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## A PUBLIC DUTY: MEDICINE AND COMMERCE IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICAN LITERATURE AND CULTURE

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A PUBLIC DUTY:  
MEDICINE AND COMMERCE IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICAN LITERATURE  
AND CULTURE

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DISSERTATION

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the  
College of Arts and Sciences  
At the University of Kentucky

By

Heather E. Chacón

Lexington, Kentucky

Director: Dr. Jeffory A. Clymer, Professor of English

Lexington, Kentucky

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## ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

### A PUBLIC DUTY: MEDICINE AND COMMERCE IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICAN LITERATURE AND CULTURE

Using recent criticism on speculation and disability in addition to archival materials, “A Public Duty: Medicine and Commerce in Nineteenth-Century American Literature and Culture” demonstrates that reform-minded nineteenth-century authors drew upon the representational power of public health to express excitement and anxiety about the United States’ emerging economic and political prominence. Breaking with a critical tradition holding that the professionalization of medicine and authorship served primarily to support and define an ascending middle class, I argue that the authors such as Robert Montgomery Bird, Fanny Fern, George Washington Cable, and Pauline Hopkins fuse the rhetoric of economic policy and public health to advocate that the era’s disenfranchised “ill” (classified as such due to demographic factors or disability/disease) be recognized as worthy citizens capable of enhancing the economic and cultural wealth of the nation.

While many nineteenth-century authors drew upon the ability for sickness and death to unify disparate peoples, such instances often tend toward sentimentalism, imparting the message of inclusion by invoking readers’ sympathy. The authors included in my project, however, do not fit this mode. Instead, they used their works to insinuate that looking after the health and welfare of one’s fellow humans was simply good economics. In featuring issues of public health rather than private disability, depicting illness realistically in accordance with medical treatises and beliefs of the period, and showing the widespread consequences of disease these writers rely on their readers’ desire for economic prosperity, rather than affect, as a catalyst for social solidarity in a capitalist society. As such, my project causes us to rethink how the ascent of the novel not only helped define, but also challenged and critiqued, the identity-politics of an emerging middle class. By showing the authors studied in “A Public Duty” used literature’s pedagogical potential to argue the “sick” literally and figuratively had worth, I demonstrates these writers’ works help create and support a reconceptualization of the political body suiting a country poised to assume global prominence and urged their readers to see the variety of people living in the United States as a source of national innovation and strength.

**KEYWORDS:** Language, literature and linguistics, social sciences, speculation, medicine, fiction

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This dissertation is the culmination of several years of hard work, rigorous questioning, and the thrillingly beautiful and frustrating process of intellectual pursuit. Along the way so many people have contributed in ways large and small that an entire chapter, rather than an acknowledgements page, seems barely adequate space to express my gratitude. However my committee (particularly Andy Doolen) always urged me to write more concisely, so I will honor their wishes as best I can.

First and foremost, I wish to thank Jeff Clymer for helping me work around walls, showing me places to gain footholds, and, occasionally, talking me off of high ledges. The insights, suggestions, encouragement, and trust he continually demonstrated---from the early and haphazard conception of this project to the texts and discussions about job market talks---were indispensable to this project's successful defense. I count myself extremely lucky for such a mentor.

The rest of my committee, too, aided tremendously. Andy Doolen consistently challenged me to think bigger and dig deeper. This project is and will be much richer because of it. Marion Rust offered support and insights in the early stages of this dissertation that helped set the trajectory for the form it would eventually take. JoAnne Melish provided leads on important historical contexts and events, enabling me see the various ways these texts responded to and engaged with the larger cultural concerns of nineteenth-century America. Randall Roorda not only helped my ideas find better expression, he was a considerable good sport about being pulled in for an emergency summer defense. My outside examiner, Stephen Voss, provided feedback during the defense that is still rattling around my head today as I anticipate and plan for expanding this work.

Aside from my committee, the intellectual generosity of many others helped bring this dissertation to fruition. In 2014 and 2015 I attended the Futures of American Studies Institute, where conversations with Duncan Faherty, Soyica Diggs Colbert, Donatella Izzo, and fellow seminar participants inspired me to strengthen my work in the best and most enjoyable ways possible. Colleagues at Kentucky such as Michelle Sizemore, J. Seth Lee, Hannah Ruel, Amy Anderson, Morgan Richardson, Mary Clai Jones, and Jesslyn Collins-Frohlich kindly read and critiqued drafts that ran the spectrum from journal submission to critical hot mess. Thank you for your shining smartness and solidarity, as well as your beautiful humor.

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Finally, my deepest thanks and loving gratitude goes to my family. My husband, David, is a rock of support and kindness that I can only admire awestruck. My parents' encouragement and generosity were vital throughout this whole process. Thanks, dad, for the good advice and work ethic; thanks, mom, for the sacrifices and love. And Graeme, thank you for being the most inspiring person I have ever met and making me one of the most fortunate of people. I love you.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

When U.S. President Abraham Lincoln delivered his “Gettysburg Address” on November 19, 1863, he was suffering the early stages of a not-yet identified illness. His condition deteriorated on the journey back to Washington, and he had to lie down with a wet towel draped across his forehead. Lying ill in the Executive Mansion days later, the President quipped “Now I have something that I can give to everybody” when servants told him the front rooms of the residence were full of people wishing to speak with him. Lincoln would suffer from the illness, which was eventually diagnosed as a mild form of smallpox, for several days. He was unable to meet with his cabinet until December 15<sup>th</sup> and his correspondence shows he felt under the weather until nearly Christmas. Lincoln was fortunate, however; he recovered.<sup>1</sup>

The man who placed the towel upon Lincoln’s forehead during the return trip from Gettysburg was not so lucky. William H. Johnson, a black youth, served as Lincoln’s personal valet from the time of Lincoln’s inauguration until the date of Johnson’s death, which historians estimate occurred sometime in mid or late January of 1864. On January 19, 1864, *The New York Daily Tribune* carried news from the Executive Mansion. In it, “Regular Correspondent<sup>2</sup>” described finding Lincoln as follows:

I dropped in on Mr. Lincoln on Monday last and found him busily counting

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<sup>1</sup> Roy S. Basler, “Did President Lincoln Give the Smallpox to William H. Johnson?” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 35 no. 3 (1972), 279-284; 279-281.

<sup>2</sup> This is the actual moniker used by the author. No proper name is given.

greenbacks. “This sir,” said he, “is something out of my usual line; but a President of the United States has a multiplicity of duties not specified in the Constitution or Acts of Congress. This is one of them. The money belongs to a poor negro [sic] who is a porter in one of the Departments (the Treasury), and who is at present very bad with the smallpox. He did not catch it from me, however; at least I think not. He is now in hospital and could not draw his pay because he could not sign his name. I have been at considerable trouble to overcome the difficulty and get it for him, and have at length succeeded in cutting red tape, as you newspaper men say. I am now dividing the money, and putting by a portion in an envelope with my own hands, according to his wish.

The correspondent closed his report by asserting Lincoln’s care for such a “humble creature...in sickness and sorrow” demonstrated the President’s “goodness of heart.”

Written correspondence from Lincoln reveals that Johnson died a few days later. He was interred at Arlington National Cemetery in the area known as Freedmen’s Village at “the President’s expense.” A simple stone bearing his name marked the location.<sup>3</sup>

The story mentioned above has played a consistent part in “Lincoln lore.” Aside from Basler’s article, numerous biographers of Lincoln have included it in their accounts of the President’s life and a recent National Geographic Channel documentary, *The Real Abraham Lincoln*, opened with the late President’s quip about his disease’s contagion as in order to dramatize Lincoln’s strong sense of humor. Yet when this tale is related in early biographies and on television there is often little mention of Johnson, whose tragic death history—like Lincoln himself—cannot definitively say was or was not caused by contracting smallpox while tending to the President in his time of illness. Such omission happens too frequently, particularly when the person who dies or lies ill is a member of a marginalized group (women, people of color, immigrants, etc.) who sicken quietly—doing their job until the job of life is done.

Yet Basler’s account of the President’s reaction to his bout with smallpox, as

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<sup>3</sup> Basler, “Did President Lincoln Give the Smallpox to William H. Johnson?,” 281-284.

well as Johnson's sickness and death, illustrate the many ways in which illness and disease unite us all regardless of social standing. While Lincoln's quip that he now could give something to everyone is wryly amusing, it nevertheless alludes to the very real ability of communicable disease to strike anyone regardless of skin color, professional standing, sex, or other like factors. In addition, Lincoln's hesitancy—"he did not catch it from me...at least I think not"—points to the guilt, disavowal, and uneasiness that often accompanied sickness in a time where the actual cause of most diseases was not yet medically known. Because the origin of most diseases was undetermined, yet their communicable nature was clear, medical treatises and preventative measures of the time were forced to consider the whole of the population. Even recommendations for prevention that seem most divisive—such as when doctors of the late nineteenth century began to embrace eugenics as a source of protection for the public's welfare—the recommendations still, paradoxically, stemmed from a sense of "togetherness." If one *could* escape the alleged causes of the disease, no additional action would be needed. Since that was not always feasible, however, other means had to be pursued that would account for the close proximity of potentially dangerous bodies.

"Regular Correspondent's" encounter with a convalescing Lincoln, too, points to another way sickness and illness bound disparate people together: economics. Too sick to gather his pay, Johnson was nonetheless apparently able to get instructions to Lincoln about how to handle his wages. What Johnson's intentions were regarding the money he asked Lincoln to leave aside are lost to history, though Basler speculates the money was intended for funeral expenses or as a legacy for Johnson's loved ones.<sup>4</sup> Regardless of its

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 283.

purpose, what is clear from the excerpt is that Johnson had plans for his money that, most likely, did not include enjoying it himself, and that Lincoln went to some exertion to make those plans come true despite his own convalescence and political duties. The economic considerations that accompanied sickness and death—provision for loved ones, burial expenses, the settlement of pre-existing debts, etc.—linked people from all walks of life, even the President of the United States and a dying young black man suffering on a hospital cot.

Finally, illness brings us together via myth. Through the inclusion of this scene in autobiographies and television shows, Lincoln’s humor in the face of illness and an unsettled nation has become part of our collective conception of the Sixteenth President—a strong, wryly smiling man who could spin a yarn as deftly as he handled a fragmenting country. Yet such myths can, of course, be selectively inclusive. When William Makepeace Thayer described the episode in *The Character and Public Services of Abraham Lincoln* (1864), he omitted the line where Lincoln denies having passed smallpox to Johnson. The result, of course, was that Lincoln seemed to be making a selfless gesture entirely devoid from personal considerations. In reality, it may have been compassion and regard that motivated Lincoln’s actions, but feelings of guilt and responsibility could have been lurking as well.

Years later, and with an amended version of the scenario, other “legacies” emerge from this tableau. It is difficult to not be moved by the thought of Johnson’s death and internment. As confidant, assistant, and attendant to Lincoln on that fateful journey, Johnson most likely gave his life in the service of a nation that refused to recognize his equal humanity. Buried in Arlington National Cemetery, his remains are literally

included in one of the nation's most poignant markers of patriotic service and loss. At the same time, however, his small and simple tombstone attests to the racism and oppression that marked his lived experiences on earth in the nineteenth century, as well as the vehicle of his life's commemoration.

Providing this brief reading of Lincoln's response to Johnson's death and its aftermath illustrates some of the key questions and themes of this project. "A Public Duty: Medicine and Commerce in Nineteenth Century American Literature and Culture" originated out of my desire to answer the following queries: How did communicable disease bring disparate people(s) together in the United States during this time? What were the results of this unity? What costs did sickness bring and who shared, paid, or avoided this cost? How did print media and literature of the period shape the public's perceptions of both, disease and its economic implications? While my answers to these questions are, of course, incomplete, it is in this incompleteness that critical inquiry grows, builds upon, and interacts with the thoughts of others. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to pursue these fascinating questions, and to learn so much from those scholars who have left me lit signposts along the journey.

### **Reading Critical Health**

Using recent criticism on speculation and disability in addition to archival materials, "A Public Duty" demonstrates that reform-minded nineteenth-century authors drew upon the representational power of public health to express excitement and anxiety about the United States' emerging economic and political prominence. Breaking with a critical tradition holding that the professionalization of medicine and authorship served

primarily to support and define an ascending middle class, I argue that authors such as Robert Montgomery Bird, Fanny Fern, George Washington Cable, and Pauline Hopkins fuse the rhetoric of economic policy and public health in their work to advocate that the era's disenfranchised "ill" (classified as such due to demographic factors or disability/disease) be recognized as worthy citizens capable of enhancing the economic and cultural wealth of the nation. By showing these authors used literature's pedagogical potential to argue the "sick" literally and figuratively had worth, "A Public Duty" demonstrates these writers' works help create and support a reconceptualization of the political body suiting a country poised to assume global prominence and urge their readers to see the variety of people living in the United States as a source of national and economic innovation and strength.

Each chapter pairs the fiction of one author with a pressing health concern (treatment for/determination of insanity, women's health as it related to poverty and motherhood, quarantine/trade regulations, and the possible transmission of criminal behavior through heredity), arguing that Bird, Fern, Cable, and Hopkins wed the rhetoric of economic policy to that of public health. I argue this fusion enabled the writers included to endorse women's property rights, disavow violence against/oppression of non-whites, and insist on humane care for the nation's disabled or disadvantaged<sup>5</sup> by appealing to the public's desire for a profitable economy. Because the burgeoning U.S. literary market allowed marginalized voices to reach the public ear, advocates for the era's "disabled" demonstrated in fiction the power of sick bodies to bolster the U.S.

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<sup>5</sup> I use the term "disabled" here and elsewhere to indicate not only people suffering from physiological disease or affliction, but also those whose sex, race, class, or sexual preference caused them to be stigmatized as unhealthy.

economy by creating items and ideas, consuming a variety of goods and services, and compounding the nation's population. In short, they maintained those society considered sick, literally, *had worth*—thus overriding the “red ink” of prejudice with the “black ink” of profit.

Novels, with their pedagogical potential, were especially suited to helping nineteenth-century readers and writers work through the financial and social costs of sickness in a society largely devoid of federal social care and predating antibiotics/contemporary medical advances. Cathy N. Davidson claims novels gained popularity by allowing common people “a larger literary and intellectual world” and “access to social and political events” from which they might be excluded otherwise.<sup>6</sup> Yet many literary critics believe this increased opportunity for intellectual participation resulted in a consolidation of middle-class values as readers internalized the socially-sanctioned morals of tales written for those with time and funds to enjoy recreational reading. In this way, the accepted view of the novel's rise mirrors conventional accounts of the medical profession's ascent.

Because nineteenth-century racial, class-based, and gender roles relied on corporeal criteria---as did the “legitimacy” of social structures like slavery, gender-based divisions of labor, and wage labor systems they engendered---many of the period's scholars assert popular attitudes toward illness were responding to a social hierarchy casting pestilence as a problem of the poor, the dissipated, or the filthy. For example, in *Healing the Republic*, Joan Burbick argues that the body, and particularly *the sick body*, was a way to “index class, gender, and race in order to create hierarchies of power that

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<sup>6</sup> Cathy N. Davidson, *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America* (New York: Oxford U P, 1986), 9.

supported...the economic, cultural, and moral leadership of the middle class.”<sup>7</sup> In contrast, my project maintains such views do not adequately consider the financial consequences of limiting civic and intellectual privilege to one relatively homogenous group. Instead, I argue the authors included in my project desired *an expansion*, rather than *a consolidation*, of ethos traditionally reserved for the middle class to those whose infirmities or bodily status as other kept them on society’s economic and political margins. As such this project sheds light on our nation’s history of literary activism and causes us to rethink how economic and public health concerns were represented in literary works and, by extension, 1800s’ culture.

Such conclusions, however, would not have been possible without the aid of other scholars. In particular, while I believe that Burbick’s view of what constitutes the “middle class” is too stringent, her demonstration of the ways in which medicine and the body operate as sites of expression for anxieties attending the United States’ expanding economic and geographical state has heavily influenced this study. For these same reasons, Justine Murrison’s *The Politics of Anxiety in American Literature*, James B. Salazar’s *Bodies of Reform*, and Stephanie Browner’s *Profound Science and Elegant Literature: Imagining Doctors in Nineteenth Century America* have proved influential as well.

In addition, numerous scholars of medical history, among them Charles Rosenberg and Carroll Smith Rosenberg, David Rothman, Margaret Humphries, Paul Starr, and others have proved vital. The archival research these scholars have conducted,

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<sup>7</sup> Joan Burbick, *Healing the Republic: The Language of Health and the Culture of Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century America*. Cambridge Studies in Literature and Culture (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1994) 303.



as well as their careful accounts of how medicine influenced and was influenced by socio-cultural factors, have provided the background information needed to complete this work. Art Wrobel's *Pseudo-Science and Society in 19<sup>th</sup>-Century America* and Anne Taylor Kirschmann's *A Vital Force: Women in American Homeopathy* revealed to me the exciting and strange world of alternative medicine, and modeled for me the ways these "eclectic" cures influenced and rivaled traditional medicine.

### **19<sup>th</sup> Century Medicine**

Medical practice in the nineteenth century was, in many ways, quite different from medical practice today. Though many of the "trappings" we associate with professional medicine in our own time---such as medical schools, medical licensure, and hospitals----existed in various forms, they were not always standardized or equally available. Doctors were not always perceived as the powerful and authoritative figures we think of now. While a few lucky students were able to formally train at elite medical institutions in France and other areas abroad, or at well-established medical colleges in the United States like the one at Pennsylvania University, many would-be doctors learned their trade through much humbler routes. For poor aspirants or those located away from the major intellectual and commercial hubs of the eastern seaboard, training for the medical profession came in the form of self-education (reading medical tracts and treatises) and/or by being apprenticed to a practicing doctor who may or may not have

been formally trained as well.<sup>8</sup> The result was that, even among “allopathic doctors,”<sup>9</sup> patients could expect quite a diversity of techniques, opinions, and recommendations. Because a standardized medical curriculum was not yet widely available and the causes of many diseases were as yet unknown, doctors would frequently arrive at different diagnosis and recommend different regimens/prescriptions. This happenstance led one doctor to exclaim in 1869, “In all of our American colleges...medicine has ever been and is now, the most depressed of all professions which liberally-educated men are expected to enter.”<sup>10</sup>

This lack of professional esteem and paucity of a standardized curriculum led to some interesting results. In the early decades of the nineteenth century, medical practitioners sought to augment their professional respectability through the issuing of medical licenses and the formation of medical societies. Such licensing laws, however, were short-lived. Angered by what was popularly viewed as an attempt to establish a monopoly on medical treatment and create a socially elite and exclusive class in a purportedly democratic society, most state legislatures repealed such laws due to general outcry. As a result, allopathic physicians had to compete with other “irregular” healers,<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> For information on the training of nineteenth century physicians, see the introduction and first two chapters of Paul Starr’s *The Social Transformation of American Medicine*. Also, chapter one in W.G. Rothstein’s *American Physicians in the Nineteenth Century* and Whitfield J. Bell, Jr.’s “The Practice of Medicine in New York a Century Ago.” Information in this paragraph is based on Starr’s work.

<sup>9</sup> An allopathic doctor refers to a doctor that has been formally trained in mainstream medicine of the nineteenth century through schooling, apprenticeship, or self-education. Allopathic doctors often practiced heroic therapies or used other methods of treatment condoned by medical professionals in the field. Generally, they were not proponents of the pseudo-sciences or other medical “sects” such as Thomsonism, homeopathy, etc.

<sup>10</sup> “American versus European Medical Science” *Medical Record* 4 (May 15, 1869), 133.

<sup>11</sup> Irregular or eclectic healers were practitioners who used therapies derived from many of the pseudo-sciences---phrenology, the water cure, animal magnetism, etc---

for customers and a livelihood, and this competition was frequently fierce. United States citizens of the 1800s supported and believed in the right and beauty of self-made men and were often suspicious of those who claimed authority over others' bodies by virtue of "book learning." In addition, allopathic medicine's penchant for heroic therapeutics—with its reliance on strong purgatives, bleeding, and blistering—deterred many patients who wished for a milder approach to illness. As a result, in the nineteenth century irregular healers, though often denigrated in professional medical journals, were in actuality quite popular with the general public.<sup>12</sup>

Of course, the general public of the United States was much more diverse than the quintessential white male medical student of allopathic institutions. While the nineteenth-century did witness medicine's increasing professionalization, it was not until Abraham Flexner published his influential "Flexner's Report" in 1910 that medical schools took on the standards, focused specialization, and rigorous licensure process we know today.<sup>13</sup> Amidst this relative openness, those who were traditionally excluded from mainstream medical schools, women and non-whites, were able to leave their own marks on medicine using both, professional and domestic channels. The increase, in the mid and late nineteenth century, of eclectic medical schools that taught the tenants of homeopathy, Thomsonism, and other medical sects offered greater opportunities for women to receive

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that flourished during this time. They may also, on occasion, resort to allopathic therapies, but on a case-by-case basis, rather than as the foundation for their entire medical practice.

<sup>12</sup> Norman Gevitz "Three Perspectives on Orthodox Medicine" in *Other Healers: Unorthodox Medicine in America*, Norman Gevitz, ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U P, 1988) 1-28.

<sup>13</sup> Robert P. Hudson, "Abraham Flexner in Perspective: American Medical Education, 1865-1910." *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 56 (1972) 545-561.

formal medical treatment.<sup>14</sup> Following the Civil War, free African Americans started their own medical schools and black-only hospitals.<sup>15</sup> These ventures into medicine, coupled with a healthy tradition of domestic healing practices cultivated in the slave house, the sickroom, and the frontier wilderness, all influenced nineteenth century medical practices.

This rich intermixture furthered the movement of power through and within the relationships between healers, patients, and public opinion; physicians from various schools borrowed and bickered with one another, patients paid for treatments they felt best suited their needs and abandoned “quacks” or heroic doctors they found inappropriate, and public opinion helped to create and smother the rise of various medical techniques. As such this study pushes against earlier, Foucaultian paradigms of medicine that viewed it as, at least in part, a disciplinary mechanism. While much nineteenth century medicine did indeed hope to control the public’s behaviors, proclivities, and internal musings in the spirit of disease prevention, ideas about what constituted disease and the “worth” of the disabled were also actively shaped by common people—both “disabled” and able-bodied. As a result medicine and its relation to those it would cure was much more complex than Foucault’s “medical gaze” paradigm would have us believe.<sup>16</sup> Instead, this project proceeds from the supposition that, in the words of Paul Starr, “Our conceptions of disease and responses to it unquestionably show the imprint of

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<sup>14</sup> Women were often prohibited from attending established allopathic schools of medicine.

<sup>15</sup> Lenworth N. Johnson, *Breaking the Color Line in American Medicine: African Americans in Ophthalmology* (New York: Slack, Inc. 2002), 122-140.

<sup>16</sup> See Michael Foucault’s *The Birth of the Clinic* for more on the medical gaze.

our particular culture, especially in its individualist and activist therapeutic mentality.”<sup>17</sup>

### **A Note on Methodology & Periodization**

As a literary scholar, my affinity for the written word flourishes through investigations of archival materials, ephemera, and personal writings (letters, diaries, etc.) in addition to works intended for the literary marketplace. For me, analyzing a wide variety of texts—whether written, visual, or aural—is a great tool for better gauging the social environment surrounding the creation and reception(s) of primary sources. This approach has served me particularly well while writing my dissertation, “A Public Duty: Medicine and Commerce in Nineteenth-Century American Literature and Culture.” My project began rather simply. Reading Fanny Fern’s *Ruth Hall*, I noticed that the homeopath that lives above Ruth and cures her daughter of a perilous fever disappears mysteriously and abruptly after supplying this service. Intrigued by why this character faded from the narrative just as Ruth’s fortunes began to improve, I read all the scholarship I could find connecting medicine and literature during this era. What I noticed was this: the majority of such criticism tends to focus on the metaphoric value of pestilence. Instead, I decided to examine linkages between the era’s conceptions of bodily and financial wellbeing in nineteenth-century novels, paying particular attention to when American authors portrayed illness as a literal, rather than symbolic, harbinger of panic and ruin. In the process my knowledge of the medical and authorial professions during the 1800s, as well as the political and financial landscape during this time, grew through consulting materials at the Philadelphia Library Company, the Special Collections at the

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<sup>17</sup> Paul Starr, *The Social Transformation of American Medicine* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), 3.

University of Pennsylvania and Transylvania University, the Historical Society of Philadelphia, and The Lloyd Library in Cincinnati.

What I found initially surprised me. Conditioned by and to a scholarly narrative holding that disease, though smiting upstanding citizens, was mainly viewed by the middle and upper classes as a problem of the poor, the dirty, or the outcast (thereby “justifying” the separation of white, middle-class citizens from the “ill” rabble of recently arrived immigrants, wage-labor earners, and non-white and/or non-male inhabitants), I instead found evidence that the financial costs of sickness—to individuals, families, and society—served as a rallying point for cooperation and empathy across gendered, racist, and classist lines. In the past I had noticed, of course, that many authors drew upon the ability for sickness and death to unify disparate people(s)—Little Eva’s death in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* is perhaps the primary example—but such instances tended towards sentimentalism, imparting their message of inclusion by invoking readers’ sympathy and using the emotional resonance of domestic characters’ experiences to gesture toward wider social truths.

The authors I was focusing on, however, didn’t fit this mold neatly, and it is their deviations from it that led me to my project’s central claim. In “A Public Duty,” I argue Robert Montgomery Bird, Fanny Fern, George Washington Cable, and Pauline Hopkins, were pragmatists who mistrusted the efficacy of such emotional appeals, though they sometimes resorted to them. Instead, they used their works to insinuate that looking after the health and welfare of one’s fellow “man” (regardless of color, class, or sex) was simply good economics. Featuring issues of public health rather than private disability, depicting illness realistically in accordance with medical treatises and beliefs of the

period, and showing the *widespread* consequences of disease—these writers rely on their readers’ desire for affluence, rather than affect, as a catalyst for social solidarity in a capitalist society. As such, my project sheds light on our nation’s history of literary activism and causes us to rethink how the ascent of the novel not only helped define, but also challenged and critiqued, the identity-politics of an emerging middle-class.

### **Chapter Overviews**

My project begins by examining two novels, *Sheppard Lee* (1836) and *Nick of the Woods* (1837) written by Robert Montgomery Bird, a physician, playwright, and novelist of the 1830s. In both novels, Bird includes a mentally ill male character whose illness stems from the loss of a stable domestic and economic lifestyle. By contextualizing Bird’s works through early mental health treatises, archival materials showing Bird’s interest in the treatment of the insane, and political commentary surrounding the rapid expansion of U.S. territory, I argue Bird transferred the medico-legal belief that well-cared for property and sound mental health were contingent upon each other onto the embedded political commentary of his novels. Doing so allowed him to pathologize the national push to acquire more and greater wealth at an ever-increasing pace by insinuating that a slow course of personal improvement and Western expansion would be a more healthful way of procuring a stable national identity and infrastructure. Because the figure of the mentally ill citizen was a common symbol representing not only the tragedy of an intellect destroyed, but the power of man’s intellect to rejuvenate, Bird’s works provide literary demonstrations of medical historian David Rothman’s belief that, in the 1800s, the insane “presented the perfect opportunity to breathe new life into a

downtrodden class” (110).<sup>18</sup>

My second chapter ties Fanny Fern’s *Ruth Hall* (1855) to mid-19th-century debates surrounding allopathic medicine’s advice for healthy mothers and homeopathy, a medical sect that, due to its welcoming attitude towards female practitioners, became closely associated with a burgeoning women’s movement. In the novel, the female protagonist’s husband succumbs to a misdiagnosed fever, her family forsakes her financially, and she is beset by the cruelty of her physician father-in-law and his wife. Once a mysterious homeopath moves into her building, Ruth finds her voice as a writer and becomes successful and wealthy. I argue that by metaphorically aligning her business acumen as a woman writer with this popular alternative medical sect, Fern illustrates the importance of alternative routes for women to participate in society’s economic and business arenas. She capitalizes on the perception, popular in the 1800s, that heroic treatments proscribed by formally trained physicians were more likely to harm than heal and demonstrates, through the character of Dr. Hall, that allopathic medicine’s insistence on women’s constitutional frailty was, in fact, one of the largest contributors of poor women’s debility. As the homeopath draws patients with therapies whose gentleness and ease of access appealed to the common working public, Ruth’s writings help her audience find cathartic release while, at the same time, they model the importance of women’s financial independence for the health of the nation.

Chapter 3 examines the role of yellow fever and public health in George Washington Cable’s *The Grandissimes*. Resisting the critical tendency to view Cable as an author primarily concerned with issues of racial demarcation, I assert Cable also

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<sup>18</sup> Rothman, David. *The Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic*. New Lines in Criminology. New York: Aldine Transaction, 2002.



privileged financial and public health related concerns in his post-Reconstruction novel. Medical references and allusions within the novel demonstrate Cable's belief that the South's social caste system and disdain for federal trade regulations stymied the region's economic recovery following the Civil War. Primary materials relating to the 1878 yellow fever epidemic such as: newspaper accounts, medical journals, and the publications of charity organizations illustrate that when disease prevention was discussed, the economic cost of preventative public health measures was consistently weighed against the financial consequences of epidemics. By harnessing the symbolic potential of this comparison, Cable advocates for greater cooperation across geographic and demographic lines, insinuating that a region which cares for the physical well-being of all will insure a healthier economy.

The project ends by discussing Pauline Hopkins's *Of One Blood* (1903) within the context of early theories of criminology which, based on the work of Italian physician Cesar Lombroso and popularized in the United States by early Sociologists, held that the tendency to commit vice was, in fact, an inheritable trait. As this view of inherent vice became accepted in science and medical communities, African American scientists and intellectuals such as W.E.B. DuBois, Booker T. Washington, and others pushed back against the notion that African Americans were, by virtue of their "degraded blood," constitutionally prone to criminal activity. In my readings of Hopkins's elaborate narration of Reuel Briggs (a young black medical student who passes as white) adventures in Boston and on an archeological dig in the African city of Meroe, I argue that Hopkins appropriates the language of criminology to show that the crime of slavery functions as the "original sin" that sullies the morality of all Americans. In doing so,

Hopkins not only laments the corruption of her own race through the introduction of “vice-laden” white bloodlines, she represents the financial and economic sins of the United States as always compounding (through slavery, then imperialism, then Jim Crow) and undermining the moral fiber and physical vitality of the nation.

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## Chapter Two -- The East Could Be Eden: Madness and Expansion in Robert Montgomery Bird's *Sheppard Lee* and *Nick of the Woods*

Buried inside Folder 275, Box 20 of Robert Montgomery Bird's papers at the University of Pennsylvania lays a curious sketch entitled "Vitalia Forgetting Himself." A pen and ink drawing showing a devil figure seated at a writing desk—its writing utensil and tail depicted as arrows, a quill tucked into its mouth—the work is both eerie and alluring. Further interest is added by Bird's marginal notations; that in the upper right corner stating: "All will be gradually murdered but the natives of two ~~countries~~ Nations. The power and wealth of the world is for them. Our work advances rapidly. We meet with nothing but Dreams: won by promises and confidence." Meanwhile, a small line at the bottom reads "The unknown life of Ross Cuthbert, a lunatic in the Penn. Hosp."



Figure 2.1: Bird's sketch of "Vitalia Forgetting Himself" from the University of Pennsylvania manuscript collection.

In keeping with a man whose interests were as varied as medicine, politics, agriculture, literature, and innovating silk-worm enterprises, Bird's notes and personal pages are fragmentary, garbled, and difficult to contextualize due to a lack of dates or apparent order. Thus, the date of "Vitalia" cannot be pin-pointed and the questions it raises—Which nations? What work? Whose promises?—resist straightforward answers. Yet the drawing tells some important things. For instance, it provides evidence that Bird's interest in psychology and treatment of those with mental illness went beyond the pages of his fiction or his years as a medical student and practicing Philadelphia physician.<sup>1</sup> The drawing also shows traces of the same concerns over financial status, political might, and vulnerability to violence characteristic of Bird's plays and fiction. Furthermore, the drawing depicts an interesting juxtaposition; for if lunatics (to use the parlance of Bird's day) saw or were perceived as devils, they were relatively civilized and learned ones—suggesting that even in delirium, the insane were capable of recognizing decorum and exhibiting reason.

This claim to partial lucidity represented a new way of viewing those suffering from mental illness—a paradigm shift that stemmed from the decline of Calvinist worldviews and the ascension of Enlightenment thought. Formerly attributed to divine retribution,<sup>2</sup> new ways of understanding the brain and its role in human perception led to

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<sup>1</sup> For more on Bird's years studying medicine see: John Collins Kilman, "Robert Montgomery Bird: Physician and Man of Letters," (doctoral dissertation, University of Delaware, 1978), particularly pages 26-56.

<sup>2</sup> Information on mental illness as an act of divine will can be found in: E. Fuller Torrey, *The Invisible Plague: The Rise of Mental Illness From 1750 to the Present* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2007); 7, 9-10; Gerald N. Grob, *Mental Institutions in America: Social Policy to 1875* (New York: Transaction Publishers, 2008); 5-21; and Part I of Lynn Gamwell and Nancy Tomes's *Madness in America: Cultural and Medical*

the relatively optimistic belief that insanity was, instead, a somatic illness that arose due to external stressors like financial ruin, over-exertion, or domestic disharmony characteristic of civilized, capitalist society. This meant that for the first time in the Western world, those suffering from insanity were not primarily viewed as God-forsaken. Instead the intellectual elite regarded them as afflicted individuals whose condition could, perhaps, be ameliorated through medical means. Such hope was shaded heavily with altruism as social reformers and men of science recognized that, in the words of medical historian David Rothman, mentally ill individuals “present[ed] the perfect opportunity to breathe new life into a downtrodden class.”<sup>3</sup> No longer solely representative of tragic, irredeemable loss, the mad could substantiate man’s sublimation of sickness with science, and mental chaos would bow to intellectual discretion.

This dual symbolism of the insane individual—irredeemable outcast and prodigal citizen potentially returnable to civilization’s fold—inhabits Bird’s fiction. Two novels in particular, *Sheppard Lee* (1836) and *Nick of the Woods* (1837), contain mentally ill characters that function as both the heroes and unwitting scoundrels of their tales. Central to these characters’ duality is their often antagonistic relationship to labor and speculation, two forces pivotal to the expansion and maintenance of the rapidly growing United States. Through these characters, Bird portrays the ill effects indiscriminate economic policy and non-productive industry (in the form of malaise, thwarted ambition, or pathological exertion) could have on a citizen’s and, by extension the nation’s, psyche. In these novels, madness is not merely a plot device; it signifies the potentially

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*Perceptions of Mental Illness before 1914*, Cornell Studies in the History of Psychiatry, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995).

<sup>3</sup> David Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1971), 110.

pathological drive Bird felt lurked behind the “enterprising spirit” of western expansionism and consumer capitalism, as well as the great possibilities that could arise for the nation if such gusto were channeled into more appropriate political and economic paths.

Such subject matter seemed timely. By the early years of the nineteenth century, Benjamin Rush, the American “father of psychiatry,” lamented that “In the United States, madness has increased since 1790” due to “an increase in the number and magnitude of the objects of avarice and ambition.”<sup>4</sup> A simultaneous national increase in asylum population seemed to provide grim evidence of Rush’s claim.<sup>5</sup> Bird, who trained for a career as a medical doctor through an apprenticeship to the well-known Quaker physician Joseph Parrish in Philadelphia before earning his M.D. from the University of Pennsylvania (which was at the time the nation’s premier medical program<sup>6</sup>) in 1827, knew this context well. Many of his instructors at Penn were former pupils of Rush, who had also taught there from 1769 until his death in 1813. Thus, Bird’s professors came of intellectual age studying medical theories like Rush’s influential 1786 study, “Inquiry into the Influences of the Physical Causes Upon the Moral Faculty,” which argued that one’s physical surroundings and their effects upon the body were the primary determinants of moral development.<sup>7</sup> By the time Bird was writing, the beliefs that financial ruin and domestic isolation precipitated mental illness were widely accepted by

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<sup>4</sup> Benjamin Rush, *Medical Inquiries and Observations Upon the Diseases of the Mind* (Philadelphia: John Grigg, 1830), 64.

