Through the Looking Glass Darkly: Episodes from the History of Deviance

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Abstract

This dissertation is a cultural history of deviance in the United States. I use a series of case studies to examine the way deviant figures have been represented and experienced within American culture. The dissertation covers four historical eras and examines a representative deviant figure in each of them. The first chapter deals with the figure of the witch in Puritan New England, the second examines the libertine in the early American republic, the third deals with freaks in Victorian America and the fourth studies the flapper in the roaring twenties. Each of these chapters is focused on a particular historical crisis, trial or scandal that produced a rich body of historical evidence for study and analysis: the Salem Witch Trial of 1692, the Apthorp-Morton Scandal of 1788, the sensational Beecher-Tilton Affair of 1875 and the Ruth Snyder Trial of 1927.

My overarching thesis is that representations of deviants reveal a deep cultural preoccupation with failure and inadequacy, which are projected onto deviant figures. This interpretation is an attempt to move beyond viewing representations of deviance as simply being attempts to repress those who do not conform to societal norms, or to shore up fragile social identities by creating 'others' against whom the normal American could be negatively defined.

Instead, I argue that representations of deviance were compelling to the Americans who created them primarily as powerful fantasies about failure, lack and inadequacy. On to the rich symbolic canvas of the deviant figure, Americans projected their anxieties about personal and social failure. In different ways at different times, deviants have been used to articulate the various possible ways in which a person could fail to meet their society's ideals and expectations, and to imagine the consequences of such failures for both individual personhood and society as a whole. The deviant has therefore historically served as a kind of mirror to the culture which produced him or her: a mirror in which a culture might darkly glimpse its own values, distorted by the terrifying failure to achieve that which is most prized.

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Za Mamu i Tatu

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Let me begin by thanking a few people who do thankless and often overlooked work, and yet who bring an enormous amount of grace and humanity to a job that the world condescends to deem unglamorous. One of the many tasks assigned to departmental administrators is to guide graduate students through the byzantine rules, spoken and unspoken, which govern life at institutions of higher education, and to be their friend, ally and advisor in the treacherous passage through graduate school. They are in every way the Virgils to our Dantes, and the best of them are shining examples of how to turn a bureaucratic job into a form of human excellence. All who know them will be able to think of countless situations in which the interventions of Christine McFadden and Arthur Patton-Hock removed with seeming ease barriers that had seemed impenetrable, or miraculously effected labors that seemed impossibly herculean. To them both, for innumerable such favors both large and small, my many thanks.

Many thanks also to John Stauffer, Arthur Kleinman and Ann Braude, who formed my dissertation committee, and also to Jackson Lears, who was kind enough to be an outside reader for the defense. To break with customary and conventional ways of doing a thing is always a somewhat precarious enterprise, and such experiments are always in need of friends in high places. My academic advisors entrusted me with an enormous amount of freedom, allowed me to take the risks that are so essential to real thinking, and humored me when I wandered very far indeed from their own areas of geographic, temporal and even disciplinary expertise. Without John's early and ongoing encouragement, I might well have left graduate school without ever starting this dissertation, and without Arthur's and Ann's generous support for the project, the hostility and skepticism it met with in other quarters might have made it impossible to bring the project to completion. They not only made the work better through their insightful comments, they made it possible for me to do it at all, and for that I am profoundly grateful.

Introduction

I.   The face in the mirror

Dreams, too, have their history and so, of course, do nightmares. The dark currents of the imagination ebb and flow with the passing of time, and every age has secret midnight fears particular to itself. For much of Western history, for instance, people were gripped by terror in the face of overwhelming, implacable Gods. The rape of the swan, the belly of the devouring whale, the flood which covers all the earth; powerful symbols of this terrible fantasy of being in the grip of something vast and unfathomable.[1] However, though we readily recognize this terror of the ancients, it has no very great resonance for us. Though we live in an age for which the prospect of catastrophic environmental changes has become a commonplace, the story of Noah is today merely quaint. And, indeed, the terror before the inhuman has been on the wane for some time; the failure of Moby Dick with the nineteenth century public can perhaps be blamed in part on the average reader's utter inability to be awed by a fish. Of course, the terror of the inhuman has not vanished entirely – witness, for instance, disaster films or (speaking of fish) Jaws and its shark-horror progeny. Yet in these modern instances of the old fear, terror often seems to have degenerated into mere horror and anxiety.[2] Today, when you go to the

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[1] The idea of contextualizing a study of modern culture through contrast with a more ancient mythic tradition I draw from Jackson Lears**,** *Fables of abundance : a cultural history of advertising in America* (New York: BasicBooks, 1994). My understanding of religion as an attempt to come to terms with and express an existential experience draws on a tradition that includes Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: the seventeenth century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954) and Jackson Lears**,** *No place of grace : antimodernism and the transformation of American culture, 1880-1920* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981.) The broad conception of the holy as a sometimes terrifying otherness I owe to Rudolf Otto, *The idea of the holy : an inquiry into the non-rational factor in the idea of the divine and its relation to the rational*, Trans. John Harvey (New York : Oxford University Press, 1950)

[2] I allude here to Radcliffe's acute distinction: 'Terror and horror are so far opposite, that the first expands the soul and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life; the other contracts, freezes and nearly annihilates them.' Terror is the violent experience of the excess of the world; horror is the sinking experience of the void. Terror is the feeling of being brought up against Life; horror is the feeling of being brought up against Death. Terror can also be parsed as a dark variation of the Romantic sublime – the emphasis being on fear rather than awe. Ann Radcliffe, 'On the Supernatural in Poetry,' *New Monthly Magazine*, Vol. 16, No. 1, 145-52.

movies to experience the ecstasy of panic, you go for the most part to see serial killers, zombies, vampires, and the like. In the modern era, terror wears a human face. [3]

But not just any face. Not, for instance, the face of the Other, whose humanity is always to a great extent obscured and who, if feared, is feared precisely as the invasion of something starkly alien – as the meaningless, horrifying void that threatens to destroy the human community. No, the face of terror in the modern world is instead pre-eminently the face in the mirror, albeit, of course, a sort of fun-house mirror. The reflection that terrifies you is a grotesque distortion, but it is one in which you precariously recognize something of yourself, even as it uncannily reaches through the mirror to seize hold of you. In the modern era, the face in the mirror is very frequently imagined as the face of the stranger who lives within our midst as one of us, but who transgresses on what we hold dear. Twentieth century sociology called this stranger the deviant – a name that, for convenience, I have borrowed to describe the subject matter of this book. [4] But, in fact, the deviant has worn many names and faces over the course of American history. In the seventeenth century, such a person was a witch who sinned against God; in the eighteenth, a libertine who transgressed against society; in the nineteenth, a freak or a hypocrite whose very existence was incommensurate with respectability, and in the twentieth, a disaffected youth who rebelled against convention and the adult world, and at times even won a certain qualified approbation for so doing.

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[3] For some perceptive remarks on this, see Mark Edmundson, *Nightmare on Main Street : angels, sadomasochism, and the culture of Gothic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997). See also Karen Halttunen, *Murder most foul: the killer and the American Gothic imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998)

[4] For the genealogy of deviance, word and concept, see the following section of this introduction.

Naturally, this is only a very partial catalogue, and we will have cause to return to it at greater length later, but the point for the moment is that all these figures are in one way profoundly similar: they are all unequivocally understood to belong to the very society that, even as it acknowledges them as insiders, regards them with a profound moral fear. To put it another way, they are all marked by a difference that is perceived as deviance – as a source of moral and mortal terror – but simultaneously with a likeness, and therein lies their particular danger. They are one of us but also, paradoxically, one of *them* – one of the outsiders whose difference we confront as our ancestors once did the face of an angry God.

This fantasy of the deviant is, as I've already hinted, highly characteristic of Western modernity. Earlier eras grappled, of course, as perhaps all societies do in some way, with the problem of persons and acts which violate the social order from within, but they did so in very different ways. As far as we can glean a portrait of deviance in the ancient world from the literary sources available to us, the classical conception of deviance seems to focus on the problem of moral misbehavior or error on the part of those who represent great virtue or excellence. Whether we think of the deviant acts of Achilles in heroic verse, the deviance of various tragic figures in Aeschylus or Sophocles (Oedipus most famously) or even the insinuations and barbs thrown at Cleon, Pericles and Socrates in the comedies of Aristophanes, the deviant subject in the ancient world is someone who is generally considered in most respects to be a symbol of moral excellence.[5] The dominant fantasy about deviance in the ancient world

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[5] For instance, see Homer, *Illiad,* trans. Richmond Lattimore (Chiacago: University of Chicago Press, 1961) Aeschylus, *Oresteia* trans. Christopher Collard. (New York : Oxford University Press, 2002) Sophocles, *The three Theban plays*, trans. Robert Fagles (New York: Viking Press, 1982) and Aristophanes, *The Acharnians ; The clouds ; Lysistrata,* trans. Alan H. Sommerstein. (New York : Penguin, 1973.) Aristophanes comes closest to the modern conception of deviance in that the figures he mocks are represented as irredeemably vicious, but I think this has to be understood in the context of a Dionysian poet targeting the well-known and celebrated to point out the flaws which contradict their fame. On this, see especially Jeffrey Henderson, 'The Demos and the comic competition' in John J. Winkler and Froma I. Zeitlin (eds.) *Nothing to do with Dionysos?: Athenian drama in its social context*

is that of a good man who does an evil thing, and the point of preoccupation is often the juxtaposition of these categories and the pollution associated with the evil act in question.[6] On the other hand, the modern concept of a member of the community defined primarily in terms of their moral perversion and inadequacy seems to have been alien to the ancient world.

Similarly, while the early modern period gave birth to a preoccupation with figures characterized primarily by social deviance and moral perversity (primarily, but not exclusively, in the fantasies of witchcraft which I take up below) it also inherited an older cultural tradition for which deviance was not something inherent in a person, but rather in a span of the year.[7] I refer, of course, to the medieval and

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(Princeton, N.J. : Princeton University Press, 1990.) Contra my argument here, there is actually a study which attempts to deploy categories of deviance and morality with respect to classical Athens but it does so by rather crudely (to my mind) treating these as ahistorical categories. See David Cohen, *Law, sexuality, and society: the enforcement of morals in classical Athens* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991.) Pertinent here is also the rather vast literature on Greek attitudes to homosexuality which I confess not to be deeply familiar with, but which seems to confirm this general line of interpretation in noting that Greek attitudes (in those cases where homosexuality is identified as deviant,) also focus on deviant acts as opposed to deviant persons. See K.J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality* (London: Duckworth, 1978), Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, vol. 2: The Use of Pleasure* (New York: Viking,1985), David Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality and Other Essays on Greek Homosexuality* (New York: Routledge, 1990) and, on Greek sexuality more broadly, John Winkler, *The Constraints of Desire: The Anthropology of Sex and Gender in Ancient Greece* (New York: Routledge, 1990)

[6] On moral pollution in Greek society, see Robert Parker, *Miasma: pollution and purification in early Greek religion* (New York : Oxford University Press, 1983) and, somewhat more broadly, Rene Girard, *Violence and the sacred,* trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977) and Mary Douglas, *Purity and danger: an analysis of the concepts of pollution and taboo* (New York: Routledge, 1995[1966])

[7] For the origins of deviance in the early modern world, see Ruth Mellinkoff, *Outcasts: signs of otherness in northern European art of the late Middle Ages* (Berkeley : University of California Press, 1993.) and Tom Nichols (Ed.), *Others and outcasts in early modern Europe: picturing the social margins* (Burlington, VT : Ashgate, 2007.) There is also a literature on the rise of persecution of minorities and outsiders in medieval Europe which bears on this, albeit somewhat more obliquely since sometimes these are defined starkly as Others (Jews, Muslims, heretics) and sometimes they are deviants in something approximating my sense (prostitutes, homosexuals, vagabonds,) groups which tend to get lumped together in medieval and early modern scholarship. R.I. Moore, *The formation of a persecuting society : power and deviance in Western Europe, 950-1250* (New York: Blackwell, 1987), John Boswell, *Christianity, social tolerance, and homosexuality: gay people in Western Europe from the beginning of the Christian era to the fourteenth century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), a useful complication of Moore and Boswell may be found in David Nirenberg, *Communities of violence: persecution of minorities in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996.) See also the suggestive section on the villein in Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972) and (a bit more obliquely, but a

early modern tradition of Carnival, a seasonal festival that preceded Lent and was strongly associated with misbehavior, inversion, transgression and excess of all kinds.[8] Unlike Greek performed poetry, Carnival does begin to prefigure the sorts of inverted and subversive figures which haunt the modern imagination, but with two crucial differences. First, there is a striking contrast between, on the one hand, the early modern fluidity with which people take up and inhabit these deviant roles during the carnival season and return to conventional forms of behavior once the festival concludes and, on the other, the apparently rigid distinction between deviants and representatives of normality and morality in the modern era. Second, the emotional register of Carnival is altogether different from the various emotions conjured up by modern fantasies of deviance: Carnival is a time of laughter and exuberance, a wild delighting in chaos and anarchy. Modern deviants, on the other hand, are more often greeted with fear, unease and repressed desire, and while, as we shall see, moderns sometimes laugh at deviants at well, their laughter rings with the harsh tones of scorn and ridicule.

While deviance (figured in broad terms) has a history in the West as old as the written record, deviance in this special sense I have in mind, deviance as the terrifying face of the stranger in the mirror, is

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classic with few peers) Carlo Ginzburg, *The cheese and the worms: the cosmos of a sixteenth-century miller*, trans. John and Anne Tedeschi (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980.). A rival account which stresses continuity (and which I take issue with in greater detail later on) in representations of deviance is John Demos, *The Enemy Within: 2,000 years of witch-hunting in the Western world* (New York: Viking, 2008).

[8] On Carnival, see preeminently Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his world*, Trans. Helene Iswolsky (Cambridge, MA: M.I.T. Press, 1968), Natalie Zemon Davis*, Society and culture in early modern France : eight essays* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975,) 97-151, and Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Carnival in Romans,* trans. Mary Feeney. (New York : G. Braziller, 1979.) Of course, parts of Ancient Greek drama may, in fact, be figured as part of this tradition given its association with the cult of Dionysius. See the essays collected in Winkler and Zeitlin (eds.) *Nothing to do with Dionysos?* Naturally, the tendency to create periods of time in which behavior contrary to traditional norms becomes acceptable is not restricted to Western culture. For a meditation on this phenomenon in a wider anthropological context, see Victor Turner, *The ritual process : structure and anti-structure* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1969.)

uniquely modern.[9] And if deviance is modern, then the history of deviance is the history of modernity. Or, to put it another way, the history of deviance casts a dark reflection on the history of modernity, permits us to glimpse obliquely what modernity might have felt like for those who responded to it, in part, by inventing a colorful gallery of strange and perplexing deviants.[10] Once we recognize deviance as a modern phenomenon, the question naturally suggests itself: what has brought about the invention of all these troubling figures, and what has caused them to be grouped together as deviants? In what follows, I try to answer this question by taking up the psychological insight that fantasies and dreams often serve as indirect expressions of repressed aspects of experience, a hypothesis which lets us consider fantasies of deviance as a historical archive of the unconscious life of modernity. I argue, in short, that representations of deviance have something important to tell us not about those identified as deviants (who are often simply a convenient canvas for the elaborate fantasies projected upon them)

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[9] Modernity is something of a dirty word in historical discourse these days, being seen as too vague and abstract to be much good as an analytical category. This says more, I think, about the increasing reluctance of professional historians to take on big questions than it does about the category as such. Intellectual abstractions like 'modernity' and 'captialism' are nothing more than intellectual shorthand for a variety of specific changes which it would be laborious to spell out in every instance one wished to make reference to them. Clearly these abstractions shouldn't be used as explanatory categories (as they sometimes unfortunately are) because intellectual abstractions don't have causal power but I see no problem using them to indicate a complex and clearly inter-related set of events which the author considers salient to their thinking. For the record, here is what I mean by 'modernity:' a complex transformation in the fundamental organization of social life and assumptions of culture starting perhaps in the sixteenth century, picking up in earnest around the eighteenth century and lasting into the present. I understand as characteristic of this transformation the spread of capitalism as a mode of economic organization, attended by the rise of industrialization, urbanization and increasingly distended and impersonal social networks. Culturally, I see it as characterized by the increasing importance of rationality, interiority and individuality, as well as by a growing awareness of change, impermanence and relativity as fundamental characteristics of experience.

[10] The experience of modernity is, of course, a very large question which is at least implicitly touched on by a great deal of historical scholarship about the early modern and modern period, but for some explicit and suggestive treatments that inspire my own inquiry, see Marshall Berman, *All that is solid melts into air: the experience of modernity* (New York : Simon and Schuster, 1982), Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), Michael T. Taussig, *The devil and commodity fetishism in South America* (Chapel Hill : University of North Carolina Press, 1980), Matthew Kaiser, *The World In Play: Portraits of a Victorian Concept* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012)

but rather those doing the identifying.[11] Rather than seeing representations of deviance as simply attempts to repress those who do not conform to societal norms, or to shore up fragile social identities by creating 'others' against whom the normal person could be negatively defined, we can see these representations as a rich repository of the unconscious fears, desires, needs and sorrows attendant to life in the modern era.[12]

My overarching thesis is that representations of deviants reveal a deep cultural preoccupation with failure and inadequacy. On to the rich symbolic canvas of the deviant figure, Americans from the seventeenth century to the twentieth projected their anxieties about personal and social failure. In different ways at different times, deviants have been used to represent the various possible ways in which a person could fail to meet their society's ideals and expectations, and to imagine the consequences of such failures for both individual personhood and society as a whole. The deviant has therefore historically served as a kind of mirror to the culture which produced him or her: a mirror in which a culture might darkly glimpse its own values, distorted by the terrifying failure to achieve precisely that which is most prized and valued.

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[11] Speaking of 'those doing the identifying,' this may be a fortuitous place to note that what follows is largely regional study of middle-class culture (and, later, mass culture) in the northeastern United States, with a particular focus on Massachusetts and New York. It is a study of 'America' in some wider sense only to the extent that these places are typical of or set the tone for wider national trends. I am inclined to think, of course, this is quite often the case, but I am happy to acknowledge that other cultural regions of the United States (and other parts of the western world, naturally) would have somewhat different experiences of deviance. One thinks, for instance, of the deviants who populate the literary tradition of the Southern Gothic, which are clearly very different anything I explore in what follows. My rationale for focusing on the American northeast and on middle-class culture was to a large extent pragmatic: that is where I did the bulk of the work on this book and those were the sources that were most readily available to me.

[12] I allude here to several traditional view of deviance in a range of academic disciplines which I explore in far greater length in the next section of this introduction. A fuller explanation of the psychological theoretical framework I am applying (in combination with various other theoretical perspectives) will be found in the third section of the introduction.

But the specific details of what deviance has meant in certain times and places and how it has changed are perhaps finally more interesting than this over-arching argument. For, after all, any statement which can be so generally applied to four centuries of historical experience is bound to be somewhat abstract and unsatisfying. To get at the actual experience of modernity, we have to dig a little more deeply into particular times and places, and the specific fantasies of deviance those contexts gave rise to. For if the fantasy of the deviant has always been modern, that is not to say it has always been the same. Indeed, just as interesting as the question of why the American imagination has been haunted by deviants is the question of why attitudes to deviance (and the deviants themselves) have undergone such dramatic change over the four centuries spanned by this study. I have thus far described reactions to deviance in terms of terror because this seems to me the emotional leitmotif which runs through the various episodes I study herein, but what is more striking in some ways, and what originally drew me to the topic, is the striking diversity of symbolic and emotional expression which deviant figures have evoked over the last four centuries.

Terror perhaps best characterizes the experience of deviance in the seventeenth century, when the witch was perceived as a grave threat that had to be destroyed. The eighteenth tendency remained deeply troubled by deviants like the libertine but also began to show some disposition to sympathize with them. In the nineteenth century, on the other hand, deviance became a kind of entertaining spectacle, characterized by a curious mixture of earnest concern and light-hearted laughter. Finally, in the twentieth century, deviance became in certain contexts something admirable and even deeply desirable, as one can see, for instance, in the ostentatious performance of deviance so common to youth culture and the culture of celebrity. In four short centuries, we have travelled a winding path from

terrifying witches to sexy flappers, and it behooves us to ask how and why this has occurred. A flapper, as we shall see, could be every bit as terrifying as a witch in the right circumstances, every bit as deserving of public humiliation and execution, so this is not some simple feel-good story of growing tolerance and increasing comfort with difference in modern society. To understand how we got from one to the other requires a deeper, more nuanced understanding of the changing experience of modernity than we currently possess. It has been my ambition here to set us off on the path to this kind of understanding. Naturally, this is a daunting task and the chapters that follow represent only the most provisional of beginnings, but then something further may yet follow of this masquerade.

II. Four ways with Deviance: the genealogy of a concept

The history of deviance is not at present a going concern in the academic discipline of history. It is not (like, for instance, the histories of race, gender, capitalism or the environment) a well-established field with conferences, journals, faculty appointments and a self-conscious historiography dedicated to generating and propagating historical knowledge of the subject.[13] This, it must be said, is one of the charms of the topic; the absence of an established scholarly community gives one plenty of room to think.

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[13] It is for this reason, in fact, that I have opted for an anthropology-style introduction which concerns itself with surveying the broad intellectual and theoretical approaches to the subject matter at hand, rather than a survey of the (largely non-existent) historiography on the topic. The bodies of historiography which I do engage with (the history of witchcraft, of libertine literature, of the Beecher-Tilton scandal, of advertising and white-collar culture) are specific to each chapter rather than to the project as a whole and are covered at length in the footnotes to those chapters. An interest in deviance as a category of historical analysis does, however, seem to be emerging on the margins (aptly enough!) of the discipline, especially in early modern history, art history and the history of medicine, as these two relatively recent collections of essays bear witness: and Tom Nichols (Ed.), *Others and outcasts in early modern Europe* and Waltraud Ernst (Ed.) *Histories of the normal and the abnormal : social and cultural histories of norms and normativity* (New York: Routledge, 2006.)

There are, none the less, a number of scholarly traditions which directly or indirectly touch on the topic, and even some which purport to dedicate themselves to the study of something called deviance. It will be helpful to take a glance at these approaches by way of giving some context to my own, somewhat idiosyncratic way of going about things. Two of the scholarly traditions I have in mind belong properly to sociological thought (though, in fact, I know them better as they percolate into history and anthropology) namely the functionalist and social-interactionist approaches to what is sometimes known as the sociology of deviance.[14] On the other hand, the other two traditions I want to mention as forerunners and interlocutors are abundantly present in contemporary historical writing, though not limited to it: I have in mind here feminist scholarship and that loose constellation of work emerging in response to the work of Michel Foucault. From this last grouping it seems to me important to extract Foucault himself, who seems to me to be asking different and, from my point of view, more interesting questions than the majority of scholars his work has inspired.

It is to sociology, particularly functionalistic sociology, that we primarily owe the descriptive (rather than pejorative) usage of the term deviance.[15] For thinkers in this tradition, deviance is a more or less objective and universal phenomenon, present in all societies at all periods of their history.[16] Fuctionalists

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[14] The sociology of deviance is in fact a large and well-established field which turns on a set of questions and debates that are deeply embedded in the assumptions and historical development of its own disciplinary grounding. I've made no attempt to offer a comprehensive survey of this field as its concerns are only obliquely relevant to my own, preferring instead to cherry-pick particularly salient examples that highlight points of overlap, divergence and conversation with the writing of history.

[15] In fact, the use of 'deviance' and 'deviant' as nouns dates to the early twentieth century and the OED cites its early usage primarily in a variety of sociological and psychological as well as statistical (as in 'standard deviance') contexts. On the other hand, the verb 'deviate' meaning to turn aside from a course or track or, more figuratively, to turn aside from a rule, method or conventional standard, dates to the seventeenth century and already turns up with reference to deviants in the modern sense in the eighteenth century. See "deviance, *n*.", "deviant, *n*.", "deviate, *v*." The Oxford English Dictionary. 2nd ed. 1989. OED Online. Oxford University Press. 1 Apr. 2012

[16] As with so much else in this stream of sociology, Durkheim's writings are the foundational theoretical text. See especially Emile Durkheim, *The Rules of Sociological Method*, Ed. Steven Lukes, Trans. W D Halls (New York: Free

define deviance as the violation of social norms, and argue that preoccupation with it serves the function of shoring up these norms by identifying and punishing those who fail to heed communal prohibitions or to live up to communal expectations. This is the logic that brings together, say, a lazy neer-do-well (who doesn't live up to communal expectations respecting labor) and a murderer (who fails to obey the strong prohibition against in-group violence) as two forms of the same phenomenon. Now, since all societies (almost by definition) create norms and since, inevitably, these norms will be imperfectly realized in the course of social life, we must according to this line of thought expect to discover deviance in all societies and at all times. What precisely gets defined as deviant behavior will vary, of course, as will the extent to which societies regulate and police themselves in this matter, but the phenomenon and the functions it serves are universal.

Since its hey-day in the 1950s, functionalism has fallen rather out of fashion as a means of explaining human behavior. It is today often represented as a crude, one-size-fits-all approach that has major intellectual flaws, not the least of which is its tendency to reify society – that is, to treat it like an object with properties and imperatives of its own, thus eliding the specific logic of the many concrete interactions which actually comprise it. But, in fact, I don't have a very pronounced antipathy for this approach myself and will thus refrain from recapitulating these critiques. I am interested not in the objective social reality of deviance but rather the subjective, imaginative experience of it, and for this reason I am perfectly happy to concede to functionalism the point that all societies are concerned with

Press, 1982) 85-118. An example of the functionalistic approach to the sociology of deviance which is rather well-known in the sociological field but largely ignored by historians has actually to do with witches in seventeenth century New England. See Kai T. Erikson, *Wayward Puritans: a study in the sociology of deviance* (New York: Wiley, 1966.) A better-known instance of the appearance of a functionalistic interpretation of deviance in the historical literature (on the same topic, as it happens) John Demos, *Entertaining Satan: Witchcraft and the Culture of Early New England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004[1982]) For an instance of a complex and rich argument about, amongst other things, deviance in different cultures that is rooted in functionalist assumptions, see Mary Douglas, *Purity and danger: an analysis of the concepts of pollution and taboo* (New York: Routledge, 1995[1966])

deviance in some capacity. However, not all societies make of deviant behavior a deeply engrossing site

of fantasy and catharsis, an intense source of fear, hatred, amusement and desire. And if we ask why

Western modernity, in particular, has tended to make this kind of experience of deviance possible and

even inevitable, we don't really find a satisfying answer in the functionalist tradition.

If rigorous thinking about deviance has its start in functionalistic sociology it owes much of its present-

day character to a rival explanatory tradition in sociology known as symbolic interactionism, and

especially to the work of Erving Goffman.[17] The concept of deviance undergoes a kind of Copernican

revolution in Goffman's hands – it is no longer an objective feature of society, as for functionalists, but

instead becomes a status that is ascribed to someone by other social actors for complex reasons that are

contingent to the particular situation in which the alleged deviant and those who label them as such find

themselves. For Goffman, society is a kind of theatre in which we take up and set down roles and

personae as necessary, that of the deviant being a negative stigma-bearing role that people largely

strive to avoid but into which they often find themselves cast. In effect, deviance is no longer seen as an

attempt to describe an objective state of affairs (the violation of social norms) but instead becomes

something more subjectively and theatrically constructed – above all, something which emerges out of

specific social contexts and is therefore far more heterogeneous and contingent than a merely

functionalist analysis would allow.[18]

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[17] See particularly Erving Goffman, *The presentation of self in everyday life* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1959.) and Erving Goffman, *Stigma; notes on the management of spoiled identity* (Eaglewoods Cliff, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963)

[18] Naturally, Goffman's work is neither the only place within sociology where the functionalist framework is challenged, nor the only place in the social sciences where a research paradigm oriented towards the subjective, contingent experience of specific persons is proposed. However, Goffman is one of the earliest and most influential thinkers to formulate such a position, and to explicitly address a large part of his work to the question of

Very few of the works I cite in this book explicitly take an interactionalist approach but a great deal of theoretically naïve history (perhaps the dominant strand to history-writing today) unwittingly ascribes to interactionalist positions about what constitutes an adequate account or explanation of the phenomenon under investigation.[19] Most historians like history to emphasize contingent factors and immediate causes of events, to recreate as far as possible the subjective experience of the people under consideration and explain action in reference to this experience. There is little patience, in this tradition, for grand theories about society, history or the psyche. This is a history concerned with proximate, not ultimate, causes and its practitioners, if pressed, will argue that such theories are to be avoided because they ride roughshod over the specific on-the-ground realities to which 'real' historical causality is usually implicitly attributed. The natural genre of this kind of history is consequently the monograph and its natural practitioner is the specialist, whose highly limited field of knowledge corresponds neatly to the narrow scope given to historical explanation in this tradition.[20]

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deviance, which makes him a natural focal point in the present context for a sea-change that is, of course, more widely felt in the human sciences.

[19] For a rare instance of explicitly interactionalist examination of deviance, which, predictably, shows the influence of William Sewell's unjustly neglected attempt to cross-breed historians with sociologists, see Ari Adut, *On scandal: moral disturbances in society, politics, and art* (Cambridge; New York : Cambridge University Press, 2008.) On Sewell, see William H. Sewell Jr., *Logics of history: social theory and social transformation* (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 2005.) I use 'theoretically naïve' in a purely descriptive rather than pejorative sense, of course. Like most theoretically oriented historians, I do as a matter of fact have pejorative opinions aplenty about theoretical naiveté but this is not the time or place to vent them and, in any case, abler scholars than me have presented compelling cases against this approach. See in particular Hayden White, *Metahistory: the historical imagination in nineteenth-century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973) and Joan Scott, 'The evidence of experience,' *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 17, No. 4, 773-797.

[20] The best elaboration of the assumptions embedded in this history is to be found in Hayden's *Metahistory*. Some pertinent examples of this kind of thing (which have many virtues to make up for their theoretical sins, one might add) picked more or less at randomly from the chapters which follow: Rosenthal Bernard, *Salem story: reading the witch trials of 1692* (New York : Cambridge University Press, 1993), Mary Beth Norton, *In the Devil's Snare: The Salem Witchcraft Crisis of 1692* (New York: Random House, 2002), Robert Bogdan, *Freak show: presenting human oddities for amusement and profit* (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1988.), Richard Fox, *Trials of Intimacy: Love and Loss in the Beecher-Tilton Scandal* (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1999)

The obvious critique of theoretically naïve history is the same as that which has been leveled against interactionalism within sociology: it has very few tools for addressing big questions about the nature of human existence or even about the causes of large-scale historical and social developments that span multiple continents and centuries. Most historical thinkers who address themselves to these bigger changes and patterns (and whose ideas are often enthusiastically taken up by historians – Marx, Elias, de Tocqueville, Foucault, to name but a few) are quite tellingly not themselves historians in the narrow disciplinary sense.[21] Historians do, of course, write about such general phenomena as capitalism, the rise of the state, or gender, racial and class oppression, but nearly always in such specific terms as to not be able to contribute anything of substance to the theoretical discussion about the social dynamics which make these phenomena so general and pervasive. To someone interested in these larger, more general questions, theoretically naïve history can provide useful data but it cannot be a real interlocutor, for the simple reason that historians in this tradition don't address themselves to these larger questions and consider them, in a sense, 'bad' questions. And, since I myself am asking precisely this kind of 'bad' question (roughly: what factors shape the representation and experience of deviance from the seventeenth century onwards, and what does this preoccupation tell us about the experience of modernity?) the implicit interactionalism of theoretically naïve history only takes me so far, providing much useful data but no arguments to engage with.

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[21] Michel Foucault, *History of madness*, trans. Jonathan Murphy and Jean Khalfa(New York : Routledge, 2006.) Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (New York, Modern Library: 1906), Norbert Elias**,** *The civilizing process*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1994) Alexis De Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. & ed. Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 2000).

Fortunately, though theoretically naïve history dominates the discipline, it has not yet attained

hegemonic sway, so let me now consider the first properly historical intellectual tradition which does

put forth a general theory about deviance, and which I engage with at length in what follows: feminist

scholarship.[22] For feminist history, as for interactionalist sociology, deviance is a contingent product of

social interactions rather than an objective fact, but feminism does in fact deploy a more general

understanding of the phenomenon. Within this tradition, ascriptions of deviance are a rhetorical

strategy resorted to by the powerful to justify the subordination of the group denoted as deviant, and

to delegitimize and undermine those who act and speak in ways contrary to and threatening to a social

hierarchy (patriarchy in most, though not all, strands of the feminist tradition) that benefits some rather

than others. The underlying conception of society is one in which the salient social relations, the ones

which best explain human behavior, are relations of power. In this framework, culture is implicitly

interpreted as war by other means: as a set of strategies and ploys by which the endless struggle

between social groups for dominion and self-assertion is carried out.[23]

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[22] I prefer to talk about feminist rather than gender history, which is often what this scholarly tradition is called these days, partly because the term 'feminist' inescapably put the politics of the thing to the forefront, while gender historians in my experience often have somewhat fuzzy or even downright questionable politics, to the detriment of both their scholarship and whatever aspirations to human decency they may harbor. Some of the work I have in mind here and engage with at greater length and in more specific terms in the chapters that follow: Carol F. Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman: Witchcraft in Colonial New England* (New York: Vintage, 1987). Lyndal Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil : witchcraft, sexuality, and religion in early modern Europe* (New York : Routledge, 1994 Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly conduct: visions of gender in Victorian America* (New York : Knopf : Distributed by Random House, 1985), Cathy N. Davidson, *Revolution and the word: the rise of the novel in America* (New York : Oxford University Press, 1986) Clare A. Lyons**,** *Sex among the rabble : an intimate history of gender & power in the age of revolution, Philadelphia, 1730-1830* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006) Altina Waller, *Reverend Beecher and Mrs. Tilton: Sex and Class in Victorian America* (Amherst : University of Massachusetts Press, 1982). Laura Korobkin, *Criminal Conversations: Sentimentality and Nineteenth-Century Legal Stories of Adultery* (New York : Columbia University Press, 1998), Ann Jones, *Women Who Kill* (New York: Feminist Press, 2009[1980], Jessie Ramey, 'The Bloody Blonde and the Marble Woman: Gender and Power in the Case of Ruth Snyder' *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 37, No. 3 (Spring, 2004), 625-650. The most explicit theorization of deviance from a feminist perspective (which I draw on in summarizing the feminist position above) is to be found in Gerda Lerner, *Why history matters: life and thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) 131-145. See also Gerda Lerner, *The creation of patriarchy* (New York : Oxford University Press, 1986.)

[23] This is not a framework exclusive to feminism, of course. Histories of class and race relations often draw on a very similar paradigm which we can ultimately trace back to Marx's sweeping assertion that 'all history is the

Feminism has been a compelling framework for thinking about both deviance and history for the last four decades, yielding a rich literature that I myself find quite compelling, if ultimately somewhat incomplete. Though I try to finesse the matter in what follows, it seems to me that if one thinks this way of thinking about deviance is more or less adequate, then most of the analysis herein will seem wrongheaded and off-base. My contention, however, is that the episodes I examine below are (each in its own way) problematic for this explanatory framework, that the appeal to power dynamics in some ways fails us in at least the instances I consider herein.[24] Indeed, I've carefully selected case studies in which I feel this kind of thinking lets us down and leaves us feeling the analysis falls short of what it purports to explain, and deliberately avoided those where I felt satisfied that an analysis grounded in social struggle was adequate.[25] In short, I think the feminist (and, more broadly, struggle-oriented) perspective is right as far as it goes, but that it does not go far enough, and I see my own work as trying to address those places where it doesn't quite seem to account for the events under consideration.

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history of class struggle.' But since I've deliberately avoided episodes of deviance in which class and race play a prominent role, feminism is as a matter of fact my primary interlocutor here, which is why I focus on it here. There is also the further point that class and race conflicts frequently give way to outright inter-group violence, whereas gender struggle is according to many of its more prominent historians carried on primarily in the cultural or discursive realm with such as acts of physical violence as do occur having a primarily symbolic function (as a warning to others, a way of creating an atmosphere of fear, or what have you.) My suspicion is that this downplays the historical (and, indeed, contemporary) importance of domestic violence and rape as vital tools in the male arsenal of dominion, but in any case feminist analyses has tended to concern itself for the most part with subtler mechanisms of control. I might also note here parenthetically that these ideas have also been raised in relation to deviance in sociology. See, for instance, Edwin M. Schur, *The politics of deviance: stigma contests and the uses of power* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J. : Prentice-Hall, 1980) and Nachman Ben-Yehuda, *The politics and morality of deviance : moral panics, drug abuse, deviant science, and reversed stigmatization* (Albany : State University of New York Press, 1990.)

[24] And I would also argue fails us more generally as a way of explaining human behavior if it is the primary or even only framework we are prepared to apply. Power relations matter, of course, but they're not all that matters, and history (feminist and otherwise) is often written as if this were the case.

[25] Thus, for instance, one finds no mention in what follows of the way immigrant groups or leftist organizations were often described as deviant (this being a fairly clear instance of class politics) or the way racially marginalized groups, particularly African-Americans, are often associated with deviance.

The other body of historical literature which has had a lot to say about deviance has been that loose constellation of scholarship heavily influenced by the work of Michel Foucault. Leaving Foucault himself aside for just a moment, this body of scholarship makes two interventions of interest to us here. One strand of it is a kind of refinement on the power-struggle reading of deviance. Power is still the central explanatory mechanism but it is no longer the power of social groups or individuals which is decisive but rather the power of language (or rather a socially situated language termed 'discourse' in this literature) to shape experience, prohibit certain forms of being and call others into existence. Deviance is still a key concept for this literature, but is seen less as a simple form of dominion and instead as a more free-floated discursive construction whose effect is quite contingent on when, where and towards whom it is deployed, the discourse having a logic of its own that also helps shape these outcomes.[26] Obviously, the points I discussed when distinguishing my approach from analyses of power grounded in social struggle apply equally to this body of work also.

The second way in which Foucault-inspired scholarship serves as a departure point for this project is in the relation it posits between deviance and normality. One of the most interesting hypotheses found in this body of work is that discourses of deviance form a mutually constitutive relationship to concepts like 'normal,' 'good' and 'correct.' That is, a discourse which defines certain things or persons as deviant

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[26] Some examples of this: Scott, 'Evidence of Experience,' Ramey, 'The Bloody Blonde and the Marble Woman,' Gail Bederman, *Manliness & civilization : a cultural history of gender and race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1995,) Lisa Duggan, *Sapphic slashers: sex, violence, and American modernity* (Durham, NC : Duke University Press, 2000.) Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of dreadful delight: narratives of sexual danger in late-Victorian London* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.) Obviously this kind of analysis is quite compatible with and in fact often enters the discipline of history spliced with the kind of group-struggle power analysis I associated with feminism above. Indeed, all the works cited in this footnote also situate themselves with a feminist or gender history tradition.

necessarily implicitly defines (or re-defines) a conception of the normal course of things against which these things stand out as aberrations, exceptions or what have you. The idea here is almost the reverse of the functionalist argument; rather than norms giving rise to deviance, it is through interactions with and representations of deviants that societies are seen to explore and develop their conceptions and experience of moral life. As we shall see, the notion that deviance is, in some sense, a reflection of moral concerns is fundamental to my own approach, though in fact I often find myself at odds with some of the assumptions inherent in the Foucault-inspired versions of such arguments and have attempted below to give a rather different account of how this process takes place.[27]

My final point of divergence from this body of scholarship is vis-à-vis Foucault himself. Most historians who are inspired by Foucault are inspired by his conclusions – his theories about power, his sweeping narratives of discursive proliferation and transformation, his genealogical approach to causality. To think with Foucault has, for historians, largely meant to put his tools, techniques and theories to new ends. For reasons which will momentary become apparent, I myself have little interest in Foucault's conclusions, but, on the other hand, I think the questions which lead him to those conclusions are tremendously interesting ones. And the motivating question of that strand of Foucault's work which engages most directly with deviance is precisely the question about the relationship between deviance

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[27] I have in mind here works such as Angus McLaren, *The trials of masculinity: policing sexual boundaries, 1870-1930* (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1997.) Rachel Adams, *Sideshow U.S.A : freaks and the American cultural imagination* (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 2001), the essays collected in Waltraud Ernst (Ed.) *Histories of the normal and the abnormal : social and cultural histories of norms and normativity* (New York: Routledge, 2006.) and (less explicitly Foucaultian) Karen Halttunen, *Murder most foul : the killer and the American Gothic imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998.)

and modernity.[28] Why, Foucault asks, do we observe at the start of the modern era a dramatic rise in concern about various kinds of behavior (grouped together as madness, delinquency, deviance, abnormality) and a set of dramatic transformations in how those who act in such ways are treated? Why are such people increasingly confined and imprisoned, and why, indeed, are they grouped together at all – why, in other words, does there arise such a concept as deviance in the first place? These seem to me precisely the right sorts of questions, primarily because they draw our attention to the modern preoccupation with deviance and cast it as a historical phenomenon, in need of historical description and explanation. However, as far as this project (writing the history of modern deviance) is concerned, Foucault's works and works heavily inspired by him are still pretty much the only game in town. Which is all the more unfortunate in that there are, I think, major problems with Foucault's basic assumptions about personhood and causality. Elucidating my differences with Foucault on these points will also go far to making explicit my own rival theoretical assumptions, so let me now turn my attention to those.

III. The Shoulders of Giants: theoretical groundings of a contemporary Humanism

Foucault is not a particularly systematic thinker and would himself have been amused, one suspects, to discover that his name has been turned into a by-word for a style of thinking.[29] Nevertheless , it seems reasonably accurate to describe both Foucault's best-known work and that of his more faithful

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[28] In particular see Michel Foucault, *History of madness*, trans. Jonathan Murphy and Jean Khalfa(New York : Routledge, 2006.) Michel Foucault**,** *Discipline and punish: the birth of the prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan.(New York : Pantheon Books, 1977.) and Michel Foucault**,** *Abnormal: lectures at the Collège de France, 1974-1975* ed. Arnold I. Davidson, tran. Graham Burchell (New York : Picador, 2003.)

[29] Though not necessarily surprised, of course. See in particular Michel Foucault, 'What is an Author?' in *Language**,** counter-memory**,** practice: selected essays and interviews*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca, N.Y. : Cornell University Press, 1977), 113-138.

inheritors as anti-humanistic. I am using the term humanism in a somewhat unconventional way here so

let me give a brief definition. I take humanism to be an intellectual tradition which concerns itself with

and attempts to explain the world in terms of human beings.[30] It differs in this respect from, on the one

hand, theology, which attempts to explain humanity and the world with reference to some sort of

transcendent or immanent spiritual reality, and, on the other, from the natural sciences, which

endeavor to explain these same phenomena with reference to natural laws that operate, in principle,

independently of either people or Gods.[31] Humanism takes for granted that there is such a thing as

human being – that people, though changeable and diverse, have a basic consistency, coherence and

similarity that makes them a fitting object of study. Indeed, humanism goes farther and suggests that

the best way to understand and explain how people act is by reference to certain aspects of what it is to

be a human being, as opposed, again, to explanations which make reference to divine will or natural

law. Humanists differ amongst themselves, of course, with respect to what they see as the decisive

aspects of human beings – some stress the nature of social relations, other emphasize the meaning-

making faculty by which we discover meaning and value in the world, others yet point to the obscure

workings of the human unconscious. Behind these differences, however, lies the shared assumption that

any given event in human life may be adequately explored by asking: what is the person who acts in this

manner like? What do they value? How do they relate to other human beings and their broader social

environment? What psychodynamics unconsciously shape their behavior and experiences?

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[30] As opposed to referring to something to do with that body of scholarship we call the humanities (which is often anti-humanistic these days, by my definition), a sort of secular religion, or the renaissance cultural and intellectual movement of the same name.

[31] My tendency to think of humanism in contrast to theology and the natural sciences is in part traditional, but has been shaped in particular (respecting the natural sciences) by Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and method,* trans. William Glen-Doepel (London : Sheed and Ward, 1975) and (respecting theology) Jacob Burckhardt**,** *The civilization of the renaissance in Italy*. Trans. S. G. C. Middlemore (London, Allen & Unwin, 1937 [1878])

To the anti-humanist, the question 'what is a person like?' is nonsense, for the anti-humanist asserts that there is really no such thing as a person, and that our tendency to imagine otherwise is a historical, contingent phenomenon that has had its day in the sun and is destined to wane one day.[32] The anti-humanist position is instead that a person is not a coherent whole but rather, in Hume's well-known description of mankind, 'nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions.'[33] Of course, Foucault's own anti-humanism owes less than to Hume than to Nietzsche, who turns Hume's characteristically eighteenth century focus on *perceptions* into an emphasis on *actions*. For Nietzsche, as for Hume, a person is not a thing with a describable coherent nature but rather a succession of more or less arbitrarily willed acts, a self-asserting will to power which knows no law but its own contingent assertions. To put it more simply, for Nietzsche, there are no persons but only actions. Foucault's achievement, from this point of view, is a kind of anti-humanistic theory of society and politics – an account of how the fluid, heterogeneous processes described by Nietzsche are molded into subjects and selves, seemingly coherent entities whose coherence is, however, an illusion and, indeed, a means by which structures of power work to limit and direct into specific channels the discrete and disconnected acts and experiences that, for this tradition, are the only real ground of being.

The anti-humanist tradition has a lot going for it as a picture of the world, of course. We would all readily agree, I think, that there is indeed something quite fragmented and disconnected about our experiences. It is not at all obvious what entitles us to speak of the coherence of a human being, to insist

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[32] The clearest exposition of this view is, in fact, found in that set of texts which I like to think of as the thinking person's Foucault: Michel Foucault, *The order of things: an archaeology of the human sciences* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1971.) and Michel Foucault, *The archaeology of knowledge: and the discourse on language,* trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York : Pantheon Books, 1972.)

[33] Hume may on the strength of such statements be properly thought of as the first anti-humanist. David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (New York : Oxford University Press, 2000), 165.

that playing the guitar, eating breakfast, teaching a class, watching the sunset – that all this somehow coheres into a life, a self that can meaningfully be discussed as a whole. None the less, I at least (and, as far as I can tell, a good many other people honesty attempting to interrogate life) remain unshaken in my feeling that not only are we justified in talking about persons in those terms, but also that these are precisely the categories which most helpfully illuminate the human condition.[34] One of the things I have attempted to do in what follows, then, is to figure out what a humanism that takes Foucault as a point of departure might look like – taking up his interest in the structures which shape experience and actions but without therefore assuming that a description of the changing shape of the structures themselves tells the whole story. Or, if you prefer, we might say that I have attempted in what follows to imagine post-structuralism with a human face.

From within the humanist tradition, I draw on three distinct strands of thinking about how to best account for human behavior and experience. Each of these three approaches is in itself quite traditional, but their synthesis is rarely attempted and can, I hope to show, yield new insights into western modernity. The first tradition I take up is that of cultural analysis, which I associate particularly with the work of cultural anthropologists, whose central insight I take to be that what matters about people is the way they invest their world with meaning and significance. The second tradition I draw on is that of depth psychology, where the cardinal insight is that human beings are not always fully (or at all) aware

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[34] There are philosophically sophisticated critiques of anti-humanism out there, but none of them really seem to me to get at what seems so implausible about this view. See, for instance, Charles Taylor, 'Foucault on Freedom and Truth,' *Political Theory*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (May, 1984) 152-183 and consider also the anti-anti-humanistic view (basically phenomenological) put forth in Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: the making of the modern identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989.) Taylor is most compelling, I think, in staking his humanistic claims on the materiality of human beings, an embodied materiality whose existence goes a unrecognized with a post-structuralist (and anti-humanistic) focus on discourse, a paradigm in which a body becomes merely a thing inscribed with and through discourse, capable at best of mute spasms of protest.

of their deepest desires, concerns and preoccupations, and that the deep, unconscious commitments of a person or culture must often be inferred from the displaced and disguised forms in which they are often expressed. Finally, there is the Marxist tradition, whose insight is twofold. First, Marxism draws our attention to social relations and material human inter-connectedness as matters of decisive importance to human beings, whether acknowledged as such or not. The second decisive insight of this tradition is that the extension of the logic of the market into an even-increasing sphere of life produced a profound and ongoing revolution in the nature of these social relations starting in about the sixteenth century and extending into the present-day. Cultural analysis, depth psychology, Marxist critique: these are the three traditions that inform what follows. Let me now examine each in turn so as to show how they do so in somewhat more depth.

It was as a young undergraduate that I first encountered the cultural anthropology of Clifford Geertz and its historical equivalents in, say, the cultural history of Robert Darnton or Natalie Zemon-Davis.[35] It was then that I acquired the conviction, that has never really left me, that people can only be understood from the inside out, by reconstructing the cultural categories through which they experience the world and express its meaning for them. Thus my primary approach to the deviant figures I examine in what follows is to ask: what did these figures mean as cultural symbols to those who encountered them? Why were witches depicted as envious, libertines as seductive, freaks as hilarious and flappers as fascinating? What were the historically specific cultural implications of envy, seduction, laughter or fascination, and how did they fit into the web of significance by which the historical actors making these images made sense of the world? These questions will sometimes take us far afield in what follows, and often seem to

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[35] Clifford Geertz, *The interpretation of cultures: selected essays* (New York : Basic Books, 1973.) Clifford Geertz, *Local knowledge : further essays in interpretive anthropology* (New York : Basic Books, 1983.) Robert Darnton, *The great cat massacre and other episodes in French cultural history* (New York : Basic Books, 1984.) Natalie Zemon Davis, *The return of Martin Guerre* (Cambridge, Mass. : Harvard University Press, 1983.)

drift hopelessly far from the ostensible matter at hand, but we shall return each time with an enriched understanding of the ways these deviant figures mattered deeply to those who imagined them.

The anthropologist whom I cite and allude to most often in what follows is not, however, Clifford Geertz but rather Arthur Kleinman. Kleinman offers a useful refinement to the Geertzian conception of the task of the cultural anthropologist by suggesting that of all the many ways people make sense of their lives, those which should interest us most are those which have a moral quality.[36] Kleinman employs the term moral in a somewhat different way from the standard usage, and I follow him in so doing throughout this text: he defines the moral is that which most deeply matters. Those commitments, values and attainments which seem to any given person or community most essential to an adequate human existence all have a moral quality, in this sense.[37] In view of the persistent tendency to talk and think of deviance in moral terms (both in its historical context and, as we saw in the previous section, in scholarly analysis of the phenomenon) Kleinman's concept of the moral provides an invaluable way to theorize the crucial moral dimension of deviance. In effect, when viewed as a moral concern in Kleinman's sense, deviance has much to tell us about what matters most deeply within the many moral worlds of western modernity. This moral emphasis is what most directly connects deviance, the ostensible topic, and the experience of modernity, which is what I myself am most deeply interested in.

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[36] Arthur Kleinman, *What really matters : living a moral life amidst uncertainty and danger* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.)

[37] The moral, in this sense, is not purely a cultural category at all, of course. Indeed, the way moral concerns blend materially, psychologically and culturally informed needs and wants in Kleinman's work is an important point of departure for my own attempt to synthesize these different dimensions of human being.

Arthur Kleinman also deserved much of the credit (as much in his capacity as a teacher as through his writing) for provoking me to think about depth psychology as an essential component of the humanistic apparatus.[38] The primary reason depth psychology is a valuable tool for the historian is that it helps us navigate a crucial stumbling block for cultural history: the inconvenient fact that people lie. That they should lie to one another is bad enough, of course, but that they even lie to themselves is what is really troubling, because the cultural historian is more or less obliged to take people at their word. The way we traditionally go about cultural history is, after all, by inferring the beliefs, values and preoccupations of a historical group (the nineteenth century middle class, say) or personage from what they actually say those beliefs and values are. If a man writes in his diary that he reads the Bible every day and holds to the precepts of Christian Love, we cultural historians are methodologically bound to take him at his word. If this man happens, as is not infrequently the case, to be a slave-owner who viciously exploits, ruthlessly terrorizes and in all other ways treats his slaves as mere chattel, all the while paying lip service to the incalculable value of their immortal souls, we have before us a serious problem. Now, we can attempt to solve this problem in three ways, two of which are not much good. We can twist ourselves into increasingly awkward rhetorical knots trying to reconcile Christianity with the slave-owner's conduct, which quickly becomes an unpersuasive approach even in very skilled hands. Or, of course, we can say that Christianity is merely an ideology, a form of false consciousness, a discourse deployed for tactical and cynical reasons as a means of social control, which is certainly more intellectually plausible. But this second solution amounts to a wholesale abandonment of the cultural historian's attempt to understand our slave-owner by reconstructing their subjective experience and instead tries to explain

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[38] Depth psychology may be an unfamiliar usage: essentially, it encompasses psychoanalysis and other forms of psychological investigation which employ the concept of the unconscious and an integrated psyche. As such, the term in its broadest usage (which is how I employ it) runs the gamut from the pre-psychoanalytic psychology of William James through to offshoots from the psychoanalytic such as humanistic, existential and gestalt psychology. The primary referent, however, both in general and in my work, is psychoanalysis in its various guises.

their behavior solely with reference to their place in a set of objective social relations (of class, power, or what have you.)[39]

Our third course of action is to become depth psychologists.[40] For while depth psychology is committed, just like cultural history, to making sense of people through examining their subjective experience of the world, it has practically since its inception been concerned with theorizing and circumventing the self-deceit of those it studies. Depth psychology at once expands and challenges our notion of what it is to understand someone else's inner world and most profound moral concerns by noting, quite rightly, that these matters are often so great a source of turmoil that they can't be consciously articulated. They are therefore often to be got at only very circuitously, by closely analyzing such phenomena as fantasies, compulsions, dreams, projections and various other forms of unconscious expression. I resort to such interpretive techniques again and again in what follows, convinced as I am that this is really the only way to get at what really matters in each of the episodes I am examining, which all share the quality of having produced a vast archive of impassioned interest and emotional turmoil out of all proportion to their seeming insignificance as historical events.

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[39] I use this example advisedly, for this is indeed an actual problem for historians of the slave-holding class in the American South before the Civil War and it has been 'solved' primarily in the two ways I outline above. For the 'twisting into awkward knots' approach by some true masters of the genre, see Eugene D. Genovese, *A consuming fire : the fall of the Confederacy in the mind of the white Christian South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998.) and Mitchell Snay, *Gospel of disunion: religion and separatism in the antebellum South* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993.) For the 'opiate of the masses' approach, there is little finer than Walter Johnson, *Soul by soul: life inside the antebellum slave market* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999)

[40] And, indeed, to round out the above example, some historians of the Southern slave-owning class do precisely this to compelling effect. See, in particular, Kenneth A. Lockridge, *On the sources of patriarchal rage: the commonplace books of William Byrd and Thomas Jefferson and the gendering of power in the eighteenth century* (New York : New York University Press, 1992.) and, albeit less theoretically grounded, Drew Gilpin Faust, *James Henry Hammond and the Old South : a design for mastery* (Baton Rouge : Louisiana State University Press, 1982.)

And, indeed, this is not such an unusual approach as it might at first appear. As a matter of necessity, most good cultural historians do resort to depth psychology-derived concepts like anxiety, unconscious desires or fears, or even repression and projection.[41] But since depth psychology is, for somewhat questionable reasons, often considered an inappropriate theoretical resource for historians to draw on explicitly, the psychology of history is a kind of informal 'folk' psychology which often provides insights lacking in rigor and specificity.[42] Thus, for instance, it is possible to find arguments to the tune of the assertion that the rapid social change associated with the spread of capitalism caused widespread anxiety in histories of the seventeenth, eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[43] Now, the

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[41] Some cultural historians even explicitly endorse the depth psychological paradigm as a useful tool and produce masterful histories that become widely acknowledged classic even in the face of widespread hostility to this kind of methodology. Perhaps the best example in American history, and certainly my own model for how to do this kind of thing well, is T.J. Jackson Lears, *No place of grace: antimodernism and the transformation of American culture, 1880-1920* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981.) and see also, to a lesser extent, the author's subsequent books. Another interesting venture in this vein is Lyndal Roper *Oedipus and the Devil : witchcraft, sexuality, and religion in early modern Europe* (New York : Routledge, 1994)

[42] The questionable objection to depth psychology is, in the first place, that its theories about the psyche are ahistorical and, in the sense place, that it is hard to imagine what might constitute evidence for claims based on inferences about unarticulated preoccupations. The first objection is questionable because it ignores the vast swathes of depth psychology (right back to the late Freud himself) which openly and explicitly historicizes psychological phenomena and recognizes they are historically contingent (the argument of Civilization and its Discontents, for instance, is explicitly historical in this way.) Obviously, if using depth psychology to write history means making breezy claims that Puritans had oedipal complexes (as it has, unfortunately, sometimes meant) then depth psychology is worthless to the task at hand, but to suppose this is all there is to depth psychology is simply not true. The second objection in questionable because it presupposes that historians have 'evidence' for any of their claims, implicitly endorsing a positivistic view of history which is, for all its popularity amongst the theoretically naïve, utterly intellectually bankrupt. Demolitions of the notion that historians make positivistic-style truth claims about the past are many and I don't know of any persuasive replies on the positivistic side, but perhaps the more compelling argument against this kind of positivistic superstition is Hayden White's masterful demonstration of history's inescapable dependence on narrative and rhetorical forms to sculpt 'evidence' into 'truth.' Hayden White, *Metahistories*, passim.

[43] A bit unfair to name names here, since this tendency is so widespread, but just to make a point here are five historians of otherwise admirable skill whose work spans the four centuries and who reach for this old war-horse in one way or another. In chronological order: Boyer, Paul & Nissenbaum, Stephen. *Salem Possessed: The Social Origins of Witchcraft* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York: Knopf, 1992) (I have in mind here particularly his section on eighteenth century condemnations of luxury), Robert H. Abzug, *Cosmos crumbling: American reform and the religious imagination* (New York : Oxford University Press, 1994), Robert H. Wiebe, *The search for order, 1877-1920*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967) and Nancy MacLean, *Behind the mask of chivalry: the making of the second Ku Klux Klan* (New York : Oxford University Press, 1994.)

trouble here is not necessarily that this is false but rather that it is a bit too generic. An argument and a concept ('anxiety' in this instance) that applies equally to such wildly different times and places as a late seventeenth century New England village and an early twentieth century metropolis is surely something of a blunt instrument, something that hinders rather than aids our understanding, even when the specific nuances I have stripped out to make a point are put back in. This lack of psychological sophistication stands in particularly vivid contrast, of course, to the quite subtle tools historians normally bring to bear on the cultural analysis of the societies they study. In what follows I take a more explicitly depth-psychology influenced approach in order to help me describe with greater specificity how the various upheavals of modernity manifested themselves in lived experience, thus showing the value of an explicitly psychological approach to the cultural historian's enterprise. My approach throughout is not to shoehorn historical experience into the terms of any one depth-psychological theory (whether that of Freud, Lacan or whom you will) but rather to approach the sources with a sensibility attuned to the unspoken, the unconscious, the deeper significance hidden behind superficial accounts of what is going on.

Cultural history and depth psychology both concern themselves, in their different ways, with the question of how people make sense of the world, how they express the meaning life has for them. But people do not live by words alone – bread also is part of their sustenance. And so we are obliged also to ask: who makes the bread, and who consumes it? For a society is not, after all, just a collection of expressive practices but also, and no less fundamentally, a set of economic arrangements. I take the word 'economy' and 'economic' to encompass all those sometimes prosaic and sometimes arcane means by which human efforts are extended to the end of securing and sustaining whatever passes in

any given context for the material necessities of life. These are, most basically, food and shelter but in practice always include a somewhat more complex set of needs and activities – cooking the porridge for breakfast, but also cooking the books for multinational capitalist enterprises.[44] Those arrangements by which a given set of human beings contrive to fill their stomachs and keep their heads dry are obviously just as fundamentally important, just as morally significant in Kleinman's usage, as the culturally and psychologically inflected concerns I examined above. And because the Marxist tradition has been the source of our most profound insights into how exactly material, economic concerns shape human action and experience, it forms the third theoretical pillar on which this work rests.

The key insight of Marxist thought, at least as far as my project in concerned, is that since human beings are not economically self-sufficient, their economic life always takes the form of a certain arrangement of social relations. That is, my economic well-being is always to some extent dependent on the actions of specific other persons (whether I am aware of these persons or not) and this dependence establishes a relation whose character shapes my life, the life of those others and the life of a society in certain ways. These economic relations are obviously of various kinds; they may be exploitative or co-operative, parasitic or altruistic, they may be mediated by such cultural frameworks as markets, money, feudal reciprocity or gender, and they may be further shaped by culturally specific structures of affiliation such as family, clan, trade guild or corporation. All these things will, of course, alter the specific character the social relations take on and their effects. But social relations grounded in material economic concerns will in every case be present and have a decisive influence on the life of a society and the persons who

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[44] Because, obviously, the tools by which one comes by the food and shelter are themselves also necessities in the given context: a man whoi makes his living by fishing needs at a minimum a fishing rod and a river filled with fish; a man who makes it by banking needs (no less fundamentally) a suit, a calculator and a money economy.

comprise it. Indeed, they will always decisively (albeit often quite unconsciously) influence the moral

commitments which find expression as a cultural ethos or a psychological preoccupation.[45]

The Marxist tradition has, of course, by and large concerned itself with economic social relations that

are exploitative and agonistic – taking as its motto Marx's famous dictum that all history is the history of

class struggle. My lack of attention to class struggle in what follows will accordingly strike some as

decidedly un-Marxist and my interest in social relations of a more complex (though not therefore a more

benign) character will seem a bastardization of Marx. To this I can only reply that while, of course, I

agree with Marx's broader point that history can't be adequately understood without taking due

account of antagonisms arising from unjust social relations, I take the above quote (the opening salvo of

the Communist Manifesto, let us recall) to represent Marx in a somewhat polemical moment. The bulk

of his thought, as I read it, is a more complex and extremely fecund meditation on the multitude of

complex ways in which social relations have been reshaped by the peculiar and changing set of

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[45] All of which is not, of course, in any way to reduce culture and psychology to a mere 'superstructure' as some of the more primitive strands of Marxist thought sometimes tend to do. These are several rich tradition of blending Marxist thought with psychological and cultural analysis without collapsing any one of these things into the others, which I have drawn on for this paragraph and indeed the thesis as a whole. See, in particular, Alfred Adler, *The individual psychology of Alfred Adler; a systematic presentation in selections from his writings*. Eds. Heinz L. Ansbacher and Rowena R. Ansbacher (New York: Basic Books, 1956), Herbert Marcuse, *One-dimensional man : studies in the ideology of advanced industrial society* (London : Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964), Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and civilization : a philosophical inquiry into Freud*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), Theodor Adorno, *Minima moralia: reflections from damaged life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott. (London : Verso, 1978), Erich Fromm, *Escape from freedom* (New York : Farrar & Rinehart, 1941), Raymond Williams, *Keywords : a vocabulary of culture and society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983). Fredric Jameson, *The political unconscious : narrative as a socially symbolic act* (Ithaca, N.Y. : Cornell University Press, 1981.) See also some of the really quite fascinating Marxist thought cross-fertilized with Psychoanalysis coming out of Slovenia at the moment, for instance: Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the desert of the real!: five essays on September 11 and related dates* (London: Verso, 2002.) and Renata Salecl**,** *On anxiety* (New York : Routledge, 2004.)

economic arrangements we often for convenience term capitalism.[46] And certainly at least one strand of scholarship has concerned itself with elaborating this side of Marx's thinking and it is in this tradition of hybrid or humanistic Marxism that I imagine myself to be participating. And what I take this tradition to be doing is not asserting categorically that class struggle (or any social relation of whatever kind) is the driving force of history, but rather attempting to discover and articulate what effect social relations of different sorts do have on the history of a culture or society, and how the undoubtedly important impact of a shift to capitalist social relations has transformed the moral concerns of those caught up in it.

IV. Themes and Structure

So much, then, for my indebtedness to my various intellectual forbearers, both in the study of deviance and in the broader humanistic tradition. But what have I got to say for myself? What, after all, do I make of the history of deviance, writ large? How is our understanding of western modernity enriched or changed by examining its peculiar preoccupation with deviance? Of course, in large part my answers to these questions will emerge most fully within the text itself, where I frequently draw comparisons across chapters to illuminate specific changes in the fabric of experience, and speculate on the causes and consequences of these changes. But let me draw out here two recurring themes or patterns that have emerged out of this study but remain largely implicit in what follows. In trying to understand the various meanings ascribed to deviance during the period I examine herein, I have been struck by the immense

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[46] I have in mind here essential concepts of Marx's thought like alienation and commodity fetishism which are obviously cultural and psychological concepts that can't be reduced to any simple narrative about class struggle without doing violence to them. The Marx I have in mind here is to be found chiefly in Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (New York, Modern Library: 1906)

importance of two distinct but related forms of mediation. The first is the mediation of social experience (the experience of both personhood and social relations) by the economic structures of capitalism, and the second is the mediation of imaginative experience by the technologies of reading and of spectacle.

Let me unpack this point somewhat. First, what do I mean by 'mediation?' I take a mediator to be some cultural convention, social structure or form of technology which enables an activity while at the same time shaping it in a particular way. Thus, for instance, we might think of someone playing a Vivaldi concerto on a violin as being engaged in an act of mediated music-making. The violin is an obvious mediator but so, of course, are the score, Western traditions of tonality and harmony, contemporary conceptions of classical music as a rarefied high-brow art form, and so on. All these things are factors which enable the production of music, but also shape that production in particular ways, enabling some forms of sound and aural experience, while restricting others.[47] In a similar way, and more to the point for our purposes, technologies like telephones or letters may be said to mediate social relations in particular ways, just as when we enter a place of commerce or business, our social relations with those we encounter there are mediated by such cultural roles as 'customer,' 'employer,' 'employee,' as well as by such unarticulated material and psychological factors as consumer desire, the profit motive, exploitation and alienation.

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[47] The reader will perhaps recognize here Foucault's concept of generative power by another name. Mediation being my attempt to provide a more specific description of the forces which shape action and experience in particular ways as an alternative to Foucault's often nebulous use of 'power' as the agent of history, albeit at the loss of Foucault genuine insight about the constellation of such forces into a fluid but inter-locking grids that sustain thematically coherent ways of being (such as subjectivity, most famously.) Foucault's most lucid exposition of generative power is Foucault, *History of Sexuality, Vol. I*

These last few examples begin to suggest the first sort of mediation I have increasingly come to see as a decisive force shaping fantasies of deviance: the increasing mediation of social relations by the logic and social realities of the marketplace. In each of the below chapters, I posit in various ways that fantasies of deviance reflected the experiences of personhood and social life that captialism at its various stages of development gave rise to. It is, of course, not a novel point to suggest that the slow economic revolution that constituted the shift to a capitalist market economy utterly transformed social and cultural life, giving rise to new kinds of identity (the autonomous individual), new kind of emotional experience (consumer desire, alienation) and new kinds of moral imperative (freedom, self-determination, self-control.)[48] What makes my own approach different is that, as I've already suggested, my psychologically-informed approach and my close attention to historical scholarship across four centuries makes for a much more complex and context-specific account of how our contemporary form of personhood and social experience came into being.

In my first two chapters, dealing with the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, I read the fantasies of witches and libertines as emerging in the context of a society divided against itself; a society in which the logic of the market begins to make itself powerfully felt, but in which it has not yet displaced older economic and cultural traditions. The witch and the libertine are not so much representations of the

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[48] The literature here is vast, and, since I've cited much of it in previous footnotes by way of getting at other topics and I go on to discuss many period-specific versions of these kinds of arguments in the chapters that follow, it would be laborious and repetitive to run through it again here. A few major texts in this tradition of general importance that have not yet been touched upon: C.B. Macpherson, *The political theory of possessive individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962.) Dror Wahrman, *The making of the modern self: identity and culture in eighteenth-century England* (New Haven : Yale University Press, 2004.) It is not, of course, necessary(or, in fact, always intellectually adequate) to see the causation running purely in the direction of economic structure giving rise to cultural forms. The most celebrated argument which turns the causality on its head and draws attention to the ways in which a moral ethos shapes economic life as well as vice verse is Max Weber, *The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism,* trans. Talcott Parsons (Los Angeles : Roxbury Pub., 1998 [1930])

new order, however, as portraits of the particular dilemmas produced by the amalgam of new ways and old. Thus, the witch stands at the tense meeting point of a communal moral order in which success and failure are group experiences, and the more individualistic ethos of market in which the individual comes to feel their economic and moral destiny is theirs alone. Fantasies about libertines, on the other hand, arise at the precise moment when an older experience of personhood mediated by the local social world in which one is embedded (incarnated in concepts like honor) encounters a new experience of personhood mediated by a new sort of object that obscures its social origins, the commodity. The witch and the libertine are compelling in their respective eras (and not the ones which precede or follow) because the emotional life and secret fears they describe are fundamentally shaped by these fleeting historical constellations in which social relations mediated by the market mingle promiscuously with social relations which are mediated by other, older forms of social relation mediated by local affiliation.

In the following two chapters, dealing with the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the situation is somewhat different. By this time, in the urban environments these chapters take as their setting, the logic of the market has largely swept the last remnants of the old order aside. We are dealing now with a market society, as opposed to a society with markets, and the logic of the market is only implicitly present for the most part. The members of this society, never having known anything else, do not usually bother to articulate the ways in which the social relations and cultural concerns they take to be of paramount importance have anything to do with the logic of capitalism. Our job here is to restore some of that hidden context and to draw out the ways seemingly non-economic categories of social experience like friendship, character, respectability and personality only gain their full significance once we restore the economic and social context in which these categories were implicitly embedded and from which much of their significance was derived. The mediation of social relations by the market is

often less explicit in these later chapters, precisely because that mediation is more all-pervasive. The logic of the marketplace and the forms of personhood and social relation that arise within it are less an explicit cause for concern, as in the early modern period, and more an underlying, barely-perceived set of assumptions about the way the world is, which none the less decisively shapes the form and content of nineteenth and twentieth century fantasies.

