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**American Callings: Humanitarian Selfhood in American Literature  
from Reconstruction to the American Century**

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**American Callings: Humanitarian Selfhood in American Literature  
from Reconstruction to the American Century**

by

**Kathryn Hamilton Warren, B.A., M.A.**

**Dissertation**

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Life is calling. How far will you go?

—The U.S. Peace Corps

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literature is a far cry from classical rhetoric, Jeff could not have been more congenial about joining my committee in the first place. Knowing that he would be reading my chapters kept me honest when using the word “rhetoric,” which I tried to do as precisely and with as much care as possible. I took a class from Martin my first semester at UT, and another during my fourth. Though I did wander a little (from the twentieth century back to the sixteenth and forward to the nineteenth), those two classes, in many ways, made me decide that nineteenth-century American literature was where it was at. The conversations in our “Re-authorizing the American Renaissance” course were among the most stimulating I had in graduate school, for which Martin deserves much of the credit. Kim Alidio taught me a lot about Filipino history, and our conversations about development work and pragmatism helped turn what was a hunch into a major component of my project. Thank you as well to Sarah Robbins, whose work, though she doesn’t bill it this way, concerns humanitarians of all stripes. Her enthusiasm for my project and willingness to come aboard at such a late date gave me a much-needed injection of energy at a crucial stage.

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## **PREFACE**

### **The Last Great Adventure**

In “American Callings: Humanitarian Selfhood in American Literature from Reconstruction to the American Century,” I argue that humanitarian practice can serve as heuristic wherein the agent arrives at a new self-understanding by way of wrestling with the questions raised by pursuing the call of service across cultural boundaries. My argument concerns late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century American literature, texts my graduate training exposed me to, but the genesis of the project is extracurricular and personal, emerging from the two years I spent as a Peace Corps Volunteer (PCV) in Togo (2001-03). “American Callings” is not a genealogy culminating with the example of the Peace Corps narrative. Nevertheless, the Peace Corps—its stated mission, the self-reflection and writing that service in it generates, and my own experience in the organization—shadows this dissertation. For better or worse, it has been the inevitable lens through which I have read and related to the texts under examination here, even as I work to situate them in their historical contexts and to illuminate their specific concerns.

The Introduction that follows explains my argument in more detail, describes the various critical interventions I am making, delimits the parameters of my project, and discusses my terminology. With this Preface I hope to do something different. I want to make the implicit explicit, to reveal, by way of a glance at Peace Corps writing and

promotional materials, the provenance of the perspective that animates “American Callings” as a whole.

\*

Almost every year for the last two decades or so, the U.S. Peace Corps has published volumes of narratives written by Volunteers about their experiences serving abroad. *To Touch The World: The Peace Corps Experience* (Jan. 1995). *At Home in the World: The Peace Corps Story* (Apr. 1996). *Peace Corps: The Great Adventure, Volunteer Stories of Life Overseas* (Sept. 1997). *A Life Inspired: Tales of Peace Corps Service* (Jan. 2006). The titles of these anthologies reflect some the ideas and values central to the Peace Corps ethos: cross-cultural connection, cosmopolitanism, humanitarianism imagined as both an adventure and a secular calling. The existence of the collections shows how central first-hand stories are to recruiting new Volunteers to the Peace Corps, for stories of self-becoming draw people into its ranks. The Peace Corps promises potential Volunteers the adventure of discovering not only a new land, but also, a new self.

Moritz Thomsen, who was among the first generation of Volunteers, describes the transformation he underwent during his service in Ecuador in his memoir *Living Poor* (1969). His language carries resonance of the sublime, of transcendence:

since arriving I seemed to exist simply as a vessel into which a million new impressions were pouring; that old, boring personality that I knew as myself had disappeared. Of course, I had experienced this same thing before—in motor cars driving at a hundred miles an hour; in bombers over German cities during the war,

when your personality disappeared and you turned into something called pure terror; and also a few times in my younger years when I had been in love. But I had never been so transformed for such a sustained period of time. (54-5)

Thomsen distinguishes the transformation his time in Ecuador brought about from other flashes of transcendence by emphasizing its duration. The Peace Corps, for him, offered the opportunity for sustained change, an “old, boring personality” giving way to something new and vital. *Living Poor* has become a staple of Peace Corps literature, one of the books (along with George Packer’s 1984 memoir *The Village of Waiting*) that gets promoted in official and unofficial channels alike as a must-read for Volunteers and potential Volunteers.

Were prospective Volunteers not already primed to expect and desire the kind of transformation Thomsen depicts, the Peace Corps itself works to shape their expectations. In a volume furnished to all new Volunteers, the Peace Corps links the desire to be transformed to success as a development worker: “If being an agent of change is important to you, then you should remember that the most effective messengers of change are those who understand what it means and who are themselves willing to go through it” (United States *Adjustments* 49). The same volume also observes that

most Volunteers hope for what we might call the Peace Corps experience. That is, you seek a profound encounter with a foreign culture, a series of experiences that change forever the way you think about the world, your own country, and yourself. You expect—and very much want—to be challenged, to have your

patience and your mettle tested, to be pulled, pushed or otherwise forced into new ways of thinking and behaving. You want, in a word, to grow. (*Adjustments* 50)

The second-person voice of this passage makes transformation imperative: “you seek,” “you expect,” “you want.” The Peace Corps doesn’t stop short of telling new Volunteers that they should want their experience to be nothing less than a conversion.

Because the organization knows that there are Americans out there who do want to “be pulled, pushed, or otherwise forced into new ways of thinking and behaving,” evidence from people who can speak to such transformation is a crucial piece of P.R. Pithy quotes attesting that transformation can be had in the Peace Corps stud the organization’s promotional material. Former Secretary of Health and Human Services Donna Shalala (RPCV Iran, 1962-64) writes, “Years later, looking back at my Peace Corps service, I realized that a wise *mullah*, an insensitive Dean, and students struggling to preserve a traditional society in a modern age had changed me forever. I had become a citizen of the world” (United States *Great Adventure* 20). The subtitle of a 1989 brochure directed at African Americans holds out “A Chance to Discover Yourself While Discovering the World.” Over and over it appears, the insistence, spoken by Volunteers and echoed by the Peace Corps back to the public, that “this experience has changed my life” (McGuire 36).

It may seem that I am casting a jaundiced eye on the way this desire for transformation gets expressed, published, and repurposed as promotional material. And I am, a little. I find it unsettling that one of the most intoxicating allures of humanitarian service in the Peace Corps is what it offers the Volunteer. (To this point, you will notice,

there has been no discussion of humanitarian practice at all.) At the same time, my experience has taught me that it is naïve to think that two years of service by a (more often than not) relatively unskilled recent college graduate yield anything more significant. This is not to say that the Peace Corps has no value, or that it has value only for the Volunteer. To judge the organization by what it doesn't do—namely, come up with and implement systemic, as opposed to piecemeal, changes that will benefit the peoples of the third world—is to miss the incredible impact it does have. Above all, the Peace Corps brings into contact people from different worlds who otherwise never would have met.<sup>1</sup> Perspectives shift and lives change course, if only slightly. Perhaps, in the aggregate, the little changes Volunteers experience add up to something significant: cultural dislocation that results in a new, more flexible understanding of the relationship between self and society.

The experience of living as the only American in a foreign place puts the self under threat. Thomsen writes on numerous occasions about his need to retreat to his house in order to “re-form” himself, as though Ecuador were eating away at his very identity. In its manual on cross-cultural adjustment, the Peace Corps warns Volunteers of the way cultural immersion can call the self into question:

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<sup>1</sup> There are some exceptional examples of the way this has benefited certain individuals in the developing world. Alejandro Toledo (b. 1946), a Peruvian who grew up poor in a *campesino* family of sixteen children, attracted the notice of Peace Corps Volunteers serving in Chimbote, where he grew up. After returning to the States those Volunteers helped Toledo attain a scholarship to the University of San Francisco. Toledo later went on to earn his Master's and his Ph.D. from Stanford. In 2001, he became the first indigenous president of Perú. To its credit, nowhere does the Peace Corps trumpet this Cinderella story.

On a more existential level, if you can't communicate your views and explain yourself, how can anyone know you? And if you can't understand others, how can you know them? Not knowing anyone and not being known *by* anyone, you feel isolated and profoundly alone. Indeed, you feel isolated from yourself and lonely for that person you know yourself to be but can no longer express. . . . No wonder you form such close friendships in such a short time with your fellow Trainees; they reassure you that you exist. (*Adjustments* 10)

The adventurous aspect of the Peace Corps—encountering a new and different world—also poses significant challenges to one's conception of what it means to be a self. The Peace Corps warns Volunteers, “Overseas, until you know the norms, you can never be sure where the culture stops and Alfredo begins” (*Adjustments* 41). While that is a decent enough warning about getting to know people in the host country—“perhaps what seems to me to be brusqueness is really just the way they are here in the Andean highlands”—it is terrifying if and when Volunteers turn the observation back on themselves. What if not only is there no *Alfredo* apart from culture, but no *Kathryn*, either? By suggesting to Volunteers that they become attuned to the connections between culture and behavior, the Peace Corps posits that understanding cultural norms can be a way of understanding the self. But this understanding calls into question the very idea of selfhood by getting Volunteers to wonder, “who am *I*, if I am only what my culture has made me?”

The disquieting experience I am describing here is at the heart of what is valuable about Peace Corps service. Scary as it is, such an experience of cultural unmooring can be a revelation. The Peace Corps claims to help Volunteers develop “an awareness of

your own cultural assumptions and values, acceptance of the reality of your own cultural conditioning, and acceptance of the reality of the cultural conditioning of others”

(*Adjustments* 36). In other words, it encourages Volunteers to notice what Kenneth Burke has termed their “terministic screens,” ways of looking at the world that direct attention “into some channels rather than others” (“Terministic Screens” 45). In so doing the Peace Corps promotes a relativistic view of the world that refuses to accept a single vocabulary or set of terms as final. This lesson resonates with the philosophy of pragmatism as it was elaborated by William James and expanded by Richard Rorty. One RPCV puts it this way:

For most . . . their Peace Corps years marked a seminal life experience. It was the moment when each of them spun out from a known center of the earth and touched another. They lived at the touchpoints, emersed [sic] in the struggle to understand language and custom, how things worked, what it all meant; all the while witnessing their own behavior and the values they took for granted reflected back to them as curiosities. . . . The returned Volunteers know—in some deep place in their consciousness—that there is another center, another definition of life, another way. (Kennedy 11)

Living at the touchpoints, as this author puts it, can be a way of putting into practice the political program Rorty’s pragmatism endorses: “extend[ing] our sense of ‘we’ to people whom we have previously thought of as ‘they’” (*Contingency* 192). This is because becoming aware of the historical and cultural contingency of one’s own values, and indeed, one’s own *self*, helps to increase solidarity among peoples. It helps make the

salience of difference recede. I suspect that one of the biggest differences the Peace Corps has made to American society has been to systematize a way for 200,000 individuals (and counting) to live out an awareness of contingency.

This kind of awareness could be attained without humanitarian practice. But in the story I am telling, it is a conviction that one has responsibilities to other people that extend beyond the boundaries of class, ethnicity, race, and nation motivates the individual to “live at the touchpoints” in the first place. Once there, the humanitarian self is shaped by more than cultural difference. How the humanitarian dynamic can be a tool to hone and refine the self is the subject of this dissertation.



**American Callings: Humanitarian Selfhood in American Literature  
from Reconstruction to the American Century**

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2010

Supervisors: Phillip Barrish and Gretchen Murphy

In “American Callings” I argue that late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century American literature dealing with cross-cultural humanitarianism contains a strand that sought to rectify the potentially oppressive shortcomings of humanitarian practice. The authors whose work I examine—novelists William Dean Howells and Albion Tourgée, reformer Jane Addams, humorist George Ade, and memoirists Mary Fee and George Freer—grappled in their writing with two reciprocal questions. First, they meditated on how humanitarianism shapes, changes, and constitutes the self. Second, they theorized how increased self-awareness and self-criticism might help the humanitarian actor avoid the pitfalls of humanitarian practice that critics, in their time and ours, have seized upon.

“American Callings” thus challenges three critiques that have been instrumental to American literary studies for decades: critiques of sentimental humanitarianism’s complicity in projects of cultural domination, realism’s investment in the status quo, and reform’s role in maintaining social discipline through surveillance. The dissertation

disputes the prevalent assertion that literature dealing with cross-cultural humanitarianism constitutes a sentimental, imperialistic, and ultimately violent discourse. I accomplish this by looking to instances of what Gregory Eiselein (1996) has called “eccentric” reform, efforts articulated from within a culture but in opposition to certain aspects of it. Drawing on narratives of what I call “humanitarian selfhood” in three historical contexts—industrializing urban centers in the North, the South during Reconstruction, and the Philippines during the U.S. occupation—“*American Callings*” traces an “eccentric” literary genealogy, one that offers up the humanitarian dynamic as a heuristic wherein the humanitarian agent arrives at a new kind of self-understanding by way of wrestling with the questions raised by service to others. The literature written by and about these humanitarians, I suggest, then provides an opportunity for readers to be transformed, as well.

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## INTRODUCTION

### **American Selfhood**

In *Sources of the Self* (1989), philosopher Charles Taylor asserts that “we are selves only in that certain issues matter for us. What I am as a self, my identity, is essentially defined by the way things have significance for me” (34). In “American Callings: Humanitarian Selfhood in American Literature from Reconstruction to the American Century,” I focus on selfhood explored and crystallized along an axis of obligation: the duty one human being has to another. Humanitarianism is a central issue of importance to the writers in this dissertation, a concern through which they refine their identities. Though “the self” and “identity” are closely related terms, I want to insist on a distinction that Taylor does not recognize in the above quotation, which collapses the two (“what I am as a self, my identity”). Selfhood, in the terms of this dissertation, refers to a *process* of becoming. I do not mean to suggest that selves are fluid whereas identities are static. Both can be in flux. Nevertheless, “identity” suggests a description of the self that is ready to go public. Meditations on the self and the appropriate state of the self in the humanitarian endeavor are, at their earliest stage, private. This is not to say that selves are formed independent of public questions. To the contrary, selves come into being relationally, through engagement with the ideas, assertions, and questions posed by other selves. More than that, selves are shaped and determined by social, historical, and economic forces. Still, “the self” is not shared. Identity, on the other hand, is a term with

public connotations. Unlike “the self,” identities can be made available to more than one person. “Identity” can be usefully thought of as the self made public, put into circulation.

The example of the Peace Corps writing I introduced in the Preface illustrates the relationship between private meditations on selfhood and publicly available descriptions of identity. Taylor posits that for the modern individual, the search for the self “involves articulation”; discovering the meaning of one’s life and self goes hand in hand with invention and creation (18). Volunteer narratives indicate the important role literary writing plays in articulating a certain kind of liberal American identity. Narratives of humanitarian selfhood written by Volunteers provide a template through which the public (most notably, potential recruits) can gain access to explorations of what it means to be a PCV, someone who goes abroad on an adventure driven (much of the time) by moral purpose. This writing therefore has the potential to shape public understandings of the humanitarian self—its challenges and contradictions, the contours of its development. When humanitarian selfhood enters the public sphere, it becomes available as a shared identity.

At the same time, the very preponderance of writing by PCVs (from published vignettes like those in promotional volumes to the unpublished letters PCVs send home) points to a different dynamic. In line with Taylor’s claim that the search for self involves articulation, there appears to be a compulsion among these humanitarians to reflect on their experiences through writing. Volunteers put into words what their experience has taught them, and what it has made them, regardless of whether that writing ever reaches a wider audience. This is the case for the authors in my dissertation as well: novelists

William Dean Howells and Albion Tourgée, reformer Jane Addams, humorist George Ade, and memoirists Mary Fee and George Freer. In very different ways, these individuals used their writing to come to grips with—to articulate—a kind of American selfhood developed and refined within the secular humanitarian dynamic. In some cases, that exploration of humanitarian selfhood circulated widely; Jane Addams’s autobiographies, for instance, shaped public understandings of a certain strand of liberal American identity. But Mary Fee’s and George Freer’s memoirs, in contrast, were not widely read, so it becomes difficult to assert that their individual articulations of selfhood had any impact on public understandings of an American humanitarian identity.