<sup>5</sup> E. Fuller Torrey, *The Invisible Plague: The Rise of Mental Illness from 1750 to the Present* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2007), 204-210.

<sup>6</sup> Kilman, “Robert Montgomery Bird: Physician and Man of Letters”, 24-40.

<sup>7</sup> Ronald T. Takaki. *Iron Cages: Race and Culture in Nineteenth Century America*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987), 23-24.

learned and lay people alike. The result was a wave of anxiety regarding the national population's mental state. Between the economic collapses of 1819 and 1837 and the rapidly expanding geographic holdings of the nation, the public's imagination was haunted by specters of insanity that represented not only the (private) loss of an individual's reason, but the (public) loss of an economically responsible and politically engaged democratic citizenry. Consequently, many believed the nation's welfare hinged on preventing, and finding a cure for, mental imbalance.

Tension between democratic ideals and capitalist enterprise lay at the heart of this concern. Because, according to our Constitution, governments should "derive their power from the consent of the governed," and are thus subject to the will of the people, the mental health of the general public piqued national interest. At the same time, the rise of the market economy, with its consumer-driven emphasis, meant that the needs, desires, and proclivities of a purchasing public were increasingly influential in determining political avenues of action. To insure optimal public governance, the voting population must be industrious, forthright, and *reasonable*. In order to prevent civil unrest, citizens needed to feel satisfied with their material circumstances and confident in a strong national future.

These two imperatives often converged in less than optimal ways, however, and by the early decades of the nineteenth century many feared some citizens equated personal fortunes with patriotic fervor.<sup>8</sup> As older subsistence patterns predicated on

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<sup>8</sup> The term "market revolution" in this paragraph is an obvious nod to Charles Sellers and his theories of American economic development. For information specifically on the development between capitalism and civic virtue, consult Steven Watts's *The Republic Reborn: War and the Making of Liberal America, 1790-1820* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987); 63-77.

agricultural labor, familial cohesiveness, and stalwart independence rubbed against burgeoning economic models privileging entrepreneurialism, impersonal wage management, and financial connectivity; commercial and speculative ventures tantalized citizens with the possibility of achieving financial wealth and social prestige virtually overnight.<sup>9</sup> Such undertakings carried little certainty and a great deal of financial risk, as well as stimulated increased consumption. The result was concern that the atmosphere of solidarity and progressivism that (at least in hindsight) characterized the early republic was capitulating to personal ambitions, shaky economic practices, and an aristocratic, British-tinged, sense of entitlement and luxury.<sup>10</sup> By including characters suffering from mental illness in his fictional works, Bird warns his readers against such vanities while critiquing the systematic conditions catalyzing them. In doing so he hoped to instill in his audience an appreciation for conservative, steady courses of economic and material improvement at both the personal and political levels.

The issue of expansion proved particularly salient for Bird's purposes, as popular conceptions of mental health, geography, and politics in the antebellum United States had more in common than might be supposed during his time. In addition to medical experts like Rush, who worried that the financial risks of land speculation could drive some investors mad, many citizens feared that the allure of distant lands would weaken solidarity amongst the national population.<sup>11</sup> As time passed, increased political

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<sup>99</sup> See Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1845* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); 3-33; 70-102

<sup>10</sup> An excellent discussion of this phenomenon can be found in Watts, *The Republic Reborn*, 78-85.

<sup>11</sup> Reginald Horseman's "The Dimensions of an 'Empire for Liberty:' Expansion and Republicanism, 1775-1825" and Walter Johnson's *River of Dark Dreams*, pgs. 1-18 provide exemplary glosses on this, in addition to Watts.



factionalism seemed to herald such disintegration, particularly during the party realignments of the 1820s and 30s.<sup>12</sup> The nation was, literally, stretching—and it was not at all certain if its political and economic “seams” would bear the force, or burst asunder. Such unhinging found its symbolic corollary in the threat of mental illness, a public health concern that Bird used to illustrate the price the United States could pay if it failed to maintain and *contain* a nation dedicated to public rule.

Bird grew up during a time when Jeffersonian visions of an “empire of liberty” still held considerable sway. However, the nation’s increasing economic reliance on mercantile trade (to the North) and large-scale agrarian ventures predicated on slave labor (to the south) threatened to make such a vision quickly archaic. Walter Johnson offers a concise description of Jefferson’s “empire” in *River of Dark Dreams*:

Given enough land, migrants from the East would naturally be transformed into a freeholding, republican yeomanry. Spread out across the landscape, white farmers would have to provide for themselves: they would be too removed from cities to be reliant upon them for their basic needs...too distant from credit networks to find themselves ensnared in the sort of debtor-credit relationship that could compromise their political independence; and too far from factories to become dependent upon wages paid by others for their daily sustenance.<sup>13</sup>

Such a system certainly privileged the independent, “pioneering” spirit many believed to be a quintessential “American” trait. Yet Jefferson’s formula severely underestimated the financial interdependence that lay at the heart of a capitalist society like that forged in the early decades of the United States. Bird deeply believed in the power of an individual’s will and hard work to overcome personal hardship, as evidenced by his indefatigable efforts to achieve financial stability through the variety of employments mentioned

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<sup>12</sup> Sellers, *The Market Revolution*, 272-82, 348-50.

<sup>13</sup> Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom*. (Cambridge: The Belenap Press of Harvard UP, 2013), 3.

above. However, by the time he was writing fiction Bird witnessed how entrepreneurial capitalism often depended on the very credit networks and capitalistic ventures Jefferson feared. In the volatile forum of the market, very few men<sup>14</sup> could afford to be financial islands onto themselves. Thus though such Jeffersonian visions portrayed the United States as comprised of rugged and self-sufficient land owners, this was more an ideal than a reality.

By filling in the “narrative space” created by this slippage between aspiration and aspersion with mentally ill characters, Bird tapped into the popular notion that the mad were a people “on the edge” of an intellectual and, often, an economic abyss. With the proper rehabilitation, they could be restored to the fold of prosperity and property. Unaided, however, they could be doomed to perpetual alienation from their life, their liberty, and their pursuit of ~~property~~ happiness. In other words, they would not only lose their mental, but their democratic, “self.” Thus the two novels discussed here, *Sheppard Lee* (1836) and *Nick of the Woods* (1837) warn readers against embracing the hollow optimism of grandiose speculation, while they also tout the United States’s potential for economic and political might—provided it kept a level head.

Rather obtusely, Bird led through negative example. *Sheppard Lee* and *Nick of the Woods* are two novels that, while quite different in genre and tone, anxiously depict the economic and civic issues resulting from the United State’s rapid geographic expansion and its contingent relation to credit speculation. A work of jocose satire, *Sheppard Lee* highlights the importance of personal satisfaction and honest labor to mental stability while refuting British political economy’s applicability to the United States. *Nick of the*

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<sup>14</sup> The use of gendered language here reflects that at this stage in antebellum America, it nearly always was men who assumed control of finances and financial decisions.

*Woods*, a frontier romance, demonstrates the tragedy and alienation that could arise when settlers moved “beyond civilization,” with its potentially charitable and ameliorating institutions, in the hopes of acquiring personal wealth in western lands. Taken together these novels form a chronicle of the United States’s financial and geographic growing pains in the 1830s while maintaining hope, however tarnished, that the nation still possessed the power to cure its delusions.

### **Sheppard Lee: An Economic Anachronism**

Published anonymously in 1836, *Sheppard Lee* is a curious book. At its beginning we are introduced to Sheppard Lee, the work’s protagonist and narrator, a bachelor strongly averse to labor and industry. Sheppard Lee sinks further and further into poverty as his overseer swindles him and what little property remains quickly depreciates in value due to neglect. Rather than rally by hard work, however, the unhappy man decides to dig for the lost treasure of Captain Kidd, which is rumored to be buried in a dank, swampy hollow known colloquially as the “Owl’s Roost.” During this undertaking, Lee injures his head and, according to his unreliable narration, dies. Rather than journeying into the afterlife, however, Lee’s spirit finds it has the uncanny ability to inhabit the body of any deceased person it encounters simply by speaking the desire to do so. Thus the shade of Lee inhabits several members of 1830s American society—a gouty brewer, a penniless dandy, a tight-fisted moneylender, a Quaker philanthropist, a black slave, and the slave’s hypochondriac owner—before discovering his original body in a traveling medical show. Upon recognizing his former earthly tenement, Lee quickly assumes his old body and returns home. Upon “arrival,” however, his sister and brother-in-law reveal that his alleged journeys have actually resulted from mental delirium, not metaphysical prowess.

Refusing to believe his experiences were hallucinations, Lee nevertheless rejoices at being reunited with his kin and regaining control of his small farm, Watermelon Hill, which has been restored to working order by the exertions of his brother-in-law during the time Sheppard Lee was absent (minded). Agreeably, Lee promises to apply himself to improving his estate and claims to have “learned to be grateful to Providence that it ordained me to a lot of toil, wherein I find the truest source of health, self-approbation, and happiness.”<sup>15</sup>

Recently rediscovered by the efforts of Christopher Looby, scholarly criticism on the novel is sparse. However, what scholarship there is makes it clear that Bird engages the political and medical thought of his day in fashioning this tale of a reformed prodigal. Looby, in his introduction to the reissued novel, states that “[Lee]...or rather Bird through him...is certainly writing a satire on politics, and a meditation on the bodily basis of political life.”<sup>16</sup> Most criticism that has followed focuses on this “bodily basis” by examining Bird’s ambivalent attitude towards race within the novel. Taking up the thread of Looby’s assertion, Justine Murison offers that “Bird dissects the language of ‘morbid sensibilities’ and poisoned body-politics in *Sheppard Lee*”<sup>17</sup> in the midst of illustrating how Bird connects hypochondria, a frequently-diagnosed mental disorder of the nineteenth century in which afflicted people believed their bodies to have been transformed into inanimate domestic objects, with antebellum conceptions equating

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<sup>15</sup> Robert Montgomery Bird, *Sheppard Lee: Written By Himself* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2008), 424. Page numbers hereafter cited parenthetically.

<sup>16</sup> Christopher Looby, introduction to *Sheppard Lee: Written By Himself* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2008), xx.

<sup>17</sup> Justine S. Murison, *The Politics of Anxiety in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2011), 41.

slaves as objects of ownership.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, Samuel Otter argues that in having Lee assume the body of an enslaved man, Bird places Lee in “a body at the center of antebellum political debate and the limits of its imagination.”<sup>19</sup>

While these readings provide valuable insights, the tendency to focus on Bird’s Tom and Megrim “tales” mean the remainder of the novel is still largely understudied. In particular, Murison’s skillful detailing of early psychiatric medicine’s importance to *Sheppard Lee* largely eschews the mental derangement of the narrator himself and, thus, the implications such medical thought holds for the book *as a whole* must begin. As the Alabama fever and other land rushes pushed native people from their ancestral lands and heralded slavery’s expansion into previously uncharted territories, fear over speculation-induced madness grew while ideological tensions between slave and free states began to flare. The resulting instability and the perceived threat of national dispersal potentially undermining the country’s political and economic cohesion caused many citizens—particularly those, like Bird, who hailed from the original colonies—to worry that the “great experiment” of democracy was in danger. At once satire and cautionary tale, Bird allegorizes such concerns in *Sheppard Lee*, critiquing rampant speculation while promoting productive industry and the conservative, assiduous cultivation of personal and federal finances. Such a view privileged northern interests while slyly rejecting alternative economic models such as the reliance on bank script to fuel western land speculation and expansion, and European models of political economy favored in Britain. Championing the geographic and material wealth of the United States—holdings which

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 17-46

<sup>19</sup> Samuel Otter, *Philadelphia Stories: America’s Literature of Race and Freedom* (New York: Oxford UP, 2010), 99.

made it possible for lay citizens to own land and, theoretically, be free from want—the novel lays out Bird’s diagnosis and treatment for the nation’s “mad” rush to gain fortune and grab territory by any means.

Sheppard Lee is undoubtedly insane. Early in the novel, Lee relates the story of his upbringing before the discovery of his metempsychosis, during which we are told that his mother, owing to “many mournful losses occurring in rapid succession...fell into a deep melancholy and died insane” (10) and that his brother-in-law has taken to telling community members Lee is “wrong in the upper story” (18)—a refrain echoed by other characters later in the novel (32, 53). In addition to these early hints, each time Lee inhabits a new body the former acquaintances of Lee’s body’s past tenants accuse them/Lee of being insane (67, 106, 257, 390-399). Furthermore, the events surrounding Lee’s descent into distraction coincides with causes the medical community, at the time, believed precipitated mental illness: a sudden change in financial fortune coupled with a blow to the head. Such evidence refutes the claim that Lee suffers from a “feverish dream”<sup>20</sup> and supports the view that Bird intended his protagonist’s wild fancies to be construed as arising from a diseased mental state.

Yet what provides the symbolic resonance behind Lee’s hallucinations is not so much their immediate cause (head wound and destitution) as the chain of events that led Lee to this precipice in the first place. *Sheppard Lee* is not only a story of madness and finances; it is a story of how failure to exert productive industry precipitates economic and intellectual devastation. In the early years of the republic, the fledgling nation was deeply concerned not only with questions of property rights and financial capital, but

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<sup>20</sup> Murison, *The Politics of Anxiety in Nineteenth-Century American Literature*, 17

with the proper use of such assets. Those who suddenly found themselves in possession of large amounts of wealth were believed vulnerable to mental enervation if they lacked the constitutional fortitude to continually pursue a steady course of systematic financial cultivation and investment. Thus Edward Cutbush, a student of Benjamin Rush, wrote as early as 1794 that “the rapid accumulation of the value of bank script, in the year 1791, by which many of our citizens became wealthy, produced Insanity [sic] in many instances.”<sup>21</sup> At the spectrum’s other end, financial ruin and bankruptcy, often cast as the result of faulty speculation or business ventures, was considered as grave a threat to mental stability. Thus Dr. Samuel B. Woodward, superintendent of New York’s Worcester Hospital, listed the causes for mental collapse of patients admitted to the facility from 1834-45 as: intemperance (278), ill health (318), religious excitement (191), masturbation (145), domestic affliction (219), loss of property and fear of poverty (131), and personal disappointment (101).<sup>22</sup> Recognizing the overlap frequently occurring between financial insolvency, personal disappointment, and domestic affliction—the stakes inherent in an individual’s or family’s financial well-being was apparent to nineteenth-century medical professionals and lay people alike. According to such a view point, then, to maintain mental health people must not only possess enough resources to meet their basic needs, they must be wise about managing what resources they had so as not to spill over into the two danger zones of dissipated extravagance or harrowing, impoverished ruin.

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<sup>21</sup> Edward Cutbush, “An Inaugural Dissertation on Insanity” (Philadelphia: Zachariah Poulson, Jr., 1794), 25.

<sup>22</sup> Worcester State Lunatic Hospital. Case Book No. 1, 298-99; Case Book No. 8, 346-47; Case Book No. 19, 526. Countway Library of Medicine, Harvard Medical School, Boston.

Sheppard Lee does not walk this line well. Though provided with a quality education and an inheritance encompassing the majority of his father's considerable estate, Lee displays astonishing apathy, frankly admitting that he "had not even the desire, so common to young men who find themselves in possession of a fortune, to launch into eloquent expenses" (10-11). Instead Lee "resolves to take the world easy," and does so even when his land, under the management of the overseer Aiken Jones, "went gradually to ruin" as his "orchards rotted away...[his] meadows were converted into swamps; [his] cornfields filled with gullies; [his] improvements fell into decay, and [his] receipts began to run short of [his] expenses" (16). The result is, of course, that the inheritance Lee's father hoped would insure his offspring from financial hardship provides Lee no protection because Lee lacks the necessary industry and fortitude to shepherd wealth. Having endured little hardship growing up and facing no immediate spur to productive action following his financial windfall, Lee merely drifts about on his ever-dwindling resources. Once these are exhausted his social capital is decreased, he resorts to incredible schemes to gain wealth, and eventually descends into madness brought about by his ennui and its resultant reversal of financial fortunes.

Yet Sheppard Lee's descent into mental and financial instability plays upon more than early medical theories about the role of work and wealth management in insanity's genesis; it also antagonistically engages with many leading concepts of British political economy, in particular those advanced by Thomas Malthus, in order to champion the need for industrious, productive American citizens capable of caring for the health of their intellect and inventory. Indeed, Bird signals belief in such responsibility when, in



planning a never-completed and undated piece entitled “the Summum Bonum,”<sup>23</sup> he writes that the plot should illustrate what Bird saw as a central flaw in the American temperament:

[A] great feature in the Am. Character, viz. a disposition to enrich...our families rather than to bring them up to be intelligent, virtuous, and happy. The duty of a father is not to give his children fortunes—but to make them wise and content...The only consequence of such bringing up is the ruin of all concerned. The contrast of a well-trained family.<sup>24</sup>

Such a moral characterizes *Sheppard Lee*, as Lee initially fails to recognize that it is not merely wealth, but its application to fruitful endeavor, which provides the foundation for personal satisfaction and national aggrandizement in the United States. Such a notion distinguishes conceptions of American success from “British” models predicated on nobility titles and disinterested leisure while providing a pedagogical model for early Americans intent on establishing a strong economy and political system. But it is not merely a desire to separate the United States from the taint of British aristocracy that motivated Bird. Rather, it was the unique challenges his nation faced as it struggled to create a political and economic framework that would operate effectively given the developing country’s large geographic size—a trait which in many ways prevented British economic thought from being applicable to the young Republic.

In *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, Malthus writes that “Nature has scattered the seeds of life abroad with the most profuse and liberal hand; but has been

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<sup>23</sup> *The summum bonum* is a Latin phrase which translates as “the greatest good.”

<sup>24</sup> Box 11, Folder 26 of the Robert Montgomery Bird papers (Department of Special Collections, Van Pelt Library, University of Pennsylvania).

comparatively sparing in the room and nourishment necessary to rear them”<sup>25</sup> before elucidating the unfortunate consequences of overpopulation. Focusing on the detriment to domestic harmony caused by a short food supply and lack of adequate space, Malthus adds “man cannot look around him and see the distress which frequently presses upon those who have large families” without thinking twice about the potentially negative consequences procreation can lead to.<sup>26</sup> In a literary echo of Malthus’s caution, Lee mentions that his father initially failed to accrue significant wealth because “the only obstacle to a speedy accumulation of riches was a disproportionate increase in the agents of consumption—his children multiplying on his hands almost as fast as his acres” (9). The situation is remedied, however, when Bird tells us that “fate sent my father relief sooner and more effectually than he either expected or desired; nine of eleven being removed by death in a space of time short of six years (16). It is this sudden decrease in family membership that precipitates Lee’s mother’s mental unraveling, as well as Lee’s ability now, as the youngest but only surviving son, to assume the inheritance he will later squander (16).

A tragically fortuitous event for Lee, the sudden death of these siblings plants the seeds of the great flaw that will continue to plague him for the majority of the novel. In *Sheppard Lee*, Lee continually looks for fortune in the demise of others instead of actively cultivating his own physical, mental, and economic assets. Having gained his inheritance due to the mortality of five older brothers, Lee continues to feel entitled to sustenance by virtue of survival, rather than sweat. Thus he envisions Captain Kidd’s

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<sup>25</sup> Thomas Malthus, *An Essay on the Principles of Population*, Fourth Edition (London, T. Bensley, 1807), 3.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, 16

treasure as marked by a sign that is “precisely” the “shape of a human grave” and consisting of gold and silver encased in an iron coffin (34-35). Later, Bird satirizes Malthus’s dreary predictions of overpopulation and food shortage when, in the guise of Abram Skinner the miser, Lee muses that:

The great mass of mankind might be made to subserve the purpose for which nature designed them, namely—to enrich the soil from which they draw their sustenance...each of these bodies could be converted into five tons of excellent manure; and the whole number would therefore produce just one hundred and fifty millions of tons; of which one hundred and fifty thousand, being their due proportion, would fall to the United States of American, enabling our farmers, in the course of ten or twelve years, to double the value of their lands. (228)

In addition to these specific examples of Lee equating death with profit, the reader also cannot help but notice that each migration from one body to the next is motivated by Lee’s desire for a better life—one that entails a well-endowed pocketbook in addition to happy circumstances. Thus for the vast majority of the novel’s 425 pages Lee, if his stories are believed, spends his time explicitly looking to profit from death, rather than live by effort.

This course of action discords with the popular image of the United States during Bird’s time. Historian Dorothy Ross notes that most early Americans dismissed the idea that Malthus’s pessimistic predictions, which supposedly arose from “industrial poverty and conflict” in Britain, could apply to their great nation. Instead, “American exceptionalism was closer to the world of the Scottish Enlightenment than to the classical liberalism of contemporary Britain” and, particularly in the North, “political economists argued that the continent of virgin land and the free course of capitalist development

would circumvent English fears.”<sup>27</sup> The most effective way to convert these raw materials and physical landscapes into lasting wealth for the new nation and its people was a primary topic of political and agricultural discussion in the early decades of the 1800s. The task proved daunting in a way not before experienced in Europe and, thus, the United States needed to develop methods and political economy theories best suited to its own unique interests without looking across the pond for example, either positive or negative. Through the character of Sheppard Lee, Bird dramatizes this need for an original, “American” approach to political economy.

As great tracts of land became available for purchase in the west and southwest, many citizens of the northeast worried that not only would their political and economic power follow the footsteps of western settlers, but their region’s enterprising spirit would as well. Such concerns drew attention from some of the area’s most prominent political and economic leaders, including Henry Clay of Kentucky, the future leader of the Whig Party and developer of the American System,<sup>28</sup> and Mathew Carey, an Irish-born

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<sup>27</sup> Dorothy Ross, *The Origins of American Social Science* (New York: U of Cambridge P, 1992), 46.

<sup>28</sup> Bird would become politically involved with the Whig party later in his life. This involvement stemmed from his friendships with Dr. George McClellan and John M. Clayton, the latter served as a United States Senator, Chief Justice of Delaware, and as Secretary of State under Zachary Taylor. For the last decade of Bird’s life Clayton used his influence to try and secure political positions within the Whig party for Bird. When this did not succeed he gave Bird financial support, loaning Bird \$26,000 to buy a one-third share in Philadelphia’s *North American and United States Gazette*, a Whig-sponsored newspaper, in 1847. In 1842 Bird had been considered as a Whig candidate for Congress, but this nomination never came to fruition. For more information on Bird and the Whig party, see Curtis Dahl, *Robert Montgomery Bird* (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1963),29-31; Mary Bird, *Life of Robert Montgomery Bird* (Philadelphia: The U of Pennsylvania Library, 1945), 115-16.

American publicist and economist who lived in Philadelphia until his death in 1839.<sup>29</sup> Close personal friends, Carey and Clay both actively endorsed a political agenda that privileged a nationalist economy—Clay through his speeches and political maneuvers, Carey via the printed page. Pivotal to this vision was the idea of keeping federal lands in trust as financial security for the future of the United States, with settlers being able to purchase tracts of land for a codified and non-deflated price, thus insuring only the industrious could afford them. Because western lands would not be sold at discount prices, but would instead be offered at a federally mandated minimum, would-be settlers might first raise capital by working wage labor jobs, fairly compensated, in the industrial centers of the nation before purchasing acres farther inland. The results, theoretically, would be that the northern industrial complex would flourish, western markets would be protected from an oversaturation of farm produce in an area of relatively little demand, and western lands would enjoy more stable property values because the tide of immigration beyond the Mississippi would be reduced.<sup>30</sup>

The panic of 1819 spawned Clay's and Carey's concerns over work availability and ethics. The economic travesties of 1819 not only caused widespread financial ruin, they illuminated what many protectionists saw as two fundamental problems facing the new nation: a lack of industrial and manufacturing jobs to supply work to the lower classes, and an increase in indolence among some citizens who, smitten by the riches hinted at within a market economy, wished only to consume rather than produce. Thus

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<sup>29</sup> See John Van Atta's "Western Lands and the Political Economy of Henry Clay's American System, 1819-1832," *Journal of the Early Republic* 21 no. 4 (2001): 633-655 for more information on Clay and Carey's relationship.

<sup>30</sup> John Van Atta, "Western Lands and the Political Economy of Henry Clay's American System, 1819-1832," *Journal of the Early Republic* 21 no. 4 (2001): 633-655; 632-40.

Carey, a leading organizer of the Philadelphia Society for the Promotion of Industry, addressed the society's members in 1820 thus:

Those habits of dissipation, which have squandered the wealth and paralyzed the industry of other nations, are coming in upon us. This encroachment, nothing but individual and family discretion can effectually prevent. To accomplish this, it is indispensable that children be early accustomed to profitable industry. That nation is becoming effeminate, in proportion as the number of families are increased, who merely consume but add nothing to the stock of labor.<sup>31</sup>

It was the importance of each American's responsibility to "add to the stock of labor" that influenced Henry Clay throughout his political career and motivated his arguments against lowering the mandated minimum price on federally held lands; settlers must prove their industry by purchasing at the established rate, rather than seizing it via squatter's rights.<sup>32</sup>

It is within this context that Lee's penchant for idleness and his embrace of Malthusian principles take on political, as well as physiological, meaning. Providing a cautionary tale of the mental and social alienation that can result from a stunted work ethic coupled with the desire for superfluous luxuries, Lee's initial unwillingness to contribute efforts towards bettering his land and increasing his fortunes are cast not only as a disservice to himself and his sister's family, who assume the burden of caring for him and his lands once they fail, but as a failure to be properly *American*. Enamored with a political economy better suited to the established nations of Europe and naively

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<sup>31</sup> Matthew Carey, Lyman Beecher, and Samuel Jackson, *Addresses of the Philadelphia Society for the Promotion of National Industry* (Philadelphia, James Maxwell, 1820), 285.

<sup>32</sup> Van Atta, "Western Lands and the Political Economy of Henry Clay's American System, 1790-1820," 633-43.

assuming that an inheritance negates the need for future industry, Bird exiles Lee from his self, reason, and family—in short, the most poignant markers of personal identity—until he gleans enough education on his “journey” to assume a rightful, if rather chastened, place within the United States’s body politic.

This humbling of Lee is an important part of Bird’s political satire. Lee’s reduced holdings, from a considerable estate of 1500 acres to a mere 40 acres, help Lee to realize the value of toil and the elation of being satisfied with one’s lot; Lee exclaiming at the novel’s end, “My estate is small, and it may be that it will never increase. I am, however, content with it; and content is the secret to all enjoyment” (424). At the same time, Bird’s decision to reduce Lee’s lands to a mere 40 acres is no arbitrary one. While some symbolic weight is placed on this particular number when Lee acknowledges that 40 acres was the exact amount his father started with before his fortunes increased—thereby lending the novel a sense that things have come to a generational “full circle”—savvy readers in Bird’s time would also recognize 40 acres as the minimal tract of land available to settlers for purchase following 1832. Thus, Bird subtly alludes to eastern anxieties surrounding western expansion by coyly suggesting that one need not actually *move* to the west to find the happiness and fulfillment imagined in the promising allure of a new 40-acre homestead. Rather, *Sheppard Lee* suggests the possibility of finding that same contentment and personal satisfaction in the more populous areas of the eastern seaboard. At the same time, such a symbolic amount invariably summons thoughts of the west and its promises for financial and personal independence. However, this is not a vision of economic surplus and grandiose land speculation, but of the modest, “honest” investment of the smallest, yet esteemed and respected, western homestead that formed

an integral part of Jefferson's vision. Such a view of the west and its potential is in keeping with those who envisioned the area as one which must be carefully and deliberately populated by the *right sort* of settler at the *most appropriate* time—a refrain which Bird developed further in *Nick of the Woods*.

### ***Nick of the Woods: Jumping the Gun of Western Progress***

*Nick of the Woods*, Bird's 1837 frontier romance, tells the fictional 1782 journey of Roland and Edith Forrester, two disinherited cousins who journey from genteel Virginia to the Kentucky wilderness in the hopes of establishing new lives for themselves. It also contains one of American literature's most intriguing sufferers of mental illness in the character of Nathan Slaughter, a peaceful Quaker turned Indian mass murderer who, like Bird's drawing that opened this chapter, possess devilish and lucid aspects. An example of the quintessential "wanderer" figure of gothic fiction,<sup>33</sup> Nathan seeks redemption for not protecting his family during a raid by natives, as well as revenge for the spilt blood of his kin. Yet rather than focus on the novel's extraordinary illustrations of frontier violence, I wish to hone in on the psychological "violence" responsible for Nathan's mental alienation. One reason the frontier posed such a threat to the sanity of early settlers was its status as a region where financial and physical security was precarious and frequently elusive. The borderlands were a place where one could live honestly and work scrupulously, yet still fall victim to unspeakable and violent tragedy. In contrast to the "civilized" world depicted in *Sheppard Lee*—a place where industry,

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<sup>33</sup> See David Punter's *The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day*, (New York; Routledge, 1996), 14-16 for a discussion of the wanderer in American gothic fiction.



common sense, and personal satisfaction provided an anecdote of sorts to ruin—the west often could not offer even a semblance of such promises. With this background in mind, I argue that Bird uses the character of Nathan not only to caution against premature expansion into western territories, but also to highlight the beneficial role amenities only available in well-established areas (hospitals, institutes of higher learning, etc.) play in reclaiming citizens “lost” under the pressure of achieving domestic and financial success.

Bird’s second novel inverts the narrative flow of *Sheppard Lee*, which dramatized the potential dangers of faulty ventures and a feeble work ethic by focusing primarily on the impact of speculation and inappropriate economic models on the Northeastern region before alluding, in the work’s final pages, to Western settlements. By choosing late eighteenth-century Kentucky as the setting for his new novel, Bird provides a complimentary vision that looks back towards the east from western settlements. The result is a novel that dramatizes the danger of embracing geographic expansion before ensuring the areas are physically safe and culturally stable. In linking the taming of the American wilderness with the taming of an over-worked American mind, *Nick of the Woods* implies rapid expansion could undermine citizens’ mental states and, by extension, their nation’s cultural and economic infrastructure. To solve such problems, the novel maintains, migration must be slowly and purposefully plotted to insure that the country’s western and eastern citizens and interests work harmoniously together for the benefit of all.

How to achieve this benefit revolved around an important concern for the United States: “How best to treat a type of disease many believed was increasing with the frequency of land speculation and so could, therefore, potentially infect a large portion of

the governing body during a time of intense political upheaval?” The answer, Bird suggests, was, ideally, a matter of prevention—though in cases where madness had already taken root, proper treatment offered potential succor. If Americans turned away from rapid expansion and embraced the relative sophistication of areas already wrested from the wilderness until strain necessitated the opening of new lands (thus thwarting population problems like those forecast by Malthus), inflammatory political and civil tensions would decrease. Furthermore, in such areas those who had already tasted the bitter pill of financial and mental ruin could find help to regain their intellectual and economic footing. In this light, if Nathan’s initial fault was failing to abandon his pacifist ways until too late, his second was not returning to a place where he could recover his senses. Rather than exile from the nexus of civilization, with its ameliorating medical and humanitarian traits, those who had lost everything, Bird suggests, should return there to start anew.

Newly developed paradigms on mental illness were responsible, in part, for Bird’s optimistic belief in progressive, urban centers as places of healing. While the insane had long been viewed as unfortunates whose intellect was wholly oppressed by divine sanction (thereby placing them beyond redemption), medical science began to see mental patients as people whose brains may only be *partially* diseased and who, therefore, often acted normal until triggered into episodes of madness by external factors or events. Fortunately, such madness was frequently thought of as temporary. Though certainly not welcomed, episodes of mental illness were no longer viewed as *catastrophic* because the center—the mainstay—of sufferers’ minds could remain sound. Conditions in the unsettled territories, however, were not conducive to remedying periodic spurts of

madness. While those living in more urban enclaves too were certainly vulnerable to bankruptcy, risky business ventures, and the like—there were, at least in Bird’s view, places like the Philadelphia Hospital which were staffed by learned men whose education and vocational calling ideally suited them for helping such unfortunates. In the nation’s borderlands, however, such aid was limited to non-existent as pioneer settlers struggled to meet the basic needs of survival (shelter, food, etc.) primarily through small-scale agricultural subsistence methods and cottage industry. Put simply, settlers on the frontier had other problems to worry about. This lack of medical resources, coupled with the risks pestilence, drought, or attacks from natives posed, meant that the American wilderness was a place particularly detrimental for the minds of its inhabitants. It was also a place where those who lacked the economic and/or familial ties to the eastern seaboard were seeking to make their place in the world. The result, Bird worried, was that running ahead of the long arm of progress, a pall of unnecessary pathology stretched across the land.

Bird’s medical training was largely responsible for this pessimistic view of expansion. As early as 1787 Benjamin Rush cautioned, in his essay *The Defects of the Confederation*, that there was “but one path that [could] lead the United States to destruction, and that is the extent of territory.”<sup>34</sup> Rush would later explicitly link the danger of geographic expansion with that of mental illness when writing the first psychiatric textbook penned by an American. “In the United States, madness has increased since 1790,” he wrote before claiming that madness was “most prevalent at those times when speculation is substituted to regular commerce,” a condition he believed was rife in the United States due to “the funding system and speculation in bank

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<sup>34</sup> Dagobert D. Runes, *The Selected Writings of Benjamin Rush* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1947), 30.

script” as well as the opening of “new lands” that were “fruitful sources of madness.”<sup>35</sup> A child of and during the Great Awakening, Rush believed that the majority of Americans were becoming addicted to ambition, vanity, and a love of luxury—demerits carrying the taint of British aristocracy, as well as providing the requisite fuel for the rampant market chaos of speculation, booms, and busts plaguing the early republic.<sup>36</sup> This belief that the economic and mental health of the nation were inextricably linked permeated western medical and cultural thinking for most of the 1800s.

This background offers an important corrective to many early interpretations of *Nick of the Woods*. Initially, critics were wont to view the novel as evidence of Bird’s pro-western expansionist stance.<sup>37</sup> Thus Joan Jaffe Hall claims that in the book “Kentucky is the promised land and the Indian is the heathen who blocks the advances of a chosen people”<sup>38</sup> while Cecil B. Williams, in the preface to the 1939 edition,<sup>39</sup> exclaims, “throughout the book it is apparent that Dr. Bird accepts the ‘Westward march of Empire’ as right and proper.”<sup>40</sup> In more recent years, the construct of Bird as an expansionist has been challenged, most compellingly by Rowland Hughes, who sees in

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<sup>35</sup> Benjamin Rush, *Medical Inquiries and Observations, Upon Diseases of the Mind* (Philadelphia: Kimber & Richardson, 1812), 58.

<sup>36</sup> Ronald T. Takaki, *Iron Cages: Race and Culture in Nineteenth Century America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987), 16-35.

<sup>37</sup> In addition to the works mentioned in this paragraph, see Dana Nelson, *The Word in Black and White: Reading “Race” in American Literature, 1638-1867* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 38-64 for information on Bird and western expansion.

<sup>38</sup> Joan Jaffe Hall, “*Nick of the Woods: An Interpretation of the American Wilderness*,” *American Literature* 35 no. 2 (1963): 173-82; 174.

<sup>39</sup> *Nick of the Woods* was originally published in 1837, but saw successive editions in 1853 (with Bird supplying a new preface), a British edition prefaced by William Harrison Ainsworth (1837), and a critical edition edited by Cecil B. Williams in 1939 (from which all page numbers in this document are taken).

<sup>40</sup> Cecil B. Williams, Introduction to *Nick of the Woods or the Jibbenainosay: A Tale of Kentucky* (New York: American Book Company, 1939), liv.

Bird's vehement portrayals of native savagery not the vitriolic bigotry of an author supporting Indian removal and Western conquest, but a Whig political supporter attempting to stymie Jacksonian expansion by dramatizing the dangers inherent in it.