The other form of mediation that constitutes an enduring presence in the cultural history of deviance is the mediation of the imagination by the various technologies of modernity. We don't often think of the imagination in this way, but to imagine is to perform a socially and culturally situated act, and so the work of the imagination will be conditioned by the various historical contexts in which it takes place. We readily acknowledge this when we say, as I for instance did at the start of this introduction, that different eras dream different dreams. But what we tend to take this to mean is that certain fantasies or imaginings will be compelling based on factors exterior to the act of imagining itself. This is, in fact, precisely the kind of argument I have just been making about the way certain new market-based forms of social relations shape fantasies about deviants. Only because social life has such and such a character do fantasies of such and such a kind become compelling; once those conditions change, so too do the fantasies. In this paradigm, it is the social world which changes, and though the products of the imagination change as well, it is only as a reflection of this social world. The process of imagining, the basic experience of those things we class as imaginary, these things are assumed to be historically constant and, indeed, are not commonly thought of as having a history at all.

This way of thinking came to me to seem inadequate as I tried to grapple with the problem of explaining the way that witches were 'imagined' (in the sense that most, if not all, of the accused at Salem were

clearly innocent of the charges brought against them) but none the less had a viscerally 'real' effect on

their victims (who not infrequently vomited blood, fell seriously ill and even died under their spell.) I

came gradually to the conclusion that, quite apart from the unfamiliar content of witch-craft fantasies,

the imagination here was functioning in a way that I could not grasp. These fantasies had a reality and

substance that did not fit the categories of 'imagined' and 'real' which I tried to impose on them. This

problem reminded me, in fact, of problems I'd previously encountered in trying to understand

phenomena like spirit possession and mystical visions, and I came eventually to the conviction that what

I was dealing with here was a different way of imagining, one mediated by categories like ritual and

performance, and far more embodied than anything I was used to.

It was only, however, when I began to reflect that there was a group of people in seventeenth century

New England who shared my difficulty in grasping what was going on that the pieces began to fall into

place. The people who most fiercely resisted the witchcraft panic were a group of highly literate

ministers whose voluminous publications and libraries suggest a life spent reading and writing. The

people who most avidly pursued witches, on the other hand, were people whose literacy emerged from

the printed record as at best a hard-won and incomplete acquisition. It occurred to me that all these

people shared, in principle, the same imaginary life as far as content was concerned; they all believed, in

principle, in witches, the devil, supernatural occurrences and so on. The key difference was that one of

these groups was increasingly mediating its imaginary life through the technologies of reading and

writing, while the other retained a more embodied imagination, and this simple fact had profound

consequences for what it meant to have any kind of imaginary experience. Once I saw this, the broad

outlines of the history of the imagination I was sketching out quickly fell into place: from about the

development of the printing press through the end of the eighteenth century, one could talk about the

transition from an embodied imagination to an imagination mediated by literacy, reading and the book. In the nineteenth century, the literary imagination reigned supreme but, from about mid-century, a new technology began to shape the way people imagined: spectacle became a key mediator of imaginary life. From the chaotic spectacle of the urban street, through the carefully staged spectacular entertainments of P.T. Barnum and right to the early twentieth century spectacular world of advertising and film, spectacle gradually became the dominant mode of presenting and experiencing fantasy and imagination in the modern era.

This story of how the imagination, which once belonged to the body as one of its faculties, gradually became a way to transcend embodied experience through the medium of first books, and then spectacles, is to my mind the most original and interesting part of the book. To investigate *what* people in the past imagined has long been the cultural historian's *raison d'être*; I have tried here to go beyond this to ask also *how* people in the past imagined, and what difference this has made to their imagined and lived experience. The history of the imagination has been a melancholy and troubling discovery, however, for I am by no means sure that we gained more than we have lost when the book displaced the body as that thing that dreams are made of. Not that what I have written is finally a narrative of declension from some fabled golden age of embodied imagination; the past seems to me too ugly to have much to recommend it as a moral ideal. But there is none the less an implied note of caution here for those who, like myself, have lived their lives (imaginary and otherwise) through and within books.

So much then, for what is about to come in the way of general themes. Let me finish by briefly introducing each of the episodes I devote my attention to, and saying a bit about how the logic of how they fit together. Deviance is by definition something unusual, and the deviant is by definition an

exceptional figure. Indeed, the moment in which deviance is most fully encountered is a moment of intense and extraordinary moral crisis. This somewhat confounds the usual tendency in cultural (and, for that matter, social) history to privilege the typical or average instance of the phenomenon or group being studied.[49] Deviance is best got at not by studying the average case, but rather the exceptional one. Of course, any given historical moment has its representative deviants, figures that are in some sense characteristic of the time and place – as, for instance, I want to argue that witches are characteristic of seventeenth century New England.[50] But, like Emerson's representative men, these are not so much *typical* deviants as those who are exceptionally resonant figures. One might think of them as archetypal or mythic symbols that in a very densely meaningful way communicate a particularly vital set of concerns.[51] Given all this, the most fitting way to structure a history of deviance has seemed to me to be a series of case studies, each of which deals with an exceptionally dramatic event involving an especially resonant deviant figure. Thus, the basic structure of the dissertation is as follows:

The first chapter takes place in Salem, Massachusetts during the famous Witchcraft Trials of 1692, over the course of which over one hundred and fifty people were arrested and nineteen hanged. More broadly, this chapter concerns itself with the figure of the witch in the early modern period. I argue in this chapter that the witch is not some sort of pre-modern survival, or even a curious early modern

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[49] Thus, one privileges, for instance, the 'typical' Irish working class woman's experience, or the 'generic' sentimental novel and specific instances (Mother Jones or Uncle Tom's Cabin, for instance) are of interest mainly to the extent they illuminate the type. Indeed, as in the case of both Mother Jones and Stowe's novel, the exceptional case is often somewhat problematic for the way it is inevitably somewhat atypical.

[50] Speaking of time and place, this may be a fortuitous place to note that this is a largely regional study of middle-class culture (and, later, mass culture) in the northeastern United States, with a particular focus on Massachusetts and New York. It is a study of 'America' in some wider sense only to the extent that these places are typical of or set the tone for wider national trends. I am inclined to think this is more or less the case, but I am happy to acknowledge that other cultural regions would have somewhat different experiences of deviance.

[51] My main referent here is the work of Clifford Geertz, particularly *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973) but see also Carl G. Jung [et al.]**,** *Man and his symbols* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1964)

aberration, but rather one of the first vivid expressions of the historical era we broadly describe as modernity. My gambit in starting with the witch as the first significant deviant of the modern era is to position the early modern witch craze as a key point of origin for the experience of modernity, no less essential for understanding what came afterwards than such conventional nativity scenes of modernity as the Renaissance or the Reformation. When we view the witch through the lens of her association with feelings of envy and her alleged dealings with Satan, and when we ground this symbolic analysis in the social context of far-flung English colony incompletely integrated into a transatlantic market economy and a print revolution, we gain important insights into the rise and fall of the witch as a cultural symbol. We also gain an appreciation for the factors shaping the coming into being of a preoccupation with deviance more broadly in the modern world.

The second chapter takes place nearly a century later, not very far from Salem, in nearby Boston. This chapter takes as its focus the Apthorp-Morton scandal which shocked polite Boston society in 1788. It was a real-life tale of seduction, marital infidelity and all-round infamy which culminated in the suicide of the wronged woman and a narrowly-averted duel between her seducer and her vengeance-seeking brother. To shocked Boston on-lookers, it must all have seemed to have leapt into being straight from the pages of the immensely popular novels of seduction which so preoccupied and fascinated the late eighteenth century gentry. Reading the Apthorp-Morton scandal alongside these fictions, I draw out the specific resonances of the deviant figure of the libertine and read this figure in the context of a society suddenly awash in seductive commodities, not the least of which were the books attempting to describe and orient the reader in this brave new world of public reason and private self-indulgence. Juxtaposing the libertine with the witch draws attention to the way in which the experience of deviance in the

eighteenth century began to move away from the outright terror of the earlier period and became instead a complex mixture of fear, contempt, curiosity and occasionally even sympathy.

The third chapter also takes as its subject an infamous sex scandal, but the backdrop has now shifted to the bustling urban centre of nineteenth century New York City and the concerns animating popular attention are consequently altogether different. The scandal in question is the Beecher-Tilton affair of the 1870s which preoccupied the national press for several years and culminated in a highly publicized trial in 1875. At this trial, Henry Ward Beecher, preacher, author, political activist and perhaps the most famous man in mid-nineteenth century America, stood accused of seducing and carrying on a long-running affair with Elizabeth Tilton, the wife of his former friend and business associate, Theodore Tilton. Surprisingly, given the details of the case, Beecher was not imagined as a libertine, that figure having long since lost its hold on the American imagination. The way his trial was represented and experienced evokes instead the figure of the sideshow freak. This figure of the freak, I argue, is emblematic of how nineteenth century Americans approached a much wider set of deviant and eccentric types. For the Beecher trial marks a moment when fantasies of deviance momentarily lost some of their more overtly threatening character and often become instead spectacular entertainments, often marked by a kind of playfulness and comedy. Ensconced safely in the midst of the homogenous urban crowd, the on-looker could for the first time afford to laugh at the deviant whose extraordinary behavior was humorous because it was no longer immediately threatening. If deviance is humorous in this period, however, that is not to say that it is easily humored, and the laughter of the Victorian age often has a harsh edge of scorn and ridicule that hints at a deeper identification with the scorned figure of the freak.

The fourth and final chapter of our story also takes place in New York City, this time in the year 1927. Our heroine in this last episode is Ruth Snyder, a pretty ordinary sort of woman in her early 30s with a pretty ordinary sort of husband and a pretty ordinary sort of lover. Said lover notwithstanding, the focus in this last chapter is on violence more than sex, for this ordinary woman had, with the help of her ordinary lover, killed her husband in the most extraordinary manner. The story was, as usual, all over the papers and Ruth Snyder's penchant for bobbed hair, short dresses, hard liquor and fast living made it almost inevitable that she should be identified with an extraordinarily compelling deviant figure of this era: the flapper. In this chapter, I position flapper is the first in a long line of commercialized deviants, those peculiar inhabitants of the youth and celebrity cultures of the twentieth century whose ostentatiously performed deviance had by this time become part of their appeal, something desirable and exciting. Lest we too hastily assume that the hour of the deviant had come round at last, let us note that Snyder was condemned to die in the chair for her crimes (very much including her fashion crimes) and that her execution was reveled in with a ferocity that would have shocked the God-fearing folk of seventeenth century Salem. My concern in this last chapter is to bring the insights of the previous three case studies to bear in untangling the curious mixture of ardent desire and fierce hatred with which deviance was greeted in 1927, and during the twentieth century as a whole. And to do so, of course, is to bring to a close this brief but surprising history of American deviance.

Chapter 1

1692: The Witch

I.   Modernity and Witchcraft

Where do you begin a history of modernity? A lot is at stake in the question, for the nature of the thing is necessarily implied in the choice you make. To begin with Martin Luther's revolt at Wittenberg, as Weber famously does, is to stake out one kind of modernity; to start instead, in the manner of Jacob Burckhardt, with the Italian polymath Leon Battista Alberti has rather different implications.[1] From Luther springs the modernity of Reformation – the shattering of medieval orthodoxy into a myriad of violently contending truths, the anxiety of the individual soul in its lonely confrontation with an unforgiving cosmos and, as Weber was the first to note, a relentless search for personal salvation through work, accumulation and rational calculation. The modernity of Luther is a dark modernity, shot through with the anxious, turbulent sensibility of the man himself, a modernity that we experience as loss and alienation. To begin with Alberti, on the other hand, is to begin more optimistically. It is to assert a modernity rooted in Renaissance humanism with its newfound optimism about the individual and its cultivation of human potential through the arts and sciences. From the Renaissance flows Enlightenment, progress, a new affirmation of the pleasures of everyday life, and that openness to change and experiment which represent the sunnier aspects of western Modernity.

If we limit ourselves for a moment to these two traditional starting points for modernity, we quickly see that they are in one crucial respect mirror images, in that they share a preoccupation with the individual self and its empowerment. To be sure, the insistent self-abnegation which we associate so strongly with

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[1] The allusions here are to what are perhaps the two most influential cultural histories of modernity, Max Weber, *The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism,* trans. Talcott Parsons (Los Angeles : Roxbury Pub., 1998 [1930]) and Jacob Burckhardt**, *The civilization of the renaissance in Italy*. Trans. S. G. C. Middlemore (London, Allen & Unwin, 1937 [1878]) I deliberately delay, for the present, discussion of Karl Marx, but I mean to come back to him in due time.

Luther's theology is at first sight a far cry from Alberti's confident assertion that 'men can do all things if they will.'[2] But self-doubt and self-confidence are both, after all, forms of self-absorption. The Renaissance humanist and the Reformation theologian both take the individual self as their starting point, and as the proper measure of human moral concern.[3] The theologian is more pessimistic about this self than the humanist, to be sure, but we can readily see they're talking about the same model of personhood: an individual being that regards him or herself as a unique person, distinct from the social and cosmic order and burdened with the obligation to find his or her own path through life and into heaven.[4] The heroic self of the humanist and the abject self of the reformer are merely different (and, indeed, competing) versions of this individual self. As is indeed suggested by their synthesis in the tragic self of Shakespeare's theatre – think of Hamlet's startling passage from optimism to melancholy in these famous lines: "What a piece of work is man, how noble in reason, how/ infinite in faculties … and yet / to me, what is this quintessence of dust?" (Act 2, Scene 2, 303-7).

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[2] Burckhardt, *The civilization of the renaissance in Italy,* 55

[3] A point ably made in Sacvan Bercovitch, *The Puritan origins of the American self* (New Haven : Yale University Press, 1975), 1-34. When I talk about moral concern here, I have in mind Arthur Kleinman's usage of moral as a term for those things which are seen within a particular cultural and historical context as essential to a meaningful human existence. See Arthur Kleinman, *What really matters: living a moral life amidst uncertainty and danger* (Oxford ; New York : Oxford University Press, 2006.)

[4] An aside seems in order here about what makes this modern self distinct from the pre-modern self characteristic of the middle ages, if only because historians of modernity have from Burckhardt on been saying extremely stupid and ill-informed things about the pre-modern era. The concept of a self conceived as a locus of subjectivity and interiority is in no way modern, and is a subject of intense interest from at least the twelfth century. The medieval sense of a separate, 'inner' self is, however, anchored firmly in conformity to exterior social roles and spiritual models; the self is formed and (spiritually) reformed through imitation of social models and, ultimately, Christ himself, as exemplified in the spiritual devotion of *Imitatio Christi*. The key concern of this self is to bring itself into agreement with the social and spiritual world in which it finds itself. The modern self, by contrast, is defined by its distinction from society and world, both in the positive sense of being free to discover or develop itself as a unique entity, and in the negative sense of being alienated from and threatened by all that is not itself. The reformation can, as I suggest above, be seen largely as an attempt to surmount these negative dimensions of modern personhood by drastic self-denial and self-abnegation. On self in the middle ages, see Walter Ullmann, *The Individual and Society in the Middle Ages*, (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins Press, 1966) Robert Hanning, *The Individual in Twelfth-Century Romance* (New Haven : Yale University Press, 1977), Colin Morris, *The Discovery of the Individual 1050-1200* (New York, Harper & Row, 1972) and, especially, Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as mother: studies in the spirituality of the high Middle Ages* (Berkeley : University of California Press, c1982.), 82- 109 and John Jeffries Martin, *Myths of Renaissance Individualism* (New York : Palgrave Macmillan, 2004) 1-20.

Moreover, the sense of helplessness which we associate with the Reformers' view of the individual (that he is abject and disgusting to God, that no amount of moral effort will redeem her, and so on) can lead us to miss the fact that the Reformers experienced this helplessness not as a mere fact but rather as a source of unbearable anguish, a crisis of such magnitude that religious life had to be radically remade in response to it. Helplessness is at the heart of the early Protestant experience, but it is at its heart as an existential crisis which the successful religious life helps to alleviate. The religion which grew out of this crisis allowed its practitioners to pass from the terror of helplessness, through the empowering experience of conversion and into the security of unconditional Grace.[5] The insistent need of the reformer, no less than the self-improving humanist, was personal empowerment. The chief difference is that the humanist looks chiefly to learning and cultivation to secure his superiority, while the reformer despairs of self-improvement and turns instead to God. But in both these figures we see the origins of the psycho-cultural dynamics which Adler would much later describe as the inferiority complex; the compensatory striving of a self haunted by its helplessness before the world and inability to find security within it.[6]

Whether we begin with humanist or the reformer, then, we seem to end up with a modernity grounded (culturally speaking, anyhow) in the emergence of the individual self, shorn from the world and caught

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[5] Charles Lloyd Cohen, *God's caress: the psychology of Puritan religious experience* (New York : Oxford University Press, 1986), esp. 25-134

[6] My relationship with Adler is a complicated one. On the one hand, his focus on insecurity, inability and striving for superiority as the key unconscious mechanisms at work in human behaviour strikes me as being a highly accurate analysis of the psychological disposition of people in both contemporary and historical America, and I rely on it throughout to guide my psychohistorical speculations. On the other hand, this project is in part an attempt to write a history of how this psychological disposition shapes and is shaped by social and cultural changes. The best summary of Adler's thought is Alfred Adler, *The individual psychology of Alfred Adler; a systematic presentation in selections from his writings*. Eds. Heinz L. Ansbacher and Rowena R. Ansbacher (New York: Basic Books, 1956)

thereby in a ceaseless striving for security, achievement and mastery. But why begin with either of these

figures? For there is yet a third figure that stands alongside these two gentlemen as a striking innovation

of the period known to historians as the early modern era. It is not a figure we commonly associate with

modernity, though it in fact emerges precisely in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries that also see the

flowering of the Renaissance and the eruption of Reformation. Perhaps the trouble is that the figure I

have in mind is characteristically a woman, and the history of western modernity has always been

something of a boy's club. I am speaking, of course, about the witch; a figure of terror and violence

whose presence made itself powerfully felt in the Witch Craze, a rising tide of persecution that from

modest beginnings in the late fifteenth century engulfed Europe and Colonial America in the sixteenth

and seventeenth centuries, leading to tens of thousands of executions before it finally subsided in the

eighteenth century.

Oddly, given her late appearance on the stage (or, at any rate, the scaffolds) of history, historians still

tend to treat the witch as a survival from an earlier era, a phenomenon closely associated with the

enchanted world of magic and superstition which began to recede before the rationalizing gaze of

modernity.[7] While I'd happily agree that belief in witches had ancient roots and relied on ways of

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[7] Weber is again the source of this view, in particular in the *Protestant Ethic*, but see also Max Weber, *Economy and Society: an outline of interpretative sociology*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978.). For a magisterial treatment of witchcraft in this tradition, see Keith Thomas, *Religion and the decline of magic: studies in popular beliefs in sixteenth and seventeenth century England* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971) The inconvenient fact that persecutions peak in the seventeenth century is variously ascribed to demographic pressures, the dissemination of witchcraft beliefs by the printing press, or the greater inclination towards persecution due to the rise of the absolutist state. All this seeks to explain the witch craze with reference to the *mechanisms* which made it possible or the *functions* it served, without any reference to the content of the beliefs themselves and the social world they address. For demographics, the printing press and the state, see Edward Bever, 'Witchcraft Prosecutions and the Decline of Magic,' *Journal of Interdisciplinary History,* Vol. 40, No. 2, (Autumn, 2009), 263-293, Robin Briggs, *Witches and neighbours: the social and cultural context of European witchcraft* (Oxford; Malden : Blackwell Publishers, 2002), H. R. Trevor-Roper**,** The *crisis of the seventeenth century: religion, the Reformation, and social change,* (New York : Harper & Row, 1967), 101-129. Christina Larner, *Enemies of God: the witch-hunt in Scotland* (London : Chatto & Windus, 1981)

thinking and being that were progressively undermined and sidelined over the course of the modern era, I want none the less to insist that the witch persecutions of this era are as culturally innovative and as historically significanct as the more familiar historical formations I began with. Indeed, my chief premise in what follows is that the specific content of witchcraft beliefs has just as much to tell us as the Renaissance and Reformation do about the nature of the forces shaping western modernity.[8] How is our understanding of western modernity transformed if we take the witch craze seriously as one of its moments of origin? If the witch could speak, what would she tell us about the nature of those changes which brought the modern world into being? These are the questions I hope to answer in the course of this chapter. Let us begin, however, with a witch:

It is the nineteenth of April, 1692 and Bridget Bishop has been brought before a court being held in Salem Village to answer accusations of witchcraft.

Witchcraft is a very serious crime in seventeenth century Massachusetts; if convicted, Bishop will hang. The charge is twofold – in the first place, that she has been practicing *maleficium,* that is, bringing misfortune or even death to her neighbors by occult means, and, secondly, that she has made a covenant with the Devil to do so. In a society that imagines itself wholly in terms of its dedication to a

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[8] I take my lead here from the anthropological literature on witchcraft, which was long ago confronted with the impossibility of maintaining that witchcraft beliefs are 'primitive' or 'pre-modern' and has long had interesting things to say about the relationship between witchcraft and modernity. See (and this is a very partial selection) E.E. Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, oracles and magic among the Azande*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), Jeanne Favret-Saada, *Deadly words: witchcraft in the bocage*, trans. Catherine Cullen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980) and, especially, Peter Geschiere, *The modernity of witchcraft : politics and the occult in postcolonial Africa*, trans. Peter Geschiere and Janet Roitman (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997) and James Siegel, *Naming the witch* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006.) Why historians almost universally attempt to write about European witchcraft without having read any anthropology on the topic published in the last fifty years is an enduring source of mystery to me. I can only conclude that they are bewitched...

rigorous form of protestant piety, the charge of bargaining with the Devil is if anything an even more

serious breach of the social bond than the charge of malicious violence.[9] The belief in witches has very

ancient roots in European history, but the precise crime for which Bishop is being tried is one of the

distinctive cultural innovations of the early modern period. Malevolent magic use is a source of anxiety

that dates as far back as the writing of Exodus, whose injunction that 'thou shalt not suffer a witch to

live' (22:18) was in fact cited extensively by early modern witch hunters to justify their persecutions.

However, it qas in fact only in the fourteenth century that charges of making bargains with the devil and

flying to witches' Sabbaths under the cover of night to perform dark rites, parody the sacraments and

conspire against Christendom slowly began to coalesce into a coherent narrative. And it was not until

the late fifteenth century that this 'new' form of witchcraft took hold in Europe in earnest, generating a

flood of literature about witches and a new eagerness to persecute the crime of witchcraft.[10] The

number of witch trials and convictions increased steadily over the next century, and, though the panic

abated somewhat during the tumult of the early Reformation, it reached unprecedented peaks in the

period from 1580 to 1630. This pervasive concern with witchcraft followed the Puritans to

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[9] The magisterial and still, to my mind, unsurpassed account of Puritan religious belief and its implications for early New Englanders' views about human nature and society is Perry Miller, *The New England Mind in the Seventeenth Century*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954). Other especially pertinent contributions to the cultural history of early New England that both build on and correct Miller are to be found in Edmund Morgan, *Visible Saints: The History of a Puritan Idea* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1963), Edmund Morgan, *The Puritan Family: Religion and Domestic Relations in Seventeenth Century New England* (New York: Harper, 1966) and David Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment: Popular Religious Belief in Early New England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990). For two slightly different explorations of the question of the relative importance of *maleficium* and diabolism in New England witch trials, see Richard Godbeer, *The Devil's Dominion: Magic and Religion in Early New England*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992) Richard Weisman, *Witchcraft, magic, and religion in 17th-century Massachusetts* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984). Some scholars see the English witchcraft tradition (at least as far as folk belief is concerned) as exceptional in its relative indifference to diabolic pacts and, consequently, Salem as a bit of an oddity but this view has been challenged. See Thomas**,** *Religion and the decline of magic,* 525-9, and Robin Briggs, *Witches and neighbours*, 25-31.

[10] A very readable, up to date overview of the evolution of witchcraft belief and witch-hunting may be found in, John Demos, *The Enemy Within: 2,000 years of witch-hunting in the Western world* (New York: Viking, 2008). See also Norman Cohn, *Europe's inner demons: an enquiry inspired by the great witch-hunt* (New York : New American Library, 1975), Briggs, *Neighbours and Witches*, 26-30. The scholarly literature on witchcraft, especially in Europe, is at this point dauntingly vast; I have cited only what seemed directly relevant to my own argument. For a more comprehensive overview, I direct the reader to Briggs's bibliographic essay in *Neighbours and Witches*.

Massachusetts, where even the zealously pious founding generation was quick to discover witches within its midst.[11]

But for all that Bishop has reason to be optimistic – New England courts are traditionally fairly sceptical of witchcraft charges, and in fact only sixteen witches have been executed since the colony's founding, though more than a hundred trials have taken place.[12] Bishop herself, in fact, has long been suspected of being a witch, and has already been in court once over such charges, having successfully defended herself from an earlier accusation in 1679.[13] And then, of course, she was not actually a witch – as indeed none of the accused ever were. Belief in and resort to magic was common in the early modern world, even in theologically strict Massachusetts where the clergy frowned on the use of magic, which they saw as inherently diabolical.[14] However, though some of this magic may well have been maliciously directed against others, historians are in general agreement that widespread fears that some members of the community secretly made bargains with the devil, gave suck to demonic creatures, attended dark rituals under cover at night and haunted their neighbors in spectral form had no basis in fact. Witchcraft was, in other words, a dark triumph of the early modern imagination, and witch-hunting a highly theatrical ritual; real enough to those who fell victim to it, but meaningful and compelling primarily as a fantasy.

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[11] The classic and still definitive study of witchcraft in New England is John Demos, *Entertaining Satan: Witchcraft and the Culture of Early New England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004[1982]) though see also Carol F. Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman: Witchcraft in Colonial New England* (New York: Vintage, 1987).

[12] Demos, *Entertaining Satan*, 11

[13] For Bishop's previous accusation, see Bernard Rosenthal, *Salem story: reading the witch trials of 1692* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 82-3.

[14] The complex relationship between Puritan theology and popular belief in magic is very ably dealt with in Hall, *Worlds of Wonder*, but see also Goodber, *Devil's Dominion.* For the broader European context, see Thomas**,** *Religion and the decline of magic**.***

But if Bishop was hoping any of this would count in her favor that cold April morning, she was in for an unpleasant surprise. The moment she entered the courtroom, the five young women who claimed her specter had invisibly attacked them fell into strange fits, screaming and writhing as though they were being tortured. When Bishop glanced their way, they fell to the floor, as though struck down by her gaze. When she shook her head to deny an accusation, their heads flew violently side to side in grotesque mimicry, and when she turned up her eyes (in frustration at all this, perhaps, or in supplication) the eyes of the afflicted likewise flew up to the ceiling. In the face of all this, the magistrates showed little hesitation to assume her guilt: "give account of what witchcrafts you are conversant in" was their opening gambit, and worse was to follow: "how far have you gone?", "Have you not to do with familiar Spirits?", "They say you bewitched your first husband to death."[15]

Naturally, Bishop denied everything and insisted the girls were strangers to her, for she lived not in the village but in nearby Salem Town. However, a rift in her dress seemed to match a tear that a sword had made in the dress of the specter that had come to haunt one of the afflicted girls a few nights ago. Moreover, her belligerent attitude towards the magistrates and evident lack of sympathy for the afflicted counted heavily against her, as did the testimony brought against her by various neighbors in the coming days and weeks. It appeared that in preceding years she had cursed a sow that her husband sold against her wishes to have strange fits, that her specter had appeared to several men in their bedrooms at night to torture them or to strike them dumb after she'd quarreled with them, and, most alarming of all, that her sorceries had made two children sick, killing one and driving another insane.

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[15] Bernard Rosenthal (Gen. Ed.), *Records of the Salem witch-hunt* (Cambridge ; New York : Cambridge University Press, 2009) 183-186.

Finally, two men testified to having found 'poppets,' voodoo-doll-like effigies known to be used to magically torture from afar, in a house that she used to live in.[16] To crown it all, several of the accused witches who had confessed their guilt named Bishop as one of the attendees of a witch meeting in a field near the minister's house, on which occasion the witches feasted on sweet bread and washed it down with tumblers of blood in a grisly parody of the communion rite.[17]

All these accusations (excepting the last about the Sabbath) were more or less par for the course in a seventeenth century New England witchcraft trial, however, and in normal times the court might well have been disposed to give Bishop the benefit of the doubt. After all, many of the complaints against her were well over a decade old, and had probably been trotted out at the earlier trial to little effect. But something was different in 1692 – different enough that Bishop's case was brought to trial on the 2nd of June, on which occasion she was found guilty and sentenced to hang. She duly went to the gallows a week later, on the 10th of June, protesting her innocence to the last. She had the dubious honor of being the first of nineteen people to be executed in what have come to be known as the Salem Witchcraft Trials, the largest witchcraft outbreak in New England history and also one of the last witch-hunts in the modern era.

The outbreak at Salem began as witchcraft suspicions often did in the early modern world – a child or, in this case, several children in the same household (that of the Salem Village minister, Samuel Parris) fell ill and began acting strangely. After natural causes had been ruled out by physicians, and the prayers of

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[16] Rosenthal (Gen. Ed.), *Records,* 330-1 (for night visitations, attacks on children), 340-42, 367-73 (for more night attacks and sick children, as well as poppets, the bewitching of sows).

[17] Rosenthal (Gen. Ed.), *Records, 350*

local ministers proved unavailing, talk began of persecution by a witch. The children reported seeing

specters and were soon able to identify several local women of questionable reputation and marginal

social status as responsible for their suffering.[18] The adults took the matter to law, the accused were

brought in for preliminary questioning and, after dramatic interviews like the one Bishop got caught up

in, were held for trial. Normally, that would have been where the matter ended or, at least, where it

faded from the historical record. The trial would have settled the matter by either dismissing the

accusations and leaving the afflicted to look for other solutions, or by convicting the suspected witch,

whose death presumably brought relief from symptoms.

What made Salem different is that the arrests did nothing to ease the suffering of the afflicted, who

instead began to be tormented by specters of other village residents, and soon also those who, like

Bridget Bishop, were strangers to both Salem Village and the sufferers. Moreover, accusations quickly

began to be leveled not only at those who fit the profile of the 'typical' witch – somewhat older women

in marginal circumstances and with suspect reputations – but even at full members of the village church,

a status which normally implied a pious reputation and relatively good standing in the community.[19] This

meant that anyone at all was fair game for witchcraft suspicions, and the numbers of both the afflicted

and accused quickly spiraled to unprecedented heights. The wheels of justice, grinding with their

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[18] Of course, the appearance of spectres was not always, or even very commonly, required. A strange misfortune or illness of an uncanny nature following conflicts with a neighbour were often enough to trigger witchcraft accusations. For more on the inter-personal dynamics driving accusations, see Demos, *Entertaining Satan*, 275-312 and Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*, 51-81 and 115-45.

[19] Full membership in a church could only be attained by the approbation of those who were already church members, which tended to mean successful applicants had to have a reputation for piety and good relationships with those who were already members. Of course, Salem was a somewhat unusual case, in that the church there was of recent vintage and troubled history, and that a lot of wealthy village residents preferred to go to church in Salem Town. On this local conflict, see Paul Boyer & Stephen Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed: The Social Origins of Witchcraft* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974).

habitual slowness, lagged somewhat behind the increasingly frantic public mood, so that only nineteen executions were in the end carried out before the panic abated. But from March through September of 1692, nearly two hundred people were formally accused and jailed as the panic spread from Salem to nearby communities.[20]

Much has, of course, been written about the Salem Witch trials, which have exercised a profound fascination for both academic and popular historians. As a consequence, we have today a rich understanding of the myriad of forces which contributed to the outbreak of the panic. We know that Salem village was a community deeply divided by internal tensions stemming from its ambiguous status as an outlying area of Salem town with aspirations for autonomous existence, and that many of the leading figures involved in the trials faced the prospect of downward social mobility or even outright marginalization. We also know that the uncertain political and legal situation in Massachusetts colony (which was in the process of renegotiating its charter with the British monarchy in the wake of the Glorious Revolution as the panic broke out) not only contributed to the anxieties driving the panic but also played a part in the government's slow and ambivalent response to the growing crisis. We also have a rich understanding of Massachusetts as a colony on the frontier, constantly under threat of attack and even destruction from terrifying Native Americans and only marginally less troubling French Catholics from nearby Canada. This near-constant state of colonial warfare contributed to the Salem panic not only a habitual feeling of being besieged by the forces of darkness, but left its toll in the form of orphaned young women with traumatic experiences of frontier warfare which may well have contributed to their afflictions. And we know, of course, that over all this hung the pall of Declension: a

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[20] A useful, reasonably exhaustive narrative of the basic events at Salem that does a remarkably good job of not subjecting the events to any particular interpretation can be found in Marilynne K. Roach, *The Salem witch trials: a day-by-day chronicle of a community under siege* (New York : Cooper Square Press, 2002).

profound consciousness that the colony as a whole was by the late seventeenth century falling away from the pious standard set by the founding generation, and that all the above-mentioned troubles were God's punishment for the sins of materialism and pride.[21]

In other words, we have a good sense of why the witchcraft fantasy had a particular resonance and spiraled out of control in this particular time and place. Curiously little attention, however, has been paid to the belief in witches itself, to the pervasive appeal of the idea that amongst their own number there lurked some who could, and in fact did, magically harm them. From this point of view, Bishop was just a woman caught in the wrong fantasy at the worst possible time. The key question then becomes why the fantasy of witchcraft exercised such a deadly fascination in colonial America (and, of course, early modern Europe). And to answer this question it is imperative to consider the actual content of the fantasy and consider the witch as a culturally compelling symbol.[22] In order to understand the fantasy,

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[21] For the local politics of Salem in the late seventeenth century see Boyer & Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed.* For the broader frontier context, see Mary Beth Norton, *In the Devil's Snare: The Salem Witchcraft Crisis of 1692* (New York: Random House, 2002). Valuable studies that place draw attention to the agency of the judges and afflicted girls are Hoffer, Peter Charles, *The devil's disciples: makers of the Salem witchcraft trials* (Baltimore : Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996) and Bernard, *Salem story.* For declension, see Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953)

[22] This seems as good a place as any to draw out my unique contribution to the discussion about Salem and witchcraft more generally. My basic contribution is to explore witchcraft as a fantasy by examining what people actually said about witches over the course of the trial rather than seeing witch accusations and panics as purely a manifestation of social conflict (see following footnote) or local factors (see previous footnote.) In this respect, I am bringing the sensibility of Early Modern European cultural history to the American material. Where I depart from most cultural historians is by offering a psychological account of the emotional subtext of the cultural imagery I am examining. Where I part company with most other psychologically informed accounts of witchcraft is in not seeing the psychology in the narrowly Freudian (and, I would argue, relatively ahistorical) terms of an oedipal projection onto a mother-figure but rather in a more Adlerian frame of the psychology of inadequacy and compensation, complemented by my own theorization of pre-modern fantasy. My most immediate engagement and debt is, however, to this tradition of Freud-inflected psychohistory, especially Demos, *Entertaining Satan,* Lyndal Roper *Oedipus and the Devil : witchcraft, sexuality, and religion in early modern Europe* (New York : Routledge, 1994), Deborah Willis, *Malevolent nurture : witch-hunting and maternal power in early modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995) and especially Lyndal Roper**,** *Witch craze : terror and fantasy in baroque Germany* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004). My fundamental ambition is to be able to say something more precise and meaningful than that witchcraft was the mysterious product of vague anxieties – I hope to offer a fairly

we'll have to ask what sorts of people were thought to be witches or, rather, what sorts of people witches were thought to be. In other words, we'll need to know what it was about Bishop that made her a 'good' witchcraft suspect. But I want to insist that understanding the fantasy is the key thing. Witchcraft was not primarily a way to get at Bishop – or people of her kind, whatever kind that might be.[23] After all, as she herself said in court, she was a stranger to those who accused her; this was no settling of old scores, whatever else it might have been. It is rather the case that Bishop was a way to get at witchcraft – the situation called for a witch, and Bishop was a convenient stand-in, someone who happened to fit the role. But what kind of situation was it that called for a witch, and what kind of a role was Bishop being asked to play?

The most striking thing about witchcraft outbreaks, it seems to me, is that everything about them was exceptional. Witchcraft accusations were relatively rare and convictions even more so – to borrow from Auden, you think of a day that you hanged a witch as a day when you did something slightly unusual.[24]

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clear account of how and why witchcraft fantasies were an expression of and witch trials were an unsuccessful attempt to confront and resolve historically specific emotional dilemmas rooted in the concrete experience of everyday life.

[23] I am differing here from the tendency in the historiography to see witchcraft as a way to negotiate social tensions or perform repressive social functions. That is, to talk about social conflict (whether between neighbours, men and women, downwardly and upwardly mobile, agrarian and proto-capitalist) as the 'real' content of witchcraft. For instances of this, see Boyer & Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed,* Demos, *Entertaining Satan*, 275-314, Karlsen, *Devil in the Shape of a Woman* and Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*. Beyond the theoretical critique of functionalism to which all such interpretations are more or less liable, it is my view that early modern people were not so squeamish about social conflict as to need the elaborate ruse of witchcraft in order to air their differences, settle their scores or oppress each other. And even the most cursory glance at the historical record (the very trial records I use here, for instance) shows that they had a vast 'secular' and 'rational' (using the term somewhat loosely) repertoire of ways to express anger, do violence and articulate their belligerence towards each other. Of course, this is a minority position. For the argument that Puritans and early modern people in general had a hard time acknowledging and expressing anger see Carol Zisowitz Stearns and Peter N. Stearns, *Anger: the struggle for emotional control in America's history* (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1986) and (implied in his projection argument) Demos, *Entertaining Satan*, 174-97

[24] On the relative rarity of witchcraft, see David Hall 'Middle Ground on the Witch-Hunt Debate' *Reviews in American History* 26 (1998) 345-7

And if the condemnation of even a single witch was a rare event, wide-spread panics like the one at Salem were singular, exceptional experiences. Likewise, the people accused of witchcraft were themselves almost always in some way remarkable or unusual characters.[25] The women were aggressive or belligerent; the men drank and beat their wives to what seemed even to their fellow patriarchs an excessive degree; witches of both genders avoided church or attempted suicide or ran afoul of the law. Bishop herself, for instance, had been whipped for fighting with her husband in 1670 and sentenced to stand gagged in the marketplace in 1678 with a paper on her head to explain she had been abusing her husband on the Sabbath.[26] In all this, she deviated in a fairly extravagant way from the ideal of female behavior that held sway in Puritan New England.[27] But it is not at all the case that Bishop was accused of witchcraft in order to punish her deviance – the community could, and did, punish deviants like Bishop more directly and openly (as for instance through her whipping and public shaming) and, in any case, plenty of deviants were never accused of witchcraft. It is rather the case that the deviance set her apart and made her seem exceptional in a way that made her a good 'fit' for the role of a witch.

The witch was always exceptional and nearly always deviant, and though her exceptional status is not an explanation of what Puritans were trying to get at with witches, it does provide an important clue to the matter, and it is accordingly a feature we shall have cause to return to again and again as we approach witchcraft from various perspectives. But before getting too far into this question of what the Puritans meant by witches and what sorts of persons they thought witches were, there is a preliminary matter to

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[25] Though, as I shall discuss later, this was less true of the Salem outbreak itself, and was indeed one of the reasons it was an outbreak. For disorderly, deviant and disruptive character of accused witches, see Demos, *Entertaining Satan*, 86-93

[26] Roach, *The Salem witch trials,* 156-60

[27] On the ideals and realities of Puritan women in this era see Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Good wives: image and reality in the lives of women in northern New England, 1650-1750* (New York, Knopf, 1982)

deal with. I have said that witchcraft was a fantasy and I have called it a product of the early modern imagination. But fantasy and imagination held a place in the early modern period radically different to that which they occupy in our own day and age, and without some awareness of this difference, we are likely to altogether misunderstand the fantasy of the witch. What follows, then, is a brief sketch of an elusive topic that, to my knowledge, has not yet been fully explored by the historical disciplines: the history of the imagination.[28]

II.   The Book, the Cathedral and the Puritan Imagination

'The Sabbath Even after I had put up my note ... my Mistris appeared to mee, and puld me out of the Bed, and told mee that she was a witch, and had put her hand to the Book ... This Examinant might have known she was a Witch, if she had but minded what Books she read in' Examination of Mary Warren in Prison, April 21, 1692[29]

'The one shall destroy the other. The Book will kill the Edifice' – Victor Hugo, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*[30]

The Puritans did not go in for cathedrals. When they spoke of 'the church' they meant a band of Christian brethren gathered together in worship and pious living; a community, not a building. The actual meeting-house could be and probably often was in those early frontier towns an altogether unremarkable edifice; a simple hall built and maintained by the local congregation, functional but unadorned and, in any case, a structure with no pretensions of being an especially sacred place. On the other hand, New England Puritans were voracious readers; one of the most literate and literacy-

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[28] My best efforts, anyhow, turned up nothing even remotely like what I offer below but it is, of course, very possible I might have missed something. If I have not, the oversight seems a peculiar one and the matter deserving of further study.

[29] Rosenthal (Gen. Ed.), *Records,* 200

[30] Victor Hugo, Walter Cobb (trans.), *Hunchback of Notre Dame* (New York: Penguin, 2001)*, 174

dependant societies on either side of the Atlantic, they made reading a key aspect of their religious practice.[31] Neither of these two facts should be surprising for, after all, they were children of the Protestant reformation – suspicion of Catholic idolatry ran thick in their veins, and the obligation of every believer to come to know God by reading the Bible was perhaps the fundamental tenet of their faith. But what did it mean to encounter God in the pages of a book, rather than in the shadow of the basilica? This shift, apparently innocuous on the surface of it, in fact signaled a profound transformation in the history of the imagination. So momentous was the change that, as Victor Hugo suggests in the passage I quote above, this history divides naturally into two great periods: the Age of the Cathedral and the Age of the Book.[32]

The pivotal figure of this history is Don Quixote, who has a good claim to being the first true child of modernity, in the sense that his is the first recognizably modern imagination. The modernity of Quixote stems, of course, from him being the first reader. Meaning not, of course, the first literate person but rather the first person whose experience of the world is utterly transformed by the act of reading. Quixote is in this respect nothing less than a new species of man – *homo lector*, as it were, the reading man. The comedy and pathos of his situation stems, of course, from the many ways the chivalric stories Quixote reads about in books are absolutely at odds with the everyday world he actually inhabits. His great adventure, his impossible dream, is the attempt to bridge the gap between the worlds of fantasy and reality, to actually experience the life he has thus far only encountered in a mediated, literary form.

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[31] On reading in early New England see Hall, Worlds of Wonder, 21-70

[32] The history of the imagination doesn't get much play in the historical literature and the relatively new field of the history of the book has not yet been attentive to the importance of literary media to this history. However, important forbearers to my approach here are (particularly in his attention to newspapers and novels) Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (London : Verso, 1983) and (in its attention to the historicity of the imagination) Colin Campbell, *The romantic ethic and the spirit of modern consumerism* (New York: Blackwell, 1987.)

In this, he does not perhaps so much fall victim to fantasy as rebel against it – he becomes the inaugurator of the quest for 'real,' authentic experience, which in this case means unmediated experience, a life not just read about but actually lived and felt.[33] But the real issue which concerns us here is that in order be either a victim or a rebel, Don Quixote must first experience 'fantasy' and 'reality' as radically separate realms of experience. He must first of all exist in that world which is conjured up so well in *The Neverending Story*, where a book serves as a literal gateway between a 'real' world and a realm of fantasy. But *The Neverending Story*, for all its endless delight, is itself after all only an unreflecting product of the modern imagination, and so fails to grasp the historical fact that it is actually the experience of reading itself that exiles fantasy and imagination to the Utopias (which means, let us recall, no-places) and Neverwheres that populate the fictions of modernity.

To illustrate the nature of the transformation, let us examine one of the great medieval imaginations at work, an imagination as exemplary of the age of the cathedral as Don Quixote's is of the age of the book – that of St. Francis. You will remember, of course, the story of the vision in the Church of San Damiano: St. Francis has stopped along his way to pray within this rather decrepit church, and in the midst of his prayer the Icon of the crucified Christ housed within this building comes alive before him. "Francis!" says the Icon, "don't you see my house is crumbling apart? Go, then, and restore it!" Francis responds to this vision in a way that today strikes us a rather incongruous and almost comical in its literal-mindedness. Taking the Lord at his literal word, as though God appeared to him merely to request a bit of interior decorating, he immediately rushes to his father's shop and appropriates a bundle of expensive cloth

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[33] I am here revising a more traditional interpretation of the modern desire for authenticity as a manifestation of alienation from modern social forms and values, a feeling that they are somehow false and need to be replaced by behavior that is more true to the individual self. See especially Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (Cambridge, Mass. : Harvard University Press, c1972)

which he sells to fund the restoration of the run-down building.[34] But there is also something very revealing in the sheer materiality of this misunderstanding, and indeed in the materiality of the whole episode. For while I think we have to understand the vision of St Francis as an imaginative experience,[35] it is scarcely of the sort we would today label a fantasy or a daydream, with the implication of something removed from the world of real things. There is, after all, a great deal of solid, workaday reality in this story – there is the building itself, the Icon, the literalness of Francis's response and, above all, the dogged materiality of Christ's message, unmistakably addressing *this* particular church, *this* particular man. To say that St. Francis misunderstood Christ in taking him literally is only partly right, for what is striking about this story is precisely the way the literal and the figurative, the material and the fantastic are one and the same.

Now, in what respect does the imagination of St. Francis differ from that of Don Quixote? Simply in this: the imagination of St. Francis is firmly embedded in the life of the senses. He experiences the vision of San Damiano in exactly the same way he experiences the presence of birds, the companionship of his donkey, or the decrepitude (or holiness!) of a church. These are all embodied, sensual experiences, and yet at the same time experiences infused, at least potentially, with something more than merely meets the eye, something that must be imagined to be believed. But even this way of putting it, this talk of seeing-plus-imagining, fails to catch the sensuality intrinsic to this kind of holiness, the way seeing *is* imagining for St. Francis. With Don Quixote, on the other hand, we can observe the two things – seeing

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[34] The life of St. Francis is documented in many a devotional and historical text, but those in search for a readable and interesting account this most winsome of saints could do a lot worse than to consult G K Chesterton's *St. Francis of Assisi* (New York : Continuum, 2001)

[35] By ascribing the religious experiences of St Francis to the imagination I should not like to be thought to be taking an atheistic or impious view of the matter. For who is to say that God did not in his infinite mercy grant us imaginations precisely that we might thereby all the better invent Him?

and imagining, reality and fantasy – starting to come apart. Quixote famously imagines giants where there are, in fact, only windmills; courtly ladies where there are only peasant wenches; vast armies where there are only flocks of sheep. Whether we see Quixote as the naive victim of or as a heroic rebel against this sad state of affairs, he is a man struggling to live as though these two things – reality and fantasy – that are presented to the reader as wholly irreconcilable are, in fact, one and the same. He is trying to live like St Francis in a world that no longer supports the saint's mode of imaginative experience. Whether this seems to you heroic or idiotic will depend largely on how you feel about modernity, but seeing the problem at all is what makes us all modern to being with.

Reading makes a rift in the world. Experience is fractured, doubled; through reading we become aware of two different modes of experiencing the world. You experience, in your imagination, the adventures of Lancelot, but simultaneously, in what comes to be described as reality, you also experience yourself sitting around in your study in La Mancha, idly leafing through chivalric tales. By contrast, the experience of the vision in the cathedral is fundamentally of the same kind as the experience of feeding your donkey. The voice of God and the braying of asses resounds in the same ears, you see the apparition of Chris with the same gaze that takes in the broken windows of His church. A culture that pours its creative and imaginative energies into cathedrals (and, by extension, other embodied and material forms of imaginative work such as, for instance, ritual) therefore experiences the world and, especially, its imaginative life in a fundamentally different way from a culture whose imaginative endeavors are channeled into the book, and other forms of mediated experience.[36]

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[36] This all seems to me a much better way of thinking about the phenomenological rift between the modern and pre-modern world than Weber's notion of 'enchantment' which seems to me, on the one hand, to misunderstand the very utilitarian quality of magic and, on the other hand, to miss the occult, enchanted aspects of modernity that are often hidden behind such terms as 'nation,' 'society' or 'economy.' For instance, I've always thought Durkheim's basic argument in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* reads much better in reverse – it is not so

The Salem Witch Trials occur on the very cusp of modernity, in the midst of the slow transformation from the Age of the Cathedral to the Age of the Book, which we might for convenience date roughly from the spread of printing around 1500.[37] As I suggested above, the Puritans of Massachusetts are, due to the radical Protestantism of their faith, something of an avant garde in this transformation – a culture unusually dismissive of the cathedral, unusually fond of the book. But necessarily the transformation of a society's imaginative life is a slow and uneven development, and the Puritans inherited an imaginative landscape that owed much to the age of the cathedral. They inhabited, as one historian has put it, a world of wonders; they experienced natural and historical phenomena as divine portents, drawing on a tradition of the imagination that also encompasses the vision of St. Francis to do so.[38] Success in war with the native peoples or rival European powers depended on and was therefore a sign of divine favour; natural disasters such a draught and flood, on the other hand, signified divine displeasure with New England's excessive worldliness and impiety. The Puritans may not have built cathedrals, but in a

much that 'primitive' man mistakes societal forces for the divine but rather that modern man attempts to ascribe to society the transcendental qualities once attributed to the divine. One need only think of the infamous 'invisible hand' of the market. For Weber on enchantment, see Max Weber, *Economy and society: an outline of interpretative sociology* (Berkeley, University of California Press: 1978)

[37] A full discussion of the macro-historical processes involved in this transformation would take me far out of my way here. However, I might here note (as a gesture of good-will to people interested in the relationship between modernity and capitalism) that the argument I present here about the transformative effects of literacy and mediated experience is paralleled by the increasing mediation of trade and production through currency in this period. In effect, money mediates work in an analogous way to the way books mediate the imagination, because money introduces a rift between the 'real' value of a thing in terms of the labor invested in producing it, and the value it has in a more or less 'imaginary' currency market. In particular, interesting things could be said about the way the inflation of c. 1470-1620 following the influx of silver from the new world would have made money seem 'imaginary' and 'unreal' in this sense. It is perhaps a telling detail in this context that the author of Don Quixote should have hailed from precisely that country which was earliest and hardest hit by these inflationary forces. For more about this inflation see Earl J. Hamilton, *American Treasure and the Price Revolution in Spain, 1501-1650* Harvard Economic Studies, 43. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1934

[38] David Hall, *Worlds of Wonder*, 71-116 and passim.

sense it didn't matter, for the world was their cathedral – a place infused with the invisible energy of the divine.

But the invisible currents coursing through this world were not all divine – witchcraft, too, was a product of the embodied, unmediated imagination which the Puritans inherited from the medieval world. Witchcraft was a product of the imagination, to be sure, but it was a viscerally embodied product. The Witch herself was believed to be bodily marked by her transgression and the accused were accordingly searched for Witches' teats from which imps suckled them (duly found in a number of cases) and several confessing witches showed their interrogators where the imps had suckled them and left red marks.[39] More importantly, to be afflicted by witchcraft at Salem was to have pins stuck in your throat or through your hands by invisible forces, it was to be bitten by invisible teeth that left bite-marks for all to see, it was to vomit blood in court when confronted with your assailants.[40] It was, above all, to be 'dreadfully tormented and afflicted' as the trial records state again and again, the words but a pale shadow of the grotesque contortions and harrowing cries of pain the writers must have witnessed, the wordless eloquence of the suffering body.[41] The embodied nature of these torments and their inherent resistance to linguistic representation is part of what makes the Salem witch trials so hard for us to grasp – written descriptions of the torments invariably fail to capture (how could they not?) the dramatic persuasiveness of seeing for oneself.

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[39] For teats, see Rosenthal (Gen. Ed.), *Records,* 141, 362-3, 517-8

[40] For pins see Rosenthal (Gen. Ed.), *Records,* 149, 268, 335, 339**,** 514, for invisible biting and man-handling that leaves marks, see 149, 156, 160, 339, for vomiting blood, see 447, 578.

[41] I am here following a train of thought first begun in Michel de Certeau, *The possession at Loudun*, Trans. Michael B. Smith (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 2000)

The connection between seeing and believing was not lost on the ministers who wrote about the witch

trials as they were taking place and commented on them afterwards. In his justification of the actions of

the court, Cotton Mather wrote with respect to the trial of Bridget Bishop, that 'there was little occasion

to prove the Witchcraft, it being evident and notorious *to all beholders*.'[42] His father, Increase Mather,

who wrote in the main to condemn and rein in the trials, none the less felt a need to make an exception

of the one trial he had actually attended, writing that 'I was not myself present at any of the Tryals,

excepting one, viz that of George Burroughs; had I been one of his Judges, I could not have acquitted

him.'[43] In principle, both Mathers had qualms about what was happening at Salem but, in practice, both

acknowledged and appealed to the power of being there: seeing was believing.

And, of course, one can't help but notice that it was precisely the ministers, physically distant from

Salem, whose confident prose and profuse quotations of Biblical and legal authorities bespeak a deep

involvement in literary culture and mediated experience, who are the great opponents of the trials.

Opponents of the trials not on the grounds that they don't believe in witches, moreover, but rather that

they don't quite believe their own eyes – the complaint that runs throughout their arguments is that the

'spectral' evidence (the spirits seen by the afflicted women) is being given too much importance.[44]

Implicitly, though this was less often stressed, the dramatically embodied evidence of the afflicted

women's physical suffering was also of dubious value. Nobody denied, at the time, that the women

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[42] Cotton Mather, *The Wonders of the Inivisible World* (London: John Russel Smith, 1862) 129. My italics.

[43] Mather, *Wonders*, 286

[44] For representative samples of ministerial opposition, see Samuel Willard, *Some miscellany observations on our present debates respecting witchcrafts, : in a dialogue between S. & B*. (Philadelphia [in fact Boston]: William Bradford, for Hezekiah Usher.[publisher in fact unknown], 1692), Increase Mather, *Cases of Conscience Concerning Evil Spirits* (Boston, Benjamin Harris , 1693), John Hale, *A Modest Inquiry Into the Nature of Witchcraft* (Boston, B Green, 1702)

actually saw and suffered, but the ministers argued instead that Satan was deceiving them, torturing

them himself and appearing in the shape of the accused to mislead them. The body, in short, could not

be trusted to imagine rightly. To justify this interpretation, the ministers cited the Biblical episode of the

Witch of Endor, which in their reading showed Satan appearing in the likeness of the Prophet Samuel.[45]

The authority of the book (or, rather, the Book) was pitted against the authority of the senses and, in

due course, the Book prevailed.

In comparison to this learned discourse of scepticism, the records of the witch trials, produced in Salem

and largely by supporters of the trials, often display a more hesitant literacy, as suggested by looser

spelling, a certain grammatical sloppiness and the scribe's evident struggle to keep up with the action

being recorded. And then there is the fact that, for those most intimately and avidly involved in the

witch trials – the afflicted and the confessors alike – the book was still capable of serving as a somewhat

mysterious magical object. In Mary Warren's confession, cited at the start of this section, Satan comes

bearing a book, and one may know a witch by the books she reads. The 'book' which the afflicted are

forever being tempted to sign, and which the confessors invariably confess to signing, is often read by

historians simply as a demonic inversion of the book in which church membership was recorded, or

simply an updated version of an ancient folk trope of signing a contract with the devil. But it is perhaps

interesting to contemplate it also as a reflection of the enduring uncanniness of that magical object, the

early modern book. It would not do to push this line of argument too far, however. In no sense is what

happened at Salem a clash of imaginary styles; a conflict between the modern literary imagination of the

ministry and the pre-modern embodied imagination of lay people. The two ways of inhabiting the

imagination were not yet mutually exclusive, and ministers and laity alike participated in both with no

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[45] A somewhat controversial reading at the time, and rather a creative interpretation to my mind as well, but the reader may judge for himself: the passage is 1 Samuel 28: 8-25

deep sense of contradiction. The point of all this is rather that, though Puritan New Englanders lead both

mediated and embodied imaginary lives, their witchcraft fantasies belonged squarely within the latter

tradition.

This means, of course, that we must interpret them differently to how we would interpret our own

fantasies. Our fantasy life, at least since Freud, has been understood primarily as an attempt to

supplement reality.[46] We say that our fantasies are 'escapist,' that they provide us with satisfactions

unavailable in reality. Or, more positively, our fantasies express values and truths that are at odds with

but potentially transformative of reality. Thus if, for instance, the impoverished have fantasies of great

material abundance, we say that this is to psychically compensate them for their actual poverty or,

alternatively, that their fantasies express the reality-transforming goal that motivates them – an escape

from want through hard work (if the poor are of a liberal cast of mind) or, less fantastically, though

political transformation of the system that marginalizes them. Dark fantasies such as the ones we're

dealing with here are a bit trickier to fit into this model, but are generally understood to similarly

compensate for or supplement reality – classically, by making visible repressed feelings. Thus, for

example, fantasies of aggression compensate the stifling of violent feelings by the demands of bourgeois

politesse; what is impossible in reality comes to be lived out in fantasy.[47]

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[46] Freud's engagement with fantasy is rather diffuse, but see especially Sigmund Freud, 'Hysterical phantasies and their relation to bisexuality' in *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud***,** ed. & trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1953), Vol 9, 156-166 and Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Trans. Joyce Crick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999)

[47] For a classic account of this kind see Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, trans. James Starchey (New York: Norton, 2005)

To illuminate the very different role of fantasy in the seventeenth century, consider once again the cathedral. As Herbert Marcuse suggests in passing in his *One-Dimensional Man*, we might think of cathedrals (along with earlier forms of imaginative life) as providing another dimension to experience. A way to easily grasp this concept is to simply imagine the experience of walking through a Medieval town: children play in the streets, merchants buy and sell in the marketplace, artisans are at work in their shops – all the aspects of everyday life unfold at eye level; reality in two dimensions, as it were.[48] But then you come to the cathedral, and suddenly, for the first time, your gaze is drawn *up*. The cathedral does not make the town disappear, it does not transport you to a magical fantasy land which compensates for its lack – instead, it qualifies the town and, as we might say, points beyond it. It *re-imagines* the town as that which takes place under the vast dome of the sky, and the majesty of God. If, in the modern age, we locate fantasy *outside* reality, in this pre-modern moment, reality is places *inside* fantasy – the visible world encompassed by the invisible. What fantasy does here is less to supplement (or, in extreme cases, supplant) everyday reality, but rather reframe and so transform it.

This, however, is not the everyday transformation of reality that we perform behind our own backs when we ascribe meaning to experience through culture. Believing in cathedrals is different from believing in banks, and not merely because banks require from us a greater leap of faith, but rather because cathedrals are holy. We believe in banks in the matter of fact sense that faith in the banks is a largely taken for granted aspect of our everyday experience; banks do not stand out for us and it is only

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[48] I have a very vivid memory of reading this particular example in *One-Dimensional Man* years ago, but going back to the book, I find I can't locate anything beyond a fleeting reference to substantiate this conviction. In any case, for the fleeting reference, and because the insight is certainly Marcusian in spirit if not in letter, see Herbert Marcuse, *One-dimensional man : studies in the ideology of advanced industrial society* (Boston : Beacon Press, 1991), 63.

when they fail that we become aware of them as imaginary entities.[49] Cathedrals, on the other hand, are holy, and the Hebrew word from which we derive holy (kaddosh) does not imply moral or spiritual excellence (as for instance in our usage 'a holy man') but signifies the set apart, the radically different, that which can't be incorporated.[50] This is the awe and the terror of the cathedral, the way it imposes upon us an awareness of something else, a transcendent reality that can't be made to square with everyday reality. This is the paradox of this kind of imagination – that it takes place alongside other kinds of experience, and is therefore in a sense undifferentiated from it (in the sense, that is, of being equally 'real') but that the reality it gives access to is defined precisely as that which is differentiated and stands apart, which transcends.

And that of course brings us back to the witch, for as I noted above the witch too points beyond the everyday and seems utterly irreconcilable with it – that this is one of the most striking things about her. I am arguing here that the Puritans were not moved to imagine witches by anything within their everyday lives but by precisely that within their culture and experience which could not be incorporated within their everyday world. Imagining themselves assailed by witches allowed them to have a kind of experience that they found compelling in precisely the way it departed from their normal lives, and allowed them to engage with an Invisible World they vaguely sensed beyond it. For the pre-modern imagination, whether incarnated in cathedrals or witches, seems powerfully oriented towards this kind of transcendence. If modern fantasy is primarily a compensation for a lack, this pre-modern way of imagining is something more positive – an attempt to experience and engage those dimensions of a

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[49] It seems to me, as an aside, one of the great problems of cultural history that we don't differentiate more clearly between the implicit acts of imagination upon which a culture rests and its more self-consciously imaginative attempts to say how life is or ought to be; between culture as common sense and culture as ideology, if you like.

[50] Rudolf Otto, *The idea of the holy : an inquiry into the non-rational factor in the idea of the divine and its relation to the rational*, Trans. John Harvey (New York : Oxford University Press, 1950)

culture which eluded everyday life.[51] It is in this limited sense that going to a witch trial and going to church were similar sorts of experiences.

But, of course, there are clear limits to the similarity, for while it is fairly obvious what kind of transcendental reality is implied by a cathedral and participated in by those who believe in such things as cathedrals, it is far less clear how the brutal execution of marginalized old women fits into this model of the pre-modern imagination. Thus far I have hopefully been able to show that there is a structural similarity between the way people experienced witch-fantasies and the way they experienced cathedrals. And I have also suggested that this imaginative tradition seems to point beyond the commonplace and everyday towards a transcendental reality, and thus to the aspects of a culture which don't find expression in everyday life. What I have yet to do is show how something as seemingly base and violent as what happened at Salem might in any sense constitute 'transcendence.' This is my task in the remainder of this chapter, and to accomplish it I will need, obviously, to enquire a little more closely into the actual content of the witch fantasy and ask what it was about witches, exactly, that was so troubling.

III Envy and the Witch

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[51] One might also think of this distinction in terms of desires and values: modern fantasy is an expression of frustrated desires (for money, success, recognition, sex, etc) whereas pre-modern fantasy gravitates towards the expression of elusive values. Beyond this distinction of content, but related to it, is the fact that pre-modern fantasies of this kind did not have the stigma of being 'unreal' and so could be understood as meaningful ways to realize transcendental yearning.

On the 27th of March, 1692, Samuel Parris gave a sermon in which he tried to make sense of the witchcraft crisis which had invaded first his home, next the village of which he was minister and, finally, even the congregation of his church. For by the time Parris gave the sermon, entitled 'Christ Knows How Many Devils There Are,' accusations had been leveled at Rebecca Nurse and Martha Cory, both women who were regular attendants of and in full communion with the Salem village church. The right to full membership in Puritan churches was reserved for those who were deemed by the church to be Visible Saints: that is, those whose behavior, reputation and pious self-examination gave them and their community reason to believe they were predestined for salvation. The desire to thus limit full membership in the church to only a select few and thus to bring social appearance in harmony with spiritual reality was a significant component of what had motivated Puritan dissent from the Church of England. Therefore the discovery of apparent hypocrites amongst those widely supposed to be amongst those elected for salvation was a grave shock, one on which Parris felt compelled to dwell in his sermon.

The first part of Parris's sermon acknowledged that the Puritan quest for total purity of the church membership was more of an ideal than a manifest reality: despite the best efforts to exclude the impious, there would always be devils as well as saints in the church, even as there had been a Judas amongst the very disciples of Christ. But though the devils could hide their true nature from men, they could not hide from Christ, who knew exactly who and how many devils there were in his churches, and who would not be fooled in the hereafter. Accordingly, Parris advised the congregation not to trust their church membership alone to count for much with Christ, but also not to despair of the church because hypocrites were found amongst them, but instead to pray to God to deliver them from the hypocrites and devils. But Parris was no more content to leave the matter entirely in God's hands than were the accusers and magistrates who were even then in the midst of preparing a new set of accusations. In the

final part of the sermon, Parris produced a list of 'sins that make us devils' and by which (the implication ran) devils might be known. In so doing he produced the most explicit portrait of the witch to come out of Salem in the year 1692, though the content of many of the accusations of course implicitly reflected his assumptions about what made someone a devil. His list of suspect characters reads as follows: "1. A liar or murderer 2. A slanderer or an accuser of the godly 3. A tempter to sin 4. An opposer of godliness, as Elymos 5. Envious persons as witches 6. A drunkard 7. A proud person."[52]

Much of this list is fairly self-evident: the first two items were probably directed as much at the afflicted girls as at suspect witches, and reflected the confusion that must have been felt by many witnessing the wild courtroom scenes in which frantic, improbable allegations of harm and mischief were earnestly made and hotly denied. Items three and four on the list alluded to qualities commonly associated the devil in Christian theology (and by implication his followers, such as Elymos, a magician who opposes Paul in the Acts of the Apostles.) The last item of the list is likewise very conventional, for pride and self-love has been the sin from which all others have been held to flow as far back as Aquinas.[53] Why Parris singles out drunkards is something of a mystery to me, for the Puritans were not (contrary to the stereotype) very determinedly opposed to drinking, so long as it was a pious, moderate style of drinking. However, drinking in any case didn't loom especially large in the accusations directed at the Salem witches so this seems a personal hang-up particular to Parris rather than a more broadly salient issue.

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[52] Reprinted in Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum (Eds.), *Salem-village witchcraft; a documentary record of local conflict in colonial New England* (Belmont, Calif., Wadsworth: 1972), 131

[53] On pride in Puritan theology see Miller, *New England Mind*

All of which leaves us with item number 5 – 'Envious persons as [ie. like] witches.' This is the only time in the sermon that Parris explicitly mentions witches, preferring throughout to use the euphemism 'devils.' Parris is almost unique in so explicitly drawing attention in this way to the enviousness of the witch, but if we take his cue and begin to look for it, the theme of enviousness pervades the testimony at Salem, and indeed the history of early modern witchcraft in general. Far more than aggression or anger, envy is the emotion most characteristically associated with the witch. Not to say the witch is not also angry and aggressive, but anger was a very common affective currency in the early modern world – savages and Catholics may be angry, as indeed may God or the Devil.[54] But of all the archetypes that populate the Puritan imagination, only the witch is envious, and so envy is the affect most closely associated with her. And it is only natural that this should be so, since envy is after all an intimate emotion, and so an apt emotion for an intimate enemy like the witch. For envy, as Lyndal Roper says in connection with German witchcraft, is an emotion which relies on identification – for me to envy you, I must be able to imagine myself in your place. And for me to do that, I must share to a large extent in your values and priorities.[55]

Now, we have to be a careful when we talk about envy, because it is not necessarily the case that Parris means by it the same thing we do. What we mean by 'envy' today, as the Oxford dictionary rather stiffly puts it, is a 'feeling of mortification and ill-will occasioned by the contemplation of the superior advantages of another.'[56] This is ancient usage indeed; the first citation the Oxford gives is from 1280 and interestingly features an old ally of the witch: 'to him the devil had envie, that he in his stid schold

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[54] Anger is the more typical emotion associated with witches (especially in Demos, *Entertaining Satan*) though a case has also been made for resentment (Karlsen, *Devil in the Shape of a Woman*), and jealousy (Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*).

[55] Lyndal Roper, *Witch Craze*, 80

[56] "envy, *v.*" The Oxford English Dictionary. 2nd ed. 1989. OED Online. Oxford University Press. 22 Sept. 2010

be brote.' But as late as the early eighteenth century, envy could be more broadly used to mean 'desire to equal another' (without any malice) 'malignant or hostile feeling; ill-will, malice, enmity,' (without comparison of advantages) or 'to grudge,' 'to give grudgingly,' as well as 'odium' or 'unpopularity,' or even more simply 'desire,' as in the French *envie*. The vast majority of the citations the Oxford gives are from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (also the age of the witch hunt, of course) at the end of which period most of the meanings unfamiliar today gradually fall away, so that Parris almost certainly does mean envy in the modern sense of the word. But it appears through this etymology as though the emotion being described is more and more something that comes into the view of the culture as a specific mode of feeling, and which therefore has need of a word unto itself. The times are envious.

But passingly so, evidently, for we don't really talk of envy much in our own time and, in fact, are prone to confuse envy with jealously.[57] However, no two feelings could be more different, for envy is emotion directed in the main at other people, whereas jealousy is directed at an object or, more commonly, an objectified person. That is, my jealously is always directed towards that object which I desire – most commonly a lover or would-be lover on whom my grip is tenuous. My rival for this love-object is incidental to the jealous feelings: he or she is their cause, as we say, but not their object. In a state of envy, of course, it is very different: I envy the person, not the advantages they possess – the advantages are the cause of my envy, but the person is the object of envy. I may desire the advantages for myself, and very likely I do, but it would be more apt to say that I want to *be* those whom I envy rather than to *have* what they have. The distinction is between wanting to *be* the object of envy and wanting to *have*

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[57] In fact, Demos makes this mistake, reading the envy of the witch as a mere desire for possessions and it throws off, I think, the psychological part of his analysis. See Demos, *Entertaining Satan*, 178-9

the object of jealousy, a distinction that has obvious connections to the history of capitalism and the rise

of the magical object that completes the self.[58]

But the more important difference, for our purposes, is that envy actually describes the state of malice

arising from the situation of desiring, not the desire itself. Envy is therefore not an entirely self-evident

feeling, for there is something mysterious about it, something that seems misplaced and unaccountable.