“American Callings” brings together narratives of humanitarian selfhood with disparate public impact. I am not trying to make a causal argument connecting self-writing and public identity. Rather, I am trying to better understand the drive toward self-definition through articulation that Taylor describes.

Taylor describes *Sources of the Self* as an exploration of *the* modern identity, a claim that he does not qualify. What he explores, however, is a very specific, western, privileged identity. In “American Callings” I too explore a specific, limited strand of American identity: the identity of liberal, cosmopolitan American citizens in a position to be able to extend humanitarian aid to someone else. I am interested in how these Americans negotiate their privilege, often drawing on their own resources and position in order to work for the betterment of another group or person; I am interested in the way humanitarian practice leads these Americans to reflect on their own social positions, the meaning and the origin of their own privilege. “American Callings” looks to the late

nineteenth century for early instances of this phenomenon. The late nineteenth century is a rich place for this exploration for several reasons, having to do both with the kind of literature being written during the period and with the relationship between that historical moment and our own. Literature of the late nineteenth century (not only realism but other genres as well) took up questions of progressive social change and justice across racial and ethnic lines as a problem of chief concern. It was, moreover, committed to depiction of ordinary lives and the interiority of ordinary people. In many ways that earlier cultural moment provides a striking parallel to the present; one might even think of the century between Reconstruction and the early twenty-first century “as constituting a long historical moment” in the history of white American liberalism, as Phillip Barrish has suggested (*White Liberal Identity* 5). Racial conflict, the complications brought about by immigration, and U.S. imperial incursions abroad were all challenges American citizens were aware of and concerned with. The Civil War and the abolition movement had left African Americans technically free while the nation was still plagued by racial injustice and the ills associated with rapid economic transformation. At the same time, industrialization and an influx of immigrants contributed to poverty and labor unrest in American cities. Then, in 1898, the U.S. government, under President McKinley’s direction, took military action in Cuba and the Philippines, thereby donning the mantle of empire and incurring responsibilities to distant peoples. Each of these national events—Reconstruction, industrialization, and the exercise of empire—took individual Americans out of their comfort zones as they acted on what they understood to be their duties to people of different classes, races, regions, and nations. As Americans followed that



calling they too experienced—and often wrote about—an inward journey that the outward enabled. As it does today, humanitarian practice then provided a setting not only for meditation on the perplexities of reform, but the perplexities of the self as well.

My analysis of selfhood in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century literature follows from Taylor's claim that, with the secularization of modern society, altruism has become an ethical ideal that structures people's lives, an axis upon which certain individuals create, define, and understand themselves in relation to others (22).<sup>2</sup> I work also from the problematic supposition that "the West is an 'anthropological culture,' in which self-image is constructed within the history of an ethnographic encounter with other cultures" (Siebers, "Ethics" 41). Such a statement inevitably sets off all sorts of alarms. The implication here could be that the white, humanitarian agent uses the ethnic other as a surface upon which to construct her own selfhood. This is an interpretation consistent with the trenchant analyses of Toni Morrison, Priscilla Wald, and Saidiya Hartman. Morrison, Wald, and Hartman explore self-making in nineteenth-century American literature in different ways and with different foci. Where Wald's work looks at stories of self-becoming told by the marginalized alongside more official stories in order to explore what she calls "the limits and boundaries of We the People," Morrison and Hartman direct their attention more explicitly to African-American selfhood

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<sup>2</sup> It is not entirely accurate to say that my analysis "follows from" Taylor's claim, because it is only in the last stages of this project that I discovered *Sources of the Self* (thanks to June Howard's article "What Is Sentimentality?" and to Gretchen Murphy bringing Howard's reference to Taylor to my attention). It would be more accurate to say, therefore, that my own sense of how humanitarianism can be an arena for self-articulation concurs with Taylor's claim. In reading his book now, I realize just how much the intellectual and philosophical history he outlines makes up the sub-strata of my own work. I expect to engage with Taylor's work more fully in later incarnations of this project.

alongside the role blacks have played, both bodily and metaphorically, in shaping white American selfhood (Wald 304).<sup>3</sup> Mindful of the lessons of Morrison and Hartman in particular, I have sought throughout my own study to keep in view the question of whether the kind of self-making my authors underwent followed the colonialist model in which the humanitarian agent empathizes with, and thereby usurps, the identity of the ethnic other he or she is there to serve. My authors' engagement with this difficult issue is uneven. George Ade ridicules the colonialist mode of creating new subjects through mimicry, and Jane Addams was more able than most to foreground reciprocity in her theories of humanitarianism, whereas William Dean Howells, by his own admission, could never quite make his theory of using literature to promote identification among peoples fit his practice. Yet it is just this sort of effort that my dissertation gets at, the pursuit, as Richard Rorty puts it, of "continual refreshment and re-creation of the self, through interaction with selves as unlike itself as possible" ("Human Rights" 132). More than navel-gazing, and distinguishable from colonialist control of the other, the self-reflection this dissertation traces, I argue, gave its authors a purchase on the problem of humanitarian practice. Indeed, the acute self-awareness brought about by the humanitarian dynamic became a method by which agents could attempt to rectify the potentially oppressive shortcomings of that same dynamic. If we, as socially-conscious

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<sup>3</sup> See Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1993); Priscilla Wald, *Constituting Americans: Cultural Anxiety and Narrative Form* (1995); and Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (1997). In a different vein, Joseph Slaughter addresses self-making through world literature. His book *Human Rights, Inc.* (2007) looks at the way the *Bildungsroman* is interwoven with the development of human rights. So although he deals with the self, he is more closely connected to the conversation about the connections between narratives and empathy that I describe below.

academics today, are to fully understand and realize the promise of the multifaceted culture of humanitarianism that I believe we have inherited from the turn of the twentieth century, it is crucial to grapple with the strand of humanitarian selfhood negotiated by the authors I discuss in these pages.

### **“Humanitarianism” as a Term of Analysis**

“American Callings” focuses on “humanitarianism” and not “benevolence,” “philanthropy,” “charity,” or “reform,” because of the specific meanings and associations that adhere to “humanitarianism” and not to the other terms. Humanitarianism, a word that, according to the *OED*, came into use in the nineteenth century, has more specific connotations than a word such as “benevolence.” The *OED* defines “humanitarian” in part as philanthropy writ-large: “Having regard to the interests of humanity or mankind at large; relating to, advocating, or practising humanity or humane action; broadly philanthropic.” The difference in scope matters to my project. Humanitarians, as I will describe them, sought to improve the lot of their fellow human beings on the grounds of their common humanity. A second reason I’ve chosen the term “humanitarianism” over the others has to do with engagement. Where “charity” and “philanthropy” both suggest financial assistance, the latter on a broader scale than the former (one thinks of a church lady tithing her income versus Leland Stanford founding Stanford University), the term “humanitarian” signals more than monetary donations. Third, “humanitarianism” has a global connotation that none of the other terms possesses. This is not only because humanitarianism is defined as an interest in “mankind at large,” but also because of the

way the term has come to be used today. Organizations are “humanitarian” if they provide assistance to development projects in the third world, and aid is “humanitarian” if it intervenes in times of crisis without asking recompense. Humanitarianism is active; it is global.

A cursory look at two uses of the term during the nineteenth century forecasts some of the themes “American Callings” engages. Take, for instance, the short-lived journal *The Humanitarian* (1892-1901), edited by American feminist Victoria Woodhull. Established in order “to discuss all subjects appertaining to the well-being of humanity,” the journal makes clear its vision of humanitarianism: a government (not a democracy) that, knowing what is best for its citizens, imposes its will upon them (3). Two parts eugenics to one part reform—the journal declares that “a humanitarian Government would stigmatize the marriages of the unfit as crimes”—*The Humanitarian* inhabits one frightening pole of the impulse to which it asserts its allegiance (5). This is humanitarianism as imposition, wherein one party, knowing what is best, shapes another to its will—the exact criticism that gets made of humanitarian efforts in the nineteenth century and beyond. Woodhull’s journal, therefore, reminds us of the potential moral blindness that lurks on the edges of the humanitarian impulse. Perhaps nowhere has the destructive nature of that impulse been more evident than in the violence and suffering caused by purportedly “humanitarian” U.S. government interventions in dozens of places in the developing world, the invasion of the Philippines being the most salient example in the time period under my purview. Having lived through that event, policy-makers and public servants in the early twentieth century debated what constituted “humanitarian

diplomacy,” many of them invoking the term “humanitarian” in order to advocate that the U.S. join the League of Nations.<sup>4</sup>

A second aspect of the way the term “humanitarianism” was used at the turn of the twentieth century brings us to its religious connotations, which pose an interesting problem when tracing part of the history of a secular humanitarianism.

“Humanitarianism,” and even “cosmopolitanism,” are terms that often appeared linked with Christian conviction, as the following quotation from an article in *Harper’s* titled “The Need of the World” illustrates:

kindness seeks forever to extend the limits of understanding and sympathy; it is not narrow or secular; it is never puffed up because of its exclusions; it seeks ever to broaden the boundaries of those it can include and serve and understand. It is not national, but cosmopolitan; not imperial, but humanitarian; not class-conscious, but aware of the brotherhood of man, the doctrine which Jesus lived and died to emphasize. (Willcox par. 4)

But the earliest uses of the term that the *OED* cites mark a *transition* from a specifically Christian world view to one centered on humanity: a humanitarian is “One who affirms the humanity (but denies the divinity) of Christ” (this based on usages from 1819). By 1844, uses have shifted: “One who professes the ‘Religion of Humanity’, holding that mankind’s duty is chiefly or wholly comprised in the advancement of the welfare of the

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<sup>4</sup> Even after the United States declined to join, political scientists and historians appealed to the public and to legislators that the U.S. should at the very least cooperate with the organization. These appeals were often made on “humanitarian” grounds, defining the term as one of national, not individual, responsibility. See George W. Wickersham, “America’s Next Step Abroad” (1922).

human race: applied to various schools of thought and practice.” Humanitarianism has changed from theology to action. Louise Collier Willcox, writing in *Harper’s* in 1911, does endorse a specifically Christian brand of humanitarianism, whereas the figures I will look at explicitly chose not to. Even her passage quoted above, however, seems to mark a transition from a doctrinal to a social application of Christianity. In that respect Willcox echoes earlier statements of humanitarianism, such as the appeals both Howells and Addams make to the example of Christ as a secular firebrand for social justice.

Nevertheless, the tradition of secular humanitarianism I am tracing is indebted to Protestantism, both as a matter of form and of literary-cultural tradition. I am deliberately pointing to the Protestant influence on secular humanitarianism and not to a religious influence more generally for several reasons, foremost among them being the difference between a Protestant, as opposed to Catholic, emphasis on conscience and motive. Where Catholicism finds justification through works, Protestantism emphasizes faith. Of course, the figures in my dissertation were all working (in some way) for their fellow humans, whether that meant the hands-on work of practice or the work of writing and thinking. The Social Gospel, to be sure, emphasized working in the world over converting unbelievers. But the preoccupation with the appropriate state of the self among those enlisting in humanitarian labor reveals a complex of feelings that is more indebted to the Protestant focus on individual conscience than it is to the Catholic emphasis on good works. Protestantism still bore strong traces of a hard-line Calvinist emphasis on predestination, the idea that one is chosen by God, not man, for salvation; the mark of the select is on the interior. Second, the humanitarian theorists and practitioners in my study

were all either Protestant, came from Protestant backgrounds, or were affiliated with faiths more akin to Protestantism than to Catholicism. And third, the Protestant ethos has had an indelible effect on American narratives of global prominence and obligation.<sup>5</sup>

In sum, “American Callings” analyzes narratives written both by and about humanitarians. The texts I discuss are stories of individuals who cross boundaries of class, race, ethnicity, and nationality in order to exercise what they see as their duty to other people. One could argue that writing fiction that critically explores humanitarianism, as Howells and Ade both did, is in and of itself a humanitarian act. Though I find this claim to be persuasive, the argument I am making does not depend on hard and fast distinctions between who counts as a humanitarian and who does not. It depends, instead, on the way humanitarianism and selfhood intersect: the importance of one in shaping the other. This is a dynamic that exists in realist novels, romances, satires, and autobiographies alike.

### **American Humanitarianism: Critique and Recuperation**

“American Callings” takes part in a movement in American literary studies over the past fifteen years or so that has sought to find a middle ground between what Gregory Eiselein has dubbed the “social control” approach to thinking about the intersection between literature and progressive change and the “humanist method” (11). Scholars who

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<sup>5</sup> See Emily Rosenberg’s *Spreading the American Dream: American Economic and Cultural Expansion, 1890-1945* (1982) and Lori Ginzberg’s “Global Goals, Local Acts: Grass-Roots Activism in Imperial Narratives” (2001) for discussions of the relationship between Protestant conversion and American ideologies of progress and civilization.

take the former approach, which is influenced by Foucauldian historiography and is “pessimistic about the possibilities for ameliorative social change,” argue that reforms constitute “sinister advancements in social control apparatuses” (Eiselein 176). The latter approach, however, is mistakenly naïve (not to mention outdated) in taking humanitarianism and its practitioners at face value, celebrating any effort at reform without critically examining it. The movement to find a balance between critique and celebration has arisen in response to the dominance of the so-called “social control” approach in literary studies as a whole, a method of reading that draws not only from the work of Foucault but also from Marxism and poststructuralism. Evincing frustration with the dominance of this approach to literature within the profession, Lisa Ruddick has compared the moves current critical theorists make to what Buddhists call “the summoning of the near enemy” (par. 24). As she explains, “any virtue has a bad cousin, a failing that closely resembles the virtue and can be mistaken for it. . . . What current critical theory often does, though, is to collapse the difference, making the good thing look bad by calling it by the name of its near enemy” (par. 24, 26). So in critical theory, for example,

the near enemy of conscience is a punitive self-surveillance; the near enemy of any ideal of human individuality or expressiveness is ‘the Kantian subject,’ which has negative connotations; the near enemy of the heart is the human heart as envisioned by a Victorian sentimental ideology; the near enemy of the feeling of shared humanity is a bourgeois humanism that says we are all exactly the same; the near enemy of a belief in independent rational thought is the specter of the



Cartesian subject, disembodied and severed from all historical context; and so on.

(par. 28)

Ruddick's metaphor is an apt one, and it gets at what I find troubling about some of the most extreme examples of the "social control" approach to literature. Above all, hers is a call for moderation, and her warning should be heeded on both ends of the spectrum: it is equally important not to overcorrect and make the bad thing (imperialism, say) look good. I hope in this dissertation to strike an appropriate balance between the two extremes.

