Still, one can argue that the citizenry of Pompeii were culpable for the disaster by developing a city in close proximity to an active volcano.

Another problem in defining disaster is the historical relegation of disaster to events exclusively impacting a human population. Only in the late twentieth-century, and aided by the American environmental movement’s political action and the growth of ecology since the 1970s, has the scope of disaster widened to include non-human organisms. In 2010, the Deepwater Horizon disaster resulted in the deaths of eleven workers and spilled in excess of two hundred million gallons of crude oil into the Gulf of Mexico, exerting deleterious affects on marine wildlife.\(^4\) The true environmental and public health toll may never be fully reconciled, but in addition to the mutations, heightened animal mortality rates, and harm done to a multitude of Gulf Coast

ecosystems, toxins from the oil and oil dispersants have adversely affected the health of human populations as well. In the case of the Deepwater Horizon, a man-made disaster, human action is responsible and culpable for an event impacting contiguous human and non-human ecological systems.

Typhoons and wars are their own unique disasters, but so too are disease epidemics, financial collapses, and even the proliferation of crime in urban districts. Easily enough we can see how so many unrelated crises can fall under the jurisdiction of disaster. Even as recent as 2019 President Donald Trump, in his ever-bombastic fashion, has declared a national emergency to combat undocumented immigration at the southern U.S. border. In point of fact, President Trump’s crisis rhetoric could just as easily be transposed with the hysteria targeting Chinese immigrants in the 1880s. But to remain true to the historical period I interrogate, by the late nineteenth-century, the rhetoric of disaster was already becoming disassociated from any singular catastrophic event such that disasters effectively ran the gamut between uniquely environmental occurrences to pervasive social conditions.

The 1918 Spanish Flu pandemic, which killed over 50 million people, can be interpreted as a biologized social disaster. World War I’s 16 million dead are the victims of a disaster decidedly engineered by man.\(^4\) Easily enough we understand the causal relationship connecting the Spanish Flu and World War I. However, ubiquitous crisis narratives about crime and urban calamity, as seen in news media and entertainment, obscure causal agents and perpetuate the belief that society is saturated by threats that remain difficult to identify. Social responses to crisis depend on how communities


perceive the scope, impact, and causes of a crisis. The press, entertainment media, and other narrative modes, communicate disaster’s omnipresent aura and format the language of disaster into a kind of null rhetoric governing social relations. Popular media obscures the structural forces generating criminality or industrial disasters and privileges scapegoating and calamitous spectacle. During the Progressive Era, I argue that this array of social disasters extended from the widespread postbellum terror campaigns against African Americans in the southern United States to the proliferation of alcoholism and addiction in the early twentieth-century, all of which the very rhetoric that narrated their existence inscribes them as disasters.

Arguably, disaster’s preeminence lies in its cyclicality. A constant sequence of destruction and rebirth, or as Kevin Rozario terms it “ruin and renewal,” promotes the sense of an indefatigable and hydra-headed threat, the ideal material, as the Chinese Exclusion and Trump examples imply, of demagoguery and political control. What Rozario terms “the catastrophic logic of modernity” orients modernity’s progressive development “as a quest to make the world more secure…through development patterns that move through cycles of ruin and renewal…producing as their collateral damage myriad social conflicts as well as technological and environmental hazards” (10). American disaster culture arouses perception of a shared national crisis and the stories of its trials tend to valorize the politics of securitization and sacrifice while enshrining ideals

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6 Rozario views modernity “as a project originating in the social and cultural conditions of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe. At the heart of this venture is the determination to apply instrumental reason to the task of making human life on earth safer and more predictable, an endeavor that has entailed an ongoing effort to control, or at least manage, nature” (13). In the modern era, natural disasters like the Lisbon Earthquake of 1755 disclose the contingencies of political sovereignty and how profound crises evoke the reconceptualization of cultural practices. Aside from the Lisbon Earthquake’s influence on enlightenment philosophy it prompted research and development into seismology and earthquake mitigation practices. As the Lisbon Earthquake makes clear, disaster contextualizes modernity, and the evolution of the modern state depended on the state’s ability to mitigate the losses to life and property caused by a disaster.
like human freedom and democracy. Real and imagined threats to social stability and national sovereignty are reproduced through sensational, traumatic, and menacing tales.

In conceptualizing this process Kai Erikson’s view is particularly helpful. Erikson writes that trauma “has to be understood as resulting from a *constellation of life experiences* as well as from a discrete happening, from a *persisting condition* as well as from an acute event” (185). Erikson’s perspective helps dislocate trauma from a singular source, so that we can think about the repetitional traumatic rhetoric mediating disaster culture as a more widely disseminated condition operating across a multitude of interconnected social systems. Jeffrey C. Alexander’s work on cultural trauma similarly forwards the understanding that trauma operates both subjectively and communally to determine social experience and suggests that negative social conditions and crises discursively perpetuate trauma across time.7 Alexander’s approach to cultural trauma suggests that historical traumatic experiences essentially remain embedded in our systems of cultural exchange, awaiting realization in the present.

Disasters function catalytically and often prove profoundly consequential to social formation. As Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer make clear, “[e]nlightenment, understood in the widest sense as the advance of thought, has always aimed at liberating human beings from fear and installing them as masters. Yet the wholly enlightened earth is radiant with triumphant calamity” (1). Disaster arguably remains the sign of modernity, a force reifying state power by effectuating crisis response and securitization as the principal features validating the state’s capacity to protect its population and manage its political and economic interests. Disaster emerges from the rubble, so to speak, and since the Lisbon Earthquake of 1755 disaster’s roving threat

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manifests the intended and unintended consequences that Western politico-economic systems rely on to maintain their legitimacy.

The degree to which traumatic reciprocity conditions a society is a matter of scale, and it is trauma’s processional chain that reveals conditions like addiction and poverty, for example, as disasters in their own right. But the unyielding array of crisis discourses narrativize these issues and, as a matter of course, advance the ideological arguments coordinating the marginalization of some and the societal elevation of others. In order to better understand this process, I analyze the ways crisis narratives effectuate societal integration. Through analysis of the aesthetics of (dis)integration, we can more clearly see how narratives disclose the social conditions that contextualize social precarity. Benedict Anderson’s concept of imagined communities and print’s role in constructing public discourse informs my orientation to disaster as a crisis of scale that expands from local to national dimensions through print culture. Reading (dis)integration reveals the natural interconnectedness of people and things while implicating the unnatural losses that result from socially engineered crises. Even as the modern state legitimizes itself through its ability to manage and minimize social and environmental threats, these same states invariably generate the innumerable hazards that require state action which in turn reifies state authority, a process of (dis)integration in and of itself.

Just as evolutionary theory and literary naturalism took hold in the United States, so too did disaster culture more decidedly seep into the social fabric. In the turn-of-the-century U.S., a growing communications network and national press and an increasingly urban laboring population’s demand for entertainment facilitated the conditions for disaster to become cause for spectatorial amusements. Patrons of Coney Island, America’s premier amusement park, thrilled at elaborate re-enactments, rides, and simulations of everything from the 1889 Johnstown Flood and 1906 San Francisco
Earthquake to the volcanic destruction of Pompeii.\textsuperscript{8} Early films also took part in the burgeoning industry of disaster entertainment with works like James Williamson’s \textit{Fire!} (1901) and Mime Miso’s 1912 \textit{In Nacht und Eis} (In Night and Ice), a retelling of the sinking of the Titanic. Whether it was the news or the novel, U.S. media promulgated disaster to thrill-seeking audiences from New York to California.

Under these conditions, disaster culture took hold in the turn-of-the-century U.S. where materially specific social crises became increasingly amalgamated into a more generalized, ubiquitous, and ever transforming threat. By parsing the dialectical negative for its constituent discourses, those narratives can be discerned in terms of their own ideological and historical continuums and in light of the dialectic, social problems reveal the already intersecting, divergent, and convergent narratives required for their amelioration. If there is to be found an attraction in scenes of violence and social depravity, then I argue that allure is not purely voyeuristic, but an opportunity to read (dis)integration as disclosing the narratological patterns, symbolic associations, and real experiences that gesture towards positive social change.

\textbf{The Ecology of Social Crisis}

This study hinges on the proposition that U.S. culture perpetuates crisis as a mode of social organization, that this disaster culture regulates behavior and coordinates social experience through narratives of threat and misfortune, and that between 1870-1910 American literary naturalism promulgated an aesthetics of (dis)integration that coordinated the interrelationship of self, society, and the environment. (Dis)integration

avails itself to assessment of the logical contradictions and environmental interdependencies housed within the narratives, images, and events under analytical scrutiny. It is through analysis of the oppositions constituting the (dis)integrative scene that the subject in turn discloses the structural conditions rendering its abasement and the forking relations of the ecology in which it is situated. An aesthetics of (dis)integration then promotes a mode of interpretation steeped in social ecology and what Murray Bookchin termed dialectical naturalism, a mode of critique emphasizing the integrative mutuality shared by the self, society, and environment.

The discursive practices that operationalize disaster culture reveal the shared rhetorical patterns and techniques that demonstrate the fundamentally (dis)integrative quality of environmental disasters and social crises. Working through the domains of poverty, addiction, racial violence, and environmental disaster, I demonstrate how literary realism, and especially its later naturalist form, affected an aesthetics of (dis)integration that, however unevenly, posed rejoinders to the rhetorics naturalizing rationales for social control. Turn-of-the-century American literature tended to aestheticize social crises and environmental calamities and American literary naturalist writing in particular exerts the perception of a world gone awry, a dystopian present in which crises animate society and the mood of impending disaster manifests a social constant.

In the years following Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* (1859), evolution fundamentally altered western epistemology and influenced paradigmatic shifts across scientific and social domains. Adaptation and fitness became the new science’s buzzwords and despite evolution’s apparent secularity, it signified an almost deific power.
over life. Recognition that inheritable variations enable an organism “the best chance of being preserved in the struggle for life” (Darwin 98) propelled Darwin’s theory of natural selection to become what the Harvard philosopher John Fiske called “one of the established truths of science” (32). Thinkers like Herbert Spencer, who saw themselves at the forefront of social theory, took Darwin’s assertion that competition propelled evolution and popularized belief in the “survival of the fittest.” The idealism of the romantics soon convalesced in the wake of philosophical naturalism’s empirical sureties, and these evolutionists looked upon a world of industrial progress and saw heredity and natural selection as a means to diagnose and naturalize social problems.

Western thought has historically designated humanity as existing outside of nature, but the social Darwinists reversed this course, naturalizing mankind in part by arguing that poverty and degeneracy were the natural outcomes for specific types of people. This naturalization of human oppression vitalizes disaster culture and actualizes social discord as human civilization’s inescapable outcome. Moreover, this perspective also appoints the more evolutionarily fit to social positions of power and esteem. Naturalized class hierarchies are both symptomatic and facilitative of disaster culture’s trend to produce social crises as naturally occurring problems that require exhaustive institutional management, again necessitating state actions that reify the state’s authority to mitigate disaster. American literary naturalists, influenced by the evolutionary paradigms of their time, viewed nature in part as a determined biological trend governing life’s procession, but naturalists also criticized social naturalization and directly linked social problems to predatory social forces that rhetorically and materially construct human oppression.

* Darwin’s assertion that “from the war of nature, from famine and death, the most exalted object...the higher animals, directly follows” (360) was adapted by thinkers like Spencer to authorize the “survival of
Evolution’s intellectual aura pervaded social thought and aligned scientific progress with civilization’s development, a logic readily expressed in the technological invention, industrial growth, and social change of the postbellum United States. But evolutionary logics also disclosed ideological conceits about human nature and taken as a panacea, evolutionary theory emboldened the social Darwinists, who believed themselves the vanguard of modern social philosophy. Social Darwinism elucidated complex formulas for social control and population management that appealed to the deep-seated androcentrism, classism, and racism in American life. Social Darwinism, which responds both to the nineteenth-century dismantling of slavery in the Americas and the expansion of European colonialism in Asia and Africa, was also not a fluke of history. Political elites and industrial titans ascribed to its tenets because it afforded scientific proof of their superiority and legitimized the socio-economic hierarchy upon which they triumphantly stood. Moreover, as I suggest, its eugenicist programs fed directly into the European colonization of Africa and later featured centrally in Nazi racial theory.

Naturalist writers treated disaster as variously psychological, social, and environmental, “the three ecological registers” (19), as Félix Guattari defines them, and approached the issues of economic exploitation, addiction, social violence, and environmental threat as features that negatively integrated American society.\(^\text{10}\) As my work discerns the unstable boundaries marking self, society, and environment, I have also drawn from scholars like Raymond Williams and William Cronon, who argue for the reconceptualization of human presence as intrinsically natural and re-evaluation of the human role in mitigating social and environmental problems. Literary naturalists saw the fittest.”

\(^{10}\) Guattari argues that the trenchant objectification of the psyche, society, and environment continue to produce crises conditions in western society and that one way to potentially mediate the perpetual crises is through the integration of subjectivity across psychological, social, and environmental domains.
environment as producing social relations and their representations of these replicative ecological wheels, where characters often emerge from negative environments only to reproduce similarly disordered social relations, suggests an already existing rhetoric of crisis permeates the naturalist text.

Naturalists tended to view social problems as the result of human machinations, but they also represented the environment as coextensive to human crisis. Slowly but surely, people and things succumb to a kind of death energy animating the diegesis and forces determined to waste the socially unfit hold sway. These perpetually (dis)integrative situations demonstrate the biopolitical dimensions of social control pervading literary naturalism and suggest negative ecological configurations. Nature emerges in environments populated not by red-tail hawks and mule deer but by factory workers and urchins situated in human-built environments. Naturalist writers like Crane and Sinclair represented closed ecological systems, spaces of degradation and ravaged urban districts whose inhabitants suffer under pervasive psychosocial and material oppressions. Ultimately, I see naturalist literary practices culminating in an aesthetics of (dis)integration that articulated crisis as a constant modern condition wherein socially constituted rhetorics produced within a Darwinian paradigm progressively consume the individual and exacerbate societal conflict.

While part of the naturalist project was to assert that social deprivations were anything but natural, these writers strove to articulate how man, by virtue of his human nature, participated in ideologically determined social relations and manufactured a highly artificial but nonetheless naturalized world. Just like Henry David Thoreau and John Muir idealized the sublimity of the American wilderness, scenes of impoverishment and social distress represented the streets, tenements, and urban factories as no less sublime environments exuding cultural decay. Representations of the individual and his
environment as mutual expressions of a negative ecology express a literary aesthetic in which a traumatic event blurs the subject-object relationship. Marshaling affective power through a technique of imagistic supplementation in which environmental imagery participates in the dramatization, destructive social forces bear down upon the individual and his environment so as to affect their (dis)integration.

American literary naturalism, while characterized by social conflict and disorder, still maintained the view that realism encouraged democratization and exposed injustice. But at literary naturalism’s center is an overriding concern for nature, and naturalist writers like Jack London and Theodore Dreiser strove to describe nature through encounters with fearsome social and environmental forces. Literary naturalists re-articulated the traditionally sublime-in-nature within what Frank Norris deemed a new modern romanticism and whether or not their work was “sincere,” the naturalists unflinchingly depicted human vulnerability within predatory environments and a destabilized social order. For the reader, this provides a freedom to feel harm and not be harmed, to see destruction and not be destroyed. (Dis)integration captures the subject at the point of his social erasure, a condition realized through negative ecology. At these points of effacement, as Brennan suggests, the boundaries separating the self and environment become obscured, staging a negative unification that starkly evokes those discursive formations generating the contingencies of disaster culture.

(Dis)integration and American Literature

Throughout this study, I look at the ways literary realism, and especially literary naturalism, stage social crises. I do so because these representations project experiences of human precarity that are presumably useful in conceptualizing strategies to reimagine social conflict and survival within a crisis culture that proceeds from the turn-of-the-
century. By emphasizing a (dis)integrative aesthetics, I consider how scenes of abjection integrate publics either opposed to or satisfied by these representations of social death. Across the accompanying chapters, I focus on social crises that range from poverty, addiction, racial violence, and natural disasters. While each of these problems represent facets of Progressive Era American social history, the way I connect these often disparate themes is through the realist paradigm. Within each semi-autonomous domain, I interpret the role played by a (dis)integrative aesthetic and question the ways (dis)integration exposes albeit negative, but nonetheless integrative ecologies.

While I restrict my focus to the period roughly between 1870-1910 and do not interrogate late twentieth and early twenty-first century literature and media, it remains important to note that it is from this period that we find the seeds of the anxiety-laden twenty-four hour news cycles common in contemporary America. Advancing communications and transportation technologies allowed the rapid dissemination of late nineteenth-century news to an increasingly literate population across the country. Moreover, a developing middle-class helped expand print markets and facilitated the increased mediation of social experience by the news. Because literary realism drew so significantly from journalistic techniques, and so many literary realists were practicing journalists, I look for the ways that crisis narratives across literary forms reinforce the sense of entrenched cultural turmoil. The interrelationship between U.S. fiction and journalism is central to my project in that it demonstrates core mechanisms for aestheticizing social crises. However, because my interest lies in the multivalent ways that narratological structures influence the production of social imaginaries, I do not limit my engagement with literary culture to these two predominant genres.

I initiate chapter one with a simple question. How and why did poverty in the 1890s become a source for mass entertainment? I answer this question through analysis
of R.F. Outcault’s comic *The Yellow Kid* and argue that the comic serves as a medium through which to sublimate cultural anxieties pertaining to child poverty and national belonging. Outcault’s *Yellow Kid* demonstrates how even something as innocuous as an early comic, while appealing to lowbrow visual culture, circulated narratives of poverty as a sensational lampoon, in effect producing the urchin as an object of ridicule and jest. Because the Kid’s spectacle satirizes child poverty, these comics oddly disclose the exigencies of child poverty even as they undermine them.

I continue to assess these problematics by demonstrating the ways literary realism posed counterarguments to social Darwinism’s naturalization of poverty. I highlight the social Darwinist emphasis on naturalization because by biologizing fitness and socioeconomic position these logics elevate poverty as a disciplinary sign. Essential to the perpetuation of crisis culture in the period is this perception of an inescapable and naturally occurring degeneration. Realist representations of rampant industrial abuse and social abandonment however implicated an exploitative economic and political system as structurally causative of impoverishment and human suffering. Analyzing the cultural logics of disaster in the turn-of-the-century United States, I address how human populations were ideologically determined as naturally fit or unfit and threatened by social forces within environments exhausted by industry.

Close readings of key social Darwinist thinkers demonstrates how empirical arguments helped legitimize classist, racist, and gendered assessments about biological fitness and social futurity, eugenicist precepts that conditioned turn-of-the-century visions of the poor as exigent societal threats.11 I work through these intersections to

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11 In the turn-of-the-century United States, social Darwinists conceived society as an organism whose strength was contingent upon a process of natural selection in which political and economic power were thought of as rights maintained by those most naturally capable of administering them. This perspective,
demonstrate the negative ecologization of the poor in a largely canonical selection that ranges from Rebecca Harding Davis’ *Life in the Iron Mills* (1861), Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle* (1906), and William Dean Howells’ *A Hazard of New Fortunes* (1890). Through these examples, I strive to make clear how the rhetoric of poverty configured social perceptions of the poor and demonstrate how realism’s (dis)integrative aesthetics took those same impoverished figures and used them to effectuate activist sentiments against poverty’s naturalization.

In Davis’ *Iron Mills* for instance, I analyze the construction of negative ecology and the depersonalizing forces of capital that channel laborers in and out of the circuits of industry. Davis articulates how mechanisms of social control orchestrate a tenuous relationship between humanity, society, and the environment, crystallizing a negative ecology that dietetically merges psychological despair and social oppression with degraded environments. Representations of negative ecologies like that realized in *Iron Mills* demonstrate the ideological and structural forces engineering social oppression. Such conditions readily produce the hopelessness expressed in addiction and mental illness, as well as in the suicidal fate of a character like Hugh Wolfe.

Similarly, my work on Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle* examines how Sinclair uses sublimity to orchestrate Packing Town’s negative ecology. *The Jungle*’s sublime manifests in two distinct ways. It arises first in the mechanized system of mass death and harvest that extends from Durham’s to the neighborhoods at its borders. Sublimity’s second example is found in Jurgis Rudkus and his relations as they are progressively transformed into spectacles of social abandonment. In the case of Sinclair’s Rudkus, anti-immigrant rhetoric and predatory economic forces gradually animalize, criminalize, and

which would later be defined as social Darwinism, often validated the material forces, violence, and coercive methodologies underlying the accumulation of financial wealth and political dominance.
violate the character. Sinclair’s approach heroizes Rudkus and through his tragedies promotes a rationale for socialist politics. At the same time, Rudkus’ violence and inebriety demonstrate the symptoms that rationalize legal and public health interventions. Rudkus’ degeneracy illustrates the immigrant as a disciplinary sign aligning white communities against him. Rudkus’ spectacle expresses his sublimity.

Transitioning from poverty, in chapter two I turn to the crisis of addiction. Addiction’s entrenchment in U.S. realism signals the significant societal quandary it posed, one that culminated in the Volstead Act of 1919 and national prohibition. Predicating my argument on the belief that vice and addiction signified social degeneration, I analyze how temperance literature and literary realism interpenetrate one another to generate representations of addiction’s social ecology. Throughout this chapter, I’m guided by Bruce K. Alexander’s dislocation theory of addiction, which posits that addiction ostensibly results from traumatic forces that precipitate failures in psychosocial integration.12

Where Alexander differentiates himself from other constructivist addiction theorists is in his assertion that more general patterns of social behavior also express addiction. Alexander’s framework assesses the biological addiction to a drug and the overconsumption of natural resources as coextensive behavioral expressions within a cultural apparatus conditioned by capitalism. Such an addiction concept has compelling merits, as it contextualizes addiction as a materialist dilemma, a problem of subjective

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12 The concept of psychosocial integration, as Alexander conceptualizes it, responds to Erik Erikson’s theory of human psychosocial development in which he posits that a human being passes through approximately eight developmental epochs from birth to death. Problems in psychosocial integration are thought to occur when a person cannot satisfy the demands of one or more of these developmental periods, e.g. abuse in childhood might condition a person to express a profound sense of distrust in later social relationships. I use the concept of psychosocial integration here as a way to discuss a subject’s inability to maintain a psychologically stable social presence, which can be due to either the persistence of historical trauma, an event that disrupts psychosocial stability, or because of the felt affect of less objectively identifiable social features that are embedded in modes of cultural exchange.
and social excess. In my focus on addiction as a component of realist literary aesthetics, I emphasize how representations of addiction reinforced the toxicity of the addict, in effect producing the addict as a symptom of cultural trauma, while also articulating the psychological, social, and environmental conditions contributing to the construction of addiction within a negative ecology.

Addiction literature’s substantial development in the nineteenth-century depended largely on the temperance movement and its efforts to address the addiction crisis across the U.S. Temperance conversion stories, propagated through urban rescue missions and revivalist meetings, articulated the plight of impoverished Americans, who due to the complexities of their lives resorted to vice and habitual intoxication. I survey some of the more prominent temperance narratives like Jerry McAuley’s *Transformed* (1876), Henry G. Cole’s *Confessions of an American Opium Eater* (1895), and Emma Whittemore’s *Delia; The Blue-Bird of Mulberry Bend* (1893) in order to establish how the rhetorical practices common to temperance literature configured the addict not as waste, but a subject awaiting spiritual transformation.

As I trace temperance through postbellum U.S. literature, I also turn to other less studied works like Frances Harper’s *Sowing and Reaping* (1876-77) and chart temperance discourse’s place in American realism, while more thoroughly considering the racial and gendered dimensions of addiction and temperance’s significant presence within African American communities. I then turn to American literary naturalism and that genre’s fatalistic visions of addiction. Evolutionary determinism afforded the naturalists a means to treat addiction, as Donald Pizer suggests, as a force of reversion capable of evacuating one’s moral sense, exciting animal passions, and degenerating the user. Michael Benn Walters demonstrates how addiction correlated with a consumerist boom by virtue of its embeddedness in socio-economics, what Walters suggests is the
“economy of desire” (376) governing the text. Discussing London’s *Barleycorn*, John Crowley identifies addiction’s link to impoverishment and “the brutal hardships of working-class life,” (25) as it both disciplines consumption and manifests consumptive affects.

Temperance discourses informed naturalist depictions of addiction and through a reading of Jack London’s *John Barleycorn*, and his white logic, I develop the argument that addiction, and alcohol abuse in particular, represented an inconsistent threshold for definitions of masculinity and productive citizenship, alcohol use being a marker of white masculinity and alcohol abuse signifying emasculation and de-racialization. By placing Stephen Crane’s *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* in conversation with E.M. Whittemore’s contemporaneous temperance narrative *Delia: The Blue-Bird of Mulberry Bend*, I argue that these two works mutually reinforce one another at the moment of their co-emergence because they discursively engage a culture of social abandonment. Both Maggie and Delia suffer through the poverty and vice of the New York bowery, one seemingly emerging as the fictional representation of the other. I consider how these texts coordinate public recognition of social ills, and, as is the case in Crane’s *Maggie*, configure negative ecologies, diegetic worlds that present a hopelessly consumptive and self-negating environment.

As I turn to Chapter three, which focuses on public violence and lynching, I analyze journalistic accounts of lynching and the role U.S. fiction played in disrupting these often celebratory narratives of violence. I here expand my analysis to other genres like political cartoons, photography, and dime novels which allow me the opportunity to critique how lynching violence could be used to romanticize mass violence in the west, memorialize lynching in the south, and generate counter-publics of resistance in the north. My work on U.S. lynching addresses how (dis)integrative aesthetics contextualize
the reader’s encounter with the Progressive Era’s most visible expression of radical social violence.

Lynching produces spectatorship and communal ideological alignment through narratives disclosing the blatant criminalization, persecution, and gross violation of non-whites in the United States. But just as lynching evidences social disintegration, it also expresses a racially determined integration that promotes whiteness as a socially empowered and ideal racial identity. I analyze the press coverage of the 1899 lynching of Sam Hose in Newnan, Georgia and the 1891 lynching of eleven Italian Americans in New Orleans and assign lynching a critical place in the period’s developing visual culture. These case histories show how ideological claims of a racialized biological superiority, like those redeployed in the guise of social Darwinian empiricism, seeped into popular discourse to perpetuate and naturalize social violence in the Progressive Era.

I place these historical accounts in dialogue with the critical work of Ida B. Wells and José Martí, as well as Charles Chesnutt’s *The Marrow of Tradition* (1901) and James Weldon Johnson’s *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912) in order to show how the literary activist text incorporated journalistic and documentarian techniques to expose severe social actualities while using the novel as a means through which to subvert the rhetoric of racial violence. While the white/non-white racial binary extends to groups other than African Americans, I emphasize lynching and its southern U.S. terror campaigns because the south really represents the hub of U.S. lynching activity and the center from which lynching violence tends to be projected onto other regions. As such, throughout chapter three, I also work with other popular literary forms like dime novels and the visual medias of political cartoons and lynching photography to show how lynching was communicated to the reading public as a normative duty in southern and western constructions of masculinity.
My work with western dime novels for instance reflects on the ways that violence, and specifically lynching, operated as a public spectacle and popular entertainment enshrining the western gunslinger and outlaw alike. I demonstrate too how political cartoons from popular magazines like Puck and Life forwarded racial prejudices that actively normalized white supremacist ideology, while in other periodicals like Judge, Harper’s, the Baltimore-based African American, and The Crisis the cartoon excoriated racial violence in the U.S., utilizing visibility as a means to convey the exigencies of a seemingly unmitigated atrocity. Acknowledging the necropolitical dimensions of lynching’s public uses, I question how realist counter-tactics found in Johnson’s Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man, Chesnutt’s Marrow of Tradition, and the era’s anti-lynching political cartoons incorporated certain of lynching’s narrative strategies to appropriate lynching’s violating logics as a means to coordinate publics of resistance.

Chapter four builds upon my work on poverty, addiction, and violence to show how the increasingly prevalent sense of disaster helped define American national identity. Throughout chapter four, I limit my critical analysis to Frank Norris’ Vandover and the Brute (1914) and delve into archival materials on the three principle disasters that inform Norris’ text: the 1872 Lone Pine Earthquake, the Great Chicago Fire of 1871, and the 1895 wreck of the Steamship Colima. I use these genres as a means to demonstrate how diverse narrative forms influenced realist aesthetics. Critical reviews of newspapers and popular magazines show how disaster reporting operated on a local and national scale and through analysis of these events I consider how an increasingly sensational press synchronized public sentiment, captivating a nation increasingly held in disaster’s thrall.
As *Vandover* oddly makes apparent, disaster reporting coordinated the public to affect a climate of anxiety and arousal at the prospect of calamitous events such that crisis conditions progressively became the normalized features of everyday life. I further link naturalist uses of sublimity to the visions of natural disasters presented in *Vandover* and discuss how disaster’s ubiquity allowed the disaster concept to be repurposed across a vast array of social crises that ranged from the economic hardships resulting from the Panic of 1893 to public health scares in San Francisco’s Chinatown. What to me is fascinating about Norris’ *Vandover* is the ways the novel represents its protagonist’s interiorization of disaster. External crises, at first cause for amusement, soon permeate his life to exert real traumatic affects, saturating the character until the lines separating subject from object start to blur.

*Vandover*’s impoverishment and eventual psychological break disclose the negative ecological system within which he is situated. Environmental and social crises are ubiquitous throughout the novel, but what is telling is how *Vandover* is positioned such that he cannot escape disaster culture because he reproduces it through his own poverty, addiction, and deteriorating physical and psychological health. My work on *Vandover and the Brute* brings this study on realism, crisis culture, and (dis)integrative aesthetics full circle as my analysis demonstrates the radical (dis)integration that disaster culture effectuates, replicating itself ad nauseam across society, wearing down and threatening to transform subjects like *Vandover* into the living embodiments of disaster.

The constellation of texts configuring the archive of this study provides a multidimensional view of the discursive formation of social crises at the turn-of-the-century. Throughout my work, I question what is attractive about profoundly negative scenes of violation and social abandonment. Through (dis)integrative aesthetics, it becomes apparent how pained human figures operate as both disciplinary signs and
portals through which to grasp the necessity for social change. The social visions
explored in American literary naturalism, while stark, remain a myriad of intertwined
and materially substantive discourses. Whether it is temperance narratives, journalism,
literary fiction, or social theory, rhetorical intersectionality demonstrates a text’s
ideological matrix. Working from the perspective of Bakhtinian dialectic, I focus on the
ways texts emit a heteroglossia that attests to the discursive features animating society.
To this end, I have selected the domains of poverty, addiction, racial violence, and
environment as areas consistent between literary naturalism and turn-of-the-century
disaster culture and explore their interrelationship and expression through (dis)integrative
aesthetics.

A (dis)integrative aesthetic is as much a form and style of writing, exemplified by
literary naturalism, as it is a distinct mode of reading and interpretation. (Dis)integration
is characterized by the weakening, fracture, and wasting away of a psychological
presence and material form, whose destruction in turn integrates the forces leveraged
against it. (Dis)integration discloses the interdependence of psychological, social, and
environmental domains and a (dis)integrative literary aesthetic traces the descent of
people and things from vitality to obsolescence until the line distinguishing subject from
object frays and one seemingly blends with the other to effect the sense of a shared
negative ecology. It is an approach to interpreting narrative forms exhausted by the
cumulative trauma and negativity catastrophizing the text. (Dis)integration then discloses
ways of re-imagining social futures that are not foreclosed by crisis, but that emerge from
the dreamwork of disaster.
Chapter 1

Laugh at the End of the World:

Social Darwinism, Poverty, and American Literary Naturalism

American literary realism’s depictions of human precarity helped determine popular understanding of social problems. Realism exuded the aura of something tangible and certain, and so it assured its readers that a world of constant change was in fact fixed and knowable through pedestrian experience. Realism’s postbellum project, as Amy Kaplan writes, meant to democratize social experience and it did so by narrativizing social stabilization out of the incommensurable forces of social conflict. It is the ways realism’s assurances falter and contribute to the narratological fabrication of a less than ideal social life that holds my interest. Nowhere more apparent than in scenes of violence and trauma do we find narratological ruptures that are not so easily resolved. I see realism’s portrayal of social and environmental crises, especially so in realism’s shift to literary naturalism, as demonstrating an aesthetics of (dis)integration that compelled societal integration in response to the disintegration of the narrative subject. Fundamentally, I question how scenes of trauma and societal crisis that seemingly foreclose the possibilities of human freedom maintain the trace of unrealized social futures and how, however idealistically, images of abjection can provide materials to spur new and more positive social imaginaries.

(Dis)integrative aesthetics effectuate what we popularly term disaster culture in which crises are channeled into spectacles meant to, however unevenly, edify and entertain. I ask what is the overall effect on the formation of U.S. publics when the object or story meant to demonstrate realism and stability becomes destabilized? How do the traumatic forces realism attempts to harness communicate not the collapse of social
futures but the possibility of subjective and social renarrativization? To what ends do scenes of crisis modify the ideological formations of social power? I begin chapter one in an unlikely place with the alternative literary form of American comics and yet this proves a worthwhile staging ground to explore realism’s dissemination across literary and visual culture and a means to see how realist techniques could use a crisis, and in this case childhood poverty, as an entertainment integrating U.S. publics through the disintegration of the poor.

The One Who Laughs Last: Child Poverty and the Wonderful Life of the Yellow Kid

In the winter of 1895, Richard Felton Outcault’s Yellow Kid, a big eared, bald headed, and jovial urchin, appeared in a Sunday supplement of Joseph Pulitzer’s New York World. Early American comics like Outcault’s Kid were part of the evolving visual culture of the period, one marked by the advent of cinema and the proliferation of photography in the late nineteenth-century. But as much as his poverty indicates a social crisis, the Yellow Kid sported a realism infused with absurdity. Outcault’s streets

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13 While there were comic precursors to the Kid, what differentiated Outcault’s work for American audiences was the scope of the Kid’s publication. Pulitzer’s World claimed a Sunday circulation in excess of 600,000 papers and through that organ the Yellow Kid was serialized and reproduced on a mass scale, facilitating comics’ emergence as a ubiquitous form of entertainment in the United States. For a comprehensive history of journalism in the United States see Michael Emery and Edwin Emery’s The Press and America: An Interpretive History of the Mass Media. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1988. For further scholarship addressing the intersection between sensational journalism, the proliferation of print media, and American expansionism see Sidney Kobre’s The Yellow Press and Gilded Age Journalism. Gainesville: Florida State UP, 1965 and David R. Spencer’s The Yellow Journalism: The Press and America’s Emergence as a World Power. Evanston: Northwestern UP, 2007.

14 Late nineteenth-century humor magazines like the British Punch and its later American counterpart Puck, which featured a variety of satirical illustrations and the already well established and critically important political cartoon, pre-date Outcault’s work. In the same period, English comics like Charles Ross’ and Emilie de Tessier’s Ally Sloper and Alfred Harmsworth’s Comic Cuts showed comics’ potential success in a niche print market. For further discussion on comics’ place in the newspaper supplement and the cultural bridge these provided between lower and upper class society see Christopher N.C. Couch’s “The Yellow Kid and the Comics Page.” The Language of Comics: Word and Image. Eds. Robin Varnum and Christina T. Gibbons. Jackson: Mississippi UP, 2001.
are gritty, his characters rendered more actual than abstract, and despite the hijinks that ensue Outcault’s Hogan’s Alley puts the privations of tenement life on display to all. *The Yellow Kid* visualized the strangeness of urban America and the Kid’s popularity can in part be explained by the scopophilic pleasures he avails while opening the poverty of America’s urban districts to spectatorial scrutiny and a hearty laugh. The fact that the *Yellow Kid* signaled the emergence of the comics medium as a widely disseminated literature in the United States is important, principally, I argue, because of how the *Yellow Kid* represents cultural anxieties related to child poverty and the problematics of national belonging as a means of entertainment.

Rather than treat poverty as a generalizable category in Outcault’s *Yellow Kid*, I focus on child welfare specifically because of the child’s centrality as a germinative national citizen and question to what end Outcault’s work addressed and leveraged child poverty for its nostalgic appeal and sensational immediacy. Moreover, I do not look to extricate Outcault’s work from reformist discourses that infantilized the poor, nor do I attempt to sanitize Outcault’s representations of these prejudicial views. If anything, Outcault’s children express the indeterminate boundaries separating the impoverished child from the poor adult. More to the point, the *Yellow Kid*’s seriality and slapstick houses both impoverished adults and children in a kind of rhetorical stasis. The poor Kid stays poor and a child, and despite the Kid’s world tour in 1897 no one ever really escapes Hogan’s Alley. Still, by virtue of its humor, Outcault’s comics formulate child poverty as less threatening and more knowable, humanizing child subjects through a resistance to sentimental constructions of child identity.

Jared Gardner suggests that comics provide a “counterweight to the narrative of modernity’s traumas” as for “each image of the ‘sharp discontinuity’ of modern life and the dangers of breakdown, there is a corresponding comic image which sees these
discontinuities as eliciting not anxiety but humor, comfort, and new pleasures” (11).\(^{15}\)

Gardner’s point is that the comic form and its joke are capable of helping the reader to process sometimes catastrophic social issues. Deprivation seems the standard ecological condition prevailing in Hogan’s Alley and despite negative environmental pressures the cast of characters remain, against all odds, impervious to destruction. Audience reception and the degree to which the Yellow Kid underwent such proliferate commodification suggests that part of the Kid’s mass appeal lies in how he contained the prejudices and threats of poverty in a relatively innocuous image and in an often fantastic literary genre.

Outcault’s comic intervention emerges as image/text in a period when the impoverished child’s photographic capture increasingly co-occurred with its literary representations.\(^{16}\) Just as urban poverty’s degradations were represented in the works of writers and photojournalists like Jacob Riis, John Tidwell, and Lewis Hine, so too did literary representations of pained and impoverished children register a social catastrophe across an increasingly literate and conscientious public sphere. The ragamuffin trope, which Outcault put to such use, was familiar to audiences during the Progressive Era, and, while writers like Charles Dickens and Victor Hugo explored the experiences of the poor and socially oppressed in Europe’s urban centers, the child’s confrontation with social inequity figured centrally in many of the best-selling American novels.

Representations of such precocious, endearing, and yet tragically abandoned kids circulated in popular works that range from Maria Susanna Cummins’ antebellum *The Lamplighter* (1854) to E.D.E.N. Southworth’s *The Hidden Hand or, Capitola the*

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\(^{15}\) See also Seldes, Gilbert. *The 7 Lively Arts.* Sagamore: New York, 1957. Seldes writes that comics have long been “the most despised” form of art and, yet, one of “the most popular” (193).

\(^{16}\) W.J.T. Mitchell discusses the concept of image/text—the co-occurring and mutually reinforcing dynamic between image and text—at length in *Picture Theory.* Chicago: Chicago UP, 1994. Mitchell’s argument that “[p]erspective is a figure for what we would call ideology—a historical, cultural formation that masquerades as a universal, natural code” (31) is especially important to understanding comics and
Madcap (1859), Horatio Alger’s Ragged Dick (1868), and Mark Twain’s Huckleberry Finn (1884). It was this already well-trod aesthetic ground that provided Outcault with a stable trope in the form of the impoverished child, an emblematic figure that signaled to its expectant audience a mix of sentimentality, comedy, and adventure. The orphan Capitola Black, who is the irascible protagonist of The Hidden Hand, navigates harrowing conditions from homelessness to encounters with ghostly apparitions, bandits, and villains of all stripe and does so with a deftness and surety that surpasses her age. Cap, who first appears in drag as a homeless newsboy in the streets of a New York slum derided as Rag Alley, is described as a “saucy little prince of patches,” (39) who lived “dreading the gnawing hunger by day and the horrid perils of the night” (Southworth 46). The image of the orphan Gertrude “Gerty” Flint, the protagonist of Cummins’ Lamplighter, was that of a little girl “scantly clad, in garments of the poorest description. Her hair was long and very thick; uncombed and unbecoming…her complexion was sallow, and her whole appearance unhealthy” (1). Little Gerty “was but eight years old, and all alone in the world,” subject to the abuses of body, “one blow for her ugliness and another for her impudence,” (2) as well as the psychological torments administered by her guardian Nan Gant, “a horrid, wicked woman, that drowned my kitten in bilin’ water!” (Cummins 12).

Horatio Alger’s Ragged Dick makes for a conspicuous example of the puckish and street wise, but always good natured boot-black, who “had no particular dislike to dirt, and did not think it necessary to remove several dark streaks on his face and hands” (4). Dick was a boy with a penchant for cigar smoking, who never failed to act with charity towards his fellow shoe shiners and newsboys, and who took pride in his shabby

the Yellow Kid’s rise within turn-of-the-century visual culture. Outcault’s work produces discourse via visual spectacle, essentially harmonizing rhetorics of social oppression through an entertainment form.
Washington coat, an iconic garment that Dick rarely failed to reference as authentic and a symbol of the ironic link between disenfranchised youth and those revolutionary statesman and generals that served as the heroic progenitors to the United States. Twain’s titular Huckleberry Finn, the foulmouthed vagabond youth of rural Missouri, reminisces early in the novel on the aftereffects of his flight from the Watson home and how he found himself “lazy and jolly, laying off comfortable all day, smoking and fishing,” but notes too that “my clothes got to be all rags and dirt” (648). Despite Finn’s recollection of an anarchic freedom outside the confines of society, he equally acknowledges that his liberty came with a high cost, and that life “was pretty good times up in the woods there, take it all around…But by-and-by pap got too handy with his hick’ry, and I couldn’t stand it. I was all over welts” (Twain 648).

Poor kids like Twain’s Huckleberry Finn and Southworth’s Capitola with their rag-wear, matted hair, and filth-stained limbs typically presented as precocious urchins capable of negotiating complex and often harrowing circumstances with an intelligence and insight beyond their years. Sentimentalized fictions like Cummins’ Lamplighter or Alger’s Ragged Dick situated their wards in bildungsromans that appealed to the sensibilities of robust readerships while reinforcing a sense of paternalism that endeared the impoverished child to the hearts of the public. The proliferation of these novels, which sold remarkably well in their day, further index the child’s potential as a motivational force for social change and a figure that brought to light the evolving social crisis of youth at the turn-of-the-century.

Despite the narrative acrobatics of satire and improbable adventures, the ragamuffin’s gaunt and often sentimentalized image signified the presence of a social detritus and the generational surplus of human life existing in the urban slums and ramshackle spaces of rural America. What then emerged in the figure of the
impoverished child was a stunted potentiality, a condition often attributed in the period to
the three-fold barrier of structural deficiencies, societal indifference, and the view that
certain families lacked the moral and intellectual fitness to enact socially productive
lives.17 These kids, adrift in the flows of abjection, signify the compromised remnants of
a generation, but their romanticized adventures and uncanny ability to surpass poverty
also obfuscated their own social abandonment. The image of the vulnerable child worked
to induce a sense of empathy in the reader while further rousing indignation and shame,
feelings at once capable of animating the would-be social actor or otherwise encouraging
one to turn their vision further from the child and those stark conditions that produced
him.

By 1890, millions of New Yorkers were housed in over 80,000 tenements and as
James Marten has noted of the period between 1870 and 1900 “the percentage of children
between the ages of ten and fourteen who worked for wages increased from 16 percent to
22 percent” (8). During roughly the same time, “the percentage of working children who
lived in cities rose…from 47 percent to nearly 75 percent” (Marten 8). Even as the
twentieth-century got underway, between 1900 and 1910, the number of children counted
in the American labor force hovered around 18 percent, a figure indicating that children
held an entrenched place in the labor market for well over a generation.18 Social historian
Viviana Zelizer notes that this figure, while dramatic, nonetheless undercounts the total
number of laboring youth, particularly because census records excluded children under
ten as well as those assisting in domestic labor or otherwise supporting “their parents in

17 See Oscar Lewis’ conceptualization of the “culture of poverty” in Five Families; Mexican Case Studies
in the Culture of Poverty. New York: Basic Books, 1976. Lewis’ study controversially posits that
negative value systems have an impact on the perpetuation of poverty across generations. Since its
publications the “culture of poverty” argument has generated significant rebuttals and critiques of the
structural causalities of poverty.
sweatshops and on farms” (56) outside of the school day. The increase in the urban child population fed the child labor market, which varied widely from newsboys to industrial workers.

The depression of the 1890s, which rose to its height in 1894, exacerbated the economic crisis in city and country alike. Nell Irvin Painter, whose work so critically treats the social dilemmas of the period, has suggested that “no one could recall times as hard as these” in which “families broke up as men took to the roads” and “employers who did not discharge workers outright cut wages drastically” (116). These conditions produced unemployment well in excess of ten percent and saw between 2,000,000 and 3,000,000 workers turned out of their employment, a trend that left “one-fifth of the industrial work force…idle in the winter of 1893-1894” (Painter 116).19 The hard actualities of economic collapse destabilized families in myriad ways and more than anything situated youth among the mass of competing laborers.

The public was acutely aware of the harsh conditions facing urban youth within a technologically advancing society, and while disease, tenement fires, and industrial accidents demonstrated the risks facing the youth of the city one of the most visible dangers lay in traffic accidents. Zelizer emphasizes this significant issue, writing that “[b]etween 1910 and 1913, over 40 percent of New York traffic victims were under fifteen years of age,” a sobering statistic that in 1914 “jumped to 60 percent” (35). Threats to youth were well known and such conditions indicated an ongoing social crisis, one punctuated by the fact that, as Steven Mintz indicates, “[a]s late as 1895, 18 percent

19 As Painter suggests, many of the socioeconomic disruptions of the early 1890’s resulted from the Panic of 1893. The subsequent economic depression was further exacerbated by predatory industrial monopolies and a lack of labor protections.
of children—one in six—died before their fifth birthday” (134) and in the same period “20 to 30 percent of all children lost a parent by age fifteen” (157). The corrupting influences of the city and changing economic patterns encouraged child welfare reform, but the new activism also responded, as Zelizer convincingly demonstrates, to a revised cultural investment in the “sacralization” of the child, a process that saw the utility of the child transition from its monetary valuation and ability to participate in the household economy to “an exclusively emotional and affective asset” (11). This cultural shift affected rich and poor alike and, as Zelizer writes, “[a]s children, regardless of their social class, were defined as emotionally priceless assets, their death became not only a painful domestic misfortune but a sign of collective failure” (32).

Turn-of-the-century child welfare reforms responded to those social conditions that at once threatened child health and wellness and conducted youth into the circuits of labor. But reformers also sought to correct the problem of youth delinquency, an issue

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20 According to James Marten, infant mortality rates during the period were also exceedingly high and in excess of “12 percent of children died before their first birthday, and another 5.7 percent died before they reached the age of five” (9). During the period, new and expectant mothers of the impoverished and immigrant classes typically received scant pre-natal healthcare and generally lacked access to a nascent public health system. Such high rates of infant mortality correlated with income inequality and a general lack of resources.

21 For scholarship addressing the ways visual art and pastoral painting helped forward turn-of-the-century beliefs about childhood innocence see Burns, Sarah, “Barefoot Boys and Other Country Children: Sentiment and Ideology in Nineteenth-Century American Art.” The American Art Journal, Vol. 20, No. 1 (1988), pp. 24-50. Burns, addressing the ways visual art presented the country youth as an idyll identifies the romanticization of the child as projecting “a false front which concealed, or refused to take account of, the social realities surrounding the largely urban or suburban audience toward which nostalgic literary and visual products were directed” (24). Burns views this culture work as “a strategy for social control, based on venerated traditions and beliefs” and that fantasized it “might help redeem civilization…from an awful fate” (48).

22 In response to so many prevalent social issues, the Progressive Era saw dynamic reforms across a variety of social domains. Jane Adams’ work at Hull House and the founding of the National Child Labor Committee in 1904, for instance, focused squarely on the issue of child and family welfare, social issues that would remain at the forefront of public consciousness. Despite the uneven development of state and city ordinances, Progressive reformers championed an educated youth capable of becoming socially contributory citizens. A crucial step in mitigating youth labor abuses came in the Keating-Owen Act of 1916, which prohibited the interstate commerce of goods manufactured by youth (age fourteen was the limit on factory workers and age sixteen on mine laborers). However, the act was overturned by the Supreme Court’s decision in Hammer v. Dagenhart, 247 U.S. 251 (1918). It would not be until the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 that the federal government adopted national legislation to eliminate the
that had consistently grown over the course of the later nineteenth-century and that came
to occupy a considerable station in public consciousness. Part and parcel to the ethos of
reform were contestations in the public perception of child development. Psychologists
and social thinkers like G. Stanley Hall found in eugenics the rationale for stringent
structural controls, and despite many reformer’s designs to save the child from its adult
corruption such suppositions often perpetuated harmful beliefs about biological and
social predispositions to degeneracy. The vogue of social Darwinism notwithstanding,
beliefs were shifting from the long history of bodily discipline and moral regulation to an
emphasis on nurture and support. This alteration in approaches to child rearing
perpetuated, as Bernard Wishy writes, a certain early American romanticism in that “the
essentially good child, or the child corrupted by a harsh world, was to be converted or
restored to his true innocent nature” (134).

The minister and social reformer Charles Loring Brace saw youth delinquency as
that which contributed to the formation of “dangerous classes,” the “young burglars and
murderers, the garroters and rioters, the thieves and flash-men” (31). It was Brace, the
head of New York’s Children’s Aid Society, who championed the placing-out system in
which eastern urban youth were placed and adopted out to western farmers and
homesteaders where they might shed the iniquities of the city, a cost effective and
unevenly successful program that by 1929 had relocated some 200,000 youth to the west.
Jane Adams, co-founder of Chicago’s Hull House and a leader in the settlement
movement, called on reformers to “know the modern city in its weakness and
wickedness, and then seek to rectify and purify it” (42). Adams strikes a more
compassionate tone when suggesting that youth were “possessed of good intentions,” but
in need of outlets and support (42). Either way, child poverty signaled a rudimentary

abuses of children in industry.
criminal-type and the category through which social ills like violence and addiction emerge. The sometimes ambiguous positions of child reformers, as Steven Mintz writes, saw them striving “both to protect children from the dangers of urban society and to protect society from dangerous children” (155). Despite these contradictions, Progressive Era reformers dramatically improved public health, reducing infant and child mortality in eastern cities by over 50 percent, and forwarded critically important legislation designed to protect children’s rights, curtail child labor, and reduce social risks to a now far more idealized American youth.

While social activists like Brace and Adams directed their energies at reform, Jacob Riis’ *How the Other Half Lives* (1890) revealed the stark crisis of a seemingly abandoned generation. The social realism expressed in photographs like Riis’ “Didn’t Live Nowhere” and “Street Arabs in Sleeping Quarters” crystallized the hard actualities of cultural violence and its traumatic affects just as the pessimistic spirit of literary naturalism took hold among the reading public. That photography provided, as Alan Trachtenberg suggests, a means to “interpret the present in light of the past” (6) helps explain the value of social realist photography in the period, but Riis’ documentarian work, much like realist fiction, also locked the subject in the “conventional image of his or her social role” (28) thereby presenting child poverty as a problematic but no less static quality of being. The child became an almost monumental figure, a type, who in photographic, critical, and fictional representations bore witness to his own abjection.

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Perhaps it was this strange conflation of harsh exigencies and those sentimentalized narratives of childhood adventure that churned within Outcault’s mind as he re-imagined the ragamuffin in the form of the Yellow Kid.

*The Yellow Kid* ran between 1895 and 1898 in both Pulitzer’s *World* and Hearst’s *New York Journal*, and for four short years the Kid was so popular that he spawned a merchandising industry that featured the Kid’s mischievous grin on everything from coffee cups to whisky. Yellow Kid themed parties were also, apparently, a thing, as were stage adaptations like Frank Dumont’s *The Yellow Kid Who Lives in Hogan’s Alley* (1897). Bill Blackbeard attributes the Kid’s abrupt decline in popularity in 1898 and subsequent drop from the papers to nationalist sentiments expressed against all things Spanish during the Spanish-American War, the yellow of the Spanish flag being no exception. At the same time, the “simultaneous appearance of two Yellow Kids in newspaper strips, and the flood of unlicensed products,” as Ian Gordon suggests, “diminished the value of the character as a commodity for both Outcault and the publishers” (33). The anxieties of war, along with an emerging discontent with the sensationalist nature of yellow journalism, of which the Kid is understandably associated, and the emergence of other popular comic strips presented a confluence of events that the Kid simply could not withstand. Nonetheless, in his brief heyday the Yellow Kid, who

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24 Following Outcault’s departure from Pulitzer’s *World* in 1896 the duty of drawing the Yellow Kid fell to George Luks, who continued the series for the *World* while Outcault drew it for Hearst’s *Journal*, effectively creating two Yellow Kids. In time, the Kid’s penchant for fantastic adventure extended from imaginary play in the streets of New York to more global dimensions and Outcault, in his work for the *New York Journal*, developed a series titled “Around the World with the Yellow Kid” in which the Yellow Kid found himself adventuring via steam ships and hot air balloons through foreign lands like England, Italy, and Egypt. While the Yellow Kid was not invading foreign countries his exploits nonetheless appear to reflect the expansionist ethos of the period.


26 In the years following the *Yellow Kid*, serial cartoons in the newspapers became all but a requisite feature in Sunday editions. Young and old readers alike welcomed the domestic comedies of Rudolph
availed himself to the literate and illiterate alike, enjoyed a readership in the hundreds of thousands.

Outcault’s Yellow Kid sallied through the Bowery District with his band of delinquents greeting his readers each Sunday with a burlesque of street life, raucous and stylized in such a way as to present to the reader a Vaudevillian stage out of doors. Lowbrow theatricality cuts to the heart of the Kid, as both his deviousness and physicality play at the nerve of a spectacle that at once compels and revolts. Both interlocutor and spectatorial subject, the Kid presented a specimen of child poverty that brimmed with a youthful exuberance in counterpoint to his abjection, and it was this nightshirted champion of the downtrodden, who provided Outcault’s frames with social commentary and a privileged view into the lives of the children of Hogan’s Alley.

In a New York blighted by poverty, the Yellow Kid and his miscreant pals undertake carnivalesque adventures amid drunkards, vagrants, and their own downtrodden relations. Amid Outcault’s calamitous urbanity it is not uncommon to find malnourished goats and horses roaming amid shrieking cats and mange-ridden dogs. The grimy streets, cracked tenement windows, and shadowy doorways suggest a despair that permeates the space and the psyches of its inhabitants, but, as David Nasaw suggests, “to paint too grim a picture of life in the early twentieth century, to speak only of scarcity, to emphasize only poverty is to caricature the conditions of daily life for many” (12). Outcault’s work is fundamentally a caricature and one that suggests a negative ecology that while permeable and subject to change, nonetheless demonstrates the ongoing

Dirks’ Katzenjammer Kids (1897), George McManus’ Brining Up Father (1913), and Sidney Smith’s The Gumps (1917). Titles like Frederick Burr Opper’s Happy Hooligan (1900) paved the way for the slapstick antics of Budd Fisher’s Mutt and Jeff (1907) and anthropomorphized characters like George Herriman’s Krazy Kat (1913). The comic form evolved in myriad ways over the course of the early twentieth-century and continued to reproduce figurations of the ragamuffin and child adventurer seen most notably in the surreal works of Winsor McCay’s Little Nemo in Slumber Land (1905), as well as R.F. Outcault’s own Buster Brown (1902), and later in Harold Gray’s Little Orphan Annie (1924).
pervasiveness of forces that exhaust resources, degrade the environment, and debilitate life. As much as this negative ecology is an objective and external process so too is it subjective and internal, influencing emotion and affect just as it does social and environmental systems.

Through its representations of a circular environmental logic, I see Outcault’s Hogan’s Alley as perpetuating a negative ecology that reinforces negative psychological, social, and environmental conditions, generated in part by the socioeconomic and ideological forces that appear absent but in reality actively produce the slum’s materiality. It is in this negative ecology, characterized by the anxieties of poverty, pernicious class conflicts, and the tenement’s degraded spaces, that the Yellow Kid and the cadre of urchins with which he cavorts, eek out their freedom and adventure in mimicry of the adult world through scenarios that range from matrimony and horse racing to the parade of armies. Despite their environment being “the city of the ‘other half’ [where] the sewers were always clogged and the streets and alleyways filled with garbage” (Nasaw 9), the Yellow Kid and his pals interrupt the narratological procession of their degradation, demonstrating a rupture in the discourse of childhood abjection.

In order to underscore Outcault’s depiction of poverty in Hogan’s Alley, its crisis of community, and what seems to be a near totalizing negativity of place, I’ll discuss several street scenes that progressively demonstrate the relationship between youth poverty and U.S. nationalism in certain of Outcault’s socially realist inflected comics. In “Moving Day in Hogan’s Alley,” Outcault depicts an ensemble of tenement dwellers haranguing a family evicted from an apartment. The scene is animated with the noise of the street, as dogs bark and men and women shout over one another. The tenement kids jeer as they hurl bricks, wooden boards, and baseballs at the family, who hollers back in protest. One child fires a spitball into the eye of a toddler and another readies to beat a
mange bearing goat with a rod. Yet another kid presents a burning stick to the face of a horse, which readies to rear back and bound.

Figure 1

The Yellow Kid gleefully motions to the scene as the undesirable Duggan family carts their dishes and laundry and iron stove from Hogan’s Alley. Even a caged bird hung from a second story window taunts, “Good Bye. Good Bye.” The proprietor of the tenement, “Casey’s Waldorf Annex,” hammers a sign near the front door that reads “To Let. 3rd Floor Back To Any Family Who Will Pay The Rent.” The mother of the three children, two of whom return the taunts, stands with arms wide in argument with another woman, who clings to her babe with one hand while bearing her fist with the other. While neighbors certainly argue from time to time, Outcault’s piece plays on middle-class anxieties by suggesting communal antagonism is a fixture of tenement life. Cartoonish behavior is depicted as real and real exigent conditions as cartoon, aspects suggesting social disregard for the infantile poor and the delegitimization of their politics.

In the turn-of-the-century, mass European immigration and the Great Migration of African Americans, fleeing widespread lynching campaigns and socioeconomic and
political disfranchisement, made New York City a hub of multi-ethnic and multi-racial demographic conglomeration. As the Yellow Kid, who was formally christened Mickey Dugan in 1896, demonstrates, impoverished Irish immigrants figure centrally in Outcault’s work, but his comedy, as Mary Wood suggests, relies on the spectacle of vaudeville and African American minstrelsy. These features suggest that the Kid’s humor is predicated in part on the reader’s normalized cognitive dissonance towards the spectacle and its racialized and socially oppressive narratological sources. Outcault’s indeterminacies, as Lara Saguisag writes, “at once infantilized and humanized” his impoverished characters whose presence “in newspaper comics were perhaps the most potent manifestation of ambivalence for the Other” (13). Arguably, one has to acknowledge certain prejudices and social power structures in order to ever really be in on the joke.

Plainly enough, we can see how the comedy of the Kid might play differently for different audiences. While I believe Outcault’s work sensationalizes child poverty, I also acknowledge that the Yellow Kid is a reaction to this critical social problem. The ambiguity of Outcault’s project speaks to the fact that the kid is not a unique person, but a representative figure, a point Outcault himself emphasized in a 1902 Bookman interview when he stated “[t]he Yellow Kid was not an individual but a type. When I used to go about the slums on newspaper assignments I would encounter him often,

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27 Mary Wood’s web-based essay provides an insightful and thoroughgoing historical analysis of the Yellow Kid and his place in print culture. In discussing Outcault’s tendencies towards racialization and pickaninny caricatures, Wood writes that “[t]he African-American for Outcault is another tool in making a joke, not a real participant in the merrymaking. Outcault creates a world defined by class tensions in the city, but suggests that white working class readers still need someone to stand upon, uniting all white readers through the one thing they have in common” (np).

wandering out of doorways or sitting down on dirty doorsteps. I always loved the Kid. He had a sweet character and a sunny disposition” (130).

To conceive of the Kid as a type suggests, as Ian Gordon indicates, that what Outcault’s Kid lacks in individuality is made up through characterization. Jared Gardner writes that like the photographic studies of motion made by photographers Eadweard Muybridge and Étienne-Jules Marey, early American comics “sought to study the movement of social types” (7). Types, and the racial logics promoting them, according to Gardner, were destabilized through comics’ seriality and with the Yellow Kid the social type transforms from ethnic Irish poor to “a mass-mediated personality” that effectively “accord[s] to the stereotype an identity” (13). So, through Outcault’s de-actualization of young Mickey Dugan, the Yellow Kid is formulated at outset not as a person but as a thing, an amalgamation of the qualities and associated metaphors constructing here a type: poor, Irish, urban, youth. We can now see the social construction of identify in action, as Outcault and his readership work to inscribe, on that billowing yellow nightshirt, their refractory visions of who and what the Yellow Kid really is.

As Outcault’s narrative progressed so too did the magical ferocity of Hogan’s Alley. In “What They Did to the Dog-Catcher in Hogan’s Alley,” the Yellow Kid again stands as an impish figure lampooning the depraved scene behind him. Here a city dogcatcher has been brought to the ground by a brick. The children mob him, kicking and bludgeoning him with sticks, while yet another mange-infested dog tears at his leg. One youth falls from a fire escape and someone else has set fire to the dogcatcher’s wagon. Some children wield stones and clubs while others ready their axes. In the far right a second dogcatcher can be seen fleeing the violence as two dogs and a child with cudgel give chase. In the diegetic space of Outcault’s work the crisis of the character’s lives reproduces itself within the negative ecology of the space they inhabit, places
overflowing with tight-packed tenement dwellers and rife with social discord. Outcault’s “Moving Day” and “Dogcatcher” present a frenetic claustrophobia, urban environments that seem to pinion their misdirected subjects, as was the experience of many urban youth, into the lived space of only a few square blocks.