After all, there is no strictly logical reason that my having something you want should make you hate

me. This sense of mystery is present already in story of Abel and Cain, the Ur-Myth of envy in our

culture, where even God himself is puzzled by Cain, asking: 'why art thou wroth? and why is thy

countenance fallen? And if thou dost well, shalt thou not be accepted?' Envy is from the beginning

something strange, something unaccountable, a feeling that moves brother kill brother without having

anything to gain by it, even as witches are often represented as tormenting their neighbors not for any

specific reason or hope of gain but out of sheer spite and hatred.

In fact, the motive of the witch was never really explicitly at issue in the Salem Witch trials. The

interrogators did often begin by asking the accused why they were hurting the afflicted, who often fell

into fits the moment the witch entered the courtroom. 'Tell me now why you hurt these persons' was

Magistrate Hathorne's opening gambit against Martha Cory, and 'why do you hurt these persons?' was

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[58] It would possibly be a worthwhile enterprise to disentangle capitalism as a mode of production from covetousness (by which I mean something like 'desire for objects and objectified persons') as a mode of affective orientation. I suspect the former may in some ways be predicated upon the latter – that is, if we are looking for the origins of the moral disease that infects our world, we could do worse than locate the fall from grace in that moment when the desire for objects displaces the desire for people as an organizing principle of affective life. Or perhaps we might look to the moment when the desire for objects begins to be confused with the desire for people: the moment when objects begin to 'speak' and people become possessions. For the sickness of the capitalist, like that of the serial killer, lies essentially in this confusion of object and subject, in the inability to any longer see the person *as* a person. Hence, too, the incurable loneliness of a capitalist society.

likewise demanded of Deliverance Hobbs, two of the women who would hang for Witchcraft in 1692.[59]

But when the accused confessed, as Hobbs did shortly after she was thus accosted, the question of why

was not pursued – in both her court transcript and in the subsequent interrogations in jail, the focus is

on what she did and whom she was with, a line of questioning that produced the first account of the

witches' Sabbath during which were consumed 'Red Bread and Red Wine like blood.'[60] The conspicuous

failure to ask 'why' is in some ways merely a product of a trial system not especially interested in

establishing motive, but it also suggests that the accusation itself, not unlike that of theft, carried with it

an assumed motive. Even as thieves stole out of greed or want, witches caused harm out of envy.

This assumption, rarely articulated because it was a piece of 'common sense,' was instead embedded in

much that the witches did and, especially, in the sorts of persons who were most liable to be accused of

witchcraft.[61] Depositions against witches often told seemingly irrelevant stories about prior interactions

with witches whose only purpose was to establish the envy of the witch towards the accuser. Rachel

Clinton, for instance, had visited Mary Edwards to ask her if she might 'haue Rome [have room] in our

house. To kepe thare. [stay there]' This request Edwards refused, but Clinton lingered on and, as

Edwards was at the time making blood puddings, mentioned "she had a great dissire to haue sum of

thos: pudens: saying yt [that] it was uery good food & yt she Loueed it uery well so I ...gaue har ... one of

ye pudens ye which she Reseaued uary Cornfully [received very scornfully]"[62] Soon thereafter, the

Edwards' pigs began to die in prodigious quantities – five hogs and three yearlings passed away in most

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[59] Rosenthal (Gen. Ed.), *Records,* 143, 211

[60] Rosenthal (Gen. Ed.), *Records,* 220

[61] On common sense, see Clifford Geertz, *Local knowledge: further essays in interpretive anthropology* (New York : Basic Books, 1983*)*, 73-93

[62] Rosenthal (Gen. Ed.), *Records,*169

mysterious and strange circumstances. The connection between Clinton's visit and the pig epidemic is left unstated in the testimony but, as Edwards' contemporaries would have known, the proof was in the pudding. Blood pudding is that rare thing – an English delicacy: it is a kind of sausage made from the copious amounts of blood that is spilled by a pig (or, less often, cow) while is it being murdered. So there is a kind of metaphorical and culinary connection between Rachel Clinton's desire for blood pudding and her implied malice towards the Edwards' pigs.

This example again illustrates the important distinction between envy and jealousy, for we note that Clinton is not in the slightest bit mollified by Edwards' gift of the pudding itself, and that attacking the pigs in fact precludes any possibility of enjoying them in pudding form in the future. What is at issue is not so much Clinton's relationship to the pudding but rather her relationship to Edwards. The key emotion at work is Clinton's resentment that Edwards has the things Clinton desires but that elude her: a home of her own, and all the pudding she can eat. Whether Clinton's specific requests are gratified or denied does not make so much difference as we might at first suppose, for the emotional crux of the matter is in the lack which Clinton experiences vis-a-vis Edwards. She is not just angry that Edwards turns her down; she's angry that Edwards is doing better than her. Her eventual attack on the pigs only makes sense in this context for, after all, she gets nothing from it, but she does to some extent drag Edwards down to her level by depriving her of the pudding-giving hogs.

This dynamic is even more evident in the various depositions where the witch stands to gain nothing from her belligerence and where her aggression is only very nominally connected to some perceived slight. To take another example from the Clinton depositions, one of the accounts states that 'som wimen of worth and quality Desired me To Aquaint the seuen men yt [that] Rachell Clinton was a grat

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Dissturuen [disturbance] unto them in ye meten-house in hunching [pushing, thrusting] them with hur

Elboo'[63] Here, there is no pretext for the aggressive behavior except the 'worth and quality' of the

women being hunched by the precariously marginal Clinton – it isn't so much about what they have, and

it is about who they are, and who, by implication, Clinton is not. Or we might consider the deposition of

Martha Dutch against Alice Parker. Dutch and Parker were both sailors' wives and Dutch recalled in her

testimony that she'd one day shared with Parker the hope that her husband would come safely home

from the journey he was on. 'No, Neuer more in This world' was Parker's astonishing reply, part-

prophecy and part-curse, and in any case 'ye wch [that which] came to pass' for the unhappy Dutch

whose husband drowned at sea.[64] Mary Warren, one of the afflicted girls, more directly accused Parker

of drowning several men who had gone to sea and also tantalizingly revealed that she 'ran after John

Loader in the Common.'[65] Parker's own husband, as we know from other testimony, spent a great deal

of time at the tavern, a fact that Parker angrily resented and picked fights in public about.[66] It is not hard

to see in all this the image of a woman in an unhappy marriage, envious of those like Dutch whose

longing for their husbands made how own lack of such a desirable mate unbearably clear.

However, the enviousness of witches wasn't just – or even primarily – embedded in their malicious acts

and resentful behavior, but was in fact implicit in the very sinews of their being, and in the targets they

chose. For even during the Salem crisis, when anyone regardless of age or gender was liable to be

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[63] Rosenthal (Gen. Ed.), *Records*, 169

[64] Rosenthal (Gen. Ed.), *Records*, 605

[65] Rosenthal (Gen. Ed.), *Records*, 261

[66] Rosenthal (Gen. Ed.), *Records*, 359

persecuted, those who hung for witchcraft were disproportionately older women.[67] This mirrors the general trend in the early modern witch craze, whose marked tendency to target women of advanced years has long puzzled scholars.[68] Our stereotype of the witch as an old crone is only partially correct, however, in so far as this implies women in very late old age. It would be more apt to talk about women in and beyond their late 40s which of course, as Lydal Roper cunningly observes, really means post-menopausal women.[69] The reason for the concentration of witches in this cohort becomes readily apparent when we reflect that what witches do, above all, is assail symbols of fertility. They murder pigs and cattle, they cause children to fall ill or die, they interfere with agricultural endeavors and with male virility.[70] More obliquely, they parody and mock fertility by giving suck not to children but to devilish imps.[71] And, of course, the archetypal scene that inspires the panic at Salem is that of a group of young girls (though, in fact, also several women of child-bearing age) being magically tortured by an old woman. Witches, then, are very often infertile women attacking fertility. And they are very often poor women attacking wealth. And they are also very often unchurched women attacking piety.[72] And why do

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[67] Demos, *Entertaining Satan*, 60- 70

[68] For a fairly straightforward reading of witch-hunting as persecution of powerful and deviant women, see Karlsen, *Devil in the Shape of a Woman*. For an account which views attacks on women as a product of psychological baggage resulting from childrearing practices see Demos, *Entertaining Satan*, 207-8. For accounts stressing the pervasive misogyny of early modern culture and the belief in the greater sinfulness of women, see Roper, *Witch Craze* and Elizabeth Reis, *Damned Women: Sinners and Witches in Puritan New England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997) For a critique of these interpretations that, however, leaves the question of why women predominated largely open, see Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*, 224-49 and, more directly, David Hall, 'Witchcraft and the Limits of Interpretation' *The New England Quarterly, Vol. 58, No. 2,* 253-281

[69] Roper, *Witch Craze*, 160-78

[70] For attacks on farm animals, see Rosenthal (Gen. Ed.), *Records* 352, 438, 451, 459, 498, 510, 513. For Children, see Rosenthal (Gen. Ed.), *Records* 330, 341, 416, 467. For interference with agriculture Rosenthal (Gen. Ed.), *Records* 331, 439, 448-9, 460. I only give a sample of such accusations for illustration; one might supply many more.

[71] Rosenthal (Gen. Ed.), *Records* 141, 163, 362-3, 416, 417, 517-8

[72] The failure to regularly attend church or pray with one's household was one of the things that made one vulnerable to accusations of witchcraft in the sense that it made such accusations more plausible. See, for example, Rosenthal (Gen. Ed.), *Records,* 132, 216, 317

they hate us so much, we who are their prosperous, pious neighbors? Why, because they are 'envious persons, as witches,' of course. But why, in that case, are they envious?

"Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen? And if thou dost well, shalt thou not be accepted?"

A common psychological reading of the Cain and Abel story would have Cain projecting his anger at himself for his inadequacy onto his brother. He turns on Abel so as not to turn on himself, destroys the other as a kind of scapegoat for his own failure. In this view of affairs, Cain's violence is dysfunctional and misdirected – a pathological projection, with at best only a cathartic effect. But I think Cain's violence makes better sense than this, and follows more readily from his conundrum. For Cain's problem is not actually that he is not able, but rather than he is not Abel. That is, his anguish and anger stem not from his inability to please God (in which case self-hatred would be apt), but are rather a response to being defined by his failure to be like Abel. For when I identify so strongly with you, this feeling that you are living my 'proper' life alienates me from myself. I come to be defined negatively in terms of you, and this is intolerable to me – all I am is a lack, and what I am lacking is what you are; all I am is a failure, and what I am failing is to be you. And this is why you must die. For in you I destroy that success which defines me as a failure, and in so doing I am liberated from its impossible burden. For it is precisely because Cain will never be able to be Abel that he must destroy this taunting mirror image in order to be freed from it. Within the terms of his problem, Cain's solution makes perfect sense.

And so, too, does the situation of the witch. For the problem of the infertile woman is not so much with fertility as it is with womanhood. Or, rather, her problem is that fertility to a large extent was womanhood in seventeenth century New England. For the Puritans, ardent Protestants as they were, took to heart Martin Luther's injunction that "A woman is not created to be a virgin, but to bear children."[73] The lived reality of Puritan womanhood was, of course, a little more complex – Puritan women were also expected to be good wives, help-meets to their husbands, and as their spiritual natures were like those of men, they were also urged to seek salvation which, in fact, they did zealously, quickly outnumbering men as fully communicating members of the churches.[74] But fertility and childbearing were none the less a woman's primary task in life – her calling, as Luther would have put it – and a woman that could not (or could no longer) bear children would have for this reason seemed something less of a woman. If this woman was also a widow (as many witches were) and therefore could not be seen as a help-meet, or if her relationship with her husband could only generously be described as dysfunctional (as was the case with many married witches), the woman was further unsexed.[75] And if she also failed to regularly attend church, or if her behavior was greatly at odds with that expected from women, that sealed the deal – she was no woman at all, she was matter out of place, she was something uncanny.[76]

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[73] Susan C. Karant-Nunn and Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, *Luther on Women: a Sourcebook*,(Cambridge University Press, 2003) 140

[74] See Ulrich, *Good Wives*. I should note that the situation in Catholic countries was not, of course, terribly different except in so far as Catholicism made a virtue out of the chaste life of the nun, meaning this kind of argument travels well to all the areas affected by witchcraft.

[75] I've documented several dysfunctional relationships in passing above. On witches as widows, see Karlsen, *Devil in the Shape of a Woman*, 71-76

[76] I mean here uncanny more in Heidegger's sense of *unheimlich* – something that feels alien and out of place because it doesn't fit within the life-world of the observer – than in Freud's sense of something coming to seem ominous through repetition and return. The Freudian definition of the uncanny, however, does have the virtue of reminding us of the connection between the uncanny and the repressed, which I develop on further below.

The problem, and the fascination, of the witch, was that she was a woman who was not a woman. She had failed to live up to the standards her society had set for womanhood, and now she bore resentment towards those who had succeeded where she had failed, and indeed towards the very virtues that eluded her, for their very existence confronted her with her own lack and inadequacy. So she attacked not only the fertile, but fertility itself, for fertility was the mirror in which she saw herself irreparably broken and incomplete. But if womanhood illustrated the failure of the witch, the witch also showed the failure of womanhood. The witch was unsettling, in part, because she unmasked the cultural system of meanings which the Puritans inhabited as a limited, fraught and incomplete.[77] Her envy was finally an expression of this resentment towards a system that failed her and could define her only as a lack. Her magical aggression, then, was an attempt to escape this unbearable state by lashing out at, most obviously, those who had achieved everything she had not and, more fundamentally, the very achievements which she both longed for and could never attain.

I have until now been speaking about all this as though the women who died at Salem were actual witches nursing actual envy against their neighbors, so it is at this point perhaps worthwhile to insist again on the imaginary quality of all this. We are not dealing here with actual proto-feminist troublemakers attacking a patriarchy that makes no place for them. The woman accused of witchcraft may well have resented their situation and their more successful neighbors, but whether they did or not is really beside the point. What I have tried to conjure up is not their actual social existence but rather the richly elaborated fantasy about envy their neighbors projected onto them. I have tried to draw out

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[77] Cf Kristeva's notion of the abject in Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: an Essay on Abjection* (New York : Columbia University Press, 1982) but note also that I complicate this notion in the next section.

the ways in which the archetype of the witch contains within itself (within the image of the infertile woman attacking fertility) a particular emotional structure – that of envy. Implicit in the argument has been the idea that what Puritans found compelling about the witch was that she was a kind of hyper-condensed symbol of enviousness. Regarded as a symbol, the witch reflected the sorts of inadequacy that caused envy, reflected what envy felt like, reflected the various forms of resentment it found expression in.

The question that naturally suggests itself at this point is: why were Puritans so hung up on envy? I will return to this question, but before looking for the social context of the witch fantasy, I want to examine the fantasy of witchcraft from another angle. We have established the witch was envious, but she was not merely envious. She was also in league with the devil.

IV The Devil, the Witch and the Problem of Evil

As we've seen, when the inhabitants of Salem gave testimony to support accusations that their neighbors were witches, they talked mostly about envy, everyday quarrels and petty acts of vengeance. But this alone did not make a witch; Satan too was at work play in Salem village. Indeed, strictly speaking, the satanic aspect of witchcraft was more alarming to the afflicted villagers than the mere ill-feeling the witch bore them. Ill-feeling and envy were, as we saw, predicated on identification and therefore implied that the witch was 'one of us,' and thus comprehensible in more or less everyday terms. But the frightening thing about the witch was precisely the unfathomable, implacable and seemingly limitless malice she bore towards the community and the things the community valued. The

crimes of a woman like Bridget Bishop might have had their roots in everyday quarrels, but they ended in dramatic acts of immorality such as the torture and murder of innocent children. The impetus for these utterly evil acts, not to mention the power required to magically commit them, came not from the realm of everyday life, but rather some dark and mysterious source. It came, in fact, from Satan himself, with whom the witch had struck a bargain and whose evil work she now did.

The devil was everywhere at Salem; indeed, he was the one responsible for turning people to witchcraft. Confessing witches invariably told, under heavy prompting from presiding judges and their afflicted accusers, of an encounter with the devil, who had tempted them to sign a covenant with him. To Abigail Hobbs he had appeared in a variety of animal shapes: "I have seen dogs and many creatures ... I mean the devil ... He said he would give me fine things if i did what he would have me ... he would have me be a witch." She elaborated that the devil had come to her subsequently as a man and as a cat, bearing a book "and would have me put my hand to it [ie. sign it] ... they would have me make a bargain for so long, & do what they would have me do." And what did these devils offer in return, the judges wanted to know? "They would give me fine cloths" was Abigail's reply, and though she never did get her clothes, the devil had since appeared in her shape to torment the afflicted.[78] Mary Lacy mad a similar confession, saying the devil had appeared to her "in the shape of a horse ... he bid me not to be afraid of any thing, and he would not bring me out; but he has proved a liar from the beginning ... he bid me also to afflict persons ... he bid me obey him and I should want for nothing ... He bid me pray to him and serve him and said he was god and lord to me."[79]

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[78] Rosenthal (Gen. Ed.), *Records* 189-91

[79] Rosenthal (Gen. Ed.), *Records,* 472

As the panic evolved, these stories of going over to the devil's side coalesced into stories of a witches Sabbath during which witches gathered to worship the devil. Deliverance Hobbs, mother of the above Abigail and the first to broach this theme, described a witch meeting at which a minister gone over to Satan "was their Preacher, and prest them to bewitch all in the Village ... assureing [sic] them they should preveil [sic], He administered the sacrament unto them att the same time with Red Bread like Blood ... and a Man in a Long crownd Hat sat next the minister"[80] The man in the hat was, as later sources elaborated, the devil himself, come to preside over this cannibalistic parody of a service.[81] At the height of the panic, the Devil was even said to have cemented his power over the witches by a sort of Satanic second baptism. Mary Lacey Senior, mother of the Mary Lacy cited above, testified "that about 3 or 4 years agoe she was ... Goody Nurse & Goody How [other accused witches] baptised by the old serpent at newburry falls And that he dipped theire heads in the water and then said They wer his and he had power over them."[82]

Not content with this role as a mere shadowy presence luring people to witchcraft, the Devil also made dramatic appearances during the trials themselves. The afflicted several times saw him appear in the courtroom to wreak havoc and interfere with the course of justice. During the examination of Richard Cartier "The afflicted persons said they saw the black Man [a frequent reference to the devil] ... stand before them on the table to Hinder there [their] Confession."[83] When Rebecca Nurse was brought before the court "the afflicted persons said, the Black Man, whispered to her in the Assembly, and

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[80] Rosenthal (Gen. Ed.), *Records,* 220

[81] Rosenthal (Gen. Ed.), *Records,* 473

[82] Rosenthal (Gen. Ed.), *Records,* 477

[83] Rosenthal (Gen. Ed.), *Records* 479

therefore she could not hear what the Magistrates said unto her. They said also that she did then ride by the Meeting-house, behind the Black Man."[84] Besides these personal appearances, the devil's presence made itself felt through the torments the witches inflicted, both on the afflicted girls, and on the neighbors who testified to having been the victims of supernatural misfortunes. These uncanny afflictions were laid at the door not only of the witches who ostensibly caused them, but also of the devil who had empowered and encouraged them to go on the attack.

The Devil's presence at Salam is fairly unsurprising, for his association with witches was a common trope of the witch fantasy both in Europe and America. In fact, the association of the devil with the witch was in many respects at the heart of the witch craze. It was the invention and popularization of the notion of the Witches' Sabbath in the fifteenth century that laid the groundwork for the rising tide of persecution. Belief in malevolent magic users had existed before this time, but only after becoming closely associated with the devil and devil-worship did witches become sources of terror and frequent victims of persecution and violence in the western world.[85]

To complicate matters even further, the devil himself was undergoing something of a metamorphosis around this time. The medieval devil had been an ambivalent figure – evil and formidable, to be sure, but also frequently a figure of ridicule and comedy. This earlier devil was something of a trickster figure, a being against whom it was dangerous to pit one's wits but over whom it was possible to triumph with

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[84] Rosenthal (Gen. Ed.), *Records* 160

[85] Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons*

peasant cunning and magical know-how.[86] In the late middle ages, however, this figure began to give way to the more terrifying and sinister devil more familiar to us today. The modern devil was evil personified – a vastly powerful and infernally malicious being plotting the downfall of Christendom and the ruination of souls. One of the manifestations of this new demonism was a veritable epidemic of demonic obsessions and possessions that overran the early modern world.[87] A victim of obsession was plagued by devils who were invisible to everyone else, and who tormented him or her mercilessly, while possession involved the total invasion of one's body by demonic forces. Both phenomena were conceptually distinct from but frequently associated with witchcraft – indeed, as we noted above, the afflicted at Salem experienced both spectral visions and torments, and frequently displayed a loss of bodily control when confronted with the accused witches.

What to make of all this? Historians tend to associate the devil with the problem of evil – that is, there is a tendency to interpret fantasies about the Devil as an explanation for misfortune and moral failure that locates final responsibility outside the self.[88] In the context of English and American Puritanism, this view of the devil tends to put him into rivalry with the doctrine, favored by protestant theologians, that sin is

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[86] Curiously, the Devil has only comparatively recently come in for any very extensive amount of scholarly attention. However, see, for America, Godbeer, *The Devil's Dominion,* Weisman, *Witchcraft, magic, and religion*, Elizabeth Reis, *Damned women: sinners and witches in Puritan New England* (Ithaca, N.Y. : Cornell University Press, 1997,) W. Scott Poole, *Satan in America: the Devil we know* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009,) esp 3-32. For England, see Nathan Johnstone, *The devil and demonism in early modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.). Darren Oldridge, *The devil in early modern England* (Stroud: Sutton, 2000) and, more generally, Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Mephistopheles: the Devil in the modern world* (Ithaca : Cornell University Press, 1986), Robert Muchembled, *A history of the devil: from the middle ages to the present*, trans. Jean Birrell (Cambridge, UK: Blackwell, 2003.) and, the best of the whole lot by a long mile, Stuart Clark, *Thinking with demons: the idea of witchcraft in early modern Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997)

[87] On demonic possession, see Certeau, *The possession at Loudun, passim.* Martin*, Myths of Renaissance Individualism, 83-102.* On the contrast between the old devil and the new, see Oldridge, *The Devil in early modern England*, 16-39, Muchembled, *History of the Devil*, 9-27

[88] See especially Goodber, *Devil's Dominion*, 85-121. and Weisman, *Witchcraft, magic, and religion,* 23-74

the answer to the problem of evil. This view holds that God's plan for the world is wholly good and perfect, and that it is only through the sin of pride and turning away from God that people bring misfortune upon themselves and others. This view of evil essentially blames human beings for its existence and directs its adherents to look within themselves for the cause of evil. Belief in the devil as a real, concrete being, on the other hand, seems to suggest that evil is out there in the world, an actual force independent of people which threatens the moral order from without, rather than within.[89]

These two ways of imagining evil seem so clearly at odds that historians have tended to want to see them as competing and mutually incompatible accounts – one book even goes so far as to attribute the tendency to blame the devil to the laity, and the more demanding doctrine of sin to the more rigorously protestant ministry and their more zealous supporters.[90] But, quite apart from the fact that ministers and laity alike seem to have feared both sin and Satan, this dichotomy misses the way in which these two doctrines of evil meet in the figures of the witch, and the supernatural event of possession.[91] As is evident from the above-cited accounts of demonic temptation, becoming a witch was understood to involve both 'inner' and 'outer' evil – one had to encounter an external manifestation of evil in the form of the devil, but one also had to give in to his temptations, displaying thereby the inner tendency towards sin. That, after all, is one of the reasons the socially marginal and morally deviant made such plausible witches. They had everything to gain (or, what comes to the same, nothing to lose) by giving in to the devil, and moreover had a history of indulging in sinful behavior which the puritans understood as

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[89] Weisman, *Witchcraft, magic, and religion,* 23-74**,** Goodber, *Devil's Dominion*, 85-121**,** Oldridge, *The devil in early modern England,* 40-89 Johnstone**,** *The devil and demonism,* 1-141**.** On sin see Perry Miller, *The New England Mind*, 3-63.

[90] Weisman, *Witchcraft, magic, and religion,* 23-74

[91] For the tendency of both ministers and laity to hold both kinds of beliefs see Goodber, *Devil's Dominion*, 85-121, who none the less agrees with Weisman in seeing them as logically irreconcilable

a slippery slope which began with more 'innocent' sins but ended in total depravity and satanic viciousness.[92] But the point is they still had to give in; for all the potency of the devil as a figure of objective evil, he could force no-one to become a witch. That is why the judges insisted on hearing that the witch had signed the devil's book, for this contractual bond implied she had gone to him of her own free will – or, rather more precisely, that she had given in to her inner sinfulness.

We see the same dynamic at work in the dramatic courtroom scenes which did so much to fuel the panic at Salem. When the slightest move the witch made seemed magically to produce a grotesque imitation in the afflicted, when they were felled to the ground by the mere gaze of the witch, and when their bodies were pierced by pins that seemed to come from nowhere, something very much like demonic possession was being enacted. The similarity lay in the way these performances displayed the permeable, porous nature of the body, its vulnerability to penetration and dominion by external evil forces, here represented by the demonic witch.[93] Further, the goal of this bodily invasion was identical to the demonic temptation in the witch confessions; the point was to convert the afflicted to witchcraft, to force a spiritual surrender-cum-conversion to evil. This much the afflicted made clear when they testified that the witches came not only to torture but also to convert them to the devil's side: "pinching

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[92] Slippery slope arguments about sin are well exemplified in puritan execution sermons. On these, see Daniel A. Cohen, *Pillars of salt : the transformation of New England crime literature, 1674-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.) and Karen Halttunen, *Murder most foul: the killer and the American Gothic imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998) For some instances of the genre, see: Increase Mather, *The Wicked mans Portion. OR, A SERMON (Preached at the Lecture in Boston in New-England the 18th day of the 1 Moneth 1674, when two men were executed, who had murthered their Master.) Wherein is shewed That excess in wickedness doth bring untimely Death*. (Boston: John Foster, 1675), Joshua Moodey, *An Exhortation to a Condemned Malefactor* (Boston, 1685/6), Samuel Willard, *Impenitent SINNERS Warned of their MISERY And Summoned to Judgment*, (Boston, B. Green and J. Allen, 1698)

[93] For the concept of a porous self, I am indebted to Martin, *myths of renaissance individualism*, 1-20 and 103-122

and almost choaking me urging me to writ [sic] in hir [her] book."[94] Indeed, one of the girls, Mary Warren, was accused by the others of having caved in to this temptation and signed the covenant; a charge to which she herself would eventually confess to.[95]

In fact, this insistence on there being something porous, vulnerable and exposed about the personhood of those attacked by witchcraft pervades the testimony at Salem. The loss of actual bodily integrity is only the most visceral and obvious instance of what is in fact a far more wide-ranging assault on the moral integrity of the victim's personhood. I use the word moral here not in an ethical sense, but to encompass all those things which are seen by the person in question as being of supreme importance, those things which constitute a good, meaningful, thriving life.[96] For New England Puritans, the moral sphere most prominently included the matter of heavenly salvation, but also more everyday concerns such as the maintenance of bodily health, the meeting of material needs through the pursuit of a calling, the formation of stable and prospering family relationships, or the meeting of social expectations for someone of one's gender, occupation, age and station. I said earlier that the witch attacks symbols of fertility, but it would be strictly speaking more accurate (if more abstract) to say that she attacks the sources of moral value. That is, she assails all those things which Puritan New Englanders considered essential to their sense of living a good, morally adequate life. Excepting the case of direct bodily assault, the target of the witch is never the actual person or object to whom she does harm, but rather

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[94] Rosenthal (Gen. Ed.), *Records* 194-5

[95] Rosenthal (Gen. Ed.), *Records* 196, 201 and 224.

[96] I am indebted for this concept of moral importance chiefly to Arthur Kleinman, *What Really Matters*. However, for a similar elaboration of moral life that gives a phenomenological account of how the moral orients personhood and casts an eye over the intertwined histories of moral life and western ideas of personhood, see also Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: the making of the modern identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989,) 3-52

the person who is morally threatened by this sabotage. When a witch was accused of killing cows or making children sick, she was not imagined to be on some sort of bovine or infantine rampage, but was rather understood to be launching an indirect assault on the moral well-being of the person whose sense of living a good, adequate, worthwhile life is caught up in such things as cows (qua property) or children (qua family.) From this point of view, her eventual assault on the body is the penultimate stage of a moral siege whose object is what, for Puritans, would have been the source of superlative moral concern – the soul. The object, always, was not merely material or spiritual harm, but total moral destruction.

Another way to put this is to simply say that the witch is evil. For what we (and, conveniently, our early modern forbearers) actually mean by evil is often nothing more than that which is contrary or opposed to the good.[97] That is, evil doesn't describe a positive condition in its own right, but rather only an absence of or negation of good (as, for instance, we think of darkness as the absence of light.) The imputation of evil to demonic entities or one's neighbors thus largely consists of the feeling that they are bent on destroying the good. This explains why the fantasies of the witches' Sabbath are somewhat under-elaborated and consist largely of inversions and parodies of sacred rites which were understood to illustrate and promote the supreme spiritual values of Puritan society. It also helps us understand the tendency not to be too interested in what the witches were trying to achieve by going over to the devil, and perhaps also gives a clue about why the devil never seems to deliver on the promises with which he tempts. Evil is conceived too negatively and oppositionally for this to be a salient part of the fantasy; evil isn't imagined as a fully-fledged alternative moral order, but merely as opposition to the existing order.

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[97] On this way of thinking about evil in the early modern period, see especially Stuart Clark, *Thinking with Demons*

And this, of course, is why what witches get up to is of interest only in so far as it reflects their hostility to and wholesale rejection of their society's moral order.

This way of interpreting the presence of the devil in Salem draws our attention to both the gravity of the witches' crime, and, more importantly, the porous and fragile conception of social and personal moral integrity. Far from being a mere act of petty vengeance for some perceived slight, the violence of witchcraft represents a wholesale going over to evil. The presence of the devil turns witchcraft from a mere moral lapse into a wholesale moral repudiation. And this repudiation is all the more terrifying for coming from someone who was previously assumed to belong to the moral community. That is what I mean by the porousness of the community – a community that imagines itself besieged by witches is a community that is profoundly sensitive to cracks in the moral order, though which its members may be drawn into a condition of evil. In just the same way, an individual who fears attack by a witch imagines themselves as profoundly exposed, vulnerable at every moment to subversion and invasion from without. The witch is terrifying precisely because she plays on a strong sense of vulnerability and moral danger.

So far, so good – but we still haven't touched on the real question in all this: why were all these fantasies compelling to the seventeenth century New Englanders, and early modern people more generally? All I've really done so far is give an analytical description of witch fantasies, showing how their concrete content points to such issues as envy, social porousness and moral danger. Now I'd like to turn at last to the question of what these fantasies tell us about the lives of the people who brought them into being, how they relate to and illuminate the social and psychological experience of life in early America, and what they ultimately tell us about the experience of modernity.

V. Envy, Evil and Individualization

In the beginning there was a misfortune; a pig dies, a child falls ill, a tool breaks. Sometimes, perhaps even most times, those affected by the misfortune attribute it to natural causes, and sometimes, no doubt, they simply don't dwell on it. But occasionally, if the sickness takes an odd turn or persists too long, if the pig is the fifth one this year, the victim is seized by anxiety. At first, this anxiety is wordless, but eventually it takes the form of a question: is someone trying to do me harm? And soon an answer suggests itself – yes, someone envious, someone evil, someone who wants me to fail. The misfortune itself need not concern us here; shit happens, and that's that. But the three things that follow from the misfortune do not follow self-evidently or naturally from it, and so we are obliged to ask: why the anxiety, why that particular question, why that particular answer? And why this intense passion, this passion which makes me point the finger and say, yes, her, she must die. Misfortunes, anxiety, envy, evil; none of this is anything new under the sun. But in the historical juncture represented by the Witch Craze, these concerns are evidently experienced very vividly and acted on with unprecedented violence? Why? And why just then?

The anthropologist Michael Taussig once famously suggested that the South American workers amongst whom he lived and worked used stories about the devil to explain and describe their encounter with western modernity, which came to them in the shape of an exploitative, alienating regime of proletarian labor. He proposed that what they were doing was adapting cultural forms drawn from an old way of life

to describe, and denounce, the new form of social organization into which they were being drawn.[98] This seems to me a promising place to start my own discussion, for I too find myself dealing with a set of comparatively ancient cultural tropes (the envious neighbor, the malevolent magic-user, the devil) which are being used and combined in strikingly new ways.

Taussig's argument about the demonic experience of capitalism doesn't entirely translate, however, to either late seventeenth century Salem or the early modern Witch Craze in general. The inhabitants of Salem Village engaged in a form of economic life that one historian has dubbed 'composite farming' – composite in the sense of involving production of goods for local subsistence and for sale in the market.[99] Owing in part to their proximity to the bustling port and mercantile centre of Salem Town, the villagers were connected to a surprisingly complex transatlantic trade network. The main way Salem Village participated in this trade network was by feeding Salem Town's urban residents, but some of their produce might have made its way as far down as the slave plantations of the Caribbean Islands. In any case, villagers would have had access to rum brewed in the sugar islands, tobacco grown in Virginia and manufactured goods (especially clothes and complex iron goods like firearms) from Britain.[100] In the eighteenth century, this transnational trade would grow exponentially, flooding the colonial market with commodities of all kinds, but in the late seventeenth century the inhabitants still relied heavily on the

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[98] Michael T. Taussig, *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America* (Chapel Hill : University of North Carolina Press, 1980)

[99] In traditional Marxist economic analysis, the tendency is to see economies as being either use-oriented or exchange-oriented, hence composite in the sense of being a composite of production for use and exchange. Marx, *Capital,* Vol. 1

[100] On composite farming, see Richard Lyman Bushman, 'Markets and Composite Farms in Early America,' *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 55, No. 3 (Jul., 1998), 351-374. On New England's participation in the transatlantic economy, see Bernard Bailyn, *The New England merchants in the seventeenth century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979.)

products of their own labor.[101] Like most people in colonial Massachusetts, they for the most part ate local foodstuffs, drank home-brewed beer and cider, and wore homespun clothing, all prominent products of female labor.[102]

There are tantalizing hints scattered throughout the Salem trial transcripts that seventeenth century New Englanders associated these new commodities and the means of obtaining them with the devil. Confessing witches sometimes described how Satan had tempted them with "fine cloths," "a shilling in money," or, in the tragic case of a boy who sold his soul for a pair of new soles, "a pair of French fall Shouses [shoes]."[103] Much could also be made of the fact that the weapons used by witches to assail the bodies of the afflicted are frequently the very pins, knitting needles and spindles associated with the homespun manufactures these commodities were slowly displacing.[104] Indeed, one influential study of the Salem episode tries to make a case for seeing the most active witch-hunters as downwardly mobile victims of the incursion of capitalism and tries to interpret the accusations as an expression of economic grievances, indirectly aimed at the capitalist Salem Town and those villagers who were seen as aligning themselves with modernizing forces.[105] This interpretation, however, is far from satisfying, whether in reference to Salem or witchcraft more generally. The main trouble it runs into is that it can't adequately account for the problem that the witches themselves were by and large drawn from amongst the poor

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[101] On the eighteenth century transformation, and for comparisons with what went before, see Richard L. Bushman, The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities (New York: Knopf, 1992) andT. H. Breen, The Marketplace of Revolution (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

[102] Ulrich, *Good wives*, pt. 1

[103] Rosenthal (Gen. Ed.), *Records*, 191 (clothes), 543 (shilling), 574 (shoes)

[104] Rosenthal (Gen. Ed.), *Records*, 149, 268, 335, 339**,** 514 (pins), 479 (needles), 480 (spindles)

[105] Boyer & Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed,* passim.

and economically marginal – impoverished older women, who made up the bulk of the accused even at

Salem, do not make for particularly compelling capitalists.[106] More importantly, tales about the devil's

shoes and about the tools of semi-obsolete forms of production being turned into weapons of violence

do not loom large in the testimony. They read, in fact, more as casual asides and inconsequential details

than as central features of the witch fantasy.[107] It is mighty hard to see how all of this adds up to

anything like a straightforward critique of capitalism.

Which is not to say that we can't draw a more subtle and satisfying connection between the social

transformations wrought by the spread of production for a market and the proliferation of witchcraft

fantasies. But to do so we need a different model of what the shift from a more subsistence-oriented

economy to composite farming entailed, what psychological and social consequences it had for those

who underwent it. One obvious consequence of this kind of economy, in Salem at least, was that some

families and individuals prospered while others did not.[108] Because our own society works like this, we

might be inclined to take this for granted, but let us remember that in more isolated and self-contained

agricultural economies, the possibilities for individualized success or failure of this kind (whether for

families or persons) are relatively limited. One family might do better than another over any given

period of time, but unless there is a lively market for produce or land, opportunities for either vast

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[106] For the demographics of witch accusations, see Demos, *Entertaining Satan*, 57-96.

[107] Sometimes the devil tempted with power, or did not make any offers at all; he even told one young girl he'd give her a puppy. Likewise, the weapons of the witch could be any odd sharp thing that came to hand, and could also be omitted. And in any case no-one ever dwelled on this; one gets the impression the judges weren't especially interested in these details.

[108] The family being in many respects the basic economic and social unit in this agricultural society, it ought not to surprise us that both witch affliction and witch accusations tended to run in the family. Whole families came under attack together, and the immediate family of a witch were often accused of witchcraft as well. Obviously, however, both witches and afflicted were seen as individuals as well. This blurring is a necessary consequence of a society in which people labour in family groups (agriculture isn't really viable as an individual endeavour) while they participate in market transactions as individuals.

accumulation of personal wealth or catastrophic individual failure are likely to be rare.[109] Catastrophes (such as extreme weather, crop failures and epidemic disease) tend to be of a social nature and are suffered by the community as a whole – he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.

The market, however, obeys a different, more individuated and discriminatory logic. All else being equal, some people prosper, while others do not. And the rise and fall of a family can be a precipitous affair, taking place over a few short decades. The Putnams of Salem Village are a case in point. They had been one of the leading families in the village around mid-century, but by 1692 their fortunes were self-evidently on the decline, as the growth of the clan did not meet with a commensurate increase in its resources. On the contrary, unsound business decisions had squandered precious material resources and the family confronted an uncertain future while others around them prospered. The other note-worthy thing about the Putnams is that many of the chief instigators of the Salem Witch Trials were drawn from their ranks – the Putnam women were prominent amongst those afflicted by witches, and Putnam men were highly active in issuing the formal complains which led to the issuing of warrants and interrogation of suspects. The Witch craze can't be put down entirely to the work of the Putnams, of course, but they were certainly amongst those to whom the figure of the witch was especially compelling.[110]

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[109] Which is not to say that such a society is necessarily egalitarian, but simply to say that whatever social system characterizes it is relatively unlikely to subject persons to individualized dangers of economic ruin or offer chances for individual accumulation. Feudal Europe was hardly egalitarian, but those who worked the land did not have much reason to suppose they would do much worse or better than their neighbors.

[110] Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*, 110-178

We find the same dynamic of uncertain prospects at work amongst the other major group responsible for egging on the hysteria at Salem – the afflicted girls who were attacked by witches in court, and who had frequently produced the names of those who were summoned to confront them there. We can divide the ones who most commonly appear in the records into two camps. Two of the girls Ann Putnam and Mary Wallcot, 12 and 18 years old respectively, belonged to the Putnam family. Most of the others (17 year-old Elizabeth Hubbard, 16 year-old Mercy Lewis and 20 year-old Mary Warren) were orphans and servants in households to which they had at best tenuous family connections. They were without husbands and, owing to their economically marginal position, also without any immediate prospect of marriage. They must therefore have encountered their womanhood and social existence as tenuous realities – more as a haunting lack than as an established fact. Carol Karlsen, the historian who first noted this fact, went on to speculate that their accusations were fuelled by the anxiety and want of attention arising from their marginal position in society.[111]

At this point, let us recall that witches were thought to be envious, and that envy consists chiefly in malice that arises from an identification with someone who enjoys advantages you desire for yourself. Clearly, it is not too much of a leap to suggest that the Putnams and the young afflicted women had good reason to feel envious. And let us remember also that witches were primarily viewed as sources of moral danger, whereas the Putnams and the servant girls would have had an acute sense of their own rather tenuous grip on the good life as Puritan New England defined it. My point is not that the most active witch hunters projected their envious feelings and social anxieties onto a motley crew of deviants on the margins of society, though this may indeed well have been the case. I am for the time being more interested in establishing the correlation than any definite causation between these various facts. I want

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[111] Karlsen, *Devil in the Shape of a Woman*, 226-30.

merely to suggest, by way of bringing together everything I've discussed so far, that envy and the fear of evil forces were closely bound up with one another, and with the possibility of individual failure in a composite farming economy.

I set out in this section to explain why misfortunes provoked anxiety in Salem, and why this anxiety was turned on the deviant and marginal members of the community. Obviously, the economically-rooted precariousness of the afflicted helps to account for the anxiety – in their particular social situation, there was a real danger that any significant misfortune (future or present) could result in irreparable damage to their most cherished hopes. But if such an economic interpretation of affliction helps us flesh out the sources of anxiety, it doesn't really account for the expressions this anxiety took. There is still a yawning gulf between the mere fact of anxiety and insecurity, and the conviction that witches must be afoot. These fantasies only come into their own when we begin to see them as an expression of and an attempt to undo the changes wrought in social relations by participation in the market.

Both envy and the sense of social porousness associated with the devil's incursions describe a world in which social relations have become somewhat ambivalent and the ties that bind a community into a moral unit have become loosened. We can with some justification see this as an attempt to describe, with language drawn from an earlier era, an important consequence of increasing market participation: the growing individualization of moral success and failure, and the consequent ambiguity introduced into social relations. I do badly, some of my neighbors do better, and some others do even worse. But since we more or less share the same criteria for success, since we have more or less the same outlook on what matters in life, I envy those who do better and mistrust those who do worse, feeling they must envy me also. None of these people are directly competing with or exploiting one another, so this is not

yet a Hobbesian war of all against all. But neither are they in as close a form of cooperation as when they depended on one another more or less exclusively for all the material support and moral goods they might hope to attain in this life. And so a certain ambiguity and ambivalence has been introduced in to the relationships between neighbors, a mysterious force, manifestly immaterial and alien to the natural order as the Puritans understood it, seemed to breed resentment and discord amongst them. Whether we want to call this force Satan or the market seems to me largely an aesthetic consideration. And, in any case, the inhabitants of Salem didn't have to chose; the Devil, they knew, did a brisk business in French fall shoes.

I don't wish to be misunderstood to be saying that concern about witches was 'really' a concern about economic changes. Rather, what I am trying to argue is that material prosperity was (and is) a vital component of moral prosperity, which seems to me the more fundamental category of analysis. We human beings don't inherently and inevitably care about material prosperity, as though we were all born into the world clutching a well-thumbed copy of The Wealth of Nations before our bawling eyes. We do, however, inherently and inevitably care about the sorts of things they consider vital to a meaningful, thriving and fulfilling existence – and, all else being equal, some basic level of material prosperity will probably be one of those things. And so the precise social structures by which one seeks and secures material prosperity will have a dramatic impact on the moral concerns of any given group of people.[112] We might therefore well expect major transformations in economic life to register as a moral problem and even as a source of moral danger.

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[112] This surely is what gives Marxist historical materialism its impressive explanatory power, in spite of its often crude models of human culture and psychology. The key point is not to see economic circumstances as over-determining a 'superstructure' but rather to see economic concerns as inextricably bound up with moral concerns, and therefore experienced through the prism of the moral.

This seems to me a powerful way of thinking about not just the witch fantasies but also early modern cultural innovation more generally. Indeed, it helps us see the way Protestant religious thought and witchcraft fantasies struggle with a similar dilemma. Namely, both Protestant religion and the witch fantasy take as their starting point the individual person for whom moral success and failure are real possibilities, and urgent dangers. The witch attacks the individual person or family who is, to begin with at least, every bit as alone with this threat as the Protestant is alone before God. This new focus on the individual person owes a lot, no doubt, to the individualization of economic destiny in the marketplace, and to the fact that moral destiny is inextricably caught up with economic destiny in both Protestant theology and witch fantasy. The entanglement of moral with and material concerns is made explicit in Protestant theology, especially through the belief the state of one's spiritual condition was reflected in one's social and material condition. The Christian whose salvation was assured might see signs of this divine favor in the prosperity which God bestowed, while misfortune was often interpreted as a sign that God was wroth. This prosperity wasn't just material abundance, of course; it included the whole range of concerns I've described as moral – harmonious relations, physical wellbeing, social recognition, inner assuredness of salvation, and so on. Early Protestant Christianity derived much of its appeal, I suspect, from this ability to yoke together the moral and material dimensions of life, to meet the morally insecure individual in his or her moment of lonely crisis, and to offer a way of understanding, mitigating and transcending that moral uncertainty.[113]

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[113] I am far from the first to suggest something along these lines, of course, though religious historians who've touched on this have tended to interpret the assurances of religion in rather exclusively spiritual terms, without due consideration for how the spiritual was infused with the everyday. This segregation of the spiritual and the mundane (the meeting house and the horse shed, if you will) seems to me a grave error. See Cohen, *God's Caress*, 25-134, David Hall, *Worlds of Wonder*,117-212.

Witch fantasies do something quite similar, in so far as they assert a relationship between economic and moral crisis, and simultaneously offer a way to transcend this dynamic. For one of the key premises of the witch fantasy is that envy *turns into* evil – that social insecurity and failure breeds a form of resentment that makes one vulnerable to the Devil's temptations. The sense of social porousness, of the ambivalent relationship between individuals, culminates in the figure of the witch, whose lack of moral achievement is so extreme (think of the post-menopausal woman, who lacks all the moral qualities of womanhood) that her envy turns into hatred. The social bonds which envy has loosened for those who were most eager to cast themselves as victims of witchcraft, such as the Putnams and the afflicted women, have been altogether severed by the more extreme envy of the witch. The witch has fallen through the cracks opened in the social order by individualization, you might say, and right into the arms of Satan. Having no commitment left to the moral order, she is now conceived as being directly threatening to it, dedicated to its downfall. In effect, social decline, envy and witchcraft form a vicious cycle in the witchcraft fantasy. The evil witch attacks a person's economic and moral domain (their children, livestock, crops, tools, body, and so on) which compromises their ability to participate in the composite farming economy and threatens them with a gradual decline that is perceived as both material and moral. This decline, in turn, makes them envious of their neighbors and weakens their ties to the moral community, in whose values they see reflected their own failure. Finally, this makes them susceptible to the temptations of the devil, who convinces them to sign his covenant and become witches. At this point, their envy turns into outright evil and they begin to attack others in their turn. The line between witch and witch-hunter is mighty thin; we may recall at this point that one of the young women who started out as an accuser ended up as one of the accused.

This finally helps us to understand why those whose attachment to the social order is perceived as most tenuous (whether because of their poverty, gender, failure to live up to moral norms, or just plain wrongheadedness) who make the most 'likely' witches. And it also helps us understand why it is those in an indeterminate or ambiguous situation who are most susceptible to witchcraft affliction. Indeed, we can now see why it is not quite right to describe the imputation of envy to the witch as a mere case of psychological projection. We might more aptly describe the feelings attributed to the witch as an exaggeration or amplification of the feelings experienced by the afflicted victim. The witch holds a mirror up to afflicted Puritans, in which they see their own envy reflected as in a funhouse mirror. For this is not a mirror in which they see themselves as they are, but rather one in which they glimpse darkly what they might become. The witch brings them not only misfortunes, but also comes bearing a grim prophecy.

Here, finally, is where the structure of the Puritan imagination becomes relevant to understanding the fantasy of witchcraft. Recall that I earlier defined the imagined as that which is set apart, that which encompasses the everyday reality and by juxtaposition transforms it, just as the village street takes on a new meaning in the shadow of the cathedral. In an analogous way, the appearance of the witch reframes and transforms everyday social reality. When the witch appears on the scene, the ambivalent and ambiguous experience of social relations is displaced by one in which good is pitted against evil. The sources of ambivalence (envy, resentment, social failure) are suddenly concentrated in the figure of the witch, who simultaneously embodies the evil consequences of enviousness, and shows how far they may go if not checked in their course.

And putting an end to the vicious cycle of witchcraft is, of course, the entire purpose of the witch trial. Tellingly, in the course of a successful witch hunt, previously private and individualized misfortunes are turned into a source of communal concern. Neighbors gather to share stories of misfortune and identify a responsible party acceptable to all the wronged parties.[114] Now the witch is brought to trial, and not just for the specific misfortunes she has caused, but for turning against the whole moral community by making covenant with the devil, an act so shocking that the community stands as one in repudiating it. The magistrate, acting on behalf of this freshly unified community, pronounces the death sentence by which the community symbolically rejects the unsettling consequences of individualization and moral failure, and cleanses itself from the taint of enviousness and evil. It takes a village, you might say, to kill a witch.

The climactic moment of a witch hunt was not, however, as you might at first assume, the execution of the witch – the erotic fixation on the moment when the offensive object is destroyed is a barbarism more characteristic of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries then the seventeenth.[115] The hangings were, by all accounts, somber and dramatic undertakings, but there is about them the feeling of denouement, of necessary consequences running their course. No, the moment towards which a witch trial insistently and seemingly inexorably surged, its *raison d'etre* as a cultural form, was not the execution of the witch, but rather her confession.

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[114] This process is described with a particularly keen eye in Weisman, *Witchcraft, magic and religion*, 75-95

[115] Compare, for instance, the ritual lynching in the postbellum South, or fetishised executions such as that of Ruth Snyder in the final chapter of this dissertation.

The very moment the witch came into their presence in court, as we saw in the case of Bridget Bishop, the afflicted began to scream and convulse, as though her very presence was unbearable to them. The magistrates turned on the unfortunate woman, assailing her with questions that aggressively assumed her guilt. Confess, said the convulsing bodies of the afflicted; confess, demanded the hostile judges. Even their own family members often turned on the witches, pressuring them to confess.[116] If all this proved unavailing, the magistrates at Salem were not above trying to extract a confession by torture, though we have no way of knowing how frequently they resorted to such methods.[117] And if the witch did break down and confess, as increasing numbers understandably did under such intense pressure, an extraordinary thing happened: 'After this confession Mary Warren [one of the afflicted] Came and took her by the hand & was No way hurt & She [the witch] did Earnestly ask Mary Warren forgiuenese [forgiveness] for afflicting of her and both fell to weeping Together.'[118] Again and again, confession brought an immediate halt to the suffering of the afflicted and seemed in a moment to erase all resentment on part of both witch and victim, and scenes of forgiveness and pity for the confessing witch were not uncommon.[119] Confession restored things to their proper order and immediately extinguished all that was disturbing about the witch, robbing her of both menace and her magical power over the bodies of the afflicted. The confessing witch would still have to hang for her apostasy, of course, and in her more immediate future she faced further interrogations aimed at extracting the names of their co-conspirators. But all this was a much more matter-of-fact process; the danger had passed, the terror was over ... for the time being.

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[116] On the pressure to confess from various directions, see Rosenthal (Gen. Ed.), *Records* 438, 693-4, 738, 739, 743

[117] Rosenthal (Gen. Ed.), *Records*, 486

[118] Rosenthal (Gen. Ed.), *Records*, 476

[119] Rosenthal (Gen. Ed.), *Records,* 137, 192, 197, 213, 476

Though somewhat strange to modern eyes, it is not in fact terribly surprising to find an act of confession at the cathartic climax of a witch trial, for confession occupied a crucial place in the religious and cultural life of Puritan New England. Confession and repentance were how Puritans sought to repair breaches of their sacred Covenant with each other and with God. Sin was, in their view, so deeply entrenched in the human soul, and humanity's stubborn failure to live in accordance with God's wishes so inevitable, that the Puritans had little hope of remaining unblemished. Their great spiritual and moral challenge was not to remain virtuous, but rather to make recompense for their inevitable shortcomings. Confession and repentance were the answer to the problems posed by this demanding spiritual vision. When you inevitably broke the covenant by succumbing to sin and so brought the wrath of God upon yourself and your community, confessing to your sins and sincerely demonstrating repentance would restore the covenant. Confession and repentance were accordingly urged not only on witches and all manner of other criminals and sinners, but indeed also on the community at large. It was not for nothing that one of the great cultural innovations of late seventeenth century New England was the Jeremiad – a genre of sermon which enumerated and condemned of the collective sins of the Puritan community, blamed the misfortunes suffered by the community on said afflictions and always ended with a call for confession, repentance and reform. Only confession could restore prosperity; only repentance could heal what was broken. [120]

Confession, then, was understood as a rite of purification – a washing away of sins and a restoration of the social order. And so, as a matter of fact, was execution, which is why the perpetrators of particularly grave crimes (such as witchcraft, murder and, interestingly, bestiality) were executed whether or not they confessed. As one Puritan minister was to put it in justifying the murder or a young man convicted

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[120] On the meanings of confession in seventeenth century New England, see Perry Miller**,** *New England Mind: From Colony to Province*, 19-52 and David Hall, *Worlds of Wonder*, 172-86 and 192-6

of bestiality: "The Land cannot be cleansed, until it hath spued out this Unclean Beast."[121] This is also why execution was, in one sense, inter-changeable with confession at Salem, where it was by and large those who refused to confess that went to the gallows.[122] Both confession and execution solved the problem of the witch, of course, but they were not quite interchangeable, for confession brought the confessor back into the moral community and thus signified a total triumph over the divisive forces of enviousness and Satan, whereas execution only made the problems represented by witch disappear by destroying her physical form. Evil was mastered in any case, but confession entailed a more complete mastery – and confession followed by execution a more complete mastery still, which is presumably precisely why the Puritans tried to employ the double-whammy in extreme cases that represented particularly disturbing departures from communal norms. Great moral stains required twice the regular amount of moral detergent.

We have no way of really knowing how well the fantasy of witch affliction 'worked.' As Michel de Certeau cunningly pointed out about a similar episode in France, it undeniably worked marvelously in the short term – from the moment accusations began to circulate to the day the supposed witch died for their sins, the presence of a witch among them brought her victims together in a community of fear.[123] And perhaps the murder of the witch was a sort of early modern community-building exercise with long-term benefits. Perhaps people were more neighborly in the wake of a witch trial, either because they shared in a post-homicidal afterglow or just through fear of being the next to be singled

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[121] Cited in Hall, *Worlds of Wonder*, 178.

[122] As pointed out and extensively analysed in Rosenthal, *Salem Story*

[123] Michel de Certeau, *The Possession at Loudun*

out. We should in any case not lightly dismiss the efficacy of scapegoating. It has surely not been practiced for thousands of years for nothing; there must be something in it.[124]

But what witch-hunting couldn't do, any more than the jeremiads that thundered from Puritan pulpits, was reverse the economic transformations which relentlessly continued to subject people to the individualized threat of failure and decline, which in turn bred anxiety, envy and, eventually, more witches. For that's the trouble with witches really – you always seem to need just one more. And so, one thing leads to another, and another, and another, and suddenly things are getting out of hand. Some brave souls begin to voice objections that too many people are being arrested and killed, some suspects are broken out of prison and spirited away by sympathizers, the rule of law is being undermined, and a fantasy intended to heal social disharmony and forestall moral danger threatens instead to plunge society into utter chaos. That, in a few sentences, is the trajectory of the Salem panic, as a direct result of which shaken social elites withdrew their support for witch-hunting, and legal authorities soon refuse to persecute any more cases.

And, as it turned out, Salem was one of the last major witch outbreaks in the Western world, for the curtain had finally begun to close on the bloody spectacle of the Witch Craze. Witchcraft beliefs persisted, of course, but the specific social and cultural circumstances which had made the witch an irresistibly compelling figure of fantasy were done away with by the tremendous social transformations of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. But if the witch herself is today largely forgotten, or

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[124] Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration through violence; the mythology of the American frontier, 1600-1860*. (Middletown, Conn., Wesleyan University Press, 1973), Rene Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore : Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977)

remembered only as a tacky Halloween figure, the connections forged during the Witch Craze between

deviance, individualized precariousness and moral danger linger on into our own day. In spirit, at least,

we will continue to meet the witch again and again. As befits her Satanic nature, we shall encounter her

in an array of various shapes as we retrace her path through history, but each time we shall be able to

look in her eyes and say with a shudder – *c'est moi, c'est moi!*

Chapter 2

1788: The Libertine

I.   **The Period**

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the spring of individual liberty, it was the winter of self-regulation, it was an epoch of restrained civility, it was an epoch of turbulent sensibility, it was an age that made the individual subject the measure of all things, it was an age haunted by the delusions and decay to which subjectivity was heir, a season of hope and optimism, a season of failure and despair. It was, in short, the age of Reason – but also, the age of Seduction.

It was the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and eighty-eight, and a woman was being seduced. Her name was Frances Apthrop and she was being seduced and driven to suicide in Boston by her brother-in-law, Revolutionary patriot and Massachusetts political figure Perez Morton.[1] Or, if you prefer, her name was Elizabeth Whitman and she was dying in a tavern in Salem, where she had fled from her native Connecticut to give birth to an illegitimate child whose father was unknown.[2] Or her name was Elvira and she was being seduced in the pages of the second issue of the newly-launched *American Magazine* by the perfidious Lothario.[3] Or her name was Maria and her seduction was a pivotal

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[1] The story broke after Apthrop committed suicide and letters attesting to the seduction as her motive appeared in *The Herald of Freedom*, which commenced a fierce debate (carried on in the pages of the Herald and the rival Centinel) about what had happened, whose fault it was. See *Herald of Freedom*, September 15, 1788, September 18, 1788, October 13, 1788, October 16, 1788 *Massachusetts Centinel* September 27, 1788, October 4, 1788, October 11, 1788. This incident would be dramatized as a minor episode in William Brown's *The Power of Sympathy*, which appeared a few months later. Brown was a neighbor and acquaintance of the Apthrop/Morton household.

[2] See *Salem Mercury*, July 29, 1788 (and widely reprinted elsewhere); *Massachusetts Centinel*, September 20, 1788; *Boston Independent Chronicle* September 11, 1788. Whitman's story served as the basis of Hannah Foster's popular sentimental novel *The Coquette*.

[3] 'Elvira: An instructive History' *American Magazine*, Jan 1788; Vol. 1, No. 2; p. 93-8

episode of the first American novel: 'The Power of Sympathy.'[4] Or she was one of the nameless victims

of equally nameless libertines who appeared in countless didactic essays in newspapers and magazines

that year cautioning against seduction and dissipation.[5] In short, wherever one looked in 1788, a woman

was being seduced.

This is how it happened, most of the time.[6] The victim of seduction was young and inexperienced; she

was often a woman of exceptional virtue but often somewhat naïve and, above all, awash in sensibility.

This last term had a weight and importance in the eighteenth century it has today largely lost; it

suggested at once an openness and sensitivity to sensual and emotional experience, and an ability to

respond to such experiences with strong and unaffected feeling. Sentiment was thus both 'delicate' and

'generous' – both a matter of being receptive and giving freely. It was a quality much prized in the

second half of the eighteenth century but also one that, as we shall see, came with considerable risks.

Though it had by the 1790s begun its slow diffusion into the middling ranks of society, sensibility was in

the eighteenth century a virtue primarily associated with the gentry – the elite families who dominated

colonial society and politics. This social class had over the course of the eighteenth century embraced a

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[4] William Hill Brown, *The Power of Sympathy or The Triumph of Nature, Founded in Truth* (Ohio State University Press, 1969)

[5] For instance, see 'For the Independent Chronicle' *Independent Chronicle*, September 25, 1788 and 'On Prostitution,' *Massachusetts Gazette*, June 13, 1788

[6] What follows is a composite portrait, put together after reading several hundred seduction narratives, newspaper reports and moralistic essays on seduction running roughly from 1788 (when they first start to appear in significant numbers) into the late 1790s. These narratives all bear a quite strong 'family' resemblance to one another and it has seemed to me more fruitful to give the reader some sense of the genre as a whole before getting in to variants on the theme or complexities within the texts. I've drawn my examples chiefly from the Massachusetts press, but the literary culture I am presenting was basically identical in Philadelphia and New York, and the MA press frequently reprinted material from these sources, as well as from British material, so I've not hesitated to dip into some of this other material. Indeed, my sense of the basically transatlantic nature of this material has made me skeptical of claims that these sources had anything very much to do specifically with the American situation in the 1790s but for more on this see below, note 20.

culture of refinement originating in the court culture of Europe, which saw them building finer, more

complex houses, and spending a great deal of money on elaborate furnishings, culinary wares, items of

clothing and the many other consumer goods that poured into the colonies over the course of the

eighteenth century. Their participation in this new consumer culture increased their material and

cultural distance from their social inferiors, but it also suggested and demanded a kind of inner

cultivation. A refined person not only had the right sort of chairs and clothes, but also the right sort of

comportment, manners and education. And, perhaps most importantly, the refined man or woman had

the right sort of sensibility; a sensibility attuned to the subtle graces which distinguished gentlemen

from mere men, and Windsor chairs from mere chairs.[7]

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[7] A Windsor chair being an example of the sort of more elaborate furniture that made its way to America via Britain in the 18th Century. I trust I don't have to define what a gentleman is. The classic text on the culture of refinement in the American colonies and republic is Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York: Knopf, 1992) but see also Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), David S. Shields, Civil tongues *& polite letters in British America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997) and T. H. Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004). Breen argues that the culture of consumption was far more widely-diffused than the other authors allow but in order to do so he has to make the questionable assumption that consuming cheap tea from a modest tea-pot is analogous to sipping fine Ceylon from your Wedgewood china as you survey your lordly estate. For the culture of sensibility itself, the best books are those dealing with Britain which is, after all, where this culture is first elaborated. See G.J. Barker-Benfield, *The culture of sensibility : sex and society in eighteenth-century* Britain (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1992), John Brewer, *The pleasures of the imagination: English culture in the eighteenth century* (New York : Farrar Straus Giroux, 1997), Markman Ellis, *The Politics of Sensibility: Race, gender and commerce in the sentimental novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), esp 5-48. For treatments of the literary expressions of the culture sensibility (which are generally seen as widely influential on the culture as a whole) see especially R. F. Brissenden, *Virtue in Distress: Studies in the Novel of Sentiment from Richardson to Sade* (London: Macmillan, 1974) and Todd Janet *Sensibility: an introduction* (London: Methuen, 1986). Also salient here is Norbert Elias's discussion of civility as an important precursor to the culture of refinement, though I should note that the culture of self-control outlined by Elias is at least somewhat in tension with the culture of self-expression in ways that haven't been adequately dealt with by historians. Norbert Elias, *The civilizing process*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1994)

As might be expected, our young woman of sensibility usually belonged to this elevated social class.[8] She was rarely depicted as engaged in productive labor and, in fact, often participated in the new culture of leisure comprised by such activities as parlor sociability, musical performance, reading and aimless strolling, through which the gainfully unemployed contrived to fill their time and assert their refinement. Our heroine was often well educated at a time when female education was only just in the process of becoming a fashionable and even necessary activity within the refined and patriotic family.[9] Though they had taken pains to provide her with an education, the parents of the seduced woman were almost always either absent, dead or curiously impotent to intervene in her situation, leaving the young woman more or less to her own devices.[10]

It was in this state of exposed vulnerability that she encountered the libertine. Like his victim, the libertine was young, a participant in the culture of refinement and conveniently unencumbered by parental supervision. Unlike his victim, the libertine was a self-conscious and quite unrepentant deviant from conventional moral norms – he indulged freely in a range of vices such as excessive drinking, gambling and extra-marital sexual escapades.[11] The libertine's sole aim was the gratification of his wild

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[8] And when she did not, or when her status was ambiguous, the author took pains to assure the reader that she had somehow or other acquired 'something of the genteel' and that she was not 'destitute of accomplishments' or 'a degree of good breeding and refinement.' All these quotes describe the heroine of 'Elvira: An instructive History' *American Magazine*, Jan 1788; Vol. 1, No. 2; p. 93-8. One might also think of Charlotte Temple in the novel of the same name, who occupies a somewhat indeterminate class position but is clearly refined in the above sense.

[9] Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: intellect and ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill :University of North Carolina Press, 1980)

[10] A feature of the narratives which has generally been held to reflect a shift in family relations over the course of the eighteenth century that lead to the shift from a preemptory and patriarchal approach to parenting to a more nurturing and pedagogical vision of the child-parent relation, which ceded a considerable degree of freedom and independence to children. On this change and its wider repercussions see, Jay Fliegelman**,** *Prodigals and pilgrims : the American revolution against patriarchal authority, 1750-1800* (New York : Cambridge University Press, 1982).

[11] The origins of the libertine as a cultural type are found in the male aristocratic culture of Restoration England, where he initially evokes a reassertion of the aristocratic claim to be above the law. This early British libertine

passions, which were restrained neither by reflection on the likely outcome of his actions nor sympathy for his victim. To accomplish his designs, he typically resorted to guile and deception, professing his undying devotion to his victim and, often, an intent to marry her. Deceived by these protestations, the young woman was seduced into elopement or sex, at which point things almost invariably took a tragic turn for the worse. Pregnancy often resulted, exposing both the woman's fall from virtue to all and sundry, and also the seducer's deception to his unhappy victim. Grief and shame drove her first to exile from her family, then to either madness, suicide or a fatal illness. Her death was the climactic moment of this sad narrative, one which sometimes drove her seducer to remorse but one which as often saw him simply evade responsibility and culpability. In either case, the curtain fell on a scene of death and tragedy; the seduction tale did not make for happy reading.

Such were the bare bones of the narrative form invented and popularized by the English novelist Samuel Richardson with the publication of his enormously popular *Pamela* in 1740, a much-imitated and obsessively recapitulated text in both Europe and America well into the early nineteenth century. The sentimental seduction tale came in many guises and variations, ranging from the psychologically complex and verbosely corpulent masterpieces of Richardson and Rousseau to the brief, relatively one-dimensional and bluntly didactic stories that filled the pages of American magazines in the late 1780s and 1790s. What all these literary productions had in common with each other, besides the basic seduction narrative and their popularity, was their appeal to the reader's sensibility. That is, readers

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always retains something of his aristocratic roots and his status as an alternative to the bourgeois gentleman. This is much less true in the American context, in which the class which embraces gentility also flirts with libertinage. For the British precedent see Mackie, *Rakes, highwaymen, and pirates: the making of the modern gentleman in the eighteenth century* (Baltimore : Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009) 35-70 and Terry Eagleton, *The rape of Clarissa : writing, sexuality and class struggle in Samuel Richardson* (Oxford : Basil Blackwell, 1982).

were asked to sympathize with the victims of seduction and sometimes even its perpetrators, to identify with them and to feel sorry for their unfortunate fate.

Clearly, these narratives reflect a very different attitude to deviance to that found at the Salem witch trial a century earlier. At first glance, comparing witches and libertines might seem to be comparing apples and oranges. The pre-marital sexual escapades of refined youth in the eighteenth century seem a world away from the satanic malice of impoverished post-menopausal women in the seventeenth. But there are nevertheless many striking similarities between these two sets of figures. Most obviously, they are both species of the 'familiar' stranger – figures that emerge from within society itself, but act in ways contrary and hostile to the society's values. Just as the witch parodies fertility and threatens the survival of the Christian community, the libertine and his willing victim act out an inversion by which the generative sexual act gives birth only to death. As in the case of the witch, this destructive inversion frequently has a social dimension – the sexual union brings about not the formation of a new family, but rather the disintegration of an existing one, as the daughter's fall not infrequently leads to the death or despair of her parents.

This assault on the family takes on a deeper significance when we recall that this is a period in which the family was gradually displacing the broader community as the primary site of social identification and interaction. The Puritan family had been seen as a microcosm of and ultimately subservient to the broader spiritual community.[12] The basic social unit had been the town, and the basic social institution had been the church. In this context, the family could even be viewed as a potential site of social

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[12] Edmund S. Morgan, *The Puritan family: religion & domestic relations in seventeenth-century New England* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1980)

subversion – as we see, for instance, in the seventeenth century belief that witchcraft runs in the family, manifested in the fact that the surest way to be accused at Salem was to be related to someone who had already been accused.[13] Over the course of the eighteenth century, however, for a variety of reasons the community, church and rather embryonic state became increasingly reluctant and even unable to exercise their once-accustomed authority, making the family an increasingly central social institution.[14] In the wake of the Revolution, the new centrality of the family was acknowledged, for instance, in the politicization of motherhood by texts which staked the health of the Republic on the ability of mothers to raise properly virtuous republican sons.[15] The period stretching from the late eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century was thus in many ways a strange interregnum between the waning of the pervasive authority of the pre-modern local community, and the rise of the vast bureaucratic social institutions (whether they be states or corporations) in whose shadows we late moderns grudgingly live our anonymous lives. It was, unsurprisingly, something of a golden age for the individual and the family, both of whom were exalted – but also scrutinized – as never before. And it is chiefly in this context that we have to consider the meaning and salience of the libertine's attack on individual virtue and family order.

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[13] As has been widely noted but is perhaps most readily evident by looking at the appendices of Marilynne K. Roach, *The Salem witch trials: a day-by-day chronicle of a community under siege* (New York : Cooper Square Press, 2002)

[14] The decline of the towns as sources of effective social discipline is document in Michael Zuckerman, *Peaceable kingdoms: New England towns in the eighteenth century* (New York : Knopf, 1970). The ways in which religious toleration and vigorous intra-denominational religious competition conspired with trends towards evangelical piety to limit the effective disciplinary authority of the churches is ably made evident in Patricia U. Bonomi, *Under the cope of heaven: religion, society, and politics in Colonial America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986) See also Nathan O. Hatch, *The democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven : Yale University Press, 1989). The withdrawal of church and state from persecutions of sexual (and other moral) misdemeanors over the course of

the eighteenth century and the family's increasing centrality in this area is documented by Richard Godbeer, *Sexual revolution in early America* (Baltimore : Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 227-263.