Ruddick's assessment of the state of the profession, while valuable, is a diatribe, and like all diatribes, it lacks subtlety and comprehensiveness. I should also note that she draws her examples mostly from critical theory. Literary criticism, while certainly influenced by theory, is not coterminous with it. All this to say that the "social control" approach to literature has yielded important insights that cannot be dismissed as mere soul-sapping. The prevailing tendency in the field of American realism (a category that does not neatly match all the texts I examine, to be sure, but one whose time period parallels the period I examine) has been to question the kind of "philosophical optimism" that views empathy as the first step to change, instead drawing our attention to the structural limits of a relationship predicated upon the kind of pity that literature can elicit (Howard, *Form and History* 119). Critics such as June Howard and Amy Kaplan, whose books *Form and History in American Literary Naturalism* and *The Social Construction of American Realism* appeared three years apart (1985 and 1988, respectively) and share much in common, endorse the view that literary form is ideological in that it allows

subjects to make sense and order of a disorderly world. For Kaplan, realism's apparent inclusiveness is "a strategy for imagining and managing the threats of social change" (*Social Construction* 10). By collecting various worlds in New York City in one coherent narrative, Kaplan argues, William Dean Howells, for instance, "fixes" the city and its contradictions through aesthetics and form (44). Both Howard and Kaplan suspect that realism's claims to greater inclusiveness and representation are not "a way of imagining the world" that seeks to revolutionize its structures, but rather to normalize them (Howard, *Form and History* ix).<sup>6</sup> Where Kaplan and Howard take on realism and naturalism as their objects of study, historians who look at reform and gender have arrived at similar conclusions, emphasizing the failure of women's reform work to actually change society and demonstrating the way reform movements reinforced the values of domesticity.<sup>7</sup>

Though no single book has emerged to challenge the "social control" approach to literature, overtly signaling a departure from readings like Kaplan's and Howard's, a spate of recent monographs in American literary studies that can be described as

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<sup>6</sup> Other examples of work in this mode include Mark Seltzer's *Henry James and the Art of Power* (1984) and Walter Benn Michaels's *The Gold Standard and the Logic of Naturalism* (1988).

<sup>7</sup> For instance, in "Discourses of Reform in Nineteenth-Century Philanthropic Literature" (1993), Deborah Carlin finds fault with women writers because, she argues, they endorse only surface solutions. Jill Conway's conclusions about nineteenth-century reformers, while also critical, are distinct; a historian, she argues that by embracing values deemed "feminine" (like empathy, compassion, and care-giving), nineteenth-century reformers limited the radicalism of their work and circumscribed their own roles (see "Women Reformers and American Culture, 1870-1930" (1971-2)).

recuperations of humanitarianism and/or reform suggests that a shift is underway.<sup>8</sup> I share with these recent authors many of the same animating impulses, and I add to their conversation by addressing different authors, texts, and time periods. More significantly, “American Callings” brings the problem of self-making in the United States to bear on the intersection between literature and humanitarian practice. It raises the stakes for examinations of humanitarianism’s intersection with literature by showing how literary representations of humanitarianism help shape a certain kind of American identity.

Where literary critics have usefully problematized representations of reform, postcolonial critics in a variety of disciplines have voiced their suspicion of the intentions, methods, and outcomes of humanitarian practice itself.<sup>9</sup> Many have cited paternalism and infantilization as two inevitabilities of humanitarianism, emphasizing the way humanitarianism robs its beneficiaries of agency.<sup>10</sup> Barbara Harlow strikes a

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<sup>8</sup> Gregory Eiselein’s *Literature and Humanitarian Reform in the Civil War Era* (1996), Susan Ryan’s *The Grammar of Good Intentions: Race and the Antebellum Culture of Benevolence* (2003), William Morgan’s *Questionable Charity: Gender, Humanitarianism, and Complicity in U.S. Literary Realism* (2004), and Paul Petrie’s *Conscience and Purpose: Fiction and Social Consciousness in Howells, Jewett, Chesnutt, and Cather* (2005) all investigate the ambiguity of the humanitarian impulse—though with different inflections, objects of study, and vocabularies. In *Utopia and Cosmopolis: Globalization in the Era of American Literary Realism* (1998), Thomas Peyser extends that investigation to an even larger scale, arguing that realist novels explore the possibilities of global interconnection and obligation. By contrast, in *Reforming the World: Social Activism and the Problem of Fiction in Nineteenth-Century America* (2008), María Carla Sánchez doesn’t so much as nod to the idea that one could be *critical* of reform work—perhaps an indication that in at least some cases a non-critical optimism (reminiscent of an earlier period in American Studies) has replaced suspicion as the dominant mode of thinking about reform and its relation to literature.

<sup>9</sup> A closely related, but distinct, conversation has grown up around a critique of humanitarian aid. In a recent *New Yorker* article, Philip Gourevitch shows how humanitarian aid organizations and workers, who operate outside state laws, have not been held accountable for the way their interventions sometimes lead to escalation of the crises they are there to redress.

<sup>10</sup> See Prem Kumar Rajaram’s “Humanitarianism and Representations of the Refugee” (2002) for an analysis of the way Western NGOs exert control over representations of suffering

common chord when she argues that humanitarian intervention bears similarities to imperialism in its disregard for national sovereignty.<sup>11</sup> Others have made similar claims about “development,” which one might call an economic application of humanitarian principles, because it is predicated on a hierarchical view of the world that judges other cultures according to their proximity to a Western standard and style of living.<sup>12</sup>

Economists too have criticized humanitarian aid and development. William Easterly, for instance, inveighs against the harm “the West” has done in its efforts to help “the Rest” in his book *The White Man’s Burden* (2006). By way of Rudyard Kipling’s famous poem, Easterly links present-day humanitarian aid to a nefarious tradition of Western aid imbued not only with an arguably humanitarian enjoinder to “fill full the mouth of Famine / And bid the sickness cease” but also with imperialist aims (qtd. in Easterly 3).

Many of these critics support human rights as a tough-minded alternative to humanitarianism. Human rights, they argue, allow for agency on the part of the person whose rights have been abrogated (it is their *right*, not their privilege, not to live in abject poverty). These rights have a basis in the law and in citizenship; the exercise of human rights does not depend on the munificence of some outside actor. Humanitarianism, in contrast, depends on sentiment and morality, the alert attention of an outsider.

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subjects, thus infantilizing them and taking away their voice. Anthropologist Miriam Ticktin has written about the way humanitarianism promotes and depends upon a limited version of what it means to be human in “Where Ethics and Politics Meet: The Violence of Humanitarianism in France” (2006).

<sup>11</sup> “From the ‘Civilizing Mission’ to ‘Humanitarian Interventionism’: Postmodernism, Writing, and Human Rights” (1996). For a version of that argument articulated in a popular forum, see Anatol Lieven’s article “Humanitarian Action Can Mask an Imperial Agenda,” in the *Financial Times* (2007).

<sup>12</sup> Though she does not endorse this argument herself, see Cheryl McEwan, *Postcolonialism and Development* (2009), for an excellent distillation of this position.

Humanitarianism strikes many of its critics as apolitical because it has been understood to promote feeling over (instead of alongside) action. A moment in American literary history emblematic of this affective posture is Harriet Beecher Stowe's declaration, in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), that the one thing every individual can do to help abolish slavery is to "*feel right*"—"the man or woman who *feels* strongly, healthily and justly, on the great interests of humanity, is a constant benefactor to the human race" (Stowe 624; emphases in original).<sup>13</sup> In its most simplistic form, the exercise of humanitarianism

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<sup>13</sup> Like reform and humanitarianism, sentimentality has met with its fair share of critics and champions, going back at least as far to the realists, who sought to enlarge the circle of human solidarity without relying on the bathos that characterized many of the progressive efforts of mid- and early-nineteenth-century fiction (I thank Phil Barrish for reminding me of this point). Sentimentality's more recent critical history might be said to begin with Ann Douglas's denunciation of it in *The Feminization of American Culture* (1977) and Jane Tompkins's recuperation of the same in *Sensational Designs* (1985), two critical moves that laid out the stakes of the debate for many years to come.

Tompkins grounds her argument in response to the New Critics, whose methods for discussing and assessing literature she challenges. Hers is not an endorsement of sentimentalism *per se*. More than that, it is an endorsement of a new and different way of reading that would put sentimental writers back into the conversation about what American literature means and the work that it does. Even so, some of the moves Tompkins makes when she defends writers like Stowe parallel some of the moves I make here in defending humanitarianism, below. In the most general sense, Tompkins argues that literary critics should not disregard the "*theory of power*" that novels like *Uncle Tom's Cabin* embody, one in which "the very possibility of social action is made dependent on the action taking place in individual hearts" (128, emphasis in original). So too do I defend humanitarianism on the grounds that humane feeling can serve as a complement to more cerebral, human-rights-based action.

Lauren Berlant's trilogy on sentimentality in American culture (*The Anatomy of National Fantasy* (1991), *The Female Complaint* (2008), and *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City* (1997)) is the most salient example of recent, incisive work being done on this topic. Berlant explores the way sentimentality and affect work to inscribe personhood and citizenship in the nineteenth through the twenty-first centuries. Like many of the critics of reform cited above, Berlant finds compassion, sentiment, and feeling to be complicit in the political work of silencing dissent and forestalling radical change:

Compassionate liberalism is, at best, a kind of sandpaper on the surface of the racist monument whose structural and economic solidity endures: in the intimate sphere of femininity a kind of soft supremacy rooted in compassion and coercive identification wants to dissolve all that structure through the work of good intentionality, while busily

relies upon the agency of the humanitarian practitioner while the recipient of aid is in a passive position of gratitude.<sup>14</sup>

In contrast to those who endorse human rights work as an alternative to humanitarian practice, I want to suggest that we—as a society and as a culture—need not replace one with the other. Human rights discourse is not a sturdier, more politically efficacious outgrowth of humanitarianism. Rather, the two discourses work on different registers and have different effects. Humanitarian and human rights discourses and practices do share certain goals with roots in Enlightenment thought, namely, justice for individuals regardless of place of birth or station and the mitigation of suffering. It is, in part, how the two discourses go about pursuing these goals that distinguishes them: the grammar of human rights is cerebral, an exercise of obligation arising “from legal-bureaucratic duties,” whereas humanitarianism is emotional and affective (Wilson and Brown 8). One could argue, further, that human rights attends to structural change (mostly legal and political structures) whereas humanitarianism works within existing structures, contributing to incremental changes in the way human beings think and feel.

One must be careful not to glorify action and the intellect in thinking through this contrast. If one can easily envision a quiescent humanitarianism, more attentive to right

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exoticizing and diminishing the inconvenient and the noncompliant. (*The Female Complaint* 6)

Other important interventions in the debate over sentimentality include Karen Sánchez-Eppler’s essay “Bodily Bonds: The Intersecting Rhetorics of Feminism and Abolition” and Laura Wexler’s “Tender Violence: Literary Eavesdropping, Domestic Fiction, and Educational Reform,” which both appeared in the volume *The Culture of Sentiment: Race, Gender, and Sentimentality in Nineteenth-Century America*, edited by Shirley Samuels (1992).

<sup>14</sup> See Richard Ashby Wilson and Richard D. Brown’s introduction to *Humanitarianism and Suffering: The Mobilization of Empathy* (2009) for a description of the human rights v. humanitarianism contrast, especially pp. 5-9.

feeling than right action, so too can one envision the harm an unfeeling devotion to human rights as an abstract principle might wreak. As a strategy for promoting human equality and mitigating suffering, changing laws without changing sentiments has numerous weak spots. This is what Albion Tourgée, the personage in “American Callings” most akin to today’s human rights activist, discovered in his pursuit of racial justice in Reconstruction North Carolina. Laws take only when societies are ready for them, and humanitarianism’s ethos of care and mutual responsibility can help lay the groundwork for laws promoting social justice. Human rights discourse is valuable because it codifies the obligations states have to their citizens and the obligations the human community has to its members, obligations that transcend national boundaries. As such, it provides a framework for *action*, for what must be done. It does not, however, address *how one should be*. This is the terrain of humanitarianism, which is more an ethos than a politics. Humanitarianism tackles morality in a way that human rights discourse does not. It describes an orientation, an attitude, a way of thinking about one’s relation to and obligation toward others. It can be the emotional and cognitive motor for action in the arena of human rights. It serves as an emotional complement to human rights work, which would be clinical and legalistic without it.

When I say that “American Callings” seeks to recuperate humanitarianism, I do not mean that I believe humanitarianism should replace human rights discourse. Nor do I intend to endorse every facet of humanitarianism, a term that describes a heterogeneous cluster of practices. What I am suggesting, instead, is that if we are to understand the impact the practice of humanitarianism since Reconstruction has had on American

conceptions of identity and selfhood, we need to be willing to engage with humanitarianism from a perspective that is critical, to be sure, but not in the dismissive sense that a knee-jerk reaction to humanitarian practices as de facto neocolonial or paternalistic would be. We need to be critical in the best sense: willing to openly acknowledge what doesn't work, and build on what does.

### **Reaching Further Afield: Sentimental Education, Cosmopolitanism, and Pragmatism**

In his essay "Human Rights, Rationality, and Sentimentality" (1993), Rorty speaks to the question of what value humanitarianism holds for us. He suggests that objections to humanitarianism are

due mainly to a semiconscious realization that, if we hand our hopes for moral progress over to sentiment, we are in effect handing them over to *condescension*. For we shall be relying on those who have the power to change things. . . . We shall have to accept the fact that the fate of the women of Bosnia depends on whether TV journalists manage to do for them what Harriet Beecher Stowe did for black slaves. (129)

Rorty accepts that fact. He is fine with "relying on those who have the power to change things," but because he recognizes how others might not be, he follows this passage with a defense of the role of sentiment and literature. Rorty's invocation of Stowe here works on two levels. First, it metonymically gestures to a central sticking point for those advocates of human rights as opposed to humanitarianism: the vexed relationship



between humanitarianism and sentimentality that I discussed above. But it also gestures to something that, for Rorty at least, is a solution. Rorty argues that, as much as it may tax our patience and offend our sense of justice, our best hope for getting powerful people to cease oppressing others lies in sentiment, not reason. The most effective answer to the question, “Why should I care about a stranger, a person who is no kin to me, a person whose habits I find disgusting?” has never been, “Because kinship and custom are morally irrelevant, irrelevant to the obligations imposed by the recognition of membership in the same species” (133). The kind of answer that gets people to change their minds, their feelings, their responses—and therefore to act differently—is, Rorty argues, “the sort of long, sentimental story which begins ‘Because this is what it is like to be in her situation’” (133). Rorty, in this essay and in many of his other works, argues that story-telling is essential to moral progress.<sup>15</sup> He calls the kind of moral education one receives through reading “sentimental education”: “That sort of education sufficiently acquaints people of different kinds with one another so that they are less tempted to think of those different from themselves as only quasi-human. The goal of this manipulation of sentiment is to expand the reference of the terms ‘our kind of people’ and ‘people like us’” (123).

At the most abstract level, my dissertation engages the question that Rorty addresses in much of his work: what scope of identification is possible among human beings, and how do we encourage the kind of identification that would lead to increased empathy and solidarity and to moral progress? Upon what kinds of claims do calls to tend

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<sup>15</sup> See also *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (1989).

to one's neighbor, near or far, rely? Though I do not (explicitly at least) venture a response to those questions, I am greatly invested in the conversation they have led to among philosophers, literary critics, historians, and anthropologists. The questions have inspired me. I would temper Rorty's endorsement of sentimental education with an insistence that work toward moral progress must proceed in a multi-pronged fashion, by changing laws and building alliances as well as altering perspectives. But Rorty's emphasis on reading as a means to achieve a more just society—even if only a limited means—is relevant to my project, and to the profession in general, because it is a compelling argument for why the humanities matter. This is a pressing issue today, a time when secondary education is becoming ever more pre-professionalized and an emphasis on science and math at the primary level threatens to edge out programs in the arts and humanities.<sup>16</sup>

Recently, questions regarding the relationship between empathy, identification, and global justice have been refracted through two related conversations: one, with roots in eighteenth-century moral philosophy, about narrative empathy (the connection between literary fiction and ethics); the other, with roots back to the ancient world, about the concept of cosmopolitanism and its possibilities. There is considerable overlap between these two conversations, for certain philosophers (e.g., Rorty, Anthony Appiah,

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<sup>16</sup> Martha Nussbaum's recent book *Not for Profit* (2010) takes up this very issue. She writes to a popular audience, pointing to cuts in funding for the humanities in the United States, India, and Europe. In her book she argues that such retrenchment imperils nothing less than prospects for justice on a global scale. She argues for the importance of education in the humanities on the grounds that literature, history, philosophy, and other disciplines help shape citizens of the world, attentive to global concerns and a global community. Nussbaum's earlier, book *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education* (1997) makes a related case for an academic audience.

and Nussbaum) see the former as a means of arriving at the latter. Still, it is worth discussing, however briefly, each conversation on its own terms.

