SUBLIME INSOLVENCY: THE AESTHETICS OF FAILURE AND AMERICAN LITERATURE AFTER THE PANIC OF 1837

A Dissertation in

English

By

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

December 2014
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Abstract

Although it is often glossed over or mentioned in passing in literary studies, the Panic of 1837 was one of the most important historical moments in the antebellum United States. Among other consequences, it served as a catalyst for a surge in literary and cultural production related to economic crisis, the “credit system,” and individual failure; its impact lasted through the Civil War. In the wreckage left behind by the collapse, American writers, especially those involved in reform movements, struggled to reaffirm faith in the rationality and comprehensibility of the credit-based market and the possibilities for individual self-possession and permanent value. This dissertation explores four such recuperative sites of fantasy that were prevalent in the literature of the post-Panic years: the home, the spirit-world, the temperance meeting, and the post-1848 West. While these discourses attempted to serve as reassurances for the possibilities of success amidst widespread failure, this project analyzes the ways in which for many authors affected by the Panic, working within these very discourses, this fantasy of recuperation was bound to end in failure. From this failure, however, emerge ways of living and relating to others that run against the grain or question the desirability of the values associated with economic success. Exploring writers from Catherine Maria Sedgwick to Theodore Winthrop, I argue that antebellum literature inverted the prevailing definitions of success and failure, making from the latter the means of imagining social ethics through and beyond the credit market.
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Acknowledgments

I would first and foremost like to express my deepest gratitude to my advisor, Dr. Christopher Castiglia, for his guidance, patience, and willingness to devote so much time and effort to aid in the completion of this dissertation. From inspiring me with ideas and broad directions to meticulously editing my writing, you were there every step of the way, and I would never have been able to finish this dissertation without you. I would also like to thank Dr. Hester Blum, Dr. Sean Goudie, and Dr. Amy Greenberg for the many insights, suggestions, and support you all have given me over the last several years.

I would like to thank my family for their unqualified support and love. Dad, Carrie, and Barbara, you were there for me through thick and thin, no matter what the circumstances, with a smile and a word of encouragement. I would also like to express my gratitude to my aunt and uncle, Tina and David, for their boundless love and uncanny ability to inspire me. We are, as we always have been, a little family.

Finally, I would like to thank my friends and colleagues, especially Kris Lotier, Ethan Mannon, and Jacob Hughes. You were always there cheering me up with good humor, good advice, and good times. Although our times as fellow graduate students might be at an end, I know that no matter where we go our friendships will last a lifetime.
Dedicated to my mother, Alice.
Introduction

“There must be a recuperative principle in this great country to restore things some time or another, but I shall not live to see it.”

-Philip Hone, New York, 1842

The expansion of print culture, as Michael Warner famously argued drawing from Benedict Anderson, worked to create a shared sense of affiliation and the “imagined community” of the nation in the late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century United States. What was equally, and arguably more problematically, drawing distant individuals together into a community during this period was the rapid expansion of the credit-based economy. Due to such factors as a lack of “hard money,” or specie, as well as geographical distance, Colonial and post-Revolutionary America had always relied heavily on forms of credit to facilitate commercial enterprise and market exchange. According to historian Bray Hammond, the lack of hard cash caused colonial and post-colonial Americans to “invent, improvise, covenant, and pretend” in order to provide entrepreneurial endeavors with funding.1 By the middle of the nineteenth century, this dense web of relations, often between distant actors, and predicated on narrow windows of timeliness, had become astonishingly complex. “Manufacturers and urban importers

depended on the remittances of wholesalers,” writes Edward Balleisen: “wholesalers on timely collections from retailers and artisans; retailers and artisans on eventual payment from consumers; discounting banks and note brokers on disbursements by drawers of promissory notes and acceptors of bills of exchange; and endorsers on the pecuniary fidelity of friends or relatives.”

The pervasiveness of intricate webs of credit, he reports, meant both that most individuals in the period would carry debt and also that the fortunes of proprietors and laborers alike would be “inextricably bound up with one another.”

According to one contributor on the “Moral of the Crisis” in The United States Magazine, and Democratic Review, the credit system had become monstrous, a “morbidly overgrown” beast “swallowing up” everyone, from the merchant and clerk to the mechanic, laborer, and everyday consumer.

Especially after the end of federal funding for the United States Bank in the early 1830s, the financial environment was just as complicated. Many states allowed anyone to open banks without any requirements of initial capital. Thousands of banks operated in a confederation that, with relative degrees of capital and solvency, circulated hundreds, if not thousands, of different bank notes. Although financial periodicals calculated, as best as they could, exchange rates and price indices for as many of these notes as possible, the length and complexity of such tables as one might find in Hunt’s Merchant’s Magazine might have caused a businessman to despair, head in hands. There was also a lag in the circulation of information, and so almost all information on banks,

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3 Ibid.
4 “Moral of the Crisis” The United States Magazine, and Democratic Review (Oct. 1, 1837), 111.
rates, specie-to-notes ratios, bankruptcies, and so on were always to be integrated into the financial planner cautiously. Checks and bills of exchange added to the entanglements of the economic environment, as was their usual course of circulation, as assets, through a variety of hands, sold at a variety of discounts by brokers along a chain that was often extended internationally, from Liverpool to Illinois and everywhere in between. A high degree of turnover in elections required a vigilant eye for the passage and overturning of new laws related to commercial enterprise, banks, credit-debtor relations, bankruptcy, and so on. Asa Greene’s 1834 *The Perils of Pearl Street, Including a Taste of the Dangers of Wall Street* is penned at wit’s end over the “miseries of trade.” “A man,” he reports, “may be continually handling the cash, without a sixpence ever sticking to his fingers.” Such were some of the perplexities financial conditions in the 1830s. And then there was speculation—speculation in stocks, in state bonds, in public works, in railroads, in waterways, in towns (which might prove real or imaginary) and real estate, in various goods and commodities. Such assets of potentially questionable value—they might, after all, be worthless paper—could, in turn, be made, often quite easily, into security to further extend credit.

No event drew attention to the ever-more tumultuous sea of credit, with its incumbent anxieties and perplexities at the individual level, than did the Panic of 1837, one of the most important, and in literary studies often overlooked, events in nineteenth-century United States history. Explanations for its cause at the time varied wildly, although irresponsible speculation, especially in land, over the course of the 1820s was

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5 Ibid, 7. Almost no one succeeds to wealth, he proceeds to note, and nine out of ten will go bankrupt and lose credit and character. And Asa Greene was writing during a “boom time” in the nation’s economy!
an almost unanimous culprit. Whig publications blamed Jackson both for the removal of funds from the Bank of the United States and for his Specie Circular of 1836, his attempt—perhaps poorly timed—to curb the rampant speculation on credit by allowing only government land to be bought with hard currency. Democrats pointed at the recklessness of financial institutions (especially Western “wild cat” banks), unstable paper currencies, and a “humbug” economy of easily-manipulated credit that had far surpassed its backing in capital. Additionally, there were crop failures in 1835 and 1837 alongside tightening credit from European institutions, especially the Bank of England. Others, especially clergymen like Lyman Beecher, suspected that the Panic was a retributive or corrective act of God, operating like a force of nature. The self-proclaimed “flunkie” of Wall Street, Frederick Jackson acknowledged that the causes for an individual’s failing is likely as complicated as the nation’s. In the preface to his *The Victim of Chancery; or a Debtor’s Experience* (1841), he wrote that it can “with great propriety be said that, the common resort of writers of fiction, to ascribe reverses of fortune always to some one important act of unfaithfulness, or some great calamity, like the perfidy of some oft obliged friend, a conflagration, or the wreck of a ship at sea, affords but a feeble picture of the intricate windings and final mesh of entanglement, which usually lead to such a result.”

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8 For an elaboration on the “moral” and theological responses to the Panic, see Balleisen.
However intricate the causes involved, in March notable failures started cropping up around the country and on May 10, 1837, New York banks ceased offering specie for their notes; over the coming weeks banks from Boston to New Orleans began going under, inaugurating years of financial tumult even after the initial “panic” or crisis subsided. The immense volume of bankrupts and insolvents accumulating in the wake of the Panic eventually brought about the short-lived Bankruptcy Act of 1841-42, the first attempt at a comprehensive federal bankruptcy law since 1800. The crisis caused widespread, angst-ridden suspicions about the free market, the workings of which suddenly appeared sublime, terrifying in effect and just on the edge of intelligibility and expression. Far more crushing than the Panic of 1819, the Panic of 1837 inaugurated, as historian Alasdair Roberts writes, America’s “first great depression,” one that led to over a decade of economic insecurity that many contemporaries called the Hungry Forties. Seemingly sturdy banks and businessmen found themselves in “embarrassed” or “reversed” situations; insolvency and bankruptcy, unemployment and inflation, were rampant. Citizens found themselves puzzling over the causes for the financial collapse and, like Philip Hone, former mayor of New York, over what “recuperative principle” would present itself to salvage both themselves—their credit and character—and that of the national economy as a whole. Writing to London, the British Ambassador to the United States, Henry Stephen Fox, noted: “it would be difficult to describe, or render intelligible in Europe, the stunning effect which this sudden overthrow of commercial credit and honor of the nation has caused . . . The conquest of the land by a foreign power
could hardly have produced a more general sense of humiliation and grief."¹⁰ The United States was glutted with, as Scott Sandage reports, “bankrupts, deadbeats, broken men, down-and-outers, bad risk, good-for-nothings, no-accounts, third-raters, flunkies, little men, loafers, small fries, small potatoes, old fogies, gomers, flops, has-beens, ne'er-do-wells, nobodies, forgotten men.”¹¹

While a great number of writers sought to create different strategies for restoring faith in the stability of the market (and the market-bound self), others, especially those looking in from the outside, became skeptical over the desirability of market capitalism and the middle-class values and fantasies of success that struggled to anchor it. Economic panic served as a catalyst to rally around long-standing political tensions: Thomas Dorr led a two-month long rebellion in Rhode Island; the Anti-renters, sometimes calling themselves the Calico Indians, caused a widespread stir in the state of New York, while, in the City, flour riots erupted over inflated prices for basic goods. In 1838 police were sent to tame massive riots in Boston, and tensions over inflation and a lack of employment opportunities spilled over into racial violence in Philadelphia in 1842.¹²

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Rather than unite the nation in collective humiliation, the financial disaster often served, instead, to intensify regional antagonisms.\textsuperscript{13}

At the same time, the decades between the Panic and the Civil War were also a period of expansive literary production in the United States. The First Great Depression was elemental to this expansion as well as the emergence of the “American Renaissance.”

Three months after the financial collapse hit, Ralph Waldo Emerson was making his famous “American Scholar” address to the Phi Beta Kappa society having transferred almost seven thousand dollars to his brother, William, in order to try to remain solvent.\textsuperscript{14}

Emily Dickinson’s family was forced to sell off much of its property (which they would later be able to recover). Almost all of the “major writers” of the American Renaissance and their works, as William Charvat noted more than half a century ago, were affected to some extent—and sometimes a very large extent—by the Panic and its aftermath. Our conventional narrative of literary history sees cultural nationalism, emblematized in the form of Young America, as the impetus behind the birth of a “uniquely” American

\textsuperscript{13} As one anonymous writer warned the “People of the Southern and Southwestern States” in a widely-circulated article from the \textit{Charleston Mercury} in August, 1838, though “pecuniary embarrassment” pervaded the entirety of the country, and the “monied institutions of the north and of the south, in point of solvency, are upon an equal footing,” a puzzling asymmetry remained: “exchanges between the north and the south, are from seven to forty per centum in favor of the former . . . southern credit is lamentably depressed, while northern credit is comparatively firm; the dockets of our courts are crowded with suits brought by northern houses against southern houses” thus causing Southerners to sue other Southerners. The Northern banks, he continues, “send hither their funds—exchange them at an enormous premium for southern funds—turn these into southern staples (cash articles) at par—draw bills on them, which they sell at like profit—reinvest the proceeds in the same way, and renew the operation.” The writer calls for Southern producers to stop selling their products for “worthless” Northern and foreign notes of credit and currencies so as to force others to, figuratively, come “to your soil.”

\textsuperscript{14} For a discussion of Emerson’s financial straights, see Maria Carla Sanchez, \textit{Reforming the World: Social Activism & the Problem of Fiction in Nineteenth-Century America} (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2008).
literature. While this push to consolidate nation culture and thus national identity, against
the grain of European prejudices, was certainly a primary factor, it was by no means the
only one. Europeans were certainly vocal about the lack of “culture” in America; but, in
the Panic years, during and after which many of these canonical authors were writing,
Europeans were louder in voicing their opinions that Americans were reckless
speculators, careless managers, and shameless defaulters; Americans, in short, had no
close. When treasury agents were sent to Europe in 1842 on a mission to secure a
loan, the agents went “a-begging,” humiliatingly denied money at bank after bank. As
James de Rothschild, of the immensely influential, Europe-based Rothschild firm, said of
the matter: “Tell them you have seen the man who is at the head of the finances of
Europe, and that he has told you that they cannot borrow a dollar. Not a dollar.”

As reform discourses struggled to push men and women to understand the terms
of success and failure as a matter of individual character, rather than stemming from the
structural necessity of failure and inequality (or complicated strings of international
finance), the terminology of credit (“third rate,” “no account,” etc.) came to define a way
of “mathematically rating men as relative winners or losers in life.” The proliferation of
the term “character” in the antebellum United States almost always carried this central
implication of credit standing prior to the emergence of inchoate credit ratings services in

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15 Quoted in Ron Chernow, The House of Morgan: An American Banking Dynasty and
the Rise of Modern Finance (New York: Grove Press, 2001), 5. The denial by European
financial institutions to deal with the United States caused a widespread push by Whigs to
pass legislation for the repayment of debts. To propagandize this movement, some
politicians and banking interests fell to unsavory tactics. As Chernow documents,
George Peabody had agents bribe Daniel Webster to agitate for debt repayment.
16 Ibid.
the 1850s. Credit was a preeminent source of anxiety, perplexity, and fascination for antebellum businessmen.

Financial disaster and failure, as I explore in this project, invited individuals to imagine ways of being and relating to others, to imagine different possibilities and futures, which chafed against the consolidation of values underwriting middle-class credit relations. This desire for alternatives builds from the idea that, as Jack Halberstam and others have argued, failure can be more than a source of shame or abjection; it can pry open ways of thinking about ethics beyond that of market capitalism and consumer culture. In the wake of widespread failure and economic disaster, antebellum reformers created fantasy spaces that attempted to restore individuals from a volatile sense of a shattered self and, even more dangerously, an irrational, topsy-turvy market linked by fragile threads of credit among innumerable agents, which no volume of knowledge sufficed to comprehend. However, as I will show, these various fantasies providing a “recuperative principle” that attempted to restore stability after the panic seem, to many writers in the twilight of its initial shocking effects, to fail to deliver on what they promise, and yet in failing open up possibilities for critiquing a market-based, middle-class ethos of credit, consistency, and control.

To this end, though I pay attention to early post-Panic texts, especially in my discussion of Washingtonian autobiographies, my selection of texts is largely drawn from later works, generally between 1848 and the Civil War. This is for two primary reasons: first, I follow Alasdair Roberts in his argument that statistics and the concept of a

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“modern boom and bust cycle” can never capture the lasting social and political effects of a financial disaster so devastating as that which occurred in 1837. While calculated numbers might show a stabilization of the economy around the period of 1842-43 (after a loss of anywhere, by estimate, of one to six billion dollars in assets, stocks, and real estate), numbers don’t account for everything. During the 1840s, the United States remained frozen out of the international credit market and credit remained an angst-ridden subject; twenty-six state governments defaulted. As a historian, Roberts back-pedals somewhat on this salient critique of periodization, calling an “end” to the Panic in 1848 when the United States was readmitted into the international financial market. At the individual level, however, it is difficult to pin down any definitive concluding moment, as the lingering effects of financial collapse then and now, touching multiple generations of Americans, are nearly impossible to calculate. Retrospective periodization based on statistics and cycles makes failures into unsettling figures of backwardness, people who, possibly because of the backwardness of their characters, can’t get with the times and take solace in the news of all time highs in the economy.

Second, this body of later fiction, as I emphasize especially in chapter one, was not only a response to a historical event (the Panic itself), but also to the body of Panic fiction and reform discourse that saturated popular culture in the aftermath. Not only are several of the authors discussed here, like Catherine Maria Sedgwick and T.S. Arthur, thus evidently quite market-savvy, but they also show a literary market in a critical dialogue with its role in the wide financial sea. Was Panic fiction and the market for recuperative fantasies another iteration of emergent forms of vulture capitalism like wrecking, “spirit-mongering,” rum-selling, and life insurance? Are developing practices
of vulture capitalism the sign of a resilient elasticity of the market able to “bounce back”
or of its propensity for breeding the desire for profit and success on the backs of others’
failures? Such are two interwoven economic and ethical questions, amongst many others,
that Panic writers, not to mention political economists, grappled with in the 1840s and
50s. In the following chapters, I chart four “principles” or fantasies of recuperation that
were prevalent in this period of widespread failure, all of which are woven, to differing
degrees, through the woof and warp of reform: the home, the spirit-world, the bottle (and
its complement, the temperance pledge), and the post-1848 West. In each case, though
with very different inflections, the authors discussed employ the extant generic
conventions of post-Panic recuperative discourses, but twist and undermine their
ostensible purpose, creating something akin to uncanny iterations of them.

These chapters thus also echo Jane Bennett’s assertion in *The Enchantment of
Modern Life* that a counter-ethic to the market need not originate in a space outside of the
field of production and consumption; each literary work testifies to the notion that one
can appropriate and retool the codes that already exist within it. In this vein, the title of
this project takes its cue from Emily Dickinson’s “Sic Transit Gloria Mundi.” The stanza
in which the narrator ultimately calls “Insolvency, sublime!” can be interpreted in two
contradictory ways depending on how one joins the lines together. In the first, she moves
from redundant pairing (“mortality is fatal”—the state of being subject to death is a state
leading to death) to growingly disjunctive or ironic pairings, linked only by a comma
(which both connects and separates them). This produces a reading of class-inflected
socio-economic commentary: in antebellum culture, to be “of the mob” and dishonest
(“rascal”) had somehow become a sign of heroism and the state of “insolvency” and
poverty had become romanticized in fiction as a mark of grandeur. In the second reading, the two middle lines are linked through the figure of texture (gentility is “fine” while the rascal is, by definition, coarse), and the first and last are paired together. To be in a state of being unable to pay one’s debts, removed from the grid of credit, becomes, given the multiple valences of the term “sublime,” “redundant” with a state of intellectual-spiritual uplift and/or, in its “weakened sense,” bodily gratification. These two readings are brought together if we see Dickinson as playing, in the stanza and the poem as a whole, with the popular idiomatic phrase “from the sublime to the ridiculous,” couching the sublime figure of death in a “ridiculous” phrasing of redundancy, and the “ridiculous” figure of commercial life (and elsewhere in the poem, humdrum politics) in the form of the sublime. Thus, in an exemplary instance of Dickenson’s poetics of “choosing not to choose,” as Sharon Cameron has termed it, we have the implication that cultural fantasies of class in the wake of the Panic might very well be throwing a false smile on the face of financial failure and poverty as well as the implication that failure might be productive of aesthetic potential. My project lies at the nexus of these two possibilities.

Chapter One looks at the work of sentimental domesticity as a means by which the market and masculine self-possession could be recuperated, an argument that has been well documented by scholars. However, I argue that the functionality of sentiment as a tonic for the fragmenting force of the market sometimes goes awry. In the case of Catherine Maria Sedgwick’s Panic fiction, sentimentalism must not fulfill what has been understood as its market function. Rather than providing a stable anchor of permanent wholeness, Sedgwick saw the work of sentimentalism as producing a temporary sense of
wholeness that can be endlessly repeated; permanence would make sentimental discourse extraneous insofar as the market conditions it sought to redress, as its fundamental raison d’etre, would be redressed. Thus, rather than stabilize the market economy and its psychological effects, Sedgwick reproduces the logic of the market within the very discourse that is ostensibly attempting to buoy it. I contrast Sedgwick, who sees the failure of sentiment to create permanent wholeness as necessary and beneficial, with Anna Warner’s *Dollars and Cents* (1852). The sister of the popular author of *Wide, Wide World* and other works of sentimental, theological, and children’s writing, Warner tells the story, in a fictionalized autobiography, of the family’s financial ruin after the Panic. In addition to deploying and then undermining the standard conventions of women’s Panic fiction, Warner exposes the failure of sentimental restoration by translating a story of financial panic into a story of traumatic loss. In shifting registers from the potential recovery of wealth to irrevocable loss, Warner suggests the inability of sentimental discourse to perform its function. However, in this failure and the sense of loss it produces, a possibility of being and relating to others beyond the gendered strictures of “sentimental ownership” is, at least momentarily, opened for the novel’s young, female narrator.

Chapter Two suggests another popular restorative discourse after the Panic that arrives in a less expected form: spiritualism. Focusing specifically on the works of Epes Sargent, whose career as editor and writer took him from Panic fiction to spiritualist non-fiction, I argue that while his brand of “empirical” spiritualism failed to create an other-worldly stabilization of market forces—to materialize the “invisible hand”—it nevertheless engendered a counter-market ethic by, as Jane Bennett suggests, “animating
objects.” The animation of objects, she argues, transforms them from inert materials into objects worthy of care and ethical consideration. This collapsed binary of human and non-human, subject and object in Spiritualism is especially of relevance in the context of slavery, which relied fundamentally upon such distinctions for its legitimacy. In his anti-slavery novel *Peculiar; a Tale of the Great Transition* (1864), Sargent shows, on the one hand, that through this animation of objects casts light on the purported illegitimacy of slavery. On the other, unlike much early Panic fiction that castigated the speculative market entirely, Sargent shows, connecting the market of stocks in New York to the market of slaves in New Orleans, how one can use the codes and conventions of the market in order to use its possibilities for the good of others. And this is, of course, in terms of the literary market, exactly what Sargent himself is doing.

Chapter three examines a different type of spirit: ardent spirits.18 This chapter explores questions of credit, addiction, and insanity after the financial collapse. The post-Panic years saw a surge in the emergent class of professionals taking to the bottle or to the asylum (or, often times, both). Attempting to restore a sense of a stable, rational market, temperance reform pointed to drunkenness and flawed character as the cause for individuals’ economic failures and loss of access to credit. Instead of (what was generally the case) anxious, broken businessmen and bankrupts taking to the bottle to drown their misfortune in temporary oblivion, temperance rhetoric reversed the causality, showing recurrently that it was taking to drinking that caused the failure in the first place.

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18 The pun is not my own but a reference to its use in the anti-temperance play “Departed Spirits, or the Temperance Hoax,” made famous by the coincidence that the main actor, a young John B. Gough, would go on to become one of the most famous temperance advocates in the country.
As scholars including David J. Rothman, Benjamin Reiss, and Matthew Warner Osborn have pointed out, reform discourses of temperance and insanity often sought to police middle-class respectability through the value of “self-control” over and against the behaviors of lower, working class individuals, especially urban immigrants. I look at two Washingtonian narratives penned by authors whose stories are informed by an ambivalent relation to their audience: one written by an Irish immigrant, Joseph Gatchell, who is also a banker and accountant, the other by a journeyman worker of Massachusetts, James Gale. Though these texts seem, superficially, to follow the formula of other Washingtonian “confessional” autobiographies, they ultimately go off script. Instead of pointing to themselves and their drunkenness as the reason for failure, these authors point insistently elsewhere: to class relations, national identity, and the confounding perplexities of the forces of the credit system.

Chapter Four revolves around the West, and especially California after the “discovery” of gold in 1848—often considered the “end” of the Panic historically—as another fantasy for restoring the wholeness and logic of self and market. While the fantasy of the “west” had lost its luster after the land bubble burst and the Panic set in, the “land of gold” seemed to rejuvenate its ideological function. Besides offering the hope for personal wealth, it also promised to provide a bulwark against one of the primary causes for the panic in the first place—the lack of specie in circulation that led to the saturation of credit relations. At the same time, from the perspective of those who pinned middle-class masculine identity to hard work and steady growth, it rejuvenated much of the same rhetoric of “illusions” and “mania” and “frenzy” that had characterized earlier Panic discourse. The “gold frenzy,” as Brian Roberts has argued, inflected the
consolidation of “respectable” middle-class identity by infusing it with the value of temporarily “rebelling” against such respectability. Theodore Winthrop’s travel fiction not only shows the fantasy of California (and the West in general) to be a marketing scheme, but his narrators also seem to perform a demonstration of switching respectability on and off; however, they veer towards the desire to not turn respectability back on. Beneath his jingoistic American boosterism is a lingering sense of desire for frustrated transgressive intimacies, often couched in cross-racial dynamics that are not adequately contained by the normative plots they seem to produce. Winthrop’s fiction thus exemplifies the ways in which the Panic created widespread skepticism and dissatisfaction with the terms of success in the “business of one’s life” offered up by middle class values and the redoubled efforts of reformers to make them the sole arbiter of personal fulfillment.

Methodologically, by emphasizing the economy, and more precisely the antebellum “credit system” as it was called, as a key element to understanding the financial Panic and its effects I hope to, first, follow those scholars looking for frameworks that push past the ostensible boundedness of the nation’s borders into a far more decentralized network of international financial institutions and an even more widespread web of credit and investment beyond their sited locations. In this project I analyze works that trace financial networks across distant geographic locations from the major Northeastern cities to New Orleans, Panama, California, Oregon, Utah, England, and Ireland. Moreover, I focus specifically on the Panic and its aftermath, roughly between the years of 1837 and the Civil War, in part in order to add historical specificity to the terms of the “market revolution” often employed in literary studies when
describing the relationship between the literature and economy of the period. Sweeping phrases about “unprecedented growth” or, conversely, “anxieties over the expansion of industrial capitalism” are all, to a certain degree, accurate. Yet, they tend to flatten out the period’s economic and cultural complexities into either a progressive narrative of growth or an anti-progressive narrative of chaotic modernity. If the economic conundrums of the Panic and its after years show anything at all, it is that the inevitability of the so-called “triumph” of market capitalism was by no means inevitable.

I do not make a claim in any chapter for representativeness. In fact, most, if not all, of the texts I examine at length are highly idiosyncratic and, as suggested above, at odds with or deeply critical of the genre they ostensibly inhere in. However, their inability or refusal to follow the course they are meant to take—what I highlight as their economic tricksterism—is what makes them worthy of analysis. It is one thing for scholars to say that different forms of reform or restoration had to fail; that, for instance, sentimental discourse could never be “outside” of the market. It is another to look at the ways that writers deployed that failure within the literature itself and experimented with what kinds of ethical bearings and lingering affects it might produce. Literary criticism has often portrayed writers of the period as either adopting narratives designed to recuperate the credit-based market, insisting that failure stems from individuals’ character flaws, or as pushing back against such false promises but leaving the meaning of failure intact. This project aims to push past this two sided debate, showing that writers as diverse as Anna Warner and Theodore Winthrop actually transformed the meaning of

failure, reclaimed its value, and turned it into an opportunity for aesthetic experimentation. In other words, instead of adopting the prevailing definitions of failure and success or simply contesting them, these writers ultimately took up failure as the object of aesthetic experimentation and socioeconomic development. Moreover, as failure intersected with the cultural formation of class-based identities along lines of gender, race, nationality, and sexuality, I analyze how authors such as Warner, Winthrop, and James Gale revised such identities in the process of revaluing failure. Although this project is historically grounded, in all of my chapters I examine the ways in which many writers, though now considered “minor” or “failed,” developed economic-based literary styles—the aesthetics of failure—that continued to influence authors throughout the “long” nineteenth century and likewise remain a productive source of study for analyzing cultural responses to the economic crises of the present.
Chapter One:  
Financial Panic and the Uncanny Sentimentality of Anna Warner’s Dollars and Cents

Mortality is fatal—  
Gentility is fine,  
Rascality, heroic,  
Insolvency, sublime!

-Emily Dickinson, from “Sic Transit Gloria Mundi”

The gendered work that sentimental fiction performed in the wake of the Panic of 1837 is, by standard accounts, the labor of restoring the fragmenting forces of the competitive market into a stabilized sense of emotional, domestic plentitude. But what happens when this narrative trajectory fails to engender this fantasy of wholeness and permanence? In this chapter, I take up two primary texts—Catherine Sedgwick’s short story “The City Clerk” in Tales of City Life (1850) and Anna Bartlett Warner’s Dollars and Cents (1852)—that complicate, and at times severely undercut, how we understand sentimental discourse after the Panic as it worked to anchor widespread economic insecurity. These two texts, as I will argue, portray the sentimental restoration of economic collapse as a work, inevitably, of failure—but of failure that is ultimately productive. What such failure produces, however, is radically different between the two works. For Sedgwick, the failure of domestic sentiment to create an anchor of “permanent value” serves as the necessary precondition for the perpetual reproduction of sentimental discourse and its “virtues.” While scholars have elaborated the many ways that the division of home and market was permeable, often focusing on how market values saturated the domestic sphere, Sedgwick, more peculiarly, shows domestic sentimentality to require the
inequalities and fragmenting forces of the market in order to maintain its (for her, necessary) existence. As a type of progressive reform discourse, sentimentality can thus neither cater to a return to the stasis of a “pastoral” past nor can the wholeness it produces be anything but momentary—in either case, its dialectical propulsion system of loss and recuperation, failure and success, would stall out; there would be no need for the fantasy. Sedgwick, in other words, does not restore the fragmenting, future-oriented forces of the market so much as she reaffirms and reproduces them under the aegis of sentimentality. For Warner, even the fleeting wholeness at work in Sedgwick’s tale fails to materialize: economic collapse is not routed into a narrative of sentimental restoration but of an even more crushing sense of loss, subjective dispossession, and emotional fragmentation. In what I call a form of uncanny sentimentalism, Warner’s novel takes up the conventions of sentimental Panic fiction while constantly subverting their recuperative purpose; the typical rhetorical strategies for producing a sense of sentimental “specie” rings, in Warner’s hands, more like counterfeits. Moreover, with its complex treatment of how “love-objects” negotiate loss and absence, Dollars and Cents both reveals the impossible fantasy of wholeness at the heart of such restorative Panic fiction while also suggesting that this failure might productively open up a space for being and relating beyond the propriety-formations of disciplined identity.

As recent scholarship has shown, the Panic of 1837 inaugurated a widespread financial collapse at the same time as it produced an immense number of literary responses penned by individuals from all walks of life, and in all sorts of venues and generic forms. Ann Fabian has outlined the ways that early responses to the Panic,
usually anonymous and largely found in newspapers and upon pulpits, argued forcefully over the causes for the collapse.²⁰

Fiction of the time largely sought to turn the market back into something beautiful. This body of “Panic fiction” has over the last decade become an object of renewed scholarly interest, recently—as Mary Templin suggests as to her own part—due to the all-too-familiar financial issues stemming from subprime mortgage lending and banking decisions of 2008. Even in 2014, we puzzle over the concept of “too big to fail.” Relating the literature of the antebellum period to the economic crisis is, of course, not entirely novel; William Charvat wrote about the effect of the Panic on the “major writers” of the American Renaissance in 1937.²¹ What distinguishes recent inquiries into the subject, at least since the 1990s, is a sustained engagement with the relationships between economics, generic form, and gender constructions that fiction responding to the Panic sought to negotiate. Scholars such as Larzer Ziff, Terence Whalen, Toby L. Ditz, and, most recently, David Anthony have explored the ways in which the complex networks underpinning economic instability provoked anxieties (and, for Ziff and Anthony, fascination) over a “fictional” economy and masculine self-possession, manifested especially in forms of sensational literatures.²² On the other hand, influenced by works

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on domesticity and gender by Ann Douglas, Gillian Brown, Nina Baym, and Jane Tompkins, scholars such as Joseph Fichtelberg, Maria Carla Sanchez, and Mary Templin have sought to articulate the ways that financial Panic impacted the discourses of domesticity and sentimentalism. These critics take their cue from Jennifer Baker’s assertion that “Economic criticism reveals not only how economic practice and theory were informed by notions of gender but also how women brought particular sensibilities and experiences to their understanding of economics.”

In line with the scholarship they take after and extend, these works tend to move past Charvat’s “major” writers of romanticism to explore the many authors of Panic texts, usually white, middle-class women, some of note in their day, obscured by the canon.

In these latterly interrogations of Panic fiction, gender, and domesticity, there is almost unanimous agreement as to the conventionality of most of the texts they are scrutinizing. As Gillian Brown has influentially written of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*: “The domestic doctrine [Catherine] Beecher helped to define held women and the home as the embodiment and the environment of stable value. Maintaining a site of permanent value, the domestic cult of true womanhood facilitated the transition to a life increasingly subject to the caprices of the market.” Such works of “sentiment,” as Jennifer Baker

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describes, “assisted in rationalizing a new economy by easing the strain of industrialization, urbanization, and financial volatility.” Baym concurs, arguing that “domesticity is set forth as a value scheme for ordering all of life, in competition with the ethos of money and exploitation that is perceived to prevail in American society.” Sanchez describes that such sentimental novels were part of the larger formations of reform, like missionary and temperance work, and as such were far more “restorative” than “radical,” an argument Templin agrees with. The texts themselves appear highly stylized: the patriarch of the family fails and loses his wealth, forcing the family’s fall from affluence into gendered routines of economizing of goods, laboring, and — what is most important — providing the support and comfort to the husband, father, or brother who has been “unmanned” by the market until he gets back on his feet. In works such as Catherine Maria Sedgwick’s Poor Rich Man, Rich Poor Man (1836), Elizabeth Oaken Smith’s Riches Without Wings; or the Cleveland Family (1838), and T.S. Arthur’s Debtor and Creditor; a Tale of the Times (1849), to name but a few, familial sentiment restores “real” wholeness and plentitude, overcoming the fragmenting, dispossessing forces of speculation and market competition; if the “crown” of the afterlife awaiting even economic failures seemed a bit too ineffable to be satisfying, the home could provide a taste of it on earth, or at the very least provide a stable foundation to resume economic upward mobility. An exemplar of this generic formula, Mrs. Coleman tells her

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25 Baker, 655.