[15] Kerber, *Women of the Republic*

The libertine and the witch have more in common, of course, than the threat they represent to the basic social institutions of their day. Most obviously, they both transgress social norms and fail to live up to expectations for persons of their type. The quarrelsomeness of the witch is in this sense the counterpart of the debauchery of the rake – they both fail to demonstrate a historically particular form of self-control; Christian humility in the case of the witch, civilized restraint in the case of the libertine. The failure of self-control in the face of unruly passions is also made evident by the close association between both these figures and sexual transgression and voraciousness though, as we shall see, changing ideas of personhood in the eighteenth century complicates this comparison.

Relatedly, and strikingly, the witch and the libertine are both unsexed figures – persons who fail to exhibit not only the qualities associated with Christian or refined persons, but also the qualities associated with their gender. In the last chapter, I described the witch as a woman who was not a woman – as figure whose menopause and, frequently, widowhood deprived her of the defining characteristics of womanhood. The libertine, likewise, was a man who was not quite a man. This may strike you as an odd claim, for in our own day the sexually predatory, rule-breaking and commitment-phobic man-child is a very prominent archetype of manliness. And, indeed, there are tantalizing hints of admiration for the libertine in late eighteenth century sources which suggests his kind of masculinity was not without its appeal.[16] However, our own veneration of animalistic, testosterone-laden masculinity is properly a phenomenon with its origins in the late nineteenth century. In the late eighteenth century, by contrast, the ideal man was defined, in the first place, by his position at the head

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[16] The best account of the libertine's appeal in the eighteenth century is, to my mind, Erin Mackie, *Rakes, highwaymen, and pirates,* which goes beyond the general tendency to see the libertine as embodying an atavistic, nostalgic masculine counter-culture of the pub, gambling track and street life defined in opposition to the new civility of the feminized parlor. For a reading along these lines, see Barker-Benfield, *The culture of sensibility* and, more sweepingly, Jackson Lears, *Something for nothing: luck in America* (New York: Viking, 2003)

of a family unity and, in the second, by his ability to exhibit the exquisite self-control demanded by the

culture of refinement and the virtuous self-denial demanded by the prevailing political ideology of

Republicanism.[17] The libertine, who scorned marriage and was in a manner of speaking enslaved to his

passions was, for these reasons, a curiously effeminate figure – a word which, in the eighteenth century

meant not only womanly, but also had connotations of self-indulgence, excess and capitulation to

pleasure.[18]

A final likeness between libertines and witches has to do with their ambiguous existence as both real

persons and figures of fantasy. I have for this reasons deliberately been a little evasive thus far about

whether I am here discussing the libertines who stalked through the pages of the sentimental novel, or

those who romped through the streets of late eighteenth century Boston. In fact, this is an ambiguity

which is characteristic of both the scholarship dealing with the libertine and even the contemporary

periodical and newspaper literature. The naked facts, as far as they can be established, are as follows:

the vast majority (though by no means all) of the seductions discussed in late eighteenth century print

culture are either outright fictions or quasi-fictional foils for a didactic moral literature which directed

itself against social types and tendencies more than in actual instances of misbehavior. From this

standpoint, most rakes are fakes; figments of overheated eighteenth century imaginations. On the other

hand, the statistical record shows a dramatic rise in the incidence of pre-marital pregnancy rates in late

eighteenth century America and a comparable increase in bastardry rates in England around the time

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[17] On the rise of animalistic masculinity, see Gail Bederman, *Manliness & civilization : a cultural history of gender and race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1995.) On eighteenth century masculinity as constituted by self-control and one's status as a household head, see Thomas A. Foster, *Sex and the eighteenth-century man: Massachusetts and the history of sexuality in America* (Boston : Beacon Press, c2006). On Republican ideology, see Gordon S. Wood, The *creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (New York, Norton 1972)

[18] On this, see especially Foster, *Sex and the eighteenth-century man*, 109-127

the sentimental novel was coming into vogue.[19] And, of course, discounting a sudden proliferation of baby-bearing storks and cabbage patches, real-life bastard children seem a strong indicator of real-life bastard libertines.

Historians of sexuality ascribe a great deal of significance to these statistics and argue from them that literature about seduction was more or less what it purported to be: a fairly accurate description of and warning against the real risk of seduction and abandonment faced by young women in the early Republic. In the wake of the Revolution, this narrative has it, the pursuit of happiness was rapidly degenerating into the pursuit of nookie, and concerned citizens were sensibly (or puritanically, depending on your views about these matters) advising American youth to put their pants back on and think of the Republic.[20] In contrast to this interpretation, scholars from more literary backgrounds have instead tended to argue that these narratives use seduction as a metaphor for a broader set of concerns

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[19] For America see Robert V Well, "Illegitimacy and Bridal Pregnancy in Colonial America" and Daneil Scott Smith, "The Long Cycle in American Illegitimacy and Premarital Pregnancy," both in Peter Laslett, Karla Oosterveen, Richard M. Smith (Eds.), *Bastardy and Its Comparative History: Studies in the History of Illegitimacy and Marital Nonconformism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980). British data are scattered variously over 71-246. More recently, Clare Lyons has provided more detailed statistics for Philadelphia which corroborate these earlier findings with the caveat that she tends to depict it as a later-day Sodom and thus potentially not representative of the wider picture. Clare A. Lyons, *Sex among the rabble : an intimate history of gender & power in the age of revolution, Philadelphia, 1730-1830* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006)

[20] Obviously, I'm being somewhat facetious but the dominant narrative is indeed of a loosening of sexual mores in mid-century followed by a late-century backlash against this licentiousness in the form of moralistic discourse which ends up making women responsible for sexual transgression while simultaneously insisting on their chaste nature and thus paving the way for the age of Victorian sexual repression and the Victorian double standard. For this narrative see, Lyons, *Sex Amongst the Rabble*, Godbeer, *Sexual Revolution*, Rodney Hessinger, '"Insidious Murderers of Female Innocence": Representations of Masculinity in the Seduction Tales of the Late Eighteenth Century" in Merril D. Smith (ed) *Sex and sexuality in early America* (New York : New York University Press, 1998*)*. It seems to me that the big elision these kinds of arguments often make is between the necessarily 'popular' quality of the pregnancy statistics and the patently 'elite' concerns and implied audience of seduction discourses. The issue here is that it is the relatively 'unrefined' masses who are producing the extra-marital offspring whereas the concern about this is clearly pitched to a very (indeed, overly) 'refined' audience, which makes it somewhat dubious to draw links between the two. Basically, I think these scholars assume a far greater diffusion of the culture of sensibility and refinement by the 1790s than would be justified by Bushman's dating in *The Refinement of America*.

with ostensibly have little to do with actual seduction – concerns about the reconciliation of individualism and social duty, the incestuous implications of sympathetic identification, the deceptions of authorship, or proto-feminist resentment at exclusion and lack of agency.[21]

My own feeling is that we must in this matter steer our course between the rocky shoals of unimaginative literalism and the dangerous rapids of allegorical symbolism. I tend to agree with the historians that seduction narratives are, indeed, precisely about seduction. On the other hand, I am sympathetic to the literary scholars' intuition that they constitute more than simple reportage of sexual danger. But the 'more' that we're looking for here resides precisely within the concept and process of seduction itself, not in the postulation of these texts as elaborate *romans-a-clef*. Rather than seeing the seduction narrative as a displaced, metaphorical way of talking about something else entirely, I want to

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[21] Many of these scholars explicitly distance themselves from, in Julia Stern's phrase, interpretations that see these texts "as a didactic fable warning about the dangers of seduction" Julia A. Stern, *The plight of feeling : sympathy and dissent in the early American novel* (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1997), 41. For proto-feminist dissent and protests over exclusion see Cathy N. Davidson, *Revolution and the word: the rise of the novel in America* (New York : Oxford University Press, 1986) and Stern, *Plight of feeling*. An interpretation which, on the contrary, explores the seduction story's conservative implication is Karen A Weyler, "'The Fruit of Unlawful Embraces': Sexual Transgression and Madness in Early American Sentimental Fiction," Merril D. Smith (ed) *Sex and sexuality in early America* (New York : New York University Press, 1998*)*. For incestuous democracy, see Elizabeth Barnes, *States of sympathy: seduction and democracy in the American novel* (New York : Columbia University Press, 1997). For authorship, see Bryce Traister, 'Libertinism and Authorship in America's Early Republic' *American Literature* 71, 1, (March 2000) 1-30. For the tragic clash of individualist and republican claims, and for one of the more inspired essays in this tradition generally, see the always superb Carol Smith-Rosenberg, 'Domesticating "Virture" Coquettes and Revolutionaries in Young America' in Elaine Scarry (ed.), Lite*rature and the body: essays on populations and persons* (Baltimore : Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988). The best sally in this tradition, and also the most recent, is Marion Rust, 'What's Wrong with Charlotte Temple' William and Mary Quarterly, LX, 1 (Jan 2003), 99-118 which usefully explores the libertine and his victim as people who are suffering from a case of not knowing what they want or how to act on their desires. This interpretation of these figures as failures of desire and agency is, it seems to me, along the right lines, though I think it more productive, as will develop, to talk in terms of failure of perception and subjectivity. More broadly, it seems to me that the great flaw of this tradition coming out of literary studies is methodological in that all these scholars confine themselves to a handful of relatively long and complex literary productions that are able to sustain their complex allegorical readings without bothering to reflect on the place of these texts in the broader flood of discourse about both actual and fictive seduction. In this sense, the hunchbacked historian with his dusty heap of archival 'evidence' is at times a useful corrective to the flighty inventiveness of the literary scholar. As Goethe once wrote: 'Let us be many-sided! Turnips are good, but

they are best mixed with chestnuts. And these two noble products of the earth grow far apart.'

begin by asking what precisely it was that made the fantasy of seduction so compelling and frightening at just point in history. For, just like the witch, the libertine lived a double life; he was at once a real threat, as historians have rightly observed, but also a fantastic threat – an object of imaginative preoccupation bordering on obsession.

Of course, for all that they bear a striking family resemblance, the witch and the libertine are also very different figures. Nor should we be surprised at this, for the world was a very different place in 1792 than it had been in 1692, and the ways in which the deviant reflected society's shortcomings and failures back to itself was necessarily very different. Indeed, reflecting on these differences shows the tremendous cultural revolutions taking place in the eighteenth century in an entirely new light, and helps us notice aspects of modernity which do not appear fully in other accounts. But this question about the differences between the libertine and the witch is approachable only once we've become a little better acquainted with the libertine in his own context, and it is therefore a question to which I will return to a little later. For now, the question is rather this: what did it mean to be seduced in the late eighteenth century?

II . Seduction, Sensibility and the rise of Subjectivity

What do novel-reading, gambling, luxuriousness, pleasure-seeking, fashion and libertine seduction all have in common? In the first place, the enmity of eighteenth century moralists, who roundly condemned all these practices in print as self-destructive and socially deviant habits. Indeed, to the disapproving eyes of the moralist, these habits were not really distinct activities but rather tended to

flow into each other, so that novel-reading and pleasure-seeking made one a natural target for libertines, who were themselves often prone to be fashionable gamblers.[22] To the modern reader, this list of vices seems somewhat arbitrarily put together and the links between them are not altogether self-evident. To the seventeenth century Puritan too, this assemblage would have had a peculiar air, but in a different way. For the Puritan moralist, many of these behaviors would have seemed offensive in that they were manifestations of worldliness and the fatal sin of pride, and others on the more straightforward grounds that they were explicitly prohibited in the Bible.[23] He would have been puzzled, however, by the largely secular logic of the eighteenth century moralist, and the tendency to blur these vices into each other. Of course, in a general way, pride begat pride and sin begat sin, but the tendency to see gambling as leading inevitably to fornication would not have been entirely legible to the Puritan. Moreover, he would have found the list too short by half – why ban novels, but not other frivolous reading? Why criticize gambling but not dancing?

The logic which makes sense of this list of eighteenth century vices, but eludes both the seventeenth and twentieth century reader, is the logic of seduction. For seduction was by no means an exclusively

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[22] See, for instance, 'On Fashions' *Massachusetts Spy*, April 1788 in which the author begins by discussing fashion in the conventional sense of what he calls 'outward ornament,' but then rushes breathlessly into 'the fashionable system of morality … to contract debts … to seduce a young creature into prostitution … the sentiments of the present day, respecting duels … sentiments which prevail, particularly on reading.' In two short columns of text, the author heaps insolvency upon seduction upon dueling upon reading as all outcomes of evil 'fashion.' Other historians have noted critiques of fashion and luxury (see Bushman, *Refinement of America*, 181-206) but, in fact, any of the above terms could, and in other texts did, rhetorically function as the 'root' cause of evil because they all mingled into each other indiscriminately. This will become evident in the examples I cite later in this section. We've misunderstood about the moral anxieties of the 1790s in so far as we have associated them too narrowly with a reaction to certain excesses of the culture of refinement and therefore with an ethos of republican virtue in which citizens were to be self-denying rather than self-indulgent. The problem, as I hope to show below, ran far deeper and extended across the Atlantic, to countries little concerned with the dilemmas of Republicanism.

[23] Extra-marital fornication is explicitly and gambling was thought to be implicitly prohibited by the Bible. For fornication, see 1 Corinthians 6:18-20, for Puritan prohibitions of gambling see Jackson Lears, *Something for Nothing*, 44

sexual activity in the eighteenth century. The image of a sexually rapacious man seducing a virtuous but vulnerable woman was a particularly evocative and rich image of what was troubling about seduction, but it was far from the only scenario in which eighteenth century writers saw seduction taking place. The gambler was seduced by the dice, the reader was seduced by the novel and, most curious of all, the libertine –seducer par excellence – was himself seduced by pleasure and by his irresistible victim.

Consider, by way of illustration, the following story of seduction, which appeared as a cautionary tale in the Massachusetts Mercury in 1793: a young person of little experience had left the protective care of the father, whose parting words advised caution, for 'on the management of the present interest every future depended.' Unhappily, this young person 'possessed of more good nature than fortitude [and] was easily seduced.' Predictably enough, after an evening of pleasure, 'agonizing reflection advanced with the morning … a fever was the consequence.' Our unfortunate protagonist requested that their 'antagonist might be sent for. He came.' 'Dying,' the seduced one 'aimed a blow at the successful winner, and expired with a bitter execration.' The seducer, meanwhile, 'laughed the matter off as a very pretty jest … The death of one was the life of the other. The former was buried without attendant. The later rides in his phaeton … Yet … he may triumph for the moment but the scorpion blast of conscience will … lacerate his inmost bosom.'[24] This is all fairly standard fare for a seduction story, of course. The good-natured victim away from parental protection, a night of guilty pleasure, the remorse leading to a fatal illness, the deathbed confrontation with the unrepentant villain, who escapes without punishment but is threatened with a bad conscience – these are well-worn tropes of the seduction narrative. What makes this narrative different, and rather remarkable, is that it is not actually about a woman losing her virginity but rather about a young man losing his fortune at the gambling table. Of course, this particular

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[24] All quotes from 'The Mentor, No. VI' *Massachusetts Mercury,* February 14, 1793

narrative is somewhat exceptional in so explicitly representing the unhappy gambler as a victim of seduction, but the language use to condemn gambling in fact often explicitly linked it to seduction. Another newspaper columnist was visibly discombobulated that 'the charms of innocence and virtue are here prostituted to the vilest deception, falsehood and villainy: the most sacred friendships are here converted into the rudest altercations.'[25] The site of this moral catastrophe is 'the gaming table' but, again, the language of innocent virtue prostituted by deceptive villainy is typical of and could easily have come from the pages of any number of seduction narratives.

Nor did seduction stories themselves escape condemnation, for in the eyes of late eighteenth century critics the novel of seduction was itself seductive and potentially as dangerous as the libertine whom it supposedly condemned. The *Massachusetts Magazine* in 1791 saw fit to publish Leander's view that novels 'are written with an intent to captivate the feelings, and do in fact lead many on to the path of vice, from an idea that they are within the pale of gallantry.'[26] This rather peculiar view of the novel as a gateway drug was echoed a few years later in the *Weekly Magazine* which warned that 'books, in which love is the only theme and intrigue the sole business of the actors, are more dangerous than even bad company.'[27] The author goes on to warn against the 'seducing arguments' through which 'evil steals imperceptibly into her [the feminized reader's] heart, while she thinks she is reading sterling morality,' just as libertines were believed to work towards seduction while maintaining a veneer of virtue to trick the unwary. Yet another periodical printed in 1802 a trenchant critique which admirably summed up the

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[25] 'The Bee – No. XXVIIm' *Herald of Freedom*, November 26, 1790

[26] 'On Modern Novels, and their Effects,' *The Massachusetts Magazine*, November 1791; vol. 3, no. 11; 662.

[27] 'Character and Effects of Modern Novels,' *The Weekly Magazine*, March 10, 1798; vol. 1, no. 6; 184

charge that 'Novels … are the powerful engine with which the seducer attacks the female heart,' entirely conflating in the process the seducer and the novel of seduction.[28]

One could multiply almost indefinitely examples of such non-sexual 'seductions.' The defection of the French general Dumouriez from the Republican Army was reported in these terms: 'He lived in a splendid and expensive style far beyond his circumstances which prepared the way for his yielding to the seduction of Austrian and British gold.'[29] Another newspaper asserted in a similar vein, with the air of one repeating a well-worn truism, that 'property is often … pernicious in the race of glory. By her attractive smiles we are often seduced from the path of rectitude.'[30] Condemnation of materialism as a source of moral corruption is, of course, as old as parable of the camel and the rich man. But then again many of the vices and deviations these articles condemned had long preoccupied the self-appointed champions of virtue. What was new, and striking, about the eighteenth century critiques was the language of seduction to which they resorted to articulate their concerns.

The obvious implication of all this is that the concept of seduction in the late eighteenth century had much wider and deeper resonances than it did either in earlier or later periods. Evidently, seduction meant much more than we might at first sight suppose, and posed a threat not only to young women, but to a broad cross-section of genteel society. But what did seduction in this pervasive sense actually amount to, and why was it such a pervasive source of concern at this historical moment?

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[28] 'An Essay on the Modern Novel' *The Port-Folio*, April 10, 1802; Vol. 2, No. 14, 106

[29] 'To the Citizens of the United States,' *Massachusetts Spy*, July 18, 1793

[30] 'Boston, April 9,' *Independent Chronicle*, April 9, 1789

The conventional wisdom about this period offers one possible answer. Historians have long characterized the era of the early Republic as an anxious age, suspended uneasily between the disintegrating communal ethos of the seventeenth century, and the rambunctious individualism of Jacksonian America. Individuals were becoming more mobile and more anonymous in a world no longer tightly ordered by hierarchical relationships and communal institutions, and there was much hand-wringing about how these newly liberated individuals would use (and perhaps abuse) their liberty. This anxiety was, to some extent, a transatlantic phenomenon, but was particularly acute in the newly formed American Republic, which had staked its political future as a democratic community on precisely the capacity of individuals to act virtuously.[31]

From this point of view, concerns about seduction (and, by implication, about libertines) give voice to the anxiety that deviant individuals would use their new-found liberty to subvert social order, thumb their noses at conventional morality and plunge the nation into anarchy. Our anxious moralists were, according to this interpretation, spearheading a counter-revolutionary retreat from and an attempt to contain the more anarchistic implications of the revolution itself.[32] Now, there is certainly something to this view, but it seems to me in the end a rather blunt instrument with which to analyze either seduction or libertines. Very similar arguments could well be made about responses to, say, Quakers in the

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[31] Preeminently, Gordon Wood, *The radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York : Vintage Books, 1993), esp. 229-370, but this is also a theme that runs through many of the texts cited in notes 19 and 20, as well as texts that look back at this period from the vantage point of the nineteenth century, such as Mary P. Ryan, *Cradle of the middle class: the family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865* (New York : Cambridge University Press, 1981) and Charles Sellers, *The market revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846* (New York : Oxford University Press, 1991)

[32] This sort of reading is particularly strongly expressed in Lyons, *Sex Amongst the Rabble* but it also powerfully motivates Davidson, *Revolution and the Word*.

seventeenth, abolitionists in the nineteenth or hippies in the twentieth century. The barbarians within

the gates are always spreading their poisonous lies amongst us and the spokesmen for the entrenched

status quo are always calling us to arms; this much is a wearisome constant in the history of deviance.

But, if we look a little more closely and a little more historically, the most characteristic thing about the

libertine is precisely that the social threat he presents has greatly diminished in comparison to, say, the

witch or even the seventeenth century adulterer, who were thought to explicitly threaten social order

and were punished in the name of upholding it.[33] To be sure, one occasionally finds sentiments to the

effect that the libertine is a threat to the republic but what is striking about such comments is precisely

how rare they are, occurring only when the libertine happens to be someone in a position of political

power.[34] The libertine is a new phenomenon in the history of deviance precisely in that he is a solitary

operator who wreaks havoc on the lives of individual woman and, sometimes, their families. His

deviance takes place in a newly-demarcated realm of private life and it is only through the intervention

of the moralists and novelists that it is dragged part-way into the public world of print culture.[35] It is

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[33] Of course, as detailed in the last chapter, this social order was seen as coterminous with a spiritual order, so that deviance from the covenant resulted in divine punishment for the whole community.

[34] For instance, the *Massachusetts Spy* of July 18, 1793 urges its readers to defend liberty by 'keeping a steady eye upon the private characters of their rulers, and by believing every libertine among them to be half a traitor.' On the role of scandal in eighteenth century political life, which has a history that predates and is substantially separate from the non-political (in the 'high politics' sense, at least) scandals I am discussing here see Patricia U. Bonomi, *The Lord Cornbury scandal: the politics of reputation in British America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998.)

[35] On the complex history of the mutual elaboration of the public and private life as separate 'spheres' in the eighteenth century, see Roger Chartier (Ed), *A History of Private Life. Vol 3: Passions of the Renaissance* (Harvard University Press, 1989) and Jürgen Habermas, *The structural transformation of the public sphere : an inquiry into a category of bourgeois society*, trans. Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989.) I will discuss the private-public divide in much greater detail in the following section of this chapter. In the American context, the concept of public and private spheres has been most heavily used by gender historians working in the nineteenth century who note that the public sphere was coded as male and thus nominally excluded women. The tendency of this historiography has been to move from considering the 'spheres' as an accurate representation of

therefore highly characteristic of the age that Alexander Hamilton, when confronted by his political opponents with his adulterous affair with Maria Reynolds, felt (rightly, as it turned out) that his best bet was to admit that he had been unfaithful to his wife, but to insist that he would never stoop to being unfaithful to his country.[36] Private sin was not necessarily public danger.

All this suggests another way to interpret libertines and the threat of seduction: seductive people, activities and objects represented a threat not primarily to public morality but rather precisely a private, personal and intimate danger. To fully comprehend the nature of this danger, we need to rethink a little what it was that was disturbing about the new individual whom the eighteenth century had given birth to. That is, we need to think of the problem represented by the seductive and seduced individual as not primarily or only as a failure to restrain individualistic urges, but more profoundly as a failure of subjective discernment. For the libertine emerges not so much at the moment when the individual is

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social life to seeing them as rhetorical constructions. See Nancy F. Cott, *The bonds of womanhood: "woman's sphere" in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven : Yale University Press, 1970) Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly conduct: visions of gender in Victorian America* (New York : Knopf : Distributed by Random House, 1985), Linda K. Kerber, 'Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History,' *The Journal of American History,* Vol. 75, No. 1 (Jun., 1988), pp. 9-39. The status of 'private' and 'public' earlier in the eighteenth century is somewhat less well-developed in the American context, but it seems safe to say that the culture of refinement roughly paved the way for Victorian middle class culture in this respect. See especially Bushman, *Refinement of America* and Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility.* The private and individualized role of the libertine is also what makes me doubt the thesis that he represented a subculture or counter-culture of pleasure-seeking, or chance, or male tavern sociability articulated, respectively, in Lyons, *Sex Amongst the Rabble,* Lears, *Something for Nothing* and Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility*. In fact, as will argue in the following chapter, this model of deviants as a relatively coherent group who together challenge the status quo is more characteristic of the nineteenth century, when both the 'deviants' and their opponents embrace this way of thinking and talking about deviance. In the eighteenth century, however, deviance is nearly always a matter of wayward individuals; it is the individual libertine who is the obsessive focus of attention, not (as in the nineteenth century) a libertine *culture* of, say, brothels, taverns and gambling dens.

[36] Hamilton published a remarkably frank account of the affair, but denied any wrong-doing in his public character as secretary of the treasury. And, of course, he remained a well-respected political heavy-weight until his death. The relevant document is reprinted in Alexander Hamilton, *Observations on certain documents in "The history of the United States for the year 1796"* (New York : Printed for the Hamilton Club, 1865)

declared to be free, but rather at that moment when she is discovered to be a subject who must look to

her own subjective experience for the truths that shall guide her through life.[37]

To appreciate the profound revolution affected by the rise of modern subjectivity, it is helpful to

contrast it briefly to what came before. In the early modern period, authoritative knowledge about the

world derived from external sources: from the Church for the devout Catholic, from the Bible for most

protestants, from the ancient texts of Rome and Greece for humanistic intellectuals and Renaissance

artists, and from local folk tradition for peasants and villagers going about their daily lives. It was a time

of objective, traditional verities, and even the great innovators of the age looked to external, and

seemingly eternal, principles to guide what we might today describe as highly 'personal' or

'individualistic' visions. We see this, for instance, in the firm grounding of Renaissance art and thought in

the ancient world and in the visual symbols of the Christian tradition; in the self-conscious return to

early Christianity and reliance on biblical truth amongst insurgent protestants; even in the framing of

Europe's highly experimental imperial adventures in the New World as a redux of the Roman project.[38]

The early modern period was paradoxically a moment of radically new naissances and formations which

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[37] What I am getting at here with the question of periodisation is that the libertine becomes a compelling figure in the mid-eighteenth century and fades out in the early nineteenth, which makes him appear to be more a consequence of the subjective turn in western culture that gradually took place in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (which I am just about to discuss) rather than the loosening of traditional social controls which is in many ways only getting underway in the later eighteenth century. The argument here is that if anxieties about individuals running amok were fuelling concern about libertines, nineteenth century popular culture would have perceived itself as overrun with libertines, whereas, as we shall see in the next chapter, even sex scandals centering on seduction did not evoke the kind of concern we see in the eighteenth century.

[38] On Protestant Primitivism, see Richard T. Hughes and C. Leonard Allen, *Illusions of innocence: Protestant primitivism in America, 1630-1875*(Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1988) and Theodore Dwight Bozeman, *To live ancient lives: the primitivist dimension in Puritanism* (Chapel Hill : University of North Carolina Press, 1988). On the Renaissance as a return to the classical world, and indeed for much more that supports this basic view of the early modern era, see Jacques Barzun**,** *From dawn to decadence: 500 years of Western cultural life, 1500 to the present* (New York : HarperCollins, 2000). On new world empire-builders and their relation to ancient Rome, see Anthony Pagden, *Lords of all the world : ideologies of empire in Spain, Britain and France c. 1500-c. 1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995)

defensively and anxiously garbed themselves as Re-naissances and Re-formations.[39] Personal experience

as yet counted for little against the weight of tradition, and even radically new ways of inhabiting the

world had to be grounded in something more objective and impersonal than the necessarily subjective

vision of their originators. The truth was out there, in the world; not in here, in your experience of it.

But faint rumblings of another way of discovering truth were starting to be heard throughout post-

Reformation Europe. In Montaigne, we find deference to classical authority mingling with a remarkable,

even revolutionary question: 'Que sais-je?' – what do I know? The question is remarkable not only for its

skepticism but also for the way Montaigne proposes to answer it: by appeal to his own judgment and

experiences. In the seventeenth century, Descartes would, of course, elaborate this strand of Montaigne

into the radical distrust of received wisdom and a solipsistic faith in the personal *cogito* as the only true

source of knowledge.[40] Illuminations of things to come came also from the Inner Light emanating from

the Quaker meeting house and, more feebly, from other protestant denominations. One of the central

tenants of the Reformed churches was the credo that Christians had to experience conversion and

salvation personally and subjectively. However, only the Quakers and a few protestant renegades took

this belief to its radical conclusion that religious truth could only be subjectively grasped; many

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[39] 'Renaissance' is, of course, not a term that would have been used in the Renaissance itself but is rather a nineteenth century invention, coined by Jacob Burckhardt in 1867 in his *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, so in using it here I am sacrificing historical pedantry to stylistic grace. Perish the thought! For anyone interested in the question (which I personally wish the scholarly community would quit flogging, for the horse seems to me well and truly deceased) of whether there was such a thing as the Renaissance and whether early modern Italians understood themselves to be doing something new and different from their medieval ancestors, the most recent round of scholarly hand-wringing over these perennial dilemmas may be found in the AHR Forum 'The Persistence of the Renaissance' in *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 103, No. 1, Feb 1998, 50-124.

[40] The best person to read on Montaigne is, frankly, Montaigne: Michel de Montaigne, *Essays*, trans. J.M. Cohen. (Baltimore : Penguin Books, c1958). On Descartes, and his relation to the general drift in western philosophy towards interiority, see the excellent Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: the making of the modern identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 143-158.

reformation movements (the Puritans, for instance) remained suspicious of personal experience and firmly curtailed its influence by insisting on the authority of the bible and that of the ministry.[41]

But it was only in the eighteenth century that the dam really burst as a wholehearted reorientation towards subjective experience took place across the cultural landscape. In religion, the shift was marked by the rapid ascendance of 'enthusiastic' religion in the early eighteenth century. This was a style of worship associated in colonial North America with ministers like Jonathan Edwards and George Whitehead, and especially the Methodists and Baptists, whose preaching appealed strongly to their listeners' emotions and sought to produce dramatic conversion experiences. Personal conversion experiences had always been important to protestants of all stripes, of course, but their reliability was always regarded as somewhat uncertain, and they were routinely subjected to community and ministerial approbation. Whether someone was saved and worthy of church membership was determined not just subjectively, but collectively, by appeal to ministerial authority and a communal sense of how a good Christian behaved, as well as to personal religious experience. By giving greater importance to believers' own conversion experiences, enthusiastic preachers and sects lead the way to a more democratic and subjective religion, for the path to God lead no longer through ministerial authority and clerical approbation, but rather through one's own experience. The truth came from within, and often through highly charged emotional states; the Quaker position that the subjective self was the sole source of true religious knowledge now began its rapid spread beyond the borders of the small, culturally marginal group of Friends.[42]

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[41] The ambivalence of Puritan theologians towards the individual and his or her conversion experience is admirably captured in Edmund Morgan, *Visible Saints*. [John: What should I cite for the Quakers?]

[42] Bonomi, *Under the cope of heaven,* Hatch, *The democratization of American Christianity,* Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A religious history of the American people* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1972). For a dissenting but not very

The revolution wrought by the Enlightenment presents a more complicated picture in that one thrust of the amorphous work of the *philosophes* was decisively away from subjective experience and towards a faith in universal principles derived through an impersonal Reason. Yet if we consider the methods of the Enlightenment rather than its utopian hopes, we find that the empirical, experimental investigation on which this new knowledge was to be based also participated in the turn to the subjective. The test of any truth was henceforth to be whether it squared with the facts as they appeared to the impartial observer. Again, this is not so different from the substance of Descartes or Locke (or even, to reach farther back, Galileo) but the point is precisely that the *philosophes* were popularizes who responded to the radical (and rather abstract) skepticism of Descartes and Locke by optimistically transforming the empirical method into a way of life by which everything might eventually come to be known. Since this method was predicated on the existence of an impartial examiner who set aside tradition and tried to discover truth through his own experiments and experiences, this invariably meant the elevation of the subject and subjective knowledge over the authority of tradition. To be sure, many of the *philosophes* looked forward to the day when subjective knowledge would give way to objectively grounded reason, and in the long run their legacy was our own world in which expert opinion decisively trumps subjective knowledge. However, in their own time their main contribution was to create a broad-based culture of

persuasive view of Great Awakening churches as authoritarian see Jon Butler, *Awash in a sea of faith : Christianizing the American people* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990). Religious changes also influenced the rise in subjectivity in a more negative way, of course, in the sense that the decline of providential thinking and the 'disenchantment' of the world effectively created a subset of experience which were seen as not communicating divine truth, and which were instead left to the individual subject to make sense of as best he or she could. On this see especially Marchel Gauchet, *The disenchantment of the world: a political history of religion*, trans. Oscar Burge (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997)

dispute and diversity in which no traditional truth was safe from interrogation, and subjective discernment was the only available path to knowledge.[43]

This transformation in religious and intellectual practice was mirrored and, I suspect, partly driven by the more subtle transformation of everyday life that I alluded to earlier when I spoke of the cultures of refinement and sensibility. Historians have tended to emphasize the material and exhibitionistic aspects of this culture, which saw social elites investing an ever-increasing amount of time, energy and capital in bigger houses, finer clothing, more abundant household goods and more exacting manners.[44] The self was, from this point of view, an object to be meticulously shaped and refined, and self-consciously put on display before others. But, of course, such a self required a discerning audience, attuned to the subtleties which allegedly made such accomplishments superior to the life of that vast majority of the community not blessed with the wherewithal to purchase an abundance of cutlery and learn to play the pianoforte. The theatre of refinement required not only highly skilled actors, but inevitably also a refined audience equipped with that mysterious invention of the eighteenth century – taste. And what else was taste but the ability to subjectively discern the good from the bad, the true from the false and,

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[43] The classic English-language account of the enlightenment is, for better of worse, Peter Gay, *The enlightenment: an interpretation* (London : Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1966-1969.) but see also Ernst Cassirer, *The philosophy of the Enlightenment*, trans. Fritz C.A. Koelln and James P. Pettegrove (Princeton, N.J. : Princeton University Press, 2009 [1932]). These are both in the old 'great men' style of intellectual history. For a brief synthesis of the more broad-based takes on the Enlightenment which are more in vogue these days, see Roy Porter, *The Enlightenment* (New York : Palgrave, 2001). For interesting thoughts on the dissemination and impact of enlightenment ideas, see Robert Darnton, *The forbidden best-sellers of pre-revolutionary France* (New York: Norton, 1995). The impact of the enlightenment in America is not much studied, but the best general overview in the 'great men' style is Henry F. May, *The Enlightenment in America* (New York : Oxford University Press, 1976). For a rather interesting account of how these ideas played out on the ground and interacted with other aspects of American culture see Susan Scott Parrish, *American curiosity: cultures of natural history in the colonial British Atlantic world* (Chapel Hill : University of North Carolina Press, 2006). For a reading of the anti-subjective dimensions of the Enlightenment, which also discusses the role of religion in fostering subjectivity see Edward G. Andrew*, Conscience and its critics: Protestant conscience, enlightenment reason, and modern subjectivity* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001)

[44] See note 7.

not least, imposters and arrivistes from genuine members of the refined classes?[45] The culture of

refinement, which populated the world with objects that demanded scrutiny, necessarily gave rise to a

culture of discernment which authorized the subjective self as a source of truth and knowledge about

the value of others.[46] And this culture was, as we've seen, rooted in sensibility, in a bodily, sensual,

emotional responsiveness to the world – a sentiment in this world was not just a feeling, but a strongly

felt conviction that governed one's relationships to others.

So much for the view from the Mt. Olympus of cultural and intellectual history. But how did it feel to be

one of these fantastical new creatures – these subjects who all of a sudden bore the heavy weight of

truth-making on their frail shoulders? This is substantially the question that will occupy me for the

remainder of this chapter, for of course I will want to persuade you that libertine stories have everything

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[45] On the cultivation of taste and subjective judgment as a necessary consequence of cultures of conspicuous consumption, European scholars have been more accomplished than their Americanist brethren. For taste, see Brewer, *The pleasures of the imagination,* Jean-Louis Flandrin 'Distinction Through Taste' in Chartier (Ed), *A History of Private Life,* 265-308 and, from a more theoretical point of view, Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: a social critique of the judgment of taste*, trans. Richard Nice (London : Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986.) It is also worth noting, of course, that the novel's increasingly central role in this culture can be accounted for by its investment in the representation of a realistic world and its cultivation of a style of reading which demands careful scrutiny and discernment. This argument was originally made in Ian Watt**,** *The rise of the novel; studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1957.) and has been influential on many subsequent more political readings of the eighteenth century novel, for instance Davidson, *Revolution and the Word*. For a persuasive critique of this view, however, which stresses the typological nature of identification and character, and which effectively draws attention to the early novel's appeal to the other side of eighteenth century culture concerned with personhood-as-type, see Deidre Shauna Lynch, *The economy of character: novels, market culture, and the business of inner meaning* (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1998) 23-122

[46] All this by way of a reply to the assertion one sometimes encounters that the culture of sensibility arose as a kind of protest to the culture of refinement – out of a yearning for more authenticity or honesty in personal dealings and a psychic revolt against the excessive repression of civility. It is true that the culture of sensibility, once fully elaborated, did have the potential to subvert the culture of refinement, but it is also important to note that in many ways these were two sides of the same coin. For an accomplished and sophisticated rendition of the view I am critiquing, see Kenneth Lockridge, 'Colonial Self-Fashioning: Paradoxes and Pathologies in the Construction of Genteel Identity in Eighteenth-Century America' in Ronald Hoffman, Mechal Sobel & Fredrika J. Teute (Eds) *Through A Glass Darkly: Reflections of Personal Identity in Early America* (Chapel Hill : University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 274-339 and Kenneth Lockridge, *On the sources of patriarchal rage : the commonplace books of William Byrd and Thomas Jefferson and the gendering of power in the eighteenth century* (New York : New York University Press, 1992)

to do with the psychic situation this new subjective model of personhood gave rise to. For while the culture of subjectivity substantially empowered the individual subject and optimistically made subjective experience the path to true knowledge, there was a dark side to this picture too. Subjectivity entailed a great burden as well an opportunity, and it was by no means clear that everyone would be up to the great challenge of providing for themselves the stable points of reference that had previously been supplied by tradition or divine decree. Once the self had become a privileged source of truth, the self as a source of error or deviation from truth became a real problem. And seduction was, of course, a vivid example of everything that could go wrong in this brave new world, for seduction is precisely the dramatic failure of a subject whose experiences lead her astray and who is unable to discern the danger she is in until it is too late. In the seduction story, discerning the truth is what is most at stake, because the failure of subjective knowledge is what hurts. In the seduction story, we see that those who hope for Enlightenment are necessarily afraid of the dark, and those who must make their own truth are necessarily afraid of being left alone with it.

Before I go back to seduction, however, I'd like to briefly draw attention, in order to forestall confusion, to one thing aspect of personhood that we ourselves more or less take for granted, but which is strikingly absent from the eighteenth century model: the eighteenth century person does not necessarily conceive themselves as have a true self or a core of 'real' identity.[47] As I've been saying, the

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[47] Here I am taking up the point, first made by Foucault but given an important restatement recently by Wahrman, that the eighteenth century understanding of self was fundamentally distinct from both earlier conceptions of personhood and later nineteenth century notions of an inner self which are recognizably a predecessor to our own way of thinking. This as against a much older tradition which sees the eighteenth century self (and, by implication, eighteenth century culture) as a more direct precursor to nineteenth century and contemporary thinking. For the argument for discontinuity between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, see Michel Foucault, *History of madness*, trans. Jonathan Murphy and Jean Khalfa(New York : Routledge, 2006.) Michel Foucault, *The order of things; an archaeology of the human sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973) and Dror Wahrman, *The making of the modern self : identity and culture in eighteenth-century England* (New Haven : Yale University Press, 2004) For some influential arguments for cultural continuity, see Bushman, *Refinement of America*, Watt, *Rise of the Novel***,**

experience of personhood was dominated by either the experience of sentimental subjectivity, the self as 'a bundle of perceptions' with no very definite locus, or by objectification: the self as a refined, performed object.[48] Missing from this picture, from our point of view, was any firm notion of 'inner nature' – self was either a way of looking or something to be looked at by others, but not in any case something that looked within itself for some inner essence, a subject which was its own object.[49] This more modern view of personhood was clearly on the horizon – Rousseau's preoccupation with the difficulty of communicating his true self to others was the first sign of it, but only around the 1790s would this new way of being begin to pick up steam as Romanticism deluged Europe and, with some delay, the Americas.[50] This must make us wary when we talk of seduction and deception in the narratives of the era, since our inclination to read these narratives as ones in which a 'true' or 'coherent'

(more ambiguously, because Taylor's genealogical method wars somewhat with his sweeping narrative) Taylor, *Sources of the Self*.

[48] The quote is, of course, a hat-tip to Hume, the man who took this view of personhood to its logical extreme and showed how much sensibility and subjectivity could exclude a stable identity. The full quote reads "I may venture to affirm of the rest of mankind, that they are nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions" David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (New York : Oxford University Press, 2000), 165. One of the great problems of the historiography on the eighteenth century self (excepting Foucault, who is always a bit of an outlier in these discussions) is that it tends to stress either subjectivity or refinement at the expense of the other. Wharman's otherwise brilliant effort in particular suffers from being an attempt to treat the eighteenth century self as a performance without any spectators. As will become apparent as the chapter advances, my principal aim is precisely to interpret the two side-by-side in order to explain the tensions and contradictions of personhood in this era. In so doing, I am particularly indebted to a casual aside Wharman himself makes when he writes 'If anything, it was the over-particularizing gaze … that had to potential to bring down … the ancient regime of identity' *Making of the Modern Self*, 185

[49] By way of an aside, it is an interesting question whether the earlier and concurrent protestant search for the God within (or for the voice of the soul, if you prefer) fits into this story and whether the subsequent Romantic invention of the self is an attempt to get back at soul via more secular byroads. In order mostly to forestall metaphysical inquiries that the academic genre can't really support, I propose to treat self and soul as separate.

[50] Obviously, Romanticism (and, by extension, Rousseau) was more symptom than cause, but more on this in the following chapter. On Rousseau, the classic text (which, despite its age, is very suggestive on how Rousseau's preoccupation with a transparent self emerges out of a broader culture of subjectivity) is Jean Starobinski, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau, transparency and obstruction*, trans. Authur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988.)

self is revealed, obscured or destroyed is at least partly a projection of a nineteenth-century way of thinking onto narratives which don't fully conform to this model.[51]

Equipped with this understanding of what the subjectively experiencing self did and did not entail, we can finally begin to make sense of the period's preoccupation with seduction. Let me begin with a definition of seduction capacious enough to contain the various examples that I cited at the start of this section: seduction is the experience of being overcome by *false* sentiments evoked by an *overpowering* object. This definition suggests that seduction is an isolated encounter with an object that we fall for in a double sense – as we 'fall' for both a lover and a deception. The seductive object is something I should respond to with aversion and fear because it is dangerous, but if I do not either because I fall for (am deceived by) its deceptive façade of innocence, or because I fall for (am overcome by) its genuinely attractive qualities. On this level, the level of an encounter with an object, seduction is about the danger that sentiment makes the subject vulnerable, that a subject overly reliant on the subjective knowledge of sentiments is weak, prone to be deceived or overpowered by outside forces. Seduction thus reveals an embattled subject struggling to make sense of a hostile or indifferent world. Or, to put it another way, seduction is about the danger that relying on my subjective experiences will lead me not toward truth, but rather into a trap. And, since I am alone when I am being seduced, there is no-one to correct me or show me my error – the frightening thing about the situation is as much this sense of being left to my own devices, so that there is no-one to save me from my failure to discern correctly.

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[51] Again, see note 46 on the Watts-Lynch debate.

To illustrate the broad applicability of this interpretation of seduction, let me begin by showing it at work in late eighteenth century criticism of the novel, after which I will give some examples from the fiction of seduction itself. What exactly did it mean to be seduced by a novel? Evidently, not quite the same thing as to be seduced by a man; the sentimental novel was heady stuff, to be sure, but as it was at best an indifferent bed-fellow. The novel, like the libertine, was seductive in that it corrupted virtue and did so by overwhelming the senses. One critic felt the novel was a fighter rather than a lover, for he described it as a species of 'artillery which love has made use of to soften hearts and brighten eyes.'[52] Another commentator worried that novels, through their 'recital of lascivious scenes might shock an ear not yet hardened in vice.'[53] Yet another had wound himself up to the point of thoroughly mixing his metaphors; he began by asserting that 'love … lends its rays too often to inflame the eyes of lust,' went on to more sweepingly condemn 'the literary opium, that lulls every sense into delicious rapture,' and ended up in a curious war-torn bedroom where the novel, a 'weapon for so black a purpose,' 'By tickling the ear … approaches the heart, and soon ruins it; for, like all other prostitutes, she is plausible and insinuating.'[54] And armed with ear-tickling opium, evidently!

What a scene! What debauchery! Ruined, bombarded hearts; (shell?)shocked, tickled ears; inflamed, brightened eyes and opiated senses – evidentially, the assumption here is that novels are seductive in that sense that they are sensually overwhelming. Far from exercising her subjective judgment to make sense of its contents, the reader finds her subjective judgment overwhelmed and unmade by the sensual overload of the novel. Hence also the militaristic language, for the novel is here something that

[52] 'On Modern Novels and their Effects,' *Massachusetts Magazine*, Nov 1791, Vol. 3, No. 11, 662

[53] 'Character and Effects of Modern Novels,' *Weekly Magazine*, Mar 10, 1798, Vol. 1, No. 6, 184

[54] 'An Essay on the Modern Novel,' *The Port-Folio*, April 10, 1802, Vol. 2, No. 14, 106

breaks in from the outside, and imposes itself on us in an intimate way, almost to the point of substituting its consciousness for our own.[55] While this seduction did not immediately lead to ruin, it was none the less disturbing because it showed the frailty and fallibility of the eighteenth century subject, at once reliant upon her experiences and vulnerable to being deceived by them.

What made the novel a immediate danger, however, was that it did more than momentarily overwhelm the reader, and in fact permanently compromised her subjective judgment. As one writer put it, once it had ravished her senses, the novel would leave 'impure traces on the memory … pollute the imagination' and lead ' into a wrong train of thinking … the pursuit of trifles if not … vicious indulgences.'[56] To the mind of the author responsible for the above-mentioned saber-rattling prostitute, the young reader would be 'infatuated and led away by fanciful dreams' and subsequently would 'sup the deleterious draught with pleasure.'[57] In like vein, yet a third critic compared novel-reading to a 'poison instilled, as it were, into the blood' and predicted that 'her intellectual powers enervated by such a course of reading, fall an easy prey to the first … languishing lover.' His meditation on distorted subjective judgment of the reader also lead him to remark on the sad plight of the ruined women who 'take pleasure in the misery [they have] created and fancy floods of sorrow sweetly graceful.'[58] Like the supping of deleterious draughts with pleasure, this was a potent image of the scrambled sensibility of the reader, who could no longer trust her senses to tell good from bad or right from wrong. In these

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[55] And for all the fun I am having with the overblown language of these critics, anyone who has been swept up in a novel (or any mediated experience, for that matter) will know that slightly unsettling feeling of being overwhelmed by an authorial perspective that is not one's own.

[56] 'Character and Effects of Modern Novels' *Universal Asylum and Columbian Magazine*, Oct. 1792, 225.

[57] 'An Essay on the Modern Novel,' 106

[58] 'Novel Reading, A Cause of Female Depravity,' *The New England Quarterly Magazine*, Apr.-Jun. 1802, Vol 2, No.1, 172

critiques, then, the novel was disturbing not only because it exposed the vulnerability of the subjective, sentimental self by violating and overwhelming the reader with its sensual overload, but also because it exposed the fragility of subjective discernment by leaving it permanently distorted.

But let's all step back and take a deep breath. Isn't this all just a little hysterical? What made some people so convinced that the novel was such a profound danger to the modern subject? What made such a strange claim plausible in the first place? This the critics don't explicitly tell us, for they more or less take it for granted that the novel is precisely such a danger. A telling hint is provided for us, however, by the strong overlap between this kind of critique, and the critique of luxury and consumption which also pervaded late eighteenth century print culture.[59] The critique of luxury identified not just novels, but a whole raft of pleasurable objects as threateningly seductive. This draws our attention to the fact that the novel was offensive not just (or even primarily) as a subversive text but, more fundamentally, as precisely a pleasurable object. The importance of this observation is that, as I mentioned above, the refined subject was constituted primarily through his or her interaction with precisely such objects. The danger of the novel, and the luxury object more generally, lay precisely in the fact that it was a key site for the formation of individual subjectivity, and therefore exercised a perceived influence that is difficult to imagine in our own day.

This last point requires a little unpacking. What exactly do I mean when I say that 'the subject was constituted … through his or her interaction with … objects' or that 'the luxury object … was a key site

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[59] An overlap in both the sort of language that is used to condemn both, and the authorship which does the condemning; as mentioned earlier, critics of one kind of seduction often criticized other kinds as well. I have only briefly touched on the critique of luxury because it is admirably covered in Bushman, *Refinement of America*, 181-203

for the formation of individual subjectivity.' Isn't subjective experience just an aspect of our biological

situation as human beings? What have objects got to do with it? The issue here is not, of course, the

basic existential conditions that govern how we experience of the world, which are necessarily

ahistorical, but rather the way we consciously reflect on and unconsciously organize these experiences.

A rich scholarly tradition asserts that we filter and reflect on our experiences through the assumptions

and practices of our culture, which is thought to be primarily constituted by language.[60] This is part of

what Foucault means when he says that discourses constitute the self; patterns in the way we talk about

personhood shape and structure the way we actually experience the world.[61] Discourses about the

subject give rise to experiences of subjectivity, while talk of freedom gives rise to the experience of

agency (or, more often, the lack thereof.)

As Foucault would have been the first to recognize, however, discourses don't hang disembodied in

space; any given set of historical conditions conspire to make certain ideas thinkable or unthinkable.[62]

This substratum of cultural life is an obscure and poorly-understood topic, in large part because it must

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[60] One could cite an endless list of theorists, but here is a brief list in descending order of accessibility who all share something like this view: Clifford Geertz, *The interpretation of cultures: selected essays* (New York : Basic Books, 1973), William H. Sewell Jr., *Logics of history: social theory and social transformation* (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, c2005) Marshall Sahlins, *Islands of history* (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1985), Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a theory of practice*, trans. Richard Nice., (Cambridge ; New York : Cambridge University Press, 1977), Michel Foucault, *The history of sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York : Pantheon Books, c1978-)

[61] Of course, with the exception of his early work in the *History of Madness*, Foucault is not terribly interested in 'experience' as a category of analysis but rather the discursive structures which make experience possible. That's really the main difference between my approach and his – to write a history of emotions as I am doing is necessarily to write history from inside the consciousness of those who live it. Which doesn't mean I am not interested in the kinds of analytical moves that try to get at the unarticulated assumptions beneath this experience (that's what I am currently attempting, after all!) but rather that the ultimate end of my scholarship is to understand the experience itself as fully as possible. For a critique of my approach, which I obviously find contemptible but which is generally well-regarded, see Joan Scott, 'The Evidence of Experience,' *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 17, No. 4. (Summer, 1991), pp. 773-797.

[62] I should again note that Foucault's idea of what this 'substratum' consists of is different from my own, which is, as shall momentarily become clear, influenced more by materialist thinkers like Marx and Bourdieu.

by and large be inferred from subtle hints in the historical record. But in the present case, we have an important advantage in that historians have been able to establish a strong correlation between, on the one hand, the rise of a new vision of person (the individual subject) and the proliferation of a new kind of object – the capitalist commodity.[63] And we do, as it happens, have access to a robust theory which helps us explain how the experience of commodities would have made the individual subject a more 'thinkable' idea.

The theory I have in mind is, of course, Marx's famous definition of the commodity as a fetish – as an object, that is, which obscures its origins in the social world of work and exchange.[64] What makes the commodity unique is that we don't know who made it, or even how it was made – it appears as though by magic on the shelf of a shop, free from any significance or meaning other than that which we subjectively ascribe to it. This makes the commodity radically different from pre-modern objects such as religious relics, locally produced goods, inherited tools or land, and lovers' mementoes. All these objects are deeply significant for their owners and help constitute pre-modern personhood, but they constitute the personhood of the owner *in relation to other people*.[65] The relic connects me to a saint or to God personified as Christ, locally produced goods connect me to the people who provide them to me, my inheritance locates me in relation to my ancestor or patron, and the lovers' token connects me to the beloved. These objects only lead my thought and sense of self back into the dense web of social and

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[63] I have in mind the works cited in note 7, many of which see themselves as describing the origins of consumer culture but none of which, to their detriment, have much to say about Marx and his theory of the commodity fetish.

[64] Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (New York, Modern Library: 1906), Vol. 1, 81-95

[65] On these other objects, many of which, of course, persist into the present-day, see especially Orest Ranum, 'The Refuges of Intimacy' in Chartiers (Ed.) *History of Private Life*, 207-63

spiritual relationships which constitutes my life and personhood. But the modern commodity, shorn as it is of all social context, connects me only to myself – reflects me back to myself, as we might say. I am forced to confront the commodity with no context but my own subjective relation to it (a relation of desire, disinterest or disgust, for instance, or a relation of ability or inability to acquire it.) And, in the process of so reacting, I subtly become more conscious of myself as a subjective locus of experience, as a person who has a personal, private disposition to an object which is not necessarily shared by or with others. The proliferation of commodities in the seventeenth and, to a much greater extent, eighteenth century thus constitutes a transformation in the very fabric of lived experience, and it is no great surprise that the idea of the individual subject surfaces amongst precisely that class which is increasingly surrounded by an abundance of commodities.

This greatly helps us understand, I think, why the seduction story insists on both the danger of the seductive commodity-object and the solitude and social isolation of the seduced subject. To be left alone with the seductive object was at once a pre-condition for modern subjectivity and a threat to the integrity of that subjectivity. The novel is dangerous not just because of its contents, but also because it is one of the commodities through which a new and unsettling subjectivity is nurtured and cultivated. The critics register this fact obliquely when they imagine the act of reading, as for instance here: 'the warm representations painted in a novel, and read in the privacy of retirement, cannot fail in exciting desires.'[66] The danger of the novel stems not just from its warm representations, that is, from its content, but also from the privacy and retirement (in the sense of seclusion) that is entailed in silent reading. The writer's ostensible objection is to the content, but at a deeper level, he registers an unease with the very notion of a subject constituted through private and dangerous dealings with desire-

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[66] 'Character and Effects of Modern Novels,' 184

provoking commodities. This kind of subject, the implication goes, is inherently and dangerously prone to delusion, deviation, and catastrophic failure of self.

And this is also the point which the seduction narrative again and again returns to as it retells, ostensibly as a cautionary tale but really as an insoluble dilemma, the decline and fall of the subject. For, just as was the case with the novel, the problem with the libertine was that his victims were always falling for him, in both senses of the word. He was both an irresistibly desirable object and someone who played on subjective error to deceive. As one story very typically told it: 'unhappily there is in female youth a critical period, when sensibility of soul leaves them susceptible of many impressions ... it is experience only that can guide them to discriminate between these impressions.' It is at this critical stage, the writer says, addressing the libertine, that 'you laid your plans with penetration and subtlety, and concealed their depth with hypocrisy. The object of your artifice had not yet learned that one may smile and deceive ... An ingenuous soul is ever in danger from the machinations of a designing world.'[67] The seduced woman is, in these stories, the tricked woman, the woman unable to discern correctly. Her inability stems only partly from her youth and inexperience, but crucially also from the depth and susceptibly of her sensibility. The danger here is again one that is inherent in subjectivity.

In another story, entitled 'On Seduction,' the woman is depicted as 'unable to withstand the whirlwind of her passions, blown up to rage by this minister of darkness.' Here the libertine is both an irresistible object and a deceptive one, blowing up desire and casting darkness over his true nature: he is described as a man with 'all the accomplishments of a gentleman, except virtue,' gallant, 'agreeable,' 'pleasing,'

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[67] Melancholy Tale of Seduction, *Massachusetts Magazine*, April 1795, 7, 1, 40

supporting 'the appearance of the *true* gentleman.'[68] His victim's 'innocence' and 'artless simplicity'

make her a 'conquest easy to this skillful deceiver,' but desire plays a part too for it is only 'when passion

subsided and reflection returned' that she realizes what she has done.[69] Another piece makes the

underlying connection between seduction and the loss of subjective discernment even more explicit

when it describes this recovery in the following words: 'Alicia, when she recovered her senses, which

she had been by art deprived of.'[70] In yet another case, the word 'delusion' literally serves as a synonym

for seduction, as in the casual remark 'she suffered herself to be deluded and conveyed to London.'[71] A

moralist playing on the same concept metaphorically compared 'He that is intoxicated with wine' with a

libertine who 'gives scope to the intoxication of passion.'[72] To be seduced was to be intoxicated (or, as

we saw above, opiated) with all the attendant distortions of perception and judgment.

A sympathetic moralist drew out the fundamental problem here: 'we will allow it possible to put cases

wherein no particular rules of discovery, no determinate modes of judgment, will enable a young

woman, by her own unassisted skill, to discern the dangers that lie in her way.'[73] Another commentator

spelled out the underlying, and inescapable, nature of the problem: 'Without sensibility, man is an

unwelcome guest in society … Yet the pores of sensibility are the inlets of deception; and virtue,

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[68] Another instance of the libertine as an irresistible object, made more so by those wretched novels: 'A libertine, adorned with Chesterfieldian graces, presents more charms to their imaginations, which are commonly fraught with romantic ideas of excellency and perfection,' in 'Libertinism', *The Boston Magazine*, March 1785, 2, 93.

[69] 'On Seduction' *Massachusetts Magazine*, May 1792, 4, 5, 308. Compare 'the perfidious Alonzo, by his persuasive flattery and external charms, ensnared her susceptible heart' in 'The Sorrows of Amelia: Or Deluded Innocence,' *Massachusetts Mercury* March 7th, 1799.

[70] 'The Duelist and Libertine Reclaimed,' *Massachusetts Magazine*, April, 1789, 1, 4, 205

[71] 'An Unfortunate Female,' *Columbian Centinel*, November 13, 1790.

[72] 'Sentiments on Libertines,' *The Boston Magazine*, 1784, 1, 419

[73] 'The Babler, No. XII' *Massachusetts Magazine*, Oct 1790; 2, 10, 616

exposed to the wiles of passion, is often surprised through them.'[74] It was precisely such cases to which

the seduction story again and again turned, but it was not young women alone who experienced the

limits of subjective judgment and unassisted discernment. The other major player in the seduction story,

the libertine himself, was himself often laboring under delusions and lead astray by subjective

experiences. Occasionally, the problem with the libertine was a want of sentiment and sympathy, as in

the following address to such a character, which explained 'what you have committed will appear no

crime; every step will harden you … Vice only found a friend in your breast … there was no space for

sympathy, or reflection' and went on to urge 'Reflect, sir …. Reflect … see … where there never times

when your heart checked you … To feel for another's woe was a lesson you had never known … you had

learned … never to pity … nor had you … tenderness'[75] Here the libertine was imagined as a hardened

criminal, someone simply bereft of the subjective faculties which might have illuminated the horror of

what he was doing. The ultimate effect of these descriptions is to depict the libertine's behavior as no so

much a product of outright malice but rather the consequence of a slow accumulation of experiences

which have distorted his judgment, as when one commentator describes the libertine as a man who 'by

intemperance and debauchery corrupted his principles, impaired his constitution, enslaved himself to

appetite … [all of which] contributed to embolden guilt, to harden vice, to render the retreat from a life

of scandal and misery more hopeless.'[76]

More often, however, the libertine suffered from the same subjective experience of falling for his victim,

though the libertine, of course, tends only to be overwhelmed rather than deceived by the virtuous

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[74] 'Worchester Speculator, No. 51,' *Massachusetts Spy*, April 2, 1789.

[75] 'Melancholy Tale of Seduction,' *Massachusetts Magazine*, April 1795, 7, 1, 40

[76] 'The Babler, No. XII' *Massachusetts Magazine*, Oct 1790; 2, 10, 616.

target of his affections. Thus, we often read that on meeting his victim, 'Such beauty did not long fail of raising a flame in the bosom of Antonio … his libertine principles … began to revive.'[77] Also incited by beauty is Sir Edward, who himself plays an enchanting violin and is according to the narrator 'one of the most engaging figures I ever saw.' His eventual victim, 'Louisa was no less captivating, and Sir Edward had not seen [her] long without emotion … when first it grew warmer, he checked it … but the struggle was too ineffectual to overcome, and of consequence increased his passion.'[78] That this story describes both parties as irresistible object who, within a few sentences, 'seduce' each other suggests some of the way the objectified language of seduction comes in these stories to wholly displace any notion of mutual attraction. In stories narrated by rakes themselves, the author often cites this overwhelming experience as a kind of excuse 'the above unhappy affair was more the effect of sudden impulse, than of any premeditated arts of seduction … the first fatal impression my heart ever received of so much enchanting beauty'[79] 'I flattered myself I should be able to resist every temptation' another libertine tells us, but we need not even read on to know he is terribly mistaken and that a seduction is about to ensue.[80] The libertine even at times has moments of remorse very much alike those of his victims, as in the following poem on 'the Rake' which reads in part:

'Yet, left alone to cooler thought,

He knows, he sees, he feels his fault;

He knows his fault, he feels, he views –

Detesting what he most pursues'[81]

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[77] 'The Duelist and Libertine Reclaimed' *Massachusetts Magazine*, April, 1789, 1, 4, 205

[78] 'Innocent Simplicity Betrayed: Story of Sir Edward and Louisa' *Massachusetts Magazine*, August, 1789, 1, 8, p 470.

[79] 'Melancholy Effects of Seduction' *Massachusetts Magazine*, November 1795, 7, 8, 467.

[80] 'The Sentimental Libertine' *Massachusetts Magazine*, March 1790, 2, 3, 173

[81] 'The Rake' *New-Haven Gazette*, March 16, 1786, 1, 5, 38

This lucidity, of course, like that of the libertine's victim, only works in hindsight and thus draws attention to the fact that this ability to see and view is precisely what is missing in the moment of seduction.

Of course, the libertine's insensibility to the suffering of his victim and his delusion by beauty and pleasure are really two sides of the same coin, as is made explicit in a poem which dramatically depicts pleasure and dissipation blinding and then murdering conscience:

> Conscience where art thou? Sleeping in my breast
>
> Yes! Yes! The sentinel is off his guard!
>
> Tir'd with the wounds from dissipation's lash,
>
> He cries for peace and fondly sinks to rest,
>
> I've taken him a prisoner of war
>
> Came pleasure, now put out the rebel's eyes;
>
> …
>
> Let's slay him quick and hurl him from his den[82]

The striking visual metaphor here of the 'blinding' of conscience vividly underlines the fact, often missed, that the concern of this literature is not primarily with failures of self-control, but rather failures of perception. The libertine and his victim are fascinating and troubling not because they give in to temptation or embrace sin, but rather because they don't even see them as such until it is too late. This emphasis on the quality of subjective experience turns out to be the real issue even when the text seems to be advocating self-control, as for instance an article entitled 'On the Regulation of the Passions,' whose author promises to deliver a sermon on the necessity of will and self-control but instead seems to have in mind something more like repression when he writes: 'Wherever the

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[82] 'The Murder of Conscience: Or, the Rake's Soliloquy' *Massachusetts Magazine*, August 1790, 2, 8, 503.

subjection of the passions has produced the necessary consequences of calmness and content heaven must be enjoyed … wherever the passions … are yet vigorous and flourishing, hell must be felt.'[83] The author here seems to have in mind not the restraint of emotion by rational reflection on the consequences of one's actions, but rather a wholesale reconstruction of subjective experience. That is, the point is not to restrain the pursuit of what seems like pleasure ('wretched, when restrained … at war with himself' is his rather grim analysis of a libertine who attempts this) but rather to remold the emotional landscape, to experience pleasure only in that which leads to virtue, and to experience it moderately.

We see this concern also, and perhaps most dramatically, in the trope that the seduced woman succumbs to madness. In the typical seduction narrative, we usually find a very drawn-out account of delirium or disease which follows the seduction itself, often depicted as a process that alienates them from their friends and family, and that ends in death. The madness and demise (frequently by her own hand) of the seduced woman is usually interpreted as a sort of 'punishment' for her fall from virtue, but in fact madness, as the late eighteenth century tended to define it, is simply the natural extension of the condition of being seduced.[84] In the period's medical and popular understanding of it, madness was a product or, rather, a consequence of overwhelming sentiment; in a way directly analogous to the long-term effects of reading novels (or of debauchery in the quotes above), madness represented a

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[83] 'On the Regulation of the Passions,' *Hampshire Gazette*, November 9, 1791

[84] The 'punishment' argument is particularly incoherent since the texts which resort to madness bend over backwards to defend precisely the 'innocence' of the figure most afflicted by madness – the seduced woman. This is all the more underscored by the fact that people die from this kind of madness even when they are not themselves involved in seduction. Think of the main characters in the *Power of Sympathy*, or, the originator of the madness archetype, Richardson's *Clarisa*. For one proponent of the madness-as-punishment argument see Weyler, 'Fruit of Unlawful Embraces.'

subjectivity debilitated by its false experiences and no longer able to orient itself in the world.[85] The specter of madness thus evoked a deep fear of the unstable, contingent nature of subjective knowledge; a fear that not only might my subjective experience fail to alert me to the dangers around me, but that my very ability to see the world accurately might become distorted in a way that alienates me from others and ultimately becomes self-destructive.[86] This is also the fear at work, of course, in the idea of a 'progress' of vice – that a mild and 'harmless' form of seduction can distort my judgment and leave me vulnerable to a more dangerous kind. Seduction was a temporary failure of subjective judgment; madness was a permanent and, frequently, fatal one. And it was, as the texts of seduction again and again insisted, a threat inherent in and proportionate to the subject's reliance on her own sensibility: 'the more delicate the texture of mind, the more easily will trouble and anxiety debilitate the intellect.'[87] One reads again and again pronouncements like the following which link the seduced woman's death not to guilt but rather to her inability and weakness in the face of her misfortune: 'her sensibility was too refined to sustain the reproach of a censorious world and therefore embraced death.'[88] Male figures

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[85] Benjamin Rush asserts in a text published in 1812 but characteristic of eighteenth century thought that 'madness is excited in the understanding … by impressions that act primarily upon the heart … joy, terror, love, fear, grief, distress, shame, defamation, calumny' Benjamin Rush, *Medical Inquiries and Observations Upon diseases of the Mind* (Philadelphia: Kimber & Richardson, 1812) 38-9 John Haslam in 1809 likewise gives as a cause 'the frequent and uncurbed indulgence of any passion or emotion, and any sudden or violent affection of the mind.' John Haslam, *Observations on Madness and Melancholy* (London: J Callow, 1809), 210. For madness in the eighteenth century more generally, see (for once in his capacity as an intellectual historian of madness) Michel Foucault, *History of Madness*, 251-296. Roy Porter, Madness: *A Brief History* (Oxford University Press,2002) 55-155, Roy Porter, *Flesh in the Age of Reason*, 305-322

[86] We can trace this idea back intellectually to Locke's notion of the person as Tabula Rasa – lacking any innate character but shaped and formed by their experiences. Few people, of course, would have read Locke in 1790s America, but the percolated through educated culture and ultimately we might think of Locke himself as simply being one of the first people to articulate the sense of subjective vertigo which haunted the classical age. For Locke in this context, see Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 159-176 and Porter, *Flesh in the Age of Reason*, 94-112

[87] 'Continuation of the extract from a Manuscript Volume published in our last,' *Heard of Freedom*, July 10, 1789

[88] 'The Sorrows of Amelia: Deluded Innocence' *MA Mercury*, March 7, 1799.

were less frequently but no less strongly susceptible: 'fury and despair rushed over him with unsufferable violence. Their effects were too much for his frame to support … He died.'[89]

From start to finish, then, in a variety of genres and with a variety of targets in mind, the literature of seduction warned against the failure of subjective, embodied selfhood. But this does not in and of itself tell us much about why people returned again and again to these stories. Seduction stories present themselves as moral cautionary tales, and as a form of the moral education whose lack they often decry in the seduced woman. The implicit and often explicit idea is that the reader, by becoming acquainted with the danger of seduction, will thereby be protected from it. In other words, the seduction story attempts to substitute a public, textual consciousness for the private, sensual consciousness which it depicts as failing. Participation in the rational, public discourse of the public sphere would make up for the shortcomings of subjective knowledge. As we saw, however, contemporary critics of the novel were not convinced that this is indeed what happened when people read novels, and they were not the last to note that novels also provided their readers with the voyeuristic, seductive pleasures of exercising their sensibility.[90] In fact, because the experience of seduction was mediated through a text, the critics of the novel probably came closer to the true state of affairs than its defenders. To experience seduction at a distance, in a mediated form, was very different from (and, in fact, incommensurate with) the bodily experience of being seduced. And, as eighteenth century aesthetic theorists well understood, this distance created a wholly different experience, one which they described as the experience of sublimity

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[89] 'On the Regulation of the Passions,' *Hampshire Gazette*, November 9, 1791

[90] Karen Halttunen, "Humanitrianism and the Pornography of Pain in Anglo-American Culture", *American Historical Review,* Vol. 100, No. 2 (Apr., 1995), pp. 303-334)

– the enjoyment from a distance what would, if one were exposed directly to it, be terrifying.[91] This accounts for the apparent paradox that the seduction narrative dramatized deep fears about the integrity of personhood, and yet was consumed as a popular entertainment. To get a better look at what was at stake in seduction, then, we must look beyond the text.