![Figure 2](image.jpg)

Outside of the home and school, urban children possessed a world of their own that was governed by its own distinct behavioral codes. Here, as David Nasaw shows, “[t]he block was the basic unit of social organization for the city kids” (32). Territorial transgressions often led to conflicts among youth “gangs” and transgressing into these contested spaces could easily result in a child “chased out of the neighborhood with sticks, stones, and fists” (Nasaw 34). Such antagonisms, although far less dramatic, extended to adults as well, as youth “resented the intrusion of others into their play world” (Nasaw 20). Outcault’s “Dogcatcher” satirizes these youth conflicts and comically inverts children’s territorial policing to target the adult transgressor in their
midst. At the same time, the violent character of the poor is realized because of its objectification and Outcault’s “Dogcatcher” projects the bowery’s reality as co-occurring and yet separated out from the one the reader inhabits. Beyond the mob violence of the slum presumably exists the less violent and depraved community in which the reader is situated. The illusion is that the two ecologies are not coextensive when in fact they are constantly permeating and conditioning one another. More to the point, it is this other social ecology to which the second of Outcault’s dogcatchers appears to run.

Mary Wood suggests the Yellow Kid’s humor resides in the ways it provided “an alternate glimpse of the tenement realm as a place of excitement and danger, and was perhaps able to satisfy poor audiences looking for escape and rich audiences looking for the spectacle of the slum” (np). Moreover, the Yellow Kid “subvert[ed] the increasingly codified roles assigned to the rich and the poor. It defies the growing sentiment that perhaps America is not the promised land of opportunity…and instead suggests that the only place where roles can be reassigned is in a fictional, two-dimensional world—where the genre must be comedy in order to subvert reality” (np). It is a bleak reality in which social liberation is delimited to the fictional portrayal of revolt and yet such alternative narrativizations of social experience are the antecedents to actualizable social change. The danger, however, resides in the representation’s concretization and the public’s potential inability to see beyond the satire and its transient relief.

The practice of “jumping the rent,” as depicted in Outcault’s “Moving Day” seems to erase community solidarity, but as Bill Blackbeard notes, this was an act “more likely to evoke sympathy than the neighborhood condemnation shown in Outcault’s cartoon” (39-40). Outcault’s depictions of urban strife then go far afield in their sketching of metropolitan barbarities and here reinforce existing class prejudices at the expense of his subjects. While Outcault’s depictions of the impoverished exercising such
petty violence upon one another seems perverse, the battery of the dogcatcher indicates that the poor, and especially impoverished youth, resisted the policing of their lives by city authorities. Through the expulsion of one form of an external regulatory power the bowery youth assert responsibility over the management of their own social relations to the end of community survival and self-care. Outcault’s tendency to illustrate the lower classes as eager to do one another in presents a violence that provoked condemnation from magazines like *Puck* and *Life*, as well as the clergy, libraries, and schools, but as is evident in Outcault’s “Dogcatcher” this violent reactivity could also challenge those institutional forces that like the dogcatcher asserted the right to legislate the lives of the poor.

Arthur Asa Berger argues that while such images “served to *focus attention on the problem of poverty*” (26) their “fantasy and use of humor masked a sense of despair” (27). Berger writes that “underneath the horseplay and absurdity, we find a world of anguish and pain…a sense of malaise, a feeling that the old, rural, natural American is being destroyed” (31). Outcault’s representations of a community in turmoil often indexed the impoverished as a fallen citizenry given over to base impulses and vice with little regard for one another’s welfare. The bowery’s poor appear to lack morality and social competence and so actively threaten social codes and the systems designed to manage their lives. Outcault’s realism contains and configures impoverishment and restricts its connection to the ideological and socioeconomic forces that produce it. Yet even as Outcault’s comic represented the poor as unfit and incapable of productive citizenship, through his work poverty becomes palatable and, as I believe Outcault’s cartoonish examples make clear, his scenes of social discord bring the problem of child poverty to the foreground while concealing its causes in the background.
Outcault’s “The War Scare in Hogan’s Alley,” published in the March 15, 1896 edition of the *World* responds to a territorial dispute between Venezuela and British Guiana. This comic situates the Yellow Kid in the foreground of a regiment of would be child soldiers arrayed for inspection and brandishing everything from washtub drums to picket signs, toy guns, sticks, and even an axe and a sword. The Yellow Kid sports a red cap and drags a toy canon behind him while another small child, also bald and garbed in a yellow nightshirt punches a child, depicted as Chinese and demonstrably foreign, in the nose. Behind the brawling toddlers a girl stands with the words “The Girl I Left Behind Me” emblazoned across her dress. At the fore of the image an older boy is clothed in navy and plays the role of field marshal complete with a feather in his cap. With one hand he raises a sword above the crowd and with the other clings to the chains that tether two small dogs, one with muzzle and one without, whose collar reads “Dogs of War.”

![Figure 3](image)

Taken at first glance the scene seems innocent enough: these are children playing at solliery. But in such a reading lies the crux of the problem. Outcault’s “War Scare” draws from a long history of political cartooning and its staunchly nationalist sentiment evokes both racial bigotry and the romantic nostalgia of self-sacrifice in times of war. In
the case of the Yellow Kid, it is the sacrifice of some of the poorest of society. While the young and Irish Mickey Dugan here postures against British imperialism, the Yellow Kid and his child army ironically stand as the ready-made agents of U.S. imperialism. The piece, while comedic, is also rhetorical. The work declares that there is a national body of which even those of the most profound disenfranchisement remain a critical part.

“War Scare” is part and parcel of an ideological apparatus, one that in the Spanish American War of 1898 realized its own capacity to exceed the American geographies of the Monroe Doctrine. Moreover, it was the Yellow Kid’s dueling publishers, Hearst and Pulitzer, whose circulation war electrified the public with sensational narratives of both urban calamity and the drama of the Spanish-American War.

While Outcault’s “War Scare” predates the Spanish American War by two years, during the war with Spain the national clamor for volunteers compelled enlistments from throughout the country and across the social spectrum. Harvard undergrads embraced a newly rejuvenated national spirit, while Georgia moonshiners and Boston toughs signed up to avoid prosecution. Recruits also came from the very same New York Bowery that features so prominently in Outcault’s comics. In an article from April 27th 1898, The New York Times documents two thousand new and somewhat surly bowery recruits incensed by a logistical error preventing their exercises at the Sixty-ninth Regiment

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30 One such cartoon addressing Pulitzer’s and Hearst’s ongoing feud was drawn by Barritt, Leon. “War.” Vm. New York. Vol. 1, No. 2. 29 June 1898. Library of Congress. Loc. AP101.V55 1898 (Case X) [P&P]. In Barritt’s cartoon the two publishing magnates are ironically depicted as adult-children and garbed in yellow kid attire, vigorously shoving against giant child’s blocks that spell out the word “war.” For further reading on the life William Randolph Hearst and the life of Joseph Pulitzer, as well as the competition between the two see Ferdinand Lundberg’s Imperial Hearst: A Social Biography. New York: Equinox Press, 1936., W.A. Swanberg’s Citizen Hearst. New York: Scribner’s, 1961., George Juergens’
Armory. Another article from April 29th suggests “Lively Recruiting in the Bowery” and goes on to state that while many bowery candidates could not satisfy the physical examination those “‘awkward squads’” (4) that did were put to drill. One might imagine how the children of Hogan’s Alley could envision their own heroics in service to a nation that might reward their bravery and lift them out of poverty if only they were to risk their lives at the expense of the lives of others.

In Outcault’s “The Day After ‘The Glorious Fourth’ Down in Hogan’s Alley,” published in a July 7, 1895 edition of the World, Outcault depicts what appears to be youth in the aftermath of some brutal conflict. A year later, his “An Old-Fashioned Fourth of July in Hogan’s Alley,” from July 5, 1896, provides the reader an image of the catastrophic national celebration that resulted in the numerous bruised and bandaged children seen in the July 7th image of 1895. In “The Day After,” the scene is somber, as if a stillness has settled over the lower ward after some great conflagration, but in “An Old Fashioned Fourth,” the kids of Hogan’s Alley delight as they blast one another and the neighborhood dogs with firecrackers and roman candles. In this 1896 image, the fire escapes of the tenement, which still posts “Flats to Let,” are packed with residents who look on in terror as a fire bursts from a third floor window. People have fallen one atop the other at the base of a ladder, while several others leap to the ground below. One terrified mother lowers her infant by a rope and a parrot squawks, “This ain’t as funny as it looks.”

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The children of Hogan’s Alley, some of whom are bandaged and others blindfolded due to their injuries, revel in the spectacle of the 4th. The Yellow Kid lets out peels of laughter as he launches firecrackers causing a dog to jump while another takes flight in terror with explosives tied to its tail. In contrast to Outcault’s 4th of July in 1896, his depiction of the aftermath of the 4th from 1895 reveals a scene of maimed and mournful children, a sentimental depiction memorializing the American fallen of the Revolutionary War. One child in a yellow nightshirt stares from a second-floor balcony, while the other children: bruised, bandaged, and battered gather to take stock of their losses. Some children are missing an arm and others stand on crutches. One child in the foreground lifts his arm to display a hand shorn of three fingers. One room of the tenement is noticeably blackened, perhaps by a fire the night before, while in the background a woman and her two small children look upon the street and a tattered American flag hangs from a bent pole. Based on these imagistic markers, it seems reasonable enough that in Outcault’s retelling of holiday revelries he imagined his
celebratory image of 1896 as a narrative precursor to the somber aftermath depicted in 1895.

Figure 5

Outcault’s war comics, as I’ve chosen to classify these three, disclose the way July 4th celebrations sublimate violence and war. The children’s play telegraphs the disintegration of those caught in war’s theater and integrates society through a narrative of shared self-sacrifice. These images hold a certain sublimity, overpowering in its demand to surrender oneself in order to perpetuate the state. So long as we detach sublimity from a static physicality and link it, as Slavoj Žižek does, to ideology, then Outcault’s war comics radiate with the violating sublimity of U.S. nationalism.33 Outcault’s depictions of social depravity and youth mobs make a farce of the period’s exigencies, but those nationalist strains that contextualize Hogan’s Alley during July 4th celebrations present an irreconcilable contradiction as they incorporate the urchin into the national body while still marking the fundamental excision of the impoverished child from civil life.

Outcault’s comic configured its youthful protagonists as locked in the paradoxical dynamic of national allegiance to a society that facilitated the predatory economics that impoverished them. The national holiday quite literally batters the kids of the 1895 cartoon, who stand as wartime casualties in miniature. These haggard figures, whose poverty expels them from the cast of ideal citizenship, nonetheless stand as embryonic national subjects recast as laboring and militarized citizens willing to sacrifice their bodies and spirits for the project of American hegemony of which they remain only marginally a part. The kids of Hogan’s Alley represent what is to be feared from moral, familial, and material collapse, and yet they stand as would be patriots, the war dead before the war has come. *The Yellow Kid* expressed the visuality of child poverty, abuse, and neglect in such a way as to bring these radical social ills to the fore of public consciousness, but as a spectacle and simulation that through its comedy undermined the exigencies of child poverty even as it projected the cartoon Kid in realist terms.34

The ragamuffin trope dramatizes poverty, but in so doing it risks the overdetermination of its significance, and so the momentum of public energy is exerted in the expression of either agreement or dissent on issues of social welfare and the structural changes needed to address them. The scope of a problem like child poverty is so monumental that for the majority of people its rectification lies well outside the activities of daily life. The mutual recognition that poverty is a social ill demonstrates a shared communal identity, an “intimate public” that, as Lauren Berlant suggests, is “organized by fantasies of transcending, dissolving, or refunctioning the obstacles that shape their historical conditions” (8) even as that public’s powers to affect change are

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34 See Freud, Sigmund. *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*. New York: Norton, 1989. Essentially, Freud posits that the joke often discloses a repressed desire or psychosocially censured issue. Jokes coordinate cultural understanding and align social groups through the joke’s supplementary function as it acknowledges the object of repression even while deferring its presence.
largely distributed out and deferred to other mediatory medico-legal and social systems. The problem lies in the assumption that empathy alone is a satisfactory intervention. Such emotional energies ultimately permeate the ethical relations of the majority to resonate as a feeling that remains unsaid, an expectation for vocality collapsed within its discourse about itself.

Outcault’s *Yellow Kid* integrated publics through the satirization of the trauma and negative ecological conditions affecting the disintegration of a kid who miraculously returned unharmed each week. Whether well-off or poor, the public connected to the Kid and, as Ian Gordon suggests, this identification is in part attributable to the ways the comic strip thumbs at “‘intimate emotions’ in simple, repeatable, easily recognizable forms,” a quality that “made them generally accessible [and] a factor that advertising researchers later concluded was the central appeal of comic strips” (23). Berger too is correct when he suggests that the Kid’s popularity relied on how “Americans saw themselves in it,” recognizing a “worldliness and bitterness that we do not now associate with childhood” (32). Our cultural expectation of childhood is not that it is marked by hardship and degradation, and yet U.S. child poverty persists with little sign of abating, part of an uneven national narrative with rates staggeringly disproportionate across regions and social groups.\(^{35}\) Outcault’s scenes position the reader to engage child poverty as a joke, a presentation allowing the discomfitting feelings registered by such depictions to fold the laugh of the urchin back upon itself, and so negate its critique and hail,

staging the reader’s identification of the American ragamuffin as an unsettling presence whose abandonment shadows the culture from which he comes.

In much of the ragamuffin literature that preceded the *Yellow Kid*, the children always come out on top. They light out to the western territories to be made anew, inherit vast fortunes, find religion, marry their childhood sweethearts, or otherwise apply their industriousness to the pursuits of education and wealth. There are significant problems with all of these romanticized scenarios, but what is important is that each narrative tends to resolve itself. Children and society come to terms and the child is wrapped securely in the social fold. None of that happens for the Kid. Nobody rescues him and he certainly doesn’t save himself. Ultimately, he stays right where he always was, in that tenement with the cacophony of the city like a miasma, its summer heat suffocating, the Kid wild eyed and delighted by the madness that surrounds him, his head shaven and deloused, his nightshirt stained with a handprint that is and is not his own.

There is no future for the Yellow Kid and perhaps that is the point, the joke we should have picked up on, because the Kid is a waste, a gross depiction of class prejudice and a marker of the malignancy of willful ignorance. The *Yellow Kid* did not sentimentalize impoverished children so much as it sensationalized childhood depravity through the aesthetics of an emergent literary form and, in many ways, complemented the yellow journalism of its publishers, who strove to turn tragedy into spectacle for a culture immersed in the rhetoric of disaster. There is violence inherent in Outcault’s work, as there is in any endeavor to make comedy out of human anguish, but the disintegrative energies emanating from this violence disclose opportunities to reimagine and so gesture to resolve such narratives of social conflict and crisis. At the turn-of-the-
century, child poverty presented a pernicious issue and a grave fact of American national life. The *Yellow Kid* turned it into a source for mass entertainment. Outcault’s *Yellow Kid* ridiculed and pantomimed poverty’s threat and, however transiently, subdued the menace of the poor, diluting narratives of biological retrogression and social fitness through a kid that took center-stage, grinning wide with a “Hully Gee,” a cartoon parody of the lived grief of the other.

What is frequently termed U.S. disaster culture really emerges at the turn-of-the-century when an expanding national press, of which the *Yellow Kid* played a minor but not insignificant part, fanned disaster news like wildfire. From the eastern seaboard to the west coast, narratives of sentiment and sensation coordinated populations within a shared narrative of American life contextualized by innumerable threats ranging from earthquakes to addiction. Necessarily, disasters motivate popular ascent for the state’s mitigation of crises, a process legitimizing the state’s authority over daily life, and modernity, as a social and historical category, is arguably defined by civilization’s capacity to reduce losses incurred by disasters and to resolve social crises. If the state is incapable of performing these duties then we might ask what good is the state? Whether it is the Great Chicago Fire of 1871 or the September 11th terrorist attacks, crisis galvanizes the national body, which rallies around the state’s promise to produce a safer and more secure world.37 Nineteenth-century disaster news, and the yellow journalism of which the *Yellow Kid* was a part, entertained and informed, just as it does today,
amplifying disaster's spectacle and theatricality. At the same time, disaster news and crisis entertainment, suppresses, displaces, and renarrativizes social actualities into the very crisis conditions that the state often perpetuates.

The (dis)integrative aesthetics that so interest me are every bit a product of this crisis culture. American literary realism, which eschews abstraction and emerges in concert with postbellum disaster culture, is the form that most clearly demonstrates the unadulterated actuality of social disintegration. Literary realism, and especially American literary naturalism, exposes the reader to the contradictory forces that produce the subject’s disintegration just as these images and narratives coordinate the public’s social integration. To say that in the period catastrophes abounded throughout U.S. culture is an understatement. Whether at Coney Island or on the front page of Pulitzer’s New York World, disaster became a way to mediate social experience allowing the viewer the illusion of control and a fleeting mastery over destructive forces. By staging and memorializing calamities, crisis narratives align publics and the reader to take on the heroic dimensions of national citizenship.\(^{38}\)

The Science of Tooth and Claw: Social Darwinism and Disaster Culture

Foucault argues, this process requires surveillance, coercion, and, when necessary, militarized response as means to reduce actual and perceived threats to state’s cultural authority.

Interpreting disaster as a spectrum encompassing both large singular events and smaller localized crises allows for a clearer view of how society and the state regulate cultural form. As I suggest, rhetorically, natural disasters and social crises overlap, communicating sentimental and sensational narratives that construct public understanding while producing disaster as an entertainment. By making space for social crises within the definitional category of disaster we acknowledge the rhetorical tendency to regard crises as possessing a certain contiguity. The danger in disaster culture is how the anxieties generated by major events like, say, the 1889 Johnstown Flood or the Titanic disaster of 1912 tend to conflate with tensions associated with social problems like poverty, crime, and addiction.

The state of constant anxiety that disaster culture feeds produces threat as a ubiquitous presence and often treats specific crises as ahistorical and detached from the material forces generating them. In considering this effect, Rob Nixon’s concept of slow violence is particularly helpful in that Nixon asks us to recalibrate our awareness of seemingly covert threats “posed not just by imperceptible violence but by imperceptible change whereby violence is decoupled from its original causes by the workings of time” (11). Narratologically, slow violence is perceivable in the displaced causalities governing social problems. For instance, what the visualizable poverty of a character like Hugh Wolfe or Jurgis Rudkus conceals is the structural violence, historical determinants, and past traumas that produce the crisis of their poverty.

U.S. disaster culture diffuses crisis narratives via an array of mass communication technologies and media’s expanding reach enabled the transmittal of repetitious and widely disseminated narratives of national crisis that communicated, contextualized, and actualized disaster’s ubiquity in the turn-of-the-century United States. Co-occurring with the incessant permutations of crisis in the public sphere was the rise of social Darwinism,
a philosophy predicated on evolutionary theory that helped speed perception of disaster’s imminence and the naturalization of social crises. Social Darwinists assessed human fitness along a biological and social hierarchy and saw in evolutionary theory a means to explain mankind’s developmental past, present, and future. In the Progressive Era, Herbert Spencer took lead in this regard and Spencer’s synthetic philosophy identified evolution as a unifying theory that expressed itself through biological and social progression. Societal advancement, according to both Spencer and his contemporary Francis Galton, occurred through environmentally determined biological competition. This logic held mass appeal for a nation where the principles of competition and laissez-faire capitalism enabled avowed social Darwinists like Andrew Carnegie and John D. Rockefeller to amass vast fortunes. Despite their gross misuses of power, labor suppression, and the sheer violence of their industrial monopolies, these American oligarchs were proof enough that only the fittest survive.

Social Darwinism perverted Darwinian evolutionary theory and its trenchant racism, sexism, and classism fed the idea that natural evolutionary progress positioned wealthy, white, Anglo-Saxon men at the top of a global civilizational hierarchy. Because

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39 Hofstadter, Richard. Social Darwinism in American Thought. Boston: Beacon Press, 1955. Richard Hofstadter’s history of social Darwinism in the United States reinforces just how central Spencer was to Progressive Era social thought. Spencer’s physics understood evolution as a process of positive change and dissolution, likening it to energy’s thermodynamic ebb and flow. As Hofstadter suggests, in Spencer’s thought “[e]volution is the progressive integration of matter, accompanied by dissipation of motion” and “dissolution is the disorganization of matter accompanied by the absorption of motion” (37). Energy, the force vitalizing the physical world, evidences an evolutionary process manifesting what Spencer saw as “a continuous change from incoherent homogeneity…to coherent heterogeneity” (37). For Spencer, homogeneity reveals instability because the effects of energy, what Spencer terms force, give rise to changes in development and invariably transforms the homogenous into stable evolutionarily progressive and heterogeneous forms. Life, as society, naturally moves from simple undifferentiated homogeneity to complex differentiated heterogeneity.

40 Herbert Spencer’s synthetic philosophy emphasizes progressive biopsychosocial development and considers evolution as the natural process that philosophy seeks to understand. Spencer considered natural laws as governing reality and that these laws direct life towards increasingly complex development. Asserting that psychology was based in physiology and that the human mind was subject to the self-same natural laws governing the material world, Spencer’s synthetic philosophy sought a panacea that aligned physics, especially the law of the conservation of energy, with evolution.
it posited that success was the result of individual fitness and not structural mechanisms, the Darwinist perspective appealed to the spirit of American individualism and the belief that men could earn social prestige and economic prosperity through hard work and determination alone. Social Darwinism also reinforced the authority of the state and informed public health and judicial strategies to more effectively manage populations. It encouraged class and racial division and enshrined state authority by positing that certain crises were the unavoidable result of in-born social characteristics.\textsuperscript{41} In the hands of the social Darwinists, evolution naturalized crisis conditions and helped embed disaster as the preordained constant of social life.

According to the social Darwinists, not everyone was going to make it to the finish line. Biologically quantifiable features proved why some people remained less fit than others, but only so far as logical fallacies could be conditionally validated through empirically crafted eugenicist discourses. Arguably, social Darwinism responded to the postbellum uncertainties of white racial power in the Americas just as its theories fueled the European colonization of Africa in the late nineteenth-century. Social Darwinism’s circular developmental-evolutionary logic draws heavily from Thomas Malthus’ \textit{Principle of Population}, and just as demographic expansion and environmental carrying capacities are irreconcilable in Malthus’ argument, so too is his position that human nature is fundamentally inadequate to manage personal desire. “The power of population is so superior to the power in the earth to produce subsistence for man,” writes Malthus,

\textsuperscript{41} See Galton, Francis. \textit{Hereditary Genius: An Inquiry into Its Laws and Consequences}. London: MacMillan and Co., 1869. Galton conceptualizes life as an evolutionary process differentiated by virtue of environmental conditions. He writes that “[w]hen the severity of the struggle for existence is not too great for the powers of the race, its action is healthy and conservative, otherwise it is deadly, just as we may see exemplified in the scanty, wretched vegetation that leads a precarious existence near the summer snow line of the Alps, and disappears altogether a little higher up” (345-46). Galton applies the same evolutionary logic that he does to scrub grass as he does people, asserting that environment has “the effect either of modifying the nature of the races through the process of natural selection, whenever the
“that premature death must in some shape or other visit the human race” (44). For Malthus, and the bevy of social Darwinists, social strife resulted from natural processes and external environmental pressures brought to bear on the individual.

Spencer similarly asserts that adequate biopsychosocial evolution requires the development of moral reason. Those unable to check their own impulses signified a lesser evolved person, who too readily confused necessity with desire. Those less fit pose risk to the civilizational development of society because the less evolved constitute a downward devolutionary force. These less evolved people, not surprisingly, constitute the lower classes, the poor, and are more readily seduced by vice, what Malthus views as the “active and able ministers of depopulation” (44). Vice, according to social Darwinist logic, delineates the fit from the unfit and, in much the same way as poverty, reveals tangible evidence that some were born to fail.

When Spencer writes in Social Statistics that “[h]e on whom his own stupidity, or vice, or idleness, entails loss of life, must, in the generalizations of philosophy, be classed with the victims of weak viscera or malformed limbs” (206), he coordinates changes were sufficiently slow and the race sufficiently pliant, or of destroying them altogether, when the changes were too abrupt or the race unyielding” (344).

42 The Malthusian catastrophe, articulated by Thomas Malthus in his Essay on the Principle of Population, suggests that unchecked population growth invariably outstrips available resources and produce social conflict and environmental despoliation. Malthus’ argument posits that unlike flora and fauna human beings are less subject to imminent environmental restrictions and so social social measures are required to curb demographic growth. “Impelled to the increase of his species by an equally powerful instinct, reason interrupts his career, and asks him whether he may not bring beings into the world, for whom he cannot provide the means of subsistence” (13). Without enforceable methods of social control and restrictive population management, death and destruction are the natural consequences flowing from humanity’s illimitable drive to procreate. Whether it’s vice or not that does-in mankind, Malthusian catastrophes abound in the forms of “sickly seasons, epidemics, pestilence, and plague” all of which “advance in terrific array” while “gigantic inevitable famine stalks in the rear” (44-45).

43 As Herbert Spencer discusses in The Principles of Biology Vol. 1, his social theories respond to disaster conditions by biologizing and socializing crises and forwarding its thought and methodologies as ways to scientifically mediate disaster. Spencer’s “continual survival of the fittest” expressed homeostasis, “a balance between inner and outer forces,” (457) and it’s this equilibrium that separates organismic and civilizational survivability from destruction. Despite Spencer’s belief in charity, he argued that unencumbered natural equilibration, the “action of natural selection,” is unfortunately “restricted to the destruction of those who are constitutionally too feeble to live, even with external aid” (468-69). Human
psychological and physical disability with moral failings, both of which, according to Spencer, impede social progress.\textsuperscript{44} Clearly enough, Spencer identifies weakness as a maladaptive trait, and he writes unapologetically that “[i]f they are sufficiently complete to live, they do live, and it is well they should live” (206). If not, “they die, and it is best they should die,” noting that such mechanisms “purify society from those who are, in some respect or other, essentially faulty” (206). Spencer’s eugenics situates the intellectually and physically disabled alongside the addict and the poor, conflating the unfit into an undifferentiated homogenous threat managed by systems that engineer the social futures of particular demographic groups.\textsuperscript{45} The biopolitical systems outlined by Michel Foucault and in many ways the necropolitics of Achille Mbembe respond to the still persistent traces of social Darwinism’s strategies for social engineering and demographic management.\textsuperscript{46} Whether it is Spencer, Galton, or John Fiske, the social Darwinist’s forecasted calamity while naturalizing the unequal distribution of social

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44 Spencer maintained an unflagging utilitarianism and his ethics emphasized individual liberty and natural rights as refined heterogeneous social expressions. He believed individual satisfaction resulted from cooperative patterns that when internalized become intrinsic to the production of vibrant and just societies. However, it is nature, as he suggest in \textit{Social Statistics}, that conditions civilizational advancement, whose “whole effort…is to…make room for better” (205), an assertion that captures a range of people as genetically and socially inferior and so less naturally capable of survival.

45 Cultural and economic dominance provide Spencer evidence enough of western society’s capacity for survivability, but Spencer, like Fiske, also reasons that the slave societies and warfare of the distant and more recent past did not produce “oppressions…detrimental to their characters,” nor did they “retard in them the growth of the social sentiments” (\textit{Social Statistics} 240) because the society in question had not yet reached the evolutionary stage in which such practices negatively impacted social and moral development. However, once such practices are recognized as unjust, then “the times give proof that the old regime is no longer fit” (240). Principally, it is the experience not of victims, but of persecutors that informs Spencer’s relativism and the implicit authoritarianism that he cloaks in the liberal democratic principles of the modern state.

\end{flushright}
power, constructing the unfit as a threat whose presence and potential insurgency is responded to with authoritarian control.

The fact that such an elaborate theory, divining its evolutionary postulates as the natural progression of all life, could install itself in American life demonstrates how severely gender and racial anxieties corresponded to fears of losing social and economic power. Social Darwinian operates through the deliberate excision of history. It dictates empirical truth and, like most ideological systems, imposes a performative reality as a natural state.\(^{47}\) We encounter social Darwinism’s rhetorical nodes each time the poor are denigrated as shiftless and lazy and the addict is scorned for his lack of self-control. The social Darwinist position naturalizes men’s superiority to women and social Darwinism’s rhetoric biologically predisposes non-white racial and ethnic groups towards criminality. Looking beyond its grandiose socio-evolutionary theory, social Darwinism’s entire movement reacts against economic precarity and, as I suggest, the threats it perceives to existing gendered and racialized power structures after the dismantlement of slavery in the Americas.

In a period of successive economic panics and social destabilization, the social-evolutionary paradigm explained why some deserved their impoverishment and others did not. Darwinian catastrophizing laid bare the clear and present exigencies of poverty, addiction, and violence. Nowhere in the United States could one turn and not find evidence of racial discord, class antagonisms, and gendered oppression. Coupled with extreme economic insecurity was the recent emancipation of African Americans throughout the U.S. south, the influx of millions of immigrants, increasingly vocal and politically engaged women’s movements, and radical alterations to rural and urban

demographics. Within the expanding industrial American cities, class, race, and gender prejudice influenced social conflict and urban crime prompted fears that an array of foreign and non-white forces were actively destabilizing American life. The social Darwinists developed their decidedly populist theories to contain these challenges, defining class conflict, racial prejudice, and gendered threats as the natural conditions of a disaster culture that white America must actively redress.

Evolution’s influence was felt everywhere in the turn-of-the-century United States, and it helped set the stage for literary naturalists both in Europe and America. The survival of the fittest was evidence of evolution’s handy-work and a thesis that naturalized psychological despair, social disintegration, and environmental degradation. Social Darwinism rhetorically produced social inequality as a natural state and its logic helps contextualize the array of crises aestheticized by many realist writers, conditions vividly captured in Rebecca Harding Davis’ *Life in the Iron Mills* (1861), Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle* (1906), and William Dean Howells’ *A Hazard of New Fortunes* (1890). Each of these novels undermine the social Darwinist position and its evolutionary logics in favor of structural interpretations of poverty and social oppression and each novel’s scenes of (dis)integration open their subjects to critique of the contradictory forces influencing their abjection.

As my text selection indicates, I do not limit myself to an analysis of literary naturalism. However, I do find that naturalism’s characteristic pessimism, grotesquery, and raw depictions of violence make this unique realist form every bit the literature of disaster culture. Even Davis’ *Iron Mills*, which arguably ushers in the era of American literary realism certainly lacks the idealism we tend to associate with realist literature more generally and Outcault’s *Yellow Kid*, a comic, produces comedy amid the poverty of the New York Bowery. What I analyze in the work that follows are literatures that
aestheticize social conflicts through a hard-edged realism bound up in evolutionary theory and social determinism, a literary naturalism more distinctly projects an aesthetics of (dis)integration and discloses the integrative forces communicating the negative ecologies of social crisis. Naturalism arouses the feeling of perpetual threat. It frames the abjectified subject as a recognizable object and discloses the rhetorical and material forces perpetuating traumatic experience. These scenes of crisis solicit both empathy and aversion towards the subject, culminating in an emotional overload that often borders on disgust.

While disintegration demonstrates the undoing of the subject, integration reveals the ideological and social forces reinforced through the subject’s destruction. Integration can serve positive ends, such as the formation of resistance politics, or negative ones by reifying forms of social oppression. I approach (dis)integration as an aesthetic that stages the reader’s encounter with scenes of extreme precarity. These scenes overexpose human crises and so exude a sense of sublimity that crystallizes the negative ecology in which the subject is situated. The coextensive defacement of people and things resists dividing the human from the non-human and reveals the persistence of mutuality and integration. These negative ecologies show how social action and environment condition one another to affect ecological imbalance. Pure environmental instrumentalization produces incalculable risks to human and non-human life and narratives that reveal these conditions demonstrate the eco-social exhaustion that decimates environments and produces human life as waste. I focus on negative ecology in naturalist literature and literary realism because like the evolutionary determinism from which it draws, naturalism tends to integrate human subjectivity and environmental objectivity. Capturing the subject at the point of collapse while crystallizing the social and
environmental exigencies that exacerbate cultural crises demonstrates the negative ecology essential to the aesthetics of (dis)integration.

**Ecology of the Future Earth: Molly and Deb in the Iron Mills**

Rebecca Harding Davis’ *Life in the Iron Mills*, a novel that forecasts the U.S. canon’s postbellum transition to realism, is singular for its integration of social and environmental crises in a shared negative ecology. Davis uses a parallel imagism to bookend the novel, a technique that merges the mill town’s toxic waterways with the polluted blood that flows from Hugh Wolfe’s self-inflicted wounds. Subjective, social, and environmental crises exert reciprocally disintegrative antagonisms constructing self, society, and environment. The images of contamination and death that ecologize Davis’ text reveal a crisis toxicity, a kind of plague state saturating life. Wolfe’s razor-cut and lifeless arm, dangling from a prison bunk, and “the black, nauseous stream of blood dripping slowly from the pallet to the floor” (Davis 32) align with the polluted river described at once as “slavish,” “tawny,” and “negro-like” (Davis 3). A river of blood and a toxic river coordinate an ecology geared to control and ultimately destroy those existing within it. Davis’ regionalist narrative critiques gender bias and condemns an androcentric U.S. culture that produces despair, social disorder, and environmental degradation. Davis coordinates the social and environmental to depict a polluted morass of immorality and industrial toxins, a world internalized in Hugh Wolfe and like him trapped in a cycle of disintegration.48

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48 Hugh Wolfe, the central protagonist in *Mills*, is an ironworker who in his spare moments carves sculpture from korl, “refuse from the ore after the pig-metal is run” (10). Hugh, through his artistry, reflects the characteristics of feminine consciousness that Davis codifies as both creative and procreative. However, due to his station in a trenchantly androcentric society these qualities, what Davis suggests have positive social potential, emasculate rather than empower. Hugh “had already lost the strength and instinct vigor of a man…his face (a meek, woman’s face) haggard, yellow with consumption. In the mill he was known as one of the girl-men: ‘Molly Wolfe’ was his sobriquet” (10). Hugh’s psychological and physical femininity are socially reinforced markers indicating that the Welshman is biologically unfit and
I situate my interpretation of Davis’ novel among other ecologically minded scholars. Sharon Harris, for instance, argues that Davis’ work “challenges passive, traditional Christianity as a solution for the nation’s ills” (29) and identifies Davis’ joining of the “distortion of nature with that of human life” (30), as a means to open realist discourses regarding economic precarity, social value, and U.S. nationalism. More recently, Jill Gatlin finds Davis “crafting an aesthetic of disturbance that disrupts moral assumptions undergirding pollution discourse” (208). Gatlin’s work demonstrates how the public variably conceptualized the industrial toxicity and pollution that feature centrally in Iron Mills as both a hazard and a marker of social prosperity.

The mill town, based on Davis’ hometown of Wheeling, Virginia, is a place of stark poverty, and, as she describes, an ecological dead zone. A dehumanizing industrial economy compels Hugh Wolfe and his cousin Deb, like all the citizens of the Iron Mills, to exist in a state of what was popularly conceived in the period as wage slavery. Much scholarship has addressed the racializations Davis applies in her characterization of Wolfe and the Mills more generally and when Davis describes a river as “slavish” and “negro-like” the implication is clear. Eric Schocket’s scholarship is particularly helpful in negotiating Davis’ terms. Schocket sees whiteness as the subject category here, a racial incapable of producing the masculinity necessitated by the iron mills. While there is little evidence to support reading Hugh as homosexual, his artistry and demureness cause his fellow laborers to denigrate him if not because he’s queer than because he is too much like a woman. Hugh’s configuration as a Molly discloses less about his supposed queerness than it does the particular stripe of masculinity that define the iron mills. The same men haranguing Hugh and teasing that he’s gay reveal their own latent desire to sexualize and dominate what they perceive as a weaker man. Hugh is desirable in ways they are not because through art he finds a means to communicate his own oppression. Hugh’s voice is embedded in the korl woman, which, rough-hewn and wild eyed, is a reaction against the capitalist intention to emasculate and control laborers. In attacking Hugh as a Molly, the workers only disclose their own blind servitude to an economic system that produces the laboring not-yet-white immigrant as detritus. Masculine aggressions convey social strife just as much as they do the all consuming industrial capitalism of the mill town, whereas feminine sentiment marks cultural refinement, emotional expressivity, especially in the arts, and a communal ethic of care. Just as the korl woman, an artifact and material signifier of the physical potential for social change, stands against an actual earth reduced to that of an urbanized wasteland, it’s women, and not men, who safeguard the vision of a world returning to a state of pastoral equilibrium.
code that oppressive labor conditions actively threaten to dismantle. As Schocket writes, “in what we might call the irony of white servitude, Davis employs linguistic conventions that invite readers to discover a new race but gives them instead a new class (the working class) whose white bodies are inscribed with uncanny signifiers of blackness” (47). Davis’ blackening of Wolfe and the arduous servitude inscribed upon the Mill’s laborers certainly equates “whiteness with freedom and blackness with slavery” (Schocket 48), and in so doing it communicates the logic of white supremacy and underscores white fears of losing racial prestige within systems of industrial labor.

It is fear of immigrants and gender non-conforming men, fear of organized labor and the criminalization of the poor, that here suppresses labor’s political agency and contributes to the environmental despoliation that configures the tiny kingdom of the Iron Mills. While Davis’ novel predates many of the central social Darwinist thinkers, her work certainly engages the attitudes and bigotry that social Darwinism incorporates, particularly its assertion that threats to nature were due to socially constructed barriers to capitalist advancement. Social Darwinism’s biopolitical logics feed directly into corporatist ideology and in a neoliberal sense it treats the market as an organism that actively works towards its own self-interest and improvement. Arguably, the capitalist economy of the Iron Mills maintains the Mills’ negative ecology, a fact that lays bare the social Darwinist conception that nature’s law is, as William Graham Sumner puts it, “[c]ompetition” (“Challenge of Facts” 25). For those like Hugh and Deb, lacking the fitness to survive, “the solution is famine and death” (Sumner 29).49 There is no respite,

49 The natural right to social equity and opportunity that is ill afforded Hugh and Deb is, according to Sumner, the product of an unrealistic sentimental philosophy manifested most dramatically by socialism, a politics that Sumner suggests obstructs liberty and, as he writes in “Challenge of Facts,” is simply “destitute of sense” (33). The society Sumner envisions facilitates a free market labor system that rigidly manages and instrumentalizes human labor. Should the labor movements of the later-nineteenth-century upend the capitalist system, “[t]he consequence would be that the industrious and prudent would labor and save, without families, to support the idle and improvident who would increase and multiply, until
only “a social regeneration through decay and the elimination of that part of the society which is not capable of being restored to health and life” (Sumner 29). Such social Darwinist tenets naturalize violence and articulate the authoritarian rhetoric that maintains an ecology where dread and disaster are societal norms invigorating state power.

Sumner recognizes capitalism’s ability to resolve economic crises, but he conveniently ignores the system’s tendency, like that of the modern state, to produce the crises that it manages. Hugh Wolfe may believe that the world owes him something, particularly so after the cynical encouragement of Kirby and his companions, but what he gets is imprisonment and death. The society in which Wolfe exists is after all a zero-sum game. Davis’ novel negotiates the same Darwinian logics that naturalize poverty and then claim poverty only spawns criminality and social decay. Much as korl is the bi-product of the foundry, so too are Hugh and Deb bi-products contiguous with the toxic environment, an environment exemplifying the disintegrative effect of unchecked industrial capitalism and that manufactures drunken, diseased, and violent human beings as social detritus.

Davis begins the novel with the following description,

The idiosyncrasy of this town is smoke. It rolls sullenly in slow folds from the great chimneys of the iron-foundries, and settles down in black, slimy pools on the muddy streets. Smoke on the wharves, smoke on the dingy boats, on the yellow river,—clinging in a coating of greasy soot to the house-front, the two faded poplars, the faces of the passers-by (3).

universal destitution forced a return to the principles of liberty and property; and the man who started with the notion that the world owed him a living would once more find, as he does now, that the world pays him its debt in the state prison (34).” Capitalism aligns with disaster culture because, for all the good it does, it remains an instrument of social control that unevenly distributes wealth while producing scarcity and social conflict.
The mill’s ecology, quite literally, connects the diseased environment to the human geography that produces it. “The road leading to the mills had been quarried from the solid rock, which rose abrupt and bare on one side of the cinder-covered road, while the river, sluggish and black, crept past on the other” (Davis 8), a path leading to “lanes and alleys and back-yards where the mill-hands lodged” (Davis 24). Noxious smoke and industrial waste saturate the town and materialize an environment from which human life, its active polluters, cannot be separated out. The worker’s community itself is physically degraded and immoral, a place of “filth and drunkenness” made foul by “the pig-pens, the ash-heaps covered with potato-skins, the bloated, pimpled women at the doors” (Davis 24). The pock-marked prostitutes and drunken laborers intermix with garbage and the fecal stench of pigs while the mill’s industry drones ever on. The mill devours the land, its human resources producing only pollution and social dissolution, perverting the pastoral ideal central to American visions of productively constructed environments.

However compassionately they are portrayed, it is the Hugh’s and Deb’s of the world, who demonstrate the living materiality that gives substance to social control. Davis describes the mill itself as “a street in Hell” complete with “pits of flame waving in the wind; liquid metal-flames writhing in torturous streams through the sand; wide caldrons filled with boiling fire, over which bent ghastly wretches stirring the strange brewing; and through all, crowds of half-clad men, looking like revengeful ghosts in the red light” (8). If the mill is a Hell, then Kirby, the mill owner’s son, and his friends are plainly enough its devils.50 For men like Kirby the people of the mills are more

50 Davis ascribes civilizational progress and the valor of industry, the same androcentric white Christian utopia lauded by Fiske, its analog in Christian apocalypticism and a Dantesque hell. Davis’ narrative structure relies on Christian mythology, specifically that of a purgatorial hell whose denizens are the victims of a violent and predatory industrial capitalism.
phantasms than flesh, expressions of a lower evolutionary step and so justifiably utilized to manufacture wealth for men of their station. In short, they are resources plucked from the environment, labor instrumentalized much like the raw materials they refine.

Dana Seitler compellingly argues that in Davis’ “aesthetic flux,” the shifting pretensions to genre, we find that “winding its way through romance, the gothic, sentimentality, and an inchoate realism—Iron Mills poses political questions as aesthetic ones” (254). Seitler’s argument conceives of Davis’ novel as not necessarily taking up “the political problem of the oppressed,” but “the aesthetic problem of what forms of representation exist or do not exist at any given moment that make imaginable new forms of personhood or even social change” (525). Seitler’s insightful analysis helps us to think through Davis’ uses of grotesque imagery and the social perversities she seems to assert that industrial capital relies upon.

Poverty and the criminalization of the poor manufactures Wolfe’s plight as a public spectacle. In point of fact, Mitchell’s, May’s, and Kirby’s debate on social responsibility occurs when they are slumming the mills. “I wash my hands of all social problems,—slavery, caste, white or black” (Davis 16) proclaims Kirby, who questions “[w]hat has the man who pays them money to do with their souls’ concerns, more than the grocer or butcher who takes it?” (Davis 17). Kirby’s moral equivocation and transactionalism asserts that individual liberty, the philosophical arbiter of social contracts and economic exchange, is that which somehow equalizes social relations even as he locates a source of amusement in Hugh Wolfe, the Welsh puddler with a talent for sculpture. Despite feigned sympathy, Kirby’s discourse objectifies Wolfe, who is treated

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51 While debating social oppression, Mitchell, a northern guest at the iron mills, suggests, “[w]hat will the lowest deep—thieves, Magdalens, negroes—do with the light filtered through ponderous Church creeds...Some day, out of their bitter need will be thrown up their own light-bringer...their Messiah” (21). Mitchell’s argument undercuts religious devotion and mystifications that promise transcendence
more as a symbolic thing like the korl woman than he is a man. Spencer and Sumner exude a similar libertarianism that idealizes laissez-faire economics and designates the free market as a democratizing evolutionary system in which “voluntary cooperation…and the carrying on of social life by exchange under agreement…makes possible that vast elaborate industrial organization by which a great nation is sustained” (Spencer, Social Statistics 401-02). The industrial organization of a Darwinian utopia places men at the center of things. There is no room for feminized men, Mollies, and much less the physically deformed Deb, who capitalists like Kirby relegate to industrial society’s clock-work negative ecology.

The Iron Mills, and the men who command it, exemplify the economic and industrial systems central to the theory of social control espoused by Edward Alsworth Ross, who believed social engineering was necessary to manage “the natural struggle among human beings” (423). Ross’ program argues that social welfare degenerates mankind such that “[t]he Christian cult of charity” and a state that “gathers the deaf mutes into its sheltering arm” (424) affect devolution and racial degeneration, regressing

without real material action. His position also suggests that coming social liberation struggles will center on “thieves, Magdalens, negroes,” categories more clearly understood as class, gender, and race.

52 Spencer, Herbert. Social Statistics Or Order Together with Man Versus the State, pp. 401-02. It is in “Man Versus the State” that Spencer defines particular societies as either “militant” or “industrial types” (281), identifying the industrial “regime of contract” (281) as exhibiting a higher order than the militaristic and authoritative socioeconomic forms of the past. Capitalism, according to Spencer, represents an evolutionary pinnacle contributing to the “diminution of warfare and growth of trade” (401). Spencer’s libertarian anti-socialist politics inform his comparison of socialism to Greek city-states and what Spencer considers the socialistic yoking of the individual to the state, wherein “slavery, however mild, must be the outcome of the arrangement” (330). What Spencer takes for communistic homogeneity is a politics on a lower social evolutionary scale than is democratic and capitalistic heterogeneity. He argues that communistic and socialist politics need “to be framed out of existing human nature” because they avail themselves to “the defects of existing human nature,” which “will generate in the one the same evils as in the other” (330).

53 Social Darwinism produced taxonomies for biological and social difference and many of these differences were contextualized as negative evolutionary expressions and aberrations. While many social Darwinist arguments are extreme and perverse, other more general positions reproduce the period’s normative prejudices. Francis Galton, for instance in Inquiries, argues that “men have more delicate powers of discrimination than women, and the business experience of life seems to confirm this view” (29-30), a perspective affording men natural superiority over women and reaffirms men’s position as society’s arbiters of socioeconomic affairs.
white laboring men into the Hugh Wolfe’s of the world, non-white feminine paupers and criminals. \[54\]

The utilitarian perspectives and moral relativism asserted by Kirby and his crew operationalize the mill’s oppressive logic as the natural order of things. While acknowledging that human suffering is the unintended consequence of industrial society, the men also ascribe these outcomes as appropriate to those less evolutionarily fit, the would-be criminal class they rely on to increase personal wealth. Kirby and his cronies cannot but dehumanize Wolfe, who, like his statue, is taken as an example of the economic rationalism at which they play. The mill’s order is absolute and the men ignore human suffering, reacting venomously against the attempts of impoverished and depoliticized people to actualize positive social transformation by the limited means at their disposal. Deb’s theft, for which Hugh takes responsibility, is analogous to the theft extolled upon the laborers of the Iron Mills and Wolfe’s dehumanization is the thing that affords Kirby wealth and power. While the men share in the perseverations of social uplift, a change to Wolfe’s position remains as unimaginable as an alteration to their own, which is why Kirby and his comrades treat Wolfe more as an ornamental figure than a man, a conversation piece to be put back on its shelf when the talking is done.

Fitness, naturalizing the inferiorities of the poor and criminals, as well as women and non-whites, was a biological and evolutionary concept enshrined by the social

\[54\] Social engineering’s importance is really the central contention of Ross’ Social Control. “The goal of social development is not, as some imagine, a Perfect Love, or a Perfect Conscience, but better adaptation; and the more this adaptation is artificial, the less need it be natural” (437). Social control presents an egalitarian cultural system, a “guardian not merely of the dearest possessions of innumerable persons, but likewise of the spiritual property of the human race—of the inventions and discoveries, the arts and the sciences, the secrets of healing, and the works of delight, which he himself is free to enter into and enjoy” (442). However, Ross’ plan for U.S. society is not all a bed of roses and requires a careful balance, as at a certain point “the effect of limiting that struggle which is a requisite of efficiency and progress is to promote race degeneration” (424). Ross’ social control drives human populations towards higher order social ideals and institutions like religion, law, and education, and, as he suggests its equalizes power, does harm to “the noble over the base…thereby slowing up the development of the most
Darwinists. For thinkers like Ross and Galton, heredity and conduct disclose “peculiarities of character” (Galton 61) that allow for demographic classification. Criminals, for instance, cannot participate in society because they lack the capacity for sympathy and self-control, a position that makes the criminal an agent without restraint. When Galton writes that “[t]he criminal classes contain a considerable portion of epileptics and other persons of instable, emotional temperament, subject to nervous explosions that burst out at intervals and relieve the system” (65) he links mental illness and biological ailments to criminality. Like many social Darwinists, Galton conveniently ignores the material conditions that produce impoverishment and criminality. Similarly, when Hugh is arrested for Deborah’s crime, he is decried a “‘[s]coundrel’” (Davis 26) deserving of his punishment and is rhetorically criminalized despite previous encouragement to “‘remember it was his right to rise’” (Davis 19). Wolfe’s Welshness and femininity already mark his abhorrence and his criminality only validates his placement as an undesirable organismic type, a subset to be incarcerated or put to labor and one way or another erased.

The Mills’ despoiled ecology contextualizes Wolfe’s disintegration and his jailhouse suicide discloses the terminality in which he has existed for so long. Caroline S. Miles suggests that Davis’ narrative “effectively reveals the coercion of Wolfe’s body, implemented through the insertion of his working body into an architectural/factory space where he remains permanently marked by visibility, governed by space, and

splendid qualities of human nature” (437) in favor of a higher dispersement of evolutionary development across populations.

55 Of the criminal type, Galton assesses that his “conscience is almost deficient, his instincts are vicious, his power of self-control is very weak, and he usually detests continuous labour” (61). Galton views criminal and incarcerated women in particular as “apt from time to time to have a gradually increasing desire that at last becomes irresistible, to ‘break out,’” and “smash and tear everything they can within reach, and to shriek, curse, and howl” (65). Galton’s generalizations capture people who transgress the laws designed to contain them as socially deviant and their conduct requiring only further measures to criminalize and punish them.
consumed by the gaze of others” (97). Just as he carves the korl waste so too is Wolfe inscribed by the socioeconomic forces that harry him, a process that, as Miles writes, culminates in “only the most tragic kind of freedom, that of cutting and molding his body into death” (99). As Davis writes, “[t]here was an inexpressible bitterness on his face, as he lay down on the bed, taking the bit of tin, which he had rasped to a tolerable degree of sharpness, in his hand,—to play with, it may be. He bared his arms, looking intently at their corded veins and sinews. Deborah, listening in the next cell, heard a slight clicking sound, often repeated” (31). Human experience, society, and environment merge in Hugh’s suicide such that the blood flowing from his arms parallels the necrotized waters upon which the mill town relies.56

By novel’s close, Hugh is dead and Deborah exists within the cloistered protections of Quaker missionaries. There are no actors striking for revolution, only the korl woman, a work of art that embodies the material potential for social change. Hugh Wolfe’s representation of suffering, imbued with a voice so singular that even Kirby and May recognize it, signifies a legacy of struggle not yet realized.

Nothing remains to tell that the poor Welsh puddler once lived, but this figure of the mill-woman cut in korl…it is such a rough, ungainly thing. Yet there are about it touches, grand sweeps of outline, that show a master’s hand. Sometimes,—to-night, for instance,—the curtain is accidently drawn back, and I see a bare arm stretched out imploringly in the darkness, and an eager, wolfish face watching mine: a wan, woful face, through which the spirit of the dead korl-cutter looks out, with its

56 Again, the river’s “negro-like” blackness problematically Africanizes the environment, allegorizing blackness as a means to conceive the persecutions of the not-quite-white Hugh Wolfe, while generating the town as a space of industrial colonization and enslavement, an ecological totality represented in the river as the de facto lifeblood of the town. At the same time, Davis’ description implies that industrial
thwarted life, its mighty hunger, its unfinished work. (Davis 34)

It is the very unfinished nature of Davis’ text that suggests resistance to narrative closure. The korl woman is all that remains of Wolfe; his struggles, hopes, and labors exercised on environmental materiality. As Maribel Molyneaux points out, the korl woman “signifies the wasted flesh, the terrible vulnerability, and the sheer expendability of millworkers...a work of art that embodies only Hugh’s wasted self, [and] endlessly reproduces the central opposition of his life.” (165). The korl woman signifies social, and, especially, gender liberation, and subverts the violent antagonisms deemed by the men of the Iron Mills both natural and desirable. This Madonna-like figure, with “not one line of beauty or grace in it: a nude woman’s form, muscular, grown coarse with labor, the powerful limbs instinct with some one poignant longing” (Davis 15), is also alluded to in Mitchell’s statement, as a Magdalene, representing at once a spirit of intercession, an injured maternal essence, and the fear of social resistance that underlies anti-immigrant rhetoric.57 Unresolved tensions exert narratological ambiguity and in this undifferentiated discursive space Wolfe’s (dis)integration suggests a potential re-narrativization and revolt visible “in the tense, rigid muscles, the clutching hands, the wild, eager face, like that of a starving wolf’s” (Davis 15). The korl woman is left the lone material signifier, the objectively present social realist artwork sequestered in the narrator’s private study, a germinative means towards the aestheticization of the ideological struggle to redefine social futures.

57 When Hugh Wolfe is questioned by Doctor May as to what the korl woman’s harrowing face communicates, Wolfe responds pointedly, “[s]he be hungry” (15), desiring “[s]ummat to make her live, I think,—like you” (16). Wolfe’s aspiration for class transposition is not solely a matter of material fulfillment, but an ideological need that conceives the masculine and feminine binary as modes of social control and which challenges the social production of gender identity.
Animal Life and Death: Jurgis Rudkus and the Marvels of the Industrial World

While negative ecological forces criminalize and emasculate Hugh Wolfe, in Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle* a similarly industrialized environment evokes the negative ecology that blurs the distinctions separating man from animal, criminalizing and animalizing Jurgis Rudkus. The ethical crises permeating Sinclair’s *Jungle* are communicated quite emphatically in Nicole Shukin’s thesis in *Animal Capital* that “the power to reduce humans to the bare life of their species body arguably presupposes the prior power to suspend other species in a state of exception within which they can be noncriminally put to death” (130-31). The pervasive slaughter extending from the yards to the social life of Chicago’s south side is energized through the economy yoking each to the other. As Shukin contends, “[i]f animal life is violently subject to capital, capital is inescapably contingent on animal life, such that disruptions in animal capital have the potential to percuss through the biopolitical chains of market life” (308-10). Moreover, as Sinclair makes evident, these cyclic processes require the perpetual sacrifice of animal and man.

In *The Jungle*, industrial capitalism reduces animal life to pure commodity and the large-scale rendering of animals into a variety of products emplaces human workers within the factory’s mechanism, themselves integrated as a resource not far removed from the cattle they slaughter. *The Jungle’s* meat-packing industry physically and psychologically slaughters everything and everyone, and, like the Iron Mills, industrial forces that emanate sublimity and an aesthetics of power govern *The Jungle’s* crippling ecology. Like Thoreau’s Mount Katahdin or Bierstadt’s Sierra Nevadas, the sublime arouses a sense of awe and appreciation for magisterial beauty. But just as witnessing a thing of immeasurable power arouses recognition of nature’s grandeur it also elicits a
sense of subjective finitude and threat.\textsuperscript{58} It is fear that Edmund Burke recognized as persistent in the sublime experience and while Burke attributes sublimity to environmental features and non-human forms, “it comes upon us in the gloomy forest, and in the howling wilderness, in the form of the lion, the tiger, the panther, or rhinoceros” (60-61), it is equally correct to identify sublimity as alternately an environmental and social object.\textsuperscript{59}

In \textit{Critique of Judgement}, Kant suggests the sublime communicates a “negative pleasure” whereby “the mind is not simply attracted by the object, but is also alternately repelled thereby” (91), an effect that, as Kant suggests, results from the mind’s inability to manage the differentiation between reality and the immensity at hand.\textsuperscript{60} Schopenhauer, in \textit{The World as Will and Representation}, further delineated sublimity as occupying the

\textsuperscript{58} See Thoreau, Henry David. \textit{The Maine Woods}. New York: Penguin, 1988. Thoreau’s 1864 descriptions of Mount Katahdin are both breathtaking and terrifying. Of particular note is Thoreau’s imagining of Mount Katahdin as a primordial space, whose threat exudes, in Thoreau’s narrative, the anxieties of white settler colonialism confronted by aboriginal society.

\textsuperscript{59} Burke’s foundational study of the sublime defines sublimity as an ecstatic state in which the witness senses their mortality before immense environmental forces. “Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime” (36). Sublimity, while disorienting also typically fixes the witnesses stare in images of profound beauty. “Whatever therefore is terrible, with regard to sight, is sublime too, whether this cause of terror, be endued with greatness of dimensions or not; for it is impossible to look on anything as trifling, or contemptible, that may be dangerous” (53). Burke further writes that “[i]n deed terror is in all cases whatsoever, either more openly or latently the ruling principle of the sublime” (54) and these experiences are each and all “some modification of power. And this branch rises as naturally as the other two branches, from terror, the common stock of every thing that is sublime” (59).

\textsuperscript{60} Kant’s evaluation of the sublime suggests that “[t]he beautiful in nature is a question of the form of the object, and this consists in limitation, whereas the sublime is to be found in an object even devoid of form, so far as it immediately involves, or else by its presence provokes, a representation of \textit{limitlessness}, yet with a super-added thought of its totality” (90). Kant suggests that sublimity is located in psychical processes and writes that “[o]n the other hand, the feeling of the sublime is a pleasure that arises only indirectly, being brought about by the feeling of a momentary check to the vital forces followed at once by a discharge all the more powerful, and so it is an emotion that seems to be no sport, but dead earnest in the affairs of the imagination” (91). This negative anxious arousal “is a greatness comparable to itself alone. Hence it comes that the sublime is not to be looked for in the things of nature, but only in our own ideas”(97). According to Kant, “[n]othing, therefore, which can be an object of the senses is to be termed sublime when treated on this footing. But precisely because there is a striving in our imagination towards progress \textit{ad infinitum}, while reason demands absolute totality, as a real idea, that same inability on the part of our faculty for the estimation of the magnitude of things of the world of sense to attain this idea, is the awakening of a feeling of a supersensible faculty within us” (97).
subject and argued that it produced a “will-less subject of knowing” in a “state of exaltation” (201-02). Thinking through a (dis)integrative aesthetics we see the sublime, as Burke suggests, as an expression of power overtaking the witness with images of natural and socially constructed objects and environments. Sublimity’s magnitude, majesty, and threat resides just as much in industrial foundries and technological marvels, as David E. Nye suggests, as it does in grand vistas, its sheen visible in the starving wolf and the starving man alike. 

When Jurgis Rudkus stands awestruck at the monolithic factory complex rising above Durham’s stockyards, the scene registers the sublime negativity that foretells his disintegration. The massive array of smokestacks, “tall as the tallest of buildings, touching the very sky” (Sinclair 21) overtake Rudkus’ vision. Enthralled, Rudkus struggles to comprehend this vision of “half a dozen columns of smoke, thick, oily, and black as night…spread in vast clouds overhead, writhing, curling; then, uniting in one giant river,” which “streamed away down the sky, stretching a black pall as far as the eye could reach” (Sinclair 21). The image occupies Rudkus with the marvels of the industrial world. His mind races to rationalize how this industrial edifice of brick and wood and steel, with its technological sophistication and clockwork mechanization, produces the opportunities he so desperately craves. Simultaneously, he is awed by the hive-like

Ultimately, for Kant, “it is the disposition of soul evoked by a particular representation engaging the attention of the reflective judgement, and not the Object, that is to be called the sublime” (98). 61 According to Schopenhauer’s interpretation of the sublime, “the beholder may not direct his attention to this relation to his will which is so pressing and hostile, but, although he perceives and acknowledges it, he may consciously turn away from it, forcibly tear himself from his will and its relations, and, giving himself up entirely to knowledge, may quietly contemplate, as pure, will-less subject of knowing, those very objects so terrible to the will. He may comprehend only their Idea that is foreign to all relation, gladly linger over its contemplation, and consequently be elevated precisely in this way above himself, his person, his willing, and all willing. In that case, he is then filled with the feeling of the sublime; he is in the state of exaltation, and therefore the object that causes such a state is called sublime” (201-202). Schopenhauer conceives of sublimity as a near transcendent state. The witness is elevated beyond the limits of his awareness and experiences the conscious transcendence of a previously accepted threshold allowing for new realizations of the self.


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activity churning miasma into the atmosphere, coating the sky with black soot and toxins, and fundamentally altering the very air he breathes.