27 Maria Carla Sanchez, Reforming the World: Social Activism and the Problem of Fiction in Nineteenth-Century America (Iowa City: Iowa University Press, 2008), 11.
anguished, bankrupt husband in *Debtor and Creditor* after he has confessed to her their “reversed” position (a domesticated parallel to the confession to creditors): “Let us try to bear the misfortune with patience. Prosperity has not elated us; and we should not be unduly cast down by adversity.”28 For Sanchez, “The overwhelming cognitive and institutional crush of national disaster is countered with a determined binary simplicity” and Scott Sandage likewise suggests that, “conventional plots and characters helped to contain failure and reinforce the idea of achieved identity. Didactic narratives understood by all fixed blame and made every dilemma seem crystal clear.”29 Adding some nuance to such arguments, Joseph Fichtelberg sees the “domestic doctrine” as operating in two primary modes: narratives that, on the one hand, “sought to reassure anxious readers by portraying Christian heroines whose reserves of feeling sustained them through any loss” such as Mrs. Coleman, and, on the other, narratives portraying “enterprising” “characterless” women, who boldly venture outside the home to try to recoup the family’s losses.30 “Seizing the reigns from their failed husbands,” he argues, “the resourceful women of these narratives manage to make money and maintain innocence.”31 As we shall see, though, in some texts of the period these two trajectories are not necessarily mutually exclusive. The core of the “Panic” text, as it is for much sentimental domestic fiction, is loss and failure. As Templin describes, “while nearly every Panic novel contains at least one instance of failure, the meaning invested in that

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30 Fichtelberg, 144.
31 Ibid, 19.
loss—for example, who bears responsibility for it, how it should be responded to—varies widely.”

As I will show below, Catherine Sedgwick’s often overlooked “A City Clerk” and Anna Bartlett Warner’s Dollars and Cents complicate how scholars have typically described, or indeed flattened, the relationships between failure, loss, and recuperation in sentimentalism. Both are responses to the financial crisis written more than a decade after it occurred, and I argue are quite explicitly engaging not simply the events of the Panic, but also the fictional literature of those events. In other words, these texts are responding not only to financial disaster, but, perhaps more interestingly, to the generic conventions and rhetorical devices of “Panic fiction” that had already become rigidified by the 1850s. They are, of course, not the only or first authors to do so; there was a diversity of texts offering, even implicitly, suggestions for what types of practices and morals fiction should engender in the wake of economic crisis, especially in the realm of fictionalized (and non-fictional) forms of “advice.” Caroline Sawyer’s “The Merchant’s Widow” (1841)—the plot of which, like so many of its kind, is predicated on a series of nearly impossible circumstances that will land the impoverished widow’s family suddenly back in wealth and splendor—advises that all ladies, even those of wealth, should be educated in certain, “appropriate” forms of labor just in case of the worst. More of relevance here, in the anonymously penned “The Failure,” a fairly conventional work of Panic fiction that appeared in The Knickerbocker; or New York Monthly

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33 Another form of advice, and one of great interest to Templin’s thesis in following Baym, is that of educating women in financial matters and using them as economic agents (such as counselors) with input in making family decisions.
Magazine in 1842, a friend suggests to Mrs. Warrington, whose husband is soon to announce his financial ruin, that the ideal of poverty that she has drawn from fiction is quite distinct from the reality in that it obscures the role of labor and production:

I suppose you have drawn your ideas of that happy state from Washington Irving’s “Wife,” and fancy that to be poor is simply to be dressed in white, with wild flowers in your hair, and play upon the harp and eat strawberries and cream. I wonder who picked those strawberries, Mr. Irving—for they are not as easily gathered as flowers—and where the cream came from?"^{34}

What makes the works of Sedgwick and Warner distinctly worthy of interest are the ways in which they complicate the idealized sense of sentimental “wholeness” and “permanence” that conventionally function to recoup the failures and losses incumbent on the fragmenting, dispossessing forces of the market. In “The City Clerk” Sedgwick implicitly suggests that the “specie” of sentiment cannot and must not be made to appear permanent; structurally reliant on economic hierarchy, sentimental discourse, for its very existence, must perpetually respond to and momentarily ameliorate the effects of market inequalities rather than fix their source, or, as Sanchez and others have described, return to a “pastoral” past. While Sedgwick thus corrals sentimentalism back into a future- and market-oriented progressive narrative, in Dollars and Cents, penned by the sister of the more famous author of Wide, Wide World, we are presented with a story detailing what happens when financial loss is circuited into sentiment, and yet that leads only to an even more profound sense of loss, dispossession, and fragmentation. As I will argue, not only does Warner thus undermine the redemptive work of domestic sentiment in narratives surrounding the Panic—a critical suspicion that structures her novel, despite being a foundational figure alongside her sister, Susan, in what we know as sentimental fiction—

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^{34} The Knickerbocker (Sep. 1842), 230.
but hints, in the offing of the text itself, that such a loss might also be productive in opening up a space beyond what Lori Merish describes as “sentimental ownership,” or a proprietary relation to the self and others that reinscribed market values within female subjectivity.

Moreover, while both texts speak distinctively to the ways in which the market and home traverse one another (complicating the status of writing itself as commodity), and bear the hallmark trappings of generic conventions, Warner’s novel is especially interested in the role that objects play as relays between economics and domesticity, absence and presence, loss and the possibility or impossibility of recuperation. Formally, “The City Clerk” and Dollars and Cents could not be more different. The former is a brisk eighty pages (plates included) that feels like twenty, at most; the latter is a two-volume, five-hundred plus page novel that feels like double that. This disparity in pacing is not insignificant, however, as it bears crucially upon the projects of these authors. Whereas the rapidity of Sedgwick’s text lends itself to being formulaically repeated indefinitely into the future, and across any number of economic failures, the drawn-out slowness of Warner’s novel, paired with her emphasis on traumatic loss, implies an intensely personal understanding of economic collapse, one that no abstract formula can do justice to.

Like much of the didactic fiction she published in response to financial crisis, including Poor, Rich Man, Rich, Poor Man and Live and Let Live (1837), Sedgwick’s “The City Clerk” is a simple story: Charles Hathaway, the son of a father maimed by a factory accident, moves from the family’s impoverished rural home to New York City to work at a merchant’s firm. There is a theft and, upon inspection by police, the stolen
merchandise appears in his pockets, so he is whisked off to the Tombs. His sister, Ruth, speeds to his side without the lengthy preparation usually associated with the “characterless” heroines Fichtelberg describes, along with one of Charles’s fellow friends and employees, Henshaw, who had befriended her in the city immediately upon recognition. The “simplicity,” honest grief, and mutual affection of sister and brother attracts the attention of a lawyer “whose clever management of a criminal case had, a few weeks before, been much talked of in the city,”\(^35\) and he is engaged on the spot, thoroughly convinced of Charles’s innocence. While Ruth stays in the prison with Charles, keeping his spirits up and diligently reporting to home, the actual perpetrator—one long suspected by both Charles and Henshaw as the culprit, Otis Jackson—is caught, Charles is acquitted honorably, and, much to the surprise of his parents, he and Ruth show up at home on Thanksgiving Day. And if that were not enough cause for joy, Henshaw, who had quit at Brown, Wilson & Co. due to their maltreatment of Ruth, has secured a position for himself and Charles at a far more reputable merchant house, punctuating the rapidly paced tale with an exclamation mark.

Sedgwick’s story is worthy of our attention for several reasons. First, as I will later argue about Anna Bartlett Warner’s *Dollars and Cents* (1852), “The City Clerk” shows that “Panic Fiction” not only responded to the “events” of the Panic of 1837 themselves, but also to the fiction surrounding those events. In other words, there was a dialogue negotiating the proper relations between fiction and economics in addition to a

\(^{35}\) Catherine Maria Sedgwick, *Tales of City Life* (Philadelphia: Hazard and Mitchell, 1850), 36.
reaction to the financial crisis itself.\textsuperscript{36} One of the central points of concern for Sedgwick is in shielding her own writing from charges of profiting from disaster: “What compromised the writer’s position,” Ann Fabian writes of literature and emergent practices of vulture capitalism, “was that the whisper was repeated by storytellers and ‘penny-a-liners’ who sold more words the worse the panic . . . like wreckers, panic writers made their money at scenes of ruin, chaos, havoc, and destruction, and the power of their texts depended as much on disaster as on reassurance.”\textsuperscript{37} Anxieties over being labeled as one profiting off of the ruin of others would be especially of concern for a market-savvy writer like Sedgwick, whose career shows her remarkable aptitude for catering to the changing demands and tastes of her audience. Thus, rather than let the moral positivity of the text speak for itself, Sedgwick dramatizes her self-defense within the story. As Ruth enters the prison with Henshaw, they are prevented from immediately getting to Charles’s cell owing to the presence of a group of ladies from the country “full of pleasing excitement, from being, for the first time, within prison walls—the scene, to their imaginations, of so much possible romance—and their cousin, a young city lawyer, who acted as exponent of the scene.”\textsuperscript{38} There is something of a tableau here representative of the two primary (and primarily gendered) genres by which fiction approached the Panic: the sensational and the sentimental.\textsuperscript{39} The cells surrounding

\textsuperscript{36} For a discussion of the historical differentiation and proximity of “imaginative” literature and economic discourse in a British context, see Mary Poovey, \textit{Genres of the Credit Economy: Mediating Value in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Britain} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).
\textsuperscript{37} Fabian, 135-36.
\textsuperscript{38} Sedgwick, 33.
\textsuperscript{39} It is important to qualify this generalization by noting that these two genres were by \textit{no} means the only forms of response to the financial panic. One largely disregarded genre
Charles, No. 81 and 83, capture the ladies’ attention, as one is occupied by “Babe, the pirate,” whom they had “read of in the newspapers,” and the other by “Cousin Jane,” a German who had “burned his wife to death.” These figures are representative of what David Anthony has called “the sensational public sphere” that emerged over the early nineteenth century, a body of sensational and gothic literature that responded to anxieties over “dispossessed” professional masculinity in an unstable economy; indeed, these “sensational” figures are aligned, elsewhere in the text by implication, to the “savage” and overly-familiar treatment Ruth receives at the hands of the merchant, Mr. Brown (which causes Henshaw to quit), as well as the tale’s concluding diatribe articulated by Mr. Hathaway about the monstrous practices of speculation and commercial deceit. Moreover, the nicknames of the criminals (Cousin, Babe) not only effeminize them as they are turned helplessly into a spectacle for the perusal of curious ladies (the very sort of gender and sexual ambivalences sensationalism trafficked in) but also suggest a false sort of family/familiarity. In direct contrast, sandwiched between Babe and Cousin is a different sort of spectacle, a redundantly sentimental one: “a handsome youth, pale, haggard, and sorrowful, bending over a sheet of paper, on which he was intently writing”; the young lady of “irrepressible curiosity” sees “the paper was wet with tears.”

of panic fiction, as failing to align with either sensational anxiety or sentimental restoration, was satire.
40 Ibid, 34.
41 Countering the Habermasian notion of a rational male public sphere, Anthony argues that much of the “sensational” fiction of the period portrayed “male characters—especially professional men—that seek to negotiate the related crisis of economic self-possession and gender” (21) often in terms of “humiliation, disempowerment, and a general sense of class instability (23). More than a reflection of anxieties, though, these texts, as Ziff also has argued, allowed readers to “fantasize about their own outré forms of desire and enjoyment even as they denied that this link existed” (34).
42 Sedgwick, Tales of the City, 35.
sentimental spectacle is complete as Ruth rushes into the cell to embrace her brother, and Henshaw offers the explanatory background narrative to the spectators. The lawyer, Henry Sandley, moves from emotional investment to professional investment in the scene, choosing sentimental narrative over sensational, inaugurating a series of rapid and improbable events that land Charles and Ruth back at home, safe and sound, in the sanctity of their home.\(^{43}\)

“A City Clerk” exemplifies the manner in which sentimental discourse submerges the inequalities and instabilities of the market and law into a sense of domestic plentitude and wholeness, and yet interestingly complicates this fantasy. Gesturing to the recession of agrarianism westward over the course of the century, the story’s trajectory from rural to city does not follow the convention of moving from a pastoral economic order to an industrial one, but from industry to finance. The home, otherwise described in typical domestic fashion as poor but “neat,” is squarely within the bounds of the influence of industry: Ruth, though hoping for news from her brother, can hear “nothing but the factory,” a painful and constant reminder of her father’s accident.\(^{44}\) Quite distinct then from inhabiting a “rural” and pre-industrial economic environment, the home’s relation to labor seems at odds with Ruth’s loveable, rural “simplicity” in the city, when she doesn’t understand that she has to pay a fee to ride a cab (“people where I live,” she

\(^{43}\) The rapidity of the lawyer’s identification with Charles and Charles’s legal redemption cannot be understated given that the Panic produced heaps of newspaper articles and fictional accounts, such as Frederick Jackson’s *Victim of Chancery; or A Debtor’s Experience* and Warner’s *Dollars and Cents* documenting the slowness, complexity, and unpredictability of the legal system as well as the chicanery of lawyers in drawing those processes out as long as possible. The system here works miraculously well.

\(^{44}\) Ibid, 12.
explains, “often give rides to strangers” gratis)\(^{45}\). And yet, puzzlingly, the Hathaways seem to exist \textit{without} money, relying, at best guess, on the generosity of the community. Sedgwick, in other words, does not see different economic orders as antagonistic but as complementary. More peculiarly, she sees class inequality as \textit{necessary for the production of the conditions of sentimentality}. In \textit{The Poor Rich Man and the Rich Poor Man}, echoing the inherent asymmetry of sympathetic relations in Adam Smith’s \textit{The Theory of Moral Sentiment} (1795), the narrator remarks on “that great subject of inequality of condition”:

> Has not Providence made this inequality the necessary result of the human condition . . . If there were a perfect community of goods, where would be the opportunity for the exercise of the virtues, of justice, and mercy, humility, fidelity, and gratitude? If the rights of the poor of all classes were universally acknowledged, if intellectual and moral education were what they should be, the deaf would hear, and the blind would see . . . This true millennium is on its way. “Blessed are those who wait!”\(^{46}\)

At its conclusion, “The City Clerk” produces something of this miraculous situation, but with far different consequences than Sedgwick illustrated above. At the outset, the father, Mr. Hathaway, is described as a happy but “unfortunate man” as he had lost the use of his arm, and his ability to labor, owing to a horrific factory “accident” the memory of which remains potently present: “There it was,” Ruth reflects, “when her father was brought home from his new factory, with flesh torn from his arm and leg, and there it remained indelible.”\(^{47}\) Such a memorial of the physical violence of industrial labor and production, a deeply-embodied parallel to the more immaterial sonic waves of the factory

\(^{45}\) Ibid, 24.


\(^{47}\) Sedgwick, \textit{Tales of the City}, 10.
traversing the home, would seemingly take a miracle to redeem not dissimilar from the “deaf” being able to hear or the “blind” see. And a miracle indeed occurs: when Charles and Ruth return near the conclusion of the novel to announce that Charles has been acquitted and taken up a new position, Mr. Hathaway regains feeling in his arm in the act of embracing him, the act of sentimental exchange obscuring, miraculously, the embodied reminder of the violence of production underpinning systems of economic exchange; Sedgwick here, as Templin and Sanchez describe, domesticates the market. And, of course, rather than signify the end of economic inequality—which, as Sedgwick described above, would be the end of sentimentality and its virtues—this moment of reclaimed physical and moral wholeness reaffirms futurity: the core family and the promise of upward mobility, in the form of Charles’s new job (at a reputable firm, of course) and the implication that, as a new, honorary part of the family, Henshaw will marry Ruth. For those perversely desiring “a perfect community of goods” in Sedgwick’s fictional universe, one will have to be blessed to wait indeed!

While Mary Templin and Maria Carla Sanchez both agree that Panic fiction is more “restorative”—longing for a pre-industrial past or “pastoralism”—than “radical”—trying to create a better future—Sedgwick’s narrative disrupts such a desire by making even the rural home, which should be temporally and spatially distinct from market economics, integrated already into an industrialized environment, marked by its temporal rhythms (the bell) as well as by its debilitating physical effects. (That the domestic economist Sedgwick, who writes of the Connecticut Clock, “bless the economical artists that have placed within the reach of every poor man this domestic friend and faithful monitor,” has no qualms describing the trace of factory time in the home should come as
no surprise). Given the description of the relationship between the community of the home and the community of goods, it appears necessary to \textit{not} represent a pre-industrial past or place, since that would occlude the need in sentimental discourse to turn the losses and fragmentations of the market into wholeness. In other words, a return to the past or backwardness would produce stasis, whereas the need of sentiment, like other reform discourse, is perpetual and perpetually moving forward. In that sense, the recuperative work taking place at the end of Sedgwick’s “The City Clerk,” though deeply entrenched in a “restorative” structure, seems to perform this operation in an unexpected way; its wholeness, even of the miraculous sort, is necessarily momentary, fleeting; just after Mr. Hathaway miraculously embraces his son, his hand again falls limply to its side. Thus rather than recuperating the fragmenting, future-oriented push of speculative capitalism, Sedgwick reproduces it \textit{within} the framework of sentimentalism.

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But what if even this sentimental scene of joyous domesticity and new prospects fails to produce even a \textit{momentary} sense of recuperation and wholeness, but instead registers only an ambivalent sense of repeated, even more fundamental, loss and dispossession? What happens when sentimental restoration fails, and the promise of wholeness it offers only makes the cut that much deeper? When loss compounds loss? Such is the questioning that lies at the heart of Anna Bartlett Warner’s \textit{Dollars and}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textbf{48} Sedgwick, \textit{Poor, Rich Man}, 105.
\item \textbf{49} Although a variety of texts, like Hannah Lee’s immensely popular \textit{Three Experiments with Living} and Caroline Sawyer’s “The Merchant’s Widow,” sought to mitigate the effects of financial loss on the home by advocating for better education for middle-class women in basic forms of labor should they face the worst, these are braces for impact, not attempts to restructure the workings of the market.
\end{itemize}
The novel is a two-volume pseudo-autobiographical rendering of Anna and her older sister Susan’s childhood set against the background of the deterioration of the family’s finances after the Panic and how the family responded to the losses. There is little in the way of action; in gratingly patriarchal terms, the writer of the *North American Review*, in a joint review of *Dollars and Cents*, *Queechy*, and *The Wide, Wide World*, describes: “In plot they are deficient, certainly; may almost be said to have none; and in variety they fall immeasurably behind, as every picture of common life drawn by a woman necessarily must, for want of the wide experience open only to the other sex.”

The slowness of the plot, and its lack of variety (it does not even possess the international, episodic scope of the other Warner novels) is one of the ways that *Dollars and Cents* both takes on the conventions of sentimental Panic fiction and at the same time these conventions ultimately fail to operate in the ways they are supposed to. It bears the hallmarks of typicality: the father, Mr. Howard, fails due to over-expansive investment and is beset by creditors, specifically one Mr. McLoon; the female portion of the household, a stepmother and two sisters, is forced to economize and make the most of what is available, though this does not prevent the forced sale of much of their household property; and, in the end, Mr. Howard is given steady employment as a professor at a local college while the eldest daughter, Kate, marries a family-favorite young clergyman, Rodney Collingwood, who, the *North American Review* aptly notes, “walks under such a

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50 Anna Bartlett Warner, *Dollars and Cents* (New York: Putnam, 1852). The novel was elsewhere published under a variety of titles including *Glen Luna; or, Dollars and Cents* and *The Howards of Glen Luna*. All references to the novel will be cited parenthetically from the Putnam edition.

51 *North American Review* 76.158 (January 1853), 114.
veil of dimness in the story, as told by a little girl, that we are hardly sure we know him fully.”

As told from the perspective of the younger sister, Grace, however, this story of failure and loss is distinctly unlike the others. For one, Mary Templin, the only scholar to offer *Dollars and Cents* an extensive treatment, outlines the way Warner describes in detail the financial incompetence of the father, Mr. Howard, as his many speculations, grand projects, and litigations, though well-intentioned, all fail, putting a disproportionate burden on the women in the family. In a novel full of puns, it is not accidental that Mr. Howard stakes their fortune on buying a large amount of land on “the Moon,” as the fictional village outside of Philadelphia where they relocate is called. Unlike prior works of Panic fiction, the enthusiastic, spontaneous domestic support to get Mr. Howard cheerful and back on his feet is deeply strained. Templin’s criticism focuses on his refusal to acknowledge the sagacity of his wife’s advice against speculation and troublesome investment; she turns from offering advice to just registering “sighs” and “sad” silent expressions; Grace writes, “Now among Mr. Howard’s peculiarities was that of not taking female testimony with regard to man or man’s doings—a kind of Salic law of evidence” (223). This gendered condescension is paired with his ignorance of the effects his financial straights have on Gracie, her older sister, Kate, and Mrs. Howard, as they steadily lose beloved objects and are forced to work harder and harder on fewer means. In that respect, also unlike other works of Panic fiction, *Dollars and Cents* is not a story of sudden disaster followed by slow, diligent recovery but the opposite; it is a suspended four-hundred and forty pages of slow deterioration, marked periodically by

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52 Ibid, 117.
appraisers and financial “intruders,” followed by a short 20 pages or so of stabilization. For Templin, Warner’s novel “implies that women might have much to teach men about economics if men would only listen” while simultaneously “she overtly reinforces the subordination that makes women’s increased economic agency unlikely.”

In several other important ways, Warner’s novel is at odds with and, I believe, deeply critical of the generic codes of women’s Panic fiction. For instance, when credit agents come to their house, Glen Luna, Grace initially, unthinkingly, subscribes to the didactic narrative of insidious creditors immorally “stealing” their family’s property abounding in Panic fiction. She is forced, however, to call this type of binary simplicity into question: “I looked at the man—what did he mean by thus commenting on the things he was trying to rob us of?—nothing I verily believe but kindness. He felt uncomfortable and saw we did, and from mere want of skill he pressed upon the thorn he wished to make us forget” (274). Her descriptions of such domestic “intruders”—from appraisers to sheriffs to “witnesses” for their trial—are thoroughly marked by middle class values (and condescension), but they tend towards nuances that subvert simple binaries. Grace is angry with and suspicious of Mr. Pratt, the appraiser, though ultimately she must remark that he does all he can (even against the grain of his fiduciary responsibilities), to leave the family as much of their property as possible, well more than they are entitled to. Grace is likewise unable to prevent herself from laughing at the stories told by the very uncouth, ungenteel witness, Mr. Barnaby: “He scattered snuff about the room till I was exceeded, and told absurd stories at which we couldn’t help laughing; and considering that we wished him anywhere else, this last was vexatious”

53 Templin, 137.
Moreover, the figure of Mr. Howard is more problematic than merely being financially incompetent and willfully ignorant of the hardships his failures place on the family. As he sinks deeper and deeper into debt, he becomes more and more tied to the typical discourses associated with Panic didacticism: he becomes vocally religious, decries the injustice of his persecution (“The war of poor rights against rich injustice” [144]), and claims—as we find in Sedgwick’s works among so many others—to be happier in poverty than in wealth (“For my own sake I would not change places with myself as a rich man” [203]). These discourses of sentimental recuperation all ring counterfeit rather than present a sense of specie, and at each turn the narrative is quick to acutely undermine them. After Mr. Howard pompously talks of the severe “trials” God forces on his true subjects, the very next paragraph begins with a summary description of a trial—a literal one, part of Howard’s fruitless and costly litigations. Elsewhere, in one of the only dramatic points of the plot, when the women are forced to “barricade” themselves in over fears that the sheriff will enter and take away their house (fears, Grace admits, one couldn’t tell real or imaginary), the question of whether the property is, in fact, rightfully theirs seems to come into question. Besides the fact that this “barricade” is described in a pseudo-comical imitation of international affairs (“A blockade,” Grace wryly remarks, “is a much more serious affair than any one would suppose” [324]), Grace’s description that they would keep the home as guarded as if it had “been the abode of the Koh-i-noor” (324) renders their right to their home tenuous. The Koh-i-noor was a seven hundred and ninety-three carat diamond that just prior to the publication of Dollars and Cents, in 1850, was seized by the British East India company to be turned into a royal jewel; for the next two years, as was well publicized in the papers, it was put
on public display. In other words, rather than the credit agents of Mr. McLoon being the thieves, as Grace initially believes and her father insists, her metaphor figures the Howards as the British colonists, not the despoiled Sikhs, and thus makes visible the sense that they possess and ferociously guard property that is quite possibly not theirs by right.

In short, Warner’s novel is conscientiously applying pressure to the entire spectrum of rhetorical devices typical of sentimental Panic fiction, and the standard means by which “wholeness” is retained or recovered. Indeed, while Sedgwick labors to differentiate the narratives of sentimental domesticity from the market by attributing its negative qualities only to sensational texts (even as she makes sentiment dependent on material economic inequalities), Warner seems to unabashedly understand sentimental fiction as part-and-parcel of the market economy. As the family’s finances deteriorate (though to what degree of hopelessness the women are unclear, not to mention Mr. Howard himself), the daughters take to doing odd jobs to try to make money. This is not unique to the novel; in fact, it was a fairly standard refrain. What is unique here is that what they take up is not just some labor, like giving piano lessons, that “brings in money while retaining feminine propriety” as Templin suggests: “We arranged our flowers,” Grace writes, “and then seated ourselves to map out a parcel of lands in Wisconsin that were to delude some unwary speculator; talking of matters and things and enjoying the elder and partridge-berry fragrance which filled the room” (353). Later they take to copying “pleas and demurrers” (415). In other words, ironically, Grace and Kate, in attempting to earn some money to help stabilize the family’s situation, are explicitly taking part in the very representational forms of market manipulation that ostensibly
ruined the family in the first place. Consider the maps that “delude” Mr. Howard, the
description of which wryly emphasizes the persuasive, “imaginative” craftsmanship of
the object:

there was great talk of mills and mill-dams, roads and plantations; and Mr. Ned
Howard and my father would come bustling in, and desire a dusted table in all
haste,—to be as quickly covered with maps and plans. New ones, just finished
apparently,—coloured and uncoloured, lithograph, pen and ink, and pencil. Here a
road going smoothly through impassable places,—and there an imposing row of
stone cottages about which a fine young forest had suddenly sprung up—but that
might have been the lithographer’s fancy. Then the scene changed to wheels and
timbers and foaming torrents,—a half-finished mill-dam, with a cart and horse
comfortably carrying out gravel;—and at the bottom a long string of units and tens
and hieroglyphics—“wheels—say so much” and “mill-stones—say so much.”

Legal documents (like the “pleas and demurrers” the sisters copy), emblematic of the
other primary reason for the Howards’ financial crisis, similarly take on this sense of a
toxic respect for form without foundation. Sundering the illusion of sentimental
discourse being outside or in opposition to the market, the sisters’ practice of mapping
and copying legal documents stands as a parallel within the text to the aesthetic labor of
the Warner sisters outside of it in trying to buoy their family affairs through writing
novels like Dollars and Cents. As Anna will later recall about the origins of The Wide,
Wide World in her biography of Susan, it was their Aunt Fanny who suggested that Susan
write a story: “whether she added ‘that would sell,’ I am not sure; but of course that was

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54 In one of the more comical moments of the novel, Mr. Howard, faced with the physical
presence of agents having arrived to inventory and confiscate the family’s transportable
property, is able to get his lawyer, Mr. Phelps (who he later suspects of deceit) to file a
replevin. Informed that “a replevin has been brought,” the agents unanimously exclaim
in disbelief, “a replevin!” but there is an air that no one seems to know exactly what a
replevin is (275).
what she meant.” In other words, Dollars and Cents registers a relation between gender and labor, home and market, that is not simply a “pessimistic” correction to earlier works of Panic fiction, as Templin describes, but carries an impression of market savvy far more aligned with the heroine of Fanny Fern’s Ruth Hall (1855) than a simple reinscription of female passivity and powerlessness or nostalgic moral recuperation.

Yet, above and beyond these reconfigurations of the standard generic codes in which it works, what makes Warner’s novel so fascinatingly distinct from and critical of its fictional kind is how it deals with the problems of loss and recovery at work in sentimental domesticity. As has been documented, Dollars and Cents sticks remarkably close to the “facts” of Anna and Susan’s biographies. Besides moving the setting from the New York area (they removed from the City to Constitution Island, near West Point) to the Philadelphia region, the main alterations have to do with coupling: Anna has turned Aunt Fanny into a step-mother and in the end of the novel her older sister marries, despite the fact that Susan never married, but lived and wrote collaboratively with Anna all her life. Templin speculates about the cause for marrying off Kate:

In appending such a conventionally happy ending—rather than having Kate and Grace face the same prospects of deprivation and life-long wage labor that the Warner sisters themselves faced—she restores the economic basis for the Howards’ threatened social status and reaffirms middle-class domesticity through the creation of a new family . . . The conventional ending might then be seen more as a fantasy of rescue than as advocacy of any particular method of economic recovery.

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56 Fanny Fern, Ruth Hall; a Domestic Tale of the Present Time (New York: Mason Brothers, 1855).
57 Templin, 139.
Yet, in line with what I have described previously, while *Dollars and Cents* has the “conventions” of a sentimental ending, it is not, I believe, a happy one. What Templin describes as possibly Anna’s “fantasy of rescue” registers instead as a fantasy of loss and psychic dispossession that is not rescued in any way within the novel itself. From the perspective of Gracie, what would conventionally be a joyous occasion, a symbol of the future, generational continuity, and progress—the marriage of her sister to their beloved Rodney Collingswood—is a moment of deep emotional distress: “I almost lost my own identity in that strange mixture of pleasure and pain” (505). Just as she does not want to laugh at the stories of Mr. Barnaby, whose presence “pollutes” the middle-class domestic ideal of Glen Luna but just cannot help herself from doing so, Grace here seems to want to feel “happy—for them” but cannot. For all of the family’s subtle efforts to train her for how to feel about the upcoming marriage (an event Grace is left in the dark about, for fear the news might kill her), she ultimately is unable to abide by either the codes of feminine selflessness or of patience through suffering they espouse, codes that would normally discipline her interiority into a class- and gender-based order. In the penultimate moment of the novel following the wedding, Gracie writes:

> I looked up, but without seeing a thing,—felt their kisses upon my face, knew that Kate held me very close in her arms for a moment, and then that I was out of the house. I reached the road, and stopped.

> It was late in the afternoon. In such weather and time of year had we first come there. Again the Cherokee roses were in full bloom, again the Baltimore birds fluttered about their nest; again the long sunbeams came over the lake and fell softened upon the pretty bay-window;—but now at the open sash stood Mr. Rodney and Kate, watching me. My eye went no further—my heart was full.”

(515)

Like her premonitions of such a scene, those which gave her “pain” (“there it was now at my heart;—I could not mistake it. How did it get there? [449]), and her reaction to when
she finds out they are to be married—a confusion of affects that, in contradicting one another, threaten to dispossess her of identity—the conclusion registers a sense of her being a numb spectator at the mercy of a “full heart.” It is certainly not a straightforwardly, “conventionally happy ending.” For Grace, indeed, there is the sense of “bitter” loss (515) and grief, quite similar to mourning, or indecipherable from it. Her lack of agency here could be understood to reflect back upon the lack of female agency in the novel as a whole, especially as Kate becomes a dependent in marriage in a novel wherein marriage does not seem all that it is cracked up to be; indeed, marriage in Dollars and Cents is usually represented, through Grace’s eyes, as unadulterated loss. What I would like to suggest, though, is that Grace’s loss of Kate (like her insistent repetition of “again,” a continuity suddenly broken by the “new” sight of the coupling) registers a type of shattering pain that produces a dislodgement of her identity into a chaos of embodied affects that, momentarily at least, dislodges her from the matrix of what Lori Merish calls “sentimental ownership,” the “deeply felt psychic investment in propriety power over, and control of objects of love” that structures the new marriage.  

In contrast to Kate, as the new wife of Rodney, it is a moment wherein Grace seems very similar to Heather Love’s description of Lott’s wife, turned to a pillar of salt for refusing the command to not look back.  

Though she has a “full heart,” which would suggest the

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58 Merish, 21. According to Merish, sentimental discourse was part of a series of “affect reforms” by which “the requirements of a capitalist society were reproduced within individuals as the very stuff of subjectivity, and a means through which middle class hegemony was secured . . . I envision sentimental ownership as a particular inscription of emotion, an eroticized formation of proprietary and political desire that sentimental narratives both describe and constitute” (22).

emotional depth that characterized middle-class female subjectivity, it renders her here, if anything, as very much a function of “surface.” Warner thus translates the story of economic loss and domestic restoration into a story of economic loss and traumatic fragmentation, showing the former to be based upon an illusory fantasy of wholeness, of making the absent present and complete. Set against the backdrop of the family steadily losing its beloved household objects, Kate becomes in Grace’s eyes the one love-object that cannot be lost; when marriage ruins, rather than establishes, that fantasy of permanence, Grace’s subjective fragmentation, as she looks backwards to the house, registers the possibility of an alternative to proprietary modes of being and relating that Kate, buying into the fantasy of sentimental wholeness, ultimately subscribes to.

The conclusion to Dollars and Cents touches upon, but does not solve, many of the central problems it had been revolving around for over five hundred pages: the effects of financial failure not only on gendered labor in the home, but also how such a crisis restructures relationships between subjects and objects, different types of loss, and what objects can and cannot be restored through the discourse of sentimental domesticity. Dollars and Cents is obsessed with the status of subjecthood and objecthood. It opens with Gracie writing, “I was but a young thing . . .when there came a change in our outward circumstances,” as she proceeds to describe the family’s early, lost fortunes in the city (5, emphasis added), and, as a young narrator, she meticulously details her affective investments in objects and environments. Templin, in line with Merish, sees the novel’s lengthy descriptions of objects, especially as they are being whisked away and sold, as a sign of middle-class identity’s reliance on material commodities, and hence its anxious dependence on financial soundness. While this is certainly true, this argument
also blends together the perspectives of Gracie and Kate into one—something easily understood, as Gracie herself addresses, in a heavily qualified way, the difficulty in separating the two sometimes: “we do always think alike! only our tastes are a little different sometimes” (133). At first, as one who had known their privileged status far longer than her young sister, Kate largely relates to objects in a primarily outward social fashion, as indicators of class comfort that underwrite the typical genteel rituals of visiting and hosting. As the Howards are forced to sell off their household property piece by piece, and to economize when it comes to things like clothing, it strikes Kate, far more than Gracie, that their lack of plate and their calico dresses will mean an end to those social practices. As is the case elsewhere in much women’s Panic fiction, she is not mistaken; old friends cease visiting the Howards slowly until large stretches of time, even seasons, pass and the women are, as Gracie notes somberly, “alone.”