III.   The Scandalous Libertine and the Crisis of the Divided Self

So much, then, for the fictions of seduction. But seduction wasn't just something that happened beneath the covers of books. The scandal surrounding Frances Apthorp and Perez Morton which came to light in Boston in 1788 provides one all-too-human reminder that seduction was a matter of flesh and blood, as well as of truth and text. As it turns out, it was precisely the sudden, violent collision of text and flesh, of public appearances and private passions, which unsettled and fascinated Bostonians as they read and gossiped about a vile seduction perpetrated by one of their leading citizens. The Apthorp-Morton scandal ultimately turned on the deep incommensurability between the two mutually reinforcing dimensions of eighteenth century personhood: the public, refined and objectified self which one cultivated and put on display before others, and the private, sentimental and subjective self whose quandaries and susceptibilities I've just discussed in some detail. As we move from the texts of seduction to the social fallout of an actual seduction, we see more clearly what was at stake, and how desperately high the stakes were, in the somewhat abstract psychological failures and deviant subjectivities that I've so far elaborated. But first, let me tell you the story of a seduction.

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[91] On the sublime, see Immanuel Kant, *Observations on the feeling of the beautiful and sublime,* Trans. John T. Goldthwait.(Berkeley, University of California Press, 1960) and Edmund Burke, *A philosophical enquiry into the sublime and beautiful* (London: Routledge Classics, 2008)

It begins at the end: on August 28th, 1788, Frances Theodora Apthorp killed herself by taking poison.[92] The brief obituary notice, which ran on the 2nd of September, would alone have been enough to raise eyebrows. Women from the upper echelons of society did not, as a rule, die of natural causes at the age of twenty-four. But it was only a fortnight later that the scandal really broke, and helped launch a newspaper in the process. The first issue of the *Herald of Freedom* hit the streets on the 15th of September and, in lieu of the traditional mission statement stating the aims of the new publication, the editors ran several very distraught letters signed F– T– A– which made more than evident that the cause of death was suicide, and the cause of suicide, seduction. In her suicide note, however, Apthorp took care to insist on her sanity, and instead tried to justify taking her own life as an act that would 'prove my guilty innocence' and also as a protest against the position she had been put in, writing 'I felt, from the first that this matter would go against me; I resolved not to live after it had.' The matter Apthorp had in mind was not only her seduction, but its public exposure. In another letter she wrote with mounting terror that 'I have no proof – I have no money to make those who know the whole truth declare it. Before long I shall be condemned in a Court of Justice! … my guilty innocence cannot save me –There is no oblation but in death.'[93]

Either as a result of these letters being made public or independently, an inquest was launched into the circumstances of Apthorp's death. The inquest implicated her sister's husband, thirty-seven year old

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[92] See obituary notice in the *Massachusetts Gazette*, September 2, 1788.

[93] *Herald of Freedom*, September 15, 1788

Boston attorney, Harvard graduate and Revolutionary patriot, Perez Morton.[94] Evidently, this was not a

satisfactory development for some parts of the community, for on October 8th a notice appeared in the

Massachusetts Centinel announcing that 'We are happy in being able to announce to the publick, that

the accusations brought against a fellow citizen … which have been the cause of so much domestick

calamity, and publick speculation, have … been submitted to, and fully inquired into by their Excellencies

JAMES BOWDOIN, and JOHN ADAMS, Esq'rs, and that the result of their inquiry is, that the said

accusations "are not, *in any degree*, supported.'[95] Bowdoin and Adams (respectively, the sitting

governor and the future president) threw the hefty weight of their public authority behind Morton and,

in so doing, offered an alternative (and familiar) explanation of Apthorp's suicide: 'an insane state of

mind.' Insanity perfectly suited Adams and Bowdoin's aims, which was to both discredit Apthorp's

version of events, and to silence 'publick speculation' about what they were trying to position as a

purely 'domestick' and private calamity. For, as we've seen, insanity was the condition par excellence of

the private, isolated subject; it trapped the sufferer within a subjective frame of reference and isolated

them from communal intervention. If it was the consequence of a private malady which reflected,

ultimately, a failure of the subjective self, the public had no further reason to inquire into Apthorp's

suicide.

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[94] Of Morton's pre-scandal career we know relatively little: the son of a well-to-do tavern-keeper, he graduated Harvard in 1771, sat in 1776 on the Boston Committee of Correspondence, Inspection and Safety, and served as major in the Revolutionary army under General Hancock in the same year, and was well-regarded as a public orator. He did well out of the Revolution, making a tidy fortune from his investments in privateering. Nor did his political radicalism prevent him from marrying, in 1781, Sarah Apthorp, daughter of a loyalist family known as one of the wealthiest merchant clans of Boston, and recovering the family mansion (confiscated as loyalist property) for his personal use. Interestingly, in the winter of 1784, he was involved in a smaller scandal concerned with the 'Sans souci' club, a society organized for gambling and dancing that was forced to close its doors after a public outcry. On Morton himself, see Chifford K Shipton, *Sibley's Harvard Graduates* (Boston: Massachussets Historical Society, 1975) Vol. 17, 555-61, and 'Sarah Wentworth Apthorp Morton' in *American National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press) Vol. 15, 961-3. On the Sans Souci club, see *Massachusetts Centinel*, January 15; January 19; January 22; January 26; January 29; February 9, 1785; American Herald, January 24; January 31; February 7, 1785; *Independent Chronicle* February 3, 1785, and anon., *Sans Souci, Alias Free and Easy Or An Evening's Peep into a polite Circle* (Boston: Warden and Russell, 1785)

[95] *Massachusetts Centinel*, October 8th, 1788

Rather than calming the situation, Adams' and Bowdoin's imperious pronouncement only fanned the flames of scandal as a number of critics wrote to the *Herald of Freedom* to question the propriety and adequacy of their intervention. The problem was twofold: that Adams and Bowdoin were trying to settle privately what was really a matter of concern to the public, and that by doing so they were protecting the guilty. This was the concern of writers who worried that 'by this new judiciary mode [ie. the note], our most fashionable vices may be wrapt up in private,' who observed that 'the extract offered to the publick … is so unsatisfactory to the whole community … when considered as a justification,' and who wanted to know 'how far the recent guilt of a person is compensated by the interference of two gentlemen, whose humanity … urged them to cast a veil over the vileness.'[96] The trouble wasn't only that Adams and Bowdoin sought to move the scandal out of the realm of public discussion by putting together 'a few private friends, in a private room' to overturn the verdict of a legal Jury.[97] It was also that in so doing they were in fact aiding and abetting the 'vices,' 'guilt' and 'vileness' which had been committed in private. Implicitly, by writing to defend the publication of the scandal in a public newspaper and a legal inquest, these writers were making the opposite move – they wanted Morton's private conduct to be subjected to public scrutiny. The private solution of Adams and Bowdoin's note was 'unsatisfactory to the whole community' and to 'unappeased justice,' as one of the correspondents signed themselves.

The *Herald* writers were evidently unsatisfied by Adams' and Bowdoin's attempt to blame the whole thing on Apthorp's alleged insanity. But who, in fact, was to blame? What had actually happened? The

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[96] *Herald of Freedom*, October 13, 1788; October 16, 1788

[97] *Herald of Freedom*, October 13, 1788

initial flurry of conversation in the papers left many questions unanswered, and only succeeded in drawing attention to the unsettling gap between what had gone on in private and what was said in public. Into this gap stepped William Hill Brown, neighbor of the Mortons and the author of *The Power of Sympathy* – a novel of seduction based, in part, on the Apthorp-Morton scandal. The novel's account of the scandal more or less explicitly addressed the Adams and Bowdoin note, and the *Herald*'s complaints that this note did not satisfactorily address questions of guilt, responsibility and justice. It also gave a much fuller account of the events leading up to Apthorp's suicide than had previously been available to the public in an attempt to answer the Herald's demand for a fuller public investigation into the private lives of the Mortons and Apthorps.

As Brown told it, Morton has seduced Apthorp, carried on a lengthy affair with her and, eventually, left her with child. The birth of the child had, of course, revealed the affair to her family. Old James Apthorp, Frances's father, was incensed and had insisted on a public confrontation with his son-in-law. From Frances Apthorp's allusions to a 'court of justice' it seems the old man had intended to take the matter to law, presumably by appeal to the laws against fornication and adultery which, though little enforced, were still on the books. This Frances sought at all costs to prevent and, finding her appeals to her father's mercy unavailing, she took poison. Brown's account of the scandal features a long extract from 'Martin' (a thinly disguised Morton) laying the blame squarely at the father's feet, depicting Frances as 'a straying and penitent child, driven to suicide and despair by a severe use of parental power.'[98] Brown himself in part embraced Morton's self-serving interpretation of events but also went beyond it by assigning to him a sizable share of the blame. On the question of Frances Apthorp's own guilt, Brown

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[98] Brown, *Power of Sympathy*, 59-70, quote on 69-70. In addition to Brown's narrative, an operatic farce was published around this time that appears more loosely based on the scandal and which also sees the father as a part of the problem, this time for his attempts to force his daughter into a financially advantageous marriage. See anon., *The Better Sort: or, The Girl of Spirit. An Operatical Comical Farce* (Boston: Isaiah Thomas & Co., 1789)

tellingly hedged his bets – on the whole, he portrays her as rather helplessly caught between the rock of parental severity and the hard place of unprincipled libertinism. She emerges from his account as unable to resist either the temptation represented by Morton or obtain the forgiveness and sympathy of her father. Indeed, Brown makes Apthorp (telling renamed Ophelia in his *roman-a-clef*) much more helpless and pathetic than she perceived herself to be, for he accepts Adams and Bowdoin's verdict of insanity over her protestations of sanity. In the process, he rewrites the suicide, which Frances herself saw as proof of her 'guilty innocence' and protest against public exposure, as the typical seduction trope of a woman overwhelmed by 'despair,' 'distress' and 'horror.'[99]

This somewhat unexpected twist in Brown's otherwise sympathetic portrait of Apthorp, which is based heavily and for the most part uncritically on her own letters, is worth pausing over, not least because this wasn't the only instance when a novelization of seduction exaggerated or invented the mental instability of the seduced woman.[100] Here we see the chief difference between the representation of seduction in the novel and the progress of seduction in real life. The sentimental novel is almost exclusively concerned with seduction as a psychological and subjective, and therefore private, event. It therefore elides the scandalous nature of seduction, which turns, as we can already begin to see, on the disjunction it reveals between public and private life. The novel has good reason to ignore this aspect of seduction, of course, for from this point of view the novel itself is implicated in a somewhat unsavory way in the drama of seduction. If Frances Apthorp died, in some sense, to protect herself from public

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[99] Brown, *Power of Sympathy*, 64

[100] This is also a very striking contrast between the newspaper accounts of the last days of Elizabeth Whitman and the Karenina-like mental disintegration depicted in the latter part of Hannah Foster's *The Coquette,* which was nominally based on Whitman's story. Compare Foster's treatment with the following newspaper account: 'She amused herself with reading, writing, and needle-work, was agreeable, graceful and genteel in her deportment, and tho' in a state of anxiety, preserved a cheerfulness which seemed to be the effect not of insensibility, but of patience and firmness.' *Massachusetts Centinel*, September 20, 1788.

scrutiny, then Brown's novel, which is precisely such an act of scrutiny, is at the very least a morally questionable and at worst an outright predatory act. In an era when the novel was, as we've seen, under attack as immoral, Brown and his fellow-scribblers had ample reason to suppress the voyeuristic and pornographic appeal of its promise to reveal private vices to public view. And they had even more reason not to inquire too closely what part such scandalous revelations played in the tragic consequences of seduction, and to emphasize instead the victim's subjective and private distress. Thus we begin to see it will be necessary to move beyond the novel's rather self-interested depiction of seduction as an exclusively private event, in part by paying more attention to the novel's own investment of publicizing the private.

But before we head in this direction, we must reckon with Charles Apthorp. Charles was the brother of Frances, and an officer of the British empire. News of his sister's seduction and demise took a while to reach him, so his arrival in Boston coincided almost exactly with the publication of Brown's novel in the waning days of January, 1789. Like Brown and the *Herald* writers, Charles evidently felt the matter of Morton's seduction of his sister had not been entirely satisfactorily settled by the Adams and Bowdoin note. He took a slightly different approach, however, to bringing the matter to a head: he was scarcely disembarked on American soil before he had challenged Morton to a duel. Morton showed up at the appointed time, but it appears he had no stomach for a shoot-out, for he came accompanied by armed attendants, insisted he would only fight in self-defense and had even arranged for an officer of the law to arrive at the scene in time to prevent the duel from taking place. Perhaps inevitably, this rather farcical turn of events ended up in the newspapers, with each side accusing the other of dishonor and

cowardice.[101] The editors of the *Herald* and *Centinel* ran knowing and insinuating reviews of Brown's novel alongside this verbal duel that had supplanted the abortive guns-and-gore duel. The Morton-Apthorp scandal was back in the public eye, and this time Morton, who had managed to remain elusive during the early phase of the scandal, was front and centre.

By challenging Morton to a duel, Apthorp was implicitly working with a different understanding of Morton's crime than the one which preoccupied Brown and the *Herald* writers. Rather than seeing his sister or some abstract concept of justice or community as the victim of Morton's offence, Charles evidently saw the matter as a personal insult to himself. For the ultimate purpose of a duel in the context of eighteenth century America was to settle differences amongst elite men – by challenging Morton, Apthorp implied that the seduction of his sister was a challenge to the Apthorp family's honor and his own manhood, and which therefore had to be settled on the field of battle. For within the elite culture of honor which Apthorp was evoking by challenging Morton to a duel, masculine identity and worth were qualities that had to be publically asserted and, if need be, defended.[102] A man's worth was determined by his standing in the eyes of his peers – the culture of honor, like the culture of refinement

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[101] The verbal fireworks can be followed in *Herald of Freedom*, February 3; February 6; February 10; February 13, 1789; *Massachusetts Centinel*, February 4; February 7; February 12, 1789; *Boston Gazette and Country Journal*, February 9, 1789. For a text purporting to be a behind the scenes look, see also anon. [but almost certainly William Hill Brown], *Occurrences of the Times. Or, The Transactions of Four Days: A Farce in Two Acts* (Boston: Benjamin Russell, 1789)

[102] In the American historiography, the culture of honor is associated primarily with the antebellum South, but it was a transatlantic phenomenon whose roots stretched very far back, which had important connections with the culture of refinement, and which has been shown to have played an important, albeit diminishing, role in the early Republic. On honor in the South (and the nature of honor as a cultural framework more broadly) see Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982); Kenneth S Greenberg, *Honor and Slavery: Lies, Duels, Noses, Masks, Dressing as a Woman, Gifts, Strangers, Humanitarianism, Death, Slave Rebellions, the Proslavery Argument, Baseball, Hunting, and Gambling in the Old South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996) and Steven M Stowe, *Intimacy and Power in the Old South: Ritual in the Lives of the Planters* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1987). On honor in the early Republic, see Joanne B. Freeman, *Affairs of honor: national politics in the New Republic* (New Haven : Yale University Press, 2001)

and civility with which it substantially overlapped, implied an other-directed self whose worth was established by the judgments of others. Moral worth was in both these paradigms a matter of appearing in the correct manner before others, and securing their approbation.

A complicating factor in the Apthorp-Morton case is that the culture of honor was never very deeply rooted in Massachusetts and was on its way out as a masculine ethos in late eighteenth century.[103] This, in fact, does much to account for the somewhat farcical way the 'duel' played out; Morton and Apthorp were both playing a game in which public repute was at stake, but they were playing by different rules. Brown ably caught this dimension of the abortive duel in his *Occurrences of the Times*, a behind-the-scenes look at the Morton household in those frantic January days during which the duel was taking place and the publication of the *Power of Sympathy* was first announced. The satirical play-script depicts Morton conniving to evade the duel, utterly unconcerned with the implications for his honor, but frantically trying to suppress Brown's novel with threats of violence. The play alternates between scenes of gossip which relate in increasing detail Morton's cowardice (culminating in a scene in which he himself brazenly admits to it) and scenes in which an increasingly distraught Morton marshals all his friends and resources to preventing the novel's publication. The comedy arises from the juxtaposition between Morton's indifference to the verbal gossip of what he calls 'the finesse' (Brown even has his wife assure him: 'your address will protect you') and his intense concern with the great danger he

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[103] Part of what made the Puritans culturally distinctive in the early modern period was their insistence on a version of moral piety that stood in direct contrast to the culture of honor. Appearances were devalued and the private conscience elevated; the all-seeing eyes of God were, nominally at least, a far more important frame of reference than the eyes of one's neighbors. As we saw in the former chapter, the reality was more complex and a good reputation was often conflated with inner virtue. None the less, Puritanism cultivated a suspicion of appearances which was in striking contrast to the honor ethos, and the influence of the latter on the elite was correspondingly curtailed.

perceives in the prospect of the novel's 'publick' exposure.[104] The pen, Brown smugly seems to be implying, is mightier than the gun.

Apthorp's bewilderment at Morton's conduct, and the fundamental difference between them, is admirably caught in a letter published in the *Massachusetts Centinel* by 'one of the persons concerned' in the duel (presumably Apthorp himself, for the letter very much takes his side.) This letter, appearing on February seventh, but dated on the fourth, distances itself from a pro-Apthorp sally which started the newspaper exchange on the 3rd but violently denounces a pro-Morton reply on the 4th as a pack of lies. 'Publick papers are not criterions to form or establish characters by' declares Apthorp in a huff, 'as the conduct, and not the language of men, must determine their reputation in the eyes of the world.'[105] And it is precisely here that Apthorp outs himself as the author of the missive and a stranger in a strange land. For America, as Morton and Brown both well understood, was rapidly on the road to becoming a place where reputations are made and unmade not by conduct, but precisely the language of men – especially such men as know how to manipulate the language of the public sphere, the language of print.[106]

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[104] Brown, *Occurrences*, 1, 12-14

[105] 'For the Centinel,' *Massachusetts Centinel*, February 7, 1789.

[106] I obviously don't mean to imply here that Apthorp's native Britain was in the 1780's a savage land unaccustomed to newspapers where personal disputes were routinely settled by rituals of violence. It is more likely the case that Apthorp, because of his background in an entrenched upper class and his connections to the military, had a somewhat 'old-fashioned' attachment to honor, while Morton, an Massachusetts-born tavern-keeper's son with a penchant for rocking the cultural boat, was unusually indifferent to this old-fashioned standard of behavior. What we have here, in other words, is a perfect example of the uneven developments which plague most attempts to periodize cultural history.

The language of honor which Apthorp is invoking was a language fitted to a world governed by personal relationships. A man demonstrated and sought honor from a community, to be sure, but the community of honor was concretely rather than abstractly defined. Honor was a dialogue with a specific set of others, which was as much defined by whom it excluded (women, slaves, foreigners and most non-elite men) as by the narrow band of brothers who were blessed with the privilege of blasting out each other's brains at ten paces. When Apthorp spoke of the 'eyes of the world' he had in mind 'le beau monde' – the small world of those that counted. To this way of thinking, what was written in the papers didn't truly matter, precisely because anyone might read it (not to mention write it!) and only those not privileged with a more intimate view of the situation would be swayed by it. The paper spoke to everyone equally, and therefore it spoke to no-one of any real importance.

But Morton was betting his reputation on another horse – the sprightly nag of print culture, and the new public sphere it brought into being in the eighteenth century.[107] In this new cultural paradigm, it was not a concrete community of elite men that adjudicated a man's moral worth, but rather the more anonymous, abstract and, in theory at least, democratic public. And all evidence points to Morton having thrown his lot in with this new paradigm well prior to the scandal; as early as 1785, well before the scandal, he is being satirized by the local gentry for having forsaken his 'right of station in the beau monde … he had no notion of mounting the mere *shadow of Pegasus*, but chose rather to prance among

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[107] On the public sphere, see Habermas, *The structural transformation of the public sphere.* On the role of print in constituting and eventually, as it became the dominant form of public discourse, transforming this sphere see Michael Warner, *The Letters of the Republic: publication and the public sphere in eighteenth-century America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), Marcus Daniel, *Scandal & civility: journalism and the birth of American democracy* (New York : Oxford University Press, 2009), Shields, *Civil tongues & polite letters,* 209-274 and, more obliquely, Jay Fliegelman, *Declaring independence : Jefferson, natural language & the culture of performance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993).

the Mules with the nag fully caparisoned.'[108] To caparison a horse is to clothe it richly; the accusation

here is that Morton cares more for impressing the multitude with public display than he does his elite

peers.[109] In any case, that is certainly true of his behavior throughout the scandal, which suggests an

indifference to what people said about him in private, but a great deal of concern about what they

wrote about him in public. When he could, he suppressed public discussions that made him look bad

and when this proved impossible he took advantage of the dialogical quality of the newspaper to

contest texts that made him look bad.[110] His reply to Frances Apthorp's suicide letters via the Adams and

Bowdoin note (which there can be little doubt he was responsible for orchestrating) is in this respect an

exact parallel to his reply to her brother's public accusations of cowardice. In each case, he was making

sure a rival narrative was out in the public sphere, casting doubt on his antagonists' version of events.

Those in the know would not have been fooled, of course, but they were never Morton's concern – it

was the unknowing public to whom he addressed his superficial lies.

As it turned out, Morton had his money on the right horse, for his caparisoned nag ran rings round the

Apthorps' Pegasus. Soon even the readers of the staunchly anti-Morton *Herald of Freedom* had had

enough: a particularly witty correspondent wanted to know 'why the publick should be troubled from

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[108] Morton is 'Mr. Importance' in anon. *Sans Souci, Alias Free and Easy Or An Evening's Peep into a polite Circle* (Boston: Warden and Russell, 1785), 10.

[109] The play implies that this is a recent development in Morton's behavior for Mr. Importance is also shown in the above-cited passage forsaking an older republican reticence and aloofness characteristic of an upper class which took its authority for granted. On the psychological difficulties of squaring this older traditional elite male culture with democratic politics, see in particular Freeman, *Affairs of Honor*. The great weakness of Freeman's book is that she never quite faces up to the role of print in transforming and ultimately destroying this culture, as Daniel points out in *Scandal & civility,* 291 fn.17, but I also provide my own analysis below.

[110] I use 'dialogic' here as an allusion to Mikhail Bakhtin's *Dialogic Imagination* in which Bakhtin makes an argument (in relation to the novel, but the argument applies equally well to newspapers) for the culturally transformative effects of the invention of a textual form in which multiple contrasting points of view are articulated simultaneously. See M. M. Bakhtin, *The dialogic imagination: four essays,* trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin : University of Texas Press, 1981)

day to day with the report of undischarged pistols, or why the particular concerns of private persons should be constantly calling on public attention.' Another echoed this sentiment, remarking rather irately that 'it is of little consequence to the independent freeholders of Massachussets … to know what happened in any gentleman's family, or which is the greater poltroon, M—n or A—p.'[111] Apthorp had unknowingly handed Morton a potent advantage: a duel was, after all, a personal matter between gentlemen, and the Massachusetts reading public was increasingly ambivalent about such rituals, which both the above authors condemned as archaic and illegal. After all, as one of them wrote, 'there is a clear distinction between trial by battle and trial by a Gazette,' and a culture that invested ever-greater authority of the Gazette had little patience for the older forms of reputation-making which the Gazette was in the process of displacing. At best, these were private matters between private persons and of no interest to the public; at worst, they were an affront to the authority of that very public. In any case, they didn't belong in the papers. And so that was all she wrote. No more ink would be spilled on the field of battle to redeem the names Apthorp and Morton; the scandal was over and done with.

But Morton wasn't quite done with. In fact, he was just getting started. In 1791 he headed up a successful public campaign to strike down the old Puritan laws against theatres, in 1792 he was named to the board of the state-organized Union Bank, in 1794 he won election to the Massachusetts House of Representatives, in 1806 he became the Speaker of the House and, in 1811, the state attorney general, which position he would hold for the next two decades. And all this as a Republican in staunchly Federalist Massachussets, and after committing what in former times was a capital crime.[112] O shade of

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[111] *Herald of Freedom*, February 13, 1789

[112] Adultery was nominally a capital crime in Puritan Massachusetts, though this was hardly ever the actual punishment inflicted. For the benefit of those not well acquainted with the parliamentary politics of the period, the Republicans and Federalists were the two major parties of the early national period. For Morton's political life see Paul Goodman, *The Democratic-Republicans of Massachussets: Politics in a Young Republic* (Cambridge, MA:

John Winthrop, cast down your eyes in shame; is this Sodom truly what has become of the City on the Hill?

Whether or not we share the outrage of the staunch Puritans spinning furiously in their graves (and in this matter the reader may do as they see fit) we are bound to see that there is something utterly fitting about Morton's public success in the wake of the scandal. For the most striking thing about all of this, as I hope I've been able to show, is how often the terms private and public recur as mutually antagonistic terms and categories of understanding. Frances Apthorp dies to keep her private shame from being publicized and imagines her suicide as a public exoneration. Morton works tirelessly to manage the public fall-out resulting from his private misdeeds. Adams and Bowdoin collude in this scheme when they insist on the private nature of Apthorp's demise. Meanwhile, the actors who struggle to keep the scandal in the public eye (Brown, the Herald writers and Charles Apthorp) are all preoccupied with exposing private behavior to public view. The newspaper scandal, the sentimental novel and the duel are all, in various ways, cultural forms which mediate between public and private, by holding private life accountable to public opinion. Morton's subsequent public career is a direct consequence of the failure of these attempts to make a public issue of Morton's private behavior. Indeed, this failure is a revealing fact about the late eighteenth century which helps explain the rise, meaning and fall of the libertine as a potent cultural symbol.

Harvard University Press, 1964), 100 and 169, and Shipton, *Sibley's Harvard Graduates*, 560-1, for his support of the theatre, see 'Town Meeting,' *Columbian Centinel*, October 29, 1791, 'Instructions to the Representatives of the Town of Boston,' *The Argus*, November 11, 1791; for an unsuccessful attempt to scuttle the theatre by, in part, drawing attention to the identity of its chief proponent, see *Independent Chronicle*, November 24, 1791. For Morton and the Union Bank, see 'Union Bank,' *Columbian Centinel*, July 28, 1792

But before we can fully appreciate that side of the story, let us examine a little more closely this recurring incommensurability between public and private selves, and their violent conjunction in the scandalous text. Scandal is such a familiar aspect of contemporary life that we are inclined to take for granted that we understand what is going on here. But the terror and desperation of Frances Apthorp at the prospect of being exposed ought to give us pause. For Brown is very clearly wrong about Apthorp – far from succumbing to the solipsistic madness of overwhelmed sentiment, she displays a great deal of lucidity and courage in the face of her seducer's betrayal and her father's disapproval. It is not her private circumstances, difficult as they are, that drive her to suicide, but precisely the threat of having her public reputation destroyed as well. With her suicide, Apthorp seems to say that she would rather lose life itself than this reputation. In this respect, she echoes the ethos of her brother, who is likewise prepared to risk life to save face. And, though he defends his reputation very differently, Morton emerges from all this as a man who is as desperately anxious to salvage his reputation as he is seemingly indifferent to the crisis engulfing his personal life.

The point I am trying to make is that reputation mattered to the eighteenth century gentry in a way that is almost inconceivable in our more anonymous age. The public self – the self that one presented to others – was, of course, readily acknowledged to be a mask and a construction, but it was not therefore experienced as a superficial matter of mere convenience alongside a more real inner self.[113] Instead, it was a profoundly important and psychologically valued source of social identity and belonging – to have one's public mask torn away was, in a very real way, felt as a traumatic loss of self. And, of course, the

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[113] On masks, see Wharman, *Origins of the Modern Self*, 157-97. Though with the caveat that Wharman seems to me a bit too keen on seeing the masked self as easily interchangeable and discardable. Certainly, the public self was malleable to a far greater extent than many other notions of personhood, but there was also a great deal at stake socially and psychologically in presenting certain kinds of self to certain communities of onlookers that Wharman tends to elide. For a more sympathetic rendition of the emotions invested in the public self, see Fliegelman, *Declaring Independence*.

public self was just as vulnerable, just as frail, just as prone to failure and disgrace, as the subjective self I discussed in the previous section. Indeed, we catch in Apthorp and Morton's desperate response to the breaking scandal the utter existential terror which any serious threat to this self provoked. It mattered desperately how one appeared – it was a matter of life and death.

But why, in that case, had Apthorp and Morton been prepared to put this precious public self at risk by having an adulterous affair in the first place? To answer this question is to illuminate the supreme tragedy inherent in eighteenth century personhood. For in so far as public appearances were what really mattered to one's moral standing, this created an effectively amoral area of private activity in which a person might do as he pleased, so long as he or she kept any shameful activity out of the public arena in which moral worth was established. Scandal was what happened when the goings-on in this amoral private realm burst into public awareness in such a way as to compromise a person's standing. The formerly amoral private act was transformed by the moment of scandal into a vice which, in turn, affected a person's public standing and individual moral worth. This is one reason that scandal was so dangerous in this period, and yet also so common.

And, then again, there was the question of medium. For the public self was a self made up of gestures, appearances and, increasingly as the eighteenth century wore on, of words. Public opinion in the late eighteenth century was constructed through talk, gossip and, in ever-increasing volume, printed text. The public self was thus, as Ben Franklin (a man on the cutting edge of textual selfhood) was fond of putting it, something like a book – a self made up of words, disembodied, abstract – a universal

subject.[114] And the private, subjective self, on the other hand, was made up precisely of those things the public self elided – the throbbing, decaying body, the sensual consciousness caught in the whirl of impassioned experience.[115] Little wonder that sex should have become the encapsulating symbol of the incommensurability of this private self and its more public, bloodlessly dispassionate counterpart, and little wonder that the public recognition of sexual life eventually had to be so fiercely curtailed in the name of respectability – the name and form which the public self assumed in the nineteenth century.

But one did not have to engage in illicit sex in order to feel profoundly the tensions inherent in this fractured model of personhood. The voyeuristic pleasure which formed part of the unspoken appeal in scandalous and sentimental literature, but which is betrayed by the somewhat lighthearted tone which at times characterized it, stemmed precisely from the reader's identification with the deviant.[116] The appeal of reading about sexual deviants like Apthorp and Morton lay in seeing the inherent incommensurability of public persona and embodied subjectivity pushed to it is utmost limit, where the unspeakable truth of the pregnant body destroyed reputation and the body was in turn destroyed to forestall the death of reputation. In fact, every reader could to some extent say of this drama 'there but for the grace of Reason go I,' for criminal sexuality was but the extreme instance of the more general problem that no public self could be easily reconciled with the private life that inter-penetrated it, that no public self was entirely free from danger. And because this breakdown of personhood was mediated

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[114] For an elegant discussion of Benjamin Franklin in this context, see Warner, *Letters of the Republic*, 73-96

[115] I am indebted here, and throughout really, to Roy Porter's magnificent rendition of the way the sensual body unsettles eighteenth century print culture as a site of failure. See especially his magnificent reading of Tristram Shandy in Porter, *Flesh in the Age of Reason,* 286-304

[116] Think, for instance, of the correspondent who punned on reports of undischarged pistols at the end of the Morton Scandal. Or see the farce plays cited throughout this chapter. Scandal, it is worth emphasizing, could be fun as well as unsettling.

by the text of the newspaper (or of the seduction narrative), it could even be enjoyed as something sublime; an experience, from a safe distance, of the utterly deadly contradictions of eighteenth century personhood.

Emphasizing the increasingly textual nature of the public self also helps clarify the historical process by which the libertine becomes a powerful symbolic figure across the Atlantic world in the mid-eighteenth century but quickly ceased to be culturally salient in the early nineteenth century. For the libertine speaks most eloquently to a context in which a widening gap appears between reputation and experience, between public and private self, even as both are invested with intense value. To some extent, this coming apart is already present in the myriad social transformations which conspire to create private spaces and experiences in the early modern period.[117] However, it is really the creation of a discursive public sphere grounded in the printed word that drives a decisive wedge between public and private life. And this development in turn leads at first to an intensification of the conditions which make the libertine an object of fascination and, in the long run, the disintegration of the system which make him relevant.

In fact, we have already seen this process underway in the Apthorp-Morton scandal. As I pointed out earlier, both the Apthorps operate under the assumption that reputation and behavior are at least tenuously connected. She kills herself, and he tries to kill her seducer, in the profound conviction that a reputation is something that can, when push comes to shove, be grounded in and demonstrated

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[117] I have in mind here both changes in social geography which conspire to create more private spaces and cultural changes such as the spread of the cultures of refinement and sensibility, and also material changes such as the experience of the commodity object which I discussed above. For a wide-ranging study which touches on a variety of these changes in the European context, see Chartier (Ed), *A History of Private Life. Vol 3.*

through embodied gestures, in particular the gesture of endangering or destroying the body. They're both aware of the power of words of course; she bitterly attributes her death to those who don't tell the truth about her, and he resorts to the newspapers when his pistols fail him. But for both of them, these words are something secondary and derivative, part of the problem. For both there exists a space where reputation and behavior meet, a final court of appeal where one's honor can be acted out with gestures and not with words. And these condensed, dramatic, violent gestures are intended to trump words – to wash away with blood the poisonous lies of gossip and insinuation. And the reasons these dramatic acts are seen as successfully countering and discrediting words is that they violently yoke together the public and private self; I defend my reputation by endangering my body, and in so doing act in a manner that affirms the unity of the two. The Apthorps still inhabit a world, of course, in which reputation and behavior, private and public, are tragically incommensurate but both retain a conviction that they can be reconciled through gestures imbued with ritual force.

Not so with Morton, of course, whose response to the scandal only makes sense in the context of an increasingly anonymous public sphere where reputation is built almost exclusively from words and private gestures are largely invisible and increasingly irrelevant. And it is, of course, precisely the textual medium in which public life is increasingly conducted which leads Morton to act as though reputation and behavior are entirely separable. Certainly, in any case, it is this radical separation which makes Morton distressing for his critics, who are forever attempting, unsuccessfully, to draw attention to the discrepancy between behavior and repute by bringing Morton's private actions to public notice. If we think of reputation as a kind of currency (and a reputation was certainly not without its social uses as a species of social capital), the Apthorps are on a kind of Gold Standard which ties the fluctuations of

reputation to the solid worth actual behavior, while Morton is playing with paper money.[118] And the trouble with paper money is that, like all fiat currencies, it is highly susceptible to becoming worthless very quickly. For the whole point of a reputation is, after all, that it allows you to predict the behavior of people whom you don't personally know. On some accounts, this is the socioeconomic driving force behind all this concern with a man's public character, for in a transatlantic economy at a time when news and information travels slowly, there is a very real economic value in being able to identify at a distance suitable and reliable partners for your financial ventures.[119] If too many reputations turn out to be built on the mere manipulation of public opinion, the whole concept of a reputation as a way of ensuring reliability is fatally compromised. Just as bad money drives out good, so bad reputations (meaning, of course, ill-founded ones) devaluate the dependability of reputation as such.

All of which accounts for some of the obsessive vigor with which newspapers publicized scandalous doings in the fading years of the eighteenth century, and the zeal with which sentimental authors and magazine moralists sought to expose private deviations from the Olympian heights of public probity. After all, too great a disparity between public and private life threatened to turn the former into a sham.

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[118] The metaphor isn't entirely frivolous – one of the important innovations of the eighteenth century was the ascendance of a whole arsenal of fiscal instruments (bank notes, notes of exchange, bonds, shares) which made possible a proliferation of fiat wealth, speculation and therefore highly publicized fiscal disasters like the South Seas Bubble. A man's worth was, in this very material sense, also increasingly tied up in what was written on pieces of paper. Of course, these changes most affected precisely the elite men who read, wrote and acted out libertine fantasies. On this, see Dickson, *The Financial Revolution in England*; for the American context and its social and political implications, Woody Holton, *Forced Founders: Indians, Debtors, Slaves, and the Making of the American Revolution in Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999) Woody Holton, "Abigail Adams, Bond Speculator," *William and Mary Quarterly*, No. 64 (2007), 821-38.

[119] Something analogous is true for the delegation of responsibility within a far-flung but centrally organized empire and, indeed, nation-state or, for that matter, the selection of marriage partners amongst a set of more or less anonymous suitors – a situation faced by elite women whose alliances were not necessarily local. For arguments along these lines see David Armitage and Michael J. Braddick (Eds.) *The British Atlantic world, 1500-1800* (New York, NY : Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) 31-68 and 93-153 (esp. 93-112)

But the libertine was to have the last laugh in this quest for transparency. For, of course, the very attempt to unmask the private self by making its doings the subject of public discourse instead simply draw more attention to the disparity between the two facets of personhood. In practice, as more and more ostensibly reputable man and women were exposed as lying, cheating fornicators, the reliably and usefulness of reputation as a guide to someone's private behavior steadily eroded.[120] As we've seen, sentimental narratives of seduction performed similar work, revealing the subjective self in its failure to discern the dangers which public discourse drew attention to. More fundamentally, because both scandal and sensibility themselves traded on language and representation, they only contributed further to the textual basis of reputation. Unlike the violent gestures of the Apthorps, narratives of scandal and seduction were themselves only textual mediations of private, bodily experiences. Hence, of course, the ever-proliferating representations which returned again and again to a story of seduction in an attempt to make public precisely what could never entirely be made public – the nature of private, subjective, embodied experience. Ironically, then, rather than purifying public and private life, scandal and seduction literature ended up producing a thorough-going cynicism about the possibility of reconciling the two.

As a reaction to this cynicism, or, if you prefer, perhaps as an answer to the crisis of the divided eighteenth century self, there arose what Foucault famously described as the modern regime of self – an interior core of identity, a stable, consistent source of self that was less vulnerable to being distorted than subjectivity, and more solidly grounded in experience than reputation.[121] Subjectivity and reputation were not entirely displaced, of course, no more than relational identities ever completely

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[120] For the proliferation of scandalous newspaper coverage in the 1790s, see Daniel, *Sandal and Civility*

[121] Rather, to continue the financial analogy, like the gold standard came in the nineteenth century to symbolize a real, substantive, material 'core' to which the ever-proliferating fiat wealth could, in theory, be tied down.

disappeared from the concept of selfhood.[122] But they did become rather less salient, less fraught

categories, which in turn made the libertine and the seduced woman rather less culturally resonant

figures. The libertine was replaced, on the one hand, by the confidence man, and, on the other, by the

Byron-esqe Romantic antihero. The confidence man was a libertine without passion, a man whose public

self was but a convenient means to his equally contingent ends; the Romantic, on the other hand, was a

libertine who threw reputation to the wind in the name of feelings that had now come to express his

true self.[123] The former was public through and through, a creature of pure appearance, the latter

obsessed with his private experience to the exclusion of any concern with the opinions of others; the

uneasy coexistence of the two modes of being in the figure of the libertine had begun to come apart.

The libertine's day in the sun was comparatively brief. Born in England in the 1740s, he had largely

disappeared from the cultural landscape everywhere by the 1820s. For all that, his career reveals

enduring shifts in the way deviants would be experienced and imagined in the following centuries. The

increasingly mediated nature of experience and imagination paved the way for the enjoyment of

deviance and, as we shall see in the following chapters, the transformation of the deviant into a

spectacle and a commodity. The anxieties about personal and social failure which deviants represented

were no less real or compelling, but as these representations took a more mediated form, they could be

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[122] The attenuation of the earlier period's preoccupation with reputation into a concern to maintain a more frankly superficial respectability is, from this point of view, telling of the shift. The extraordinary persistence of older categories in a degraded form can be seen, for instance, in the fact that it still makes sense to us, for instance, to answer the question 'who are you?' with something like 'a parent' which is an answer that still contains the logic of relational identity within itself. That we don't say 'the parent of so-and-so,' however, suggests something of the attenuated nature of the thing.

[123] The classic study on the nineteenth century version of these problems is Karen Halttunen, Confidence Men and Painted Women: a study of middle-class culture in America, 1830-1870 (New Haven : Yale University Press, 1982). Indeed, the process of distinguishing between confidence men and libertines was already underway at the close of the eighteenth century. See, for instance, 'The Companion No. XXIV', *Massachusetts Spy*, June 24, 1795

experienced as not immediately threatening. Moreover, the libertine marks the point at which deviance is interiorized through its association with the private and personal, so that it no longer marks the boundary where the society runs up against something other than itself (the invisible world, say, or alternate social visions) but rather begins to recognize itself within the image of the deviant. The gap between the witch and the puritan is, on the surface of it, immense; to see the one as a distortion of the other takes a lot of doing. But the libertine and the seduced woman are closer to the eighteenth century self, these deviants are more readily and more overtly experienced as objects of sympathy and identification. This is a sympathy, of course, that continues to hold them at arms length – they are selves gone wrong, but they are more recognizably our selves, and their failure more recognizably our own.

Chapter 3

1875: The Freak

## I.	The Minister and the Freak

Let us begin with a peculiar fact: the nineteenth century was the age of the freak. It has been called other things, of course: age of revolutions, of capitalism, of industrialization, of urbanization, of the bourgeoisie. And we'll touch on all those developments before we're through with it, but for our purposes it was first and foremost the century of the freak. For it was in the nineteenth century that the display of freaks – persons with extraordinary bodies, such as dwarves, giants and Siamese twins – became an enormously popular form of entertainment, a fundamental component of the new popular culture that was slowly coming into being in the new cities within which an ever-growing proportion of Americans now lived and died.[1]

This new popular culture differed from that which it replaced (that which would soon be re-imagined as 'folk' culture) chiefly in that it declared entertainment was up for sale, and thus transformed it into a commodity.[2] In so doing, of course, it participated in the proliferation of commodities and extended the

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[1] The definitive study of this form of entertainment is Robert Bogdan, *Freak show: presenting human oddities for amusement and profit* (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1988.) Other important studies are Rosemarie Garland Thomson*, Extraordinary bodies : figuring physical disability in American culture and literature* (New York : Columbia University Press, 1997), Rachel Adams, *Sideshow U.S.A : freaks and the American cultural imagination* (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 2001), Linda Frost, *Never one nation : freaks, savages, and whiteness in U.S. popular culture, 1850-1877* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), Michael M. Chemers, *Staging stigma : a critical examination of the American freak show* (New York, NY : Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.) In a category of its own, and the most direct inspiration (in general approach at least) for the interpretation I go on to give here, is Leslie Fiedler, *Freaks: myths and images of the secret self* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978.)

[2] Most of the best work on the commodification of culture concerns itself with the late nineteenth century when the emergence of consumer sites like department store and the dance hall and proliferation of advertising provides a particularly rich base of sources, but the phenomenon is widely acknowledged by this literature to be well underway before this. See Elaine S. Abelson, *When ladies go a-thieving : middle-class shoplifters in the Victorian department store* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), William Leach, *Land of desire: merchants, power, and the rise of a new American culture* (New York : Pantheon Books, 1993), Jackson Lears, *Fables of abundance : a cultural history of advertising in America* (New York: BasicBooks, 1994), Deborah Cohen, *Household gods: the British and their possessions* (New Haven : Yale University Press, 2006), Roy Rosenzweig, *Eight hours for what we will: workers and leisure in an industrial city, 1870-1920* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983),

reach of a newly commodified culture for which all things – whether objects, activities, experiences or even persons – were imagined as having a value, and being at least potentially up for sale. The new cities of the nineteenth century were worlds made of commodities, a fact which, as we shall see, had a profound impact on the new moral world that came into being there. If, in the last chapter, we had to do with a culture reacting to the proliferation of commodities as something new and disruptive, we find in the nineteenth century city a world in which the commodity reigns supreme. This is a world in which the commodity relation is no longer felt as a conscious presence, but rather as one of the unconscious, unarticulated assumptions that now organizes experience and social relations.

The triumph of commodity culture has a great deal to do with the rise of the city, which will be an important part of our story, for this chapter in the history of deviance unfolds in the largest of the new urban centers: New York City. There had been cities long before the nineteenth century, of course, but they were relatively small places and only a small fraction of the population had lived within them. Early in the century, however, the urban population in the northeastern states began a period of explosive growth that gave birth to new cities and swelled old ones to an unprecedented size. Springing up practically overnight, and initially populated by a young, highly mobile population, these new cities represented a brand new social world, in which the moral order of rural life had little hold, and even less relevance. Looking back from our own vantage point, we can see that these new environments were the cradle of a new kind of social order, one in which the market was not a new, intrusive presence but rather the foundation from which all other aspects of life sprang. This new social order was anchored in startlingly new conceptions of personhood, family, religion and virtue – in short, a radically new moral world, a world dominated by and made over in the image of a social class which we (aptly enough, given

Kathy Peiss, *Cheap amusements: working women and leisure in turn-of-the-century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986.)

its birthplace) have named the bourgeoisie.[3] For those who lived in that age of sudden and drastic changes, however, it was a world in which, as Marx famously puts it, 'all that is solid melts into air' – a world of new moral expectations and commitments, to be sure, but even more profoundly a world profoundly shaped by a sense of change and instability.[4]

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[3] For a general overview of the transformations taking place in the nineteenth century, usually somewhat misleadingly termed the ' market revolution,' see Charles Sellers, *The market revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846* (New York : Oxford University Press, 1991) and Daniel Walker Howe, *What hath God wrought: the transformation of America, 1815-1848* (Oxford ; New York : Oxford University Press, 2007.) The classic history of urbanization is Lewis Mumford, *The city in history : its origins, its transformations, and its prospects* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1961.)The consolidation of bourgeois culture within the new cities has spawned a vast literature, but most relevantly see Paul Johnson*, A shopkeeper*'*s millennium: society and revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837* (New York : Hill and Wang, 1978), Stuart M. Blumin, *The emergence of the middle class: social experience in the American city, 1760-1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), Mary P. Ryan, Cradle *of the middle class*: *the family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York: Knopf, 1992), Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York 1789-1860* (New York: Knopf, 1986), Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: Knopf, 1985), Karen Halttunen, *Confidence men and painted women : a study of middle-class culture in America, 1830-1870* (New Haven : Yale University Press, 1982), John F. Kasson, *Rudeness & civility : manners in nineteenth-century urban America* (New York : Hill and Wang, 1990.) In a category of its own but invaluable as a portrait of the American bourgeoisie by a contemporary thinker is Alexis De Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. & ed. Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 2000). A word on nomenclature: I have generally preferred to call the people I am here talking about 'bourgeois' rather than 'middle class' because the latter term misleadingly suggests there is some sort of substantive difference between the way this 'middle' and some sort of 'elite' above them view the world or benefit from the suffering of those beneath them in the social order, which is something I have never found much evidence for. I suppose one could make an argument for drawing these kinds of distinctions as a more self-conscious ruling class emerges in the late nineteenth century. However, even today at the apex of what has been called the second Gilded Age, having had various opportunities to interact with the children of the rich over my four years at Harvard, I can't say I find them to be cut from a substantially different cloth to the people of 'middling means' that I myself grew up amongst. And then, as I say above, the word bourgeois has the advantage of reminding us of the historical links between this group of people and the city.

[4] Other than Marx himself, who has a keener psychological feel for the class he loved to hate than is commonly allowed, the best work on this consciousness of change and instability as a new aspect of everyday experience is Marshall Berman, *All that is solid melts into air: the experience of modernity* (New York : Simon and Schuster, 1982). Religious historians have also been very eloquent in reading the religious upheavals of this era as an expression of this pervasive feeling of change. See in particular Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned-over District : the social and intellectual history of enthusiastic religion in western New York, 1800-1850* (Ithaca : Cornell University Press, 1950) and Robert H. Abzug, *Cosmos crumbling : American reform and the religious imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994). De Tocqueville is also very rich on this point.

All this is, of course, a very old and a very familiar story, recapitulated in hundreds of histories of this era. The point of starting with the freak is to shake the cobwebs from this well-worn view of the nineteenth century bourgeoisie, which we have come to feel we know all too well. For it remains, even after all that has been written about it, a curious, bizarre and altogether unexpected fact that one of the most enticing and fascinating commodities on offer in this new culture so saturated with commodities was the opportunity to gaze upon a deviant body. Why were nineteenth century men and women willing to pay good money for nothing more than a peep at a motley crew of giants and dwarves, Siamese twins and bearded ladies, armless men and corpulent women? Is that not a peculiar and quite extraordinary fact? What on earth did they see in those bodies that proved so compelling, and what does this tell us about their experience and their world?

Let us look, by way of answering this question, at a most peculiar and fascinating freak – the Reverend Henry Ward Beecher, perhaps the most famous preacher in nineteenth century America.[5] Now, some unscrupulous historians will try and tell you that this is all a humbug – that Reverend Beecher was no freak at all, that he was at most a man with an expansive circumference, which in any case was no such uncommon thing in a century which liked its men a little on the hefty side.[6] That historians do not commonly recognize the way in which Beecher was a freak, however, only show us that the nature and cultural importance of freakery in the nineteenth century has been seriously misunderstood. To get at Beecher's freakery, it helps to be a little anachronistic. In our own time, and dating back to about the

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[5] Beecher's place in bourgeois society and culture is a complex matter and I will go into it at great length shortly, but let us for the time being leave him somewhat ill-defined.

[6] On the positive connotations of manly girth in the nineteenth century, see T.J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace antimodernism and the transformation of American culture, 1880-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994 [1981]), 3 and 7 (wherein nineteenth century bellies are praised by no greater, and I use the word advisedly, an authority on the subject than Henry Ward Beecher himself!)

1960s, the word 'freak' is used very generically to mean anything outlandish, strange, weird or peculiar and carries either a strongly positive or negative connotation.[7] On the other hand, we think of the nineteenth century as a time when freak meant, more narrowly, someone whose body was marked by an extreme physical deviance from the norm – the dwarf, the giant, the bearded lady, the Siamese twin, the armless man – figures that were regarded, as far as we can tell, with an intense ambivalence that mingled curiosity, humor and contempt. But the greater specificity with which the Victorians applied the epithet freak must be set against the fact that, in the nineteenth century, a diverse selection of deviance and strangeness were experienced in a manner analogous to a freak exhibit. The Victorians went to the freak show to gaze, to judge, to wonder, to laugh, to be entertained – but they often went in exactly the same way and for exactly the same reasons to abolitionist lectures, spiritualist séances, dime museums and minstrel shows.[8] In the world of print, racy sensational novels and coverage of sensational trials

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[7] A freak is someone you don't want to be seen with in the high school playground, but in the right circumstance a freaky hat can translate into cultural capital, see? On the evolution of the concept of the freak in the American cultural imagination, see Fiedler, *Freaks.*

[8] The best studies of this taste for gazing at strange and exotic things take as their focus the great impresario P.T. Barnum, whose popular entertainment empire bridged displays of freaks, circus performers, natural curiosities, artful deceptions, strange animals and exotic 'others' (Indians, blacks, racially ambiguous figures.) See especially James W. Cook, *The arts of deception: playing with fraud in the age of Barnum* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), Niel Harris, *Humbug; the art of P. T. Barnum* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1973) Benjamin Reiss, *The showman and the slave: race, death, and memory in Barnum's America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), A.H. Saxon, *P.T. Barnum : the legend and the man* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989) and Andrea Stulman Dennett, *Weird and wonderful : the dime museum in America* (New York: New York University Press, 1997.) A large literature exists about the minstrel show, a complex phenomenon which clearly has both similarities and differences with the freak show that have not been fully explored; it seems to me there are important differences between the depictions (and visual consumption) of deviant figures and racialized others but equally there is evidently some similarity. See in particular Eric Lott, *Love and theft : blackface minstrelsy and the American working class* (New York : Oxford University Press, 1993), Dale Cockrell, *Demons of disorder : early blackface minstrels and their world* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), William J. Mahar, *Behind the burnt cork mask : early blackface minstrelsy and Antebellum American popular culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999.) Robert C. Toll, *Blacking up: the minstrel show in nineteenth century America* (New York : Oxford University Press, 1974.) W.T. Lhamon, *Raising Cain : blackface performance from Jim Crow to Hip Hop* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998.) The classic study of spiritualism in the United States from the point of view of those who took it seriously as religion is Ann Braude, *Radical spirits : spiritualism and women's rights in nineteenth-century America* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1989.) Professor Braude notes in her conclusion that spiritualism began to degenerate into sensationalistic entertainment after the Civil War but the tendency of critics had always been to attend spiritualist events in a Barnum-esque spirit of playful spectatorship and debunking. The reception of spiritualism amongst non-spiritualists is not much studied (I've written on it myself,

swam in the same emotional currents when they presented readers with sexually deviant characters whose antics were detailed in minute detail, at times ostensibly for the readers' edification but often simply for the sheer entertainment value.[9]

Popular as they were, the entertainments explicitly advertised as freak shows would not by themselves justify calling the nineteenth century the century of the freak – for, as we've just noted, they shared the limelight with many other forms of amusement. And, in any case, it seems unclear at best that such ephemeral and perhaps frivolous phenomena as popular entertainments tell us much of real importance about a society. However, I want to suggest that the freak show is, in fact, a sort of representative event – a particularly vivid example of a mood, a way of experiencing deviance and difference (and, indeed, the world) characteristic of the nineteenth century. To frame the nineteenth century as the century of the freak is thus to insist on understanding not just why people paid to see freaks, but more broadly why

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and indeed that is when I first became convinced of the similarities between it and these other forms of popular entertainment but nothing that has as yet been published) but, for what it is worth, something may be gleaned from the following: Howard Kerr, *Mediums, Spirit-Rappers and Roaring Radicals: Spiritualism in American Literature, 1850-1900* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1972), John J. Kucich, *Ghostly Communion: cross-cultural spiritualism in nineteenth-century American literature* (Hanover: Dartmouth College Press, 2004), Molly McGarry, *Ghosts of Futures Past: Spiritualism and the Cultural Politics of Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 94-153 and R. Laurence Moore, *In Search of White Crows: Spiritualism, Parapsychology, and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 40-69.

[9] For the seedy underbelly of antebellum print culture one can hardly do better than the magnificent David S. Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance : the subversive imagination in the age of Emerson and Melville* (New York: Knopf, 1988), sensationalism in the newspapers and print more widely is a major theme of Patricia Cline Cohen, *The murder of Helen Jewett : the life and death of a prostitute in nineteenth-century New York* (New York : Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), Karen Halttunen, *Murder most foul: the killer and the American Gothic imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), James L. Crouthamel, *Bennett's New York Herald and the rise of the popular press (*Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1989), John D. Stevens, *Sensationalism and the New York press* (New York : Columbia University Press, 1991), Barbara Leckie, *Culture and adultery : the novel, the newspaper, and the law, 1857-1914* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999). Sensation novels are mostly written about by scholars of British fiction , which saw a particular explosion of the genre in the 1860s (they were popular in the US as well, but seem to have received less scholarly attention: despite their titles neither Thompkin's *Sensational Designs* and Streeby's *American Sensations* cover the kinds of novels I have in mind here, domestic novels gone to seed like *Lady in White* and *Lady Audley's Secret*); in lieu of American scholarship, the best of the British studies (though I don't pretend to have read it all) seems to me to be Nicholas Daly, *Sensation and modernity in the 1860s* (New York : Cambridge University Press, 2009.)

they came to experience all sorts of deviant activities and persons as entertaining, curious and potential humorous – in a word, why their world took on a freakish quality.

This way of putting the matter brings us back around to Reverend Beecher. For while he was indeed no freak in the narrow sense of the word, he did find himself late in life at the centre of a huge scandal that thrust his alleged sexual deviance before the national gaze, which proceeded to linger longingly over the sordid details for an astonishing two and a half years. The Tilton-Beecher Scandal was big news across the nation, and frequently diverted the nation's attention altogether from such less consequential matters as the failure of Reconstruction and the subversion of democratic process through political violence across the South. The Tilton-Beecher trial, the culminating episode of the scandal, happened to open in January 1875, and in so doing nearly overwhelmed reports of the political violence that had engulfed Louisiana in the elections of the preceding year.[10] The papers were riveted by Beecher's alleged deviance, and so was the paper-reading public, if the huge crowds that gathered before the courthouse each day of the trial is any indication.

To the naked eye, there wasn't much in the case to justify the vast amount of public attention lavished upon it. Beecher, one of the nation's most famous but also one of its more controversial ministers, stood accused of having had an affair with Elizabeth Tilton, the wife of his close friend and former protégé, Theodore Tilton. According to Beecher's accusers, the affair had gone on for several years in the late 1860s, but eventually Elizabeth had had second thoughts, broken it off, and confessed to her husband. Tilton had confronted Beecher privately on New Year's Eve, 1870, but had consented to keep

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[10] Indeed, some of the papers noted as much. See for instance *New York Herald*, Jan 10, 1875.

the matter quiet to protect his family from scandal and disgrace. Word of the affair, however, eventually

started to get around and eventually came to the ears of Victoria Woodhull, a radical feminist who

publically accused the minister of hypocrisy in her newspaper in November of 1872. Tilton and Beecher

tried to ignore Woodhull's charges, but demands from various parties that the men clear up the matter

became more and more insistent and, in the end, the increasingly tense situation led to a break

between the two. Tilton, attempting to clear his own name, finally in 1874 publically accused Beecher of

adultery, publishing various documents pertaining to the affair and its cover-up and eventually taking

Beecher to court for having had what then went by the name of 'criminal conversation' with his wife.

Beecher denied everything, of course, and the ensuing trial dragged on for six months. Despite the fact

that the scandal had broken more than two years earlier, and despite the fact that Tilton's publications

and an earlier investigation by Beecher's Plymouth Church had given all the parties abundant

opportunity to give their account of the events and set the record straight, the trial proved irresistible to

Victorian audiences and most of the nation's papers printed either verbatim transcripts of the entire

thing or else voluminous excerpts, supplemented by their own commentary, editorials and the views of

the public.[11]

We tend to take it for granted that the nineteenth century was an age of sexual reticence and

repression, and are thus perhaps inclined to be unsurprised that the possible sexual transgressions of a

famous minister became a sensational and well-publicized scandal. But the situation is more

complicated than this, for the Victorian bourgeoisie turned a blind eye to such matters more often than

we might be inclined to think, and a substantial (and certainly very visible) portion of Victorian society

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[11] In fact, the official transcript of the trial is one of the newspaper transcripts, specifically that of the *New York Tribune*. My writing on the scandal is based on the contents of this transcript, as well as newspaper coverage of the trial more broadly.

held and promoted what would even today be considered rather heterodox views of the subject.[12] Indeed, part of what raised the stakes in the Beecher scandal was that Beecher had been exposed by Victoria Woodhull, easily one of the most infamous sexual radicals of the Reconstruction era.[13] Woodhull was an advocate of Free Love, a view that help that sexual relations ought to be governed only by the desires of individuals, not social institutions such as marriage. A fierce critic of matrimony and even monogamy, Woodhull did not attack Beecher for adultery so much as the hypocrisy he displayed by criticizing in public the Free Love principles that he clearly adhered to in his private life.

The ensuing scandal was in large part shaped by Woodhull's framing of the alleged adultery as a reflection of Beecher's true moral convictions. The question taken up in the trial and in the press was never just the factual matter of ascertaining the whereabouts of Reverend Beecher's penis on the 13th of October, 1868. Rather, both Beecher and his accusers were questioned minutely about not just what they had done, but what they believed. Did they agree with Woodhull? Did they believe in spiritualism? In the Bible? In the emancipation of women? In the sanctity of marriage? What sorts of people were they, anyhow? And since the facts of the matter were, after all, finally only known to Henry Beecher and Elizabeth Tilton, the scandal inevitably turned on these questions of moral commitment or, in the language of the time, on the character of the antagonists. The question, really, was less whether

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[12] A comprehensive survey of the various complex and often conflicting attitudes to sex in nineteenth-century America is Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Rereading sex: battles over sexual knowledge and suppression in nineteenth-century America* (New York : Alfred A. Knopf, 2002). Also worth a read on this topic are Timothy J. Gilfoyle*, City of Eros : New York City, prostitution, and the commercialization of sex, 1790-1920* (New York : Norton, 1992), Peter Gay, *The Bourgeois experience : Victoria to Freud* (New York : Oxford University Press, 1984-1998), Steven Marcus, *The other Victorians; a study of sexuality and pornography in mid-nineteenth-century England* (New York: Basic Books, 1966)

[13] On Woodhull, see especially Barbara Goldsmith, *Other Powers: The Age of Suffrage, Spiritualism and the Scandalous Victoria Woodhull* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1998) but also Horowitz, *Rereading sex*, where she has a starring role in her capacity as a sexual radical.

Beecher had committed adultery but rather whether he was on some deep and fundamental level one of *them* – a deviant, a freak, a person whose very being debarred them from the moral community. Indeed, it was only on the condition that he was all of those things that the scandal became of interest to anyone. A falsely accused Beecher was of no more interest than any other staunchly moral clergyman – it was a deviant Beecher people couldn't stop reading or thinking about.

That the Beecher scandal is of interest to us as a significant episode in the history of deviance is probably self-evident, but my insistence of equating him with freaks probably still seems somewhat eccentric. And, indeed, I won't insist on it too stridently; this chapter is about the minister more than it is about the freak, but I do think the two figures can mutually illuminate each other's historical significance. And it bears noting that contemporary observers not infrequently drew this unlikely-seeming comparison themselves. One reporter complained in a fit of penny-pinching outrage of the vast sums it cost to 'display the hideous deformity' of 'respectable society,' thus directly equating the scandal with the display of deformed bodies.[14] A correspondent of the New York Herald, in complaining of the inadequate size of the courtroom in which the trial was being held, playfully suggested that it might be an idea for P.T. Barnum to rent a larger hall and sell tickets to the event.[15] This invocation of Barnum was a clever insinuation about the attractions of the trial, for Barnum ran a popular culture empire famous above all for his display of artful deceptions (objects whose authenticity was questionable) and the display of curious and extraordinary objects and persons including, most famously, freaks. To say that the scandal was worth of Barnum was to drawn attention to its attractions as a form of public

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[14] New Orleans Times, March 4, 1875

[15] New York Herald, January 15, 1875

entertainment in which there was pleasure to be had in both sifting truth from falsehood, and also simply gazing on the deviant bodies of the accusers and the accused.

But what convinced me of the need to bring freaks (and, more broadly, that whole frame of mind to which deviance was a form of entertainment) into this discussion of a sex scandal were not these isolated allusions, but rather the pervasive laughter. You see, when I began to read transcripts of the Beecher-Tilton trial and the newspaper coverage of the event, I was taken aback by how often people were laughing. Efforts to suppress it by the presiding judge and complaints from both sides sets of counsel notwithstanding, the legal proceedings were frequently punctuated by bursts of laughter from the audience, who were even on occasion joined in the merriment by the leading participants in the trial, for whom the outcome was certainly no laughing matter. The newspaper reportage also frequently took a jocular, lighthearted turn, as did some of the correspondents who wrote to air their views of the case.

This laughter surprised me, because the voluminous scholarly literature on the scandal had lead me to expect not merriment, but anxiety. Again and again I had read that the reason nineteenth century Americans had taken such a disproportionate interest in the Beecher-Tilton scandal was that it exposed some of the main contradictions and ambiguities of their culture and society, and brought into public view usually hidden, latent anxieties about the stability of the Victorian moral world.[16] The precise

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[16] A word about this literature seems in order. As I say above, most of the scholarship on the scandal endeavors to explain its fascination as an expression of anxiety, whether about intimacy and relationships (Fox and Waller), sexuality (Horowitz), religion (Carter, Bjerga and Waller), character and sincerity (Korobkin), about the moral order for which Beecher was a spokesman or representative (Clark) and, in nearly all cases, about the suddenly exposed instability of Victorian moral codes. The definitive work on the scandal is Richard Fox, *Trials of Intimacy: Love and Loss in the Beecher-Tilton Scandal* (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1999) but frankly I have found more

nature of the anxieties exposed and explored by the scandal varied depending on the scholar's bent, but in each case the scandal was a case of the delicate and precarious structure of bourgeois assumptions about how the world worked being given a rude shock and crashing tumbling down. Indeed, I had originally hoped to add yet another strand to this 'anxiety' literature by suggesting that the scandal revealed a fundamental ambiguity about what counted as deviance in a world where moral values and social relations were in a constant state of flux. And, as you'll shortly see, I haven't entirely given up on this strand of thinking, but the laughter gave me pause. People whose moral world has been drastically compromised are not typically in the mood for jokes, unless by way of escaping into a hysterical and defensive laughter, and that interpretation didn't entirely seem to fit the merriment I was encountering.

All this not to say, of course, that laughter itself can't be anxious or that the anxiousness and distress noted by other scholars wasn't equally well represented in court and in the papers. The case I want to make is not for replacing our view of the Victorian age as an anxious time with the contrary proposition that it was an unusually jovial and playful epoch of history.[17] Rather, what I'd like to understand is the intense ambivalence that produced this particular amalgam of laughter and anguish, distress and delight, when confronted with the face of deviance. And the freak show seems to me an important part

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useful the slightly dated but vastly underappreciated Altina Waller, *Reverend Beecher and Mrs. Tilton: Sex and Class in Victorian America* (Amherst : University of Massachusetts Press, 1982). Other important contributions are to be found in Deborah Applegate, *The Most Famous Man In America: the biography of Henry Ward Beecher* (New York: Doubleday, 2006), Paul Carter, *The Spiritual Crisis of the Gilded Age* (DeKalb, Northern Illinois University Press, 1971), Helen Horowitz, *Rereading sex*, Laura Korobkin, *Criminal Conversations: Sentimentality and Nineteenth-Century Legal Stories of Adultery* (New York : Columbia University Press, 1998), William McLoughlin, *The Meaning of Henry Ward Beecher: An Essay on the Shifting Values of Mid-Victorian America* (New York, Knopf, 1970), Clifford Clark, *Henry Ward Beecher: Spokesman for a Middle-Class America* (Urbana : University of Illinois Press, 1978.) Alan Bjerga, "The Trials of Faith: Discussion of Religion and the Beecher Adultery Scandal, 1870–1880." *American Journalism* 18, no. 1 (2001): 73–94

[17] Though I might note that something of that sort has been recently suggested in a number of places. It seems to me a view that is at least implicit in Cook, *Arts of Deception* and Matthew Kaiser, *The World in Play: Portraits of a Victorian Concept* (Forthcoming)

of this enterprise because it lets us consider this amalgam in an especially pure form, through a form of theatrical display whose sole purpose it was to evoke this ambivalent pleasure. The Beecher scandal, on the other hand, show us this ambivalent pleasure brought to a fever pitch in the messy world of lived experience and social relations, and lets us more easily perceive what is really at stake in these troubling joys. My focus throughout is on the figure of Beecher himself, who seems to me to be at the heart of this matter. First, therefore I want to talk a little about the man and his time, how he was imagined by his nineteenth century audiences and what place he occupied in the moral world of the Victorian bourgeoisie before he became embroiled in scandal. Then I will discuss why the crowds gathered in the Brooklyn courthouse were so anxious gaze at Beecher and what the pleasures of this gaze entailed. Finally, I turn to the laughter itself, to see what the jokes told about the Beecher-Tilton scandal have to tell us about those who made and laughed at them. But first, let's get to know Henry Ward Beecher.

II . Imagining Beecher: The Victorian Moral World

One way to start thinking about the significance of laughter in the Tilton-Beecher scandal is to consider its place in the life and works of one of the era's most prominent public figures. The man I have in mind is Henry Ward Beecher, who by a happy coincidence is also of interest to us for other reasons. Had it been any other minister in America who had been accused of adultery, the public excitement would have been nowhere near as great as that which accompanied the Tilton-Beecher scandal. It was Beecher that made the scandal big news and so, in order to understand the fascination of the scandal itself, we need to think a little more deeply about what Beecher meant for nineteenth century Americans before the scandal, and to what historical circumstances he owed the fame which made the scandal such shocking news.

And one of the things which Beecher was famous for was, as it happens, his sense of humor. Like so many of the things that contributed to his fame (the others being his liberal theology, his radical politics and his informal, warm personal style) Beecher's fondness for laughter made him a figure of controversy. His lack of gravitas and tendency to crack jokes in the pulpit were highly distressing to many of his fellow-believers, especially those who still retained a view of religion as a matter of grave moral seriousness and who expected the tone of church services to reflect this seriousness.[18] In fact, Beecher's characteristic levity also got him in hot water outside the pulpit – his humorous tone during the scandal trial, for instance, was condemned even by some of his friends, who felt in reflected poorly upon him in such grave circumstances.[19]

In fact, humor as a general thing was dangerous business in the nineteenth century. The culture of politeness and refinement had rapidly spread beyond the gentry class in the early nineteenth century, becoming one of the pillars of the new middle class culture, and laughter was anything but polite behavior.[20] Manuals of style going back to Erasmus's *Handbook on Manners for Children* cautioned against the gross physicality of laughter, and recommended restraint and moderation in all things comical; if possible, one ought to confine oneself to merely smiling. Laughter was morally dangerous because it involved a many-layered loss of face: physically, it disfigured the composed, controlled face

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[18] Beecher's sense of humor and its reception by his contemporaries is touched on briefly in Carter, *Spiritual Crisis of the Gilded Age*, 126-128

[19] The Nation, July 8, 1875; New York Times, May 18, 1875; New York Herald, May 13, 1875

[20] On the spread of politeness, see Bushman, *Refinement of America*, Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility*, Halttunen, , *Confidence Men and Painted Women* and C. Dallett Hemphill, Bo*wing to necessities: a history of manners in America, 1620-1860* (New York : Oxford University Press, 1999)

which one ideally presented to the world, and metaphorically, in so far as it was laughter at somebody else's expense, it lead to a loss of face (in the sense of reputation) for both the object of laughter and potentially also the laughing person, who might come across as a buffoon.[21] Because it undermined the idealized self that the refined person projected to others, laughter threatened the delicate façade of civility on which men and women increasingly depended to safely navigate a social world increasingly populated by strangers and casual acquaintances.