Hughes is correct in arguing against Bird's classification as a zealous advocate of manifest destiny and citing Bird's political beliefs as a catalyst for this denunciation. Indeed Bird seems to express an overtly negative view of expansion in *Nick of the Woods* when he has Nathan admonish Roland, at the two's final parting, "And now friend...do take theeself to the haunts of thee fellows...for truly it is not well...to dwell nigh to where murdering Injuns abound<sup>41</sup>." Nathan's farewell advice that Roland should return to cultivated Virginia, rather than remain in unkempt Kentucky, appears to support Hughes's assertion that rapid expansion would, in Bird's view, recklessly "expose American society to the chaotic and degenerative forces latent in the wilderness, retard the progress of civilization, and prevent the American people from developing a crucial attachment to the land of their birth."<sup>42</sup> Hughes's use of "degeneration" might work when applied to Bird's frontier pioneers, who speak country dialect, have coarse manners, and emit a general salt-of-the-earth rusticity. Indeed, the highest praise Bird seems to offer a pioneer is reserved for Colonel Bruce, described as "...a plain yeoman, endowed with those gifts of mind only which were necessary to his station, but with the virtues that are alike common to forest and city"—a backwards compliment if ever there was any (21).

Yet "degeneration" does not really apply to Roland and Edith, whose aristocratic

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<sup>41</sup> Robert Montgomery Bird, *Nick of the Woods or the Jibbenainosay: A Tale of Kentucky* (New York: American Book Company, 1939), 403. Page numbers hereafter cited parenthetically.

<sup>42</sup> Rowland Hughes, "Whiggery in the Wilderness: The Politics of Indian Hating in Robert Montgomery Bird's *Nick of the Woods* (1837)," *Literature in the Early American Republic: Annual Studies on Cooper and His Contemporaries* 3 (2011), 197-226; 3-4.

bloodlines, fine sensibilities, and sophisticated refinement do not regress into uncouth behaviors. Instead, this heightened refinement makes the rough conditions of the interior particularly difficult for them to negotiate, so much so that the struggle takes a mental toll.<sup>43</sup> Edith Forester progresses from being “anxious” to “wan” to “unnatural” before suffering under a “stupor of despair” that seems to “unsettle her brain” (108, 158, 325). Roland Forester, a celebrated war veteran whose adventures on the battlefield “antedated the period of manhood,” becomes suddenly prone to fits of fainting and “suppression of body and mind” the longer he remains in the west (116, 165). Rather than illustrating a place where civilization is ruined, *Nick of the Woods* instead shows how the American wilderness can *ruin the civilized*. As such the novel also upholds the privileging of Northern interests Bird began in *Sheppard Lee* and suggests that the developed areas of the country are still those best suited for the country’s upper/middle class citizens to seek their fortune in the new nation.

This theme was apparently much on Bird’s mind in the mid-1830s. In a letter accompanying “The Old Sycamore,” a piece written in 1835 to celebrate the anniversary of the first settlement in the Northwest Territory, Bird wrote:

...it becomes us to trace the footsteps of our progenitors, and do honor to the sites made memorable by their labors and sufferings. There is no fear that local attachments will degenerate into sectional jealousies. They who have most to be proud of at home, are not found to be the most narrow-spirited of our citizens. I would for my own part, that every state had its Bunker Hill, and its Rock of Pilgrims.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Mental illness was often thought to exclusively smite those of the upper and middle classes. Only such people, it was believed, possessed the necessary “sensitivity” to external stimuli that could lead to intellectual pathology.

<sup>44</sup> As quoted in Cecil B. Williams’s introduction to *Nick of the Woods*, xxx.

Here we can see traces of both, the meritorious and the melancholy. In commemorating the “labors and suffering” of the pioneers who established the first “American” settlement in the Northwest Territory, Bird pays homage to the bravery and fortitude which made it possible for him to hope that “every state” would have such monuments. At the same time, however, his mention of Bunker Hill and Plymouth Rock, praise for those who “have most to be proud of at home,” and desire for each state to have the sort of monuments that inspire such prideful, permanent populations hint at Bird’s distaste for westward migration. Rather than burgeoning homesteads serving to unite a yeoman’s republic, Bird’s tribute slyly suggests patriotism could be better furthered by taking pride in the glories already earned, rather than future potential conquests.

To further this argument, Bird drew upon and the symbolic potential newly developing medical views on insanity offered, incorporating it into his adventurous tale of frontier life. The concept of “partial insanity” mentioned previously—which held that a person’s mind could be fundamentally sound on all things except certain “trigger” topics—was particularly useful. Initially advanced by Rush in *An Inquiry into the Influence of Physical Causes on the Moral Faculty* (1796) and developed further by Phillippe Pinel of France in *A Treatise on Insanity* (1806), the concept was used to refer to patients whose intellectual faculties seemed intact, but whose behavior could suddenly become overly emotional, erratic, and violent.<sup>45</sup> The British physician James Prichard, in his 1835 *Treatise on Insanity and Other Disorders Affecting the Mind* would christen his

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<sup>45</sup> Mary Ann Jimenez, *Changing Faces of Madness: Early American Attitudes and Treatment of the Insane* (Hanover, NH: U P of New England for Brandeis, 1987), 74.

concept with the name “moral insanity,”<sup>46</sup> describing it as when:

The intellectual faculties appear to have sustained little or no injury, while the disorder is manifested principally or alone, in the state of the feelings, temper, or habits. In cases of this description the moral and active principles of the mind are strangely perverted and depraved; the power of self-government is lost or greatly impaired; and the individual is found to be incapable, not of talking or reasoning upon any subject proposed to him, for this he will often do with great shrewdness and volubility, but of conducting himself with decency and propriety.<sup>47</sup>

Bird uses the symbolism of this malady in *Nick of the Woods* to offer a sympathetic portrait of humanity gone intellectually and morally adrift amidst the isolation and stress of frontier life. Historically, cases of insanity amongst pioneers were fairly common due to these causes. Lillian Schlissel describes such occurrences, stating that “frontier conditions generated their own share of tensions and instabilities. Insanity was not an example of the random misadventures of one family but a condition sufficiently present in the larger community to draw purposeful response.”<sup>48</sup> In the novel, this uncertainty is driven home through Tom Bruce’s loss of three sons in Indian battles and the gothic story of the unfortunate Ashburn family. In spite of these risks, the pioneers of fiction and history continued to journey west.

The biggest motivation for these westward endeavors was, of course, the same reason Roland and Edith venture into the wilderness: potential financial rewards. Bird drives this point home early in the novel, musing on the same page that holds the epigraph from *Paradise Lost* that for the “exiles of America, who first forsook their

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<sup>46</sup> For additional information on the history of moral insanity, see Eric T. Carlson and Norman Dain, “The Meaning of Moral Insanity,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 36 (January-February 1962): 130-39.

<sup>47</sup> Jame C. Prichard, *Treatise on Insanity and Other Disorders Affecting the Mind*, (Philadelphia: E.L. Carey & A. Hart, 1837), 4.

<sup>48</sup> Lillian Schlissel, “The Frontier Family: Dislocation and the American Experience,” *Making America: The Society and Culture of the United States*. Luther S. Luedtke, Ed. (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1992), 83-94; 90.



homes on the borders of the Atlantic” for a “second elysium,” the lure of western wealth bordered on obsession (11). For them, “The Dorado of the Spaniards, with its cities built of gold, its highways paved with diamonds and rubies, was not more captivating to the brains of Sir Walter Raleigh and his fellow freebooters of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, than was the KENTUCKY of the red men, with its fertile fields and ever-blooming forests, to the imaginations of their descendants, two hundred years after.” (11, original emphasis).

Through this comparison Bird is already laying the groundwork for what he saw as, largely, a fool’s errand. In mentioning Raleigh, whose ill-fated voyages to the New World resulted in the establishment of the “lost colony” of Roanoke<sup>49</sup> and the murder of one of Raleigh’s son by natives when attempting to find El Dorado in South America, Bird provides his readers with a historical reminder of the tragedy that can result from chasing the chimera of latent wealth in the American wilderness. Furthermore, Bird’s description of Raleigh and his companions as “freebooters” insinuates that their attempts to appropriate the land were unlawful—a claim calling contemporary debates surrounding squatter’s rights and preemption to the minds of Bird’s reading audience.

Through these allusions Bird illustrates that the pursuit of economic gain through investments in interior lands borders on the pathological and is a nefarious goal causing United States’s citizens to risk domestic harmony and physical safety while circumnavigating the laws of the country. In short, land speculation is the source of the

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<sup>49</sup> Roanoke was originally intended as an economic venture similar to that of Jamestown. Attempts to establish the colony were unsuccessful, Raleigh’s first attempt leading to the colony being abandoned due to lack of supplies. The second attempt resulted in the fabled “lost colony” of Roanoke. For information on Raleigh’s involvement with the Roanoke Colony, see David B. Quinn’s *Set Fair for Roanoke: Voyages and Colonies, 1584-1606* (Durham: U of North Carolina P, 1985).

nation's moral insanity—the one topic on which an otherwise sensible population descends, sometimes literally, into bedlam.

The solution to this problem, according to *Nick of the Woods*, is to return to the east and refocus enterprising efforts there. That Bird includes his meditation on “American exiles” questing after illusory treasure immediately after featuring Milton’s epic poem underscores the irony of his novel. While such “exiles” may feel they are journeying towards Eden—still a paradise, though an “earthly and unsanctified one”—the remainder of the novel demonstrates that compared to the west of “reality” rather than promise, those forsaken homes on the “borders of the Atlantic” remain the true Promised Land (11). Fortunately for Eden and Roland, they can repent of their “sin” and return to civilization as wiser, more appreciative citizens. Having discovered that they were, in fact, not disinherited at all but instead were duped by the machinations of Braxley, their late uncle’s lawyer, the two are free to live a secure and happy life in Virginia. Their adventures in Kentucky, though unsettling, have helped them realize that “Individual virtues may be...found among men in a natural state; but honor, justice, and generosity, as characteristics of the mass, are refinements belonging only to an advanced state of civilization” (220). In this way the cousins represent a counter-point to Sheppard Lee and his squandered inheritance. Having endured hardship and refinement in the crucible of the nation’s interior, they have “earned” their inheritance through developing an appreciation for the “public goods” that can flourish in an area of abundance.

Bird, however, does not end his frontier romance as satisfactorily as could be hoped. In an otherwise happy ending, one man is left behind. The novel’s most developed example of the frontier’s ability to sever reason is the travesty-filled history of Nathan

Slaughter. Having witnessed the murder of his entire family at the hands of Indians whom Nathan formerly treated as friends, the young Quaker himself is also scalped, but miraculously survives. When finally revealing this gory past to Roland, Nathan laments:

Ten years ago I was another man,—a poor man, friend, but one that was happy... There was the house that I did build me; and in it there was all that I held dear... Well friend, the Injuns came around us; for being bold, because of my faith that made me a man of peace and a friend to all men, I sat me down far on the border. But the Shawnees came upon me, and came as men of war, and their hands were red with the blood of my neighbors, and they raised them against my little infants. (261-262)

In such a setting, unprotected by the nearness of civilization, Nathan's hard work, pious life, and familial devotion provide no safety against the dangers inherent in such a wilderness.

An incremental increase in Nathan's lunacy allows Bird to demonstrate the dangerous nature of remaining in the borderlands. When the reader first encounters Nathan he is depicted as a nomadic outcast who patiently suffers the taunting villagers fling at him due to his pacifist ways, and whose eyes indicate a "good-natured, humble, and perhaps submissive simplicity of disposition" (53). As the novel progresses, however, occasional hints about Nathan's secret violence surface, though the Quaker continues to deny participating in bloodshed. For example, during a shootout in the Ashburn ruins Nathan obviously kills a native, but tells Roland he fell upon him, unwittingly causing the attacker to "split his head on a log" (147). Eventually, Nathan's claims to accidental retaliation become less and less plausible—at one point he admits to shooting two natives because of "nervousness in his finger" (250). Still, while these violent lapses may complicate Nathan's pretensions to religious piousness, they bring him closer to the

novel's status quo of masculine behavior, allowing him to join the ranks of Roland, Pardon Dodge, Ralph Stackpole, and other frontiersmen who ward off Indian attacks.

During the novel's penultimate battle, however, Nathan sheds all attempts to disguise his desire for violent vengeance, spilling into outright barbarity in the process. Rather than the peaceful Quaker or a man resorting to violence out of grim necessity, we see a man whose "...appearance and demeanor were rather those of a truculent madman than of the simple-minded, inoffensive creature he had so long appeared to the eyes of all who knew him (309). Such a transformation coincides with Prichard's description of moral insanity; while Nathan continues to speak coherently, logically, and shrewdly after the fighting, he, like the unfortunate figures in Bird's sketch, lives a secret life. The fact that Nathan expresses, if not remorse, at least concern and embarrassment over his transformation, illustrates that this vengeance is more of a compulsion than a calculated decision. Like the unfortunate sufferers listed in the admissions records for the Worcester State Lunatic Hospital, a combination of domestic tragedy, false confidence, and the loss of worldly possessions has divorced a formerly upright and conscientious man from his intellect and moral code.

Bird was afraid something similar might happen to the people and capital migrating westward during his own time. Much like Roland and Edith, many would-be settlers found ample financial motivation to relocate further into the interior. Bolstered in part by hopes of establishing a port at the mouth of the Columbia River to harness Asian trade and the discovery of gold on Cherokee-held lands in Georgia, many aspiring entrepreneurs were willing to venture (economically and geographically) far from the

Eastern seaboard and its established trade.<sup>50</sup> But for those, like Bird, whose financial and patriotic loyalty lay with the Northeast, the prospect that so many were risking their economic and mental stability in migrating to areas of the nation which were not only “backwards,” but harmful and dangerous due to their isolation, was alarming. To pursue such risks was madness, when opportunity beckoned closer to the “homestead” of the nation. Yet Bird offers a potential palliative to such erroneous migration. Those who have risked and/or lost everything in the interior should, like Roland and Edith eventually decide, return to the east.

*Nick of the Wood*'s most interesting connection between medical views on the treatment of mental illness and geographic location offers surprising support for such an assertion. Indeed, the connection itself stems from a surprising source: Nathan's Quaker faith. The belief that environment was a key determinant of mental stability, coupled with the medical profession's optimistic stance on patient recovery, led many leading physicians and asylum superintendents to adopt an innovative method of patient treatment known as moral therapy. Embracing the belief that regular exercise and respectful treatment could rejuvenate patient's mental maladies, asylums based on this method operated in opposition to more punitive, custodial models of hospital treatment. Under this new treatment model, patients were treated with respect (called by name, engaged in conversation about current events, etc.), kept from idleness by adherence to strictly regimented schedules consisting of physical labor in the asylum's agricultural areas and exercise, and housed in bright, spacious, and well-ventilated quarters. Initially devised by Pinel and (independently) by his contemporary, the English Quaker William

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<sup>50</sup> Reginald Horsman, “The Dimensions of an ‘Empire for Liberty’: Expansionism and Republicanism, 1775-1825,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 9 (Spring 1989), 1-20; 10-20.

Tuke, moral treatment denounced the use of restraints, corporal punishment, and forced purging and isolation utilized by earlier, eighteenth-century facilities for mentally ill patients.<sup>51</sup> Eventually, this innovative approach to treating the mentally ill was adopted by American psychiatrists, particularly those living and practicing in Philadelphia and other large cities on the eastern seaboard.

The first asylum to implement these new practices in the United States was a private facility, Friends Hospital, located in Frankford Pennsylvania and founded in 1813 by Quakers. Modeled after William Tuke's famed York Asylum in England, the hospital initially accepted only Friends as patients. Though religious restrictions determined whether a patient was admitted, the institution soon found itself at full capacity and touted throughout the medical community as a prime example of humane, progressive treatment for the mentally ill by the era's leading medical professionals, amongst them Bird's former mentor Dr. Joseph Parrish.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Much has been written on the paradigm shift from custodial models of institutional treatment to the relatively more humane therapeutics of moral treatment and what follows is a partial list. For general information on this shift encompassing developments in both Britain and the United States, see Andrew Scull's "The Social History of Psychiatry in the Victorian Era" in *Madhouses, Mad-Doctors, and Madmen: The Social History of Psychiatry in the Victorian Era*, Andrew Scull, Ed. (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1981), 5-30. Information on moral treatment's development in the United States can be found in "Part One" of Ruth B. Caplan's *Psychiatry and the Community in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Basic Books, 1969); Norman Dain's *Concepts of Insanity in the United States, 1789-1865*, 165-83, and "Part II" of Lynn Gamwell's and Nancy Tomes's *Madness in America: Cultural and Medical Perceptions of Mental Illness Before 1914* (Ithaca: Cornell U P, 1995). To learn about the eventual adoption of moral treatment methods by the Pennsylvania Hospital, consult Nancy Tomes's *A Generous Confidence: Thomas Kirkbride and the Art of Asylum-Keeping, 1840-1883* (New York: Cambridge U P, 1984), 22-37.

<sup>52</sup> Nancy Tomes's *A Generous Confidence* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 62-69.

In contrast, the interior of the nation, often viewed as culturally and intellectually “behind” the coastal areas, was depicted as a place where the insane were still treated according to archaic (some would say barbaric) regimens. Kentucky, in particular, was singled out as an example of the atrocities committed under prior, custodial models and portrayed as a region woefully incapable of caring for the mental health of its burgeoning population. Easter State Hospital in Lexington, one of the oldest psychiatric treatment facilities in the nation (1817), in particular, bore an unsavory reputation.<sup>53</sup> Built on plans predating the new, moral-therapy based approach to asylum design, its patient rooms were smaller and quite dark, while the hospital sat on grounds too small to offer much in the way of physical exercise or agricultural vocation. In addition, it was horribly overcrowded due to its status as the sole mental health hospital in the state—giving rise to rumors that Kentucky harbored a large population of destitute, “feral” lunatics who, like Bird’s fictional Nathan, were without proper lodgings, to say nothing of effectual treatment.<sup>54</sup>

Thus for many of Bird’s initial readers, particularly those belonging to the intellectual and philanthropic elite of the North East, Nathan Slaughter, the Pennsylvania Quaker turned mad vigilante of the Kentucky wilderness, represented more than a tragic victim of frontier violence or degeneration. Instead, his mental illness made him an archetype of the potential tragedy that could await those who gambled their sanity and

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<sup>53</sup> Bird was familiar with Eastern State hospital by virtue of his medical connections. In his correspondence with Dr. George McClellan, Bird makes frequent reference to the goings on at Transylvania Medical College, whose physicians had a long history working at the facility.

<sup>54</sup> Ronald F. White, “A Dialogue of Madness: Eastern State Lunatic Asylum and Mental Health Policies in Kentucky, 1824-1883.” (Doctoral Dissertation, University of Kentucky, 1984), 54-70.

futures on risky speculation in the nation's interior—for if they lost reason along with rations, aid was extremely limited due to geographic distance and population dispersion. In Eastern municipalities, sufferers of mental illness were much more likely to receive state-of-the-art care, but those on the frontier were largely unattended or kept cloistered in overcrowded and unhealthy facilities. Within this context, Nathan is not only a victim because the hard work and industry he demonstrated establishing his homestead is undermined by violence and bloodshed. Rather, he also represents a wretched, wandering, sick man who *could*, potentially have been restored to reason and society if, instead of following the archers and arrows of Wenonga's tribe, he had followed the direction of the arrows in Bird's devilish sketch; arrows which, if transferred onto a map, point North and East. To Philadelphia. To treatment. To home.

### **At Madness's End**

For Bird, mental illness was an ever-present possibility exacerbated by a capitalistic society. While the United States was truly a land of opportunity and plenty, its vast resources and seemingly endless possibilities could herald the young nation's rise to a world-power or its disintegration into chaos and contention. This same danger attended the mental state of the individual would-be entrepreneurs and homesteaders who comprised a large amount of the United States's citizenry. Faced with the logistical task of establishing an economic foothold in a country whose democratic political system, vast land-holdings, and massive raw-material assets were unlike any other nation's on earth, many "honest men" lost life, limb, and livelihood while some audacious speculators and squatters achieved unheard of riches seemingly overnight. Committed to



conservative resource management, systematic internal improvements, and a slow and steady approach to financial gain, Bird nevertheless continually worried that the sources of the United State's power would prove overwhelming, causing the nation's intellectual and material accomplishments to fall before a wave of pathological grandiosity. To prevent such a fate, Bird used insanity in his fiction to warn readers of the potential consequences of pursuing quick-made fortunes and frontier lands. In his eyes, while some schemes yielded their investors handsome results, these fortunate anomalies only spurred larger numbers of individuals to assume astounding risks. More than banknotes or social reputation were at stake. Rather, such gamblers risked that they and the nation they comprised would—like Ross Cuthbert's *Vitalia*—forget their selves in a world of delusion.

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### **Chapter Three - Fighting Like With Like: Fanny Fern's *Ruth Hall* and Literary Homeopathy**

Of course, Bird's prescription to ward off insanity was not available to all. For the majority of women in the antebellum United States, financial status hinged on the generosity, business sense, and/or investment quality of their nearest male relatives. For married women, the law of coverture decreed that upon marriage a woman's legal existence became subsumed into that of her husband. Consequently, any property she brought into a marriage became the property of her husband, any wages earned via outside employment were controlled by her husband, and she was no longer able to enter into contracts under her own name.<sup>1</sup> For nearly all women, regardless of marital status, the "angel in the home" paradigm that characterized much of antebellum American thought meant instruction in well-paying vocational skills, socially approved models of business-minded women, and opportunities for self-sufficiency outside the domestic realm were in incredibly short supply. If a woman were black or working-class, bigotry and classism exacerbated an already bleak field of opportunity. As a result of these constraints, women often found themselves at the mercy of speculative deals and financial straits that were threatening to their own life and life-quality, yet were beyond their power to control.

In the absence of government sponsored safety-net programs like WIC or Social Security, the consequences of this subordinate status were far ranging. Previously well-to-do women could find their fortunes reversed due to a husband's financial mismanagement or death and young, unskilled widows could find themselves suddenly

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<sup>1</sup> Dorothy A. Mays, *Women in Early America: Struggle, Survival, and Freedom in a New World* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO Corporate, 2004) 91-92.

the sole means of support for a hungry brood of dependents—conditions that often hastened their entrance into another marriage and another social death. Married women, too, could find themselves starved for economic and/or social support if a previously doting husband developed a cold shoulder in a society where divorce, though sometimes granted, was heavily stigmatized and difficult for women to obtain. As a result, many early and mid nineteenth-century women found that their physical and mental wellbeing depended, at least in part, on the conduct of others. Independently achieving or sustaining financial stability which, though not an infallible safeguard against illness has always been an important health factor, was beyond their sanctioned purview. In short, the very laws and social norms that constricted women’s legal existence and ability to participate in the market as free agents could undermine their health and inhibit their chances for recovery by throwing them into poverty.

By making the above statement, I do not mean to portray economic wealth as the sole or primary determinant of physical soundness. Money, in and of itself, does not make wellbeing. Rather, I refer to the fact that (most) antebellum women’s inability to procure and enjoy the economic rewards of earning their own livelihood undermined their health in two interrelated ways. From a material perspective, such women were vulnerable to the caprices of a capitalist market and financial ruin (as were all), yet they were often denied any official agency to take action against speculative losses (unlike white and, ostensibly, free men of any race). As a result, they often found themselves “passengers” in a family being driven toward destitution and misery, their foot legally prevented from touching the brake. At the same time, a woman’s status as a dependent meant that even during flush times she was “kept,” and therefore could find herself

trapped in an unfulfilling, loveless domestic situation because she lacked the skills, capital, and support needed to leave. Such circumstances could and often did exact a heavy toll. Ill equipped to make a living, many women lived as the ill “equipment” of a patriarchal family. While the physical and intellectual vitality of men was perceived as nationally important because, as enfranchised citizens, their good health helped ensure good citizenship via conscientious voting and diligent property management, as legally non-existent individuals the “value” of a woman’s sanity and physical vitality was scored using different criteria. The way a woman related to others, rather than her personal subjectivity, determined her worth. And if relationships deteriorated, ended, or changed--her very health often paid the price.

Sarah Payson Willis was keenly aware of this due to personal experience. After losing her first husband unexpectedly to sudden illness, Willis found herself struggling to support two young daughters while relying upon a father and father-and-law that begrudgingly offered just enough financial support for just long enough to avoid social censure. As a means of providing for her family, Willis agreed to marry Samuel P. Farrington. It was a loveless union that ended when Farrington filed for divorce in 1852 due to desertion, Willis having left him in 1851. Vowing to support herself and her daughters on her own, Willis turned to writing, adopted the pseudonym Fanny Fern, and eventually became one of the mid-nineteenth-century’s most popular and financially successful authors.<sup>2</sup>

As a self-made woman, Fern was an anomaly for the 1850s. Her success was

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<sup>2</sup> Susan Belasco, an introduction to *Ruth Hall: A Domestic Tale of the Present Times* (New York: Penguin, 1997). For more information on the life of Willis/Fern, see Joyce W. Warren’s *Fanny Fern: An Independent Woman* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992).

largely built upon the fact that she drew inspiration from and shared her experiences of being a marginalized woman in her periodical writings and novels. Many of her newspaper sketches lament the unequal lot of women and denounce what Fern once described as the “fence that was put up around women to keep them from seeing anything but feathers and bracelets.”<sup>3</sup> Such themes also feature prominently in *Ruth Hall*, Fern’s first novel. Drawing liberally from her personal experiences to create the novel’s plot, Fern delivers a book that inverts many of the popular tropes of sentimental fiction. Beginning with the marriage of Ruth Hall, rather than culminating in it, Fern shows the trials and tribulations a woman could face once she reached the supposedly stable years of middle-class marriage. In doing so Fern not only highlighted a period of life seldom written about in “women’s writing” of the time, she cast the fact that women were prevented from earning their own living as both, an economic and a public health concern.

To help rectify these problems, Fern allegorically incorporates aspects of traditional and eclectic schools of medical therapeutics and their competition in the medical marketplace into *Ruth Hall*—a move that allows her to present the economic enfranchisement of women as an effective panacea for the ills of a patriarchal society. In the novel Ruth suffers the loss of her husband and oldest child, is socially and economically abandoned by her immediate family, and experiences hunger and want before ultimately triumphing as a professional woman writer of public acclaim and private economic stability. To undergo this transformation, Ruth is forced to learn self-

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<sup>3</sup> This quote is from Fanny Fern’s column in the *New York Ledger*, written December 28, 1861. It is quoted in Joyce C. Warren, *Fanny Fern: An Independent Woman* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 299.

reliance and adapt to a new lifestyle radically different from her former role as the beloved wife and mother of a respectable middle-class household. By learning to operate as a successful authorial competitor in the open market of periodical publications, Ruth escapes poverty, reclaims her eldest daughter from her cruel in-laws, and is able to provide a secure life for herself and daughters. In essence, she heals the economic and domestic trauma that results when her husband passes away and leaves the family in unexpected financial straits. To underscore the ameliorative aspects of this economic enfranchisement, Fern aligns her business acumen as a woman writer with homeopathy, an alternative medical sect known for its popularity with upper-middle class patients and openness to female practitioners. As a foil for this acumen, Fern unites traditional, allopathic medicine with patriarchal authority—ultimately portraying both as stultifying, pompous, and self-serving.

In doing so, Fern joined ranks with many nineteenth-century authors who incorporated aspects of medicine and medical rhetoric into their fiction when investigating questions of citizenship and belonging. In *Healing the Republic: The Language of Health and the Culture of Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century America*, Joan Burbick asserts that in the nineteenth century the desire to establish a stable national identity gave rise to a widespread fascination with procuring a healthful body and life. To this end, various reformers, medical practitioners, business entrepreneurs, and public intellectuals worked to define for the general public what an “ideal American” was by codifying the physical, mental, and moral attributes<sup>4</sup> of the exemplary citizen—a body

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<sup>4</sup> Though we might today separate these types of attributes into various realms of medical treatment such as pathology and psychiatry and hesitate to discuss “morality” in medical terms—a practice which in the past has led to the unnecessary stigmatization of various

whose perfection signified the robustness and might of the young country—in their writings, lectures, and social exchanges.<sup>5</sup> Writers, as a result, often used medicine to signify the stakes of social and/or cultural “rules” and beliefs.

Maria Sanchez and Gale Temple, two of the few critics who remark upon Fern’s use of medicine in *Ruth Hall*, have already noted this interplay at work in the lengthy phrenology<sup>6</sup> scene of the novel, Sanchez arguing that the scene establishes Ruth as “a distinctive woman, in part because she knows how to make distinctions”<sup>7</sup> while Temple maintains that “The phrenologist repeatedly appeals to Ruth’s natural sense of taste and beauty, implying that such taste is vitally connected to Ruth’s status as an American citizen.”<sup>8</sup> Both critics read this scene with an eye towards better understanding how Fern’s use of markers for middle-class, feminine identity offers a critique of market capitalism. For Sanchez, Ruth’s tastes for a natural-world aesthetic and innate decorating ability work to form an “anti-market individualism”<sup>9</sup> that naturalizes class distinctions and divorces class from the market. Temple, meanwhile, posits that Ruth (and Fern) exhibit(s) and capitalize(s) upon “fraught individualism,” or the sense that “good” people

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groups—practitioners in the nineteenth century often viewed the corporeal, intellectual, and social practices of individuals as symbiotically related and maintained that all contributed to the overall health of the being.

<sup>5</sup> Joan Burbick, *Healing the Republic: The Language of Health and the Culture of Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Cambridge U P, 1994); 3-4.

<sup>6</sup> Developed by the German physician Franz Joseph Gall and popularized in the United States by the Fowler brothers (Orson Squire Fowler and Lorenzo Niles Fowler) in the United States, phrenology held that because the brain was the organ of the mind, its topography could be measured to determine character, strengthen desired traits, and treat mental disorders.

<sup>7</sup> Maria Sanchez, “Repossessing-Individualism in Fanny Fern’s *Ruth Hall*,” *Arizona Quarterly* 56 no. 4 (2000), 25-56; 26.

<sup>8</sup> Gale Temple, “A Purchase on Goodness: Fanny Fern, Ruth Hall, and Fraught Individualism.” *Studies in American Fiction* 31 no. 2 (Autumn 2003), 131-163; 144.

<sup>9</sup> Sanchez, “Repossessing-Individualism in Fanny Fern’s *Ruth Hall*,” 25.

are frequently downtrodden by an unprincipled and mercenary mainstream, in her criticism.<sup>10</sup>

This chapter too views medicine as a conduit to larger discussions of economics and citizenship, but I believe that Sanchez's and Temple's interpretations of medical therapy in the novel too often duplicate one of Fern's phrenologist's cautionary exclamations: "Too much attention was paid to [the] mind, and not enough to [the] body."<sup>11</sup> In contrast, I believe Fern is interested in the figurative and literal implications of medical treatment and disease on the public's finances. Because a strong population comprised of healthy individuals is what allows for the consumption and production that generate a strong market, quality medical care helps generate the needs/desires that create a vibrant economy. Yet the legal constraints imposed on women during Fern's time meant the United States' economy was underdeveloped because, though products were increasingly marketed to women, women were still largely prohibited from engaging in commercial activity and managing property on their own. As a result, the vitality of the nation's economy was undermined and women's health was frequently undervalued because they were not typically considered active contributors to the nation's financial might.

To highlight the negative consequences of these tendencies, Fern wrote a novel whose themes of wellbeing, recovery, and healing culminate in a desire for women's greater economic enfranchisement. In *Ruth Hall*, Fern uses homeopathy to thematically double Ruth's ascent from impoverished widow to comforting author for the masses.

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<sup>10</sup> Temple, "A Purchase on Goodness," 156.

<sup>11</sup> Fanny Fern, *Ruth Hall: A Domestic Tale of the Present Times* (New York: Penguin, 1997), 216. Hereafter citations included parenthetically.



Successful medical treatment (exemplified by homeopathy) is metaphorically aligned with Ruth's successful literary production. Like Mr. Bond's healing homeopathic draught that cures Nettie's fever in the moment of Ruth's despair, Ruth's writings are portrayed as offering succor, relief, and understanding to many downtrodden and humble readers. Though the resonance many readers experience in reading Ruth's "plain-spoken" articles is portrayed in sentimental terms at times, the novel makes clear that "fine fellow feeling" is not the ultimate product created through Ruth's literary endeavors. Ruth's fictional writings help ease some of her reader's pangs, but they also generate a large amount of capital---something Fern takes pains to underscore by inserting a facsimile of a large bank note (the ultimate symbol of Ruth's economic prosperity and independence) in the novel's final pages. In addition, though Ruth's writings are characterized as more pragmatic and accessible in tone than the "flowery" and baroque writings of critically praised but foppish authors like her brother, Hyacinth, their subject matter is refined and their execution elegant enough to create mass appeal. In these ways Ruth's developing "empire" of authorship has much in common with homeopathy's ascent as the go-to therapeutic choice for middle and upper-class patients weary of heroic medicine's gore and intensity. As "upstarts" challenging the exclusionary establishments of the medical and publishing fields, Ruth's "homeopathic writings" not only aim to heal and comfort, they aim to overturn patriarchal conceptions of who can achieve economic and cultural prominence in the United States, and by what means.

## **Women's Need for Economic Healing in the Antebellum United States:**

To say that women's health was not a public concern in the nineteenth-century United States would, of course, be misleading and overly simplistic. Throughout the mid-century numerous physicians, social reformers, and lay-healers meticulously detailed what women "ought" to do to ensure a healthful life for themselves and their families. The fact that most Victorian women became mothers had much to do with this concern. When the United States was born, the women who gave birth to its newly freed citizens found themselves vested with a new form of cultural significance—what Linda K. Kerber has famously described as "republican motherhood"—that portrayed mothers as the moral and self-sacrificing inculcators of civic virtue.<sup>12</sup> As the decades progressed the popular conception of what Fern calls "pattern mothers," (50) who closely embodied the antebellum maternal ideal, would continue to be influenced by this paradigm. In the first half of the nineteenth century, the so-called "cult of true womanhood," with its portrayal of "good" women as retiring, domestically focused, and devoted to the self-less nurturing of others, prevailed. As the custodians of children's formative years, women<sup>13</sup> were given a sanctified role that, in many eyes, could be at least partially upheld through adherence to a "wholesome lifestyle" that corresponded neatly to a patriarchal society's idealized expectations regarding femininity.

Paradoxically, this instruction often idealized women's physical and mental suffering as the necessary and saintly-paid price of a job well done. Because women were

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<sup>12</sup> Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Williamsburg, VA: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 11.

<sup>13</sup> I use "women" here, rather than "mothers," to reflect the assumption that unmarried women would become mothers, as well as the common practice of women who did not biologically give birth acting as guardians to younger family members and/or orphans.

expected to be self-sacrificing creatures that toiled on behalf of others, a certain measure of physical discomfort and frailty was expected and perceived as a trademark of proper femininity.<sup>14</sup> Countless nineteenth-century missives testify to the physical toil and debility domestic service exacted. In a mid-century letter, Caroline Briggs lamented that to fulfill domestic obligations her mother “gave her health, her strength, and her life.”<sup>15</sup> To help minimize daily discomforts, women were urged to avoid excess of any kind. For example, Edward H. Dixon, a New York physician, advised women in *Woman and Her Diseases* to avoid tight dress, physical activity/exercise after dark, strong foods, “pampered living,” and “luxurious education.”<sup>16</sup> It is worth noting that Dixon, though claiming to address all stages of a woman’s life, focuses the vast majority of his volume on the childbearing years and dedicates it to “the Mothers Among my Coutrywomen [sic].”<sup>17</sup> These editorial choices reflect a larger belief prevalent in mid-nineteenth-century America: that a woman mattered most when she was a mother and *because* she was a mother. While a married woman’s legal personhood was subsumed under that of her husband at marriage, the value of her health was predicated upon her worth as a mother to offspring, rather than her status as an individual.