Gracie, on the other hand, from the outset sees objects as keepsakes that seem to keep the absent present. As they barter away some of their little “trinkets,” she describes:

I cared little for the things in themselves—in fact they were most of them either worn out, or such as we should never use; but if dimmed or broken, so were not my associations with them. The hands that had touched them, the faces they had touched, I had heard of at least; and these poor little reminders of what had long ago perished, seemed to help both imagination and memory. (206)

Elsewhere, she says, “one does love the inanimate things one has grown up among” (400). Her perspective towards objects (which usually are articulated at the point when they are being dispossessed) falls in line with Sara Quay’s description of keepsakes in the context of Susan Warner’s The Wide, Wide World. Such objects, she argues, “register a range of losses and assist their readers in the recovery from them” while “nostalgia is
resolved through the attribution of affect to the material world”;\textsuperscript{60} middle-class subjects invested “emotion and memory” into objects so as to differentiate them from “the utilitarianism of the Homespun Age and the reification of emerging consumerism.”\textsuperscript{61} Quay’s formulation, though, need not only be a historical function (especially one as generalized as offered); the investment of imagination and memory into objects likewise would distinguish between the utilitarianism of the working class and the vain consumption of the upper. Grace, in line with what Quay and Merish describe, invests emotion into a wide range of objects “of care,” especially with an eye to making the absent present: in commodities, natural environments, and pets. All of the pets in the novel become representative of their owners through Gracie’s eyes: there is something of herself in her cat Purrer-purrer (even in the name itself), and when Rodney is absent, his dog, Wolfgang, stands in for him.\textsuperscript{62} In the same vein, though in opposite terms, Rodney’s dissolute brother, Carvill Collingwood, who comes to take possession of the farm, the Lea, after their father’s death in order to turn it into a hunting lodge, has animals that are valued as either ornamental (like a Lorius that spouts French revolutionary rhetoric—“Liberte! Egalite! Fraternity! . . . Qui vive? A bas les aristocrats!” [198]—but is, ironically, named Louis Quatorze) or utilitarian (hunting dogs). His French wife, a peripheral figure, seems to fit in both categories.\textsuperscript{63}

\textsuperscript{60} Sara Quay, “Homesickness in Susan Warner’s The Wide, Wide World.” \textit{Tulsa Studies of Women’s Literature}, 18.1 (Spring, 1999), 53.
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid, 54.
\textsuperscript{62} Similar to Gracie’s logic, Rodney Collingwood describes, sadly, that Wolfgang “has his own chain of remembrance and association, I suppose . . . I am perhaps such a link to him as he is to me. It is a great comfort to know that Wolfgang is so tenderly cared for—if it were only for the sake of the friends he used to have” (310).
\textsuperscript{63} This is not without its national allegory, as the exotic, luxurious French accoutrements of Carvill have usurped the place of Rodney and farmer Collingwood, on whose mantle
Grace’s affective investment in material objects comes to the fore of the novel in a scene in which several characters discuss why the bare white flag that Gracie made to hail the arrival of her sister struck them all as resembling Grace. Stephanie interjects, “I want to know why that white flag looked like this young one,—for it certainly did, even to my unsentimental eyes,” to which Rodney replies, “Unsentimental—yes, none other could see it. Sentimental eyes look rather at the effect of matter upon mind than of mind upon matter” (105). Reversing the normal association of the term, Rodney’s statement suggests that it takes an unsentimental perspective to project, as Grace does, memory and imagination outward into the material world of objects, whereas the “sentimental,” as Katie initially appears, is primarily projected upon (later, Mrs. Carvill Collingwood will see in Katie the most charming object of “simplicity”). The two perspectives of sentimentality and unsentimentality, of course, are not mutually exclusive and the novel itself offers both in a negotiation that we might think of as an uncanny sentimentalism, a force of defamiliarization at work in the extant codes of domestic love.

One of the peculiar things to note in passing that this perspective produces in Grace, as she reflects on her family’s growingly dire financial straits, is a strange

Grace had noticed the emblematic national symbol: “on a stand opposite the fireplace was a real bald-headed eagle which had been shot in some stoop after a lamb, and then stuffed; and he now stood with wings outspread and measuring more than seven feet from tip to tip, as if to guard all American liberty that was then and there represented. A most superb creature he was; his dark brown plumage well contrasted by the white head and tail, his legs, eyes, and hooked beak of a bright yellow; while the crooked brown talons told of many an encounter with living and dead prey” (87). What is interesting about Grace’s description is that while she pulls towards making the stuffed eagle into a symbol (of American liberty’s guardian), she seems to emphasize, relentlessly, its status as an aggressive bird of prey, caught while trying to kill a lamb no less. As in her descriptions of money, the distinctions between symbol and object appear conflated or ambivalent.
approach to the object-status of money. While typically understood as a medium of exchange, rather than a thing itself, Grace insistently disrupts its immaterial qualities while simultaneously calling attention to the fact that the objects of production her father has invested in are only its immaterial exchange values, and poor ones at that; if reality, as Grace finds out, is about “dollars and cents,” the “real” status of money appears itself convoluted. “The mill worked not,” she writes, “because some needful machinery we could not buy; so the rest of the works rusted like the money that had been spent on them, and the stream babbled of our folly, for want of other employment” (191, emphasis added). Elsewhere, she describes that her father must have walked around with a “bag of dollars” as,

here they were laid down on some new road instead of paving stones, and here they went up in the air per force of gunpowder; and another time were exchanged for a new pair of farm-horses—though we had five already. But alas! there was no transforming back again;—whenever this was attempted, mill and roads and horses became all dry leaves . . . we thought they were only stone and mortar but I know now they were dollars.” (57)

Given her affective investments in materials, and acute sense of the convoluted materiality and immateriality of money, Grace is especially disturbed by the “listing” of the family’s property under appraisal to be sold to pay debt, more so than the agents of its execution or the experience itself. In a moment that prefigures her even more desperately conflicted sense of paralyzing self-dispossession at the loss of her sister to marriage is the moment she must write such a list, as her father confesses himself unable to: “It was well clear eye sight was not needed . . . I wrote on in a dream, 1 Turkey carpet—2 blue damask easy-chairs—1 lady’s cabinet desk—1 case of minerals, &c., &c.” (275). Her grief over loss is mixed with the anxiety that these objects of affection might actually
only be objects, transportable, capable of being the vessels of others’ memories, and worth so much in dollars and cents.

It is the death of the aging Miss Easy Caffrey that draws Kate’s relation to material objects closer to Grace’s; however, in doing so she will not only part ways from Grace (in a physical sense), but will also pry Grace from that very mode of sentimental ownership she had been so conspicuously invested in. Miss Caffrey is the social “friend” who draws most of the primary characters together, including Rodney, in their mutual affection for her, though she makes only a few appearances in the text itself. She lives with her cousin, Avarinthia Bain, in an old Dutch-style home called “the Bird’s Nest” (a name that implies familial nurturing, a natural home) and whose verbal tick (she sprinkles in the word “yes” and “yes m’am” so often in her dialogue that Stephanie wants to nickname her “Yes M’am”) solidifies this sense of benevolent affirmation. Although her role is fairly disproportionate to the intense emotional investments the other characters have in her, Miss Easy’s household after her death, specifically her garden, serves as the mourning site (the empty nest) through which Kate comes to endorse Grace’s sense of sentimental objects that aid “memory” and “imagination”:

Kate and I had determined that the little rose-hedged garden should not be left to utter desolation—we could not bear the thought. Keep it in perfect order we could not, for it was too far away, but my stepmother agreed to walk there with us every afternoon, that at least the flowers might be kept trimmed and tied up . . . there was nothing in the garden with which we had not some association—that we did not love for Miss Easy’s sake; and to spend upon her favourite plants some of the love we bore her, seemed almost a relief.” (261)

Elsewhere, in a style of repetition and difference framed by a sense of loss that parallels Grace’s concluding description, she describes:

The summer passed on, and the fall came in all its bright beauty, with its troop of associations,—perhaps no season has so many. And one after another told its
tale.—That we had been children,—that we had been strangers at Glen Luna,—that we had found friends,—that with them we had seen year after year put on and put off its foliage,—that the last autumn winds had made a clean sweep, and we were alone again. Those very artemisias that made such fair show in Miss Easy’s garden—the last time they had bloomed she had been there to look at them!” (301)

The manner in which the Howard sisters tend to the garden and household appears as a substitute for tending to Miss Easy’s grave (which they never do), but it bears with it the fantasy of being restored and re-inhabited. It is around the same time as Miss Easy’s death that Rodney’s father dies in Bermuda, where Rodney had taken him to try to restore his health in a warm climate. When asked why he left such a beautiful place as Bermuda to return to the Moon, Rodney claims homesickness, but a “shadow” on his face bespeaks a deeper felt grief over the death of farmer Collingwood that requires the ameliorating effect of geographical distance. Very soon thereafter, although unbeknownst to Grace, Kate becomes engaged to Rodney, and having discarded her earlier aspirations of middle-class social forms, though maintaining its values, and endorsed “sentimental ownership”—two requisite precursors to her recuperation—Kate marries him. Although this union offers her newfound economic stability (notably beyond the instabilities of finance), their marriage appears as, more fundamentally, a fantasy of sentimental domesticity to restore a sense of wholeness to the fragmenting force of trauma over the death of loved ones, rather than or in addition to restoring wholeness to the fragmenting force of the market.64 This impossible desire is made explicit when they decide to move

64 Along these lines, Gracie writes earlier of Miss Easy’s garden: “Everything was in nice order, everything wore its old look of quiet security,—one could not imagine an intruder there. Yet had one been,—we looked at the house and turned sighingly away” (339). Here, she posits a parallel and yet a crucial distinction between the other intruders in the novel—the many agents of creditors that beset the Howards’ home—with the “intruder” of death at Miss Easy’s.
into “The Bird’s Nest” upon marrying one another; it is from Miss Easy’s window that they gaze forward at Grace while she, in turn, gazes backward from up the road, numbly, at them. Rodney had always been puzzlingly defensive about Miss Easy (when Stephanie jokes about her verbal tick, he “warmly” repudiates her, his only flash of anger or deep emotion in the novel), implying a love for her dismissed due to their age disparity. Kate thus serves Rodney as a suitable fantasy-substitution (the “superstructure,” as he calls it, of Miss Easy in a more desirable structure) and Kate willingly buys into this fantasy despite the fact that she can look at others “with Miss Easy’s eyes” (346), but cannot actually be her, cannot make Miss Easy present again; the “easy” life, or life of ease promised by sentimental restoration, is here simultaneously produced by and undermined by the sense of irrevocable loss. Crucially, the “Bird’s Nest” that seemingly caters to this fantasy of restored plenitude is, even prior to Miss Easy’s death, already implicated in the very associations of death, loss, and representation that Rodney and Kate attempt to overcome by re-investing the space with the future-oriented codes of marriage, genealogical continuity, and economic mobility. As Grace observes in their first visit to the Nest:

> On this [wall] hung one or two old portraits—telling amid all their silence that the hopes and fears of the present generation are no brighter, no darker, than those of a century ago,—which have passed without leaving a trace except upon some such bit of canvass. It is a hard thing to realize, that just such a face appeared in ‘this working-day world,’ when that world was two hundred years younger than it is now!—It is like seeing that mysterious sort of shadow where the substance is out of sight” (44)

The portraits that should make those represented present only register for Grace as an uncanny “trace” of absence on the material “canvas”: a “mysterious” shadow of a figure that is not there. The final scene is, in this sense, a more complex unfolding of what
happens to Stephanie earlier when she marries Mr. Snow Freeman: Stephanie disappears, is lost from the text completely, and the reader is left only with the concluding summary: “The bird was fledged at length. Stephanie and Mr. Freeman were married one fair day when the autumn was showering gold leaves; and beneath a blue October sky they went forth into the world to seek their fortune” (146). What is different, of course, is that Kate’s “flight” away is simultaneously an impossible return to the “nest.”

The conclusion thus presents us with a mutually-constitutive, uncanny mirroring of mediating loss, neither pole of which, locked in a gaze framed by Grace, seems “happy” or whole: on the one hand, in the figure of the newly married couple, Warner suggests the failure of the sentimental fantasy of recuperating loss into domestic wholeness through a progressive narrative (of Kate and Rodney’s newfound marriage, steady upward mobility, etc.) by the introduction of loss that cannot be made whole, which casts an indelible shadow over the couple’s fantastical desire to do so. On the other hand, in the figure of Grace—dispossessed of the object of love she was confident could never be absent—we see, distinctly unlike the route Kate has taken, a fracturing of the subjective structure of “sentimental ownership” into a maelstrom of inchoate emotions that opens up a space of being that is irreducible to a proprietary-formation. The novel ends, however, without offering us a glimpse of what that looks like besides affective incoherence. Like Grace’s description of her identity’s collapse, we only “almost” get there.

Indeed, the site of the Bird’s Nest is already, prior to the ending, undercut by a sense of doubled loss: one of the always-cheery Miss Easy’s dying statements—“Every since I lost my mother, one sorrowful thought has been on my mind—that I should die alone” (252)—continues to resonate anxiously through the novel’s pages.
Whether the unconventional domestic life Anna and Susan inhabited was, for the former, such a fantastical space is impossible to discern. Whether such a space is inexpressible, or inexpressible in the pages of what the author consciously understands to be a commodity, is just as difficult. When Anna would re-tell the story in her biography of Susan more than fifty years later, she represents the reading public much as she did the creditors and appraisers in *Dollars and Cents*. In the preface, she writes,

> If ever this book is printed and read, at two things, I doubt not some people will wonder. First, at our strange, exceptional life, and then that I should be willing to tell it so freely.

> I was *not* willing. I am by nature a terribly secretive person, and it goes hard with me to tell anybody what is nobody’s business. Furthermore, our home life was so unendingly precious, that it hurts me to have it gazed at by cold and careless eyes; this also is true.”

What is discernable in the biography is how the opening of the space outside of “sentimental ownership” in the wake of failure and loss that I have argued takes place in the offing of *Dollars and Cents* is seemingly, much like the miraculous recovery of Mr. Hathaways arm, momentary. It has been, as Foucault might say, disciplined. The biography itself is an exemplary instance of sentimental property; although Anna intersperses commentary sporadically, the text is largely an edited compilation of letters, a love-object (“My love, they want me to tell about you”)\(^{67}\) of love-objects: images, journals, letters. When she does offer moderately extensive commentary, it likewise tends to fall along these lines:

> Ah, how I wish I knew on which rocks, and under which cedars! The room was probably the front one with the little windows: afterwards our beloved and special study. Where so many of the books were written; and where we lived our life,

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\(^{67}\) Ibid, viii.
more than in any spot on earth; fighting the fight, wrestling with sorrow, gathering up the joy. Almost everything in that room has a history: people of all sorts and many nationalities have been there. And for me, the silence now has a phonographic power; bringing back talks, debates, counsels, songs, and laughter. Words of patience and of thanksgiving; of brave endurance and humble trust.  

But what is evident in her re-telling of the story of financial failure in the biography is that there is a cost involved here, that something that in the textual economy of *Dollars and Cents* had fascinatingly short-circuited had since been contained, restored, rebooted. Despite the biography ostensibly, in terms of genre, being closer to reality than the novel, it is nevertheless far closer to the fictional conventions the novel seemed so deeply suspicious of in the first place. Rather than being a problematic figure often away for large stretches of the time in *Dollars and Cents* and thus putting the girls in constant jeopardy, the father has been transformed into a devoted parent, a figure of “purity and peace” redundantly there for his children: “In his busiest days and most troubled years, he always found time to talk with his children. So he gave me subjects to study and then report upon at breakfast; he wrote questions for compositions; he read to us in the evening, poetry, history, fiction. Our mealtimes were always delightful seasons of talk, discussion, and intercourse.”  

In *Susan Warner*, it is the age-old story of the Panic: an honest, loving father, whom one could not ever “imagine” as being in “breach of honour,” is beset by immoral, unyielding creditors (the “depth of evil that was at work against him”) while the family members, though pressed for funds, support one another in domestic emotional plentitude. Even the chapter title she chooses to introduce the

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68 Ibid, 118.
69 Ibid, 178.
70 Ibid, 196.
initial hints of failure in the Warner household bears the worn-out, agentless cliché of sentimental Panic fiction: “Riches Take Wings.”

What, we ought to ask, accounts for such a reversal? So much historically takes place between 1852 and 1909 that it is almost too capacious a question to be adequately answered. The Civil War affected the Warners, who lived close enough in proximity to West Point as to hear its clock-tower chime (like the factory bell in “The City Clerk”), in countless ways. In terms of their work and domestic life, they found paper more difficult to come by, books more difficult to get published at decent rates, rising prices of goods, and a lack of available domestic help. They also were deeply anxious about the larger fate of the “Government” as news slowly trickling in kept them in constant suspense, and the Warner biography traces the interrelations between the trials of home and nation.

Anna comments on the pain Susan expressed in receiving a letter from a British correspondent about the dire prospects of the nation:

> It is hard for people to believe now, what some of us well remember then; the hurt feeling over such letters and papers. As if a trusted friend had failed us, in our sorest need. When the London Times threw mud rather promiscuously; and Mr. Gladstone wrote that the Government could not possibly succeed; and private correspondents sent such words as these: ‘We always knew that Republics had in themselves the seeds of decay.’ How could we be quite patient?—the pain of such things was beyond telling. *For the Nation was on trial for her life! and there was enough at home to make our hearts ache.*

Anna’s comment that “it is hard for people to believe now, what some of us well remember then” also registers one of the crucial differences between the biography and *Dollars and Cents*. While Warner’s novel had been—in the parlance of the day—a tale of the times or “present times,” one that conclusively pitted looking backwards against

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71 Ibid, 434-35, emphasis added.
forwards, her biography of Susan is distinctly retrospective. And it is not only about commemorating her sister but also about the changing face of commemorations and technologies of memory; she is dealing with a past that her readership does not know (as in Susan’s life) or cannot be relied upon to remember. In her description of the island home cited previously, Warner calls attention to the “phonographic power” the objects of memory has on her, and elsewhere in the biography she writes, “This age of photographs does not know its riches; I have not even a sketch of [Susan] in those early days. But I seem to remember her dimly.” In other words, Susan Warner documents, or memorializes, eroding forms of sentimental memorialization. Nostalgia, though, for times past does not preclude her faith in technological progress; the two are not antagonistic but juxtaposed.

There is also a marked difference in what the two projects are laboring to accomplish. In Susan Warner, the odd, marginal, idiosyncratic family living at the Glen Luna estate near the Moon is transformed into an exemplary Christian and distinctly national family: from Puritan stock, living in an historical, Revolutionary home as Warner insistently reminds us, and embodying lives of diligent hard work, domestic affection, and charity towards the surrogate family of “boys” or cadets at the military academy. (Indeed, the Warner sisters remain the only civilians buried at West Point cemetery.) There is a sense that as (fictionalized) sisters within a localized domestic space, there was a flexibility for abnormality, but now exchanging that for an identity on a national scale they must be pared down. It is the ultimate attempt at the very type of disciplinary sentimental restoration the 1852 novel had suspected of humbug, and one

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72 Ibid, 87.
that sees Anna no longer as Grace, sundered in a fragmented (but, as I have suggested, productive) position of paralyzing loss; but, instead, inside calmly looking outwards.

In both Sedgwick’s “The City Clerk” and Warner’s Dollars and Cents the typical Panic narrative of recuperating the chaotic forces of the market by means of domestic sentiment doesn’t appear to function normally, or as our standard scholarly accounts would have it. In the former, sentimental wholeness becomes a momentary phenomenon framed within a continual dialectic—one predicated on, rather than in contest with, market instabilities and inequalities. Sedgwick reaffirms faith in the market while also, more profoundly, reproducing its structure of progress and future-oriented deferral within the framework of sentimentalism. Thus her attempt to differentiate the work of sentiment from the predatory nature of sensational fiction is tenuous at best. In Warner’s novel, as it consistently undercuts the rhetorical devices conventionally at work in sentimentalism, the “conventionally happy” ending appears as not a moment of wholeness and future hope but one of loss, pain, and a backwards look. Warner casts the “happy ending” of the sentimental Panic text as founded on an illusion of impossible restoration. The image of the future and “good prospects”—Kate and Rodney—inhabit a fantasy space produced by but always undercut by irrevocable loss, while, contrarily, it is Grace, in her surface numbness, her chaos of affects, and her grief, who appears as the one to confront what such a loss that cannot be made whole, what the failure of sentimental restoration, feels like.
“Before going to bed, I saw, on the opposite side of the way, a handsome building of white marble, which had a mournful, ghost-like aspect, dreary to behold. I attributed this to the sombre influence of the night, and on rising in the morning looked out again, expecting to see its steps and portico thronged with groups of people passing in and out. The door was still tight shut, however; the same cold, cheerless air prevailed . . . I hastened to inquire its name and purpose, and then my surprise vanished. It was the tomb of many fortunes; the Great Catacomb of investment; the memorable United States Bank.”

-Charles Dickens, Philadelphia, 1842

The spirits appear to be in want of “material aid.” One communicated that he wanted to borrow a sum of money in bank notes, promising to pay soon. Whether the spirit offered his note, and what the rate of interest was to be, I am not prepared to say. It looks quite like a Wall-street “shave.” If our stock-brokers come to the knowledge of this truth—that money can be loaned to the inhabitants of the “spheres”—they will do a thriving business. They may yet incumber [sic] the estate of the blessed with mortgages, and sell out the whole under foreclosure at a fearful discount. Alas! for us, dear reader, our future home may be a bankrupt concern before we get there.


Tracing the effects of financial panics presents difficulties for historical periodization. While a macroscopic economic analysis can show “boom and bust” cycles, periods of growth and periods of decline, a more microscopic, less tabulated, view reveals the effects of financial tumult to be far more lingering and complicated. The moment generally dated as the birth of Modern Spiritualism is 1848, when the U.S. market was in the process of recovering from the revulsion years after 1837. But the newfound state of economic growth (spurned on largely by many of the same economic practices that led to the Panic in the first place—speculation in land and railroads, and overtrading) did not,
and could not, erase widespread middle-class anxieties over the fragmenting, potentially irrational, whirlwinds of financial ups and downs that the Panic had unleashed.

The immediate historical origin of the Spiritualist movement is pinned to the famous Fox sisters’ practice of decoding spectral “rapping” in Hydesville, New York. Mediums began popped up throughout the nation. Those in support of the movement, such as Emma Hardinge, the early historian of Spiritualism, as well as those bitterly opposed to it claimed that adherents in the 1850s numbered in the millions. The broader cultural and political causes for its sensational, and almost instantaneous, popularity in the United States are various: Spiritualism has been considered as a categorical rejection of extant Calvinist doctrine; another outlet for reform popular amongst the middle class (many spiritualists were also suffragists, temperance reformers, abolitionists, vegetarians, etc.); an extension of the well-documented antebellum obsession with death (which would be exacerbated by the profound loss of life during the Civil War); and a way of revitalizing Christianity in a period when emergent fields of science and mechanics seemed to be sapping the strength of religious belief. I would like to suggest that, in addition to this complex array of influences traced by scholars, lingering middle-class anxieties over financial instability and the immense difficulty in finding a principle behind market fluctuations were crucial causes. In this chapter, through a close analysis of several works of Epes Sargent, I will argue that Spiritualism offered itself as a (super)natural solution to the perplexing fluctuations and angst-inducing manipulability of the antebellum market(s) that, for Sargent and others, revealed its most nefarious form in the

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73 For a fascinating work that links spiritualism, economic discourse, and Freud’s New Psychology at the turn of the twentieth century, see David A. Zimmerman, “Frank Norris, Market Panic, and the Mesmeric Sublime” American Literature 75.1 (2003): 61-90.
trafficking of black (and female, and especially in black female) bodies. Underpinning Sargent’s critique of scientific empiricism and innate matter, and hovering just below its surface, is this market mentality that broadly views the material world of “objects” as nothing more than a potential source of exploitation and profit for (white) subjects. Although, in the works of Sargent, and especially his abolitionist tale, *Peculiar; a Tale of the Great Transition* (1864), Spiritualism fails to extricate itself from the problems of counterfeiting and fraud that it attempts to overcome and stabilize, it nevertheless offered, I argue, a possibility of newfound ethical reconsiderations for others, especially in the context of those “animated objects” working the plantations. Additionally, while authors immediately in the aftermath of the Panic of 1837 generally castigated speculation in totality, Sargent did not call for its overthrow or structural reformation entirely. Rather, in the same way that he understands the spirit world to be always already operating *interior* to nature, Sargent suggests that those “spirits,” as many Spiritualists labeled themselves, who experience and understand the fictions and forms of the market—of the slave exchange in New Orleans as well as the stock exchange of Wall Street)—can “juggle” those codes to work the system differently, and more ethically, from within.

The loss of a particular type of economic order is hauntingly embedded within the tale of the movement’s origin in the story of the Hydesville rapping: the Fox girls, Leah, Katie, and Maggie, all of whom would later go on to make a very nice living off of their “mediumships,” deduce that the sounds they heard were not only intelligent but that they were produced by the ghost of a murdered peddler. By the 1840s, of course, the “New England peddler” was the icon in the North of Yankee entrepreneurial spirit as well as a nostalgic figure for an eroding mode of economic exchange understood to be more local,
personal, and authentic.74 It was, in short, the figure of the entrepreneurial economy prior to that spirit being deranged by the “mania” of speculation and fictive currency rampant in the antebellum period. As Thomas Olman Todd described of the emphatically pre-industrial setting in *Hydesville: The Story of the Rochester Knockings, Which Proclaimed the Advent of Modern Spiritualism*, a history largely based on the earlier, popular work of Emma Hardinge Britten, “The place not being directly accessible from a railroad, was lonely and unmarked by those tokens of progress that the locomotive generally leaves in its track, hence it was the last spot where a scene of fraud and deception could find a possibility of a successful execution.” According to the testimony of Lucretia Pulver, a servant for the family that owned the house prior to the Foxes, the peddler was also a “familiar” face to them, an “old acquaintance,” before his murder and was known to talk with the lady of the household about their families and children; he was *more* than a mere salesperson.75 In other words, the ghost story that launched the wave of Spiritualism is fundamentally a story about a lost form of economic exchange and its spectralized return through the powers of the “sensitive,” “innocent” (often young female) medium.

Moreover, as Ann Braud and Molly McGarry have noted on this last point, Spiritualist gatherings generally took place in intimate settings, thereby shoring up the “innocence” of the female medium with the values of a domestic context of authenticity and plentitude.

74 The murdered peddler, in this sense, becomes a sort of economic analogue to the fairly common Spiritualist phenomena of spectral Native Americans appearing at séances.

75 See A. Leah Underhill, *The Missing Link of Modern Spiritualism* (New York: Thomas Knox and Co., 1885). Leah (born Fox) was the oldest of the three Fox daughters, having already been married (and abandoned by her husband) by the time of the rappings in 1848.
untainted by market exchange, or even by any proximity to a railroad. The discourse of sentimentalism was thus crucial to the emergence of Spiritualism, even as the latter diverged emphatically from the former in its robust rhetoric of empirical investigation. For Sargent, as I will show later, sentimental discourse was actually a problem to be reckoned with. In the context of abolition, sentimentality, he suggests, tends to obscure the notion that marriage and the family unit is itself a destabilizing market of speculation and investment.

Amidst the topsy-turvy workings of the antebellum financial market, Spiritualism attempted to make visible, quite literally, that invisible hand of the free market Adam Smith insisted on as the crucial force of economic self-regulation. Hands, visible and otherwise, are everywhere in Spiritualist discourse. Two of the most predominant performances of spiritualist power revolved around them: pneumatography, writing that appears on a slate or paper without human agency, and “spirit-hands,” the actual materialization of a spirit’s hand or hands in front of the audience. As one witness at the home of the famous Cincinnati, Ohio, medium Jonathan Koons wrote to the New York Spiritualist of a particularly genteel spirit: upon seeing the newly-formed hand and desiring to touch it so as to test its materiality, “instantly it passed to the head of the

76 Ann Braude, Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women’s Rights in Nineteenth Century America (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001); Molly McGarry, Ghosts of Futures Past: Spiritualism and the Cultural Politics of Nineteenth-Century America (Berkley: University of California Press, 2008). The conjunction of the innocent female medium and the rural, non-industrialized setting also produced heated debates over whether mediums should be paid or not. On the one hand, these questions often revolved around whether for-profit mediumship suggested the possibility of fraudulent intentions. On the other hand, they suggested concerns over making the domestic spaces where séances took place a space of explicit market transactions as well as of making young “innocent” women economic agents.
circle, and while still holding the lighted paper [of phosphorous], passed around and
shook hands with all. The skeptic and believer alike received the proffered hand.”77 At
other times, partial or full bodies of the spirit would appear. This, however, according to
many Spiritualists, was quite beside the point. Synecdoche suffices. As long as one
admits that the “spirit-hand” exists, the rest of the body is superfluous; the authenticity of
spiritualism, and thus a principle beyond irrational materialist chaos, has been validated.
Many so-called skeptics would, and did, ask: but what is the principle? What are its
countours? To which many ardent “believers” or “spirits” responded that, while worthy of
future interrogation, the question is somewhat moot so long as one admits that
spiritualism reveals that there is some principle, or ordering force.

The figure of the hand, however, as I will elaborate on, would also drag
Spiritualism back into the very economically-inflected anxieties over deception and
manipulation it otherwise appears to overcome and restore. Arguments over the merits of
Spiritualism proliferated in newspapers and periodicals of the 1840s and 1850s (and well
into the 1880s an 90s), especially as more than a dozen periodicals emerged as a
consolidated Spiritualist press, stretching from Boston to San Francisco. The terms and
phrases of “counterfeit” and “fraud,” which had taken on new weight in the Bankruptcy
Act of 1841 and during the expansion of the life insurance industry, were pervasive in
attacks on and defenses of spiritualist authenticity.78 While believers documented, in

77 Quoted in “Wonderful Manifestations: To the Friends from Cleveland,” Liberator
(Dec. 15, 1854), 200.
78 Such terms of deception, of course, were by no means new. However, the short-lived
Bankruptcy Act, which many considered overly-generous to debtors, made it so that the
only way of stopping the process of voluntary insolvency proceedings was to prove
willful fraud on the part of the debtor beyond any reasonable doubt. The emergent
extremely minute detail, the various placements of hands (the medium’s, their own, other attendees’ and so on) within the context of the domestic space so as to verify the impossibility of manipulation, skeptics claimed to expose the charade of the spirit-hand as nothing more than a stuffed glove, manipulated easily by the use of foot and string. Attendees were being deceived, and the fraudulent mediums were profiting handsomely from such gross deceptions. As one individual wrote to The Albion, although “table-turning” (the moving of furniture without agency) had quickly become a bore, “it was, however, too good a speculation to be allowed to die altogether; and of late, a spirit-rapping, table-turning, ghost-seeing movement has been organized on both sides of the Atlantic.” Not only were such performances deceiving a credulous audience, they could also have dire psychological effects. As Justine S. Murison has described, the market for life insurance likewise pivoted on questions of willful fraud. Thus accusations of fraud within the legal and cultural realm took on added urgency and import.  

79 See, for example, William H. Ferris, “A Review of Modern Spiritualism: Its Institutions Contradictions” (The Ladies Repository, 1856). See also “Spiritualism Exposed” (New York Observer and Chronicle, 1856). As the latter describes of unmasking the trick of the spirit-hand: a skeptic “quickly leaped to the end of the table, clutching the “spirit hand” before it had time to descend, and the gas being turned up, disclosed a stuffed glove! fastened on the foot of one of the [Davenport] boys, so that his leg slyly lifted, made the manifestation!” The writer continues: “The confusion occasioned by this open exposure of flagrant fraud and bold imposture on the part of the ‘spirits’ and this Davenport Family, has put a stop to these dollar exhibitions here” (53). 

80 In turn, of course, Spiritualists accused those who claimed to be able to “expose” the “tricks” as swindlers after profit. As Sargent writes summarily in Planchette; or the Despair of Science (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1887), “Every now and then paragraphs would appear in the news papers [of the 1850s and 60s], headed ‘The humbug exploded at last,’ ‘Spiritualism exposed,’ &c. And then we would be told that some ‘medium’ had turned State’s evidence, and had revealed how the ‘tricks’ were accomplished. There have been many such mediums, who, having failed to attract attention by genuine phenomena, have hoped to reach the public ear and the public purse by undertaking to disclose how the manifestations were brought about” (9).

clinical rhetoric of “anxiety” and “nervousness” was integral to debates over
spiritualism.\textsuperscript{82} One “orthodox” contributor to the \textit{Woburn Journal} warned that anyone
liable to “excitement” or who possessed a “large organ of marvellousness” should avoid
going to any such display of spiritual interaction.\textsuperscript{83} Others lamented that former mediums
were creating overpopulation in the nation’s asylums. Spiritualists claimed skeptics were
abdicating their powers of reasoning; skeptics claimed spiritualists were cracked in the
head.

No one was more ardent a Spiritualist, and as painfully aware of the manner in
which, in the market economy of credit and speculation, appearances could be
manipulated, than Epes Sargent, an often overlooked but prolific jack-of-all-literary-
trades of the nineteenth century: writer, poet, editor, play-right. Over the course of
several decades he edited and contributed to the \textit{New York Mirror}, \textit{New Monthly
Magazine}, and \textit{Boston Daily Atlas}, as well as starting his own \textit{Sargent’s Monthly
Magazine}, which, though not long lasting, boasted of original literary contributions from
many of the “most notable authors” of the day, including Dana, Longfellow, and
Hawthorne. He penned several comedies and tragedies for the stage (including “Love’s
Sacrifice; or The Rival Merchants” [1847] and “The Priestess, a Tragedy” [1854]), wrote
two adventure maritime narratives (\textit{American Adventure by Land and Sea} [1841] and
\textit{Arctic Adventure by Land and Sea} [1857]), a biography of Henry Clay, and a substantial

\textsuperscript{82} Justine S. Murison, \textit{The Politics of Anxiety in Nineteenth-Century American Literature}
(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011). Interestingly, much later Millais
Culpin in \textit{Spiritualism and the New Psychology: An Explanation of Spiritualist
Phenomena and Beliefs in Terms of Modern Knowledge} (London: Edward Arnold, 1920)
sought to explain and integrate Spiritualism into the “terms” of Freudian psychology,
especially the relation between hysteria and repression.