The idea that the narrative imagination can generate empathy that leads people to identify with and feel responsible for distant others dates at least back to eighteenth-century moral philosophers such as Adam Smith and David Hume. Smith explores this phenomenon in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), a text that had a significant influence on nineteenth-century British writers such as George Eliot and Charles Dickens, who used literature to generate empathy in their reading audiences in the hopes that such imaginative identification would lead to real political change. Eliot and Dickens, in turn, influenced the development of American literary realism, a tradition that attempted to “widen the circle of we” (to borrow a phrase from David Hollinger) even as its practitioners staged the problematics of such an intention (and even if present-day critics have argued that realism does just the opposite, as we have seen).<sup>17</sup> Today, critics work through the implications of Smith’s thesis in two closely related ways. Though they do not lack an historical sense, some critics approach the subject of empathy and literature in a somewhat formal and structural way, looking at how literature generates the effect of empathy.<sup>18</sup> Others more pointedly take up the question of the relationship

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<sup>17</sup> See the introductions of Frank Christianson’s *Philanthropy in British and American Fiction: Dickens, Hawthorne, Eliot, and Howells* (2007) and Amanda Claybaugh’s *The Novel of Purpose: Literature and Social Reform in the Anglo-American World* (2007) for overviews of the literary-philosophical connections I am outlining here. Julie Ellison traces this genealogy more expansively in *Cato’s Tears and the Making of Anglo-American Emotion* (1999).

<sup>18</sup> See Karl Morison, *“I Am You”*: *The Hermeneutics of Empathy in Western Literature, Theology, and Art* (1988); Tobin Siebers, *Morals and Stories* (1992); and Suzanne Keen, *Empathy and the Novel* (2007). Susan Sontag’s book *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003) also belongs in this category, even though Sontag deals first and foremost with photography, not

between literature and human rights, thus concentrating on the way that a discourse of human rights grew up alongside the novel.<sup>19</sup> Critics who take part in this general conversation are interested in the way stories may or may not help readers to imagine the suffering of others and to take action in order to alleviate it.

Though certainly not all of the critics I cited invoke this term, for many, the hoped-for outcome of narrative empathy is cosmopolitanism: an identification across national boundaries that “endorses reflective distance from one’s cultural affiliations, a broad understanding of other cultures and customs, and a belief in universal humanity” (Anderson 267).<sup>20</sup> Recently, philosophers, literary critics, historians, and anthropologists have advanced a functional version of cosmopolitanism that rescinds flattening ideas of the universal and parochial versions of the particular alike.<sup>21</sup> “Rooted cosmopolitanism”

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literature, as narrative. A new development in literary studies (called, for short, “neuro lit crit”) pursues this question from a scientific angle, bringing the insights of cognitive science, theory of mind, and evolutionary biology to bear on the practice of reading. (See Patricia Cohen’s *New York Times* article for an overview of the development.)

Elaine Scarry’s seminal *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (1985) takes up this question as well, though she is profoundly skeptical that representations of pain and suffering will ever lead to action. Like critics of humanitarianism, Scarry is hesitant to endorse a mode of intervention that is entirely contingent upon the reader’s decision to act (or not).

<sup>19</sup> See Lynn Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights: A History* (2007); and Joseph Slaughter, *Human Rights, Inc.* (2007) and “Humanitarian Reading” (2009).

<sup>20</sup> See Amanda Anderson’s essay “Cosmopolitanism, Universalism, and the Divided Legacies of Modernity” (1998) for an excellent discussion and genealogy of the term.

<sup>21</sup> In philosophy, see the work of Martha Nussbaum, particularly “Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism” (1996) as well as that of Anthony Appiah, discussed below. In literary studies, see Bruce Robbins’s *Feeling Global* (1999) and Tom Lutz’s *Cosmopolitan Vistas* (2004). In history, see David Hollinger’s essay “How Wide the Circle of the ‘We’? American Intellectuals and the Problem of the Ethnos Since World War II” (1993) and *Postethnic America* (1996) in addition to Jonathan Hansen’s *The Lost Promise of Patriotism* (2003), which redefines patriotism in light of the events of September 11, 2001, as cosmopolitanism. In anthropology, see James Clifford’s essay “Traveling Cultures” (1992). Many of these thinkers—Appiah, Robbins, and Clifford, as well as Rorty—contributed to *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling beyond the*

sees density of local affiliations as the necessary starting point for broader connections (Appiah, *Ethics* 213). In this rendering, cosmopolitanism becomes more of a goal than an identity. The goal is to be able to feel and act upon one's responsibilities to every other human being. One conviction that recent exponents of cosmopolitanism share is a pragmatic realization that one's duty to another on the grounds of shared humanity is not as compelling as a duty one has to another person as an American, as a member of the local neighborhood association, or as a mother. Both intimate and local affiliations matter. Where universalist neo-Kantians like Jürgen Habermas work out cosmopolitanism as a sense of obligation, the scholars whose conversation I join theorize an arguably more complex and nuanced version of the identification, one that begins with the local and works from there to the universal. Though the method by which this identification might occur remains to be fully theorized, many have pointed to literature as one way of promoting familiarity among distant peoples. As Kenneth Burke observes, the very 'global' conditions which call for the identification of all men with one another have at the same time increased the range of human conflict, the incentives to division. It would require sustained rhetorical effort, backed by the imagery of a richly humane and spontaneous poetry, to make us fully sympathize with people in circumstances greatly different from our own. (*Rhetoric of Motives* 34)

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*Nation* (1998), Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins's edited volume, an excellent resource for a variety of critical perspectives on cosmopolitanism.

Anthony Appiah is one philosopher who brings together the insights of critics working through the implications of narrative empathy and the political hopes of those invested in cosmopolitanism. Appiah endorses what he calls “cosmopolitan reading” (a practice that Burke’s and Rorty’s theories support as well, though neither of them uses that phrase), casting imaginative encounters in rhetorical terms by drawing attention to their conversational quality:

Conversation, as I’ve said, is hardly guaranteed to lead to agreement about what to think and feel. Yet we go wrong if we think the point of conversation is to persuade, and imagine it proceeding as a debate, in which points are scored for the Proposition and the Opposition. . . . Conversations across boundaries of identity—whether national, religious, or something else—begin with the sort of imaginative engagement you get when you read a novel or watch a movie or attend to a work of art that speaks from some place other than your own. So I’m using the word “conversation” not only for literal talk but also as a metaphor for engagement with the experience and the ideas of others. And I stress the role of the imagination here because the encounters, properly conducted, are valuable in themselves. Conversation doesn’t have to lead to consensus about anything, especially not values; it’s enough that it helps people get used to one another.

*(Cosmopolitanism 84-85)*

Here Appiah reimagines the possible settings, and outcomes, of human exchanges.

Though the purpose of this passage is not to elevate sentiment over reason, as Rorty does

in his work, Appiah does suspect that reason alone (here represented by the traditional parameters of a debate) cannot change the way people relate to one another.<sup>22</sup>

One might imagine the place the conversations about narrative empathy and cosmopolitanism overlap as the terrain of American pragmatism. William James conceived of pragmatism as a method of knowledge production that could help reconcile the competing epistemologies of science and religion, empiricism and idealism. Truth for James was instrumental, not absolute. New truths emerge as thinking subjects graft new ideas onto old ones, thus expanding their understanding of the world. No one, James believed, throws out old truths and replaces them with new ones entirely. Change was incremental for James, as it was for the humanitarians in “American Callings.” Pragmatism thus helps me to describe the attitude, posture, and method many of the authors in my dissertation espoused and helped to create, one that eschews epistemological philosophy and certainty in favor of a results-oriented practice. It is helpful in illuminating the philosophical implications of the texts I analyze. Written under and animated by its spirit, “American Callings” adds to the story of pragmatism in the United States<sup>23</sup> by finding it in places we haven’t looked for it before: in Tourgée’s

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<sup>22</sup> Appiah returns to this idea over and over in his work. For explorations of cosmopolitan reading, see his essay of the same title, “Cosmopolitan Reading” (2001); “Citizens of the World” (2003); *The Ethics of Identity* (2005), especially the chapter on rooted cosmopolitanism; and *Cosmopolitanism* (2006).

<sup>23</sup> Two major studies of American pragmatism are Cornel West’s *The American Evasion of Philosophy* (1989) and Louis Menand’s *The Metaphysical Club* (2001). West and Menand investigate pragmatism in a top-down method, looking at the intellectual giants who founded and shaped the philosophy. For West, these figures are: Emerson, Charles Peirce, William James, John Dewey, Sidney Hook, C. Wright Mills, W. E. B. Du Bois, Rienhold Niebuhr, Lionel Trilling, W. V. Quine, and Richard Rorty. Menand’s book is, as he puts it, “a story of ideas in

approach to interregional dialogue, George Ade's satires, and the self-writing of ordinary people, from the Thomasites in the Philippines to Peace Corps Volunteers.<sup>24</sup> This is pragmatism from the ground up. The story I tell in these pages shares with pragmatism a focus on the moral life of the individual, voluntarism, cultural relativism, and gradualism.<sup>25</sup> When Peace Corps Volunteers write about the way that service abroad has made them aware of the contingency of their own vocabularies, to borrow a phrase from Rorty, they are reflecting on the way cross-cultural humanitarian practice has changed their ideas about the self and its relationship to culture in a way that makes room for diversity. They are, that is to say, adding their voices to a dialogue about the appropriate state of the self in the humanitarian endeavor that reaches back at least to the late nineteenth century, a dialogue that runs parallel to pragmatism in the development of a certain liberal strand of American identity that persists today.

## Organization

“American Callings” deals with the problem of selfhood and humanitarianism in three distinct historical arenas, each arena characterized by a challenge facing the United States at the turn of the twentieth century that still besets us today. The three historical

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America,” and as such it covers a lot more ground (and people), but his focus is likewise on major figures.

<sup>24</sup> Jane Addams is the person in my dissertation who has been most consistently linked with pragmatism, perhaps, if unfairly, more because of her affiliation with John Dewey than because of her own methods. There have also been a handful of very recent studies reading Howells's novels through the lens of pragmatism. See, in particular, Patrick Dooley's *A Community of Inquiry: Conversations between Classical American Philosophy and Literary Realism* (2008).

<sup>25</sup> These are elements of pragmatism that West emphasizes in *The American Evasion of Philosophy*.



arenas— Reconstruction, industrialization, and empire—tackle the question of how to pursue humanitarian change across racial, ethnic, class, and national lines. Though of course these three arenas encompass a variety of very specific, historically contingent challenges, I feel this scope is justified because there are also ample continuities through all three settings. Specifically, all of the figures I look at, from the fictional characters to the historical human beings, face the challenge of communicating and connecting with people unlike them in order to pursue a project of humanitarian change. This is the largest issue all the chapters address, but each intervenes in more local discussions as well.

In Chapter One, “Howells’s Humanitarian Striver,” I redirect the conversation surrounding William Dean Howells’s exploration of selfhood through humanitarianism by identifying and analyzing a character type in his fiction heretofore slighted: the humanitarian striver. In contrast to Howells’s ironists, who absolve themselves from duty to others because they believe change unattainable, and to the ideologues, who confidently pursue what to them is a clear path to justice, the strivers work toward the social good even though they also partake of the ironists’ skepticism and self-doubt. Through readings of these three humanitarian types in *The Minister’s Charge* (1886), *Annie Kilburn* (1888), and *A Hazard of New Fortunes* (1890), I counter the claim that the ironists are the moral voice of Howells’s novels and argue for the centrality of the striver. By elucidating the striver’s consciousness within the specific, contingent worlds of his novels, I argue, Howells usefully complicated the theories of his Christian socialist contemporaries. Working from William Morgan’s thesis that late-nineteenth-century literature has played an important role in shaping today’s “liberal-humanitarian ethos,”

Chapter One helps us understand that ethos by outlining the contradictions and challenges of humanitarian selfhood, thus setting the stage for subsequent chapters (9).

Chapter Two, “Albion Tourgée’s *A Fool’s Errand* as Rhetorical Humanitarianism,” foregrounds Tourgée’s use of persuasion in his 1879 novel in order to illuminate the way a despairing belief in the necessity of force to implement change intersected with his commitment to rational exchange. While a popular discourse of reunion tried to paper over the wounds of the Civil War, Tourgée, I argue, believed the nation could move forward only after recognizing, not denying, the rifts within. Therefore, he used his novel to examine the cultural gulf separating North and South and to outline a way forward. Arguing that structural change only works when accompanied by a change in perspective, and that a change in perspective can happen only through empathetic understanding, Tourgée aimed *A Fool’s Errand* at recalcitrant white southerners in an attempt to alter their racist beliefs by first persuading them that he understood (even if he did not agree with) their point of view. Tourgée put his theories into practice by writing a romance, thus harnessing pathos, glory, and heroism to the cause of racial justice.

Chapter Three, “Sentiment, Science, and the Self in Jane Addams’s Humanitarianism,” challenges currently prevalent readings of late-nineteenth-century reform, readings that unmask reform’s colonizing effects, by demonstrating how Addams anticipated—and countered—those very critiques in her memoir and essays. Writing during what Laura Wexler has called “sentimentalization’s afterglow,” Addams, I argue, straddled two eras of reform by uniting sentiment and science in her writing (19). She

deployed the scientific discourse surrounding neurasthenia to promote Hull House, the settlement she co-founded, and distinguished her understanding of humanitarianism's impact on the self from the sentimental view by insisting upon truly reciprocal humanitarian encounters and the mutual transformations they yield. At the same time, Addams one-upped scientific reformers by maintaining the importance of "the human impulse" to organized reform efforts, arguing, in effect, that sentiment *is* scientific. Drawing on Darwinian discourse, Addams argued that settlements should be recognized as a humanitarian technology that could generate the mutations—flexibility, humility, cosmopolitanism—that would propel the evolution of a more democratic society.

Coming full circle with the final chapter, I trace the literary-historical arc connecting the teachers who were part of the U.S.'s colonial apparatus in the Philippines to Peace Corps Volunteers. Chapter Four, "Humanitarianism Goes Abroad," analyzes George Ade's satirical "Stories of Benevolent Assimilation" (1899) in conjunction with the memoirs of two teachers, William Freer and Mary Fee. The chapter demonstrates how turn-of-the-century fiction and autobiography centered on the Philippines theorized the practice of cross-cultural humanitarianism and prefigured the identity of the humanitarian adventurer. Where Ade's sketches trace that identity in relief, the memoirs introduce a developmental template for humanitarian-adventurer narratives. My analyses reveal a shift in self-writing generated in an international context, a move from affirming the self by changing foreign others to seeking self-transformation through cross-cultural humanitarianism. In conclusion, I reflect on the evolution of the humanitarian-adventurer

identity through the lens of American pragmatism, a philosophy whose development coincided with the U.S.'s emergence as a world power.

### **Limitations**

The story I tell is a partial one. There are nineteenth-century writers (Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, for instance) whose writing and thought would help flesh out my narrative but who are not part of this study. Temporally, I would like to go back earlier and look at humanitarianism before the Civil War, especially in the writing of Emerson and Thoreau. Geographically, it would be fascinating to pursue more of the transnational connections I begin to explore, looking at more instances of Americans abroad during the period and thinking more about the influence of European fiction and philosophy on people like Howells and Addams.

The story I tell is partial, also, because it is a story of privilege. I do not undertake a wholesale examination of humanitarianism from all angles. Instead, I am interested in analyzing what kind of insight is generated through the uncomfortable situation of a person in a position of privilege reaching out to extend aid to someone in need. Even within that significant limitation, I miss part of the picture in neglecting to consider the way people of education and privilege who were not racial or cultural outsiders worked on behalf of their own communities, as W. E. B. Du Bois and Anna Julia Cooper both did. All of these limitations are also opportunities to think more thoroughly, and differently, about the issues “American Callings” raises. They are openings for further study.