The result of this social negation and limits on public engagements and education was often a perpetuation of the retiring, nurturing, and domestic woman trope. For women who had daughters the show of heroic suffering was particularly important; it was

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<sup>14</sup> Martha Verbrugge characterizes this view as the “cult of female frailty.” Her excellent discussion of this belief can be found in *Able-Bodied Womanhood: Personal Health and Social Change in Nineteenth-Century Boston* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

<sup>15</sup> Caroline Briggs, *Reminiscences and Letters* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1897); 22.

<sup>16</sup> Edward H. Dixon, *Woman and Her Diseases: From the Cradle to the Grave* (New York: Charles H. Ring, 1847), 13; 44.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, xvii

their responsibility to model for daughters the abnegation and sacrifice expected of domesticated women. Nancy M. Theriot describes this process of feminine acculturation as follows: “Not only were daughters learning to curb their ambition and confine their activities within the narrow field of domestic service; not only were they learning the feminine necessity of internalizing anger and dissatisfaction...they were learning also that the feminine sphere often destroyed the physical and mental health of its occupants.”<sup>18</sup> Thus the exhibition of toil-induced sickness ostensibly became a totem of sanctified, middle-class femininity that initiated a new generation of women into the “angel in the home” paradigm and its attending ailments.

While advice on protecting women’s health was written by male and female authors during this period, the views it espoused originated from a paternalistic, male-dominated, and professionalizing medical field. As such it naturalized the culturally relative distinctions between women and men prevalent at the time—the “separate spheres” belief that aligned women with the domestic/private and men with the worldly/public—by claiming that women were, by nature, less capable of “public” activities such as handling property, engaging in business pursuits, laboring, and voting.<sup>19</sup> Non-wage earning, non-property holding woman became the medical *and* social ideal women were expected to embody and/or desire.<sup>20</sup>

Yet many women, among them Fern, learned through hard experience that

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<sup>18</sup> Nancy M. Theriot, *Mothers and Daughters in Nineteenth-Century America: The Biosocial Construction of Femininity* (Lexington, KY: The U P of Kentucky, 1997), 71.

<sup>19</sup> For more on the medical profession’s views on women, see Carol Smith-Rosenberg’s *Disorderly Conduct*.

<sup>20</sup> Though women’s socio-economic status often determined *how well* they could achieve this model, women of all walks of life frequently strove to emulate what society dictated as the dominant ideal. Then as now, people often wanted to be what they were told was most desirable, regardless of actual ability to do so.

adhering to such proscribed roles could leave them vulnerable to profound suffering without the consolation of middle-class respectability. Of course, working-class and non-white women often had little hope of achieving this lifestyle; work was a necessity for them. For recently widowed or financially ruined women formerly accustomed to middle-class living, however, the promise that feminine self-sacrifice was rewarded through an augmentation of the “greater domestic good” rang surprisingly hollow after tragedy struck—and it often did. While exact figures are difficult to obtain regarding the number of widows present or made in the United States during a given year in the mid-nineteenth-century, some data survives to testify to this overwhelmingly common event. For example, Pension Office records for the years 1836-1859 show that over 47,000 widows applied for pensions under federal pension laws in this period.<sup>21</sup> This sheer volume of applicants testifies not only to the high chance of widowhood women experienced in the mid-nineteenth century, but their widespread difficulty in obtaining monetary support and financial security without outside help.

In such desperate circumstances, the dark underside of adhering to a cultural ideology relegating women to the domestic and private avenues of life became apparent. For there to be an “angel” in the home, there *had to be a home*. And if circumstances colluded to destroy a family’s livelihood and financial stability, formerly protected mothers and daughters often found their suffering reduced from a symbol of romanticized martyrdom to a plebian and unsightly symptom of crushing poverty and want. Faced with such dire circumstances, women in these situations often found the very social norms and

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<sup>21</sup> Kristin A. Collins, “‘Petitions Without Number’: Widows’ Petitions and the Early Nineteenth-Century Origins of Public Marriage-Based Entitlements,” *Law and History Review* 31.1 (2013) 1-60; 11.

behaviors they had emulated hindered their financial and domestic stability. A life of domestic retirement left them woefully inept at procuring a livelihood.

Though Fern had largely overcome such obstacles by the time she penned *Ruth Hall*, the novel makes it apparent she had not forgotten the bitter experience of learning this lesson. To confront the fallacy behind the “logic” that a frail and retiring woman was, in fact, society’s strongest and most publically cherished asset, she penned a novel that lampooned patriarchal medical views on women and co-opted popular rhetoric portraying domestic women’s ailments as badges of honor. In *Ruth Hall*, the “pattern” wife and mother Ruth initially becomes is not yet the heroine; she is the unwitting victim of a society that pays her worth only lip service. Ruth becomes the heroine after achieving success as a writer and displaying enough business sense to profit from it. Throughout this journey, Fern sarcastically skewers the ostensible claim that a male-dominated, patriarchal society cares for and about the health of women out of altruistic feeling. Instead, Fern portrays a culture that defines women’s wellbeing and its worth according to the dictates of sexist paradigms (rather than actual physical health) and only upholds the vow to protect women when doing so serves paternalist purposes. She then inverts the rhetoric of sanctity surrounding the aches attending feminine domestic toil, instead attaching such regard to the laboring female body---one that works not for a house well-kept, but in order to keep a house. The result is a novel that inverts the process of female acculturation Theriot describes, as Ruth models for her daughters and Fern models for her female readers a new type of feminine ideal—the woman who suffers not out of a misguided acceptance of a life of domestic service, but to maintain her autonomy and support her family independently.

As the middle-class wife of Harry Hall and mother to young daughters, Ruth exemplifies the feminine antebellum ideal during the novel's beginning. Initially brought up ignorant of housekeeping, she soon learns to arrange her domestic surroundings impeccably, fashions sundries exquisitely by hand, soothes her husband's cares, and delights in spending time with her children. She also, periodically, displays physical debility from these exertions. Following the birth of her eldest child, Daisy, Ruth suffers from exhaustion and post-partum depression, to the point where her untactful mother-in-law exclaims, "How your sickness has altered you!...I shouldn't wonder if you lost all your hair...or your teeth either" (22). This discomfort pales in comparison to Ruth's sadness after Daisy dies; indeed, her despair is so pronounced at this time her husband fears for her reason (52).

Throughout these ordeals Harry tries to help Ruth as much as possible by hiring a nurse for Daisy and selling the couple's country farmhouse after Daisy's passing so that Ruth will not have to live in the same house where her daughter breathed her last. While these measures do not save Ruth from experiencing grief and sickness, they do help her recover her physical strength and mental composure. Eight years after Daisy's death, Ruth is portrayed as a woman who, though still saddened by the memory of her firstborn's death, is nonetheless a loving mother to two other daughters and a devoted wife to Harry. Though there are still hints that Ruth's health may not be strong—Harry dies while they are on vacation at a resort frequented by "the invalid and the pleasure seeker"—the conventional family structure remains intact, and Ruth is able to fulfill the role of domestic and self-less wife/mother (55).

This triumphant return to form is permanently undermined, however, when Harry dies before completing important business deals. To compound this misfortune, the now-widowed Ruth learns that “owing to the failure of parties for whom [Harry] had become responsible, there will be little or nothing for [Ruth] and [the] children” (67). Though she has fulfilled all society requests of her regarding traditional feminine behavior, Ruth now finds herself in the position of having to accept a charity purse kind patrons of the hotel collected and beg money from stingy and truculent relatives—including her own father. Later, as she struggles to find employment and feed her children, Ruth’s physical health deteriorates rapidly. She is continually plagued by debilitating headaches, and it is whispered that she “is white as a sheet of paper” and often sits “holding onto her side, as if she would never move again” (75, 101). Yet her endeavors to provide a stable and wholesome environment for Kitty and Nettie are not met by her middle-class relatives’ sympathy and approbation, but by their scorn and derision. Disinclined to financially support their widowed relation, Ruth’s male family members nonetheless echo the common belief that true women are reclusive and urge her to find “unobtrusive employment” (147).

In doing so these characters enact fictionally what many antebellum women knew from experience—that paternalism’s benevolence towards women was limited and circumscribed, that only *certain* mothers were worthy of admiration, that a man’s protection often extended only as far as his inclination and pocketbook deemed prudent, and that even if a woman were fortunate enough to find a kind, providing husband death always threatened to destroy such protection. The promise of paternal succor was false. Jennifer Harris notes the centrality of exposing the myth of masculine protection to *Ruth*



*Hall*, stating the novel shows “the middle-class domestic realm may shelter its privileged female occupants...but it does not concomitantly protect them.”<sup>22</sup> This revelation, Harris goes on to assert, causes Ruth to reject “sentiment” and replace it with “sympathy,” before ultimately speaking “on behalf of those who have been wronged” and articulating “the public’s rights and broader public wrongs.”<sup>23</sup> One of these “broader public wrongs” Fern addresses is the nefarious result of traditional medicine’s complicity in a cultural fable of male benevolence and female dependency. By illuminating the social implications of ostensibly scientific and objective medical thought regarding women and their alleged business and breadwinning capabilities, Fern provides a counter-narrative of feminine health rooted in economic self-sufficiency, market prowess, and active public advocacy.

### **Allopathic Medicine’s Female Problems**

Regularly trained physicians used a variety of tactics in their quest to achieve professional respectability during the early decades of the nineteenth-century, many of which were detrimental to women’s autonomy and self-governance. In order to limit competition for paying customers, doctors increasingly denigrated traditional healers. In the years prior to the mid-nineteenth century, midwives, bonesetters, and herbal healers, most of which were women, treated common sicknesses. When doctors began to cast dispersion on the healing abilities of these irregular practitioners, however, such avenues

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<sup>22</sup> Jennifer Harris. “Marketplace Transactions and Sentimental Currencies in Fanny Fern’s *Ruth Hall*.” *American Transcendental Quarterly* 20 no. 1 (2006) 343-360; 345

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 354-355.

of outside employment for women decreased and female patients were more likely to be attended by male practitioners for female complaints.

In addition, the nineteenth-century saw a paradigm shift in popular views regarding the state of women's health. The early years of the Republic were painted in popular memory as a time when its inhabitants—men and women alike—were hardy enough to survive and thrive in the American wilderness. Yet by the early 1800s, as Chapter 1 demonstrates, many feared the fortitude of the nation's citizenry was rapidly decreasing. In particular, medical experts portrayed women as weak and sickly. Such claims may not have been entirely free from self-interest. In *Invalid Women*, Diane Pierce Herndl wryly notes that insisting women were constitutionally prone to illness bolstered male doctor's professional aspirations by ensuring a large client base (ill women) and weakening the public's trust in allopathic doctors' female competitors in the medical market.<sup>24</sup>

As a result of these changes, allopathic medicine supported and helped shape the larger cultural belief that women were biologically fitted for the domestic environment by nature of their sex. Eventually, male doctors wrested control of women's health—including childbirth and gynecological concerns—from women on the grounds that their reproductive organs unfitted them intellectually and constitutionally for professional and/or vocational endeavors.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, by 1820 a prominent Boston physician remarked that women's exclusion from obstetric practice was among “the first and happiest fruits

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<sup>24</sup> Diane Pierce Herndl, *Invalid Women: Figuring Feminine Illness in American Fiction and Culture, 1840-1940* (Chapel Hill: The U of North Carolina P, 1993) 33-34.

<sup>25</sup> For more on this transition, see Laurel Thatcher Ulrich's “Martha Moore and the Medical Challenge to Midwifery” in *Maine and the Early Republic: From Revolution to*

of improved medical education in America.”<sup>26</sup>

This “turf war” between formally trained physicians and female healers was emblematic of an even larger transfer of power. As the vanguards of what constituted a healthy woman, allopathic doctors in the nineteenth-century United States found they could exercise influence over aspects of domestic life that had previously been considered women’s purview. Bolstered by credentials from institutions that, for the most part, only admitted men, formally trained physicians increasingly dictated what actions and environments “best suited” the female constitution. As regular doctors increasingly handled the public’s health needs, such recommendations gained support and acceptance throughout the nation.

Women’s status as mothers or future mothers became a primary justification for adopting the retiring and domestic lifestyle recommended by these regular doctors. Because the organs and biological functions related to childbirth supposedly wreaked havoc on women’s constitutions, they were encouraged to avoid any external stimuli that could morbidly excite their body or mind. Since women performed the majority of child-rearing tasks, such care was doubly important. According to Mary P. Ryan, by the middle decades of the nineteenth century “Motherhood . . . extended far beyond the woman’s biological role in reproduction and the physical care of the infant; it now gave the female

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*Statehood* and pages 49-50 in Paul Starr’s *The Social Transformation of American Medicine*.

<sup>26</sup> Quoted in Laurel Thatcher Ulrich’s “Martha Moore and the Medical Challenge to Midwifery,” in *Sickness and Health in America* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1997) 72-83; 72.

parent responsibility for the whole process of childhood socialization.”<sup>27</sup> While Ryan asserts, rightly, that this belief afforded women cultural capital that allowed them to participate in public discourse—thus temporarily breaking their domestic seclusion and social death—the extension of motherhood from a single biological event to a socially and culturally bound process also caused medicine to shift focus. Prevention of illness, rather than the treatment of pathology, became a major goal in women’s health. Through domestic health guides and public lectures, doctors increasingly maintained that women should forego education, wage-labor, and intellectual engagement if they wished to remain healthy and live to raise their young to maturity. As a reward for passively sacrificing ambition, women in the antebellum United States were offered the promise of not just paternal protection and community esteem, but a *long life* of them.

Fern uses the character of Ruth’s cruel and obstinate father-in-law, Dr. Hall, to lampoon such claims in *Ruth Hall*. A man who believes himself the pinnacle of respectable society and virtue due to his medical practice and financial wealth, Dr. Hall is actually a miserly and misanthropic man whose conviction that he is always right leads to the destruction of his son’s family. After Harry’s death—in which the good doctor is implicated—the doctor publically takes credit for supporting Ruth and her family. The truth, however, is that he resentfully offers insufficient financial support, castigates Ruth for her efforts to win bread for her daughters, and terrorizes Ruth’s daughter Kitty when she lives with him, treating her as less than a servant. By offering a steady stream of exhortation while turning a blind eye to Ruth and her daughters’ lack of the basic

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<sup>27</sup> Mary P. Ryan, *The Empire of the Mother: American Writing about Domesticity, 1830-1860* (New York: The Institute for Research and History and The Haworth Press, 1982), 56.

necessities for survival, Dr. Hall enacts the historical blindness many allopathic doctors displayed about the precariousness of women's ability to obtain the necessary means of subsistence in a culture that told them not to work or to work invisibly.

Dr. Hall's career rests, in part, upon this dependence. At the novel's opening Fern quickly establishes that his success as a country practitioner comes at the expense of traditional female healers. Describing the doctor as "naturally loquacious" and "equally fond of administering jalap<sup>[28]</sup> and gossip," Fern states that this propensity for idle talk helped him "become a great favorite with the 'women folks,'"—to the point where they "soon began to trust him, not only in drawing teeth, but in cases involving the increase of the village census" (16). While this statement may initially seem to paint Dr. Hall as a practitioner sympathetic to and skilled in treating women's complaints, the subversive and caustic bite that would become a hallmark of Fern's writing soon rears itself when she follows with the statement that "several successes in this line, which he took no pains to conceal . . . enabled his practice to overtake his fame as far as the next village" before lambasting him as "circumscribed," "immovable" and quick to regard different opinions as "personal insult[s]" (16). Described in this way, the character of Dr. Hall emerges not as a compassionate healer who would seek to establish physical and social harmony, but as a petty and intractable man whose professional career has come about through his displacement of traditional women practitioners.

Fern further underscores Dr. Hall's penchant for jostling women from their traditional positions of authority by showing how his self-righteousness prompts him to

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<sup>28</sup> Jalap refers to a purgative drug, fashioned from the roots of a Mexican climbing plant. Through this small detail, Fern already aligns the doctor with the heroic practice of purging thought by many non-orthodox healers and their supporters to worsen patients, rather than cure them.

infiltrate the domestic realm, with tragic results. Selfish, arrogant, miserly, and hate-filled, the doctor and his wife continually seek to disrupt nearly all the familial bonds Ruth possesses by attempting to destroy the marital harmony between Ruth and their son and scheming to take Ruth's children from her following Harry's death. Eventually, Fern portrays the doctor's tendency to disregard female expertise as a matter of life and death. When Ruth and Harry's firstborn, Daisy, becomes ill, Ruth is alarmed and insists that Harry fetch the doctor. Scoffing that Ruth is "always a-fussing with that child," Dr. Hall refuses to go to the aid of his granddaughter until she is beyond all hope (44). When he does finally arrive at Ruth's home, the tardy doctor declares he can do nothing for her until, cajoled by Ruth, he commences bleeding Daisy with leeches. This treatment, along with the mustard-paste administrations of a servant and the last-minute attempts of a young doctor "not yet 'professionally hardened' by medical practice, tragically fail (45). At the time of Daisy's death, the reader is left pondering two things: the image of a grief-stricken mother clutching her daughter's lifeless body which is clothed in a blood-stained nightdress, and the uncanny feeling that such gore could have been avoided if only help had arrived sooner.

This first loss indirectly leads to even greater tragedy. In an attempt to put Daisy's death behind them, Harry and Ruth vacation at a resort where Harry becomes stricken with what his attending physician describes as a solid case of typhus (59). In spite of his best efforts to rally, Harry's condition deteriorates and his parents are summoned to his deathbed. Upon arrival and against all admonishments to the contrary, Dr. Hall informs Harry that the typhus will soon prove fatal. Overcome with the shock Harry slips into unconsciousness and never gains lucidity.

Yet though Dr. Hall is implicated in the death of his son and granddaughter, he places the blame elsewhere. Convinced of his own rectitude and respectability, he is not only certain he knows *what* killed his son, but *who*: Ruth Hall. Agreeing with Mrs. Hall that Ruth made Harry so unhappy he “was not anxious to continue in this world of trial,” Dr. Hall rehashes his prior belief that Daisy died because Ruth failed to follow his advice. Refusing to acknowledge his own role in the death of his patient, Dr. Hall instead tells his neighbor, “Now you know, Mis. Jones, I’m a physician, and *ought* to know something about the laws that govern the human body, but you’ll be astonished to hear that [Ruth] frequently acted directly contrary to my advice, and [Daisy’s death] is the result” (50-51). Ruth’s nonconformity to her father-in-law’s ideas of a somber and suitable wife—she is pretty and cheerful, walks about without a bonnet, reads and writes poetry, and possesses frilly underclothes—renders her, in his mind, a pathogen responsible for the deaths of her immediate family.

In this way, Fern aligns Dr. Hall with patriarchic medicine’s insistence that independent and willful women endangered themselves and their family. In the late eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth century, medical journals, advice books for young mothers, and physicians’ lectures extolled women to behave demurely, act conscientiously in accordance with cultural norms portraying women as selfless, ethereal, and retiring, and summon male practitioners at the first sign of trouble rather than trust their own intuition or the recommendations of traditional women healers. Prominent physicians such as William Andrus Alcott, who wrote over 100 volumes on educational and medical matters during his lifetime, advised in *The Young Mother, or, Management of Children in Regard to Health*, that “The future health, and even the moral well-being

of the child, depend much more on the proper management of the mother herself than is usually supposed.”<sup>29</sup> He follows by extorting new mothers to confine themselves to a simple diet of plain food and to avoid “every form of premature exertion, whether in sitting up, laboring, conversing, or even thinking. It is of very great importance that both the body and the mind should be kept quiet; and the more so, the better.”<sup>30</sup> Such beliefs would only gain support as the century continued, culminating in therapies like the infamous “rest cure” favored by Silas Weir Mitchell. While men in Bird’s time needed to maintain health in order to secure a promising livelihood and function as conscientious citizens, women in antebellum America were instructed to refrain from intellectual and mental stimulation, lest they irreparably damage their or their children’s constitutions.

Including scenes inviting readers to recall that mainstream antebellum medical beliefs augmented women’s subordination by undermining their claims to authority over the female body and suggesting that women who ventured beyond the domestic realm were gambling with their family’s wellbeing, Fern dramatizes the hypocrisy and damage such beliefs spawn. Paternalistic schools of medical thought touted the health and hardihood of families as their main goal. In practice, however, practitioners holding to these philosophies all too often disregarded women’s observations of loved ones’ (and their own) conditions, undermined women’s skills in the sickroom, and made women believe if they were other than a retiring, ethereal person their children would pay a heavy price.

Such cautions, however, could actually contribute to mortality. If a woman

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<sup>29</sup> William Andrus Alcott, *The Young Mother, or, Management of Children in Regard to Health* (Boston: George W. Light, 1838), 121.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.



suffered a change in fortune, either through financial ruin or a change in marital status, she would have to find a means to support herself and any children. And this necessity not only had an immediate effect on families visited by tragedy, but on the greater community as a whole. Census records from 1820-1890 indicate that in the major metropolitan areas of the Eastern seaboard (New York, Boston, Baltimore, and Philadelphia), women were greater than half of the adult population.<sup>31</sup> Of these, women who were head of the family were overwhelmingly more likely to live in poverty; such women in Philadelphia, for example, rarely owned property valued at more than \$500 in 1870.<sup>32</sup>

Several reasons exist for this economic disparity. Aside from the fact that many women were vocationally untrained due to the assumption that they would devote their energies to the home, what work was deemed suitable for working women—sewing, piece work, and washing—paid very little. In addition, women with small children were severely limited in what sorts of outside employment they could accept; wages were frequently too paltry to pay for child care and most domestics were only allowed to bring one child with them to work. Impoverished women could appeal to family, friends, and church communities could for financial aid, but if none were forthcoming they were reliant upon the beneficence of private charities or almshouses.<sup>33</sup> Fern alludes to many of these issues in *Ruth Hall*—Biddy refuses to leave Ruth after protesting that she cannot work outside the home while Kitty and Nettie are so young; Ruth’s attempts to earn a

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<sup>31</sup> Priscilla Ferguson Clement, “Nineteenth-Century Welfare Policy, Programs, and Poor Women: Philadelphia as a Case Study,” *Feminist Studies* 18.1 (Spring 1992), 35-58; 35.

<sup>32</sup> Theodore Hershberg and John Modell, *Philadelphia: Work, Space, Family, and Group Experience in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Oxford U P, 1981), 444.

<sup>33</sup> Clement, 35-37.

livelihood by sewing fall short of the actual cost of living; and Ruth is forced to solicit money from her relatives and ask grocers and landlords to receive goods on credit (75, 87, 107). In doing so, Fern draws reader's attention to the disparities between society's publically touted reverence for women and mothers, and the lived experience of women and mothers reliant upon the public for sustenance.

This disparity between public perception and actual reality was particularly pronounced during the time Fern was writing. In her study of nineteenth-century welfare systems and their effect upon urban women, Priscilla Ferguson Clement notes that the years 1810-1850 saw a considerable decrease in financial charity donations for the poor and that this deficit was particularly harmful to women head-of-households with dependents. While many United States citizens refused to believe that Malthus's principles of population could apply to the United States on a national scale due to the country's massive landholdings, many were concerned that his prognostications could come to pass in urban areas where populations were dense. As a result, urban-dwelling mothers in need were often viewed as early prototypes of today's "welfare queens" and were "blamed for the growing numbers of poor on welfare and also for the rising cost of relief."<sup>34</sup> In addition, the increasing number of poor paying, yet available, external jobs for women in sewing and textile facilities caused many would-be alms givers to assume that women in need of financial aid were not unfortunate, but unwilling to exert themselves.<sup>35</sup>

It should be noted, however, that while such beliefs were (and are) obviously

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<sup>34</sup> Clement, "Nineteenth-Century Welfare Policy, Programs, and Poor Women: Philadelphia as a Case Study," 42.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 44.

callous and blind to the larger socio-economical factors contributing to poverty—the existence of poverty is problematic, regardless of the context of its genesis. In *Ruth Hall*, Ruth and her children are clearly the most sympathetic characters and her in-laws and father are antagonists. Ruth is a financial encumbrance to her relatives as the result of unfair patriarchal impositions on women, but *she is still an encumbrance*. And for as long as women's financial opportunities were curtailed, men and women would, alike, suffer negative economic consequences. In providing financial succor to women, whether willingly or begrudgingly, men's personal wealth was depleted. Meanwhile, many women still did not have sufficient funds to live upon after receiving such aid.

In this way, women's health was an economic issues as well as a public health issue, but it did not threaten the public's wellbeing in the way allopathic medicine claimed. Single mothers and poor women did not pose a threat to the health of the nation because they jeopardized their life and that of their offspring by violating the allopathic "prescription" of rest and passivity. Instead their ills—the literal ones caused from poverty, poor nutrition, and fatigue as well as the more intangible grievances of the disenfranchised—stemmed from a cultural adherence to a gender-based system of conventions that inhibited women's ability to survive outside of the realm of male "protection" and its attending domination. If women were indeed vital to the wellbeing of the nation, as many claimed to believe, than it was time medical thought was revised so that it worked to empower and educate women, rather than as a complicit tool in their subjugation. Only then might the number of women needing external financial assistance decrease. Only then might poor women and children not suffer the diseases of poverty while themselves being treated as a poverty-spreading disease. And if this were to come

to pass, citizens of both sexes would enjoy increased physical and economic health.

Before becoming a successful author, Fern suffered dearly from the cultural consequences of two myths. She, like the heroine she would create, was saddled with pressure to conform to class-based, “medically” based norms of passive, frail, and conventional femininity. At the same time, her lack of money was construed by her relatives as a moral failing—a dearth that precluded her from respectability on the grounds that she did not put forth the necessary effort to find adequate employment or snag a husband-provider. In short, she was not a proper woman and mother because she *was too passive* to provide for her family and yet *was not passive enough* to recede into anonymity and leave her relations’ bank accounts alone. At the heart of this impasse was traditional medicine’s insistence that women should avoid exerting themselves in the pursuit of external employments—a conception that, in actuality, jeopardized women’s health by leaving them unable to support themselves when fortunes reversed. Obviously a new model of therapeutics was needed if women were to escape such a fate, and it was to one that Fern would turn in the closing pages of *Ruth Hall*.

### **Homeopathic Help Arrives:**

When Mr. Bond, Ruth’s homeopath neighbor, appears he is described as a friendly and unassuming old man of “refined and courteous manners” who offers to treat the fever of Ruth’s youngest daughter, Nettie. Mr. Bond tells Ruth he spent two years learning to doctor himself and readily offers future medical aid to Ruth and her family, should it be needed. Initially distraught by her inability to pay for medical treatment of any kind, Ruth nevertheless accepts Mr. Bond’s help out of desperation and because “he

seemed so much like what Ruth had sometimes dreamed a kind father might be, that it lessened the weight of obligation.” After giving the young girl some pills, her temperature decreases and the child recovers following a deep, restorative sleep. As the scene closes, Ruth is left praying by the bedside of a now-sleeping Nettie as a strange “whir-whir” sound emanates from Mr. Bond’s apartment (162-163).

The differences between Mr. Bond’s and Dr. Hall’s bedside manner are, of course, strikingly apparent. Though Dr. Hall has a familial relationship with Ruth and her children, his abrasive remarks, cold demeanor, and pretenses to grandeur stand in unflattering contrast to Mr. Bond’s graciousness, solicitude, and humble self-regard. At the same time, Bond’s refusal to take any money for treating Nettie stands in stark contrast to the miserly resentment Dr. Hall exhibits towards Ruth. Indeed, it is this action that causes Ruth to regard him as a “fatherly” figure. In ideal familial interactions, favors and provisions are given without a thought of repayment; the consanguineous ties that bind kin together remove any thought of financial obligation. One does not typically raise their child to maturity and then saddle them with a bill for room and board. Ruth, however, receives no such complimentary sustenance from her father-in-law or biological father. Instead, each dollar borrowed and expenditure doled is carefully marked, publically touted, and used as further evidence of Ruth’s “thriftless” nature. As such, Ruth’s actual paternal relatives behave more like outraged citizens who have been asked for alms from a stranger, rather than the protective and caring individuals they suppose themselves to be. In contrast, Mr. Bond and his compassion toward the unfortunate widow and child exemplifies the way medicine *should* work. Representing a humane alternative to male-dominated, allopathic therapeutics—whose approach of

“drawing off an excess of blood” symbolically mimics Ruth’s foppish family members’ desire for poor relations to make themselves scarce—Mr. Bond’s therapeutics alleviate suffering and want instead of furthering a dogmatic set of doctrines or seeking money from society’s most vulnerable.

But the fact that Mr. Bond, a medical healer, successfully treats Nettie when all other attempts at medicine in the novel have failed signifies more than just kindness. While much allopathic medicine of the time was indirectly killing women and children by ignoring them in their time of need---a historical occurrence that Ruth distills in her depiction of Dr. Hall refusing to come to Daisy’s aid—Mr. Bond represents a new kind of therapeutic approach that allows women an active role in health care and provides avenues of ownership over their own bodies and voices.

Fern’s familiarity with homeopathy and its therapeutic approach likely stemmed from a culmination of circumstances. Ruth likely gained an interest in women’s health from her former teacher, Catherine Beecher, who had a life-long interest in public health. Beecher’s *Letters to People on Health and Happiness* was published in New York the same year as *Ruth Hall*<sup>36</sup>. Boston, also, was a center of homeopathic debate during the time Fern lived there. Incensed by the steadily increasing number of homeopathic schools and practitioners in the city during the 1830s, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr. gave a prominent series of lectures in Boston warning of the dangers he believed would stem from adopting its therapeutics in 1842. These lectures inspired a wide range of pro-homeopathic responses in the city, including printed materials, public lectures, and

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<sup>36</sup> For more on Beecher and her beliefs regarding women’s health and education, see Regina Markell Morantz’s “Making Women Modern: Middle Class Women and Health Reform in 19<sup>th</sup> Century America,” *Journal of Social History* 10.4 (Summer 1977) 490-507.

patient testimonials.<sup>37</sup> In addition, many of the city's literary and intellectual figures, including Ralph Waldo Emerson and Harriet Beecher Stowe, were known to publically endorse the new medical approach. As a result, homeopathy gained a reputation as the therapeutic choice of the intellectual and artistic elite.<sup>38</sup>

Yet it was most likely homeopathy's association with various reform movements, particularly women's rights, which peaked Fern's interest. In 1848 the New England Female Medical College (NEFMC), one of the first women's medical colleges in the nation, was established in Boston. An eclectic school, it furnished its students with classes in both, allopathic and homeopathic instruction.<sup>39</sup> NEFMC and schools like it helped make medicine one of the most common professional options for women during this time. Indeed, in the first half of the nineteenth century, medicine was the second most chosen profession for females, teaching being the first.<sup>40</sup> Reacting to what was perceived as an infringement of their professional turf and angered by increased professional competition, conventional medical schools refused to admit women and irregular practitioners. As a result, schools dedicated primarily to homeopathic instruction flourished, in part because they welcomed female students who would have otherwise been denied a medical education.<sup>41</sup> Elizabeth Cady Stanton, the prominent suffragist and

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<sup>37</sup> Norman Gevitz, "Three Perspectives on Unorthodox Medicine" in *Other Healers: Unorthodox Medicine in America*, Ed. Norman Gevitz (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins U P, 1988) 1-28; 12.

<sup>38</sup> Anne Taylor Kirschmann, *A Vital Force: Women in American Homeopathy* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers U P, 2004), 21.

<sup>39</sup> Jonathan Davidson, *A Century of Homeopaths: Their Influence on Medicine and Health* (New York: Springer, 2014); 9.

<sup>40</sup> John Duffy, "The Social Impact of Disease in the Late Nineteenth Century." *Sickness and Health in America: Readings in the History of Medicine and Public Health*. Judith W. Leavitt, Ed. (Milwaukee: U of Wisconsin P, 1997) 418-425; 420.

<sup>41</sup> Kirschmann, *A Vital Force*, 55-60.

Women's Rights leader, was known to practice homeopathy and argued that conventional "medical ministries" portrayed "genteel" women as ill to ensure women's reliance on patriarchal authority. She urged women to escape the "cruel bondage of mind and suffering of body" by taking "the liberty of being her own physician of both body and soul."<sup>42</sup> Within this context, homeopathy functioned not only as a mild alternative to conventional heroic therapies, but as a symbol of women's increasing demand for and efforts to secure equal educational, economic, and professional opportunities. As a result of this cultural currency, readers familiar with homeopathy's progressive associations would have recognized in the character of Mr. Bond not just a kindly gentleman who saved a young woman's life, but a potent symbol of a new type of life for women---one that welcomed them to express their experiences of being female to others openly and to strive for greater agency over their own lives.

For these reasons, Fern links the advent of Ruth's career as an author with homeopathy by showing how Ruth's writings—texts that provide both, catharsis and financial reward—operate as panaceas for the mental anguish women suffer as they struggle to live in a patriarchal society. After Ruth bids farewell to Mr. Bond, she hears a strange "whir" sound emanating from his apartment, and periodically this sound "plays" in the background of subsequent scenes. While Fern never overtly explains the sources of the noise, careful reading of *Ruth Hall* reveals its likely cause and significance. Readers are given a strong hint when Ruth seeks employment at the office of the *Daily Type*. Giving a tentative knock and receiving no answer, Ruth is forced to open the door uninvited because the "whir" of the printing machines drowns out her appeal for entry

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<sup>42</sup> Quoted in Kirschmann, *A Vital Force*, 52.



(153). This moment represents the only time in the novel when a “whir” noise is attributed to a specific machine—a printing press—and therefore hints that the mysterious sound emanating from Mr. Bond’s apartment may be the result of him printing materials.

Further evidence can be found for such connections when Ruth decides to make a living by writing. Indeed, readers seem invited to connect homeopathic practice and authorship when, immediately after hearing the “whir” from Bond’s apartment for the first time, Ruth ponders “What *could* it mean?” She then spies a carrier delivering the morning paper and the very next paragraph begins “A thought! Why could Ruth not write for the papers?” (145). The scene presents an associative chain within which Ruth tries to determine the cause of the sound, sees a newspaper delivery boy, and immediately decides to become a writer---thus unifying noise, periodicals, and Ruth’s future occupation into one crystalline moment of question and answer. This motif is further developed when, a few pages later, even Ruth’s rather daft landlady muses that her two borders “are as much alike as two peas. *She* goes scratch---scratch---scratch<sup>[43]</sup>; *he* goes whir---whir---whir” (215).

The ways in which historical homeopaths used print media to counter the charges of quackery frequently lobbed at them by allopathic physicians may have influenced Fern’s choice to frame her heroine’s writing in this way. Certainly, it would have appealed to Fern’s sense of sarcasm and parody. After Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr. denounced homeopathy in 1842, his lectures were published in pamphlet form under the title “Homeopathy and its Kindred Delusions.” Holmes’s high profile caused Boston

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<sup>43</sup> Fern uses this word to refer to the sound of Ruth writing her manuscripts by hand.

publications like *The Christian Examiner* to review his work, and several homeopathy proponents wrote treatises and brochures of their own to refute his claims.<sup>44</sup> For example, Figure 3.1 shows the title page of Dr. Hamilton Ring's "The 'Little Pills' Vindicated: Or, 'Orthodox' Delusions' versus Homeopathy." An obvious jab at Holmes's title, the pamphlet bears the inscription "printed for the author," thereby highlighting the not only the cheeky style of venom Fern too employed in her writings, but "ownership" of the authorial voice.