\textsuperscript{83} Referenced in “Spiritualism,” \textit{Liberator} (Dec. 22, 1854), 204.
amount of poetry, the most famous being his collected works in *Songs of the Sea, and other Poems* (1847). He was often called upon to pen odes for commencement ceremonies. He wrote two novels, *Fleetwood; or The Stain of Birth* (1845), a fairly conventional work revolving around marriage and money, and *Peculiar; a Tale of the Great Transition* (1864), a fascinating story about spirits, slavery, and the Civil War. Following the war, he wrote three works devoted specifically to Spiritualism: *Planchette, or the Despair of Science* (1869), *The Proof Palpable of Immortality* (1875), and *The Scientific Basis of Modern Spiritualism* (1880). Although during and after the Civil War Sargent thus gravitated towards works devoted to elaborating his brand of Spiritualism, in the 1840s, in the aftermath of the Panic, a substantial portion of his fictional work had centered on issues of market and legal manipulation, speculation, marriage, and labor. In “Love and Speculation,” for example, one of his many works of short satire, Sargent wittily described how, in the world of Wall-Street, “humbug” (itself something of a sublime term, operating at the border of legibility) was the philosopher’s stone that could turn nothing into gold specie: fictions could corroborate fictions.\(^4\) The protagonist, Mr. Singleton, is a poor artist whose family had gone bankrupt due to ill-advised endorsements, causing his fiancé’s family in turn to call off the engagement and push the daughter towards a more well-to-do suitor. Apprized of Singleton’s plight, a friend introduces him to a man of Wall-Street and dealer in all sorts of cockamamie stock schemes, the aptly named Mr. Timberstock. While Singleton looks on bemusedly, Timberstock “kills” his uncle, i.e. he creates a fictional wealthy uncle, has him

(fictionally) die aboard a ship bound across the ocean, and writes up a piece to be placed in the major papers detailing the narrative of Singleton’s newfound wealth. Singleton likewise, at Timberstock’s behest, buys large amounts of stock in the wall-street man’s ludicrous schemes with this new backing of capital, thereby corroborating the story. The next day those who had shunned Singleton since the insolvency of his family are aggressively friendly; banks that had turned him down for small loans extend massive amounts of credit at his disposal with low interest rates; the father of his former fiancé renews the engagement, and the future Singletons, ostensibly, live happily ever after. As I will show, the theme of this short tale of “the days of discount in New York” will resonate, in a more robust form, in his novel, *Peculiar*.

Owing to concerns that fictions could corroborate fictions, there is an obsessive quality in his works on Spiritualism involved in the sheer volume of testimonies he accumulates (“thousands” and of the most honest and expert observers, he insists), as well as a relentless defensiveness over the question of counterfeiting. If, as I argue, Spiritualism fails, in a sense similar to sentimental discourse, to restore (supernatural) order to the destabilizing antebellum speculative market, I would also suggest, taking my cue from Jane Bennett’s acute analysis of modern “enchantment,” that it nevertheless did produce an ethical disposition that, while not antithetical to commercial values or beyond their pale, was also not reducible to a simple reproduction of them. If spiritualism cannot ultimately produce or reveal the “invisible hand” of the market (and William Ferris, in the quote cited previously, parodically shows that it might very well extend the scope of market speculation into even the sacred afterlife), it yet destabilizes binaries of subject and object, human and non-human, living and dead, past and future--binaries of critical
importance within the context of antebellum racial hierarchies—and thereby allows for a recalibrated relation of self and other. As I will show, this is particularly salient in his novel, *Peculiar; a Tale of the Great Transition* (1864), which, put into conversation with his later nonfictional works, weaves together Sargent’s interest in the market, abolition, and Spiritualism, and attempts to think through how spiritualism’s animated objects and suspended persons can produce a counter-ethic to the dominant economic order as well as political action that works the system by appropriating and manipulating its forms and fictions.

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In the last decades, nineteenth-century Spiritualism has proven to be a newfound source of scholarly interest. Brett Carroll’s *Spiritualism in Antebellum America* (1997), Braud’s *Radical Spirits; Spiritualism and Women’s Rights in Nineteenth-Century America* (2001), John J. Kucich’s *Ghostly Communion: Cross-Cultural Spiritualism in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (2004), and Molly McGarry’s *Ghosts of Futures Past: Spiritualism and the Cultural Politics of Nineteenth-Century America* (2011) are but a smattering of examples of the serious interest that “occult” or marginal religious practices, like Spiritualism and Mormonism, have recently produced. The main thrust of this body of scholarship is to show that nineteenth-century Spiritualism was not simply a minor trend or fashion, but an integral component to the national imaginary, one that reflected and altered broader cultural anxieties and investments during an intense period of political and economic crisis and change. These scholars show the political work that Spiritualism performed (in the realm of women’s rights, Native American rights, free love advocacy, etc.) while at the same time they employ the marginalization of
Spiritualism to critique the dominant narrative of modern secularization in contemporary scholarship. Resistance to studying Spiritualism, according to McGarry, “has everything to do with the politics of secularism. If secularization is a progress narrative that culminates in the freedom from religion, religion can function only as an anachronistic invasion into public life that logically aligns with conservative and reactionary returns to moral values.” By applying pressure to the story of the inexorable triumph of secular modernity over antimodern forms of religious practices, we are able to grasp “a more nuanced understanding of the past” as well as “a more complicated politics of the present” (5). Although not particularly focused on the specifics of Spiritualism in the United States, Jane Bennett’s The Enchantment of Modern Life: Attachments, Crossings, and Ethics does pick up and extend this critique of secular triumph over forms of enchantment, magic, and other so-called premodern or “irrational” bodies of thought and practice. Through a rich synthesis of Epicurean philosophy and that of Deleuze and Guattari, and a range of sources from Kant to Kafka to chaos theory, Bennett makes the case that the “disenchantment” narrative of modernity fails to take into account the many resiliently enchanted elements of modern life. If secular modernity is a process of purification (of magic, of the irrational, and so on), its force cannot be comprehensive; its promise must fail. Moreover, not only does she make the case that enchantment remains potent even today—and even in the field of pre-packaged, always-already commodified culture—but that, if taken seriously, it also has the power to produce a revitalized ethic to counter the sense of a hollowed-out modern existential vacuum of powerlessness that the dominant narrative of modernity, especially as articulated by Max Weber, leaves us
foundering in. As Thomas Wentworth Higginson described the vitalizing force of Spiritualism, it makes life “sublimer, not sadder – more rich and vast and beautiful.”

Spiritualism productively chafes against and richly complicates the “disenchantment” narrative of the inevitable triumph of modern secularism. In an 1845 article from *The Tablet*, an organ of the Spiritualist press, the writer makes a bold claim about the stakes of modernity: “Materialism has had its day,” the writer declares; “it is past; it is conquered. Spiritualism springs up on all sides.” Rather than the disenchantment of modernity (or its “materialism”) being inevitable, this writer shows that, during the period, the direction of modernity was very much contested. Moreover, the very core of the Spiritualist project was to contest growingly rigidified boundaries between spirit and material, science and religion, enchantment and disenchantment. Nowhere was this platform more sustained and richly complicated as in the Spiritualist theory of Epes Sargent, which was developed, written, and rewritten over the course of four decades: from the late 1840s through the 1880s. Like the period itself, his writing is at times glowingly articulate and at other times gratingly, but fascinatingly, convoluted. Fundamentally, he employs an alchemical rhetorical mixture of science (particularly empiricism) and religion so as to turn the terms of religion and science against both institutions.

Scientific materialism, Sargent argues, rendering all things as a function of unguided, innate matter, not only contributes to the sapping of a particular vitality in life that Bennett discusses, but also had become so attached to this foundational a priori

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86Quoted in *The Catholic Telegraph* “Mesmerism” (Mar. 20, 1845), 81.
principle that it refused to follow its own investigative protocols. In contrast to the empiricism Sargent advocates for, anyone interested in Spiritualism (his fundamental motto is akin to something like “just see for yourself!”), materialists refuse to acknowledge the potential validity of it out of hand; it is simply dismissed as an impossibility—as being against natural law, the principles of physics, biology, and so on. If science had thus refused to adhere to its own disciplinary process, established religion (specifically institutionalized Christianity) refused to acknowledge its own investments in magic and enchantment, or more precisely that it relies fundamentally upon them, while also serving as a rhetorical engine for the validation of immoral beliefs, such as support of slavery. As a religion based on empirical validation, Spiritualism offers itself, theoretically at least, to everyone willing to give it a chance.

The manner in which William Ferris mocked the Spiritualist view of the after life as a dystopian extension of speculation and market manipulation is actually quite apropos, at least insofar as Sargent’s own view of the “future life” seems simply to be a utopian rendition of the market as a spectral form of upward mobility:

[B]y beneficent and eternal laws every soul will gravitate, in the life to come, where it belongs, where it can best find what is congenial to the disposition it has formed here, and there continue till it can rise, by proper gradations and its own

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87 Often times these charges by scientific skeptics were articulated through dismissive humor and ridicule, and Sargent’s frustration caused by this type of condescension is visceral. “Such facetiousness can amuse only the ignorant,” he responds to the skeptic Wundt, “your jocular allusions are of so mild and harmless a quality, that their point is not felt by any one versed in Spiritualism” (106-8)

88 For another history, from the perspective of a Seventh Day Adventist, of the Biblical precedent for Spiritualism, see Uriah Smith, Modern Spiritualism: A Subject of Prophecy and a Sign of the Times (Hagerstown, Maryland: The Review and Herald Publishing Co., 1896).
sincere efforts, to more worthy conditions, and take in at length a realization of
the ineffable grandeur and the splendid possibilities of its inheritance. 89

He likens his imaginative vision of the after-life as more akin to the more “consistent”
and “reasonable” Native American belief in an “Elysium” of a “grand hunting ground”
than the Christian idea that heaven is a place where all the elect “eternally strike golden
harps.” 90 Along these lines, however, Sargent seems to hit a snag, leading him to ever
more convoluted layers of anxious elaborations on the authenticity of the “principle” or
ordering power (borrowing from William Crookes, he calls it an “X-force”) that
Spiritualism reveals. “As the theory is,” he writes, “that there are all grades of good and
bad, stupid and intelligent, in spirit-life as well as in this, we get just what we ought to
expect”; or later, he says that “the fool will not at once become a sage, nor the clown a
gentleman, nor the thief an honest man.” 91 Given eternity, all have the opportunity for
growth in the form of perpetual upward mobility. In the meantime, however, this after-
world-view that is uncannily similar to a this-world-view presents certain issues over the
requisite question of counterfeiting and frauds that Spiritualism was incessantly accused
of concocting. There are, Sargent admits, swindlers claiming to be “genuine mediums”
for profit but they are the exception not the rule; in fact, much like the false readings
sometimes provided by mediums, they tend to prove that Spiritualism is true. “The man
who has counterfeit money palmed off upon him,” he argues, “is not he who disbelieves
in money, and refuses to take it, good or bad, but he who has reason to know that most of

89 Epes Sargent, *The Scientific Basis of Modern Spiritualism* (Boston: Colby and Rich,
1881), 86. When describing Sargent’s brand of Spiritualism, I will focus primarily on
this text, as oppose to his other two nonfiction works for the cause, because it presents the
most comprehensive elaboration of his theory.
90 Ibid, 119.
91 Ibid, 118, 123.
the money in use is genuine.”

This, however, just begins a slippery rhetorical slope. He goes on:

That genuine mediums may sometimes purposely resort to fraud in cases where the supersensuous power producing the phenomena is not readily available, is highly probable . . . Most mediums are dependent on the exhibition of their powers for a support; and if they sometimes supplement real phenomena by devices of their own, it must not be taken always as verifying the maxim, False in one thing, false in all.

Later elaborating upon this point of fraud in relation to spirits and his view of the afterlife, he concludes, “The theory that there are imposters in the spirit-world as well as in this, is consistent with all the facts . . . throughout the ages.” He continues, “That spirits may sometimes play gross hoaxes on unsuspecting mortals” is most likely true, especially in cases of economic advice.

To summarize: the medium could be a fraud in the spectral market for the sake of profit, or the medium could be genuine but requires some extra fraudulent tactics (most likely, he suggests, for the sake of profit), or the spirits could be the frauds! Sargent is trying to have it both ways, and he is struggling to keep his head above the water. On the one hand, if any of the phenomena of Spiritualism is understood to be valid, then the grand principle it seeks to prove (rather than particularly explicate) is valid. He hedges his bet by saying that seemingly “insignificant” things like rapping “would be extremely suggestive” rather than

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92 Ibid, 30.
93 Ibid, 19.
94 Ibid, 124, 135.
95 Elsewhere his struggle with the question of counterfeiting becomes even somewhat immature and silly, as he suggests that it takes a fraud to know one: “Now if there is any man who can be called an ‘expert’ in the matter of detecting fraud in an experiment made in broadest daylight, involving the question of direct writing, independent of any human delusion or trick, it must be the experienced juggler” (66).
96 Ibid, 78.
authoritative, but the implication is clear. In fact, later he writes that if one admits the validity of the spirit-hand then “all the rest is made credible.” On the other hand, evidence of fraud does not work the same way; “false in one thing” does not prove “false in all.” In fact, it proves, tautologically, genuine Spiritualism to be genuine: “What change could the counterfeit have had if there had not been a basis of the genuine?”

Clearly, Sargent’s vision of that ordering “spirit-hand” behind the market organized by the upward mobility of heaven is looking more and more like Ferris’s joke; that his compilations of testimony from persons whose honesty “cannot be doubted” have a whiff of the corroborating market fictions of “Love and Speculation,” despite his incessant protestations that the rooms are all well-lit, hands are all in proper place, and “conditions” admit of “no possibility” for fraud or deception.

All of the above does not mean, however, that Sargent’s logic is all bunk, and his Spiritualist theory worthless. Perhaps due to the renewed “stability” of the market in the early 1850s, Sargent distances himself from those who had denounced the “fictive market” as a whole and moves towards a position wherein the fictions of that market can be used for ethical ends. Crucially, he comes to this perspective through the spirit-world. Drawing its philosophical precedent particularly from Leibniz, Spinoza, Kant, Swedenborg, and Immanuel Herman Fichte, his brand of Spiritualism is far more nuanced and rich than most others of his contemporaries, such as the emphatic “animal

97 Ibid, 200.
98 Ibid, 103.
99 As but another interesting example relevant to the question of veracity: Sargent was an ardent follower of the medium, Henry Slade. Suspected of deceit, Slade was arrested in England, convicted, but was eventually freed on a technicality (that “and psalmistry” was not included in the written indictment) and he immediately fled to America to start his craft up again. Sargent’s faith in Slade, however, never wavered.
magnetism” and electrical theories of the famous “Poughkeepsie Seer” Andrew Jackson Davis and Catherine E. Beecher.¹⁰⁰ (He had counted Transcendentalist philosophy amongst his influences, but was seemingly blind-sided when his friend, Ralph Waldo Emerson, rejected Spiritualist investigation as, in the common saying, trying to find out what goes into the sausage. Sargent punctuates his argument against Emerson’s logic with an emotional allusion: “Et tu Brute?”) Sargent’s theory of matter and spirit is surprisingly salient under the aegis of what Bennett describes as the “enchanted” nature of modern science, and it requires some elaboration before a discussion of ethics and abolition in his novel Peculiar.

One of Sargent’s primary disagreements, if not the primary disagreement, with scientific materialism is that it denies the possibility of anything but inert matter and insists on irrational chaos being the constitution of the natural world; materialism, he suggests, leads inevitably to a way of seeing the world of objects as available for exploitation. “Just at this critical moment,” he writes in a vein reminiscent of the spectral pronouncement of Marx in the year of the birth of Spiritualism, “when faith in aught but matter and motion seemed to be dying out of the hearts of men—up starts this ill-favored, this perplexing and exasperating Spiritualism—this marplot—this enfant terrible” to disrupt its totalizing force.¹⁰¹ Spiritualism, according to Sargent, proves that, contrary to skeptics who reject the notion a priori, “marvellousness” is not outside of nature, but interior to it. Using Leibniz’s theory, he argues that the world is made up of “monads” or

¹⁰⁰ Sargent did not rule out the possibility of animal magnetism and electricity as causal mechanisms for Spiritualist phenomena out of hand. However, in his works they have a far less important role than in other iterations of Spiritualism.
¹⁰¹ Ibid, 113.
atoms that are “developed in degrees infinitely diverse” and are going through constant mutations, “evolutions,” and changes of state.102 This perspective informs his insistence on saying “spirits” rather than ghosts, insofar as etymologically “spirit” signifies “breath”; similarly, he creates the analogy between spirits and “vapor.” With similar attention to language, he insists that “the Spiritualist’s theory is, that life is continuous; that the word immortal must be taken in its etymological sense as not-dying.”103 The body is an organized field of atoms, and “death” is not an end, but a recombination of those atoms into a different (more dispersed) pattern. In this sense, moreover, matter is not a thing, for Sargent, but a constant activity: “Matter is but an expression of force, and force is the mode of action of that which exists and is alone persistent. Material forms have no stability. An organism is a temporary form, from which there is a continual efflux of particles.”104 Temporally, then, all times exist together: “Nothing really dies, all exists” because existence is continual mutation, folding in on itself and reforming. This theory of matter as force under perpetual transformation is how he integrates the “spirit” into materialism. Under certain circumstances (such as in the proximity to a medium, or what he elsewhere calls “a sensitive”), the dispersed atoms of an individual can be re-organized temporarily, by a sort of “condensation” or “change in the molecular disposition.”105

Amidst the buzzing field of change, however, is an “invisible hand” or natural-spiritual law that organizes it. Following Kant, Sargent sees reason as the means by
which this organizing force of the world, bridging phenomenon and neumenon, makes itself fleetingly glimpsed in Spiritualist phenomena. As Bennett describes, though without explicit reference to the séance, “Kantian magic occurs only fleetingly and ambiguously in nature itself—nature does offer tantalizing threads of connection to the supersensible, but they are fragile and thin.”

She continues:

[F]or Kant, thinking had what Deleuze describes as an ‘up-right’ nature. To really get beyond a teleological imaginary, however, would be to explore the opposite set of assumptions. Why not suppose that thinking is not in alignment with the world and not upright in character, that it can be contrary toward things outside of itself and can be playful and ill-mannered as well as upright? Under this set of contestable assumptions, thinking becomes a conglomeration of intentions, leaps, intensities, trace elements, and accidents, out of which emerge the surprises that temporarily jar humans out of the stupor of their duly sequential representing and recognizing.

As I have described above, dealing with the playful and ill-mannered are, translated into the economic terms of counterfeiting and fraudulence, very much what Sargent struggles with, as he attempts to show the after-life to be a well-ordered economy of upward mobility predicated on the authentic, if always local and temporary, evidence of Spiritualist phenomena. Sargent seeks desperately for a glimpse of the principle, and, as I have been arguing, this desire is driven by the experiences of the topsy-turvy, destabilizing force of the “fictive” antebellum market. The view that understands the world as inert matter lends itself, he suggests, to a view underwriting slavery that all is thus available (to humans, thus to white subjects) for the sake of personal investment and profit. Sargent’s theory of Spiritualism thus does not anticipate the Deleuzian theory of chaotic, “playful” matter and the “body without organs” valorized by Bennett.

Nevertheless, his theory, which strikes against the privileging of the human (and, importantly, the human as white), engenders the types of ethical considerations for other “objects” that she elaborated as a result of embracing forms of enchantment in modern life, even in the ostensibly “disenchanted” field of commodity culture, which, in the context of the 1850s, included the circulation of the “animated objects,” or commodities, of the slave trade.

Spiritualism gave vital “force” and “life” to things otherwise considered inert objects: candles would melt and become active hands, tables would (as Leah Fish, nee Fox, once wonderfully described) dance with “evident joy,” papers and sheets of music would fly around the room, and instruments would play themselves. Spiritualism thus, as Bennett might describe, had the potential to make one consider the apparent objects of the world not as inert matter available passively for exploitation and profit, but as invested with life and agency, and thus worthy of ethical treatment. This deprivileging of the human into a realm of a buzzing world of lively, fluctuating objects was especially salient during the racial politics and marketplace of slaves of the 1850s, when to be human and alive meant to be white, and to be black meant often to be given the abject, “socially dead” status of object or commodity. Spiritualism, as is evident in the case of Sargent’s abolitionist novel, _Peculiar_, thus served as a means of collapsing the binaries that underwrote racial oppression and thereby of extending ethical investment towards the so-called “objects” of the field and household.

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Peculiar; or a Tale of the Great Transition revolves around the exchange and circulation of bodies, money, and spirits, all three terms mutually informing the others.\textsuperscript{108} Set in the 1850s and extending into the war in 1862, the novel’s plot is sprawling, encompassing a mish-mash of sub-plots barely tied together at the conclusion. The first involves a New York lawyer and miser, Charlton, whose relation to others is purely pecuniary; he has no allegiance but to the accumulation of non-circulating wealth, and as such is emblematic of the manner in which, for Sargent, materialism is translated into a market mentality. As a lawyer of conveyances and real estate transactions, moreover, Charlton emphatically does not \textit{produce} anything, but merely profits as a medium between parties, taking a percentage off transactions. The second involves the young Clara Berwick, who, though white, is sold into slavery by the notorious slave “finder” Delancey Hyde after the death of her parents in a steam boat explosion on the Mississippi, thereby assuring Charlton’s inheritance of a fortune while also inaugurating an elaborate slave-seduction plot (the insidious Carberry Ratcliffe buys her at auction and grooms her to be his future lover and wife). The third involves the plots of two figures circulating through the country (and beyond it) in order to undermine the institutions of slavery: the white Mr. Vance set about the destruction of slavery following the torture and death of his wife, Estelle, who was deemed a slave though the implication is that she was white; and the free black and aptly named Peculiar Institution, shortened to “Peek,” who helps Vance’s designs while also searching the slave states, as an investigator, for information about his missing wife and child, whom he fears had been sold back South after escaping to Canada. By their help, 

\textsuperscript{108} Epes Sargent, \textit{Peculiar; or a Tale of the Great Transition} (New York: Carleton, 1864). All references to the text will be to this edition and will be cited parenthetically.
as well as that of a female cohort of slaves surrounding Ratcliffe (and, of course, some spiritual aid), Clara is ultimately revealed to be the heir of the Ayelsford-Berwick fortune, and a rapid series of marriages punctuates the novel.

There are several other subplots, but suffice it to say that formally Sargent is operating in the conjunction of pairs either of good and bad or of chronological repetition: Charlton, the immoral miser, is set against Albert Pompilard, the unpredictably upstanding (and highly comical) spendthrift and wall-street speculator; Clara is figured, especially in the eyes of Vance, as the new Estelle; Onslow, supporter of slavery despite his father’s abolitionism (his father experiments in free labor in Texas before being killed by a mob), is set against his college friend, Kenrick, an ardent abolitionist despite his father’s moral and financial investments in plantation slavery; Vance parallels Peek, and both “slave liberators” are set in opposition to Hyde and Quattles (the “nigger finders”), and so on.

The capaciousness of *Peculiar*’s plot, as well as Sargent’s insistent “intrusions” of lengthy diatribes (posed as dialogues) and footnotes, led many reviewers to dismiss the novel. *Godey’s* suggested that the “patchwork is too evident” and that Sargent “displays all the facility of a vaudeville in moving his characters according to his own convenience.”109 The *Liberator* noted, with distaste, the obsessive need for empirical verifiability that, counter to its very intention, ruined the “realism” of the novel rather than supporting it. While Murison understands this contradictory status of the “real” to be something integral to the problems of Spiritualism, what I believe it points to is rather,

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109 Quoted in Murison, 148. Information about Sargent and his works is relatively scant, and Murison, in her chapter on his authorship, does an able job of accumulating such information as is available, to which I am indebted.
more materially, the manner in which the “real” vis-à-vis middle-class readers of abolitionist fiction had been subsumed into the discourse of sentimentality, in which emotional verisimilitude trumps. Laura Tremaine, a New Orleans coquette and false friend to Clara, exclaims, while Kenrick and Onslow debate politics, “Sink the shop!” (269). But this submersion of rational experimentation and argument into parlor-room rituals and emotions is exactly what Sargent cannot bring himself to do. While many tears are shed in *Peculiar*, and families broken up by slavery, and marriages are consummated at the conclusion, and so on, Sargent ultimately subscribes to the Kantian faith in reason, even if something like traumatic grief (as is generally the case in the novel) leads one to reason, and thus, inevitably, to Spiritualism and consequently Abolitionism. What Sargent insists upon in *Peculiar* relentlessly is that slavery is a speculative market, linked with such institutions as “Wall Street,” and, in trafficking in bodies, exacerbates the market’s most unethical qualities (or, we might suggest, reveals them in exaggerated form).

The figure of the speculator is not uncommon in such works as *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*; however, in sentimental abolitionist fiction, market speculation serves as a mechanism for elaborating upon broader emotional investments (like insolvency leading to the breakup of slave families) while in *Peculiar* the opposite is the case. For example, Sargent’s rendition of the slave auction is less filled with the grief over the breakup of families than it is a scene of speculation and manipulation. One slave woman stands at the block and “without shame . . . stood there, as if used to the scene, and rather flattered by the glib commendations of the auctioneer” (168), thus marketing herself, while another, less used to the market, is somewhat nervous. Clara, of course, has been
“painted” brown by Hyde so as to appear mulatto. Similarly, the narrator is more focused on the bidding process for the “lots” than he is on any sense of emotional intensity. He recurrently focuses on the way the auctioneer rigs the scene so to amplify profit: “see-sawing from one chimerical gentleman to the other, he carried the sham bidding up” (169). Meanwhile, the crowd presents a scene of ruthless, masculine competition: bidders bitterly angry at any other person who makes a bid higher than his own. Within this field, (white) personhood is actually submerged into the terms of exchange. After Clara is bought by Ratcliffe, someone asks Quattles and Hyde who had bought her, to which they can only reply that “Cash” had (174). While lacking in conventions of sentimentality, Sargent insists on the auction block as a site of the circulation and exchange of commodities and currency.  

As hinted at by Ratcliffe being referred to as “Cash,” and is developed through the “white slave” in Clara, this attention to economic process opens into a certain reversibility of race and its implications on the subject/object, human/commodity divide. Introducing the fair, wealthy, white, pro-slavery Laura Tremaine, unlike the lengthy descriptions introducing other characters, the narrator writes:

Had she been put up at a slave-vendue, the auctioneer, if a connoisseur, would have expatiated thus: “Let me call your attention, gentlemen, to this very superior article. Faultless, you see, in very way. In limb and action perfect. Too showy, perhaps, for a field-hand, but excellent for the parlor. Look at that profile. The Grecian type in its perfection! Nose a little retrousse, but what piquancy in the expression! Hair dark, glossy, abundant. Cheeks,—do you notice that little dimple when she smiles? Teeth sound and white: open the mouth of the article and look, gentlemen. Just feel of those arms, gentlemen. Complexion smooth, brilliant perfect. Did you ever see a head and neck more neatly set on the

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[110] This perspective likewise informs his lengthy arguments, in the plot as well as in footnotes, describing the ways in which slavery undercuts the value of the labor of the poor whites of the South.
shoulders?—and such shoulders! What are you prepared to bid, gentlemen, for this very, very superior article? (236)

Even Clara Berwick, the heroine of the novel, is described in such a fashion as to subvert racial hierarchy while also pointing to the manner in which all women tend to be understood, within the competitive arena of heteronormative coupling, as objects of pleasure. There are many ways to describe a character as appearing intrinsically genteel; the narrator chooses a particularly odd one: “A man of the turf,” he writes of Clara, “would have summed up his whole description of the girl in the one word ‘blood’” (189).

Such reversals are not simply a warning to a white readership that even white children might be sold into slavery, but follows from Sargent’s extensive treatment, early in Peculiar, of advertising and speculation in the realm of love and marriage. Emily Berwick, whose story opens the text, marries one Mr. Bute, who “was one of those persons whose efforts in life are continual failures, from the fact that they cannot adapt themselves to circumstances,—cannot persevere during the day of small things till their occupation, by gradual development, becomes profitable” (4). When he is presented with a dowry upon his marriage and is suddenly flush with cash, Bute immediately sets off to gorge himself in the realm of consumption. He is offered a set of horses and carriage, with exorbitant detail made by the seller of the animals’ tameness and the plushness of the vehicle, and decides to buy the set. This proves to be a poor decision:

This urgent recommendation from “a particular friend, entirely disinterested,” decided Bute. He bought the “establishment.” The next day as he was taking a drive, the shriek of a steam-whistle produced such an effect upon his incomparable span, that they started off at headlong speed, ran against a telegraph-pole, smashed the ‘new patent-string phaeton,’ threw out the drive, and broke his neck against a curbstone. (5)
This brief story is paired, right at the outset of *Peculiar*, with scenes of marriages compacted so as to either save a family from financial ruin or, on the part of husbands, made for profit. Prior to the introduction of slavery as a key element to the novel, and highly unlike most sentimental abolitionist works, marriage is offered here (as it had been in “Love and Speculation”) as a prevalent form of speculation, a competitive marketplace of love, rather than a redemptive force beyond market values. People, in this arena, are constantly deceived. “Charlton,” the narrator describes of the miser, “was not venturous in speculation. The boldest operation he ever attempted was that of his marriage” (13). In a parallel to the “bill of goods” that doomed Bute, Charlton marries twice for money only to realize his information about the women’s family finances had been faulty. Of course, despite his venomous accusations of their fraud, it is Charlton’s avarice that leads him along. He is, after all, the swindler: “It was the old, old story of the cheat and the dupe; of credulous innocence overmatched by heartless selfishness and fraud” (12). Charlton distances himself from the speculative economy of Wall Street—he is a non-producer and a non-circulator. He also ultimately comes to his fortune, at least temporarily, by manipulating a menacingly complex legal code for inheritance: upon the death of the Berwicks on board the Pontiac (the explicit result of masculinized competition between steamships for profitable reputation) he manipulates testimony so as to ensure that it appears that Mr. Berwick died *after* Mrs. Berwick but *before* the child. Yet, while distanced from stock-jobbing, Charlton, not unlike his Southern counterpart Ratcliff, is simply part of a different type of speculative economy: the economy of trafficking in marriages.
This sense of marriage being but another type of market is central to why, much to the chagrin of his reviewers, Sargent’s novel, later on, lacks those emotional scenes of slave families being broken up at the block, and instead relentlessly focuses on the economic plantation practice of manipulating families and bodies for the purposes specifically of “breeding” slaves. Though certainly couched in the sentimental code of female purity, Ratcliff’s abuse of Estelle, and later Clara, lies in his avowed ability to marry them off at will for the sake of the production of more slaves. The conclusion to the novel (which, as I show later, is quite literally and necessarily farcical), though filled with pairings, is overshadowed by this skeptical critique of marriage as not a redemptive institution but another economic order. Even in the otherwise conventional, grief-inducing tale of Vance, the novel’s hero, and his lost Estelle, there are unsettling implications. His deep-abiding love, the traumatic memory of which will render him unfit to marry Clara later, is not only a matter of her matchless beauty: “She wanted,” he writes, “further to be my valet, my very slave, anticipating my wants, and forestalling every little effort which I might put forth” (127, emphasis added).

Sargent is not calling for the overthrow of the financial market so much as advocating for the overthrow of slavery, as its most insidious extension. The reason for the existence of a fortune that will ultimately be given to Clara is that Robert Aylesford had successfully speculated in large tracts of lands in Chicago. More importantly, Charlton’s economic foil is a “reckless spendthrift and speculator,” Albert Pompilard, who also marries for the sake of wealth. His story, moreover, exemplifies the topsyp turvy movements of speculation. Following his first marriage, after ruining himself financially on Wall Street, he stakes his wife’s money on a stock operation and wins,
suddenly coming into a fortune. Following her death, Pompilard goes back to stock trading, but “Ill-luck now pursued him with remorseless pertinacity” and he is ruined (49). So, he marries a second time, and, without breaking stride, takes up possession of his wife’s money, pays off his debts, and stakes the rest on stocks. He wins and “at sixty he was richer than ever. . . . But soon one of those panics in the money-market which take place periodically to battle the calculations and paralyze the efforts of large holders of stocks, occurred to confound Pompilard. In trying to hold his stocks, he was compelled to make heavy sacrifices, and then, in trying to hedge, he heaped loss on loss.” He ultimately makes a “wreck of his wife’s property” (50).

Given the rest of the novel’s concerns with the speculative market, especially the foil of Charlton, we might ask: What is Pompilard’s saving grace? How does he escape censure? And not only does he escape serious censure in Peculiar, but when Clara comes into her fortune, she saves the impoverished Pompilards and reinstalls them in the splendor of wealth. There are several reasons, I believe, for this. First, Pompilard, though immersed in the fictive universe of Wall Street, is not a manipulator of exchange rates. Just as in Sargent’s nonfiction works on Spiritualism, (and here Pompilard is something of a market medium) being wrong sometimes is a sign of being authentic beneath individual instances of success or failure. The one (like Charlton) who always seems to win or be “true” is the most likely swindler. Second, Pompilard is

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111 Robert Aylesford, the origin of the “fortune” at stake in the novel, disinherits his sister specifically because she marries the reckless speculator, Pompilard, and develops an elaborate scheme of secluded education for keeping his daughter from seeing marriage as a speculation (as well as to avoid “fortune hunters” like Pompilard).
molded and complimented by his friend, Pierre Toussaint, a free black and former slave of Haiti. Toussaint is described as “Ben Franklin in ebony” (16):

No two men could be more unlike than Toussaint and Pompilard; and yet they were always drawn to each other by some subtle points of attraction. Pompilard was a reckless speculator and spendthrift; Toussaint, a frugal and cautious economist; but he had been indebted for all his best investments to Pompilard. Bold and often audacious in his own operations, Pompilard never would allow Toussaint to stray out of the path of prudence. Not unfrequently Pompilard would founder in his operations on the stock exchange. (17)

A figure of the black middle class (though always, even in name, carrying his history as a slave), Toussaint is, like Pompilard, not above the fluctuations of the market: “By the great fire of 1835, Toussaint lost by his investments in insurance companies” (10). Crucially, no matter how much he had lost, and though “incurring no debts” at any time, he always, like Pompilard, has something to give others. Toussaint is always reinvesting gifts others give him for their own benefit (generally in the form of bank securities and trusts). Early in the novel, he functions, therefore, as something like a bank. He is able to (even deceitfully) manipulate some of Pompilard’s capital and investments for the latter’s own good (and vice versa), while he is likewise able to secure Emily Charlton’s precious gold jewelry box (meant for Clara), with receipt, from the greedy paws of Charlton.

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112 Sargent offers a brief history of Pierre, but his timeline is slightly skewed, as he writes that Pierre and his master left “at the outbreak” of the revolution “in 1801,” at which point the revolution was quite well underway.