The factory is to Rudkus the organ of economic democratization. It is the epitome of American innovation and technological prowess; the cutting edge, semi-autonomous, mechanism designed to feed and clothe, a system producing commodities on a mass scale, its science and engineering representing limitless cultural power. But just as the intoxication absorbs him with a mix of admiration and anxiety, the living root of the factory’s sublimity makes itself known. Beneath the oily black sky Jurgis Rudkus hears a sound made up of ten thousand little sounds…a vague disturbance, a trouble…like the murmuring of the bees in the spring, the whisperings of the forest; it suggested endless activity, the rumblings of a world in motion. It was only by an effort that one could realize that it was made by animals, that it was the distant lowing of ten thousand cattle, the distant grunting of ten thousand swine. (Sinclair 21)

Sinclair describes nature’s sublimity idyllically as the murmur of bees and a whispering forest, the simple contiguity of life’s Arcadian procession. Then the terror comes, as Rudkus and his family realize that the sounds they hear are the bucolic perversion of thousands of animals led to slaughter. The factory-complex signifies the socio-economic potential Rudkus imagined awaited him in America, but its gargantuan form and sheer power elicits fear at the ceaseless slaughter modernity requires. “[T]he stream of animals was continuous…a very river of death” (Sinclair 27) and it is this menacing process that actualizes animal death while portending man’s destruction. What Rudkus misses, but Sinclair is quick to point out, is that the onlookers mistake industry as a means to social freedom. “[T]he sight suggested to them no metaphors of human destiny; they thought only of the wonderful efficiency of it all” (27). Rudkus cannot fully
intellectualize the scene, yet his desire compels him towards it. Rudkus clings to the ideological sureties the factory-complex materializes, and its sublimity prevents Rudkus from understanding how the slaughter expands outward from its center to incorporate all life into its decimating orbit.

In the pages following Rudkus’ survey of Durham’s stockyard, Sinclair focuses the reader’s eye on the constituent elements producing the manufactory’s network. Beneath the surface operate the laborers, each working single-mindedly in the execution of their role and “doing a certain single thing to the carcass as it came to him” (30). Everywhere, the industrial matrix automatically reduces the living to the dead while affecting the rote desensitization of its workers. The Jungle’s documentarian record details how “one saw, creeping slowly, a line of dangling hogs a hundred yards in length; and for every yard there was a man, working as if a demon were after him…then it was rolled into the chilling room, where it stayed for twenty-four hours, and where a stranger might lose himself in a forest of freezing hogs” (Sinclair 30). Again, Sinclair emphasizes industrialism’s perversion of nature by using an ideal arboreal environmental language perverted in a forest of death.

The laborers ceaselessly render the animals until every part is made into a commodity. “From such things as feet, knuckles, hide clippings, and sinews came such

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63 Medicalizing the affects of industrial labor, Sinclair writes that each worker type, according to their duties, “had their own peculiar diseases” (71-72). He describes men pulverized and mutilated until their bodies, bruised and cut, back bent out of shape and limbs rheumatic, resemble the flesh they render. “Let a man so much as scrape his finger pushing a truck in the pickle rooms,” writes Sinclair, “and he might have a sore that would put him out of the world; all the joints in his fingers might be eaten by the acid.” Still others exhibit “a maze of cuts, and each cut…a chance for blood poisoning” with thumbs no more than “a mere lump of flesh” (71-72). The slaughterhouse is a place of death and disease for livestock and workers alike, a place where the “germs of tuberculosis [were] renewed every hour” (71-72). While many of the injuries and privations that Sinclair documents have their real world equivalent, Sinclair’s most sensational claim was of workers who “fell into the vats; and when…fished out, there was never enough of them left to be worth exhibiting,—sometimes they would be overlooked for days, till all but the bones of them had gone out to the world as Durham’s Pure Leaf Lard!” (72-73). Sinclair’s claim of inadvertent cannibalism jarred the public, and roused the condemnation of sitting president, Theodore Roosevelt, but
strange and unlikely products as gelatin, isinglass, and phosphorus, bone black, shoe blacking, and bone oil” (Sinclair 33-34). While the list of animal products is far more expansive, in every instance, capitalism strips the commodity of its animal origins. Through Durham’s industrial nexus, each of the industries drawing from the animal harvest “were gathered into buildings near by, connected by galleries and railroads with the main establishment” (Sinclair 34). It is the innumerable slaughtered animals that sustain the “two hundred and fifty thousand people in its neighborhood” and “half a million” total, as it delivered “its products to every country in the civilized world” and fed “no less than thirty million people!” (Sinclair 34). The slaughterhouse’s meats and other commodities are fetishes, their commodity forms erasing animal sentience as well as the socio-economic oppressions disciplining the commodity’s production.64 We then might say that to consume the product is to eat of the animal’s flesh and to likewise ingest the energies of man.

Although the manufactory is not a natural geologic form, it is a definite environmental feature and demonstrates the kind of negative ecological systematization I associate with the aesthetics of (dis)integration. Sublimity’s second and quite different deployment is evident in human beings socially riven to destitution and stark poverty. Images like that of Hugh Wolfe’s suicide shock the reader with at once recognizable and radically alien human frailty. The image’s sublimity occupies the observer, discharging

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64 See Marx, Karl. Capital A Critique of Political Economy Volume 1. Translated by Ben Fowkes. New York: Penguin, Kindle Edition, 1990. In conceptualizing commodity fetishism, Marx posits that individual labor is only perceived as part of the aggregate force of labor through commodity exchange and that the commodity object obscures the real social relations that produced it. “In other words, the labour of the private individual manifests itself as an element of the total labour of society only through the relations which the act of exchange establishes between the products, and, through their mediation, between the producers. To the producers, therefore, the social relations between their private labours appear as what they are, i.e. they do not appear as direct social relations between persons in their work,
its violation and so disclosing the traumatic narrative that has rendered the subject’s abject state. The ruined subject is magnified and threatens to overtake the witness and totalize our experience if only for a moment with the absolute perils of (dis)integration.

Perhaps best classifiable as a social protest novel, Sinclair’s work integrates the techniques of the naturalist, journalist, and propagandist, ultimately resolving in a romanticized vision of political futures. Much as naturalists like Norris pledged their work to be sincere, the Progressive Era writer’s craft, as Christopher P. Wilson discusses, “was no longer an intuitive gift separate from the mainstream of contemporary affairs. Rather, it was based in the quality of truthfulness a professional writer developed” (518). By “[r]eflecting the rationale of the marketplace, the author developed an audience, established public confidence, and then relied upon the reader’s loyalty to a trademark. Sincerity was the crux: the product had to measure up to the guarantee” (Wilson 518).

Problematically, as Wilson makes clear, these claims to sincerity “introduced into American writing an element of ‘real life’ they rarely recognized: a nascent consumer culture’s fascination for ‘image’ over reality, for credibility over truth—not for sincerity, but only what looked like it” (527).

Since The Jungle’s publication in 1906, debates on Sinclair’s facticity, let alone his artistry, have been wide-ranging.65 Winston Churchill, writing in the P.T.O., described Sinclair’s work as “a tract in a swelling political agitation” documenting “a human tragedy” (74-75). Theodore Roosevelt was less kind. In correspondence to Sinclair in March of 1906, Roosevelt suggests that Sinclair’s socialism would avail nothing but “the diseases, moral and physical, attendant upon starvation, of that same

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65 Originally serialized in 1905 in both Appeal to Reason and One-Hoss Philosophy, Sinclair revised The Jungle for Doubleday, Page in 1906.
portion of the community on whose behalf socialism would be invoked” (452).

Moreover, in a letter to Owen Wister written a month later, Roosevelt takes issue with Sinclair’s realism itself, averring that though influential The Jungle produces an unhealthy effect by “imply[ing] that these are the only facts that are true and that the whole life is such as they represent it” (470).

Many critics have derided Sinclair’s novel and dismissed it as a disjointed naturalist foray that borders on propaganda, a contention that Christopher Taylor suggests imposes literary standards inappropriate to the novel’s assessment. For Taylor, “the very didactic, crusading elements which Sinclair saw as central to his aesthetic project” (167) are the very things that make it unique. Øverland’s analysis of the influence on Sinclair of Ernest Poole, whose story of the Lithuanian immigrant Antanas Kaztauskis provided Sinclair the seed for Jurgis Rudkus, demonstrates yet another intertextual dynamic that supports the importance of aesthetic re-evaluation. 66 I suggest that whether or not Taylor’s assessment of Sinclair’s text as a roman à thèse is correct or if we treat The Jungle as naturalist scrimmages we should consider the text, much like Davis’ Mills, as successfully or not attempting to incorporate genre forms like social realism and propagandist writing, as a means to make use of art as social intervention.

Once Rudkus’ wife, Ona, reveals her rape and forced prostitution to her shop manager, the already battered Rudkus, the once humble, hard-working, family-man, transforms into “a wounded animal,” a spiritually crippled “target of unseen enemies” (Sinclair 116). 67 Trauma and the structural conditions producing it effectively transform

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67 Ona’s disclosure that she consented to Conor’s demands “to save us” (108-09) discloses the bald-faced class violence and predatory culture seething beneath the veneer of turn-of-the-century industrial society. Ona’s rape and forced provision of sexual favors enables her employment and maintenance of a subsistence level income. The Jungle’s social ecology really leaves no other option. To refuse Conor’s advances is to cast her family into blacklisting, penury, and the eventual turn to vice and prostitution that
Rudkus from the impoverished laborer into the criminal poor. When Rudkus attacks Conor, Ona’s perpetrator, he “screamed aloud in his fury, lifting his victim and smashing his head upon the floor” (Sinclair 127), then “bent down and sunk his teeth into the man’s cheek; and when they tore him away he was dripping with blood, and little ribbons of skin were hanging in his mouth” (Sinclair 127). Rudkus’ assault terminates with his blood-soaked visage and mouth gorged with the flesh of his victim. We might say that Rudkus has morphed into a kind of heroic criminal, but the truth is that he has interiorized his own abjection and whether against his will or not become the violent criminal threat suspected of the laboring immigrant. Rudkus’ metamorphosis demonstrates his change into the dangerous animal-like foreigner decried in the press and social Darwinist rhetoric alike as prone to criminality and madness. In short, the violent exigencies of packing-town produce his disintegration, and while Rudkus’ assault discloses labor’s potential to combat social and capitalist oppression, it more decidedly expresses how interiorized the urban jungle’s predatory dynamics have become.

While incarcerated Rudkus ruminates over “the vision of Ona starving” (Sinclair 129) and his fears prove not far from the mark.\(^6\) When Rudkus finally returns home he finds Ona “all but a skeleton, and as white as a piece of chalk” (Sinclair 158). Yet again poverty’s imaging, this time of Ona reduced to a deathly pall, excites a sublimity that at once draws the reader’s sympathy near to its subject while violating the reader with the depiction of a woman ravaged by circumstance and delivered from a dream of prosperity to destitution and collapse. Economic conditions compel Marija, Ona’s cousin, to

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\(^6\) Overcome by loss, victimization, and now imprisoned, Rudkus imagines that “[h]e should have taken her away, even if it were to lie down and die of starvation in the gutters of Chicago’s streets!” (112). Material conditions constrain Rudkus’ desire to spirit his wife away. The heroic spirit of the working man and his inspired national character is revealed as fantasy and Rudkus’ agential potentiality is limited to dying in the street.
prostitution and Marija prostitutes to feed and educate the remaining children of her extended family. Describing Marija Sinclair writes, “her complexion was in reality a parchment yellow, and there were black rings under her eyes,” (246) qualities attributed to her drug dependence. “‘It’s morphine,’ she said, at last. ‘I seem to take more of it every day’” (246). Marija’s addiction and distress emanate from her face, and it is in her jaundiced skin and sunken eyes that her disintegration bears out. While Marija narrativizes the crisis of prostitution, it is Marija’s actual defacement and physical deterioration that communicates the symptomology of social oppression. Our responses to such scenes of abjection facilitate our psychosocial integration and despite one’s best intentions when we see precarity as a threat and the poor as criminal types we actualize the limits of our empathy. Since the swell of perturbations is unavoidable, we must ask what emotional thresholds do scenes of (dis)integration force us to negotiate or deny?

While the ongoing maiming and death of immigrant children is common, if not socially normative in Sinclair’s Jungle, the death of Stanislovas, recounted by Ona to Rudkus, is particularly jarring.

The poor little fellow, with his frostbitten fingers and his terror of the snow—his wailing voice rang in Jurgis’s ears, as he lay there in the darkness, until the sweat started on his forehead. Now and then he would quiver with a sudden spasm of horror, at the picture of little Stanislovas

69 Maria details how young women fall into prostitution, women who invariably fulfill the desires of the laboring men of the stockyards and surrounding manufactories. Of a French girl, Marija says, “‘they gave her some dope in her food, and when she came to she found that she had been ruined. She cried, and screamed, and tore her hair, but she had nothing but a wrapper, and couldn’t get away, and they kept her half insensible with drugs all the time, until she gave up’” (213-14) and killed herself. And of a Jewish girl that lost her job Ona recounts, “she was four days on the streets without a mouthful of food, and then she went to a place just around the corner and offered herself, and they made her give up her clothes before they would give her a bite to eat!” (214). If the men who slip their working-class rung become, like Rudkus, animalistic aggressors and criminals, then impoverished women risk occupying the position of prostitutes, reduced to the vessels of sex upon which men’s failures are expiated.
shut up in the deserted building and fighting for his life with the rats!

(Sinclair 245)70

Stanislovas is Rudkus’ nephew, and while working at an oil factory toting beer for the men, he one night drinks past his limit and being locked in the factory overnight meets a grisly demise. To be clear, the image that so haunts Rudkus is that of an impoverished boy eaten alive by vermin. Even though the event is neither present for Rudkus nor the reader, it still exerts a radical presence. Evacuated of his knowability and made phantasmic, little Stanislovas becomes de-actualized and fashioned into the expression of an intricate system of violence. It is this trace that Rudkus carries with him, a perpetually reemerging trauma that harries and reminds him of the negative ecological forces coalesced to destroy his nephew and himself.

In The Jungle, market expansion, increasing monopolization, and the centralization of meat production drive mass animal harvests. Durham’s rote slaughter germinates a system of social exchange that expands outward from production’s economic center to discipline social life.71 Just as Hugh Wolfe cannot escape the mills, so too is Jurgis Rudkus a captive of packing-town, where a repetitious system of graft and

70 The perpetual death of children reinforces poverty’s spectacle, displaying the negation of social futures for the not-quite-white Eastern European immigrant. Economic necessity forces Ona away from her infant Antanas, who, lacking his mother, is fed “the pale blue poison that was called milk at the corner grocery” (79). Juozapas is run over in the street and loses his leg. Ona’s stepmother, Teta Elzbieta Lukoszaite, suffers the untimely death of several of her children. Kristoforas, a sickly and underdeveloped child, succumbs to sickness. And Jurgis Rudkus, newly released from jail and already lamenting the death of his wife Ona, learns of his son Antanas’ death, who was “‘drowned out in the street’” after becoming “‘caught in the mud!’” (152). Through the death of children Sinclair constructs a wheel of disposability. The kids simply are not productive in the manufacturing system of packing town and similar to their immigrant fathers and mothers are devoured by a system always poised to incorporate new labor even as it exhausts the old.

71 Even when the violence seems meaningless, the abjection of Jurgis Rudkus and his family possesses meaning and exerts a kind of social value. The family’s labor potential exhibits each individual’s capacity to produce capital. When they exhaust their labor power they become disposable and are subsequently utilized to produce alternative forms of value. The rape of Rudkus’ wife by Phil Connor produces pleasure for the foreman and allows him to maintain control over women’s bodies and minds. The reacquisition of the home by the bank produces profit for financial institutions. Rudkus’ eventual fall into poverty and dissipation allows society to manifest the Eastern European as a criminal and so validate
victimization contextualizes nearly every aspect of daily life. From the tenements to the stockyards, pollution and disease ecologize the urban squalor of Sinclair’s south-side Chicago. Here the line separating man from animal is permeable and the social Darwinist tenet of competition outstretches the protections afforded by law and charity. Durham’s perpetual slaughter reveals the technological ability to commodify and destroy animals on a mass scale and the brutal social relations it determines forecasts human desensitization to the systematization of mass death.72

The spectacular images Sinclair deploys: the drug addled prostitute, a child eaten by rats, the man with the flesh of another man caught in his teeth, each capture a moment of (dis)integration supercharged with emotional arousal and traumatic incomprehensibility. Each also presents the disintegrating subject as a spectacle designed to spur the reader’s investment in ameliorative social action. The reader cannot escape the menace these scenarios exude, and yet despite Sinclair’s intention for the activist text, these perverse situations, didactic though they may be, are designed to entertain. Such scenes integrate the reading public as social actors who reject society’s violence all the

72 In The Jungle, Sinclair devotes significant space to describing methodical and mechanized butchering and this presentations articulates how the technologized factory omits not human presence, but human emotional connection. The men of the line are largely nameless hands and bodies assimilated into the unthinking slaughter. Of hog rendering Sinclair writes, “[t]he carcass hog was scooped out of the vat by machinery, and then it fell to the second floor, passing on the way through a wonderful machine with numerous scrapers, which adjusted themselves to the size and shape of the animal, and sent it out at the other end with nearly all of its bristles removed. It was then again strung up by machinery, and sent upon another trolley ride” (27-28). Over time, hardship transforms Rudkus and Sinclair’s muckraking novel applies social realism as a documentarian study, revealing the abuses of the American meat packing industry and how a capitalist system poisons and manipulates its market while ravaging its labor as a means to increase profit. The disease and dehumanization of the meat-packing district stages the destruction of Rudkus and his family, as they are progressively ensnared in a social and economic system that siphons their value, rendering them, much like the stock animals of the slaughterhouse, until there remains little to exploit. The Rudkus family’s suffering is a litany of perversion, and even Theodore Roosevelt charged Sinclair with exceeding the boundaries of sensationalism. But key to understanding Packing Town’s ecology is to see how its desensitization and violence transmits violence and social oppression as a rote and acceptable affective template, a system perpetuating natural conditions that are anything but.
while trafficking in the social types whose presence conjures social control and props up state authority.

Considering the apparent split in Sinclair’s novel from the first half’s naturalistic abuses to its later utopian idealism, Matthew J. Morris writes that “[t]his change of focus, from the experience of injury to the elucidation of causes and remedies, brings with it an increasingly deliberate reflection on the nature of political knowledge” (59). Rudkus’ trials certainly demonstrate the socioeconomic toxicities that require the political transformation of the self and public sphere. However, the great pains Rudkus suffers, and a point shared by Christopher Wilson and Morris both, also demonstrate Sinclair’s particularly spectatorial approach to working class and immigrant communities.

Certainly, as Morris suggest, “Sinclair meant to show how industrial capitalism, among its other effects, could strip away the uniqueness of folkways as it transformed immigrant farmers into industrial workers” (57). Still, Sinclair’s perverse scenes generate another kind of cultural violence. Because Rudkus’ attack or Marija’s profligacy are meant to be mimetic, Sinclair deploys scenes of violation as a means to harmonize the subject and reader, integrating the two in a voyeuristic spectacle that struggles to humanize even as it generates its subjects as the social detritus of the urban jungle.

In one of Sumner’s more famous works, “Forgotten Man,” he describes the social ideal neglected by society as “the simple, honest laborer, ready to earn his living by productive work” (476). Sumner’s forgotten man is passed on “because he is independent, self-supporting, and asks no favors…He only wants to make a contract and fulfill it, with respect on both sides and favor on neither side” (476). The forgotten man is the unsung hero performing the ideological expectation of the hard-working American, who serves family, god, and country without complaint. The forgotten man is an ally to industry because he realizes that he “must get his living out of the capital of the country”
(Sumner 476). As such, Sumner’s working man, which neither Hugh Wolfe or Jurgis Rudkus represent, is the allegiant national subject whose activity and belief empowers the capitalist engine.73 The forgotten man powers the state.

Opposing the forgotten man is “the vicious, the idle, and the shiftless” (476), character types that Sumner argues must be prohibited from depriving the forgotten man of the wealth he so rightly deserves. Essentially promoting interclass warfare, Sumner’s argument hinges on class antagonisms meant to invigorate capital and reproduce an evolutionarily ideal civilization naturally attuned to competition and the survival of the fittest. What Sumner’s gross populism ignores is what Rudkus cannot.74 Labor does not guarantee social equity and the line separating survival from disintegration is a thin one at best; one that with the slightest of disruptions transforms the forgotten man into the realized poor that Sumner so abhors.75

73 Also see, Sumner, William Graham. “The Boon of Nature,” Earth Hunger and Other Essays. Ed. Albert Galloway Keller. New Haven: Yale UP, 1913. In “The Boon of Nature” Sumner again dismisses natural rights as the fantasy of liberal philosophical idealism and argues that “[b]efore the tribunal of nature,” writes Sumner, “a man has no more right to life than a rattlesnake; he has no more right to liberty than any wild beast; his right to the pursuit of happiness is nothing but a license to maintain the struggle for existence” (234).

74 Despite his many early tribulations and losses, Jurgis Rudkus heroically forges ahead, but following Ona’s death Rudkus is at his breaking point and seeks out a saloon. “‘Whisky,’ he said, as he entered, and as the man pushed him some, he tore at the rag with his teeth and pulled out half a dollar. ‘How much is the bottle?’” he said. ‘I want to get drunk’” (138). Following the death of his wife and son, the once proud Rudkus is reduced to pauperism, intemperance, and contemplating robbery in the street. The urban jungle has effectively remade him into the vice-driven immigrant criminal forecasted by the social Darwinists. Rudkus’ penury only increases and he takes on the look of “a ragged, ill-smelling tramp” (177) and following a bar fight and his second jailing, Sinclair again depicts Rudkus as an animal, but this time a creature denuded its power. “Poor Jurgis was now an outcast and a tramp once more. He was crippled—he was as literally crippled as any wild animal which has lost its claws, or been torn out of its shell. He had been shorn, at one cut, of all those mysterious weapons whereby he had been able to make a living easily and to escape the consequences of his actions” (202).

75 In “The Forgotten Man,” Sumner again turns to one of his favorite arguments, aligning working class aspirations to wealth with national prosperity, while attacking the poor as the unwanted burden foisted upon the working class. Sumner writes that “[t]he silly popular notion is that the beggars live at the expense of the rich, but the truth is that those who eat and produce not, live at the expense of those who labor and produce. The next time that you are tempted to subscribe a dollar to a charity, I do not tell you not to do it, because after you have fairly considered the matter, you may think it right to do it, but I do ask you to stop and remember the Forgotten Man and understand that if you put your dollar in the savings bank it will go to swell the capital of the country which is available for division amongst those who, while they earn it, will reproduce it with increase” (477).
In a vein not far removed from Louis Althusser, Edward Alsworth Ross, a vocal turn-of-the-century social Darwinist, postulated that social control could be effectively maintained through a multitude of co-occurring social systems. For Ross, whose racism is as overt as any of the social Darwinists, racial antagonisms affect economic and industrial progress. “In a passive race,” writes Ross, “the individual keeps to his prescribed orbit from sheer inertia. In an aggressive race order is perpetually endangered by the unruliness of the individual, and can be maintained only through the unremitting operation of certain social forces” (3). This aggressive race finds its apex, according to Ross, in the modern white American male, and it is only through the inheritance of civilization that “the slow emergence of order out of disorder and violence presents itself as the attainment of a difficult and artificial condition” (4). The problem with Rudkus, and really anyone on the short-end of Ross’ formulation, is that “passive races” are rhetorically subdued and biologized as less capable of survival. Non-whites simply cannot compete.

77 In “Social Control” Ross contends that optimal social regulation is based on an interdependent system of social controls, a social cybernetics, similar to what Louis Althusser would later posit as the interpellated state. “The uplifting of the American negro” for instance, is for Ross “another field for the method of control by social valuations. It is now recognized that not churches alone will lift the black race; not schools; not contact with the whites; not even industry. But all of these cooperating can do it” because they spur “The growth of new and higher wants” (336). It is this supposed outgrowth of social values and desires that Ross sees as the monumental project facing U.S. society. Ross suggests too that “extreme division of social labor and high organization is the surest sign of order, since it requires the nice adjustment of multifarious activities according to some prearranged plan” (2). Attending to an interpretation of history as evolutionarily deterministic, it is during what Ross conceives as a period of cultural lapse in the European “Dark Ages” that “the mutual slaughter of untamed nobles and enhancers cleared away the aggressive spirits and gave the more peaceable industrial type of man an opportunity to multiply the bonds of social life” (10). Despite this drift towards civil society, Ross asserts that “gentleness is still no salient trait of the European,” suggesting that “[i]n endowment for friendly association he is inferior to any one of half a score of races that might be mentioned” (10). Still, the European, according to Ross, “continues ceaselessly to develop his wonderful social organization” and this “proves that his order rests upon something else than the social sentiments” (10).
78 Certain of Ross’ other arguments rely more heavily on a racialized biologization that Ross legitimizes through an evolutionary paradigm, which allows some immigrants, who possess more adapted constitutions, to survive a new environment where others might not thrive. For Ross, this demographic
Throughout this chapter, and the larger work in general, I refer to demonstrably white subjects as non-white. The way I use terms like whiteness is influenced by the work of scholars like Mike Hill, Toni Morrison, and David Roediger, who analyze whiteness as a flexible, empowered, and historically determined identitarian category. The reason I eschew the whiteness of the Welshman Hugh Wolfe and the Lithuanian Jurgis Rudkus is because in their historical moments, they have not yet been constructed as white subjects. Whiteness, as defined in critical race studies, is empowered only to the degree that it disempowers its oppositional construct in blackness. Whiteness then expresses the perseverance of racial power with its attendant socioeconomic benefits and cultural prestige. As I suggest, Hugh Wolfe and Jurgis Rudkus, in their historical moments, are not-quite-white and so remain leveraged under a racial logic of disempowerment, which is to say that their nascent whiteness is corrupted by the negative energies white culture applies to the subjugation of blackness.

When analyzing the problems of gender and sexuality I turn to the work of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Judith Butler, who identify gender performativity as a central aspect in the social production of gender identity. Feminized men like Hugh Wolfe threaten heteronormative social formations. Men, and a male-driven industrial capitalism, commodify women like Ona and Marija. Beyond the family’s stabilizing confines, male desires de-feminize Ona and Marija and produce them as criminal types. The poverty of these characters further communicates their inability to gain a more productive economic station and their vice, addiction, violence, and crime are the qualities ascribed to their

vetting “enables the offspring of the latter group to gain on the others, till in a few generations the immigrating race has, as it were, been made over and adapted to the new climate. This principle of unequal deathrates (or birth-rates) is the key, not only to acclimation, but to all manner of fitnesses in nature” (338). Social control is predicated on the widespread adaptation of values that emanate from a cultural center and Ross’ argument hinges on social competition and the natural ascendency of the fittest, a position that suggests “the improvement in the ethical standard of a civilization is due to the survival
positions among the underclass. Moreover, class position comes to determine character and poverty expresses the structural formation of an intrinsic failure and lack of fitness that rhetorically determines the inescapability of the subject’s degeneration.

However idealistically, Jurgis Rudkus eventually finds the faith in socialism, but for many of the criminalized poor the outcome Sinclair projects is hardly realistic. Poor workers like Hugh Wolfe are too weak to be socially productive and laborers like Jurgis Rudkus too passionate and strong to match social Darwinism’s civilizational ideal. In each of these examples, emasculation and animalization are the naturalized outcomes originating from social Darwinism’s racialized, gendered, and classist rhetoric and its modes of population management demonstrate the biopolitical logic of a particularly egregious late nineteenth-century social theory, one that held significant traction among industrial elites. Those considered non-white, non-gender conforming, and poor are formulated as a nascent criminal class and their social constructions leverage an array of interpellated social controls designed to police them.

Problematically, Sinclair’s attempt to resolve his industrial tragedy forecloses the social imaginary and ignores the fate of characters like Marija, who remains locked into a life of prostitution. Sinclair’s fixity at novel’s close eschews ambiguity and actually curtails alternative political futures, leaving Rudkus, despite his new political consciousness, as existing within a still stable monopoly capitalist regime. I suggest that turn-of-the-century movements in U.S. society to marginalize and often criminalize certain groups on grounds of race, class, and gender possess the hallmarks of biopolitical control because the logics of social Darwinism precipitate and develop eugenics and make clear prescriptions for demographic engineering. Moreover, the scope of

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and ascendency of those elements which are best adapted to an orderly social life” (342). In Ross’ view, the working-class mediate the excesses of the wealthy and the abandon of the poor.
biopolitical management extends from human populations to environmental resources. Extractive industries, as James O’Connor shows, eagerly reproduce the contradictions of capitalism by harnessing resources to the point of polluting and de-stabilizing ecosystems. Resource overconsumption degrades environments leaving them, much like the wasteland of the Iron Mills, stripped and uninhabitable. But all of this also hinges on what we take for beauty and what promises we believe capitalist industrialism might hold. The socioeconomic and political systems that facilitate the depredations on Chicago’s south-side and the purgatorial life of Wheeling, Virginia materialize the integrative violence of the industrial sublime and the biopolitical controls underlying it that from the smokestacks to the beggars aestheticizes the free market dream colonizing every aspect of life.

The Sound of One Hand Clapping: Berthold Lindau at the Head of the Martyr’s Brigade

Berthold Lindau is the disabled German-born Civil War veteran in William Dean Howell’s *A Hazard of New Fortunes*, whose service resulted in the battlefield loss of a hand. Lindau’s foreignness, politics, and physical deformity mark Lindau’s alterity and subsequently suggest a threat to the prevailing social order. John Crowley, in *The Mask of Fiction*, writes that “[t]hroughout his war-related fiction, by the recurrent image of the injured or missing limb, Howells suggests that those who lust for romantic apotheosis in battle often return less than complete men” (22). Crowley suggests this tendency in Howells’ fiction likely originates in the author’s masculine anxieties and guilt over never enlisting, pressures Howells managed “by stressing the importance of the commonplace

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present rather than the heroic past” (27). As Joseph Darda suggests, “[t]he sight of poor or disabled ex-soldiers reminded citizens of the precariousness of life in the United States, challenging the idea that success is fair recompense for bootstrap determination and, on the other hand, failure the result of idleness” (212). Darda places Lindau’s disability as the operative logic constructing *Hazard* and argues that Lindau’s death and memorialization reflects the period’s attempts to “reconstruct a coherent social through the elimination of illegible bodies: the unrehabilitated bodies of the Civil War that destabilized the process of reunification and the production of reassuring national myths” (227). Still working with Lindau’s wound as the novel’s central motif, Andrew Rennick maps the Civil War onto the climatic labor battle that costs Lindau his life and demonstrates the substitutive gestures that predominate throughout the novel, suggesting that just as Lindau’s memorial helps the characters regain their centeredness and surety their memorialization substitutes nostalgia for political and material change.

Lindau’s wound contextualizes sacrifice as part of a valorized national narrative and his disability discloses the story of war as perpetual trauma. It is the natural death and destruction of the unfit that Spencer suggests keeps “the race…free from vitiation” (*Social Statistics* 206).\(^{80}\) Lindau’s lost hand certainly indexes him as less fit, but the

80 Like Galton, who links social degeneracy to physical ailments and suggests that natural selection is the pure mechanism rightly weeding out the unfit, Spencer’s organismic society possesses a fixed “vital force” that he suggests is too often squandered. While his equilibration correlates to a utopian social vision, ultimately Spencer’s use-inheritance perspective obscures Darwinian adaptation in favor of fitness. “Consumptive patients, with lungs incompetent to perform the duties of lungs, people with digestive organs that will not take up enough nutriment, people with defective hearts which break down under effort, people with any constitutional flaw preventing due fulfillment of the conditions of life, are continually dying out, and leaving behind those fit for the climate, food, and habits to which they are born (205). Injurious variations consistently related to biological and social fitness eclipse causality, providing a tidy narrative venerating those who exercise social and economic power. In *Inquiries*, Galton also uses intellectual and physical disabilities as undeniable evidence of natural selection’s operation, a position disclosing the moral quandary posed by positivism when unchecked by humanist ethics. Attacking the disabled, Galton suggests that “[t]he discriminative faculty of idiots is curiously low; they hardly distinguish between heat and cold, and their sense of pain is so obtuse that some of the more idiotic seem hardly to know what it is. In their dull lives, such pain as can be excited in them may literally be accepted with a welcome surprise” (28). Galton’s interpretation of the sensorial capacities of
quality that Spencer might suggest truly debilitates Lindau is his socialist politics. Or, as
Spencer puts it, “[n]ature just as much insists on fitness between mental character and
circumstances, as between physical character and circumstances; and radical defects are
as much causes of death in the one case as in the other” (206).

Spencer’s argument qualifies the physically disabled and mentally challenged
alike as unfit, but it goes further to capture “mental character,” a category indicating that
particular world-views contribute to psychological and social degradation. Foil to Ross’
forgotten man, Lindau espouses the virtues of socialism and reflects grudgingly on the
failures of American social liberation. Lindau refuses his military pension as an act of
protest against the oligarchical systems that produce social oppression and situates
himself among the downtrodden and oppressed because, as he says, “I was beginning to
forget the boor!” and “you must zee it all the dtime—zee it, hear it, smell it, dtae it—
or you forget it” (Howells 190). Lindau’s declaration emphasizes the visibility of the
poor, suggesting that if the poor and downtrodden are not encountered and seen then
their presence becomes less real. Lindau’s position is that in order to know poverty one
must immerse oneself in its social networks and yet his insistence on sightedness cannot
help but present poverty as a kind of spectacle. Lindau’s assertion attests to a critical
precept of a (dis)integrative aesthetic in that the subject’s witnessed abjection is the thing
integrating its public.

Significant scholarship has engaged Howells’ technique and approach to realism,
but generally we find the city as a central force coordinating its human actors. In

intellectually disabled people, particularly his arguments regarding the testable thresholds of their pain,
reveals the extreme perversity of social Darwinist thought. It’s passages like these that disclose social
Darwinism’s inherent sadism and it should give us pause to question whose pleasure it is that Galton is
actually describing. Aside from Galton’s apparent arousal at the prospect of inflicting pain on the
intellectually disabled, it’s important to think about how these dangerous ideas became trafficked in
popular discourse and how this science validated racial bigotry, gender violence, and the de-
humanization of specific groups of people.
conceptualizing the role of the city, I turn to Philip Fisher, whose view of modern urbanity conceptualizes the city as “synecdoche and metonymy” (129) in which the city “mediates between and models the larger society” (130) yielding “a map of the psyche, a quantitative account of the strength and complexity of human desires at a given moment” (132). Similarly, Amy Kaplan orients the city as a space signifying “‘the unreal,’ the alien, or that which has not yet been realized” (“Knowledge of the Line” 69). The city is a matrix of shifting potentials and desires, again, a “metonymy for the elusive process of social change” (Kaplan 69) that undergoes formal solidification through its narrativization.

Kaplan’s insights pertaining to Howells’ uses of foreground and background further help us to see Howells’ representational strategies at play. As Kaplan puts it, “[t]he drawing of boundaries offers a narrative solution to the ideological question of how to represent and control social difference and conflict...What comes into view as background, as cityscape, becomes invisible as an arena for social agency. Against this setting, the colony of characters in the foreground stands out as a synecdoche for the whole city—the knowable urban community” (74). Further, when crises penetrate this foreground they reveal the social forces, such as Dryfoos’ wealth and the exigencies of the poor, that manage the contingencies of what on the surface appear to be free standing social relations.

*A Hazard of New Fortunes* presented to Howells, as Cynthia Stretch writes, an “attempt to grapple with what it might mean for an author, a realist, to ‘represent’ the ‘people’ and to establish fiction as a significant factor in public life” (234). Howells took this responsibility seriously, striving, as Michelle Kohler suggests, to use the
techniques of “observation as a mode of unmediated literary production” tempered by “observation as a mode of reception that is mediated by the good judgment and common sense of the realist writer” (189). Henry Wonham, in discussing Howells’ conception of realism, suggests that “[w]hen he turned to professional authorship, Howells continued to regard literature—or, more precisely, literary realism—as a means of preserving the always suspect integrity of the self by delimiting the free play of consciousness. Writing became a way of channeling anxieties about the self outward, where they could be objectively observed and controlled” (704).

Early in the novel, Basil March encounters a “decent-looking man with the hard hands and broken nails of a workman,” who he watches “like a hungry dog…pick up a dirty bit of cracker from the pavement and cram it into his mouth and eat it down as if he were famished” (Howells 70). In this stark image, Howells presents the animalized poor as a spectacle for public review, effectively consumed by the reader in much the way Howells’ out-of-work working man devours dirtied food. March’s encounter with a man scavenging garbage discloses the discursive differentiation separating the haves from the have-nots. The man’s violation is also a violation of the reader designed to evoke empathy and so communicates the class position and material securities Howells ascribes to his readership.

The supplementary logics animating Howells’ characters and plot finds Basil March as the Gramscian intelligentsia mediating the social relations between classes. As Kaplan suggests, March’s middle-class sensibilities provide him the intellectual framework that allows him to structure the city as it suits him, “distinguish[ing] an unthreatening domestic space by excluding large segments of the city in the generalized

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81 For a compelling study on Howells, literary realism’s connections with insurance writing, and perceptions of cultural crisis also see Puskar, Jason. “William Dean Howells and the Insurance of the
perception of ‘decay’” (71). March’s indeterminacies facilitate the beggar scene as practically a “return of the repressed” signaling to the March’s that their imaginary fashioning of the city and “denial of ‘real’ misery” (Kaplan 73) cannot be sustained. What solicits the reader’s anxieties, particularly so because the beggar is termed respectable looking is how the man demonstrates the severe actualities of class permeability, “lines” as Kaplan would have it, actualized via the background logics nowhere more realized than in the anti-immigrant and anti-labor vitriol that cannot be separated out from Dryfoos’ wealth.

Traumatic events create psychosocial disruptions and just as trauma reconfigures one’s neural pathways and alters brain function so too does it alter the narrative patterns constituting individual consciousness. Here the disintegrative scene exerts the irreconcilable and disrupted ontology of trauma. The reader is overwhelmed at the realization of the subject’s likely fate as the scene discloses the ideological and material factors affecting the subject’s destruction. I ask then, in what ways a (dis)integrative aesthetic uses trauma and its constructive power to the end of positive cultural production?

Many social Darwinian theorists, and I here draw again from Sumner, viewed the accumulation of wealth among the laboring classes an unlikely prospect not because the deck was stacked against them, but because they simply were not fit to make intelligent long-range financial decisions. Due to natural constraints, “it is inevitable that capital should speedily slip from the hold of the man who is not fit to possess it, back into the great stream of capital, and so find its way into the hands of those who can use it for the benefit of society” (Sumner, “Challenge of Facts” 43). By that logic, any socialist model advocating economic equity is a threat to civilization because it attempts to subvert

liberty at the expense of those most hereditarily capable of managing society. While
denying Marx’s supposition that accumulated capital at one end of the economic
spectrum produces poverty at the other, Sumner maintains that it is the laboring class, the
forgotten man, that mediates the social order, an economic placement that he views as
victimized by capital and distressed through taxation and charitable demands to support
the poor, a rhetoric essentially aligning labor with capitalist and statist power.\(^\text{82}\)

At the same time, Sumner assigns the aggregation of wealth a natural position in
social evolution and disparages “democratic” sympathies that view monopolization and
oligarchy as socially destructive.\(^\text{83}\) “The concentration of power (wealth), more dominant
control, intenser discipline, and stricter methods are but modes of securing more perfect
integration” (Sumner, “Concentration of Wealth” 82). The failure of capitalism then

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82 See Sumner, William Graham. “What makes the Rich Richer and the Poor Poorer?,” The Challenge of
that “It is the tendency of all social burdens to crush out the middle class, and to force the society into an
organization of only two classes, one at each social extreme.” (70). Identifying the poor and wealthy as
debtors and creditors, Sumner reiterates his view that socialists are parasitic, perpetuating a culture of
dependence among the poor and fraud among the wealthy. For more on the social Darwinist’s perspective
on the economic basis of class conflict also see Ross, Edward Alsworth. Sin and Society An Analysis of
the modern villain is found in “the countenance of the boodler, the savings-bank wrecker, or the ballot-
box stuffer” (10). Ross, in his ascription of blame suggests that “sin” is no less pervasive among the poor
and vile than it is among society’s elites, who augment human suffering by transgressing against
populations. To illustrate his concept of social victimization, Ross suggests that “[i]ke a stupid, flushed
giant at bay, the public heeds the little overt offender more than the big covert offender. It resents a
pinprick more than a blow at the heart” (26). Oddly aligning on common ground with Lindau, Ross
argues that society mis-recognizes the greater of two villains and is quick to punish the transgressor in its
midst while treating other pervasive industrial and economic abuses as if they were an accepted part of
everyday life. As Ross suggests, “[t]o-day the villain most in need of curbing is the respectable,
exemplary, trusted personage who, strategically placed at the focus of a spider-web of fiduciary relations,
is able from his office-chair to pick a thousand pockets, poison a thousand sick, pollute a thousand minds,
or imperil a thousand lives” (29-30).

83 Sumner, William Graham. “Who is Free?,” Earth-Hunger and Other Essays. New Haven: Yale UP,
1913. Considering the ways that capital accumulation produces hierarchies of power, Sumner writes that
“[i]t may be said, then, that liberty is to be found at the summit of civilization, and that those who have
the resources of civilization at their command are the only ones who are free. But the resources of
civilization are capital; and so it follows that the capitalists are free, or, to avoid ambiguities in the word
capitalist, that the rich are free. Popular language, which speaks of the rich as independent, has long
carried an affirmation upon this point. In reality the thirst for wealth is a thirst for this independence of
the ills of life, and the interdependence of wealth on civilization and civilization on wealth is the reason
why the science of wealth is concerned with the prime conditions of human welfare, and why all
denunciations of desire to increase or to win wealth are worse than childish” (147).
portends a societal devolution where “war is the normal and only possible condition of society, unless we take refuge under the pitiless despotism of the socialistic state” (Sumner, “Industrial War” 98). While the unionization Lindau advocates makes labor a formidable presence, Sumner, like Dryfoos, views organized labor as impeding social management by more evolutionarily fit elites and sees acts of labor resistance like boycotting as bringing “terrorism to bear on the whole community” (100-01). Fear of a worker’s revolt conflates with the anxieties of criminalized poor to stoke a more generalized social panic and these imminent threats, as Sumner and others foretell, promise the dissolution of the American way of life.

It is this irrational panic over populations seeking equitable wages and humanitarian work conditions that so excites Dryfoos, the natural gas magnet and funder of March’s Every Other Week. Dryfoos’ hysterical claim that Lindau is the type of man “that would cut my throat if he got the chance” (Howells 348) discloses the insecurity of his position. Lindau becomes the individual emblematic of workers “waiting to get the city into a snarl, and then rob the houses—pack of dirty, worthless whelps” (Howells 416). Dryfoos’ position is that of capital. His solution is the aggressive policing of the poor. “They ought to call out the militia, and fire into ‘em”’ declares Dryfoos. “‘Clubbing is too good for them’” (Howells 416). Despite his claims of socialist plots,

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84 According to Sumner, and as he writes in “Industrial War”, “[a]n employer has no obligation whatever to an employee outside of the contract, any more than an editor has to his subscribers, or a merchant to his customers, or a house-owner to his tenants, or a banker to his depositors. In a free democratic state employees are not wards of the state; they are not like Indians, or freedmen, or women, or children. If it can be shown that any law or custom of our society keeps down the man who is struggling for himself, every fair-minded man could and would join the agitation for its removal; but when we are asked to create privileges or tolerate encroachments, resistance is equally a social duty” (101). The duty that Sumner describes is not contesting labor oppression, but the repulse of social forces that might constrain and limit free trade.

85 Unlike Dryfoos, who views labor conflict with hysterics and believes it requires authoritarian discipline, the Colonel’s social Darwinian rhetoric aligns political, racial, and economic forces as the framework for the south's reconstitution. “[W]hen the last vestige of commercial society is gone, then we can begin to build anew; and we shall build upon the central idea, not of the false liberty you now worship, but of responsibility—responsibility. The enlightened, the moneyed, the cultivated class shall be
it is Dryfoos who is the radicalized subject, spouting anti-immigrant conspiracy theories and a desire to subjugate and violently suppress labor. Moreover, Dryfoos is so certain that his wealth is evidence enough of his political sovereignty that he calls for labor agitators and immigrants to be executed. Attacking Lindau, Dryfoos declaims him as a red-mouthed labor agitator. He’s one of those foreigners that come here from places where they’ve never had a decent meal’s victuals in their lives, and as soon as they get their stomachs full they begin to make trouble between our people and their hands. There’s where the strikes come from, and the unions, and the secret societies. They come here and break our Sabbath, and teach their atheism. They ought to be hung! Let ’em go back if they don’t like it over here. They want to ruin the country (Howells 347).

In Dryfoos’ xenophobia one hears the same rhetoric that Sumner uses to bemoan the economic displacement of the working man by foreign rabble and political radicals. Repugnant paranoia and rage seep into common usage because they reaffirm cultural anxieties about the destabilization of racialized, classist, and gendered formations of social power. Dryfoos’ litany communicates the already well established racial scapegoating that maintains the socioeconomic survival and political hegemony of one group at the expense of another. He projects the rhetoric of biological and social superiority that the man-on-the-street internalizes as beliefs determining national allegiance. The perception of anti-American labor agitators as immigrant and socialist

responsible to the central authority—emperor, duke, president; the name does not matter—for the national expense and the national defence, and it shall be responsible to the working classes of all kinds for homes and lands and implements, and the opportunity to labor at all times’” (344). The Colonel’s position, anathema to Lindau, is a top-down social control suggesting the oppressive racial violence and paternalism of the old south is resurgent. “The working classes shall be responsible to the leisure class for the support of its dignity in peace, and shall be subject to its command in war. The rich shall warrant
threats reinforces the dangers to the good life. What we hear in Dryfoos’ rhetoric is the narrativization of the working-class as either allegiant to capital and thereby benefiting from a certain social prestige or as a socialistic and criminal underclass undeserving its Americaness. This economically disruptive and criminalized working class are managed, as March describes, by police ready to “‘club the ideal when he finds it inciting a riot’” (Howells 430). It is police, functioning as the formal state agents of capital, who surveil, monitor, and when necessary discipline the poor.

Howells’ pivotal labor riot has its historical antecedent in an 1889 New York City transportation strike, but the event that looms larger in Howells’ novel is Chicago’s 1886 Haymarket Affair, a bombing amid labor demonstrations that led to the execution of four of the eight Anarchists convicted of the plot. Through the vehicle of the labor strike, the world Howells constructs effectively destabilizes. Suggesting that Howells’ work in Hazard “interrogates the impossibility of the realist project itself as it comes face to face with the intractable social conflicts that were the inevitable results of capitalist modernization,” Cynthia Stretch treats the eruptive nature of the labor strike as the “distillate” of social ‘conflicts “the shadowy graveyard of the public sphere and the disinterested observer” (245). Political violence threatens to subsume labor’s counter-discourse, but these scenes of violation resurge the sacrificial actors, whose deaths resist the novel’s attempts at memorialization and societal suture that Howells attempts in Hazard’s conclusion. During the labor strike “a squad of policemen leaped out, and began to club the rioters” (Howells 421). Conrad, the burgeoning Christian socialist, “could see how they struck them under the rims of their hats; the blows on their skulls sounded as if they had fallen on stone; the rioters ran in all directions” (Howells 421). It

the poor against planless production and the ruin that now follows, against danger from without and famine from within”’ (344).
is here that Lindau is struck by a policeman and his already wounded arm is ""'[s]mashed all to pieces by the clubbing'"" (Howells 424) and at last amputated, an injury to which Lindau soon succumbs and dies.

Lindau’s hand, like his life, as he states was not given to ""save this oligarchy of traders and tricksters, this aristocracy of railroad wreckers and stock gamblers and mine-slave drivers and mill-serf owners’’"” but for “the slave; the slave—ha! ha! ha!—whom I helped to unshackle to the common liberty of hunger and cold’’” (Howells 193).66 Lindau’s hand signifies the ongoing resistance to pre-existing forms of economically driven social oppression, first the slavery of antebellum America, and now the violent control of labor within the capitalist regime. What Basil March and the reader encounter in the clubbing of Lindau and shooting of young Conrad Dryfoos is a slowed violence that coalesces and shifts in each discreet image. “The officer whirled his club, and the old man threw his left arm up to shield his head” (422) writes Howells. “Conrad recognized

66 Lindau understands that capitalism is individualistic and predicated on the extrapolation of value at the cost of labor. “How much money can a man honestly earn without wronging or oppressing some other man?” (191), asks Lindau, arguing that “'[i]t is the landlords and the merchant princes, the railroad kings and the coal barons (the oppressors whom you instinctively give the titles of tyrants)—it is these that make the millions, but no man earns them’” (191). Lindau is pitted against anti-union capitalism and envisions a new socially democratic America where the poor are not given work, but all people work collaboratively to manage communal needs. What Lindau strives for is political power and a re-membering of the social liberation struggle that motivated his service in the Civil War. Democracy, in Lindau’s eyes, promotes individual freedom through communal support. According to Sumner, however, as he writes in *What Social Classes Owe*, “[d]emocracy, in order to be true to itself, and to develop into a sound working system, must oppose the same cold resistance to any claims for favor on the ground of poverty, as on the ground of birth and rank” (37). Social Darwinism subordinates Lindau’s vision of communal society to individual liberty because democracy, like capitalism, is associated with natural competition and so it manifests an evolutionary ideal, a law of nature socially expressed. For Sumner, “[a] member of a free democracy is, in a sense, a sovereign. He has no superior. He has reached his sovereignty, however, by a process of reduction and division of power which leaves him no inferior” (38). Contractual labor and free market enterprise exude a democratic ideal, but for Lindau these are manipulative narratives that occlude actual social oppressions. “Lindau furiously interrupted. ‘Yes, when they have gathered their millions together from the hunger and cold and nakedness and ruin and despair of hundreds of thousands of other men, they ‘give work’ to the poor! They give work! They allow their helpless brothers to earn enough to keep life in them! They give work! Who is it gives toil, and where will your rich men be when once the poor shall refuse to give toil? Why, you have come to give me work!’’” (192). Even Lindau’s work exemplifies a form of supplementation. As model for the artist, Angus Beaton, posing ironically for war scenes like the Damascus Massacre or as that most famous of betrayers, Judas Iscariot, Lindau exemplifies Howells’ strategy by taking actual conflict as representational of historically determined fictions reproduced discursively as cultural truths.
Lindau, and now he saw the empty sleeve dangle in the air, over the stump of his wrist” (Howells 422). Howells stills the critical moment, excising it from the event’s temporal momentum such that the reader must bear full witness to the sluggish destruction, in effect, the slowed-down moment of trauma. Howells narrates how Conrad Dryfoos “heard a shot in that turmoil beside the car, and something seemed to strike him in the breast” (422). He then constructs Dryfoos’ internal dialogue and collapsed intention. “He was going to say to the policeman, ‘Don’t strike him! He’s an old soldier! You see he has no hand!’ but he could not speak, he could not move his tongue” (Howells 422). When a seemingly random bullet strikes Conrad Dryfoos dead, Howells slows the action to a crawl. Howells presents Dryfoos’ interior speech, revealing language as his last gasp, expressed but shorn of vocalization in the moment before he realizes that he has been shot dead.

The action compressed in the traumatic moment, Lindau and Dryfoos’ destruction become static and monumental. Narrating the space between Lindau’s beating and Dryfoos’ murder, Howells emphasizes this perceptual fixity. “The policeman stood there; he saw his face: it was not bad, not cruel; it was like the face of a statue, fixed, perdurable; a mere image of irresponsible and involuntary authority. Then Conrad fell forward, pierced through the heart by that shot fired from the car” (Howells 422). It is when Basil March emerges into the scene that the narrative aperture again opens and motion returns. “March heard the shot as he scrambled out of his car, and at the same moment he saw Lindau drop under the club of the policeman, who left him where he fell, and joined the rest of the squad in pursuing the rioters” (Howells 422). Howells applies realism’s visuality to produce the reader’s encounter with Lindau’s fatal brutalization and Dryfoos’ collateral death and in this scene, which is tantamount to a double murder, Howells appropriates a scopic facility in order to represent trauma’s objective and
subjective dimensions, its perceivable interiority and observable exteriority. In so doing, Howells exposes the reader to the discursive formations that have produced the subject’s (dis)integration and the reader must answer for himself what are the limits of his own empathy and just what type of world these traumatic episodes are meant to construct.

When we encounter a scene like Lindau’s beating or Wolfe’s suicide, we do not just witness the representation of a traumatic event. The scene communicates a subtle secondary traumatization that occupies the reader’s consciousness. What we do with these negative feelings aligns our ethico-political relations to the world and through our engagement with representations of crisis we receive the opportunity to rethink causalities and outcomes and restore positive and ethical relations with society. The danger, however, lies in the very experience of empathy and the negative feelings the traumatic scene demands. This negative arousal threatens to overtake the reader and through subjective misdirection and the event’s discursive reiteration instantiates disaster culture’s perpetual constancy. It is when the integrative forces producing the perception of social threats are not critically evaluated that the event’s traumatic aura becomes static. When conflated with personal histories, external crises that may or may not have much to do with the individual easily enough help drive a cycle of self-abjection and despair. Daily life’s precarity is inscribed as the meter of our social relations and the world’s dangers necessarily exist everywhere and at all times, leaving the individual with little respite from his continuous engagement with crises that do not end.

Fundamentally, Davis’ Iron Mills resists a clearly delineated closure. The possibility for social change remains imminent and imaginable because the traumatic episode is not resolved. Sinclair’s Jungle strives to demonstrate social resistance’s possibilities through political forms oppositional to capitalism. Problematically, Sinclair’s idealism gestures towards a clear path to industrial revolution. Socio-economic
transformation is left as a promised future given that certain ideal political conditions are met. However, I see Sinclair’s political certainties as the flaw that erases the potential for radical social change. We cannot ignore the fact that while Rudkus locates stability in a masculine politics, Ona’s cousin, Marija, remains pinioned to her addiction and a life of prostitution, arguably facilitated by many of those same socialist minded laborers. Howells’ resolution, as I suggest, wholly excises the possibility of any fundamental social change because, in its own perfunctory way, it resolves antagonisms and disavows new potentialities for social freedom. Howells’ problematic ending, in which all debts are set to rights and the cast’s opposing positions are at least tentatively resolved, curtails the opportunity to re-imagine the world in any meaningful way. The ambiguities necessary for new imaginaries are reduced to simplified closure and critical antagonisms are displaced into new social relations. The struggle for social equality effectively disappears. Underlying the Howellsian resolution labor continues its competition with predatory capitalist forces and it is Howells’ gesture to solve the crisis that perpetuates the social world’s erasure.

In each of these realist novels the poor emerge as the object of spectatorial analysis. Their supposed criminality and social transgressions demonstrate the social crisis reifying state power and its authority to police and control. Through the (dis)integrative analysis of these three texts, I argue that the realism of Howells, and to a lesser degree of Sinclair, disperse social antagonisms into neat resolutions thereby displacing social change into the technologies of power that they otherwise deride. However, in Davis’ anti-resolution we see realism willing to engage the indeterminacies of trauma and allow the speculation of social imaginaries that are essentially an “unfinished work.”
Chapter 2

Occult Works and Days:

Temperance, Realism, and the Social Ecology of Addiction

Jerry McAuley was a figurehead in the late nineteenth-century temperance movement. His 1876 autobiography *Transformed* was widely read and McAuley’s publications, speaking tours, and founding work at the Water Street Mission, a hub for social work and temperance reform in turn-of-the-century New York, made McAuley one of the most recognizable temperance activists in the period. In *Transformed*, McAuley emphasizes real conversion and presents psychological, physical, and spiritual transformation as outcomes actualizable through temperance. He articulates that a sober life is reproducible through correct moral choice and McAuley’s authority to construct this ideal reality is contingent upon his claims to realism. Throughout this chapter, I integrate the relationship between the social crisis of addiction and realism and demonstrate the ways that temperance literature foregrounded realist conceits to exert an air of permanency and verifiability for its readership.

In temperance writing, conversion’s material actuality is critically important because it stages the demonstrable consequences that hinge on spiritual transformation. The change must be *real*, as it were, in order to show the utility of communities of faith and the linkages coordinating aid societies, the church, and local politics. The restored self that McAuley communicates to his readers, a healthful, Christian, and hardworking man, only manages an aura of authority due to the fact that it is set in opposition to the degradation and inebriety of McAuley’s former life. McAuley’s work demonstrates inebriety’s social construction and generational transference, but it is an aesthetic of (dis)integration that empowers McAuley’s representation of himself. McAuley’s long
repressed but nonetheless ideal persona is the negation of the drunkard and criminal, the debased subject whose discursive production disciplines social behavior and actuates cultural form.

When considering temperance’s representational strategies, I think integratively about addiction and consider how narratological aesthetic features influence our perceptions of the social ecology of addiction. As much as an ecology constitutes the interrelationship between material forces, social ecology applies to the multivalent interdependencies between psychological, social, and environmental domains.87 Jerry McAuley’s realism is as much about his experience of emotional despair and biological compulsion as it is about communities of vice and communities of faith and the spaces these populations mutually construct. Part of reconciling the negativity compacted in scenes of disintegration and their rhetorical construction is the necessary parsing of those forces that situate one within a negative ecology.

Negative ecology is a term that conveys the socio-economic and political engineering of discrete ecologies made hazardous by the routine extraction of the material resources and vitality of the human populations existing within them. I am not suggesting that a negative ecology is without hope, simply that a negative ecology entraps its subjects and reproduces a cycle of environmental degradation and social

87 When we think about ecology, the inclination is to conceptualize organic and inorganic interdependencies, the things producing a biosphere. What our ecological thought commonly omits is human presence. Nature, in our cultural imagination, tends to be synonymous with environment, and nature is often relegated to the observable phenomenon at the human periphery. We see nature and touch nature, but we often fail to realize our place in nature. The problem of not seeing oneself is measured by the inability to recognize or to otherwise disregard evidence indicating how human behavior negatively impacts and alters an environment. Complexity theory has supported our movement away from linear cause and effect environmental models, and since the 1970s social ecology has provided an interdisciplinary means to expand ecological thought to more readily capture the complex cybernetics governing human presence and built and natural environments. This perspective theoretically realigns human experience with environmental nature. Social ecology considers human and environmental interrelationships, encouraging an ethics sensitive to the security of non-human life and considerate of how human action generates social and environmental outcomes. Recalibrating ecological thought to the
oppression. Negative ecology expresses disintegration and attention to these patterns and their representations, in which human experience and environment demonstrate a shared diegesis, helps bring eco-social problems to light. Through exposure and analysis negative ecologies can undergo re-narrativization and the disintegrative aura exuded in material decay and human precarity disclose the rhetorical and material conditions producing social crises.

There is hardly an image more evocative of social failure than that of the addict and in the turn-of-the-century United States, addiction signaled a national crisis. Addiction explicitly generated vice, promoted immorality, and compromised volition, all things contraindicating that U.S. society was producing the type of resourceful and hardworking citizen expected of an America ascending to the world’s stage. In popular discourse, the addict represented the perils of liberty, the too-free subject devolved into a social waste and, consequentially, a figure paradigmatic of disaster culture. The spread of addiction at the turn-of-the-century coincides with other consumptive momentums nowhere more clearer than in the proliferation of mass media and its expanding literary markets and the conspicuous consumption and materialism that Thorstein Veblen tied to class status and social identity. Consumerism and addiction share a correlationality, consumerism serving as a structural catalytic automating a pattern of supplementation and arousal that telegraphs addictive behavior within a culture whose steadfast progress was marked by instability.

social incorporates the individual, society, and environment as part of a mutually interdependent ecological system.

88 Veblen, Thorstein. The Theory of the Leisure Class An Economic Study of Institutions. New York: MacMillan, 1918. The Progressive Era’s changing economic conditions increasingly emplaced men, women, and children in the labor force. This demographic shift required wage-laborers to more frequently purchase goods and services, affecting the expansion of commodity markets. What we know today as mass consumerism has its roots in the changing labor and purchasing dynamics of the period.

89 The commodity-object conceals the real conditions of its manufacture just as it vocalizes value, and when commodities usurp the place of real social relationships and social relations are expressed through
Just as consumerism palliates impoverishment, alcohol and drug addiction salve chronic emotional and physical pain. This pleasure in destruction, which is the work of supplementation, reveals the symptomology of cultural crisis. Unfortunately, the vast majority of addiction treatments, then and now, view addiction as a symptom of other underlying psychosocial problems and not as a symptom of structural inequalities, what Bruce Alexander terms dislocation that influence traumatic experience and psychosocial disequilibrium. According to Alexander, traumatic forces that negatively alter normative social relations trigger psychosocial dislocation because the societal processes that might have traditionally stabilized an individual within a community have in varying ways broken down. Traumatic events reverberate generationally, destabilizing populations and affecting a range of social problems which in turn contributes to increased rates of addiction.

My approach to trauma-informed analysis takes into account that a unique radical event does not always characterize trauma. I orient traumatic experience to a crisis of truth and ontological rupture that, as Cathy Caruth suggests, “places its truth in question” due to “its very overwhelming immediacy” (6). While I do not subscribe to the belief that trauma is unknowable, I recognize its fundamental resistance to interpretation and see its causes as requiring experiential and structural analysis across time. Further, while I object signifiers like fancy jewelry or a new hat, personal and social worth is communicated through the accumulation and show casing of commodities. The commodity’s signification arouses pleasure and produces status to the degree that it mitigates anxieties and produces a false sense of security. Alcohol and drug addiction are not the same thing as consumerism, but they do operate within the same consumptive paradigm through the public and private incorporation of substances meant to alleviate fears and tension. Addiction and consumerism each co-emerge, along with mass media, as cultural practices coordinating disaster culture.