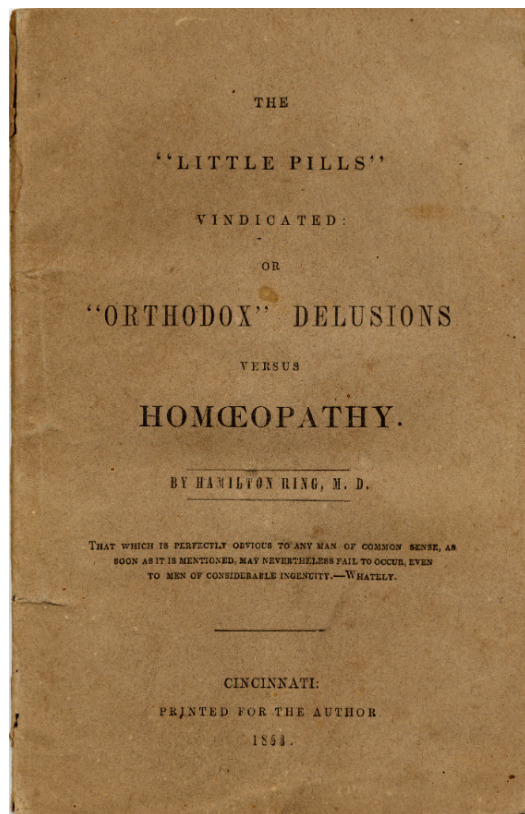


Figure 3.1: Dr. Hamilton Ring's "The 'Little Pills' Vindicated: or, 'Orthodox' Delusions versus Homeopathy," printed "for the author" in Cincinnati in 1853. Photo courtesy of Amherst College's Special Collections.

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<sup>44</sup> Martin Kaufman, *Homeopathy in America: The Rise and Fall of a Medical Heresy* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins U P, 1971), 33-34.

In borrowing from the title of his antagonist's tract when writing his own rebuttal, Dr. Ring enacted, through the form and content of his title page, homeopathy's foundational "law of similars," or what would be commonly known as the "like cures like" philosophy. Homeopathy's founder, the German physician Samuel Hahnemann, developed the "law of similars" after giving cinchona bark, which produced fever-like symptoms in healthy individuals, to a patient already suffering from fever. The patient recovered. Excited by the success of his cure, Hahnemann built his approach to homeopathic therapeutics around the belief that "like cures like," or that illness could be successfully treated by giving the sick drugs that, in a healthy person, would cause the symptoms of the illness the patient was suffering from.<sup>45</sup> In essence, the law of similar held that medicine that aggravated the healthy would prove healing to the sick. Mr. Holmes, in his initial attack on homeopathy maintained that its practitioners would poison their patients and undermine the nation's health. As a homeopathic practitioner who—according to Holmes—sickened the nation, Dr. Ring took a tiny amount of the offending agent—the title of Holmes's piece—diluted it, and then redeployed it out into the public. There, it could "cure" supporters of homeopathy's outrage (their illness) through a nice dose of heated rebuttal while aggravating purportedly "healthy" doctors who denounced homeopathy in favor of allopathic medicine.

In *Ruth Hall*, Ruth becomes successful by producing "homeopathic writing" that works in a similar fashion. As Ruth hears the steady "whir, whir" of machinery coming from Mr. Bond's apartment, she takes the first steps of a writing career that will become immensely successful due, in large part, to her penchant for writing about the ways

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<sup>45</sup> Kaufmann, *Homeopathy in America*, 25.

women feel oppressed, neglected, and shoved aside in a patriarchal society that maintains they are too frail to participate in the political and intellectual life of the nation. Thus Mr. Walter, when musing on the identity of the new writer Floy (Ruth's pen name), describes her articles as "wail[s] from her inmost soul" that "taken consecutively, would form a whole history of wrong, and suffering, and bitter sorrow" (180).

Yet for all of their sorrow and pathos, Ruth's stories *do* heal those who are receptive to it. In the last pages of the novel Fern inserts the contents of letters Ruth has received. In one, a man going by the initials M.J.D. writes the following: "I am a better son, a better brother, a better husband, and a better father, than I was before I commenced reading your articles. May God bless you for the words you have spoken (though unintentionally) so directly to me. May you be rewarded by Him to whom the secrets of all hearts are known" (235). While Ruth's tales of hardship and want are anathema to some "healthy" men—particularly her male relatives who resent her commercial success and public airing of their family business—Ruth's articles help some to view women with respect and treat them with greater decency.

In describing the novel's appeal Temple writes, "The satisfaction one gains from reading *Ruth Hall* is due to the desire for vengeance it inspires and amply satisfies..."<sup>46</sup> It's an astute observation. By the novel's end Ruth is a successful and wealthy authoress whose "homeopathic writing" accomplishes what actual, allopathic medicine only claimed to do—offer sustenance to ease women's ills and protecting them from harm. Ironically, by eschewing nearly every recommendation practitioners like Alcott recommended for healthy mothers, Ruth manages to drag herself and her children out of

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<sup>46</sup> Temple, "A Purchase on Goodness: Fanny Fern, Ruth Hall, and Fraught Individualism," 135-136.

poverty and into a life of independence and affluence. In doing so, she models for her daughters, Kitty and Nettie, a new form of “healthy woman” who procures the means of survival on her own, just as Fern’s novel models the same for its readers.

In the last letter contained in the novel, Ruth’s cousin John Millett, who publically snubbed her during her poverty, laments that he cannot find enough patients to procure a livelihood as a young doctor. Ruefully he adds, “To think of Ruth’s success! I was in hopes it might help me a little in the way of business, to say that she was my cousin; but she has cut me dead!...I tell you, mother, we all missed a figure in turning the cold shoulder to her” (258). While John’s personal conduct towards Ruth was no doubt why she “cut him dead,” his search to find financial footing in a city overcrowded with allopathic doctors symbolizes the economic losses that would plague posterity if the paternalistic paradigms espoused by mainstream medicine continued to influence the public’s view on women’s economic conditions. The times were beginning to change, and women like Fern would become more and more financially active and independent. Faced with this reality doctors had a choice, they could stop categorizing women as too frail and weak to earn their own livings, or they could help women in their quest for economic enfranchisement. Choosing the latter would not only help heal the literal and figurative ills of poverty and sublimation, it would be a quality investment for citizens of all sexes.

### **From Domestic Civility to the Civil War**

Through use of medical rhetoric and themes in their writings, Robert

Montgomery Bird and Fanny Fern strove to express the benefits—economic and civic—of improving the health of women and the mentally ill. Doing so allowed them to argue for the greater inclusion of women and the mentally ill—two groups which were nearly always excluded from the legal, economic, and political lives of the nation—into the socio-political fabric of the United States by appealing to readers’ desire for a stable national economy. The benefits of such enfranchisement, their stories show, would not only apply to those suffering from disease or illness, but to the entire free population of the United States.

Following the Civil War, the United States found itself confronted with the task of integrating former slaves into this same cloth. The challenge was, of course, massive. In response, authors writing in the decades following the Civil War frequently explored the implications of recognizing former slaves as political and legal subjects of the nation within their work. While many United States citizens feared the incorporation of a population previously regarded as only three-fifths human would negatively impact the economic, political, and physical health of the nation, others viewed free blacks’ enfranchisement as an opportunity for increasing the overall welfare of the nation.

At the same time, increased industrialism and the expansion of trade beyond geographically localized trade routes meant that Americans, increasingly, were exposed to and did business with people who did not share the same communal, regional, or national loyalties and ties. This widening of scope carried implications for the nation’s public and economic health. Contact with people(s) from others regions, states, and nations increased the chances that communicable diseases could

be spread, on one hand, yet the larger system of economic trade also seemed to offer opportunities for economic growth.

In the chapters that follow, I examine how George Washington Cable and Pauline Hopkins respond to and participate in larger cultural discussions centering around these conditions. Their novels examine the economic and moral implications of slavery, abolition, and war's aftermath using the medical "lenses" of sanitation reform and the hereditary transmission of ills. In doing so they offer literary meditations on how the welfare of the United States was dependent not only on the health of its citizens, but on the way those citizens treated the distant and the marginalized.

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#### Chapter Four -- "'Public Health as Public Wealth:' Yellow Fever and New Orleans's Trade Economy in George Washington Cable's *The Grandissimes*"

Set in 1803 during Louisiana's transfer from French to American rule and regarded for its coupling of quaint local color techniques with impressive historical realism, George Washington Cable's *The Grandissimes* (1880)<sup>1</sup> is largely read as the author's most technically advanced depiction of Reconstruction and its political contexts—an aesthetically appreciable (if at times flawed) allegorical work that heralded the writer's artistic apex before encounters with recalcitrant editorial policies and a fickle audience caused his work's quality to descend from dramatic pathos to dogmatic polemics.<sup>2</sup> As a result critical investigations of Cable's novel have tended to cluster around two related foci: the author's views on Southern racial politics or the literary strategies Cable employed while attempting to present these racial views to potentially hostile readers. Thus Barbara Ladd characterizes the text as a locus for “deeply embedded cultural conflict between a nationalist principle of segregation and a colonial principle of assimilation” in the post-Civil War South.<sup>3</sup> Brian Hochman and Gavin Jones debate whether the sound of the novel's “black speech” unifies or separates characters by racial

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<sup>1</sup> *The Grandissimes* was serialized in *Scribners* from November 1879 to October 1880. It was published as a novel in 1880. George Washington Cable, *The Grandissimes: A Story of Creole Life* (New York: Penguin Books, 1988). Page numbers hereafter cited parenthetically.

<sup>2</sup> For more on Cable's artistic struggles, see: Thomas J. Richardson, “Introduction” in *The Grandissimes: Centennial Essays* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1981); Louis D. Rubin, *George Washington Cable: The Life and Times of a Southern Heretic* (New York: Pegasus, 1969); Arlin Turner, *George W. Cable: A Biography* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1956).

<sup>3</sup> Barbara Ladd, *Nationalism and the Color Line in George W. Cable, Mark Twain, and William Faulkner* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996), xvi.



lines<sup>4</sup> and Robert Allen Alexander Jr. argues that Cable's black characters are progressive because they do not fit the two stock black archetypes of nineteenth-century culture: dangerous mutineer or accommodating, cheerful servant.<sup>5</sup> Underlying these critiques is a pivotal assumption: when engaging with post and antebellum Southern culture, whether allegedly adopting an egalitarian or ethnocentric stance on issues of race---Cable's *prima facie* concern in *The Grandissimes* is the contentious relationship between the country's black and white inhabitants.

This assumption is restricting. Race figures prominently in *The Grandissimes*, but questions of African American enfranchisement, white guilt, and the historical burden of slavery often resonate within and from cultural issues beyond the black/white social divide. Indeed, historian John Hope Franklin elucidates the relation between slavery and public welfare in the South when he claims the region "lagged behind the rest of the country in social reform generally because of its obsession with defending slavery and engaging in the struggle for power in national politics."<sup>6</sup> Once slavery was eradicated, the region was forced to attend to the welfare of its masses because it was now reliant upon a wage-labor system.<sup>7</sup> With such connections in mind, I examine Cable's racial depictions in *The Grandissimes* as one locus amongst many contributing to what I believe is the

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<sup>4</sup> Brian Hochman, "Hearing Lost and Hearing Found: George Washington Cable and the Phono-Ethnographic Ear," *American Literature* 82 no. 3 (2010): 519-551; Gavin Jones, "Signifying Songs: The Double Meaning of Black Dialect in the Work of George Washington Cable," *American Literary History* 9 no. 2 (1997): 244-267.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Allen Alexander Jr., "The Irreducible African: Challenges to Racial Stereotypes in George Washington Cable's *The Grandissimes*," in *Songs of the Reconstructing South: Building Literary Louisiana, 1865-1945*, Suzanne Disheroon-Green and Lisa Abney, eds. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002), 123-133.

<sup>6</sup> John Hope Franklin, "Public Welfare in the South During the Reconstruction Era, 1865-1880," *The Social Service Review* 44 no. 4 (1970), 379-392; 380.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, 380-381.

work's preeminent focus: the South's desperate economic situation following the Civil War and the region's attempts to rejuvenate its mercantile prowess. Because slavery and its abolishment cannot be divorced from the Southern economy and its post-war devastation, a discussion of its eradication necessarily touches upon the region's life-quality, public health, and governmental trade regulation---concerns which, I argue, are as central to understanding *The Grandissimes* as the peculiar institution itself.

Writing his novel immediately after Reconstruction, Cable found ample opportunity to observe connections between the South's prejudice, financial state, and public health. The removal of federal troops from Louisiana, allegedly occasioned by the Compromise of 1877,<sup>8</sup> furthered the political resurgence of Southern Democratic Redeemers and their platforms of black disenfranchisement and state's rights advocacy. At the same time, economic and epidemiological crisis crippled an already stunted Southern economy's growth. In addition to debts incurred by the war and a fragile agricultural infrastructure, the national financial panic of 1873 made attempts to improve the region's financial situation particularly difficult. Five years later a crippling epidemic of yellow fever, believed by many to be the result of lax quarantine and port sanitation, further burdened the former Confederacy as maritime trade was disrupted and market exchange slowed due to widespread death and population dispersion. Such factors served to augment a growing sense of frustration and futility in the minds of many Southern progressives as gains made in civil rights, financial recovery, and disease prevention

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<sup>8</sup> The Compromise of 1877 refers to a supposed, unofficial agreement that awarded the Presidency to Republican Rutherford B. Hayes in exchange for the removal of federal troops and abandonment of Republican-held state government in Louisiana and South Carolina. For a discussion of the agreement's influence on Cable's work, see Robert O. Stephen, "Cable's 'Madame Delphine' and the Compromise of 1877," *The Southern Literary Journal* 12 no. 1 (1979), 79-91.

seemed continually undone by adherence to archaic race/class prejudice and reliance upon corrupt state-run political systems. For Cable—a man who watched blacks emerge from slavery to citizenship, knew the domestic hardships attending financial instability from childhood, and remembered the terrible aftermath of 1853’s deadly yellow fever epidemic<sup>9</sup>—the possibility that such incidents could reoccur due to the region’s failure to learn from past mistakes was truly devastating. In *The Grandissimes* Cable illustrates the economic and human consequences that would continue to plague the South unless the area abandoned its support of regressive racial and classist views—not only because such views were morally wrong, but because their perpetuation continually fostered blind support of state government rather than cooperation with federal authority. The results, his novel suggests, were not only threatening to the nation’s democratic ideals, but to the South’s welfare and prosperity.

I wish to invert the established view that monetary concerns in Cable’s novel serve to invoke questions of race and social class and instead assert that the work’s examples of racial and class stratification actually serve as vehicles for further explorations of economic trade policy in a post-Civil War South. Doing so paves the way for a reading of *The Grandissimes* that, while mindful of the influential social and historical contexts affecting the status of white and non-white individuals in nineteenth-century America, resists the tendency to view Cable’s commentary on fractious race relations as the sole focal point of his artistic endeavor. Instead, Cable acknowledges the South’s history of racial oppression as one catalyst for the region’s financial woes, then

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<sup>9</sup> In 1853 New Orleans experienced its worst yellow fever epidemic. See John Duffy, *Sword of Pestilence: The New Orleans Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1853* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996).

dramatizes how Southern paradigms predicated upon the assumption that white gentility entitled its possessors to exploit non-whites and the poor polluted other areas of civic life not traditionally linked to questions of race. In this way *The Grandissimes* operates in a similar manner to my examination of it—slavery and racial discrimination do not formulate the endpoint, but rather the starting point, for larger discussions on ethics, economics, and public policy surrounding the South at Reconstruction’s close

At this juncture, a concrete example of the tendency for discussions of race to overtake discussions of economics might prove helpful. At the novel’s end, Palmyre Philosophe and Honoré Grandissime, f.m.c., both free people of color, sail to France. Critics are divided in their assessments of these characters’ exile, as well as the ambiguous summary of the affair Cable offers when he writes that the white Honoré Grandissime remits to Palmyre “the equivalent, in francs, of fifty thousand dollars...without interruption for twenty years” for a total of “one million dollars” before claiming, “But that is only a *part* of the *pecuniary loss* which this sort of thing causes Louisiana” (331). Ladd characterizes this statement as a satire of the perverse belief that slavery’s true tragedy was the institution’s detrimental effects on a white, democratic population.<sup>10</sup> Karsten Piep, meanwhile, argues that as representatives of the “black race” the quadroon couple must, in Cable’s view, remain exiled until they can rise to the “standard of American freedom” defined by white middle-class values.<sup>11</sup> And Michael Germana reads this continued remittance as signifying the unresolved debt whites owed

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<sup>10</sup> Ladd, *Nationalism and the Color Line in George Washington Cable, Mark Twain, and William Faulkner*, 83.

<sup>11</sup> Karsten H. Piep, “Liberal Visions of Reconstruction: Lydia Maria Child’s *A Romance of the Republic* and George Washington Cable’s *The Grandissimes*,” *Studies in American Fiction* 31 no. 2 (2003): 165-193; 172.

their former slaves.<sup>12</sup>

Regardless of whether this exile and remittance is indicative of just restitution, a purgatory with pay-off, or a cutting critique of white privilege, these interpretations all focus on the color of the travelers' skin rather than the color in their wallets. In contrast, I argue Cable is equally concerned with the financial implications of this scene. While certainly critiquing a caste system that necessitates the removal of this quadron pair from American soil, he does so to highlight the monetary loss this removal occasions—not only for its symbolic representation of white tyranny, but to identify the self-destructive nature of a social system that would forego such a large sum simply because individuals possessing a fraction of African blood hold it.

The South's precarious financial position following the war meant that keeping Southern money *within* the American economy, rather than sending it abroad, assumed new importance. When the South traded domestically, it decreased its exposure to the corporal and corporate devastation of epidemic disease while augmenting its trade relations with industrial centers to the North reliant upon raw materials like those produced in Louisiana. Furthermore, since the South was again firmly ensconced within the Union it too would theoretically benefit from a strong national economy. It is the background of this need for a strong economic infrastructure—created in part by Southern racial politics, but also and equally by lackadaisical attitudes toward public health and trade regulation—that makes the exile of Palmyre and the Honoré Grandissimes's capital not sarcastically, but sincerely, problematic. Viewed in this light,

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<sup>12</sup> Michael Germana, *Standards of Value: Money, Race, and Literature in America* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2003), 12.

the quadron pair's exile is indicative not only of racial oppression, but of missed financial opportunity.

### **The Troubles of 1878**

The year 1878 was a trying one for the Mississippi Valley due to a wide-ranging yellow fever epidemic. While the cause of this dreadful disease was still unknown to the medical community,<sup>13</sup> it was commonly recognized that the scourge preferred temperate climates and port towns located along waterways. As a result, the fever was particularly devastating to commerce as well as communities. The first case of the outbreak of 1878 appeared in New Orleans in May. Once confirmed reports of yellow fever cases reached outlying areas, interior commercial centers enacted quarantine against New Orleans, often using local militia to prevent trains, merchants, and their wares from entering the municipal limits.<sup>14</sup> Rural inhabitants had good reason to fear contagion as the confirmation of yellow fever spawned a mass exodus of Crescent City citizens. An estimated 40,000 of the city's inhabitants fled, in some cases unwittingly spreading infection.<sup>15</sup> As the disease reached other towns it elicited similar reactions, resulting in massive regional migrations, sporadic episodes of violent chaos and vandalism, and a near-complete gridlock of the former Confederacy's trade with domestic and

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<sup>13</sup> The actual cause of yellow fever was not determined until 1901 when the U.S. Army Yellow Fever Commission conclusively demonstrated the role of the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito as the virus's vector. For more on the commission's findings, see Walter Reed, "Recent Researches Containing the Etiology, Propagation, and Prevention of Yellow Fever by the United States Army Commission," in *The Journal of Hygiene* 2 no. 2 (1902), 101-119.

<sup>14</sup> Margaret Humphreys, *Yellow Fever and the South* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 174.

<sup>15</sup> John H. Ellis, *Yellow Fever and Public Health in the New South* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1992), 41.

international parties. For four months yellow fever spread from the gulf into the interior, decimating Memphis and Vicksburg before trekking as far North as Gallipolis, Ohio. By September, conservative estimates posited 120,000 cases nationwide, of which 20,000 were casualties.<sup>16</sup> The economic cost was equally staggering, prompting a somber Rutherford B. Hayes to remark in his annual message to Congress on December 2, 1878: “It is impossible to estimate, with any approach to accuracy, the loss to the country occasioned by this epidemic. It is to be reckoned by the hundred millions of dollars [sic]”.<sup>17</sup>

As the epicenter of this disaster, New Orleans not only suffered some of the greatest mortal and financial losses<sup>18</sup>---it lost in terms of reputation. President Hayes’s remark highlights that while the disease may have afflicted only a portion of the country and its people, the detrimental effects of the South’s prostration under it spread nationwide. Attempting to prevent similar outbreaks, federal and local government agencies conducted investigations into the plague’s genesis, uncovering Louisiana’s state-run, haphazard trade regulation in the process. Yellow fever’s preference for warm climates and water routes led many to believe that ships, particularly those from the West

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<sup>16</sup> While this number represents the official count compiled by the investigatory board organized by Congress in 1879, actual casualties are thought to be much higher due to a lack of reliable information about cases in rural areas. See Ellis, *Yellow Fever & Public Health in the New South*, 56-57.

<sup>17</sup> As quoted in Ellis, *Yellow Fever & Public Health in the New South*, 57. The Board of Experts organized by Congress to investigate the epidemic estimated monetary losses in the range of \$150-\$200 million. See Ellis, 189.

<sup>18</sup> The Louisiana State Board of Health officially tallied 4, 046 casualties and anywhere from \$12-\$100 million in economic losses in New Orleans. Higher estimates compensate for a lack of information about out-lying, rural areas.

Indies and other areas located within the temperate “yellow fever zone,”<sup>19</sup> were conveyors of the illness. In 1878 a lack of federal oversight for customs and quarantine regulations meant such responsibilities fell under state purview. Thus the international trade which established New Orleans’s mercantile importance also meant Louisiana was responsible for protecting the country from tropical endemic diseases arriving with its port’s cargo—a charge difficult to fulfill when combating a little-understood malady. This difficulty accorded New Orleans little sympathy, however. In the epidemic’s wake factions of the popular press and medical community were quick to lay the country’s massive economic and human losses at the Crescent City’s feet, one Tennessee physician going so far as to characterize the port as “a standing menace to the country along the Mississippi River for several hundred miles north of her at least three months out of the year”.<sup>20</sup> Chaffing under its scapegoat status, Louisiana experienced tension with Northern states and its former Confederate allies; despair settled over a region already struggling to bury its dead and rectify its debt.

Cable was familiar with these economic and emotional burdens on a professional and personal level. In the closing years of the 1870’s he worked as a clerk in the cotton firm of William C. Black, as well as for the New Orleans and National Cotton Exchanges.<sup>21</sup> Reliant upon overseas and interstate shipping, the cotton industry was amongst those hit hardest by the halting economy of 1878. Even more tragic, the year’s yellow fever victims included Cable’s young son, George, and brother-in-law, James

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<sup>19</sup> Physicians described the yellow fever zone as a region stretching from Charleston, SC to lower Brazil. Mexico and the West Indies were considered the “heart” of this zone. See Humphreys, *Yellow Fever and the South*, 19.

<sup>20</sup> G.B. Thornton, “Memphis Sanitation and Quarantine, 1879 and 1880” as cited in Humphreys, *Yellow Fever and the South*, 59-60.

<sup>21</sup> Turner, *George W. Cable*, 24, 72.



Cox. While young George was the only member of his immediate family to perish, Cable's wife and other children suffered bouts with the dangerous disease. Faced with the task of caring for this large group, Cable initially had little time to mourn as his son's body was quickly buried to avoid distressing the poor boy's sick siblings. The author's services were further taxed when his sister, Nettie, was left destitute after her husband succumbed. Cable eventually placed her and her children in a house across the street from his residence to receive assistance from relatives.<sup>22</sup>

It is here that we begin to see how traces of Cable's personal worries about familial support, concern over illness, and desire for the economic prosperity of a region beset by political and mercenary missteps helped shape *The Granddissimes*. A reformed secessionist, Cable was strongly committed to a unified nation working to overcome the scars and pitfalls left in the wake of the Civil War prior to 1878. But at Reconstruction's close, many of the ideological hardships involved in making such a vision reality were clear---particularly regarding issues of race. At the same time, rapid industrial growth on the Eastern seaboard threatened to exacerbate an already widening gap between the fragile, agriculturally-based Southern economy and the burgeoning manufacturing economy of the North. Military uniforms no longer distinguished Confederate and Union adherents, but true uniformity was still elusive. Cable recognized that the recent yellow fever tragedy could serve as a potential symbol of unity through mutual misfortune and a call for cooperative civil improvement.<sup>23</sup> Many Southerners hesitated to embrace racial equality, but were keenly troubled by their region's economic recession. Approaching

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 81-83.

<sup>23</sup> For more on the 1878 epidemic as a catalyst for national unity, see Edward J. Blum, "The Crucible of Disease: Trauma, Memory, and National Reconciliation during the Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1878," *Journal of Southern History* 69 no. 4 (2003), 791-820.

civil reconciliation via the need for solidarity in a time of trial allowed Cable to advocate for stronger national alliance and trade while subsuming the race question under a more encompassing umbrella of general public interest; social equality could be indirectly addressed by advocating for mutual wealth and welfare.

Cable's vantage point as a grieving father and struggling merchant from the city which served as ground-zero for the scourge meant he was intimately familiar with the loss (financial and familial) occasioned by the fever and what that loss meant for national, regional, and domestic morale. At the same time, writing about events that specifically impacted New Orleans but possessed national reverberations let Cable play to his interests and strengths as a writer: the use of historical material and allegory. Opening *The Grandissimes* at a masked charity ball benefitting the local hospital is apt, for this novel of two young heroes (one Northern, one Southern) struggling to navigate a city of pestilence, penury, and pride masquerades as quaint local color. Beneath the veneer, however, Cable's belief in philanthropic and economic responsibility to not just one's immediate family or social group---but to the interests of humanity---held the potential to motivate more than Honorè Grandissime's fictional donations. Such altruism could, Cable hoped, help the South financially recover and the nation finally reconcile.

### **Yellow Fever: A Scapegoat('s) Disease**

Cable found the antithesis of his ideal commercial model in the slave trade---a business model he saw as economically benefitting few while physically devastating many. Yet he could little afford to have issues of slavery and black oppression overshadow the progressive cultural views of his two heroes. The South had long labored

under what Honorè Grandissime describes as “the shadow of the Ethiopian” (156), a taint Cable hoped the South would overcome. To make his literary vision work, then, *The Grandissimes* had to accomplish two things simultaneously: it must show the destructive power of racial and class discrimination, but characterize such power as an ugly presence that could be overcome. Once the South realized this, the region could move on to the more immediate and progressive work of stabilizing its economic infrastructure and improving its public health---measures which both Frowenfeld and Honorè pursue in earnest throughout the novel. In a stroke of ironically macabre luck, yellow fever provided the symbolic potential to address slavery’s damaging legacy and the need for progressive reform.

The saffron scourge was historically connected to slavery via the disease’s association with maritime vessels and the West Indies, as well as black’s alleged immunity to the fever---an assumed imperviousness used as justification for their bondage by slavery’s apologists. Charles Schwann argues that per Cable’s design, we as readers must “learn to discover and distinguish between the myths of origin which the community of New Orleans tell themselves to explain themselves and their actions---and the real history which enables us to view these myths critically by situating them historically.”<sup>24</sup> Given the overall allegorical nature of the novel Schwann is absolutely correct on this point. In lieu of a scientifically proven vector for yellow fever transmission, lay-theorists were free to invent a mythology surrounding the illness to explain its erratic behavior. Such “myths” coexisted with theories based on scientific

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<sup>24</sup> Charles Schwann, “*The Grandissimes: A Story-Shaped World*,” *Literature and History* 13 no. 2 (1987): 257-277; 261.

knowledge of the time and, frequently, popular beliefs and accepted medical doctrines on contagion informed one another.

An example of the symbiotic relationship between economics and medically-coded racism can be found in the writings of Dr. Samuel Cartwright. One of few Southern physicians to write on alleged differences between black and white health, Cartwright is perhaps most well known as the physician who maintained run-away slaves suffered from *drapetomania*, a “disease” he argued led slaves to flee their masters.<sup>25</sup> While Cartwright’s diagnosis is certainly absurd, his premise that the race of an individual largely determined whether that person would develop or succumb to communicable illness was widely accepted in the nineteenth-century. In keeping with this view, Cartwright explained the yellow fever epidemic of 1853 as stemming from a disruption of racial hierarchies, claiming “nature scorns to see the aristocracy of the white skin...reduced to drudgery work under a summer sun, and has issued her fiat that...they shall not be hewers of wood or drawers of water, or wallow in the sloughs of intemperance, under pain of three fourths of their number being cut off.” He then proceeds to blame poor white immigrants for further spreading infection by their desire “to jostle the Negro from his stool, and to take from him those outdoor, laborious employments in the sun” (Cartwright 1853: 312-13).<sup>26</sup> In doing so, the doctor supplies an allegedly scientific medical explanation for the scourge’s course while justifying keeping blacks in bondage and white immigrants of the poorer classes out of New Orleans—

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<sup>25</sup> Primary source information on Cartwright’s theory of *drapetomania* can be found in Samuel Cartwright, M.D., “Diseases and Peculiarities of the Negro Race,” *Debow’s Review* 11 no. 1 (1851), 64-69.

<sup>26</sup> Samuel Cartwright, “On the Prevention of Yellow Fever.” *New Orleans Medical and Surgical Journal X* (1853): 306-317.

views which corresponded nicely to conservative Creole world views of that era.

Yet while some believed the disease indirectly justified slavery, others felt slavery's connection to yellow fever was a form of justice. Many opponents of slavery saw yellow fever as divine retribution for the United States's involvement in the slave trade.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, Cable seems to embrace this retributive view in his 1887 census report by claiming New Orleans failed to become the commercial super-metropolis many believed it was destined to become due to "the all-prevailing blight which fell upon labor, and especially upon intelligent, trained labor, through this institution of African slavery."<sup>28</sup> He then declares this blight led to a widespread malaise that prevented New Orleans officials and social elite from adopting adequate precautions against impending sickness. Per Cable's viewpoint, this stunted work-ethic of many Southern-born gentlemen also inhibited the South's economic recovery following the plague so that in 1853, "the effect of the great epidemic upon the commerce of New Orleans was great" and a "careful search—fail[ed] to reveal any other cause [than the disease for commercial decline]."<sup>29</sup>

Thus slavery begot disease in two ways according to the public imagination, and which mindset an individual adopted heavily depended on where that particular citizen stood regarding the slavery debate. While nearly all believed the disease was introduced to American shores via ships bringing human chattel and goods from places like the West

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<sup>27</sup> For more information on yellow fever's epidemiological connection to slavery, see Debbie Lee, *Slavery and the Romantic Imagination* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 46-65; and Philip Curtin, *Death by Migration: Europe's Encounter With the Tropical World in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 62-79. For information on slavery and yellow fever in the eighteenth century, see Philip Gould, "Race, Commerce, and the Literature of Yellow Fever in Early National Philadelphia," *Early American Literature* 35 no. 2 (2000), 147.

<sup>28</sup> Lawrence N. Powell, *The New Orleans of George Washington Cable: The 1887 Census Report* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008), 147.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.

Indies, some felt the scourge was an unfortunate by-product of the necessary importation and maintenance of an enslaved workforce. Others believed that once established, slavery enervated the native population by removing the need for industry from the shoulders of the privileged, resulting in an aristocratic class incapable of anticipating impending disaster and instating preventative measures. When slavery was abolished, yellow fever continued to plague the area—providing a reminder to all Southerners of slavery’s enduring legacy written in saffron upon the skin of its unfortunate victims.

Cable was sensible of this symbolism when he penned the legend of Bras Coupè,<sup>30</sup> which details incidents occurring eight years prior to the action of the novel. Driven to battle by “ennui,” an African prince, the future Bras Coupè, is captured and sold into slavery by enemy tribesmen. He is then carried to New Orleans and sold in a lot to Agricola Fusilier, who persuades his brother-in-law and a distant relation of the ladies Nancanou, José Marinez, to purchase the former prince for a field hand (169-71). Long regarded as an embedded folklore-like tale in the novel that dramatizes slavery’s evils,<sup>31</sup> the legend also functions as a portrayal of Southern views on race and physical wellness under slavery. Cable is quick to draw attention to the commercial value of slave “health” at market and to the imported nature of the city’s living commodities. By describing the captive as a *Jaloff* warrior and underscoring Bras Coupè’s physical strength, the throwing of sick and “unmerchantable” slaves over the ship’s side, and the administration of

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<sup>30</sup> Cable wrote an earlier version of the Bras-Coupé legend as a short story entitled “Bibi.” Because the manuscript for this prototype is lost, it is not possible to say whether the enslaved prince originally curses his owner with fever or if this occurs in versions published after the epidemic of 1878.

<sup>31</sup> For a discussion of the historical Bras-Coupé figure and its relation to folklore, see Brian Wagner, “Disarmed and Dangerous: The Strange Career of Bras-Coupé,” *Representations* 92 no. 1 (2005): 117-151.

medicine to Bras Coupè when he falls sick—the latter incident serving as a visceral reminder to the prisoner that he “was no longer king” (169-70)—Cable highlights the role of the slave’s physical vitality at market, as well as the slave’s status as an import. Bras Coupè is thus clearly reduced to a commodity whose value lies in strength and soundness, one whose robust health, presumably, negates the need for any coinciding vitality on the part of the master he serves.

And while he may possess youth and opportunity, Martinez does suffer from overall malaise. A man who “knew nothing about agriculture and cared as much about human nature” (172), his sole work is to avoid conflict on the plantation and reap financial gains. When Bras Coupè refuses to work, Martinez installs him as a driver supervising other slaves. To insure Bras Coupè stays on the plantation and performs effectively, Martinez promises him Palmyre’s hand in marriage—a promise he may or may not be able to keep. When Honoré’s sister refuses to give Palmyre to Bras Coupè, order predictably deteriorates as the slighted slave gets drunk and invokes a Voudou curse upon the household. Shortly after, a fever visits La Renaissance and blight takes its crops. Bras Coupè is tortured and captured, only to curse the house again. By the time the legend concludes, the slave has succumbed to his wounds, many plantation inhabitants (including Martinez) die of the fever, and the estate lies in ruins (173-93).

Utilizing his well-honed sense of irony, Cable presents an imported slave that does not suffer from fever, but causes it—a configuration that plays upon popular myths surrounding yellow fever’s origin. Yet it is not the ship bringing Bras Coupè that is responsible for the calamity; the catalyst is the enslaved prince’s sense of outraged justice and desire for revenge. Cable therefore invokes prior abolitionist arguments that the

disease was a punishment, sent by Providence, to chasten the moral and commercial sins of the region. At the same time, he refutes the notion that slaves and others of African descent are immune to the fever by stating that: “Fever and death, to a degree unknown before, fell upon [Martinez’s] slaves” (184). Doing so negates popular racist beliefs that slaves/blacks spread illness while remaining immune, substituting such vitriol with images of universal suffering and an orderly and formerly profitable enterprise run aground by the exploitative actions of its managers and leaders. In this scenario, no one benefits. All lose. Participation in the slave trade meant many antebellum Southerners chose to sacrifice the health and lives of other humans in exchange for monetary gain. Once this system was no longer possible, illness and chaos disrupted the formerly lucrative plantation organizations spanning the Mississippi valley. Thus the legend of Bras Coupè, while certainly chronicling the violence inherent in slavery, also signifies upon nineteenth-century medical discourses regarding yellow fever’s genesis in the South and the fever’s ability to destroy prosperity.<sup>32</sup> Initial readers of *The Grandissimes* would thus recall not just slavery, but the recent economic losses they were *still experiencing* as a result of the peculiar institution’s legacy.