113 Later, during the war, Peek will function similarly in New Orleans as a secure repository for funds (those funds not already deposited in the North), while Southern Banks became insecure, not only in terms of solvency but also in terms of forced Confederate Currency conversions and the specter of confiscation.
As we can see in the Pompilard-Toussaint dynamic, in the realm of *Peculiar* one can use the forms and fictions of market institutions (their means) for the sake of benefitting others. Moreover—and this is where the market plot dovetails into the abolitionist plot—while war might provide structural change, individually one can use these means *against the institutions themselves*.\(^{114}\) In the only extended treatment of the novel, Murison argues that *Peculiar* revolves over questions of appearance versus a “true” self: “As with Peek’s performance of Jim Crow, Sargent’s mode of characterization continually undermines readers’ expectations.”\(^{115}\) Indeed, Peek and Vance are performers, the latter literally schooled as an actor by trade (as well as later becoming a successful speculator in lands in the Midwest). Vance is introduced as a pro-slavery plantation owner only to reveal that he is the notorious slave-liberator “Gashface.”\(^{116}\) As Hyde describes of his successful operations: “Two millions of dollars would n’t pay fur all the slaves he’s helped across the line” (91). Like Peek, he circulates through the nation in disguise, going by various names depending on the context, playing, for instance, a “border ruffian” in Kansas while feeding the pro-slavery contingent’s movements to the abolitionists. Successful deceit, as Murison argues, relies on subverting readers’ expectations. Peek, like Esha, is able to deftly play the “Jim Crow” slave, though he himself speaks without that dialect: “There was nothing,” the narrator writes, “in the negro’s language to indicate the traditional slave of the stage and the

\(^{114}\) The conjunction of investments, slavery, and law also comes to the forefront in recurrent allusions to the Mississippi repudiators.

\(^{115}\) Murison, 147.

\(^{116}\) Gashface is widely understood to have been killed, but, again in the vein of the novel, it turns out that someone else had been killed and marked up so as to appear as Gashface for the five thousand dollar reward.
novel, who always says ‘Massa,’ and speaks a gibberish indicated to the eye by a cheap misspelling of words. A listener who had not seen him would have supposed it was an educated white gentleman who was speaking” (21). Within the novel, it is Ratcliffe’s adherence to and abiding faith in such inherited conventions that causes him to fail to see the conspiratorial plot for Clara’s escape occurring around him (with Clara, his creole wife, slave lover, Peek, and several others all working together). Years earlier, in what would inaugurate his hatred for Vance, he had seen the latter on stage in a romantic play, the heroine being played by a woman he admired (but whom Vance disliked). As would be the case later, Ratcliffe is unable to tell “performed” love from a “true” form. His stubborn insistence on received wisdom renders him unable to “reason” and differentiate performance from truth.

Vance and Peek, on the other hand, are able to pursue their aims by a knowledge of conventions and an ability to wield them. It is a nice pun that Peek (the Peculiar Institution) works through the marketplace of slavery with its matrix of fictions and conventions in order to undermine it; the “institution,” for Sargent, produces its own destruction. Peek’s story is marked by this manipulation of appearances, and the use of false papers, that the narrator ascribes as a rightful and inevitable product of feeling oneself a slave: “To blame a slave for lying and stealing, is about as fair as it would be to

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117 The very reverse is true in the case of Vance’s father, who had also been an actor. Playing the hero in a tragedy, Vance’s father is handed a prop sword for the concluding suicide only to have it turn out to be, by means of a mistake, a real sword. Thus, believing something false to be true is as problematic as its opposite. Meanwhile, Vance’s mother becomes the figure of financial ruin: she “had invested her seven thousand dollars in bonds of the Planters’ Bank of Mississippi, to the redemption of which the faith of the State was pledged. The repudiation of the bonds by the State authorities . . . deprived her of her last resource. Impoverished in means, broken in health, and unable to labor, she fell into a decline and died” (109)
blame a man for using strategy in escaping from an assassin.” (28). He reiterates that the “natural instinct” is to “cheat and baffle” and that “from his earliest years, lying and fraud become legitimate and praiseworthy in the slave’s eyes” (29). This has two foundations: on the one hand, a slave who feels “robbed” of his own labor and freedom becomes an acute skeptic of the “false” discourses that support the institution; on the other, he develops an ability to use those forms for his own ends. In a wry poke at Charlton (and later, Ratcliffe’s self-serving lawyer Semmes), Peek “grew to be so expert a liar, that among his fellows he was called the lawyer” (22) and “At eighteen he was a match for Talleyrand in using speech to conceal his thoughts” (30).

This skill was not, though the narrator insists upon the point, merely an inevitable result of slavery, but also an experience of the broader marketplace of schemes and appearances. His first master, who treats his slaves purely as commodities, as “horses and sheep,” runs into financial ruin: the estate “was heavily mortgaged. Finally the creditors took it, and the family was broken up. Peculiar was sold to one Harkman, a speculator, who let him out as an apprentice in New Orleans, in Collins’s machine-shop for the repair of steam-engines. But Collins failed, and then Peek became a waiter in the St. Charles Hotel” (23). Later, in one particularly telling scene that exemplifies the nexus of trafficking in bodies and in stock-schemes, Peek, upon being captured after an attempt to runaway, is “taken to a new patent whipping-machine, recently introduced by a Yankee. Here was left for a whipping. Bought off the Yankee with five dollars, and taught him how to stain my back so as to imitate the marks of the lash. Thus no discredit was brought on the machine” (23). Thus, Peek’s experiences with “jugglers” and expert manipulators give him a profound mobility and aptitude in freeing slaves as well as
tracking down his wife and child; just as Sargent describes in the nonfiction works on Spiritualism, aware of all forms of humbuggery, Peek “is not a man to be humbugged” (43). Besides his usage of physical disguise, his rhetorical disguises likewise allow him to negotiate within the framework of slavery wherein he has, ostensibly, no leverage: “Peek,” describes the narrator, “to serve some purpose of his own, here dropped his dignity entirely, and assumed the manner and language of the careless, rollicking plantation nigger. “Yah! Yah!” laughed he. “Wall, look a-he-ah, Kunnle Delancy Hyde. Les make a trade,--we two” (78).

Amidst all of these sub-plots, and especially as slavery becomes the centerpiece of the novel, Pompilard is something of an easily overlooked figure; however, like Vance and Peek’s manipulation of the fictions and conventions of the (slave market) for the sake of liberating the enslaved, Pompilard operates analogously in the context of the stock market, connecting the two together and deftly using, rather than disavowing, its manipulability to work for the benefit of others. The reckless speculator is ultimately reinstalled into luxury and fashion by means of Clara’s generosity. He signs an oath for Mr. Maloney never to speculate again, but his ability to massage appearances, as had been the case with Peek and Vance, remains intact. Formerly, Mr. Maloney had been a poor tailor and friend to Pompilard, the latter of whom, being then rich and fashionable, circulated the notion that he would only get pantaloons from Maloney: “Soon the superstition prevailed in Wall Street and along the Fifth Avenue, that if one wanted pantaloons he must go to Maloney.” “How many fortunes,” the narrator asks, “have a

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118 As Murison aptly writes: “Peek performs throughout the narrative as a code shifter who knows when to fall into dialect and when to speak grammatically correct English” (147).
basis quite as airy and unsubstantial!” (181). Near the conclusion of the novel, Pompilard’s son-in-law, missing an arm from the war, comes to live with him in desperate circumstances and the same dynamic is repeated. Although Cecil Purling is a failed author (and, moreover, one who had “ruined” every single publisher that had ever gone in with him, from Boston to Philadelphia), Pompilard suggests that he write a history of the Civil War. He takes up a subscription for the project and with the generous offerings of Mrs. Charlton and Clara the work should prove an enormous success: “It was the first money his literary efforts had ever brought him. The spell was broken. Thenceforth the thousands would pour in upon him in an uninterrupted flood” (463). Indeed, when word gets around that more than two hundred copies had been subscribed to the first day, there is no stopping things; and “The moment it was understood in fashionable circles that, through Clara’s access to fortune, [Purling] stood no longer in need of help, subscribers to his history poured in not merely by dozens, but by hundreds” (481). Whether the work was any good or not is, of course, like the war itself, beyond the scope of the narrative. But the narrator tells the reader (the future “reader of 1875”) to leave an open place on the bookshelf for a six-volume octavo edition.

It is right, at this point, to ask: but how is one to tell the “good” from the “bad,” the ethical use of performance as opposed to the selfish uses of it? One of the central tenets that Sargent is combating, after all, is the idea that slavery benefits the slaves. Doesn’t the tenuous notion of “means” fail to adequately escape from the mess of market fictions? The answer, of course, is a belief in spiritualism. Whereas characters like Ratcliff are fooled because of their unthinking adherence to inherited conventions, Spiritualism forces one to call these codes into question. In a two pronged thrust it
privileges empirical investigation over received wisdom while also thereby functioning to undermine the inherited binaries of subject/object, human/commodity, and living/dead that underwrote racial oppression.

Defending Spiritualism takes up as much of *Peculiar* as attacking “the institutions” of slavery. For instance, skipping a period of more than a decade, Sargent devotes, in summation of it, a short paragraph to the Fugitive Slave Act, a short paragraph to John Brown, and a massive, nearly two-page paragraph to the importance of the Rochester Rappings. At times, a character’s debt to Spiritualism is made in passing, elsewhere it takes up huge chunks of the novel, but all the “redeemed” characters are “spirits”: Onslow’s father, who attempted to use free labor in Texas only to be mobbed and murdered, is mentioned as a believer; Esha, inherited from an admixture of “African animism” and Islamic law, believes in spirits of this world while Mrs. Berwick, prior to her death, was a spiritualist, both of whom influence Clara. Delancey Hyde, the ruthless slave hunter and trader, is converted to abolition at the same time as he becomes a believer (while his name “Hyde,” resonant of Hydesville, serves as a thinly-veiled foreshadowing to this). Vance expiates variously on Spiritualism.119 It is, indeed, a

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119 As but one example, especially as to the interminable “intrusion” of diatribe into the novel’s verisimilitude: “Do you, too, then, believe in ghosts?” asked Berwick “Yes; I am a ghost myself,” said Onslow. Berwick started at the abruptness of the announcement, then smiled, and replied, “Prove it.” “That I will, both etymologically and chemically,” rejoined Onslow. “The words ghost and gas are set down by a majority of the philologists as from the same root, whether Gothic, Saxon, or sanscrit, implying vapor, spirit. The fermenting yeast, the steaming geyser, are allied to it. Now modern science has established (and Professor Henry will confirm what I say) that man begins his earthly existence as a microscopic vesicle of almost pure and transparent water. It is not true that he is made of dust. He consists principally of solidified air” (88).
central part of Peek’s development as a character, his recognition of his own lively “animation,” and the impetus behind his desire to escape slavery. He has three “eras” of his early life:

In the first, he felt the slave’s crowning curse,—the absence of that sense of personal responsibility which freedom alone can give; and he fell into the demoralization which is inherent consequence of the slave’s condition. In the second era, he encountered his mother, and then the frozen fountain of his affections was unsealed and melted. In the third, he met Corinna, and for the first time looked on life with the eyes of belief. (28)

Corinna is a slave and Spiritualist medium, who inducts him into the world of the spirits while also engendering the “empirical” qualities Sargent saw as essential to converts: “He renewed his interviews daily as long as the quadroon [Corinna] girl lived. Skeptical, cautious, and meditative, he must test all these phenomena over and over again. And he did test them. He established conditions. He made records on the spot. He removed all possibilities of collusion and deception” (36). He is shown the many typical phenomena of spiritualist performances including spirit-hands, the playing of instruments without human agency, levitation, pneumatography, stigmata, and so on. As was the case in the nonfictional works, Peek is also subjected to many “erroneous answers,” which, interestingly here, are ascribed generally to questions of “worldly concern”: “He was repeatedly told of places where he could find silver and gold, and never truly” (39). Spiritualism can offer only the sense that there is specie (in the market and as a principle in the world), not how to find it or where it is located because this would obviate the economic necessity of risk and chance.

How, though, does spiritualism translate into ethical principle and action? Murison sees this as the central, anxious problem of spiritualism in Sargent and
elsewhere. “The question of the benefits of spiritualism to the ‘real,’ political world—what was often termed the ‘cui bono?’ question—haunted spiritualism throughout the 1850s and 1860s,” she writes.120 She continues: “The crux of Peculiar is the inability to make political reform and spiritualism operate conjointly.”121 On this point, Murison falls in line with the negative contemporary reviews of the novel’s failings, while instrumentalizing such formal faults by showing that they were part of a broader cultural failure on the part of Spiritualism as a whole to connect the dots between a belief in spiritualist phenomena and political activism. This is a gap that, as I have been arguing, can, and should, be filled, even if Sargent, amongst other Spiritualists, found it at times difficult to articulate. It is important to note here that cultural appropriation and projection remain problematic for Spiritualism as a cross-cultural and racial-ethical foundation; as we can see in the context of Peculiar, Sargent projects his brand of Spiritualism (which was predominantly white and middle class) onto the figures of slaves like Corinna and Peek, at the expense of other now well-documented forms of spiritual practices amongst slave populations, a point especially salient in the context of a tale of New Orleans. But following McGarry’s elaboration on Spiritualism and Native American Rights, I do not believe that this stands as an immediate grounds for dismissal. Fundamentally, Sargent’s Kantian brand of Spiritualism was anti-authoritarian in that it attacked a belief in inherited codes (such as but not exclusively slavery) at the expense of personal experimentation: “most men,” he writes in Peculiar, echoing his nonfiction, “are mentally so inert, they would rather believe than examine; and so they flatter themselves

120 Murison, 153.
121 Ibid, 155.
that their loose, unreasoning acquiescence is a saving belief” (40). Additionally, more so than most of his contemporaries (especially those who exclusively privileged things like animal magnetism and electric currents as the causal mechanisms of spiritualist phenomena), Sargent’s own rich theorization of spiritualism lends itself to an ethic that fits especially well within the context of a market that speculated and trafficked in animated commodities. First, the notion that all matter is a field of forces in constant mutation undermines the typical conceptual privileging of the human, which is, of course, a highly contested term (possibly the contested term) within the context of slavery. It draws one into a leveled consideration of things like animals, plants, even rocks as something different in type but not kind. Moreover, this is non-imperialistic; in a spectrum of molecules and forces, the ground for privileging sameness over difference is tenuous. “Plants and minerals are,” Sargent writes, “sleeping monads with unconscious ideas; in plants these ideas are formative vital forces” (16). In Peculiar, those who are believers in the spirit world, and especially in the case of former slaves, exhibit an ethical conduct towards humans and non-humans alike. As Bennett describes, moreover, of extracting ethics from within commodity culture, the animation of objects otherwise considered inert, which was a standard part of the Spiritualist performance, can disrupt the subject/object, human/non-human divide that, as I have described above, served as the conceptual framework for racial privilege: “If the power to self-move, to laugh, or to dance adhere, albeit differentially, in all material things, then humans must reckon with a much larger population of entities worthy of ethical concern, and humanity faces the difficult prospect of moderating its claim to uniqueness” (112). Also, by complicating standard temporal and chronological orders, Spiritualism tapped into and kept present
questions of the racial and cultural violence of national expansion that many historical narratives had closed the book on (as “past”) in order to disavow its implications in the process. All of these ethical dimensions have a crucial bearing on Sargent’s treatment of slaves (those different “animated objects”), and his attempt to create a “brotherhood” that is not outside of capitalism, and its underside of slavery, but attempts to work or “juggle” things differently, more ethically, within it. The “spirits” of *Peculiar*, through their conversion to Spiritualism, take advantage of means for ethical living at their disposal within a speculative market of stocks, slaves, marriages, and so on. Vance, Peek, and Pompilard all work their magic from within, appropriating the conventions of the economic order so as to ultimately help, so far as they can, a range of discarded others.

The conclusion to the novel seems, puzzlingly, to wrap things up with a nice bow in a combination of unbelievable marriages and comical refrains. Charlton, having learned he has lost his fortune to Clara, knows that he is ruined and commits suicide; Ratcliffe, too, loses all, unable to run his slave gangs to Texas. Peek dies gallantly as part of a Louisiana Black regiment, where just prior to his death he is reunited with his lost son. Vance returns to the war. The reformed Hyde, now a solid Union man, returns minus a leg. Onslow returns, wounded, and marries the daughter of Charlton, Lucy. Kenrick returns having been blinded by a cannonball and marries Clara. Strangest and most awkward of all, Mrs. Gentry, the staunch pro-slavery advocate who had educated Clara for the purposes of grooming her for Ratcliffe, has reformed and married the (likewise reformed) former auctioneer who had sold Clara as a slave to begin with.

While the proliferation of marriages is strained to the point of some ridiculousness, in the concluding sub-plot of Pompilard, Sargent is quite explicitly
comedic. In a comic reversal, the now-impoverished Pompilard and Maloney, the tailor whom Pompilard had helped “create” (even if a bit falsely), fight and threaten one another to a drubbing because the latter is attempting to force the former to borrow some of his money, no interest, no strings, any amount. It is a scene of mutual-debt and friendly consideration in the form of a creditor-debtor brawl. Thus, far from serving as some form of containment or redemption, Sargent seems to ridicule the hollowness of “tidy” endings that conclude with wealth and a rapid train of happy marriages. Like Vance and Peek, who laugh over their successful performances, the narrative of *Peculiar* seems not without a type of a wink.

If, during and after the financial upheavals of the antebellum period, spiritualism failed to adequately make visible the invisible hand of the market, to offer a substantive principle to its operations that would create a basis for authenticity (the afterlife may be the utopian vision of upward mobility or the already-mortgaged dystopian space of unbridled market manipulation), it nevertheless should not be considered useless for us and be made to die intestate. Rather, as I have argued, within the (spiritual) world-view espoused in Sargent, by suspending the human and animating the object—of especial import given the context of slavery—Spiritualism offers a potential means of dealing ethically with other humans and non-humans alike. Bracketing the desire for a unifying force, the world, understood as a field of “molecules” that organize, become

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122 Here it is of interest to note the number of traumatized victims that the “happy ending” of marriage and success seems to submerge. Peek has been killed, Onslow wounded, Kenrick blinded. Purcil and Hyde are both missing limbs. Toussaint has passed away following his grief over the death of his wife. Clara wants to marry Vance, but as he takes his tear-filled departure to re-enter the war (he remains true to never straying from his dead wife, Estelle), she ends up, to put it blankly, settling on Kenrick.
disorganized, and can be re-organized in different ways undermines typical binaristic hierarchies of life and non-life, the dead and the living, what is worth care or not, that served to underwrite racial violence. As was the case in Peculiar, moreover, this does not necessitate a position of structural overhaul outside of the system per se (although, in the case of slavery, the War, in the background, is figured as such), but offers a means by which even within the speculative market(s), North and South, the enchanted spirits can appropriate the codes by which to effect change from within. Such a vantage, I believe, is especially necessary and salient today, if we are wont to believe what William Ferris had warned: that even the sacred clouds of heaven have already been bought, traded, encumbered, and mortgaged.
Chapter Three:
“Such is Life”: (Ardent) Spirits, The Credit System, and Ruin After the Panic

Inebriety in America is more impulsive and precipitate than in other countries . . . Among the many reasons for this are the tremendous activity and competition in the ordinary work of life, the intensity of living, the constant excitement and changes, filling every moment of time, calling out every energy, putting them in a constant strain, followed by want of rest, neglect of the healthy functions of the body, etc., etc. . . When under the influence of alcohol the average American is full of delusions of speculation for wealth, power, and political achievement; his ideas flow in a channel of great events, and great schemes for the welfare of the nation and the race; he is rarely a wife-beater or avenger of personal wrongs, but may be prominent in a mob to destroy some great evil, or foremost to break up some old order of events which are supposed to be blocking the wheels of progress.

Thomas Davison Crothers, *The Disease of Inebriety from Alcohol, Opium, and Other Narcotic Drugs* (1893)

Overtrading, debt, bankruptcy, sudden reverses, disappointed hopes, and the fearful looking-for of judgments which are to dissolve the natural elements of time, all seem to have clustered in together in these times, and are generally influential in producing insanity.


Just a year prior to Samuel Woodward’s lament, quoted above, Orson Squire Fowler, the “George Washington of phrenology,” as William Youngquist called him in his 1909 eulogy, attempted to explain the debilitating effects of alcohol on the body with recourse to a metaphorical language most of his readers would be familiar with: financial institutions. The “animal economy,” the human body itself, is likened to a businessman with thousands of pounds in a bank, to accumulate interest and only, under times of absolute emergency, to be drawn from. Otherwise, this businessman would simply make his deposits and draw his checks to “keep about square” with his expenditures. “At
length,” however, “his expenditures exceed his receipts, and he is compelled to draw on his thousand pounds. Instead of replacing the amount drawn, he draws again, and again, and again, small draughts, perhaps, but numerous. By constantly reducing and finally exhausting his original fund, he inevitably induces bankruptcy.” Alcohol, in this way, like masturbation, fatally uses up the “fund of life.”

The mapping of finance onto interiority could, however, itself seem to produce insanity. “An intelligent clerk, rational as at any period of his life upon all matter appertaining to mercantile affairs,” wrote Dr. Pliny Earle, suffered under peculiar delusions of the imagination:

He had a piece of iron about two feet in length by two inches in breadth, which he assured those around him came out of his eye. Again, he brought in a land-tortoise and a rusty file, both of which he was positive “came from his back like a clap of thunder.” Soon after the failure of the United States Bank of Pennsylvania, he one day had two large iron buckles which he exhibited with much enthusiasm, saying, “There, Sir; those are Nick Biddle’s Bank-books—they came out of my back;” and about the same time, his attendant showed me a large collection of bones, nails, screws, buckles, horse-shoes, locks, &c., which he had collected in his rambles, and deposited under his bed. He requested that they might be sent to Peale’s museum, as remarkable curiosities, inasmuch as they all came from various portions of his body.

Later this “young clerk” would point to three rocks, declaring them to be three packet ships on the Philadelphia-Liverpool line, all of which came out of his “back” or “knees.” While Benjamin Reiss takes this clerk’s account to signify desire to have some control over his appearance amidst the curious tourists frequenting asylums, it also registers a desire for agency over what he interiorizes and purges from his insides. For this adept

counting-house man who perhaps, to use Fowler’s language, had, by way of his profession, created a “bank” in his body, the news that the USB had failed translates into a purging of its “bank-books.” Amidst the growing cultural trend to make success and failure, credit and bankruptcy, a matter of character rather than of actions, this young clerk’s “delusion” is that he can successfully purge out of his system the financial networks of credit, debt, and failure in an international marketplace of commodities. He disgorges from himself what reform discourse asserted was something interior to his person; thus it can only be a delusion owing to a deranged mind.

In this chapter, I explore the antebellum linkages between the webs of the credit-based market, the insane, and especially what often conjoined these terms together, intemperance. Drunkenness was not only growingly understood in professional medical discourse as an addiction or disease that would lead to the asylum (and the sensationalized throes of delirium tremens), the almshouse, or the potter’s field; it was also itself a form of what many lumped into a condition of “monomania” and the individual on a drunken “spree” was understood to be temporarily insane.125 The cultural dialogue about intemperance thus freely mixed with that of “mental derangement,” and both were fueled by concerns over financial collapse and the “manias” of the market. As recent scholarship on the rise of antebellum temperance discourses has documented, popular middle-class reform movements in the 1830s through the Civil War sought to localize the causes for financial collapse in the form of deviant individuals and their unhealthy economic behaviors, pinning this errant way of life especially to those in

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125 For an example of how individuals dealt with the complicated intersection of insanity, inebriety, and the law, see Isaac Ray, A Treatise on the Medical Jurisprudence of Insanity (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1853).
marginalized and lower-class populations. Reiss and Matthew Warner Osborn have argued, building from the foundational work of David J. Rothman’s *The Discovery of the Asylum*, the conjunction of insanity and addiction in the antebellum United States negotiated, under the aegis of medicine and pathology, the “fraught issues of social success and failure in a culture obsessed with both.”¹²⁶ For Osborn, the pathologization of drinking, an emergent phenomenon largely by middle-class white males for middle-class white males, emerged in the “shadows” of the middle-class linkage of success to steady industry and habits of self-control. “The equation of sobriety with prosperity,” writes Jeffrey Mason, “assures the audience that the capitalist system is composed entirely of winners, that every man *can* begin humbly, accumulate capital, and increase both the public and his private prosperity, and that no one need remain a member of the working class.”¹²⁷ According to Christopher Castiglia, moreover, the drunkard became an analogue to the speculator in post-Panic temperance fiction as figures of insatiable desire and deception; reformers sought to pathologize their “intemperate” behaviors over


and against the “self-control” of middle-class respectability (and moderated economic practices) even as the antebellum economy persistently encouraged the desire for more and more. In an economy predicated on character consistency for the assurance of future profits, Castiglia writes, “trust is a complicated affair.” It is complicated not only because one can be deceived by a skillful swindler (and not only because, legally-speaking, contracts and agreements arranged while one party was potentially “not of sound mind” for “full and clear” consent were highly problematic, as civil courts sought to grapple with the “temporary” or “moral insanity” of the inebriate), but also because of the very dispersed nature of the market’s credit relations; with the circulation of notes as assets, individuals could be in debt to someone or many people they had never met and might have innumerable degrees of separation from (an event of a sudden, shocking demand for payment from a distant source often dramatized in Panic fiction) while having the same relationship as creditor to others. For all of the sensationalized swindlers and speculators abounding in fiction and theater of the time, and the seemingly clear distinctions between those who were (privileged) creditors and those who were (abject) debtors, the road to insolvency was not unidirectional and often paved with honest intentions. A contributor wrote to The United States Magazine, and Democratic Review on the “Moral of the Crisis” in 1837 and its causes, describing that, “a general over-action, over-borrowing and over-lending, over-buying and over-selling, over-speculating and over-spending, over-importing . . . all growing out of the common parent of evil—

over-banking, contain the sum and substance of the cause of the late convulsion.”

While his repetition in this passage emphasizes the lack of individual self-control across the board—no one knew when enough was enough—as the central catalyst for the economic disaster, the writer nuances this argument immediately with what he saw as the complicated structural over-saturation of the credit system that had ineluctably drawn the nation’s population into the problems of the maniacal economy: “The ‘credit system’ had gradually expanded and diffused itself, so as to swallow up the whole business of society, in all its departments. Instead of being confined to its natural and proper sphere . . . it gradually extended to all the minor concerns of life, so as even to include the daily consumption of personal necessaries.” Engulfing the “largest importer or manufacturer” down to the “pettiest tradesman and his humblest customer” everything that was “produced and consumed, ate, drank, and wore” relied on credit, creating a “morbidly overgrown system” of “myriads of minutest fibres.” To this problem, he saw no end in sight.

Extending well beyond the borders of the middle-class, and the professionals on the ‘change, then, the dense network of credit relations in the United States had drawn almost everyone into being creditors and debtors simultaneously along indefinitely extended axes of the “minutest fibres.” In this chapter, I argue that Washingtonian autobiographical narratives, specifically those written by Joseph Gatchell and James Gale—texts often cited in passing but never analyzed extensively—though penned by two men brought back from ruin to a “sound” mind, are unable or refuse to adequately

130 Ibid, 113.
create a causal link between their financial failures and their intemperate or compulsive behaviors as temperance reform demanded; they likewise sit uneasily within the frame of sympathetic identification that was central to Washingtonian rhetoric. Instead, they insist on the perplexities of being agents in a topsy-turvy “sea” of credit, subject to the closing of banks and problems in large-scale financial institutions as well as to the hodge-podge quotidian practices of localized exchanges of notes and individual (class and national) prejudices, all of which were bound up into one “morbidly overgrown” credit system. The way that these authors twist the ostensible purpose of their “reformed drunkard” narratives is lost when the titles are simply lumped into a set list of examples of the genre. Despite being prior to the emergence of inchoate credit rating services in the 1850s, they are as dogged by their notes as their addictions. “I have in my drawer a package of notes,” wrote another reformed drunkard, John Bartholomew Gough, the famous Washingtonian lecturer, in his autobiography, “for thousands of dollars—labeled ‘money lent and lost;’ another package labeled ‘noted of doubtful value,’ (they are very doubtful; ) another labeled ‘notes to be collected by installments,’—(on one or two there have been installments collected . . . and yet another, labeled ‘notes.’” Gough himself, of course, as he documents in the autobiography, was often in debt as well, presumably also offering notes of questionable value—at times perhaps questionable due to the inability to have those in his possession paid off in a timely fashion (a widespread reason

for individual insolvency in the antebellum economy). The texts I analyze below, though framed clearly as tales of reformed drunkards, shift registers from intemperance (and the potential for scintillating details of depravity) to these confounding issues of credit and debt relations, the difficulties of actually calculating one’s assets, and being subject to layers of exclusionary (but seemingly all-inclusive) market forces beyond one’s control; and they puzzle over how, given this state of affairs, any one, drunkard or reformed, can hope to succeed at all.

There is at times a tendency at times to lump “temperance literature” together into one generic category, even though this covers over an incredibly diverse set of texts (fiction and non-fiction), pictures and illustrations, melodramas, and ephemera that may only be loosely affiliated. I use the term “Washingtonian narrative” or “Washingtonian autobiography” here to designate the written, extended, published versions of what would have originally been or takes their cue from oral tales spoken in Washingtonian meetings, such as Joseph Gatchell’s The Disenthralled (1844), James Gale’s A Long Voyage on a Leaky Ship; Forty Years Aboard the Sea of Intemperance (1842), or Charles T. Woodman’s Narrative of Charles T. Woodman, the Autobiography of a Reformed Drunkard (1845) and John B. Gough’s Autobiography (1846).133 While certainly these

133 Gough’s Autobiography went through numerous editions between 1846 and 1871. To each was added more and more information, shifting from the original Washingtonian plot to a documentation of his lecturing to a travelogue about the United Kingdom and his thoughts on British society, to a vaguely-paranoid defense against the machinations of his “enemies,” complete with a full court transcript of his London libel case and newspaper reports, to a tale of his “modest” success, bank records, and settled family life. To borrow a pun from Stephen Belletto’s analysis of P.T. Barnum, the compulsive additions and, as the author admits, lack of “logic” in the Autobiography show Gough replacing the insatiability of “drink” with “printer’s ink.” See: Stephen Belletto, “Drink Versus Printer’s Ink: Temperance and the Management of Financial Speculation in The Life of P.T. Barnum,” American Studies 46.1 (Spring, 2005): 45-65.
texts are crafted, despite all claims to being unvarnished truth of the plain facts, they lack the overtly fictional apparatus of, for instance, T.S. Arthur’s *Six Nights with the Washingtonians* (1842) or Walt Whitman’s more lurid *Franklin Evans* (1842). According to Thomas Augst, while such narratives avoided the “stages” of ruin and reform “sensationalized by so much temperance literature and iconography, and which led inexorably to social devastation and death,” he also claims that they lost their political power when removed from the oral, emotionally-charged, anti-intellectual space of the meeting and put into the “elite” technological mode of print discourse. Certainly the shift from live performance to narrative altered the nature of how these tales were experienced. Many of them, such as Woodman’s and Gough’s narratives (as well as those of Andrus Green and George Haydock), ultimately follow a fairly standard script, lacking the ostensibly “magical” qualities, Augst describes, of the story spoken in the moment “from the gutter”: a young man of promise, hoping to rise in the world, falls into habits of intemperance (usually, unlike sensationalist pieces, in ways that lack any malice, like established but “dangerous” rituals of hospitality or leisure), becomes growingly unable to work steadily, spends all his savings on strong liquor, falls into the depths of unemployment, ruin, and friendlessness, only to be offered sympathy by someone, usually a stranger, who helps him on the road to recovery and the ritual taking of the temperance pledge.

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134 In contrast, Joseph W. Crowley, editor of the collection of Washingtonian narratives in *Drunkard’s Progress; Narratives of Addiction, Despair, and Recovery* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999) sees both the Arthur and Whitman texts as constituting a part of the Washingtonian genre.

However, if meaning changes in the shift between media technologies, the texts need not inevitably lose their political efficacy and become, as Augst argues, part of the “rationality of temperance as a system of discourse, bounded by literary conventions and social exclusions.”136 Bracketing the notion that Washingtonian oral confessions were themselves subject to certain conventions in order for their “magical aura” to be intelligible and sympathetically identified with, I will argue below that Gatchell and Gale, though taking up the frame of the standard script, submerge it, consciously or unconsciously, into a wider critique of the exclusionary and dizzying workings of the credit-based market society of local as well as international scope. As one writer quipped about everyone having “monomania” in The New Monthly Magazine, “if the man is no better than a lunatic who parts with his goods on a remote and improbable chance of seeing the money, what can be thought of that class of creditors, who, without any hope of repayment, let any one into their books with a handle to his name; and who hesitate not to injure their wives and children by making a Lord John their debtor.”137 Likewise, “If the man who fritters away a fine fortune in paying tradesmen’s bills, has a crack in the upper story, surely he who encourages him in the delusion by trusting the first comer with goods a l’indiscretion, is a plain manic.” Ultimately, the writer concludes that “there was much pith, then, in that saying of a reputed madman, that the great difference between his colleagues in the asylum, and those at large in the world, was that the latter were too numerous to include between four walls.”

136 Ibid, 310.
137 New Monthly Magazine (1843), 47-48.
Economic practices that chafed against the dogma of benevolent, steady Christian capitalism had, by the time of the Panic, long been denounced, especially in the form of the lottery and the gaming table. In a speculative, credit-based market that incentivized risk-taking and forward-thinking that looked more like the gaming table than anything, it became a crucial point of concern in policing what constituted moral, healthy forms of economic behavior. Especially after the Panic and into the “Hungry Forties,” those seeking to restore or stabilize the market took their aim at the man who desires to get rich quickly, even as the market itself produced the desire for wealth as the pivotal arbiter of success in one’s character and one’s life. What was different, however, by the 1820s, and especially after the devastation of the Panic, was that to engage in reckless economic practices in the hope of sudden wealth was not just a reflection of character (which always carried with it the significance of access to credit) but also the sign of disease.

“At present,” one doctor wrote to the *American Journal of Insanity*, “there is no institution for the insane that does not present some instances of persons having become deranged in mind, from indulging fallacious expectations of great wealth.”\(^{138}\) The problem, he argues, was an issue of an “excited” political and economic environment that the nineteenth century produced in increasingly numerous iterations. “All great excitements are represented by their victims in the Mad Houses. The French Revolution, the American Revolution, the Reformation of Luther, all produced an increase of insanity.” He further cites the testimony of a physician of the Bloomingdale Asylum outside of New York who claimed that that “the Anti-Masonic excitement, the Jackson excitement, and the Anti-Jackson excitement, the Bank excitement, the Abolition

\(^{138}\) *American Journal of Insanity* 5 (1848-49), 327.
excitement, and the Speculating excitement, have each furnished the Asylum with inmates.” From this follows “That the excitement caused by the discovery of an immense amount of Gold in California will cause an increase of insanity, we have no doubt.”  