90 Alexander, Bruce K. *The Globalization of Addiction: A Study in Poverty of the Spirit.* Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008. Dislocation can be tracked throughout the postbellum United States and for some it stems from the violence and vast death of the American Civil War. For others, dislocation is found in a legacy of enslavement or American colonialism and the Indian Wars of the nineteenth-century. Dislocation theory addresses discrete issues affecting specific populations, but rather than ascribing social disruption to one particular event or practice, it’s perhaps more accurate to state that psychosocial dislocation and cultural trauma is the running narrative principally contextualizing nineteenth-century America.
approach trauma as critically disruptive, I do not view its rupturing effect as foreclosing positive transformation. In point of fact, trauma generates new potentialities and the opportunity for narratological revision that is inherently palliative. One cannot alter the traumatic event, but how we manage these experiences and regenerate from them indicates the possibility to recover. I recognize too that trauma can slow-burn over time to affect psychosocial dysfunction, a process heavily dependent on the stories we tell and the cultural narratives we construct.

Before addiction’s sustained medicalization began at the turn-of-the-century, the temperance movement sounded the rejoinder to the quandary of the inebriate. From the antebellum Washingtonians to the increasingly urban rescue missions and tent revivals in the later half of the nineteenth-century, social workers, ministers, and activists sought to alleviate the iniquity of intemperance one person at a time. Crucial to the success of temperance success was the testimony of former addicts like McAuley, who found absolution in sobriety. While face-to-face social work and live oratory was essential to temperance reform, textuality often constructed temperance publics, which is to say that print culture largely coordinated the temperance movement. Presses disseminated the testimonies orated in religious revivals and mutual aid societies throughout the United States and these temperance narratives, typically oriented to Protestant Christianity, offered accounts of subjective personal awakening unencumbered by religious intermediaries.

Protestantism’s freer associations made religious conversion a spontaneous event, and for people like Jerry McAuley, an Irish Catholic, Protestantism’s spiritual self-determination presented a way to shed the less reliable systems of the past through a personal conversion closely tied to the independence we associate with American national identity. These narratives of spiritual and material recuperation that emerged
from the poorest sectors of society suggest, as Eoin F. Cannon writes, “a real and symbolic solution to problems of social fragmentation” (27). Temperance literature synchronized public sentiment and communicated that the moral failings of men and women lost to profligacy were not set in stone. Class permeability, moral rebirth, and expansive communities of faith were the tangible results of conversion.

Temperance remained one of the most contentious social issues in nineteenth-century America and it provided a critical intersectionality. Temperance permeated racial, gender, and class formations, and the addict presented a site upon which medico-legal, sociological, and theistic discourses competed to explain the problem of addiction and the addict’s challenge to national progress. The realities of addiction could not be denied, and it is through the addict’s representation as a real subject capable of change that the addiction concept took on the plasticity required to normalize citizen-subjects like McAuley. The persistence of addiction in the realist tradition discloses the centrality of its crisis and, as I argue, even in the most pessimistic of realisms, the addict’s (dis)integration poses ways to navigate the unresolved conflicts that haunt U.S. culture and literary history.91

91 See Fuller, Metta Victoria. The Senator’s Son; Or, The Maine Law; A Last Refuge; A Story Dedicated to The Law-Makers. Cleveland: Tooker and Gatchel, 1858. Foster, George G. New York by Gas-Light and Other Urban Sketches. Berkeley: California UP, 1990. and Arthur, Timothy Shay. Ten Nights in a Bar-Room, And What I Saw There. Philadelphia: J.W. Bradley, 1854. Temperance literature provided narratives of religious conversion, sentimental heroism, and social action that promoted sober living and civil restoration, but the form variably draws from other well established genre types that range from sentimentalism and realism to sensationalism and the gothic. Temperance literature emphasized the brutal hardships and criminal underbelly of urban America while also showing that redemption and a good life was still possible even for the most degenerate of the underclass. The temperance form stages this trajectory because the text operates as a site for intervention in which the reader recognizes experiences similar to his own and gains hope from them. As time and circumstances change, so too do literary genres and some of the most impactful and popular temperance narratives emerge in the period of literary realism. For the temperance audience, literary realism, with its characteristic idealism, presents a middling didactic path, at once cautionary and hopeful. Late realism, which is the purview of literary naturalism, provides no easy resolution and instead privileges the subject’s disintegration as the stark outcome awaiting the dissolute. These distinct genre forms aestheticize a social crisis, and, while each discloses their own unique ideological positions, they intersect and inform one another, cultivating popular discourse and coordinating the reading public’s varying dispositions towards addiction. Frederick Douglass lamented whisky’s power to enslave and the Pequot minister William Apess principally blamed
Jerry McAuley is Drowning Again: The Carceral Logics of Reform

Despite its gritty realism, temperance literature has its foundations in the U.S. sentimental tradition, a form derided by male writers from Nathaniel Hawthorne to Frank Norris. Charges of sentimentality notwithstanding, in the logic of the temperance movement truth really was found in feeling and the spiritual transformation that preceded material change.92 As such, the temperance narrative aligns sentimental and realist genres. Temperance literature’s didacticism and biographical realism work, as Cannon suggests, through “conflating spiritual redemption and social rehabilitation” such that “when the drunkard’s conversion template brought a subject into the body of the respectable public it gave divine sanction to its vision of the social order” (25). When Jerry McAuley’s iniquities land him in Sing Sing Penitentiary, McAuley’s scrimmage of affects deliver sentiment to the hardest of men. Hearing a reform testimonial by Orville Gardner, McAuley writes that “[t]ears filled my eyes, and I raised my hand slowly to

alcohol for the disintegration of his family and early abuse. The sensational Metta Victoria Fuller Victor’s The Senator’s Son explores the ruin of drink and the Maine “dry” Law of 1851. Other texts like George G. Foster’s New York by Gas-Light and Timothy Shay Arthur’s Ten Nights in a Bar-Room plumbed the depravity of intemperance among the poor. Even Walt Whitman, America’s poet, penned his temperance novel Franklin Evans with the Washingtonian movement in mind. Intemperance and addiction was a crisis felt everywhere and across all walks of life and it remains an important strand in the tapestry of U.S. literary culture.

92 Berlant, Lauren. The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture. Durham: Duke UP, 2008. The trajectory of sentimental politics manifests what Lauren Berlant calls a “culture of true feeling” whose “core pedagogy has been to develop a notion of social obligation based on the citizen’s capacity for suffering and trauma” (35). These rhetorics and affective relations, which have traditionally sought to “humanize those subjects who have been excluded from the formal and capaciously social aspects of citizenship, embedded seemingly intractably on the bottom class, racial, ethnic, and sexual hierarchies” nonetheless traffic in “cliché” and “indulge in the confirmation of the marginal subject’s embodiment of inhumanity” on the way to providing the privileged with heroic occasions of recognition, rescue, and inclusion.” Sentimentality then, according to Berlant, “softens risks to the conditions of privilege by making obligations to action mainly ameliorative, a matter not of changing the fundamental terms that organize power, but of following the elevated claims of vigilant sensitivity, virtue, and conscience” (35). Sentimental politics “renders scenes and stories of structural injustice in the terms of a putatively nonideological nexus of vulnerability wherein a threat to the survival of individual lives is said to exemplify and express conflicts in national life” (36). Berlant’s apt critique speaks also to temperance literature and its politics, which more often than not charts the addict’s
wipe them off, for I was ashamed to have my companions or the guards see me weep; but how I wished I was alone, or that it was dark, that I might give way to my feelings unobserved (18).”

McAuley’s desire to “give way to my feelings unobserved” recognizes the gendering that sanctions men who feel too much while foregrounding the book’s utility as a space of enclosure. Within social realism’s sentimentalities the reader experiences catharsis while reproducing temperance’s attainable communality through the act of reading.

Just as intemperance is a socially transferrable condition, so too is reform, but to internalize the conditions governing a good life requires McAuley’s investment in systems of social ostracism and control. Recognizing that Transformed is a story told after the fact of recovery, one of the text’s more disturbing prescriptions is its ameliorative take on the forced removal and social exclusion of the addict. McAuley himself reacts to Gardner’s prison oratory by sublimating his own carceral experience into divine intervention. His confinement, which prompts McAuley to “thank God for ever and ever that he was shut up in a prison” (14), implies, however problematically, that the forced removal of the inebriate from public life served to both dry him out and spiritually recuperate him. At the very least, McAuley’s position indicates that temperance responds to class antagonisms and fears of the underclass and by recuperating the addict the temperance movement served to ameliorate the social threat

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93 McAuley tells of his childhood in Ireland and his disreputable father, who abandoned McAuley to the care of his grandmother at an early age. At thirteen years old, McAuley emigrated to New York where he fell in with other street kids and by necessity adapted to a hard scrabble existence, burglarizing ships in the night and selling their goods by day. McAuley made his home on Water Street, a center for vice whose poverty and crime attracted social reformers, and, eventually, provided the arena for McAuley’s outreach. At the age of nineteen, he was arrested for robbery, a charge for which he maintained his innocence throughout his lifetime, and ended up a convict at Sing Sing Penitentiary.
posed by the poor, who, through temperance’s good graces, are quietly folded back into the mold of productive citizenry.

The addict provides a spectatorial object of derision, who by virtue of his visibility supplies an ongoing disciplinary sign across the public sphere. By being drawn out from impoverished, violent, and debauched social environments and isolated in prison, hospital, or asylum, the addict-criminal is granted a freedom from vice that neatly prepares him for the fellowship required in the circles of temperance reform. Resurfaced from penitentiary, McAuley suggests that the addict’s reformation inverts the discursive sanction against social transgression. But the reformist position maintains validity only under the condition that addiction is the result of individual moral choice and not the structurally determined outcome resultant from endemic patterns of social oppression.

Arguably, McAuley legitimizes penal logics because he views addiction as a spiritual crisis and so aligns social punishment with religious penitence. At the same time, McAuley’s reflection as to the edification incarceration can provide reflects a wider culture of abandonment in which prison is the recourse allotted to addicts without financial means. It is also within the confines of Sing Sing that McAuley develops literacy but deigns that the “cheap novels” he read were “filled with low and wicked thoughts” (16). After he discovers the Bible, McAuley freely chastises sensational literature as the reading habit of lower men who fail to understand that reading’s efficacy lies not in entertainment but didacticism and moral refinement. Not only can a man regain his volition in prison, a concept of critical importance as Elaine Frantz Parsons’ scholarship demonstrates, but he becomes educated too, a turn that reiterates the critical value inherent in the addict’s punishment because the sins of the addicted can never be
resolved until the addict is socially sanctioned for his transgressions.\textsuperscript{94} What McAuley offers to his reader is a kind of self-sacrifice. His experience incorporates the severest of consequences and welcomes the reader’s projection of their own failures upon McAuley.

While McAuley’s life’s work was to convert others into a community of faith through sobriety, his initial transformation occurs in the privacy of his cell and face to face with a book. “Just then,” he writes, “in the very height of my distress, it seemed as if a hand was laid upon my head, and these words came to me: ‘My son, thy sins which are many are forgiven.’” (29). It is here in the monastic confines of a prison cell suddenly filled with “heavenly light” and “a perfume like the fragrance of sweetest flowers” that McAuley, not knowing “if [he] was living or not,” invites the reader to experience his ecstasy and with an evangelical flourish claps his hands together and shouts, “‘Praise God! Praise God!’” (29). McAuley’s testimonial, like most temperance tracts, integrates sentimentality and realism to simulate intellectual, emotional, and moral rebirth and produce for the reader a vicarious spiritual conversion.

The conversion scene itself draws the outcast from the spaces of social abandonment and into the light of Christian fellowship, but McAuley’s story is a wending tale and despite his inroads to Christian self-actualization, upon his release from prison, he soon finds himself unemployed and without tangible supports. Material deprivations prompt McAuley’s relapse and renewed descent but contextualizing his turn to alcohol is his lack of a spiritual community. When incarcerated, McAuley can experience a kind of limited subjective salvation, but upon his return to Water Street, he

\textsuperscript{94} Parsons, Elaine Frantz. \textit{Manhood Lost: Fallen Drunkards and Redeeming Women in the Nineteenth-Century United States}. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2003. Parsons work shows how the question of volition, and the degree to which one could exercise agency over drink and narcotic alike, became central to nineteenth-century concepts of addiction well before Beard’s thesis, which linked technological advancement to neuroses, honed in on cultural anxieties that likely had their locus more in economic precarity than they did the telegraph and steam engine.
quickly returns to the bottle and again integrates with a negative ecology, reproducing the conditions of his addiction and impoverishment.95

McAuley’s second conversion occurs after almost drowning, drunk, one night in the East River. “Hell seemed opening under my feet, and I fancied I could hear the wails and shrieks of the lost” (44), writes McAuley, until a voice directs him to “‘Call on God’” (45). McAuley knows that he is a desperate man, but even after being fished from the drink by God himself, he goes on yet another binge, a pattern he continues even after signing a sobriety pledge, an omission assuring even the most hopeless inebriate that deliverance remained a possibility. In the end, it is not until a missionary offers to pawn his own coat so that McAuley will not be compelled to steal that he actually adopts a sustained temperate life. As much as transcendental experience might play a role in the drunkard’s conversion narrative, real material change and charitable acts of social solidarity emerge as the qualities essential to sobriety and cultural transformation.

The potential of charity to denigrate its receiver and further demonstrate one’s social oppression and economic subordination to the bestower was a persistent concern for reformers like McAuley, who had lived the life and knew full well the ways that kindness could affect subjection. It is also a feature of temperance literature that Cannon takes up at some length, writing that “[i]n their narratives, the subjects of the drunkard’s conversion strategically and explicitly resisted the aspects of a social hierarchy that

95 Fired after inciting a strike at a hat manufactory, McAuley writes in *Transformed* that he turned to “the bounty business” wherein he “would pick men up wherever I could find them, get them half drunk, and coax them to enlist” (38), himself drowning “conscience in a glass of whiskey” (39). As the Civil War comes to a close and his recruitment job is eliminated, McAuley again turns to river thievery where he would rip off his accomplices by paying out counterfeit money, much like his father, for fence-able goods. McAuley’s tales of East River piracy are a mixed bag and include being shot at by a boat captain and aiding in the rescue of passengers aboard the Idaho Ferry disaster, which he describes as yet another instance of divine intervention. “The whole scene was terrific. The fire raging, the screams of the perishing, the struggles of the poor creatures in the water, impressed my mind deeply with the thought of the last day and the fiery hell to which I knew the sinner must go. And yet God used us wicked people in the midst of all this terror and confusion, to save his children” (41-42), McAuley’s reminiscence
would disrespect either them or their former selves, whom they identified with still-suffering sinners” (50). Unequivocally, the value placed on material interventions signal McAuley’s legitimacy to his readership. His realism is communicated not solely through images of hard times, but in the fact that McAuley knows the worth of a meal or a coat to the impoverished and addicted.

If McAuley’s narrative reveals anything, it is that temperance rhetoric was aware of its own limits. It could motivate change, but the real work came in acts to feed, clothe, and even employ the reformed addict, steps that McAuley recognized as a means by which to invigorate self-worth and draw men from the isolating powers of their addictions and into social life. “One day I had a sort of trance or vision,” writes McAuley. “I was singing at my work, and my mind became absorbed, and it seemed as if I was working for the Lord down in the Fourth ward. I had a house, and people were coming in. There was a bath, and as they came in I washed and cleansed them outside, and the Lord cleansed them inside. They came at the first by small numbers, then by hundreds, and afterwards by thousands” (McAuley 62). McAuley’s vision exposes a simple truth: only the labors of the body actualize temperance’s rhetorical intentionality articulates the latent moral potential of the criminal and social pariah just as it makes McAuley out to be larger than life.

Cannon notes that “[t]he realistic imagery of photography provided apparently objective evidence of the reversal of dissolution in each of the physical, moral, and mental processes where it was held to occur” (42). Visuality also played an important role in temperance narratives, conveying the material presence and positive change experienced through conversion. Transformed features three images: McAuley’s portrait, the Idaho Ferry fire, and a portrait of McAuley’s wife Maria. The illustrated portrait of the reformed man is a staple of temperance literature and shows how conversion produces the model civil subject, well kempt, suited, and emblematic of the productive American ideal. “This before-and-after imagery,” as Cannon suggests, “epitomized the simplicity of the narrative’s religious logic, by turning the physical signs of dissolution (in hygiene, posture, and facial expression) into their redeemed opposites” (41). The illustration of the Idaho Ferry disaster stands out for its sensationalism and shows McAuley and his accomplice pulling the terrified survivors from the water. It’s a curious illustration that conveys a perception of McAuley as a man of action, a penitent visionary just as capable of saving the passengers of a burning wreck as he is of saving fallen men and women from the devastations of their lives. The third image, a pen and ink portrait of McAuley’s spouse, Maria McAuley, herself a reformed inebriate, reflects how abstinence from vice can rejuvenate two who had long succumbed to its powers such that both Jerry and Maria McAuley reveal the normative social future awaiting the temperate. The
and the realities that the temperance narrative sought to convey. However, McAuley’s reliance on penitential logics and carceral intervention communicate that the addict’s compromised volition also requires external management, a position reifying the addict as a crisis laden figure who invokes the state powers to control him.

**Opium and Other Earthly Delights**

Alcoholism is certainly the dominant issue in the U.S. history of addiction, but in the years following the American Civil War, the United States also contended with an escalating opium and morphine epidemic. Framed in popular discourse as a problem generated by foreign interlocutors, drug addiction made it more evident than ever, as both David Courtwright and Virginia Berridge have shown, that drugs were in high demand, and, like other things, they were highly prized commodities set in market relations.\(^{97}\) While the saloon maintained its centrality as a source of drunkenness and debauchery, and the opium den its aura as a shadowy pleasure house, opiates and cocaine-based remedies could be readily accessed through an array of patent medicines. These medications, touted as treatments for illnesses ranging from joint pain to anxiety, facilitated the expansion of drug addiction across the United States.

Dr. George Miller Beard’s 1881 *American Nervousness* in which he expounded on what would become the popular psychological diagnosis of neurasthenia, theorizes that a slew of social maladies, including addiction, were the direct result of industrial progress.\(^{98}\) Beard’s position contextualized addictive behavior as less motivated by

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choice than environmental conditions and adds a systems perspective to the etiology of addiction. Turn-of-the-century medical discourse then held that the socio-economic pressures of a rapidly technologizing civilization encouraged addiction, a condition that destabilized the laboring and upper classes while increasing society’s criminals and the poor.

In time, first with the passage of the 1906 Pure Food and Drug Act and later following the Harrison Narcotics Act of 1914, courts increasingly conceived of the addict as either a juridical or volitional type. Formally productive citizens overcome by addiction are what Timothy Hickman refers to as juridical addicts, individuals who became “addicted by the conditions of a changing world” (10) and the modifications of laws in their lifetime that criminalized previously noncriminal behavior. Addiction was largely considered volitional and a choice for those of the lower classes and non-whites. The volitional addict abused alcohol and drugs in spite of the fact that they “were supposedly free of the commercial and cultural strains of modern life,” (Hickman 10) and, so, lacked an excuse for their behavior. The juridical addict, who quickly found himself addicted to now illegal drugs, found himself to be a patient while the volitional addict, whose habits would appear to supersede these legal modifications, was conceived as a criminal. As such, the population of who could be defined as an addict grew to encompass urban toughs, mid-western housewives, and military veterans.

Medico-legal discourses strove to define the addict as symptomatic of a society in turmoil, but despite widespread fears about drug addiction, alcohol, the serpent in the cup, remained the national drug of choice and far outpaced the use of more illicit substances like opium, cocaine, and hashish. While the intemperance crisis ultimately resulted in the 18th constitutional amendment and 1919 Volstead Act, which prohibited the production, transport, and sale of alcohol in the United States, addiction remained a
problem of competing narratives. Was one a drunkard simply because they drank too much or because their drinking delivered them to penury? Was one narcotic addict a patient while the other a criminal? Who the addict was and how he was perceived was a major concern for social reformers and public health programs that sought to ameliorate addiction and reform the addict?

Other more hardline social theorists like William Graham Sumner looked at addiction not as a symptom of social crisis, but a cause. Sumner’s position, like many social-evolutionists of the period, is that modern social competition exacerbates societal conflict and these frictions reveal biological weakness, disclosing the “misery and poverty” (“Challenge of Facts” 23) of the unfit. Vice then attended “those who have inherited disease and depraved appetites, or have been brought up in vice and ignorance, or have themselves yielded to vice, extravagance, idleness, and imprudence” (Sumner 23). Sumner’s rhetoric omits historical causalities, defining all addicts as immoral criminals, a sentiment that cuts to the heart of U.S. drug policy since the early twentieth-century and that easily enough threads McAuley’s theo-political rhetoric equating incarceration with penitence. Where Sumner’s social Darwinist position, and that of McAuley’s part ways is in the social Darwinian naturalization of addiction as an inherent sign of the biologically unfit. “Vice is its own curse” writes Sumner.

“If we let nature alone, she cures vice by the most frightful penalties. It may shock you to hear me say it, but when you get over the shock, it will do you good to think of it: a drunkard in the gutter is just where he ought to be. Nature is working away at him to get him out of the way, just as she sets up her processes of dissolution to remove whatever is a failure in its line. Gambling and less mentionable vices all cure themselves by the ruin and dissolution of their victims (Sumner, “The Forgotten Man” 480).
Sumner views the addict as a disease in need of eradication, and through slow-death, the addict eventually cures himself. What need is there for social interventions, hospitals, and prisons, when the addict can disintegrate in public view, a warning against social transgression? Sumner’s prescription of abandonment demonstrates a technology of power. The addict’s displacement into spaces of acute vulnerability and visibility augment the disciplinary aura that the addict exudes, threatening contagion, uncaged desire, and the subsequent redistribution of poverty throughout the working-class. By abandoning the addict to his own destruction, society produces a means to regulate socio-economic productivity and ideological alignment.

Although less frequently published than drunkard’s tales, narratives describing opium and narcotic dependence would become increasingly prominent in the Progressive Era. Arguably, the most famous text on narcotic use in the nineteenth-century was Thomas De Quincey’s 1821 *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*, wherein De Quincey recounts his trials and surreal experiences under the sway of opium. But it was Henry G. Cole, who in his *Confessions of an American Opium Eater* (1895) revisited the topic of opium addiction in turn-of-the-century Boston and New York. Cole’s work does not attempt to expand on De Quincey’s vision of drugs as vitalizing the writer’s creativity, but instead censures the picture of transcendent highs and bohemianism De Quincey presents, going so far as to suggest that De Quincey’s text “has without doubt been the innocent cause of many a lost soul” (4). According to Cole, by the late 1890s opium addiction had become a ubiquitous, albeit underground, social phenomenon. “There is no department of life, no order of society, from the highest to the lowest, that cannot muster a large roll of opium takers. I come in contact with its victims almost
everywhere” (Cole 5).99 Cole’s assertion that opium addiction occurs among the poor and rich alike, transcending class and threatening to conflate the experience of the poorest street beggars with that of wealthy American tradesman, cuts to the heart of turn-of-the-century fears regarding economic and social precarity.

Cole describes his descent into vice as a kind of living death in which he was prone to hallucinatory fits and debauched extremes. Particularly compelling is Cole’s account of the many treatments that he takes in attempts to get clean, ultimately settling on opium maintenance until he finally accepts a religious conversion that frees him from addiction. Echoing Beard’s theory of neurasthenia and the illnesses of civilization, Cole argues that the technical advancements of U.S. society have positioned Americans to more readily experience alcohol and drug dependence. Social, economic, and technological change produces an “overworked body and the overtaxed brain” (Cole 5). This physically and psychologically exhausted population, according to Cole, increasingly requires “the stimulus of alcoholic liquors, or find rest in the repeated use of opium or morphine” (7-8).100 For Cole, and many of the leading theorists of his day,

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99 Central to Cole’s narrative of his own fall into inebriety, and the dislocations from family, friends, and labor that he experiences, is his Christianity, which frames his story from beginning to end. Cole recounts his grandfather’s puritanical attitude during his childhood and concludes his story with a reflection on family, which contextualizes Cole’s place in the temperance movement’s rhetoric of redemption.

100 In a passage that seems to forecast London’s white logic, Cole writes that “[u]nlike De Quincy, I have no language to deify the Opium god, although from the bottomless pit of despair he has often lifted me to an exalted physical paradise, but only to hurl me back again” (8). Cole describes addiction as a perpetual wheel of fulfillment and loss, a process paralleling the affective cycle of arousal and deprivation inherent in disaster culture. He also identifies intemperance and drug use as forms of entertainment readily found in saloons, bowling alleys, and shooting galleries. For his own part, Cole admits to an early adulthood in which he frequented “the gambling house, the drinking palace, the racetrack, and the brothel” (25). Such a “fast” lifestyle populated by constant diversions produces “[t]he abandoned wrecks of humanity everywhere to be seen, and that fill our almshouses and insane asylums” (25). So, Cole ties together entertainment, consumerism, and addiction as mutually reinforcing modern conditions. Cole suggests that he came to morphine after exhausting alcohol’s enjoyments and found that “[a] small quantity of this delusive fluid made of me, for the time being, a new creature, and weariness and fatigue fled, and the animal and carnal nature found expression where it otherwise would have lain dormant” (32). Morphine buoyed Cole’s spirit and provided him a sense of power to persevere through a modernity partly imaged through the hypodermic syringe, a technology that Hickman suggests in The Secret Leprosy of Modern Days became “crucial in differentiating the ‘opium-eaters’ of the early nineteenth-century past from the ‘morphinists’ and ‘morphinomaniacs’ of the fin de siècle present” (38). While many blamed the syringe
American progress was a double-edged sword, improving living standards while whittling away at traditional modes of communality. Changing social conditions in turn gave rise to addiction and rhetoric that aligned modern progress with social crisis.

Cole, taking his reader on a tour of Boston and New York’s seedy urban centers, stages a realism inflected with a romantic past. As modern as Cole seems, he nonetheless turns to romanticized rural spaces for restoration, spaces where, paradoxically, an ideal agrarian America is also plagued by addiction. The persistence of genres in conflict and Cole’s attempt to coordinate romanticism, sentimentality, and realism creates the very narrative disjunctures that Cole’s testimonial attempts to reconcile. In a very post-modern sense, Cole’s narrative displaces cultural certitudes even as it attempts to recover a theistic center.

Cole reports an ease of access across the urban centers of his travels and despite the fact that “[t]he world contained but one thing of importance to me—morphine” (93), his desire for a hermitage in New Hampshire, far removed from the pressures of civilization suggests not only nostalgia for a simpler rural American life, but also a reconnection with the region’s transcendentalist scribes of a generation ago. “That abandoned farm among the barren hills, where a few straggling sheep grazed the thin, dry grass, the deep receding valley, and in the distance the horizon kissing the bosom of a calm lake, was in harmony with the Opium Eater’s wretched hope” (Cole 93). Cole wishes to return to nature and diffuses his ideal subjectivity across the natural world, a veneration of nature that erases his own presence through the projection of a nature filtered through romantic fantasy.

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for accelerating drug addiction in the United States, its significance as a marker of modernity cannot be overemphasized, a technology that sped the high for a society whose primary narrative about drug addiction was tied to industrial advancement.
At one point, Cole recounts the story of “[a] fine farm drank up” (36), a narrative underscoring how addiction occupies and alters the individual much as modernity heralds changes to rural society under urbanization. The idea that drug dependence produced a kind of chemical colonization, a hunger inhabiting the addict, was of real concern to specialist and lay audiences alike. Just as the assembly line and systems of automation advanced industrialism, it was speculated that addiction affected a similar automation of human behavior, animating the addict, as it were, to single-mindedly seek out and consume the materials spurring his addiction. Recounting alcohol’s debilitating affect on a farmer, Cole charges it “the fiend that possessed him” (36), recasting an assumedly productive citizen into a “foul fiend” (36), who satisfied his addiction by prostituting his own children in their home. Cole’s example shows how the substance itself occupies the subject, producing abhorrent behavior thought to be alien to the temperate man while nonetheless infusing a gothic romanticism into tales of fierce perversion.101

Cole’s longing for transcendence aside, more than marriage and family, property is the material signifier that separates the addict from the non-addict. Cole’s example of the destitute farmer reiterates a scene previously formulated fifty-three years earlier in Walt Whitman’s *Franklin Evans* (1842) and one man’s farm lost to intemperance and perversion echoes back as Cole’s nostalgic desire for a pastoral New England homestead.

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101 See Rush, Benjamin. *An Inquiry into the Effects of Ardent Spirits Upon the Human Body and Mind with an Account of the Means of preventing and of the Remedies for Curing Them.* Exeter: Josiah Richardson, 1819. and Rush, Benjamin. *Medical Inquiries and Observations, Upon The Diseases of the Mind.* Philadelphia: Kimber & Richardson, 1812. Despite Rush’s work and other late eighteenth-century theories ascribing addiction as a disease, the disease concept of addiction would not become paradigmatic until the early twentieth-century. For addicts like Cole, who himself remains adamant that his addiction is not a disease, addiction was conceived as a behavioral habitation and organismic response to modernity. The disease concept of addiction promotes the idea that addiction is contracted through use, spread via social relations, and generationally inherited, a perspective that continues as the operative logic in the neurobiological treatment models prevalent today. The disease concept allows for the demystification of moral failure and concludes instead that addiction should not be criminalized and addressed through the justice system, but treated instead as a disorder requiring public health intervention. Still, there remains problems with neurobiological treatment models because there is a tendency to overdetermine heritability while obscuring social determinants.
Despite the addict’s obvious presence in rural America, for Cole and Whitman alike, the addict simply does not fit into the provincial pastoralism associated with agrarian life. Their prescriptive realisms painfully do not cohere with reality because the addict is designated a future-self, a disrupted agent of a technologically driven urban modernity, unrelentingly consumptive, who forgoes sovereignty over land and property, favoring instead the sovereignty of his desires and in many ways fashioning himself into capitalism’s perfect consumer-subject.

Cole’s countryside signals aspirations for a normative life, and so it understandably becomes the site whereupon Cole works out his panicked visions of a wilderness thick with hauntings and persecutions. The farm and its surrounding woodlands contain both the promise of absolution and failure’s curse, a phantasmic binary that echoes Hawthorne’s “Young Goodman Brown,” and discloses the crisis of a national self caught between the agrarian past and an urban future. Cole’s haunted materialism arises again in his debilitated physiology. It is Cole’s body that he so closely narrates as an objectified and abnormal vessel, writing that at times his body became sore and tender while at others “hardened” so as to break his syringe, a “skeleton in my emaciated looks” (96).\textsuperscript{102} Cole recognizes that his addiction is a fight against the degree to which opium has incorporated itself into his body and diminished his ability to act

\textsuperscript{102} Cole’s Edenic heaven and hellish wilderness affect a Biblical analog and communicate environmental mastery as a condition attending white Christian masculinity, but the environmental binary here parallels the other more crucial materiality found in Cole’s consumptive physiology. He lacks a heaven-like vitality and struggles amid the obsequious demands of his addiction. Similar to McAuley and Loughlin, Cole’s image in the text’s front matter provides clear evidence of the individual’s restoration following a conversion to Christ and adoption of a temperate life. Ultimately, it’s what Cole suggests is divine inspiration that motivates his transformation. He recounts, “a voice, quick, and sharp, and piercing” telling him “this is your last chance!” (114). This ecstatic experience, which “pervaded my being, from the crown of my head, a power that might be likened to a bolt of fire” (114-15) motivates Cole’s conversion and integration into a community of faith. Cole’s ecstasy is necessarily transient, and during his detoxification Cole describes his body as fixed and non-human. “My face under its deadly power would appear like marble, my arms often raised above my head, and not a muscle giving a perceptible evidence that the inanimate form contained life…for hours I would lie in this deathlike condition” (116).
independent of the intoxicant. Despite Cole’s sometimes romantic appeals there is no escaping the brutal realism with which he and the reader are confronted.

In another section, Cole recounts a dream in which he is visited by an angel, who reads Cole his sins. “Looking off into space, there passed before me scrolls of exquisite workmanship, each graduating smaller than its predecessor, and on each, in raised letters of gold, the word ‘Forgiven!’” (Cole 149). The entity explains that the scrolls are a record of Cole’s sins and Cole receives a divine warning to repent and practice a temperate life. To underscore the severity of his transgressions, a new set of scrolls floats before him “beautiful in design, yet black as night in their composition, all lettered in gold, and bearing legends thereon in harmony with acts of my fast life, such as ‘Opium Eater,’ ‘Drunkard,’ ‘Profligate,’ ‘Gambler,’ etc., down to the very minutest sins” (149). What today is taken for cliché is for Cole a serious matter. Cole’s angelic instructor then informs him that Satan “will flay you with them until the end of your days; but if you continue faithful in the Lord Jesus Christ, you shall be saved’” (149-50) at which point Cole wakes with a new lease on life.

Cole’s text is compelling both for its first-hand account of opium addiction and the multiplicity of genres it incorporates. The interpenetration of romanticism, sentimentalism, and realism demonstrates the insecurities inherent in the temperance form, a genre that necessitated the demonstration of its own real assurances while still arguing towards the harsh realities of a terrestrial conflict between mystical forces vying for the human soul. At the same time, Cole’s narrative is contextualized by the medico-legal discourses that ascribe addiction as a byproduct of modernity and drugs a commodity capable of infecting the individual. Despite Cole’s gritty realism and self-medicalization, erstwhile though they may be, his surreal narrative pointedly depicts the addict as a sensational figure whose obsessional outpouring smacks of the
commercialization of addiction and the salability of experience on the literary market. Cole’s self-disclosure about dreams of being lost in the woods and hunted by ghouls or visited by an angel, who reads him a litany of his sins, while ways for him to incorporate and respond to De Quincey’s text, nonetheless produce a narrative of addiction as not only socially degenerative but spectral, a pre-existing force waiting to animate the would-be addict and transform him into a spectacular deviant carried off by his desire.

The addict’s aberrance contrasted the array of social behaviors and statuses enabling participatory citizenship. Articulating the transformation from an addict to a stable citizen required the overdetermination of feeling and as much as McAuley’s and Cole’s tales emphasize penitence and pathos their success is measured by the degree to which they seize upon gritty depictions of poverty and human depravity, which is to say their true-to-life realism provides the spectacle so attractive to the reading public. This realness places the reader face-to-face with (dis)integration and the degree to which the narrative is effective can be measured by the reader’s empathetic response to suffering and the exhilarating possibilities held by Christian salvation.

Race, Gender, and Realism’s Hard Edge

In the proceeding pages, I further evaluate the ways addiction literature integrated U.S. publics and analyze addiction’s intersectionality vis-à-vis the categories of race and gender and analyze how intemperance informed Frances Harper’s approaches to African American feminist communality while disrupting Jack London’s vision of white male independence. I interrogate too the social construction of the addict’s deviance and further consider how these social formations contradicted one another in the arena of literary realism and produced the addict as a site of identitarian rupture across fictional and autobiographical accounts.
Frances E.W. Harper’s *Sowing and Reaping: A Temperance Story*, which first appeared in the pages of the *Christian Recorder* (1876-77), demonstrates the social interdependencies that can determine communal restoration or collapse. *Sowing and Reaping* is a prime example of temperance literature’s sentimental didacticism and it explores the underrepresented issue of intemperance in African American communities. Generally, temperance literature reflects the period’s racial privileging, allowing white voices widespread public forum while largely excluding black experiences from public discourse. Popularity understood, addiction emasculated men and for whites it threatened de-racialization. Intemperance undermined rigid racial

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103 See Harper, Frances. E. “African Methodist Episcopal Church Review, July 1888.” *Standing Before Us: Unitarian Universalist Women and Social Reform, 1776-1936*. Eds. Dorothy May Emerson, June Edwards, and Helene Knox. Boston: Skinner House Books, 2000. Writing in a July 1888 article, published in the *African Methodist Episcopal Church Review*, Harper marks the period by the “uprising of women against the twin evils of slavery and intemperance” (94), a politics her novel champions. But, even as the evangelical missionary tradition espoused the rhetoric of Christian universalism, the color line remained an intractable barrier. Despite the racial divides within the Women’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), Harper declares intemperance a universal blight affecting both whites and blacks alike, a cause for racial and political alliance, whose solution could not be realized “by expending in feeling what they should utilize in action” (96). Harper also reflects on the racial politics within women’s temperance and links the subordinate political position of women in America with the outrages of intemperance, closing with an impassioned comparison of enslaved African Americans to Christ and his tribulations while pleading with her audience to act for temperance. When Harper asks if the movement “will subordinate the spirit of caste to the spirit of Christ” (99), she challenges racial prejudice and seeks to forge partnerships across a sentimental politics that coordinates individual loss with national crisis.

104 Antebellum abolition and women’s rights movements intertwined and to varying degrees reinforced one another, but the temperance movement was no less enmeshed in the activism of abolitionists and women’s rights campaigners. Frances Willard was a prominent suffragist and temperance advocate. She was the president of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) for nearly a decade and advocated strongly for both prohibition and women’s suffrage. Harper, Wells, and Willard each addressed the politics of intemperance, but Willard was often accused by both Harper and Wells of a racist sentiment that villainized African American men, particularly in the U.S. south, where lynching was meted out as an extralegal persecution. Even while acknowledging that the WCTU was one of the largest and most active suffragist and temperance organizations in the United States with cadres of White Ribboners providing church oratory and outreach, community social work, and school-based educational initiatives, the WCTU also relied on the popular rhetoric of sentiment, presenting women as a purer sex naturally capable of addressing men’s moral deficits. Despite her eventual falling out with Willard, Harper understood too well the role that organizations like the WCTU and the African American Episcopal Church played as sites through which both white women and African American men and women were politically coordinated as social actors to combat intemperance. Organizations such as these, with socially progressive agendas, produced communities of faith across regional, gendered, and racial spectrums that were capable of enduring social hardships to exercise political will and direct action. Women’s suffrage coalitions, to varying degrees, supported the movement of African American uplift and temperance helped build activist partnerships well into the postbellum period until the lynching
demarcations, the white inebriate losing self-determination and so blackening by virtue of his dependency and the black inebriate slipping from freedom into a new form of enslavement. For white communities, addiction threatened biological and social degeneration and was imagined as a de-racializing force capable of subverting the definitional strategies that delineate racial identities.105

*Sowing and Reaping* forecasts temperance’s communal renewal by staging the radically different outcomes facing those who uphold the temperance gospel and those who ignore it.106 Throughout, Harper reiterates the analogy of intemperance as enslavement, a comparison long ascribed to the drunkard’s compromised will and a rhetorical strategy that resonated with African American readers, many of whom saw the collapse of U.S. slavery in their lifetimes. Unlike Whitman’s earlier *Franklin Evans*, which unremittingly correlates intemperance with a blackening of the white male, Harper’s concern is that intemperance produces yet another means through which white society configures African American social containment after slavery.107

It is Harper’s Belle Gordon who declares, “[t]he man who claims my love and allegiance, must be a victor and not a slave” (102-03) and later suggests the parallel between “rum sellers and slave holders” (110). Inverting the idea of the saloon as a place where boys become men, Harper critiques the saloon as the spatial hub where young men

crisis made visible the rifts among suffragettes, notably articulated in exchanges between Frances Ellen Harper, Ida B. Wells, and Frances Willard.

105 For a compelling analysis of whiteness’ role in formulating American identity and literary culture see Morrison, Toni. *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. New York: Vintage, 1993. Morrison’s study considers the definitional features that contrasted whiteness and blackness in antebellum America and, as Morrison suggests, to be white was to perform one’s empowerment and to be black was to be wreathed with discourses of subjection. Without the linguistic strategies that racialized concepts like slave and master or captivity and freedom, whiteness and blackness lose their meaning.

106 *Sowing and Reaping* stages its argument through the ideological differences separating the intemperate Charles Romaine and Jeanette Rowland from the temperate Belle Gordon and Paul Clifford. Here the intemperate allow their desires to dictate their conduct and fail to realize how targeted cultural practices seduce, restrain, and destroy African American social progress. The temperate, however, recognize the pitfalls of drink and strive to produce ideal normative outcomes.

are turned not into fuller men, but reduced to economic servitude, morally corrupted, and made dependent upon white capitalists that would exercise socioeconomic dominance over them. The saloon is, in effect, a site of renewed physical and spiritual colonization in which addiction renders personal liberty an illusion. Harper’s *Sowing and Reaping* poses that intemperance constitutionally re-enslaves African Americans and positions individuals and families alike into debt and dissolution just at a time when African American social transformations were yielding greater educational, economic, and political gains.

Early on, Jeanette Rowland chastises Belle Gordon’s teetotaling. “[W]hat a train of horrors you can conjure out of an innocent glass of wine” (Harper 101), chides Rowland. But, come to find out, the horrors wafting from the cup are a litany of domestic violence, social failure, and financial crises that avalanche as the narrative advances. To drive home the significance of intemperance and the crisis it posed to the African American community, Harper appropriates the testimonial form, allowing diverse accounts of the townspeople to intersect and produce the sense of a shared communal crisis. One such story is that of Mary Gough, whose abusive husband, guided by the counsel and aid provisioned by reformers, gradually recognizes his moral failure. John Coots’ alcohol fueled jealousies result in murder, or, as Harper puts it, “Intemperance and Sensuality had clasped hands together, and beneath their cruel fostering the gallows had borne its dreadful fruit of death” (137). Mr. Anderson, the town saloonkeeper, witnesses his own son die from alcohol poisoning and the trials of the once promising Charles Romaine resolve themselves “in a drunkard’s grave” (Harper 172). Liquor carves a path of destruction everywhere it is imbibed.

While men are often the worse for wear, it is really women’s perspectives that frame alcohol’s carousel of horrors and Harper’s sentimental appeal arouses the female
reader to become the reformer who “does not wait for the drunkards to come to him,” but “goes to them” (139), an assertion that quite literally operationalizes the activist text.\(^\text{108}\) Harper sees that intemperance in the African American community cannot be effectively mediated without women’s political action and enfranchisement. It is women, and African American women in particular, whose doubly marginalized position Harper recognizes. It is also African American women that she sees as capable of conditioning domestic restraint through a political practice that acknowledges women’s active roles in steering social change. Harper’s realist pastiche appropriates the temperance testimonial, a technique that legitimizes the conversion narrative as a kind of social truth. Each negative event forwards Harper’s argument while the positive socioeconomic outcomes facing the temperate Belle Gordon and Paul Clifford idealize sober life free from inebriety’s re-enslavement.

Harper’s *Sowing and Reaping* seems paradigmatic of the realist style. Despite terrible events the story holds out an ideal resolution and while Harper contextualizes religious devotion as a means to a sober life she clearly links intemperance to structural forms of social control. By the time U.S. naturalism develops, the addicts these later realists represent are largely evacuated of their Christian temper. Unseen biological and social forces and not spiritual ones prey upon the would-be addict, manipulating his desires within the exigencies of environment. American naturalist writers disdained sentimentalism and for those examining the human condition in the neurasthenic society of late nineteenth-century America, there was little room for the moralism and

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\(^{108}\) Temperance was part of a sentimental politics at a time of dramatic social change. It motivated women’s action and helped shore up social partnerships essential to the women's suffrage movement. As if to underscore the centrality of temperance as a women’s social movement, Harper’s Mrs. Gladstone, the town gadfly, reiterates Harper’s contention that “‘a nation as well as an individual should have a conscience, and on this liquor question there is room for woman’s conscience not merely as a persuasive influence but as an enlightened and aggressive power’” (161).
melodrama of the sentimental novel, a form Frank Norris suggested should be “handed down the scullery stairs” (“A Plea for Romantic Fiction” 1165).

Naturalism subverts temperance rhetoric and the faith-based culture of recovery it promotes, overexposing human suffering while refusing idealized resolutions. The naturalist’s living-dead do not resuscitate. They remain in their final destroyed forms, variably indicting individual will and society for the structural outcomes their failures disclose. Spiritual transformation certainly isn’t what American literary naturalists borrowed from the temperance genre, but the problem of addiction courses through their work and the addict’s psychological and social disintegration provided literary naturalist’s the perfect aesthetic model for the new American century, addiction as desire without limits, what John Crowley terms “the sign of modernity itself” (18).

Jack London’s *The Call of the Wild* and *White Fang* have long held sweeping popular appeal, and the public’s enshrinement of these texts position London as perhaps the Progressive Era’s most enduring naturalist, but it is *John Barleycorn*, his 1913 autobiography, that really bridges the divide between temperance literature and literary naturalism. London envisions addiction’s ecological kernel in the psychology of the addict and views inebriation as at once liberating and injurious, a “white logic,” where self-destructive behavior compels use to transcend suffering, but leads only to debilitating dependence. London’s work deals squarely with the problem of alcoholism

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109 See Zola, Émile. “The Experimental Novel.” *The Experimental Novel and Other Essays*. Translated by Belle M. Sherman. New York: Cassell Publishing Co., 1893. Taking lead from Émile Zola, and his call to represent “the natural man...modified by the influences of his surroundings,” (23) Norris and the period’s naturalists saw their literary project as the redevelopment of the romance unencumbered by the optimism associated with the realist novel. Still, sentimentalism was central to the literary tradition inherited by Norris and his fellow naturalists, and their reworking of moral suasion amid the dictums of psychology and evolutionary determinism marked a shift in literary aesthetics that gestured away from the real and towards more radical, if not grotesque, representational strategies.

110 London’s most iconic works, *The Call of the Wild* and *White Fang*, have enjoyed translations into film not long following their original publications in 1903 and 1906. London’s canonical narratives of Klondike adventure have been reproduced in forms that vary from children’s serials to comics. *The Call*
in America in the years leading up to prohibition and he recognizes the alcoholic’s desperation to pass beyond the material and spiritual forces of his oppression. But the white logic cannot see beyond itself and addiction’s conditions only reiterate the cumulative traumatic forces that produce psychological and physical debility.

Unstated, yet inferred at every turn, is the way alcohol, the white logic’s causative agent, determines masculine fitness. Drinking and saloon culture defined the curvatures of white masculinity by producing sites for the solidification of male relationships while shoring up the concept of whiteness as an identity germinative of the embryonic national subject. Where else might men physically attack one another to prove their strength and openly weep over their losses? Such dynamics feature prominently in John Barleycorn and as Crowley notes, “[t]he emotional excess here—friendship based on drunken camaraderie never seems less than ‘eternal’ or ‘undying’—suggests the economy of desire that governs the culture of drinking” (White Logic 29). The ways that alcohol unevenly mediates homosocial relationships is central to Barleycorn, and whether London is regaling the reader with his youthful exploits as a San Francisco Bay oyster pirate or his adventures at sea aboard an 1893 voyage to Japan drink is his constant companion. Despite London’s romantic boyhood adventures among “rough men…and weazened wharf-rats…all of them enemies of the law” (973), it is alcohol that appears to determine his manhood throughout his life.

_of the Wild_ was adapted to the screen in Fred Jackman’s 1923 silent film, William A. Wellman’s 1935 adaptation starring Clark Gable and Loretta Young, and Ken Annakin’s 1972 version starring Charlton Heston. More recent adaptations of _The Call of the Wild_ have included Jerry Jameson’s 1976 made for television version scripted by James Dickey, Peter Svatek’s 1997 take on Buck’s tale starring Rutger Hauer, and a 1992 edition directed by Michael Toshiyuki Uno. London’s other notable animal tale, _White Fang_, has been similarly embraced by the motion picture industry, receiving a Disney adaptation by Randal Kleiser that starred Ethan Hawke in 1991 as well as a 1973 adaptation by Lucio Fulci. Aleksandr Zguridi’s 1946 Soviet _Belyy klyk_, and Laurence Trimble’s 1925 adaptation starring Strongheart the Dog further evidence London’s longevity and mass appeal. _White Fang_ was additionally adapted as a children’s cartoon series running from 1993 to 1994 and the story has inspired countless film and cartoon spinoffs.
Despite sometimes fond recollections, negativity saturates London’s interpretation of the British folk personification, John Barleycorn, to the degree that London describes the alcoholic high as tantamount to “grin[ning] jocosely into the face of the Noseless One” (1097). While London refuses to acknowledge his own alcoholic temper, he sees alcohol as a force that reifies manhood while simultaneously sapping will and paralyzing man’s capacity to manage stable social relationships.

I am. I was. I am not. I never am. I am never less his friend than when he is with me and when I seem most his friend. He is the king of liars. He is the frankest truthsayer. He is the august companion with whom one walks with the gods. He is also in league with the Noseless One. His way leads to truth naked, and to death. He gives clear vision, and muddy dreams. He is the enemy of life, and the teacher of wisdom beyond life’s wisdom. He is a red-handed killer, and he slays youth. (London 935-36)

London’s white logic suggests that the alcoholic experiences a limited relief through intoxication, while the high’s whiteness is akin to a divine ecstasy that takes on a quasi-religious significance. This spiritual self-realization remains the purview of mystics, but London contradicts this impulse towards transcendental idealism by emphasizing death’s materiality through yet another permutation of whiteness, the white of bone and skull. In rapture’s blinding light, eternal life and temporal death coalesce, and the illusory high reveals sublimity in the stark realization of one’s own mortality and powerlessness before violent and predatory psychological, social, and environmental forces.

Regardless of its allegorical dimensions, the white logic cannot be separated out from the white masculinity it legislates, and London ultimately decides that he lacks the character of the inebriate, a figure of carelessness and waste seemingly incapable of
experiencing an ill-defined true masculinity. For London, there are two types of drinkers. The first “is the man whom we all know, stupid, unimaginative, whose brain is bitten numbly by numb maggots; who walks generously with wide-spread, tentative legs, falls frequently in the gutter, and who sees, in the extremity of his ecstasy, blue mice and pink elephants. He is the type that gives rise to the jokes in the funny papers” (939). The drunkard’s caricature is a sloven and comical inversion of London’s ideal man and all the more threatening because of its easily recognizable and public character. “The other type of drinker has imagination, vision,” writes London. “Even when most pleasantly jingled, he walks straight and naturally, never staggers nor falls, and knows just where he is and what he is doing. It is not his body but his brain that is drunken” (934). Clearly, London envisions himself as the latter of the two, the white drunkard that maintains his manhood and is not de-racialized, not enslaved by the bottle.

[H]e may see intellectual spectres and phantoms that are cosmic and logical and that take the forms of syllogisms. It is when in this condition that he strips away the husks of life’s healthiest illusions and gravely considers the iron collar of necessity welded about the neck of his soul. This is the hour of John Barleycorn’s subtlest power. It is easy for any man to roll in the gutter. But it is a terrible ordeal for a man to stand upright on his two legs unswaying, and decide that in all the universe he finds for himself but one freedom—namely, the anticipating of the day of his death. With this man this is the hour of the white logic… when he

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111 Proposition 4, which London supported, was a 1911 amendment to the constitution of the State of California that legalized women’s suffrage in the state. Even at outset, as London dialogues with his wife, Charmian Kittredge, on his vote for women’s suffrage, he implies that cultural power conducted through androcentric social forms cannot remedy intemperance. In Barleycorn, London writes assentingyly that “[w]hen the women get the ballot, they will vote for prohibition” (935), a statement that he makes, ironically enough, and, per his own disclosure, while drunk.
knows that he may know only the laws of things—the meaning of things never. (London 939-40)

London designates inebriation as a sublimely transcendental experience and seemingly aligns the psychological, social, and material forms of the addict to philosophical naturalism. Nature exerts the laws of things, but beyond observable causalities there lies only the hazy guesswork of man. When the inebriate grasps “the laws of things,” he acknowledges the unequivocal outcome that life ends in death and he understands the sublime terror of psychological and physical vulnerability. At the same time, the existential questioning that alcohol importunes helps the user to see his own nakedness and in that a commensurability with all human beings and all life. Addiction undermines independence, queers the addict, and lessens white racial prestige. London knew that the addict traffics in a false transcendence—there is no Emersonian new man waiting in the wings—and like Ouroboros devouring his tail, the addict returns time and again to the very point of his own disintegration. This terminality, what London posits is a striving towards death, while compelling in ontological terms, is better understood as a symptom of social as opposed to a purely existential crisis and the context in which the individual generates an experientially negative ecology.

The degree to which addiction posed a threat in the Progressive Era correlated with the public’s willingness to place the fault of addiction squarely upon the shoulders of the addict and ignore addiction’s structural determinants. Even for London, alcoholism’s contagion was proximal, one need only carouse with gamblers and drunks to risk adoption of their ways, but the scale to which addiction was perceived as a

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112 It is nature’s apparent laws that drive literary naturalism’s aesthetics, so whether the subject is an ill-equipped man freezing to death on a Klondike trail in “To Build a Fire” or another eaten alive by wolves in the opening chapters of White Fang, it’s naturalism’s deterministic logic and not a sentimental idealism that orchestrates the interplay between brutal actualities and environmental sublimity.
widespread social problem depended on how the addict and alcoholism subverted social expectations of masculine fitness even as drink and the ability to hold one’s liquor expressed a masculine ideal. Alcoholism, and addiction more generally, demonstrates a behavioral trend towards overconsumption rallied to its highest pitch, and despite societal sanctions addiction remains a behavior encouraged by capitalism and consumer culture.

_John Barleycorn_ is a case in point of just how “‘[a]lcoholism’ and literary ‘modernism’ emerged together in a dialectical relationship that produced, in the drunk narrative, both a portrait of the modernist as an alcoholic and a portrait of the alcoholic as a modernist” (Crowley, _White Logic_ 18). Crowley’s assertion speaks as much to the literary culture of celebrity as it does to the increasingly medicalized view of addiction in the early twentieth-century, but preceding the modern view of alcohol foregrounded by London, realists staged inebriety and addiction as disintegrative modern forces. For Harper, addiction threatened to compromise African American socio-economic gains and political futures. London viewed addiction as de-stabilizing the white masculine self. In both accounts addiction produced spectatorial objects and crises perpetuating social (dis)integration.

**Narrative Symmetries: Crane’s Maggie and the Bluebird of Mulberry Bend**

Naturalist writers adopted the hard-boiled sentimentalism of the temperance form and inverted the conversion trope to focus instead on addiction’s terminality. Literary naturalism subverted conversion rhetoric, demonstrating how crises of personal will and social and environmental threats made any authentic transformation a tenuous proposition at best. While the addict’s place in literary culture suggests an increased awareness of addiction as a social problem it also indicates a social crisis’
marketability. Addiction, consumerism, and an expanding national press align at the turn-of-the-century where an increasingly synchronous communications network allowed for the rapid proliferation of crisis narratives. The juridical addict helped build a healthcare industry and the volitional addict the business of criminal justice. Drug abusers and alcoholics also made for the perfect figures to inhabit a literature and literary culture where the sentimental and sensational competed for the serious-minded reformer and vicarious thrill seeker alike. Addiction presented a trope ready made for the turn-of-the-century and literary realists certainly recognized the interplay between it and consumerism. Temperance stage-plays and performances, as John W. Frick writes, helped exhibit temperance’s didactic rhetoric in popular culture and from temperance anthologies to revival auditories the temperance question leveraged addiction as a didactic amusement.

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113 Sensationalism has a longstanding place in U.S. literature and the form was cultivated in the nineteenth-century through serial publications, dime novel fiction, and the novel. The sensational trend, which escalated in postbellum America, exploited the literary market to rival the waning popularity of sentimental domestic fiction. The public desire for exciting narratives of western gunslingers and urban crime noir was equally satisfied by stories of social depravity that often, as is the case with George Lippard’s *Quaker City* (1845), depicted men of wealth and station as licentious villains. Such works held mass appeal and in a variety of ways intersected with temperance literature. But even before sensational literature rose to prominence in America, works like Timothy Arthur Shay’s *Ten Nights in a Bar-Room and What I Saw There* and George Foster’s *New York by Gas-Light* disclosed lurid scenes of urban depravity and inebriety for audiences at mid-century.

114 According to Bruce K. Alexander, one can recreationally use cocaine and not express addiction, a position complicating the medico-legal logics that pathologies and criminalize drug use. Alexander’s argument appropriately expands the definition of vice from drug use and gambling to contain things like reckless spending or overeating. Also see, “Cocaine Project.” *WHO/UNICRI*. 03 March 1995. Much like addiction, conspicuous consumption operates through supplementation. The commodity, much like the drug, stands in for an unmet psychosocial need. As the supplemental object takes on the aura of that of the original, the original psychological need becomes obscured and the satiation of desires, now disconnected from their original source, becomes of paramount concern. Still, the line separating pleasure seeking from addiction is hard to identify and Bruce Alexander’s work is helpful in this regard. For Alexander, addiction is really discernible when the individual practices an overwhelmingly detrimental pre-occupation with a particular behavior. The scope of addiction then becomes less about illicit substances than it is the adoption of problem behaviors.

115 For further discussion on temperance drama see Frick, John W. *Theatre, Culture and Temperance Reform in Nineteenth-Century America*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003. Temperance rhetoric and reform orations created spaces for conversion, but the articulation of the reformer's performance was not limited to social intervention. Just as McAuley, Cole, and Whittemore create environments on the page, stage plays that dramatized destitute behavior and moral reform also produced the space of the slum as entertainment for its audiences.
Temperance literature and American literary realism produced publics, who, regardless of their ideological positions, participated in a print culture that asserted the realities of social crisis as entertainments. The story of Delia Loughlin and the illicit society in which she traffics in particular conflates with Stephen Crane’s *Maggie* in ways that turn on the sentimental to reveal the morally barren and physically brutal society of the lower classes in late nineteenth-century New York. The ways temperance literature and realist fiction, the one purportedly real and the other realist, coordinated cultural narratives around an issue like addiction can tell us much about realist strategies for mapping the actual as well as the limits of these representational practices to both document experience and motivate social change.

Stephen Crane’s *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (1893) was published the same year as E.M. Whittemore’s temperance narrative *Delia: The Bluebird of Mulberry Bend* and the gritty depictions of New York’s urban squalor, inebriety, and lost womanhood explored in both reveal the dialectical relationship between fact and fiction while demonstrating the ways that temperance narratives and realist literature mutually reinforced one another’s representational strategies. Although its signage in 1872 advertised a “‘Helping Hand for Men’” (64), McAuley’s Water Street Mission provided aid to men and women alike. Rum-sodden men like McAuley were only ever part of the larger demographic of drug addicts and inebriates and despite moralist sanctions against discussing women’s descent into poverty, prostitution, and inebriety, these issues were genuine social concerns in American urban centers and problems significant enough to work their way into public oratories, newspaper exposés, and temperance literature.

E.M. Whittemore’s *Delia* is one such text. The biographical account takes up the crisis of women’s intemperance through the life of Delia Loughlin, a notorious figure and a known criminal, prostitute, habitual opium user, and alcoholic, imprisoned on at
least six occasions in facilities on Blackwell’s Island and Brooklyn. Loughlin’s biographer and mentor, Emma Whittemore, often referred to as Mother Whittemore, was an upper-class evangelical convert, whose spiritual awakening came after witnessing one of McAuley’s sermons. Whittemore quickly became known throughout the temperance circles of New York City, engaged in social work and outreach, and in 1890 founded the Door of Hope for Fallen Girls.

Delia Loughlin’s narrative, written by Whittemore, privileges Loughlin’s life and transformation, but also emphasizes Whittemore’s relationship with Loughlin, who was categorical proof of Whittemore’s efficacious reform efforts and an early resident at the Door of Hope. Whittemore catalogs certain of Loughlin’s early trials by implication, noting that “through the subtle administering of a powerful drug by one regarded as a friend, she was, in a great measure, forced into a life which she soon learned to despise” (9). The passage indicates that Loughlin likely engaged in an opium habit early on, but prior to her addictions Loughlin was an orphaned child, raised in a convent, and at the age of seventeen became enamored with an “unscrupulous” suitor. While not explicit, it is implied that Loughlin’s paramour first introduced her to drugs. After Loughlin’s abandonment by her lover she flees the city where “[a] few months of misery followed, never to be forgotten, when, one day, a greater sorrow than all came into her life, and, having none to counsel with, she soon became desperate” (Whittemore 11). While the source of this “greater sorrow” is never clearly stated it seems obvious enough that Loughlin’s desperation was that of a young woman abandoned in her pregnancy. Following an indeterminate period of difficulties, Loughlin eventually resorts to drink, opium, thievery, and prostitution.116

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116 In the Progressive Era, focus extended from women’s alcoholism to an increasing concern for women’s drug dependence, and, particularly after the Harrison Narcotics Act, on illicit non-medical
The fallen woman trope is fundamental to sentimental women’s literature and the early American conduct tract, but temperance literature emphasizes moral and material deprivations in ways sentimental literature tends to not. Critical to the temperance narrative is its authenticity and the degree to which it can capture and represent human subjects appropriate to their environment. By her own admission, Whittemore’s transformation was as much about her ability to see dignity in the inebriates and denizens of the streets that she had formerly derided, as it was about coming into a closer relationship with Christ. This authenticity was not solely rhetorical and social action that ameliorated the suffering of others showed it to be true. While poverty tourism or slumming was probably less common than is generally thought, the reformer’s authenticity and placement within communities of vice, as discussed in the case of McAuley, was central to reform efforts. Whittemore’s situating of herself within the narrative of Loughlin’s restoration underscores this importance even as it limns its subject’s infantilization.