As it stands, “American Callings” allows us to learn from Howells, Addams, Tourgée, Ade, and the Thomasites. This is not to say that they can provide answers to the stubborn issues that are with us still, nor that theirs are the only voices that matter, for they are not. Still, these turn-of-the-century individuals offer us something of value: an assessment of humanitarian practice at an increasingly global, transnational historical moment that can teach us about how it is we have come to be the society we are. Perhaps looking for the openings and possibilities in the story we think we know about the American past can allow us to think about the future in a way that sets us on a different path.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Howells's Humanitarian Striver

If the humanitarian impulse has mostly disappeared from Christmas fiction, I think it has never so generally characterized all fiction. One may refuse to recognize this impulse; one may deny that it is in any greater degree shaping life than ever before, but no one who has the current of literature under his eye can fail to note it there. People are thinking and feeling generously, if not living justly, in our time; it is a day of anxiety to be saved from the curse that is on selfishness, of eager question how others shall be helped, of bold denial that the conditions in which we would fain have rested are sacred or immutable. (Howells, *Criticism and Fiction* 183)

Even if the “humanitarian impulse” did not in fact “characterize [...] all fiction” in the 1890s, when William Dean Howells wrote the above passage for the “Editor’s Study,” it most certainly characterized his. More specifically, three of the novels he wrote between 1886 and 1890—*The Minister’s Charge* (1886), *Annie Kilburn* (1888), and *A Hazard of New Fortunes* (1890), widely recognized as representing the height of Howells’s use of realism to engage social problems—investigate the gap Howells identifies here between “thinking and feeling generously” on the one hand and “living justly” on the other. Ever the realist, in both his fiction and his life, Howells recognized that no matter how compelling or convincing he found the humane visions of Utopian thinkers like Edward Bellamy or radical Christians like Leo Tolstoy, he would have

trouble living up to the ideals so much of him wanted to emulate. Yet the struggle to do so haunted him. When the Reverend David Sewell, of *The Minister's Charge*, says, “the world seems so put together that I believe we ought to think twice before doing a good action,” and when the narrator of *Annie Kilburn* tells us that the protagonist “began to see that one ought to have a conscience about doing good,” Howells introduces a new problem—his own, in fact—into realist fiction: not the right relationship among or between social classes, or even the relationship between representation and reform, but the question of how best to inhabit the role of the humanitarian actor—what the role consists of, the complications of it (*Minister's Charge* 25, *Annie Kilburn* 745). For Howells, this question was intimately related to the enterprise of self-construction because the striving and struggle brought about by the effort of humanitarianism leads to a dynamism lacking in more static, complacent ways of living in the world. By raising the issue of how to be a humanitarian, Howells points us away from the institutions and movements that would guide reform in the late nineteenth-century inward, toward the individual conscience. Such a movement from the institution to the individual as a site of change has its parallel in a movement in representations of selfhood: from the clear ethics and “discrete mental states” of sentimental works like *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to realism's more nuanced depiction of the self and, therefore, its arguably more ambiguous engagement with ethics (Gordon Taylor 5). Drawing on Gordon Taylor's work in *The Passages of Thought* (1969), Thomas Peyser describes this shift as one “from the moral quality of easily distinguished thoughts to the process by which thought itself is produced” (“Other Selves” 20). Reading Howells's 1886-1890 novels through Taylor's

insight allows us to notice Howells's complex engagement with the question and process of self-definition through the dynamics of humanitarian action.

Despite the fact that Howells represents a range of humanitarian personalities, as this chapter will show, most criticism has emphasized those I describe below in more detail as "ironists." Though critics have indeed recognized that other humanitarian types exist, most of them, following Henry Nash Smith, dismiss their importance by noting that the most strident advocates for social justice—Lindau the socialist and Conrad Dryfoos the Christian socialist of *Hazard* and the Reverend Julius Peck of *Annie Kilburn*—die in the novels, their ideals unrealized. Smith argues that, not knowing what to do with these believers, Howells kills them off, an interpretation that does not give Howells much credit for craft and also overlooks the other types of humanitarian characters left standing.<sup>26</sup> In a more recent analysis, Phillip Barrish describes Howells's elucidation of a "realist disposition" among the characters I call ironists—a cosmopolitan, ironic view of the world that, among other things, realizes "the *impossibility* of people of different classes truly understanding one another's lives" (*American Literary Realism* 31). Those in possession of a realist disposition "insist upon their own privileged access to hard, irreducible realities"—for instance, the impossibility of realizing social justice, the challenges of cross-class understanding, or the difficulty of truly helping another human being (Barrish, *American Literary Realism* 8). Barrish's nomenclature suggests that the characters with these qualities represent realism's ethos as a whole, which is why I depart

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<sup>26</sup> See Henry Nash Smith, "Fiction and the American Ideology: The Genesis of Howells' Early Realism," p. 51. William Morgan echoes Nash's interpretation of these characters' demise in his chapter on Howells in *Questionable Charity*, pp. 41-2.



from it to use the term “ironist” instead of “realist”; as I will go on to argue, the ironists represent only one dimension of Howells’s exploration of selfhood. Though the ironists may applaud the humanitarian impulse that Howells argued characterized fiction in the 1890s, they, by and large, are in “bold denial” not of the *immutability* of the conditions that hold people back, as Howells was when he wrote the column, but of their mutability. William Morgan implicitly concurs with Barrish’s emphasis on the ironists when he contrasts realism’s steadfast embrace of failure with pragmatism’s optimism:

realism’s emphasis on failure, error, and helplessness differentiates it from the optimism about a contingent understanding of democratic ethics implicit to most forms of pragmatism. . . . literary realism refrains from endorsing even contingent answers to the problems of how to translate worn-out universal ideals into a new antifoundational epistemology for selfhood. (11)

In contrast to what Morgan calls Howells’s “antifoundational openness,” Peyser argues that it is because of Howells’s discomfort with the fragmented, modern self that he turns to realism, using it as a tool to help him to rein in and define the self, to give it a clear foundation (Morgan 54).<sup>27</sup> For Howells, “consciousness becomes a largely self-regulating system” built around the dictates of the ought (Peyser 25). In sum, though a number of critics are interested in the way moral consciousness plays a part in Howells’s efforts to construct and refine the self, they disagree on how that happens.

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<sup>27</sup> In “Those Other Selves: Consciousness in the 1890 Publications of Howells and the James Brothers,” Peyser finds Howells’s understanding of selfhood to be considerably less radical than Henry and William James’s. Whereas the Jameses are comfortable with the idea of a fragmented, moment-to-moment experience of the self and stress being over doing as the defining experience of consciousness, Howells, Peyser asserts, sought to solidify the self and emphasized action over contemplation.

What has heretofore been missing in discussions of Howells's engagement with selfhood along a humanitarian axis is a detailed examination of what that humanitarian self looks like: how Howells dramatizes the contradictions, challenges, and problems facing the humanitarian actor. In counterpoint to critics who emphasize the ironists above other characters, this chapter will demonstrate that when Howells employed realism to explore the issue of humanitarian action, both he and his characters were often more optimistic, meliorist, and willing to fight the good fight than the dominance of the ironist figures in the criticism would suggest. The ironists are not the locus of Howells's engagement with the complexity of humanitarian selfhood; indeed, Howells uses a range of characters to think through humanitarian action and the influence it has on forming the self. If Morgan and Barrish neglect the import of Howells's more earnest, striving characters, Peyser, on the other hand, may go too far in the other direction when he asserts that Howells conceived of his purpose as forcing the self "into the conventional, the habitual, moral mold" ("Other Selves" 35).

As a salutary complement to these approaches, I will argue that a skeptical view of the world and of one's best intentions is a necessary component of Howells's humanitarian actor, for a skeptical inclination checks the overwrought earnestness and hubris that can hamstring humanitarian action and inhibit the growth of the self. We need to do more to consider the psychological dimensions of literary realism, particularly in the case of Howells, for whom writing served the purpose of working through conflicted and nuanced feelings about his place in the struggles for social justice that characterized his historical moment. Like Morgan, I am convinced that "U.S. literary realism plays an

unheroic yet important role in transmitting a liberal-humanitarian ethos for citizenship from the Age of Enlightenment to the twentieth century” (9). That is one reason why it is important not to shortchange our understanding of that “liberal-humanitarian ethos,” either by neglecting the complexity of Howells’s struggle to inhabit that “moral mold” or by focusing on the world-weary resignation of the ironists. Both keep us from noticing and engaging with a strong, and complex, current in Howells’s life and work: the belief that an individual could, and should, contribute to building a more just, humane society. Picking up on the two strands of criticism explained above, this chapter will go further and into more detail about how exactly the humanitarian imperative helps to define the contours of the self in Howells’s fiction. I will show that by portraying a range of humanitarian characters, from those utterly convinced that they have found the just path to those too jaded to believe one exists, the fiction of Howells’s 1886-1890 period dwells in a productive space between the ideal and the real, the goal and the status quo, the humanitarian perfectionist and the flawed man. With the humanitarian striver, most fully exemplified by his character Annie Kilburn, Howells explores what it means to be a humanitarian actor. Through an elucidation of the several types of humanitarian in Howells’s novels and a close focus on the striver, I will show that there is more to Howells’s engagement with humanitarianism than ironic detachment while also contributing to an ongoing conversation about humanitarianism, its pitfalls and its promises.

This chapter, then, embodies the impetus of “American Callings” as a whole, namely, the will to recognize, recover, and find value in the always-already-compromised

figure of the humanitarian. More locally, it will build on Peyser's insights about Howells's embrace of action over contemplation, thus serving as a corrective to criticism that has privileged a detached, ironic attitude toward humanitarian change in Howells's fiction. I will begin by describing the political, religious, and philosophical influences on Howells during the turbulent period of 1886-1890, during which he wrote the three novels that are the focus of this chapter. I will then go on to explain what realist fiction offered Howells that made him choose it, not romance, as a potent means to contribute to the conversation about humanitarianism among the thinkers he so admired. Then, for the bulk of the chapter, I will identify and explore three humanitarian types in *The Minister's Charge*, *Annie Kilburn*, and *A Hazard of New Fortunes*: the ideologues, those who confidently believe in a clear (usually Christian socialist) path to humanitarian change; the ironists, those who believe change is necessary but are resigned to the reality that it is unattainable; and the strivers, who, with their earnest desire to engage in humanitarian action—to do something, to act, to care, even despite their awareness that their efforts might not be enough—fall in between these two poles. My exploration of these types will proceed from the recognition that they are not as clear-cut as my taxonomy suggests; a striver can be an ideologue; an ironist can strive. As Basil March, the organizing consciousness of *Hazard*, observes to his wife, Isabel, "There's the making of several characters in each of us; we *are* each several characters, and sometimes this character has the lead in us, and sometimes that" (486). Still, the taxonomy is a way to highlight disparate humanitarianisms in Howells, thereby bringing attention to them. Doing so helps to complicate the notion that selfhood for Howells is a self-disciplining process

undertaken by the will in response to a humanitarian imperative, as Peyser asserts, while at the same time giving overdue attention to selves who are not ironists through and through. Though I investigate three types of what I call the humanitarian self, my focus will be on the strivers, the most overlooked type, most fully represented in *Annie Kilburn*.

### **Humanitarian Influences and Goals**

Howells's humanitarian impulses grew out of a number of religious influences, including his grandfather's Quaker faith, his parents' Swedenborgian convictions, and the Methodism of his extended family. Most of Howells's biographers seem to agree that while as an adult he never subscribed fully to any religious faith, he maintained a strong tug toward religious thought, a fascination with the ideals of Christianity and the Christ figure. Always, Howells eschewed any kind of moral creed. His interest in Christianity proceeded from a practical, of-this-world concern for the well-being of others, not out of any belief in redemption, salvation, or the afterlife. During the 1886-1890 period, a cluster of events awakened Howells's latent religiosity, forcing him to apply his humanitarian convictions to the world around him. In Haymarket Square, Chicago, in May 1886, a peaceful strike for the eight-hour work day turned violent, attracting the country's attention and its outrage. Someone in the crowd detonated a bomb that killed eight of the police officers who were trying to break up the strike. Though Howells decried the strikers' use of violence, he sympathized with their plight, so much so that in November, 1887, he—alone among major American authors—published a letter in the *New York Tribune* seeking clemency for the so-called anarchists. It was denied. That

same year, in July, Howells reviewed Tolstoy's *Que Faire?* in the "Editor's Study," thereby announcing his allegiance to the radical Christian socialism of the great Russian writer. Also during this period, Howells's daughter Winifred was at the height of her suffering from an undiagnosed ailment. She died in 1889.

The public crisis of the anarchists' execution and the private crisis of Winifred's death after years of suffering coincided with a fertile period of writing and intense religious and political searching for Howells. In an 1898 interview, Howells recalled some of the content of that searching:

It was ten years ago . . . that I first became interested in the creed of Socialism. I was in Buffalo when Laurence Gronlund lectured there before the Fortnightly Club. Through this address I was led to read his book, "The Cooperative Commonwealth," and Kirkup's article in the Encyclopedia Britannica. After I read the "Fabian Essays"; I was greatly influenced also by a number of William Morris's tracts. The greatest influence, however, came to me through reading Tolstoi. (qtd. in Cady 81)

Like Tolstoy, Howells was interested in socialism not just as a material, economic philosophy, but as a spiritual one as well. During 1889-90, a year the author spent in Boston, he was affiliated with a mission of the Episcopal church called the Church of the Carpenter, led by the Reverend William Dwight Porter Bliss.<sup>28</sup> The mission emphasized, as many of Howells's ideologue characters did and would, emulating the life of Christ

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<sup>28</sup> See Clara and Rudolf Kirk's article "Howells and the Church of the Carpenter" for the most complete description of Howells's involvement with the group.

over adhering to any strict creed. As Richard Ely, a contributor to the Christian socialist journal *The Dawn*, explained in his book *The Social Aspects of Christianity* (1889), Christian socialists like the communicants of the Church of the Carpenter “must come into real, living contact, into a sort of oneness with people before we can give to them and receive from them needed help” (qtd. in Kirk 196). This strand of thought gets borne out by Tolstoy’s writing and life and by Howells’s ideologue characters, though not by Howells himself. Instead, he wrote. Clara and Rudolf Kirk observe that his

association with both organizations [the Nationalists and the Christian Socialists] helped Howells turn words into deeds, which for him took the form of social-religious novels and essays expressing his belief in the possible amelioration of civic evils by simply accepting Christianity—as Bliss invited his hearers to do—as “a life, not a creed, not a philosophy; a battle, not a dream.” (204)

Turning words into more words was the deed Howells was most suited to perform.

Writing realist novels became Howells’s contribution to the battle of living out a Christian perspective.

By depicting the contradictions and struggles of individuals who sought to take part in the battle Bliss identified to his parishioners, Howells contributed to the conversation in which Gronlund, Bellamy, Morris, Bliss, and Tolstoy were all engaged. To their sermons, essays, and advocacy work Howells added his unique exploration of the principles they extolled: humanitarianism in the particular, theory through fiction. Writing novels about humanitarian action is a distinctly verbal kind of deed—writing about doing rather than doing. Howells, however, added life and texture to the words of

his fellow philosophical and religious travelers, adapting their prescriptions to specific, contingent, particular settings. Realism, Howells wrote, “behooves us to know and understand” “human nature and the social fabric” so that “we may deal justly with ourselves and with one another” (*Criticism and Fiction* 94-5).<sup>29</sup> Howells believed that fiction can “widen the bounds of sympathy,” helping readers to connect with, empathize with, and understand people unlike themselves (*Criticism and Fiction* 15). Paul Petrie observes that Howells espoused a “social-ethical aesthetic” driven by the belief that “the chief end of literature is to perform a public role of cultural mediation, enlarging the sphere of social understanding and sympathy by employing fiction as a tool for communication across the cultural boundaries dividing classes, regions, and ethnicities in the late-nineteenth-century United States” (x). As I will show, Howells’s actual practice does not live up to this ideal. Nevertheless, recognizing that communicating across cultural boundaries was Howells’s goal, even if it was unmet, is crucial to understanding his humanitarian striving. Howells wrote novels to put his own theories into action. He believed that “men are more like than unlike one another: let us make them know one another better, that they may be all humbled and strengthened with a sense of their fraternity” (*Criticism and Fiction* 188). This is a goal that Conrad Dryfoos, of *Hazard*, endorses when he encourages Basil March to contribute columns on New York life to

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<sup>29</sup> Scholars of nineteenth-century humanitarianism and philanthropy have concurred with Howells’s assertion of realism’s relation to reform: “both realism and reformist writing sought to make visible what had been invisible and to draw attention to what had gone unseen,” writes Amanda Claybaugh, while Frank Christianson observes that “literary realism came into being as a response to ongoing but newly pressing dilemmas regarding the relationship between sociality and morality and the function of literary representation in imagining a society based on evolving and unstable class relationships” (43, 32).