As a history lesson, the doctor cites two “schemes” that had produced widespread “mania” and insanity: the Scottish Darien Scheme (1695-1701) and the infamous late eighteenth-century South Sea “Bubble.” It is not coincidental that the former has to do with Panama as a site of potential commercial enterprise and the latter bore, at least in the doctor’s description of it, a striking resemblance to the “gold frenzy” of California, both very much of concern to market expansion in the 1840s and 50s. And both are stories of speculative schemes igniting what appears to be a latent desire in “every one” for sudden wealth, only to end up in failure and “lunacy.”

This story about failure is complicated, though: while the South Sea scheme was a “bubble” through and through, orchestrated by a close number of individuals who manipulated appearances to increase the value of their personal stocks at the expense of others (and who would later be condemned for it), the former, the writer admits, showed “good promise” of commercial success and stood on good credit; it failed due to a complicated network of political and economic antagonisms in the colonial hemisphere as well as the slow transmission of information and news across the Atlantic. Far more so than the relatively straightforward deception of the South Sea Bubble, the story of the Darien failure asks: how is anyone to be a rational economic agent in a speculative market? The prudent Scottish or English businessman would have had to anticipate,

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139 Ibid, 327-28. The term “excitement” as a cause of insanity was fairly common. See Rothman, 111.
Despite appearances, that while British parliament approved the scheme (over and against the Bank of England), the King would reject it based on certain prejudices against the Scottish people; one would then deduce that the news of the colonist’s failure to get any goods from British ports because of this rejection would cause them to starve and then be conquered by the Spanish, who would see a good opportunity to take over the Isthmus. Even entrepreneurial opportunities promising success with the best resources and credit, the doctor seems to suggest—and this would be quite apropos in the post-Panic years—are apt to fail for any number of entangled reasons. A business venture is only a “scheme” in retrospect. The widespread “mania” is predicated on a sense of certainty, and individual “lunacy” on the failure of that self-assured promise. The doctor of “Money-Making Mania” remains ambivalent about this state of affairs. While there is an implication that steady industry can prevent mania, he accepts schemes as unavoidable and ubiquitous: as history shows repeatedly, excitements and failures, far more so than successes, are inevitable—which is not terrible news for an emergent class of young medical professionals seeking to find an economic niche in a national depression.

Drunkenness, gambling, speculating, and insanity became tightly interwoven in antebellum reform and medical discourses—a triad of behaviors predicated on insatiability and their product of “mental derangement.” It was a means by which the unstable market could be salvaged by excising those whose character deserved no credit, in a period of pervasive and complicated indebtedness. Thus, as Maria Carla Sanchez has argued, though her focus is largely on the question of “literariness,” Panic discourse was
a mainstay of reform discourse. As restorative discourses of the market, both sought to negotiate the tenuous distinctions between who could be “cured” or reformed and brought back into the trusted fold of contract and credit and who was “hopelessly lost” from it and irretrievably ruined, left to the asylum or grave.

Both Panic fiction and temperance fiction were filled with anxieties over the rise of “vulture capitalism” that intensified in the wake of the financial collapse. Balleisen writes that in the 1850s as the workings of the volatility of the market became better understood and “through the growth of vulture capitalism, many commercially minded Americans found a means of coming to terms with some of the harsher aspects of a market economy” it was still a very troublesome topic for debates over economic behavior in the 1840s. John Gough, for instance, was dogged by reports that he had accumulated substantial wealth in his supposedly “benevolent” lecture-tours, a charge that turned his famously spontaneous and wild gesturing into a paid performance. “One charge so often brought against me, and which was a never-failing armory from whence to draw their weapons, was, that I was ‘making money.’” He proceeds to list the average profits he took in per lecture, broken down by each year. Of course, he never puts anything into aggregate totals (which, given the number of lectures he gave—somewhere in the thousands—would produce a substantial total figure). Downplaying the amount of capital earned, he asserts nevertheless that “if the associations that employ me are satisfied, I know not why I should not be,—and outsiders have no reason to

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140 Maria Carla Sanchez, Reforming the World: Social Activism and the Problem of Fiction in Nineteenth-Century America (Iowa City: Iowa University Press, 2008).
141 Gough, 247.
Seemingly, though, he can’t help himself from expressing a certain pride in his success, documenting the many, often ludicrous, requests for assistance he (or his agent, hired given the volume of entreaties to lecture) receives; quite at odds with the sympathetic figure of the poor inebriate he dramatized throughout his narrative and career, Gough tells the financial failures of the country to just be stronger: “Every man in life’s battle may meet reverses but need not be overwhelmed. Let him do his duty, and strive to be a man.” He sums it up concisely: “Such is life.”

The line separating whose profit was morally legitimate and whose wasn’t had to be drawn somewhere. From the massively popular *Ten Nights in a Bar-Room and What I saw there* and the tales of “Deacon Giles Distillery” to the less popular *Autobiography of a Reformed Drunkard*, it is the financial success of the “rum-seller” that is so deeply disturbing, as he makes his profit, like a wrecker, off the financial (and psychological) “ruin” of others. Disavowing the idea that the grocer or rum-seller accumulates profit steadily and by industry, the story went that in enriching their own coffers, they would deplete those of the community, thereby ensuring their own eventual collapse. Toeing a tenuous line, the rum-seller, in an even more sinister way than the rum-drinker, can only see the short-term. As Horace Mann argued, intemperance was the “country” version of the “lottery-like speculation” of the cities, and, when the two are put together, causes widespread problems of credit and debt: “With the exception of their rum debts, this class of men is always very remiss in making payment, and oftentimes debts due from them are not only wholly lost, but money derived from sober men is taken to pay a lawyer’s bill, a

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142 Ibid, 248.
143 Ibid, 534.
sheriff’s bill, and costs of court.” The rum-seller only profits if “he should live but two years” insofar as turning everyone into drunkards would “gain money faster.” The figure of one who induces others to drink for the sake of profit also was represented elsewhere in more sensational form. In William H. Smith’s popular play and novel, *The Drunkard* (1844), the sinister lawyer Cribbs induces the protagonist into drinking (and he quickly spirals into ruin) in order to defraud him of his estate, just as he had induced the protagonist’s father into wild speculations. Vulture capitalists, like the rum-seller, were thus said to make their wealth off the slow ruin of their clientele while reformers, authors, and medical professionals represented themselves as profiting from their suddenly revitalized success, despite the fact that their livelihoods depended on the widespread failures of others, a tenuous track exemplified in the case of Gough.

That businessmen who failed would turn to “the bowl” to try to recover a sense of self and escape the fragmenting, dispossessing force of financial collapse is no surprise. In attempting to differentiate along gendered lines the causes for insanity and intemperance, Dr. Edward Jarvis also sought to explain why business failure had become one of the leading causes for men to be admitted to asylums. It is because, in his estimation, a male’s place in life exposes him “to many of the causes of insanity, such as some of the varieties and changes in life and fortune.” “Poverty, destitution, its reality or its fear, anxiety about business, the hopes and disappointments with regard to property,”

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144 Horace Mann, *Poor and Ignorant, Rich and Educated; Two Lectures on Intemperance* (Syracuse: Hall, Mills, and Company 1852), 48-49.
145 Ibid, 54.
he argues, are “prolific sources of mental derangement.”\textsuperscript{147} As men are bent on the “acquisition of wealth” and make this into the very “business of their lives” devoting “mind and heart” to it, they are shaken at failure. Engaging in the “uncertain issue” of the public economy, “they have more plans [than females] to fail, and hence they are exposed to disappointments, and misfortunes connected with business, speculation, and money, and they suffer more when these troubles come upon them.”\textsuperscript{148} Bracketing the problematic issue of gender here (the supposition that business matters caused more “troubles” to men than it did women, which ample evidence contests), Jarvis points to the issues of man’s complete investment in success in an environment of clear “uncertainty” and, especially, the uncertainty of money as leading to mental anguish. Indeed, as Balleisen writes of antebellum bankruptcy, “business failure could exact a substantial psychological toll, not infrequently leading those who endured it to the whiskey bottle or the insane asylum.”\textsuperscript{149} This also crucially involves the centrality of character and the loss of reputation not simply as a source of personal shame, but as the moment that one is denied access to the credit network. More than personal in scope, this was also an international matter during the 1840s; believing Americans to be reckless defaulters after the Panic (Mississippi did, in fact famously “repudiate” its foreign debts), European financial institutions froze the United States out of the global financial circuit. The tethering of sobriety to credit was not entirely new; in the late eighteenth-century poem, “The Credit and Interest of America, Considered: Or, the Way to Live above Want.

\textsuperscript{147} Edward Jarvis, “On the Comparative Liability of Males and Females to Insanity, and Their Comparative Curability and Mortality When Insane” \textit{American Journal of Insanity} 7 (October, 1850), 150-151.

\textsuperscript{148} Ibid, 156-57.

\textsuperscript{149} Balleisen, 15.
Wherein Temperance is commended for her Decency, and being provident,” the author concludes by way of linking temperance to the credit market:

To Save our Money and to Keep our Land
And that’s the Credit every Man should price,
The Saving Hard to good Estates doth rise:
In all Concerns she [temperance] is a certain Guide.150

Sobriety was key to keeping up national credit. Washingtonian autobiographical narratives dramatized a re-admittance into the credit market on an individual scale. In a widely reprinted short article in 1846, the writer asks the rhetorical question of whether the reader would employ a drunk: “No, no; you would understand your own interest better than to employ such a one. You would mark him down for a fool, on the road to ruin, and likely to ruin all who should have much to do with him.”151 Pointing to the individual deviancy of the drunk employee on the way to ruin, the writer nevertheless implies that the inebriate’s loss of credit and failure, if employed, will lead to the failure and loss of credit of the employer, and from there, as was often the case, to the crunch of impossible credit obligations to other employees, friends, family members, and a host of other businessmen.

Panic fiction and temperance fiction were thus mutually informing narratives of failure and recuperation hinging on questions of credit. In the standard conventions of the former, moments of poor investments in the speculative market (owing to temporary “mania”) leads the male, often father, figure to attempt hopelessly to “salvage” his finances, leading ultimately, through the aid of the female family members and a trusty

151 Crystal Fount and Rechabite Recorder, 5 (1845), 116.
“successful” male friend, to a settling with creditors and renewed hope for upward mobility. The notion of the father’s mental derangement being temporary was crucial for the didactic purposes of the narrative. In *Debtor and Creditor*, for example, penned by T.S. Arthur, who will go on to be one of the most popular and prolific authors of temperance fiction and contributor to *Godey’s Ladies Magazine* (while continuing to write Panic-related works as well), the father, Mr. Coleman, finds himself in serious risk of “embarrassment” and imminent bankruptcy. As is typical, his situation deteriorates rapidly, so he sets out to borrow a large sum from a reputable, wealthy merchant, whom he “knew very well,” Mr. Everton. Everton sees Coleman’s various proposals for securing repayment as all being, as they are despite desperate protestations to the contrary, unsafe. Finally, though Everton is nervous to do so, he exchanges his loan for the security of Coleman’s stock in goods; in the event (which Coleman insists is an impossibility) of his failure, Everton would be a preferred creditor and take his share before all others, a highly contentious and, by the novel’s publication in 1848, potentially illegal proposition. Everton does not like this, but, in something like sympathy, agrees. The loan of twenty-five thousand dollars does not save Coleman, however, who likewise had been caught resorting to the unseemly, potentially “fraudulent” operation of “borrowing from Peter to pay Paul.” The crisis finally arrives: despite his deal, Coleman refuses to offer preferential payment to Everton. Assets are divided equally between the creditors, and at the end we see Coleman trying, once again, to get back on his feet in his trade. How, might one ask, does Arthur justify what was such a blatantly gross

deception, the breaking of that very sacred element to the market, the contractual agreement? Men, he writes, who are “seriously embarrassed” are temporarily “insane,” and like the blacked-out drunk, without any “memory” of what they had been doing. Thus, according to the narrator, borrowing language from the foundational British “insanity defense” case of 1843 (which would become codified in U.S. law in the early 1850s), Coleman cannot be charged, even in moral sentiments, as having committed any sort of “premeditated wrong.”

Arthur here is balancing on a tight rope in attempting to differentiate the honest, sober merchant who simply overexpanded, but who deceives others on false credit, from the sinister, permanently deranged speculator such as that found in the anonymous “The Speculator,” which Arthur included, as editor, in his 1853 Temperance Offerings (which very well may have been penned by himself). This latter character, Robert Oakley, is, far more ingrained in the conventional temperance-speculation dynamic. He is “crazed indeed!” by the “wolfish instincts of greed he felt to be latent within him, and which, he knew, required to be but once alimented with suddenly, easily-acquired gold, to start into vigorous, untameable life.”

His relation to speculation and the stock market is not a temporary aberration. Oakley is addicted: the thought of risk-free “sudden” wealth produces a “feverish appetite” while his brain “throbs” and his blood is “on fire.” Making his “risk-free” fortune on a piece of insurance fraud (when, as he later reflects much in the vein of temperance, he “lost” himself leading to inevitable ruin), he loses all in the 1825 Panic in London’s stock exchange; he attempts to recoup his losses by means

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of a forged will but the plan is spoiled when Oakley (drunkenly, of course) turns over a
candle and burns down his house, his ruin leading him to “permanent lunacy.” The
difference between Coleman and Oakley pivots on the slippery distinction between a
mania of the moment and a passion deeply latent in one’s nature, a “vigorous,
untameable” passion for wealth that results in “permanent” insanity. Like the troubled
Bankruptcy Act of 1841-42, Arthur is trying, if somewhat hopelessly, to differentiate
conscious and unconscious fraud, who should and should not be redeemed. Moreover
there is something dangerously poignant when Oakley suggests, very much in passing,
that it was likely that “all men,” like himself, have felt at some point or another the desire
to become wealthy, whether on the exchange or “in less reputable places.”

Arthur’s Coleman neglected his business due to his maniacal frenzy to somehow
raise capital; Oakley neglected his business because of his greed. In temperance
narratives, a parallel sort of business neglect arises due to a similar catalyst for mental
derangement: “the bowl.” As implied by the cross-over storylines of “The Speculator,”
such narratives tended to manipulate the causality between drinking and business failure.
Many professional medical voices, not to mention the traditional figure of the ruined
merchant taking to drink, focused on the way business failure led men to try to escape
their embarrassments through the “magical” effects of the bottle and restore a sense of
wholeness to a shattered, “unmanned” self. As one temperance doctor wrote, “drinking
has been adopted by thousands “to secure a temporary forgetfulness of misfortune and
sorrow, arising from the failure of business, bereavement of friends, loss of reputation, or

\[154\] Ibid, 76.
that ‘aching void, the world can never fill’” (127). However, temperance narratives reversed the order, showing how taking to drink precipitated the failure of one’s business and, of course, the loss of one’s reputation and credit-standing, making it difficult, after insolvency proceedings, to gain the funding necessary to re-enter business. Such is the crux of the opening tale in Arthur’s *Temperance Tales; or Six Nights with the Washingtonians* (1848), “The Broken Merchant.” Like many other works of temperance fiction, the novel tracks how drinking leads both to ruin and, what centrally precipitates that disaster, exposure. The drunkard will always be exposed as a drunk, even if it takes the highly intrusive probings of Arthur’s narrators in this work and especially in *Ten Nights in a Bar-Room* to unveil the truth; false credit must always be shown to be a sham. Taking to drink, Wilson Hamilton goes from wealthy Baltimore merchant to penniless drunk imprisoned for debt. On the one hand, his intemperate habits cause him, as is a typical convention of temperance narratives, to “neglect his business affairs.” This inconstancy of character, once exposed in the financial community, freezes him out of the web of credit and contract, though posed in the domesticated terms of marriage; Bailey won’t allow his son to marry Hamilton’s daughter because his affairs will go to ruin: “Why [Hamilton] is not himself one half of his time, and therefore does a very unsafe business. Fifty thousand dollars will not cover his losses in the past six months, and all from the miserably blind speculations into which he has entered. Formerly he was one of the shrewdest merchants in the city. Then he

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156 Timothy Shay Arthur, *Temperance Tales; or Six Nights with the Washingtonians* (Philadelphia: W.A. Leary, 1848).
never made a bad operation; now he rarely makes a good one.”

On the other hand, he becomes a failed speculator, addiction relaying into addiction: “About this time an important rise in the price of cotton was anticipated, and a few capitalists in various cities commenced purchasing and storing considerable quantities. Among others, Mr. Hamilton invested largely, buying, and giving his notes, with a recklessness as to the aggregate amount, that could only be accounted for from the fact that he was not one half of his time, really in his right mind.” If Hamilton (like the “bank mania” that produced Panic) recklessly extends his credit in a manner far surpassing his capital, it remains unclear how reckless this speculation in cotton was. It is only after the stock’s plummet “down, down, down” that the narrator can say with the benefit of hindsight, “the wise ones sold” prior to the fall, while “Hamilton, among the rest, held on.”

The rest of the narrative is a perfect synthesis of Panic fiction and temperance reform: Hamilton is hounded by merciless creditors, drinks more as a result (in that vicious cycle of causing his ruin and being the “false capital” to get him back on his feet), and ends up in jail for debts. As in Washingtonian narratives, only the pledge and the temperance society could turn Hamilton back from being a “wheel-turner,” i.e. a laborer, into a “respectable” middle-class calling. The ritual act of taking the pledge that ends such texts was crucial insofar as, while the drunk neglected his duties of debt, it signified one’s ability to once again enter faithfully, soberly, into contractual relations and thus into the grid of credit. It is a sort of parallel to the ritual of the bankrupt’s calling together of creditors and “honestly” disclosing the state of his affairs, thereby assuring confidence.

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157 Ibid, 15.
158 Ibid, 17, my emphasis.
in his character and ability to maintain a standing in market relations. This, of course, was tenuous business for temperance reform. As David S. Reynolds has it, “according to an estimate made in 1848, 80 percent of those who had taken the temperance pledge in 1840 had resumed drinking.”\textsuperscript{159} The most famous of such instances of relapsing on the pledge was by none other than one of the most vocal leaders of the temperance movement, John Gough, who went on a spree on the sly and found himself suddenly exposed in a brothel. He maintained that his enemies had drugged his cherry soda.

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As has been well-documented by scholars, temperance reform and medical discourses were deeply invested in the policing of middle-class and national identity during a period not only of widespread financial collapse, but also of class-conflict, immigration, and the increasing stranglehold of cities as the primary sites of the nation’s economy. However, perhaps owing to their origins in the more “egalitarian” class-dynamics of the Washingtonian setting, two particularly understudied Washingtonian autobiographies of the 1840s don’t seem to function as they were meant to. I want now to turn to two Washingtonian ‘confessional’ autobiographies that draw these issues into focus while complicating their understood trajectory, that is, the manner in which temperance texts were meant to relate financial failure integrally to intemperate habits. If the specter of speculation was understood as a middle-class problem, the specter of credit relations was a far more widespread and profoundly disturbing issue. The first, Joseph Gatchell’s 1844 \textit{The Disenthralled; Being Reminiscences in the Life of the Author} follows the typical conventions and plot of Washingtonian narratives; however, as an Irish

\textsuperscript{159} Reynolds, 17.
immigrant, he and his story of intemperance, the brink of insanity, and salvation by the pledge becomes, almost literally, overshadowed by ambivalence over his national and class status given an American audience. In the second, James Gale’s 1842, *Forty Years in a Leaky Ship; or, a Forty Year’s Cruise on the Sea of Intemperance*, the class-based images of drunks falling in with “knaves” and “rogues” rather than respectable middle-class folk becomes vexed as the plot-line wanders from its expected path. While in Gatchell’s narrative, intemperance ultimately takes a back seat to questions of Irish immigrants and class dynamics, in Gale’s it takes a back seat to the perplexities of the credit-based market. Both texts, rather than point to drink as the sole cause for economic failure point, instead, insistently to the ineluctable power of market forces weighing them down, the one as an Irish immigrant and merchant, the other as a country journeyman on the fringe of middle-class life but deeply ingrained in its every-expanding web of credit.

Joseph Gatchell’s story is a simple one: he takes to drinking, being introduced to it as a course of ritual in friendly homosocial commercial society, and then becomes a “confirmed inebriate” and tumbles down the ladder of the economy. From a young, eager merchant rapidly rising up the ranks, he becomes (as many drunks did) a sailor on board a whaling vessel and then a laboring railroad worker, until he is saved from the mental and financial “ruin” by the temperance pledge. Gatchell was also Irish, and, at least until he leaves his native country midway through the narrative to emigrate to New York City, an emblem of an entrepreneurial Irish middle class that, as such, chafed

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160 Joseph Gatchell, *The Disenthralled; Being Reminiscences in the Life of the Author* (Troy, New York: N. Tuttle, 1844). All references to the text will be cited parenthetically.
against American prejudicial conceptions of Irish immigrants as working-class laborers and drunks fleeing a land of tillage and peasantry.

There is thus a very important reason why his story adheres so closely to the conventional temperance “confessional” narrative: Gatchell is extremely self-aware of his relation to his audience; though he claims near the conclusion to have “two audiences” on both sides of the Atlantic he really has only one, an American one and largely middle-class at that. He understands that he is in the precarious position of framing his story of intemperance as owing to something other than his national status. So he translates it into a story of commercial society that could be widely identified with. As a young man “fast gaining a knowledge of commercial transactions in the counting house” he “spared no pains” to “shape his habits” according to the demands of his profession. He is employed for a time in the Bank of Ireland, before taking a job as accountant in the Agricultural and Commercial Bank of Ireland in Dublin. Owing to his aptitude for auditing branches with “inconsistent books,” he is promoted to “sub-inspector of branches” and finally to a manager of his very own branch. There is something like a Kafkaesque humor in his ardent pursuit up the endless chain of bank bureaucracy (one day, he dreams, he might be a director!), but Gatchell is attempting as forcefully as possible to make his tale of intemperance a tale of the middle-class professional, poisoned by the inadvertent habits of young professionals, rather than of the Irish immigrant and laborer. He cherishes, like his audience, the authentic domesticity of

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161 Whether the elaborate audience considerations that I am arguing informs Gatchell’s narrative confirms Augst’s claim about the shift from orality to print is impossible to say given the fact that no documentation of his “oral” narrative survives. Nevertheless, it certainly does not, I believe, testify to an impoverishment of political or social efficacy in the narrative form.
“HOME” even in its pastoral contrast to his upward commercial mobility: “At such a period,” he describes, “I stood on an eminence that overlooked our house and farm; the implements of labor in the hands of the workmen glimmered in the sun, and recalled to my mind the days when in the light-hearted gayety of boyhood I had rambled amid the scenes that now lay before me.” Surrounded by the “warm domestic circle” of his family, he soliloquizes on his home as the place outside of business where “in the quiet and endearing converse of those we love, all our unruly passions, our turbulent emotions, are stilled, and a calm and holy feeling pervades; so, at least, have I always felt” (12). This latter phrase (“at least, have I always felt”) is a savvy rhetorical move as it appeals to a sentiment he can count on being widespread while personalizing it as his spontaneous feeling.

The trajectory of his addiction is likewise strictly within the codes of fallen young professionals. He begins as a “moderate drinker” doing what he believes he needs to in order to fit in. He shares in (the very class-inflected) “wine” rather than “ardent spirits” and carouses with other young professionals in “the Shades,” or areas of public entertainment, after they finish work. His addiction grows more intense until his situation grows dire. His “mercantile pursuits were wholly neglected” and his affairs were becoming “embarrassed” (25). He defaults, closes his business, agrees to terms with his creditors and tries to get back on his feet. He becomes a commercial traveler who finds that part of his job is to “entertain” his potential customers, again finding drinking to be an integral part of commercial business. Emblematic of the notion that drunks are easily preyed upon (a relay between personal responsibility and outside agency) he finds that the bankroll under his charge has been stolen (29). In an effort to
regain the money, he turns, of course, to gambling. While his friends and family had salvaged his prospects after becoming a bankrupt, this second crisis puts the nail in the coffin. When moving from job to job previously he had always come away with strong recommendations. Now, his director, a pseudo-father figure, tells him, “You will, however, see the propriety of not seeking employment in Dublin; as should we be applied to, concerning you, we must speak the truth. And let me tell you at parting, that such was the opinion I entertained of you prior to these transactions, that had you asked me, I would have gone security for you to the utmost extent of my property. Now, farewell” (31). Like Hamilton in “The Broken Merchant,” he drowns his sorrows in the bottle, until, no longer having a standing of character and credit in Dublin, he sets sail for the United States as a place of financial rebirth.

Gatchell thus insists upon intemperance as a phenomenon well-known to members of his audience: a routinized part of middle-class professionalism. He is distinctly aware of class-based perceptions. After successfully auditing a branch of his bank, he attends the opening of a village church. After a ceremony for the opening, he writes that “It was finished—the organ ceased its thrilling notes—and the vast assemblage there congregated passed to other scenes; the peasant to resume his hard, but useful toil—the mechanic to his workshop—and the more favored children of nature to mingle in scenes of festivities” (15). While the peasant and mechanic go back to work, the middle-class professionals go to imbibe, and it is the Vice President of his bank, not the working figures, who takes too much and seems “not himself.” Though the “useful toil” of the laborers is necessary and moral, Gatchell very much distances himself from them. Just prior to leaving for the States he looks, with tears in his eyes, to the windows
of the Bank of Ireland, imaging what “could have been” his ultimate accession to wealth and financial power: “To that proud and honorable position had he raised himself, because he had not contracted a vitiated appetite, nor suffered passion to triumph over reason. Reader, look on his picture and on mine” (34). His departing image of Ireland is not a land of poverty and peasantry, but of a region stagnating amidst complicated economic and political issues (including, of course, British-Irish relations): “How oft, too, as I passed the Bank of Ireland and through its magnificent halls, once the seat of Erin’s senate, has my mind reverted to the by-gone days of my country’s glory . . . How oft have I, with the natural pride of country, beheld the foreigner and the stranger gaze with admiration on those chaste and beautiful specimens of Irish architecture—the general post-office and the custom-house; the latter now but little used!” (40).

Two other key and related elements mark his downward fall into disgrace and departure. First, his jobs become tied more and more to “unstable” forms of financial ventures. From large-scale banking and accounting he eventually enters into arrangements with a Joint Stock Bank “which was in fact nothing more than a private concern” but manipulated its titling to accord with the national law prohibiting “any bank (save the bank of Ireland,) having more than six partners, to issue note (bills) in, or within, fifty miles of the metropolis” (24). He wishes to tender his resignation owing to the fact that he did not much like a commission based percentage in a tight market but he is persuaded to stay, “They assuring me that from the large amount of funds at their command, they would eventually succeed in inspiring the community with faith in their stability. I unfortunately listened to their suggestions” (24). Soon his involvement in this type of institutionalized gambling venture leads him to the tables of real gambling.
Second, his drinking will seal his commercial fate in Dublin as the cause for his losing of the bankroll, but it fails to account for why he moved from job to job in the first place. At the Bank of Ireland, his first position, he is doing well (is even promoted) and is sanguine, stating, “I well knew that if I could by my attention to business recommend myself to the notice of the directors, [my salary] would be increased” (12). That is “until a reduction in the business of the establishment rendered it necessary to dispense with the services of some of the persons employed; and I, as a junior, was of course among the number” (12). But he is given good references! Time and again this occurs and he takes it he had in this initial firing—as a matter of course. In his new position, he quickly rises up the ranks from accountant to sub-inspector of branches to manager. Then the prospect dims: “In consequence of an unusual excitement in the monetary system of the country, a 'run' came on the bank, which finally led to a temporary suspension of payment. Pending the Panic, I exerted myself too much” (20). In this “Panic” the bank’s board of directors decides to close up branches and he finds “that mine was one of them” (23). In other words, even as Gatchell insists that he is ruined by “the bowl,” he seems to be relentlessly fired and forced to move on due to large-scale international market forces very much beyond his control. Unlike the narrative of the merchant whose drunkenness leads to ruin, a financial Panic (possibly related to the devastating Panic of 1825 that swept out from the Bank of England) leads him to become invested in the dubious Joint Stock Bank and then the “gambling” table, as much as his inebriation does, if not more glaringly so. There is thus something dubiously missing when he reverts back to the language of temperance: “Go ask yon unfortunate merchant, doctor, or lawyer, why they are the puppets of fortune, the sport of the idle truant? They will tell you, that whilst inhaling the
perfume of the rose-bed they were not aware that a serpent lay coiled beneath the flowers” (19). He is indeed a “sport” of “fortune,” the sport of the chance nature of the international money market.

Things don’t bode well for Gatchell when he reaches the United States. Though the reasons go unsaid, he “has difficulty finding employment in the city.” Eventually, he is offered a job by a Mr. Church, an offer that Gatchell describes in robust language as a representative instance of kind and disinterested benevolence. What is Gatchell employed to do? Scrape the dregs off Church’s boat bottom and other forms of manual labor to which he is totally unaccustomed, being, of course, a banker and accountant. From then on, Gatchell, falling into intemperate habits again, goes a-whaling and then, upon return, serves as one of any number of Irish immigrants building new railroad lines. It is, needless to say, difficult to account for this conclusion solely within the conventional terms of temperance (it appears, in fact, that when he is drunk he is especially willing to give money to those he sees in need, an oddly moral form of pecuniary mismanagement), and Gatchell seems, as I’ve described above, well aware of what he should and should not say. If there is reason to believe, and I am pretty sure there is without stretching too far, that he finds himself unable to get a position in New York City financial institutions because of his status as an Irish immigrant during a period of widespread immigration and nativism, he attempts quite forcefully to frame his story in the terms of his reformist American audience, who perhaps have their own prejudicial notions of immigrants, as best as he can. His triumphant moment of taking the Washingtonian pledge is overshadowed by a lengthy and ludicrously hyperbolic address to his audience—a very transparent act of containment. Though he claims to be
speaking, first, to his “American reader” and then after to his “Irish” one, the latter is really meant for the American reader too. “In conclusion,” he declares, “to the American reader I say, through the kindness of some of your noble hearted countrymen, I am again restored to society and to the world . . . To my own countrymen I say I have seen accounts given of American society and ere you make up your mind of these people, come and visit them” (59). The American woman, he says in a strange travelogue-like manner, is “refined, easy and elegant” but also has a strong character of independence and strength. The men are “well-natured, benevolent, and gentlemanlike, always ready to assist a friend or succour the stranger and the unfortunate.” One need only look to the American farmer to see the true “nobleman” while “Enter an American factory, and you see health, contentment and happiness depicted on the countenances of the persons employed.” Indeed, he finishes by remarking that the Americans are “hospitable to all, but particularly to strangers; they are intelligent, and are ever ready to reward merit, from whatever quarter it proceeds” (59). There are exceptions to this mold, but they are an overly-vocal minority. This conclusion, tethered to his pledge, fails to cover over a narrative in which the individuals fall into financial and mental “ruin,” however, and his triumphant rescue is constantly undercut by questions between-the-lines of market forces as well as racial and class tensions. He can neither put a drunken face to his professional insecurity in the commercial world nor a happy face to his scrubbing the bottom of a boat and railroad labor in the United States.

James Gale’s *Forty Years in a Leaky Ship; or a Forty Year’s Cruise on the Sea of Intemperance* (1842), despite being told by one at the fringe of middle-class identity, is a story far more about the credit-based economy, the limits to economic knowledge, and
the travails of one trying to get a leg up despite widespread uncertainty, than it is a story about intemperance.\textsuperscript{162} It is moreover, not really a text about being swindled so much as it is about the risks involved in everyday quotidian credit relations facing not just the middle-class but also journeymen, mechanics, and other working class subjects. One could argue that his story testifies to the common refrain that drunks were easy prey for economic vultures. Yet Gale’s narrative is so obsessed with the upturns and downturns of market relations that this conventional argument fails to adequately account for its prevalence, just as the plot-less meandering of the narrative (following the narrator’s own meandering economic existence) is barely pulled back into the Washingtonian promise; for a narrative of around two hundred pages, Gale’s “pledge” and recovery constitutes just over one page. More likely than showing the easy prey drunks become, then, the story testifies to the saturation of the credit market and the problematic necessity of knowing how this market works, even in “rural” areas and amongst those not necessarily within the boundaries of the middle class.

Whereas the redemptive promise of domesticity is a typical convention in temperance narratives, Gale comes from a broken home in rural Massachusetts, his father (“as I shall call him”) having departed for the West when he was a child. (Interestingly, his father will re-appear about mid-way through the narrative, giving Gale a deed for lands in Pennsylvania that turns out to be worthless and once again disappearing.) In a household without a husband or father figure, it becomes his mother’s “first care” to place Gale into a respectable calling so as to eventually take his place among middle-

\textsuperscript{162} James Gale, \textit{Forty Years in a Leaky Ship; or, a Forty Year’s Cruise on the Sea of Intemperance} (Cambridgeport, MA: P.L. & H.S. Cox, 1842). All references to the text will be cited parenthetically.
class respectability, and restore promise to the family; his “versatile genius” needed a suitable master to “direct” and “manage” it.\textsuperscript{163} This path to a trade, however, is undermined by the evident cruelty of the masters he is attached to, and this cruelty (especially of being treated as not “one of the family”) leads him instead to drinking. Unlike those “impressionable” naïve young men who become intemperate found everywhere in temperance reform, drinking for Gale provides a means of recuperating a sense of family. His first master drinks and it is the mark of Gale’s outsider status that he is barred from doing so; drinking thus becomes a way of ambivalently inserting himself into a narrative of family as well as of his successful overcoming of the abuse the master’s family had inflicted on him.

The frustration of what seemed to be the direction to upward mobility leads Gale into a directionless economic existence. He works, invests, goes into partnerships, gives out credit, takes on debt, contracts, sub-contracts, in any number of combinations and always seems somehow to come out the loser in the end (though at times he notes in passing to having accumulated a substantial sum without getting into any details besides noting that things had been “going well”). Rather than follow a slow ruin stopped by the temperance pledge (or contrarily a story of upward progress), Gale’s narrative follows no narrative at all, revealing in turn the haphazard, topsy-turvy nature of economic agency.