Loughlin’s renewal occurs, like McAuley’s prison cell conversion, in a moment of religious ecstasy, and while McAuley can smell flowers and witnesses divine illumination, Loughlin receives a rose from Whittemore in a basement tavern. As Whittemore looks upon Loughlin’s abused visage, she suggests that a divine presence looks upon it too, a moment metonymically linked to religious inspiration compressed in the image of poverty and abuse.

narcotics abuse. While the majority of public concern centered on middle-class women succumbing to cocaine and opiate dependence and thus sinking into poverty, Loughlin’s narrative discloses the extreme economic vulnerability faced by already impoverished women while its form harkens back to the early American epistolary novel. The naïve youth corrupted by a libertine, a plot paradigmatic among conduct tracks, reveals class conflicts and the instrumentalization of women’s sex, and demonstrates how the same social transgression could potentially affect a man and a woman in radically different ways. Loughlin’s narrative repurposes sentimentality to invalidate gendered social power differentials because although Loughlin dies by story’s close she is rehabilitated within a women’s community of care, regaining her womanhood from within the androcentric system that caused its original loss.
I looked upon her poor, bruised face, with those ugly black marks under her eyes, I saw a bad cut on the forehead, and that part of her hair had actually been pulled out by the roots, while the side of her ear showed another bad scar, from a former fight, as she afterward explained. The remainder of her hair was hanging loosely down the back, over a dirty blue cotton dress (Whittemore 17).117

Whittemore’s description of Loughlin as a battered rogue contrasts Loughlin’s pre and post-conversion physicality to a similar effect.118 The inebriate’s strategic visuality, and in Loughlin’s case, a female inebriate at that, produces a panoply of incommensurate emotions, revulsion at the sight of the addict, compassion, and exhilaration at the potential for physical and spiritual restoration.119

Loughlin, like McAuley, affects change by working within her community. When she proselytizes to her old gang they are “blear-eyed, bruised and battered” and “strangely stamped by sin” (Whittemore 42). Whittemore’s focus here is on the women of the crowd and not the men, whom she suggests she “had better not describe” (42). Whittemore surveys pained and brutalized women. “One wretched specimen of a woman, with an eye out, her hair flying in all directions, stood listening in respectful silence, while down her cheek could be seen signs of tears on one side of her poor face. Another, literally covered with rags, had, through a dreadful fight, broken her nose, and yet she stood and stood, taking in all that was said” (Whittemore 42). The degenerated lives Whittemore surveys give the sense that their suffering is part of an undifferentiated mass,

117 The rose is a symbol of the Virgin Mary and in various hagiographies a miracle of the roses represents divine intervention. A later image of a rose also appears on p. 49.
118 Similar to McAuley’s Transformed and Cole’s Confessions, Whittemore uses the before and after photograph of Loughlin in the volume’s front matter to visualize the effects of rehabilitation.
119 Aside from the before and after image of Delia Loughlin located in the book’s front matter, other imagery throughout Delia are illustrations of the saloon where Loughlin was found p. 17, the Door of
a human geography of abandonment and abuse, from which one can only obtain
individuality through conversion and temperance.\textsuperscript{120} Whittemore actively produces a
voyeuristic frame, detailing social abjection to give dimension to the social crisis of the poor.

Whittemore’s \textit{Delia} is a text written by women, about women, and for women.
“[Y]ou know when a woman is down,” writes Whittemore, “she’s down, and she is even
cast out by her own, and she is lower, as the saying goes, than a man could ever be”
(60).\textsuperscript{121} Compellingly, Whittemore’s Delia never relapses, a feature that runs counter to
an aspect common in temperance narratives and cycles of addiction more generally. The
story itself is also non-linear and pivots from Loughlin’s conversion, missionary work,
and death to return the reader to Loughlin’s missionary experience. This structural
movement implicates Loughlin as a Christ-like figure whose death is memorialized on
the cross and then again in the resurrection at his tomb. At one point, Loughlin, writing

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\textsuperscript{120} In \textit{The Saloon and the Mission} Cannon notes that reformers “transformed saloons into missions by
taking advantage of their roles as performance spaces, substituting infectious piety for the addictive and
the carnivalesque qualities of intoxication” (37). Such interventions in the midst of saloon and street were
expectedly uneven, tolerated by some proprietors and rebuked by others, but the temperance reformer’s work
required direct action to transform the inebriate and her environs.
\textsuperscript{121} Throughout \textit{Delia}, image and form work together and Loughlin’s symbolism weights the rose’s
emotive power, “something suggested the thought that once she was as pure as the rose, and the bright
days of her early childhood flitted before her imagination, and the smile of her young, happy mother”
(25-26). It’s Loughlin’s own recognition of her apparent fall from grace that “caused her hand to tremble,
and the rose to fall almost apart” (26). Much as McAuley glimpses Hell in the depths of the East River,
Loughlin, reflecting on the rose, suggests that her conscience speaks through it. “You were once as pure
and as fresh as that rose was; now those leaves lying in your hand are your years, dropping off one by
one; that centre where it is all blackened said that is hell before you, and you are going down” (65).
Loughlin soon abandons her depraved life and enters the Door of Hope mission where “[i]n her hand she
lovingly clung on still to the once beautiful rose” (29). From the point of contact, the rose invigorates
Loughlin’s spiritual and material transformation from an addict of the street to a missionary reformer
preaching in meeting halls, hospital wards, and, notably, New York City’s Tombs prison. The sentimental
impulse is further harnessed in the form of an epistolary correspondence, dated June 1891, between
Loughlin and Whittemore, a period during which Loughlin was hospitalized due to failing health. The
image of a rose is even placed following a later sequence of letters, which, in addition to Loughlin’s later
address to Auburn Prison are some of the sole areas of the text presented in Loughlin’s voice.
about herself, is even quoted as saying, “No; praise God, Delia died, was crucified, and, as Jesus was risen, so is she in newness of life” (48).

During the first death scene, Loughlin, addressing Whittemore, exclaims “‘O mother dear, He’s given me something!’” and explains that “‘I couldn’t sleep last night, so spent hour after hour in prayer and waiting upon God, and just asked Him to give me a birthday gift in a message, and He gave me this: ‘Chosen and sealed unto the Lord,’ and, giving my hand a tight pressure, she added, ‘O, isn’t it beautiful?’” Quite literally, Loughlin’s assertion is that God provided her a message, a text really, that Whittemore has “cut out in large letters, and hung over her bed!” (74-75). The scene suggests that just as a religious devotee might consider the Bible a divinely inspired text, so too does the word of God animate the convert, whose narrative here is reproduced as Delia; The Blue-Bird of Mulberry Bend.

Of this divinely inspired message, Whittemore writes “[h]ow she loved to gaze up at it! Just before entering into the presence of God her eyes rested upon the text, and when asked if she felt then as if she was truly chosen and sealed unto the Lord, though past speech, her face was illumined with expectant glory, and she bowed her head in assent with a smile of joy. A few moments later she entered into the reality of it all” (74-75). Not only does Whittemore portray Loughlin as receiving divine language upon her death, but because of Loughlin’s conversion and temperance she receives a merciful end. During the second death scene Whittemore helps to prepare Loughlin’s body, noting that “I had often been told by human lips how scarred her body was from cuts, bruises and stab wounds, but I could hardly imagine it could be so marked” (98). Whittemore determines the abuses Loughlin suffered throughout her life as markers of her grace and the violations to her body provide evidence of her chosen status. “I saw the scars and cruel marks of her former life, until I thought how Christ had branded her, as it were,
with His own marks of glory, and that through the ages to come the former ones would be lost sight of forever, while His would remain to tell the story of redeeming love for even one such as she” (Whittemore 98). Whittemore’s narrative crucially intertwines corporeality and language, exposing realism’s narratological primacy in the construction of the temperance public.

Amy Kaplan describes realism as “constructing a society which appears more interdependent and interconnected than ever before while the connections between people appear more invisible and elusive” (Social Construction of American Realism 43). I might add that realism constructs linearity through sequentiality and cohesion by way of fragmentation. Realism’s subjective interconnectivity is only ever representational objectivity. Realism can never really live up to its claims, but sometimes in its thrust to capture moments of pivotal crisis, what I term (dis)integration, realism acutely demonstrates the ecological connectivity coordinating self, society, and environment. At the turn-of-the-century, and as realists strove to “construct a social world out of the raw materials of unreality, conflict, and change” (Kaplan 14), literary naturalism’s treatment of addiction in many ways demonstrated its subjects material ruin to refract the social inequalities and traumas dissipating the addicted self.

Donald Pizer’s foundational criticism on Crane’s Maggie argues that Crane principally formulates the slums as an ideological space less “about the slums as a physical reality” (169) than they are a social “battlefield” and “prison” where the “key to the morality of the Bowery is…its self-deceiving theatricality” (171).122 There is without

122 Also see Pizer, Donald. “‘Maggie’ and the Naturalistic Aesthetic of Length.” American Literary Realism, 1870-1910, Vol. 28, No. 1, Special Issue on Stephen Crane (Fall, 1995), pp. 58-65. For further work addressing Crane’s approach to social issues see Horwitz, Howard. “Maggie and the Sociological Paradigm.” American Literary History. Vol. 10, No. 4 (Winter, 1998), pp. 606-638. Working from Pizer’s theatricality, Howard Horwitz advances the argument that Crane’s emphasis on physicality and gesture produced characters as general character types like the street tough, the drunken mother, and the naive innocent, who reproduce the scripts from which they are constituted. Horwitz identifies “Crane’s
doubt an implicit theatricality to Crane’s text, but the conditions facing both Loughlin and Maggie represent real socioeconomic barriers and the slum’s rhetorical production reveals the convergence of violent social forces that affect a negative ecology. Maggie’s older brother, Jimmie, is first introduced sneaking past his mother who is passed out on the floor of the Johnson’s apartment. Crane notes how her “great chest was heaving painfully” and “face was inflamed and swollen from drinking” (13). The ravages of intoxication and domestic violence have incapacitated the mother, while Maggie, “the ragged girl…haggard from weeping” (Crane 14), looks on from a corner.

The vision of two children terrified of their inebriate guardian’s rampages and huddling for safety in the corner of the room express vile social conditions that, as Pizer suggests, perpetuate both Jimmie and Maggie’s imprisonment. Even within the shabby confines of the Johnson’s apartment, one traumatic experience stacks atop the next. These negativities saturate the Johnson kids, defining the scope of their emotivity while configuring Jimmie as a youth of perpetual distrust and rage and Maggie forever descending into a desire for security that can never be met. The ecology of the home

aesthetics, especially with its irony,” as that which “distinguishes himself (and his readers) from the depravity he depicts, specifically from his subjects’ determination by environment” (620) and argues that “[a]s audience, we feel superior to Crane’s other-half characters and their false self-sense,” noting “[t]hat is how slumming works: we are not types or representations of a type; the other half is” (624). Horwitz also views Crane’s approach as in line with sociological thought and its modes of group classification, aligning Crane’s work with the theories of environmental determinism prevalent in his day, a model that “conceives persons as natural growths of environment, who do not modify but instead reflect and reproduce environment” as imitations of it (607-08). Horwitz argues that Crane’s intervention was in part the way that he “deflates the ideal of transcendence structuring the sociological paradigm” (610) and asserts that “Maggie realizes early sociologists’ ideal of social control” (619). For work considering the intersection of class, economy, and theatricality see Lawson, Andrew. “Class Mimicry in Stephen Crane’s City.” American Literary History, Vol. 16, No. 4 (Winter, 2004), pp. 596-618. Andrew Lawson argues that conspicuous consumption enables Maggie’s characters to similarly participate in the miming of class. For Lawson, this “emulation is based on class mimicry, a form of mimetic excess attuned to both the aesthetic and the precise indices of social worth in a rigorously stratified society” (599). Lawson sees cultural practices like “vaudeville, organized charity, and prostitution” as serving to “make and unmake the self, weaving and unraveling the fabric of identity as they perform their cultural work” (599). This assertion regarding selfhood returns to Maggie, whose “emulation” prefigures her destruction, as she is “conducted not upwards but downwards through social strata organized and sustained by class mimicry, her society’s regulative principle” (610).
animates the poverty, violence, and inebriety of the slum such that psychological, social, and environmental conditions reinforce one another, blurring public and private space.

Similar to Loughlin’s early experiences, men and an androcentric social order define the parameters of Maggie Johnson’s social experience. Familial abandonment and social dysfunction drive Maggie and Loughlin alike to intemperance, prostitution, and an early death. However, Maggie is not permitted the sentimental politics that brought Delia to Mother Whittemore’s guardianship. Instead, Maggie’s abusive mother throws her out after she learns of Maggie’s relationship with Pete, a saloonkeeper, and further refuses to provide her shelter when Maggie comes begging to return. The same stigma of fallen womanhood that harries Maggie Johnson compels the bonds of womanhood so central to Whittemore and the Door of Hope mission.

While it is certainly possible that Maggie’s mother would throw her out on her ear, it seems to me that the Johnson’s familial culture would not demand Maggie’s ostracism. What is apparent is the manner in which Crane depicts the viciousness of the inebriate and the poor. Maggie’s purity, like that of Loughlin’s, is realized, albeit somewhat condescendingly, in her comparison to a flower, a symbol also made clear in *Delia*. “The girl, Maggie,” writes Crane, “blossomed in a mud puddle” and “grew to be a most rare and wonderful production of a tenement district, a pretty girl” (18). Even when Maggie’s infant brother dies, his wake indexes the flower. “He went away in a white, insignificant coffin, his small waxen hand clutching a flower that the girl, Maggie, had stolen from an Italian” (Crane 14).  

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123 For further work on the social conditions influencing Crane’s aesthetic see Sweeney, Gerald. “The Syphilitic World of Stephen Crane’s ‘Maggie.’” *American Literary Realism*, 1870-1910, Vol. 24, No. 1 (Fall, 1991), pp. 79-85. Discussing other imagery in Crane’s *Maggie*, Gerald Sweeney compellingly links the skin blotsches that pervade the story as a means by which to index syphilis as a rampant public health issue among the poor. Blotches on Mary Johnson’s arms, Pete’s neck, and a john, while not symbolic, nonetheless produce an imagistic geography suggesting “that the entire slum world of Maggie is pervaded by disease, and not merely alcoholism, but syphilis as well” (80). Also look to Petry, Alice Hall. “Gin
intercession and the spirit of the Virgin Mother, in Crane’s hands is an object signifying societal naïveté and death, again not the street-wise persona we assume such an environment would generate. While Maggie-as-flower gestures towards the possibility of Maggie one day transcending the slums, hers remains a death flower that undercuts sentimental formulas and lays bare the outcomes of those that will not be saved.

Jimmie, Maggie’s brother and by far her most resolute male support, is still a young man “dreaming blood-red dreams at the passing of pretty women” and who “menaced mankind at the intersections of streets” (Crane 15). A drunk and a philanderer, Jimmie wiles away in saloons because he recognizes his world as one where masculine desire corrupts nurturing and restorative feminine attitudes. After all, “on a certain star-lit evening,” Jimmie once said, “wonderingly and quite reverently: ‘Deh moon’” that ancient symbol of woman, “‘looks like hell, don’t it?’” (Crane 18). It simply doesn’t seem to matter whether one turns to celestial bodies, city streets, or maternal figures, everything in the diegetic space vitalizes a negative ecology characterized by androcentric consumption. Much like Loughlin’s narrative, Maggie seeks respite from the oppressions of home and poverty through a relationship with a man who inevitably cares little for her aspirations to a normative life. Pete, the saloonkeeper and local tough, essentially defines Maggie’s sexuality for her by virtue of the gendered power disparity instantiated by his ability to take what he wants, specifically her sex, and then abandon her as it suits him. Loughlin too, although she becomes a hardened criminal on the streets

Lane in the Bowery: Crane’s Maggie and William Hogarth.” American Literature, Vol. 56, No. 3 (Oct., 1984), pp. 417-426. Alice Hall Petry’s work compares Crane’s depiction of turn-of-the-century New York to William Hogarth’s 1751 “Beer Street” and “Gin Lane.” Petry, in considering both Hogarth and Crane’s concerns with intemperance’s role in the breakdown of family, suggests that “[t]he first half of Maggie reads like a social worker’s case study,” as “all three children-Maggie, Jimmie, baby Tommie-are either neglected or abused” (420). Petry convincingly reads Hogarth’s London slums as a using space and its materiality to “reflect a deteriorating social order” (423), a turn made apparent in Maggie’s descent through the increasingly impoverished landscape of lower New York, its industrial sectors, and docks.
of New York, is made vulnerable by virtue of her desire to gain station through marriage. Denied the cultural model of true womanhood, both sink further into despair and intemperance. Such plot conventions evoke sentimental politics because male desires actualize the narrative of the fallen woman that produces the pervasive threat of social failure and (dis)integration.124

In The Female Complaint, Lauren Berlant writes that “the emotional labor of women places them at the center of the story of what counts as life” (20) and Maggie’s trials, which force her into the configuration of an object by each and every man she encounters, effectively conjure masculinity as a force that seeks to occupy and dismantle the feminine center, producing its authority in direct relation to women’s degradation. When Pete takes Maggie out on the town among the immodest women and prostitutes, a displaced male desire projects the anticipations of the brothel onto Maggie. “Grey-headed men, wonderfully pathetic in their dissipation, stared at her through clouds. Smooth-cheeked boys, some of them with faces of stone and mouths of sin, not nearly so pathetic as the grey heads, tried to find the girl’s eyes in the smoke wreaths” (Crane 45). Maggie is effectively put up for show and, against her will, materialized as a prostitute.

The slum’s ecology is where dissipation and salvation struggle to outdo one another, but temperance literature resists deterministic social logics and figures like McAuley and Loughlin directly challenge the cyclicality of naturalized social oppression. If men and women could recover within the slum, then the slum was an impermanent environment capable of positive transformation through communal partnership. Robert M. Myers suggests that Crane responds to the environmentalist concerns of the period,

124 Tropes of the fallen woman are central to the American literary tradition and are readily found in early American epistolary novels like Susanna Rowson’s Charlotte Temple and Hanna Webster Foster’s The Coquette, works wherein a male libertine seduces a young woman, who then typically bears a child and soon dies impoverished and ashamed by her social fall.
split between, as Myers puts it, negative environmentalists who “focused on eradicating the evils of the slums, especially prostitution and alcohol” and positive environmentalists who “pursued tenement reform, city planning, and the construction of parks and playgrounds as ways to inculcate virtue among the poor by improving their environment” (191). The social responses Myers details demonstrate the nuanced environmentalism of the period and the significant weight that many reformers attributed to material change. Crane’s environmental determinism speaks to a far more negative ecology and yet, as I will argue, there is value here to social ecological thought.

Crane’s negative ecology reveals pernicious social conditions that naturalize unending (dis)integration as the process actualizing the addiction crisis. His depictions of the abused Johnson kids and Maggie’s adult collapse tug at the heart strings, and while provocative, these images are no more stark than Whittemore’s descriptions of a bruised and world worn Delia Loughlin. Each character, the one fictional and the other not, fall into a shared world of dissipation, sexual abuse, and death. Their realities demonstrate the hard actualities at play and while Loughlin’s conversion is the result of her encounter with Whittemore, no such intercession is afforded Maggie.

Maggie, unlike Loughlin, does not die among friends and family anticipating heaven and at peace with the world. Maggie is devoured, homeless, penniless, and prostituting herself in the New York night, a sequence reinforcing the consumptive economy dominating the novel. “She went into the blackness of the final block. The shutters of the tall buildings were closed like grim lips. The structures seemed to have eyes that looked over her, beyond her, at other things. Afar off the lights of the avenues glittered as if from an impossible distance” (Crane 62).125 What Sydney J. Krause

125 For debates on Maggie’s death see Dowling, Robert W. and Donald Pizer. “A Cold Case File Reopened: Was Crane’s Maggie Murdered or a Suicide?” American Literary Realism. Vol. 42, No. 1
identifies as the enmeshment of the human and non-human, “[s]huttered buildings, glistening avenues and streetcar bells become symbols of an ironic vitality, life without the living” (255), is the surreal and dehumanizing diegetic space that amalgamates the psychic, social, and environmental to affect Maggie’s disintegration. It is negative ecology that animates Maggie’s descent and reinforces the human and environmental co-extension from which she can never escape because it is this destructive ecology to which she belongs.

In thinking through the disintegrative conditions Crane sets in motion, Michael Fried’s critique of Crane’s “powers of defamiliarization” (93) is useful. Fried identifies tendencies of miniaturization (shifts in scale and perception) and monstrosity as two features that seem to reiterate in Crane’s aesthetic. For Fried, Crane’s “monstrosity” is apparent in the gigantic forms threats sometimes take, as in the fat man preying upon Maggie at novel’s close. Fried further writes that “miniaturization,” an observational distancing, expresses “a subliminal awareness of the nearness of the writer’s hand” (141). Crane’s New York becomes an animated colossus, a god made of brick and

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(Fall 2009), pp. 36-53. Maggie’s death has been source of some academic debate. Robert W. Dowling and Donald Pizer consider Maggie’s fate and question whether textual evidence points to suicide or homicide. Pizer’s central claim lies in the compression of time that occurs in the final chapter where Maggie seems to move from prostituting herself in the more well-to-do theater district and subsequently descends to the docks. The environmental forces here are protracted and manifest in the “phased decline” of Maggie’s salability. Conversely, Dowling argues that positions supporting the telescopic-chronology of the final chapter lose validity when read at the literal textual level. While one can read Maggie’s death as a suicide or a homicide, as these fine scholars do, what is perhaps most important is recognizing that either way Maggie is physically destroyed by predatory social forces that either directly destroy her body or otherwise motivate her to do the same. The fat man, for all of his loaded symbolism, represents less an actuality than he does the coalescence of predatory dialectics dedicated to the plunder and occupation of human life. Whether or not the fat man is only the loathsome trigger of Maggie’s suicide or in fact her murderer is secondary to his symbolism as the destructive force that consolidates the violence and gluttony that has determined Maggie’s destruction.

126 Sydney J. Krause suggests that surrealism “becomes the very medium of Maggie’s life” (254) and sees the novel as managing “a bleak naturalistic motif being evolved from an essentially surrealistic projection of it” (254). Krause views the actual as having been “dissolved in the blackness of its unreality, the unstated formulation of Maggie’s suicide” (255).

127 Fried also suggests that “alternatively it could be argued that the opposition between miniaturization and monstrosity lines up with the contrast between the relatively minute scale of writing and the unlimited magnitude of writing’s representational effects” (141).
steel and glass that remains not only unmoved, but oblivious to Maggie’s plight. Its monumental sublimity only gives perspective to Maggie’s insignificance as she is turned-out to a culture of unmitigated and cruel desire. Emerging from this monstrosity is the corpulence and greed of the city made flesh, the john whose “whole body gently quivered and shook like that of a dead jelly fish” and who “[c]huckling and leering…followed the girl of the crimson legions” (Crane 63). It is here, in Maggie’s prone state, exhausted and hungry, that she succumbs to a man that is gluttony personified. “At their feet the river appeared a deathly black hue. Some hidden factory sent up a yellow glare, that lit for a moment the waters lapping oilily against timbers. The varied sounds of life, made joyous by distance and seeming unapproachableness, came faintly and died away to a silence” (Crane 63). Everything here, from the black passages to the deathly waters, implies that this is the night of Maggie’s death at the hands of a pig-like monstrosity, who for all his inhumanity, is ultimately just a man.

Both Maggie and Delia Loughlin are trapped within social systems contextualized by despair, poverty, and violence, but the degree to which either experiences social agency seems largely dependent upon the gendered construction of the communities in which they exist. Loughlin, although she eventually succumbs to a health issue likely exacerbated by her years of inebriety, gains agency through a temperance subculture that to varying degrees empowers women. Maggie is not afforded such an opportunity, and her narrative of violence and violation is only ever a reality produced by men in which she appears but an incidental subject. Hollowed out and deprived her womanhood, she dies a vessel for men’s animus and desire. Psychologically tormenting, socially predatory, and environmentally despoiled, Maggie’s world ceaselessly moves in one self-cannibalizing direction, discursively returning upon itself to devour the parts most exhausted and which fuel its negative ecology. Maggie’s death forecloses her social
future, but not all social futures. Irreconcilable trauma confronts the reader and Crane’s antithetical resolution provides the undetermined space permitting the reader’s authorship within the imaginary. The space of the predatory world remains exposed, if not primed, for reinvention. Realisms like those of Crane and Whittemore generate diegetic worlds of abuse and in both instances such representations effectuate scopophilic portals through which the reader attains sight and spectatorial authority over the poor and addicted. Although the social realist text and realist biography here hold different aims their affects, like their stories, conflate and so discursively produce the addict and the publics aligned to witness her fate.

Thus far I have separated out addiction’s technologies into a myriad of messages and forms of social control. McAuley’s text uses addiction to generate religious aid societies and promote the logics of incarceration. Cole’s narrative demonstrates addiction’s trans-regionality and presence across urban and rural spaces and helps tie together Beard’s neurasthenic society and Veblen’s culture of conspicuous consumption, making evident addiction’s leap from alcohol and drugs to consumerism and a modernity characterized by capitalistic overconsumption. Harper and London each in their own way articulate the social gendering and racialization of addiction in white and African American communities and the threat it posed to dismantling specific forms of cultural power. The examples of Whittemore and Crane further show the thin line separating realist fiction from biography while demonstrating too the ease with which the writer can project visions of poverty as either survivable or inherently destructive.

Addiction’s placement in the naturalist text interpenetrates and stages the natural outcome facing Darwinian visions of the socially unfit, but the temperance tradition from which it draws signals resistance to the disintegration of the addict-subject. These contending poles importantly reflect a spectrum within which people in profound distress
are conceived as either redeemable persons or a social detritus deserving its poverty. The different narrative approaches that I discuss here inform the social constitution of addiction and generate paradigmatic arguments as to whether the addict is to blame for his own misfortune or if his precarious state has been constructed for him, a position allotted within a social system that uses the addict as the example of excess gone awry, an abject figure, whose presence rallies a population around national ideals that conceal economic injustice, racism, and sexual violence while reifying the social conditions producing the addict as an ecological self in perpetual collapse.

Temperance narratives emphasize the tenuous line separating survival from disintegration, but their logic requires faith-based conversion. Without Christ and a religious community, the addict simply cannot rehabilitate. Temperance literature publicizes the inebriate’s plight, a process that, as Stacy Margolis writes, “repeatedly articulates subjects that can only be understood—can only understand themselves—through the production of public effects” (3). Even as temperance literature articulates personal and social crises it also manages categories of social fitness, articulating the drunkard’s social rejection and the sober apostle’s acceptance into society. The sentimental literary tradition yielded temperance literature, but the scenes of social depravity and destitution found there emerge equally from a realism that attempts to capture the social discourses and debauched spectacles that purport representation as actuality and make the addict a discursively variable subject defined in literary culture by his capacity for revision.

The turn-of-the-century shift to a harder realism in naturalist fiction coupled with an increasingly sensational national journalism and an emerging visual culture helped affect the sense of a culture in crisis. Addiction provides one example of how a particular social issue reinforced U.S. disaster culture and an aesthetics of (dis)integration, as it
defined public perceptions while motivating state interventions that ultimately resulted in alcohol and drug prohibitions and the criminalization of the people who used them. Reading addiction through the aesthetics of (dis)integration enumerates the irreconcilable perturbations and desires animating the addict’s social construction and his place within a negative ecology. For better or worse, realism stages addiction’s traumatic exigencies and through the (dis)integration of the addict questions the reader’s place among those forces generating social futures.
Chapter 3

American Brutalities:
Lynching, Spectatorship, and (Dis)integration

On March 26th, 1891 José Martí’s “The Lynching of the Italians” addressed the March 14th torture and execution of eleven Italian men by a New Orleans mob.\textsuperscript{128} Racial violence was certainly not new to the city and the Italians’ acquittal in the murder trial of police chief David Hennessy the day prior incited vicious retribution. Nativists eager to purge the city of the Italians in their midst and oust a vaguely defined mafioso threat took to the streets demanding justice. Incited by local political leaders, the mob stormed Parish prison and systematically executed the eleven men. The New Orleans atrocity made international headlines and struck fear into the hearts of Italians across the United States. Martí’s article and the many press accounts make evident lynching’s brutality as well as its role in visualizing violence and coordinating U.S. publics around depraved spectacles and perverse entertainments.

The example of the Italians presents a racialized violence that seemingly de-racializes itself even at the moment of its occurrence. For some readers, it may strike as odd that I do not automatically associate American Italianicity with whiteness, but this betrays how accustom we are to racialized homogeneities. At the turn-of-the-century, Italian immigrants were typically not considered white and, as Peter Vellon’s scholarship shows, the period’s Italo-American press responded to anti-Italian sentiment by striving to demonstrate not only Italian whiteness, but the group’s claim to high culture and

\textsuperscript{128} Martí originally published this essay in the Buenos Aires-based \textit{La Nación} on May 20th, 1891. The New Orleans lynching was provoked following the acquittal of twelve Italians charged with the conspiracy to murder New Orleans police chief David Hennessy, who was shot and killed on October 15th, 1890.
civilization, an argument often staged in contrast to the non-assimilationist attitudes and purported savagery of Asians and Native Americans. Complicating matters further is the fact that at least one victim of the Italian lynching, Macheca, was a native Louisianan, former Confederate soldier, and a white supremacist. The Italian lynching illuminates the thin line separating the white from the non-white in a history that understandably emphasizes white-on-black racial atrocity in the U.S. south.

While this chapter focuses on the history of U.S. lynching and its representation in American literary culture, I am using lynching as a specific historical example in order to talk about the ways spectatorship and public violence aestheticize the social disintegration of victims while facilitating the communal integration of its participants. If I were to advance the timeframe of this study by one hundred years, then this chapter might instead address gun violence and mass shooting in America and turn backwards to lynching as a germinative form of this violence and its mass spectatorship in U.S. history. But as my focus is on the coordination of turn-of-the-century disaster culture vis-à-vis literature and the mass press, I address lynching and racial violence as materially specific antecedent conditions that forecast other forms of public violence.

I have also led my discussion of the Italian lynching with an article by Jose Martí, yet another figure once more removed from the black-white racial binary that we justifiably tend to focus on when studying lynching in the U.S. South where approximately three-quarters of all U.S. lynchings have occurred. Martí saw immigration and its diverse vocalizations as forging the democratic and modern identity of the North American, but Martí also recognized that contrasting this diversified culture was an American nativism that threatened the North Americanization of Latin America. As is the

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case in the Italian lynching, this racialized American ideology reacted to perceived threats with viciousness and cruelty as a means to assert its authority.

To understand how lynching narratives and imagery influence perceptions of cultural power, I treat these representations as mimetically affective and analyze how, through use and disbursement, the image and story detach from the material actuality of the events they represent, effectively transferring racial ideology to other discursive forms. The argument that lynching images somehow uncouple from the real historical events they record and represent remains a complicated assertion, and, yet, the crisis of lynching imagery is found equally in the atrocity it documents and its use in expressing racial sovereignty. Through lynching imagery, we encounter victims resisting socioeconomic and political injustice, just as we do the vulgar and morally obsolescent sign of white power. Lynching holds a critical place in the emerging visual culture of the late nineteenth-century because it reveals how its visual spectacle integrates white society through the violent disintegration of typically non-white victims. Narrative, illustrations, and photography alike staged the public’s encounter and indirect participation in lynching and lynching’s prevalence and visibility in American life demonstrates the depths to which public violence’s celebratory aura is ingrained in American character and culture.

Throughout this chapter, I analyze an array of narrative forms that range from journalism, essay, political cartoons, photography, dime novels, and literary fiction. I do this as a means to demonstrate the scope of narratological disbursement and consider the very different ways lynching violence permeated U.S. culture and served to generate publics that both enshrined and resisted lynching violence. Across my analysis, my central contention is that similar imagery and scenes of racial violence exercise an aesthetic of (dis)integration, aligning publics through the violation of the subject. I
specifically question how theses narratological encounters generate traumatic contingencies. I view the ambiguities of closure as the structure through which counter discourses avail opportunities for social transformation.

The Face: Disfigurement for the Masses

In Martí’s description of Antonio Bagnetto, fruit peddler, Martí harnesses lynching’s violating spectacle and asks the reader to look upon Bagnetto as a man deprived his human features and quite literally defaced. In the aftermath of the mob’s revelries, Martí directs the reader to see what cannot see back, the desecrated space of Bagnetto where “there is no face left, only a wound” (303). Through Bagnetto’s transformed visage Martí reveals the stark terms of racial power. It is in the wound that the reader encounters the type of violation that Michael Taussig sees as making the sacred somehow knowable amid desecration and ruin.130 Bagnetto destroyed, the mob remakes him into the bloodied pulp and vessel of its rage. Much as René Girard’s work on violence and the sacred suggests, the mob’s ritualistic striping of its victim’s humanity inscribes the mutilated body with its persecutor’s fantasy of communal sovereignty.131

The image’s lurid detail, which exists for the reader less as what is stated than what is implied, crystallizes Bagnetto’s disintegration and gives rise to the presence and racial integration of his white persecutors. Bagnetto’s desecration attests to the mob’s desire to render a man into a mute and unrecognizable object, a sacrifice renewing the mob’s wasted faith and labor. It is the wound, as Martí so deftly articulates, that makes Bagnetto and lynching’s innumerable victims narratives in the interstices of U.S. history,

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wounds that like Bagnetto stare out from their horrified shells, muted indictments of the monsters grown from their destruction.

The March 14th lynching of the Italians stages radical communal violence as a means to experience social belonging, and despite reports of a mixed race crowd, the atrocity restores white racial hegemony in New Orleans, circa 1891. Perhaps the fact that among the mob’s victims were stevedores and cobblers as well as merchants and politicians is incidental. After all, if there is a message in the spectacle of mass violence, it is that class distinctions do not grant immunity to any member of the targeted group. Popular sovereignty and its attendant vigilantism displace the law’s power over life and death and enshrine the citizenry’s authority to do harm, naturalizing the hierarchies of power that effectuate the oppression and defacement of lynching’s targets.

The unequivocal headline scoring page six of the March 15th New Orleans local Daily Picayune reads “Retribution” and openly attacks the court’s acquittal, suggesting the jury’s “crime” had “roused in every breast a firm determination to avenge the murder by prompt and decisive means” (6). The southern press often rallied public support for lynching, validating the redistribution of judicial power to the public while propagandizing lynching’s legitimacy. Citing civic leaders, the Picayune recapitulates claims of mafia plots and jury tampering and heroizes the armed crowd bursting street upon street as they advance to the prison where the Italians frantically attempt to evade their pursuers.

To give some sense of what was in the water prior to 1891, one need look no further than the New Orleans-based Mascot’s “Regarding the Italian Population,” a cartoon advocating popular violence by rounding up Italian immigrants, beating them,
and drowning them alive like rats in a cage. The only way to remove the Italian menace, it would seem, is to incarcerate or deport them far from American shores. The cartoon satirizes Italian poverty and criminality and visually sequentializes lynching violence. The cartoon communicates despair and social crisis as a joke pitched across class lines and available to all. *Puck*, no stranger to anti-Italian sentiment, is no less provocative.

In the days following the New Orleans massacre *Puck* responds with a drawing of a mafioso brigand wielding pistol and sword. The figure is female, earringed and garbed like so many piratical gypsies of popular imagination. The masked assassin glares into the jury box, implying mafia intimidation and witness tampering, charges roundly denied following the trial of the Italians. The cartoon both feminizes the Italian male as an individual who lacks masculine agency and inverts the nationally procreative

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132 Echoing Darwinian sentiments, J.C. Wickliffe, attorney and editor of the *New Delta*, and one of the lynching’s primary instigators suggests that “[s]elf-preservation is the first law of nature,” (6) a statement effectively linking white racial power in the U.S. south with a broader eugenicist ideology.

133 Years following the Italian lynching, cartoons still trafficked in Italian denigration and perpetuated a cultural narrative that Italians require policing and control. For further examples of cartoons denigrating Italian immigrants see “A Wop.” *Life.* 6 July 1911. *Life*’s “A Wop,” portrays the Italian male as a bestial, subservient, and imbecilic subhuman. The figure, more creature than man, eagerly spit-shines a wealthy white-man’s shoes, obeissant to a racial and class hierarchy he enables the leisure and excess of whites. See also “A School of Italian Art.” *Life.* 1 April 1909. In “A School of Italian Art” an Italian brigand paints a black hand emblematic of the mafia, implying that all Italian high culture is ultimately reduced to the vulgarities of street violence and gang signs. For examples of the Italian as villain in early crime noir see “The Compact of Death or Nick Carter’s Singled Hair Clew.” Ed. Chickering Carter. *New Nick Carter Weekly.* No. 456, Street & Smith, 23 Sept. 1905, New York. Popular and nationally circulated periodicals propagated the image of the buffoon Italian or Italian criminal and contributed to the cultural perception of Italians as impoverished social burdens. The press continued to associate the mafia threat with Italian Americans and this sensational rhetoric advanced the racial criminalization and dehumanization of the Italian ethnic minority, a discursive process that in the case I discuss precipitated the New Orleans lynching. Rhorically, racial bigotry found prominent espousal in the news, but so too was it perpetuated in other popular literary forms. Mafiosi thugs, which any Italian could presumably embody, are the frequent protagonists in popular dime novels like the *Nick Carter* series and the go-to villain throughout twentieth-century crime noir. Periodical cartoons as well played an important role in managing the public’s perception of Italian identity. In “Possibly Both.” *Life.* 27 Dec. 1888, p. 8. a well-to-do white couple wonder aloud whether the ragged Italian organ grinder or his monkey are in fact Italian nobility, while the Italian’s three small children look on. In “An Old Italian Garden.” *Life.* 1 March 1923, p. 7. *Life* undercuts pastoral sentiment by presenting a shanty worked by Italians and strewn with rubbish where the wild dogs and rats come to feed. Typically, these cartoons tended to lampoon and denigrate the Italian. Whether it was a bowl of spaghetti near strangling its Italian diner or the Italian organ grinder with monkey busking for charity, the cartoon Italian was consistently framed as impoverished, hot-headed, unintelligent, and yet cunningly dishonest. These comic funnies reinforce racial bigotry and attest to the ways that visual media criminalized and disparaged the Italian immigrant.
Columbia in the figure of the female Italian criminal. Moreover, it justifies the abhorrent violence of the Italian lynching, providing for its readers an unequivocal rationale.

Figure 6

On March 14th, crowds eager to witness the lynching overwhelmed the streets. Of the lynching of Politz, *The Picayune* writes, “[a] hundred willing hands grasped him wherever a hold was obtainable, and, struggling to the last, the unfortunate man was hustled to the corner of St. Ann and Tremo streets.” With the “crowd cuffing and kicking him at every step” (“Retribution” 6), the mob hung Politz from a lamp post. The idea that “[a] hundred willing hands” (“Retribution” 6) synchronize to murder him suggests the scale of spectacle and the passage elides that those gripping the paper and pouring over the lynching also occupy a place in his agony.

The article takes care to detail how the people of New Orleans hoisted and fired upon Politz until “with a convulsive shudder Politz dangled at the end of the rope dead” and notes that quickly “the relic hunters swarmed up to the body” and with knives cut loose Politz’s clothing, leaving the corpse nearly “stripped” (“Retribution” 6). The paper
discloses here that Politz’s wife, “wild with grief,” witnessed his execution and “fought her way through the crowd with the ferocity of a tigress” (“Retribution” 6). The Picayune also narrates Bagnetto’s interrogation. When Bagnetto responds “‘I don’t know’” as to the identity of Hennessey’s killer, the Picayune inveighs that “[i]t was the Sicilian watchword. They were his last words” (“Retribution” 7). Dragged from the prison, Bagnetto, “more dead than alive” confronted “a deafening chorus of hostile and derisive yells” (“Retribution” 6) and is, like his co-defendant, soon hung from a tree.

Metropolitan areas in the east were home to greater numbers of Italian immigrants than anywhere else in the country and these regions typically excoriated the southern massacre.\textsuperscript{134} The New York Times attacked the “New-Orleans Affair” in a March 16th article, suggesting that “[t]he lynching of a pair of murderers or horse thieves in the West or Southwest is not an event of such uncommon occurrence as to attract much attention,” but charges that “[t]he records of Judge Lynch’s court probably afford no parallel to this bloody business in the City of New-Orleans” (“New-Orleans Affair” 4).\textsuperscript{135} Despite many humanitarian positions, anti-Italian sentiment in the East remained strong.

A day later on March 17th, the Times published an article blaming the acquitted victims and chastising those Italians that did not agree with the lynchers, suggesting that New Orleans Italians could have “secured themselves much more effectually against being

\begin{footnote}
\textsuperscript{134} For reporting on Italian-American protests of the New Orleans lynching see “Italians Meet in Cooper Union.” \textit{The New York Times}. 21, March 1891, p. 4. According to the \textit{Times} six thousand Italians gathered to protest in the East Village’s Cooper Union where prominent Italian journalists and writers like Edoardo Michelangeli and Bernardino Ciambelli denounced the New Orleans lynching, declaiming Wickliffe in particular a “detestable name, that shall pass to the history of infamous deeds” (4).

\textsuperscript{135} This slight passage attests to the commonplace assumptions linking lynching to the west. The turn from the Picayune’s heroic community to a gang of villains is evident, as the Times characterizes the mob as sadistic killers, who “shot down the crouching and shrieking Italians as they would have shot down street curs” (4). The Times not only attacks the New Orleans mob, but takes its contempt a step further, charging that “while every good citizen will readily assent to the proposition that this affair is to be deplored, it would be difficult to find any one individual who would confess that privately he deplores it very much” (4). It is “human nature” that the article puts on trial, which “in some respects has been but slightly modified since the days of savagery by civilization and criminal jurisprudence” (4), a turn
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classed with those murderers” (“Lynch Law and the Mafia” 4) should they have condemned them. This chastisement displaces racism’s production back onto the racially oppressed and argues that Italians, threatened, fearful, and enraged at the New Orleans atrocity, have no one to blame but themselves. Echoing these sentiments, Henry Cabot Lodge condemned the mob’s violence, but only as a means to validate his position on restricting Italian immigration into the U.S. Other political figures were less equivocal, as when Theodore Roosevelt opined that the lynching of the Italians was “rather a good thing.”

Lynching narratives emphasize visuality and the Picayune is no exception. Its grotesque descriptions are meant to arouse pleasure and satisfaction from its readership. Seeing that the community’s expiation is complete enables communal renewal and solidifies group identity. For those unable to engage in and witness the torture and murder of these men, the Picayune offers a vicarious participation and through narrative reauthorizes the reader’s shared presence and stake in cultural power. After the massacre, “[t]housands of spectators” line the streets, ushering “a storm of approving cries” (“Retribution” 6) at the lyncher’s procession. Describing ligature marks, bullet holes, and garments shredded into souvenirs, the Picayune revels in the violations delivered upon each lynched man.

condemning U.S. society as ignorant to the civilizational qualities that even in its best light it only ever mimics.

136 Despite charges of barbarism, coverage in the Times remained uneven. An article on the 17th titled “Lynch Law and the Mafia” walks back the positions of the day prior. When asserting that the New Orleans violence “is not analogous to the common cases of lynch law, in which the hot-headed citizens take the law into their own hands and execute what they believe to be justice without waiting for the law to act,” (4) the Times differentiates extralegal killing into two discernible forms. The first type is defined as a crime of passion in which the outraged community seeks immediate recompense against the accused perpetrator. The second type, seemingly justified here, is the reassessment of guilt after trial in which the community harnesses the right to self-determination by executing those social agents, like the mafia, that it has deemed guilty. In this case, “[t]he criminal organization that had put the city in terror had been too strong for the law” (4) thus requiring public action. The article does not so much exonerate the lynchers, as it sympathizes with their course, validating sadistic public murder.
Epitaphic summaries reify the public’s extralegal authority while serving a stark warning to other Italians, and anyone who might consider themselves as an out-group, that the people of New Orleans exercise a brutal vigilante justice from which there is no quarter. The Picayune describes Monasterio’s injury at the hands of the mob as “a large gunshot wound at the back of the head, the brain being penetrated and badly torn” (“Retribution” 6). The paper goes on to recount the lyncher’s work on Traina, who was found with “[n]othing other than a rosary” and “a look of horror and agony upon the face” (“Retribution” 6). Caruso’s narrative specifies exactly what parts of his body were wounded by each of the forty-three gunshot wounds that assail him. Romero, whose brain “oozed out” presents with a face “badly powder burnt” (“Retribution” 6), each gruesome detail only enhancing the community’s right to kill while transforming the atrocity into entertainment.

Murderous sketches also add to the Picayune’s sensationalism. One drawing shows Politz comically grinning, his face upturned and eyes shut as if asleep, while he dangles lifeless from a lamp post. In another, Bagnetto hangs from a tree before a faceless white crowd. Other images display Macheca, Marchosi, and Scaffedi shot to death and sprawled in pools of their own blood. The images provide the reader the semblance of evidential proof, a story not to be told but a scene to witness, that produces the viewer’s authority as a spectator surveilling the aftermath. Foil to these images are heroic profiles of civic leaders W.S. Parkerson and J.C. Wickliffe and illustrations of the rifle wielding mob breaching the prison. Beneath the image of Bagnetto hung dead, the article suggests the “wails of anguish and woe from the relatives of the deceased were heartrending, especially the cries of the women and children” (“Retribution” 6). Poor

consolation is the cruelly sentimental portrayal of the victim’s grief following a massacre that laid waste to eleven innocent men, scarred their wives and children, and horrified Italian communities across the United States.138

The Picayune’s illustrations demonstrate sure enough the size of the crowd gathered to lynch the Italians. However, the serenity they portray does not correlate with the event’s brutal narratives. The picture of an unmolested Bagnetto stoically accepting of his fate before the immense crowd starkly contradicts the description provided by Martí and others and ascribes to lynching the orderly and civilly orchestrated fiction to

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138 The New Orleans Press took pains to legitimize the mob’s actions in part because the lynching triggered an international imbroglio between Italy and the U.S. In the midst of the growing conflict the Picayune published “As Others See Us.” The Daily Picayune. 17, March 1891, np. and continued its defense of the New Orleans action, emphasizing that the grand jury has been convened to investigate jury tampering, and going so far as to suggest that portions of New Orleans’ own Italian population supported the lynching, “[s]ome of them, recalling the bloody deeds of the Mafia in the place of origin, admit that the citizens of New Orleans were justified in their attempt to suppress the organization by all means possible” (np). For the readers of the Picayune, it really doesn’t matter “How Others See Us” because those others threaten to subvert the practices of popular sovereignty and the racialized social order so essential to white supremacy. In “Mr. Rocchi’s Remarks.” The Daily Picayune. 20, March 1891, p. 6, the Picayune’s racial scapegoating transforms a terrorized community into the mob itself, in effect whitening the Italian while silencing local descent. The Picayune’s March 20th edition published a translation of remarks made by John Rocchi, a prominent New Orleans Italian. Rather than approve the mob action, Rocchi purportedly condemns it and treading thin ice goes only so far as to state that “I was pleased to see that after the attack on the prison was over the committee prevented further massacres upon the unarmed Italian colony” (6). Rocchi is however quoted as being pleased “that the uprising was not due to race prejudice,” a strange assertion for an individual who then states that he believes among the killed there were some innocent persons” (6). Rocchi concluded by indicating that no portion of the Italians “approved the uprising” but notes that it “will be a severe lesson to the Mafia, if such a society exists” (6). Then in the March 25th “The New Orleans Lynching.” The Daily Picayune. 25, March 1891, p. 6, the Picayune presents an array of commentaries spanning Louisiana-based newspapers, each to its own degree validating the necessity of mob violence against the Italian victims. Even when these editorials adopt a half-critical tone it is undercut by the need to preserve a laudatory view of men taking the law into their own hands and defending southern society from the mafia. In the coming days, the Picayune swirls with narratives defending the atrocity, notices of threats to Italians in other southern states, anti-immigrant polemics, and rebukes from northern metropolitan papers. Other reporting further west like “The Excitement Over.” The Morning Oregonian. 17, March 1891, p. 1. was littered with supposed confessions and suggests that “the element of Italians are glad a salutary lesson has been administered to the Mafia” (1). Also see “Temperate Talks.” Morning Oregonian. 17, March 1891, np. Another editorial in the same edition excoriates the “wholesale butchery” (np) while still clinging to a cultural bias differentiating the industrious northern Italian from the “widely distinct” and criminally prone southern Italian, discernible by his “dark complexion” (np). In “Threats of War.” Rocky Mountain News. 17, March, 1891, p. 1. the Denver-based paper presents an amalgamation of other national correspondence, includes both criticism of the lynching as well as arguments like those preferred by the Pinkerton Agency, which went on record asserting a mafia plot in Hennessy’s murder. Nonetheless, the guiding narrative emphasizes the outrage’s international dimensions and excites its readership with the headline “Threats of War” (np).

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which it clings for legitimacy. Lynching’s visual representation here resists its actualities and sanitizes its violence for the audience at home.

Having killed Bagnetto, the mob then hung his corpse from a tree. Many reports, including Martí’s, tell of men climbing into the crown, sawing off the branches, and shaking free the leaves that the crowd hastily fastened to men’s lapels or otherwise used to ornament women’s hair. These grim souvenirs fetishize the dead, providing iconic reminders of the singular communal body to which their possessors belong. As the crowds rubbed the leaves between their fingers, they must have thought that the flesh of the leaves was not unlike their own. The leaves slipping from their fingers and settling into palms; leaves flayed from the earth and fluttering into hands outstretched from New Orleans to Newnan, Georgia.

The Body: (Dis)membering Race
On April 23rd, 1899, a white mob tortured and lynched Tom Wilkes, a.k.a. Sam Hose, in Newnan, Georgia. Charged with murdering Alfred Cranford, his white employer, as well as the sexual assault of Cranford’s wife, the white crowd dismembered Hose while he was still alive and his body parts made, like Bagnetto’s leaves, into mementos of the killing. Every lynching is monstrous, but the crime against Hose stands out for its barbarity. In closing commentary, the April 28th Kissimmee Valley Gazette notes that “masks played no part of the lynching,” emphasizing that “[t]here was no secrecy; no effort to prevent anyone from seeing who lighted the fire, who cut off the ears or who took the head” (“Sam Holt Burned” 11). The atrocity materializes white society’s shared consensus that it alone determines social penalties while energizing lynching’s spectacle. The minute details of the atrocity captured in press accounts visualizes Hose’s torture and death, inspiring a rhetorically transferrable arousal that demarcates empathy’s racialized limits.

Prior to Hose’s apprehension, the April 14th edition of The Atlanta Constitution chronicles his pursuit and indicates that “Mrs. Cranford has signified a wish to see the negro lynched” (“Determined Mob” 1), a figurative turn perhaps, but one that presupposes the importance of communal witness and participation.139 The article closes with lurid details of Hose’s alleged crime, detailing Mr. Cranford’s “brains issuing from the wound,” (“Determined Mob” 1) while emphasizing Hose’s cowardice in landing the axe from behind. The Constitution reports that after bludgeoning Cranford with an axe, Hose struck the Cranford’s young child and then proceeded to rape Mrs. Cranford in full view of the child and beside Cranford’s gruesome corpse. This story of sensational

139 The Constitution declares in no uncertain terms that “[w]hen Hose is caught he will either be lynched and his body riddled with bullets or he will be burned at the stake” (1). The article narrates Hose’s pursuit by bloodhounds and an armed posse and for its titillated readers forecasts his capture in a matter of hours. According to the Constitution, Mrs. Cranford intended to witness Holt’s torture and execution and states
depravity, later acknowledged as false by Mrs. Cranford herself, spread from Boston to Los Angeles and reinforced white perceptions of black social deviance and criminality. Racial crime narratives, like that of Hose, represent the individual in the public mind as emblematic of a wider conspiracy and communicate the latent intent of all black people to progressively degrade American civilization or otherwise wage open revolt and upend white power.

As this untitled example from an 1899 edition of *The National Police Gazette* and the illustrations I discuss from the *Daily Picayune* make clear, pro-lynching cartoons held a dedicated place in U.S. literary culture. Like other press accounts, *The Police Gazette*, a men’s lifestyle magazine, details Sam Hose’s torture and execution, striking a sympathetic tone for the lynchers while remonstrating Hose as a man who “fought his certain fate like a demon” (“Burned at the Stake” 6). While the *Gazette* relishes in the gruesome details of Hose’s death, its most striking difference from other accounts is its use of image. While the *Gazette* does not illustrate Hose’s murder, it does provide a cartoon of the grossly big-lipped and venomous Hose bringing down an axe upon the oblivious Cranford while his wife starts in horror. The cartoon sensationalizes Cranford’s murder and provides an image that criminalizes Hose and justifies the mob’s barbarity in meting Hose a terrible fate.

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that “[w]hether the negro is burned or hanged, it now seems certain that he will face his victim before paying the penalty of the crime and that she will see the execution” (1).
The next day’s edition notes the menace with which Georgia communities responded, “rid[ding] themselves of those they believe to be undesirable neighbors” (‘Capture of Sam Hose’ 1) through a terror campaign that saw a black church burned and African American families ordered out of the area. In the coming days, articles continued to forecast Hose’s fate and amid threats of summary execution against anyone withholding information as to his whereabouts, newspapers continued to dramatize his pursuit by “cool, determined man” charged by their community, and especially the women of their community, to “remain away until every trace of the negro had vanished” (‘Capture of Sam Hose’ 1). It is not until the April 18th edition, a full six days

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140 The Constitution details a sensational pursuit through swamps and towns, the interrogations of townsfolk, and the investigation of known habitations punctuated by stories of sightings. Always the search parties increase from tens to hundreds and despite the passage of days they are continuously described as closing in on Hose. One interrogation details an unnamed African American man fitted with a noose and led to a tree where “[w]ith his knees trembling and with his entire body quaking with fear, the negro swore that he knew nothing” (np). Also see Carey, Daniel. “Hose is a Will O’ The Wisp to His Determined Pursuers.” The Atlanta Constitution. 16 April 1899. p. 2. Also see “Catch the Criminal.” The Atlanta Constitution. 19 April 1899. p. 4. The race to capture Hose with armed bands and bloodhounds is described as a coordinated movement deployed from every surrounding county. On April 19th the Constitution offered a five hundred dollar reward for Hose’s capture. This, coupled with the already existing seven hundred and fifty dollar bounty brought the total reward to one thousand two hundred and fifty dollars, the equivalent to over thirty thousand in today’s dollars. For another expression of lynching and racial violence’s monetization see “A Side Light on the Cranford-Hose Tragedy.” The Mutual Life
following the murder of Alfred Cranford, that the *Constitution* runs a physical
description of Hose, noting his height at five foot eight inches and weight at one hundred
and forty pounds. Hose’s supposedly deceptive cunning is alluded to by the fact that
“[h]e wears his hat well down over his forehead,” (“Circle of Vengeance” 1) a trait
making him a character of practiced subterfuge. Other than Hose’s apparent tick, “an
affection which causes him to jerk his head at intervals,” (“Circle of Vengeance” 1) the
description seems quite general, even nondescript, but through Hose’s visualization the
paper communicates his infamy. Hose’s apparent abnormality suggests biological
irregularity, casting an already racially despised figure as constitutionally aberrant and
therefore more prone to harbor perversities and carry out crimes.

The day after Hose’s apprehension, torture, and death, news of his lynching filled
the *Atlanta Constitution* and ran in newspapers across the country. In the April 24th
edition of the *Los Angeles Times*, an Associated Press article vividly details Hose’s
dismemberment and the revelry of the mob that murdered him. A crowd of two thousand,
“who sent aloft yells of defiance and shouts of joy,” (“Burned Alive” 1) mark the event’s
celebratory aura. What the people of Newnan orchestrated and the U.S. public
encountered was the narrative of a public atrocity, variability lauded and condemned, that
details Hose’s mutilation and murder as he “pleaded pitifully for his life” (“Burned
Alive” 1) while burning alive. Hose’s lynching was of such brutality and the outrage so
severe that it incited Ida Wells-Barnett to coordinate an independent investigation of the
event. According to the investigator, Louis P. Le Vin, “[t]he Cranfords are an old,

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Insurance Company of New York. *The Atlanta Constitution*. 10 May 1899. p. 6. Hose was tortured and
killed on April 23rd 1899, but in a May 10th article the *Atlanta Constitution* ran an advertisement for the
Mutual Life Insurance Company of New York. The ad prints a letter of thanks from the widow Mrs.
Mattie Cranford and a copy of the bank check in the amount of two thousand dollars along with figures
comparing the benefit of investing in life insurance versus depositing in a savings account. The ad further
produces a timeline stretching from the policy date to its expedient payout sixteen days following the
wealthy and aristocratic family, and it was intended to make an example of the Negro who killed him. What exasperation the killing lacked was supplied by the report of the alleged attack on Mrs. Cranford. And it was not the irresponsible rabble that urged the burning, for it was openly advocated by some of the leading men of Palmetto” (Wells-Barnett 15).

Hose’s lynching drew spectators from across the state, many transported by special excursion trains, and press accounts describe a mob of “nearly 1500 people” clogging roadways and “[a] line of buggies and vehicles of all kinds,” all of which “followed the procession” (“Burned Alive” 4) trailing Hose. To call the lynching a procession evokes the dark ritualism attending lynching as a form of worship. Hose’s brutal murder, like the lynchings of so many others, demonstrates the boundless perversity attending white racial power. While those who came to leer and celebrate Hose’s lynching are culpable in his murder, lynching narratives in the press, not to mention their representations vis-à-vis photography and cartoons, collapse the event’s spatial and chronological dimensions, expanding the procession of profane gawkers to a national level.

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As Wells-Barnett suggests, the lynching of Sam Hose is a brutal and diabolical affair. Following his apprehension, Hose was incarcerated in Newnan. Pressured by a mob the local sheriff acquit himself and turned Hose over to the lynchers. Hose was then led to the town square where oratory was heard by former state governor Atkinson and a judge A.D. Freeman, who chastised the mob. Following this public display, Hose was marched to the home of Mrs. Cranford’s mother, who identifies Hose not as the perpetrator of murder and rape, but simply as himself. Hose was subsequently driven again to the location where he would be murdered. Importantly, Mrs. Cranford never made an identification. Once on the outskirts of town, “[t]he clothes were torn from the wretch in an instant. A heavy chain was produced, wound around the naked body of the terrified negro, and clasped by a lock at his neck” (4). Soon enough, Hose is systematically dismembered. “His fingers one by one, were severed from his hands and passed among the members of the maddened crowd,” (4) as “[t]he shrieking negro was quickly relieved of other portions of his anatomy” (4). Hose only confesses after he is dismembered and his genitals cut from his body. Under such unfathomable distress Hose is compelled to falsely attest that he was a paid assassin in the employ of the African American preacher Elijah Strickland, who supposedly contracted Hose to murder Cranford for twelve dollars. Elijah Strickland would later be lynched himself.
Just outside Newnan, Hose is bound to a pine tree and systematically flayed and striking is the way his individual persecutors, similar to the hundred hands seizing Politz, blend into an undifferentiated mass, a kind of sadistic Bacchanalia wherein each killer and would-be killer dissolves within a shared desire. “[A]t the sight of half a dozen knives fishing in the hands of members of the mob, he sent up a bloodcurdling yell” and “[i]n another moment a hand grasping a knife shot out and one of the negro’s ears dropped into another’s hand ready to receive it” (“Burned Alive” 4). It is as if the many hands of the community have integrated into a unified body, whose singular purpose is to slaughter Sam Hose and carry him off piece-by-piece as a means to incorporate his body into their own. Kindling stacked at his feet, Hose’s ceremonial dismemberment culminates in the anointing of his head with kerosene oil. “A flame shot up and spread quickly over the pile of wood. As it licked the negro’s legs he shrieked once more and began tugging at his chains” (“Burned Alive” 4).142 With each detailed violation, Hose’s

142 For further details as to the spectatorial dimensions of the lynching of Sam Hose see “Run Excursion Trains.” The Los Angeles Times. 24 April 1899. p. 4. Particularly startling are the three excursion trains that ferried “nearly four thousand people to Newnan to witness the burning of Sam Hose” (4) and returned “loaded down with ghastly reminders of the affair, in the shape of bones, pieces of flesh, etc.” (4). The lynching’s bizarre and carnivalesque aura indicates that it was far from a sudden eruption of unrestrained emotion. Hose’s public murder is highly coordinated and the viciousness of his torture seems escalated to meet the demands of the staggering crowds. The Atlanta Constitution’s defense, reprinted in the L.A. Times’, “The Negro’s Crime.” The Los Angeles Times. 24 April 1899. p. 4. characterizes Hose as both cowardly and brutal, striking Cranford from behind and betraying even the basest of social conscience by “[t]earing the child from the mother’s breast” and flinging it “into the pool of blood oozing from its father’s wound” (4). It is after this that Hose reportedly rapes Mrs. Cranford “in the blood of her husband” (4). Hose’s description as a “brute” and “black beast” reinforces the mob’s right to vengeance less against a man, than a monster. At the same time the Constitution idealizes the Cranford’s pastoral life to the degree that the Cranford’s become less actualized persons and more the ornate fabrications of white supremacist ideology. Cranford is described as “[a]n unassuming, industrious and hard-working farmer,” who “after his day’s toll, sat at his evening meal. Around him sat wife and children, happy in the presence of the man who was fulfilling to them every duty imposed by nature” (4). The Cranford family was “[a]t peace with the world, serving God and loyal to humanity” (4), a monument to the American ideal of familial, religious, and economic stability. A day later the L.A. Times published “Danced on Air.” The Los Angeles Times. 25 April 1899. p. 1., an article that follows up on the fate of Elijah “Lige” Strickland, the preacher accused by Hose of contracting the assassination of Mr. Cranford. Strickland’s body was similarly mutilated and to his shirt a note was attached that read, “New York Journal—We must protect our ladies, 23-99” and another warning, “[b]eware all drakes. You will be treated the same way” (1). These inscriptions signify warning to local African Americans just as they attempt to challenge northern anti-lynching sentiments. The notes additionally connect the white population not only in Georgia, but throughout the south and the greater United States by asserting that lynching intrinsically
murder and dismemberment produces white racial power’s narratological assemblage, the absolute disintegration of one body for the purpose of integrating another.