Such reminders were evidently needed. In the late 1870s it seemed little had been learned from previous mistakes. Slavery was abolished, but ships continued to arrive at port under relatively little systematic scrutiny from public health officials (thus privileging commerce over caution), medical professionals continued to debate yellow fever’s cause and treatment methods, and the general public still conceived of the illness

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<sup>32</sup> In most cases, those who suffered a case of yellow fever and survived were immune to the disease afterwards. Since many natives suffered relatively mild cases as children, the myth that all “native born” New Orleans residents were immune was credited by some circles of Crescent City society.



as one caused and contracted by members of so-called lower classes.<sup>33</sup> It is the vulnerability of a particular portion of New Orleans's population, recently arrived immigrants, Cable dramatizes through Joseph Frowenfeld. As early as 1802 the French visitor Berquin-Duvallon argued that the "Americain" in particular was liable to infection. Owing to their "copiously" filled veins and proclivities for "succulent meats and spices," as well as "the bottle," he believed them "susceptible to inflammation and corruption."<sup>34</sup> By characterizing American immigrants as a group of people whose indulgence perpetrated their ill health, Berquin-Duvallon provides decidedly classist and moralistic overtones to his disease observations. Such beliefs continued to gain credence in the public psyche as the century progressed.

Throughout the 1800s, Northerners and foreign immigrants flooded New Orleans. Though largely viewed as social inferiors by the city's native Creoles, these newly arrived entrepreneurs, craftsmen, and workers contributed in various ways to the economic infrastructure of the region and became, over time, a vital part of the Crescent City's business landscape. Many native New Orleans residents viewed the city's recently arrived inhabitants as either usurpers of the wealth and prestige once held by grand antebellum plantation families, or as an uncouth rabble pushing native New Orleanians out of jobs in a tough post-war economy. In either case such Creoles considered recent transplants unsavory, often asserting that the increase of foreign-born Crescent City citizens led to increases in infectious disease. Where slaves and slave ships had once

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<sup>33</sup> See: Jo Ann Carrigan, "Privilege, Prejudice, and the Strangers' Disease in Nineteenth-Century New Orleans," *The Journal of Southern History* 36 no. 4 (1970): 568-578.

<sup>34</sup> Pierre-Louise Berquin-Duvallon, *Travels in Louisiana and the Floridas*, John Davis, trans. (New York: Riley & Co., 1806), 116.

borne the brunt of the blame for causing yellow fever, this burden was quickly shuffled to newly arrived immigrants.

In this context, Frowenfeld's dual characterizations as a "German immigrant" and "Americain" in *The Grandissimes* places him within two demographic groups that were thought most susceptible to yellow fever, on one hand, and were synonymous with nouveau riche wealth and social mobility, on the other. Cable claims that by 1811 Louisiana's American immigrants were a relatively small, but powerful, part of New Orleans's society. Acknowledging the threat felt by many Creole families at this influx of the newly wealthy—a mistrust based on suspicions that such immigrants, in Cable's words, represented a "commercial conquest"—the author nevertheless praises the "active," "practical," and "vigorous" natures of these Northern newcomers, viewing them as the impetus for the Crescent City's rapid commercial growth in the first half of the nineteenth-century.<sup>35</sup> Similarly, at mid-century the port city experienced a large increase in German immigration, some 240,000 arriving to the United States via New Orleans from 1848-1861. While many moved to German hamlets in Pennsylvania and the Midwest, several stayed in New Orleans and quickly developed reputations as industrious and steady workers who harbored, generally, anti-slavery sentiments.<sup>36</sup> Within this context, the destruction of Frowenfeld's family in *The Grandissimes* is not merely conforming to the traditional opening of a nineteenth-century sentimental novel. Rather, it recalls a type of modern, progressive, and financially desirable Crescent City citizen whose fatality exemplifies prior market sins leading to the death of contemporary

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<sup>35</sup> Powell, *The New Orleans of George Washington Cable*, 124-125.

<sup>36</sup> Patricia Herminhouse, "The German Secrets of New Orleans," *German Studies Review* 27 no. 1 (2004): 1-16; 7-9.

economic promise. The massive casualties occasioned by epidemics were not only tragic from a human perspective; they made it difficult for the commerce of the port city to stabilize, an outcome that all, including staunch supporters of the former Confederacy, desired. Because yellow fever was always a threat and frequently a reality, businesses were constantly opening, closing, and needing to be re-staffed while determining production and demand amounts from one year to another proved all but impossible. To many Crescent City merchants, it was clear that stymieing pestilence was pivotal for economic improvement.

### **The Work of Reconciliatory Reform**

Honoré Grandissime, Cable's young and relatively open-minded merchant hero, is the first to combat this need within the pages of *The Grandissimes* by coupling practical prophylaxis consistent with late nineteenth-century medical beliefs alongside a world-view that transcends archaic Southern views of caste. Within the novel's first paragraph, the reader is told that the opening masquerade ball Honoré attends is held because "...it was fitting that something should be done for the sick and the destitute" (1), thus establishing the work's overarching themes of charity and a hope for universal wellness from its onset. Honoré, who we learn from a passenger on the vessel carrying the Frowenfeld family donated \$250 toward this cause, actually gives another \$250 so he may catch a glimpse of Aurora's countenance (10, 6). Thus within the first ten pages Cable provides a blueprint of the proper "cure" for the city's threatening fevers: a release of private funds for public benefit. Honoré's second contribution, spent during a flirtation with an anonymous woman who is actually his future wife and current family vilifier,

adds a greater layer of meaning. Though impossible to discern until finishing the novel, Cable insinuates that charitable giving holds the potential to resolve and rectify prior wrongs even at this early stage in the narrative. The result is a scene foreshadowing the novel's interests of reconciliation, economics, and community health concerns.

Inspiration for these interests came in the form of community organizations dedicated to improving public health, particularly the New Orleans Auxiliary Sanitary Association (ASA). Formed in the wake of the 1878 epidemic, the association adopted the motto "public health is public wealth"<sup>37</sup> and solicited funds from the city's social and mercantile elite on the platform that such donations were, in fact, sound business investments.<sup>38</sup> Firmly convinced of the cyclical relationship between economic improvement and public welfare while recognizing a severe lack of state funding for public health measures, the ASA assumed responsibility for several sanitation measures civil authorities were unable to provide. Indeed, Dr. Edward Fenner, an ASA Vice President, summarizes the organization's early goals by remarking in 1882:

Imperfect drainage, filthy streets and gutters, foul and ill-constructed canals, low lots and places, a meager water supply, a vile privy system, the rapid removal from our midst of all refuse matters tending, under our hot sun, to produce and spread disease are matters which engage their attention. Just so long as the citizens contribute the material aid required, they can rely upon the best efforts of the Association to continue the war against every enemy to the material prosperity of the Crescent City.<sup>39</sup>

Prominent merchants, physicians, and other high-profile citizens comprised the bulk of the ASA's membership---several of whom Cable knew personally, including his boss,

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<sup>37</sup> Ellis, *Yellow Fever & Public Health in the New South*, 86.

<sup>38</sup> Dennis East, II, "Health and Wealth: Goals of the New Orleans Auxiliary Sanitary Association, 1879-1884" *Louisiana History* 9 no. 3 (1968), 245-275.

<sup>39</sup> Edward Fenner, "History of the New Orleans Auxiliary Sanitary Association," *APHA Reports* 7 (1882), 91-95.

William C. Black, who served as an ASA Vice President, and Henry Ginder, whom Cable met while clerking for Captain T. Ellis during the war. Most intriguing, however, is the fact that Adolph Schreiber, a prominent Creole merchant of New Orleans, was also a charter member.<sup>40</sup> In a letter to his wife dated June 8, 1887, Cable identified Schreiber as the model for Honoré Grandissime's character.<sup>41</sup>

Many of the specific measures Fenner mentions inhabit the periphery of *The Grandissimes*'s plot. For readers living in today's world of large-scale urban sewage systems and improved water quality, the novel's periodic references to squalid ditches, un-drained marshes, and water three-inches from the floor may seem like details Cable employed to enhance the work's mood and imaginative appeal<sup>42</sup>; for initial readers of his fiction, however, such circumstances would have been recognized as environments conducive to yellow fever. Eradicating such cesspools would do more than improve aesthetics, it would increase the health and finances of the community. For example, when Honoré and Frowenfeld initially meet, it is at the old oak tree which shelters the grave of Bras Coupè and Frowenfeld's recently deceased family—itsself a powerful

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<sup>40</sup> *An address from the New Orleans Auxiliary Sanitary Association of New Orleans to the other cities and towns of the Mississippi Valley*. Pamphlet. New Orleans: Auxiliary Sanitary Association, 1879. From Harvard University Library Open Collections Program. "Contagion: Historical Views of Disease and Epidemics." <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn:3:HMS.COUNT:1062904?n=17> (18 Feb. 2014).

<sup>41</sup> Turner, *George W. Cable*, 92.

<sup>42</sup> Prior to Walter Reed's demonstration of mosquitoes as the vector for the yellow fever virus, it was commonly believed that yellow fever stemmed from noxious miasmas emanating from standing water. Because New Orleans's elevation is so slight, ground water frequently saturated the entire top layer of soil. To combat the miasmas of the ground, homes of the New Orleans middle class and well-to-do were frequently built on stilts or piles to provide an arid buffer from the soggy ground. Cable's house on Eighth Street, in which he wrote *The Grandissimes*, was raised one floor level above the ground for this purpose. See W. Kenneth Holditch, "The Grandissimes and the French Quarter" in *The Grandissimes Centennial Essays*, Thomas J. Richardson, ed., 46.

symbol uniting thwarted ambition, vulnerability, and disease. Honoré, venturing out “with some practical object in view—drainage, possibly” and finding “the matter of business which had brought him out” shining with a “somewhat golden radiance...[a] little secret worth many pounds” finds the young German mourning at the gravesite (35). The “gold” and “pounds” hidden within the prospect of draining wetlands point to a literary endorsement of the ASA’s assertion that better sanitation equaled better income. Yet upon his return Honoré is confronted with the tragic specter of a son mourning the loss of his entire family. Through this combination Cable manages to play upon the sentimental and monetary concerns of his reading audience, showing how failure to prevent disease limits financial development and destroys domestic bonds by symbolically linking sympathetic compassion, medical prophylaxis, and sound economic speculation.

Yet while practical steps toward disease prevention were valuable, sanitation measures could only prevent yellow fever, not eradicate it. Honoré’s character provides a pedagogical model of a successful and civic-minded businessman, but the need for scientists capable of understanding the illness’s epidemiology was as dire as the need for increased funding of public health measures. Michael Germana, one of few critics to examine Cable’s novel in an economic context, is also one of few to offer an explanation for Frowenfeld’s esoteric topics of study. Germana’s larger argument is that the novel provides an allegorical representation of the nineteenth-century gold/silver debate and the role of paper specie in a Southern post-bellum economy. Within this framework he asserts that Frowenfeld’s penchant for keeping meteorological statistics and examining weather patterns is indicative of Cable playing “the bimetalist trump card by invoking

Newton”—a man who, besides being a “fellow astronomer and student of the physical sciences,” was also the “father of modern bimetallism and one-time Master of the Royal Mint.”<sup>43</sup> Germana is correct in his association of Frowenfeld’s hobbies with monetary issues and commercial success. However, there is another explanation for Frowenfeld’s activities placing him within the realm of nineteenth-century views on disease prevention—he’s recording meteorological data to determine which weather conditions foster outbreaks. Figure 4.1 is a chart contained in the Howard Association’s publication *The Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1878, in Memphis, TN* (1879).<sup>44</sup> Because of the fever’s association with tropical climates, many medical scholars took to studying weather patterns in the hopes of determining which atmospheric conditions produced hospitable conditions for the scourge.

### METEOROLOGICAL TABLES.

Comparison of Mean Daily Barometer, Thermometer, Prevailing Direction of Wind, State of Weather, Mean Daily Humidity and Daily Rain-Fall of August, September, October, and November, 1878, in Memphis, as recorded by Dr. Thornton, Surgeon in charge of City Hospital, and assistants, with corresponding months of 1873.

DATE.	Barometer.		Thermometer.		Prevailing Direction of Wind.		Condition of Weather.		Mean Humidity.		Rain-Fall.	
	1873.	1878.	1873.	1878.	1873.	1878.	1873.	1878.	1873.	1878.	1873.	1878.
August 1.....	30,067	30,000	75	88.2	south	south-west	cloudy	clear	83.3	59.3	2.94	0
" 2.....	30,030	29,942	79	81.2	south-west	south	fair	fair	80.0	77.0	0	.21
" 3.....	30,090	29,872	75	80.2	north	westerly	fair	cloudy	78.0	77.0	.05	.02
" 4.....	30,170	29,881	72	78.2	north-east	northerly	clear	fair	63.7	69.3	0	.02
" 5.....	30,160	29,875	75	84.2	north-east	north-west	clear	clear	62.7	65.7	0	0
" 6.....	30,092	29,917	78	85.7	south-east	north-west	fair	clear	69.3	61.3	0	0
" 7.....	30,020	29,953	75	86.2	east	south-west	fair	clear	80.7	63.0	0	0
" 8.....	30,012	29,943	77	85.7	southerly	westerly	fair	clear	69.7	59.7	0	0
" 9.....	30,062	29,899	81	86.2	north-west	south-west	fair	clear	74.3	57.0	.03	0
" 10.....	30,072	29,899	83	81.7	north-west	south-west	clear	cloudy	74.7	72.7	.23	.13
" 11.....	30,022	29,960	85	78.2	north	north	clear	cloudy	72.7	82.3	0	.12
" 12.....	29,978	29,737	84	75.5	west	north-east	cloudy	cloudy	68.0	81.7	0	.33
" 13.....	29,967	29,897	79	78.7	westerly	north-east	fair	fair	80.0	72.0	1.09	.07
" 14.....	29,980	29,927	78	81.2	north-east	northerly	clear	clear	65.7	62.7	0	0
" 15.....	29,895	29,997	79	82.5	westerly	south-west	clear	clear	65.3	65.0	0	0
" 16.....	29,945	30,040	75	84.2	north-west	west	cloudy	clear	85.7	63.0	0	0
" 17.....	29,997	30,061	76	86.2	north-west	south	fair	clear	76.8	64.7	0	0
" 18.....	30,037	30,079	73	87.0	north	south-west	clear	clear	60.3	62.7	0	0
" 19.....	30,032	29,994	76	83.2	north	south-west	fair	clear	61.6	63.7	0	0
" 20.....	29,972	29,889	76	87.0	northerly	south-west	fair	fair	61.0	67.7	0	0
" 21.....	29,990	29,898	79	84.0	north-east	north-west	fair	fair	71.0	73.3	0	.02
" 22.....	30,042	29,965	77	81.7	easterly	north-east	fair	clear	70.6	68.3	0	0
" 23.....	30,095	30,006	81	81.5	east	north-west	fair	clear	66.0	55.0	0	0

A HISTORY OF THE YELLOW FEVER.

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<sup>43</sup> Germana, *Standards of Value*, 67-68.

<sup>44</sup> The Howard Association, like the ASA, was a voluntary organization with a public health mission. Instead of focusing on disease prevention and sanitation, however, Howard Association chapters acted during times of contagion and epidemics, supplying basic supplies and medical attention to communities and citizens in need.

Fig. 4.1. Chart comparing meteorological data from 1873 and 1878 that was gathered by Dr. Thornton of City Hospital, Memphis, in *The Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1878, in Memphis, TN* (Memphis: The Howard Association of Memphis, 1879) 195.

Documents such as this chart lend new meaning to Frowenfeld's journals, which contain such seemingly random tidbits as: "Morning observation: Cathedral clock, 7 A.M. Thermometer 70 degrees...Hygrometer 15...Barometer 30.380" (138). In providing examples of Frowenfeld seeking the cause of the disease which took his family, Cable underscores Frowenfeld's status as an industrious, progressive reformer striving to eradicate the figurative and literal illnesses plaguing the South and individuals who could best help its industrial commerce: Northern investors. Germana does, however, provide a cogent insight into the novel when he links monetary concerns and "social reformers of the period."<sup>45</sup> While Germana envisions this convergence occurring due to similarities between social and monetary reformers' rhetoric regarding black enfranchisement and legal tender, I locate Cable's connection between economic concerns and social reform within the realm of commercial regulations and exchange.

Following the Civil War, the role previously cast upon slavery as a leading impetus for epidemic disease was transferred to other forms of international commercial trade. This transfer was augmented once federal investigations into the cause of the 1878 epidemic revealed Louisiana's spotty, haphazard ship inspection and quarantine practices. At the time two views of fever prevention, one based on quarantine and the other on vessel disinfection, were vying for dominance in the medical community.<sup>46</sup> The

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<sup>45</sup> Germana, *Standards of Value*, 62.

<sup>46</sup> For information on the debate between disinfection and quarantine, see: Ellis, *Yellow Fever & Public Health in the New South*, 60-82; Humphreys, *Yellow Fever and the*



inability of medical professionals to achieve consensus on this issue inadvertently allowed political and mercantile interests to heavily influence trade regulation.<sup>47</sup> Because there was no definitive proof that quarantine measures actually stymied the disease, merchants dependent on fast shipping and delivery could advocate for ship fumigation, a method involving little to no delay in transferring cargo. Politicians devising the laws and medical examiners appointed to oversee the port and its functions thus found themselves consistently pressured to lower quarantine detention times or, in some cases, to eradicate detentions altogether. Before 1878, then, state-mandated regulations governing trade restrictions tended to take their shape from the special interests of each administration's cronies and cohorts and/or the need to pacify influential lobbyists who could cause trouble at election time. Such practices, viewed as insidious corruption (at worst) or weak-kneed cowering (at best), were denounced locally and nationally after 1878. It was clear to New Orleanians that they must restore the nation's confidence in their port's safety by creating standardized and more stringent trade regulations that encompassed elements of both, disinfection and quarantine.

Cable viewed the circumstances that created this need for greater trade oversight--self-interest, pandering to the desires of the wealthy elite, and a tendency to gamble with the region's public welfare—as similar to attitudes of exploitation, social privilege, and willful ignorance that helped slavery and class discrimination flourish. The economic

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*South*, 17-44; Jo Ann Carrigan, *The Saffron Scourge: Yellow Fever in Louisiana*, (doctoral dissertation, Louisiana State University, 1961), 280-362.

<sup>47</sup> For greater detail about business interests influencing yellow fever prevention measures, see: Margaret Warner, "Local Control versus National interest: The Debate over Southern Public Health, 1878-1884," *The Journal of Southern History* 50 no. 3 (1984), 407-428; and James O. Breedon, "Joseph Jones and Public Health in the New South," *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 32 no. 4 (1991), 341-370.

models favored under both paradigms, he felt, ultimately benefitted only a small cross-section of the population: elite leaders and aristocrats willing to risk the long-term health and well-being of fellow humans for the short-sighted acquisition of a few bucks. Against this background, reform meant more than simply preventing sickness; it meant eradicating the practices and mindsets that allowed illnesses like yellow fever to perpetuate and thrive. Such a theme is dramatized in chapters like “Louisiana States Her Wants,” which contains a list of Creole society’s mandates for its new American government. Personifying the state as a woman, Cable writes, “she wanted an *unwatched import trade!* she did not want a single additional Américain appointed to office; she wanted the slave trade” (236). In this grouping Cable links archaic racial views, local prejudice, and the desire for unregulated imports---characterizing such desires as antiquated and unfit for the “American” Louisiana of his day.

Yet the scene that most clearly dramatizes Cable’s belief that ideological and commercial mistakes of the past haunted and plagued the South’s progress in his present can be found in an exchange between *The Grandissime*’s two heroes. When Honoré Grandissime encounters an injured Frowenfeld in the back room of the apothecary shop both men struggle under burdens. Frowenfeld, following an attack by Palmyre’s female slave, Zizi, suffers from fever and anguishes over his ruined reputation. Honoré, meanwhile, struggles between his wish to return Fausse Rivière to the ladies Nancanou and the obligation he feels to preserve the good fortunes of his own family line. On the surface, these friends’ individual conundrums seem to possess little similarity. Yet when Frowenfeld asks Honoré to elaborate on his troubles, Honoré establishes a symbolic connection between their two maladies by using fever as a metaphor---claiming “You

know, Mr. Frowenfeld, there is a kind of tree not dreamed of in botany that lets fall its fruit every day of the year...we call it—with reverence—‘our dead father’s mistakes.’ I have had to eat much of that fruit; a man who has to do that must expect to have now and then a little fever” (219). In return, Frowenfeld advises his friend to choose between “expediency” and “divine justice” in the matter. Only then, suggests the apothecary, will prior wrongs be overcome.

This speech of Honoré’s is telling. The first case of yellow fever to strike New Orleans in 1878 was eventually traced back to the Havana-launched schooner *Emily B. Souder*, whose cargo of fruit prevented it from being detained at the New Orleans quarantine station as long as vessels carrying less perishable goods.<sup>48</sup> Prior to the spring of 1878, it had been customary to disinfect ships arriving from the yellow fever zone with sulfurous acid gas; but one month before the ’78 epidemic began a fruit vessel was treated with such gas, causing the bananas on board to turn black. Unable to reap market value for the darkened fruit, the shipmaster and supplying fruit company brought legal suit against the state board of health. Stung by these legal repercussions, then-board president Samuel Choppin instructed the quarantine physician to exempt all fruit vessels from fumigation.<sup>49</sup> When the fever gained a foothold in the city one month later, many looked back on these changes with a rueful eye. For many Americans reading *The Grandissimes* in 1880, Honoré’s quip about eating fruit poisoned by the mistakes of his fathers and reaping fever as a consequence would have been a somber reminder of the epidemic’s genesis—especially when one takes into account that most of the casualties in the epidemic of ’78 were young children like Cable’s unfortunate son.

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<sup>48</sup> Ellis, *Yellow Fever & Public Health in the New South*, 39.

<sup>49</sup> Humphreys, *Yellow Fever and the South*, 85-86.

At the same time, Zizi's fever-laden blow echoes Bras Coupè's disease-laden vengeance a mere 35 pages prior. One important difference, however, is Frowenfeld's innocence. While Martinez's treatment of Bras Coupè can be read as precipitating the slave-owner's illness, Zizi's attack on Frowenfeld stems from a critical misunderstanding when, believing her mistress's chastity threatened and knowing the potential sexual threat white men pose for black women, the slave strikes to protect her mistress. In a move reminiscent of the plague visited upon Martinez's unfortunate slaves, this scene once again highlights fever's inability to be confined. Rather than smiting those whose actions cultivate an environment of illness, the disease, once unleashed, is capable of afflicting good and bad, black and white, native and immigrant alike. The fact that Frowenfeld has suffered fever once, only to suffer it again, allows Cable to present slavery's legacy of violence and disease as an ongoing problem threatening newly arrived *and established* American immigrants who would lead entrepreneurial spirit in the Crescent City through local business ventures---a connection the reader is invited to make when Frowenfeld and Honoré commiserate under the roof of Frowenfeld's self-run business.

This scene between Frowenfeld and Honoré thus skillfully alludes to a central tension of American culture: its dual adherence to market capitalism, with its emphasis on pursuing profits, and social welfare, with its decree to help even the lowliest members of the population survive and thrive. Espousing the belief that all men were equal and equally entitled to life, liberty, and happiness, America's commitment to the wellbeing of its inhabitants was nonetheless compromised by its adoption of *laissez faire* capitalism, with its hands-off approach to regulation, and the nation's involvement with the slave trade. Frowenfeld's calls to abandon the South's archaic caste system ask Southerners to

turn away from a social model that sacrificed the moral and financial growth of the region and its people on the altar of prejudice. At the same time, his vocation and store serve as a symbolic answer to the tension between mercantile and civic interests by exemplifying a flourishing business venture whose sole aim is restoring good health to the masses. In so doing, Cable invokes progressive reform creeds like the ASA's belief that higher levels of public health would lead to greater economic security. The suggestion behind the novel's two heroes, then, is clear. America should overcome the erroneous belief that pursuing profits trumped social responsibility.

Yet Honoré's business knowledge and Frowenfeld's studies of natural science will achieve only limited success if their approaches compete. Within *The Grandissimes*, as well as historical New Orleans, rebuilding an economic infrastructure that could increase prosperity and was beneficial to all involved required cooperation across social and geographic lines. In his description of the ASA, Finance Committee member Edward Fenner remarked: "Successful business requires for its prosecution popular repose, whether it be in the form of freedom from civil and national turmoil and wars, or from panics engendered by the sudden outbreak of a malignant and mysterious disease. In the face of the first danger, the merchant or financier, to avert its evils, puts forth every effort and unhesitatingly resigns a portion of his wealth that the remainder may be preserved."<sup>50</sup> Fenner's equation of civil strife with endemic illness is significant because neither pestilence is portrayed in traditional terms of death and loss. Rather, both events are characterized as economic travesties disrupting regular business functions and spawning panics that require a sacrifice of bills, not blood, to be resolved. In this metaphor, donated

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<sup>50</sup> Fenner, "History of the New Orleans Auxiliary Sanitary Association," 91.

money is equated with soldiers on the front lines of a battle---both are risked so that others may survive unscathed. In addition, the doctor's comparison subtly denigrates any residual animosity remaining from the Civil War as detrimental to business. The implied call, then, is not for the South to rise again, but to rise above.

Honoré models such behavior when he restores Fausse Rivière to the ladies Nancanou, nullifying the animosity Aurora and Clotilde harbored for his family in the process. Obviously this decision does not show Honoré consciously funding the sciences or making a contribution toward sanitation reform, but it does illustrate a businessman making decisions based on personal feelings of moral responsibility, rather than greed. The gesture provides an exemplary transaction based on concepts of fairness and restitution for past wrongs instead of the pursuit of higher profits—and this decision ultimately serves the public good, for Clotilde knowingly funds the sciences when she enters into business partnership with Frowenfeld—an arrangement which, in addition to allowing the apothecary to expand and refurbish his store, also allows him the freedom to hire more clerks so he can devote his own time to scientific study (294). Honoré's restitution, then, holds the potential to benefit many more individuals than he could have foreseen. Not only does it allow Frowenfeld to further his studies on disease prevention, it facilitates a business partnership between Clotilde and Frowenfeld which foreshadows the marriage between this Northern scientist and Southern belle. North and South are finally healthy, prosperous, and reconciled.

Cable may have found his inspiration for Clotilde's character in wealthy philanthropist and widow, Elizabeth Thompson. Hailing from New York, the eccentric Thompson was nonetheless deeply dedicated to improving the plight of disease-stricken

New Orleans and, by extension, the rest of the nation. When Congress refused to offer monetary support for yellow fever investigation, Thompson bankrolled a Yellow Fever Commission connected with the U.S. Marine Hospital Service and composed of three nationally prominent physicians and Col. T.S. Hardee, a renowned New Orleans scientist who served as Sanitation Engineer.<sup>51</sup> Ultimately Thompson would donate approximately ten thousand dollars to yellow fever prevention during her lifetime, some of which went to the ASA.<sup>52</sup> To show their gratitude, the *Sacramento Daily Union* reported on June 3, 1881 that the ASA named one of the New Orleans's public squares in her honor.

Clotilde and Thompson both are touted as quintessential compassionate women, yet their nurturing ways and altruism help mediate transgressive forays into what, in the nineteenth-century, were considered masculine arenas of business and public policy. Thus at an 1879 meeting of the American Public Health Association, during which the Yellow Fever Commission gave a report, Dr. Ezra M. Hunt of New Jersey lauded Thompson's and other women's contributions to yellow fever prevention in glowingly sentimental terms: "It is the hand of a woman that has extended itself to the hand of the distinguished chief of our national merchant marine; the carrier-dove that has saluted the American eagle with precious gifts for the saving art...It is like Florence Nightingale who, in middle life, a secluded invalid, is still busy in her precious affairs of life—

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<sup>51</sup> Ernest Hardenstein, *The Epidemic of 1878 and its Homeopathic Treatment: A General History of the Origin, Progress, and End of the Plague in the Mississippi Valley* (New Orleans: J.S. Rivers, 1879), 37.

<sup>52</sup> Rossiter Johnson, ed. *The Twentieth Century Dictionary of Notable Americans: Brief Biographies of Authors, Administrators, Clergymen, Commanders, Editors, Engineers, Jurists, Merchants, Officials, Philanthropists, Scientists, Statesmen, and Others Who Are Making History*. Boston: The Biographical Society. 1904.

preserving love.”<sup>53</sup> Aligning women’s efforts to suppress the disease’s spread with a social paradigm that conceived of women as selfless caregivers, Hunt converts these women’s donations into “healing gifts” from retiring, ethereal creatures. Cable, having already endured editorial criticism for “Bibi” and its “unmitigatedly distressful effect,”<sup>54</sup> was keenly aware of the conventions and expectations of his audience. Careful to preserve traditional gender roles, he would treat his Clotilde as Hunt did Thompson and Nightingale: he would make the supposedly feminine desire for love and peace a woman’s main motivation for charity work.

In her role as benefactress, Clotilde supplies the final compliment needed for an idealistic nineteenth-century society. To Frowenfeld’s visionary liberality and Honoré’s pragmatic action she adds compassionate sympathy. Yet this compliment can only be realized and the book’s medical allegory function properly if Cable’s readers adequately remember the catalytic role fever plays in both the novel’s narrative and actual Southern trade. To encourage this recall, Cable formulates his plot’s ending so that careful readers can piece together the progression of the relationship between Clotile and Frowenfeld.

During his initial bout with yellow fever, Frowenfeld believes he sees a “strange and beautiful young face” through the midst of his delirium. Upon inquiry, however, Dr. Keene denies the existence of such a nurse and blames the vision on a “vagary of the fever” (12-13). Later in the novel, however, Aurora asks Frowenfeld who nursed him during his illness and, upon hearing the reply of “an old hired negress” gives an inexplicable giggle (91), the motivation of which is not revealed until the final pages

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<sup>53</sup> Ezra M. Hunt, M.D., “How to Study an Epidemic,” quoted in “The Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1878,” *The American Public Health Association, The Sanitarian: A Monthly Magazine*, A.N. Bell, ed., VII (70), 1-23.

<sup>54</sup> Rubin, *George Washington Cable*, 39.



when, in the midst of affirming her love for Frowenfeld, Clotilde exclaims”---Evva sinze de firze nighd w’en I big-in to nurze you wid de fivver” (334). At first it is tempting to view this declaration as a reference to Clotilde’s assistance following Zizi’s attack, except Frowenfeld sustained that injury during regular business hours and not at night--- as shown by the legions of gawking passersby who throng his shop. Instead, this utterance by Clotilde clues a discerning reader into recognizing that she actually fell in love with Frowenfeld at the novel’s beginning when she helped nurse him through the epidemic that took his family. Though unrevealed through much of the novel, the genteel and impoverished Creole beauty has longed for the Northern idealist-turned-entrepreneur since the narrative’s opening pages. Their eventual union, then, is in keeping with the larger allegory of wealth and health permeating *The Grandissimes*. Not only do Northern vision and Southern resources combine into a symbolic harbinger of a unified nation, but the representative of outdated medical and racial paradigms, Dr. Charlie Keen, is supplanted by the egalitarian Frowenfeld in Clotilde’s affections.

But there is blight on the otherwise optimistic ending of Cable’s novel, for while Frowenfeld and Clotilde rejoice in their impending marriage and financial stability, Palmyre and Honoré Grandissime, f.m.c. drift further from the land of their birth— removing their substantial capital in the process. By including this remittance, Cable dramatizes how continued reliance on racial and class-based social hierarchies hindered the region’s financial recovery by precluding the establishment of profitable business partnerships between New Orleans’s wealthy black elite and white merchants. To illustrate the value of such relationships he portrays a scenario that could not fail to arouse the indignation of all Americans—the loss of significant capital during a time of

economic struggle and medical disaster. Cable hoped that by doing so, *The Grandissimes* would not only cause its readers to reassess their priorities regarding wealth and the wellbeing of others; it would make them consider what such bigotry cost all members of society, regardless of social status.

Cable's novel is, as Robert O. Stephens claims, a pedagogical one.<sup>55</sup> The lesson Cable wished to impart to his beloved South is that economic prosperity would be enhanced, rather than hindered, by greater attention to public welfare. To fully achieve this goal, however, former paradigms of social segregation, regional animosities, and unregulated trade would have to be replaced with reform-minded measures benefitting the entire citizenry. Undergirding this process in the novel is yellow fever---a shadowy presence whose constant threat represents antiquated Southern views on slavery and commerce, as well as their consequences. In *The Grandissimes*, fighting this disease meant more than simply disinfecting ships or placing them in quarantine; it meant visualizing the South as a part of America, not apart from America. Only then could the nation truly enjoy the benefits of public health and public wealth.

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<sup>55</sup> Robert O. Stephens, "Cable's *The Grandissimes* and the Comedy of Manners," *American Literature* 51 no. 4 (1980): 507-519.

## **Chapter Five -- The Laws of Changeless Justice Bind Oppressor and Oppressed: Slavery, Crime, and Heredity in Pauline Hopkins's *Of One Blood***

The idea that all peoples living in the United States contributed to both the virtue and vice of the nation was particularly evident to African American leaders endeavoring to articulate the moral responsibilities of their newly enfranchised people while, at the same time, being mindful and sympathetic to blacks' continued economic and professional subordination in the Jim Crow Era. Eager for African Americans to prove the moral and intellectual quality of their race through ethical and intelligent living, leaders such as W.E.B. Du Bois, Booker T. Washington, and others were careful to elucidate the discriminatory practices and cultural attitudes African Americans contended with, hoping their illustrations would teach African Americans the means of overcoming such obstacles. Often, economic and legal concerns were paramount in these discussions given slavery's role in the development of American capitalism and the subsequent role poverty played as a catalyst for African American-committed crime following Abolition. Thus in his sociological essay "The Negro and Crime," Du Bois solemnly admits the development of a black criminal class during Reconstruction but highlights the destruction of African American families and sexual exploitation of black women under slavery, as well as the lack of economic and educational opportunities for freed slaves and their descendants following emancipation, as catalysts for its origination.<sup>1</sup> And, while Du Bois and Hopkins famously disagreed with Booker T. Washington's methodology for

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<sup>1</sup> W.E.B. DuBois, "The Negro and Crime." *The Sociological Souls of Black Folk*, Robert Wortham, ed. (New York: Lexington Books, 2011), 103-106.

racial uplift,<sup>2</sup> all three viewed black-perpetrated crime as a social evil whose commission not only fostered discord and danger on a national level, but originated, largely, as a response to the criminal legacy of slavery, lynching, and oppression.

In his 1896 speech “Democracy and Education,” given before the Institute of Arts and Sciences in Brooklyn, Washington would characterize crime as a shared problem of national proportions, cautioning his listeners: “When the South is poor, you are poor; when the South commits crime, you commit crime. My friends, there is no mistake; you must help us to raise the character of our civilization or yours will be lowered....”<sup>3</sup> The “southern crimes” Washington referred to undoubtedly caused some audience members to recall the census report of 1890, with its prison statistics showing that African Americans, though representing 12% of the population, accounted for 30% of the nation’s prisoners (particularly in the south),<sup>4</sup> and the work of prison physicians like R.M. Cunningham, who, describing an Alabama prison in *The Medical News* in 1894 patently ignored the role of slave-owner disciplinary techniques before stating that in the nadir “85 percent of the prisoners were black, when before emancipation 99 percent of Alabama’s prisoners were white.”<sup>5</sup> In addition, Southern newspapers prominently

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<sup>2</sup> So much has been written on the ideological differences and similarities between DuBois and Washington that Jan Miller compiled an annotated bibliography of sources concerning it which can be found in *Journal of Black Studies* 25.2 (1994), 250-272. For information on Hopkins’s views regarding Washington, see Kevin Gaines’s “Black American’s Racial Uplift Ideology as ‘Civilizing Mission’: Pauline Hopkins on Race and Imperialism” in *Cultures of United States Imperialism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993).

<sup>3</sup> Booker T. Washington, “Democracy and Education.” Address Before the Institute of Arts and Sciences, New York, September 30, 1896.

<sup>4</sup> Khalil Gibran Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 5.

<sup>5</sup> R.M. Cunningham, “The Morbidity and Mortality of Negro Convicts.” *The Medical News* 64:5 (1894), 113.

featured accounts of African Americans supposedly committing rape, robbery, and other illicit activities.