Gale attempts to stick to the conventional script of demonizing the rum-seller in the terms of financial mismanagement. As he writes early on, “the rumseller’s till is a poor place to make deposits” (22), and he often claims that “drink” was the sole barrier to

\textsuperscript{163} The introduction of the broken home into the narrative concords with many Jacksonian medical experts that deviancy begins with the home and parental behavior. See Rothman, 76-77.
his progress: blue ruin, as poor quality gin was called, “ruins credit, purse, health and reason (44). But this insistence is at odds with the narrative of the market of labor, credit, and debt that he tells. Recurrently there is a schism between what appears to be a very knowledgeable sense of credit-based economics, exchange, and his affairs, and yet, unlike in his brief gambling stint, he always seems to come out fine in the red. His first engagement, in the butchering trade (his most consistent line of work), ends in his being in extreme debt. Though he had accumulated eighty dollars, he was also running into debt with his employer (though “many persons were [also] indebted to me”); having worked for eight months he ultimately owes Mr. Deming more than fifty dollars. “My assets amounted to nearly three hundred dollars in notes and accounts, which however were barely worth twenty-five cents on a dollar. Thus I suddenly found myself stripped of what little I had acquired, and plunged into debt, with no certain means of liquidating it” (26). He sets about collecting what money he can, discounting notes for what they could bring. Meanwhile he leaves notes and bills of $150 with an attorney in Boston, who pockets the cash and takes “French leave” for the South, never to be heard from again. This, however, is not the end to this episode. After a time working elsewhere, he returns to settle with Demming, giving him three notes of eighteen dollars each, to be paid in three month increments, and re-enters employment under him “on condition I should not be responsible for what I should trust out” (33), the main cause of his previous indebtedness. Unbeknownst to Gale, Demming had, during his absence, commenced a suit against him for his debt and obtained a judgment. “I staid with him, however, for a while, and collected some of my old debts; and then, as I did not think myself well used, I left him, and hired myself to a man by the name of Ruggles” (34). Much later in the
narrative, quite out of the blue, he will be arrested for this judgment. He settles with Demming, but with the “good fortune” of being debt free realizes he is also unemployed and thus will soon be in debt again.

Gale’s economic relationship to Demming is just a small taste of such events that constitute the bulk of the narrative, far overwhelming the theme of intemperance. Gale wins a small prize in a lottery, from which he loans thirty dollars to a Mr. R, but is never repaid because he “neglected to take his note” (34). At one point, after his marriage, he is forced to give up his home to creditors. He works for a period of time with White & Son, only to botch it: “When they settled with me, they gave me some very handsome presents, and offered me large wages, if I would engage myself with them for one year. Another individual, however, had offered to give me more than the Messrs. Whites would give; but when I informed him how much they offered me, he refused to give as much” and both parties refuse to employ him (79). He becomes involved with a shingle producer, Dexter, who gives him a note to be paid in another town; on arrival, he learns that the man had already paid off the note and that Dexter was “greatly in debt, and had no property. I recovered only a small part, and was obliged to let the rest go for a bad job.” (88). Such “bad jobs” accumulate. He goes into butchering with John Grace, loans him money to purchase a stock of cattle, and Grace steals the money. He works for D. & H. cattle killing; they represent to need three thousand killed, but it turns out there are only eight hundred, and he is forced to pay those he hired for help as if they had killed the original estimate. He goes into stone-blasting, and of his partner he writes: “One day, I hardly know how it happened, he got into his hands what money he could, and went away, but forgot to return. He left his tools, however, as well as some debts, which I was
obliged to pay” (107). He has issues with clients due to contracts being “merely verbal.” He makes a deal with a “friend” to attach his property, and with another to write a receipt and buy up all his obligations. Both of whom fail to accomplish this, because a man who had been arrested for theft and turned state’s evidence thought it prudent to bring Gale into “the scrape” since he was absent. So his furniture is all taken. There was a settlement and an agreement that items “as did not bring near their value should be bought in, and lent to me, that I might be able to go on with my work again . . . The time of the sale came. My supposed friend was the principal purchaser, many of the things being sold for less than one tenth of their real value” (113), and nothing was bought to be loaned to him. When he seems finally to be over the hump, his bank notes turn out to be worthless: “one day there came a trying time for those who held Jacob Barker's 'shin plasters' for he closed his doors and stopped payment. The excitement caused was tremendous; I was myself not a little moved, for I had in my possession something like fifty dollars of the miserable stuff. I was indebted to Nash & Rudman for a considerable amount” (90-91), forcing him to discount the notes at fifty percent, an offer he is, given the bank’s failure, more than pleased to take.

The list could go on and on; to make it complete would require transcribing the narrative almost in its entirety. Describing the vicious cycle of the sailor taking his pay and drinking it away and shipping out again, Gale writes: “again he returns, and again the same scenes are acted over, again he ships” (53), and this could very well be applied to his own narrative. The “perverse” repetition, though, is not so much a matter of drinking away one’s money, an attraction to that which will only hurt him in the end; it characterizes his entire “forty years” cruise on the sea of the tangled webs of credit and
debt in the market economy, which can perhaps only be told from its fringes. “I am persuaded,” he insists, that “had I renounced my cups, my circumstances would have been far better than they were” (109). This may be true, but it deflects attention away from the confounding nature of his economic existence that blurs the lines between hard work and speculation, the cyclical/perverse and the progressive/norm, the personal and impersonal forces of the market. Blaming drink for his lack of upward mobility and wealth accumulation hardly submerges a story that seems more about the tenuousness of being an economic agent in a web of credit and debt, even one with a seemingly adequate knowledge of its workings in theory. This inadequacy of the temperance argument is, as I noted previously, emblematized by the structural proportions of the narrative: the “pledge” and reformation come quite suddenly out of nowhere and takes up less than two pages of an otherwise sprawling text. *Forty Years* is not a story of redeemed personhood but of a dubious bank note of a person circulating hither and thither, as exchanges may happen, randomly succeeding at times, losing at others.

While reform discourse sought to pin success and failure onto character, onto the drunk or the speculator, Gale’s narrative suggests that all antebellum market relations—the circulation of credit, giving of notes and taking them in—are gambles. Even the most seemingly stable concern, just as was the case in the Darien scheme, can cause failure and ruin. The reverse is also the case: in *Forty Years* those “deviant” economic behaviors castigated in Panic and reform discourse seem not quite so perverse and doomed to ruin after all. Successes, even if momentary, crop up that in most temperance literature would be unthinkable. He actually *wins* a lottery—that authorized form of “gambling” that reformers throughout the antebellum period decried as the “false hope” and ruin of many
workers. Gale gets into a drunken “scrape,” is let go by an employer, and immediately rehired by the same employer *with a raise*. While a sailor in the port of Havana, he makes a “bit of a speculation” in buying fruit to sell in the Boston market and succeeds (48). And finally, while still a sailor, he meets with a passenger who is unable to make exact change so they decide, given the captain’s absence, to “snap” to see who should keep it (so Gale will take the fourpenny or the passenger will board for free). It “fell” to Gale, and the Captain lets him keep it. This he takes to the gaming table and wins, turning it into thirteen dollars. “It must not be supposed,” he declares after this episode, “that I now approve of the course I took to ‘raise my sinking fortunes.’ Far be it from this . . . Gambling is a vice, at least second to none but intemperance for its dreadful and destructive influence.” (30). He is merely, as narrator of a Washingtonian autobiography, to “state the simple facts” and those facts are that he won a game of chance then took it to the gaming table and came out the better for it. And he was “rejoiced” by his “good fortune,” which allowed him to obtain much-needed clothing and left him some pocket change. Deviant economic behaviors and sites (like the bar-room) that catered to them no longer seem like the pathway to ruin, but to opportunities—opportunities for success. And yet these moments of success, reliant as they are on the caprices of the economy, are always temporary for Gale and overshadowed by what seems to be the inevitability of failure.
Chapter Four:
“If I had a home”: Western Life, Straightness, and Theodore Winthrop’s Travel Fiction

“Diarrhea haunts the dwellers of this famous land, like the debts of a rejected applicant for the benefit of the Bankrupt law”
- Israel Shipman Pelton Lord, *A Doctor’s Gold Rush Journey to California*

“We must gain
Not flimsy immortality of fame,
But the high royalty of self-control,
A God’s inheritance of self-control.
So the soul stands amid its passion throngs,
Like some wild nation’s bold-eyed orator:
He lifts his hand; men hush, listening him breathe
Words as of God. Ah! self-control too late!
Where wert thou, laggard ally, while we fought?”
- Theodore Winthrop, from “Two Worlds”

In this chapter, I argue that the California Gold Rush, even if, as some historians posit, it indeed served as the transitional moment out of the Panic years, still served ideologically in much the same vein as sentimentality or Spiritualism—as a restorative fantasy attempting to stabilize the widespread failures and fragmenting psychological forces of the financial market. “Gold fever,” the rhetoric of which often borrowed directly from Panic discourse, took the national imagination by storm as it rejuvenated the “west” (an imaginary geographical region) with the ideological power it had lost in the 1840s after the land bubble burst. While this idea of California seemed to once again offer a space of abundance, a space where the only capital one needed to succeed was labor, a space thus without the male professional anxieties related to market competition and class, the works of Theodore Winthrop reveals this all as a fantasy that fails to live up to its promise. However, this failure does not mean that the desire for non-market-oriented
social relations, or intimacies, is not valuable or worthy of pursuit. If, in the wake of the gold rush, middle-class masculine identity came to be constructed as a dialectic between “respectability” and rebellion against this very value, a play refereed by the meta-practice of “self-control,” Winthrop’s travel fiction pushes this operation to its limits. Though his works seem to perform this negotiation, and ultimately contain such rebellion, they fail to adequately do so, thereby hinting at the dangerous allure of transgressive desires that are not corralled back into narratives of respectability—narratives of past tales of thrilling, rebellious adventure shared over tea by the warm, middle-class domestic fireside.

Especially in *The Canoe and the Saddle* and *John Brent*, Winthrop suggests that the reactive movement from meandering, transgressive desires and behavior back into the “straightforward” path of respectability might not be a demonstration of manly self-control so much as a sometimes violent, and almost always inflated, compensatory reaction to the frustration or failure of those non-normative desires to come to fruition in the first place.

For those in the middle-class who came of age during the Panic of 1837 and its aftermath, the speculative market could seem to be even unworthy of the title of sublime; it might be something more like, as Winthrop described of the “lower” sublime of the western mountains, an “ill-regulated frenzy.” As David Anthony has written of the sensationalist novels of the period, such texts sought to “negotiate the related crises of economic self-possession and gender” for an emergent professional class produced by and during the destabilizing and fictive universe of finance that had become glaringly evident in the wake of the crisis, and revitalized itself in the recovery period (21). This was a professional universe of intense, and at times ruthless, competition, frenzied
speculation, dubious bank notes, and strained, angst-ridden entanglements of credit and debt—a view quite in contrast with the vision of liberal progress owing to a mordant Yankee pluck put forth by Louis Hartz and many other historians of the so-called market revolution in the United States.\textsuperscript{164} Even as thousands poured out to emigrate to Oregon, the “West” that had promised to be the always-present safety-valve for economic congestion in the cities and had been the “booming” site of hope and investment during the 1830s had largely ceased to fulfill its economic and ideological function. Former sites of intense speculation, like Cairo, Illinois, dotting the western states and territories were nothing more than blighted ghost towns. It is far more accurate, Roberts justly asserts, to think of the Panic years as spanning from 1836 to at least 1848, the latter date being the year in which California gold was announced by the President as abundant and the United States was re-admitted into the international credit market (i.e. Europeans were willing once again to invest and lend).\textsuperscript{165}

The “discovery” of gold in California in 1848 took the popular imagination of the nation by storm for a variety of interrelated reasons partially traced by Roberts and other historians. On the one hand, given the almost unanimous consensus by the mid-1840s that one of the primary causes (if not the primary cause) for the financial disaster of 1837 had been reckless lending of credit by banks without a sufficient backing in capital, the prospect of an influx of specie would prevent its repetition. This was especially salient given the “upswing” of the economy after 1843, which re-inaugurated many of the same


\textsuperscript{165} Alasdair Roberts, \textit{America’s First Great Depression: Economic Crisis and the Political Disorder After the Panic of 1837} (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002).
forms of rampant speculation and lending that had caused the collapse to begin with; it shifted the burden from a series of reckless, often deceptive, economic practices to a security against their (likely inevitable) effects. This is perhaps why even Hunt’s Merchants Magazine, which had started up in 1839 largely as a stuffy, moralistic guide to proper financial behavior for young professionals, embraced the prospect of gold with relish, elaborating the authenticity of the discovery alongside savory details of objects “glittering” and “glowing” in the sun. Meanwhile, concerns over “gold fever” reignited the idea that the vision of California was simply a repetition of the land boom of the 1830s; indeed, the very terms so often used popularly to describe the gold rush—“frenzy,” “fever,” “mania”—are borrowed directly from Panic discourse. For the skeptics of the emigration west, the “fever” would erode the value of steady growth and hard work as the means to professional success. Picking up on one of the touchstone terms of the Panic as a means of castigating speculation, the work of miners seemed to be nothing more than a form of “gambling.”

On the other hand, as Brian Roberts has detailed in arguing for the largely middle-class orientation of the “forty-niners,” the west provided a newly refurbished medicinal fantasy for those professionals overcome by the pressures and instabilities of the market. “They joined the rush for a variety of reasons,” he writes with reference to Melville’s “Bartleby the Scrivener,” “for gold, to be sure, but also to escape this new world of competition, the stultifying walls of moral codes and lawyers’ offices.” While Roberts’s argument here is specifically interested in the predominantly middle-class

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composition of California emigrants—documenting, for instance, the need for family solvency and the high cost of passage—it also obscures one of the great lingering social effects of the Panic: even those who were solvent and stable could be subject at any time to a “sudden reversal of fortune,” an element that the emergent industry of stock life insurance, as Sharon A. Murphy describes, preyed upon: “The negative economic impact of death was always present, but panics and depressions served to underscore middle-class fears of failure and socioeconomic decline—the same fears that life insurance advertisements continued to highlight.”\textsuperscript{168} In this same vein of “sudden” disaster, we might look also at those prudent investors who, prior to the Panic, had taken positions largely in state bonds. Such was a very conservative investment at the time, until, of course, dozens of states defaulted, leaving even the most conservative in a lurch. As George Peabody, one the founding figures of the Morgan banking firm, wrote in a letter to a friend in 1852, “My capital is . . . ample (certainly nearer 400,000 pounds than 300,000) . . . but I have passed too many money panics, unscathed, not to have seen how often large Capitals are swept away.”\textsuperscript{169}

The decades after the Panic and its proliferation of failures produced widespread popular interest in forms of social and creative experimentation that sought to excise the market of its nefarious effects. The vision of California especially, but also the “West” as an imaginary geographical space, offered a revamped fantasy of abundance that not only offered the prospect of quick wealth for those who dared to test their might, but one that

\textsuperscript{168} Sharon A. Murphy, \textit{Investing in Life: Insurance in Antebellum America} (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 130.

would also remedy the negative force of economic male competitiveness, negotiating individualism with forms of relationality otherwise understood as impossible or utopian. For Brian Roberts, the flight away from the middle class strictures of respectability, steady growth, and self-control also informed the formation of the middle class, “a class empowered with the ability to rebel against itself, daily, repeatedly, and, as long as its members defend the myth of bourgeois repression, seemingly without end.” A key, in other words, to the consolidation of middle-class identity, as inflected by the fantasy of the gold rush, was its ability to turn or “rebel” against itself temporarily.

Theodore Winthrop, though the descendent of John Winthrop and Jonathan Edwards, is emblematic of this middle-class type, and yet puts pressure on such confidence in being able to turn the switch on and off as demonstrative of manly self-control. Framed by his journals and letters, Winthrop’s travel fiction reveals both the failure of the fantasy of “the West” as a recuperative space beyond market competition, as a space literally and figuratively of gold, of solidity and non-competition, while also pointing to some of its central, and potentially productive, failures. Is solidity—is marital and professional stability as the arbiter of a successful life—even desirable? This is the question at the heart of Winthrop’s writing. While Axel Nissen notes that Winthrop’s letters and journals reveal a man who is chronically unhappy and unhealthy, and this is certainly the case, he fails to link this evident discontent with Winthrop’s uncertain professional status and ambivalent relation to middle-class values. Born in 1828, and educated at Yale, Winthrop came of age in the tumult of the Panic and its aftermath,

170 Brian Roberts, 15.
though his family’s solvency was ostensibly never in doubt.\textsuperscript{172} Though trained as a lawyer, he found himself largely unable to decide on what would be the most desirable “business” of his “life.” Having become friendly with William Aspenwall, a large-scale investor in and director of the Panamanian Railroad Company, Winthrop took a position in Panama in 1852, a pseudo-colonial space that had become a center of American interests after the discovery of gold in California and the mass emigration there via the Isthmus.\textsuperscript{173} In addition to hoping to improve his health (which is odd given the widespread reports of the “Panama fever” decimating foreigners in the region), the opportunity also gave Winthrop the prospect of developing traits of middle-class “salaried” masculinity. “I have entered upon a completely new life,” he wrote his family, “and having begun by making many mistakes, am now beginning to control and direct myself. With a pure and single mind, a man may be happy anywhere.”\textsuperscript{174} Likewise, he seems desirous of expressing an emergent sense of business acumen in an international (indeed, colonial) antebellum setting: “For a man who is capable of seeing and grasping opportunities,” he describes, “Panama is the focus of two Americas. It commands the Australian continent, and is within easy reach of the Indies. South America is at hand with inexhaustible wealth, untouched as at the creation. This very Isthmus, small as it

\textsuperscript{172} Winthrop’s sister, who collected and edited his \textit{The Life and Poems of Theodore Winthrop}, notes that the family moved from New Haven to New York in “reduced circumstances” in the 1830s, though nothing more explicit is mentioned. Regardless, the family had capital enough to send Theodore for an extended, circuitous “tour” of Europe when he fell ill health as a teenager.

\textsuperscript{173} For a thorough history of Panama during this period, see Aims McGuinness, \textit{Path of Empire: Panama and the California Gold Rush} (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008).

\textsuperscript{174} Laura Winthrop Johnson, \textit{The Life and Poems of Theodore Winthrop} (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1884), 106. All references to Winthrop’s letters are taken from this volume and will be henceforth cited parenthetically.
looks on a map, has miles and miles of the richest soil” (111). This element of developing his “self-control,” as well as business savvy, is a consistent theme in his letters; later he would note, in a vein of self-possession, that, “as I am seeking my fortune, I must not allow apprehensions” (129).

However, his repetition of the need for self-control seems more a way of convincing himself of it than of his belief that he actually possesses it; he is unable to submerge his apprehensions, which are representative of widespread male professional anxieties. He is gripped, in short, by a sense of insecurity:

The uncertainty of my residence here keeps my mind employed in planning for the future, and I now hope they may not keep me at my present employment, as I can do much better for myself. Energy is sunk, when a man works on a salary without the spur of personal interest. I am sure of doing well in the course I propose. This will probably require my return to New York for a time. Why do men live? Just tell me that if you please, and I will go home. (106)

Between December of 1852 and the Spring of 1853, Winthrop’s correspondence back home is growingly more apprehensive. He wavers back and forth between the notion that his specific job status in Panama is the cause of his discontent and his fear that his restlessness is something more interior to him, that the “obstacle” to his success is not the profession or his job status, but his own roving “unsettled” disposition, which is “always” getting in the way. In a letter to his mother on February 12, 1853, which, as emblematic of Winthrop’s dilemma, deserves to be transcribed in its entirety, Winthrop wrote:

Discontented, and conscious that I cannot continue so long, I am all the time on the anxious seat. By every steamer I look for some orders that never come, and I cannot make any settled plan for the future. What is a man to do, who at the very period of life when he ought to be in the straight, well-known path of certain and steady employment, when he should have the self-guidance of a nearly completed development, what is a man to do, who, instead of all this, is still afloat, without any rudder? I have always supposed that, at twenty-five, the manly character
would have taken its tone, as the physical is then complete. I know this is painful to you, but I must sometimes relieve myself of gnawing thoughts, or I shall eat my heart out, here. (125)

What his letters from the period of his time in Panama exhibit is not simply, as Nissen notes, a very unhappy individual, but one who is anxiously ambivalent about his ability to proceed in the “straight, well-known path” of middle class life. Taking leave from Panama, he finds California not to be the fantasy of gold and comradery, but a space of hyper-inflation, large-scale swindling, and mass speculation, where, contrary to the representations in the papers and periodicals, everything appeared ultimately “unsubstantial” to him.

Winthrop remained fearful of being a “wasted life,” a failure. But is the idea of professional success as the arbiter of value what he desires? From Oregon, he writes in the vein of the conventional middle-class fantasy of success that, “If I had a home, a wife, and something to fix me to a local habitation, I should most certainly establish myself here in Oregon. But until then, I shall probably be a rolling stone. I believe, if I could make up my mind to stay here, I could have a small fortune in six months” (154). Of course, Winthrop could never make up his mind to stay there or, for that matter, anywhere. In a search for that sense of security and self-possession that middle-class professional life in Panama, and then mining-life in California, and then “savage” life in Oregon, had promised and had failed to deliver, he must search for it elsewhere, on and on ad infinitum, until his death at the first battle of the civil war, when he failed to get notice to not proceed further, and took a fatal bullet to the head from a confederate drummer boy. Ironically, it is his death—widely publicized at the time as heroic and glorious, but yet another instance of setting out fatally without foresight—that would
salvage his reputation from being that of a “wasted” existence, and his numerous unpublished works from obscurity.

I emphasize the context of Winthrop’s letters here, in preface to a reading of his travel novels, for two related reasons. First, the specificity of his ambivalences over the desirability of the “straight” road of goal-oriented middle class male professional life is, I believe, crucial to understanding how his fiction is operating in terms of both content and form. From *Isthmania* to *The Canoe and the Saddle* and, finally, to *John Brent* his stories become more and more overtly fictional, with more fleshed out characters and more explicitly-crafted plot-lines. More specifically, Winthrop moves from a predominantly western or travel style towards a more gothic one. As I will argue, this is emblematic of his ambivalent negotiation of the potential pains and pleasures of self-control and self-dissolution, transgression and respectability, straightness and crookedness. Second, it is important to note that the narrative voices of the travel fiction, from the anonymous voice of *Isthmania* to the voice of Richard Wade in *John Brent*, are distinctly not that of Winthrop. They are bold and dashing (even, in the context of Wade, “reliable”), whereas Winthrop was chronically ill and frantically ambivalent about his lack of an upwardly-mobile profession, marriage prospects, or stable life-trajectory—all of which were being consolidated as necessities for a middle-class identity during the antebellum period even as they were subject to constant instability.¹⁷⁵ The narrative voices, like the stories they

¹⁷⁵ His ill health, alongside his corollary conviction that he would die young (although not in the way he actually did die) might very well have informed Winthrop’s aversion to the values associated with the ideology of the “healthy” middle-class life arc. As he wrote in his journal from the Northwest, in a characteristic manner of his ambivalence: “Life is of very little value to me, as I shall never accomplish anything in it, but there is something very desperate in the idea of death in this wilderness” (188-89)
tell, are compensatory figures who attempt, but fail, to perform certain restorative work for a speculative market economy that is not only and no longer simply a Wall Street affair but extends southward to Panama and westward to California.

It is not hyperbolic to say that Winthrop is obsessed with straightness in several senses. Of course, one need not (although one could) read the term anachronistically from the perspective of modern sexual discourse. As described above in his letters, he laments being a young man who has yet to find the “straight” path of life, by which he means, of course, the conventional middle-class ideal of settling down, having a family, a wife and children, a steady income, professional success, a healthy body, and so on. However, it remains somewhat unclear whether he laments not being in such a path, or whether he laments how “painful” the news would prove to his mother and her expectations. Reflexively, as will prove the case in his fiction, the confession of being not on the “straight” path is couched in a moment of the breakdown of what Winthrop saw as essential to finding that very path: the breakdown of self-control. To remain buttressed by the stricture of self-control that would enable him to be straight at last would mean that he would “eat my heart out,” a strikingly cannibalistic or “savage” image of self-mutilation. As likewise suggested by this image (which is a sort of folding in and pulling out of the interior without cardinal bearings), Winthrop is also obsessed with his ambivalent relation to straightness in a more literal sense of geography and spatial orientation, which, as was common under the aegis of manifest destiny rhetoric, also involved a relation to time. In Isthmania, a short fictionalized account of Panama, also involved a relation to time. In Isthmania, a short fictionalized account of Panama, 176

176 All references to both Isthmania as well as The Canoe and the Saddle are taken from the original edition, and will be cited parenthetically. Theodore Winthrop, The Canoe
the narrator claims a far different relation to space and time from those other Americans who saw Panama only as a “geometrical line” West connecting them to California. “Instead of appreciating the almost superhuman enterprise that has placed such a trophy of civilization in the very home of unchanging repose,” Winthrop’s narrator reports, “they growl because the prudent trains to not despatch them speedily enough” (305-06).

The narrative shows how this conventional “Yankee” compass, within the hybridized space of the Isthmus and the voyage “West,” becomes troublingly unraveled, revealing the geographical understanding to be a flattening over-simplification. “In the evening perhaps,” he writes, “they take the air upon the Battery, are desorientes by finding the Pacific lying eastward instead of westward” (312). This sort of disorientation from typical “Americanized” bearings is repeated numerous times, and in more aggressively disturbing fashion: “A traveller arriving from the Atlantic side of the Isthmus,” Winthrop writes, “with eyes wide open to stare, as Balboa did, at the Pacific, stares wider when he finds it at Panama to the easy instead of the west . . . [he] becomes convinced that after all the toils of his trans-Isthmian travel, he has only wandered about as one does in the labyrinths of a tropical forest, and has been brought back to the shores of the tumultuous, keel-vexed, practical Atlantic” instead of the “ocean of imagination and hope . . . The points of the compass are as much reversed as social position in the gold-diggings” (314-15). Explicitly here, Winthrop suggests that the points of the compass are not neutral but are freighted with cultural meaning, and the “straight” geographical line these emigrants expect towards wealth, towards their “seventh heaven,” is anything but. Near the outset

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*and the Saddle: Adventures Among the Northwestern Rivers and Forests; and Isthmania* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1863).
he wryly asks the reader whether he should describe the party of travelers in the future “lounging in fresh attire, upon Las Boredas, the Battery of Panama, looking out upon the beauty of the bay and inspecting the steamer which awaits them? Or shall we follow them through mud-hole and swamp-hole, through gulley and alley?” (307). Of course, the first half of Isthmania traces the latter, taking the party through torrential downpours, fevers, potentially-fatal mule-rides along steep crevices, shabby accommodations (the women are placed in rooms the walls of which are “perforated by peep holes”), endless delays and logistical issues of conveyance (the local “poco tiempo” sense of temporality at odds with time-discipline): “They embark on the river, are perplexed by the jabbering confusion of the boatmen, and again hardly observe the beauty that surrounds them” (307). Of course, as one can see already the narrator has a strangely ambivalent, even contradictory, relation to the “beauty that surrounds them” insofar as much of this first half of the text is anything but beautiful (not to mention the fact that in John Brent Winthrop will, translating his “two years wasted” biographically in Panama into two years wasted owning a California mine, show that the “reversal” of social positions in California is, like the expectations of Panama, fantastical). It is only in the distinct second half of Isthmania when the narrator joins some friends on a pleasure trip around Panama that the typical, elaborate descriptions of natural beauty come to the fore. In other words, it is only when one removes oneself from the ostensibly “straight” line to economic success, and takes up a meandering, circuitous journey, that one is in full self-possession and, through this possession, “beauty” reveals itself. Of course, as much scholarship on the subject of traveling would show, this appreciation of beauty is itself shot through with issues of class, which reveal themselves even in his letters from the
time. In a symbol of his desire for independent self-possession, Winthrop takes a hand car instead of the train: “It was the luxury of traveling,” he writes, “to be whirled along against the fresh morning breeze that my own progress created, down the long narrow vista of the forest.” Immediately afterwards, though, he notes that he soon became overcome by sleep, “and telling my two Carthegenians that I would give them a dollar each, if I arrived by a certain time, I enjoyed one of the soundest and most blissful sleeps in my life.”

With the sudden appearance of two racialized laborers, his independent “progress” is underwritten as far from independent. He enjoys the feeling of exerting his own will, but has no problem delegating authority when he gets tired of it. As I will argue is the case in *The Saddle and the Canoe* and *John Brent*, this assertion of a managerial identity within a racial- and class-based context becomes more and more problematic when the question of desired intimacy is involved.

The narrator of *Isthmania* veers back and forth between creating an aestheticized space of “authentic” nature and indigenous peoples who inhabit a climate where “time is of no value” before almost immediately undercutting that notion by introducing the hemispheric market into even the most distant locale. In one village, “Occasionally, a rush and a roar and a rattle and a scream and a hurrying locomotive tell that a scene at once so busy and so beautiful is not isolated from metropolitan influence” (344). Elsewhere, he meets a Frenchman who had speculated in a new omnibus for transporting freight and failed, and whose house is marked by an ironic imitation of a native “household god”: outside stands a giant figure-head of Napoleon taken from a condemned ship. The non-Spanish indigenous figures wear British manufactured clothes, the

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conversion to which, the narrator notes, put their own local manufacture out of business (365). Similarly, the narrator often eroticizes not only the women (the “senoritas” at the fandangos) but also the landscape. However, he suggests that there is also a real, material danger in doing so. He writes of dozing off while on board a bungo:

Consecrate to love should be such nights; so I remained idly dipping my hand in the water as we unconsciously glided along. Presently a circle of fair forms closed around me, as the nymphs about Rinaldo in the enchanted grove. Each bore the scarcely recognized lineaments of some well-known face. One detached herself from the throng and laid her hand upon my shoulder. As she approached, a masculine hardness grew over her delicate features, the graceful floating of her sylph-like robe resolved itself into a conventional attire, a black beard covered the bloom of her cheeks; she whispered “Senor, the boat has no gunwale; you will fall overboard if you go to sleep. (323)

In the typically elevated seriocomic style that would come to characterize much of Winthrop’s later writing, the erotic vision of “nymphs” in an “enchanted grove” is suddenly fractured by suggesting, as he had been wont to do, that there is a danger in eroticizing the environment as “available”; this physical danger, more interestingly, appears as an attempt to contain the sexual danger of conflating “well known” nymph and “bearded” anonymous Panamanian boatman, and, given the incompleteness of the transformation from dream to reality, female to male (“she whispered . . .”), such an attempt seems ultimately to fail. He had almost lost his self-control and paid a heavy price for doing so. In the wake of the Panic, middle-class reformers redoubled their efforts to show that the problem was not the economy, nor the integral nature of failure to its operations, but to the professional individual’s loss of masculine self-control, which leads one inevitable to ruin, and, in this case, quite literally, death.

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Isthmania sets the stage for The Saddle and the Canoe, “a drama with Indian actors, in Indian costume, upon an Indian stage, [which] is historical, whether it happened two hundred years since in the northeast, or five years since in the northwest corner of our country” (6). The latter, which traces the narrator’s trip from Oregon to the Dalles, also extends and problematizes questions of self-possession and self-dispossession, straightness and crookedness, intimacy and race that the former had begun to explore. Yet, unlike the almost personality-less narrator of Isthmania wandering around the tropical Isthmus and dancing with the senoritas, the narrator of Saddle and the Canoe is most distinctly a man of action, capable of handling himself (and his Colt revolver, if need be) in any sticky situation that should arise amongst the savages in the wilderness. He is a man, in short, of preeminent self-control. However, as the novel plays out, his hyper-masculinity and unerring self-possession appear more and more to be a mask that at crucial times shows itself as such. Not only does the redemptive space of “savage” nature thus fail to fulfill its function as a fantasy of self-reliance and rugged masculinity but the work of containment that self-control ostensibly performs likewise fails.

The novel opens, in the explicitly heightened dramatic language that would come to characterize much of Winthrop’s writing, with a striking contrast between the robustly masculine self-possession of the narrator attempting to negotiate terms for canoe transportation and the drunk, effeminized Native of the Whulge, the Duke of York, who was “ducally drunk.” At the very outset, the narrator’s disgust with the chief (framed, of course, in the terms of middle-class temperance) translates into a violent legitimation of manifest destiny: “Boston men are coming in their big canoes over sea,” he thinks to himself while regarding the drunk man; “Pikes have shaken off the fever and ague on the
banks of the muddy Missouri, and are striding beyond the Rockys. Nasal twangs from the east and west soon will sound thy trump of doom. Squatters will sit upon thy dukedom, and make it their throne” (18). Later, this rhetoric of the inevitability of the Native’s demise becomes ever more intense. He and his guide, Loolowcan, bump into a Native whom the narrator nicknames Shabby owing to his appearance, and Shabby proceeds to make a speech about the greed of the whites; they do not know, he says, the concept of “plenty,” but must always seem to want more and more in perpetuity. The narrator understands this “poisonous” speech to be an attempt to turn Loolowcan from his position as guide. He responds, in an almost “savage” way in his own Chinook to Shabby: “No war is in our hearts, but kindly civilizing influences. If you resist, you must be civilized out of the way... Succumb gracefully, therefore, to your fate, my representative redskin. Do not scowl when soldier men, searching for railroads, repose their seared and disappointed eyeballs by winking at your squaws. Do not long for pitfalls when their cavalry plod over your kamas swamps. Believe all same very much good” (200). This explicit elaboration about the violent appropriation that would come lest the Natives “succumb gracefully,” though, is complicated. On the one hand, as will become clear when I discuss Loolowcan, the rhetoric here is so hyperbolic that it shows itself to be, as the opening “drama” suggests, theatrical; the narrator is performing a part. On the other hand, Shabby will ultimately prove not a “snaky beguiler” but a key function in the success of the narrator’s journey to the Dalles.