That, at any rate, was the lesson taught by the conduct manuals which proliferated in the nineteenth century, as Beecher might well have known, having tried his hand at writing one such volume himself in his younger days.[22] And yet Beecher thrived not just in spite of but very much as a consequence of his winsome and slightly risqué antics. Indeed, even the scandal which threatened to ruin him seems to have added to his allure in some eyes. Or so, at least, one newspaper reporter evidently thought as he noted that, after one sermon Beecher delivered while his trial was unfolding, 'many … notably women, lingered to the last moment, watching with hungry eyes his every look and action.'[23]

This paradox of the misbehaving author of books about how to behave catches well the problem involved in making sense of Beecher's significance to his contemporaries. On the one hand, we have the man described by his defense lawyers, his eulogists and many historians as a great moral teacher, a spokesman for the values and attitudes of the new middle class, one of the most successful purveyors of

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[21] Anca Parvulescu, *Laughter : notes on a passion* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010), 23-58

[22] Henry Ward Beecher, *Lectures to young men: on various important subjects* (New York: J.C. Derby, 1856 [1844])

[23] New York Times, February 8, 1875

its myths about itself, and one of the most reliable indicators of the moral status quo in respectable society. On the other hand, we have Beecher the controversialist: the man who supported abolitionism, gave his blessing to the nascent women's rights movement, banished the harsh and angry God of Calvin from mainline Protestantism and was one of the first clergymen to cautiously embrace evolution; the man who defended Andrew Johnson in 1866 (he was not always on the side of the angels, our man Beecher,) affected a bohemian style, wore his hair long, took many of his cues from heterodox types like Emerson, and cracked jokes in church. And got himself embroiled, lest we forget, in the scandal of the century. [24]

Of course, I shouldn't overstate Beecher's provocativeness, for he was often a timorous sort of cultural rebel. His new theology consisted in little more than a sort of washed-out Quakerism and he was timid about pursuing even that to its logical conclusions; in the context of the religious upheavals of his day he was decidedly a moderate. Likewise, he came to abolitionism rather late, becoming very active in the movement only after the compromise of 1850, when public opinion in the North started to shift decisively in its favor, and he was quick to part ways with the more radical advocates for racial justice in the wake of the Civil War. He threw his support behind the most conservative of the women's rights groups, the American Women's Suffrage Association, and would have nothing to do in public with Victoria Woodhull and her frankly sexual vision of female emancipation. In the turbulent 1870s, as industrialization and growing class tensions began to become national issues, he spoke against the labor movement, though one suspects that had he lived into the 1890s he would have become a staunch

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[24] The details of Beecher's behavior are mostly from Applegate, *The Most Famous Man In America.* The tradition of seeing Beecher as a moral symbol or spokesperson includes Carter, *The Spiritual Crisis of the Gilded Age,* McLoughlin, *The Meaning of Henry Ward Beecher*, Clifford Clark, *Henry Ward Beecher: Spokesman for a Middle-Class America* and, from a more hostile vantage point, Ann Douglas, *The feminization of American culture* (New York: Knopf, 1977.)

middle-of-the-road sort of Progressive. Throughout his life, moreover, the opinions he expressed privately seem to have been well in advance of what he was prepared to commit to in public. As a recent biographer says of him, 'he had an instinctive feel for the edge of the envelope' and he knew exactly how far to push without alienating his many adoring readers and listeners.[25]

And, of course, those many followers are the other crucial component of Beecher's status in mid-nineteenth century America, for he was one of America's first celebrities as we understand the term today – one of the first people who became well-known to a multitude of Americans through what he said, did and wrote. There had been other nationally renowned figures before Beecher (some of the more popular presidents come to mind; Washington and Jackson, for instance) but theirs was precisely renown rather than fame, a rather aloof sort of presence in the minds of the public, closely tied to their political function and their time in office. Beecher, on the other hand, had by 1850 more or less begun to live his life before an audience – if he wasn't taking advantage of the rapidly spreading railroad network to tour the country on lecture tours, he was appearing to the reading public as the author of sermons, editorials, advice books, novels and a plethora of other print material, which was itself circulating in an unprecedented volume along the proliferating canals and railroad lines. And, unlike earlier figures of renown, Beecher was an intimate presence in the lives of his readers and listeners. His style of writing and speaking were often praised for their apparent transparency and sincerity, and he spoke about intimate moral concerns in a vivid, personal and informal way that made his audiences feel like they really knew him.[26] It is a measure of this extraordinary status that Beecher's lawyers built a

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[25] Applegate, *Most Famous Man in America*, 214

[26] On the birth of the modern conception of fame, see Fred Inglis, *A short history of celebrity* (Princeton : Princeton University Press, 2010). For an interesting survey the *longue duree* of the concept in the western world see Leo Braudy, *The frenzy of renown: fame and its history* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.)

substantial portion of his defense on the argument that the accusations of adultery were so utterly at odds with his reputation as a morally upstanding character, that they must be false.[27]

Of course, what the public had constructed over the years of its acquaintance with Beecher was not, as the lawyers insisted, an accurate knowledge of Beecher but rather a fantasy about him. So perhaps rather than thinking of Beecher as a spokesman for the middle classes, we might better see him, like so many subsequent famous people, as a somewhat unwitting receptacle for their fantasy life. He seems at first a rather unlikely figure for imaginative play, this rolly-polly pastor with his goldilocks dispensation of moral courage and somewhat mealy-mouthed theology. It is not hard to think of more audacious rebels against or more staunch defenders of the evolving edifice of Victorian respectability; the period had its fair share of both. And yet, those two words I've just used, 'evolving' and 'respectability,' perhaps begin to give some idea of what was compelling about Beecher's yoking together of the roles of Romantic rebel and moral prophet.

The words 'evolving' and 'respectability' each speak to different sides of the moral experience of the nineteenth century bourgeoisie. At the heart of that experience, as the word 'evolving' reminds us, is an inescapable awareness of change. For both those, like Beecher, born at the start of the century and those coming on age in the latter half of the nineteenth century, the world they inhabited as adults was drastically different to the one they had grown up in, and utterly unlike that inhabited by even their parents' generation. Their experience was one of flux, dislocation and uncertainty, and found dramatic expression in the new religious, social and political movements so characteristic of the early nineteenth

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[27] See, for instance, Trial Transcript, II, 6-7 and 91-2.

century. Urbanization, industrialization and unprecedented levels of geographic mobility transformed the physical world and the way people inhabited it, but perhaps the more profoundly felt change was the change in social relations as more and more interactions between people began to be mediated exclusively by a market economy.[28] The market economy was not an invention of the nineteenth century, of course. Indeed, we have already discussed the implications of its presence in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. But whereas in the last two chapters we saw how the experiences of being drawn into market relations beginning to compromise and reshape older forms of social relatedness and moral experience, in the new cities of the nineteenth century, the old ways were either swept away or never even took root, and instead new social and moral configuration begin to evolve in their place.[29] For these new configurations, the marketplace was not an intrusive element to be contended with or ambivalently accommodated, but a fundamental bedrock of experience that unconsciously shaped moral concerns and commitments.

We see this process at work when we consider what exactly happens to the experience of human beings (both the self and others) in the nineteenth century city. As we noted in the last chapter, Marx famously begins his analysis of capitalism by noting that something peculiar happens to the experience of objects in a capitalist society – the way they are produced becomes mysterious to those who interact with them, the social relationships that bring them into being fade from consciousness. They become, in his

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[28] I am drawing here and below very heavily on works cited in footnotes 3 and 4.

[29] Of course, in saying all this and much that follows, I am ignoring to some extent those social configurations which remain outside of the marketplace and thus continue to operate in large part according to a different logic, the family foremost amongst them. But, as Victorian ideas about the family in particular suggest, to be outside the marketplace was in no way not to be defined by it, even if only as an antithesis to its values, which is what the family quickly became. The classic statement of Victorian domestic ideology in the US context is Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860." *American Quarterly*, Vol. 18, No. 2, Part 1 (Summer, 1966), 151-174 See also Jeanne Boydston, *Home and Work: Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labor in the Early Republic* (Oxford, 1990), and Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class*, and Stansell, *City of Women*.

words, commodities, objects which seem to appear as if from nowhere and as if by magic. Some of the consequences of living amongst commodities we examined in the previous chapter. But, of course, once labor (that is, the aid of another human being) is likewise transformed into a commodity to be bought and sold, the relationships between people begins to undergo a similar transformation. As with the commodity, a major part of this transformation is the loss of the ability to perceive social relations, so that other human beings increasingly take on the appearance of strangers – people with whom one has nothing to do, unless one happens to be conducting an economic transaction with them. Moreover, within the subjective experience of the self, one's own relatedness to others is now likewise obscured and gives rise an experience of individual solitude – a feeling that I, too, am a person who is a stranger, who has nothing to do with others.[30] The same mechanisms which produce the commodity – the object in which the relationships which produce it are hidden – also produce the individual and the stranger, who are simply persons in whom the social relations with shape and sustain them are likewise obscured.[31]

Of course, we find it much easier to accept an object shorn of the social relationships which produced it than we do a person thus abstracted from social reality, and this was no different in the nineteenth

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[30] This link between individualism and the feeling of being a stranger amongst strangers is brought out particularly well by Camus in *The Stranger*. On strangers in the nineteenth century, see in particular Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women*. Studies of individualism and its elaboration into the dominant mode of perceiving the self over the course of the modern period are legion, but for texts which (in various ways) connect this development together with changes in social relations see Jeffrey Sklansky, *The soul's economy: market society and selfhood in American thought, 1820-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), C.B. Macpherson, *The political theory of possessive individualism : Hobbes to Locke* (Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1962.) Philip Cushman, *Constructing the self, constructing America : a cultural history of psychotherapy* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Pub., 1995) Marshall Berman, *The politics of authenticity; radical individualism and the emergence of modern society* (New York, Atheneum, 1970.) Less attentive to social relations, but indispensible: Charles Taylor, *Sources of the self: the making of the modern identity* (Cambridge, Mass. : Harvard University Press, 1989)

[31] I uses the passive voice here to emphasize that this is not a willful transformation, but the estranging effect of market mediation at work.

century.[32] What we observe, in fact, is not so much the wholesale disappearance of social relations, but their reappearance in a new form. The new relationless individual is quickly endowed (by moralists like Beecher, in fact) with two allied concepts which serve, in effect, to re-establish their relation to the human moral community: 'reputation,' and 'character.' Reputation and character are, in fact, what the Tilton-Beecher Trial is substantially about in its more serious moments, in so far as the thing turns ultimately not on issues of fact but rather the contesting parties' relative trustworthiness and moral worth. We see this in a myriad of ways, perhaps most obviously in Tilton's obsession with defending and restoring his reputation through the trial, the way he always justify his actions as 'the protection of … name and fame,' both his own or that of his wife or attempts to rectify the 'misrepresentation of my case and character … to the general public.'[33] It is evident too in the widespread assumption about Beecher's character and reputation being at the heart of the matter, whether in Tilton's remarks that 'an unsullied character and reputation are the requisites to his sacred office' or newspaper correspondents' expressed willingness to weigh 'the character and the life of the man [ie. Beecher]' against the evidence and conclude that 'the consideration due to long established character and good repute outweighs the strong circumstantial evidence.'[34] It is, of course, an assumption which also fuels the decision of Beechers' lawyers to stake their plea for Beecher's innocence on his 'moral integrity' and

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[32] Why is this? Why is the cognitive dissonance less when it is an object that is in question? Perhaps, on the one hand, because of a basic tendency to relate to people as members of a human community which makes the concept of a world of strangers unsettling and implausible, and perhaps, on the other hand, as Jackson Lears has argued because capitalism feeds here into a basic fantasy of a world in which all our wants are magically satisfied without exertion. On this last, see Lears, *Fables of Abundance*.

[33] *Theodore Tilton Vs. Henry Ward Beecher, Action for Criminal Conversation* (New York: McDivitt, Campbell & Co. Law Publishers, 1875), vol. I, 113, 424, 446 (henceforth simply cited as *Transcript*)

[34] Tribune, July 9, 1875 and July 16, 1875

'enviable reputation' and to undermine Tilton's testimony by pointing to 'glaring defects of his character.'[35] But what, after all, did they mean with all this talk of reputation and character?

Though technically separate concepts, reputation and character were often spoken of, as we see in the quotes above, in the same breath, and not infrequently confused.[36] Reputation was the more superficial of the two categories, however, and signified how the community at large assessed a person's moral status. Because a reputation consisted basically in what people who didn't know you very well might think of you, it was often a matter largely of respectability, for respectability could be established in a myriad of ways that did not require an especially intimate acquaintance. Respectability was made largely from such things as how one dressed, how one ate, talked, acted in public, what sorts of objects one owned, what sorts of opinions one expressed – all these things, in fact, which had once signified refinement and social distinction now became ways to establish moral common ground with the strangers amongst whom one now lived. Respectability became a way to signal, and to discern at a glance, that an unknown person ascribed to the same rules of conduct as oneself, and thus presumably belonged to the same moral community. And so deviations in what might from our point of view appear minor matters of social etiquette were often perceived as troubling and dangerous, in that they potentially compromised a person's membership in the community of strangers.

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[35] *Transcript*, I, 440 and II, 7-8, 91-2

[36] I base the following discussion of the contours of the Victorian moral world largely on Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women*, supplemented by other studies of the culture of politeness and respectability, especially Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility*, Dallett, *Bowing to Necessities* and Bushman, *Refinement of America*. My own approach is probably closest to Kasson's and Halttunen, in so far as they both see the moral stakes of manners as an attempt to find a foothold in the highly unstable nature of social reality in the nineteenth century city. I'd say I insist more on the sheer *need* for other people's co-operation and approval, and the difficulties of securing it in this era, than these other writers, who see the moral stakes of civility in somewhat different terms.

As reputation was built for the most part on a superficial veneer respectable conduct, it could of course be false and misleading. In fact, a major problem within this moral world was the very real possibility that a person could act respectably without necessarily subscribing to the more profound moral values of Victorian bourgeois society.[37] This is where the concept of character came in. If reputation described a person's moral standing in the eyes of the community, character denoted their true moral worth. The economic turn of phrase is telling, as are such terms as 'morally bankrupt' and 'morally worthless,' for character, like reputation, was to persons as price was to a commodity – it was an index of worth totally abstracted from concrete human relationships. Character was a more intimate form of moral assessment – only those who knew you well could describe or vouch for your character – but it nevertheless implied that a person's moral adequacy was in some sense a fundamental quality of their being that colored all their social relations. One might have a bad character, a good one, or simply an indifferent one, but in any case, it was thought to be a relatively consistent quality which would shape how a person reacted to whatever kind of situation they were placed in. That a person could be, for instance, a good friend and upstanding politician, but a bad husband, was something that was very difficult to accept to that social class which had hitched its moral cart to the concept of character. This, of course, was why so many people simply refused to believe, in the face of some fairly incriminating evidence, that Beecher had done anything wrong, while others went whole-hog in the other direction and declared him a reprobate and moral monster. The idea of a very good man (which Beecher was taken to be) who had done something very bad did not quite compute in the Victorian moral universe and the obsessive need to return again and again to the Tilton-Beecher scandal was driven in part by the need to square that particular circle.

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[37] As discussed at length in Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women*.

The existence of the two terms, character and reputation, tips us off that the Victorian moral universe was fundamentally bifurcated.[38] Getting along in Victorian America, working towards the attainment of all those ends which were held to be what really mattered about human life, involved navigating two distinct kinds of human relationships. A morally successful person had, as we've already noted in discussing the importance of reputation, to be able to secure the approval and co-operation of strangers. For a public figure like Beecher, this co-operation most obviously took the form of attendance at his sermons and lecture tours, subscriptions to his newspaper and the purchase of his books – he needed people who didn't know him and didn't feel personally connected to him to pay attention, or at least to pay for admission. To have his reputation called into question by the scandal threatened not only Beecher's moral standing in some abstract sense, but, as Tilton's affidavit to the court cunning noted, his livelihood. He and his allies, the affidavit noted in language that explicitly acknowledged the material stakes of maintaining a reputation, had a 'direct pecuniary interest in maintain his name before the public at its former marketable value.'[39] The famous Beecher was a special case, of course, but for more typical members of the bourgeoisie, making the right impression on strangers played an equally essential part in obtaining and keeping employment, successful courtship, buying or selling commodities, securing membership in a wide variety of both formal and informal social groups (such as

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[38] Here I am switching from the Victorian usage of moral (which has a narrowly ethical meaning) to Arthur Kleinman's more encompassing sense of the term which I've already resorted to in previous chapters. To make this switch is to subvert the nineteenth century insistence on a moral realm set apart from 'personal' or 'self-interested' matters, such as economic success or social approbation. The point of doing this is to illuminate how the Victorian commitment to character and reputation was connected to the attainment of those myriad aims which the Victorians held as morally significant in the broader sense as that which really matters. It is my feeling that this broader moral perspective better helps us understand how and why these categories came to matter than if we were merely to reconstruct the moral discourse of the era.

[39] *Transcript*, I, 4. Naturally, Beecher also had a more than material stake in the approbation of strangers; it is simply easier to get at the material dimension than, say, Beecher's psychological need for public adulation or his conscious sense of the importance of securing public influence in order to advancement more narrowly ethical ends. I am not making a crude Marxist argument that attempts to reduce moral concerns to economic ones. Rather, I am trying to show how moral commitments about what really matters are intertwined with the economic, psychological and social 'lay of the land' in the Victorian moral world.

benevolent societies, churches, political parties or fraternal organizations) and even simply having the psychological satisfaction of feeling that one was deemed by others to be *comme il faut*.[40]

All this forms, as it were, the political economy of reputation, and it ought not to be too unfamiliar to us, insofar as it resembles the moral world the bourgeoisie inhabits in our own day. With the important exception, of course, that reputation has today hardened into habitus and that the social interactions which establish it are mediated by institutions (particularly schools and professional organizations) which confer respectability and a sense of belonging upon the just and unjust alike. So that one might better speak of respectability as a form of capital handed down in a somewhat aristocratic manner from one generation to the next, rather than as something gained or lost by individual exertion or error, as was believed to be the (and, to a certain extent, was) case in the nineteenth century. If we worry less about our reputations today than did the Victorians it is not because we are any less anxious to impress strangers, but rather because the tokens by which we do so (whether they be our fashionable brand-name goods, our appreciation for Chopin or our degree from a prestigious university) devolve on the majority of those who possess them as a birthright.[41] This contrast with our own time highlights the precariousness of belonging in an age when old forms of social affiliation were losing their importance and the institutional structures that 'tell your place' in our own historical period had not yet come into being.

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[40] The allusion here is, of course, to Tolstoy's *Death of Ivan Ilyich* which is, amongst other things, a psychologically penetrating satire on the limits of a moral world grounded exclusively in the approbation of strangers. The material importance of reputation (and, for that matter, character) to the lives of the people who attended Beecher's Plymouth Church is excellently drawn out in the vastly under-rated Waller, *Reverend Beecher and Mrs. Tilton,* esp. 38-53 and 64-81.

[41] Which is, of course, Bourdieu's argument. See especially Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: a social critique of the judgement of taste,* trans. Richard Nice (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986.), 9-97

If the concept of reputation seems familiar by analogy to the social structures of our own time, the concept of character on the other hand helps remind us how very different the Victorian moral world was to our own. For what character tells us about the nineteenth century is that it was not enough to impress strangers – one had also to be able to make friends. For character was something that came to be known, and came to matter deeply, not primarily through one's dealing with strangers but rather through the intimacy characteristic of relationships of deep trust and dependence. This is something we can't readily understand because, while we have an attenuated understanding of concepts like character and friendship, the social constellations they once supported and imbued with moral significance have largely been displaced by the same social institutions which helped transform respectability into an aristocratic inheritance. Leaving the specific nature of this change to another time and place, let us simply note for now that friendship today exists on the margins of moral life, so much so that we often call friends people with whom we in fact neither have nor desire to have an intimate acquaintance. In the nineteenth century, however, friendship was a more robust and important concept, one which implied a much greater involvement in another person's life and a far greater concern for their well-being than we customarily feel for anyone today, with the possible exception of our immediate families.[42]

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[42] There is a sizeable literature on what scholars have termed 'romantic friendship' in the nineteenth century, most of which emerges from the history of sexuality and studies the these relationships in terms of their affective or symbolic importance. See Carol Smith-Rosenberg, 'The Female world of love and ritual: Relations between women in Nineteenth-Century America' in *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986,) 53-76, Caleb Crain, *American Sympathy: men, friendship and literature in the new nation (*New Haven : Yale University Press, c2001), Peter Coviello, *Intimacy in America: dreams of affiliation in antebellum literature* (Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press, c2005), E. Anthony Rotundo, *American manhood : transformations in masculinity from the Revolution to the modern era* (New York : BasicBooks, 1993), 75-91, Jonathan Ned Katz, *Love stories: sex between men before homosexuality* (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 2001.) 3-44, as well as Fox, *Trials of Intimacy*. For interesting examples of the way friendship functioned as a

Nowhere was the importance of friendship in Victorian America more fully on display, in fact, than in the Tilton-Beecher trial, which found some of its most captivating moments in the story of the evolution and disintegration of not just one, but indeed three relationships which the participants in them described as great friendships. Most obviously, the courtroom spectators were treated to a minute retelling, from both the participants, of the rise and fall of the friendship between Henry Beecher and Theodore Tilton. I don't propose to go into this famous friendship in any great detail, for its ins and outs and social resonance have been very satisfactorily treated elsewhere, but let us quickly note the main outlines as they are relevant to us here.[43] Tilton was acquainted with Beecher from boyhood, for he attended Beecher's church as a very young man. The beginnings of a real intimacy dated, and this is significant, to Tilton's employment as assistant editor at *The Independent*, the paper for which Beecher was at the time editor and lead editorial columnist. As Tilton was responsible, amongst other things, with ensuring that the line the paper took on the contentious religious and political issues of the day agreed with Beecher's sentiments, this took him frequently to the latter's house, and a friendship began to blossom.[44]

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form of political affiliation in unsettled times, see John Stauffer, *The black hearts of men: radical abolitionists and the transformation of race* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002) and (a bit before this period, but suggestive) Richard Godbeer, *The overflowing of friendship: love between men and the creation of the American republic* (Baltimore : Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009.) Also very suggestive on this point, albeit too early to really take full account of friendship as a moral category, is Waller, *Reverend Beecher and Mrs. Tilton*

[43] The standard text on the Beecher scandal as a drama which drew its fascinating from the way it displayed in full relief all the ambiguities of intimate relations in the nineteenth century, including that of friendship is Fox, *Trials of Intimacy*.

[44] Transcript, I, 477-480 and II, 735-40

This relationships mixed indiscriminately business, pleasure and intimacy, and the two men engaged in a wide variety of activities and services that were both mundane and intimate. As Beecher himself put it their friendship had consisted of 'common employments, companionship, and downright loving on my part,' and Beecher did not hold back, even at the trial, from gratefully acknowledging the many services and kindnesses Tilton had done to him over the years, including the use of some influence he happened to have in the army regarding a matter concerning one of the Beecher's sons.[45] Tilton echoed this, writing to Beecher 'You are my minister, teacher, father, brother, friend, companion … my religious life; my intellectual development; my open door of opportunity for labor; my public reputation; all these, my dear friend, I owe … to your own kindness … my gratitude … must be expressed only in love.'[46] In the letter which I have just cited, Tilton took care to assure his friend that their friendship was based on more than just Beecher's promotion of Tilton's career. And, of course, we can take him at his word there, while at the same noting that neither would the friendship have had a chance to develop outside the work which brought these men together, nor would they have been as useful to one another in that context without the affective bonds which lead them to trust and care for one another. We may also note that the friendship began to grow less warm around 1865 after Tilton became an editor and public figure in his own right and began to advocate his own opinions which sometimes differed from Beecher's, though neither man ever made the connection in court between these two facts. But it is perhaps telling that Tilton's profession of friendship was provoked precisely by one such public spat in which the two men took different sides on the question of how the defeated South should be dealt with in the wake of the Civil War.

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[45] Transcript, II, 735

[46] Transcript, II, 10

The Beecher-Tilton friendship tugged at the audience's heart-strings by evoking through the powerful eloquence of these two gifted public speakers the ideals of friendship, and then allowing them to relive in excruciating detail how that idealized friendship had been strained, and then broken, by desire, jealousy and selfishness. But a darker side of friendship was also illuminated through testimony by and concerning Frank Moulton (the 'mutual friend,' as the press tellingly christened him) who became involved as a mediator between the two men once Beecher's improper conduct had brought the Beecher-Tilton friendship to a breaking point. That Beecher and Tilton should have both as a matter of course turned to a friend in this extreme crisis of their lives (as opposed to, say, a family member, or a legal or spiritual advisor) is itself extremely telling of the crucial place friendship occupied in this moral world. Even more telling is the fact that Beecher, who did not know Moulton all that well at the start of his involvement in the quarrel quickly set about trying to forge affective ties with this man who now knew his darkest secret.[47] As with Tilton, Beecher's friendship with Moulton began life as a practical relationship in which the friend was asked to take on a number of somewhat ill-defined responsibilities in the blurry realm between private and public life, personal and business matters. Moulton was tasked with holding on to all the correspondence relating to the affair and its suppression, giving advice about how to handle the succession of crises that came up over the years, acting as Tilton's banker, lying in public to shield Beecher, listening in private with sympathy to what he later portrayed as Beecher's incessant whining about the whole situation, and in general handling whatever came up in a way that served both Beecher's and Tilton's interests.[48]

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[47] Beecher's attempts to create affective ties with Moulton come through best in his letters to the man; a good selection can be found in *Trial Transcript*, I, 57

[48] The bewildering range of ad hoc favors and functions Moulton was asked to perform defy any succinct quotation and would take us far afield indeed, so I refer the reader simply to Moulton's direct examination, in which these are described at such laborious length as to satisfy even the most resolute insomniac. *Trial Transcript*, I, 60-142

It was no accident that Beecher and Tilton sung praises to Moulton's character during the course of their friendship with him, for character was precisely what was wanted in a friend of whom one had to be able to ask, and to whom one had to be able to tell, nearly everything.[49] Character, that conception of moral rectitude that extended to any circumstance and bore up under unforeseen extremities, was crucial in a social relationship like friendship that imposed obligations which were not specified ahead of time but arose in an ad hoc manner. Neither Beecher nor Moulton knew exactly what they were getting in to on that dark December night when Moulton offered Beecher his friendship in an hour of need. They had to trust each other that each would do as he was asked and would be asked no more than he could do. It was only on the understanding that Moulton was a man of the highest character that involving him in such a potentially compromising situation made any kind of sense.

Of course, as it turned out, the friendship between Moulton and Beecher was ill-starred, for the 'mutual friend' at the end of the day turned on Beecher and testified against him in court. And, naturally, Beecher's defense team made much of this betrayal as a means of undermining Moulton's character. In his opening for the defense, General Tracy dramatically (albeit somewhat pretentiously) drew a comparison between the 'red matted hair, the sharp and angular face, the cold and remorseless eyes of Judas Iscariot' as depicted in Da Vinci's *Last Supper*, 'and the same features in his legitimate successor, the "mutual friend."'[50] Indeed, the defense did its best to insinuate that Moulton's friendship was

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[49] There is room in this essay for only one extravagantly florid author, so I must banish Beecher and Tilton to the footnotes. Here is Beecher in letters read out in court but dating to the period when he was friendly with Moulton: 'He is worthy of all confidence. He is worthy of all trust .… Moulton, whom I believe to be high minded and honest and whose statement should be received … with implicit confidence .… I would trust him with my life and property without scruple.' *Trial Transcript*, I, 57. And here is Tilton during his cross-examination: 'Mr. Moulton … whose ability, integrity and loyalty … genius of administration and great courage of thought and action … Moulton is the successor of Sir Phillip Sidney in all that is honorable, manly and magnificent in friendship.' *Trail Transcript*, I, 483.

[50] Trial Transcript, II, 38.

'utterly hollow and false,' and that by his own account Moulton had every reason to think the worst of

Beecher's character at the time he proffered his friendship.[51] As his cross-examiner pointedly remarked:

'the inception of your friendship for Mr. Beecher was on that stormy night when … you learned that he

had debauched the wife of your most intimate friend.'[52] This was very far from the Victorian ideal of

friendship as originating in mutual respect and affection.[53]

Not content with pointing out the improbability of the Beecher-Moulton friendship, Beecher's defense

team provided an alternative account of how and why this relationship had developed, and in the

process illuminated a darker side of the politics of Victorian friendship. Beecher's lawyers insinuated

that Moulton's involvement in the affair was motivated not by concern for Beecher or Tilton, but rather

by the desire to use the two men's behind-the-scenes influence with the Republican party to serve his

own business ends. This fantasy of Moulton as a capitalist manipulator is worth quoting at length:

> 'What was this man? … He was the junior member of one of the largest … commercial houses in
> this city. … [T]he *maintenance of friendly relations* with [customs, port and quarantine] officers
> … was a matter of the utmost concern to the firm …. [T]hey should be represented, as occasion
> arose, at Washington, at Albany, and among … officers of both the national and State
> governments, by some *confidential agent*, who could undertake the management of such affairs
> involving the most delicate and weighty considerations … [I]n every large concern of this kind
> there is invariably a junior partner … who undertakes the management of these interests, and
> concerning whose transactions no questions are ever asked …. [T]he confidential partner cannot
> do all his work with his own hands …. He cannot … go down to Washington and urge or oppose

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[51] Trial Transcript, II, 37.

[52] Trial Transcript, I, 148

[53] The evident contrast between Beecher and Moulton as people also helped the lawyers' case. In an age that
associated friendship with similarity, the friendship between Beecher and Tilton made perfect sense, for the two
were clearly both emotional, literary, verbose, attention-hungry, controversy-seeking birds of a feather (and
brightly-colored ones they were too!) The contrast with the cold-blooded, cynical, practical and business-like
Moulton was striking, and ran counter to nineteenth century assumptions about what friends ought to be like,
which is to say, that they ought to be alike.

legislation without any support from the public press …. Through … Mr. Tilton … Mr. Moulton had, therefore, easy and confidential access to the principal organs of the Republican party.'[54]

This portrait of Moulton as a behind-the-scenes operator illuminates something that is often forgotten in discussions of nineteenth century social relations as well as in histories of friendship: friendship was the flip side of patronage and corruption, and in the nineteenth century patronage and corruption were what made the world go around. The reason this story about Moulton was plausible was that for most of the century neither the apparatus of the state nor the hierarchies of business enterprises resembled the professional, bureaucratic, supposedly impersonal and stable institutions within which we live our lives. Official state jobs were doled out through a mechanism known as the 'spoils system,' which allowed the winners of elections to reward their friends and allies with lucrative positions within the state. Success in business was likewise an informal process that depended as much on making friends in the right places and demonstrating one's trustworthiness as it did on any objective demonstration of competency.[55] This was indeed a world in which the 'maintenance of friendly relations' mattered in the highest degree, because friendship was how things got done. Tilton, we recall, felt he owed his rise in the world to Beecher's friendship. And Richard White has shown us that friendship could even move mountains in the nineteenth century. For the great transcontinental railroads that blasted their way across and through the Rockies in this era were not so much, in his recent account of their genesis, the

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[54] Trial Transcript, II, 36. My italics.

[55] On the somewhat ad hoc, informal nature of business enterprise and the transition away from it see Alfred D. Chandler, Jr., *The visible hand: the managerial revolution in American business* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1977) but see also the recent revision of this view in Richard White, *Railroaded: the transcontinentals and the making of modern America* (New York : Norton, 2011.) The workings of local government, and the political machines built on the patronage system, have not been a sexy topic for quite some decades, much to the loss of historians trying to incorporate into their analysis of a culture its social relations. For that early work, see John M. Allswang, *Bosses, machines, and urban voters* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986) and Bruce M. Stave and Sondra Astor Stave (eds.), *Urban bosses, machines, and progressive reformers* (Malabar, FA: R.E. Krieger Pub. Co., 1984.) Again, for the importance of connecting these matters to the Beecher trial (along with an early prototype for the kind of work I'm doing here) see Waller, *Reverend Beecher and Mrs. Tilton*.

progeny of impersonal corporations but rather of a tight-knit group of men who yielded influence in both the state and the business world, and who tellingly described themselves as 'friends.'[56]

In the late nineteenth century, in no small part owing to a number of well-publicized business scandals, these arrangements would come to be described as instances of corruption, but in fact the ad-hoc, personal, informal, open-ended character of friendship made it peculiarly suitable to this age of rapid change and development. The very fact that Moulton's supposed role behind the scenes was so vague and ill-defined ('the maintenance of friendly relations … the management of these interests … concerning whose transactions no questions are ever asked') is what made it so essential in a world in which sudden and wrenching changes in the fundamental organization of social and material existence frequently threw people into unprecedented situations and unexpected difficulties. It is a familiar idea, encountered in much scholarship about this era, that to navigate this world of moral uncertainty the Victorian bourgeoisie improvised a number of more or less formal social institutions to mitigate this uncertainty by creating new models of the good life, and offering new ways to attain it. The sentimental family, the benevolent association, the new religious movements of the great awakening and, indeed, the regime of respectability which we outlined above are all well-known examples of this tendency to impose a new order and stability on moral life.[57]

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[56] Richard White, *Railroaded*, 93-133

[57] See, for instance, Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class*, Stansell, *City of Women*, Johnson, *Shopkeeper's Millenium*, Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility,* Halttunen, *Confidence Men,* Abzug*, Cosmos Crumbling*, but really the theme runs throughout the works cited in notes 3 and 4. Of course, a great many of these studies argue that this order was determined in large part by the need to assert authority and superiority over an emerging working class, and while there is certainly a good deal to this, it is worthwhile to see the problem more broadly as a problem of disorder and instability within bourgeois life itself, not just vis-à-vis social groups defined as other.

But, of course, as disparate, mutually contradictory and improvised as these early forays into ordering the chaos of modernity were, they fell well short of the moral exigencies of actual life.[58] And in these moments, when formal social mechanisms feel short of one's deepest and most urgent needs, what one needed was a little help from one's friends. Though they are less studied, for the very good reason that they are less visible and obvious in the historical record, the informal social relations which the Victorians developed to help them cope with change were no less important than the formal ones which historians have lavished attention upon. Indeed, as we see in the case of Moulton, they functioned alongside and complemented formal relationships, helping grease the wheels of social life and fill the gap between formal arrangements and the particularity of actual experience. For, after all, as replete as the nineteenth century was with books of guidance and advice, very few indeed contained instructions for how to act when trying to cover up a scandal or what to do when caught in adulterous relations with an intimate friends' wife. At such times, as Beecher well understood, one had to fall back on such friends as one could muster to one's side.

It is starting to become obvious in light of this nexus of respectability and friendship, I hope, why it is that Beecher was able to combine unorthodox behavior with his status as a moral guide, even as it is becoming clear why so many Americans who had never so much as exchanged greetings with him were convinced they had a sound knowledge of his moral character. In the collective imagination of the American bourgeoisie, Beecher had taken on a somewhat mythic status as America's Best Friend. He had taken on this role because his Gospel of Love was in fact a Gospel of Friendship – one that offered a

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[58] As is suggested by the fact that the ordering of modernity was an ongoing project, something particularly well caught in studies of the late nineteenth century which emphasize the 'search for order' went on with unabated zeal as early nineteenth century mechanisms for managing change fell short. See the foundational text Robert H. Wiebe ,*The search for order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967) and, for a more recent update of this influential thesis, Steven J. Diner, *A Very Different Age: Americans of the Progressive Era* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998.)

vision of Jesus as the universal best friend, infinitely loving, solicitous of the worshipper's welfare and equal to any emergency. And for those for whom this metaphysical best friend was a bit too abstract, Beecher himself was a useful synecdoche, what with his gregarious, warm manner and intimate, open-hearted style both on and off the podium.[59] Likeable, earnest and sympathetic, in his own life Beecher made friends easily and he certainly made a good imaginary friend.

But what really helped Beecher become the nation's most trusted friend was his gift for being controversial without becoming alienating. Friends came into their own, as we've just seen, in moments of moral uncertainty, when existing social institutions and arrangements fell short of lived needs. And the work for which Beecher was most famous took form of supplementing and gently challenging the moral status quo in ways that addressed this shortfall. Whether in championing abolitionism as support for slavery became a morally and politically untenable position for many Northerners, or in reimagining the stern God of Calvin as a more friendly deity when the religious turmoil of the antebellum era signaled a wide-spread discontent with traditional Calvinist theology, Beecher performed for the wider public the function expected of a personal friend. He stepped in where the conventional way of doing things did not seem to answer, and found informal, ad-hoc solutions that necessarily had an unconventional and somewhat deviant air, but which never broke radically with the more rigid moral order represented by respectability and usually in the long run proved acceptable to bourgeois America. Also revealing of his function as America's Best Friend is the sheer variety of topics Beecher weighed in on. Not limiting himself to religious, political or even broadly moral questions, Beecher gave his

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[59] During the trial Tilton, hardly a sympathetic observer, gave this recollection of Beecher in his prime: 'his manner was large, and hearty, and gay, and companionable, and winning ... there was a certain bouncing character to his life and manner. He was very companionable, hale-fellow-well-met, fond of a joke and a frolic.' *Transcript*, I, 478

attention to whatever was current – like that of any good friend, his role was somewhat nebulous and ill-defined, allowing him to step in and lend a hand with whatever might come up.

And, of course, it is precisely because he was the nation's Best Friend that the saga of friendships gone wrong which played out in the courtroom was so captivating to the reading and watching public. For despite the fact that Beecher was so good at making it seem like the ethos of respectability and that of friendship were compatible as well as complimentary, despite the fact that he so successfully seemed to conflate reputation and character in his own person, there was still room for doubt, and room for error. The fantasy that played out in the courtroom was always the fantasy of Beecher's guilt, for anyone convinced of Beecher's innocence would have found little to interest them in the testimony. And this fantasy of Beecher's guilt was ultimately a fantasy about the incompatibility of respectability and friendship. Again and again during the trial, friendships (whether Beecher's with Tilton and his wife, Beecher's with Moulton, Tilton's with Victoria Woodhull) lead one or the other party astray, revealing how thin was the line between a 'friendly' and thus tolerable deviance from respectable conduct and that full-fledged repudiation of conventional norms which marked the perpetrator as not a friend, but a dangerous stranger.

In fact, the Beecher scandal was the beginning of the end for friendship as a fundamental building block of American society. Over the next half-century, the patronage-based spoils system would be largely dismantled in favor of a professional government bureaucracy; the small, informal business firm would be replaced by the large corporation with its impersonal hierarchy of managers; the rise of an integrated education system which increasingly served as a necessary prelude to worldly success would make the satisfaction of its one-size-fits-all, institutional demands far more valuable to life success than the ability

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to form intimate human relationships.[60] In this world, friendship (and character, for that matter) became an eccentric and frivolous pursuit, an ornament rather than a morally urgent matter. During that brief moment during which it had become a vital part of the Victorian moral world, however, the ethos of friendship had changed what deviance meant and cultivated a certain tolerance for it, even as the ethos of respectability had given a new significance and moral urgency to those old Puritan injunctions against straying too far from the flock. To chart this changing moral context, however, only takes us part-way to understanding how deviance was actually experienced, what it felt like to encounter it, and why it might have provoked laughter and desire as well as anxiety. To try and get at some of this, let's take another look at Beecher.

III.   Looking at Beecher: Deviance, Modernity and the Crowd

So far, we have been speaking about what people saw when they looked at Beecher, how they imagined him and his relationship to the community. The fantasy of Beecher as an intimate friend helps us understand both Beecher's moral status before the scandal and throws new light on the scandal as a sensational expose of friendship gone awry. But almost as important as *what* people saw when they looked at Beecher is the matter of *how* they looked at h

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[60] The history of these changes is by and large the history of corporations and the progressive era. See texts cited in notes 54 and 57, as well as, for the cultural dimension, Alan Trachtenberg, *The incorporation of America: culture and society in the gilded age* (New York : Hill and Wang, 1982)

im, for looking too has a history, and it is a history which has much to tell us about the meaning of deviance.

The newspaper coverage of the Tilton-Beecher scandal repeatedly draws the reader's attention to the unsettling urgency and tenacity of the huge, voyeuristic crowds gathered to watch the trial unfold. We have encountered already, of course, the women who showed up to Plymouth Church services while the trial was in progress, to gaze on the pastor with 'hungry eyes.' Descriptions of the courtroom likewise dwelled on the voyeuristic crowd, whose mere presence was often no less newsworthy than what was said and done by the judge, the counsel on both sides, or the witnesses. The New York Herald ran as one of its headlines 'Extraordinary crush of people to view the scenes,' and the next day noted in a somewhat contemptuous tone that 'The rush at the court room yesterday was greater than ever … a file of curiosity seekers … extended down the stairs and into the street … The court room is altogether too much beset by mere idle lookers-on … and it is next to impossible to suppress their expressions of dissent or approval at climactic times'[61] The Tribune reported on the crowd in a somewhat more alarmed vein, waxing on at some length about the enormous number, tenacity and vulgarity of the spectators:

> 'About 3,000 applicants were turned away from the doors and every foot of space inside was occupied. After running the blockade … the spectators were unwilling to surrender their places at noon … the gallery lost its lunch, read newspapers during the intermission … The morbid curiosity of the spectators and loungers illustrated at the adjournment … the balcony was black with spectators who were anxious to watch the departure of the ladies. On the sidewalk a small group soon became a restless, vulgar crowd of starers. Such curiosity as this should be tempered with decency.'[62]

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[61] *New York Herald*, January 14 and January 15, 1875

[62] *Transcript*, I, 50-51

The next day it again reported that 'Mrs. Beecher was evidently annoyed by the rude stare of several boors who jostled about her with elongated necks and bulging eyes,' as they tried to get a look at her husband. Understandably, the Beechers made a hasty exit, pursued by the spectators: 'leaving the courtroom in company with his wife … the crowd still hung to his heels and followed him to the sidewalk.'[63] The reporters more or less got used to the crowd and devoted less space to documenting it, but to the very end of the trial these kinds of observations remained a staple of trial reportage.[64]

Clearly, this kind of looking is something very different from the visual encounters with deviance that we've encountered thus far. At Salem, to look or be looked at was a dangerous business, for looking brought one into a direct relationship with the witch. With a look, a witch could curse or strike down the unhappy observer, and the line between spectator and participant in the unfolding drama was therefore a fine one indeed. The mediated gaze we encountered in the eighteenth century was likewise a source of danger, for it was chiefly through injudicious looking and listening that one succumbed to the seductions of the rake. Nineteenth century looking, by contrast, has evidently ceased to be a dangerous or even particularly disreputable activity. The reporters make a show of being unsettled by the crowd, but their own presence at the trial and obsessive attention to what was said and how the principal figures looked implies a wide-spread desire by the paper-reading public to participate at second hand in the curious crowd of idle spectators.[65] Indeed, the Tribune report notes the slippage between curious

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[63] *Transcript*, I, 75

[64] See for instance, *The Chicago Tribune*, April 13, 1875 and June 10, 1875

[65] The newspapers' condemnations of unruly looking can best be understood in the context of attempts to discipline spectatorship in the mid-nineteenth century, an ultimately successful battle to push middle class norms about public comportment into spaces potentially inhabited by a cross-section of society like theatres and concert halls. This conflict ought not to obscure the point that people of all classes formed eager, voracious and not always well-behaved spectators to the Beecher trial. For spectatorship, discipline and the battle over popular

onlooker and curious reader obliquely when it records that the crowd 'read newspapers during intermission' and the Herald playfully and more overtly acknowledges it by comparing itself to a courtroom usher and suggesting that 'we appear in the overture each day and show the readers of the Herald to their chairs.'[66]

The Beecher scandal evidently drew unprecedented public attention, but this unabashed desire for and readiness to seek out spectacular encounters with deviance was, of course not limited to this one event. As we've noted, the sensation novel with its deviant protagonist, the dime museum with its curiosities and freaks, the spiritualist séance and public lectures by controversial and eccentric speakers could all play to the same voyeuristic desires. Taken all together, these practices amount to an almost entirely new form of encounter with the deviant, one that will continue to be a striking feature of the history of deviance down to the present. As we'll see in the following chapter, large crowds will also assemble hungrily before the courtroom in which Ruth Snyder is being tried in 1927, and the newspapers will play even more shamelessly to their readers' desire to gaze at second hand at the deviant. And if the crowd of vulgar starers has ceased to accompany sensational events and deviant persons in our own day, it is surely only because it has been displaced by the unblinking eye of the television camera, which allows us to satisfy our voyeuristic compulsions without leaving the comforts of home.

But what brought about this tremendous change in how deviance was regarded over the course of the nineteenth century? In part, of course, the story is tied up with the history of looking as such, which, as

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entertainments, see Kassen, *Rudeness and Civility*, 215-256 and Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/lowbrow : the emergence of cultural hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988.)

[66] *New York Herald*, January 28, 1875

quite a few historians have noted, undergoes a complicated transformation in the nineteenth century.

The burden of this scholarship is that, by the middle of the century, it has become possible and indeed

commonplace to look without coming into contact with the object of one's gaze. Looking no longer pulls

the subject into a relationship with that which is being observed, and this object of attention is

increasingly experienced in abstraction from the spectator, as something which has nothing to do with

him or her. Another way to put this is to say that the things and people we look at don't look back at us,

don't make any demands on us, pass us by as though we (or they) weren't really there.[67]

Walter Benjamin, the first to give a scholarly account of this new experience of vision, illustrates it

through the figure of the flaneur – an idle stroller who inhabits the new urban environments of the

nineteenth century as a detached observer. For Benjamin, the flaneur is a response to the experience of

life in an industrialized city, particularly the overwhelming variety, unreliability and insubstantiality of

the visual stimulus encountered on its streets and, crucially for our purposes, the experience of

observing and losing oneself in the large crowds which are so characteristic of the modern city.[68] And

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[67] The dominant voice in this history of the gaze is Walter Benjamin, whose formulations still set the terms for the historiography which grows out of his work. See in particular his 'Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,' *Illuminations*, Random House, 1988, 217-52, 'On some motifs in Baudelaire, Illuminations, 155-200 and 'Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century' in *Reflections*, Random house, 1989, 146-62. A very important theoretical elaboration on Benjamin is John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin, 1972). For histories of visuality in the nineteenth century which document this shift more substantially, see Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the observer : on vision and modernity in the nineteenth century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990.), Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of perception : attention, spectacle, and modern culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), Nicholas Daly, *Sensation and modernity in the 1860s* (New York : Cambridge University Press, 2009), Dana Brand, *The spectator and the city in nineteenth-century American literature* (New York : Cambridge University Press, 1991) Cook, *Arts of Deception* and Kassen, *Rudeness and Civility*, 70-111. From a slightly different angle, but one which confirms this basic outlook, Bourdieu has interesting things to say about the way the bourgeois gaze privileges form over function, thus abstracting the thing beheld from the place it might occupy in the beholder's life. See Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 3-5, 30-33, 55

[68] I am giving somewhat short shrift here to what, for Benjamin himself, is the crucial formative factor for this new type of vision: the mechanically produced and infinitely reproducible visual stimulus which robs visual encounters of their 'aura,' meaning something like their immediacy as objects which are actually present to the observer (as opposed to reproductions, images.)

there is obviously something of a flaneur sensibility to the crowds described in the above-cited excerpts. Terms like 'idle lookers-on,' 'loungers' and 'curiosity seekers' give a sense of detachment and superficiality, albeit one tempered by the evident passion with which this crowd seeks out visual stimulation. This flaneur spirit no less animates the style of the newspaper coverage itself, of course, especially that of the metropolitan papers whose frequently flippant tone (think of the Herald's little punning joke about serving as an usher) and roving, somewhat helter-skelter visual descriptions serve as textual equivalents of this detached mode of seeing.[69]

One of the things that makes the gaze of the crowd strikingly different from that of the flaneur, however, is its collective character. Benjamin briefly draws attention to this aspect of the crowd in his account of the modern gaze, writing that 'the greatly increased mass of participants has produced a change in the mode of participation.'[70] However, his focus on the flaneur has accustomed us to think of the modern gaze as belonging to an isolated, individualized and alienated (and thus detached) urban dweller, who finds anonymity and invisibility within the crowd but without ever feeling a part of it. However, our newspaper coverage emphasizes over and over precisely the collective nature of the visual act. It is always the crowd that looks: a 'crowd of starers,' or 'a file of curiosity seekers,' and individual observers are scarcely if ever singled out.[71] And, of course, it is always the crowd that is

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[69] Hard to give an example of this last without quoting at what would be excessive length for such a small point; I have in mind the fact that the papers would frequently devote the opening column of the trial coverage to somewhat rambling descriptions of who was in the courtroom, how the principals looked and any striking or unusual-looking characters who happened to catch the reporter's eye.

[70] 'Work of Art,' 239

[71] In contrast with eighteenth century voyeurism which is usually individual in nature. Think, for instance, of the prints which accompany French pornographic texts of the Enlightenment, which often depict several onlookers to the sexual act, each of whom is separate and seemingly unaware of the others. This, of course, mirrors the more solitary character of deviant reading and reading about deviance in the eighteenth century. For French

addressed by the newspapers themselves, binding their solitary readers into an imagined community of

fellow-voyeurs.[72]

We can begin to see from this why the deviant is no longer imagined as a source of moral danger. In the

first place, because the gaze of the crowd (or the solitary flaneur within it) is a detached gaze, it no

longer places the on-looker at risk. Looking has ceased to constitute a social relation and now instead

tends merely to objectify those whom it surveys.[73] The look no longer serves as a prelude for aggression

or seduction, nor indeed any other kind of interaction, but instead becomes an end in itself, and indeed

a source of seemingly inexhaustible pleasure.

The fact that this gaze is the gaze of a crowd, moreover, means that the pleasures of looking are really

the pleasures of looking *together*, and that too altogether changes the meaning of the deviant. For if the

deviant is now no longer threatening, it is also because the deviant is (almost by definition) a singular,

remarkable, uncommon figure, whereas those who are arrayed to gaze together constitute an imposing

beast with numberless heads. And, as de Tocqueville cunningly noted on his visit to mid-nineteenth

century America, the individual is in this society experienced as fundamentally powerless vis a vis the

pornography, see Robert Darnton, *The forbidden best-sellers of pre-revolutionary France* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995), 85-114

[72] A point famously made in Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (London : Verso, 1983) but also (and curiously this is often forgotten) by that other observer of the birth of the modern nation – Alexis de Tocqueville, to whose observations on newspapers I am deeply indebted to for what follows. See Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 493-5

[73] Not to say this is the only form of looking in the nineteenth century, of course! In particular, one thinks immediately of the sentimental mode of looking where the gaze precipitates an affective, sympathetic connection between the looker and the looked-at. But the very fact that the sentimental gaze is self-consciously elaborated as a special kind of looking in the early nineteenth century suggests that looking *as such* no longer automatically implies relatedness.

collective force of the majority. As he says, 'the majority possesses an empire so absolute and so irresistible that one must in a way renounce one's rights as a citizen and so to speak one's quality as a man when one wants to deviate from the path it has traced.'[74] And this in turn breeds a curious indulgence towards the individual deviant; consider the peculiar amalgam of tolerance and condemnation with which de Tocqueville's crowd says to this unfortunate person 'you are free not to think as I do … everything remains to you, but from this day on, you are a stranger among us.'[75]

This is one reason that even the most serious of scandals is, after all, not such a serious matter. The more outrageous and outlandish the behavior of the scandalous figure, the more isolated and unrepresentative they evidently stand in the eyes of the assembled crowd. Indeed, the greater the deviance on display, the greater the communal satisfaction of drawing together into a crowd momentarily united by its curiosity about and abhorrence towards this peculiar creature. For the ritual to work, the participants must be able to take it for granted that the crowd is indeed distinct from the deviant, that its values are indeed different and opposite to their own, and this is all the easier to believe the more the deviant's behavior departs from the commonplace. This process echoes, in certain respects, the scapegoating of the witch, though, of course, the degree of abstraction from actual social relationships in the nineteenth century is much greater. The deviance is less a personal threat and more an impersonal spectacle, and the imagined community which forms around it is a fairly flimsy fantasy of togetherness. The experiences of difference and sameness are both utterly removed from everyday life, and take place, as it were, in another world. And, as we shall see later on, this changes altogether the significance of the ritual.

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[74] This is one of the main leitmotifs of *Democracy in America*, but see especially 244-7, 470, 495. Quote on 247.

[75] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 244.

De Tocqueville's assessment of the relationship between the majority and the deviant would lead us to expect that not only does deviance cease to seem dangerous, but that it also comes to be imagined as impotent and ridiculous, even when the social status of the deviant might lead us to expect otherwise. And indeed, this is exactly what happens in the Beecher scandal. Henry Ward Beecher, as the lawyers persecuting him and the papers hostile to him did not hesitate to point out, was a powerful, wealth man with powerful, wealthy friends.[76] He represented, as much as any of his contemporaries, the bourgeois way of life, the fortunes of liberal Christianity and the spirit of moral reform. If any man's deviance could have been a serious threat to the moral integrity of this society, Beecher was the man. And yet, even those who were inclined to feel there was something to the charges against him were inclined to portray him as weak and ridiculous rather than as a serious moral danger.

For example, throughout the trial, descriptions of him and of Tilton in the papers stressed how old, tired and weak the two men appeared. Of Tilton, the New York Herald wrote 'He looks tired; his eyes are without luster and seem to need sleep, and his face, though not pale, is without bloom … The elastic step, self-consciousness and open air of manhood are gone' and of the Beechers it noted 'The appearance of this old couple grows daily more pitiable … he …wears the scarlet, damascene color indicative of apoplectic tendencies'[77] Of Beecher, the Chicago Tribune (a pro-Tilton paper) observed while the minister was on the stand: 'Beecher was very nervous, his voice trembled violently, and he swayed backwards and forward incessantly.'[78] The New York Tribune, more friendly to Beecher, none

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[76] See *Chicago Tribune*, Feb 3, 1875 and *Transcript*, I, 20, 25, 32, 37, 41, 58

[77] *New York Herald*, January 15, 1875

[78] *New York Herald*, January 28, 1875

the less acknowledged 'his saddened, careworn features.'[79] These may indeed have been guilty men, but they scarcely looked to the assembled reporters like very formidable ones. This is evident also, of course, in the power dynamics between Beecher and the crowd as depicted in the papers; it is clearly the crowd which is the domineering aggressor as it hounds the minister and subjects him to its relentless curiosity. Beecher's weakness vis-à-vis the crowd was also on display in the wake of the scandal, when publications which saw the trial as discrediting him contented themselves with a dismissive tone towards his misdeeds, even as they draped themselves in the mantle of speaking for the majority. For instance, the Nation was scathing of Beecher in its self-appointed role as the voice of 'the sober second thought of the community' but even in its call for the minister to step down the dominant note is contempt for a weak man rather than alarm at a dangerous one, as for instance in its insistence that: 'any minister who finds that his religion has not prepared him for such a crisis may well doubt the propriety of his continuing to preach.'[80]

The days when a rake might topple the republic were evidently long gone, even when the rake had as prominent a platform as did Henry Ward Beecher. Tilton's lawyers did valiantly attempt to paint Beecher's crime as a grave moral danger and the man himself as a rake in language strongly reminiscent of the eighteenth century discourse of seduction. The opening for the persecution concluded in what will be a familiar strain: 'Their home is desolated, the hopes of that family blasted … as you love your homes, as you love your families … I call upon you … in the name of Christianity … by every consideration that is near and dear to us on earth, I call upon you to brand the seducer as his crime

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[79] *Transcript*, I, 50

[80] *The Nation*, July 8, 1875

deserves to be branded.'[81] But this language simply did not resonate with mid-nineteenth century audiences, and even in papers deeply unsympathetic to Beecher, one finds little trace of it. What some publications hostile to the pastor did find a little unnerving was, tellingly, the number of enthusiastic followers Beecher could still claim as the dust began to settle on the scandal. However, they none the less took comfort in the vastness of the imagined community which stood arrayed against Beecher and his remaining adherents. The *Nation* is again a good example in its insistence on contrasting 'the uproarious crowds who attend his prayer-meetings' and 'the noisy brethren of Plymouth Church' with 'reflecting men all over the country … the sober thought of the community … a very large and respectable portion of the Christian world, whose opinions neither they nor their pastor can well afford to disregard.'[82] Whether this was an accurate reading of public sentiment is almost irrelevant – the point is that it was only at the head of a potent social movement that a deviant could now command real fear and anxiety. Even the many prosperous and influential attendees of Plymouth Church could be dismissed as harmless eccentrics, if the public could plausibly be imagined as largely hostile to them.

All this helps us understand why deviants in the nineteenth century no longer command the terror and alarm that in the past so defined fantasies about them. But we have not yet gotten at the longing that is so manifest in the crowd, at the desire that surfaces to view once the fear begins to ebb. It is tempting, in view of the sexual nature of Beecher's alleged wrongdoing, to argue that the desire at work here is an unacknowledged desire to transgress. The newspapers certainly imply as much when they pointedly draw attention to the fact that is it *women* looking at Beecher with hungry eyes, or when they say the male crowd in the courtroom was especially keen in its inspection of Mrs. Tilton. Combined with the

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[81] *Transcript*, I, 58

[82] *The Nation*, July 8, 1875

rather extravagant denunciations that Beecher was subject to from those who felt he was guilty of the crime, it is easy to take a Freudian view of the matter and say that the desire to look is really a sublimated desire to give free rein to repressed sexual impulses.[83] And, while I don't want to deny there is something like that going on here, this interpretation doesn't extend very readily to the broader context of nineteenth century visual encounters with deviance. That the appeal of sensational sexual scandals is the opportunity to vicariously misbehave is plausible, but can this interpretation also account for the desire to look at freaks, murderers, political radicals, spiritualists and other eccentrics that were subject to the desirous gaze of nineteenth century audiences?

It seems to me that Freud cannot be stretched so far without doing violence to him, and that another psychoanalytic take on desire can serve us in better stead here. I have in mind Lacan's insight that desire is a relation not so much to a concrete object but rather a yearning something that is not present, something that is lacking.[84] This view of the matter seems to fit better with the nature of nineteenth century looking which, as we've seen, creates a vast sense of distance between the subject and the object of the gaze. Beecher, and whatever the fantasy of Beecher evokes, is felt to exist almost in another world, certainly it is not as it were 'here,' amongst the crowd; it is separate and, in a sense, lacking. To look at the deviant with desire is indirectly to acknowledge this lack by fantasizing about

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[83] Freud's basic theory of sexual repression is outlined in Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the theory of Sexuality,* Trans. James Strachey (New York : Basic Books, 1962)

[84] As the great impresario of psychoanalysis himself rather opaquely puts it: **"**Desire is a relation of being to lack. This lack is the lack of being properly speaking. It isn't the lack of this or that, but lack of being whereby the being exists.**"** Jacques Lacan**,** *The seminar of Jacques Lacan Book II: The ego in Freud's theory and in the technique of psychoanalysis, 1954-1955.* Ed. Jacques**-**Alain Miller (New York: WW Norton, 1991), 223**.** For my own part, I have no desire, to import the rest of Lacan's imposing (and, so it seems to me from a superficial acquaintance with it, somewhat suspect) theoretical edifice along with this concept of desire as lack; it seems to me that this observation can quite readily and usefully be abstracted from the theoretical framework within which it occurs, albeit with some violence to Lacan's own line of thinking about the subject.

some radically different way of being in the world. It is not exactly that one necessarily wants to identify with or become the deviant; it is more simply that this detached act of looking makes the deviant into a symbol for something which one is not, and something which can therefore be experienced as missing, absent, lacking. That is, in fact, why people go on looking for so long; this kind of gazing creates a sense of lack that can only be satisfied, but only ever incompletely, by more looking.

The importance of this concept of lack is that it suggests the deviant becomes an object of desire not because (as per Freud) Victorian bourgeois culture was exceptionally *repressive* but rather because it was exceptionally *inadequate*. That is, this pronounced desire for something that's alternative to or in excess of Victorian moral norms seems to suggest that these norms were at an unconscious level felt to fall short in some fundamental way, that something important had been left out. And this, of course, squares well with the preceding discussion of friendship, where we likewise found ourselves noting that the moral order of respectability falls short of real life, is in some important respects not adequate to actual experience. Somewhat surprisingly, then, this line of thinking dovetails with a very old critique of Victorian culture, one first articulated by the late Victorians themselves but since somewhat neglected by scholars of the period. This is, of course, the notion that bourgeois culture is in some fundamental way guilty of being in bad faith with itself, of presenting itself as complete and sufficient, whereas in fact it is partial, evasive and thus prone to hypocrisy.[85] In this view, the problem of hypocrisy is not that the person who is guilty of it does not really hold the values they profess to (which was the conventional Victorians idea of hypocrisy) but rather that what is professed falls short of what actually happens.[86] The

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[85] The best study I know of this late-Victorian attitude is T.J. Jackson Lears, *No place of grace: antimodernism and the transformation of American culture, 1880-1920* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981)

[86] For an exploration of the problem of hypocrisy as the Victorians themselves conceived it, see Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women*.

hypocrite is not so much someone who does not do what they say, but rather someone who does not say (all of) what they do, someone whose lived commitments are in excess of what they are prepared to admit to themselves or others.

This line of psychological speculation, interesting as it might be, takes us well beyond the domain of the gaze and, seemingly, beyond the limits of these sources. It just doesn't seem possible to get at the unconscious life of the crowd from the newspapers' relatively brief accounts of how it looked as it looked at Beecher. Fortuitously, the crowd did not just look, it also laughed. And, as it turns out, the evidence of its laughter can help confirm the psychoanalytic speculations I've laid out in the last few pages, as well as take us beyond them. The time has finally come, therefore, to have a bit of a laugh at Beecher's expense.

IV.   Laughing at Beecher

Let me tell you a joke. I should warn you, though, that it isn't a very funny joke. That, indeed, is why it is so useful to us, for while it isn't very funny anymore, it brought down the house in 1875. Indeed, it caused some of the hardest and most prolonged laughter that was heard in the courtroom over the course of the trial. Understanding why this joke, which took the form of a poem, was once so irresistibly

hysterical will, I think, help us get at the import of that curiously tragic-comical mood in which nineteenth century audiences greeted Beecher's fall from grace.[87]

It is the nineteenth days of the trial, and Theodore Tilton is on the stand. It is the second day of his cross-examination and the rather unsavory tactics of Beecher's lawyers are starting to become obvious. Unable to meet the rather compromising circumstantial evidence produced against Beecher with anything more substantial than the minister's own denials, Beecher's legal team resorted to attacking the character of his main accusers, Tilton foremost among them. They would, over the following weeks and months attempt to paint Tilton as a free lover, atheist, adulterer, communist, blackmailer, traitor, liar and a generally immoral and untrustworthy character. On the nineteenth day of the trial, this attempt to destroy Tilton's credibility took the form of a number of poems and essays either written by Tilton or published in papers which he at the time edited, by way of which Beecher's lawyers hoped to persuade the jury of Tilton's disturbingly heterodox views of love, marriage and gender relations.

One might from all this expect the atmosphere in the courtroom to be tense and antagonistic but in fact this was one of the more light-hearted moments of the entire trial. The reporters' notes appended to the New York Tribune's transcript of the trial, usually a quite restrained and impersonal summary of the day's events and incidents, uncharacteristically dwell on this festive atmosphere, writing 'a stranger not familiar with court procedure might in the morning easily have thought himself in a place of amusement, for Mr. Tilton's examination and its surroundings resembled more a literary entertainment

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[87] Here I am indebted to the method of Robert Darnton's great essay on the massacre of cats in eighteenth century France, where a joke we don't get also serves as a way into a bygone historical consciousness. See Robert Darnton, *The great cat massacre and other episodes in French cultural history* (New York : Basic Books, 1984), 75-106.

than a trial … a pleasant vein of humor running through the whole.'[88] Of the poem in question, which brought such eruptions of laughter that the trial was momentarily suspended, the Tribune had this to say:

> 'Perhaps the most entertaining part of the entire proceedings was the reading by Mr. Evarts [the cross-examining lawyer] of Mr. Tilton's exquisite poem, entitled "French with a Master," each verse of which closes with the words "Aimer, aimer, c'est a vivre" …. The constant repetition of the words … caused a ripple of amusement to run through the room, which swelled each time the line was repeated until, when the last verse closed, there was an outright burst of laughter, in which the Judge, the jury, Mr. Evarts and Mr. Tilton joined heartily'[89]

Well, I think we had better have the poem and see what all the fuss is about:

'French With a Master
A New Poem By Theodore Tilton

Teach you French? I will my dear!
Sit down and con your lesson here.
What did Adam say to Eve?
Aimer, aimer, c'est a vivre.

Don't pronounce the last word long;
Make it short to suit the song;
Rhyme it to your flowing sleeve,
Aimer, aimer, c'est a vivre.

Sleeve, I said, but what's the harm
If I really meant your arm?
Mine shall twine it (by your leave),
Aimer, aimer, c'est a vivre.

Learning French is full of slips;
Do as I do with the lips;
Here's the right way, you perceive,
Aimer, aimer, c'est a vivre.

French is always spoken best
Breathing deeply from the chest;
Darling does your bosom heave?
Aimer, aimer, c'est a vivre.

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[88] *Transcript*, I, 459

[89] *Transcript*, I, 460

Now, my dainty little sprite,
Have I taught your lesson right?
Then what pay shall I receive?
Aimer, aimer, c'est a vivre.

Will you think me ever bold
If I linger to be told,
Whether you yourself believe,
Aimer, aimer, c'est a vivre.

Pretty pupil, when you say,
All the French to me to-day
Do you mean it or deceive?
Aimer, aimer, c'est a vivre.

Tell me may I understand
When I press your little hand,
That our hearts together cleave?
Aimer, aimer, c'est a vivre.

Have you, in your tresses room
For some orange buds to bloom?
May I such a garland weave?
Aimer, aimer, c'est a vivre.

Or if I presume too much,
Teaching French by sense of touch,
Grant me pardon and reprieve!
Aimer, aimer, c'est a vivre.

Sweetheart, no! you cannot go!
Let me sit and hold you so.
Adam did the same to Eve!
Aimer, aimer, c'est a vivre.

[Uproarious laughter]'[90]

Well, I hope you had a good, hearty guffaw, dear reader, but I suspect you join me in being somewhat

puzzled by what there was in this piece of doggerel to cause such '[uproarious laughter].' It may help us

to understand the joke, such as it is, to note that the words comprising the 'punchline' had turned up

earlier in Tilton's literary work. Indeed, they had been read out in court that very morning in a very

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[90] *Transcript*, I, 467-8

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different context; they appeared at the head of a quite serious and indeed earnest editorial written by

Tilton that argued for the liberalization of divorce laws. 'Aimer, aimer, c'est a vivre' was in that context

an important concession to the arguments of Free Love advocates that individual romantic sentiment

had a greater importance than and moral priority over social conventions such as marriage. If to love

was to live, then individual persons were perfectly justified in following their hearts wherever they

might lead – and if that meant having a succession of lovers or even several lovers at once, then so be it

and monogamous marriage be damned. In his editorial, Tilton had tried to steer away from the more

radical implications of this argument by insisting that love in its essence involved fidelity to one partner,

and that the sentiment of the French poet was therefore perfectly compatible with marriage. But Tilton

did substantially concede the principle to Free Love advocates, and this lead him to argue in favor of

what we today know as no-fault divorce laws, so as to allow couples who no longer felt affection for one

another to separate.[91]

By conceding that 'aimer, aimer, c'est a vivre,' Tilton occupied a position perilously close to Victoria

Woodhull and other Free Love advocates. But, of course, he was also not so far away from his teacher

and one-time mentor Henry Ward Beecher. Beecher's 'Gospel of Love' had sacralized love as the

essence of God's being, which had the implication of making human desire more acceptable (no longer

imagined as offensive to this loving God) and elevating the sentimental individual's ability to give and

receive love to a high moral principle. All this tended to strongly imply that individual affective life was

indeed more important than conventional religious forms, and it was only by his willingness to tolerate

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[91] The editorial is reprinted in *Transcript*, I, 463-5. This was a pretty radical stance for the time, as marriage law at the time still had strong religious overtones and 'til death do you part' was generally taken as an injunction to be upheld in all but the most extreme cases of abandonment or abuse. See Nancy F. Cott, *Public vows : a history of marriage and the nation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), Hendrik Hartog, *Man and wife in America : a history* (Cambridge, MA : Harvard University Press, 2000)

inconsistency in his thinking that Beecher himself was saved from accepting the proposition that 'aimer, aimer, c'est a vivre.'[92]

It is a long way down from these lofty moral and theological propositions into the gutter of 'French with a Master' and therein, of course, lies the comedy. The joke here is that the speaker's lofty sentiments are a rather flimsy cover for his lustful and, we must assume, lecherous sexual advances on his young pupil. The comic mode we're inhabiting here is that of burlesque, wherein the lofty and grave is imitated in a facetious fashion and combined with the base and lowly. And it is funny, of course, because it imitates the situation in the courtroom. Beecher's lawyers are reading the poem because they hope to suggest that Tilton himself is the French Master, using lofty rhetoric and poetic expression to mask his own moral decrepitude. Tilton himself, on the other hand, probably had Beecher in mind when he wrote the poem, as the Master's attempts at theological self-justification ('Adam did the same to Eve') strongly imply.

If we think about the structure of this joke, we can readily see that it has something to do with deception and hypocrisy. Whether we conceive of the French Master as a cynical confidence man who is trying to deceive his pupil by masking his sexual desire with philosophical sentiments about love, or whether we see him (and this is my take on him) as a self-deluding figure, taken in by his own rhetoric, the humor arises from the grotesque mismatch between his language and his acts. His acts evidently have a second meaning that he is not admitting to himself or to his pupil, but which are evident to the

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[92] The most thorough study of Beecher's ideas in their historical context is probably McLoughlin, *The Meaning of Henry Ward Beecher.* On the gospel of love specifically, see also Waller, *Reverend Beecher and Mrs. Tilton*,18-37 and Fox, *Trials of Intimacy*.

observer who laughs at this mismatch (the knowing stance we might attribute to the poet and the reader.) Now, we can describe this mismatch in two ways: we can say that the French Master's actions are *in excess* of his language, that they reveal there is more to him than he says, or we can say that his language is *inadequate* to explaining his actions, that his actions reveal 'aimer, aimer, c'est a vivre' as an incomplete or lacking, and thus somewhat ridiculous, assertion. Either way, we seem to find here a strong echo of the themes of inadequacy and bad faith that I proposed might be behind the gaze of desire. And again we note that the deception the French Master is engaged in is not exactly hypocrisy – he does not, after all, preach chastity while sneaking his hand up his pupil's dress – but rather a kind of omission that has hypocritical consequences, in so far as we expect a teacher to enlighten rather than deceive, to care for rather than prey upon his pupils.