The *Constitution* reports that “[b]efore the body was cool it was cut to pieces, the bones were crushed into small bits, and even the tree…was torn up and disposed of as souvenirs” (“Burned Alive” 1). The “ghastly relics” included Hose’s butchered heart and liver. “Small pieces of bone went for 25 cents, and a bit of liver, crisply cooked, sold for 10 cents” (“Burned Alive” 1). Once Hose’s body had been extinguished, “[a] rush was made for the stake, and those near the body were forced against it and had to fight for their freedom. Knives were quickly produced, and the body was soon dismembered” (“Burned Alive” 1). The article discloses the perverse psychodynamics energizing white racial violence in the U.S. south. As the mob surged forward, wielding their knives and slashing at Hose’s body, the revelers pressed against the charred remains with nowhere to escape but deeper into the burned flesh. Pressed against Hose’s blackened corpse, their white hands stained by his body’s black char, were they revulsed by the soot coating their faces and arms or did they welcome this stain they could not be rid of, the blackness they fantasized into the thing vitalizing white futures?¹⁴³

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Throughout this chapter I focus on lynching and its aesthetics and critique how lynching disintegrates its often non-white targets while integrating its typically white engineers. As I proceed, I review the historical forces influencing lynching and its spectatorial aesthetic and through further analysis of dime novels, comics, photography, and literary fiction, I discuss the ways lynching influenced a variety of narratological forms across literary culture. Ultimately, I critique the ways that lynching and its representations operated as a tactic of racial oppression and analyze how lynching’s disintegrative aesthetic was appropriated by African American writers like Charles Chesnutt and James Weldon Johnson as a means to motivate social action by indicting and exposing this uniquely American atrocity and social crisis.

In the years following the U.S. Civil War, the south underwent rapid social change. African American men were exercising their right to vote, black schools and vocational institutes were on the rise, and African Americans increasingly entered government and public service and in certain municipalities even outnumbered whites in these roles. But diminished political will and lingering racial antagonisms, coupled with the Financial Panic of 1873, set the stage for the profound racial violence that scarred the Progressive Era. Mob violence and lynching in the U.S. south increased in the years following the Civil War, but the use of lynching and public execution as methods of social control already had significant precedents in Jacksonian America. In the U.S.


Certainly mob violence, extrajudicial executions, and murder are not unique to U.S. culture and yet lynching is distinctly, almost definitionally, American. It was in the summer of 1780 that Colonel Charles Lynch Jr., along with other members of the Bedford County militia, ended a purported Tory conspiracy in Chestnut Hill, Virginia. Two of the captured Tories were whipped. The third was summarily executed by hanging. Lynching, or lynch law, as Colonel Lynch himself would term it in 1782, became understood as either the punishment of civilians by military personnel exceeding their authority or as the extralegal violence characterized by assault, torture, and execution that the term conjures today. In Colonel Lynch’s
south, lynching demonstrated the full force of slavery’s disciplinary apparatus, and as Ashraf Rushdy’s work suggests, despite regional differences, lynching has consistently justified itself through “the claim that the institutions and apparatus of the court are inefficient” (35), requiring a popular sovereignty maintained through the people’s justice.

Lynching principally signifies men’s ability to self-govern and coordinate community around “the claim that those who whipped, tarred and feathered, and hanged their enemies enjoyed the full support of the people in whose name they performed those actions” (Rushdy 36). To orchestrate and actively witness a lynching is to experience communal belonging and it is this quality of investment in a shared social responsibility that “creates the illusion of community by stating the terms by which one belongs or not,” while making “local experience the test of community” (Rushdy 37). As Stewart Tolnay and E.M. Black argue in their study of postbellum lynching in the U.S. South, lynching’s deliberate and widespread application, coupled with larger racially motivated riots, produced high African American death tolls and significantly destabilized African American communities. The techniques of racial oppression that ranged from disenfranchisement, laws restricting economic and social liberty, and terrorist violence beating and killing of Tory insurgents in 1780, these two expressions, one the overdetermination of state power and the other an assertion of popular sovereignty coordinate the historical linkage between law, lynching, and state execution and the insistent demand to align extralegal violence with state power in order to demonstrate white racial hegemony.

145 Responding to Richard Slotkin’s discussion of frontier expansionism, Ashraf Rushdy identifies four phases in which lynching too transformed along with social conditions: “in the first stage collective violence is exercised against those accused of crimes against property in the early days of settlement, while the territory still lacks legal and judicial apparatus” (38). In the second stage, a society now largely possessing a reliable legal and judicial apparatus “punishes primarily crimes of homicide or especially heinous crimes of other sorts” (39). Lynching’s third stage incorporates capitalist expansion in a “vigilante violence that emerges to become a tool for capitalists who use it as they establish dominance in particular economies” (39). Rushdy’s fourth and final stage is characterized by the use of lynching as “a weapon of terrorism used to control the mobility of particular groups that are defined along ethnic, racial, or class lines” (39). Importantly, Rushdy allows that these stages are not stable, but intersect, overlap, and respond to one another producing lynching “not [as] an unchanging ritual but a practice adapted for and rationalized through new ideologies” (39). As Rushdy suggests, the western volunteer Indian fighters align well with the southern model of the lynch mob in its exercise of collective violence against minorities.
perpetuated by paramilitary organizations like the Ku Klux Klan and the Knights of the White Camelia reveal lynching as a critical part of a deliberate and systematic strategy to maintain white supremacy and manage African American life in the U.S. south.

While social conditions for African Americans changed dramatically after the Civil War, the methodologies of white power did not. Black people continued to be narratologically constructed within white discourses as requiring stringent social management and the southern press stoked fears that the naturally ignorant and docile blacks of the antebellum period had transformed into the naturally violent and lustful deviants of the postbellum United States. White racial violence legitimized itself through “the mythology of racial retrogression” wherein visions of the “contented, childlike plantation samba” were increasingly replaced “with that of the threatening black ‘beast,’” (Tolnay and Black 14) a figure that necessitated aggressive policing and violent retribution.

Despite apologist claims, southern lynching was not a spontaneous communal response to perceived threats, but the most violent outward expression of an integrated system of cultural beliefs and social controls. Southern terror campaigns were often highly coordinated and relied on the press to stoke pro-white sentiment and condemn African American politics. Lynching presented a method to diminish African American political and economic power. Citing the 1872 Joint Select Committee’s majority report, Tolnay and Black conclude that “[t]he purpose of the violence was to dislodge African American and sympathetic whites from positions of influence, to eliminate hated Yankee interference in southern life, and to restore Democratic one-party white rule to the south” (10).146 Lynching tactics were particularly effective in rural areas like the Louisiana

146 Complicating African American freedoms were several key legal rulings. The 1873 Slaughterhouse decision stated that it was the state’s responsibility and not the federal government’s to ensure civil
cotton belt where, as Michael Pfeifer indicates, mob violence responded to “the tensions that underlay exploitative arrangements in the rural cotton economy, domestic service, and the credit-based mercantile system” amid “[a]n undercurrent of black racial consciousness that protested the constriction of African American rights” (22). Ever scapegoating and sublimating its perversity as a way to maintain southern honor, lynchings in the U.S. South provided whites a means to manage a highly racialized postslavement economy, projecting white supremacy as a cultural value that generates wealth for white capitalists and an ephemeral racial prestige for working-class and poor whites.

Systematic racial conflicts destabilized reconstruction throughout the south and the violence of organizations like the Ku Klux Klan was far from random. Bruce Baker’s work in particular reveals how the Klan, while not reducible to “a political device,” nonetheless operated in synchronization with political forces in the Carolinas. In many areas of the South, the Klan’s strength rivaled both local police and Republican militias and with retreating federal support, a Republican government losing its authority to pro-Democrat forces, and reduced opportunities for African Americans to exercise their franchise, “African Americans lost political power [and] became more vulnerable to violence” (Baker 40). The evolving Jim Crow system soon disempowered African

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147 While the historical membership roles of the Ku Klux Klan are largely speculative, the Klan captured whites across the class spectrum, and acted to empower pro-white Democratic politics in the postbellum South. As Baker emphasizes, Klan leadership was often constituted of the same merchant and governmental actors as was the larger society. A case in point is found in William H. Wallace, klansman and South Carolina Democratic House Speaker from 1876-1877 and member of the South Carolina House of Representatives from 1872-1877. So, poor whites and wealthy white elites both trafficked in the rhetoric of black bestiality that justified white aggression while legal mechanisms politically and economically disenfranchised African Americans. See also Newkirk, Vann R. Lynching in North Carolina: A History, 1865-1941. Jefferson: McFarland & Co., 2009. Vann Newkirk’s research also charts
Americans and precipitated the loss of African American social, economic, and political gains. Lynching campaigns throughout the south enforced this state-of-affairs.

Public encounters with the grossest of lynching’s depravities circulated across literary mediums and while the novel and the press coordinated widespread cultural understanding through print, other non-standard forms like the dime novel and cartoons also actively participated in this literary nexus, diffusing lynching’s ubiquity across high and low culture. Despite lynching’s inordinate clustering in the U.S. south, lynching and the American public’s experience of it varied widely in the north, south, and west. The same lynching narrative that met with moral rebuke in the northeast might receive laudatory praise in the south. Alternatively, a white man lynched for cattle rustling in the west might be met with consternation by southern readers. Regardless of cultural and political differences, what remains consistent is the experience of encounter vis-à-vis literary culture and the fact that these stories of profound violence synchronized a contested narrative of national life.

**Lynching the Dime Novel Cowboy**

Just as the dime novel influenced American popular culture by romanticizing the West it steadfastly conveyed lynching as a standard trope in America’s narrative of the western frontier. These cheap, mass produced yellow-backs romanticized the west and communicated ideas about heroism and masculinity through adventurous tales of cowboys, Indians, and outlaws that remain with us today.\(^{148}\) Definitionally, the western

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hero exacts revenge and carries out acts of extralegal violence that restore community. The dime novel conveyed these characteristics and encouraged a young working-class population’s fantasy of an ideal masculinity that was rugged, adventurous, and whose heroism was predicated on a capacity to punish and kill.\(^{(149)}\) Still, it is less the western hero’s capacity to do violence that interests me than is his methodology: the chivalry of pistols at high noon and the communal restoration availed through lynching. While the dime novel cowboy presents as the virtuous knight-errant of the west, lynching cuts to the quick of the free-soil hero and it is the relation between the hanged man and his executioner, roles easily swapped between hero and villain, that reifies popular sovereignty, racial power, and violence as categories inseparable from the manhood represented by the western gunslinger.

One might be quick to point out that conditions in the western United States were not the same as those in the U.S. south and that lynching’s black-white racial binary is diminished in the west. Certainly, many western lynchings document the white townsfolk lynching the white thief and murderer, evidence of popular sovereignty and not racial violence, but we also cannot dismiss the west’s shifting demographics in the late nineteenth-century, nor the ongoing racial violence between whites and non-whites. By way of example, David Courtwright characterizes the Central Texas frontier of the 1870’s, a region boasting some of the highest homicide rates in the period, as “a hunting, 

grazing, and military economy” that possessed “a large surplus male population, including many southern-born men who were combat veterans, sensitive about personal honor, and deeply contemptuous of other races” (97). This influx of young men into the west encouraged a culture of violence and outlawry, but so too did it perpetuate ideas about gentility, personal responsibility, and courtship, values represented in Owen Wister’s The Virginian, where southern patterns of social organization, culture, and punishment are transposed onto the great western frontier.

Judge Henry validates western lynching as the “fundamental assertion of self governing men” (Wister 284) and does so only through the condemnation of southern lynching.151

I consider the burning a proof that the South is semi-barbarous, and the hanging a proof that Wyoming is determined to become civilized. We do not torture our criminals when we lynch them. We do not invite spectators to enjoy their death agony. We put no such hideous disgrace upon the United States. We execute our criminals by the swiftest means, and in the quietest way. (Wister 283)

The Judge’s position romanticizes western lynching and suppresses its spectatorial actualities. Western lynching was frequently a public event that like lynching in the South coordinated communal adherence to the social hierarchies and economic relations governing western society. Further, the Judge’s terming of lynching victims across

150 Courtwright discusses the cowboy’s persistence as a cultural icon, a condition largely attributable to his mythologization in media. Courtwright notes that between 1883 and 1917 William F. Cody’s Wild West Show had been viewed by some 50 million people (103). The Hollywood western films of the early twentieth-century also carried the cowboy into modernity, a media bolstered by the mid-century’s significant western fiction market and adaptations of the western to television.

151 For further scholarship on racial displacement and the transposition of lynching from south to west in The Virginian see Outka, Paul. “Western Landscapes and the Dreamwork of Whiteness: The Virginian in The Virginian.” American Literary Realism. Vol. 49 No. 1 Fall 2016. pp. 37-62. For more on lynching
regions as criminals elides lynching’s clear racial codification. This omission and substitution of race for criminality essentially validates the racial violence that he refuses to name.

When Wister’s Steve is earlier lynched off-page, the event’s violence is rhetorically concealed and it is this quality of suppression that is so striking in dime novels that display lynching while burying its racial logic during the 1880s and 1890s, a period when the lynching of African Americans in the U.S. south was at its peak. To track the persistence of white supremacy, we don’t need to look much further than settler colonialism’s pervasive depredations committed against Native Americans and Mexican Americans across the West, but racial power can easily be hidden from historical view and its legacy diffused into normative social constructs and narrative forms. Cowboys, for instance, who remain part and parcel to a romanticized “tradition of extralegal violence,” (41) were often, as Courtwright explains, “lower-class bachelor laborers in a risky and unhealthful line of work…members of a disreputable and violent subculture with its own rules for appropriate behavior” (88). Worked into popular culture, these American frontiersmen, daring rogues, lawmen, and outlaws, adventuring at the social fringes, made for ample material to entertain the public with tales of western adventure.

Bill Brown forwards the view that the dime novel displaced social anxieties from the Civil War and projected a stable romance of U.S. society onto a nationally unified west. Responding to the ease by which national crises like the Civil War and U.S. sectional conflicts can undergo erasure in popular literature, Shelley Streeby also argues that many dime novels “tried to level differences among whites by representing the United States as a middle-class nation that honored (free) labor and republican virtues

even in the new social formations of the West” (231). As Streeby suggests, “the North/South divide, the question of slavery, and black/white racial tensions are not entirely screened out” (216) of dime novels published in the 1860s and 1870s, but later nineteenth-century dime novels also perpetuate a national narrative dictated by post-Reconstruction era conflict, racial power imbalances after southern redemption, and the proliferation of lynching as a mechanism of social control in which state authority and popular sovereignty struggle to reconcile one another in the West.

Lynching hounds the dime novel and its embeddedness in heroic tales featuring cowboys and frontiersmen merges American rugged individualism with stark racialized violence as the de facto nature of frontier society. So often, the only way for the denizens of the pastoral town to ever really find justice is to round up a posse and serve the outlaw a makeshift gallows. For newly minted frontier communities, this wasn’t all that far from the truth. Stephen Leonard’s study of lynching in Colorado emphasizes the role of the People’s Court, an informal legalistic system that provided the semblance of law in the territories. It was the People’s Court that tried John Stuffle and subsequently produced Denver’s first hanging on April 9, 1859, “a public, daylight execution done by orderly people after an open trial” (Leonard 17). A little over a year later on June 15, 1860, Marcus Gredler was hanged before a crowd of four thousand people, “practically the entire population of Denver,” (Leonard 20) indicating a roughly four-fold population increase in just over a year. These two executions show that extralegal People’s Courts in the West were prepared to mimic a legal process solely provisioned by communal agreement and that public execution, contrary to Judge Henry’s defense, exerted itself as a highly visible spectacle and must-see community event.

The People’s Court bridged the divide between state authority and popular sovereignty, but as Leonard’s example of the communities along the South Platte River
shows, over time, and as Colorado entered into territorial status, “People’s Courts largely faded away,” but “[l]ynching lived” (Leonard 28). According to Michael Pfeifer, “postbellum rural and working-class midwesterners and westerners, drawing on memories of the history of popular violence in their regions, revived the elastic doctrine of popular sovereignty as an antidote to changing practices of criminal justice in an era of economic and social consolidation” (14). Lynching’s place in the West is partly attributable to what Pfeifer asserts is its “deterrent and morally enabling effect,” (15) the very conditions that became increasingly hard to maintain in the urban centers of the Northeast where religious and social authorities could not rely on the hanged man to inspire circumspection among crowds of strangers and thrill-seeking voyeurs.

In other western locales like California, where the Indian Wars of the nineteenth-century demonstrated settler colonialism’s extreme depravity, long established Mexican and Chinese immigrant communities also became the targets of white racial terror campaigns. The experience of Latino communities in particular discloses the white racial formation of the Latino as an impoverished and morally obsolescent greaser. As Ken Gonzales-Day’s research demonstrates, Latino men were disproportionately the victims of white lynching, a measure that, as in the South, demonstrated a racialized authority beyond the law. Gonzales-Day’s assertion that “Chileans, Spaniards, Moors, blacks, and Latinos of Mexican descent or origin were less linked by some fantastic racial fantasy than they were by the real history of lynching in the West” (33) disperses racial mythologization while concretizing the identitarian and ethnic logics defined through violence.152

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152 Gonzales-Day emphasizes the public spectacle of lynching in nineteenth-century California and the American southwest. Gonzales-Day notes that while California amended its laws to end public executions in 1872, the penal code was amended in 1891 to dictate that all executions occur in a state prison. However, the last public execution occurred in 1895. Gonzales-Day identifies lynching photography and
Lynching produced white sovereignty in direct proportion to the degree that it annihilated it for non-whites and the racial homogenization and blackening of the Latino and Native American projected southern racial conflicts onto the dime novel’s romantic western adventures. In western dime novels, martial duty, extralegal violence, and a heroic spirit granted the individual mastery over oneself and one’s community. These texts communicated what it meant to be a white man to legions of youth and adult readers eager to imagine the sagas of gunslingers and bandits west of the Mississippi. In 1860, Beadle and Adams launched the dime novel and by 1865 the house had published some four million individual dimes with sales for some volumes ranging from 35,000 to 80,000 copies.¹⁵³ The dime novel, an inexpensive, light to carry, and easily distributed text, held widespread appeal across a predominantly white and ethnically European readership, and while dimes were greedily read by youth, so too were they transferred among factory workers and soldiers at camp. As Michael Denning writes, “the bulk of the audience of dime novels were workers—craftworkers, factory operatives, domestic servants, and domestic workers—and that the bulk of workers’ reading was sensational fiction” (27). While the dime novel was at turns condemned as an “opiate of the people,” (Denning 54) the form’s popularity attests to the escapism it provided for readers locked in the daily toils of their lives.

Beadle’s Dime and Half-Dime Library spun western yarns to a vast readership and delivered a particular vision of western masculinity that required spectatorship and an investment in brutal public murders. Through the dime novel, lynching became

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emblematic of the frontiersman and American individualist, in effect producing the lyncher as a cultural hero. Smack on the cover of Frank Dumont’s “Blue-Blazes” (1880), the dime novel’s protagonist, Robert Warden, is strung up feet-first above a fire, as another gunslinger pops from a chest and levels his pistols on the burly frontiersmen. Similarly, the cover illustration of T.C. Harbaugh’s “Judge Lynch, Jr.; Or, The Boy Vigilante” (1880) features the juvenile Lynch and his Indian companion, Red Crest, frozen in the seconds before they startle the horse that will leave their noosed captive strangling from a rope. These images advertise the heart-pounding excitement of men murdering one another outside the law and represent lynching as the catastrophic ultimatum awaiting the warrior and rogue alike.

![Figure 12](image1.png)  ![Figure 13](image2.png)

Popular sovereignty, the concept that the will of the people supersedes governmental dictums, is one of the principle rationales that legitimized lynching and the western hero. It is following a woman’s suicide, that Warden, the undercover lawman and protagonist of Dumont’s “Blue-Blazes,” is struck with fear at “the dread summons of the sheriff, or worse—to find himself in the hands of the excited crowd who would
execute lynch law in a summary manner” (3). Warden’s anxiety at being mistook for the woman’s killer arouses the blurred line dividing legal and extralegal violence and it is only when the sheriff intervenes, corrects the narrative from murder to suicide, and states “you know that I wouldn’t shield a murderer” (Dumont 3) that Warden is set to rights. But here too the sheriff’s gesture indicates the lawman’s complicity in sanctioning mob violence because if Warden was guilty the mob would be granted retaliatory justice. When the narrator later asserts “never is reform accomplished so thoroughly as when the outraged community rises and asserts its power, and deals out summary justice to those who have defied and trodden all laws under their feet” (Dumont 7-8) the text again reiterates the doctrine of popular sovereignty and validates lynching as an established cultural practice.

The mob’s roving presence and predilection to violence sanctioned by communal rule is disclosed again in Edward L. Wheeler’s “Blonde Bill; Or, Deadwood Dick’s Home Base” (1880). When the heroes are introducing one to the other following a foiled stagecoach robbery, the hulking Beautiful Bill divulges that he is a standing member of the “Death Committee of ther Mines,” a citizens brigade charged with rooting out thieves and roughs and as Bill relates, “[o]ur, pulp’t’s a tarred rope—our platform et be ther limb o’ther fust convenient tree’” (Wheeler 1). Violence’s eruptive potential instantiates communal will beyond the reaches of law and suggests that frontier justice and self-

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154 The region’s chivalric culture and its raw violence is emphasized when Dumont’s narrator suggests that no insult will be tolerated against a woman and for the murderer of a woman, “[a] rope and the nearest tree would surely wait him” (3). Dumont’s “Blue-Blazes” also takes pains to reduce non-white characters to perverse ethnic stereotypes like the Chinese man Lung Chee and the Irishman Patrick Moriarty, a drunkard perpetually aroused by whisky. Lung Chee, referred to as a “yaller-faced nagur,” (9) is introduced as “[a] short, yellow-faced. Chinaman with an immense cue coiled upon the summit of his cranium. His little eyes twinkled with pleasure and his capacious mouth exposed a set of wolffish teeth. He advanced, grinning and bowing toward the reclining bandit” (8). Such racist depictions of drunken Irishmen and greedy Chinese further racial prejudices that excite ethnic violence. But even here, while blackness is imposed on the non-white Chinese, Moriarty, the inebriate, still manages to play the foolhardy hero.
governance remain dialectically linked in American culture. Moreover, without frontier justice and its attendant lynching, the western hero simply ceases to exist.

When Dumont’s Blue-Blazes is finally captured, summary execution “beneath the stout limb of a tree” (12) is exactly what awaits him. Following the shooting of Salamander Sam, Deadwood Dick too is very nearly lynched as the deputy declares “‘if there are any here who want invitations to a lynch picnic, let ‘em speak up quick!’” (Dumont 8). In this instance, Deadwood Dick is sentenced by popular vote, literally a show of hands condemning him “‘to be hanged ter ther first convenient limb o’ a tree’” (Dumont 9). Similarly, in Dumont’s “Ebony Dan” (1880) when the outlaw Bully Bolton is finally captured the sheriff directs his attention to a rope, telling him “‘we’re going to swing you off without judge or jury’” (12). No matter where one seems to turn, extralegal execution determined by men’s belief in their own absolute sovereignty waits in the wings.

While concepts like frontier justice and popular sovereignty are necessarily intertwined, in Harbaugh’s “Judge Lynch” popular sovereignty takes a back seat to individual retribution. In the mountains of Colorado, the youthful Captain Harry, known by his vigilante sobriquet, Judge Lynch Jr., hunts down an array of bad guys, but what is compelling is how Lynch internalizes and expresses his individual sovereignty as the embodiment of legal structure. According to Judge Lynch, “I try, condemn, and execute. I’ve a kind of traveling court that sits constantly. I’m judge, jury, prosecuting attorney, and sheriff” (Harbaugh 2). Those who grow to fill the role of judge and sheriff alike emerge from the community’s ideologically gestational space where the culture of violence installs itself as a normative condition even after formal legal structures are in place. As if to speak to lynching’s efficiency in an era of increasingly corporatized violence in the West, Judge Lynch Jr. even has a business card that reads, “‘Court always
in session! Villains executed with neatness and dispatch! Hangings cheerfully attended to at all hours’” (Harbaugh 2). While Judge Lynch Jr. is far too noble to sell his services, he nonetheless exudes an aura of salable violence.

As the murders mount, it is said the Judge has “‘got to hangin’ indiscriminately,’” (Harbaugh 10) prompting the town’s anxieties, but soon enough Judge Lynch Jr. is acknowledged as a man of moral resolve and is even granted command over the local militia and at the prospect of being led on a lynching, “every hat was doffed, and wild cries of delight accompanied a score of sombreros to the ceiling” (Harbaugh 13). Judge Lynch’s youth underscores the significance of popular sovereignty’s generational transmission and Lynch’s placement at the head of the town’s surly guard designates lynching as a cultural future, a means to coordinate community, reify manhood, and arouse celebration at the prospect of unthinkable violence. After a final shootout, Judge Lynch finally gets his men and standing beneath Tom Terror and Deadly Dan, the “two human bodies swinging side by side” (Harbaugh 15), he adjourns his court and “decrees that Cutthroat Canyon be hereafter known as Paradise Gap” (Harbaugh 15). Lynching not only restores community, but it affects the transition from a violent and depraved frontier environment to one of paradisiac and civilized dimensions. Harry and Jennie return to New York to marry, Jennie inherits her fortune, and criminality is excised from the region, all thanks to lynch law.

Dime novel literature draws from historical practice and demonstrates how the group’s enactment and witnessing of torture and execution affected a public spectacle. In Wheeler’s “Blonde Bill,” Beautiful Bill and Rosebud Rob turn away from Deadwood Dick’s lynching as Rosebud Rob explicitly comments, “‘I don’t care to witness the spectacle’” (9). Still, the many gathered townsfolk reveal how, according to Amy Louise Wood, lynching staged a relationship in which “[a]s protected and guiltless witnesses—
as literal extensions of the state—they could feel a communal sense of white virtue and strength” (25). Lynching’s highly visualized spectacle manifests a site for communal integration and the reconstitution of social power through the desecration and murder of the subject that the community has aligned against. Episodes of lynching in the dime novel offered voyeuristic pleasure in an era when lynching itself became “more public, more ritualized, and more spectacular,” (Wood 23) and just as lynching typically expressed racial violence, so too did the dime novel.

When Dumont’s Warden is captured by the outlaw Blue-Blazes, the rogue fantasizes how “I’ll put him to the torture as the wild Indian tortures his captive; laugh at his shrieks of pain; scoff at his entreaties to be merciful” (7). The villain’s desires express lynching’s sadism and spectacle, but also a white retrogression triggered by lynching itself and the ways Blue-Blazes’ criminality constructs a vilified indigeneity. Soon enough, in the gang’s mountain fortress, Warden is bound and “suspended over the flames, head downward, swinging to and fro” (Dumont 9). The graphic depictions of lynching and torture seen in “Blue Blazes” surface again in Dumont’s “Ebony Dan” wherein Dan’s nemesis, Bully Bolton, threatens to “‘build a fire upon your bosom, directly over your heart and slowly torture you to death’” (10). While neither Warden nor Dan are immolated, the implication that they will be burned alive suggests the transposition of southern lynching’s extreme depravity.

It may go without saying that in the dime novels I survey, and in the U.S. western more generally, whiteness dictates a racialized social authority inextricably linked to lynching. “Ebony Dan” stages racial conflict between two rival outlaw bands: the white

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155 Wood notes that while lynching effected a disciplinary apparatus it was also “commonly performed in active resistance to the encroaching power of the modern state” (24). According to Wood, it was in the early nineteenth-century that civic leaders became increasingly concerned with mob disorder and the public’s dis-identification with the condemned in urban settings. If executions were becoming...
contingent managed by Bully Bolton and an African American group led by Ebony Dan, a man with “a face black as the raven” (Dumont 3) and purported to be “in league with Satan himself” (Dumont 3). In describing Dan, the black body is subjected to an anatomical analysis predicated on eugenicist logics and concepts of racial fitness. Even Dan’s ability to command other men is biologized as his features are critiqued: “[t]he lips were far from resembling those of the ordinary African and the teeth were white and even. The crispy, woolly hair alone, suggested the pure Ethiop” (Dumont 3). Dan is described as a higher-order black man and through that process his blackness is allotted a deference not to whites, but to the alternatively degraded non-white biological status of other black men.

Racial violence is palpable throughout the text. At one point, Bolton declares that “‘[t]his gang of niggers must be wiped out or my occupation’s gone’” (Dumont 4), a remark suggestive of white anxieties related to black political and economic power. A black man upstaging a white man simply cannot be abided and even Bolton’s lieutenant, Sid Wilson, tells him “‘[y]ou deserve to be shunned by every man of the league if you do not make an effort to capture this Ebony Dan and torture the nigger in a horrible manner to atone for his share of the work’” (Dumont 4). But Dan also turns to lynching as a sign of cultural power and when he confronts the local mine owner and industrialist, Spencer Mason, Dan warns him “‘De next time dat you dare to cross dis trail and you fall into my han’s I’ll hang you to de nearest tree’” (Dumont 4).156 White on black racial atrocity is the expected outcome due the black transgressor and while there are well documented cases in which African American mobs lynch African American men, such events are far

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“carnivalesque entertainments” (27) then they no longer enforced the political and religious solemnity required to reify the social authority of church and state.
and away historical outliers. The lynching of a white man by a black mob, as threatened by Dan, is certainly a historical deviation, but the threat here is not without purpose.

Near the close of “Ebony Dan,” Dan is revealed to be the falsely accused murderer Edward Carson in blackface, a turn revealing the quite literal infusion of white language into the pantomimed black body. Dan’s fictive blackness projects white fears of violent black reprisal, narrating African American survival as contingent on the appropriation of white tactics that only further justify retaliatory white racial violence. Dan’s identity as a white man disclosed, his enemy, Bolton, fires a shot that misses. He then turns his gun upon himself and fires “with the rope still fastened about his neck” (Dumont 12). Following this the sheriff concludes with the double entendre that although Dan has “transgressed the laws, you are not as black as you have been painted” (Dumont 12), banter that stabilizes Carson’s whiteness even as it projects the black male as a criminal. Similar racial problematics arise again in “Judge Lynch, Jr.” and when Deadly Dan is finally caught, he must ask himself, “[w]as he to perish at the end of a rope held by hands as white as his own?” (Harbaugh 4). Deadly Dan’s contemplation complicates lynching’s cultural perception and utility between the U.S. West and South, echoing the same irreconcilability demonstrated in Judge Henry and Molly Wood’s dialogue on lynching’s regional differences in Wister’s Virginian. Judge Lynch Jr.’s rejoinder sanctions Deadly Dan and seemingly strips him of the racial marker that he holds most dear. “‘Brave men die by the pistol,’” says Lynch, “‘cowards and murderers by the rope!’” (Harbaugh 4). Lynch’s position defines lynching as a way to punish the worst of criminals and trespassers, while rhetorically blackening, the criminal, Deadly Dan.

156 While hero and villain compete to lynch one another, Mason also ruminates on ways to place his enemies “in the hands of the Lynchers,” (5) revealing how western extractive capitalism might employ the lynch mob as a means to manage labor and popular dissent.
In Wheeler’s “Blonde Bill” black-white racial conflict is again pronounced, as the brigand Salamander Sam auctions off his daughter to the highest bidder. Sam’s sale of his white daughter overlays the southern slave auction atop the frontier town. Even Beautiful Bill inveighs against this manifestation of chattel slavery, declaring that “[w]hen wimmen cum ter be sold like sheep, I reckon et’s high time for ther Death Committee ter show a tooth er two” (Wheeler 4). Bill’s chaffing at a white woman sold into slavery in the West displaces slavery from its historical locus in the U.S. South, while inverting its racial construction to communicate western chivalry. “Captain Ku Klux” (1887), written by the former Confederate Colonel and prolific dime novelist Prentiss Ingraham, and perhaps the strangest and yet most insidiously racialized of these selections, features Keene “Kent” Kendall, a man whose initials literally spell KKK and who adopts the title, Captain Ku Klux. But “Captain Ku Klux” is never overtly about the Klan.

The sensational adventure focuses instead on the irregular Texan scouts Night Hawk and Broncho Bill, who are fully half the team also made up of the Comanche Chief Red Wolf and Scraps, the text’s only African American character. For a dime novel with the title “Captain Ku Klux,” the Klan itself is inexplicably absent, making that lack the most compelling thing. It is the Klan’s very invisibility in relation to a title that declares its presence that arouses a sense of the Klan’s ubiquity. The Klan shadows Keene Kendall’s western outlawry just as it does the legal chicanery of Kennard Kemp in New York, characters who both work to defraud an heiress and whose initials signify the Ku Klux. These elements mark the Klan’s undisclosed presence, but it is the turn towards narrative’s end that opens the context of this otherwise unremarkable dime novel.

It is Scraps, the Alabaman African American member of the Buckskin Pards, whose role is largely relegated to the background that suddenly comes to the fore after
Captain Ku Klux is captured. When one of the Captain’s henchmen reveals that Scraps’ former master Henry Harcourt, who was once betrothed to the heiress Clio, was in fact not eaten by wolves, but living among the Comanche, Scraps lets out a “yell of joy” (Ingraham 13) and dedicates himself to help Harcourt escape the Indians, retrieve Clio’s inheritance, and settle in New York. When the two reunite “the delighted negro [was] laughing while tears were dimming his eyes” (Ingraham 14). The secret of Harcourt’s survival exerts the ideological momentum that has been largely restrained throughout the piece. Despite the villainy of those characters associated with the Ku Klux Klan, Kendall and Kemp still signify the KKK’s synchronous presence across the United States. The Klan’s ideology is fulfilled in Scraps’ decision to abandon his life as an irregular scout and lawman in the West to go traipsing after his beloved former master and Captain Ku Klux, while hung off page, lives on as a diffuse racial logic across the United States.

Certainly not every dime novel features lynching, but enough of them do to justify the critique that lynching in the dime novel embodied white racial power and produced the imagined and imagistic encounter tantamount to what Amy Louise Wood terms a “vicarious spectacle” (43). The displacement of southern racial conflicts onto western dime novel romances produced lynching as a mode of entertainment and cause to idolize both the outlaw and lawman, each participating in the same frightful display of power, competing to lynch one another until they all but conflate in the solitary figure of the hanged man. The examples I have discussed narrativize a cultural apparatus that aligned extralegal violence with state authority to codify lynching as a necessary if not desirable means of social control. For the predominantly white readers of the dime novel, thrilling in the adventures of the cowboy and gunslinger, extralegal violence coordinated the tacit acknowledgement of lynching’s role as an evil necessary to police a lawlessness invariably marked by race.
Lynching Photography and Cartoons in the Age of American Naturalism

Evident in the seemingly incongruent and yet oddly complimentary pairing of press accounts and dime novels, lynching’s multi-vocality communicated racial violence’s normalcy across a wide range of media forms. In the proceeding pages, I continue to exhume lynching rhetoric through the evaluation of lynching imagery and discuss the competing arguments, aesthetic features, and cultural affects provoked by lynching photography and cartoons. If, as Marshall McLuhan suggests, “the medium is the message,” then the multiple mediums I discuss here reveal the nuanced and multidimensional expressions of white racial power, and, as I explore here, the counter-rhetorics of resistance.

Literary realism was as much a means to acknowledge the hard facts of democratic governance in the postbellum United States as it was a means, as Amy Kaplan and other theorists have suggested, to contain social experience. Realism prescribes the conditions of normalization and through its representation of the world as it is realism enshrines the product while, as John Tagg suggests, represses production. But what is repressed does not lie dormant within literature or the photograph’s text. “What lies ‘behind’ the paper or ‘behind’ the image is not reality—the referent” writes Tagg, “but reference: a subtle web of discourse through which realism is enmeshed in a complex fabric of notions, representations, images, attitudes, gestures and modes of action which function as everyday know-how, ‘practical ideology’, norms within and through which people live their relation to the world” (100). Realism’s narratological techniques corresponded to the fast-developing technology of photography and it spoke to the stabilization of a society still reeling from the after effects of the Civil War.
Photography provided a sense of fixity and a seemingly reliable account that captured history in its universal and forever unchanging reality. Realism in writing and the fine arts coordinated with the technological advances evident in photography, which, as Alan Trachtenberg suggests, “transferred the skills of the hand to an inanimate apparatus” (5). The camera served as the perfect artistic medium for the techno-industrial culture of late nineteenth-century America, a machine capable of capturing the minutest of detail, solidifying the image and reproducing it for a culture of industry. Oddly enough, early photography found its use in two forms of portraiture. The one typically memorialized sitters in respectable poses. The other captured the subject’s likeness and deployed it for the purposes of science, surveillance, and social control. The question then arises as to how lynching photography operates through a realist mode and incorporated portraiture and criminal photography, two competing and yet complementary modes.

Photography entraps, as Trachtenberg would have it, and locks the viewer in a dialectical relationship with the subject. In discussing the 1850 portraiture daguerrotypes of enslaved African Americans stripped from the waist up by the South Carolinian photographer J.T. Zealy, Trachtenberg writes that “[t]he illustrations are trapped within a system of representation as firmly as the sitters are trapped within a system of chattel slavery. And they powerfully inform us of our own entrapment” (56). The viewer’s acknowledgement of his presence as a witness to the abjection of the people captured in Zealy’s portraits suggests, according to Trachtenberg, “the possibility of imaginative liberation, for if we reciprocate their look, we have acknowledged what the pictures most overtly deny: the universal humanness we share with them” (60). Self-awareness at the point of encounter suggests the capacity to recognize the language spoken by the frozen image and its response to the narrative and society generating it. As Tagg so thoroughly
Lynching photography perverts photographic portraiture, transposing the familial portrait with the community of persecutors and replacing the criminalized subject with the grisly corpse of the condemned. Lynching photography sought to produce a story of righteous communal violence meted out to rogues, villains, and monsters. Referring to an unattributed photograph documenting the 1877 lynching of Francisco Arias and José Chamales, and the attendant and grinning crowd, Ken Gonzales-Day suggests that if the photograph “documents anything, it documents the presence of the photographer and the spectacle of the camera itself” (97), a simple and yet profound insight that uncovers the social apparatus and ideology motivating the frozen violation and the economy of affects and desires that culminate in the camera’s eye. Gonzales-Day’s insight draws into distinction how photography displaces the captured spectacle from its historical locus in time and place while still providing the intractable certainty of the event’s occurrence at a specific time and in a specific place.

As Gonzales-Day suggests, “such images were not only testaments to the modern marvels of photography, but given photography’s propensity to multiply, they were also destined to become sought-after commodities that would be bought and sold” (98). In a real sense lynching photography represents, as Hanna Arendt might suggest, “the banality of evil” in miniature, a memento mori attesting to how radically dehumanization can be monetized and atrocity fall under a system of commodification. Each lynching photograph portrays the one critical point, “that heinous crimes lead to heinous ends” (Gonzales-Day 103). The warning that lynching photography brandishes before its viewer radiates with Barthes’ punctum, the puncture or wound that destabilizes the
viewer’s interpretation. Barthes’ punctum is helpful to understanding photography’s emotional resonance, but his concept is nonetheless problematized by its self-referentiality and the fundamental excision of the subject’s history.

Shawn Michelle Smith advocates a shift away from Barthes’ solipsistic view, and instead returns the viewer’s puncture to the “undeniable referentiality of the photograph” and the “uncanny presence of its subject” (27). Smith’s point is that the uncanny remembrance that Barthes stages through the punctum cannot satisfy the historical conditions rehearsed in the photograph nor the contingencies of contemporaneity that reiterate through time. As Amy Louise Wood suggests in her discussion of the 1893 lynching of Henry Smith in Paris, Texas, one cannot extricate lynching atrocity from the Christian communities where it was enacted and lynching photographs were “not simply secular mementos of a public spectacle but an iconography celebrating what were considered divinely sanctioned acts” (74). Lynching photographs coordinate two contradictory cultural narratives. One communicates the perseverance of white power and its capacity to know itself through the violent abrogation of the non-white while the other attests to the unimaginable stakes and sacrifices made to fulfill the story of African American resistance and cultural transformation.

Photographs of celebratory crowds and the torture documented in photographs like “Applying the Soldering-Irons to the Negro” (James 65) in which a white mob tortures Smith atop a scaffold painted with the word justice across its base, as the crowds look on, demonstrate the communal alignment expressed through the photograph. As such, lynching photographs “served to normalize and make socially acceptable, even aesthetically acceptable, the utter brutality of lynching” (Wood 75). Lynching photography and its uses in postcards and other visual mementos promoted the lynching’s imagistic transferability, ensuring that lynching “was visually remembered
and repeatedly witnessed, that it was perpetually alive or in force” (Wood 76). Lynching photography, as Wood suggests, “redramatized the violence, allowing the victim to be tortured and killed once again in the viewer’s memory” (103).

Leon F. Litwack writes that “[t]he use of the camera to memorialize lynchings testified to their openness and to the self-righteousness that animated the participants” (10-11). Clearly this is the case in the Smith photo as it is the same aura of cultural power that permeates the 1912 postcard commemorating a lynching in Andalusia, Alabama. This particular image of an unidentified lynching victim was sent to the New York-based Unitarian pastor Rev. John H. Holmes as a means to sanction anti-lynching activities and articles in the press.\footnote{157} Lynching photography’s utility is found in its capacity to speak and perhaps for those less supported than the Rev. Holmes to silence.\footnote{158}


\footnote{158} In this manuscript’s original draft, I used several lynching photographs to forward my discussion of lynching iconography. Originally, I placed within the text a photograph of Henry Smith, who was lynched in Paris, Texas in 1893. The photograph comes from P.L. James’ \textit{The Facts in the Case of the Horrible Murder of Little Myrtle Vance and Its Fearful Expiation at Paris, Texas, February 1st 1893, with Photographic Illustrations}. James’ book documents Smith’s brutal lynching and through photography historically configures racial violence’s social eminence and uses photographs to generate the white community’s participatory nexus. The second photograph features an unidentified man sprawled before a white mob in Andalusia, Alabama in 1912. The second photograph, as I discuss, was featured on a postcard and reprinted in \textit{The Crisis}. The third photograph, also from 1912 and excerpted from \textit{The Crisis}, is of an unidentified lynched man situated in an unknown location. I used the images to demonstrate how the African American press appropriated white racial violence’s tactics to provoke political action and communicate the exigencies of resistance. Ultimately, I questioned to what degree my own use of these images perpetuated the very base spectatorial gaze that I condemn. I have removed these images from this chapter and I do so acknowledging the image’s perversity and its power to disempower. I recognize too the inherent value of Ken Gonzales-Day’s project and how removing the image of victims frozen in lynching photographs reclaims them from the brutal and spectatorial gaze that historically and even now locks them into these final moments of abjection. Gonzales-Day’s work to reclaim the subject from this double violation restores victim’s dignity by ceasing the subject’s unending and fixed destruction. Again, acknowledging the critical value in Gonzales-Day’s work, I have displayed and then removed these images. I do not do so lightly because these images demonstrate the value in the photograph’s materiality less as artifact than as evidence of crimes we must continue to acknowledge and sanction in our history. That being said, I refer the reader to other projects like that of James Allen’s \textit{Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America}, Amy Louise Wood’s \textit{Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1890-1940}, and Ken Gonzales-Day’s \textit{Lynching in the West: 1850-1935}, works that dedicatedly treat the social history and representational crisis we find in lynching photography.
Photography captured lynching’s celebratory aura and the “carnival-like atmosphere and the expectant mood of the crowd” (Litwack 11). The myth of lynching in the turn-of-the-century, and even today, is that it was primarily carried out by the underclass and social rabble, but this is far from the case. White communities rationalized lynching as a means to met out justice to African Americans for often imaginary crimes against whites. It was especially the case that white mobs accused African American men of sexually victimizing white women. These rationales belie the fact that lynching often lacked discernible reasons beyond its use as a cruel method of socioeconomic and political control. Lynching atrocities were regularly carried out by whites in order to manage white racial dominance in the south and, as Litwack suggests, lynching perversely satisfied “white emotional and recreational starvation” (26). As lynching progressed, particularly in the late nineteenth-century, “[f]or some, ‘nigger killing’ had simply become a sport, like any other amusement or diversion” (26).

Other images forego the white spectators and like the unidentified victim in a 1912 postcard from *The Crisis*, the victim’s torn shirt and wounds attest not to lynching’s orderly civic procession, but to lynching’s stark brutality.159 Amelia Jones’ arguments pertaining to the subjectivity of the viewer are particularly important. Citing Joan Copjec, Jones suggests that “the scopic drive immerses us in the image and as the image” (370), a turn suggesting that the scopophilic gaze, and the arousal it produces, breaks down the boundaries between the self and the object, a point particularly salient when considering the strange intersubjectivity that seems to arise in lynching narratives and photography. The image of the unidentified lynching victim implicates the viewer as a presence engaged in the atrocity. For those that might enjoy trade in lynching postcards

and other imagistic mementos, the arousal is similar to the narrative dismemberment and racial transposition articulated in the Associated Press article that graphically detailed the lynching of Sam Hose.

Hose’s lynching, much like the lynching of the Italians, deploys a vivid if not depraved realism and it does so through its use of image. While the examples I discuss related to the Hose lynching focus on narrative, the Italian lynching uses a significant number of drawings. The illustration of Politz, lifeless and grinning with satisfaction, communicates the reader’s expectant pleasure at Politz’s death and just as the article pornographically documents the lynching, so too does Politz’s grin implicate the reader as a privileged witness whose presence helps generate communal solidarity and the pleasures of racial power. Newspaper illustration, like photography or video today, is an example of one medium’s textual integration with another. This merging of forms can augment the scope and rhetorical sweep of the text. The political cartoon, unlike the newspaper illustration, enjoys a degree of autonomy from the text in which it is embedded. Cartoons can expand and embellish an article, but typically their rhetoric is self-contained such that the cartoon exhibits independence over its own narrative. Much like lynching photography, the political cartoon can be read within a larger article or apart from it and still retain its rhetorical argument.

U.S. cartooning history is replete with racist depictions of African Americans. Images depicting black people as ignorant sambos or wanton jezebels and cartoons featuring black men coveting a watermelon or black kids as grinning tar-babies populated turn-of-the-century magazines and advertising, a visual rhetoric that promoted white economic mobility and consumerism through the mockery, infantilization, and disempowerment of black people. Over time, and as Tim Jackson suggests, cartoons borrowed “from the already-popular image of the blackface minstrel” and this
“grotesque, hopelessly buffoonish misrepresentation of people of African descent was over time further stylized until it lost all remnants of individuality and humanity” (4).

Such imagistic degradations traverse the rhetorical distance separating bigoted caricature from racial atrocity and just as lynching photography and postcard mementos perpetuated the spectacle and commercialization of racial violence so too did illustrations and cartoons advance pro-lynching agendas. But the political cartoons that ran in African American papers like *The Crisis* and *The Afro-American* stand as powerful rejoinders that staged critical arguments against lynching and communicated the exigent need for political action and resistance to racial violence.

Still, as Kelvin Santiago-Valles writes, the uses of the ignorant sambo and mammy caricatures found ready application in cartoons legitimizing U.S. expansionism resulting from the Spanish American War. Santiago-Valles discusses the maintenance and projection of black caricature onto Pacific Islander and Caribbean cultures as evidence of the technologies of hegemony that conveyed a unified U.S. culture in the years following the American Civil War, in effect coordinating U.S. publics through the rhetorical Africanization of the Caribbean and Pacific Islander, subjects whose imaginary re-enslavement provided white America with cause for national solidarity. As Santiago-Valles notes, “[r]egardless of whether its focus was the United States or the new overseas colonies and neo-colonies, this pictorial imaginary of romantic racism was very much a part of the spectacle-as-observation generalized on a mass scale during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries” (36).

In the face of these culturally ingrained rhetorics, many African American cartoonists pushed back against white caricatures of black people. Of Henry Jackson Lewis, arguably the first African American political cartoonist, Garland Martin Taylor writes that “[h]is work recalls an age when images of blacks by blacks served blacks in
strategies of resistance and uplift” (198). Lewis’ work at The Freeman, “the only black-owned illustrated newspaper,” forwarded “the sole site of resistance to the American visual war on the image of its black citizens—the plethora of abject caricatures of African Americans printed, published, and widely disseminated by publishers like Currier and Ives, Harper’s Weekly, Frank Leslie’s Illustrated, Judge, Puck, Life, and others” (200). Other prominent African American cartoonists like Jay Jackson, working at the Chicago Defender, used the cartoon to push against stereotypes and as Amy M. Mooney suggests, Jackson’s work “not only provided an opportunity for introspective self-evaluation, he also reinforced the understanding that the scrutiny of others contributed to the collective construct of the New Negro” (115).

In discussing the works of Romare Bearden, who drew for The Crisis in the 1930’s, Amy Helen Kirschke, suggests that “Bearden’s cartoons ‘mainstreamed’ race and racial issues, connecting them to questions of international affairs, war and peace, and domestic politics—a connection that had been absent since the era of the Civil War and Reconstruction” (108). Even in Bearden’s Crisis drawings his modernist aesthetic and pull to abstraction already circulates in the social realism of his work. National periodicals like Harper’s and Puck often deployed racist caricatures of African Americans, but these journals also sometimes ran cartoons that challenged racial violence.

In Harper’s “Halt!” (1903) by W.A. Rogers, southern lynching is pointedly depicted as the devil’s work. The figure, armed with torch, knife, and noose, projects racial violence and lynch law as an antithesis to Christian morality and more to the point

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lynching manifests a mythological diabolism rampant upon the earth. Lynching transforms the figure into an abomination, his body morphing from man to monster, hoofed and horned and winged. The fact that the character is also masked suggests that the kind of virulent racial bigotry that promotes lynching is the materialization of spiritually malevolent forces occupying the klansmen and other soldiers of white supremacy. The drawing suggests that U.S. society’s central racial conflicts have been transferred from enslavement to lynching as the crucible of its time. Interestingly, the devil’s wings appear ephemeral, like wisps of smoke and shadow, and the satanic charge met with bayonet is itself in transition. It is unclear if this inchoate evil is entering the world or fading from it, outcomes that either way call upon legal enforcement and intervention.

The stark image in Judge’s “Their Christmas Tree” (1922) reminds Judge’s holiday readers that in vast swaths of the United States racial violence perpetually supersedes the spirit of Christian charity and goodwill towards men. The klansmen, who shake their fists and stare, form a white sea, their pointed hoods like the fins of sharks circling their victim, and the white of their mass itself is of a white-hot intensity like that of the cross they hold above them. The heavily shadowed hanged man and tree strike a sharp contrast and seem fading into another darker realm, a respite in death where the earthly terrors and mob’s rage can no longer harm them. The untitled illustration from the February 23rd, 1923 edition of the Afro-American, again depicts a satanic monster strangling a Columbia-figure, whose dress is inscribed with the words “American Civilization.”162 While the brute menaces her, a klansman eggs on this primal

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161 The bayonets blocking the lyncher’s charge represent recent local police actions to disband lynch mobs in Evansville, Indiana and Danville, Illinois.
embodiment of race hatred, commanding the devil to “[t]ear her to pieces!” The cartoon articulates racial violence’s critical threat to democratic governance and the promise of liberty so essential to U.S. culture. These illustrations attest to the cartoon’s potency as a literary form capable of redeploying lynching’s visualization as a means to affect popular sentiment and promote social action against racial violence and injustice.

Figure 14

Figure 15
Other works like John Henry Adams’ “The National Pastime” and Albert A. Smith’s “The Reason” present stark rhetorical arguments as to the grave cost of lynching and its affect on African American lives. Adams’ “National Pastime” spreads the image of a woman bent over a table in grief. She grips a newspaper in one hand and the headlines “American People Love Justice and Fair Play” and “Negro Lynched—Brute Struck White Man—Made Confession” taunt her as she gazes broken hearted at the dignified portrait of her dead husband. The paper also states that the “Mob was Quiet and Orderly,” yet another inversion of the reality that the grieving widow must take in. It may be that the newspaper is the most striking feature of Adams’ cartoon because its rhetoric overlays a false perceptual reality in which orderly men carry out a just execution that rather than being defined as a criminal act is in fact contextualized as a means to honor and make real core American values like fairness and justice. Deliberately, the news attempts to unmake the incident and locks both victims in a

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traumatic recursion, a frozen moment from which, much like the photograph, there is no escape.

Of particular significance is Adam’s note in the lower right hand corner in which he declares that out of all lynchings in the U.S. south, upwards of seventy-five percent have not been carried out in response to claims of sexual violence, a counterpoint to the frequent rationales for lynching barbarities, and as I will discuss, one of the triggering points for the 1899 Wilmington Insurrection. The reality Adams recognizes, as does the mourning widow, is that the unnamed victim, who stares back at her from the photograph on her desk may well be captured again in another photograph, this one of him tortured and brutalized and shared among the eager crowd set to destroy him.

Smith’s “The Reason” takes aim at the Great Migration, emphasizing that African American flight from the south and its agricultural economy to northern industrial centers is provoked by the always persistent threat of a brutal death at the hands of “persons unknown.” The African American figure in the foreground, fleeing with luggage in hand, turns with a look of revulsion and a fear mixed with outrage at the
figure brutally murdered behind him. The hanged man, whose features are distorted out of recognizability presents a defaced mirror-image of the man in flight. Smith’s cartoon argues that for African Americans to remain in the south is to risk a torture and death that could rise seemingly out of nowhere. Just as Adams’ image boldly declares lynching “The National Pastime” so too does Smith’s white lyncher unveil his work before the invisible crowds that we might imagine are stirring from the white space that he gazes into.

Figure 18

Lynching provided a form of spectacle and entertainment, and to reiterate Litwack’s point, lynchings made for “carnivalesque” affairs. Even the black-jacketed lyncher in Smith’s cartoon seems to call upon his audience to step-right-up, as what could be the spirit of the hanged man, now clad in white, is spectrally swept up among clouds rushing to the north. Smith’s illustration, like the works of the other cartoonists I discuss here, appropriate lynching narratives and photography, and revolving between
fantasy and realism, effectively re-image lynching as a means to coordinate a visualizable resistance to atrocity. It is the visual framing of lynching’s stark historical actualities that writer’s like Charles Chesnutt and James Weldon Johnson deploy to harness the (dis)integrative scene, aestheticize it, and apply the image as a counter-tactic against racial atrocity.

(Dis)integration: Chesnutt, Johnson, and the Image as Counter-Tactic

The only coup in U.S. history to successfully oust an elected American government occurred in Wilmington, North Carolina on November 10th, 1899. Viewing Wilmington’s racial fusion government as an existential threat to southern life after redemption, pro-Democrat white supremacist forces plotted an overthrow that remapped Wilmington’s political architecture and resulted in the deaths of sixty or more people. The “White Man’s Declaration of Independence,” read at the Wilmington courthouse on November 9th by political elite and former U.S. representative Alfred Waddell, called for immediate action to dismantle the African American handhold in local government, a situation Waddell viewed as a fundamentally unnatural state of affairs. According to Waddell, black political governance and the white “subjection to an inferior race” signaled a social regression that disrupted white racial hegemony by preventing “the


white community” (“Defamer Must Go” 1) from holding the most economically productive social positions. The Wilmington Insurrection terrorized the city’s African American population as well as its white integrationists and forced hundreds to flee the city amid multiple lynchings, the razing of African American businesses, and the ousting of political leadership that included Wilmington’s mayor Silas P. Wright.

The provocation cited by the highly coordinated Wilmington insurrectionists is an August 18th, 1898 editorial written by Alexander Manly, the owner and editor of the Wilmington-based African American newspaper *The Daily Record*. Manly’s article responded to the anti-black sentiment increasingly propagated in the white press and its inducements that whites remain vigilant of the threat posed by black men, ever plotting to sexually prey upon white women. The rhetoric of the black brute biologized black criminality and called upon lynch law to expiate often imaginary crimes. Manly’s rebuttal suggested instead that more commonly it was white women who sought “clandestine meetings with black men” and “white men with colored women,” a direct response to the reprinting of Rebecca Latimer Felton’s infamous 1897 speech to the Georgia State Agricultural Society in which she called on white southern fathers and sons to stop the black menace and “lynch a thousand a week if it becomes necessary.” As is the case in the Wilmington Insurrection, the press’ deliberate bestialization and criminalization of black men and its claims that socioeconomic empowerment emboldened black men to rape and murder white women provided the rationale southern whites used to aggressively dismantle racially integrated governments after Reconstruction.

This widespread rhetorical pattern weaponized the threat of sexual violence and motivated the spirit of southern honor that so often valorized lynching within white southern communities. In the case of Sam Hose, which I discussed earlier, Louis P. Le
Vin’s investigation found zero evidence of either premeditated murder or the sexual assault of Mrs. Cranford, and, yet, rape remained the primary legitimization for the Hoseatrocity. As is becoming clear, in cultures where crisis manifests a means of social discipline, threat supersedes reality, a point attested to in the NAACP’s 1919 findings, which reported that roughly sixteen percent of all U.S. lynchings between 1889 to 1918 were attributed to revenge for sexual assault.166

At the center of the rhetorical fictions of rampant black on white sexual assault is the fear of miscegenation. The politics of miscegenation were crucial to social formation at the turn-of-the-century and it is miscegenation that undergirds the Plessy v. Ferguson decision of 1896 and the blood quantum laws that followed. Separate but equal doctrines managed the hierarchies of racial power and it is the “much dreaded ‘miscegenation,’ so freely condoned by a former generation of white people when it was the result of unbridled license, and so loudly condemned by the present generation” (Chesnutt, “An Inside View” 59) that courses throughout Charles Chesnutt’s Marrow of Tradition (1901).167 The cultural fiction of the black male as a criminal beset on violating white women and thereby replacing white men is the absurd conjecture that Manly exposes in his article, a recapitulation of the findings Ida Wells-Barnett discusses throughout Southern Horrors.168 The irrational threat of black sexual wantonness and depravity masks a more fundamental racial anxiety and that is the problem of consensual affection and love between blacks and whites, a dynamic that threatens to deprive white society of

167 Originally published January 10, 1889. In the same volume also see “What is a White Man?” Originally published in the Independent, 30 May 1889, in “What is a White Man?” Chesnutt again attacks the miscegenation laws and intricate methodologies by which to define blackness and whiteness. Chesnutt views miscegenation laws as “they make mixed blood a prima-facie proof of illegitimacy” (72).
the sacrificial victims it appears to necessitate in order to maintain racial dominance in the south.

Chesnutt’s Marrow of Tradition loosely fictionalizes the Wilmington Insurrection and the novel climaxes with Dr. William Miller’s drive through the white terror campaign that convulses the Town of Wellington. Drawing from Kenneth Warren’s insights into the promises and problematics of realism’s democratizing aesthetic, my analysis aligns with that of John Sampson, who argues that Chesnutt’s clear delineation of racial violence realizes the fundamental democratic crisis in Wellington and the Jim Crow South more generally. “For Chesnutt, confronting a race riot in a politically-expedient way meant blunting the free-floating elements of high realism—its style and its meaning—by directly representing an aesthetico-political act” (Sampson 195).\(^{169}\) Eric J. Sundquist’s trenchant analysis of Marrow further demonstrates the cultural intricacies through which Chesnutt navigates the doubling instabilities of gender and race, and “the world of the folk and its survivals of slave culture” (449), a feature most evident in the cakewalk’s antagonisms.\(^{170}\) Sundquist’s assessment, to which I readily accede, is that

\(^{169}\) Also see Wegener, Frederick. “Charles W. Chesnutt and the Anti-Imperialist Matrix of African-American Writing, 1898-1905.” Criticism, Vol. 41, No. 4 (Fall 1999), pp. 465-493. Frederick Wegener connects General Belmont and his filibustering in Nicaragua to the modes of control and usurpation he plots for Wellington at the outset of the Spanish-American War (1898). As Wegener makes clear, “Chesnutt conveys an unusually acute intuition of the essential and ominous kinship that linked domestic campaigns of racial terror and repression with the nation’s swiftly multiplying expeditions overseas” (477-78). Ianovici, Gerald. “‘A Living Death’: Gothic Signification and the Nadir in ‘The Marrow of Tradition.’” MELUS, Vol. 27, No. 4, Varieties of the Ethnic Experience (Winter, 2002), pp. 33-58. Gerald Ianovici’s work discusses Marrow’s use of gothic tropes, highlighting slavery’s spectrality within postbellum southern society. Ianovici points out that nowhere is this sense of repression and return, in many ways the hallmarks of the gothic aesthetic, more apparent than in the miscenegenation drama and Delamere’s blackface minstrelsy at the novel’s center. For a compelling analysis of the role southern convict lease-labor systems play in Marrow see Gorman, Gene I. “‘Awakening a Dormant Appetite’: Captain McBane, Convict Labor, and Charles Chesnutt’s ‘The Marrow of Tradition.’” The Southern Literary Journal, Vol. 44, No. 2 (Spring 2012), pp. 1-18.

Chesnutt’s *Marrow*, while variably termed propagandist and, though appreciated for its artistry, described in a 1901 review by William Dean Howells as “bitter,” demonstrates an aestheticization of historical fact that makes it “the leading literary assessment of that crisis during the turn-of-the-century decades, touching as it does every important social, political, and personal aspect of the problem of segregation and color prejudice” (Sundquist 275). ^171

Miller’s journey stages a progressive chronicle and, like the pivotal lynching scene in James Weldon Johnson’s *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912), applies realism’s documentarian sequentiality to reveal the devastations wrought by the white mob. Chesnutt’s realist vision captures the pageant of racial violence, arranges it, and produces a panorama of social disorder: white brigands assaulting at will, buildings ablaze, and a carousel of murdered men, women, and children. Chesnutt and Johnson alike reconnoiter historical facts through the journalistic aesthetic, capturing horrifying realities in scenes wherein the disintegration of the once prosperous town of Wellington and Johnson’s unnamed lynching victim materialize the reader within a community of resistance.