*Every Other Week*, the magazine that serves as the novel's figurative linchpin. Conrad says to Basil, "If you can make the comfortable people understand how the uncomfortable people live, it will be a very good thing, Mr. March. Sometimes it seems to me that the only trouble is that we don't know one another well enough; and that the first thing is to do this" (147).

With his fervent belief that fiction can open up new realms of experience, Howells anticipates and endorses both Anthony Appiah's notion of cosmopolitan reading and Richard Rorty's idea of sentimental education, two closely-related approaches to "widening the circle of we," in David Hollinger's phrase, that I introduced in the Introduction.<sup>30</sup> Appiah promotes reading literature as a way of relating to and understanding other kinds of humans as they respond in particular ways to particular circumstances. He believes that because it dwells in the contingent, literature can help us find common ground, not at the level of principle or essence, but through our response to specific circumstances. This is possible, Appiah says, because humans share an ability to respond to narrative logic, to stories. Both Appiah and Rorty see literature as capable of promoting empathetic identification, which in itself promotes solidarity and community across lines of class, race, ethnicity, and nation.

There is a significant distinction to be made, however, between the kind of empathetic work Howells's novels accomplish and what Appiah, Rorty, and Howells himself would have novels do. To be sure, Howells encourages identification with his

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<sup>30</sup> See Appiah, "Cosmopolitan Reading," and Rorty, "Human Rights, Rationality, and Sentimentality."

characters. In his own critical theory, he endorses identification across class lines so that human kind's "sense of their fraternity" might be strengthened (*Criticism and Fiction* 188). In practice, however, the kind of character that Howells encourages identification with is, more often than not, the white, liberal protagonist: the humanitarian actor. Though he may have wanted to, Howells does not widen the "circle of we" by depicting protagonists who come from the working class, the urban center, or an immigrant community; his rare attempts to do so, as Henry Wonham and Melanie Dawson have shown, are of limited success, especially as compared to his in-depth exploration of the white, liberal consciousness.<sup>31</sup> What Howells accomplishes, instead, is an exploration of the humanitarian self, the actor who, because he or she seeks to identify with the Other, takes steps to turn sentiment into action. Howells's humanitarians are those who, more likely than not, have already been subject to the kind of sentimental education that Rorty outlines. That initial act of identification, however, happens off the page, before the story. Howells picks up where characters take sentiment and turn it into action, or try to.

Howells's 1886-1890 novels were not the only, or even the most obvious, of Howells's responses to Christian socialist thought. Beginning in 1892, Howells published

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<sup>31</sup> In "Writing Realism, Policing Consciousness: Howells and the Black Body," Henry B. Wonham applies Toni Morrison's insights about the Africanist presence in American fiction to Howells's realism through an analysis of *An Imperative Duty* and shows, convincingly, that while Howells may include black or ethnic characters in his novels, the purpose is not to explore their consciousness but to use the inscrutability of those Others' subjectivities as a canvas on which to explore white, liberal identity. While she recognizes that "during the 1886-1892 time frame . . . Howells' fiction is most invested in the possibility of cross-class evocations of empathy," Melanie Dawson, in "Searching for 'Common Ground': Class, Sympathy, and Perspective in Howells' Social Fiction," concludes that Howells is ultimately unsuccessful at depicting the consciousness of any mind outside the middle class (92). She focuses on *The Minister's Charge* and Howells's attempt to narrate from the point of view of Lemuel Barker.

a sequence of fictional letters written by a traveler from a place called Altruria. The letters, published in the magazine *The Cosmopolitan*, describe a series of encounters and conversations between Aristides Homos, the traveler, and Mr. Twelvemough, the American author who befriends him. The traveler, who hails from a world where society is just, equal, and well-ordered, reacts with astonishment at the way things are done in the United States, and the Americans react with astonishment at this odd traveler who does unaccountable things, like shake hands with porters or ask how the working man spends his leisure time (what leisure time?). In these sketches, arguably Howells's most pointed literary effort to deal with the problem of social justice, the Altrurian innocently exposes the malignant core of the American economic and social systems. The Altrurian letters are social commentary, not realism. The traveler explains how things are in his Utopia, Altruria, and allows the reader no room for dissent. Though the Americans question him, it becomes obvious to the reader that Homos's take is more just, and more reasonable, than theirs. As far as using literature to explore social systems goes, it's a bit of a cheat to lay out a program for idealistic change without any hint that it doesn't work in practice. To the contrary: Altruria, as Homos describes it, emerges as an acceptable and workable ideal.

Howells himself recognized these letters to be distinct from his realist fiction, calling them a romance. And though he spent much of his career decrying the romance, he also wrote, "Of the finer kinds of romance, as distinguished from the novel, I would even encourage the writing"—one can only assume that he considered his Altrurian letters to be of this "finer kind"—"though it is one of the hard conditions of romance that

its personages starting with a *parti pris* can rarely be characters with a living growth, but are apt to be types, limited to the expression of one principle, simple, elemental, lacking the God-given complexity of motive which we find in all the human beings we know” (*Criticism and Fiction* 115). It is the distinction Howells notes here—the fact that in romance, the characters lack “God-given complexity of motive”—that makes realist fiction suited to a purpose distinct from what theory, including theory communicated through the romance, can explore. The Altrurian letters allowed Howells to theorize, and fantasize, about a new set of social arrangements that could bring about a more just and egalitarian world. Realism, on the other hand, helped him deal with a different problem, for unlike romance, realism allows for humanitarian convictions and inclinations to be played out (not always successfully) in the context of the quotidian. The humanitarian strivers in Howells’s fiction were precisely those characters “with a living growth” that could chafe against, and work beyond, the ironists’ skepticism and the ideologues’ certainty.

If Howells was ever strident, it was in his defense and championing of realism, which he believed enlisted itself in the cause of justice by dwelling in the thorny, complicated, contradictory world of people’s lives. Using fiction to explore how characters meet with difficulty as they struggle to apply the lessons of Christian socialist theory and exercise their humanitarian impulses was a fitting choice for Howells’s anti-doctrinal temperament. As his biographer Edwin Cady notes, Howells never became, “in the ordinary churchly sense,” a Christian:

Theologically, metaphysically, intellectually, even perhaps spiritually, he remained an agnostic. He could commit himself, could give himself away, only sporadically and impermanently. That gave him certain advantages both in life and art. It kept him from saintly arrogance, the fanatic pride of formal humility and absolute knowledge. It kept him focused on persons and their troubles, kept him tolerant and humane. It also probably denied him great rewards of personal consolation and the creative potency of assured faith. As a realist he was deprived of the romantic's faith in the sublimity of his ego, and as an agnostic deprived of the believer's faith in the support of the cosmos. (9)

As this passage suggests, Howells's openness, his rejection of a creed, and the instability of his beliefs—he is at one moment an ideologue, the next a striver, and then an ironist, before see-sawing back again—all find a home in realist fiction. There, the narrative structure at once illuminates distinct humanitarian types before complicating the distinctions among them. To quote Cady again, "Howells' ideal was the fiction which could empower [sic] the reader's imagination to lie intelligently in a world of keenly delicate perceptions, of fine-spun and therefore richly complex experiences" (128).

Realism gave Howells a set of tools, a purchase on the problem of humanitarian action, that the socialist and Christian socialist thinkers whose ideas so influenced him lacked. In the next section I will introduce and explore the first of the humanitarian types in Howells's fiction: the ideologue. Of all of the instantiations of the humanitarian selves in Howells's fiction, the ideologue is perhaps the most cartoonish and the most romantic; though ideologues garner the respect and admiration of other humanitarian actors in

Howells's fiction, they are also the flattest and most static of Howells's characters. Like the ethnic or working class subject in Howells's fiction, the ideologues exist to help the more thoughtful, introspective humanitarian selves come into recognition of their goals, abilities, and limits.

### **Ideologues**

The ideologues in Howells's 1886-1890 novels are those characters who confidently espouse and preach an economically redistributive world view, as well as those who subscribe to and seek to implement theories of social betterment. Unlike the ironists and the strivers, an exploration of whom follows this section, the ideologues lack the kind of rumination and introspection that leads to self-doubt. They are, thus, some of the least complex characters in Howells's fiction. Their purpose is to serve as catalysts. Their example prompts other characters to reflect on their actions and reexamine their beliefs so that the ideologues become a spur to self-development and self-creation.

Tolstoy is the ideologues' common root. It is through characters like Lindau, the socialist of *Hazard*, and Peck, the Christian-socialist minister in *Annie Kilburn*, that we see Howells using fiction to work through his complicated response to Tolstoy, a response that can profitably be described as the confrontation between literalism and irony. In his April, 1886, review of *Que Faire?*, Howells wrote that Tolstoy is "fully a believer in Christianity; too fully, perhaps, for those who believe it ought to be believed, but not that it ought to be practiced. He supposes that Jesus Christ, being divinely sent to make God known to man, was serious when He preached meekness, submission, poverty,

forgiveness, charity, and self-denial” (“Editor’s Study” 1886 808). Howells thus underscores the gap between the literal application of theology—Jesus meant what he said—and the lackadaisical application of Christian teaching that he believed many American Christians of his time made do with. For Howells, it was indisputable that Tolstoy, not those who were Christians in name alone, was the true inheritor of the life and example of Christ: “Work, equality, brotherhood, are his ideals; and whatever may be said in ridicule or argument, it cannot be denied that the life he is living is in literal fulfillment of the teachings of Jesus Christ” (“Editor’s Study” 1887 317). Tolstoy’s literalism “must of course strike Christians who kill, and litigate, and divorce, and truckle to rank, and hate, and heap up riches, as very odd; but none of the sort who take Christ in the ironical way can help being startled by the attitude of this literalist, and suffering perhaps some pangs of disagreeable self-question” (“Editor’s Study” 1886 808). Part of Howells, the part that reached out in hope and optimism, responded to the literalism of Tolstoy’s example. But another part stepped back, doubtful and afraid. Moved, even convinced, by Tolstoy, Howells did not follow his (literal) example.<sup>32</sup> Instead, he struggled with the “pangs of disagreeable self-question” that Tolstoy’s writing and life awoke in him, and he used fiction to probe the intersections of literalism and irony, complacency and striving. Tolstoy’s example became an irritant, a nagging voice that led Howells to new depths of self-understanding, which he plumbed through his fiction.

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<sup>32</sup> It is important to note (and I thank Phil Barrish for reminding me of this) that Howells questioned even Tolstoy’s “literal” application of his social theories, for Tolstoy’s wife and agent still made sure that royalties were collected on Tolstoy’s novels even as the author himself embraced poverty. See the recent film *The Last Station* (2009) for a sympathetic rendering of Sophia Tolstoy’s fight to see that Tolstoy not turn his profits over to the Russian people.

If Tolstoy's example served as a spur to Howells, so too do Howells's ideologue characters provide an example to the strivers and ironists who interact with them. A *Hazard of New Fortunes*, Howells's most cosmopolitan novel, features a menagerie of ideologue characters from all walks of life. The most vocal, if the least articulate, is Lindau, an old friend of Basil March's whom the protagonist encounters anew in a New York restaurant. Lindau is a German immigrant who used to teach the young Basil his native language; now he has become a socialist who lives among the poor not out of necessity, but in an attempt to realize his ideals. He is a fervid anti-capitalist, but one whose speeches against the injustice of a society where "no man that works with his hands among you has the liberty to pursue his happiness" are rendered in a thick dialect that makes them come across more as ravings than as astute political observations (318). Still, his choices align him with the example of Tolstoy. He tells Basil that he lives his life so as not to forget the existence of poverty:

You must see it all the time—see it, hear it, smell it, taste it—or you forget it. That is what I come here for. I was becoming a bloated aristocrat. I thought I was not like these people down here, when I come down once to look around; I thought I must be something else, and so I said I better take myself in time, and I come here among my brothers—the beggars and the thieves! (190)

Lindau takes the active step of the literalist: making sure the poor are always with him. In this goal he is joined by Conrad Dryfoos, who works among the poor on the Lower East Side of Manhattan and is sympathetic with the workers whose strike winds up claiming both his life and Lindau's. Conrad, a "humanitarian dreamer," is the son of Jacob



Dryfoos, the natural gas tycoon whose new fortune funds *Every Other Week* (*Hazard* 324). Conrad follows not in his father's capitalist footsteps, but in Tolstoy's, Lindau's, and Christ's. In a conversation with Conrad about a dispute between Lindau and Dryfoos, senior, Basil realizes that the young man sides with the socialist:

“Why, bless my soul!” cried March. “Do *you* agree with Lindau?”

“I agree with the Lord Jesus Christ,” said the young man, solemnly, and a strange light, of exaltation, of fanaticism, came into his wide blue eyes. “And I believe he meant the kingdom of heaven upon this earth, as well as in the skies.”

(350)

Here again we see the contrast between the literal and the ironic. Conrad refuses the complacency that believes justice will be served in the afterlife; he insists on it in the present. His contribution to alleviating inequity is to work among the power of the Lower East Side. Like Lindau, he also insists on dwelling amid them. As his mother translates Conrad's convictions: “You got to give your time, and your knowledge, and your love—I don't know what all—you got to give *yourself*, if you expect to help ‘em. That's what Coonrod says” (232).