There is a lot more to be said about 'French With a Master' but as it is a somewhat atypical joke (most jokes weren't roman-a-clef poems, after all) let us first place it in a somewhat broader context of historical humor, starting with other examples of humor at the Tilton-Beecher trial. Tilton's joke-poem is a close cousin of the many, many kissing jokes that emerged from the Tilton-Beecher trial. These kissing jokes referred to Beecher's habit of kissing close friends as an expression of intimacy and affection, a Romantic and somewhat unusual affectation on his part, but not an altogether unknown one in the context of nineteenth century friendships which tended to be emotionally intense and physically intimate. This kissing habit of his, however, came up a number of times during the minister's testimony and, in the context of an adultery trial, it proved irresistibly hilarious. As the Tribune stenographer duly noted, nearly every reference to kissing during the trial was greeted with '[laughter]' and the newspapers had a field day with the topic.[93] One wag remarked that 'The variety of kisses introduced in

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[93] For instance, *Transcript*, II, 796, 804, 871; III, 72

the Beecher business is calculated to amaze people who do their kissing without analysis. There have

been the paroxysmal kiss, the inspirational kiss, the impulsive kiss, and the holy kiss; the kiss of

reconciliation, the kiss of grace, mercy and peace, and the kiss mutual. The other kisses are reserved for

the rebuttal and re-rebuttal testimony.'[94] Another joke that proved popular was the suggestion that

'Beecher, who has written about thirty books … should write one more, and the title should be "Kissing."

He seems to be master of that subject, and we have no doubt a good round sum could be realized from

the sale.'[95] The New York Herald had another, more racist use for Beecher's expertise: 'A correspondent

informs us that kissing is unknown in China,' it asserted, recommending that 'missionaries should be

sent from this country to give them the proper instruction. He wishes to export the Rev. Mr. Beecher as

the champion kisser of the United States. Paroxysmal, paternal, sisterly, reconciliatory and inspirational

kisses appear to be as familiar to Mr. Beecher as household words ... as Mr. Beecher has kissed almost

everybody in Brooklyn.'[96] Another paper ran the facetious news item 'A New York man, who has been

too freely gives to kissing in the household of his acquaintants, has recently been enjoined from so

doing by order of the court. Such as injunction as this a few years ago in Brooklyn would have saved

much trouble.'[97] The Denver Mirror, for its part, ran an item that reported a conversation between two

printers that ran thus: '"Why, Beecher kissed Tilton on the mouth." [says one] … "Well," said Tom, after

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[94] Because the kissing jokes were widely reprinted from paper to paper, often without attribution, it is often impossible to work out the paper in which the joke originated. I have thus cited more or less as convenience and availability of materials dictates; because they were so widely reprinted, it should not be hard to find the jokes in papers other than those I cite. *Minnesotian-Herald*, April 24, 1875

[95] *Arkansas Gazette*, April 27, 1875

[96] *New York Herald*, April 21, 1875

[97] *Owyhee Daily Avalanche*, April 24, 1875

a meditative pause, "I can forgive Beecher for his intrigues with Mrs. Tilton, but I never will forgive him for kissing that son of a gun."'[98]

One could go on and on in this vein, and the prospect of doing so is not without its temptations, but this seems a fairly representative sample. The first thing to note here is the way many of the jokes turn not just on Beecher's promiscuous kisses, but on the over-wrought language in which these kisses are framed. The long, absurd lists ('paroxysmal kiss, the inspirational kiss, the impulsive kiss, and the holy kiss,' 'Paroxysmal, paternal, sisterly, reconciliatory and inspirational kisses') and the suggestion that Beecher write a book about kissing all rely for their comic effect on the same sort of mismatch between language and action that we saw at work in 'French with a Master.' There is clearly an excess of kissing here, as deliberate exaggerations like 'Mr. Beecher has kissed everybody in Brooklyn' imply, but there is also an excess of language attempting to explain, but ultimately falling short of the kisses themselves. These jokes, finally, are not about the many ways Beecher describes his kisses but rather about the one way he necessarily omits to describe them: as sexual kisses, kisses of desire. Like the French Master, Beecher is trying to sell us on a conception of '*aimer*' which excludes, as it were, '*baiser*,' which is why the kisses and Beecher's circumlocution about them becomes so amusing in the context of the adultery trial, since this context necessarily creates the implication that all these kisses mean more than Beecher is willing or able to admit.

Jokes like the ones we've been looking at fall into a distinct genre of nineteenth century humor which we might term the comedy of caricature. This kind of joke is always 'about' an individual character,

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[98] *Denver Mirror*, May 9, 1875.

usually representative of some sort of social type, who is ridiculous in some way that is not immediately apparent to themselves and that often involves some sort of mismatch between their self-perception and the reality as seen from another point of view. Dickens is a master of this kind of comedy and the Micawbers of *David Copperfield* are perhaps his finest creation in this line. The Micawbers, you'll recall, are funny because they are virtuosi of bad faith, never seeming to notice the connection between their eternal financial woes and their fecklessness and greed for the finer things in life. Closer to home, this kind of comedy practically defines popular American humor in the nineteenth century with its overdrawn portraits of piously ruthless Yankee merchants, bombastic backwoodsmen and, though this last example is more complex, blackface Minstrels whose nominal racial status undercuts whatever pretensions to civility or seriousness they may assert on the stage.[99] The newspapers of the era are replete with similar comic types that have proven less interesting to historians, usually invented on the fly to ridicule some new trend in American society. Thus we find caricatures of naïve or hypocritical abolitionists, self-deluding spiritualists, and, as a response to the Beecher scandal, a satiric portrait in embryo of the sentimental and over-wrought 'Brooklynite' of whom Beecher and Tilton are supposed to be a type. Thus, for instance, in the *New York Times* we find the off-hand remark that 'To the transcendentalist, the gusher, or the Brooklyn weeper and slobberer, the incidents of the trial … are meat and drink.'[100]

The comedy of caricature is not, of course, exclusive to the nineteenth century. Don Quixote is an early example of it, and Mr. Bean a comparatively recent one. But it was a form of comedy uniquely resonant

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[99] The best (and, indeed, as far as I know, the only robust) overview of American humor in the nineteenth century is still the somewhat dated Constance Rourke, *American humor : a study of the national character* (New York : Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1931.) though see also Carol Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct*, 90-108

[100] *New York Times*, February 13, 1875

in that era, and we might get a better sense of its nature and appeal if we compare it with the forms of

comedy that immediately precede and antecede it. The history of humor is, unfortunately, a somewhat

neglected field, the topic having been largely left to theorists and literary scholars not particularly

interested in historical questions, but what we do know about the history of comedy suggests two

obvious points of contrast for the jokes we've been looking at here.[101] On the one hand, we have the

carnivalesque humor of the medieval and early modern period described so eloquently by Bakhtin in his

justly celebrated *Rabelais and his World*, and on the other hand, we have the pervasive and

characteristic presence of absurd humor in the twentieth century (think of the Marx Brothers, or

Beckett, or Month Python.) The humor of carnival is, like the humor of caricature, fond of grotesque

contrasts and its characteristic 'joke' is a burlesque of the official values of the culture, in particular its

religious symbols and social hierarchies. This is the comedy of a world turned upside down, of paupers

crowned as kings and fools ordained as bishops, of holy rituals profaned and profane things treated as

holy. This form of humor is, in Bakhtin's view, deeply subversive and liberating, as it allows participants

to experience momentarily a world in which a stifling yet hegemonic social order is dissolved by laughter

and a primordial freedom may fleetingly be grasped. The twentieth-century humor of the absurd

likewise presents the world itself in a grotesque and mixed-up way, but here the dark, aggressive tone

and rapid sequences of non-sequiturs suggests a world gone mad, a world in which the hegemonic order

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[101] With the exception of the magnificent Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his world*, Trans. Helene Iswolsky. (Cambridge, MA, M.I.T. Press, 1968) and Rourke's *American humor* (which is very dated) I know of no book-length historical study of humor, though there is a rather large literature in literary studies dealing with the comic in this or that author or period. Important chapter-length sallies (both heavily influenced by Bakhtin) are Darnton**,** *The great cat massacre*, 75-106 and Carol Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct*, 90-108. There is also a decent collection of essays in Jan Bremmer and Herman Roodenburg (eds.) *A cultural history of humour: from antiquity to the present day* (Malden, MA : Blackwell Publishers, 1997.) Of the theorists of humor, I have found useful, of course, Sigmund Freud, *Jokes and their relation to the unconscious*. Trans. James Strachey. (New York: Norton, 1960), Alexander Kozintsev, *The mirror of laughter*, trans. Richard P. Martin (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2010) and Henri Bergson, *Laughter an essay on the meaning of the comic* trans. Cloudesley Brereton and Fred Rothwell (New York: Macmillan, 1911.)

is itself grotesque and illogical, and fools and madmen rule on a permanent basis. One laughs not so much to remind oneself of one's freedom, but in order to assert and maintain one's sanity.

The first thing that leaps out at us about the humor of caricature is that, in contrast to the carnivalesque and the absurd, it takes as its subject an individual character, albeit one who usually stands in for some social type. This does not mean, however, that the humor of caricature says nothing about the wider world, for the eccentric and excessive individual who is being laughed at is funny only by contrast to a more normal or ordinary world. Just as, in the humor of carnival, the 'normal' order of things is always silently present as that which is being upturned and violated, in the humor of caricature, the expected standard of behavior is present as that which is being exceeded by the butt of the joke. Thus in the above-quoted New York Times article, the Brooklyn weeper and slobberer who waxes eloquent stands in contrast to 'ordinary people who are confused by these lofty flights' and, in another article we find the quip 'The jurors, being men who had never lived in that peculiar atmosphere of sentiment, love, kissing and general frenzy over everything commonplace' might be lead 'to an acquittal on the ground that – well, after all, they were a queer lot.'[102] The dynamic here is obviously very similar to that which we discussed in relation to the gaze of the crowd; the laughter helps constitute an imagined community of 'normal' or 'ordinary' people who are amused by these wild antics. And, as with the gaze, the deviant is represented by this kind of laughter as foolish and inferior, rather than threatening. At first sight, then, this is a violent and defensive sort of humor which can be read as an attempt to shore up one's own fragile sense of belonging to a community with shared moral norms by laughing at and dismissing people who breach the moral norms of respectable conduct. And, indeed, this is how Victorian amusement at deviants or others is usually interpreted; one laughs at the outsider to be confirmed as an

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[102] *New York Times*, February 13, 1875 and *Chicago Sunday Times*, March 14, 1875. We might also think of the earlier reference to 'people who do their kissing without analysis'

insider, one laughs at the freak in order to reassure oneself of one's normality.[103] In contrast to the liberating laughter of carnival, the laughter of caricature seems to constrict and forbid, to draw lines in the sand between respectable insiders and ridiculous outsiders.

This is hardly disputable, but I think we can dig a little deeper here as well. For the picture is altogether different if we think about the humor of caricature as a form of comedy which is succeeded by the humor of the absurd. For when we compare the two, we find that the only significant difference between caricature and absurdity is really the number of people implicated in the joke. In caricature, a large community laughs at an exceptionally grotesque figure; in absurdity, an implicitly small audience laughs at a world that it experiences as grotesque in relation to some private sense of order, but that it is itself implicated in. We can see that the line between these two forms of humor is really quite thin, and consists largely in the amount of faith the humorist has that they themselves, and those that laugh with them, really do represent a moral community which is different from and superior to the butt of its jokes. If the caricaturist is a person to whom some people seem mad, the absurdist is merely a person to whom all people seem mad. Nor is this a merely theoretical observation; the works of the great Victorian caricaturists (think in particular of Dickens or Twain) famously grows darker and more absurd as the humorists age and their satiric vision expands to include more and more of their fellow creatures. Indeed, we can even fix with some precision the moment that absurdist humor emerges as a separate genre from within caricature: on February 14, 1895 the first performance of *The Importance of Being Earnest* is given, and comedy will never again be the same. Wilde's characters are still recognizably

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[103] In American Studies, the archetypal form of this argument is to be found in whiteness studies, which points out that laughter and aggression directed at blacks helps confirm racially dubious groups as white, with specific reference to the minstrel show. See especially David R. Roediger, *The wages of whiteness: race and the making of the American working class* (New York: Verso, 1991) and Alexander Saxton, *The rise and fall of the white republic: class politics and mass culture in nineteenth century America* (New York: Verso, 1990.)

drawn from the world of caricature, but they are at the same time utterly indistinguishable from one another, and there is no trace of a 'straight man' with whom we are asked to identify; everyone is implicated in their hypocrisy, not least the author himself.

From one point of view, Wilde marks a dramatic turning point in the history of humor, but from another he only brings to the surface something that was always latent in nineteenth century comedy – the hidden element of identification. For there is, after all, more than a hint in this kind of comedy that the Victorians were laughing not just at starkly differentiated eccentrics, but rather at themselves, whether they could consciously bear to admit this to themselves or not. For if the laughter of the crowd has something in it which seems to distance it and differentiate it from the situation of the deviant, it also pulls in the opposite direction, momentarily blurring the seemingly sharp distinction between looker and looked-at. Indeed, the very necessity of such an explicit assertion of difference at the conscious level (as it were) of the joke ought to alert us to the possibility of a more ambiguous relationship to the deviant figure, an unacknowledged similarity between joker and joked-about. The best way to see this is to recall that, as we noted above, laughter itself is a somewhat suspect activity in the nineteenth century, frequently itself involving a loss of face and a breach of the rules of respectability. Indeed, the laughter of the crowd came in for frequent censure during the Beecher-Tilton trial, weather by way of the presiding Judge who resented the interruption of legal proceedings or by way of hyper-respectable rags like the New York Times which tried very hard to keep a straight face during the scandal and evidently considered the jokes indulged in by less fastidious journals something less than 'all the news that's fit to print.'[104] More fundamentally, there is obviously something less than morally adequate about laughter at the inferiority and misfortune of others; to tell and laugh at such jokes is always to be somewhat

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[104] For irate comments on the New York Herald's flippant and over-blown manner of reporting the trial, see *New York Times*, February 13, 1875

degraded oneself and that is, naturally, part of the joke.[105] And finally, let us recollect that laughter is a physical, bodily occurrence, one that is somewhat involuntary and visceral, that 'escapes us,' as we sometimes say. In this last respect, laughter (like other bodily states such as desire and fear) seems to itself be a form of excess, something that can't altogether be contained or accounted for by language.

All this helps us see that laughter, the very act of laughter, takes the crowd beyond the detachment of the gaze and into a more intimate, ambiguous relationship to the deviant. But in this case, what is the crowd laughing at? What is the humor giving expression to at this deeper level of the joke where difference gives way to similarity? We can best get at this by returning again to the freak as an extreme case of the kind of deviant encounter we've been dealing with. For freaks, too, are usually thought to have been amusing to nineteenth century audiences because they embodied a deviance in contrast to which the observer could affirm their own status as a normal or ordinary self.[106] But this view of the matter neglects something very important about the presentation of freaks – the respectable middle-class settings in which they were exhibited. Appearing in parlor-like rooms, dressed in neat, conventional middle-class attire, and surrounded by markers of bourgeois respectability such as musical instruments, freaks were made to appear not as weird Others but rather as thoroughly conventional urbanites.[107] The point of this was, of course, thereby to play up the grotesque effect of their physical

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[105] I am indebted for this observation to *The Mirror of Laughter*.

[106] Such arguments are to be found in the majority of studies of the nineteenth century freak show. See note 1.

[107] Obviously, this does not apply to racially-themed freaks such as "What is it?" who were duly dressed in 'savage' costume to play up their otherness. I base my comments on the display of freaks on the Currier and Ives lithographs of Barnum's 'Gallery of Wonders,' which is one of the best sources we have for how freaks were marketed to the public. Most of the surviving lithographs are reproduced in James W. Cook (Ed), *The Colossal P.T. Barnum Reader: Nothing else like it in the Universe* (Urbana : University of Illinois Press, 2005,) 158-80. That freaks were a source of amusement and humor is also evident from both Barnum's promotional material and newspaper write-ups. See, for instance, *P.T. Barnum Reader*, 116-21; 217-19.

peculiarities. What was on display was not so much radical difference, but rather the failure of a performance of respectable conventionality through some fundamental excess or lack. Too much of something (sheer bulk in giants and fat people, excess bodies in Siamese twins, an excess of masculinity in the bearded lady) or, on the other hand, not enough of something else (as, for instance, in midgets and limbless persons) made all attempts at meeting conventional standards of appearance and behavior somewhat absurd, and thus potentially laughable.

But the joke here is not, as we might therefore suppose, on the deviant body of the freak. What is funny, in fact, is precisely the *mismatch* between bodily peculiarity and conventional expectations, and the fault for that is as much in the expectations as in the body. Indeed, as we saw in our discussion of friendship, the inadequacy of the emerging order of respectability was tacitly acknowledged and accommodated by the Victorian bourgeoisie in its everyday experience, and this acknowledgement fundamentally shaped its relationship to the freak. The freak, in fact, occupied the same realm of experience as the friend – both marked the point when conventional models of behavior ran aground on some particular reality which was in excess of it. The bourgeoisie sought out friends to mitigate and navigate such perplexing realities, and it sought out freaks so as to contemplate, at a safe remove from its own situation, the contradictions such realities involved.[108] For ultimately, the grotesque situation of the freak in regard to respectable self-presentation was not so different from the grotesque situation of the nineteenth century bourgeois. For, in this era of ceaseless striving after the moving target of a respectable existence, who did not feel at times like a bearded lady, their actual existence grossly out of tune with an abstract, impersonal and fluctuating ideal? Indeed, from this point of view, interest in the

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[108] Namely, as discussed above, the contradiction between a moral world which represented itself as whole, complete and sufficient, and a set of objects and experiences which could not be integrated within it.

freak casts a new light on the Victorian preoccupation with deception.[109] It wasn't so much, perhaps, that the bourgeoisie was genuinely afraid of being hoodwinked by the malevolent strangers roaming the streets of the new cities, but rather that this dark fantasy of confidence men was a projection of its own awareness that its pretensions to respectability were, in a sense, also a deception. To be respectable required one to shave off one's beard every morning, and to pretend before all the world it had never been there.

Now, whatever one might think of this as an interpretation of freaks (and I fully admit that I haven't proven my case, and that I can't even imagine what might count as compelling evidence in this context) it is clearly an interpretation which fits very well indeed the jokes about Beecher. As I've already been at pains to demonstrate, these are jokes about deception and jokes about realities that are in excess of the moral discourse which purports to account for them, a discourse which is by that very fact shown up as inadequate and ridiculous. Moreover, they are jokes about precisely the interplay and tension between friendship and respectability – about the excesses we are involved in through intimate relationships and the ways these exile us from the imagined community of 'ordinary persons' who don't do such things with each other and look at them with disgust and bewilderment. The moral discourse that is being accused of inadequacy here is, of course, not that of the 'ordinary persons' themselves but rather that of those 'weeping and slobbering Brooklynites' who are nothing like us regular folk. But I think it is fairly evident by now that this is a rather flimsy alibi and that the weeping and slobbering character we are laughing at is, *mutatis mutandis*, the nineteenth century bourgeoisie itself. For whether or not you agree with me that the Victorian bourgeoisie saw anything of itself in the bearded lady, it certainly did see something of itself in that beardless gentleman, the Reverend Henry Ward Beecher.

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[109] As discussed in Harris, *Humbug*, Cook, *Arts of Deception*, and Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women*

Indeed, this is precisely why the jokes came so thick and fast, and alternated so beguilingly with earnest outrage and harsh condemnation of Beecher and company. For if what the crowd laughed at in the deviant was ultimately a distorted image of itself, then surely the better the 'likeness' the sweeter the jibe. Up to a point, that is. For the point at which the resemblance becomes too great, too close to a conscious recognition of similarity, all humor vanishes and a defensive, angry repudiation then takes its place. If the deviant is to remain funny, the optic illusion that they are unreal and somehow radically separate from the crowd which beholds them must not be disturbed, for it is only this illusion that prevents the abyss also from gazing into thee. And yet the Tilton-Beecher scandal was precisely the moment in nineteenth century history when this fantasy came closest to collapsing outright, and it is this which ultimately made it such a source of endless fascination. Indeed, the Beecher-Tilton scandal was itself one of those unprecedented realities whose particularity proved strangely resistant to the conventional assumptions and codes by which bourgeois Americans made sense of their world. No ordinary deviant stood exhibited before the crowd and the applicability and appropriateness of the comedy of caricature was at best uncertain; to laugh or not to laugh, that was the question. It was an exceptional event, after all, and if in this respect it was not so atypical (for there was much in those days that was new under the sun) its exceptional character lent an air of uncertainty and tentativeness to the reactions of both the participants and observers.

In the end, the crowd for the most part laughed long and heartily, and Beecher did his best to encourage this reaction to the scandal. Ever the friend-in-need, he cracked jokes throughout the trial and laughed heartily at himself and his accusers alike. As we've noted, some commentators felt this flippant tone was unbecoming and compromised his case, but, as it turned out, the wily preacher yet again had a better

read on the mood of the nation. After six grueling months of testimony, the jury returned a hung verdict, but it leaned 9-3 in favor of Beecher and public opinion seems to have broken more or less the same way.[110] For some, Beecher was a finished man, disgraced forever, but for most Americans he was vindicated by the trial – he continued to be a prominent and popular public figure and on his death in 1887 he was eulogized in glowing terms and given a hero's burial. Somewhere deep inside, Beecher had heard what the laughter was saying: "He is one of us; he would never do such a thing. And even if he did do it, don't we all make mistakes sometimes?" And so Beecher joined in with this indulgent merriment, and laughed all the way to the bank – in the wake of the scandal, his salary was raised by his congregation to an astonishing 10,000 dollars, to help cover his legal fees.

So much, then, for Henry Ward Beecher and the scandal of the century. But there is still just one more thing that bothers me. We've arrived at an understanding of that disposition to greet deviance with laughter that was so puzzling at the start of this essay, and have hopefully cast light on a few other things along the way. But what we haven't yet asked is why was there this laughter in the first place? For the story of Beecher and the Tiltons, with its broken friendships, ruined marriages and blighted lives (for the Tiltons fared less well than Beecher in the wake of the scandal) seems more a tragic story than a comic one. There seems something troubling about a society that simply laughs away such things, and it seems pertinent to conclude with a word about that.

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[110] In the weeks following the conclusion of testimony and the verdict, the papers were flooded with editorials, letters from the public, and reprints of other papers' verdicts. There seemed to be a particularly concerted effort to take some sort of gauge of public opinion, which was indeed divided but which leaned Beecher's way, if only because even Tilton's defenders seemed to feel he had been disastrously compromised by the whole affair.

Oscar Wilde, in his reflection on his own downfall and the equally merciless laughter which accompanied him to prison, hears in this laughter a lack, an inability to grasp or face tragedy, except as comedy.[111] He writes in *De Profundis*: 'the dreadful thing about modernity was that it put tragedy into the raiment of comedy, so that the great realities seemed commonplace or grotesque or lacking in style … our very dress makes us grotesque. We are the zanies of sorrow. We are the clowns whose hearts are broken.'[112] As usual, Wilde is on to something here, and I think we can see what it is if we reflect that the 'great realities' he is preoccupied with in this magnificent essay are the realities of suffering and misfortune. For the comic and the tragic both deal, after all, with precisely these realities of suffering, but they do so in strikingly different ways. In comedy, misfortune is always ascribed to human incompetence, wickedness or folly and is thus in theory avoidable, contingent or amenable to correction and improvement. In tragedy, however, misfortune is the work of inevitability, fate, destiny, no more to be avoided by courage or cunning than the Great Birnam Wood, come at last to Dunsinane Hill. Comedy holds out to us a promise of a better world; tragedy calls us back to the mystery of inescapable suffering. And precisely because it was an age of turbulent change, change which gave birth to utopian hopes for a better future, the Victorian period was also a comic age. Tragedy became for it 'commonplace,' as Wilde puts it, because it became just like anything else, amenable to change, reform, the march of progress. And as tragedy became comic, laughter itself became cruel, for the victim of sorrow was henceforth always in some sense culpable for that sorrow, as much a grotesque clown as an embodiment of the inevitability of suffering, failure and disappointment: this was no less the case with such ostensibly 'tragic' fictional figures as old Ahab, Emma Bovary, or Dorothea Brooke, than with the unfortunate Theodore Tilton. Whether or not the Victorians lost hold of something important in the

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[111] It would be remiss of me not to mention here the work of Ann Douglass, who similarly, but for very different reasons and from a very different point of view, also accused the Victorian age of lacking a sensibility for the tragic. See Douglas, *The feminization of American culture*.

[112] Oscar Wilde, 'De Profundis' in *The Works of Oscar Wilde, 1856-1900* (Collins: London, 1948), 881.

process of coming to their comic vision of life and whether our own time has inherited this lack are, however, questions for another time.

Chapter 4

1927: The flapper

I.   The death of a flapper

They killed Ruth Snyder on the 12th of January, 1928. They led her into the death chamber of Sing-Sing

prison in upstate New York at 11.01 and strapped her into the electric chair. They placed a leather

football helmet on her head, to which was attached one of the electrodes through which the current

would flow. Her right stocking was rolled down to make way for the other electrode. At 11.05, or

thereabouts, the executioner, Robert Elliot, administered three separate shocks. As Snyder's body

convulsed and pressed against the restraints, Tom Howard, who'd smuggled a camera into the chamber

against prison regulations, secretly snapped one last picture of the 32-year old mother and housewife.

The picture appeared on the front page of the next morning's *New York Daily News*, one of the city's

most popular tabloid papers, accompanied by the triumphant headline 'Dead!' Not even death, it

seemed, could put a stop to Snyder's uncanny ability to make the front pages and sell papers. And thus,

with the aid of those two mechanical marvels of modernity, the alternating current electric chair and the

photographic place camera, the people of the state of New York were avenged upon and entertained,

one last time, by the grim spectacle of Ruth Brown Snyder.[1]

But what had Ruth Snyder done that she should be murdered and humiliated with such mechanical

fury? She had killed her husband, Albert Snyder, with the help of her lover, Henry Judd Gray who was to

die a few minutes after her. Of course, New York City is hardly a stranger to violent murders, so that

wasn't the whole story. It didn't hurt matters any, however, that Gray and Snyder had done the thing in

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[1] The execution was described in exhaustive detail in what became a famous article by Gene Fowler for the *New York American*, a piece of writing which is, if possible, even more distastefully pornographic than the clandestine photograph. Fowler does not fail, for instance, to tell us the color of Ruth Snyder's underwear. For the article, see H. Allen Smith, *The Life and Legend of Gene Fowler* (New York : Morrow, 1977), 169-179. For the photograph, see *New York Daily News*, January 12, 1927

a brutally thorough and utterly premeditated manner – first they'd gotten Albert Snyder good and drunk and then, as he lay dozing in an alcoholic black-out, they'd brained him with a sash-weight, blocked his nose with a chloroform-soaked rag and tied a picture-wire around his neck for good measure. It also didn't hurt that this all took place in the Snyders' suburban bungalow in the middle of a quiet, middle-class section of Queens, a milieu into which the accused pair blended seamlessly. The story was in many ways natural fodder for the era's sensation-hungry press, especially for the tabloids which found much of their popular appeal in their none-too-fact-based coverage of crime and sex-related news.

Still, even taking all this into consideration, public interest in the story was remarkably intense. From the moment Albert Snyder's murder came to the attention of the police in the morning of the 21st of March, 1927, until the death sentence passed on the accused pair in mid-May of the same year, the Snyder-Gray murder was front page news on a daily basis. It was a source of seemingly endless fascination especially for the tabloid press, which found much rich material in this story of adultery, fast living and bloody murder, but even the city's most respectable and austere newspapers covered it in extensive detail. As was the case during the Beecher saga fifty years previously, the newspaper coverage both reflected and fuelled an intense interest in the trial itself, and, much as with that earlier episode of sensationalistic mania, the courtroom was assailed by huge crowds eager for a glimpse of the accused.

All this public interest was in marked contrast to the rather simple and seemingly straight-forward nature of the case. In contrast to the Byzantine tangle of accusations and ambiguities that made up the Beecher-Tilton scandal, the Snyder-Gray trial gave reporters relatively little to actually report. The lovers' clumsy attempt to make the murder look like a robbery gone wrong fell apart within twenty-four hours of the murder, and by the 23rd of March both of the accused had made confessions in which each

heavily implicated themselves while attempting to shift the burden of the blame on the other. These confessions were quickly repudiated once lawyers got involved, but each of the killers would stick to the basic narrative about being a reluctant accomplice to the other all the way to the electric chair. The newspapers, for their own part, quickly settled into a narrative about Gray the weak-willed sap and Snyder the pleasure-loving, cold-blooded manipulator and murderer of men. Repetitive as this basic narrative was, unmarked as the trial and the weeks leading up to it were by any major twists, revelations, ambiguities or alternate narratives of the murder, the papers retold the story with obsessive urgency and hounded its unhappy protagonists even into the death-chamber itself.

What was the source of fascination here, in this rather sordid and seemingly unremarkable tale of bungled murder? As the papers both obliquely and, at times, explicitly acknowledged, it was all about the woman. There was something about Ruth Snyder, something compelling and mysterious that made the papers swallow line and sinker, and without much prompting on his part, Henry Gray's somewhat unlikely story about having succumbed to her magnetic influence and having become her love-slave. Of course, Snyder's seemingly callous and deeply unfeminine murder of her husband was an egregious violation of early twentieth century assumptions about women and moral standards, and almost inevitably made Snyder an obvious source of interest. Indeed, the only two robust scholarly treatments of this sensationalistic trial make much of Ruth Snyder's gender transgressions and interpret the deeply unsympathetic portrayal of Snyder as attempts to shore up beleaguered gender norms in a time of rapid change and reassert patriarchal norms in an era which saw women winning the vote, entering the workforce in unprecedented numbers, and asserting their rights to seek pleasure and satisfaction,

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including sexual satisfaction, on the same terms as men.[2] But other women were accused of murdering their husbands in roughly similar circumstances even as the Snyder case unfolded and yet (though they were presumably equally guilty of serious infractions of gender norms) the tabloids paid much less attention to these other cases.

The fascination with Snyder was never just about the fact that she was a woman who had killed her husband, though, as we shall see, that was no small part of it. The attention she garnered had also to do with how she wore her hair. For Snyder added to her transgressions against the gender status quo also an ambiguously transgressive fashion statement: she wore her hair in a bob. And, like many other young women who bobbed their hair in the 1920s, Snyder liked to go out to cabarets, to dance to Jazz, and to have a stiff drink or two while she was at it. In all this, and also in her intimacies with men she was not necessarily married to, Snyder evoked an instantly recognizable social type – the flapper.

The flapper was an ambiguous social phenomenon, one whose historical significance was hotly debated by her contemporaries and which continues to divide historians. Flappers were young women who wore their hair and their skirts short, who drank, smoked and danced the new shockingly sensual dances of the day such as the Charleston and, most alarmingly of all, engaged in 'petting' – premarital sexual intimacy. In all this, they seemed to many concerned adults to be in open rebellion against the Victorian

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[2] Ann Jones, *Women Who Kill* (New York: Feminist Press, 2009[1980]), 286-299. Jessie Ramey, 'The Bloody Blonde and the Marble Woman: Gender and Power in the Case of Ruth Snyder' *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 37, No. 3 (Spring, 2004), 625-650. Jones and Ramey both offer accomplished feminist readings of the case, Jones from a second-wave perspective which has Snyder being executed for her crimes against the patriarchy whereas Ramey gives a somewhat more nuanced Foucault-influenced treatment of the same basic interpretation. The only book-length treatment is Landis MacKellar, *The "double indemnity" murder: Ruth Snyder, Judd Gray, and New York's crime of the century* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2006) which is a narrative history without much in the way of analysis. There is also a somewhat lackluster chapter on the press coverage of the trial in Mark Gado, *Death row women: murder, justice, and the New York press* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger Publishers, 2008.)

feminine ideal which made moral purity, modestly and selflessness synonymous with womanhood.[3] On the other hand, many others, not least the Flappers themselves, couldn't see what the fuss was about and insisted that the flapper represented no fundamental break with the moral order but was simply trying to have a good time.

Historians have by and large tended to concur with the latter, more benign view of the flapper. In contrast to earlier female rebels against the Victorian moral order (Free Love advocates, for instance) flappers displayed little in the way of political consciousness or inclination to think of themselves as champions of women's rights or gender equality. Whereas the New Women of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had won a place for women in the professions, colleges and the ballot box, the flapper presided over a period of stagnation and reaction in the history of feminism.[4] Moreover, even if the flapper was in open rebellion against the adult moral world of Victorian America, she was deeply a conformist with respect to the more local moral world of youth which had recently come into being in the nation's schools. The early twentieth century had seen a vast enlargement of the nation's

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[3] The classic statement of this ideology in the American context is Barbara Welter, 'The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820–1860' *American Quarterly,* 18, 2 (1966), 151–174. Subsequent historians have questioned the extent to which this ideal ever found social realization, but there is general agreement that it was a hegemonic moral ideal amongst the middle classes until the early twentieth century. For this historiography, see Linda K. Kerber *Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History,* The Journal of American History, Vol. 75, No. 1 (Jun., 1988), 9-39

[4] This rather dismissive view of the flapper may be found in Nancy Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987). For somewhat more optimistic appraisals, see Angela J. Latham. Posing *a threat: flappers, chorus girls, and other brazen performers of the American 1920s* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2000,) Smtih-Rosenberg's blurring together of the flapper and New Woman, to the advantage of the former in Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly conduct: visions of gender in Victorian America* (New York: Knopf, 1985), 245-296 and (more of a popular book) Joshua Zeitz, *Flapper: a madcap story of sex, style, celebrity, and the women who made America modern* (New York : Crown Publishers, 2006.) For a study of representations of flapper in literature that bears on some of this, see Billie Melman, *Women and the popular imagination in the twenties: flappers and nymphs* (New York : St. Martin's Press, 1988.) In fact, however, despite being a prominent feature of a fairly pivotal moment of US history flappers have not been subjected to any very great amount of scholarly consideration.

educational infrastructure; largely an ad hoc affair in the nineteenth century, primary and secondary education became a nearly universal phenomenon in the twentieth. This meant that children spent far longer in school, both in the sense of attending for more years and being in school for more hours in the day. College attendance likewise grew, albeit not so dramatically. All this meant young people spent more time with their peer group and comparatively less with the adult generations. Within the schools a distinct youth culture began to evolve, one in which the approval of one's peers mattered infinitely more than the approbation of adults. From this perspective, all the signs of the flapper's rebellion against the moral world of the Victorian generations were simultaneously signs of conformity to the moral world of youth, in which her distinct visual style betokened belonging rather than difference and the pursuit of pleasure was taken for granted as a matter of ultimate concern.[5]

Another perspective from which one might question the flapper's claim to being any kind of moral renegade is by drawing attention to her complicity with the culture of consumption that played an increasingly important role in shaping the American moral outlook. Of course, as we saw in earlier chapters, cultures of consumption had been a prominent feature of the American ethos since the eighteenth century. However, the early twentieth century saw a flourishing of a new version of this culture, expressed through new forms of spectacular, attention-grabbing media such as advertising (which began to assume its contemporary shape in this era) and even new physical spaces such as department stores.[6] Like the earlier cultures of refinement and respectability, the new culture of

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[5] The classic work on 20s youth culture and the contrast between rebellion vis-à-vis adults and conformity vis-à-vis peers (and indeed the preeminent history of flappers in their social context) is Paula S. Fass, *The damned and the beautifu : American youth in the 1920's* (New York : Oxford University Press, 1977). See also Jon Savage, *Teenage : the creation of youth culture* (New York: Viking, 2007) and, more tangentially, John Springhall, *Youth, popular culture and moral panics : penny gaffs to gangsta-rap, 1830-1996* (New York : St. Martin's Press, 1998)

[6] William Leach, *Land of desire: merchants, power, and the rise of a new American culture* (New York : Pantheon Books, 1993), Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American dream: making way for modernity, 1920-1940*

consumption promised its participants that they could buy a new self in the marketplace. Whereas refinement and respectability appealed to the desire and indeed the material necessity to belong to a given social group, however, twentieth century consumerism was more purely a gospel of individual self-fulfillment and personal gratification.

I shall have more to say about the significance of this culture in due time but let us for the moment note that while the flapper was indeed a departure from an earlier, more self-denying vision of womanhood (and, indeed, personhood) the fact that she sought pleasure and self-realization in consumerism marked her as a creature of this new culture of consumption. The cigarettes she smoked, the cars she drove, the clothes and hairstyles she wore – in short, everything that defined the flapper (with the important exception of her sexual adventurousness, even though sex was itself increasingly becoming a commodified experience) was an item which was available for purchase, and which was advertised accordingly.[7] From this point of view, it is easy to conclude that the flapper's values and behavior amounted to little more than an acquiescence to the increasingly insistent and pervasive injunctions of consumer capitalism to find pleasure and define one's identity by purchasing things.

(Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), Jackson Lears, *Fables of abundance : a cultural history of advertising in America* (New York: BasicBooks, 1994), Elaine S. Abelson, *When ladies go a-thieving : middle-class shoplifters in the Victorian department store* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), Deborah Cohen, *Household gods : the British and their possessions* (New Haven : Yale University Press, 2006), Roy Rosenzweig, *Eight hours for what we will: workers and leisure in an industrial city, 1870-1920* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), Kathy Peiss, *Cheap amusements: working women and leisure in turn-of-the-century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986.) Thorstein Veblen, *The theory of the leisure class* (New York : Penguin Books, 1979)

[7] On the commodification of sex, see Timothy J. Gilfoyle, *City of Eros: New York City, prostitution, and the commercialization of sex, 1790-1920* (New York: Norton, 1992) and Peiss, *Cheap Amusements*

All this makes the flapper seems less a deviant figure than a sign of the times – a symptom of the decline

of the Victorian moral world and its gradual displacement by a more relaxed, self-indulgent, consumer-

oriented set of norms and expectations. But matters are not so simple, for plainly the flapper *was*

deviant. Not perhaps in some absolute sociological sense but rather, what is more important for our

purposes, in the minds and imaginations of both those who condemned the lifestyle and those who

actually lived it out. Part of the flapper image and, crucially, part of both the appeal and the concern she

evoked, was precisely the free-wheeling, slightly risqué quality to her actions – the knowledge that some

people, albeit perhaps only stodgy conservative types, did feel that she was going to hell in a hand-

basket. For, from the point of view of a history of deviance, the flapper marks the point when deviance

becomes sexy and, strangely enough, the point at which a great many people begin to self-consciously

make claims that they themselves are deviant, usually through forms of consumption and display. For

the flapper is only the first of many informal twentieth century subcultures (both youth-oriented and

otherwise) that emphasize their deviant character while in fact encouraging in-group conformity and

conspicuous consumption – one might think here of hipsters, hippies, bike gangs, goths and punks to

name just a few.[8]

Ruth Snyder was not your average flapper, of course. For one thing, as a woman in her 30s with a 9-year

old child, she was a touch too old to fit the type. More importantly, she had unambiguously and

extravagantly violated some fairly basic tenets of early twentieth century moral order. Drinking and

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[8] This phenomenon is not much studied, but there are some suggestive books out there. A fairly exhaustive
catalogue of youth cultures is to be found in Savage, *Teenage*, and my favorite book on the topic is the stunningly
written and surprisingly smart Hunter S. Thompson, *Hell's Angels: a strange and terrible saga* (New York: Random
House, 1966.) A good general survey of the phenomenon is Joseph Heath and Andrew Potter, *Nation of rebels:
why counterculture became consumer culture* (New York : HarperBusiness, 2004) and more scholarly treatments
include Thomas Frank, *The conquest of cool : business culture, counterculture, and the rise of hip consumerism*
(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997) and Doug Rossinow , *The politics of authenticity: liberalism,
Christianity, and the New Left in America* (New York : Columbia University Press, 1998)

suggestive dancing were one thing; murder and adultery quite another. But she did, by her appearance and her actions, tap into the fantasy of the flapper. Indeed, as we shall see, she was persistently imagined as a kind of heightened, exaggerated flapper, one whose sexual daring, androgyny and lack of respect for conventional morality went much farther than was ordinarily the case. And, of course, she provoked much the same sort of ambivalent reaction – a mix of desire and fear articulated as disapproval – but in a far more vivid and dramatic manner than more typical examples of the type ever did. Because of this, a close examination of the way Snyder's crime and trial were reported can tell us much about the social conditions that brought this new form of deviance into being and help explain the strange mix of emotions with which it was greeted. On the other hand, because Snyder's particular case 'overflowed' the flapper stereotype and partook also of an older mode of imagining deviance associated with making sense of murderers, it allows us to examine the conventional or cliché fantasy being applied to a situation which it does not altogether fit. Again, this gap between the cliché and the particular details of the events involving Ruth Snyder further illuminates the meaning of the flapper fantasy in the 1920s.

Our question in what follows, then, is twofold: one the one hand, we should ask why was Snyder news in the first place and, on the other, why did she have to die? The question about why Snyder was news has to do, as I have suggested and hope to show, with the way she seemed to make a particularly compelling receptacle for fantasies about flappers. To ask why people were captivated by Snyder and why they were captivated by flappers is, from this point of view, nearly synonymous. Thus, in the first part of what follows, I focus on exploring the features of Snyder's imagined character which overlapped with those ascribed to the flapper. In particular, I look at the ways Snyder was insistently depicted as both 'hot' (sexy, temperamental, pleasure-loving) and 'cool' (composed, controlled, unemotional.) On

the other hand, the question about why she had to die is a question about how it was that these qualities could be interpreted as parts of the crime for which she was ostensibly on trial. In effect, this question demands that we try and work our way backward from this kind of 'evidence' brought against her (entirely spurious from the point of view of a murder trial, of course) to infer the unspoken crime for which she was actually being tried. The answers to these two questions will then shed light on a further, more general problem, a problem, in fact, which first piqued my interest in the history of deviance. Namely: why is it that in the twentieth century we have come to experience deviance as both an object of intense appeal and longing, and, often simultaneously, as a source of profound moral danger? Or, to put it in the more concrete terms of the matter at hand, why did the readers and authors of New York's newspapers want both to watch Snyder undress, and to watch her die?

II. Illusions of Pleasure

Ruth Brown was born in 1895 in uptown Manhattan to Scandinavian immigrant parents of modest means. Like most children of her generation, she attended public school into her teenage years and, like a growing proportion of women of all class backgrounds, entered the workforce at a fairly early age. She was employed, in relatively quick succession, as a telephone operator, book-keeper, salesclerk, and a copyist – all positions that placed her on the lower rungs of the new white collar workforce that was coming into being at this time to people the increasingly complex bureaucratic hierarchies of corporate capitalism and the public service.[9] Like more traditional white-collar jobs in the professions and

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[9] The biographical sketch is derived from John Kobler (Ed.), *The trial of Ruth Snyder and Judd Gray* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1938), 3-8. (*Trial* from here on in.) The Kobler volume is a partial trial transcript and features an introduction by the editor which is one of the first reliable, scholarly accounts of the case.

commercial trades, these new forms of employment brought with them a tenuous claim to middle-class status but, and especially at the lower strata of the hierarchy, they were scarcely less mechanical, alienating or poorly remunerated than factory work.[10] Whatever she might have thought of the work (her quick succession of employments suggests a certain restlessness, and she certainly never expressed any regret at leaving paid employment behind,) Ruth Brown did eventually get something out of her time in the paid workforce – it was through work that she met Albert Snyder, thirteen years her senior and a fairly well to do art editor at Motor Boating Magazine. The two quickly became romantically involved and were wed in 1914, when Ruth was just nineteen. Again like many women of the era, Ruth Snyder withdrew from the workforce after marriage to dedicate herself to her new family.

The Snyders were not a happy match, however. Albert seems to have been a difficult and temperamental man, with something of a hang-up on a past flame who had died suddenly and tragically before they could be wed. According to Ruth Snyder's later account, the Snyders fought frequently, their daughter Lorraine seeming to have been an especially frequent source of tensions. Towards the end of their thirteen years together, they slept in separate beds and seem to have lived largely separate lives, though they kept up appearances in front of their friends, attending a party together and acting the

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[10] On the world of white collar work and the psychological and cultural make-up of the new middle class which it brought into being, the best material still seems to me to be those inspired and justly celebrated sociological studies of the 1950s. C. Wright Mills, *White collar; the American middle classes* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1951) David Riesman, Reuel Denney and Nathan Glazer, *The lonely crowd: a study of the changing American character* (New Haven : Yale University Press, 1950), William H. Whyte, *The organization man* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1956.) See also Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The managed heart: commercialization of human feeling* (Berkeley : University of California Press, 1983). For whatever reason, historians, who lavish attention on the nineteenth century middle class, don't seem to have been too interested in its early twentieth century transformation (though interest does pick back up in the Cold War era.) There are, however, some suggestive cultural histories that obliquely inform what follows. See especially T.J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: antimodernism and the transformation of American culture, 1880-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994 [1981]), Alan Trachtenberg, *The incorporation of America: culture and society in the gilded age* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982) and Warren Susman, *Culture as history: the transformation of American society in the twentieth century* (New York : Pantheon Books, 1984.) Some books on the progressive era also tap into parts of this story, perhaps most especially Robert H. Wiebe, *The search for order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967)

happy couple the very night Snyder was murdered. The newspapers were very little interested in the

dreary particularities of this slowly disintegrating marriage, however. Instead, they latched on to Ruth

Snyder's fateful admission during her police interrogation that her difficulties with her husband had

stemmed in part from lifestyle differences: 'His interests were not mine' she was reported to have said

to the police 'I was fond of a good time, lots of jollity in life, and parties. Albert did not especially care

for them.'[11] This revelation gave the papers the angle that quickly came to define the story – Snyder was

henceforth cast in the role of the 'woman whose burning passion for a mate of her own desires brought

disaster.'[12] Photographs of Snyder, pointedly showcasing her stylish bob, quickly became a mainstay of

the coverage, often bearing such unsubtle captions as 'the bob-haired Mrs. Snyder … enjoying her

greatest desire – pleasure,' 'here weeps the woman of callous soul and unruly passions,' and 'this

beautiful face sent one man to death and another to damnation.'[13]

The photographs set the tone for a verbal portrait of Snyder which emphasized again and again her

flapper-like qualities. The *World* inferred from her appearance 'an attractive, casual unconventionality

which won … her nickname "Tommy",' amongst her pleasures the paper listed 'Drinking, flirtations in

restaurants … more drinking, nights spent away from home' and concluded that her tragedy was to have

been 'born for the boulevards; cafes, music and dancing were in her blood.'[14] The *News*, for its part,

tended to concur in depicting Snyder as a drinker and a partier, writing by way of a character sketch 'She

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[11] *New York Daily News*, March 22, 1927. (*Daily News* from here on in) See also *New York World*, March 21, 1927 (*World* from here on in)for a slightly different wording.

[12] *Daily News*, March 22, 1927

[13] *Daily News*, March 25, 1927; *Daily News*, March 24, 1927 and *New York Daily Mirror*, March 24, 1927 (*Daily Mirror* from here on in)

[14] All this from *World*, March 23, 1927.

liked bridge parties … she liked to go about with people who drank.'[15] Like the *World*, the *Daily Mirror*

also quickly picked up on Snyder's androgynous nickname, noting that it was 'the name Mrs. Snyder's

friends had given her because she is "a real fellow."'[16] A few days later, it re-iterated that 'her husband

loved his work … books … outdoor sports, while she preferred entertainments and the high life.'[17] For

their own part, Snyder and her lawyers saw the danger of what was going on in the papers, and tried to

correct the rapidly-solidifying image as a hard-drinking, hard-partying flapper: her mother gave an

interview in which she insisted that 'Ruth never smoked and she did not drink' while Snyder herself

fronted the press to insist that she was not the wild type and to declare that 'I don't care for liquor and I

don't drink except to take a mouthful to be a good sport.'[18]

This tussle over drinking had something to do, of course, with the year being 1927, which meant that

the Eighteenth Amendment and the Volstead Act were still the law of the land, outlawing the purchase

of alcoholic beverages in the United States. While the law was widely broken right from its inception in

1919 to its repeal in 1933, and within New York City in particular had quickly degenerated into

something of a joke, Snyder's affinity for the Demon Rum and the murderous lovers' alleged state of

seemingly near-constant intoxication were both placed before the public on a regular basis as salient

pieces of circumstantial evidence. Drinking, like smoking, going out, pleasure-seeking, dancing became,

like Snyder's haircut, stylish appearance and androgynous nickname, mutually reinforcing signs of her

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[15] *Daily News*, March 25, 1927

[16] *Daily Mirror*, March 23, 1927

[17] *Daily Mirror*, April 1, 1927

[18] Mother: *Daily News*, April 2, 1927; Snyder interview: *World*, March 24, 1927

whole-hearted participation in that cult of 'casual unconventionality' which also characterized the flapper.

It is not so much that Snyder self-consciously acted the part of the flapper – she was in all likelihood a few years too old to have participated in the youth culture that was the flapper's social milieu (she was five years the senior of Zelda Fitzgerald, for instance, whose portrayal in *This Side of Paradise* in many ways invented the type.) Rather her somewhat flapper-like appearance and tastes provided an irresistible invitation to the press to project a fantasy of a murderous flapper onto the case by playing up everything that contributed to this characterization and playing down everything (her age, her nine-year-old child, her disintegrating marriage) that interfered with the fantasy of a foot-loose flapper on the rampage. It was a process in many ways startlingly similar to the one by which socially marginal villagers because good pretexts for fantasies about witches in 17th century New England; Snyder's downfall was not so much that she actually was a flapper – or even a murderer, for that matter – but rather that she lent herself readily to being imagined in this way.[19] Like the women who went to the gallows for bewitching their neighbors, Snyder's death was less a direct product of her own belligerent behavior than a consequence of the fantasies for which she became an unwilling and frequently unwitting receptacle.

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[19] As usual, I have absolutely no interest in the question of whether Snyder was or was not actually responsible for the murder of her husband. The evidence we have is in any case so tainted by the fantasies through which it was refracted that we can't derive actual events from it with any degree of confidence. The point is that she was never on trial for murder alone and would probably not have gotten the chair even had she been found guilty of mere murder (very few women murderers did) so that our work is to uncover the real allegation against her, which has, as I said above, something to do with her being flapper-like.

The fantasy that Snyder was made to play a leading role in was a fantasy overwhelmingly about two things: murder and sex. Either of the two would have gotten Snyder's name in the papers, but it was the way the two were intertwined that kept her name and picture in the front pages for the better part of three months. The conjunction of sex and murder found its most vivid expression in the rather oxymoronic portrait of Snyder as both 'hot' (sexy, passionate, temperamental) and 'cool' (composed, determined, remorseless, seemingly emotionless.) Thus we find her characterized as both, to take some particularly florid examples, 'a creature of flame, longing for mirth, for laughter, for unlawful love' and, with no sense of contradiction, as 'a chilly looking blonde with frosty eyes and one of those you-bet-you-will chins.'[20] Her crime was simultaneously a crime of passion and yet a remorseless, premeditated act of cold-blooded violence. This conjunction of hot sex and cold murder was in some mysterious, never fully explicated way at the heart of what Snyder meant to the many who so avidly followed her story. For the time being, however, I'd like to disaggregate these two aspects of her portrayal and explore the resonances of each independently, focusing first on the sexual dimension of the story.

Snyder's association with the fantasy of the flapper was, as the above has already tended to suggest, closely connected to her depiction as a creature governed by passion and desire. It was but a short leap from the premarital sexual experimentation so closely associated with the flapper to the voracious sexual appetite that was widely attributed to Snyder. Snyder's sexualization was to a certain extent a predictable response to the early revelation of her affair with Judd Gray, which neither of the accused attempted to deny. Both in the newspaper coverage and during the trial, however, Snyder's imagined sexual history and sexual appetite became a major theme almost to the point of displacing the actual

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[20] *Daily Mirror*, March 25, 1927; *New York American*, April 19, 1927 (*American* from here on in. The *American* was represented in the courtroom by Damon Runyon, whose sparkling prose was also preserved in a printed volume, whose page numbers I give in parentheses for reference. Damon Runyon, *Trials and other tribulations (*Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1947), 139)

crime. Snyder's cross-examination, for instance, dwelled at length on the character of her sexual

involvement with Gray, over the objections of her own attorneys who, reasonably enough, averred that

she was not on trial for adultery.[21] The *Mirror* revealed both its own priorities and the way this played

out in the courtroom by leading the coverage of the day's events with the title 'depravity emphasized by

cross-examination' and giving pride of place to Snyder's revelations 'that she could not remember

whether it was day or night when she first broke her marriage vows with [Gray]' and that 'she had

been… unfaithful …so often she couldn't remember the number of times and places.' These revelations,

it noted, 'made a decided impression on the jury. Their faces showed their disgust and disbelief.'[22] The

more substantive and more legally relevant parts of the day's cross-examination, establishing Snyder's

motives for the murder, were tellingly buried in the back of the paper.

While Snyder's infidelity was perhaps by the very nature of the case going to be a point of salacious

interest, a close comparison of the newspaper coverage with the account presented in the trial

transcripts in fact reveals a number of telling erasures and inventions that suggest something more

complex than mere voyeurism was taking place. The most significant of these creative interventions

came during the direct examination of Judd Gray, who treated the courtroom to a lengthy tell-all

account of his relationship with Snyder. During this recital of drinking binges, adulterous trysts and

general sinful living he happened to testify 'That night again the question came up of her husband in a

sexual way. *She said she had never known what sexual pleasures were with her husband.* I sympathized

with her … *She told me that when he came into bed with her that to her it was so disgusting and*

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[21] Kobler, *Trial*, 231-40. For objections, see 237.

[22] *Daily Mirror*, May 3, 1927

degrading that she felt like killing him. I told her I could not understand such a thing.'[23] Now, what is interesting about this passage is that, when the *Daily News* published a lengthy transcript of this part of Gray's testimony, running to about a dozen densely-packed pages of the issue, it omitted the italicized parts of the statement. The *Daily Mirror*, which, as we just saw, was not a publication to let a spicy detail languish in the back pages, failed altogether to report the passage, despite devoting nine full pages to covering that day's events.[24] Plainly, this Ruth Snyder, who had lived in sexual frustration until she'd met Gray and whose homicidal rage stemmed not from an excess but a deficit of sensual delight did not very much interest the press. In fact, so unacceptable a revelation was this, so irreconcilable with the fantasy being woven around the actually existing Snyder that none of the papers I looked at actually reported it.

A sexually prodigious Ruth Snyder was absolutely necessary for the fantasy being woven around this murder trial; if she did not exist, it would have been necessary to invent her. And invent her they did – almost immediately after the story broke, the papers spun a web of insinuations and outright fabrications around Snyder that made her seem sexually brazen, aggressive and utterly insatiable. In fact, one instance of this is observable in the coverage of the very first day of the police investigation and indeed helped create the idea of Snyder as a brazen, hyper-sexual woman. When police arrived at the scene of the crime, they found Snyder lying in bed and it was here they conducted their initial questioning. As holes began to appear in Snyder's story of the burglary, the detectives asked her to accompany them to the police station. With the policemen still in the room, Snyder got out of bed and quickly got dressed. The *Mirror*'s version of this event, which bore the heading 'the telltale slip,' read as follows: 'clad only in a single, abbreviated slip, she tossed her pretty blonde hair defiantly and dressed …

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[23] Kobler, *Trial*, 263

[24] See *Daily News* and *Daily Mirror*, May 5, 1927

displaying, amongst other things, a towering rage, though no embarrassment.'[25] The *News*, for its part, noted as interesting details of the case 'Mrs. Snyder leaping from bed in a towering rage and a short slip when arrested – her dressing brazenly before detectives … her fleshy ogling of officials.'[26] The *World* also picked up on this angle, informing its readers that 'the detectives noted her clam leap from bed in a single silken slip garment, and her subsequent dressing before them … Perhaps no other incident so much convinced them that she might be guilty of the crime.'[27] The described incident did, of course, occur but the sexualization of Snyder through a focus on her 'abbreviated,' 'short,' 'silken' and 'telling' slip and her lack of embarrassment, the coy insinuation of 'displaying amongst other things,' these are all opportunistic and gratuitous fantasies. Tellingly, Snyder's sexuality is already imbued with an aggressive character here, and her 'towering rage' and 'fleshly ogling' are already part of her guilt.

Snyder's defiant manner and her life circumstances lent themselves all too well to these kind of imaginings, but evidently the verifiable facts left something to be desired, for the papers quickly began to supplement these with outright fabrications. Not content with just one illicit lover, the *Mirror* invented a whole busload of other paramours for Snyder, at one point running the headline 'Gray the 16th' without offering so much as a shred of evidence to substantiate this insinuation.[28] The *News* joined in on the fun, dating Snyder's sexual escapades back to her schoolgirl days, reporting that 'she was carrying on a mad affair with a young teacher' in 1908.[29] Formidable if true; Ruth Snyder was twelve

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[25] *Daily Mirror*, March 22, 1927

[26] *Daily News*, March 22, 1927

[27] *World*, March 23, 1927

[28] See, for instance, *Daily Mirror*, March 26, April 9, April 14, 1927

[29] *Daily News*, April 5, 1927

years old at the time. The very next day after printing this scoop regarding Snyder's pre-pubescent precocity, the *News* valiantly tried to do one better on the *Mirror*'s tally of Snyder's more recent lovers, or more precisely twelve better, drawing its readers' attention to 'Mrs. Snyder's famous red notebook … which contained the names of … twenty-eight other men, believed to be admirers.[30]' One begins to wonder, in the face of all this, how Snyder ever found time to murder her husband while maintaining this opulent harem of lovers.

Not content with inflating her sexual history to Don Juan-esque proportions, reporters also felt a need to lend Snyder's sexuality a violent edge, which made it clear that sexual excess was part of the crime for which she was actually being tried, whatever the formal charges brought by the district attorney might have been. We've seen hints of this already in the way reports of the slip episode made it signify Snyder's 'towering rage' and, implicitly, her guilt in the murder. But we see it even more clearly in the rather extraordinary fact that the papers insisted, on the basis of no evidence whatever, that Gray and Snyder had been sexually intimate immediately after killing Albert Snyder – 'Slayers petted after killing' was the headline in the *Mirror*.[31] This yoking together of rampant sexuality and violent aggression found a convenient shorthand in the widespread tendency to compare Snyder to a variety of exotic wild animals – a practice that reached such a pitch in the lawyers' closing arguments that even some of the journalists began to demur. Damon Runyon, covering the trial for the *American*, in his inimitable style observed rather sardonically that 'Snyder … heard herself termed enough kinds of animals to populate a zoo' during closing arguments.[32] Runyon of all people, however, might have had more sympathy for the

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[30] *Daily News*, April 6, 1927

[31] *Daily Mirror*, March 23, 1927. This particular distortion has been documented at length elsewhere. See Gado, *Death Row Women*.

[32] *American*, May 10, 1927 (Runyon, *Trials*, 203)

zoology lesson; in the preceding day's coverage he himself had pronounced Snyder a 'blond throwback to the jungle cat.'[33]

Evidently, from all this, the papers stretched the facts to a considerable degree and resorted to a highly suggestive rhetoric in order to present Snyder as a sexually aggressive and excessive figure whose sexuality was part of her guilt. But why was this sexualized figure so compelling? Let me note, first of all, that Snyder's sexual excess did not really resemble the superficially similar Beecher scandal that took place half a century earlier. Though Snyder and Beecher had done more or less the same thing (from a sexual point of view, at least) in carrying on a long-running adulterous relationship, the sexual mores of New York (and, to a lesser extent, the nation) had changed significantly in the intervening decades. The best way to see this is to note that, though Beecher's sexual misdeeds were likewise to some extent inflated (as in the persistent rumor that he preached to a dozen of his mistresses every Sunday) really *any* amount of adulterous misbehavior would have been equally damaging to him. The adultery was fascinating, upsetting and hilarious, as we saw, because it lay beyond the ostensible moral order of which Beecher was a spokesperson and representative. The whole business revolved around Beecher's reputation for moral goodness and an accusation that seemed to lay at his feet behavior that was unambiguously evil. The resulting contradiction was, as we saw, grotesque and freakish.

The relationship of Snyder's behavior to the moral norms of her society was far more opaque than this. It hardly needs pointing out that Snyder was depicted in unambiguously negative terms, but this fierce condemnation belies the fact that many of the behaviors Snyder was accused of were felt to be perfectly

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[33] *American*, May 9, 1927; Runyon, *Trials,* 198. Animal imagery was widespread elsewhere, of course, occurring as early as a fortnight before the trial commenced. See for instance *Daily News*, April 1, 1927

acceptable and even appealingly unconventional in young women. The reason it is so important to recognize the strong association of Snyder with the flapper is that it prevents us from mistakenly thinking that the fantasy Snyder was simply an inversion of conventional feminine norms.[34] She certainly was an inversion of one kind of feminine norm, that of Victorian womanhood with its strains of maternal domesticity, sexual purity and moral goodness, but this was a feminine style that was rapidly going out of fashion in early twentieth century New York. We know from their pictures in the paper that the female reporters who laid into Snyder with such ferocity (Runyon helpfully notes of his fellow-toilers in the journalistic vineyard that 'the girls … have been none too strong for Mrs. Snyder') themselves wore their hair short and bobbed, as certainly did many of the women who attended the trial.[35] The chances are pretty good that many and perhaps even most of these women drank, enjoyed going out to the theatres and cabarets and indulged their lust for pleasure as far as they could afford to. It is probably a bit much to suggest that a majority of them had a lover on the side, but certainly attitudes to sex and female sexual pleasure were rapidly changing in the United States, and, as mentioned above, one of the most distinctive identifying features of the pervasive flapper style was her openness to sexual experimentation, all of which complicates a simple characterization of Snyder as a shameless hussy.[36] Even the bestial imagery used to describe Snyder is not unambiguously a simple marker of difference, for the early 20th century was a time of growing fascination with and desire to reconnect with the

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[34] This is really my main point of disagreement with the otherwise very good feminist work on the case; I feel it tends to cordon off gender (whether in order to find a violation of gender norms or a dangerous ambiguity) from some of the other dimensions of the coverage and so misses the ways in which gender is deployed together with other categories of understanding to reveal a set of preoccupations in which gender participates in crucial ways but of which it is not the sole determinant.

[35] *American*, April 30, 1927 (Runyon, *Trial*, 167)

[36] See Peter N. Stearns, *Battleground of desire: the struggle for self-control in modern America* (New York : New York University Press, 1999), esp. 187-251, also Peiss, *Cheap Amusements*, Leach, *Land of Desire*, Beth L. Bailey *From front porch to back seat: courtship in twentieth-century America* (Baltimore : Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988) John C. Burnham**,** *Bad habits***:** *drinking, smoking, taking drugs, gambling, sexual misbehavior, and swearing in American history* (New York: New York University Press, 1993.), Christine Stansell, *American Moderns: bohemian New York and the creation of a new century* (New York : Metropolitan Books, 2000.)

primal, animalistic 'uncivilized' aspect of life – part of the white community's fascination with jazz, for instance, stemmed from a racist conception of it as 'jungle' music and its association with 'savage' African-Americans.[37] To express one's animal nature and give free rein to one's instinctual drives (this was the age which made Freud into a household name, let us recollect, and *Civilization and its Discontents* with its rueful critique of societal repression was only a few years away) was potentially a sign of authenticity and modernity – terms to which a growing moral value was being attached.[38]

Of course, Snyder as imagined in the papers took her search for pleasure and sexual satisfaction, not to mention her release of primal aggressions, much too far. Indeed, the crux of her crime as it emerges when we look through the lens of sexuality was a matter not, as with Beecher, of ambiguously mixing moral discourse and immoral behavior, but rather of pursuing certain behaviors whose moral significance was itself fairly ambiguous to unambiguously evil extremes. The implicit argument (absurd once stated in plain language, of course) was that Snyder was a woman that was having too much fun, and that's why she killed her husband. Indeed, it was partly in order to establish this excess of sensual indulgence that the papers had to puff up Snyder's sexual history to ridiculous extremes. There seems to have been an underlying anxiety that the unadorned Snyder was perhaps not excessive enough, which

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[37] Ann Douglas, *Terrible honesty: mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s* (New York : Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1995), 44-52; Gail Bederman, *Manliness & civilization: a cultural history of gender and race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1995.)

[38] On Freud, see Douglas, *Terrible Honesty*, on authenticity, for cautiously sympathetic treatments that emphasize the early 20th century as a key moment see Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (Cambridge, Mass. : Harvard University Press, 1972), Miles Orvell, *The Real Thing: Imitation and Authenticity in American Culture 1880-1940* (Chapel Hill : University of North Carolina Press, 1989.) For a longer historical view with a philosophical focus, see Marshall Berman, *The Politics of Authenticity: radical individualism and the emergence of modern society* (New York: Atheneum, 1970) and Charles Taylor, The *Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991.), and, for a searing indictment of the whole thing, Theodor W. Adorno, *The jargon of authenticity*, Trans. Knut Tarnowski and Frederic Will. (Evanston, Ill. : Northwestern University Press, 1973). Also highly relevant here is Colin Campbell, The *Romantic ethic and the spirit of Modern Consumerism* (New York, NY: Blackwell, 1987)

again confirms to us that *excess* was at the heart of the matter. Indeed, when we place Snyder in the context of the other deviant figures we've had to do with in previous chapters, it is again excess that stands out. All the figures we've looked at ran afoul of desire in some way: think of the envious, thwarted desire of the witch, the treacherous, misleading desire of the libertine, the hilariously un-acknowledgeable desire of Beecher. Snyder's desire is radically different form all of these, in that it is the only desire whose flaw is that it is too fully indulged in. In fact, Gray's rival account of Snyder's violent resentment of her lack of sexual satisfactions, so witch-like in its attack on the very source of frustrated longing, was deliberately airbrushed out of the picture. Envy, or at least that kind of envy, was no longer at issue and, in fact, only distracted from this new preoccupation with the excesses of desire.

But why, then, this preoccupation with excess? One take on this, which some of the other scholarly work on the Snyder case in fact gestures at, is that the preoccupation with excess has to do with widespread anxieties about opening the Pandora's box of female sexual desire and, indeed, of individual desire more generally, both of which were ceasing to be thought of as morally dangerous and making a transition to being seen as harmless or even salutary. The model of the good life whose touchstone is the pursuit of individual satisfaction, this argument goes, is substantially a creation of the consumer culture of late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and cultural flashpoints like the Snyder murder are its birthing pangs, moments when we see a new ethos being brought painfully into being. In this reading of the matter, the fascination of the Snyder saga revolves around the suddenly pressing question: can you have too much of a good thing? How much pleasure is too much?

And indeed, surely there is something to this. But the flaw with this argument, as I see it, is that it buys in a little too wholeheartedly into the twentieth century's fantasy about itself as an era of sensual

freedom and delight. Let us not forget that this sex vixen version of Ruth Snyder that we are discussing

was, as I have just shown, a figure of fantasy, one that had to be almost entirely invented and was only

with difficulty grafted to the threadbare realities of Ruth Snyder's actual live of quiet (and not-so-quiet)

desperation. For indeed, the vast majority of middle-class men and women who inhabited the twentieth

century were (as I suppose anyone with the poor luck of having been born in that drab and listless era

will assent) in no danger of succumbing to a surfeit of wonderful pleasures. Their work and lives were

becoming every year more routine, mechanical, impersonal and regimented as the bureaucratic

structures of corporate capitalism and new techniques of worker management reshaped the

workplace.[39] Meanwhile, though the rigid Victorian codes of self-control and self-denial (whose all-

pervasiveness and cultural hegemony has in any case been exaggerated) did indeed loosen into a

somewhat less formal style of self-regulation, it is highly doubtful that this new informality was any less

demanding or more spontaneous a standard of comportment.[40] Life did perhaps become more free

insofar as it become more anonymous, and pleasurable indiscretions that once might have incurred

communal disapproval (the Snyder and Gray affair being a case in point) because easier to hide and thus

to pursue without consequences, and as prohibitions against them in any case weakened. Whether such

fruits of anomie were sweet enough to make up for the boredom, alienation and loneliness that have

also been its hallmarks is an interesting question.[41] And so, of course, is the matter of whether the

fleeting consumer pleasures of a new dress, an evening of drinking or two hours at the movies made up

for the drudgery of house and office-work, and the absence of more substantive satisfactions. Wherever

one might come down on this question, it does seem to me that when (in the face of all this) we hear

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[39] Mills, *White Collar*, Whyte, *Organization Man.*

[40] Stearns, *Battleground of Desire*, Hochschild, *Managed Heart*

[41] On modern anomie, see especially Emile Durkheim, *Suicide: a study in sociology*, trans. John A. Spaulding and George Simpson (New York : Free Press, 1951)

people constantly reassuring each other what a good time they're having, we might have grounds for not taking them entirely at their word.