Chesnutt focuses on racial violence’s ubiquitous potentiality and he does so by staging lynching’s imagistic distribution. Throughout Miller’s trek “the ominous sound of firearms” (Chesnutt 204) puncture the night just as they break upon black bodies and as Miller drives forth he encounters a pageant of spectacular violence. First there is “the dead body of a negro, lying huddled up in the collapse which marks sudden death” (Chesnutt 202). ^172 Then he “came upon the body of a woman lying upon the sidewalk”

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causing him to reflect that the “‘war’ had reached the women and children” (Chesnutt 208). Chesnutt’s terming of the Wellington Massacre a war indexes lynching as a mode of racial cleansing diffuse throughout the U.S. south that perpetuates the renewal of a civil war that truly never ended.

Throughout the city, murdered African Americans are strategically positioned, reiteratively, at proverbial crossroads. Within these temporal stations trauma produces atrocity’s ontological aporia and, as Henry Louis Gates Jr. suggests, at such discursive disjunctions, “there is no access, or contact, with truth or meaning” (45) and it is this very irreconcilability between the known world and the world that is that prompts Miller further into a night of surreality. “At the next corner lay the body of another man, with the red blood oozing from a ghastly wound in the forehead. The negroes seemed to have been killed, as the band plays in circus parades, at the street intersections, where the example would be most effective” (202). Each intersection demarcates a crossroad and each crossroad signifies a disorienting unreality where the sacred and profane merge in the figures of lynched men, passages that Miller and the reader alike must traverse in order to encounter and witness the violence that they are meant to stand against.

Wellington, like its real-world referent, Wilmington, is a coordinated atrocity. Major Carteret and Lee Ellis’ staunchly white supremacist Morning Chronicle uses miscegenation and declining democratic power in the U.S. south as political expedients and justification enough for lynching’s extralegal practice.173 The article that so incenses

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173 The speculative rhetoric espoused by Wellington’s white nationalist contingent evokes social Darwinist prescriptions for an ideal social order. Among his co-conspirators, Major Carteret argues, “‘[i]f we are to tolerate this race of weaklings among us, until they are eliminated by the stress of competition, it must be upon terms which we lay down’” (63). That African Americans might be “eliminated” by the “stress of competition” exhibits the outcomes fantasized by thinkers like Francis Galton and Herbert Spencer and discloses how whites readily applied evolutionary determinism and eugenics to the logics of
the editors of Wellington’s *Morning Chronicle* draws from Manly’s text, both of which argue, as Chesnutt writes, that many lynchings were not for crimes at all, but for voluntary acts which might naturally be expected to follow from the miscegenation laws by which it was sought, in all the Southern States, to destroy liberty of contract, and, for the purpose of maintaining a fanciful purity of race, to make crimes of marriages to which neither nature nor religion nor the laws of other states interposed any insurmountable barrier (62-63).¹⁷⁴

Carteret and Ellis’ response churns desires to punish African American transgression and directly excites localized violence. Chesnutt emphasizes the ways that startling headlines and graphic details arouse anti-black sentiment and his reflection that “[a]ll over the United States the Associated Press had flashed the report of another

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¹⁷⁴ The Chronicle’s counter incorporates the murder of Mrs. Polly Ochiltree and characterizes her death “as an atrocious assault upon a defenseless old lady, whose age and sex would have protected her from harm at the hands of any one but a brute in the lowest human form” (132). While Mrs. Ochiltree is in fact murdered by her white nephew, Tom Delamere, in blackface it is Sandy Campbell, the African American assistant to the elder Delamere, who ultimately takes the rap. But it is Lee Ellis’ editorial that “fix[es] the prisoner’s guilt,” (154) underscoring the press’ significance in coordinating communal attitudes and trying black people in the court of public opinion. Racism reproduces itself through social agreement, but media and the press is crucial to its rhetorical distribution. White supremacist rhetoric stoked public fears of black men by portraying them as violent sexual predators intent on violating white women, dishonoring white men, and forever destroying that most fundamental of social units, the family. Underlying much of this hysteria lay the anxiety that miscegenation would lead to a fundamental dismantling of white power structures in the south. If shared civil governance was possible and economic equality on the horizon, then open interracial love and partnership likely lay waiting to strike. These fears provided scapegoats for the economics motivating white terror campaigns in the south. If black people could be politically and economically disenfranchised, then southern agricultural interests could also more easily manipulate and control African American labor and largely manage the wealth it produced. Chesnutt’s rendering of the interracial marriage between Merkell and Julia as taboo, and so secret,
dastardly outrage by a burly black brute...and of the impending lynching with its prospective horrors” (196) asserts that the press extends the scope of racial violence, regionalizing and then nationalizing white reactivity to the supposed villain in its midst.\(^\text{175}\) Ian Finseth’s scholarship emphasizes the careful attention Chesnutt pays to dialect and texts in order to draw together the discursive valences coordinating racial discourse. “If a characteristic concern of the era’s realist and naturalist writers was to apprehend the great impersonal forces that shape human existence,” writes Finseth, then Chesnutt sought “to understand his society’s use of words, to get beneath the surface of racial signs, to expose the role of language in perpetuating oppression, and to demystify the mechanisms of society by which language is disseminated and naturalized” (3).

Finseth’s analysis is particularly useful in understanding Chesnutt’s clear articulation of the textual and rhetorical techniques, as in Chesnutt’s critique of pro-lynching newspapers, applied to the end of racial oppression and atrocity. Lynching integrates the white community because it manifests the rhetoric of white supremacy by materializing belief through the visual spectacle of ritualized murder. Chesnutt appropriates these discursive practices, using the journalistic techniques that arouse and excite white readers by redeploying graphic realist imagery as a means of resistance.

Hearing the “hurrying footsteps on the silence of the night” (134), James Weldon Johnson’s anonymous narrator in Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man cautiously

\(^{175}\) Certainly, the expression of racism varied widely between the north and south in the postbellum U.S., but whether racial segregation manifested in de jure or de facto forms belies the consistency through which northern and southern racism alike were a part of individual and group consciousness, often apprehended by whites as the natural circumstances governing race relations. While focusing on the U.S. south, Chesnutt is careful to make clear that racial antagonism is part of a national climate and not a condition relegated to the south alone.
approaches the scene. Among the bustling congregants he observes that “[t]here was gathered there a crowd of men, all white, and others were steadily arriving, seemingly from all the surrounding country” (Johnson 135). The group’s highly coordinated and “orderly manner” (Johnson 135) suggests they are rehearsed in their practice. The people thronging Johnson’s country road have come to share in a public execution. These spectators, like the thousands eager to witness the torture and murder of Sam Hose or Henry Smith, are not necessarily rough men, but families celebrating a communal ritual and entertainment. Soon enough “they brought him in,” and the sight of the condemned man rouses the crowd to ejaculations of the “‘rebel yell’” with calls to “‘Burn him!’” (Johnson 136). These declarations “ran like an electric current” and a procession of hands bearing “fuel…oil, the torch” (Johnson 136) douse the captive and burn him alive.

While my treatment of Johnson’s work here is principally concerned with the ways Johnson expands the reader’s perception of racial atrocity by aestheticizing the moment of lynching and witness, I wish to provide some overview of contemporary Johnson scholarship, particularly in so far as it addresses the intersections of genre and the looming questions of racial identity so central to the text. Kathleen Pfeiffer, considering the ways Johnson conflates genres, suggests that The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man “reveals the instability of generic distinctions in much the same way that the Ex-Colored Man’s passing reveals the instability of racial distinctions” (“Individualism, Success” 403). Heather Andrade’s critique of Johnson’s genre inversion argues further that “[t]he black protagonist’s struggle between ‘self-interest’ and ‘self-sacrifice’ is, narratologically, at the heart of the matter of race, ideology, manhood, and

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social progress” (260) and that it is “the public discourse framing black masculinity” that remains “rhetorically embedded in public acts of literary representation that offer spatial possibilities for the enhancement of black public life in general” (Andrade 260).

Striving and indeterminate, Johnson’s protagonist challenges realist configurations of racial identity, a point Thomas L. Morgan emphasizes when he argues that once realist “characters had been established in the public’s mind, they became a part of the formulaic structure through which realism’s mimetic efficacy was measured” (214). Of the many pitfalls facing turn-of-the-century African American writers was the hazard of a U.S. literary market more accepting of racial type than the complex figurations of non-white characters. Morgan’s assertion that “[a]n author’s depictions also had to comply with the established parameters used to represent African Americans” (214) indicates that for white audiences authorial deviations from established stereotypes and formula chanced the public’s invalidation of the very identities African American realists sought to represent. Johnson’s narrative project, an exercise in the tactics of dissimulation and the reimagining of American racial mythology conceals fiction with autobiography and blackness under cover of whiteness, its diegesis expressing the covert ontology of passing just as it demonstrates the lassitude inherent in managing the rigid racial demarcations defining white and black identity.

At the behest of NAACP leaders, Joel Spingarn and W.E.B. Du Bois, Johnson joined the NAACP as a field secretary in 1916. One of Johnson’s first major investigations, as Philip Dray discusses, was the Memphis lynching of Ell Persons in 1917.177 Johnson, who himself was almost lynched by a white mob in Florida in 1901, an

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event that haunted him, recollects the Persons lynching, a horrifying ordeal that aligns closely with the bizarre cult like violence that narrates the Hose murder.

I reassembled the picture in my mind: a lone Negro in the hands of his accusers, who for the time are no longer human; he is chained to a stake, wood is piled under and around him, and five thousand men and women, women with babies in their arms and women with babies in their wombs, look on with pitiless anticipation, with sadistic satisfaction while he is baptized with gasoline and set afire. The mob disperses, many of them complaining, ‘They burned him too fast.’ I tried to balance the sufferings of the miserable victim against the moral degradation of Memphis, and the truth flashed over me that in large measure the race question involves the saving of black America’s body and white America’s soul. (Johnson, *Along This Way* 482)

Appropriating the sequentiality common to press accounts, Johnson’s *Ex-Colored Man* stages its climatic lynching scene as documentarian encounter. The sequence chronicles southern barbarities and its pacing and detail evoke journalistic investigation in part because of the narrator’s invisibility as a black man passing for white. The victim’s namelessness foregrounds his erasure and signifies the interchangeability of victims and their narratives, lending the lynching itself a feeling of emblematization, a procedural torture and celebration repeated ad nauseam across the United States. Just as the crowd undergoes a “transformation [from] human beings into savage beasts,” (Johnson 136) making death a cause for celebration, their victim is riven mad. “[H]is eyes, bulging from their sockets, rolled from side to side, appealing in vain for help” as the spectators “yelled and cheered” (Johnson 136). When the pyre is finally extinguished and the unnamed victim left “a man only in form and stature” (Johnson 136), the
expiation of his blackness is complete and the white crowd has again repossessed the black body and fashioned it into a symbol of their community.\textsuperscript{178} The namelessness of the victim, murdered arbitrarily and outside the law, communicates the acute crisis facing Johnson’s narrator, who, like Johnson himself on a Florida evening in 1901, risks summary torture and execution.

In Chesnutt’s \textit{Marrow of Tradition}, when Sandy Campbell is charged with the murder of Polly Ochiltree, Chesnutt focuses on lynching’s material assemblage. “A T-rail from the railroad yard had been procured, and men were burying it in the square before the jail. Others were bringing chains, and a load of pine wood was piled in convenient proximity” (Chesnutt 156).\textsuperscript{179} Lynching’s implements, organized in front of the jail, demonstrate the methodical and labor intensive work that goes in to construct the atrocity, a visualizable materiality that quite literally supersedes the social authority of legal structures. Here too “[s]ome enterprising individual had begun the erection of seats from which, for a pecuniary consideration, the spectacle might be the more easily and comfortably viewed” (Chesnutt 156). Lynching, whether experienced vicariously through the press or witnessed as an actual lived event, orchestrates a spectacle and cultural ceremony that necessitates the viewer’s presence as a means to reify white power. Even

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\item[178] The immolation scene affects a doubled dehumanization, first of the black subject and then of the largely white crowd, who metamorphose from a romanticized people valuing “chivalry and bravery and justice” (138) into an animalistic menagerie. Johnson links the lynching spectacle, four paragraphs later, with novels and violent theatrical performances. He indicates that by applauding the theatrical “hero, who with his single sword slays everybody” (138) and pouring over “the bloody deeds of pirates and the fierce brutality of Vikings” (138) the public produces violent recreations deemed socially acceptable and designed to “gratify the old, underlying animal instincts and passions” (138). But it is precisely the “animal instincts and passions” that form the circuit connecting the lynching spectacle to popular amusements. Imagination and identitarian performance are central to Johnson’s cultural assessment and the ways that white cultural fantasies project the valences of white supremacy.
\item[179] Similarly, when describing Josh Green, who refuses to be cowed by white threats, Chesnutt portrays lynching through scenes of anatomical dissection. “They would applaud his courage while they stretched his neck, or carried off the fragments of his mangled body as souvenirs, in much the same way that savages preserve the scalps or eat the hearts of their enemies” (208). Chesnutt’s assertion associates white racial violence with civilizational retrogression, but more to the point it lists the anatomy of the body through dismemberment.
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in the gathering of lynching’s materials Chesnutt underscores lynching’s critical significance as a form of entertainment.

As the Wellington lynchers ready to storm the jail and execute Sandy Campbell, some of the men are overheard “discussing the question of which portions of the negro’s body they would prefer for souvenirs” (156). Whether the artifact is sections of the rope used to lynch Robert Lewis in Port Jervis, New York in 1892 or the tree leaves cut from the branches from which Antonio Bagnetto hung in New Orleans in 1891, or the body parts cut from Sam Hose in Newnan, Georgia in 1899, these macabre trophies fetishize racial violence. But just as lynching fetishes disclose the mythologies of white racial sovereignty, they also importantly provide material evidence of criminal atrocities. During the Wellington riot it is under the condition of shared criminal action that class barriers between the Wellington whites dissolve and their racial identification integrates them into a communal whole such that men of means work hand-in-hand with poor laborers and criminals. Their shared rhetoric is as eruptive as the gun shots tearing the air. “‘Kill the niggers!’ rang out now and then through the dusk, and far down the street and along the intersecting thoroughfares distant voices took up the ominous refrain,—‘Kill the niggers! Kill the damned niggers!’” (Chesnutt 210). 180 Where before lay class divisions, the rioters locate their integration and with each racial epithet they rhetorically disintegrate the black community while integrating that of the white.

Chesnutt does not demure when presenting images of racial violence and what Miller sees provides a biographical account of the atrocity. As Miller proceeds through

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180 Chesnutt emphasizes the massacre’s temporary erasure of class distinctions and its unification of the white population by detailing the class and ethnic mixture, which included “a clerk in a dry-goods store where Miller bought most of his family and hospital supplies” (203) and “a well-known Jewish merchant” (204) mixing company with “the virtuous citizen who…only a few weeks before finished a term in the penitentiary” (203). The wealthy and the poor are subsumed in a mob “drunk with whiskey or with license, [that] raged through the streets, beating, chasing, or killing any negro so unfortunate as to
Wellington’s streets, his “eyes fell upon a group beneath a lamp-post, at sight of which he turned pale with horror, and rushed forward with a terrible cry” (Chesnutt 209-210). The lynchers, swollen with a desire to destroy his blackness, do not look to lynch Miller the man, but Miller the black, the animal, the brute. To murder Miller is to destroy his blackness by incorporating it, elevating it as a sign of social control enabling their transient mastery over life and death. It is an uncanny moment, a familiarity long repressed and now come to light that anticipates Miller’s violation and emplacement in the emptiness beneath the lamppost, a photographable absence the men so desperately yearn to populate with him.

Within the crucified city “[a] dozen colored men lay dead in the streets…slain in cold blood because they had been bold enough to question the authority of those who had assailed them, or frightened enough to flee when they had been ordered to stand still” (Chesnutt 213). Wellington’s riot effectively redraws the prison-complex of the old south, retrenching the normativity of the obscene. When Miller arrives at the African American hospital where Josh Green and the force of black resisters have holed up, he finds the white mob setting fire to the building. “The flames, soon gaining a foothold, leaped upward, catching here and there at the exposed woodwork, and licking the walls hungrily with long tongues of flame” (Chesnutt 215). The revolutionists burn black institutions in the ways they do black people and the fire’s tongue takes on the dimensions of some satanic organ, reducing the life’s work of Wellington’s African American population to the char and ash that yet again blackens the mob’s white hands.

Exemplified in Josh Green’s heroic last stand is Chesnutt’s belief that “the negro will insist upon his rights, and will if needs be, die in the attempt to exercise them, and in fall into their hands” (210). The perception of a shared whiteness being the condition that maintains the mob’s ideological fidelity.
defense of them” (“An Inside View” 64). Similarly, discussing the value of African American service in World War I, Johnson declares that “America is the American Negro’s country” and its possession requires investment if the dire situation of “the lynching and burning alive of Negroes, without any effort on the part of authorities to punish the perpetrators of these crimes” (“Why Should a Negro Fight?” 633) is to be remedied. After the hospital is engulfed by flame and the men fling themselves into a “volley that laid them all low,” (Chesnutt 216-17) Jerry, Major Carteret’s obsequious servant, is murdered “in a roar of rage and a volley of shots from the mob” (Chesnutt 216). While Josh Green gets his man, and both he and McBane die by one another’s hand, a scene in which, as John Sampson suggests, the “[a]ntagonic racial violence, which pits Green against his mortal enemy in a battle to the death, is shown to be self-cancelling—a political and representational zero” (207), it is the hospital that Chesnutt leaves behind as a symbol of the lynched black body. This “promise of good things for the future of the city, lay smouldering in ruins, a melancholy witness to the fact that our boasted civilization is but a thin veneer, which cracks and scales off at the first impact of primal passions” (Chesnutt 217-218). Fully, the hospital’s destruction signifies the dismantling of Miller’s generational legacy and the attempt of the whites to cull African American liberation. For Chesnutt, African American progress is located in real material gains. Things of substance like schools and hospitals that give objective proof that African American people have achieved social equity and justice not as ideals, but as experiential permanencies.

It is telling that Chesnutt’s hospital is featured so prominently in the final vicious battle. Chesnutt does not want his reader to look away and what he stages, even in the hospital’s ruin, is the reader’s encounter with the waste and aftermath of a race war that refuses to abate. The devastation remains visible and just as lynching’s visuality
facilitates white integration, so too in Chesnutt’s hands does it communicate the necessity for resistance. The consciousness within the body may evacuate and the body lay destroyed, but the ruined body and the hospital’s smoking walls remain the testament to African American sacrifice, the visible realist memorials to the loses that seem to perpetually inaugurate the struggle for social freedom. Despite the intensities of racial oppression, Chesnutt poses that stories provide testimonials that resist death and resonate with actualizable futures.\textsuperscript{181} The reader must reconcile the violence of the image and their place in the story of the subjects that gaze back upon them.

*The Marrow of Tradition* is, as Chesnutt classed his work, among the “purpose novels,” social realist texts designed to “throw light upon the vexed moral and sociological problems” (“Chesnutt’s Own View” 169) of southern race relations.\textsuperscript{182} As Sundquist suggests, “Chesnutt intended his novel to be conciliatory” and to “contain an anguished cry of righteous protest moderated by the hopeful voice of compromise” (449). Holding fast to the idealism so typical of literary realism, Chesnutt asserts that “[t]he book is not a study in pessimism, for it is the writer’s belief that the forces of progress will in the end prevail, and that in time a remedy may be found for every social ill” (170), a sentiment underscored by the ambiguity of loss and salvation laid at Miller’s feet at novel’s close. Just as the perpetual passing of Johnson’s anonymous narrator

\textsuperscript{181} For some indication as to the authors’ ideas regarding African American authorship see Johnson, James Weldon. “Dilemma of the Negro Author.” *Writings.* New York: Library of America, 2004. Reprinted from *The American Mercury*, 1928. Playing off of Du Bois’ concept of double consciousness, Johnson argues that the African American author’s “audience is always both white America and black America,” (745) but Johnson also calls for the African American author to “fashion something that rises above race, and reaches out to the universal in truth and beauty” (752). Also see Chesnutt, Charles W. “Negro Authors.” *Essays and Speeches.* Eds. Joseph R. McElrath, Jr. et. al. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1999. Chesnutt echoes Johnson’s sentiment regarding arts power to evoke social change when he suggests that “I am as firmly convinced as I ever was that there will be no permanent solution of the race problem in the U.S. until we are all one people” (459).

\textsuperscript{182} Originally published in the *Cleveland World*, 20 October 1901. Also see Bufkin, Sydney. “Beyond ‘Bitter’: Chesnutt’s *The Marrow of Tradition, American Literary Realism*, Vol. 46, No. 3 (Spring 2014), pp. 230-250. Sydney Bufkin argues that a critical re-evaluation of the text’s early criticism provides a
resists narrative closure, so too does Chesnutt’s finale rely on the ambiguity of social futures. Miller, whose own child is killed in the riot, is compelled by his wife, Janet, to save the life of the white child, Dodie Carteret. Whether or not Miller can restore the young Carteret remains undetermined and, importantly, an unresolved outcome. It is the traumatic anti-resolution that opens the narrative to creative re-imaginings and, as of yet, unrealized strategies for social change.

The aesthetics of (dis)integration integrates the viewer within a shared affective community, and in the case of U.S. lynching, (dis)integration operates discursively across rhetorical domains and genres. Through the example of U.S. lynching it becomes clear how its rhetorical practices insinuate the violating logics of racial power into daily life. Overtly through lynching photography and often graphic press accounts and far more subtly through dime novel adventures and the kitsch too often shrugged off as the artifacts of Americana racial violence’s normativity is actively instantiated. Counter to these discursive modes of oppression are the aesthetics of resistance. The imagistic tactics used by cartoonists like John Henry Adams and Albert A. Smith apply documentarian realism to communicate the violence of white communal solidarity. Chesnutt’s and Johnson’s novels adopt the imagery of oppression as a means to aestheticize the disintegrative forces and solidify publics of resistance. Just as disintegrative aesthetics rally populations to scenes of the most negative and profane social experiences, we can see how these practices, particularly so when they resolve in ambiguity, can be appropriated to the ends of social justice. The lynching imagery used by Chesnutt and Johnson, much like Martí’s way of describing Bagnetto’s face as a “wound,” visualize the rhetoric of social oppression and public violence in such a way so

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means to better assess not only the novel’s reception, but how its reviewers and the publics they effected undercut Chesnutt’s project.
as to prevent the reader’s escape from it, revealing the incontestable truth of lynching as an American atrocity and the opportunities such traumas provide for subjective and societal re-narrativization.
Chapter 4

“Oh, come out here and see the fire, will you?”: U.S. Disaster Culture and Vandover and the Brute

Frank Norris’ *Vandover and the Brute*, written between 1894-95, but published posthumously in 1914, examines its eponymous protagonist’s degeneration in turn-of-the-century California. Vandover’s devolution has been central to scholarship on the novel, and rightly so, as the Darwinian logics that influence the ne’er-do-well aesthete’s derangement into a crazed alcoholic lycanthrope are hard to ignore. However, Vandover’s collapse does not occur in isolation. Everywhere the novel traffics in constellations of social and environmental calamities, laying down a mounting succession of crises that for Vandover amount to disaster as everyday life. *Vandover* coincides with the advent of yellow journalism and while Vandover’s ever increasing alcoholism and deteriorating mental health result from a lax morality and predatory social forces his degeneration corresponds dialectically as much to evolutionary determinism as it does to the ubiquitous and inescapable threats found in the news.

By way of Vandover’s example, I analyze how U.S. media portrayed disaster and relate journalistic practices to the cultural fatalism so central to American literary naturalism. Through detailed assessments of national reporting on the disasters informing *Vandover*, I critique how Norris treats disaster not as incidental to social experience, but as a fundamentally omnipresent condition animating turn-of-the-century U.S. society. I argue that *Vandover* is a case in point as to how these discursive practices move from public discourse to personal internalization and effectively inscribe a crisis epistemology within the individual. Taken far enough this disaster consciousness produces the misanthropes and public monstrosities that require containment and whose eventual
disintegration, like that of Vandover’s, reify modes of social control and mitigation that effectuate state legitimacy.

*Vandover* presents a site where the interpenetration of literary realism and journalism effectuate a vision of U.S. society overwhelmed by the very language used to coordinate its shared social experience, an example of how, as Karen Roggenkamp explains, “the imaginative and the journalistic drew upon each other in forming their respective stories” (21). In *Vandover* alone there is an earthquake, an urban fire, a shipwreck, the financial ruin of the protagonist, and a public health crisis. Through their consistent presence, this array of crises manifest a disaster concept unmoored from any one disaster type such that the threat implied by disaster settles into a kind of homogenous anxiety stalking social experience. In everything from conjectures about earthquakes to property fraud, disasters structure Norris’ text and over time become less objective environmental conditions than they are internalized forces spurring Vandover’s descent.

Even while Norris cynically traces out the problems of desire and moral agency in a time of heightened consumerism, I argue that just as Vandover’s descent provides a spectacle for the reader it is the sense of constant crisis that produces Vandover’s identity. Stage shows and rides that re-enacted disasters drew crowds to Coney Island in 1905 and the promise of smoking wrecks thrilled onlookers at the 1913 California State Fair. As Kevin Rozario writes, these recreational “occasion[s] for adventure, escapism,

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184 In Dialectic of Enlightenment, Horkheimer and Adorno, addressing social alienation and labor’s unceasing perpetuation within capitalism, write that “[e]ntertainment is the prolongation of work under late capitalism. It is sought by those who want to escape the mechanized labor process so that they can cope with it again. At the same time, however, mechanization has such power over leisure and its
and entertainment” (105) allow participants “an occasion for processing, intellectually and emotionally, the experience of living in a world of systemic ruin and renewal” (6). A similar outlet is afforded by journalism and literature. Under the sway of yellow journalism urban crime and tenement fires promoted social crises, aligning readers in the shared experience of national crisis.185

State responses to disaster legitimize state authority and coordinate popular sympathies within the national collectivity. Whether the crisis is a public health scare in San Francisco’s Chinatown or an earthquake leveling the city in 1906, disasters prompt state regulatory measures. Modernity and the modern state require a politics of securitization because modernity’s validity is contingent on state capacities to address social and environmental threats. The predatory disaster capitalism of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries that, as Naomi Klein writes, relies on “moments of collective trauma to engage in radical social and economic engineering” (9) has its roots in late nineteenth-century disaster culture where disasters increasingly synchronize the

thoughts and feelings of national publics and often prepare those publics to accept state authority. At the turn-of-the-century, a rapidly expanding national press sped news of crises from major cities to rural communities across the United States. Developing visual technologies like photography and film presented new ways to come face-to-face with environmental calamity and societal discord. These changes in media technologies, accompanied by the standardization of time zones, advancements in transportation, and improving communication systems improved consumer access to the news and stoked the demand for news-worthy diversions and entertainments.

This disaster culture, marked also by the wider dissemination of social Darwinist thought, saw tales of crisis increasingly define the American experience and provided the stage for late-realism’s naturalist turn. To varying degrees, U.S. literary naturalism incorporates crisis narratives as a means to critique American culture and democratic society’s legitimacy as it actively produces political and socioeconomic inequality. June Howard writes that in literary naturalism emancipatory actors are set in opposition to evolutionary deterministic logics and that these contrasting forces generate “the tension between determinism and reform” (117). For Howard, “reformism and sensationalism are more the rule than the exception in American naturalism” (37) and often within the genre these approaches follow a “documentary logic” that articulates naturalism’s realist conceits in a “plot of decline or fatality” (142). Naturalism’s documentarian style gleans much from disaster news.186

186 My samples, despite being limited to the three specific disasters that informed Norris’ Vandover, still evidence a consistent overlap of textual approaches across the national press that range from major U.S. newspapers like the San Francisco Call, the Chicago Tribune, and the Sacramento Daily Union to smaller regional papers published in less populous markets like South Dakota’s Yankton Press, the South Carolinian Charleston News, and the Kansas City Journal. In addition to the reporting from these six newspapers, I have reviewed disaster coverage in the Overland Monthly, published out of California, and the New York-based Harper’s Weekly, two periodicals of national significance that covered politics and culture in the period. This catchment assesses coverage of U.S. disasters in the days and weeks following their occurrence. Based on the reporting that I have collected here, disaster news relied on a multiplicity
Generally, disaster news stimulates reader engagement to the degree that it excites reader anxieties, eventually affecting a sense of fatalism that leaves individuals poorly equipped to discern the difference between actual and imagined perils. My argument is not that these approaches to narrativization steadfastly produce social discord because social and environmental crises do require representation and dissemination to the public. I argue instead that these tactics often have unintended consequences because they use a representational strategy in which narrative repetition increases the public’s exposure to negative stories, propagating anxieties that easily displace into other facets of daily life. This pattern of perpetual emotional arousal conditions fears and prompts the association of actual threats with other perceptually ill-defined dangers. When social and environmental crises do arise, a public already geared towards suspicion and fear are then more readily manipulated by social forces that amplify potential dangers. If, as Marita Sturken suggests, U.S. culture is definitionally coded to seek its legitimacy vis-à-vis the persistence of threat and an always present “sense of danger” (39) then it must produce systems that regulate the anxieties of its population. The media’s approach to disaster is one way this social alignment occurs. Under these conditions, disaster harries the individual such that, as is the case for Vandover, one’s immersion in intoxication and vice should not be all that unexpected.

Stories and images lacking accessible knowable objects are still real and when encountered conflate with the reader’s personal history. Crisis is then reproduced and simulated in subjective and communal dimensions. Simulated threat conditions individual response and social interaction. The news filters, formulates, and spreads

of intersecting narrative techniques that include illustrations, imagistic language, historical comparisons, first-person accounts, narrative proximity within the field of text, highlighted or bolded headwords and phrases, scientific reasoning and rationalization, sensational narratives, and rhetorical appeals to reader sentiment, religious faith, and national identity.
crises and in this sense an event can be both real and not real at the same time, cold and static yet undeniably alive, echoing an aftereffect in the incommensurable blend of numbness and hypersensitivity so characteristic of trauma. Even when such arousal spurs one to ignore bad news, the event maintains a residual presence. Despite the distance separating reader from event, the thing itself becomes proximal, intimate even, and the medium through which disaster narratives spread is but a means to enlarge a sense of general crisis.

*Vandover* represents crisis conditions as longstanding, culturally embedded, and of an increasing magnitude in turn-of-the-century America. Much of the novel’s scholarship focuses on evolutionary determinism, the cultural politics of social deviance, and the stress factors influencing Vandover’s descent into a dissolute life. I depart from these critical areas and consider instead how structural determinants and the constant reemergence of crises position Vandover, the supremely apathetic aesthete, to not so much devolve into a syphilitic lycanthrope, as to utterly disintegrate.187 In *Vandover*,

187 Criticism of Vandover’s perversion and reversion has been far ranging, but throughout the scholarly corpus social Darwinism takes center stage. The novel’s evolutionary logics suggest that individuals guided by reason sit at the highest of evolutionary states and imply that deviations from a highly rationalized ethics portends destruction. However, as Vandover essentially produces his abasement by virtue of his belief in a moral system codified by class expectations, his destruction reflects the perversity of what is taken as the normal and proper state of affairs. For further scholarship on morality and evolutionary determinism in *Vandover* see Pizer, Donald. “Evolutionary Ethical Dualism in Frank Norris’ *Vandover and the Brute* and McTeague.” *PMLA*, vol. 76, no. 5, 1961, pp. 552-560. Pizer, laying important contemporary groundwork on the novel, views the evolutionary ethical system, as an “ethical duality” (555) in which *Vandover* sanctions “the sensual” while requiring its subject to “resist the pressures of environment, since man has the unique capacity to control rather than be controlled by his environment” (557). Also see Astro, Richard. “Vandover and the Brute and The Beautiful and the Damned: A Search for Thematic and Stylistic Reinterpretations.” *Modern Fiction Studies*, vol. 14, no. 4, 1968, pp. 397-413. Bender, Bert. “Frank Norris on the Evolution and Repression of the Sexual Instinct.” *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, vol. 54, no. 1, 1999, pp. 73-103. Bender writes that Vandover’s degeneracy evidences a kind of “primitive sexuality” (86) that makes love and other higher evolutionary states inaccessible to him. Bender links Norris’ representation of animality as a characteristic of degeneracy to Norris’ belief, articulated in “Theory and Reality,” that human beings are essentially animals driven by desires and needs not always appropriate to the moral order. Regarding Norris’ evolutionist positions, Bender recognizes the likely influence that Joseph LeConte, one of Norris’ preferred professors at Berkeley, exercised on Norris’ understanding of human behavior and evolution. LeConte posits that humans evolve in a progressive ascension to a higher order of intelligence and functionality, but that degenerate behavior corresponds to evolutionary decline, particularly so as this
crises promote gossip and spectatorship, but when disaster dislodges from objective social dimensions to become personal and subjective its discipline over psychology becomes apparent. No matter how much he drinks, gambles, and carouses, Vandover can never remediate these crisis conditions, and it is these very habits through which he attempts to cope that progressively determine his abjection and debility.

Throughout Vandover, personal crises refract within the public sphere and public calamities resonate with individual significance. There is the ever-present threat of earthquake, which will level San Francisco in 1906. Urban fires explode in the sirens and burning haze settled over the city in a scene that echoes the Great Chicago Fire of 1873. The wreck of the Steamship Colima in 1895 off the coast of Mazatlán, Mexico parallels Vandover’s trials at sea. Vandover’s addiction, disease, and impoverishment further coordinate a socioeconomic disaster located in the Panic of 1893. These disasters relates to sexual conduct and the expression of love. Williams, Sherwood. “The Rise of a New Degeneration: Decadence and Atavism in Vandover and the Brute.” ELH, vol. 57, no. 3, 1990, pp. 709-736. Sherwood Williams’ work suggests that through the decadence, desire, and perversion articulated in Vandover, Norris “stages for us the fin de siècle production of sexual perversion” (710). Williams identifies Vandover’s decadence as indicating a disposition towards sexual perversity and writes that the syphilis crisis “biologizes more fundamental anxieties about the transmission of deviant sexuality itself” (721).

188 Like most financial crises, multiple interrelated transnational factors affected the Panic of 1893. In the United States the crisis was exacerbated by disruptions on several fronts. Falling agricultural prices, especially for wheat and cotton increased debt and insolvency in the agricultural sector. In response to this agrarian crisis, the 1890 Sherman Silver Purchase Act compelled the United States to buy large amounts of silver in hopes to increase monetary supplies and trigger an inflationary market that could benefit western farming and mining interests. This action artificially inflated the cost of silver within the bimetal standard and motivated investors to purchase the now deflated gold with the more readily available silver specie. High gold accumulation at prices below its actual value threatened the depletion of gold reserves, which undermined the ability of governmental and financial institutions to guarantee loans. Under these conditions businesses began to fail. The closing of the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad and the National Cordage Company, whose capital outlays outstretched their income, signaled a massive financial crisis. As these major businesses fell and economic sectors languished, panic struck the stock market, which triggered bank runs and mass withdrawals that caused banks to demand repayment on existing loans. Foreign investors too sold off their U.S. stocks and valuable capital subsequently vacated the United States. It was like the rug had been pulled out of the formerly robust U.S. economy. Unemployment reached double digits, urban and rural poverty soared, and young white working-class men like Vandover increasingly realized that their previously economically stable positions were tenuous at best. For more on Vandover’s crisis economics see Mulligan, Roark. “A Case of Domestic Violence” Norris’ Vandover as a Subprime Victim.” American Literary Realism, 1870-1910, vol. 48, no. 1, 2015, pp. 58-75. Recent scholarship by Roark Mulligan considers how, following the Panic of 1893, inflation and declining property values affected housing development in San Francisco. Mulligan interprets

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possess elemental qualities: earth, fire, water, and wind respectively, and taken together they present disaster as a latent ecological threat poised to strike at any moment from a concealed position in the material world. The fact that disasters are ever present in the novel demonstrates their ubiquity, a trait suggestive of the ways disasters discursively promote social vulnerabilities. But even in these scenes of crisis structural causalities provide narratological contradictions, situations that Amy Kaplan, in *The Anarchy of Empire*, identifies as affecting “dissonance as well as resonance” (10), opportunities to see clearly the systems of cultural power effecting social oppression as well as modes of counter-discourse, or as Kaplan puts it, the “anarchy” of social freedom disrupting hegemonic forces.

**A Fallen Earth: Lone Pine and the Art of Affective Synchronicity**

Early on Vandover attends a social gathering at the home of Turner Ravis. As the hour draws late and the party winds down, Ravis and the others debate the exact time that an earthquake struck the day prior. Some say it was the stroke of midnight. Some say two, three, and five in the morning. Charlie Geary notes that his parent’s clock stopped “a little after three,” lending his assertion an objective authority. \(^{189}\) Then something strange happens. Turner Ravis picks up a glass and tells how a similar glass broke in her mother’s hands in the hours following the quake. “It was at breakfast; she had just drunk

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\(^{189}\) While several earthquakes struck California in the late nineteenth-century (North Coast 1873, Vacaville-Winters Earthquakes 1892, and Laguna Salada Earthquake 1892), the Lone Pine Earthquake of 1872 was the most significant in terms of deaths and structural damage. The Lone Pine Earthquake, also known as the Owens Valley Earthquake, resulted in twenty-seven deaths and massive structural damage to buildings in Lone Pine, CA with other structural damages reported up to eighty-one miles from the...
a glass of water and was holding the glass in her hand like this”—Turner took one of the thin beer glasses in her hand to show them how—‘and was talking to pa, when all at once the glass broke right straight around a ring, just below the brim, you know, and fell’” (Norris 28). With this, the glass Ravis holds breaks in the exact same manner.

Norris establishes an acausal and mimetic relationship between the glass’ breakage, Ravis’ story, and the group’s discussion of the earthquake. The scene suggests spectrality and a gothicism that will manifest more fully in Vandover’s lycanthropy and regression into the Brute. Once the glass shatters and the event’s actuality laid bare the characters must reconcile not its representation, but its event. While some guests rationalize Ravis’ uncanny glass, most are left stunned and frightened. It is as if Ravis holds the after effect of the quake in her hand. “‘Ah, no,’ she said after a while. ‘That is funny. It kind of scares one.’ She was actually pale” (Norris 29). This synchronistic event eschews causality and despite Geary’s argument that temperature variation and physical pressure break the glass, his assertion fails to explain why it happened in relation to Ravis’ story.

The proximity of the debate about the earthquake, a story about a broken glass, and Ravis’ shattered glass are purely coincidental, but not without meaning. The earthquake is articulated as a knowable threat of which each character has some vague sense, but it is not until the metonymic leap from threat in earthquake to threat in glass that the characters experience a sense of anxiety and obscure dread. The question arises, as to whether or not the broken glasses evidence a synchrony between feelings and}

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191 In an effort to explain acausal relationships, in 1951 Carl Gustav Jung developed his theory of synchronicity. Jung’s theory states that seemingly unrelated events that lack causal relationships can express coextensive relational meaning and that psychic forces determine the coincidental nature of
things? The sequence also reveals Norris’ representational strategy and innocuously enough establishes how narrativized public disasters filtered through a process of supplementation can produce personal crises. Ravis’ narrative seemingly produces an event, one that discloses how social exchange manifests a disaster rhetoric capable of synchronizing behavioral and emotional response.

How the news represents disaster and the narratives populating the novel demonstrates the narrative and visual techniques that condition disaster culture. Vandover’s disasters operate as visualizable spectacles and stories coordinating social experience. It is hard to say just what earthquakes inform the novel, but the Lone Pine Earthquake of 1872 was significant and seems a probable candidate. The Lone Pine quake made national news and its coverage extended to well-regarded journals like the Overland Monthly. The quake resulted in twenty-seven deaths and massive structural damage to buildings in Lone Pine, California with other structural damages reported up to eighty-one miles from the quake’s epicenter. It notably stopped clocks as far away as San Diego. On March 29th, 1872, three days following the Lone Pine Earthquake, the Sacramento Daily Union reported that “[t]he Court-house at Independence, and brick and adobe buildings were thrown down. The earth opened in great fissures for miles in length…and the earth seemed in a state of vibration most of the day. A child was killed and other persons injured. Camp Independence is reported in ruins” (“News of the Morning” 1).

A day later, on March 30th, as the quake’s effects became clearer, the Daily Union reported that “[f]ive hundred shocks occurred at Lone Pine in 30 hours,” (“News events. See Jung, C. G. Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle. Translated by R.F.C. Hull, Abingdon: Routledge, 1999.

192 The Sacramento Daily Union was the largest newspaper in Sacramento in 1871. According to Geo P. Rowell & Co. the Union had a daily circulation of 9,000 newspapers and its weekly edition a circulation
of the Morning” 4) leaving the town a scene of devastation. The article further suggests that if the estimated structural damage and loss of life is accurate, “it is the hardest earthquake that has occurred since the settlement of the country by Americans, and probably since the destruction of San Juan Capistrano” (“News of the Morning” 4). The Union’s descriptions of the panic at Lone Pine suggest surreality, a spectacle in which “dogs set up a mournful howl, which was kept up until the earth ceased growling” and “[p]eople rushed out into the streets in their night shifts of clothing, terror stricken” as men gambling in a saloon “threw up their hands, and all, including the barkeeper, passed out into the street” where they find a woman “with a masquerade costume, intended for the masquerade ball” (“Earthquake in Nevada” 5). These events represent early reports and demonstrate how the narratives chronicling disaster project an uncannily familiar and yet radically transformed world.

An article in the April 1st edition of the Daily Union narrows its focus to convey a sense of the claustrophobia and panic that assailed the trapped survivors. “In an instant the whole town was in ruins, not a building being left standing,” and according to a Colonel Whipple “he had just time to jump from his bed and get to the doorway, when the house appeared to crumble to pieces beneath him, and he was buried” in a scene which “beggars description” (“Early Earthquakes” np). The paper not only reports the event, but simulates the experience of being buried alive. Fear hangs palpable in the air.

193 Also see, “The Electrical Theory of Earthquakes.” Sacramento Daily Union. 30, March 1872. p. 4. The “Electrical Theory of Earthquakes,” republished from a November 22nd, 1865 article by Philip A. Roach, argues that earthquakes are produced by electrical discharge and that increased technologization through telegraphs and railroads will help to conduct the earth’s electrical energies and “[l]ike the lightning rod pointing heavenward, protecting the fireside and the cradle, the connections planned by science will equalize the powers which now here and there in perturbation seem to defy it” (4). Roach’s intertwining of civilizational and technological advancement as socially and environmentally curative discloses a misplaced faith in scientific progress as a cultural panacea while also conveying anxieties about advancing technology and its potential ability to radically alter natural environmental processes.
as “cries for help and screams of pain from the wounded filled the air, while from the ruins those who escaped were calling for help to rescue fathers, brothers, wives and children” (“Early Earthquakes” np). The pandemonium makes clear the town’s absolute loss and affectively aligns the reader with the pitched terror and survivor’s frantic calls for help.

The *Union* then describes the quake’s persistent reverberations and environmental toll, emphasizing the image of “[a] chasm…extending thirty-five miles down the valley, ranging from three inches to forty feet in width” (“Earthquake in Inyo” np). Description subdues nature even as the earthquake demonstrates the limits of human mastery over a land where “[r]ocks were torn from their places” and “[e]verywhere through the valley are seen evidences of the terrible convulsion of nature” (“Earthquake in Inyo” np).

The story then presents a list of the dead and wounded, recounts rumors of volcanoes in the region, and compares the earthquake to artillery fire, turns heightening the disaster’s stakes and associating it with other seemingly apocalyptic events as well as the devastating power of modern warfare technology. Still another article in the April 1st paper touts the Lone Pine Earthquake as the most powerful in California state history and again compares it to the Earthquake of 1812 that destroyed San Juan Capistrano, “burying in its ruins many who were there worshiping at the time” (“Early Earthquakes” np). Placing an event in relation to a historical precedent makes the event knowable and its purported scale and significance easier to comprehend. At the same time, comparisons of one disaster to another produce an accumulative affect and as events blend a less

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194 This report is a reprint from *The White Pine News* dated March 26th.
195 The article itself is reprinted from a March 30th edition of the *San Francisco Bulletin*.
196 The passage concludes with a reversion to folklore suggesting that “[t]he Indians in that vicinity have all left, fearing the recurrence of a general convulsion of nature, which, according to tradition, occurred there some hundreds of years ago, and created what is now known as Owens River Valley” (np). The invocation of a supposed Native American lore, as subtle an ideological marker as Roach’s electrical
differential perspective emerges. This more general concept of disaster as an ahistorical and seemingly amorphous thing is a necessary condition of disaster culture, which begins to take hold in the form of exponentially varied threats that persist in the present, are perceived to have existed in the past, and that persevere into the future.

Two thousand miles away, the April 1st edition of the Charleston Daily News provides a summary description of the earthquake at Lone Pine, noting mortality figures and the extent of property destruction, but by April 4th, it supplies a far more robust and harrowing story. Beneath the headline “The Great Earthquake” the text expresses the disaster’s apocalyptic dimensions, declaring “Awful Destruction of Life and Property—California Shaking Night and Day—Vast Chasms Opening In the Earth—The Population of Lone Pine Buried—Volcanoes Bursting Forth in the Mountains” (“Great Earthquake” 1). Amid news of a cataclysm, the Charleston Daily takes an odd turn, disclosing that “among the killed there was Mr. Grey, aged forty two, a native of Texas. The remainder were all Spanish-Americans” (“Great Earthquake” 1). The identification of one presumably white American individual and the homogenization of others into one racialized “Spanish-American” mass expresses the racial hierarchies of the United States and evidences how U.S., and, in this case, southern U.S. society, attributed greater value to white life than it did others such that the victims of an earthquake in rural California reify the binary racial power dynamics in Charleston, South Carolina.

The April 11th edition purports to deliver a story not yet reported on by other papers by an unnamed eye-witness to the quake. The letter tells the tragedy of a father lamenting the death of his daughter, who “had evidently been killed instantly, having fallen on her back” while her father, “terribly bruised, and [with] blood…pouring from a

current, displaces white anxieties onto Native Americans, seemingly reaffirming settler colonialism’s naturalized displacement of Native American people.
wound on his forehead…began rubbing the hands and chaffing the temples of the senseless girl” (“Great Earthquake: Further Details” 1). For audience and textual subject alike, “[t]he groans of the unhappy parent as the realization burst upon him, and he bent over and rained tears upon the fair upturned face of his child, were agonizing to bear” (“Great Earthquake: Further Details” 1). The sensational horror mounts as the article presents the death of a family in which “the husband was found lying on his face dead, a beam across his neck, which, in falling, had nearly severed his head from the trunk; and the mother was so frightfully burned by the fire brands that she could not have lived many minutes, and the infant was discovered lifeless nearly a foot distant” (“Great Earthquake: Further Details” 1).

In these two scenes a farmer frantically attempts to revive his crushed daughter and a man is nearly beheaded, a woman is burned alive, and an infant found dead near to its destroyed parents. These gruesome accounts shock the audience, while also compelling their sympathy for a tragedy that feels relatable because it presses fears of familial loss in the small agrarian town of Lone Pine where patriarchal figures, nurturing mothers, and the futurity that lies in babes has been erased from the earth. Such descriptions provide a deliberate visual spectacle in which the image arouses the pleasures of sympathy while also exciting a voyeuristic compulsion not to look away from the dead, distant and sprawled in ways so vulnerable they do not seem real.

What should give us pause is the fact that the devastation and terrifying reportage on the Lone Pine quake remains embedded in the casual banter occurring at Vandover’s dinner party. The great disaster morphs into a kind of parlor trick, a footnote to everyday life, and this trace presence discloses disaster’s commonality in turn-of-the-century American culture. Moreover, the quake discussion exerts disaster’s public spectatorial presence. Its materiality becomes secondary to its rhetorical and visualizable
representation and it literally becomes something you cannot hold in your hand. The implicit threat of disaster, whether emerging in environmental destruction or social crisis, signifies the prevailing discourse driving Vandover’s need for succor within a social ecology defined by pitched competition and exigent risk.

Josiah Whitney’s “The Owen’s Valley Earthquake” was published over the course of two volumes in the *Overland Monthly*, which in 1872 had a national circulation of several thousand. Whitney, a Harvard geologist and former chief of the California Geological Survey, provides a geographic sketch of the Lone Pine region and his cartographic view chronicles the displacement of slopes and other alterations to the land as he maps out the topography and clinically assesses the disaster. Whitney’s review notes that “the destruction of all buildings of *adobe* and brick at Independence was nearly as complete as it was at Lone Pine itself” (135). His assessment also takes into account rather remarkable features otherwise neglected in newspaper reports. Whitney writes that “fish were thrown out upon the bank; and the men stopping there…did not hesitate to capture them, and served them up for breakfast in the morning” (138). Whitney also documents the peculiar behavior of local fauna, particularly domesticated dogs and cattle.

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197 *The Overland Monthly* was originally published between 1868 and 1875. The magazine was revived in 1883 and published again from 1923 to 1935. According to *N.W. Ayer & Son’s, The Overland* had a circulation of 12,000 in 1884. See *N.W. Ayer & Son’s American Newspaper Annual*. Philadelphia: N.W. Ayer & Son, 1884.

198 Whitney’s assessment reports in clear and purposeful prose for an audience that expects a specialist’s hand. “This town contained from 250 to 300 inhabitants, living almost exclusively in *adobe* houses, every one of which, and one of stone—the only one of that material in the town—was entirely demolished. Twenty-three persons were either killed outright, or found dead when disinterred from the ruins; four more were so badly injured that they have since died, and some sixty others were more or less seriously hurt, some of them very severely, so that their recovery seems indeed remarkable” (135). Importantly, Whitney’s assessment considers the human actions that created the risk of disaster through the use of *adobe* building practices in an area prone to earthquake and subsequently warns against the use of mud brick architecture in the region. As such, Whitney’s report engages more global perspectives on disaster and seems far more in-line with contemporary approaches to disaster assessment that seek to mitigate property destruction and loss of life. “The Owen’s Valley Earthquake” was a two part essay featured in the August 1872 and September 1872 editions of the *Overland Monthly*. Whitney’s analysis brings a scientific assessment to bear on the disaster, theorizing how the movement of seismic waves and regional topography affected the quake’s distribution and “destructive character” (274 II).
who suffered the same panic and destruction faced by the human population of Lone Pine,

Dogs sought protection from men to whom they were strangers, and whom they would have been more likely to attack at an ordinary time. In short, the panic among the brute creation was sufficient to indicate that they had no slight appreciation of the fact that a great catastrophe was impending. Some cattle were squeezed to death in the fissures, it is said; and it is also stated, on what seems good authority, that some were found dead without any apparent cause. (139)

Whitney’s observations tie together the earthquake’s power to disrupt an ecosystem of which humans are a part, while articulating procedures for disaster mitigation. Still, Whitney’s article, while informative to disaster prevention, interests the Overland’s readership because it speaks to a socially informed and intellectual class position.

At the time of literary naturalism, and the events that Norris draws on to produce Vandover, the American conservation movement was rapidly advancing. John Muir, the reluctant figurehead of turn-of-the-century U.S. environmentalism, viewed being in nature, and specifically the wilderness, as centering and didactic. Muir argued that by spending time in nature a person could learn to be more empathetic and better connected to a positive natural state. Guided by an unyielding belief that wilderness needed to be preserved, Muir viewed nature as a balm to modernity’s anxious and harried citizenry and while Muir acknowledged that nature operated under its own prerogatives, he nonetheless viewed nature, as David Wyatt suggests, “a tender rather than a terrible affair” (125).199

199 Central to Wyatt’s study is how photography and visual culture produced conceptions of environment as either threatening, as in the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake or, as is the case with Ansel Adams’
Muir’s arguments push back against disaster culture and its sensationalism, but Muir’s writing on the Lone Pine earthquake discloses the difficulties in reconciling a vision of nature as restorative in the face of its potential violence. John Muir’s account of the Lone Pine quake, “the strange, wild thrilling motion and rumbling” (261) is far more romantic than anything else published on the subject.200 Muir, who in 1872 was working in the Yosemite Valley, writes “I feared that the sheer-fronted Sentinel Rock, which rises to a height of three thousand feet, would be shaken down, and I took shelter back of a big pine, hoping I might be protected from outbounding boulders, should any come so far” (262). Muir further notes that “[a]s soon as these rock avalanches fell every stream began to sing new songs; for in many places thousands of boulders were hurled into their channels, roughening and half damming them, compelling the waters to surge and roar in rapids where before they were gliding smoothly” (266).

Muir’s perspective naturalizes ruin into renewal as an almost automatic environmental stabilization. His descriptions too confirm certain of the more dramatic accounts, writing that “[t]he Eagle Rock…had given way, and I saw it falling in thousands of the great boulders I had been studying so long, pouring to the valley floor in a free curve luminous from friction, making a terribly sublime and beautiful spectacle,—an arc of fire fifteen hundred feet span, as true in form and as steady as a rainbow, in the

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midst of the stupendous roaring rock storm” (262). Aftershocks make “the cliffs and domes tremble like jelly, and the big pines and oaks thrill and swish and wave their branches with startling effect” (Muir 264). Muir’s assertion that “kind Mother Earth is trotting us on her knee to amuse us and make us good”’ (265) evokes a sense of respect and admiration for nature’s power, but unlike Whitney’s analysis Muir’s romanticism ignores the disaster’s material affects on human communities. When describing the earth as “a living creature…calling to her sister planets,” (263) Muir emphasizes his own folksy mysticism, suggesting that “[s]torms of every sort, torrents, earthquakes, cataclysms, ‘convulsions of nature,’ etc., however mysterious and lawless at first sight they may seem, are only harmonious notes in the song of creation, varied expressions of God’s love” (267).

Problematically, Muir’s assessment ignores the significant death toll and devastation that resulted from the Lone Pine quake. The victims are screened out of a narrative that instead chooses to emphasize nature as a processional and restorative power. Muir’s removal of the human from a nature that he so steadfastly argues for humans to join signifies an environmental consciousness unable to adequately align human society with nature. Despite the chaos and violence that ensues throughout literary naturalism, naturalist writers like Norris, who mine profoundly negative situations to evoke social reassessment, perhaps more definitely articulate the interdependence between the individual, society, and the environment, posing ways to read disaster and its litany of traumas as a no less accurate measure of ecological thought.

From the Ashes a Nation: Thrill Seeking the Great Chicago Fire

260 Just as Josiah Whitney produced his authoritative account, Muir, who had a contentious relationship with Whitney, asserts his own naturalist assessment of the changing geography.
In 1871, the Great Chicago Fire, one of the largest urban disasters in U.S. history, destroyed vast sections of the emerging metropolis and the reports documenting the event emphasize disaster reporting’s reliance on visuality. On October 8th, the Chicago Tribune detailed the first day of the blaze, and similar to reportage on Lone Pine, the Tribune envisions the scene telescopically, allowing the reader to tour urban spaces wracked by disaster. Charting the fire’s travels and the array of positions from which it is seen privileges audience participation in the civic chaos and the panoramic movements, expansions, and contractions of the fire itself. The article reports that from all the bridges in the vicinity of the great fire the scene was one of unparalleled, terrible beauty. The dense column of smoke, driving before the southeasterly gale the millions of burning cinders, carried by the force of the wind over a mile from the theatre of conflagration, and the dense fiery glow of the destroying element itself, illuminating the entire city, made up a panorama of grand but terrible features. (“Terrible Scene” 1) 

This visual framing treats disaster as optically containable, a sweeping environmental portrait that enthralls the reader and aestheticizes “the fiery sea” (“Adams Street” 1) into a thing of awful beauty.

Conversely, disaster news also places the reader in unnerving proximity to the crisis. In “Scenes on Wabash Avenue” from the October 11th edition, chaos reigns as panicked citizens evacuate the city. “The street was crowded with vehicles of all descriptions, many drawn by men who found it impossible to procure draught animals”

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and “[p]oor women, with mattresses upon their heads, or weighted down with furniture, tottered with weary steps up the crowded street,” as “the wail of women and children rent the air” (“Scenes on Wabash” 1). All of them knowing only “that the horrible fire was behind them, and they must move on” (“Scenes on Wabash” 1). The effect of such descriptions is striking and demonstrates the rapidity with which the disaster transformed Americans into refugees in their own land. Harrowing and affecting, descriptions like these create a sense of motion and lived urgency in which the reader shares in the chaotic spectacle and pitched survival. The danger, however, lies in just how subtly a narrative of crisis can slip into a kind of disaster entertainment.

By October 12th, the fire was largely extinguished and the Tribune’s reporting shifted from panoramic fire to a cityscape in ruin. The edition leads with people returning to burned homes and sifting through the rubble, “hunting for shreds and scraps of property” (1) and although the death toll would reach four times the figure, the paper reports that seventy dead were “recovered from the ruins” (“Yesterday” 1). Throughout the city’s northeast “scarcely a street has a yard of wooden sidewalk remaining, and those who witnessed the conflagration know full well the fatal certainty with which they conducted the fire from block to block” (“Yesterday” 1). Across the cityscape “[a] brick tower tells where the North Avenue Police Station stood, and, standing out in bold relief against the sky are the walls and tower of St. Michael’s (German) Church” (“Yesterday” 1). This panoramic account of the ravaged city describes site specific ruins as “monuments of departed glory,” (“Yesterday” 1) and these shifting images present distinct cultural landmarks as memorials.202 For Chicagoans, such sites were real and

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202 The edition is peppered with narratives of loss and chance survival, recreating the sense of chaotic activity, people burned to death, and the arrest of thieves. It relates the story of the wife of James Roehe, who fell victim to a “blazing fagot” and whose “clothes caught in the house, and to save her life her
more tangible than for readers far removed from the city, but churches, hospitals, and
police stations are places familiar to any reader and the impression of their specific
destruction in Chicago conjures the simulated imagining of the destruction of more
familiar local sites, an associative logic connecting local experience to the disaster.

In a passage that twines spiritual and material loss in a decidedly capitalist vision,
the expected lamentations for the nation and its dead are undercut by concern for the
destruction of capital and property.

All is not lost. Though four hundred million dollars’ worth of property has
been destroyed, Chicago still exists. She was not a mere collection of
stone, and bricks, and lumber. These were but the evidence of the power
which produced these things; they were but the external proof of the high
courage, unconquerable energy, strong faith, and restless perseverance
which have built up here a commercial metropolis. (“Rebuild the City”
np)

Suggestive of a nascent disaster capitalism, the Tribune links industrial production,
urbanization, and Christian religiosity with civilizational progress, suggesting that “[a]ll
the losses of the fire, will in time be passed into the great clearing house…Rich men have
become poor; the accumulations of years have been destroyed; but no one will sit down
and waste time crying for spilled milk. Labor will be resumed. Production will be
restored, and the general trade and commerce of the city will at once be resumed”
(“Rebuild the City” np). Commerce’s valorization orients disaster to capitalist production
and asserts the preeminence of a society principally determined by market relations. The
ways that labor, production, and wealth are filtered through an instrumentalized

husband was forced to tear the clothes from her body” leaving Mrs. Roehe with “only a horse blanket
around her” (1).
sentimentality demonstrates how something like disaster can be easily placed in rhetorical service to cycles of economic ruin and renewal. Importantly, part and parcel to the images, stories, and reports documenting one of the great disasters of nineteenth-century America is an ideological undercurrent coordinating perception of the American character as decidedly Christian and capitalist and that reinforces categories like masculinity and whiteness as qualities best suited to facilitate recovery.

Along the Missouri River and some six hundred miles west of Chicago, the October 11th edition of the Yankton Press writes that portions of the city “soon went down in the ocean of fire and smoke” (“Carnival of Fire” np). Linking the urban conflagration to scenes more recognizable to its readership, the Yankton suggests “[t]he flames swept through the city with the rapidity of a prairie fire” (“Carnival of Fire” np). Similar to an example in the Kansas City Journal that I discuss later, the article is abutted by a second piece that outlines an out of the ordinary tragedy. The article, titled “Death of an Aeronaut,” details the September 30th death of a Professor Wilber in Orange County, Indiana, who fell to his death from a hot air balloon. It describes Wilber’s death in front of his wife and small child and graphically details his mangled body, emphasizing how “half a gallon of clotted blood” (“Death of an Aeronaut” np) vomited from his mouth, the indent that his body left in the ground, and the way it bounced upon striking the earth. The placement of multiple unrelated narratives of death and ill-fortune in close proximity to one another produces a carousel effect, allowing one story to condition the reader’s experience of the next. While such stories titillate,

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203 Co-occurring with the Great Chicago Fire was the Great Peshtigo Fire, a massive unrelated wildfire that claimed upwards of one thousand and five hundred dead. The Yankton’s “A Carnival of Fire” declares a grand conflagration across the midwest, acknowledging Peshtigo and writing that “[t]he Prairies of Nebraska, Iowa, and Minnesota—The Woods of Wisconsin and Ohio, and the Business Portion of Chicago in Flames” (np).
narrative proximity and rates of occurrence blindly advance the ubiquity of crisis narratives and their attendant dread.