Other audience members, however, may have recognized irony in Washington's statement. Addressing a group of Northern intellectuals, progressives, and aesthetes--- individuals who, sitting and listening to a black man speak, probably felt (rightly or wrongly) quite advanced in their racial views---Washington's phrase conjured the South's greatest crimes, the slave trade and extralegal death of black citizens under Jim Crow, as well as Northern industrial centers' capitalistically-based complicity in them. As such, Washington's speech served as a reminder that, for many turn-of-the-century African Americans, the evil villainies of slavery and its attendant racial oppression seemed ground zero for a perpetual chain of illegal and immoral activity spanning decades, classes, races, and generations.

This insistence that the interracial crimes of history begot contemporary race-related transgressions undoubtedly influenced Hopkins's comments in *Furnace Blasts*, as well as her fiction. In *Contending Forces* (1900), Charles Montfort's decision to relocate his plantation from Bermuda to the United States---thereby circumventing British law ordering the manumission of slaves---results in his murder, the "blackening" of his wife, and the subsequent sale of his white children into slavery. In the same year Hopkins's "Talma Gordon," considered the first detective story penned by an African American, centers on the mysterious murder of Captain Gordon and the subsequent trial and acquittal of his mixed-race daughter, Talma, for the crime. The true murderer is revealed to be Simon Cameron, a racially ambiguous East Indian who killed Captain Gordon, a former pirate, to avenge Gordon's murder of Cameron's father. In both works an initial

sin involving the trans-national exploitation of non-white individuals for financial gain serves as the foundational transgression for an on-going legacy of crime, violence, and disenfranchisement.

*Of One Blood* operates in a similar manner. Combining scientific racial and heredity-based theories of biology with aspects of ethnography and domestic thrillers, Hopkins fashions a novel that insists upon the corporeal and spiritual brotherhood, the “one bloodedness,” of all humanity. She expounds this unity, however, not through refuting racial stereotypes by deploying an “ethos of racial uplift” that was “generally assimilationist” to turn-of-the-century ideals of western progress, superiority, and social Darwinism, as Kevin Gaines and other critics suggest.<sup>6</sup> Written during a time when the belief that one’s moral sense was as liable to be transmitted genetically as skin color or physical size according to the tenants of early psychology and eugenics, *Of One Blood* instead reveals the folly of assigning stringent racial identities based on blood ratios and outward appearances and dramatizes the impossibility of distinguishing upright citizens from the criminals in a cosmopolitan world where good and bad, black and white, truth and treachery are continually in contact with one another through a complex international web of sexual, economic, and imperialistic relations.

While Robert Montgomery Bird and his antebellum medical colleagues may have harbored optimistic hopes that the mad, the “imbecile,” or the “degenerate” could be salvaged through a combination of humane treatment and compassionate institutionalization, most medical practitioners and early psychologists were decidedly

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<sup>6</sup> Kevin Gaines, “Black Americans’ Racial Uplift Ideology as ‘Civilizing Mission,’ in *Cultures of United States Imperialism* (Durham: Duke U P, 1993), 433-451; 437. It should be noted that Gaines, here, is characterizing what he sees as Hopkins approach throughout her body of fiction and non-fiction writings, including *Of One Blood*.

more pessimistic as the twentieth century dawned. This was due, in large part, to theories of heredity generated in the wake of Darwin's work and the often-fatalistic views of human progress that accompanied it. Thus the Washington-based physician W. Duncan McKim lamented that "Generation after generation, the ever-widening circles of hereditary influence approach one another, those of the nobles and those of the vilest human progenitors, until they overlap and completely coincide, with the sad result that all of mankind are kept at one low level."<sup>7</sup> Written at a time when science and medicine commonly portrayed mankind's progress through the stages of civilization as polluted and beleaguered due to inferior moral and physical antecedents, *Of One Blood* displays the pessimism, fatalism, and environmental determinism characteristic of literary Naturalism.<sup>8</sup>

In addition, Hopkins, the "foremother of African American mysteries."<sup>9</sup> gives a novel that, while not traditionally considered a detective work like "Talma Gordon" and *Hagar's Daughter*, nonetheless anticipates---thematically if not stylistically---the noir novels of twentieth century crime writers.<sup>10</sup> Rather than the traditional view aligning the

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<sup>7</sup> W. Duncan McKim, *Heredity and Human Progress* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1900), 119.

<sup>8</sup> For more information on Hopkins as a Naturalist writer, see Elizabeth Ammons's "Expanding the Canon of American Realism" in *The Cambridge Companion to American Realism and Naturalism* (New York: Cambridge U P, 1994).

<sup>9</sup> Paula L. Woods, *Spooks, Spies, and Private Eyes: Black Mystery, Crime, and Suspense Fiction of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 16.

<sup>10</sup> In "Literary Naturalism and its Transformations," found in Vol. 7 no. 2 of *Studies in American Naturalism*, Richard Lehan states "At the center of a noir plot is the assumption that everyone is degraded: nobody is innocent; good and evil blur as moral choices; redemption and betrayal are one and the same" (238). Lehan arrives at this conclusion after tracing naturalism's origin to the closing of the United States's geographic frontier and the ascension of its urban, technological frontier---themes Hopkins, with her interest in U.S. imperialism and technological progress, also invokes in *Of One Blood*.

lower classes and minorities with those inhibiting mankind's progression, Hopkins presents a revision of these beliefs that casts Anglo-Saxons---a "race" that assumed power in large part through the enslavement and sexual exploitation of their darker brethren---as the morally corrupting seed from which subsequent descendants of all races inherit criminal proclivities.

Widely known for its unconventional plot and use of multiple genre conventions,<sup>11</sup> *Of One Blood's* first half focuses on Reuel Briggs, a light-skinned mulatto who initially passes for white. Reuel leads a socially and economically limited life in Boston, where he studies medicine at Harvard, spending the majority of his time sequestered in his modest garret studying and only rarely socializing with his closest friend, Aubrey Livingston. One evening Reuel and Aubrey attend a concert featuring a group of African American singers. While there Reuel first sees (in the flesh) a beautiful and fair soloist, Dianthe Lusk, whose face has appeared to him in past visions. Later, Reuel will encounter Dianthe at his hospital where she has been brought following a railroad accident. Reuel is able to restore her consciousness through animal magnetism, but she suffers from memory loss. Aubrey and Reuel decide to keep Dianthe's identity a secret, enabling her too to pass, though inadvertently, as white. Later Reuel declares his love to Dianthe (now going by the name Felice Adams) and they become engaged. However, Reuel finds it hard to acquire a medical appointment in Boston and so agrees to accompany a group of English archeologists on an expedition to Meroe, leaving his bride to the care of Aubrey and Aubrey's fiancé's family, the Vances.

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<sup>11</sup> Serialized in *The Colored American Magazine* in 1902-03, *Of One Blood* contains stylistic elements of realism, romance, sentimental novels, and travel literature.



The novel's second half largely follows Reuel to Meroe, where amidst the ruins of the great and ancient metropolis he discovers not only the lost city of Telessar and its inhabitants, but the fact that he is a member of their royal line. Having been notified by letter that Dianthe perished in a river accident, Reuel marries Queen Candace of Telessar. Later, Reuel discovers in a vision that Dianthe is not dead. Instead Aubrey a false friend, has killed his own fiancé and seduced Dianthe via hypnosis. Angered, Reuel decides to return to the U.S. and seek vengeance on Aubrey. Meanwhile, an elderly former slave at Aubrey's ancestral Virginia home, Aunt Hannah, reveals that Dianthe, Aubrey, and Reuel are actually siblings---the illegitimate offspring of Hannah's daughter, Mira, and her white slave master. This news prompts Dianthe to attempt to poison Aubrey, but his will is stronger and he forces her to drink the deadly draught. Reuel returns in time for his sister-bride to die in his arms. Saddened, he returns to Telessar and Candace, where he uneasily anticipates the encroachment of other nations into the hidden realm. Left in the United States, Aubrey commits suicide after being instructed to do so under hypnosis by Reuel and his allies. At the story's end, readers have encountered "ancient" and contemporary societies, characters from all parts of the black/white racial spectrum, and a dizzying array of familial connections and secrets spanning time, place, cultures, and metaphysical planes.

By casting this rather large narrative net, Hopkins portrays a world in which no race, nation, or individual is autonomous. Instead, the late nineteenth's and early twentieth century's emergent technologies, worldviews, and the enterprising spirit they help to satisfy---what Charlie Vance refers to as the desire for "a few more dollars and

fresh information”<sup>12</sup>---render distinctions between past and present, white and minority, innocent and guilty impossible. Instead, Hopkins portrays the worldly desires for wealth and power as an “original sin” that taints humans of all races. Because capitalism favors the acquisition of power and wealth while paying scant attention to the frequently ruthless means of procurement, nations with economic and political might exploited other, less fortunate peoples to generate profits. Chief among these exploitative super-powers were the nations of the Anglosphere. Over time these exploitative relationships became entrenched into international commercial trade, dirtying more and more hands of various hues in the process. The result was not only the birth of sinister systems such as the peculiar institution and imperialist endeavors, but a long line of biological offspring in whose blood coursed the same tendency to exploit and subdue others for personal gain. Thus greed and cunning become concentrated in the blood of all humankind. Taking the belief that the tendency to commit crime and immoral activities was indeed inheritable at face value, *Of One Blood* dramatizes the consequences of market-fueled sins such as slavery and imperialist ventures, showing how the lingering ramifications of wrongdoing can poison not just the future of one individual, but the bloodlines and futurity of the entire world.

Through the years, many critics have noted Hopkins’ use of early scientific theories on heredity and genetics in *Of One Blood* and her other works of fiction. Noting references to late nineteenth and early twentieth-century ethnology and blood-based theories of man’s origin, as well as mysticism and early psychological thought, Susan Gilman writes that for Hopkins “none of these sciences is race-neutral. Like so many

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<sup>12</sup> Pauline Hopkins, *Of One Blood*, in *The Magazine Novels of Pauline Hopkins* (New York: Oxford U P, 1988), 584. Hereafter pages will be cited parenthetically.

African-American intellectuals throughout the nineteenth century, stereotyped as different and inferior by those sciences, Hopkins not only responds to those dominant discourses but also converts them to her own use.”<sup>13</sup> Martin Japtok argues that *Of One Blood* is ensnared within a “Darwinist Trap” in that Hopkins casts the lost civilization of Telessar as “superior” to both the cultures of turn-of-the-century Africa and the United States because it has achieved greater feats in the arts and sciences---a configuration which still paints early twentieth-century blacks as backwards peoples in need of enlightenment.<sup>14</sup> Honing in on Hopkins’s portrayal of incest, Shawn Salvant claims that the novel’s invocation of scientific racism ultimately shows that “the cultural meaning of incest, like the meaning of miscegenation, is based upon constructed categories only taken as natural,”<sup>15</sup> thereby illuminating the ethnocentrism that lingered behind many supposedly “objective” turn-of-the-century biological theories. Mandy Reid maintains that Hopkins draws upon Martin Delany’s theory that all people derived their pigment from varying levels of “rouge” in order to refute scientific racism with a new narrative privileging black blood as the source of scientific and artistic genius<sup>16</sup> and, most recently, Nathaniel Williams posits that the novel follows a tradition in “early imperialist science fiction” that sought to rectify scientific accounts of evolution with biblical creationism by “holding out the possibility that technology and exploration could...bring the Bible back

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<sup>13</sup> Susan Gilman, “Pauline Hopkins and the Occult: African American Revisions of Nineteenth-Century Sciences.” *American Literary History* 8 No. 1 (Spring 1996): 57-83; 58.

<sup>14</sup> Martin Japtok, “Pauline Hopkins’s *Of One Blood*, Africa, and the Darwinist Trap.” *African American Review* 36 No. 3 (2002): 403-15.

<sup>15</sup> Shawn Salvant, “Pauline Hopkins and the End of Incest,” *African American Review* 42 No. 3 (2008): 659-677; 672.

<sup>16</sup> Mandy Reid, “Utopia is in the Blood: The Bodily Utopias of Martin R. Delany and Pauline Hopkins,” *Utopian Studies* 22 No. 1 (2011): 91-121.

to a position of authority in scientific matters.”<sup>17</sup>

Such a wealth of scholarship is a pleasing luxury. I am indebted to Gilman’s skillful analysis of how Hopkins use of racial sciences not only refutes popular notions of racial hierarchies, but---to use Henry Louis Gates, Jr.’s term---signifies upon the logic undergirding them. In addition, Salvant and Reid, in chronicling how Hopkins channeled early works on ethnology and evolution provided valuable models for how to show the bias undergirding these (at the time) supposedly empirical theories. Lastly, Japtok’s astute demonstration of how Hopkins---perhaps unwittingly---reduplicated the dominant scientific discourse’s logic of racial hierarchy proved the value of examining moments of “thematic redundancy” in *Of One Blood*.

This chapter builds on such scholarship by showing how late nineteenth and early twentieth-century theories of heredity, evolution, and racial difference came to be used as explanations for criminal behavior and how Hopkins, drawing upon such rhetoric, indicts whites of the United States for their crimes of slavery and extralegal violence against African Americans. If black people are biologically disposed to commit crime, her novel asks, how do we explain the prevalence of white-led criminal activity? And when blacks do commit crimes, is it really dark blood that is responsible, particularly in cases where the perpetrator is of mixed race? In striving to answer such questions, Hopkins does indeed turn the “dominant discourses” of turn-of-the-century scientists and sociologists to her own use. Yet rather than borrowing from these scientific discussions solely to pit one race against the other, Hopkins instead uses them to meditate on the shared, interracial

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<sup>17</sup> Nathaniel Williams, “Reconstructing Biblical History: Garrett Serviss, Pauline Hopkins, and Technocratic Exploration Novels,” *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 34 No. 3 (2012): 323-340.

legacy that slavery and its resultant blood admixtures bequeathed the children of the United States and the world at large.

In *Of One Blood*, Hopkins creates a narrative rendering of American anthropologist G.A. Dorsey's musing that each child is "endowed with the heritage transmitted from numerous ancestors, and is already rich in personal experiences from its prenatal life"<sup>18</sup> and McKim's belief that "from a criminal ancestry a man usually inherits such a brain as will evolve a multitude of morbid desires and have little power of self-restraint,"<sup>19</sup> adapting such views to consider what sort of biological legacy Anglo-Saxons---a "race" that assumed power in large part through the control, enslavement, and sexual exploitation of their darker brethren---is leaving an increasingly interconnected world. The result is a novel that negates the alleged moral inferiority of non-white peoples through a dramatization of the guilt attending *all men and women* living in a society where atrocities such as slavery, rape, and the pilfering of cultures and lands are and were permitted in the name of capitalism and financial accretion. Through the many individual crimes---murder, theft, forced coercion, sexual assault---contained in the novel, as well as the escapades of the three estranged siblings who commit them, Hopkins exposes a genealogy of criminal activity whose roots originate from the physical and economic exploitation of the world's black inhabitants at the hands of Anglo societies during slavery. In the process, Hopkins argues against emerging criminological discourses that, using evolutionary-based hypothesis of degeneration, increasingly defined blacks as not merely intellectually inferior, but criminally atavistic. Instead, Hopkins critiques what she sees as the original crime of the United States---the

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<sup>18</sup> G.A. Dorsey, *Science, New Series*, (vi, 1897), 119.

<sup>19</sup> McKim, *Heredity and Human Progress*, 102

subjugation of allegedly “inferior” African and indigenous peoples in the name of profit--  
-which began under the slave trade and returned in the guise of “benevolent imperialism”  
towards the Philippines and other island nations following the peculiar institution’s end.  
Inverting the belief that “primitive black blood” spawned criminal descendants, *Of One  
Blood* casts white ruthlessness, rather than black “primitivism,” as the inherited and  
villainous tendency that dooms generations.

### **Theories of Criminal Heredity During the Nadir**

Writing over twenty years after Cable, Hopkins too conceived of slavery as a stain  
whose trace tainted contemporary times and refuted the United States’s historical claim to  
democratic equality and political enlightenment. Unlike Cable, however, Hopkins was  
not optimistic the damage caused by this crime against humanity could be overcome  
because she viewed the slave trade not as the central disease or vice plaguing the history  
of the U.S. (if not the western world), but as the biggest symptom of a archetypical  
pathology: the unbridled desire to subjugate and control others for economic gain and  
power. By the twentieth century, Hopkins was in a position to see many of the fears  
expressed in *The Grandissimes*---a curtailing of blacks’ rights, increased racial violence,  
and the political resurgence of white supremacy groups---come to fruition. Though  
slavery was legally eradicated, the systematic oppression of blacks---of which slavery  
was but the most overt form---still continued.

A leading contributor and editorial force of *The Colored American Magazine*, a periodical dedicated to showcasing African American literary talent and serving as a forum to further black political and cultural expression, Hopkins broadcast her frustration with Jim Crow-Era politics and prohibitions to an audience consisting of both, white and black middle-class readers. As a result she would frequently adopt the literary conventions of popular styles, such as dime novels and detective fiction, and incorporate current events and the public discourses surrounding them into her fictional works. *Of One Blood* is no exception, with Hopkins playing upon emerging scientific theories of genetics and biological inheritance in her novel of secret identity, long-lost civilizations, and mesmeric trances.<sup>20</sup> This synthesis allows her to signify on popular medical conceptions of black physiology, a tactic also employed successfully by Cable. Cable's riff on popular conceptions of blacks' alleged insusceptibility to infectious disease revealed the fallibility of biologically-based rationales for slavery. In *Of One Blood*, Hopkins employs a similar tactic by subverting the rhetoric of early criminal anthropologists and geneticists who, building upon early twentieth-century theories of evolution and biology, maintained that society's marginalized were inherently disposed to commit criminal acts. However, Hopkins does not discount the idea that a proclivity for crime can be transferred generationally. For Hopkins, crime does result from heredity, but it is the compounded prejudice, pride, and lust for economic power that courses through white blood that spurns criminal transgressions through the generations.

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<sup>20</sup> Hazel Carby, "Introduction," *The Magazine Novels of Pauline Hopkins* (New York: Oxford U P, 1988), xxix-xlix; xxx-xxxvi; xliii-xlviii. Hopkins began contributing to *The Colored American Magazine* in 1900, its inaugural year. She would continue to place a variety of fictional and non-fictional works, as well as fulfill editorial duties there, until 1904 when the periodical moved from Boston to New York due to the influence of Booker T. Washington.

Hereditary-based theories of criminal behavior gained intellectual ascension at the turn of the last century due to a variety of convergences. Early theories of biology and evolution proposed by Lamarck, Charles Darwin, and Francis Galton (amongst others) provided a strong intellectual foundation for the belief that criminal behavior was genetically predisposed due to their theories' emphasis on atavism, progressively sophisticated adaptations, and retrograde extinction. Excited by the possible connections of such biological theories to the studies of human behavior and psychology, many social reformers and scientists utilized biologically based theories of adaptation and atavism to explain certain human behaviors and conditions.

Two studies in particular, Richard L. Dugdale's *The Jukes: A Study in Crime, Pauperism, Disease, and Heredity* (1877) and Oscar McCulloch's *The Tribe of Ishmael: A Study in Social Degradation* (1888) helped further the belief that poverty and criminality were traits passed, at least in part, through hereditary transmission. Originally a penal reformer, Dugdale began his study after noticing that a number of related individuals around the Finger Lakes area of New York, the titular "Juke" family, continually showed in local penal logs. Intrigued, Dugdale traced the family history, eventually concluding that the family's patriarch left a consanguine legacy that included 540 legitimate and 169 illegitimate descendants---of which 77 were criminals, 128 were prostitutes, 142 were vagabonds, and 131 were idiots/impotent/syphilis sufferers.<sup>21</sup> Though conceding that a healthy environment could, possibly, curtail the impulse towards dissipation and crime, Dugdale concluded from his study of the Jukes that, in lieu of environmental correctives, those born to habitually pauper and criminal parents

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<sup>21</sup> Stedman, T.L. Review of "Twentieth Century Practice of Medicine." Vol. Xii *The British Medical Journal*, Vol. 1 No. 1953 (June 1898), pgs. 1457-1458.



would inherit and display similar degenerate behaviors.<sup>22</sup> McCulloch, meanwhile, took a more hardline approach. Familiar with and influenced by Dugdale's earlier study, McCulloch, a prominent Indianapolis minister, investigated a group of Indiana paupers and petty criminals he dubbed the "Tribe of Ishmael." While Dugdale believed a wholesome environment had the potential to mitigate a genetic disposition toward pauperism and crime, McCulloch concluded such unfortunates were beyond aid because "they are a decaying stock; they can no longer live self-dependent."<sup>23</sup> Together, Dugdale and McCulloch's works influenced a long line of turn-of-the-century intellectuals and medical men, as well as gave momentum to the "scientific charity movement" of the last decades of the nineteenth century.<sup>24</sup>

It did not take long for the belief that chronic poverty and immoral behavior were largely the result of hereditary factors to dovetail with racist beliefs of the time period. In a world that widely assumed the superiority of Anglo-Saxon blood and intellects--- counting such specimens as the zenith of human evolution---those possessing darker skin and/or non-Anglo heritage quickly found themselves aligned by some circles with not

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<sup>22</sup> Carlson, Elof Axel. "R.L. Dugdale and the Jukes: A Historical Injustice Corrected." *BioScience* 30.8 (August 1980), 535-539; 536. Carlson's piece also provides a cogent gloss on how Dugdale's theories were coopted by later proponents of eugenics.

<sup>23</sup> Oscar McCulloch, "The Tribe of Ishmael: A Study in Social Degradation," in Isabel C. Burrows, ed. *Proceedings of the National Conference of Charities and Correction* (Boston, 1888), 154-59. For more information on McCulloch, see Brent Ruswick's "The Measure of Worthiness: The Rev. Oscar McCulloch and the Pauper Problem, 1877-1891" in *Indiana Magazine of History* 104.1 (March 2008), p. 3-35.

<sup>24</sup> The Scientific Charity Movement was founded on the belief that members of the "unfit poor"----those whose supposedly dissipate lifestyles and immorality led to chronic pauperism---were taking relief and services from the deserving, industrious poor. Armed with a strange amalgam of evolutionary and statistical information, Scientific Charity organizations sought to limit the giving or relief only to those whose moral and constitutional make-up, they believed, would allow them to benefit from such altruism. For more information, see Brent Ruswick's *Almost Worthy: The Poor, Paupers, and the Science of Charity in America, 1877-1917*.

only physical, but criminal, degeneration. In particular, the emerging field of criminology provided a hotbed for such thinking. Cesar Lombroso, the Italian psychiatrist and physician commonly regarded as the spearhead of this then-developing discipline, was in part responsible for such alliances. Dedicated to the tenants of scientific racism and social Darwinism, Lombroso initially wrote an anthropological tract entitled *L'uomo bianco e l'uomo di colore (The White Man and the Man of Color)*, before becoming intrigued by the motives and behavior of criminals after serving as a military physician in Southern Italy when the army was trying to bow Southern peasant populations to Northern Italy's views of law and rule. Convinced that the "barbarity" of the Southern peasants resulted from atavistic genetics, Lombroso began to study the cranial and anatomical features of known criminals, eventually concluding that the skulls of European criminals "correspond to characteristics observed in normal skulls of the colored and inferior races."<sup>25</sup> Lombroso's theories on criminal behavior proved internationally influential, as a motley group of physicians, psychiatrists, biologists, and social reformers latched on to this purportedly scientific explanation for the outlaws and misfits of society.

This fusion of scientific racism and anatomically based theories of crime's genesis was particularly appealing to many social scientists in the United States. While the first textbook on criminology to appear in the United States was penned by the Hungarian neurologist Moritz Benedikt and titled *Anatomical Studies Upon the Brains of Criminals* (1881), Benedikt's approach relied upon brain dissection---and therefore his method was not adopted by social scientists. Lombroso's work and methods, however,

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<sup>25</sup> Nicole Hahn Rafter, *The Criminal Brain: Understanding Biological Theories of Crime* (New York: New York U P, 2008), 65-69; Cesare Lombroso, *Criminal Man*, Mary Gibson and Nicole Hahn Rafter, trans. (Durham: North Carolina U P, 2006), 65.

were much more user friendly. Yet while physicians in the United States who could read French or Italian were able to read Lombroso's work upon its initial publication, those who knew only English were reliant upon various digests, summaries, and the introductions Lombroso wrote for books by American criminologists, such as those for Arthur MacDonald's *Criminology* (1893) and August Drahm's *The Criminal* (1900), to get information regarding his theories.<sup>26</sup> The result was that by the time Hopkins penned *Of One Blood*, not only had Lombroso's theories of criminology permeated intellectual discussions of crime and race in the United States, many of these "discussers" were armed with an understanding of Lombroso's hypotheses that had been channeled through American scientists (who held their own biases regarding racial differences) for an American audience (with its own particular racial and social concerns). As a result, many came to believe that African Americans---whose genes, supposedly, were not as evolutionarily developed as their fairer neighbors' and whose relatively impoverished living conditions were insufficient to environmentally trump such retrograde heritage---were inherently more likely to perpetrate and perpetuate criminal activity through the ages.

*Of One Blood* inverts such beliefs. Playing upon the popular conception that the tendency to commit crime is transmitted biologically from parents to offspring, Hopkins uses her last novel to insinuate that the world's white populations have contributed vastly to the evils of the world through their sexual, economic, and physical subjugation of the planet's non-white populations over the course of hundreds of years. In doing so, she

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<sup>26</sup> Nicole Hahn Rafter, "Criminal Anthropology in the United States." *Criminology* 30.4 (1992), 525-545; 528-530. Rafter's article also includes an excellent bibliography of early works on Criminology that would be of interest for researchers interested in such primary sources.

joins the ranks of black intellectuals such as W.E.B. DuBois, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, and Monroe N. Work who struggled tirelessly to eradicate the charge of rampant criminality from African Americans and their dark brethren.

In presenting readers with the tale of three estranged siblings of mixed race brought together through a complex web of events involving murder, incest, and polygamy---Hopkins dramatizes the folly of maintaining a hereditary-based assumption of moral superiority in a society where, by holding their brethren in bondage, white slave owners created entire legacies of biologically related, though socially unacknowledged, kin. Setting her story after Emancipation, when the institution of chattel slavery no longer tethered slaves to their master's estates, *Of One Blood* unsettles the idea that one could determine the purity of a person's black or white heritage, let alone the purity of one's moral compass based on this ratio, adequately. In particular, her "United States" portions of *Of One Blood* highlight the hypocrisy of a nation where white citizens denigrate their darker brethren as morally inferior due to the taint of African blood while failing to acknowledge their own race's frequent contributions to the family trees of the nation's "black" population.

### **The Slavery of Crime: *Of One Blood's* Sibling Case Studies:**

The three main characters in *Of One Blood* are born of crime. The offspring of a young mulatto slave woman named Mira and her half-brother master, the physician Aubrey Livingston Senior<sup>27</sup>; Dianthe Lusk, Reuel Briggs, and Aubrey Livingston Junior

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<sup>27</sup> When Aunt Hennie tells Dianthe about her family history, she states that she was brought to the big house as a toddler and raised there by the master's wife. Once she grew older, however, Hennie's mistress changed toward her because "she soon knowed of my

were conceived through a forced sexual union that, while legally sanctioned under the peculiar institution, violated not only the “higher laws” of humanity, but the natural laws of the incest taboo. Benefactors of this line of ancestry, the three siblings are bequeathed a line of inheritance that includes not only physical traits, but proclivities towards sexual deviance and economic exploitation, the latter of which Hopkins underscores when Aunt Hennie muses that her Master (and lover) sold nine of her ten children to “raise de mor’gage off de prop’rty” (604). The result of this unsavory union is three children, each of whom exhibits a pathological facet of the legacy of crime permeating their creation. By depicting Dianthe Lusk as an enfeebled woman subject to the willful rule of others, Hopkins not only demonstrates the continuing trauma and innervation that results from a history of oppression, she explores the line between passive victim and complicit accomplice when Dianthe duplicates her mother Mira’s “sin” of incestuous and coerced relations with a half-brother (victim) and silent witness to Molly Vance’s murder (accessory). Aubrey Livingston, through his maniacal desire to possess Dianthe, duplicates his father’s lust-filled ravishing of Mira while also providing an example of how inherited traits of vice become concentrated as subsequent generations containing criminal tendencies accumulate. Lastly, Reuel Briggs, though the novel’s hero, nonetheless does not fully escape the repercussions of his crime-laden heritage. While Aubrey Jr.’s and Dianthe’s transgressions center around the history of sexual exploitation attending the peculiar institution, Reuel’s journey to Meroe threatens to reproduce the economic exploitation of African people through imperialist means. Indeed it is not until

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relations with massa, an’ she was hurt to de heart” (*Of One Blood*, 604). Hennie then claims to have had ten children. Assuming that her master (the only man she admits to having a sexual relationship with) is the father, her daughter Mira and Aubrey Livingston Sr. are half-siblings because they share the same father.

Reuel encounters the lost city of Telessar---which Hopkins uses to symbolize a reconnection with African bloodlines free from the taint of slavery---that Reuel turns from the path of appropriation to one of rectitude.

Through the characters of Dianthe and Aubrey, Hopkins presents two alternative versions of heredity-based criminology; her central heroine ultimately demonstrates that African ancestry, when compared to that of white-slave owners, produces morally superior descendants while Aubrey Livingston's trail of crime and deceit illustrates the biologically *and* environmentally corrupting influence of a white, slave-holding genealogy and a culture of white supremacy, white privilege, and economic citizenship. Indeed only Reuel Briggs, the sole sibling who physically leaves the United States, is eventually able to overcome the toxic taint of slaveholding antecedents and United States capitalism, though his doing so is ultimately a tale of rehabilitation, rather than rectitude. Through these three characters, Hopkins not only dramatizes the horrors attendant the human crimes of slavery, she borrows from popular debates surrounding criminality to meditate upon how the biological and social conditions of Americans during the racially charged atmosphere of the nadir create a "slavery of crime," whereby generations of people fatefully commit criminal acts because their hereditary and social circumstances predispose them to do so. Compelled to homicide and theft because born of a society built on the murder and robbery of Africa's children---Hopkins's mixed-blood siblings not only dramatize the sinful legacy of slavery for the United States, but portrays African bloodlines and worldviews as ethically and environmentally superior to those of Anglo-Saxon origin.

Through the many iterations of Dianthe Lusk, her central heroine, Hopkins undermines the time-honored Victorian myth of angelic white womanhood by presenting an alternative chain of evolution that inverts the Western belief that white bloodlines correlated to greater moral perfection. In the tale told by Molly Vance on Halloween night, Hopkins presents her readers with a miniature narrative that demonstrates the tendency for cruelty and greed to poison future generations by incorporating aspects of Dorsey's theory that all people are "already rich in personal experiences from [their] prenatal life."<sup>28</sup> The legend unfolds when, bored and desirous of entertainment at the Vance estate, Reuel and Aubrey, along with their friends, agree to tell ghost stories on Halloween night. Molly Vance proceeds to tell the group the legend of Hyde House, a supposedly haunted neighboring estate. Paraphrasing a report published in a local magazine, Molly tells her friends that a former owner of the home, John Hyde, colluded with the house's governess and together they murdered and robbed a guest. Later, Hyde's unnamed niece discovers bloodstains on the woodshed door and confronts her uncle about them. Admitting his guilt, Hyde makes his niece promise to conceal his crime, which she does until her death. However, the spirit of the niece---along with those of the governess and Hyde himself---remained "chained to the scene of the crime," the niece's spirit only attaining release following a "public confession" through a spiritual medium (459). After this confession, the ghost of the niece only returns to Hyde House on Halloween nights when the moon is new, during which, if she encounters a living person, she will "utter some sentence of prophesy for his future" (456). Intrigued, the men decide to take turns waiting for the specter. Charlie Vance and Aubrey finish their slots empty-

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<sup>28</sup> Dorsey, *Science*, 119.

handed, but when Reuel takes his turn he encounters a female shade amongst the mist that looks exactly like Dianthe Lusk. As the figure displays obvious signs of anxiety, Reuel offers aid, to which she replies, “You can help me, but not now; tomorrow . . . The time is not yet” (461-462). Afterwards, Reuel returns to his friends but keeps quiet about his adventure.

Though providing an important window into the criminally-centered logic of the novel, most critics have eschewed focusing upon the Hyde House story. One exception, however, is Melissa Asher Daniels who, in the course of convincingly arguing that *Of One Blood* is more aligned with realism than most critics suppose, describes the Hyde House legend as “a gothic yarn about mayhem, murder, and miscegenation that places her turn-of-the-century characters in slavery’s moldy manacles.”<sup>29</sup> I agree with Daniels that the tale, by harkening back to past crimes, invites both the novel’s readers and the fictional characters listening to Molly’s story to meditate upon the lasting effects of injustice, violence, and corruption. I am not, however, convinced by Daniels’s particular reading of the scene, which she characterizes as a “masked miscegenation crime” that occurred because John Hyde was “having an improper relationship with his female [black or mulatto] guest and murdered her to keep the matter private.”<sup>30</sup> In the first place, the racial makeup of the characters involved is never explicitly mentioned, though one assumes that John Hyde and his family were at least socially recognized as white by virtue of their large estate. More troublesome, however, is the fact that Daniels misreads the gender of the murdered guest, for in detailing the incident Hopkins writes, “The story

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<sup>29</sup> Melissa Asher Daniels, “The Limits of Literary Realism: *Of One Blood*’s Post-Racial Fantasy by Pauline Hopkins,” *Callaloo* 36.1 (2013), 158-177; 165.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.



is told of an unfaithful husband, a wronged wife, and a beautiful governess forming a combination which led to the murder of a guest for *his* money” (458). While the exact ways in which this “combination” of people and sexual dalliance contributes to the guest’s robbery and homicide is never clarified, the line makes it clear that this is not an example of “unbridled male desire and its homicidal implications for black women”<sup>31</sup> (unless the implications are that it may make such women kill). Instead, we have a tale of violent crime whose genesis may lay in illicit sexuality, but that is nonetheless perpetrated against a male victim with an eye toward economic gain.

Instead of a tale focusing solely upon the slavery’s sexual horrors, the story of Hyde House serves as a small-scale allegory for a more encompassing and metaphorical type of slavery than Daniels supposes. Rather than exclusively invoking the historical slave trade, Molly’s tale harkens to the *slavery of crime*---the condition of vice repeating itself through the generations because impure antecedents predispose individuals to commit legal and moral transgressions. Viewed in this light, the peculiar institution and its attendant sexual exploitation of black women of course stand as some of the darkest and most evil of American sins, but they reside in a chain of reprobate behaviors that used violent means to serve economic ends, a chain that stretched from the first slave ship to visit Africa’s shores down through the subsequent vices of chattel-market slavery in Europe and the United States, Western imperial endeavors, and Jim Crow oppression. Through the character of Dianthe, Hopkins establishes the seedy history influencing Dianthe---a history that Hopkins uses to explain, though not excuse, her central heroine’s behavior throughout the novel.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 165

Though the legendary Hyde House crime may initially seem an isolated incident or mere fodder for local folklore, the temporal circuitry of the novel's plot serves to highlight the lasting impact of criminal deviance in this particular scene (as well as throughout the novel proper) by playing upon the novel's engagement with doubling, reincarnation, and inheritance. Reminiscent of Sheppard Lee's spirit's education via the assumption of numerous identities, Hopkins's central female character learns ethical and moral behavior by inhabiting a series of bodies. If we take Molly Vance's testimony at face value, when Reuel encounters Dianthe's shade amongst the hemlocks, he is also meeting the prophetic ghost of John Hyde's niece. Of course, such a configuration initially seems unlikely, given the realist nature of the novel's first half,<sup>32</sup> but a careful reading of the full work shows the statement is fitting. The ghost's proclamation that Reuel can help her tomorrow is fulfilled when he restores Dianthe's sentience the following day. Given this background, readers are invited to associate Molly's tale of a woman's silent acquiescence to crime as a part of Dianthe's past life. As a result, Dianthe's passivity at the hands of Reuel and Aubrey takes on new meaning. The "sin" of standing witness to robbery and murder while doing nothing to bring about justice has created a continued legacy of tainted passivity spanning generations. Dianthe's lack of will and enfeebled susceptibility to the machinations and desires of others is inherited on a metaphysical level and transmitted from one life to the next.