I mean to come back to this question of what Snyder's excesses meant a little later at greater length when I turn my attention away from Snyder herself and towards her interactions with the two men who helped make her famous for a brief moment in the spring of 1927. For the time being, I want only to suggest that perhaps the hyper-sexual, pleasure-wild Snyder represented not (or, at least, not only) a projection of the kind of ethos the early twentieth century middle class was embracing to its own unconscious distress. In the place of this hypothesis, I want to propose, without fully substantiating the claim for the moment, that perhaps what we have incarnated in the fantasy Snyder is a mode of life to which the middle classes in many ways aspired, but which they could not actually to any great extent (with perhaps a few lucky exceptions) realize.

Now, if I am at all right in making such a suggestion, something very interesting follows. The claim that Snyder represents a kind of unrealized ideal implies that we find ourselves standing on the cusp of another distinct epoch of the history of the imagination. Recall that hitherto, the imagination has always been situated either at the 'edges' of experience where the everyday moral order gave way to a transcendental reality (in what I have called the age of the cathedral) or else that it has both conceptually and experientially been severed from everyday life in a manner that permitted it to reflect that world and the experience of social life back onto itself (as in 18th century fiction or 19th century sensation.) As we saw in previous chapters, in both of these imaginary regimes, fantasies about deviance had held up a mirror to the moral realm of everyday life, revealing a dark, often distorted reflection of the failures and shortcomings of that moral world. However, according to the logic of the previous

chapters, if I am right about the frustrations of 20th century life (the boredom, alienation, lack of real pleasure, and so on,) we would expect the sexually frustrated Snyder of Gray's court testimony to be a compelling fantasy figure rather than an inconvenient fact to be displaced by a prodigious sex vixen, since it is obviously the frustrated woman who better reflects the bitter realities of the twentieth century pursuit of sensual delight.

The unlikely triumph of the fantasy of a sexually potent Snyder suggests, therefore, that fantasies of deviance came to play a fundamentally different role in the early twentieth century to that which we've outlined so far. And I think we can see that something like this must, in fact, be the case when we consider that Snyder (and, more broadly, the flapper) is only one of the many deviant figures who are imbued with a curious potency in the twentieth century – again, one need only think of the romantic aura enjoyed by counter-culture types like bohemians, hippies or revolutionaries and, indeed, even rather morally troubling figures like Hell's Angels and serial killers. The meaning of deviance is clearly undergoing a fundamental transformation here and what best explains this transformation, I want to suggest, is an underlying change in the social place of imaginary life in the twentieth century. In order to better explore this transformation, let us lay aside for the moment Snyder's representation as a hot-blooded lover and turn our attention to another, more troubling side of her imagined character: that of a cold-blooded killer.

III. Murder and Celebrity

Ruth Snyder was hot, as we've seen – a boiling-point blonde simmering with an excess of violent sexual energy. Paradoxically, she could also wax ice-cold, becoming 'a chilly looking blonde with frosty eyes and one of those marble, you-bet-you-will chins,' 'she of the cold dignified poise … a cold murderess,' '"Ruthless Ruth" the Viking Ice Matron of Queens Village.'[42] As these quotes (which could be multiplied endlessly) suggest, descriptions of Snyder as a cold woman gestured in part at the allegation that she had murdered her husband in a premeditated manner (in cold blood, as we still say) and in part at something more elusive about the way she carried herself in the courtroom and when she fronted the press. There was something unflappable (ironically enough!) and controlled in her demeanor both in the courtroom and on the stand, something that most reporters readily identified as a facade, calling her impassive face a 'white marble mask' even as they grudgingly gave her credit for keeping her 'cool, matter-of-fact manner' under extreme pressure.[43] Runyon captures their ambivalence well when he notes that Snyder has been called by witnesses both "a woman of great charm" and "a woman of great calm" and goes on to note that 'to the male reporters … she is all that, anyway, though they construe her calm as more the chill of the icy Northland.'[44] Snyder was cool both in a negative sense, lacking some basic feeling (a kindness or horror that might have stayed her hand) and cool in a more positive sense – self-possessed, in control, able to maintain an impression of inner calm under pressure. Like her sexual warmth, Snyder's cool was presented ambivalently, as both a source of fascination and strength, and as part of that for what she was being punished.

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[42] *American*, April 19, 1927 (Runyon, *Trials*, 139); *Daily News* , April 19, 1927; *Daily Mirror*, May 3, 1927

[43] *American*, April 27, 1927 (Runyon, *Trials*,145). *Daily Mirror*, March 29, 1927 (where also is noted 'the mask this woman would wear' and that she was 'rehearsed carefully.')

[44] *American*, April 27, 1927 (Runyon *Trials*,145)

Just as her sexual heat must be understood in the context of the changing sexual expectations, so Snyder's cool only makes sense in the context of a novel and significant shift in middle class emotional style that took place in the early part of the twentieth century – the rise of cool as a moral ideal. Indeed, our contemporary usage of the word 'cool' to describe a self-possessed, fashionable person with a subdued affective style dates from this era, and the celebration of cool (in contrast especially to the emotional effusiveness of a sentimental nineteenth century middle class style) may be readily observed in the characteristically laconic style of the decade's authors – think of Hemmingway or Hammett, for instance. Of course, the embrace of a more emotionally subdued style was not merely a literary phenomenon but percolated through many spheres of life, from child rearing to emotional expectations in the bureaucratic workplace.[45]

In Snyder's particular case, however, this new, positive assessment of emotional coolness was necessarily undercut by the much older, very negative associations between coldness and the sort of murder she had been accused of committing. Or, anyway, Snyder coolness was from the very beginning a much more unusual aspect of her personality than that sexual heat which was, as we've seen, becoming in some measure expected in a young woman, and which was exceptional in Snyder only in being exceptionally unrestrained. Snyder's cool, on the other hand, like the actual fact of murder to which it always necessarily alluded, was what made her exceptional and newsworthy. In being a red-hot pleasure-seeker, Snyder gestured at something that was becoming commonplace as a moral aspiration.

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[45] On the birth of cool, the most comprehensive study is Peter Stearns, *American Cool : constructing a twentieth-century emotional style* (New York : New York University Press, 1994) but see also Hochschild, *Managed Heart* and, for nineteenth century contrasts, Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women : a study of middle-class culture in America, 1830-1870* (New Haven : Yale University Press, 1982) On the history of the word cool, see 'cool' adj. def 8&9, The Oxford English Dictionary. 2nd ed. 1989. OED Online. Oxford University Press. 5 March. 2012

In maintaining her cool, she also reached for something that was becoming a cultural ideal, of course. However, because this cool was so closely associated with the actual act of murder that made Snyder into a newsworthy moral problem, instead of winning her much in the way of admiration, Snyder's coolness was taken as further proof of her moral dangerousness, and thus became yet another reason to condemn her in the press and condemn her to the chair. She wasn't just cool, she was a cool killer, and the murder of which she was accused decisively shaped the manner in which her cool was interpreted.

Now, it happens to be a fortuitous thing that Snyder's violently murdered her husband. Not for him, of course, nor ultimately for her as it turned out, but it is rather convenient for my purposes in that one of the books which has been one of my silent interlocutors over these last several hundred pages is, in fact, precisely a book about how Americans have imagined murder and murderers. In *Murder Most Foul,* her classic study of representations of murder in popular culture, Karen Halttunen surveys attitudes to murder across several centuries of American history with an eye to Americans' changing understandings of deviance and moral life.[46] She argues that, in the seventeenth century, Puritan New Englanders interpreted a murderer as a sinner, and thus envisaged murder as merely a more extreme form of the universal human tendency towards sinfulness – as, indeed, merely a sin which was the culminating yet inevitable outcome of a lifetime of impious living. In contrast to this Christian vision of murder (and by implication moral evil in general) as an expression of the universal fact of human moral weakness, Halttunnen's book charts the rise of a 'gothic' way of imagining murderers in the early nineteenth century, which stressed the horror and mystery of a crime that flew in the face of liberal enlightenment optimism about the basic goodness and rationality of human nature. The point she makes is not so

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[46] Karen Halttunen, *Murder most foul : the killer and the American Gothic imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998.)

much that there was no room in enlightenment rationalism for murder but rather that the reading public's investment in its own sense of innate moral goodness required that it experience horror, fear and disgust at such crimes, and that it ultimately find itself unable to understand how anyone could do such things. Gothic depictions of murderers as inhuman monsters thus helped constitute and shore up the audience's sense of its own 'ordinary' humanity, in which there could be no place for such things.[47]

Halttunen's work deals primarily with the early nineteenth century but she strongly implies that the gothic imagination remains alive and well into the present day, and certainly other studies do explicitly argue as much.[48] And, to be sure, it requires no very great feat of detective ingenuity to discover an unbroken genealogy running from Halttunen's Victorian killers through the 'frosty' Ruth Snyder and right down to the attitudes expressed today in, say, horror films or contemporary crime reporting. However, starting in the early 20th century and continuing into our own day, something new also happens to the depiction of killers that Halttunen's account does not lead us to expect and that her interpretation cannot accommodate. The killer, and Snyder is here a fairly typical example, at times unexpectedly becomes a celebrity.

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[47] By way of generalizing this argument to other forms of deviance, note how very similar this is to the argument Foucault makes about madness, contrasting the ship of fools/humanist tradition of finding common cause with the mad in universal human insanity to a great confinement/enlightenment practice of rigorously segregating the mad and defining reason as the antitheses of madness. Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: a history of insanity in the Age of Reason,* trans. Richard Howard (New York: Vintage Books, 1973). Note also the parallels of both these accounts with my earlier argument about the displacement of the imagination from an earlier status on the frontier and, as it were, horizon of everyday life to occupying a rigidly separated realm which now defines reality by antithesis and distorted, unacknowledged reflection.

[48] See especially, Mark Edmundson, *Nightmare on Main Street: angels, sadomasochism, and the culture of Gothic* (Cambridge, Mass. : Harvard University Press, 1997). Also worthy of note in this context is Patricia Cline Cohen, *Murder of Helen Jewett : the life and death of a prostitute in nineteenth-century New York* (New York : Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), a case study in the very era Halttunen covers, which reflects on the parallels between contemporary and 19th century tabloid sensationalism.

Snyder came in for her fair share of gothic demonization, whether in the form of insinuations about her 'callous soul,' headlines that described her as 'fiend wife' or, more implicitly, in the posture of horror and outraged incomprehension that writers adopted towards the actual murder.[49] But alongside this, there ran another, more puzzling tendency to describe and treat Snyder in a manner very similar to the customary treatment received by a celebrity like a sports or film star. This was a more implicit dimension of the coverage than the others I've described so far; no-one out and out called Snyder a celebrity, but both the papers and the public very much treated her like one.[50] Most obviously, crowds flocked to the courtroom to catch a glimpse of her and, when actual celebrities showed up to take in the spectacle of her trial, she was often depicted as being in direct competition with them ('celebrities outshine Ruth' ran one headline.)[51] A little more obliquely, the newspapers' obsession with what Snyder was wearing or how she spent her time in jail smacked heavily of the celebrity gossip columns.[52] The newspapers even reported that the alleged murderess got fan mail in jail.[53] And then, of course, Snyder's very presence in the papers was a form of celebrity, especially given the way the story of the murder in which she was the leading figure dominated the papers.

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[49] *Daily Mirror*, March 24 and March 23, 1927

[50] Not an uncommon way to depict killers in the 20s. Jon Savage notes, in passing, that Leopold and Loeb (the killers who gave their name to a sensational murder trial of 1924) were likewise treated as celebreties. See Savage, *Teenage*, 212-16

[51] *Daily Mirror*, April 30, 1927. See also American, April 30 (Runyon, 163) where Runyon muses 'Slap a little rouge and powder on Mrs. Snyder, give her a session with a hairdresser, and put some of Peggy Joyce's clothes on her, and she would be a snappy-looking young matron' (Peggy Joyce was a famous, and scandalous, actress.) A juxtaposition with Peggy Joyce also occurs in the *World*, April 21, 1927.

[52] For coverage of Snyder in jail, see *Daily Mirror*, March 29, April 11, 12, 1927; *World*, May 11, 13, 1927. For clothes, see *Daily Mirror*, April 19, 1927; *Daily News*, March 24, April 19, 1927; World, April 21, 1927

[53] *Daily News*, April 18, 1927 and *Daily Mirror*, April 23, 1927.

The appearance of a murderer in the dress of celebrity is perhaps less odd than it might at first appear. In order to see why, it is important to appreciate that the early twentieth century concept of celebrity was a breed apart from the fame of earlier periods. More or less right up to the age of Beecher (he himself is, conveniently, the last prominent example of this) renown was awarded on the basis of imputed moral excellence. The celebrated figures who stalked the pages of Emerson's *Representative Men* (to take a late example of this type of celebrity) were people of exemplary virtue, representative of the highest and best in human accomplishment. The same ideal of celebrity was embraced by America's founding fathers and, indeed, was self-consciously adopted by them from a classical conception of fame in which the subject of renown might say to the world, as modest Achilles puts it, 'Do you not see what a man I am, how huge, how splendid?'[54] By the early twentieth century, however, the famous were a more motley crew: sportspeople, movie and theatre stars, musicians (a tradition reaching back to Liszt,) capitalist 'Robber Barons' whose ostentatious displays of wealth cast them into the public eye, and political figures whose power rather than moral excellence (their lack of virtue was proverbial in an era of gross corruption) won them admission to the ranks of celebrity. One of the most well-known Americans in the year 1927, to illustrate the broader point, was a highly successful immigrant businessman by the name of Al Capone.

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[54] There was a time you didn't have to footnote Homer. I'll do it, mind you, I'm just saying. Homer, *Illiad,* trans. Richmond Lattimore (Chiacago: University of Chicago Press, 1961) book 21, line 108. Obviously, Homer's Achilles is a complicated figure and not at all unambiguously admirable but it is not disputed that he embodied a widely embraced male moral ideal. Recall Socrates's playful and audacious suggestion in the *Apology* that he himself become the new Achilles (essentially the suggestion that the traditional warrior-morality be replaced by his own philosopher-morality.) Saints are another example of renown-as-moral-excellence but more problematic in the sense that a saint's life is really best understood as a recapitulation of Christ's moral excellence rather than as something personal to the saint. For the evolution of celebrity Fred Inglis, *A short history of celebrity* (Princeton : Princeton University Press, 2010). Leo Braudy, *The frenzy of renown: fame and its history* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.)

One struggles at first to find a common denominator amongst the figures of modern celebrity; success, rather than virtue or excellence in any moral sense, seems at first a good common denominator, but success alone was neither enough (one struggles to imagine a famous accountant, though many have presumably been successful) nor even really strictly speaking necessary, as Snyder's moment in the sun suggests. Success was simply the way most famous people managed to stand out, and to be a famous person in the modern era was in essence to stand out from the crowd – often, of course, by achieving something great or unusual, but frequently also simply by working in front of a movie camera or in a setting where one might be observed by large crowds. To become famous was, then, to be radically individuated from the urban crowd, and this, of course, is why the common denominator of fame is so elusive. To be famous was to be seen, and recognized, and therefore (since visibility increasingly depended on mediated representations) to have one's image reproduced in the papers and other forms of mass media. To be famous was, thus, in a sense, to be made into a spectacle of individuality.

In one sense, there is an unbroken continuity between this spectacle of individuated celebrity and the spectacles of individuated deviance which I discussed in the previous chapter. But, of course, there is also a decisive difference between the two modes of individuation. In both cases, the spectacle picks out and isolates a figure by transforming them into the object of the gaze of the crowd; that is, the basic technique of spectacle stays the same, and this is why we can observe a basic similarity in how Beecher and Snyder are written about or hounded by curious crowds. However, whereas in the nineteenth century, the person who stands out is thereby diminished and rendered laughable (unless they stand out as morally exemplary, that is), in the 20th century the celebrated figure has a kind of glamour about them and a power vis-à-vis the crowd that, far from being diminished by moral indiscretions, is often amplified by them.

To put this somewhat more abstractly, we can observe that the significance of the spectacular vis-à-vis the ordinary has begun to change. The nineteenth century spectacles of celebrity and deviance both took their cues from everyday moral life – the famous person functioned as a symbol of the 'farther reaches' of moral excellence and the deviant as a meditation on moral shortcoming or ambiguity. Achilles was splendid, yes, but only in the sense of being a splendid exemplar of a martial Hellenic masculine ideal that animated not just the deeds of epic heroes but also the everyday moral commitments of men in that culture. Roughly the same might be said for the relationship between Beecher (no Achilles, alas!) and nineteenth century masculinity in the days when scandal had not yet marred Beecher's fame. Indeed, even when the scandal broke and he was redefined as a deviant in the eyes of many, the issue at hand was precisely Beecher's inability to embody conventional moral norms.[55] In both cases, the extra-ordinary world of spectacle inhabited by Beecher basically reflected to the ordinary world of everyday moral life back to itself, even if only negatively. As Halttunen says, to take a different example of the same process, it was precisely in being shocked at the killer's inhumane acts, the nineteenth century discovered its own humanity.

By contrast, in the twentieth century, the spectacles of celebrity and deviance become less and less a reflection of ordinary life and come more and more to represent enticing alternatives to it. In this era, spectacle and celebrity hold up a vision of life that is defined as utterly unlike ordinary experience, that is indeed often deeply at odds with conventional moral commitments, but that is none the less represented and experienced as admirable or attractive. In the nineteenth century (and earlier) a

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[55] Obviously, this is not quite the argument I made in the last chapter, where I was seeking to complicate Beecher's moral exemplariness and do justice to the moral fluidity of the era, but there is no fundamental contradiction between this and the earlier view.

celebrity was basically an object of emulation and, while a twentieth century celebrity may still be emulated this is no longer at the heart of the matter or even a particularly logical response to a form of spectacle which stresses the inimitable uniqueness rather than the representativeness of the famous.[56] The reason moral flaws do not diminish this form of celebrity or turn it into infamy but rather add luster to the celebrity in question is precisely because their underscore how different their existence is, how far removed from everyday reckonings of right and wrong. The spectacle has ceased to be a mirror in which the possibilities and limits of moral life can be obliquely glimpsed but has instead taken on a life of its own, to become a window on to another world. The mirror of former times is magically transformed into an Alice-through-the-looking-glass portal which leads to an unreal world of beautiful people doing extraordinary things, seemingly unencumbered by everyday norms or anxieties.[57]

But how did this extraordinary world come into being in the short half-century separating Beecher and Snyder, and what did the people who sought it out make of it? The answer to both these questions has to do with advertising. Or, to put it somewhat more broadly, it has to do with the process by which modern forms of spectacle (already highly elaborated in mid-nineteenth century, as we saw in the previous chapter) became one of the key mechanisms by which the new culture of consumption spread and reproduced itself. Modern spectacle had long been linked with consumer capitalism, of course.

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[56] Indeed, celebrities today are not emulated but rather imitated; a very different and much less salutary process through which the imitator is reduced to a second-rate copy. The relation between the Elvis impersonator and the King himself is in stark contrast to the relation between a Greek man and Achilles or even Beecher and one of the admirers who took him as their model – say Tilton in his younger days.

[57] This is, incidentally, the state of affairs I take Baudrillard to be reacting to and attempting to theorize when he talks about things like hyper-reality, though what follows is at best loosely-inspired by him. See especially Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and simulation,* trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor : University of Michigan Press, 1994) While I am doffing my cap to really quite unreasonably difficult French theorists of spectacle, I should also mention my not precisely illuminating but nonetheless provocative encounter with Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit : Black & Red, 1983.)

However, as I touched on previously when discussing Barnum, modern spectacle was in its early days itself a commodity and the hullaballoo surrounding it (when it was deliberately stirred up, anyway) was a kind of primitive attention-grabbing device, designed mainly to make the spectacle stand out amidst the visual cornucopia of the modern city and to make potential customers curious enough to fork over the price of admission.[58]

Our contemporary form of advertising, which dates back to the early twentieth century, has not entirely lost this vaguely hucksterish 'hear ye! Hear ye!' quality, but what it mainly strives to do is to suggest to the viewer that he or she can be personally transformed by the experience of consumption. In the age of Barnum, advertising plays rather crudely on the viewer's curiosity; modern advertising, by contrast, plays to the viewer's insecurities and desires, engaging them in a far more intimate meditation on what sort of person they are, or might become. More precisely (and more importantly, for our purposes) the viewer is invited to imagine the commodity being advertised as a sort of magic wardrobe by the aid of which one may step into the fantasy world of beauty, glamour, success, adventure and satisfaction that is depicted by the advert.[59] The long-standing practice of using celebrities in advertisements is, of course, no accident, for the spectacular, extraordinary world of the celebrity is more or less the same place in the geography of the imagination as that of the blemishless people who populate modern ads. And, of course, the logic of the advertisement demands that this world no longer be placed in a subsidiary relation to the everyday world but that it instead becomes a pleasing and desirable

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[58] Of course, I am simplifying a little but not, I think, to the detriment of the overall argument. For more robust treatments of nineteenth century spectacle and its relation to commerce, see James W. Cook, *The arts of deception: playing with fraud in the age of Barnum* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001) and Lears, *Fables of Abundance*

[59] On advertising, see Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream*, Lears, *Fables of Abundance*, Leach, *Land of Desire* and especially John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (New York, NY : Penguin Books, 1972)

alternative to it. Instead of going on living your dreary everyday life, why not become like those beautiful Technicolor people in our ads? Escape from your mundane existence is as easy as buying a coke!

The idea that advertising entices people to yearn for a state of utopian satisfaction and seek fulfillment in what then inevitably become somewhat disappointing acts of consumption is, of course, a commonplace critique of consumer culture. I am suggesting something a little different here, however. I am arguing, in the first place, that the birth of advertising marks a historic shift through which the eighteenth and nineteenth century use of imagined realities to cast a reflection of everyday life gives way to an imagined reality which is offered up and experienced as a pleasing alternative to that everyday existence.[60] But I also want to suggest that, as this process unfolds, advertising participates, along with celebrity (and other factors, assuredly) in the formation of a new conception of what it is to be a person, a new moral ideal which I will, for lack of a better term, refer to as spectacular personhood. This takes place because the people who inhabit the beautiful world of celebrity and advertising aren't just enjoying themselves more, having better sex, and so on, but are also pointedly *seen to be doing so* by the multitudes who are invited to gaze longingly at their achievements – this is not just consumption,

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[60] Naturally, the possibility that imaginary experience may come to function as a potentially preferable alternative to everyday 'real' experience is a possibility, a nightmare, even, that is present in the modern imaginary epoch that I have called the age of the book from the seventeenth century onwards. Once you make the imaginary life something radically separate from real life, you automatically create the possibility that someone will want to live exclusively in one rather than the other. We need think only of that long tradition of addicted readers, of whom Don Quixote and Emma Bovary are only the most famous. But this possibility is only that, a distant possibility (realized at most as a symptom of isolated descents into psychopathology) until material conditions conspire to make this possibility widely accessible and appealing. It is, in this context, highly telling (and prescient, for his part) that Flaubert makes Emma a *shopper* as well as a reader. The spread of consumption is what makes this possibility of imaginary escapism into something more than Quixote's isolated dreaming, into something more like a socially sanctioned way of life. Of course, I readily acknowledge that one could easily find traces of this preference for the imaginary in the case studies I discussed in the previous two chapters, but with the important difference that it would be a much less prominent feature of the deviant fantasy, whereas it becomes the dominant note in the early twentieth century.

after all, but conspicuous consumption.[61] In effect, then, modern spectacle invents a new kind of human being, a spectacular self that lives through being seen, and lives well when it is being seen at its best. Thus what we have at work here is a kind of new ethos of visibility: the most real and valuable things are those which can be seen and displayed, and the more widely seen, the better, for to be seen is to exist in the fullest sense of the word.

It is very important to note that this kind of self-display is a very different beast from the other displays of selfhood we discussed while we were concerned with the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As we've seen, in these earlier paradigms, appearances mattered profoundly but only as indicators of social belonging (as in the categories of gentility and respectability) or inner states (such as refinement and character.) Appearance and spectacle were assuredly important, but their importance remained tied to the moral concerns and commitments of everyday experience – primarily, of course, the experience of social relations. In an era of rapid change and growing anonymity, spectacular displays of one's social status and inner being served to mediate relationships in a manner analogous to the market (and indeed, in so far as the spectacle was a display of commodities, inextricable from it.) But that's all the display was at the end of the day – a mediator of social experience, which was in the final analysis that which ultimately mattered. That is why, in fact, in previous chapters we couldn't fully understand the furor around certain symbolic acts until we put them in the context of the social relations and other matters of ultimate moral concern which they underpinned and made possible. In contrast to all this, twentieth century spectacle is far less frequently a means to the moral ends of everyday life, and is

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[61] The concept of conspicuous consumption we owe to Veblen, *Theory of the Leisure Class*. Veblen is a brilliant observer of his era, but his historical account of consumption leaves a lot to be desired and tends to lump early twentieth patterns in with superficially similar earlier practices – I offer what I think is a more adequate analysis in the following paragraph.

more frequently encountered as an end in itself, a thing with its own irreducible moral value, a value frequently defined in stark opposition to the values of everyday existence.

By way of illustrating this, consider the following episode from the Snyder trial, which gets at the very heart of Snyder's famously cool manner. It is May 9th, 1927 and it is all over in the courtroom; all the witnesses have been examined, the final arguments have been heard, and only the verdict remains to be pronounced. Ruth Snyder is waiting in an anteroom of the court for the jury to come back in with said verdict, which they will momentarily do. They've been out less than two hours and she has to know that a quick verdict means death. The newspaper photographers find her and descend upon her as usual. They ask her to pose for a photo with her brother, who has come to offer his support. 'Keep him out of this' she snaps with her usual hard-boiled aplomb, 'I'm the one that's being hung here.' Not to be so easily denied, the photographers plead with her to pose without her hat – 'It's the last the boys'll bother you' one of them rather insensitively points out. 'I don't care' she shoots back 'my hair's all mussed and I haven't got a mirror or anything. I won't do it.'[62] This is Snyder in all her 'icy' splendor – a woman with cool self-possession and a dogged determination to present a unruffled (in every sense of the word) image of herself to the world.

On any previous day of this sordid saga, one might have interpreted this performance as an attempt to save her hide by making the right impression, whether on the police, jury or reporters. That is, one might have been inclined to see her performance as a means to more fundamental moral ends – indeed, one of the most fundamental ends of all, the preservation of her own life. But this is evidently a woman

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[62] As reported in *World,* May 10th, 1927

who at this moment knows the game is up and that she must in minutes go and hear her death-sentence pronounced. There is something worthy of the term moral courage here, a kind of doomed tenacity that makes one think of Macbeth's 'Yet I will try the last. Before my body / I throw my warlike shield,' pathetic as its manifestation admittedly and necessarily is in this instance. But, and this is really the point, the moral commitment at work here is a strange one – who or what is this *for*, exactly, this determination to face fate with one's hair unmussed? This is about a kind of self-respect, to be sure, but the self in question is one whose moral worth is refracted through the eyes of not just others but *imagined* others. For surely the actual others whom she is in relation to (the jury, for instance) are no longer at issue, and are in any case about to make all too clear what they think of Snyder's performance; this is not for their benefit anymore, but for that of some wholly imaginary audience. And, more fundamentally, it is for the benefit of a self that takes its last refuge in maintaining appearances which have long since ceased to signify anything beyond themselves.

I began by drawing attention to two seemingly unrelated things about Snyder: the way she was described as cold and the way she was treated as a star. I think we can now see that these two aspects of her depiction are in fact intimately related, in that they are both dimensions of the spectacular self. Because, of course, cool is the emotional style supremely appropriate to the spectacular self for whom close emotional links with particular persons (the social relation facilitated by the sentimental emotional style) take a back seat to appearances projected out to an anonymous, and largely imaginary, audience. And, in fact, we can in hindsight also note that Snyder's warmth, her overflowing cup of pleasure, likewise feeds into this image of her – the extremes of delight which she is supposed to have sought and experienced are exactly those of the person who inhabits the cornucopian, extraordinary world of the advertisement, or, for that matter, the celebrity gala.

And, in a peculiar way, a deviant figure and, specifically, a killer is also in many ways a fitting representative of the spectacular self. The deviant, as we've seen again and again, has long had a close association with fantasy, spectacle and the extraordinary which made it almost inevitable that changes in the structure of the modern imagination would be reflected in representations of deviance. Furthermore, and again as we've frequently seen, deviance is always on some level about the moral commitments that prevail in the local moral world in which the deviant is experienced as such. Thus deviance becomes an easy category to reach for in describing the way the moral claims of the imagined world of spectacle increasingly impinge upon the moral world of everyday life. The murder of which Snyder was accused was, in fact, a particularly vivid example of this. The basic story about that murder is that here we have a woman who kills her husband because she is too 'hot' and too 'cool.' As we've seen, her heat and coolness both refer ultimately to a moral disposition which elevates personal pleasure and the performance of selfhood above the moral commitments that pertain to everyday social relations, such as the relation between a husband and a wife. Indeed, the marital relation is a particularly vivid symbol of the moral world that is being compromised here because it is in twentieth century American society in many ways the unmediated social relation par excellence. That is, it is the relationship which Americans most closely associate with a kind of human connectedness that transcend appearances, considerations of utility, market value or other forms of mediation endemic to modern life. The murder of a husband for the sake of pleasure, and a determination to act nonchalant about it in the wake of the crime, thus add up to a particularly vivid example of how utterly incompatible the values of the spectacular self are with more commonplace moral commitments.

All this adds up to an interpretation much like the one I cautioned against when discussing Snyder's excesses of pleasure. That is, it would be very easy to conclude that Snyder's coolness, like her heat, represents the birthing pangs of the spectacular self and the anxieties attendant upon its displacement of earlier modes of selfhood which grounded performance and appearance more firmly in actual social relationships. The question that naturally arises in such circumstances is this: given that contemporary society encourages coolness towards others, what is the ideal temperature for inter-personal relations? Where is the line between cool and just plain cold? Or, to drop the temperature metaphor, given that a new form of personhood is coming into being in America at this time which encourages (amongst other things) a kind of smilingly sociopathic disposition to other human beings, what then is to stop us all from killing our husbands when the need arises? Alas, "Ruth Snyder, c'est moi!" and so on …

Though there might indeed be some truth in this, I would again caution against this line of interpretation, and for much the same reasons as earlier. My objection is simply that we are again mistaking a widely accepted fantasy for actual social reality. The contention, so basic to spectacular selfhood, that *I am being seen* is, in fact, every bit as groundless a fantasy as the idea that twentieth century life was governed by the pursuit of personal pleasure or satisfaction. To be sure, crammed as the population increasingly is into cities of unprecedented size, twentieth and twenty-first century life is lived under the gaze of millions of eyes. But these are not the admiring or judging eyes that are imagined by the spectacular self, but rather the unseeing, indifferent eyes which barely register us and then only to note that we are in their way. Despite what the advertisements tell us, no-one really cares that much about our fancy car, or bad breath, or professional achievements, no more than we ourselves

lie awake at night thinking about the fortunes of others.[63] Indeed, it would probably be more accurate to characterize the generations that inhabited twentieth century America as haunted by loneliness and invisibility than by any pronounced consciousness of being beheld by others. The obsessive concern about being seen and impressing others, and I'll grant that one observes it in contemporary America (and many other places besides) in great profusion, is fairly obviously a compensatory and defensive fantasy that helps disguise a deeper, more intolerable anxiety about one's basic invisibly and insignificance to the world at large.

All of which still leaves us with the problem of determining what exactly people saw in Snyder to provoke such intense interest and hatred, if it was not a displaced projection of their own situation as they could not quite bear to imagine it. To get at this, it we be helpful to put Snyder back into the context from which I have extracted her for the purposes of analysis. For while the fascination of the Snyder-Gray story clearly centered on the leading lady, newspaper readers never encountered or thought about Snyder in isolation, but always in connection to the two men who were inextricably bound up with her crime, the one as its victim, and the other as its accomplice. Albert Snyder and Judd Gray are the pieces missing from this particular jigsaw puzzle; once we add them to the mix, the whole picture readily emerges.

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[63] Unless, of course, we've managed to form human relationships of actual intimacy in which love and hate (both forms of intense caring, as different as they otherwise are) may hope to blossom. But if we have done so, then we have done it against the grain of the culture and on the margins of what constitutes the moral life of the society. That such relationships continue to exist is a testament more to our deep, even desperate need for them than it is a reason to qualify our understanding of life in contemporary society as characterized by anonymity and a basic indifference to others. For a more optimistic and measured portrait of American society than any I'd ever sign my name to, but which I think substantially bears me out on this, see Robert N. Bellah et. al., *Habits of the Heart. individualism and commitment in American life* (Berkeley : University of California Press, 1985)

IV. The Fatal Triangle

The full meaning of what people imagined Snyder had done only emerges fully when we consider the two men who were most intimately involved with her – the two people to whom she 'happened,' as it were. It is not hard to see why this might be the case, for in effect the jury and the newspaper readers were asked to identify with these two men (mostly with Albert Snyder, of course, but to a surprising extent also with Henry Gray) and to punish Snyder for what she had done to them. Because of this surprisingly explicit identification, the way these two men were imagined and depicted had about it a strong element of projection. That is, I want to suggest that the newspaper coverage tended to displace onto these two men precisely that which was most difficult to acknowledge and cope with about the broader public's own confrontation with Ruth Snyder. Or, to put it another way, part of the attraction of the Snyder-Gray case was the way its supporting figures worked well as symbols or vehicles for the complex, ambivalent reaction Ruth Snyder provoked in newspaper-readers. So, then, what kinds of men are we dealing with here?

Albert Snyder was, for the obvious reason of having taken his final bow before the show started in earnest, the less vivid of the two figures. In the immediate wake of the killing, the papers offered an unabashedly sentimental portrait of the man: the *Daily News* in particular fell into love with a fantasy about 'jolly Al Snyder, the out-of-doors man whose laugh was so hearty.'[64] Snyder's distaste for the urban entertainments that gave his wife such delight, the age difference between the two and his fondness for nature made it quite natural to depict his as 'old-fashioned' and invite a reading of the

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[64] *Daily News*, March 22, 1927

crime as the revolt of Modern woman against traditional masculinity.[65] But this early portrait of Albert

Snyder soon gave way to one which, though somewhat less laudatory, was perhaps closer to home for

the average New Yorker.

The *Mirror* led the way with its depiction of Albert Snyder as 'a good man, a faithful husband' who 'was

thrifty. Worked hard and late. Bought a home, an automobile, a radio' and thus displayed 'his goodness,

his loyalty, his quiet earnest belief in the better things of life.'[66] A little later, Irene Kuhn, who wrote the

bulk of the paper's copy for the story, called him 'quiet and unobtrusive,' while the *Mirror*'s lightly

fictionalized account of the Snyders' life attributed to him habits of 'hard work and self-denial' and

informed readers that he 'plodded on' unaware of his wife's infidelity.[67] A former colleague of the dead

man clinched this new portrait, writing of him on the eve of the trial that 'Snyder was always willing to

follow instructions and put his best into every task assigned to him,' calling him 'like scores of your own

friends … a quiet, honest, upright man, ready to play his part in the drama of life without seeking the

spotlight or trying to fill a leading role.'[68] This second, more considered picture of Albert Snyder still had

about it a trace of the Victorian masculine ideal with its work ethic and embrace of self-denial, but more

prominently this was the picture of a modern office worker, who followed instructions, plodded

unobtrusively through life and found his reward, such as it was, in the realm of consumption. Such a

figure was an increasingly common sight in the era which gave birth to the white collar workforce, but it

was not therefore one which inspired much enthusiasm. Most writers refrained from doing more than

[65] This line of argument is very competently brought out in Ann Jones, *Women Who Kill*, as Jones thinks this is the main 'message' being sent to readers by this whole episode.

[66] *Daily Mirror*, March 25, 1927

[67] *Daily Mirror*, April 4, 1927; April 13, 1927; April 15, 1927.

[68] *Daily Mirror*, April 18, 1927

hinting that Al Snyder cut a rather dull profile but the urbane and bohemian Damon Runyon couldn't

resist a hilariously unkind jab at the dead man, writing that the murder was so horrible 'the thought of it

probably makes many a peaceful, home-loving Long Islander of the Albert Snyder type shiver in his

pajamas.'[69]

Henry Judd Gray, too, was one of the new white collar men who sprang up like so many weeds on the

pavements of the city. Whereas Albert Snyder personified the dutiful, dependable but decidedly dull

climber of office hierarchies, however, Gray represented a slightly different type – he was a travelling

salesman. After graduation from high school, where he had been universally popular and a bit of a local

football star, Gray got married, had a child, bought a house in the suburbs and settled down to the

corset-selling business, a life leavened by the occasional stint of teaching Sunday school.[70] Gray's

profession was often alluded to in the papers, who quickly christened him 'the neat, dapper, little corset

salesman'[71] The article he happened to sell was obviously a ready symbol for the effeminacy that was

implicitly and often explicitly attributed to him from very early on in the coverage – rather typically, one

editorial depicted him as 'mincing around selling corsets.'[72] However, even had Gray happened to sell

hammers and welding tools, his profession would have been a symbolically potent fact about him, for

the salesperson was fast becoming a highly fraught marker for that new type of American person that

the sociologist David Riesman would in a few decades christen as other-directed and who would soon be

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[69] *American*, April 19, 1927 (Runyon, *Trials*,139.)

[70] *Daily Mirror*, March 23, 1927

[71] For quote, *Daily Mirror*, March 29, 1927. See also *Daily Mirror*, March 30, April 9, April 21, 1928; *Daily News* March 22, March 23, April 5, 1927; *American* April 19, 1927.

[72] *Daily Mirror*, April 21, 1927. For other examples of effeminacy see *American*, April 19 (Runyon, *Trials*, 142, 144)

marketed as an explicit cultural ideal by such books as Dale Carnegie's 1937 best-selling self-help book

How To Win Friends and Influence People.[73]

Though the full articulation of what we might now describe as moral life in a service-based economy was as yet some years away, the people whom these books in hindsight described were rapidly proliferating and increasingly setting the tone for a new way of life, and their contemporaries did not fail to notice the fact. For instance, one article on Gray remarked in passing, with the tone of merely stating a truism, that 'his whole stock in trade as a business man … [was] a pliable and agreeable manner of speech … suavity or persuasiveness.'[74] A salesman, like so many of the new white collar workers, staked his basic material survival (in the form of his paycheck) on an ability to persuade, to make himself agreeable and to make a good first impression. Character in the nineteenth century sense mattered very little to such a person, but the more superficial achievement of having a pleasing personality was paramount.[75] It was thus no accident that Gray was 'a bit to the dressy side' as Runyon contemptuously puts it, for putting on appearances was his stock in trade.[76] However, dress here no longer denoted participation in and belonging to a moral community of the properly-dressed (as we saw it doing in earlier chapters) but drew its logic from the purely utilitarian consideration of impressing strangers and securing their

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[73] Riesman, *Lonely Crowd*, Dale Carnegie, *How to win friends and influence people* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1937)

[74] *Daily Mirror*, March 29, 1927

[75] The great scholar of this shift, from whom I borrow the contrast between character and personality, is Warren Susman. See in particular his *Culture as History*. Also rich on this transition is Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women.*

[76] *American*, April 19, 1927.

cooperation.[77] Like this new logic of dress, personality was just a costume which one used to make the

right impression, and might be put on or discarded as convenient.

The moral world of the salesman (let us borrow Riesman's term and call it an other-directed morality)

was thus not so much hypocritical as contingent to the point of becoming vacuous. In this context, it is

both telling and illustrative that no-one thought for a moment to question the sincerity of Gray's

religiosity either before (he had taught Sunday school, let us remember) or after the murder, when he

made a full confession and reverted wholly to the conventional morality of legal justice and Christian

piety his crime seemed so starkly to contradict. Rather than making him seem morally hypocritical, as

the juxtaposition of religious piety and criminal misconduct had made Beecher seem, this contrast in

Gray's case only underscored the weakness of his moral commitments. Or, rather than weakness, one

ought to say their malleability, for Grays tragedy was that he took his moral bearings from those around

him, and happened to fall into bad company. As several reporters put it, around friends and family has

was a mild-mannered Jekyll, but with Snyder he was transformed into a demonic Hyde. And the point is

very much that neither role was more 'true' or 'authentic' than the other, for the other-directed

morality did not really allow for any solid core values. At most, it suggested a moral life oriented

exclusively towards how one appeared in the eyes of anonymous strangers, and a tendency to modify

one's behavior accordingly without much concern for moral commitments that might transcend the

requirements of contingent social interactions.[78] And, of course, this pliable susceptibility to social

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[77] On dress in earlier periods, see Richard L. Bushman, *Refinement of America: persons, houses, cities* (New York : Knopf : Distributed by Random House, 1992) and Michael Zakim, *Ready-Made Democracy: A History of Men's Dress in the American Republic* (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 2003.)

[78] Not entirely different from the nineteenth century preoccupation with respectability which itself suggests an 'other-directed' ethos, as Riesman puts it. Indeed, since the other-directed 'confidence man' is already a figure haunting the nineteenth century, we might think of the change here more as one of degree rather than kind. In any case, I had a lot to say about this in the previous chapter so I won't go too deeply into it here.

circumstances was a useful habit not just for salespeople but all those many white collar workers whose

jobs demanded not only competent or diligent labor but also the ability to 'sell' themselves to bosses,

co-workers and clients or customers.[79]

A susceptibility to the influence of others was, in fact, the cardinal trait of Gray's character according to

newspapers. A surprisingly strong consensus prevailed amongst reporters, despite ample evidence

suggesting his active participation in planning and executing the murder of Albert Snyder, that the man

just didn't look much like a killer and couldn't have cooked up, let alone carried out, such a bold,

audacious crime on his own initiative. 'You couldn't find a meeker, milder looking fellow in seven states'

Runyon opined, echoing appraisals of Gray as 'a short … mild-appearing man,' a 'dejected little bundle of

human nature,' 'the last man in court I would have picked for a slayer … looked too well-fed and

unromantic,' a 'Mamma's boy gone wrong.'[80] And how, in that case, had this mild-mannered wimp

gotten involved in such a sordid murder? The prevailing theory (which Gray, a pliable, keen-to-please

fellow to the very end, readily confirmed in his testimony during the trial) was that Ruth Snyder had him

wrapped around her little finger, that he was so completely in her power that he did anything she told

him to do, up to and including braining poor Al Snyder with a sash-weight. The *News*, in particular, loved

this angle and provided some delightfully strange – and revealing – copy in support of the theory. 'Her

eye enslaved me' ran the headline, 'Snyder's hypnotic eye forced him to kill' a secondary headline

helpfully explained and there followed three increasingly bizarre paragraphs purporting to be Gray's

account of this process: 'she would place her face an inch from mine and look deeply in my eyes until I

was hers completely … Her eyes ruled me. She gained complete physical and mental domination over

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[79] The pervasiveness of such needs is ably suggested in Mills, *White Collar* and Hochschild, *The Managed Heart*.

[80] *American*, April 19, 1927; *Daily Mirror*, March 23, 1927; *Daily Mirror*, March 29, 1927; *Daily Mirror*, April 19, 1927; *Daily News*, April 13.

me … Her power seemed to draw every ounce of strength out of me.'[81] Admittedly, this was as lurid as it ever got, but the *News* was slow to let go of its hypnotic eye theory, though this did gradually morph into a somewhat more general, and marginally more plausible, line about Snyder's 'old reliance on her power over men.'[82] Other tabloids soon got in on this act, calling Gray a 'love slave,' speculating that 'he may have been … under a hypnotic spell' and giving their readers to understand that he had been 'one of the many … who felt the bitter slavery of Ruth Snyder's spell.'[83]

Let us linger here a moment and look a little more deeply into these hypnotic eyes of Ruth Snyder's, and try to see what there was that was so enchanting about them. Snyder's eyes were, in point of fact, deeply compelling in their own right well before the hypnotic eye theory ever saw the light of day – there was scarcely a writer who spent any substantial amount of time covering the story who failed to take note of them, sometimes in passing and frequently at some length.[84] The reason this fact caught my own eye is, of course, that I've had a lot to say, in previous chapters, about what eyes, looking and the experience of seeing the deviant have to tell us about the specific meaning of the deviant figure under consideration. As we saw earlier, Witches could do harm with their evil eye, unwary eyes invited seduction by libertines and the pleasures of looking at Beecher had a lot to do with his inability to look back. Snyder's eyes, with their spell-like, hypnotic quality can't fail to remind us of the powerful eyes of the witch, as, indeed, the manner in which Snyder was summarily dispatched to the hereafter once the public had tired of ogling her also can't help but remind us of the witch-hunt. Indeed, Snyder is the first

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[81] *Daily News*, April 1, 1927 (Aptly enough!)

[82] For more hypnotic eye copy, see April 3, 1927. The 'old reliance' quote is in *Daily News*, April 18, 1927.

[83] *Daily Mirror*, April 8, 1927; *Daily Mirror*, March 29, 1927 (see also April 6); *Daily Mirror*, April 9, 1927.

[84] For instance, *American*, April 19; April 30; May 3

figure we've had to do with since leaving Salem who *looks back* at her accusers, whose way of looking is one of the unsettling things about her, one of the things for which she must be punished.

This seems at first sight somewhat incongruous to say the least. For, as I argued in the previous chapter, the dangerousness of the witch and the power of her gaze had a lot to do with the fact that she had to be confronted in person, whereas encounters with latter figures were mediated by print and the gaze of the crowd, which placed the deviant figure in a more clearly separate realm of existence and permitted a kind of safe voyeurism. This sense of distance was, if anything, even more characteristic of Ruth Snyder, whom most people never encountered outside the pages of the tabloids. Beecher, at least, could be actually seen by whomsoever cared to attend one of his lectures of sermons; by contrast, Snyder spent her brief moment in the limelight in the lonely confines of a prison cell. In person, the woman does seem to have been gifted with a degree of charisma (in any case, courtside reporters on the whole grudgingly felt she put on an impressive performance on the witness stand) but this can't have counted for much under the circumstances.[85] The Ruth Snyder we have to do with here is the woman in the paper, not the woman in the cell and, as we've seen, the two are unusually distinct figures in this particular instance. But in this case what made her seem so capable of turning the gaze back at her audience?

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[85] The coverage of the trial on April 30 and May 3, spanning the two days Snyder spent on the stand, has a markedly different tone to the rest of the run in practically every paper. Runyon, always with one eye on his fellow-toilers in the press gallery, notes 'I asked a lot of men how she impressed them. They said they thought she made a good witness for herself. Then I asked some of the girls … they, too, thought she had done very well.' (*American*, April 30, 1927 Runyon, *Trials*, 167)

To get at this, and working from my earlier hypothesis that Gray is a kind of stand-in for the reading public, let's note one final thing about Gray. All this talk about Gray bearing a strong resemblance, morally speaking, to a piece of limp lettuce might lead one to suppose he was being depicted as a somewhat unusual character. But, in fact, the stress was instead on Gray's as a quite ordinary and typical figure . Both he and Al Snyder (and, to a more limited extent, also Ruth Snyder) were described again and again as ordinary people. Remarking, as things were starting to wrap up in the courtroom, that the Snyder trial was the 'best show in town,' Damon Runyon jokingly suggested that a second company be put together and added '8,000,000 different blondes are being considered for the leading female role. No one has yet been picked for … Gray's part but … almost any citizen will do.'[86] Likewise, in reply to her fellow reporters' tendency to picture Gray as a hapless weakling, Fay King reminded the *Mirror's* readers that 'as I look around the courtroom I see no man present that reminds me of Apollo' – the cartoon which ran above this article underlined the message by reminding readers that 'Gray of happier days looked and acted like a multitude of other men.'[87] Peggy Joyce, a scandalous theatre star moonlighting as a reported for the *Mirror*, who might have been expected to know a bohemian when she saw one, likewise concurred that 'they don't look like people who would be so moved by passion … they don't look unusual.'[88] Yet another author likewise reported that the accused lovers looked 'like any suburban wife and husband you see going to business, shopping or that you meet in a friendly bridge game.'[89]

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[86] *American*, May 6, 1927 (Runyon, *Trials*, 195)

[87] *Daily Mirror*, April 22, 1927

[88] *Daily Mirror*, April 21, 1927

[89] *Daily Mirror*, April 19, 1927

In Ruth Snyder's case, this seeming ordinariness was undercut and complicated (in ways I will come back to in a minute) by the other aspects of her portrayal I've already discussed. Gray, by contrast (like Al Snyder who evoked comparisons, as we saw, to 'many of your friends' and 'long islanders of the Al Snyder type') was both implicitly and explicitly a representative figure, a kind of weak-willed everyman. In fact, if Ruth Snyder in many ways represents the new spectacular imaginary world of advertising and celebrity, both these men, insistently described as every-day and unremarkable characters and associated so strongly with their ordinary occupations, represent the opposite pole of the moral landscape of the early twentieth century – the moral world of everyday life, with its demands for discipline, adaptability and self-denial. And their relationships with Ruth Snyder thus dramatize and act out the fraught relationship between the two moral worlds which exist alongside one another in the early twentieth century – the glamorous world of spectacle and the mundane, and the everyday world of white collar work, family obligations and suburban life.

Here is where looking comes back into play, for Ruth Snyder's relationship with her husband is entirely a matter of looking. Ruth Snyder, we are given to understand by the coverage, kills her husband in essence because she *looks down* on him. Or, anyway, this is the impression created by systematically effacing all the mundane, everyday reasons she might have for detesting her husband, and zeroing in on the 'lifestyle' differences between them. The effect of making Ruth Snyder over into a condensed symbol of the pleasure-filled, good-looking world of spectacle and of presenting her husband as a crude caricature of dull everydayness is to turn their sad domestic tragedy into a larger-than-life confrontation of the two moral worlds between which twentieth century persons were torn. And the power of Ruth Snyder's gaze is, in this instance at least, that the reader can readily share in it; for in the newspaper coverage, too, Albert Snyder seems a bit dull, a bit wanting. Nice chap, hard worker, didn't deserve to be

brained to death, and yet … What we have here is the characteristic ambivalence introduced into twentieth century life by the tendency to view one's life from the standpoint of spectacle, to compare it (unconsciously, of course, for on a conscious level the comparison is evidently absurd) to the life represented in advertising or, say, film, and to find it an impoverished and pathetic thing. The power of Snyder's eyes is that they stand in for the slightly contemptuous gaze with which all our billboards regard our paltry and mundane existence. Beecher doesn't look back in the nineteenth century, because in that era (and, indeed, all pervious historical periods in which we encounter spectacle) it is the nature of spectacle only to be seen, to offer itself up passively for our curiosity, or at most to entice us into looking. In the twentieth century, primarily through the medium of advertising, spectacle turns its gaze back on us and its judgment is devastating.

Gray's encounter with Snyder's gaze brings out another, equally troubling dimension of the relationship between ordinary and spectacular expectations. You might have felt, as I was describing Gray's pliable moral disposition, his other-directed tendency to see himself through the eyes of others and adopt whatever persona suited the moment, that this amounted to more or less the same thing as what I had above called the spectacular self. But, while these forms of personhood are both in a broad sense mediated by the gaze of others, it does seem to me that there is an important distinction between them. Gray's behavior is still anchored in concrete social situations – in however attenuated a fashion, his pliable personality is still a means to ends firmly rooted in social relations with concrete others, to making a good impression, making that sale, pleasing the other. The spectacular self, on the other hand, is performed for everybody and nobody, for a purely imagined audience.

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On the other hand, it is surely no accident that these two moral dispositions should arise in roughly the same historical moment, for they evidently feed upon and reinforce one another. In fact, the relationship between Gray and Snyder, all this business about hypnotic dominion, really only makes sense as a displaced recognition on the power of the spectacular world over someone like Gray. If Snyder's relationship to her husband represents the way the world of spectacle breeds a sense of the inadequacy of everyday life, her relationship to her lover represents the way the world of spectacle seduces the twentieth century person, intrudes upon them irresistibly with compulsions and desires that are, as it were, not their own, but that are no less insistent for that. The impulsive purchase one can't really afford, the strange yearning after a fashionable dress, a luxurious holiday, the addictions to heavily marketed substances and activities (alcohol, coffee and tobacco come to mind, but so do spectator sports, movies and, later, television) are all phenomena which are indeed quite fittingly described as exercising a kind of hypnotic force. In each case, one knows one shouldn't, and yet again and again one does.

Gray's moral weakness, or, rather, his moral dependence on the eyes of others, makes him a prime candidate for these kinds of seductions, of course. Lacking a moral centre of gravity of his own, and dependent on others to set the standards up (or down!) to which he tries to live, he becomes, in Runyon's words, 'a dead set-up for a blonde, or the shell game, or maybe a gold brick.'[90] The progression here is a telling one. 'Gold brick,' like the more recognizable term shell game, is an early twentieth century slang usage which basically means 'swindle' or 'con game.'[91] The term comes from an actual late nineteenth century swindle in which a gold-plated clay brick was sold to the unsuspecting rube as a bar

[90] *American*, April 19, 1927 (Runyon, *Trials*, 139)

[91] See 'gold brick' n., def. 2 <u>The Oxford English Dictionary</u>. 2nd ed. 1989. <u>OED Online</u>. Oxford University Press. 5 March. 2012

of solid gold. And what better metaphor could there be for the seductions of consumer capitalism, or for the unsuspecting unwariness with which one falls for them! Note also Runyon's easy transition from blonde (implicitly, a gold-plated woman) to gold-plated brick, from seductive person, through seductive situation (the shell game) to seductive commodity, making almost explicit the analogy which underlies Snyder's seductiveness. For, even allowing her all the charisma in the world, it is not as a woman that Snyder frightens and titillates, but as a representation, an embodiment of a new force which is otherwise very hard to grasp or talk about. The seductions of capitalist spectacle and new and unprecedented, and thus hard to come to grips with; the language available lags behind the lived realities. But sexual seduction is as old as the hills, and the misogynistic language used to order and explain it is of only slightly more recent vintage, and in a pinch it will be made to do. So it is of course a woman who becomes the vehicle for these displaced anxieties, and a woman that must die, and die spectacularly, that we might feel back in control of our lives and our selves.

Runyon's rather reassuring analysis in the above passage is that Gray falls because he is stupid, a sucker, a rube. But the dominant tendency (shared, indeed, by Gray himself) was to explain Gray's participation in the murder of Albert Snyder not through stupidity, but rather what one reporter tellingly termed the 'most modern' of defenses: a plea of 'moral weakness.'[92] For Gray's susceptibility to Snyder's hypnotic eyes was not ultimately a matter of him actually sharing her imagined moral commitment to spectacular pleasure, but rather a matter of his being overwhelmed by it. This is why it is important that we maintain a clear distinction between Gray's contingent, other-directed morality and Snyder's spectacular morality – because only this separation catches the ambivalent way someone with such a contingent morality is so easily swept up by the demands of modern spectacles like advertising. For

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[92] *Daily Mirror*, April 1, 1927

these spectacles, with their emphasis on maintaining appearances before an ever-present imagined audience, make a powerful yet diffuse demand upon the other-directed person. They invite him to imagine himself as always under the eyes of others, and the contingent moral commitment to pleasing *this* person, in *this* particular situation, is thus generalized into a more pervasive demand to perform at all times as though under the gaze of the imagined others.[93]

We've begun to see, by considering her effect on Albert Snyder and Henry Gray, what newspaper reporters and readers saw in Snyder's eyes that made her seem both appealing and threatening. Figuring her as a kind of embodiment of the gaze that looked down upon them with derision and irresistible compulsion from the advertising billboard and movie screen, the public projected onto her the feelings of unfulfilled yearning and resentment this gaze provoked within them.[94] But there is one final dimension of this account of how the Snyder-Gray trial disturbingly dramatized the relationship between spectacle and everyday life, and it revolves around the figure of Ruth Snyder herself. Thus far, I've confined myself to describing Snyder as a kind of embodiment of spectacular reality. But, of course, she was at once more and less than this for, as we saw, Ruth no less than Gray could be described as an ordinary woman, the kind you might meet in the stores or at work. And, in the way Snyder's everydayness sits along her spectacular crime, we discover a final troubling aspect of the relationship between everyday reality and spectacle.

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[93] The very same year all this was taking place, incidentally, an up and coming German philosopher by the name of Martin Heidegger published a book that described this condition as the inauthentic mode of being determined by Das Man, mistaking, I am inclined to think, a historically specific phenomenon for an ontological one.

[94] In this context, I can't help but be reminded of the joking observation I once heard that if someone talked to you the way advertising does, you would punch them in the face – a telling example, albeit anecdotal, of our pent-up aggression towards the medium.

For the experience of the spectacular was not only, or even for the most part, shaped by a sense of inadequacy or loss of control. It was also possible to more or less wholeheartedly embrace the values of the spectacular, either as a replacement for or supplement to older moral commitments (to hard work, say, or maternal virtue) whose importance or value was no longer as self-evident as it once had been.[95] Clearly, this is the path blazed by the flapper, whose cultural significance lay not only in her refusal of the old strictures (and thus the categories of value which underpinned them) for women, but also in her embrace instead of what we can now identify as the moral world of the spectacular. For the flapper was certainly not much of a gender warrior, as a skeptical feminist tradition has asserted, but she was none the less implicitly (and largely unconsciously, one must imagine) committed to the radically new moral order centered around celebrity, advertising and conspicuous consumption. This commitment was, of course, only ever partial; as social histories of the era's young women make clear, this cohort remained deeply tied to everyday moral life of workplace, school, peer group, and family, contexts in which the social relations which mattered were deeply particular and often intimate and unmediated. But to try and explain the value systems of these women only in reference to the particular others with whom the youth of the 1920s interacted is, I believe I have shown, a mistake – relations with the imagined people encountered through advertisements and media mattered as deeply as actual social relationships.

And what, finally, was the nature of those relations? Berger may be able to help us here with his famous observation that what the advertisement produces in the viewer is not so much desire, as envy.[96] That is, because the viewer is asked to identify with the person in the advert, they experience themselves as

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[95] This possibility is recognized by the old argument, made by Mills in *White Collar,* 215-38 amongst others, that as the protestant quest for meaning through work declined, it was displaced by a search for meaning within consumption.

[96] Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 129-154

lacking the joys or pleasures with which the advert-person is so abundantly supplied – their self is reflected back to them by the advert entirely in terms of lack and absence. They experience a yearning not just to possess what the advertisement is selling (at least in principle a realizable desire, supposing one's pockets are deep enough) but to *become* the person who is depicted. This latter desire is, of course, utterly unrealizable and thus turns readily into a form of resentment that will be somewhat familiar to us from the first chapter. The schadenfreude with which the misfortunes of celebrities are habitually greeted is, of course, an expression of this envy. But so, more to the point, is the intense animus generated against Snyder. For, as we saw above, Snyder is defined precisely as a woman uniquely devoted to pleasure and spectacular personhood, a flapper par excellence, an extreme realization of the hot-and-cold ideal which the spectacular world holds up as the supreme moral virtue. Ironically enough, she even manages by way of her bungled crime to actually pass through that looking-glass pane separating the everyday and the spectacular, becoming a celebrity in her own right, seizing that much-longed-for prize: the attention of others. And this would have made her even more galling, of course.

Naturally, no-one actually wanted to *be* Snyder, imprisoned and accused of a capital crime as she was. But then this twentieth century envy did not work quite the way its seventeenth century counterpart did. In that earlier era, envy was precisely the desire to be some particular other person, and in order to make sense of it we had to delve fairly closely into the social life of the village and the interactions which comprised it, so as to be able to identify the witch as occupying an extreme of economic precariousness and her accusers as only one step removed from it. Obviously, not one of the people reading about Ruth Snyder in the paper knew her intimately enough to experience this kind of envy, even had her situation been an enviable one. Rather, this new form of envy is not so much for the specific situation of the

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person envied (just as one does not know the people whom one envies in the advertisements enough to envy them in this way) but rather envy for an imagined self – an imagined projection of *myself*, in fact, as I would be if I were the person in the advertisement. And this self is, of course, the spectacular self, and also the self which is projected onto Snyder. In so far as she was experienced in terms of spectacle, and we've abundantly seen that this was precisely how she was represented and imagined, her very excesses would have provoked feelings of lack to those who aspired to a spectacular self in a more measured, flapper-like way (through conspicuous consumption, say.)

Indeed, it is hard to see what can explain the scorn and hatred heaped upon her (most vehemently by other women Runyon tells us, who would, of course, identify more readily with her) if not some degree of unacknowledged envy for the spectacular pleasures she had enjoyed, the charming, unshakeable cool she was for the most part able to maintain after her arrest and, of course, all the attention she was getting in the press.[97] Again, it was not so much her specific situation they envied (who would, after all?) but rather some imagined version of themselves that had those enviable qualities in Snyder's place. Ultimately, as far as those who felt envy towards her were concerned, Snyder's crime was to remind them of and make unbearably real that spectacular self which they were always attempting to find in the market but could never quite seize hold of. Indeed, this new form of envy takes us far towards understanding why Snyder should have simultaneously been an object of desire and an object of hatred, why it was necessary to both kill her, and for reporters to be on hand to remark on the color of underwear she was wearing when the fatal current shot through her. The envious public wanted to *see*

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[97] For Runyon on the hostility of women , see American, April 30, 1927 (Runyon, *Trials*, 167.) The surviving evidence bears him out in so far as the most hostile coverage tends to come from female reporters whereas men (Runyon himself is a good example) tend to sexualize her and adopt an amused, condescending tone.

this self, wanted to see it so badly that they invented it, in fact. But since they could never *be* that self they couldn't help also hating it with the fierce hatred of their seventeenth century ancestors.

More broadly, the phenomenon of spectacular envy, along with the other forms of encounter between the spectacular and the everyday imagined into the figures of Albert Snyder and Henry Gray, permits us to understand that otherwise puzzling manner of imagining deviance in the twentieth century which makes deviance both glamorous and dangerous, both seductive and alarming. For we can see now that the deviant, always necessarily imagined as a liminal figure, is in this era placed at the edge of that mysterious boundary separating the everyday and the spectacular. The deviant becomes, in fact, one of the few figures (along with the celebrity) imbued with the ability to step over into that other world which otherwise remains forever tantalizingly out of reach, and is thereby rendered somehow more real than those fated to remain mired in the anonymity of everyday life.[98] This intense ambivalence felt towards deviants in the twentieth century and indeed our own time is thus not, perhaps, evidence of any fundamental increase in tolerance (or, indeed, intolerance) of difference. Rather, it emerges as a symptom of that new bifurcated experience of the world into everyday and spectacular reality, which in turn arises within a culture in which spectacle takes on an urgency and importance previously reserved only for social relationships. If our deviants seem different today, it is because we see them no longer as through a glass darkly, but rather through the kaleidoscope of color that is the spectacular imagination.

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[98] This also helps us understand why in the 1960s (but really starting even earlier, with the bohemian generation, in fact) deviance will increasingly be associated with real or authentic experience. On this, see Rossinow, *Politics of Authenticity*, Douglas, *Terrible Honesty* and Stansell, *American Moderns*. There is a rich irony here in so far as authenticity, in both the colloquial and the strict philosophical sense, usually means an intense lack of pretense, a focus on the real demands of a contingent situation as seen from within the subjective perspective of the authentic self. This is, of course, exactly the opposite (as Heidegger makes clear, but see also Berman, *Politics of Authenticity*) of the inauthentic world of the spectacle where one does and feels exclusively for the benefit of the imagined eyes of Das Man. It also helps us understand, which is otherwise very puzzling, why people sincerely concerned with authenticity will often feel an urge to do performative and rather phony things like dress in a striking fashion.

Coda:

Cracks in the mirror

I began the research which would one day culminate in this book with two quite simple questions: why has Western modernity been marked by an enduring preoccupation with fantasies about deviant figures, and why have these deviant figures been represented in such different ways across time? The first of these questions is really a question about continuity; why is it possible at all to group such disparate figures as flappers, witches, libertines and freaks and what emerges when we step back to consider the broader historical category which they together reveal? The other question is, of course, about change, about the changing shape of western modernity and the cultural trajectory on which we find ourselves as they are revealed in changing fantasies about deviance. Since these were the questions with which I began, it seems well to conclude this volume by saying something more broadly about how what I have written is an answer to these questions.

To take the continuity question first, as I have already suggested in the title, the introduction and throughout, it seems to me that fantasies of deviance are best understood as a kind of distorted mirror, in which the avid onlooker may glimpse an ultimately terrifying image of themselves as they might one they become, or as they subconsciously recognize themselves to already be. It is this element of subconscious recognition, I have tried to argue, which provides the logic and enduring interest of the deviant fantasy across time, whether incarnated in the figure of the witch, the libertine, the freak or the flapper. The reason this recognition must be kept secret, moreover, the reason the reflection in this mirror is ultimately always a disturbing one, is because it reveals some aspect of human existence which is extremely painful and difficult to consciously acknowledge. Though these reflections are necessarily shaped by and best understood within the specific historical context in which they are most insistently produced and reproduced, they do also have a basic similarity to each other which is, indeed, what justifies us in grouping them together in the first place.

What is the nature of this similarity? What is that basic condition of being to which fantasies of deviance all speak, whatever their more historically specific context? I have been struck by them particularly as fantasies of failure, lack, inadequacy and excess; as images of compromised and failed personhood. The modern era has no monopoly on such images, of course, nor is the most striking representation of such an abject state in Western culture – the crucified Christ – a product of the modern period. What is unique about the modern fantasy of failed personhood, especially in juxtaposition with the imagery and tone of the Passion, is the extent to which the failure of personhood is something unendurable, something that must at all costs be repudiated. Suffering and failure are, in the pre-modern narrative of the Christ, figured as a source of identification, mystery and, ultimately, as a path towards something beyond the merely human. Some of this transcendent, holy quality clings, as we have seen, to the earliest deviant figure I've examined herein, the witch, but the overall trajectory is sharply away from failure and suffering as meaningful or even tolerable human experiences, let alone sources of spiritual insight. One could perhaps in trying to explain this flight from suffering speak of disenchantment, of the underbelly of enlightenment optimism, of the rise of the atomistic human subject as the ground of moral being – all these have their truths. But I have found it more useful, on the whole, to think of it as a result of the sundering of our personal experience from the world, human and otherwise, which we inhabit. That is, it is only when we feel ourselves to be alone with it that suffering becomes unendurable and begins to be projected upon other figures, themselves often marked by stark social isolation. The various developments which we group together as the rise of capitalism certainly have much to answer for in this sundering of self and world but they are, on the other hand, as much as consequence as cause for this striking development.

So much, then, for continuity in the history of deviance, but there is of course also change to be reckoned with. And what has stood out most vividly as we've travelled along the long historical trajectory which leads from the witch to the flapper is precisely the attenuation of the deviant's capacity to disturb and terrify. In moving from the witch to the libertine, we see the figure of the deviant become less immediately threatening, more seductive and even, at times, a sympathetic figure. The passage from libertine to the freak, on the other hand, sees deviance become more light-hearted, as the deviant becomes for the first time entertaining and laughable. Finally, when we come to the flapper, deviance (in moderate amounts, at least) has become an entirely desirable quality, presenting a stark contrast indeed to the terrifying visage of the witch. This transformation is never a complete one, of course – it was, after all, no less imperative for Ruth Snyder to die than it had been to dispatch Bridget Bishop to the hereafter. However a growing willingness to tolerate and even delight in deviance is none the less observable through the passage of time.

The story of this growing ambivalence or, if you prefer, the attenuation of the moral danger presented by the deviant, has largely been a story about the history of the imagination. We have witnessed, in our study of fantasies of deviance, the rise and fall of what I have termed the Age of the Book, an era which displaced the embodied imaginary life of the Age of the Cathedral and which at the turn of the twentieth century itself began to be displaced by the imaginary medium of the spectacle. The trope of the mirror in which the deviant appears as a kind of reflection is, of course, most applicable precisely to those times and places for which print is the primary medium for the life of the imagination. It is precisely for the print-oriented eighteenth century gentry and the nineteenth century bourgeoisie that the deviant is most obviously a direct reflection of their own moral failures. The witch, as we saw, is best through of as retaining that otherness which pertains to the holy and unholy, and being a reflection less

of the Puritan self as it actually was and more a dark harbinger of what the Puritan self might become. In an analogous manner, the spectacle of the flapper confronted twentieth century audiences not with a reflection of their own failings, but rather with a spectacular reality which they aspired towards but which necessarily remained forever out of reach.

From one point of view, this is a story about the surprising return of the imaginary and fantastic to the prominence they enjoyed in the pre-modern period, when 'real' and 'imaginary' did not constitute mutually exclusive categories, and when that which we are inclined to render as 'fantasy' often had more importance and urgency than did the undeniable material minutia of everyday life. The flapper, like the witch and unlike the intermediary figures of the libertine and the freak, is not merely a reflection but also partakes of something foreign and different. If the witch appears before us as that person whom we do not wish to become, the flapper appears as the person whom we in many ways do desire to become, but who is no less separate from us. This curious reversal, a product as much of different technologies of the imagination as of the material historical circumstances in which these technologies had their birth and development, does much to explain the diminution of the capacity of the deviant to confront and terrify us. The deviant has been frightening and unsettling because what has always frightened and unsettled has been precisely the deep realization that we are seeing, through a looking-glass darkly, the distorted image of our own moral fears and failings. At some point in our history, however, cracks begins to appear in the looking-glass, and the fragmented figure we glimpse therein no longer seems to us so certainly a reflection of ourselves, though we still recognize it as a disordered bearer of our hopes and dreams. We no longer see deviance itself as the problem – what disturbs us far more is what we are not, that lack which we grope darkly to fill through performance of difference and vicarious experiences of spectacular personhood. The unbearable experience in our own day is the

feeling of unreality, of insubstantiality of person – a lack of moral and existential integrity that performances of deviance are now used to obscure rather than reveal. It is not the image in the cracked mirror which unsettles us now, but instead the deep fissures which run along the glass, in whose dark recesses we see an emptiness far more terrible than the fractured reflection that leers at us mockingly from the disjointed shards.

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