The October 18th edition of the *Yankton* advances a sensational narrative that associates the ruin of the city with biblical wrath. “There are people who, in the bitterness of their souls, ascribe the calamity to God’s judgement,” writes the *Yankton*, while an unnamed “German” is attributed as claiming it “‘a second Sodom and Gormorrah’” (“Great Chicago Fire” np). The article further reports on “incendiarism” and declares that “[i]mmense numbers of people are missing” while forwarding narratives designed to shock like “a rumor that in a burnt blacksmith shop on Rush street, the bodies of fifteen men were found burned to a crisp” (“Great Chicago Fire” np). Later on, in the same edition, an article titled “Particulars of the Chicago Fire” presents a roving panoply where “the walls melted and the very bricks were consumed, and no human being could possibly survive many minutes” (“Particulars” np). Smaller subheadings lead into full paragraphs to emphasize the disaster’s proportions, as in “Men and women were loaded with bundles and their household goods, to whose skirts were clinging TENDER INFANTS” (“Particulars” np). At another turn the article zeros in on the death of a family when on “Chicago avenue a father rushed up stairs to carry three children away when he was overtaken with the flames and perished with them. The mother was afterwards seen in the street on the northwest side A RAVING MANIAC” (“Particulars” np). This narrative style, which applies capitalization to emphasize dramatic passages, booms with the aura of the soapbox orator and draws the reader into harrowing trials that promise to fright and excite.

In the *Yankton’s* October 25th edition, the paper reports an array of grotesque spectacles. A Miss Rollins states “‘The little girl I had, walked until the hot pavements blistered her little feet’” and reports seeing “some women and children, and one man,
exhausted, lie down in the gutters to die” (“Horrors” np). Such images induce exacerbation and sorrow as the qualities of a shared emotional response designating the public’s social collectivity. These emotionally overcharged encounters dare the reader to feel a sensation beyond the threshold of their comfortability and it is this affective puncture that arouses the sense that social crises also exist as a personal wound. Disaster’s spectacle and fantastical dimensions again assert the unreality of crises, imagistically revolving the known into the unknown and stable forms into those of ruin.

To underscore disaster’s fantastical dimensions, Chas N. Armour’s account is particularly helpful. Armour recalls that in approaching the Adams Street Bridge “a handsome coach with two splendid horses, apparently furious with fright came leaping upon it. As the centre was reached the timbers gave way and horses and carriage were tumbled into the river” (“Horrors” np). It is not just physical environments that are failing, but the fixed and static reality held by the viewer too disintegrates with each new account. Mr. S. W. Whitcombe is recorded as saying “[t]he sky was lit up with a lurid glare for miles around, and a dense volume of smoke hung over the entire city like funeral pall” (“Horrors” np). It is beneath this death cloud that the article continues with its carousel of horrors: “[h]uge fire-brands were hurled about like wisps of straw” and the “screams of the women and children were almost drowned by the agonizing yells of hundreds of horses, cows, and dogs, which were enveloped by the flames” (“Horrors” np). Again, a rotational devastation successively consumes the material and emotional presences on the page, a violence so complete and in this example the conflation of human and animal so unnerving that the event seems the stuff of nightmare.

In another section in the edition of the 25th, the Yankton publishes an October 15th sermon by the Reverend Joseph Ward, the pastor of the Congregational Church at Yankton. Perhaps channeling Michael Wigglesworth, the Reverend Ward writes
[t]he suddenness with which it came, the swiftness with which its work was carried on, the immense reach of its ravages, the utter impotence of all attempts to stop its progress, the fearful looking for of even greater woe, and the widespread reach of its effects, all combine to make it, more than any thing that has ever occurred on the earth, like the day of doom for the world. ("Chicago Fire!: Sermon” np)

Actual crisis sublimated into myth returns as the spectral reality that must be negotiated into stable and reformed materiality through ruin’s renewal. Lauding not only Chicago’s economic power, but its place as a cultural center for middle America, Ward suggests that “if it is a judgement for Chicago, it is for all the rest of us” (np). While Ward challenges his audience to relate the transience of human life to the permanence of the Christian afterlife, or as he writes “one short day, this solid wealth becomes vapor” and Chicago “changed into the thinness of invisibility,” (np) he nonetheless uses the disaster as a means towards social discipline.204

The October 21st edition of Harper’s Magazine, which boasted a circulation of 175,000, featured a large spread on the Chicago Fire complete with stories and images of the city before, during, and after the disaster. Central to Harper’s coverage is its illustrations and the double page spread by Theodore R. Davis titled “Bird’s-Eye View of

204 During his sermon Ward refers to the threat of fire, earthquake, flood, and tornado, stating that “man has to contend for the possession of his wealth against all the agencies of nature” (np) and turns to contemplate rust and decay as natural forces that erode “man’s property” (np). He posits that the will of Christian men will endure all such catastrophes. “Yes! even if every roof in the city were in ashes, there would yet remain the energy of the citizens. Though every place of business were burned, yet the integrity of the merchants still lives. Though every church had gone, yet would remain the Christian character which had grown up and been nurtured there” (np). Deprived of property and livelihood, Ward suggests that such destruction invigorates man’s better nature and writes “[t]he flames of that mighty burning must have been like the light of eternity shining on the shores of time, giving men power to see things as they are” (np). Of “evil men” displaced from the Christian center, “who have used their wealth only to consume it on their lusts, and to drag other men down to woe with them,” Ward warns that “[o]ne little hour of God’s breath upon them and they are gone” (np). Ward’s sermon, not unlike the Tribune’s article of October 18th, while at turns heartening, asserts capitalism and Christianity as ideological strains
Chicago as It Was Before the Great Fire” provides a sense of the disaster’s scale. In this picture, the viewer hovers west from Lake Michigan over the Midwest’s bustling commercial hub. Ships navigate the bay and the Chicago River meanders through the western districts. The cityscape stands in its uniform grid, a model of urban design and efficiency. A week later, in the October 28th edition another image by Davis titled “Chicago in Ruins” holds the same double page spread, but the city now roils in smoke as flames twist across the outer barriers of a blackened and scarified land. The Chicago River too glistens with the reflection of flames as the bay is wracked and ships burn in the harbor.

Moving from the broad survey of a ruined cityscape to the ocularly condensed stories and images of the tumult occurring within the burning city the narratological aperture pulls the reader out where the image seems optically containable and then draws the reader into disempowering scenes of tragedy and horror. “Chicago in Ashes,” from

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primary to the formation of American national identity, institutional forces readily deployed to reconstitute community and existing modes of social power in times of crisis.

205 Also see “Chicago As It Was,” *Harper’s Weekly: A Journal of Civilization*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1871. Vol. 15 Issue 773. p. 990. Harper’s reports that “[i]t was estimated that at least ten thousand buildings had been consumed, and the fire was still raging. The wind was blowing a gale, and to this was added the calamity of a scarcity of water…Whole blocks of buildings were blown up with
the October 28th edition, emphasizes this refocusing, a perspective that parallels the witness’ emotional proximity to the event.

It is difficult, at a distance from the scene, to form a conception of the extent of the dire calamity which has befallen Chicago. For days the newspapers were filled with dreadful tidings of the fierce and swift progress of the flames, blown by the winds of heaven from house to house; of terror-stricken men, women, and children flying from burning homes and spreading out, a helpless starving half-naked multitude, on the open prairie; but, as a writer in the World has well remarked there is little to be said of such a calamity which the imagination of every reader cannot build for himself on the simple statement that a great city has been swept away in a day. (1010)

As the coverage continues, so emerge further tales of horror that reiterate the incomprehensibility of the event while disclosing already existing differentials in social power. One such passage reports that “[s]everal children were born into the world in the midst of the storm, only to die” (“Chicago in Ashes” 1010). Another notes “[t]here were invalids of every age and condition of life, who had been taken from their beds and carried where death came to them less swiftly but not less surely than in the fiery flood” (“Chicago in Ashes” 1010). Other stories indicate yet more gruesome events like “prisoners confined in the basement of the Courthouse…burned to death” (“Chicago in Ashes” 1010) and while these reports are observational and by degrees removed from the sensationalism that often attends disaster reporting none question why children, the

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powder in the effort to arrest the flames. The amount of property destroyed is estimated by millions” (990).

disabled, and prisoners, each representing some of the most vulnerable members of society, were placed at a higher risk than were free, mature, and able bodied persons. Although it is plainly the case, the article simply enumerates the losses while forgetting to question, as its readership forgets to question, why those with little agency also lived so close to death.

Highlighted too are episodes of debauchery and intemperance and these “hundreds of men and boys in a state of beastly drunkenness…who seem to have felt the same impulse that leads sailors on a sinking ship to drown their terrors in the delirium of intoxication” (“Chicago in Ashes” 1010) again present the underclass as subject to higher risk presumably because they cannot adequately manage their desires. As if the image of these “poor wretches [who] found their death in the flames,” (“Chicago in Ashes” 1010) drunken men quite literally burning alive in the streets, was not startling enough, the article persists with the narrative of lawlessness that prevailed as the Great Fire destroyed Chicago. Amid the conflagration,

armed patrols were needed to guard the helpless from robbery and the baser passions of desperate ruffians…Houses were broken open and pillaged all over the town. Rape and arson and murder were not unfrequent; and it became necessary to form vigilance committees, who promptly disposed of the culprits by hanging or shooting…The city was placed under martial law, and wretches caught in the act of pillaging or setting fire to buildings—for, incredible as it may seem, men became incendiaries in the midst of the burning town—were executed on the spot. In some cases the citizens, maddened by the sight of pillage or arson, fell upon the miscreant and beat him to death. The number summarily executed is estimated at above fifty. (“Chicago in Ashes” 1010)
Disaster produces the narrative stage upon which the dueling spectacle of lawlessness and popular sovereignty play out. Not only does Chicago physically erupt block by block, but the inferno also engulfs any semblance of normative society. What emerges is a nightmare vision of what happens when the established social order breaks down into a carnival of anarchic violence. The narrative implies that a stable society necessarily mediates the always present threat of the lower classes, who are only subdued through rigorous management by the state. Yet even in this world untethered from societal strictures the destroyed environment still takes on a visualizable romanticism.

In Harper’s “Account by an Eye-Witness,” John R. Chapin writes that upon waking in the Sherman House he “gazed upon a sheet of flame towering one hundred feet above the top of the hotel...a shower of sparks as copious as drops in a thunder-storm” (1010). This cascading rain of fire introduces Chapin’s panoramic and its sublime environmental destruction.

No language which I can command will serve to convey any idea of the grandeur, the awful sublimity, of the scene. For nearly two miles to the right of me the flames and smoke were rising from the ruins and ashes of dwellings, warehouses, lumber-yards, the immense gas-works; and the view in that direction was bounded by an elevator towering one hundred and fifty feet in the air, which had withstood the fire of the night before, but which was now a living coal, sending upward a sheet of flame and smoke a thousand feet high. (Chapin 1010)

Chapin stands in awe before Chicago’s decimation and the vividness of his account conveys ruin as a rich visual spectacle.

Chapin’s claustrophobia and disorientation is palpable in scenes where he describes “[t]he smoke [being] so dense that we can hardly see. It blows aside, and what
was the reflection of the fire is now a lurid glare of flame” (1011). Chapin’s cataclysmic account promotes a kind of sensorial simulation for his reader in which buildings “dissolved like snow on the mountain” and “[l]oud detonations to the right and left of us, where buildings were being blown up, added to the falling of the walls and the roaring of the flames” (1011). This mounting cacophony emanates the fire’s audibility and sensorial experience. With buildings crashing down and flames tearing through the sky “the moaning of the wind, the shouting of the crowd, the shrill whistling of the tugs as they endeavored to remove the shipping out of the reach of danger—made up a frightful discord of sounds which will live in memory while life shall last” (Chapin 1011).

Chapin’s reader experiences disaster as an imagistic and emotional torrent and his account is also one of the few that directly references the sublime, an aesthetic feature buttressed by Chapin’s descriptions of a world literally turned to ash as walls of flame rush upon the city. Whether it is the Lone Pine Earthquake, the Great Chicago Fire, or the Wreck of the Colima, disaster is imbued with a sublimity at once beauuteous and awful, signifying one’s profound finitude and mortality before immense environmental forces. This sublimity, as evident in Chapin’s narrative, aestheticizes disaster, leaving the reader struck with the magnitude of loss.207 Other illustrations from October 28th reveal forlorn refugees huddled in the street while smoke and flames in the far background harry others into a night without shelter. Small children and able-bodied men sit bereft

207 See “Chicago in Ruins.” Harper’s Weekly: A Journal of Civilization. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1871. Vol. 15 Issue 775. pp. 1028-30. In the November 4th, 1871 edition, Harper’s published “Chicago in Ruins” wherein through direct addresses and commands, a narrative voice repositions the reader’s shifting field of vision and sequences the movement from site to site throughout the city. “At our feet the ruin commences with the shapeless debris of Terrace Block” (1028) stars the narrator and then depicts a panoramic of the city that moves through streets and districts to describe what does and does not remain. “Come with us to the other scene chosen by the artist” from which the speaker notes “[w]e drive down Wabash Avenue” where “familiar corners are indistinguishable, or only to be made out by landmarks traced with difficulty” (1029). Following this, “[w]e turn into State Street,” a documentary scene of absent buildings where once stood “a range of great bookstores equaled in no other city in the world” (1029).
amid the remains of their apartments. In Chapin’s “The Rush for Life Over Randolph-Street Bridge” teeming masses of Chicagoans struggle shoulder to shoulder across the expanse made narrow by their numbers as the city is incinerated mere blocks from their ranks and the sky is awash in flames that arc and roll stories above the devoured buildings.208 These images facilitate the reader’s survey of the destruction and again provide the opportunity to objectively witness the event. Visuality engenders the reader’s authority over the disaster’s discourse.209


When the fire strikes in Norris’ novel, Vandover is initially indifferent about it. His friend Ellis, however, excitedly determines the fire’s proximity by virtue of the sirens’ cadence. It is only after Ellis calls to Vandover, “Oh, come out here and see the fire, will you? Devil of a blaze!” that Vandover is motivated to seek the source of “a great fan-shaped haze of red through the fog over the roofs of the houses” (Norris 53). As an individual Vandover can resist the urge to court disaster, but when socializing Vandover quickly aligns his desires with that of his fellow thrill seekers. The event quickly becomes a spectacle and the formerly recalcitrant Vandover even grows impatient, shouting “‘Hurry up, hurry up!…It will be all out by the time we get there’” (Norris 53).

The group hurries one another to the street where they find the sidewalks teeming with gawkers. “They all hurried into the street and turned in the direction of the blaze. Other people were walking rapidly in the same direction…Every one was in good humor; it was an event, a fête for the entire neighborhood” (Norris 53-54). Norris is not just critiquing the amorality and disaffection of a younger generation. The disaster is a spectacle and public amusement of which the young and old alike equally take part. The
throng are not descending to aid in rescue efforts. They want to see the fire overtake the district. When Vandover and his group near the blaze they “could smell the burning wood and could see the roofs of the nearer houses beginning to stand out sharp and black against the red glow beyond” (Norris 54). To what degree Vandover and the crowds experience fear at the prospect of an urban fire is somewhat moot. Their anxieties are adrenalized into a mass spectatorship that demands to be entertained.

It is soon understood that the “[d]evil of a blaze” was actually isolated to a single barn, the same site that the Chicago Fire is believed to have originated. With the event in eyesight Vandover encounters an old man who exclaims “‘I was here when it first broke out; you ought to have seen the flames then! Look, there’s a tree catching!’” (Norris 54). While Vandover’s couldn’t-care-less attitude suggests his resignation, Norris’ emphasis on the I indicates the significance that the old man places on his own witness. The old man represents the extreme of one who can’t possibly see the destruction enough. He is elated and revels in the height of the flames before their containment. In fact, he is so enthralled by the event that he points out new fiery outbreaks. Certainly, the old man’s witnessing of the fire from its beginning provides him a sense of authority over it. Stories about the fire’s origin can begin with his account, which will take on a kind of originality and truth, and so second-hand experiences of others become predicated upon his narrative.

As the fire dies away and police “stretched a rope across the street” amid “a world of tumbling yellow smoke that made one’s eyes smart” (Norris 54), Vandover and Ida Wade find themselves separated from their group and quickly lose interest in the failing spectacle. Once the fire is extinguished and the crowds disband Vandover’s indifference
returns and he looks for a new entertainment that just so happens to be embodied in Ida Wade. The two retreat to the Imperial, a bar and restaurant known for its debauched revelries. Within the Imperial, Vandover and Ida request a private room and order champagne and oysters. Ida is taken with the scandalous scene. “She had never been in such a place as the Imperial before, and the daring novelty of what she had done, the whiff of the great city’s vice caught in this manner, sent a little tremor of pleasure and excitement over all her nerves” (Norris 57).²¹¹ It is here that Vandover kisses Ida, and Ida reciprocates his advance, but not before Norris telegraphically recalls the disaster within the confines of the restaurant. “Ida’s face was ablaze, her eyes flashing, her blond hair disordered and falling over her cheeks” (Norris 57). The scene indexes Vandover’s and Wade’s lustful tryst with those faces passed en route to the fire that were “in the open windows above…faintly tinged with the glow, looking and pointing, or calling across the street to their friends in the opposite houses” (Norris 54). Whether the face is familiar or foreign, private or public, they are illuminated by the same crisis aura. Vandover and his posse are not afraid of the fire even when its dimensions are not entirely clear and are instead drawn to the threat because disaster is already a pervasive condition of their lives and even within the confines of the Imperial Ida Wade’s face registers something of it.

²¹⁰ The Great Chicago Fire of 1873 left in excess of 300 dead and displaced a third of the city, roughly one hundred thousand people, and like the fire witnessed in Vandover, the fire was believed to have started in a barn owned by Patrick and Catherine O’Leary.

²¹¹ For more on an analysis of the Imperial and the colonial and geopolitical dimensions of the text see Castronovo, Russ. “Geo-Aesthetics: Fascism, Globalism, and Frank Norris.” boundary, vol. 30, no. 3, 2003, pp. 157-184. Russ Castronovo argues that “[t]he formal properties of art allow economic and imperial interests to condense dispersed geographies into a single unified form as the beauty of empire” (159). While Norris’ Octopus provides a clearer example of this mechanism that, as Walter Benjamin would have it, politicizes aesthetics while aestheticizing politics, Vandover’s logic presses against assumptions of social security for white men. In Castronovo’s analysis sites like the Imperial bar and Vandover’s unfinished painting signify the trace of empire, but such imperial symbols are more often promulgated through the more mundane objects found in Vandover’s home and apartment like the Renaissance reproductions and Assyrian bass reliefs that disclose Vandover’s longing for the security he ascribes to cultural power.
Disaster’s spectatorship promises emotional arousal and self-mastery, a way to subjectively hold the crisis and exert power over it. Staging one’s encounter with a disintegrating world while the witness remains secure in his viewership promotes anxiety at the same time it alleviates unease, allowing the viewer a safe and active presence in a cycle of ruin and renewal. Disasters are a cause for panic and, as is the case in reporting on the Great Chicago Fire, a means to coordinate public values. Despite the exigencies at play, through their narrativized ubiquity disasters become seemingly commonplace, unremarkable, something to be treated, as Vandover does, with indifference.

The Wreck of the Steamship Colima and the Narrativized Self

On May 27th, 1895, while en route from San Francisco to Panama, the steamship Colima foundered off the coast of Manzanillo, Mexico. Two days later on May 29th news of the disaster appeared in *The San Francisco Call*. While the article is only partially informed as to the full sweep of the tragedy, it leads with an affective warning and “[t]idings of a marine disaster that may bring sorrow and suffering to many homes in the City” (“Sunk in the Pacific” 12). The brief narrative states that the ship carried from San Francisco “121 passengers, as follows: Forty cabin, 38 steerage and 43 Chinese” (“Sunk in the Pacific” 12) and then lists the passengers of the Colima by name. It does not name the “43 Chinese,” only indicating their ports of call, a move reminiscent of the nameless “Spanish-Americans” referred to in the *Charleston Daily’s* coverage of the Lone Pine earthquake.

The *Call’s* article concludes with a brief description of the sinking of the S.S. Golden Gate, which wrecked near the site of the Colima in 1862. What is depicted is the havoc of the Golden Gate’s demise when “flames had gained so much headway that the efforts proved futile, and she burned to the water’s edge” (“Sunk in the Pacific” 12). The
comparison of the two events, separated by thirty-three years, much like the comparisons of the destruction in Lone Pine to San Juan Capistrano, affirms the reliance disaster news places on a strategy of repetition in order to compare one event to another and sequentialize crises. In so doing, the wreck of the Colima is infused with the tragedy of the S.S. Golden Gate and taken far enough this accumulative strategy conflates multiple disasters into a singular event so that one event maintains the representationality of the many. The problem for the public becomes one of selection and discernment. As disasters multiply one from the next threat becomes detached from its historical actuality and multiple disasters, while materially distinct, undergo a kind of flattening such that each contains the affective trace of the other, producing the aura of a more general and indistinct threat in public consciousness.

The day following, on May 30th, The Call ran a front page story on the wreck complete with a map of the Mexican coast. In dramatic fashion, the article asserts that “not a tick sounded over the telegraph wire which stretched from here to Mazatlan, San Blas, and Manzanillo,” indicating that the public, and especially those worried for their loved ones, continued to pine over a maritime disaster “enveloped in mystery” and “shrouded in doubt” (“Wreck of the Mail Steamship” 1).212 The use of interviews, pleas from family, and brief biographies personalize the catastrophe and bridge the distance between reader and text as the enervating grief draws the reader into a sympathetic relationship with the lost. This strategy aligns the reader and the newspaper as co-participants opposing the impersonal capitalist and industrial forces represented here by the Pacific Mail Company.

212 Also see “A Search for a Son.” The San Francisco Call. 30, May 1895. p. 1. The May 30th article drums upon family pleas for news and notes one Mrs. Renwick, who laments the fate of her son, “He is all I have in the world” and then presents “[t]wo young colored girls…the daughters of Chief Steward Smith,” quoting the elder of the two, who asks “Is my papa drowned?” (1), passages emphasizing the
Still lacking the full details of the disaster, The Call’s May 31st headline optimistically forecasts a less dramatic loss of life than was previously publicized. This edition, which again displays portrait sketches of passengers, and, notably, a group of six children missing at sea, continues to manage the extremes of hope and despair. Take for example the narrative of R. Brewer, a San Franciscan, whose wife and children were missing in the Colima wreck, whose telegram posted at the steamship office “was displayed to the anxious eyes of weary watchers who kept coming and going all day long. A gleam of hope was given by this dispatch…Your wife and children have not appeared. But they are still finding and picking up shipwrecked people on rafts and boats” (“Encouraging News” 1). The passage reflects how news travels at an expeditious rate from person to person and place to place while news media synchronizes perception along a human chain. Despite the paper’s attempt to hearten its readers, because the report is based not on fact but conjecture the news only recycles an unresolvable tension.

It is four days following the sinking of the Colima, in The Call’s June 1st report, that the event’s true horror reaches the San Francisco public. The headline that day reads “Overloading Caused the Colima’s Wreck” and “Additional Details of the Horror on the Mexican Coast, in Which Only Thirty-Four Out of Two Hundred and Sixteen Escaped” disaster’s communal dimensions. Ultimately, the Steamship Colima resulted in the deaths of 157 passengers.

213 In the edition of the 31st The Call publishes headlines that read, “Some Encouraging News from the Colima” and “It is Definitely Ascertained That the Loss of Life Will Not Be So Great as Was at First Reported,” (1) projecting hope for the public while still not realizing the tragedy’s scale. See also “An Alarming Rumor.” The San Francisco Call. 31, May 1895. p. 1. Here the paper continues to sew hope for its readers by profiling individual passengers like Lang Chang, a merchant from San Salvador, and Louis H. Peters, a bookkeeper at Dinkelspiel’s dry-goods. The emphasis on individual stories advances the reader’s sense of knowability and access to the lives of others. Still, while the paper asserts that “[e]very craft for miles along the coast is out looking for survivors” it also makes conjectures as to the cause of the ship’s sinking that range from running aground a reef to mechanical failure, and again asserts a sensational drama by stating that “the killing of the captain and his chief officers must have greatly increased the demoralization among her passengers, due to the storm, by which the steamer was buffeted,
("Overloading" 1). As the wreck’s cause is disclosed, the news projects a narrative of heroism and tragedy. At turns valorizing, the article asserts that “[s]urvivors who have landed speak in the highest terms of praise of the behavior of the officers and crew of the wrecked steamer during the time of peril,” while attributing blame to the “stevedores in San Francisco, who stored the cargo so badly as to make the catastrophe possible” ("Struck" 1). The narrative then details the horrors faced by the Colima’s passengers. “Survivors say that all the women and children were in the staterooms at the time of the disaster and that all went down with the steamer” and “those who saved themselves did so by clinging to portions of lumber, to spars and especially to the liferafts until the next morning, when the steamer San Juan of the same line, bound north…discovered and rescued them” ("Story of Disaster" 1). Scenes of death and dying punctuate the crisis and place the reader within both episode and aftermath.

*The Call* also provides vignettes of the identified deceased and further discusses the struggles of family members hoping for word. Of the people still seeking answers from the steamship company, “[t]here was none of the subdued crowd, the wan and tear-stained faces of twenty-four hours before. Bitter anguish had given place to dull heartache and hard dry sobs to the tears of the bereaved” (“Stories that Others” 1). Grief aligns the public and in writing that “[o]n the streets before the newspaper offices little knots of men and women read the meager bulletins and turned away with a muttered curse for the ‘coffin boat’” (“Stories that Others” 1). *The Call* again coordinates reader sentiment with what is reported as the griever’s experiences and suggests that the pain of loss is now directed towards the steamship company, which in turn displaced responsibility onto the San Francisco dock workers. This dynamic thumbs at the tensions and that there must have been excitement which greatly interfered with any attempt to utilize the boats with safety” (1).
between labor and capital and the power of industry to produce human vulnerability while leaving the Colima’s “coffin boat” as lost to the sea as those gathered for news of survival remain adrift in their grief.

The Colima is a significant maritime disaster and news of it was published in jurisdictions far removed from the Pacific Coast. Echoing the still ill-informed reports, the May 31st edition of the Kansas City Journal writes “Cheering News of the Colima” and provides a hopeful assessment of the wreck stating that “the Loss of Life Has Been Greatly Exaggerated” (1). However, a second piece in the same edition immediately contradicts this article and discloses that “the outlook for the passengers and crew not already reported saved is very poor,” suggesting the Colima sank “entirely in ten minutes” and that “only a few of the people on board the steamship got away” (“Later Reports” 1).214 The uneven reporting in this edition, while perhaps the hurried work of a questionable editor, nonetheless presents a condensed representation of the divergent narratives that emerged in the days following the Colima wreck.

Disaster narratives generate anxiety and suspense, but in the case of the Kansas City Journal article what is also critical to the reader’s perception is the story’s placement in the textual field. On the same page and adjacent to the Colima story is another piece titled “An Infernal Machine” that details the discovery of a pipe bomb in the basement of the Grand Missouri Hotel.215 This approach, similar to the “Aeronaut” example I discuss from the Yankton Press, places the reader in relation to multiple threats and social malfeasance. In addition to the bomb, there is a tale of perjury, the arrest of a thief, and the story of a young man injured after chasing a squirrel into a tree. Perhaps

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214 The article concludes with an ominous note from a Pacific Mail Steamship agent’s telegram that reads “[t]he Colima cannot be afloat again. She is a total loss” (1).
excluding the article, “The Limb Broke,” which sent poor Joseph Long crashing to the ground, the assemblage of narratives here, in ways similar to the news websites, periodicals, and television broadcasts of today, immerses the reader in synchronous stories of dread.216

Subsequent reporting in the Kansas City Journal on June 9th publishes a first-hand account from Colima survivor Gustav Rowan, in which Rowan accuses the Colima’s crew of negligence. Rowan reports that other survivors “‘will not dare to tell the truth, as they have been promised money to keep still,’” claiming “‘[t]he Colima was lost because she was badly handled by officers without capacity, and bad men when the gale struck us. When I saw that the ship was going to sink, I went after the life preservers and commenced to give them out to the passengers. The steward told me to let them alone, and ordered me forward’” (“Negligence” 1).217 Rowan goes on to claim that “I was saved because I got a life preserver, and if the others had been allowed to get them too, many would have been saved with me. The passengers were kept penned up until the last moment and then made to go down into the ocean like a pack of dogs” (“Negligence” 1). This sensational narrative relates the dehumanization of the Colima’s passengers, who have been transformed here from casualties of a disaster to the victims of human ineptitude and cruelty. Despite the various explanations as to the wreck’s cause, readers from California to Kansas City were left to question if the wreck of the Colima, which foundered due to poor weather and improperly stowed cargo, may as well have been a massacre.

215 “An Infernal Machine.” The Kansas City Journal. 31, May 1895. p. 1. The paper reports that the hotel was “unoccupied two years ago and the police believe that the bomb was placed there at that time, but no one has advanced a reason why it was deposited there” (1).
217 Reprinted from The Call.
For Vandover, personal crises only mount after he learns first of Ida Wade’s pregnancy and then of her suicide, a tragedy compelling Vandover’s father to send him on a sea voyage and vacation to Coronado Beach just outside San Diego. While Vandover makes resolutions to reform his life, it seems apparent that even before the wreck of the S.S. Mazatlan he is starting to crack. It is en route to Coronado that Grace Irving, the young female passenger that Vandover had formerly encountered at the Mechanics Fair, approaches him and solicits a queer response. At first, Vandover lusts after Irving. His “heart knocked at his throat; he drew his breath once or twice sharply through his nose. In an instant all the old evil instincts were back again, urging and clamouring never so strong, never so insistent” (Norris 90). Irving, coyly, asks, “‘Don’t you want to come and talk to me?’” (Norris 90). To which Vandover, aware now of the ruin that his behavior has wrought, replies, “‘No, I don’t…I don’t want to have anything to do with you’” (Norris 90).

Vandover’s staunch rejection of Irving’s advances is determined and direct, but it also suggests lability. Following the encounter, Vandover “felt a glow of self-respect for his firmness and his decision, a pride in the unexpected strength, the fine moral rigour that he had developed at the critical moment” and wishes that his father “might know how well he had acted” (Norris 90). Throughout the novel Vandover battles against his desires and as he degenerates his thought becomes increasingly erratic, ruminative, and self-persecutory. Vandover does not trust himself and even in this scene he does not so much reject Irving, as he does the Brute. Vandover’s articulation is the externalization of an internal struggle. It seems likely that already something has fissured in him and that Vandover is essentially losing the power to self-regulate. When he wishes that his father could have seen him act, he means just that. As he increasingly succumbs to despair,
Vandover’s ideal, moralizing, and socially acceptable self becomes the performative identity.

The wreck is the novel’s most brutal section and it culminates in the bludgeoning death of Brann, the Jewish jewelry salesman, who only attains naming after the fact when Toby, the bleary-eyed waiter at the Imperial, discloses it to Vandover. Throughout the shipwreck, Vandover, arrogant and self-serving though he may be, ultimately displays restraint, ego strength, and ethical fortitude but, initially, he panics. “Vandover’s very first impulse was a wild desire of saving himself; he had not the least thought for any one else. Every soul on board might drown, so only he should be saved” (Norris 95). But soon following, and after the fate of the Mazatlan is assured, Vandover selflessly volunteers his life jacket to a fellow passenger.

The scene is purest chaos and Vandover provides the narratorial eye through which Norris directs the reader’s gaze sequentially through the pandemonium. A waiter approaches Vandover and they shake hands “fervently, without knowing why…then the waiter turned away, and dropping on his knees began to pray silently to himself” (Norris 97). A Salvation Army congregation raises hymns. The once confident boatswain’s mate “rushed to the rail…stood upon it for a moment, and then with a great shout jumped over the side” (Norris 98), a suicide that encourages others to do the same. So, while the S.S. Mazatlan is foundering in choppy waters off the California coast its deck is a spectacle of whistles, flare guns, and gun shots. People drop to their knees in prayer or otherwise leap to their deaths through “clouds of steam and smoke and mist” (Norris 100). It is here that the woman Vandover had offered his lifejacket, and who refused it, is struck by the foremast’s boom and killed. “She dropped in a heap upon the deck…her eyes rapidly opened and shut, and a great puff of white froth slowly started from her mouth” (Norris 100).
The episode culminates in the murder of Brann, who, save one passage, is referred to solely as the \textit{Jew} throughout the text. Brann’s murder has been the subject of significant scholarly attention for its antisemitism, as Brann’s final moment provocatively stages the death of the Jewish jeweler, revealing “a silver chain of bubbles escaping from his mouth” (Norris 103). This discharge of the material markers of his profession constructs the Jew through bigoted stereotype, but perhaps most startling in Brann’s murder is not the struggle that ensues as he clings to an oar nor the drawn out beating, but Norris’ refusal to name the character, even in his death throes, as anything but the \textit{Jew}. Brann only gains a name after his murder, when he becomes yet another story, and Norris’ approach closely aligns with the racial biases I’ve indicated previously in readings of articles that omit the names of the Mexican American victims at Lone Pine and in certain of the reports addressing the Chinese dead of the Colima. The omission of non-white names reflects a bleak vision of racial power that actively subordinates the value of non-white lives within the national narrative.

As the lifeboat takes on water, one passenger cries “‘Push him off!’” while another screams “‘Let him drown!’” (Norris 103). The scene expresses the moral evolutionary spectrum just as much as does Vandover’s devolution, and it does so with a baser public human animality, a group think that, although uneven, targets and destroys the ethnic Jew in order to save itself. “It was the animal in them all that had come to the surface in an instant, the primal instinct of the brute striving for its life and for the life of its young” (Norris 103). Despite the depraved calls for Brann’s death, Vandover pleads to spare his life. But the Brute, as Norris would have it, wins out. “‘Oh, God!’ exclaimed Vandover, turning away and vomiting over the side” (Norris 103). The fact that the

\footnote{218 For more on issues of anti-semitism in the work of Frank Norris see Pizer, Donald. \textit{American Naturalism and the Jews: Garland, Norris, Dreiser, Wharton, and Cather}. Champaign: Illinois UP, 2008.}
Salvationist, Brann, and Vandover each wretch some bilious discharge is a grotesque yet important feature. These eruptions exude a kind of dead oralization, an automatic response suggestive of language’s limitation to express traumatic events as well as its tangibility via the rhetorical production of social crises. Brann murdered, Vandover and the other survivors brave the rain and cold, many half-clothed and freezing. Vandover himself “could do nothing; he had almost stripped himself to help others. Nothing more could be done. The suffering had to go on, and he began to wonder how human beings could endure such stress and yet live” (Norris 105). Vandover may be a reprobate and ne’er-do-well, but he also possesses a clear moral compass. In an episode that affirms Donald Pizer’s belief in literary naturalism’s “affirmative ethical conception of life” (Realism and Naturalism 12) Vandover chastises and sanctions himself for his conduct, offers to give up his life vest to save another, and then strips himself nearly naked in order to help those worse off than he.219

Following Vandover’s rescue from sea and return to San Francisco, he again ventures into the Imperial and there encounters Toby the waiter, who conveys that twenty-three people died in the sinking of the Mazatlan. Vandover “marveled at the strangeness of the situation, that this bar waiter should know more of the wreck than he himself who had been upon it” (Norris 110). Vandover, looking quite the sight, seems to Toby as though he’d “been drawn through hell backward and beaten with a cat!” (Norris 109). Vandover’s appearance after surviving an actual disaster smacks of vagrancy and prefigures his financial ruin and degeneration. “His hat was torn and broken, and his clothes, stained with tar and dirt, shrunken and wrinkled by sea-water. His shoes were

219 Naturalism humanizes even its most repellent characters while presenting, as Donald Pizer indicates, a world that is “both commonplace and extraordinary” (12). Pizer’s insight into the genre’s “affirmative ethical conception of life,” (12) despite its plays on morality and its characteristic pessimistic
fastened with bits of tarred rope; he was wearing a red flannel shirt with bone
buttons…tied at the neck with a purple handkerchief of pongee silk; his hair was long,
and a week’s growth of beard was upon his lip and cheeks” (Norris 109-10).

Despite Vandover’s haggard look and ill-fitting clothes his experience is
yesterday’s news. Vandover is hardly able to regale Toby with his tale, as Toby is
already aware of the event and its repercussions up to and including Brann’s murder.
Vandover’s crisis as a victim is present for him, but it is displaced for others because the
news has aligned the public’s understanding of the Mazatlan disaster while excising
victims like Vandover from it. In a sense, the waiter has already lived through the
tragedy and Vandover’s narrative, unlike that of the old man and the fire, loses an
authentic immediacy because it is a story already told. It seems then that while personal
tragedy is socially suppressed, tragedy as public spectacle is a prized commodity.

In Toby’s recounting to Vandover of Vandover’s experience, it becomes clear
that with the rapidity that news is spread the public defines the parameters of mourning, a
situation that obscures personal experience and threatens to invalidate lived actualities.
Such mediations allow the event to languish in the rhetoric of sympathy while staging an
empathetic nearness and physical distance between social actors, ultimately producing
the wreck of the Mazatlan as just another story. The Imperial comforts Vandover with
“oysters, an omelette, and a pint of claret” and he soon “began to wish that Flossie would
come in” (Norris 110-11). Following the wreck, Vandover desires the comforts of habit,
the company of a prostitute, and revelry amid his “many past debauches” (Norris 111).
Vandover’s licentiousness and intemperance are succor to him. He senses their power to
stabilize his anxieties and set things, even transiently, to rights. At the same time,

determinism, is central to conceiving how its violence ruptures identity and social form in order to
demand ethical re-evaluations of human experience.
Vandover wants to be recognized, so that he might tell of his travails and locate catharsis through the acceptance and support of another. But this option is not available to him. Subjective trauma is subordinated to public spectacle. Much to his chagrin, the only person Vandover sees after leaving the Imperial’s seductive comforts is a reminder of his terminal future set in the guise of Ida Wade’s mother. The moment suggests how Vandover’s addiction takes the place of more meaningful communal modes of therapeutic stabilization. A now thoroughly traumatized Vandover cannot locate social integration because the climate of crisis has generated barriers to authentic personal connection.

**Socially Engineering Vandover and His Brute**

The aleatory nature of crisis keeps Vandover off balance and imposes an ever present threat that over time disrupts the boundary distinguishing Vandover’s subjectivity from his environment. Norris conveys these episodes of psychological fissure through scenes of sublime encounter within natural and manmade environments. On the Mazatlan, Norris describes “[a] sickly half-light…spread out between the sea and the heavens” and “livid blotches of fog or cloud whirling across the black sky, and the unnumbered multitude of white-topped waves rushing past, plunging and rising like a vast herd of black horses galloping on with shaking white manes” (93-94). The sea is described as a living thing and much in the way that Vandover injured Ida Wade so too does Vandover envision the ocean violating the land. “To the landward side and very near at hand, so near that he could hear the surf at their feet, the long procession of hills continually defiled, vague and formless masses between the sea and sky” while “[t]he wind, the noise of the waves rushing past, the roll of the breakers and the groaning of the cordage all blended together and filled the air with a prolonged minor note, lamentable
beyond words” (Norris 93-94). The sea’s vividness, much like the image of Lone Pine in ruins and the firestorm devouring Chicago, represents the environment’s inherent violence. Vandover experiences the sea as the intimate externalization of his own thoughts and feelings and as the boundary distinguishing self from environment frays it provides space enough for Vandover to perceive his own fragility in relation to the disasters held within the sea.

Norris’ second turn to the sublime occurs after Vandover recognizes his diminished artistic. As he gazes from his apartment upon San Francisco, Vandover contemplates the city’s enormity.

It was night. He looked out into a vast blue-gray space sown with points of light, winking lamps, and steady slow-burning stars. Below him was the sleeping city. All the lesser staccato noises of the day had long since died to silence; there only remained that prolonged and sullen diapason, coming from all quarters at once. It was like the breathing of some infinitely great monster, alive and palpitating, the sistole and diastole of some gigantic heart. The whole existence of the great slumbering city passed upward there before him through the still night air in one long wave of sound. (Norris 170)

Norris’ contextualization of the city as a living thing shifts the sublime experience away from encounters with the natural environment to that of the manmade. Romanticized nature is revised and infused with fantasies of industrial violence and mechanization. The urban world is aligned, however unevenly, with that of the natural one, and disaster’s potentialities ascribed a contiguous natural and social environment.

It was Life, the murmur of the great, mysterious force that spun the wheels of Nature and that sent it onward like some enormous engine,
resistless, relentless; an engine that sped straight forward, driving before it the infinite herd of humanity, driving it on at breathless speed through all eternity, driving it no one knew whither, crushing out inexorably all those who lagged behind the herd and who fell from exhaustion, grinding them to dust beneath its myriad iron wheels, riding over them, still driving on the herd that yet remained, driving it recklessly, blindly on and on toward some far-distant goal, some vague unknown end, some mysterious, fearful bourne forever hidden in thick darkness. (Norris 170-71)

Vandover’s vision conceptualizes society as a technological marvel, an organized machine exuding social forces that like a great hive ceaselessly work to erect a modernity that relentlessly feeds upon the people constituting it. Life as disaster doesn’t provide for renewal in any emancipatory sense. It facilitates the culling, as Herbert Spencer and his Darwinian contemporaries might suggest, of those deemed biologically weak and socially unfit, drawing into focus the social Darwinist’s vision of a scientifically engineered, market-driven, and oppressive society somehow, by the social Darwinian logic, more adequately in tune with the exigencies of nature.

Vandover can’t exist in the world, but he also never really knows why, because, as Barbara Hochman writes, Vandover, alone in his self-sovereignty, “experiences all losses as punishments…caused by him alone” (7).²²⁰ Vandover’s melancholia only mounts as he learns about his father’s death, comes to understand that his lifestyle cannot be so easily maintained, and eventually descends into inebriety, destitution, and madness.

²²⁰ Regarding Vandover’s habits, Barbara Hochman identifies Vandover’s gambling as a coping strategy because “without the threat of loss, Vandover has nothing to live for. It is in this sense a stroke of genius that Vandover finds a framework within which to tempt fate to force losses upon him regularly” (10). Hochman, focusing on Vandover’s trauma, especially the early death of his mother, suggests that Vandover “never adequately recovers from the losses he endures” (5) and rightly identifies Vandover’s conduct as largely childlike, a person “who takes that abandonment (and all future abandonments) as a deserved punishment” (5).
Vandover’s problem may be that he is extra moral or, as Dan Colson more recently suggests, that Vandover’s conduct is a response to ideological and socioeconomic conditions precipitated by Darwinian logics exerting “an unnecessary, destructive force that causes biological regression and social malfeasance” (44). As Vandover careens down the rungs of the social ladder, he more and more comes to view himself as abject and a degenerate of increasing magnitude. Vandover’s psychotic break and devolution is nothing short of a violent self-abrogation, a discursively produced disintegration manufactured less by him than it is by a society engaged in a similar pattern of arousal and self-reproach. Barred a way to imagine himself outside his maze of oppressions, Vandover’s only real freedom is found in the supine art of his self-destruction.

221 Dan Colson understands Vandover’s fall as a response to social Darwinism and the incommensurability of Herbert Spencer’s “evolutionary anarchism and laissez-faire liberalism” (43). Colson identifies Vandover as responding to political and economic crises, noting how particular characters represent socioeconomic placeholders and writes that in Vandover’s predatory friend Geary we find a “condensed image of the oppressive state, a reminder that capitalism and government produce negative consequences” (43).

222 Freud, Sigmund. On Murder, Mourning and Melancholia. New York: Penguin, 2005. Freud differentiates melancholia from mourning on the supposition that the melancholic loss is unconscious, and, so, not easily realized. He suggests that “[i]n mourning, the world has become poor and empty, in melancholia it is the ego that has become so” (205-06). In Freud’s interpretation, the lost object and the ego become indistinguishable within the psyche of the individual. Melancholia “behaves like an open wound, drawing investment energies to itself from all sides…and draining the ego to the point of complete impoverishment” (212). Melancholia generates “self-reproaches as accusations against a love-object which have taken this route and transferred themselves to the patient’s own ego” (208). Essentially, the potential to love is caught in a cycle of abrogation and self-loathing. Freud writes that “[i]f the love of the object, which cannot be abandoned while the object itself is abandoned, has fled into narcissistic identification, hatred goes to work on this substitute object, insulting it, humiliating it, making it suffer and deriving a sadistic satisfaction from that suffering. The indubitably pleasurable self-torment of melancholia, like the corresponding phenomenon of obsessive neurosis, signifies the satisfaction tendencies of sadism and hatred, which are applied to an object and are thus turned back against the patient’s own person” (211). See also Kristeva, Julia. Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection. New York: Columbia UP, 1992. Central to Kristeva’s theory of abjection is the object of fixation and its symbolic logic that triggers a negative associative chain, producing revulsion and aversion, but which also breaks down the borders between self and sign and self and others. The abject is a violation that always looms, threatening to shatter our preconceptions of psychological and social stability. Psychologically, “what is abject,” writes Kristeva, “is radically excluded and draws me towards the place where meaning collapses” (2) and it is the “abject and abjection” that Kristeva asserts are “[t]he primers of my culture” (2). Abjection so violates ideal ego states that it lays bare the basest of human desires, violence, and predations. Taken far enough abjection signifies the unremitting return to perversion and horror, a self-abuse characteristic of the borderline type that seems not dissimilar from Vandover’s transformation.
Vandover’s Lycanthropy-Pathesis is described as “some kind of nervous disease” (Norris 205) and it makes for a sensational dehumanization and cynical riff on man’s exalted place in nature’s evolutionary hierarchy. While Vandover’s unique etiology likely results from his seemingly limitless debaucheries, alcoholism, and syphilis infection, Norris still frames it as a kind of neurasthenia and symptom of social crisis. Vandover is a masochist, who likes to slum, but his immorality and poor sense are coordinated by public narratives of disasters, economic crises, and social failures that reinforce Vandover’s catastrophizing mentality. The truth is that Vandover is so conditioned to await the next crisis that Vandover can’t really be Vandover without his brute. He thrives on the anxieties inducing his self-abasement and can’t seem to separate himself from what lives,

[far down there in the darkest, lowest places [where] he had seen the brute, squat, deformed, hideous; he had seen it crawling to and fro dimly,

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223 For further reading on disease and devolution in Vandover see Mitchell, Lee. “‘Little Pictures on the Lacquered Surface’: The Determining Vocabularies of Norris’s Vandover and the Brute.” Papers on Language & Literature, vol. 22, no. 4, 1986, pp. 386-405. Lee Mitchell takes up a semiotic analysis of Vandover and considers the moral rhetoric constituting Vandover’s character as contributing to his self-destruction, indicating that “Vandover is destroyed less by what he does than by moralizing descriptions of his behavior, less by contingencies of an unknown future than by the terms he has to assess his past” (387-88). Mitchell, reflecting on language’s influence on the construction of individual psychology and social relationships suggests that “[h]ow conditions are interpreted and, more specifically, how the story of oneself is told, determines an individual far more than any particular aspect of conditions themselves” (388), arguing that the novel shows “that both circumstance and heredity are less constraining than the power of language itself” (388). Mitchell further asserts that Vandover’s syphilis infection remains an unspoken and suppressed disaster metonymically implying the spread of “diseased patterns of thought” (404) and the destructive force of repression. Seitter, Dana. “Down on All Fours: Atavistic Perversions and the Science of Desire from Frank Norris to Djuna Barnes.” American Literature, vol. 73, no. 3, 2001, pp. 525-562. Dana Seitter takes up a similar approach when she argues that Vandover exposes how sexual desire has been narrativized in American society, identifying Vandover’s devolution and apparent hybridizing between man and beast as evidence of “a degeneration narrative” (526) that expresses a cultural fascination and anxiety towards “sexual perversity” (526). Compellingly, Seitter forwards that Vandover “stages the body in a state of ruination that bears the decaying effects of modernity and, in turn, advances a bestialized human figure as a mode through which modern perversity expresses itself” (528). Seitter, analyzing the scientific and medical discourses informing the novel, identifies Vandover’s decline as dialectically responding to beliefs in racial inferiority and sexual degeneration vis-a-vis miscegenation. The cultural anxieties related to sexuality that Seitter and others identify correlate to the public health crusades and perceived crises pertaining to white American beliefs about Chinese American effeminacy and disease in San Francisco’s Chinatown and the Barbary Coast.
through a dark shadow he had heard it growling, chafing at the least restraint, restless to be free. For now at last it was huge, strong, insatiable, swollen and distorted out of all size, grown to be a monster, glutted yet still ravenous, some fearful bestial satyr, grovelling, perverse, horrible beyond words. (Norris 159)

It is the brute that ceaselessly cycles through Vandover’s mind, reproducing its authority through vice and whether Vandover remedies his anxieties through sex, gambling, or booze, each new arousal and satiation only prompt him to become a little more unhinged. Eventually, he is left the maddened evacuated spectacle of consumption “sitting bolt upright in his chair, his hands gripping the table, his eyes staring straight before him. He was barking incessantly. It was evident that now he could not stop himself” (Norris 222). The degree to which Vandover “feared that he was going mad” (Norris 180) during his metamorphosis into “an angry dog…snarling and barking over a bone there under the table” (Norris 221) correlates to the rate at which crises permeate his life and Vandover’s disturbing tale of an inebriate harried to his pitiable end in the form of a wolf is just as much a play on devolution as it is a critique of disaster culture.

Myles Weber suggests that Vandover’s debility ultimately frees him from the ideological and economic drives structuring his psychology and experience.224

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224 Myles Weber suggests that Vandover’s collapse into poverty evidences “abandonment of the character’s predatory nature due to his vexing inability to channel nascent barbarism toward a sustainable leisure-class profession” (221). Weber understands Vandover’s class position to be so central to his identity that even when “abjectly poor and living a precarious life of want and discomfort” he remains “morally unable to stoop to gainful pursuits” (230). Weber suggests that it is only by succumbing to his brute fate that Vandover releases himself from middle class prerogatives and ironically positions himself to survive. Jennings, Randee Dax. “The Economy of Affect in Frank Norris’s Vandover and the Brute.” Studies in the Novel, vol. 46, no. 3, 2014, pp. 335-353. Adopting a position similar to Weber, Randee Jennings views Vandover’s descent from comfort and financial security to abject poverty as representing an experience of many young men following the Panic of 1893. Jennings suggests that Vandover’s pliability “should be understood as a defensive tactic for negotiating diminished socioeconomic expectations” (335) and writes that “even the ugliest of emotions can resonate with or even garner sympathy from readers similarly experiencing economic turmoil” (337). Jennings also discusses the phenomenon of slumming and the spectacle of middle-class and wealthy urbanites descending into the
Vandover’s poverty facilitates his radical alterity and in that a certain social freedom. I struggle with Weber’s argument because Vandover’s disintegration demonstrates a depraved state of severely limited social agency. Moreover, I interpret Vandover’s debility as structural endpoint in producing the vagrant as a disciplinary sign. That also does not make Weber’s position any less valid and his conclusion lends an inherent ambiguity to Norris’ closure. Vandover’s poverty destabilizes the social futures assumed of young, well-off, and college-educated, white men and suggests that the leisure class are threatened by their own amusements. Norris’ play on social fitness emasculates and de-racializes Vandover, and the final scene in particular suggests the ease with which crisis rhetoric constructs social deviance.

Sped by a sensational national press, disasters take on such a persistent ubiquity that they present as much as socially engineered crises as they do catastrophic environmental events, which is why one can and should contextualize issues like crime and public health scares as social disasters perpetuated through economic and social inequalities. Vandover’s debasement, seen perhaps most clearly in the novel’s closing moments when he enviously stares at a child eating buttered bread, exemplify the social Darwinian logics that precipitate intemperance and poverty, conditions exuding a radical social sublimity nowhere more apparent than in Vandover’s vagrancy. Vandover covets the simple extravagance, the rich creamy rendered milk of the mother cow spread thickly atop the boy’s bread just as the boy does, so Vandover’s encounter with the child at novel’s close is like an encounter with himself. Confronted by the dull unthinking automatic desire separating satiation from want, Vandover hovers there, the ruin before city’s impoverished districts to revel in the spectacle of the lower-classes. He argues that in Vandover’s inability to “extract himself from the slums” (347-48) the reader is exposed to a sense of their own “vulnerability” (348), a dynamic that “reflects both the white bourgeoisie xenophobia toward a growing
renewal. Salivating for a crumb, Vandover manifests the alterity of the destitute, a
disintegrative presence binding society through its warning against social transgression
and emanating the full interiorization of a culture that configures him as less a man than
he is the logic of disaster itself.

immigrant population and the actual dire consequences of economic depression at the fin de siècle”
(347).
Conclusion

(Dis)integration and Cultural Form

Literary naturalism strove to simulate empirically natural dramas. In doing so, naturalism replicates the conditions exacerbating social threats by revealing the integrative psychological, social, and environmental crises that formulate the negative ecologies aestheticized in literary fiction. Through interrogating these sites where scenes of fragility can most clearly be observed, (dis)integrative analysis ascribes causality to the rhetorical and material conditions that prevail throughout the text. We are then able to not only encounter the subject, but through the subject interpret the prism of cultural forces animating the subject’s vulnerability and further question our relationship to these conditions of precarity.

Thinking (dis)integratively about American literary realism helps us to recognize the influence that crisis culture exerted on realism’s democratizing project and how the chaotic narratological matrix from which realist’s wrote influenced authorial choices to emphasize the inconsistencies and disorder of American progress. American literary naturalists struggled to reconcile the terms of nature through pessimistic critiques of biological and social determinism and in so doing laid bare the prevalence of disaster culture. To read a naturalist text is to be encountered at every turn by a new crisis and these traumatic rents, while often sensational, nonetheless disclose a pervasive cultural fatalism.

In the turn-of-the-century United States postbellum urbanization, advances in transportation, especially the completion of the transcontinental railroad, industrial development, an evolving consumerism, and innovations in communication technologies set the stage for disaster culture’s emergence. During this same period, evolutionary
theories, especially those promulgated by the social Darwinists, worked to naturalize social crises, promoting a vision of society threatened by those deemed biologically unfit and that required scientific management and social control. With the advent of the mass press and new visual medias like photography and film, disaster narratives and stories of social crisis accelerated disaster as a shared national experience across urban centers and rural America alike. U.S. disaster culture did not emerge from turn-of-the-century literary naturalism, but literary naturalism’s emphasis on nature fueled its construction of negative ecological contiguities. It is then not surprising that the American mythopoeia characterized by U.S. literary naturalism conveys societal integration predicated on (dis)integration.

The problem is not that the press informs a national population of the conflicts in their midst, but that the press embellishes crises that are ideologically determined, and all too often placed in service to oppressive social forces. Moreover, as the rate of narrative dispersal increases, something Joseph Pulitzer’s and William Randolph Hearst’s yellow journalism wars of the 1890’s certainly accelerated, narratives of social calamity and environmental disaster undergo a rhetorical conflation, generating an aura of constant threat that precipitates disaster as the context of daily life. Distant catastrophes manifest as localizable threats and local conflicts evidence one’s stake in a shared national crisis, but this process germinates anxieties that blur the line separating the personal from the public such that one begins to experience the crises of others as a crisis of the self. Within modern consumer culture and its innumerable entertainments, these subtle secondary traumas take on a rhetorical ubiquity making it difficult to separate from and resist the compulsion to engage the ever-expanding disasters that so arouse, fright, and excite.
A (dis)integrative aesthetic unearths the cumulative negativity saturating a text by emphasizing scenes of abjection and crisis. So, as much as a car wreck or a structure fire are cause to turn away from calamity, they nonetheless tend to draw us closer to the chaotic center, as if through some performative veneration a redemptive insight might be gleaned through the act of witness alone. Scenes of horror provoke our anxieties and their wounds draw us nearer to our own, but when renewal and reconciliation are unavailable to us the tragedy only reintroduces an irreconcilable anxiety. These transient devastations circulate with such fluidity that they become a kind of dialogue unto themselves arcing from our newspapers and televisions to computer screens and phones. Bad news seems just about everywhere we turn, and while since the late nineteenth-century the technological mediums have changed, disaster has persisted as the thing holding society together.

By interpreting the narratological properties of (dis)integrative stories and questioning how and why these narratives integrate us, we create a pause in the chaotic and emotionally numbing rhetorics that obscure and normalize our crises. Honestly appraising the logics of (dis)integration provides a means to discern the narrative conditions affecting the aesthetics of everyday life because narrative does not just express ideology, it is ideology, a form of participatory discipline governing our thoughts and actions. The logic of (dis)integration synchronizes U.S. culture in a kind of shared desperation, but, allowing that the narratological matrix constituting crisis already contains solutions to its remedy, it is also a logic that discloses its own causalities and contradictions.

Across this study, I have analyzed the ways (dis)integration operated in literary culture as a means to narrativize Progressive Era social crises. Through the domains of poverty, addiction, racial violence, and disaster I have demonstrated how realism’s
(dis)integrative scenes project negative ecologies, the matrixial relations shared between psychological, social, and environmental forces, that seem to foreclose the social futures of the poor and the addicted. I have tried to look at these categories as disciplinary signs and question the value of poverty, addiction, and racial violence to cultural hegemony in the U.S. Thinking ecologically means thinking integratively not only about the material features of an environment or social behaviors, but also about the ecology of mind and the social imaginaries that construct those shared narratives coordinating publics. Ecology’s inherently integrative system allowed my further explication on the narratological formations of the ecology of racial violence.

Texts like Rebecca Harding Davis’ *Life in the Iron Mills* or Stephen Crane’s *Maggie* do much to demonstrate negative ecologies in which self, society, and environment mutually reinforce terminal futures. These narratives disclose how (dis)integration manifests ideological violence by producing forms of social discipline. Conversely, these same narratives reveal the structural violence that make these crisis conditions possible. Interpreting narratological (dis)integration clarifies the rhetorics constituting the subject’s violation and facilitates counter-narratives in strategic opposition to the forces naturalizing abjection and violation.

The renewal staged following a great tragedy implies that ideology motivates material resurgence. That is to say that when faced with social crises the (dis)integrative scene signifies the psychological renewal of the witness more so than it does the material regeneration of the subject. That is not to suggest that encounters with societal crises do not motivate social change. They do, and often give rise to people’s better moralities, but the object of derision and threat remains ideologically emplaced in order to reify the production of a particular social order. By way of contemporary example, when we contemplate the unhinged violence so rampant in the early twenty-first century United
States, we would do well to recognize that the gun massacres in our schools and shopping malls are part of a contiguous historical narrative. Popular sovereignty and its trail of racial violence has given way to a radical individuation, a sovereignty not of the community but of the individual, who, though motivated by ideological forces, remains committed to his own absolute power.

Much as lynching victims are deprived their selfhood as a means to generate the communities of their persecutors, the mass shooters of today manifest a terminal sovereignty closely aligned with the logics of gendered and racial power. That is to say that the politics of U.S. gun violence correlate with the cultural traumas of lynching in the United States. Even in this example crisis reifies state securitization and the further militarization of domestic life. Victims are trafficked in the politics of sentiment and public grief facilitates communal alignment. The mass shooter reiterates (dis)integration across the United States, for some representing the absolute sovereignty of the individual, a white male power exercising its authority over all life, shaping nature through death, a ruin promising a resurgent power, a (dis)integrative logic validating crisis culture. For others, the mass shooter integrates publics through calls to re-narrativize these same logics as a means to generate security and positive social change.

Similarly, the street vagrant projects a (dis)integrative narrative of mental illness and addiction. What is not disclosed are the actualities that effectuate his vagrancy. Despite the fact that in his very physicality he manifests the story of structural violence and personal trauma, these elements are culturally suppressed and the communal abandonment he signifies rationalized as the symptom of personal choice. In point of fact, those who witness the vagrant rhetorically discipline themselves and generate their own ideological containment because the vagrant’s disciplinary aura reminds one that the
vagrant is not just expressing his own violated presence, but exists as the emblematic failure stalking social life.

What must be sanctioned is not so much the vagrant, but the witness who encounters him. Behavioral deviations that lead one on a path to inebriety and destitution must be guarded against, monitored, and mitigated via other socially approved beliefs and practices and so the (dis)integrative subject emanates the violating actualities that motivate retrenchment in the labors of daily life and its culture of crisis. If the vagrant articulates a stark warning against violations to the established social order then the promise of (dis)integration that he communicates with every material fiber of his being motivates the witness to reify the conditions of social power that oddly enough perpetuate the man’s poverty. In this zero-sum game the object of derision maintains a spectrality in public consciousness, a constant presence determining the boundaries of empathy and social action. That is, unless we choose to reimagine the logics of representation.

There is no escaping (dis)integration and we would do well not to try. Instead, we should endeavor to question the authority of these disciplinary signs, endeavor to understand their discursive formations, and rethink how we interpret the experiences they inscribe. By working through the narrativity of the subject we open our discourse to the structural determinants of social problems and more accurately identify the discursive practices either exacerbating or resolving social problems. Once understood, the narratological systems generating (dis)integration can be addressed through alternative narrative strategies. (Dis)integration then becomes a rehabilitative enterprise that discloses the alternative discourses already circulating within the disintegrated subject. In this sense, the negative critique allows access to a more balanced, integrated, and ecologically determined social future.
(Dis)integration provides the opportunity to rethink our relationships to social problems and see how studies in U.S. literature, and narrative more generally, can expand our understanding of the forces that facilitate and counteract social crises. I again return to the idea of trauma as an indeterminate and ambivalent space. Rather than think of the depraved and often grotesque scenes that (dis)integrative aesthetics avail to us as somehow foreclosing the possibility of psychological health or social equality, these representations of crisis provide the opportunity to recall the value in the dignity of human life. Just as much as (dis)integration conveys the integrative forces of violence and social oppression so too does it open us to the potentialities of empathy and those re-narrativizations of crisis enabling positive social action and emancipatory change.
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