But the lasting reverberations from the violence committed at Hyde House assume greater meaning when the events of the entire novel are taken into account and

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<sup>32</sup> Though some read Reuel's initial vision of Dianthe as supernatural in origin, Daniels is quick to point out that Reuel and the narrator characterize this vision as the "effect of imagination." This more realistic explanation, Daniels, maintains keeps even this scene within realism's purview.

the legend is placed within the context of late nineteenth century views on race and crime. While John Hyde's niece and Dianthe are linked through the Halloween legend, Dianthe is also connected to Queen Candace in the novel's second half. Candace bears a striking resemblance to Dianthe in both voice and appearance, and the possibility that another soul migration has occurred forms when Ai explains to Reuel that for the people of Telessar and their descendants, reincarnation occurs when the "Ego" of a "good man or woman" is not yet "sufficiently fitted for the higher condition of another world" (533). Because at this point in the text it is unclear whether Dianthe is living or not, readers are invited to assume that she has drowned and assumed yet another identity as the virginal ruler of Telessar. Once it is revealed that Dianthe lives, however, the nature of the connection between Candace and Dianthe is complicated, to the point where Reid offers the most accurate description when she simply states the queen "may or may not be a reincarnation of Dianthe."<sup>33</sup> In the end, however, it does not matter much whether Dianthe definitively is a reincarnation of Candace, for either way the notion that black blood carries a strong proclivity towards for vice is challenged. Though anthropologists, physicians, and social scientists believed that African Americans contributed more than their fair share of criminal activity to the nation, Hopkin's tale of Hyde House and her subsequent iterations of its central female character illustrate the opposite.

Let us first suppose that Hopkins did intend Candace to be another, subsequent life for Dianthe. In presenting a "soul-life" that spans the physical bodies and experiences of the women known as John Hyne's niece, Dianthe Lusk/Felice Adams, and Queen Candace of Telessar, she presents a progression from the criminal to the virtuous that

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<sup>33</sup> Mandy Reid, "Utopia is in the Blood: The Bodily Utopias of Martin R. Delany and Pauline Hopkins," *Utopian Studies* 22 no. 1 (2011), 91-103; 95.

inverts popular conceptions of black criminality by aligning the white niece with criminal accessory, the mulatto Dianthe/Felice with non-criminal (but sexually-sullied) vulnerability, and the “bronze” Candace with feminine virtue and sweetness, behind which “lurk[s] a sense of power.”<sup>34</sup> Such a configuration undermines the Victorian ideal of angelic white womanhood and refuses to accept women’s supposedly passive nature as an exculpation of guilt for transgressions while establishing the darkest of these three women as the most virtuous, pure, and influential. The small-scale evolutionary chain presented here therefore accords with contemporary theories of biological progression in that it does show its human subject(s) advancing to greater heights of moral and political acumen, but these gains do not coincide with an increase in Anglo-Saxon racial characteristics, as scientists like McKim and Lombroso would expect. Rather, this moral and intellectual “improvement” occurs as the central feminine subjectivity accumulates bodies displaying increasingly African characteristics and a decidedly more pro-active stance. Thus the less “Dianthe” resembles white, middle-class ideals of Western feminine subjectivity, the more virtuous, powerful, and inspiring she becomes.

However, if Candace is not part of this chain, then Dianthe and John Hyde’s niece, both of whom contain a majority of white blood, represent tarnished counterexamples to Candace, the “ideally perfect” queen of a “pure-blooded Ethiopian” people and city (565-566). While critics such as Reid, Williams, and Jennie Kassinoff have tended to read the latter description of Telessar’s inhabitants in biological terms by

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 568-569.

debating whether the description of “pure-blooded” means “of only African origin,”<sup>35</sup> I instead posit that the term “pure” functions as a further description of Candace and Telessar’s moral virtue, an argument to which we will return in greater detail. When compared to the stately figure of Candace in her prosperous kingdom, the niece’s complicity to murder and Dianthe’s crimes of bigamy,<sup>36</sup> failure to implicate Aubrey in the homicide of Molly Vance, and her eventual attempt to poison Aubrey, form a powerful literary refutation of theories like those proposed by Dr. Charles H. Otken, a Southern educator and sociologist who claimed that:

There is a difference between the Anglo-Saxon people and the Negro race. Color is the least difference. Character, exhibiting itself in honor, in high incentives to action, in rational obedience to law and constituted legal authority, characterizes the white race in a far higher degree than the black race. The black man is far more disposed to construe liberty into license than the white man. Self restraint is a hard lesson for him to learn. To this quality of character is to be traced the increase of crime [following Emancipation].<sup>37</sup>

In stark contrast to the unlawful actions of Hopkins’ white or mulatto heroines, Candace, a “bronze” queen whose virginal status marks her as the epitome of “self restraint” while the homage of her subjects highlights the “constituted legal authority” consecrated in her royal person, represents a moral and political ideal existing *apart from* the corrupting influence of Anglo-Saxon culture and heredity, with their penchants for exploitation and violence. As the recognized ruler of Telessar, Candace not only resides at the apex of

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<sup>35</sup> See Reid, 96; Williams, 335; and Jennie Kassanoff’s “Fate Has Linked Us Together: Blood, Gender, and the Politics of Representation in Pauline Hopkins’s *Of One Blood*,” 172.

<sup>36</sup> Upon finding out that Reuel did not perish during his travels, Dianthe laments that “If Reuel lived, each day that found her still beneath the roof of this man whose wife she was in the eyes of the world, was a crime” (602).

<sup>37</sup> Charles H. Otken, *The Ills of the South: Or, Related Causes Hostile to the General Propensity of the Southern People* (New York: G.P. Putnam & Sons, 1894), 221.

freedom in her domain, she exists in a position of authority synonymous with the “national character” of her realm. Rather than the sexualized women of mixed race such as Mirah and Dianthe, whose presence in the novel serve as reminders of the ethically and biologically compromising circumstances attending U.S. slavery, Candace embodies the virtuous and intellectually enlightened people those of African descent *could have been* if they’d never been made chattel, as well as what they *may become* if the world would actually free blacks socially and economically, as well as legally.

Thus either way, the tale of Hyde House serves as the epicenter for a chain of rampant greed---for money, for power, for sexual gratification----that results in a continual occurrence of vice and degradation. As such it is reminiscent of slavery’s “moldy manacles,” but the “slavery” in question is more a pervasive force or compulsion towards evil deriving from a compromised inheritance, rather than a specific historical event. Instead of a tale dramatizing the crime(s) of slavery, Molly Vance’s story of Hyde House in fact tells of the slavery of crime by illustrating how vice poisons those around it and creates a cycle of perverse repetition---vice begetting vice---that plagues generations. In playing upon early nineteenth-century theories of criminality, inheritance, and scientific racism, Hopkins skillfully insinuates that when it comes to criminal behavior, the insatiable desire for economic primacy and sublimation of non-whites which characterizes the United States’ and worlds’ white populations---a propensity that has intensified through the generations---is the true foundational sin compounding all others. To negate such a horrible legacy, black blood---with its attending and ancient appreciation for the highest arts, sciences, and ethics---proves the antidote rather than the antagonist in the fight against vice.

### **Aubrey Livingston: Nurture vs. Nature**

Yet while the tale of Hyde House and the subsequent iterations of Dianthe serve as refutations of whites' claims to biological and mental superiority, Hopkins saves her most glaring example of the tendency for villainy to be transmitted through the generations in the character of Aubrey Livingston. Though a fully biological brother to Reuel and Dianthe, Aubrey has been raised as the legitimate son of their father, an aristocratic planter and former slaveholder in Virginia. As a result Aubrey is accorded the license given to young men of means, proving self-restraint is a lesson he does not necessarily have to learn. The secret child of a slave and her master and thus already hereditarily tainted with a proclivity towards rape and deceitfulness through his father's blood, Aubrey's descent into infamy allows Hopkins to not only further illustrate corrupting moral seeds sown under slavery, but to show how the South's social caste system allows such seeds to thrive when "planted" in a subject whose wealth and social position, far from offering a "wholesome environment" which could counterbalance any organic proclivity to vice, instead insulates him from the consequences of (thereby giving greater license to) moral depravity.

Aubrey is obviously not to be trusted. Described as a "tall man with the beautiful face of a Greek God," Aubrey's features nonetheless fail to "inspire confidence, " instead they "engender...doubt" (447). Yet while his dubious features may inspire suspicion in and of themselves----this is the age, after all, where many believed physiognomy reflected the inner conscience---the conversation Reuel and Aubrey have during the novel's opening pages solidifies Aubrey as a man comprised of good and evil tendencies,

each struggling for mastery, within a character whose worldly views on money, capitalism, and their connections to class spawn a sense of entitlement that will lead him to ruin. Hopkins, however, makes more of Aubrey than a dissipated child of fortune. Rather, she uses him to dramatize the fateful role slavery and its attendant culture of aristocracy played in exacerbating the pathological desire for economic and political control that spawned slavery and tainted the national and moral character of the United States.

Though Dugdale's work on "the Jukes" was frequently cited by subsequent social scientists like McCulloch as evidence of the supremacy of nature over nurture, Dugdale was actually inclined to believe that early "rehabilitation" of those with criminal ancestry in the form of vocational programs, socialization, and models of sober living could do much to counteract any inborn tendencies to vice. Should such early interventions not take place, however, he believed a lapse into infamy was unavoidable. Pontificating on the importance of gainful employment to the health of not only individuals---but the society which would include their offspring----Dugdale claimed that illicit "fornication" spread:

"...diseases that undermine the vital force and literally create the idleness which is fortified by the cessation of work, so that both surroundings and proclivities become cumulative. The residuary vital force having ceased to be expended in labor, must find another mode of activity, and the one which presents itself as the most alluring is sexual excess, which thus completes the viscous cycle, making idleness and fornication reciprocal causes of each other..."<sup>38</sup>

Dugdale's belief that idleness and illicit sexual activity were inextricably linked proved heavily influential, and it was frequently used to justify work programs in poorhouses and

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<sup>38</sup> R.L. Dugdale, *The Jukes: A Study in Crime, Pauperism, Disease, and Heredity* (New York: G.P. Putnam, 1877), 60.



prisons, in addition to contributing to the stereotype of the African American male as a lust-filled and unemployed menace to and/or burden of society.<sup>39</sup>

Through the character of Aubrey Livingston, Hopkins turns the tables on such theories, however, by showing how the lifestyle of “good” southern families of substantial financial means actually prove to be optimal environments for the flourishing of incipient sexual vice. Raised as the sole son of a respectable and wealthy Southern family, Aubrey is more accustomed to luxury and indolence than any other character featured in *Of One Blood*, and this life of ease does seem to correlate with an ambivalent attitude toward labor and a strong interest in the fairer sex. When Aubrey visits Reuel at the novel’s beginning, readers are quickly made aware of this fact. Comparing Reuel’s rigorous study habits with his own lackadaisical approach to medicine, Aubrey exclaims “How a man can grind day and night beats me.” Once Reuel replies that poverty is a great motivator, Aubrey rejoins “Doubtless it would do me good...but just at present, it’s the ladies...who disturb me, and not delving into books nor weeping over ways and means. Shades of my fathers, forbid that I should ever have to work!” After an envious growl, Reuel enigmatically adds “Lucky dog! ...Yet you have a greater gift of duality than I” (447). The lighthearted tone of this exchange masks the serious repercussions of a faulty character such as Aubrey’s having a social position that initially insulates him from suspicion and, once his true nature is divined more clearly, nonetheless protects him from suffering the warranted legal consequences.

Uttered at this early stage in the novel, Reuel’s final retort prove rather ironic, for while Aubrey is certainly duplicitous in that he lies and schemes throughout the novel,

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<sup>39</sup> See Elof Axel Carlson’s “R.L. Dugdale and the Jukes Family: A Historical Injustice Corrected” in Vol. 30, No. 8 of *Bioscience*.

his doing so is actually indicative of a more static racial identity. Invested with the outward trappings of respectability by virtue of belonging to a “good family” of wealth and means, Aubrey hides diabolical behaviors that simultaneously echo and surpass the sins of his slaveholding father. Through the hypnosis and rape of Dianthe---a crime that reproduces Aubrey Livingston Sr.’s incestuous sexual exploitation of Mira---as well as his subsequent perfidy towards Reuel and the Vance family, Aubrey illustrates both the corrupting influence of slaveholding and the increasingly duplicitous form this corruption must take when those who carry it struggle to adapt to a world without the peculiar institution. Denied the legal ability to own a woman such as Dianthe---an ability that not only “allowed” Aubrey Livingston Sr. access to Mira’s body, but to show his dominion over her through public spectacle----Aubrey instead kills his fiancé to, in the words of Jim Titus, “have a free road to Dianthe” (593). Literalizing the “bloody cost” of sexually “owning” a mulatto woman by replacing a monetary purchase price with the sacrifice of Molly Vance, Hopkins not only paints a picture of a ruthless villain whose ancestry leaves him prone to vice, she shows how a life of indulgence and pandering exacerbates this tendency---rendering Aubrey powerless to resist satisfying his desire for Dianthe regardless of the consequences. Thus, Hopkins, in a moment of foreshadowing, reminds the reader that “Aubrey was no saint; he knew that fickleness was in his blood; he had never denied himself anything that he wanted very much in his whole life” (476).

This intensification of aberrance, however, amplifies more than Aubrey’s transgressions, it also strengthens his *whiteness*, to the point where his mixed-race ancestry is overwhelmed. While readers are treated to a “reveal” scenes where Reuel admits to being Mira’s son and Aunt Hannah tells Dianthe the true identity of her parents,

no such scene exists for Aubrey. Indeed, it is never fully known if Aubrey ever learns he is part black, or if he assumes he is the white son of Aubrey Livingston, Sr. and his lawful wife throughout the novel. Certainly Aubrey is socially received as a white man throughout the book, a fact Hopkins underscores when she details the lack of legal censure Aubrey's misdeeds accrue. Doing so allows Aubrey to stand as, to borrow Deborah Horvitz's words, an expression of a "white man's unbridled power to alienate irreparably a black woman from her husband, her brother, her art, and her community."<sup>40</sup> The irony, of course, is that because Aubrey's upbringing keeps him from recognizing his inner, racial blackness, his moral blackness is compounded. Thus Hopkins casts worldly markers that supposedly, in the early years of the twentieth century, reflected moral respectability---white skin, economic affluence, high social position, and upper-class family connections---as the hallmarks of insidious vice that threatens to destroy the guilty and innocent, and by pursuing these same markers, Reuel Briggs commits the same fatal mistake.

### **Reuel's Temptation**

Though the closest character to a hero contained in the novel, Reuel Briggs does not escape the criminal taint of his mixed heritage. While Hopkins takes pains to establish Reuel as "absolutely free from the vices which beset most young men of his age and profession" (473), it is clear that such a description is a relative one that is mediated through Western eyes. Conducting himself in the morally tainted and worldly environment of the United States, Reuel is rather virtuous---a fact Hopkins underscores

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<sup>40</sup> Deborah Hortvitz, "Hysteria and Trauma in Pauline Hopkins's *Of One Blood; Or, the Hidden Self*." *African American Review* 33 no. 2: (1999) 245-260, 252.

when, shortly after the above description she writes “Livingston could not but admire the newly developed depths of nobility which he now saw unfolding day by day in Reuel’s character.”<sup>41</sup> Though this characterization does much to elevate Reuel above his peers as an example of ethical and moral virtue, to be recognized as virtuous by someone of Aubrey’s character is, frankly, not a terribly great contest. Yet within a culture that privileges monetary wealth (with little regard for how it is gained), entrepreneurial endeavors, and the ruthless acquisition of social and economic capital, Reuel’s rather modest dreams of procuring a livelihood for himself and his young bride through hard work and the cultivation of natural talent does, indeed, mark him as a honorable man.

Reuel’s involvement with the Meroe expedition, a venture whose monetary implications Hopkins is quick to underscore, complicate these claims to irreproachable goodness, however. Daydreaming of the “fame and fortune” that will hopefully result from the trip, Reuel initially regards his journey to Meroe as a mercenary errand rather than a quest for intellectual fulfillment (516). Showing little regard for the ancient African cultures that created the ruins his company hopes to discover and catalog, Reuel instead simply hopes to profit from these relics. The degree to which he has adopted western attitudes regarding capital and race is further demonstrated when, not persuaded by Professor Stone’s theories of Ethiopia’s prior greatness, Reuel dryly remarks to the expedition’s company, “I come out to do business and I have determined to see the matter through...”(531). Reward, rather than respect, is paramount in his mind.

Such an attitude is hardly surprising, however, given the degrees to which Reuel has gone to hide his true ancestry. While Reuel may claim that Aubrey has a “greater gift

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<sup>41</sup> *ibid*

of duality,” it is Reuel who lives a truly double life in Boston. As Martin Japtok notes, in African American passing novels of the nadir frequently aligned passing with a desire for material gains and, consequently, portrays embracing one’s African heritage as a renunciation of worldly desires. For Japtok, however, Hopkins reverses this somewhat by offering Reuel entitlement to a royal lineage (and attending fortune) based on his African blood. Thus, she “blur[s] the distinction between materialistic whiteness and altruistic blackness.”<sup>42</sup> However, Hopkins makes it clear that Reuel’s ascension to the throne of Telessar, though certainly dependent on maternal bloodlines tying him to Ethiopia, is not dependent on his public recognition of such bloodlines. In other words, never in the story is Reuel forced to publically vow he will no longer pass before he will be recognized as King Ergamenes. Instead, Reuel renounces his pretext to whiteness because his experiences in Telessar illuminate the corrupt and debauched nature of U.S. society---a pollution that, as has been shown, Hopkins traces directly to the desire for wealth that brought about the corrupting institution of slavery.

Once discovering the lost city of Telessar, however, Reuel encounters a “past” civilization that, nonetheless, is intellectually and morally more evolved than that he experienced in the United States. While Ai chides Reuel that the outside world is “in many things yet in its infancy,” he not only speaks to the scientific advances of Telessar, but to their advanced ethics (501). When Reuel questions how the descendants of such an advanced African people could find themselves downtrodden and oppressed in the western world, Ai explains, “Great were the sins of our fathers, and the white stranger was to Ethiopia but a scourge in the hands of an offended God” and admits that Ethiopia

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<sup>42</sup> Japtok, 410.

has been atoning for “worshipping Mamon” (555-558). In doing so Hopkins signifies upon popular theories of civilization maintaining the atavism of Africa and its peoples. Casting aside its worldly ambitions and, instead, pursuing scientific and artistic endeavors for the sake of contributing to their nation’s beauty and enlightenment, Telessar emerges as an advanced civilization while the outside western world is revealed as the truly degenerate realm. Indeed, Telessar’s moral strength is such that not even white blood corrupts it. Comprised of a citizenry “ranging in complexion from a creamy tint to purest ebony,”<sup>43</sup> racial make-up ceases to matter as a significant marker of identity because it no longer functions as a determining factor of morality in a society that has been cleared of its economically motivated transgressions. The blood that courses through Telessar’s citizens is not “pure” in that it comprised of a lineage wholly circumscribed within one racial category, it is “pure” in that it is virtuous and right. In this way, *Of One Blood* does, as Melissa Asher Daniels suggests, operate as a “post-racial fantasy,”<sup>44</sup> but this fantasy is confined to the geographical and narrative limits of Telessar.

Which is why even though he is their long-lost ruler, Reuel must be rehabilitated and unmoored from his westernized worldview---an endeavor entailing not only Reuel’s permanent relocation to Telessar, but the severance of all consanguineous ties that precipitate inherent vice. Indeed, such a necessity is highlighted when, explaining his perfidity upon his deathbed, Jim Titus piteously claims “Aubrey Livingston was my foster brother, and I could deny him nothing” immediately before Reuel “curse[es] with a mighty curse the bond that bound him to the white race of his native land” (594). Here

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<sup>43</sup> *ibid*, 545

<sup>44</sup> Daniels, “The Limits of Literary Realism,” 159.

Anglo bloodlines are indicted not only because such a heritage represents a connection to an oppressing race, but an exploitative nation where money reigns supreme. Faced with the tale Aubrey's perfidity and Jim's willingness to abet Aubrey for financial gain, Reuel encounters the full horrors born of one race's sexual and physical ownership of another.

Yet while Hopkins biting critiques western whites' claims that "good family" produce "good offspring," she signifies upon that most fearsome institution for "rehabilitation" designed correct immoral citizens: prison. Though certainly treated with respect and dignity throughout his stay, at times Hopkins depicts Reuel's time in Telessar in ways that subtly suggest incarceration. When Ai and the people of Telessar initially encounter Reuel, they ask "Are you too one of those who seek for hidden treasure?" before informing him that the council will "hear his *case*." After this, though they show him much kindness, Reuel "knew he was virtually a prisoner," and when Reuel goes back to the United States to confront Aubrey, Ai also goes as "surety for [Reuel's] return" (456). Through the use of such language, Hopkins underscores the latent, blood-bound crime permeating all Americans due to the original sin of the peculiar institution. Unlike the prisons of the United States, which Hoffman and others appropriated as ready symbols of African American's incorrigible degeneracy, Hopkins invokes the themes of retribution and justice that close her gripping tale.

### **Conclusion: Jude Lynch Needs a Doctor:**

In the first lines of the first chapter in Arthur MacDonal<sup>45</sup>'s *Criminology* (1892),

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<sup>45</sup> MacDonal was an American criminologist who served as the Specialist in Education as Related to the Abnormal and Weakening Classes for the U.S. Bureau of Education and was a member of the New York Medical Legal Society. Cesare Lombros wrote the

MacDonald remarks, “The most impartial individual we can conceive of would be one coming from another planet, who has no special interest upon this earth, except to see things exactly as they are. But such impartiality is impossible; nevertheless, it has been one of the efforts of science to endeavor at least to approximate such an ideal.”<sup>46</sup>

MacDonald uses this preface to bolster criminology’s importance. Because humans are imperfect---often consciously or subconsciously influenced by cultural biases as well as personal interests---relying on public opinion to determine who is truly aberrant is fraught with potential pitfalls. For him, using the scientific method and empirical data to determine moral degeneracy circumnavigates these issues. It is, of course, ironic that MacDonald would make such assumptions in a volume rife with bias against the non-white and the non-male. MacDonald is, after all, a follower of Lombroso and thus is quick to use statistics and “anthropomorphic measurements” to demonstrate the alleged savagery of “primitive” people and under-developed mental faculties of women. Yet MacDonald’s opening lines do speak to a desire for an impartial judge---one who could dispense justice according to the “true nature” of the case, rather than overt or internalized prejudices and desires, and whose position as an “outsider” made him/her a disinterested mediator---speaks (though in a flawed manner) to the desire for a form of justice that transcends circumscribed and selfish subjectivities.

When Reuel returns to the United States seeking the “apprehension and punishment of Aubrey Livingston,” his combined status as a highly trained medical professional and recent sojourner in Telessar make him a near equivalent to MacDonald’s

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introduction to this volume, and MacDonald dedicated *Criminology* to Lombroso, whom he calls the “father” of Criminology.

<sup>46</sup> Arthur MacDonald, *Criminology*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1893).



idealized agent of justice (594). His recent rehabilitation in Telessar---experiences which not only taught him to value cultural rather than material capital, but to renounce the conventional pursuits of the “outside” western world---have purified him. Armed with the wisdom gained from afar and placing hope in the effectiveness of the American justice system, Reuel’s goals and anger are not only “right,” they’re righteous. Unfortunately, Reuel’s faith is misplaced. The “old adage that, ‘the dead tell no tales,’ was not....set aside for visionary ravings unsupported by lawful testimony” and Livingston’s riches provide “shrewd and active lawyers to defend him against the charges brought by the Vances...and Reuel Briggs” (618). It is here that Hopkins makes a very important move. Faced with the shortcomings of the American justice system----shortcomings that, like those lamented by MacDonald, stem from the corrupting influence of monetary wealth and internalized prejudice----Reuel and his company become corrective agents of vengeance. In doing so, Hopkins inverts familiar lynch narratives of the nadir, where black men are denied the due process of the law and murdered for the purported crime of raping white women. As a result the conclusion to *Of One Blood* further denigrates theories of blacks’ inherent moral culpability by lampooning the United States’s legal system and claims like those advanced by Hoffman stating: “the fact that lynching should be frequent is a natural consequence of a social and political condition [i.e. black enfranchisement and freedom] under which the frequent commission of the crime of rape is possible.”<sup>47</sup>

Reuel’s status as a doctor is paramount to this critique. As an African American practitioner, Reuel’s professionalism places him within DuBois’s “talented tenth,” calls

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<sup>47</sup> Hoffman, *Race Traits of the Negro*, 234.

to mind DuBois's invocation that the "Negro problem" was a "vast sore" requiring "social surgery" for healing<sup>48</sup>, and seems to echo the use of African American physicians in works like Charles Chestnutt's *The Marrow of Tradition*, Francis E.W. Harper's *Iola Leroy*, and Rebecca Harding Davis's *Waiting for the Verdict* which use the figure of the African American doctor to explore the implications of miscegenation in a post-slavery United States.<sup>49</sup> At the same time, Reuel's involvement in a profession (medicine) that often indirectly sanctioned the extralegal murder of African Americans accused of crime by normalizing a narrative of black criminality and guilt as pre-existing conditions of legal conviction proves unsettling. Indeed, medico-legal discourses of the nadir became so interwoven with "corrective" administrations of "justice" under lynch law that on May 25, 1892 the *Evening Scimitar* threatened to murder the author of an anti-lynching editorial (Ida B. Wells, though at this time the author's identity was not public knowledge) in decidedly medical terms, stating that whites should not hesitate to tie the author "to a stake at the intersection of Main and Madison Sts., brand him in the forehead with a hot iron and perform upon him a surgical operation with a pair of tailor's shears."<sup>50</sup> The threat of medical castration against Wells, whose editorial belittled the pretext that African American men raped white women and insisted that in the vast majority of such cases the white women involved were willing participants in the sexual relationship, is representative of the degree to which the preservation of racial boundaries through the policing of sexual behavior was bolstered by the medical profession. Against

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<sup>48</sup> Quoted in Stephanie Browner's *Profound Science, Elegant Literature*, 182-183.

<sup>49</sup> For more on this, Chapter 6 in Browner. Oddly, Browner does not devote much examination to Hopkins's use of the African American physician in this volume.

<sup>50</sup> Quoted in Ida B. Wells, "Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases," (New York: The New York Age of Print, 1892), 5.

this background, medicine's implication for African Americans becomes dual and contradictory in nature---the field serving as a symbol for racial uplift and racial oppression.

Hopkins utilizes this dialectic when Reuel ultimately avenges Molly's and Dianthe's deaths. By instructing Aubrey to take his own life after placing him under hypnosis, Reuel plays the role of the avenger who resorts to extralegal means to see justice done. Yet Aubrey's death sentence differs from the chaotic specters of mob violence surrounding the lynching of black suspects in fundamental ways. First and most importantly, Reuel's vengeance upon Aubrey happens only after the existent legal system fails to convict him of crimes that Reuel and his companions, as well as Hopkins's readers, know he did in fact commit. Thus instead of an innocent black man being violently murdered because he is wrongly assumed to have raped a white woman, readers encounter the justified killing of a "white" man for the actual rape and murder of a black woman, as well as the homicide of Molly Vance. Because the legal system is rife with prejudices favoring the white and well-connected at the expense of minorities and the marginalized, Reuel's actions do not represent an explosion of presumptuous anger, but a calm and calculated corrective to a failure of justice.

Secondly, though Reuel is the instrument of Aubrey's demise, his hands remain clean. Rather than a hangman's noose---the proscribed punishment for those legally convicted of murder (gallows), as well as the preferred method of a lynch mob---Reuel instead follows the legal code of Telessar stipulating that "members of the royal family in direct line to the throne [become] their own executioners when guilty of the crime of murder" (620). In hypnotizing Aubrey, he insures that this sentence is carried out while

avoiding having to actually execute his brother. In this way, the ancient laws of Telessar fulfill prognostications made by criminologists like Lombroso and MacDonald, who believed that criminals would eventually die out due to their inferior constitutions.<sup>51</sup> Bequeathed a crime-ridden genetic inheritance, raised in an environment of indulgence furthering such weaknesses, and denied the opportunity for a redeeming connection to his morally superior Ethiopian ancestry---Aubrey does kill himself, figuratively and literally. Meanwhile, in severing his last known kinship-based connection to the western world, Reuel finally frees himself from the worldly goals, tainted environment, and debilitating bloodlines of an internally corrupt and pathological nation. The negative image of a white would be lynch-man, Reuel returns to Telessar a righteous avenger whose black skin and African heritage reflect the white moral purity of a race that, rather than subjecting a fellow race to countless outrages and oppressions, was morally purified in the “furnace blasts” of its adversity.

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<sup>51</sup> See Raftner, *The Criminal Brain*, pgs. 85-90.

## **Chapter Six: Conclusion:**

Fifteen years after the opening of the twenty-first century, the ideas and arguments contained in this study prove relevant despite the passage of time. Our newspapers, online feeds, and television screens carry discussions of the political and social implications of public health issues for the economic and physical well-being of not only the United States, but its individual citizens and inhabitants. Such connections appear most pronounced in recent debates concerning the 2010 passage of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act and Health Care and Education Reconciliation Act—both of which form what is better known as the Affordable Care Act (ACA) or, colloquially, Obamacare. In his September 9, 2009 address to a joint session of Congress, President Barack Obama stressed his dedication to stabilizing the U.S. economy following the Great Recession before making the clarion call that, “Put simply, our health care problem is our deficit problem. Nothing else even comes close. Nothing else”<sup>1</sup> before elucidating the early particulars of his healthcare reform.

In the years since this initial overview politicians, pundits, medical professionals, and lay-citizens have continued to ruminate over and argue about the efficiency and legality of the ACA, paying particular attention to the ways fiscal concerns and constitutional authority influenced not only the mandate’s formation, but also the desirability of its enforcement. Such responses, of course, fall on a spectrum. Many proponents of the bill argue that this complex piece of legislation is

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<sup>1</sup> “President Barack Obama, Remarks by the President to a Joint Session of Congress on Health Care (Sept. 9, 2009),” accessed July 23 2015, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/transcript-obamas-health-care-speech/>.

not only vital, but that it is also ethically imperative. Others fear that the linkage of the ACA's primary goal of prohibiting health status discrimination—a goal that, while noble, necessitates a federal mandate of health insurance provision and the consequent need for government subsidies and tax increases—will ultimately undermine both the nation's economic stability and the bill's social good. At the heart of these debates is a question that the authors contained in this study grappled with so many decades ago. Because disability and financial ruin are not discreet events that happen to individuals but are instead occurrences which influence and impact many due to the various domestic, civil, and commercial ties uniting us all, do we have a duty to others regarding their economic and physical welfare, or is a laissez faire approach ultimately best because it forces us all to become our "fittest" in order to survive?

As a developed nation possessing immense global power and resources, the United States occupies a "super-power" status that, many argue, brings with it the imperative to provide quality health care at little (or even no) cost to its citizenry. In August of 2012 the American Public Health Association released a website entitled "Why Do We Need the Affordable Care Act?" that provided five major rationales for the bill's necessity. Listed as one major catalyst was the lament that: "The U.S. spends far more on medical care than any other industrialized nation, but ranks 24<sup>th</sup> among 30 OECD [Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development] countries in terms of life expectancy."<sup>2</sup> In calling attention to the

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<sup>2</sup> "Why Do We Need the Affordable Care Act? Critical Health System Problems Facing the United States," The American Public Health Association, accessed on July 26, 2015, [https://www.apha.org/~media/files/pdf/topics/aca/why\\_we\\_need\\_the\\_aca\\_aug2012.ashx](https://www.apha.org/~media/files/pdf/topics/aca/why_we_need_the_aca_aug2012.ashx).

United States's subpar rank in comparison to other nations, the creators of this website invoke not only economic, but nationalist, justifications for supporting the ACA.

The report that the United States spends more than any other nation highlights the country's *ability* and *willingness* to invest fiscal resources into the wellbeing of its population. But the signification of wealth coded in this primacy—the U.S. spends “more” than any other nation and therefore is “number one—is then immediately subverted by the paltry value gotten for such a sum. The United States is first in spending; it is 24<sup>th</sup> in returns. Through this configuration adopting the ACA becomes not only a legislative act or political gesture, it becomes way to rectify poor speculations while simultaneously restoring the United States to its “rightful” position of humanitarian, scientific, and economic superiority. In the shadows of such statements we can see the echoes of Bird's equation of institutional healthcare with governmental strength, as well as Cable's insistence that the wellbeing of the American people was fundamentally tied to the nation's economic and political stability.

At the same time, some opponents of the ACA maintained that, while its ostensible goals are virtuous, the complex web of economic exchanges—in the form of subsidies, tax hikes, and hardship exemptions—needed to insure all U.S. citizens complied with the health insurance mandate would eventually stymy any social good the bill's architects hope to achieve. One chief reason for this concern was the threat of higher insurance premiums in the wake of a sharply increasing demand for health care coverage, on one hand, and the inability of insurance companies to

insulate themselves from the risk of providing for those with pre-existing conditions via “cherry-picking” healthy customers, on the other.<sup>3</sup> Faced with this potential rise in premium costs, many wondered if individuals in the middle and lower economic brackets might simply opt to pay the fine, rather than procure coverage—a pattern that could exacerbate premium hikes for others if it were perpetuated in any great scale. Within this complex network of economic interdependence, the cost of care for could leave some of the country’s poor and working class paying a fine to continue in a state of unprotected, because uninsured, vulnerability. Meanwhile, those who followed the mandate would be forced to bear the financial burdens of this non-compliant faction. In such discussions we see echoes of Fern’s and Hopkins’s skepticism about the dominant discourses and beliefs of public health to protect society’s most vulnerable and, by extension, the remainder of the population from monetary and medical woes and highlights the ways in which the health of the disenfranchised directly affects the health of the nation.

“A Public Duty” examines the ways in which reform-minded authors of the nineteenth century used the tropes, concepts, and language of public health to express, in their literary works, apprehension and enthusiasm regarding the United States’s emerging economic and political prominence. Because the burgeoning U.S. literary market allowed diverse and under-heard voices to reach the public ear, advocates for the era’s “disabled” demonstrate the power of “sick” bodies to bolster the U.S. economy by creating items and ideas, consuming a variety of goods and services, and compounding the nation’s

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<sup>3</sup> For an in-depth discussion of this and other financially based arguments against the ACA, see Michael Lee, Jr., “Adverse Reactions: Structure, Philosophy, and Outcomes of the Affordable Care Act,” *Yale Law & Policy Review*, 29 no. 2, 559-602.



population—provided they were given opportunities to contribute to the nation's economy through the gift of health. Placing nineteenth-century novels in dialogue with medical and legal writings of the period, as well as drawing upon more recent criticism on speculation and disability, this study shows the authors studied within it believed those considered sick nonetheless had value, and that value, in turn, translated to economic as well as social worth.

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## Vita

Heather Chacón grew up in Indianapolis, Indiana and attained a B.A. in English and Anthropology (double-major) and a M.A. in Comparative Literature from Ball State University. While at the University of Kentucky she was awarded a Dissertation Year Fellowship, a University of Kentucky Women’s Club Endowed Fellowship, an Association of Emeriti Faculty Endowed Fellowship, and a Dissertation Enhancement Award from the University of Kentucky Graduate School. A version of Chapter Four of this dissertation, entitled “Public Health is Public Wealth: Yellow Fever and New Orleans’s Trade Economy” was published in *Studies in American Fiction* and an independent manuscript is accepted pending revision at *Literature and Medicine*. In addition to serving as a TA and Graduate Instructor of Record in UK’s English Department, she also worked as the Graduate Intern and Assistant Director of Composition & Communications for UK’s Department of Writing, Rhetoric, and Digital Media.