*The Minister's Charge*, the earliest among the triad of novels I look at in this chapter, does not have the same kind of fully-developed ideologue characters that *Hazard* does, but we catch a glimpse of Tolstoyian influence in David Sewell, the minister whose sermon on “complicity” marks the moral climax of the novel. Sewell is something like Tolstoy, and Conrad, in his emphasis on human relations on this earth, deed over creed; the narrator tells us that “he was rather faithfuller and busier in these than he might have

been if he had not laid so much stress upon duties of all sorts, and so little upon beliefs” (5). But self-doubt and irony nag at Sewell, making him more ironist than ideologue. It is in another minister that the ideologue type finds its fullest expression: the Reverend Julius Peck, of *Annie Kilburn*. Howells grants Peck eloquence (and a forum for that eloquence) that forces readers to contend with his ideas in a way that they are not asked to contend with Lindau’s. Peck is the fictional character who most fully subscribes to every aspect of ideologue behavior: living with the poor, literally applying Christ’s teachings, and struggling for justice in this world. He is to Annie what Tolstoy was to Howells. Reasoning away Annie’s well-intended desire to do some good for the poor from her position as a wealthy woman, Peck tells her that “sympathy—common feeling—the sense of fraternity—can spring only from like experiences, like hopes, like fears. And money cannot buy these” (684). With his rueful dismissal of humanitarian charity as it is commonly practiced among New England’s upper classes, Peck demands more of his congregants, as his sermon on equality, liberty, patriotism, and charity makes evident:

. . . equality is the perfect work, the evolution of liberty. Patriotism has been the virtue which has secured an image of brotherhood, rude and imperfect, to large numbers of men within certain limits, but nationality must perish before the universal ideal of fraternity is realised. Charity is the holiest of the agencies which have hitherto wrought to redeem the race from savagery and despair; but there is something holier yet than charity, something higher, something purer and further from selfishness, something into which charity shall willingly grow and cease, and that is justice. Not the justice of our Christless codes, with their penalties, but

the instinct of righteous shame which, however dumbly, however obscurely, stirs in every honest man's heart when his superfluity is confronted with another's destitution, and which is destined to increase in power till it becomes the social as well as the individual conscience. Then, in the truly Christian state, there shall be no more asking and no more giving, no more gratitude and no more merit, no more charity, but only and evermore justice; all shall share alike, and want and luxury and killing toil and heartless indolence shall all cease together. (804)

Looking forward to the day when "there shall be no more asking and no more giving," Peck casts his sight beyond humanitarianism to imagine a world that doesn't need it at all, imagining, in other words, a world much like the Altruria that Howells would depict a few years later in the pages of *The Cosmopolitan*. Rather than flatter Annie's do-gooder instincts, Peck argues that humanitarianism thrives on inequality; it can only exist when one person has more than another. As he tells Annie,

it is difficult to help others when we cease to need help ourselves. . . . as he prospers he withdraws from them and loses their point of view. Then when he offers help, it is not as a brother of those who need it, but a patron, an agent of the false state of things in which want is possible; and his help is not an impulse of the love that ought to bind us all together, but a compromise proposed by iniquitous social conditions, a peace-offering to his own guilty consciousness of his share in the wrong. (755)

Peck serves as something of an ethical super-ego in *Annie Kilburn* by refusing to applaud Annie's efforts to put her humanitarian impulses into practice. He is the stern voice that

reminds her, and Howells along with her, that a society that requires the humanitarian self is already broken.

A secondary character in *Annie Kilburn*, the bourgeois business-owner Mr. Gerrish, says of Peck, “He is not a practical man—not a man of the world” (698). Gerrish is one of the avowed Christians whom Howells might describe as truckling to rank and heaping up riches (per his review of *Que Faire?*). Gerrish’s take on Peck, therefore, is meant to be taken ironically, as a meaningful misunderstanding of Peck’s application of Christian thought. In Howells’s eyes (and likely in Tolstoy’s, too, one imagines), Peck is very much a man of the world because he applies Christian theology to *this* world, not the next. Gerrish’s description of Peck exposes his ignorance of what Peck is all about while at the same time introducing an element of doubt about Peck’s path: perhaps his implementation of Christian socialist ideology is not as effective—not as practical—as it might be. Like Tolstoy, who famously neglected his wife and children in his mission to live out his humanitarian vision, Peck neglects his young daughter, Idella. His theory doesn’t *do* much in the novel, except—and this is significant—that it has an effect on those around him, those who listen. It has an effect on Annie.

Characters like Peck, Lindau, and Conrad Dryfoos are flat and static because they do not possess the kind of consciousness that interested Howells the most. Instead, they serve as tools in the development of that kind of consciousness. Peyser suggests that Howells looked to social pressure for restraints upon “the vagueness of consciousness” and that he had a “belief in the healthiness of self-accusation” in the development of a self (“Other Selves” 28). I would amend this observation only slightly to say that it is not

social pressure, per se, that exercises a restraining or a reflective influence on Howells's most complex selves, but rather, a current of social thought that goes *against* dominant social mores: Christian socialist thought, as represented by the ideologue characters. The example those characters set promotes self-accusation among the strivers, thus leading to a version of humanitarian selfhood more nuanced than that of the ideologues. Picking up on Henry Wonham's point that Howells's representation of blackness "was motivated by an impulse to explore what Howells himself might call 'white thinking and white feeling,'" I would like to suggest that his representation of the ideologue serves an analogous function (720).

The evolution of Margaret Vance, a minor character in *Hazard*, provides one example of the way Howells uses ideologues to shape the trajectory of the humanitarian self. Vance is a young, attractive, bright woman from a good family. The narrator of *Hazard* tells us that "she had a repute for good works which was out of proportion to the works, as it always is, but she was really active in that way, under the vague obligation, which we now all feel, to be helpful" (246). Like Conrad Dryfoos, Peck, and Lindau, Margaret Vance subscribes to the version of Christianity that Tolstoy endorsed, "the early ideals of Christian brotherhood" (246). Yet Vance is not a flat character in the way her fellow believers are; as the narrator notes above, her reputation exceeded her works. There is room for conflict here, the interesting inconsistency of a self who aspires to be one way but is, in fact, another. The narrator tells us that Vance "was like every one else, a congeries of contradictions and inconsistencies, but obedient to the general expectation of what a girl of her position must and must not finally be" (254). By the end of the

novel, though, Vance has joined an Episcopal sisterhood and has devoted herself to working amid the poor from whom Conrad Dryfoos was taken too soon. Vance is a character who behaves as an ideologue might, but Howells gives us a perspective on her motivation and decision-making that he does not provide for the ideologues I discuss above. When, for instance, Vance takes the seemingly innocuous step of paying a visit to the Dryfoos sisters, her action is granted ample analysis by the narrator:

Margaret Vance tried to give herself some reason for going to call upon the Dryfooses, but she could find one better than the wish to do a kind thing. This seemed queerer and less and less sufficient as she examined it, and she even admitted a little curiosity as a harmless element in her motive, without being very well satisfied with it. She tried to add a slight sense of social duty, and then she decided to have no motive at all, but simply to pay her visit as she would to any other eligible strangers she saw fit to call upon. She perceived that she must be very careful not to let them see that any other impulse had governed her; she determined, if possible, to let them patronize *her*; to be very modest and sincere and diffident, and, above all, not to play a part. (255)

Vance's consciousness, her self-justification and self-doubt about an action she regards as humane condescension and generosity, gets much more attention than Peck's, Lindau's, or Conrad Dryfoos's ever do. In this she is distinct from the ideologues. Howells lets us see that she is human, and dynamic. He allows us to see the kind of growth that is possible when someone like Vance, filled with the desire to do good, comes into contact with the example of an ideologue like Conrad Dryfoos. As a secondary character in

*Hazard* observes, Vance becomes a person who “wanted to talk more about social questions than about the psychological problems that young people usually debate so personally” (395). She becomes a person who changes her life radically in response to the examples she has encountered in it. She is, in other words, a striver, a type that Howells explores more fully in *Annie Kilburn* than he does in *Hazard*.

As noted above, critics beginning with Henry Nash Smith have dismissed the importance of the ideologue type in Howells’s novels by pointing out that most of the ideologues—Conrad Dryfoos, Lindau, and Peck—all meet an untimely demise. Morgan notes that “the men of absolute humanitarian principle in Howells’s economic novels” “are killed or maimed without advancing their ideals,” finding in these renderings a critique of the Christian martyr (41). For Howells, Morgan contends, “martyrs who die to demonstrate deep convictions are neither effective social reformers nor enlightening figures” (41). Concluding that Howells relegates his humanitarian ideologues to the dustbin of realism allows Morgan to seize upon the ironist (not the striver, a type he does not acknowledge) as the seat of realism’s instantiation of humanitarian action. While it may be true that Dryfoos, Lindau, and Peck die “without advancing their ideals,” it is not so that they are not “enlightening figures.” These three characters offer a banner, an enlightening path forward whose pull characters like Margaret Vance and Annie Kilburn continuously feel. They may not stick around long enough to implement the changes they dreamed of, but others follow their lead.

## Ironists

Howells is most frequently equated with his ironist characters, the sensibility his novels promote most frequently associated with theirs. This is implicit in Barrish's explication of not just ironist but *realist* taste as "the impossibility of people of different classes truly understanding one another's lives, or the unavoidable contradictions lived by liberal/radical intellectuals"; this perspective is, in Barrish's view, "what Howells presents as the only genuinely tasteful stance one can take vis-à-vis painful and insoluble American difficulties" (31). Though critics quibble over whether David Sewell (or perhaps Basil March) is an analogue for Howells, most agree that the disposition Barrish describes dominates. Though the ironist characters do outnumber the ideologues and (especially) the strivers, I agree with John Cyril Barton when he suggests, in contradistinction to Wai-Chee Dimock's claim that Sewell is the moral voice of realism and of Howells, that we over-simplify Howells's novels if we fail to recognize that there is no *one* voice of realism (or, in this case, humanitarianism), but many. My use of the term "ironist," as opposed to "realist," as a name for the skeptical characters is meant to underscore this conviction. There are many voices in Howells's novels that together provide "a collective—but *unincorporated*—discourse on social complicity" (Barton 183). Still, the ironists are the most common humanitarian figures in Howells's novels, and for that reason their particular brand of engagement and complacency demands close attention.

Of the three novels I look at here, *The Minister's Charge* is most fully imbued with the humanitarian ironist perspective. The charge of the title is Lemuel Barker, a



Massachusetts country boy who aspires to be more. Sewell, the minister, and his wife encounter Lemuel and his family on their country vacation, and Sewell, against his better judgment, makes encouraging noises about Lemuel's poetry. Weeks later he regrets doing so when the boy, who, in Sewell's eyes, has no hope of making a literary career, shows up at Sewell's doorstep, looking for help getting a footing in Boston. The novel is a chronicle of Sewell's (and several other characters') frustrated attempts to help Lemuel, and of Lemuel's stubborn efforts to help himself. Ultimately, the novel drives home the grim idea that however necessary understanding and identification are to humanitarian action, they are also close to impossible across classes.

As noted above, Melanie Dawson argues convincingly that *The Minister's Charge*, Howells's most complete attempt to give as full a rendering of the point of view of a working class person as he does to those of his middle-class characters, bumps up against "the impenetrability of the lower-class mind or the difficulty of representing it" (195). Not only can Howells not fully and sympathetically portray Lemuel's point of view, but also, at the level of narrative, Lemuel himself has trouble communicating or understanding what is said to him. Or at least, this is how it comes across to Sewell, who "had begun to doubt whether Barker understood anything"; after talking to him, "Sewell felt as if he had been preaching to a dead wall" (14, 15). Dispirited and bewildered by his failure to get anything across to Lemuel, Sewell says to his wife, "I couldn't find any common ground where we could stand together. We were as unlike as if we were of two different species. . . . Every one of us dwells in an impenetrable solitude! We understand each other a little if our circumstances are similar, but if they are different all our words

leave us dumb and unintelligible” (26-7). Lemuel is “dumb and unintelligible” even when he interacts with other working-class characters. When he is falsely accused of stealing a young woman’s purse, it takes him a long time to pipe up to defend himself, so much so that the police captain asks him why he just stood there “like a dumb animal” (46). As a minor character remarks late in the novel, “Barker’s *not* very conversational” (261). Apart from any one character, the novel as a whole evinces a strongly ironist perspective on cross-class communication.

In this way the novel accomplishes what Dimock, in “The Economy of Pain: Capitalism, Humanitarianism, and the Realistic Novel,” has argued is one hallmark of realist texts: limiting liability and responsibility. Responding in part to historian Thomas Haskell’s provocative suggestion that capitalism provides the cognitive framework necessary for humanitarianism to flourish,<sup>33</sup> she writes that “the realistic novel, operating as an economy of pain, turns out to honor the dictates of both capitalism and humanitarianism. Even as it faithfully represents human sufferings, it just as faithfully prevents those sufferings from becoming liabilities” (86). If Sewell shows that the savvy response to human suffering (here represented by Lemuel’s travails in Boston) is to own up to one’s inability to remedy it, then the novel does indeed outline the limit of humanitarianism’s claim on our actions and our sympathies. But I would qualify Dimock’s assertion by saying that it is not a hallmark of realist *texts* to delimit liability

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<sup>33</sup> See Haskell’s two-part essay “Capitalism and the Origins of the Humanitarian Sensibility.”

and responsibility—in fact, realist texts often flirt with the possibility of unlimited liability—but instead, the limitation of liability is a hallmark of ironist *characters*.

A binocular awareness of complicity in a harmful system (which parallels Dimock's faithful representation of human suffering) and an inability to alter one's behavior (preventing those sufferings from becoming liabilities) characterizes the ironist, who can be anguished, but is just as often quite cheerful about his or her open-eyed acceptance of humanitarian impotence. Evans, a minor character in *The Minister's Charge* and a friend of Sewell's, represents this binocularity when he comes to his minister friend with an idea for a sermon: the notion of complicity. He describes an outing he took to the theater to see a Restoration drama "where all the jokes turn upon the belief of the characters that their wives and husbands are the parents of illegitimate offspring" (161). Though watching a bawdy Restoration drama hardly is the same thing as winning one's bread off the labor of the disenfranchised, Evans's conclusion from the evening pushes him toward his articulation of what it means to be complicit:

"All the people were nicely dressed, and they sat there before that nasty mess . . . and listened with as smooth self-satisfaction as if they were not responsible for it. But all at once it occurred to me that they *were* responsible, every one of them—as responsible as the players, as the author himself."

"Did you come out of the theater at that point?" asked Sewell.

"Oh, I was responsible too; but I seemed to be the only one ashamed of my share in the business." (161)

Evans believes that shame of his “share in the business” distinguishes him from the other theatergoers. Though he sins just as his neighbors do (if aiding and abetting in the representation of crass humor is a sin), at least he does so with eyes wide open. Howells himself expressed a similar disposition in a letter to Edward Everett Hale, writing, “In the meantime Elinor and I live along like our neighbors; only we have a bad conscience. . . . The only proof I have that I might to do right [sic] is that I suffer for my selfishness, and perhaps this is enough” (qtd. in Cady 203).

That “perhaps” nagged at Howells, for in his more striving moments, he realized that the kind of ironic detachment that Sewell and Evans possess valorizes complacency. This is apparent in the response one of the secondary characters of *Annie Kilburn*, Ralph Putney, has to that novel’s ideologue, Peck. As we have seen, Peck’s eloquent and harsh sermons touch his listeners and make them see differently.<sup>34</sup> Seeing differently, however, does not necessarily mean acting differently. When Putney, a recovering alcoholic loaded with irony, tells Annie about the effect one of Peck’s sermons had on him, he communicates a peculiar kind of detachment from the implication of the minister’s words. Putney says to Annie,

He said it was a good deal more desirable to understand evil than to hate it, for then we could begin to cure it. Yes, Brother Peck let in a good deal of light on me.

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<sup>34</sup> Gregory S. Jackson explores the influence the homiletic tradition had on literary realism in *The Word and Its Witness* (2009). He doesn’t describe Howells’s novels as homiletic, but the fact that Howells uses ministers (Peck and Sewell) and their sermonizing to get his readers to see differently, reconsidering their place in the world and their relationship to others, suggests to me that there is a connection there that remains to be fleshed out. Jackson is interested in the way “homiletic practices helped channel the reformist energies . . . into a national ethic of social intervention” (35); see in particular his chapter “Cultivating Spiritual Sight” for an analysis of the relationship between homiletics and the Social Gospel.

He rather insinuated that I must be possessed by the very evils I hated, and that was the reason I was so violent about them. I had always supposed that I hated other people's cruelty because I was merciful, and their meanness because I was magnanimous, and their intolerance because I was generous, and their conceit because I was modest . . . but after listening to Brother Peck a while I came to the conclusion that I hated these things in others because I was cruel myself. . . . But he didn't reform me, I'm thankful to say, any more than he did you. I've gone on just the same, and I suppose I hate more infernal scoundrels and loathe more infernal idiots to-day than ever; but I perceive that I'm no part of the power that makes for righteousness as long as I work that racket; and now I sin with light and knowledge, anyway. (728)

Here Putney sounds like an echo of Augustine St. Clare, Stowe's humane slaveholder whose opposition to the system coupled with a reluctance to do anything to change it encapsulates the essence of the ironist. What Barrish writes about Basil March could apply equally well to Ralph Putney in the above passage: "Howells's late 1880s and 1890s novels have the effect, we might say, of increasing our imaginative ability to see why someone such as Basil March could come to have a keen sense that 'unfamiliar sorts of people' are suffering but still end up not trying to do much of anything about it" (*American Literary Realism* 45). More often than not, the ironists use open-eyed complacency as a buffer. Ralph hears Peck's message, and his response is to "sin with light and knowledge, anyway." Ironist characters distinguish themselves from others not

by their behavior, but through their self-knowledge and their knowledge of the hard realities of the world.