The question of whether the narrator, for all of his bravado, actually supports this sort of territorial expansion is rendered dubious by his own language. He writes that, “In the Cascades, klickatat institutions were toppling, Boston notions coming in. It was the
fulness of time. Owhhigh and his piratical band, slaves of Time and Space, might go
dodging with lazy detours about downcast trunks, about tangles of shrubs and brambles,
about zones of morass; but Boston clans were now, in the latter day, on the march,
intending to be masters of Time and Space, and straightforwardness was to be the law of
motion here” (emph. added, 102). As I have described above in the context of Isthmania,
Winthrop is deeply critical of “straightforwardness.” Indeed, for all of the narrator’s
insistence in Saddle and the Canoe on his need for speed (he must make the journey in a
week), the narrative form, with its elaborate descriptions of the environment, is
constantly “interrupted” and takes on a “desultory progress.” His desire for detour is
evident even in the fact that he chooses to take the far slower in-land route East rather
than the far quicker route by sea back across Panama. In this way, the “disorientation” of
coordinates of time and space that were evident in Isthmania again crop up. Here, the
narrator is moving east (by way of a circuitous southeasterly curve) along the paths that
“progress” and the “future” are moving west:

   Eastward I galloped with what eager joy! I flung myself again alone upon the
torrent of adventure, with a lurking hope that I might prove new sensations of
danger, new tests of manhood in its confident youth. I was going homeward
across the breadth of the land, and with the excitement of this large thought there
came a slight reactionary sinking of heart, and a dread lest I had exhausted
onward life, and now, turning back from its foremost verge, should find myself
dwindling into dull conservatism, and want of prophetic faith. I feared that I was
retreating from the future into the past. (75)

The inconsistency here, or the turn from “eager joy” at the thought of home to a
“reactionary sinking of heart,” reveals a desire to prolong or extend the present “torrent
of adventure” as long as possible. Going “homeward” and what that means (and what
that precludes), though ostensibly the point of his journey, doesn’t necessarily seem
desirable. If it is, he certainly does not seem to desire a straightforward path there. The
conclusion of the novel (in the Dalles, he is still far from home), rather than exhibiting a sense of triumph, is an environment of despair, showing that “the toil of Nature for cycles working a world out of chaos, had failed, and achieved only a relapse into ruin, drearier than chaos,” while “Mount Hood, full before me across the valley, became a cruel reminder of the unattainable. It was brilliantly near, and yet coldly far away, like some mocking bliss never to be mine, though it might insult me forever by its scornful presence.” It is not the triumphant end of a completed journey, but the conclusion to a well-constructed play: “As a journey, it was complete with a fortunate catastrophe after the rapidity of its acts, to prove the plot well conceived” (295).

The “inevitability” of white territorial expansion is, moreover, undercut throughout the narrative, especially as Winthrop seems to have written it during the Rogue River Wars of the mid-1850s. He describes the “lumber vessels” taking their loads of fir-trees to make “piles for docks in San Francisco” before immediately nuancing this image of market expansion: “It was the epoch of hope, but fruition has not yet come. Savages and Yankees have since been scalping each other in the most uncivil way, the P.R.R. creeps slowly outward, Ormus and Ind are chary of tribute. Dreams of growth are faster than growth” (emph. added, 30). Elsewhere, he describes the failed dreams of a pair of Oregon emigrants: “These two had taken this pretty prairie as their 'claim,' hoping to become the vanguard of colonization. They became its forlorn hope . . . These squatters were knocked off, as some of the earliest victims of the Indian war three summers after my visit. It is odd how much more interest I take in these two settlers since I heard that they were scalped” (86). This “odd” retrospective interest in the settlers given their violent deaths after the end of the narrative points to the narrator’s desire for
or interest not in figures of success and progress but of loss and failure. He repeats at the
beginning of the narrative, and at the end of the narrative that Owhhigh, a chief and father
of his guide Loolowcan, was “unreasonably hung” during the conflict, a martyrdom he
“regret[s],” despite the fact that he insists elsewhere on Owhhigh being an untrustworthy
horse-thief. The road that emigrants had made, for all of his “patriotism” over it, is not
all it is cracked up to be: “The Boston hooihut,” he ultimately admits, “was a failure, a
miserable muddle” impossible, unlike the native paths, to traverse (104). “Inevitability”
of the triumph of the “Boston Men” seems something like a stretch.

The narrator seems emblematic of what Roberts describes as the way the West
(specifically the gold rush) inflected the nature of middle-class identity as that which
contains within itself the ability to temporarily rebel against itself. He claims the “multi-
sided” ability to be a “savage” for a time if he so wishes. “I can identify myself
thoroughly, and delight that I can, with the untamed natures of my comrades,” he writes;
“I can yield myself to the dominion of the same impulses that sway them out of
impassiveness into frantic excitement . . . It is easy to linger while one has a hand upon
the locomotive's valve. I will, on the whole, remain an American of the nineteenth
century, and not subside into a Klalam brave” (41). It is, in other words, the power of the
white, middle-class self-possessed subject to be able to control the “locomotive’s valve”
of identity, to be able to transgress that identity for a time without complete “rupture”
(41), an image reminiscent of his passage on the hand-car in Panama. His confidence,
however, in this sense of unerring self-control, his ability to speed up or slow down along
the path, is tenuous, which comes to the fore in his relationship with his guide,
Loolowcan, whom he nicknames Loolowcan, the Frowzy.
On the surface, the relationship between the narrator and Loolowcan seems to fit snugly within the racial hierarchy of white privilege, but the performance of this containment plot ultimately fails. The narrator immediately distrusts the “serpent” eyes of his guide, who he suspects might be at any moment plotting some hideous “outrage” against him. He believes Loolowcan to be “an unfaithful, sinister, cannibal-looking son of a horse-thief” (174) who will turn against him at any moment; self-control is, in this context, paramount. Not coincidentally, Loolowcan does indeed “turn against him”; near the end of their journey, he refuses to proceed any farther, apparently justifying all of the narrator’s suspicions about Loolowcan and the inconsistency of Native Americans in general. This refusal, more peculiarly, causes the narrator to break into a fury: “Wrath mastered me. Prudence fled” (210). He calls Loolowcan an “insolent varlet” and coward and other terms of opprobrium. He was “in a raging wrath” “too angry” to think of anything else besides the “treachery” that had been committed. He loses, in short, self-control. Why, one might well ask, does Loolowcan’s refusing to go any farther, produce such a disproportionately exaggerated effect on the narrator? Keep in mind that Loolowcan refuses to proceed because of fears over hostile Natives in the Dalles area, fears he had expressed previously until the narrator “wheedled and bullied the doubter” (78). Keep in mind also that when this “betrayal” occurs, the two have already passed in “triumph” through the most dangerous parts of the journey. The narrator is, in fact, only twenty miles from his destination, a short distance even on a horse. In other words, there must be a deep affective investment that the narrator had placed in their relationship that had been present beneath the surface, a frustrating and ultimately frustrated desire, and one that calls into question the narrator’s surefire hand on the valve.
The narrator’s disavowed desire is for a cross-racial intimate relationship with Loolowcan the seeds of which are planted even in the very introduction of the latter into the narrative: “He flaunted his dirtiness in the face of civilization, claiming respect for it, as merely a different theory of the toilette. I cannot say that this new actor in my drama looked trustworthy, but there was a certain rascally charm in his rather insolent dignity, and an exciting mystery in his undecipherable phiz. I saw that there was no danger of our becoming friends” (73). Of course this last sentence seems almost coy, because there is a danger of their becoming friends. Even the trait of “insolent dignity” that would seem to make that impossible becomes a point of attraction. Calling himself a “not unsociable” fellow, the narrator is “very indulgent” towards his guide and acts very “republicanly” towards him, and yet—bracketing quickly the “uncounted arrears of blood-money owed by my race to his”—he is puzzled to find in his companion any expression or sense of “gratitude” (172). Though the narrator claims that it is “easy work” for any “inductive philosopher” to look into the mind of a “frowzy savage,” Loolowcan resists not only the narrator’s “probing” imperial gaze but, more potently, his advances. Despite calling the guide “a half-insolent, half-indifferent, jargoning savage” (183) in some shape or form recurrently, their relationship is quite complicated; again, the narrator seems to be playing an exaggerated part but is unable to contain the implications. There is a sense of jealousy when the narrator describes the contrast between how Loolowcan treats him and how he treats other Natives:

With me Loolowcan was taciturn. I could not tell whether he was dull, sulky, or suspicious. When I smote him with the tempered steel of a keen query, meaning to elicit sparks of information on Indian topics, no illumination came. He acted judiciously his part, and talked little. Nor did he bore me with hints, as bystanders do in Christendom, but believed that I knew also my part. With his comrade he was communicative and jolly, even to uproariousness. (92)
And there is a sense of shame when, in an inverse situation, he sees how the other white emigrants with whom they camp treat Loolowcan: “At the camp of the road-makers, he had passed through a period of neglect,--almost of ignominy. My hosts had prejudices against redskins; they treated the son of Owhhigh with no consideration; and he became depressed and slinking in manner under the influence of their ostracism” (123). And there is, indeed, a sense of despair and disappointment when he seems to come to the conclusion that Loolowcan will not be his friend: “I am a steward to him; I purvey him also a horse; when we reach the Dalles, I am to pay him for his services;--but he is bound to me by no tie of comrade-ry” (173). It is, of course, impossible to say whether this is how Loolowcan actually “feels,” as he remains, much to the chagrin of the narrator, beyond the pale of the white gaze; nevertheless it is fitting that the narrator expresses his disappointment in his frustrated desire for intimacy in terms of a market relation—that, despite his advances as a comrade, his guide sees him only as a client. Perhaps

178 Although one would hesitate to label the narrator’s desire for an intimate relationship with Loolowcan as sexual, given the modern freight of the term, it is nevertheless interesting to note that the narrator’s growing recognition of his frustrated desire coincides with a very explicit eroticization of his descriptions of nature. Going to “lap” from the waters of a river, he creates an elaborate romantic fantasy: “Why so, sweet foundatin, which I may name Hippocrene, since hoofs of Klale have caused me thy discovery? Is this a rebuff? If there ever was lover who little merited such treatment it is I. ‘Not so, appreciative stranger,’ came up in other bubbling gushes the responsive voice of Nature through sweet vibrations of the melodious fount. ‘Never a Nymph of mine will thrust thee back. This sudden leap of water was a movement of sympathy and a gentle emotion of hospitality . . . Stoop down,’ continued the voice, ‘thirsty wayfarer, and kiss again my daughter of the fountain, nor be abashed if she meets thee half-way. She knows that a true lover will never scorn his love’s delicate advances’ (157). In the surrounding strawberries, he tastes the “lovely fabrics of pithy pulpiness.” Moreover, in almost explicitly phallic language, he describes the rejuvenation of his similarly refreshed horse Klale (Chinook for black, a prefiguration of Don Fulano): “It was a pleasure now to compress with the knees Klale, transformed from an empty barrel with protuberant hoops, into a full and elastic cylinder” (161).
Loolowcan presents the narrator with an ability to negotiate his ambivalence about “settling” and an “unsettled” disposition: not the homestead in Oregon with a wife and children Winthrop had imagined if he could only “settle,” or the narrator’s “home” in the East, but a nomadic “settling” with the roving Loolowcan and his tribe that would preclude the necessity of, as he described it in *Isthmania*, the “unwilling willingness that marks the end of a journey” (333). Perhaps Loolowcan provides and then collapses the prospect of solving those ambivalences that Winthrop’s writing consistently revolved around. Perhaps Loolowcan revealed the dangerous allure of taking one’s hand off of the valve. Nevertheless, in the narrator’s final thoughts on the topic after his “wrath” settles down and he is trying mentally to exculpate Loolowcan from responsibility, the language with which he vents his frustration, even agony, is almost comical: “My type Indian, one in the close relations of comrade, had failed me. It is a bitter thing to a man to find that he has thrown away even a minor measure of friendship or love upon a meaner nature. I could see what the traitor influences were, but why could he not resist, and be plucky, honorable, and a fine fellow?” (213-14). Why, indeed?

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*John Brent* is the capstone to Winthrop’s three works of travel fiction, trying again to resolve what neither of the prior two works could, and again failing to do so.\(^{179}\) It takes us from his travels in the Pacific Northwest down to the Dalles South to Utah, and East back “homeward” and then as far as England. The plot revolves around the narrator, Richard Wade, and his old college friend, John Brent, reunited in the deserts of the

Southwest. Meeting up with a caravan of Mormons heading to Utah, Brent falls in love with the daughter of one of the English converts, Ellen Clitheroe, and aims, with Wade’s help, to rescue her from the “slavery” awaiting her amongst the Mormons. Ellen, however, is kidnapped, and her “rescue” then suddenly turns from the complex moral discourse of anti-Mormonism into a “healthy, simple, broad-daylight” (5) ride (as Winthrop described of the novel) to save her in true knightly fashion. After being rescued, though, her father, Hugh, who suffers from a pathological desire for restored wealth having lost his fortune and nobility in the “fever” (my emph.) of mining speculations in Lancashire, whisks her back to England where they disappear. Eventually, by means of some transparent plot twists (something equivalent to the conventional “rich uncle” device), Wade and Brent find Ellen in England, and she and Brent would seem to live happily-ever after.

*John Brent* is constructed by a series of interlocking containment narratives that fail, ultimately, to perform their work of erasure. It begins with the failure of the Land of Specie, California during the gold rush, to live up to its promise (but opens up certain possibilities nevertheless), and ends with the failure of the heteronormative middle-class containment plot “back East” to live up to its end, the transition between which being a chivalry tale. Moreover, the ambivalences over self-control and self-dissolution, straightness and crookedness, the settled and unsettled, that Winthrop attempts to negotiate in the hybrid racial and cultural spaces of the West, likewise informs the formal qualities of his writing. As author, Winthrop moves from the generic codes of western travel writing to the codes of the gothic novel (as is especially the case in his most famous novel, *Cecil Dreeme*). This is also a transition from the values in the former of
western rugged masculinity and self-possession to the latter which, as Anthony and others argue, is expressive of anxiety of the impossibility of self-possession in a credit and paper based economy in the wake of financial crisis. And one could say that *John Brent*, a tale of mines, knights, and Mormons, is the node at which this relay between generic forms takes place; moreover, as I will argue, one of the central characters is trapped in a gothic imagination. Winthrop translates his “two years wasted” as a clerk in Panama biographically into the premise of the story as Richard Wade’s “two years wasted” as a speculator in and owner of a gold-quartz mine in California. Financial failure, for Wade as well as the fallen English nobleman and insolvent-speculator-turned-Mormon, Hugh Clitheroe, is therefore what frames the novel as a whole.

In the wake of the gold rush, California presented itself as the land without competition and class. As one contributor wrote to *Hunt’s Merchant’s Magazine* in representative fashion, “the laborer is now the capitalist in California.” Labor is the only capital that one needs for success.180 The abundance of gold (much like the prior image of the West as the abundance of land) would sunder the boundaries of class and economic competition; there would be, as news reports and Western narratives had it, plenty to go around. In *John Brent*, however, this fantasy of California as the utopian space beyond the fragmenting forces of the market is immediately undercut as marketing humbug. Wade’s mine, given his lack of adequate means, is worthless: “If I had had countless dollars of capital to work my mine, or quicksilver for amalgamation as near and plenty as the snow on the Sierra Nevada, I might have done well enough . . . As it was, I got but certain pennyworths of gold to a most intolerable quantity of quartz. The precious metal

was to the brute mineral in the proportion of perhaps a hundred pin-heads to the ton” (6). Clearly labor is not the “only” capital necessary to make it in California. “My quartz has humbugged me,” he writes, before correcting himself and relaying that his expectations and the marketing myth proliferating in print culture had, in fact, humbugged him. Far from an emblem of individual enterprise and anticompetition, moreover, his mine is integrated into the rapidly emergent market economy of the West. His partners, Wade reports,

had been speculating in beef, bread-stuffs, city lots, Rincon Point, wharf property, mission lands, Mexican titles, Sacramento boats, politics, Oregon lumber. They had been burnt out, they had been cleaned out, they had been drowned out. They depended upon me and the quartz mine to set them up again. So there was a small steady stream of money flowing up from San Francisco from the depleted coffers of those sanguine partners, flowing into our mine, and sinking there, together with my labor and my life. (7)

Far from being presented with the opportunity for immediate wealth, most miners, if they work hard, he believes, may grow rich “in the third or fourth generation” (11). At the outset, then, Winthrop quickly dismisses the “gold fever” fantasy as a marketing gimmick, just as Wade, after discovering his knack for drawing, is offered “many a not unseemly octagonal slug, with Moffatt & Co.’s imprimatur of value . . . if I would paint up some miner’s hell, as ‘The True Paradise,’ or ‘The Shades and Caffy de Paris’” (37). The same inflated marketing will also later effect Hugh Clitheroe, who becomes convinced to turn Mormon and move to Utah as a land of plenty that will rejuvenate his wealth—Clitheroe’s pathological ambition. The west serves in John Brent as the fantasy space of success for those who failed in speculation as well as in love (the two paralleling one another), those who had, for various reasons, been called like John Brent a “wasted life”; but when one finally arrives there, anticipating redemption, it reveals itself as
nothing but a swindle. Wade’s mine, he sighs, has less gold than “the cellar of an Indiana bank” (33).

Such a swindle is more intensely dramatized with the injection of the (anti- )Mormon plotline and the history of the Clitheroes. From the perspective of Wade, Mormon “prophets” prey on and manipulate the insecurities of financial insolvents as well as a laboring class of England without any apparent hope for upward economic mobility. Reviewing the appearances of the British converts in the Utah caravan, he writes, “They were the poorest class of townspeople from the great manufacturing towns,—penny tradesmen, indoor craftsmen, factory operatives . . . Their faces told of long years passed in the foul air of close shops, or work-rooms, or steamy, oily, flocculent mills. All work and no play had been their history” (96). Much like Wade himself (who had written that “All work, no play, no pay, is a hint to work elsewhere” [9]), Hugh Clitheroe blends the figure of labor with the figure of the financially ruined speculator. Once a nobleman, Clitheroe is reduced, owing to bad investments in mining operations, to poverty, earning his pitiable wages for himself and daughter working in the very mines he had once invested in. Offered the illusory fantasy of restoring his wealth by converting to Mormonism and moving to Utah, he takes his daughter west, under the impression that, as he states, “I have escaped at last into the region I have longed for. I mean to renew my youth in the Promised Land,—to have my life over again, with a store of the wisdom of age” (120).

Given the constant cross-over of character traits, it is right to ask: what exactly differentiates Wade from Clitheroe? It is a complicated question given the fact that the narrative is filtered through the perspective of the former, and, much like the narrator of
The Canoe and the Saddle, the reliability of this voice is unreliable. Throughout the doublings in the narrative, Wade relentlessly attempts to create differences (between himself and Clitheroe, his own “knightly” quest and the latter’s pathological condition) only to have these collapse. The central difference, at least according to Wade, is that Clitheroe has internalized his financial loss (as well as accusations he had been fraudulent in his dealings) and become locked in a sort of gothic pathology: “There was a trepidation in his manner,” Wade describes,

half hope, half fear, as if he dreaded that some one would presently announce to him a desperate disaster, or fancied that some sudden piece of good luck was about to befall him, and he must be all attention lest it pass to another. Nothing of the anxiety of a guilty man about him,--of one who hears pursuit in the hum of a cricket or the buzz of a bee; only the uneasiness of one flying forever from himself. (113-14)

Clitheroe’s subjectivity is predicated on the singular desire of recovering his wealth by any means necessary, and defined as such, he is a figure of insecurity, instability, and haunting. His relation to financial ruin, moreover, is somewhat contradictory; while internalizing loss into a frenzied gothic imagination within, he aestheticizes the world around him into the beautiful: “He filled the world with illusions. Whatever was future and whatever was past, seen though his poetic imagination, seemed to him so beautiful, or so strange and interesting, that he lost all care for the discomforts of the present. And this same refinement of nature deluded him in judging character” (167). In other words, Clitheroe’s derangement is not so much the typical antebellum sort wherein a desire of wealth is a form of “mania” as much as it is the fact that it represents exactly what Panic and reform discourse sought to achieve: an internalization of failure that leaves the world around (and the unequal structures of the economy) intact and beautiful. He thus has become “passive” and unable to tell “truth” from “falsehood.” He is lacking in “manly
feeling” (161). He suffers, as Wade diagnoses, a case of “drapetomania,” the supposed pathological condition, published in a study by Samuel Cartwright in 1851, of slaves who ran away from their masters. The highly racialized context of the word (and the racialized subject, in Winthrop, is always an object of disavowed desire) is something we must return to; let it suffice for now that Wade sees Clitheroe’s case as a most “hopeless” one. A “slave” to himself (his identity being the desire to restore his wealth), he becomes a Mormon and, in Wade’s conventional anti-Mormon rhetoric, willing to put his daughter, the beautiful and “self-possessed” heroine of the novel, into that order’s enslavement of women.

Seemingly unlike Clitheroe, Wade resists making his financial ruin define himself; in fact, it leads him to become deeply critical of the “straightforward” path of financial success as the most desirable path possible. After a time of purposeless activity, Wade finds himself “in that state when one needs an influence without himself to take him by the hand gently, by the shoulder forcibly, or by the hair roughly, or even by the nose insultingly, and drag him off into a new region.” And this “influence comes.” In a very odd juxtaposition he states, “My only sister, a widow, my only near relative, died, leaving two young children to my care” before immediately glorifying in this “bad news”: “How this responsibility cheered me! My life seemed no longer lonely and purposeless. Point was given to all my intentions at once” (11). As in The Canoe and the Saddle, though, wherein the narrator has an ambivalence about returning “home,” in John Brent these “two young children” that seem initially to be the focalization of Wade’s purposes and intentions fade into the background of a suspended “adventure” that redirects “purpose” into a different but corollary path: a different restoration of the family
unit that will, somehow, obliquely restore the two orphans. His “goal” at the outset of the narrative is to not only go home, but also to provide a middle-class home and family for these children, something he seems to not be terribly desirous of accomplishing.

Wade transfers his desire for financial success into a commodity that ostensibly resists the typical workings of market exchange: an “unsaleable horse.” Literally he trades his shares in the Don Fulano Mine for a horse he names Don Fulano: “Don Fulano, a horse that would not sell, was my profit for the sternest and roughest work of my life! I looked at him, and looked at the mine, that pile of pretty pebbles, that pile of bogus ore, and I did not regret my bargain. I never have regretted it” as the horse presents a “value” beyond “dollars and cents” (34-35). What is the value then that Don Fulano represents? Fulano, it is evident, comes to symbolize the anti-market and transgressive values that the mines of the gold rush and California society failed to deliver on, presenting instead only an extension of the speculative marketplace. Despite the promise he holds out, however, Fulano is, though a horse, a figure of trauma; as the seller tells Wade, “Somebody's tried to break him down when he was a colt, an now he wont stan' nobody” (17), and Wade, in “breaking him” with love rather than discipline, will ostensibly restore him. A fantastical projection that negotiates the ambivalence over self-control and self-dispossession, the defining trait of their relationship is that it is non-hierarchical: “He did not obey, but consented. I exercised no control. We were of one mind. . . I loved that horse as I have loved nothing else yet, except the other personages with whom and for whom he acted in this history” (34). Prefiguring, as is explicit here, his love for John Brent, there is also a displacement of erotic desire onto the black Fulano. After confessing his “want of experience” with regard to women, Wade is told by the horse’s seller, “Well, you will be
when your time comes. I allowed from seeing you handle that thar hoss, that you had got
your hand in on women,—they is the wust devils to tame I ever seed” (32). Wade
wonders whether that time will come (it doesn’t), and, implicitly, whether he wants it to
or not. Indeed, it is Wade’s time as a “purposeless” meanderer (which, in fact, is not
without a purpose but allows him to pursue creative endeavors) that opens up
opportunities for transgressive (anonymous male-male and cross-racial) intimacies that
the introduction of “purpose” and the “straight path” into the novel attempts to contain
and foreclose. Wade dreams of his future with Fulano: “I had a vision of him in a
paddock, with a fine young fellow, not unlike myself, patting his head, while an oldish
fellow, not unlike myself, in fact very me with another quarter of a century on my head,
told the story of the Gallop of Three and the wild charge down Luggernel Alley to that
unwearying auditor, while a lady, very like my ideal of a wife, stood by and thrilled again
to the tale. Such a vision I had of Fulano’s future” (285-86). However, Fulano, as an
object of Wade’s transgressive desire, cannot be corralled into this middle-class domestic
fantasy. Having fulfilled his purpose of helping to rescue Ellen, Fulano is killed off.
After Wade and Brent hear that a very capable slave is being duped and sold down South,
they inform him of the plot and help him to escape; ultimately, this will require the fatal
heroism of Fulano, as Wade offers it to the fugitive. And, to contain the significance of
Fulano even more straightforwardly in a middle-class vein, Wade later hears from the
escaped slave, who, apparently, is doing quite well for himself, a reassuring symbol of
the possibilities for upward mobility.

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181 Elsewhere, Biddulph, the spurned lover of Ellen who becomes friends with Wade and
Brent, applauds Fulano’s “coquetries” which are “as beautiful as a woman’s” (287).
While Wade’s double in the text is Hugh Clitheroe, Don Fulano’s double is the eponymous John Brent. Such pairings, however, always infect one another. If Fulano will be Wade’s “woman,” in inverse terms Wade will be Brent’s; upon seeing his old friend garbed in the vestments of frontier life, in one of the more transparently homoerotic moments in the novel, Wade exclaims: “What a poem the fellow is! I wish I was an Indian myself for such a companion; or, better, a squaw, to be made love to by him” (38). This avowed fantasy to be “made love to,” however, is importantly prior to his recognition of Brent as his old college friend. As is the case with Don Fulano, a Spanish version of “John Smith” or sign of anonymity, Wade’s desire for such intimacy crops up in moments prior to identification. Certainly there is a lingering remainder. After Brent admits that “Ten years of experience have taken all the girl out of me” (39), Wade seems not entirely convinced: “Brent was a delicate, beautiful, dreamy boy. My counterpart. I was plain prose, and needed the poetic element. We became friends. I was steady; he was erratic. I was calm; he was passionate. I was reasonably happy; he was totally miserable” (41). Later, after their first thousand miles of journey through the wild, Wade will conclusively describe their love: “In all this time I learned to love the man John Brent, as I had loved the boy; but as mature man loves man. I have known no more perfect union than that one friendship. Nothing so tender in any of my transitory loves for women. . . Such a friendship justifies life” (57). And yet, the moment of a more transgressive romantic desire seems to be already retooled into a friendship of opposites, wherein Wade has re-presented himself as a middle-class professional ideal, quite unlike what we had previously known of him (which is more like the “wasted life” and poetic dreamer who cuts across the “worldly tests of success” [44] he projects onto Brent).
In a trajectory emblematic of the trafficking in women within the homosocial triangle Eve Kosofky Sedgwick famously described, the two western wanderers without seeming “purpose” are given one—the knightly task of rescuing the innocent female, Ellen Clitheroe, from the sexual “slavery” awaiting her in the land of Mormons. The introduction of this untimely chivalry tale and straight narrative path inaugurates an almost hyperbolically heteronormative plot. As soon as the anonymous and apparently non-white figure by whom Wade would like to be “made love to” becomes John Brent, whose fantasy is to be the knightly heroic “Lover,” Wade must suppress not only this transgressive desire but likewise must become the middle-class male. Romance has reintroduced competition (submerged into “brotherhood”) and Wade’s frustrated desire for Brent becomes a frustrated desire for Ellen: “I have never been quite sure but that the same would have been my fate, if I had not seen him a step in advance, and so checked myself. His time had come. Mine had not. Will it ever?” (134). He, instead, becomes her “brother.” The purposeful family unit thus arrives as a seemingly spontaneous, non-hierarchical social formation. Suddenly, we learn that Wade had always wanted a father figure: “I longed to find a compensation for my own want,—and a bitter one it had sometimes been,—in being myself the guardian of this errant wayfarer, launched upon lethal currents” (127), and in the course of the new adventure he is given two: first the “childish” father Clitheroe (to whom he feels a “filial” responsibility), and then, in the hunt for Ellen’s kidnappers, Armstrong, the “paternal” element of the party. Moreover, in shifting the “rescue” plot from rescuing Ellen from the Mormons to the explicitly insidious pair of gamblers, thieves, and murderers, Murker and Larrup, the potential fascination with the sexual practices of Mormonism is dispersed; much like the inflated
avowals of westward progress in *Canoe and the Saddle*, its potential desirability as an alternative to middle-class heteronormative practices is submerged under inflated anti-Mormon rhetoric. It likewise seems to submerge the idea that, compared to Wade’s financial failure, the Mormons seem to be quite successful economically, despite the dustiness of the converts’ clothing. When it comes to the leader of the Mormon caravan, Sizzum (who is, of course, described in ways that suggest his sexual appetite), Wade refuses to give the Mormons a voice in the text: “Shall I let him speak for himself? Does any one wish to hear the inspirations of the last faith humanity has chosen for its guide? No. Such a travesty of true religion is very sorry comedy, very tragical farce. Vulgar rant and cant, and a muddle of texts and dogmas, are disgusting to hear, and would be weariness to repeat” (93). There would be, it seems, a danger in including this voice, though Wade waves it off out of hand.

The normative romance plot, moreover, is closely knitted, especially towards the conclusion of the novel, with a restored economic plot. Well prior to this, *John Brent* had already begun this work. If speculation is seen as something of a sham or false space of escape from failure, the text nevertheless attempts, in contrast to the “brotherhood” of Wade and Brent, to restore it by splitting it into a moral divide that, central to Panic literature’s castigations of speculation, was translated into anxieties or concerns over the gold rush. The “delirium” of gold, many worried, was predicated on the “premeditated recklessness of the gambler.”182 The daily life of the forty-niner would be “dangerously close to gambling.”183 This moralistic rhetoric of the “gold fever” being dangerously

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182 *Godey’s Lady’s Magazine* 38 (1849), 205.
183 Quoted in Brian Roberts, 37.
close to gambling fever translated itself into innumerable descriptions of the prevalence of gambling halls and illicit, sometimes violent scenes provoked by the habit. In *John Brent*, rather than the figure of the gambler being a sign of reckless addiction, that figure comes to be far more insidious—quite the opposite of reckless; keenly manipulative, they are able to stack the deck (literally) in their favor. The two antagonists of the novel, a pair of murderers and horse thieves who will go on to kidnap Ellen Clitheroe, are most elaborately described through their gambling habits. Wade goes off on something like a diatribe: “The gambler's face and the gambler's manner are the same all over the world. Always the same impassible watchfulness. Always the same bullying cruelty or feline cruelty. Always the same lurking triumph, and the same lurking sneer at the victim”; they “wear a face”: “Wear,” he explains, “for their faces seem masks merely, dropped only at stealthy moments. Always the same look and the same manner” (75-76). He continues: “All men and all women who make prey of their fellows, who lie in wait to seize and dismember brothers and sisters, get this same relentless expression. It fixes itself deepest on a gambler” (76). The gambler is thus not simply a reckless addict lacking in self-control, but the “relentless” redundantly self-possessed figure who understands all relations to “brothers and sisters” as a zero-sum economic competition and who cunningly fixes, that competition. In line with the moralistic body of Panic fiction then, *John Brent* does not point to the speculative market itself as the central problem, but to the con-man and fraud.

Near the end of *John Brent*, the tethering of the normative romance plot and the financial “rescue” becomes ever more interwoven. After the knights errant rescue Ellen from the clutches of Larrup and Murker, we find Wade involved in some anonymous
trade in New York City and the intertwined reappearance of his initial “purpose” in the form of his sister’s orphans. This anticipated “end,” however, proves to be not really an end, but a means by which the adventure might continue. It is unclear what exactly Wade is engaged in (he claims wryly that “I fancied that I could mine to more advantage in New York than at the Foolonner. There are sixpences in the straw of every omnibus for somebody to find” [297]), and yet he reiterates time and again his anxious desire to get word from Brent about the Clitheroes, who, once reunited, had traveled back to England as the father was newly bent on pursuing “new schemes” and there disappeared. Brent, alongside Biddulph, his rival-turned-comrade (much like Wade), had gone abroad in search of them. As an ambiguous professional, Wade seems as unsettled as he was after leaving the Don Fulano Mine. Suddenly, in a stilted, almost ludicrous plot device, the two stories of romance and finance fuse together: an old friend shows up with plans for a new “cut-off” contrivance for steam ships and asks Wade to go to Europe to patent it; he is offered unlimited resources and can take whatever percentage he sees fit. Not coincidentally, the individual investor financing the operation is Mr. Churm, the figure of the middle-class type of respectability found in Winthrop’s *Cecil Dreeme*. Once abroad, Wade takes the Cut-Off scheme to the most able mechanic, Mr. Padiham, a “midget” whose physical growth was stunted by laboring in the mines, and his mental growth only salvaged by being removed from labor and educated. Not only is he the man for the job when it comes to designing a model for the cut-off (and here Winthrop is punning on the inventor of the device, Mr. Short, the name of the device, and the physical stature of the British mechanic), but he also leads Wade to the whereabouts of the Clitheroes (who live upstairs!). Hugh Clitheroe is, of course, not long for this life. As the pathologized form
of the financial capitalist, without self-control and awareness, bent on schemes, and bearing the dangerous allure of speculative frenzy, he must be removed from the novel to allow for the self-controlled professional Wade to preside, an end already foreshadowed when Clitheroe took to gambling. His desperate desire for financial restoration appears, paradoxically, to prevent him from ever achieving it. The Lover Brent, of course, is finally united with Ellen.

The conclusion of *John Brent* thus seems to neatly contain, in the professional-domestic hybrid space of Padiham’s house, the transgressive energies unleashed earlier in the novel. This work of containment, however, is not complete; there is a remainder or a reminder that refuses to be integrated. On the one hand, while Padiham seems emblematic of the middle-class fantasy of upward mobility (once offered opportunity and education he became the most able mechanic in London), his “stunted” growth is a constant reminder of the violence of industrial capitalism, and keeps him on the margins of its society even as it relies on his handiwork for the “progress of civilization.” On the other hand, the conclusion presents a reversal of that meeting of Brent and Wade in the Southwest. Having learned the whereabouts of Ellen from Padiham, Wade dashes out of the studio to tell Brent. Wondering at why the servants look so surprised, Wade reports, “I perceived, as I entered. A mirror fronted me. My face was like a Sioux’s in his war-paint. There had been flies in Padiham’s shop, and I had brushed them away from my face, alas! with hands blackened over the lathe.” Although one could rightly read this scene of “black face” as signifying that Wade is now in the “war paint” of civilization, its mechanical oil, facilitating the professional and martial end to the novel, it also presents, as I am inclined to believe, a reversal of the initial meeting between Wade and Brent. It
is an opportunity for Brent now to choose to “be made love to.” He does not and within the moral (professional, marital) economy of *John Brent* likely cannot.
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*American Quarterly* 44.3 (Sep. 1992): 381-417.

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Dissertation: Sublime Insolvency: The Aesthetics of Failure and American Literature After the Panic of 1837
Committee: Christopher Castiglia (advisor), Hester Blum, Sean X. Goudie, Amy Greenberg


BA English, Northwestern University, 2007 (Departmental Honors).

Publications:

“A Monument Upon a Hill: Antebellum Commemoration Culture, the Here-and-Now, and Democratic Citizenship in Melville’s Israel Potter” (forthcoming in Studies in American Fiction)


Conference Presentations:

“A Monument Upon a Hill: Israel Potter’s Dystopian Nationhood” (June 2012).
Presented at the Melville Society Conference, The University of East Anglia, United Kingdom.

Teaching Experience:

English 231, Penn State: “American Literature to 1865”
English 200, Penn State: “Introduction to Critical Reading”
English 202D, Penn State: “Business Writing”
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