While awareness of one's own impotent complacency is perhaps the most honest tool Howells's ironist characters use to keep humanitarian action at a remove, it is not the only one. Basil and Isabel March, the married couple whose search for housing in New York City comprises the first hundred or so pages of *A Hazard of New Fortunes*, are also pros at talking themselves out of taking a principled stance, taking steps to make a real change, or sharing the suffering of the poor, as Lindau does. In the scene quoted below, they talk themselves out of the guilt that rises up in them as they drive through the streets of the Lower East Side, which are filled with "a poverty as hopeless as any in the world" (65):

"Oh, it's very easy to have humane sentiments, and to satirize ourselves for wanting eight rooms and a bath in a good neighborhood, when we see how these wretched creatures live," said his wife. "But if we shared all we have with them, and then settled down among them, what good would it do?"

"Not the least in the world. It might help us for the moment, but it wouldn't keep the wolf from their doors for a week; and then they would go on just as before, only they wouldn't be on such good terms with the wolf. The only way for them is to keep up an unbroken intimacy with the wolf; then they can manage him somehow." (66)

The Marches use reason (rather disingenuously) to convince themselves that doing nothing to alleviate the suffering they witness is a kind of humanitarianism in and of

itself, the right thing to do. They can be humanitarians by doing nothing, so that the denizens of the alleys and byways Jacob Riis once photographed can “keep up an unbroken intimacy with the wolf.” In fact, doing nothing is their duty. This passage serves as evidence for Dimock’s overall argument in “The Economy of Pain”: the realist novel operates according to an economy of pain that is at peace with the truth that some pain is necessary; it’s just a matter of who feels it. When Isabel remarks to her husband, “I don’t believe there’s any *real* suffering—not real *suffering*—among those people; that is, it would be suffering from our point of view, but they’ve been used to it all their lives, and they don’t feel their discomfort so much,” she draws on an apologist trope common in the nineteenth century, arguing that the poor (and, in other cases, blacks, or Irish, or Filipinos) do not experience pain the way civilized, middle-class people do (69, emphases in original). Let them be the ones to cope with poverty and want, disease and hunger. Because the poor are accustomed to such circumstances and we are not, they do not feel the pain those circumstances bring about, whereas we would—so goes Isabel’s argument.

Ironists like the Marches, Ralph Putney, Sewell, and Evans use their keen humanitarian awareness to justify inaction. Their thoughts and actions buoy the economy of pain that Dimock describes. Though it is beyond the scope of the present project to argue that realism as a whole does not, in fact, make possible such an economy, I do want to assert that we need to avoid collapsing the distinction between ironist characters and Howells’s novels, allowing the ironists to metonymically stand for the perspective of the fiction as a whole. In the next section I will introduce the strivers, individuals who work toward social justice even as they recognize multiple impediments to genuine change.

The striver is a hybrid of ironist and ideologue. Their self-awareness and skepticism might be drawn from the ironists' playbook, but their earnest devotion to action—to doing *something* to help—and their commitment to principle are qualities they share with the ideologues. An analysis of the strivers is indispensable to thinking through Howells's use of realism in the project of self-construction because it is they, more than the ironists or the ideologues, who are the dynamic selves in Howells's fiction, open not only to self-reflection but to change as well.

### **Strivers: The Example of Annie Kilburn**

It should be evident at this point why so much of the criticism has focused on the ironist characters. They're everywhere, they're amusing, and they make us feel better about the disconnect between our own beliefs and behavior. Perhaps this was the moral space in which Howells most frequently dwelled. Even so, he was moved by the same notions that moved his ideologue characters, and, like his strivers, Howells never abandoned the struggle to create a more just, more humane world. Much like Eveleth Strange, the American woman Aristides Homos falls in love with, Howells often straddled that boundary between the ironist and the striver. Eveleth “denied nothing; but she had lost the faith to affirm anything. She no longer tried to do good from her heart, though she kept on doing charity . . . always with the ironical doubt that she was doing harm” (qtd. in Cady 201).

If the ideologues are characterized by their confidence, and the ironists by their doubts, then it is this will to act, in spite of doubt, that characterizes the strivers. Annie



Kilburn, the striver par excellence, shares Eveleth Strange's insistence on doing something, anything, despite "the ironical doubt that she was doing harm." Peyser observes that this emphasis on action distinguishes Howells's perspective on consciousness from that of the James brothers. In his review of William James's *Principles of Psychology* (1890), Howells quotes James at length on the "'dead beats,' whose life is one long contradiction between knowledge and action . . . [men whose] moral knowledge . . . never wholly resolves, never gets . . . its speech out of the subjunctive and into the imperative mood, never breaks the spell, never takes the helm into its own hands" (qtd. in "Editor's Study" 1891 315). Peyser explains that in his review of James's compendious volume, Howells focuses almost entirely on the chapter on habit. This may be because Howells saw habit as a major impediment keeping people from breaking out of the subjunctive and into the imperative. Perhaps Howells saw the ironist disposition as the only tasteful response to suffering, as Barrish contends, but it seems to me that he also had a strong inclination to do *something* rather than nothing and a strong inclination to admire those who chose a similar path. This is the striver in him.

If we look beyond Howells's fiction to his other writing (columns, book reviews, and letters) and to the historic events, both public and personal, that shaped him between 1886 and 1890, it becomes apparent that the easy equation between Howells and ironist characters like Basil March breaks down. As we have already seen, Howells devoted time and energy to reading about and engaging with the theories of many of his socialist and Christian socialist contemporaries, and he attended (even if he did not join) the Reverend Bliss's Church of the Carpenter from 1889-91. This is evidence that Howells shared with

his character Annie a strong, searching need to contribute to something greater than himself, to intervene in the world in a humanitarian fashion. Like Annie, he was moved, swayed, and oftentimes convinced by the ideological views of characters like Peck, Lindau, and Conrad Dryfoos, but, also like Annie, he could never quite make his behavior match his convictions. Instead, he took from the ideologues a commitment to fighting the good fight and blended that conviction with the ironists' skepticism. That blend yielded a heretofore underappreciated alliance between Howells and a more earnest, hopeful point of view.

Howells's reviews of Tolstoy's writing and his reflections on his own writing during this period also confirm that while the comfortably resigned humanitarianism of the ironist—he who is aware of his sins but goes on sinning—may have been part of Howells's makeup, there is an overlooked element of Howells that demands further notice. For instance, in his review of *Que Faire?*, Howells wrote that Tolstoy “tells us, with that terrible, unsparing honesty of his, how he tried to do good among the poor in Moscow, and how he failed to do any good, because he proposed a physical instead of a moral relief, false instead of a real charity, while he grew more and more into conceit of himself as a fine fellow” (“Editor's Study” 1887 316). Here, Howells is interested in and respectful of Tolstoy's struggles—his striving to do good, his failure to do so, his tortured reflections on the process. Howells takes part in such striving as well. In a letter to Edward Everett Hale, Howells refers to *Annie Kilburn*, writing, “if you read it to the end you'll see that I solve nothing, except what was solved eighteen centuries ago. . . . as yet I haven't got to *doing* anything myself” (qtd. in Kirk 190). Chiding himself here, Howells

seems to channel his heroine. This is a Howells dissatisfied with inaction, longing to *do* something himself. The frustration with his own ineptitude that Howells evinces here finds its echo in Annie Kilburn's determined search to find a way to do good. Reading Tolstoy made Howells reject complacency. He wrote,

I can never again see life in the way I saw it before I knew him. . . . [He] gave me heart to hope . . . that the world may yet be made over in the image of Him who died for it, when all Caesar's things shall finally be rendered unto Caesar, and men shall come into their own, into the right to labor and the right to enjoy the fruits of their labor, each one master of himself and servant to every other. He taught me to see life not as a chase of a forever impossible personal happiness, but as a field of endeavor towards the happiness of the whole human family; and I can never lose this vision. . . . (qtd. in Cady 8)

Tolstoy gave Howells "heart to hope" for a better world and to strive to see that world realized.

The kind of self and self-development drawn out in *Annie Kilburn* is an exploration of the part of Howells that earnestly strove toward humanitarian goals, devoted to the abstract aim of helping others whose stubborn call the ironist characters repress with logic, guilt, and humor. Annie—not the ironists Putney or Morrell, or the ideologue, Peck—is the organizing consciousness of the novel; her trials, both personal and social, form its moral fabric. The novel is a flirtation with the idea of unlimited liability, in Dimock's terms. Where the realist novel, by and large, operates on an "economy of pain," which keeps "moral responsibilities from becoming moral

liabilities,” *Annie Kilburn* is an exception (Dimock 72). The novel inhabits the point of view of a woman who so desires to be of use that she opens up her heart, and her resources, to the world around her, casting about for a specific way to put her abstract principles into practice. Referring to *Annie Kilburn*, then still in progress, Howells told his sister that the novel would “deal rather with humanity than with love” (qtd. in Christianson 175). I understand the contrast here to be between tackling the question of human beings’ relationships with each other (along the axes of obligation and responsibility) and one human being’s particular, romantic relationship with another. The working title of the book was *The Upper and the Nether Millstone*, which suggests Howells’s interest in a focus on the relationship between classes. By changing it to the name of his protagonist, however, Howells shifts his focus to the exploration of one character’s psyche. In the remainder of this chapter I will draw out the contours of that psyche, which *Annie Kilburn* explores with compassion, admiration, and trepidation, in order to amend previous interpretations of Howells’s humanitarian theories.

Annie is a woman in her early thirties who, as the novel opens, is mourning her father’s death. She had lived with him in Rome for the past twelve years, but she takes the occasion of his passing as incentive to return to her home, Hatboro’, Massachusetts, a small mill-town where in decades previous her family had been prominent. It is a sense of responsibility to others that draws her back stateside, as she tells a compatriot in Rome: “I suppose I shall be almost a stranger when I get there. . . . But I have a longing; I feel that I must try to be of some use in the world—try to do some good—and in Hatboro’ I think I shall know how” (645). Howells takes Annie’s longing seriously, but that is not to say

that he abandons all criticism of her motivations, which can sometimes be self-aggrandizing and naïve. Howells shows us that, rather than being motivated by a specific set of circumstances, Annie is, at the onset, moved by her desire to play a role, to be a certain kind of person. This is so much the case that she starts to look, cravenly, for suffering, and feels disappointed when she finds so little of it to alleviate. Howells has fun with this perverse desire of his protagonist's in the following exchange between Annie and Dr. Morrell, a Hatboro' figure who comes to be Annie's friend (and, much later, her husband):

“I suppose you ought to go to a factory town like Fall River, if you really wanted to deal with overwork and squalor.”

“I'm beginning to think there's no such thing anywhere,” she said desperately.

“. . . Well, then, there are more women than men in the shops, and they earn more. I suppose that's rather disappointing, too.”

“It is, rather.”

“But, on the other hand, the work only lasts eight months of the year, and that cuts wages down to an average of a dollar a day.”

“Ah!” cried Annie. “There's some hope in *that!*” (746)

Howells plays up the irony of Annie hoping for the existence of poverty and misery only so that she can play a part in relieving it. In this passage, the selfishness and contradictions of Annie's humanitarian striving come to the fore while Peck's conviction

that humanitarianism depends on inequality hovers in the background, giving texture and piquancy to the exchange.

Annie develops beyond this somewhat self-centered approach to humanitarianism in a way that others of Howells' characters do not. Sibyl Vane, a minor character in *The Minister's Charge*, represents the striver gone wrong. At the same time that David Sewell attempts to come to grips with his responsibility toward Lemuel, Sibyl strives to play the role of humanitarian in a more ostentatious, performative fashion. We first learn of her efforts at a dinner table conversation during which the Sewell family chats with their friend Miss Vane, Sibyl's older sister, about Sibyl's latest humanitarian venture: bringing flowers to invalids in the hospital.<sup>35</sup> More charity than a humanitarian effort that transforms the giver's life, such as Annie seeks, Sibyl's flower charity nevertheless represents her own efforts to, as her sister remarks, experience "the sensation of doing good—of seeing and hearing the results of her beneficence" (22). Not content to act for the sake of acting, she wants people to notice and to thank her for her good works. (Annie is not immune from such vanity, either; in one scene, she imagines Peck at her grave, "reading the lesson of her work to the multitude of grateful and loving poor who thronged to pay the last tribute to her memory" (839).) When Lemuel comes to work, briefly, for the Vanes, Sibyl fancies herself Lemuel's protector and savior, getting miffed when

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<sup>35</sup> Here Howells is alluding to a practice common among middle-class women of philanthropic spirit. "Flower missions" were one of the avenues for involvement that charity organizations suggested to women desiring to be of use. As Deborah Carlin explains, "most often, the suggestions offered by philanthropic organizations and charities stressed the natural domestic talents women possessed that could be immediately employed to brighten, beautify, and magically transform the tenement into a home" (209). In Sibyl's case, it is a hospital room that she seeks to transform.

Lemuel fails to regard her in that way or show her what she thinks is the proper gratitude. After her efforts at ministering to Lemuel come to naught, Sibyl works herself into a rage that results in Lemuel's dismissal. Reflecting on the incident, Miss Vane remarks, "Whatever has happened, you may be perfectly sure that it has been partly a bit of stage-play in Sibyl and partly a mischievous desire to use her power over him. I foresaw that she would soon be tired of reforming him" (135). Sibyl wants to play the role of ministering angel but is flummoxed by the details of the job. As for her flower charity, "she wasn't at all satisfied with the result. She said the patients were mostly disgusting old men that hadn't been shaved" (86).

In one sense, Sibyl is a humanitarian striver because she wants to be able to put her energies to use on behalf of others. At the same time, her pursuits are portrayed as laughable, her quick discouragement that of a dilettante. The way characters wryly and knowingly respond to Sibyl's fling with humanitarianism has the effect of making even the narrator seem more ironist than striver. But Sibyl's character is not meant to highlight the follies of humanitarian striving as a whole. Rather, Howells uses her as a foil for characters whose striving is more nuanced, sustained, and less inspired by vanity. Wanting to do good in order to be *known* for doing good, Howells seems to say, is as reprehensible as avoiding one's duty entirely. To be sure, Annie has some Sibyl Vane in her. Her self-realization depends upon someone, somewhere, suffering—and yearning for her intervention. Annie "looked in vain for destitution" (746). However, with his portrayal of Annie, unlike his portrayal of Sibyl, Howells shows us that while such a search for suffering may on its face seem self-indulgent, it is born of a desire to be useful

and good—a desire admirable in and of itself—and that the perversity that makes humanitarian striving dependent upon injustice is a contradiction around which the complex identity of the humanitarian striver takes shape.

*Annie Kilburn* is remarkable for my purposes not only because it is Howells's most in-depth exploration of the humanitarian-striver type, but also because the portrait of Annie anticipates the figure of the humanitarian adventurer subsequent chapters in this dissertation explore: the person who uproots herself in order to do good in a place where she is, at first at least, a stranger. This similarity comes across first in the fact that Annie is an outsider. As the novel opens, Annie feels adrift in the wake of her father's death: "A pang of aimless, unlocalised homesickness passed through her; she realised that she was alone in the world" (666). Even though she hails from Hatboro' originally, she has spent most of her adult life in Rome. She is an expatriate, a woman who returned to Massachusetts only to summer, and was a guest even then. So it is striking that Annie is drawn to Hatboro'—to her, as foreign as Europe must have been, once—in order to follow through on the dictates of her conscience. "I suppose I shall be almost a stranger when I get there," she tells a woman in Rome, and indeed, when she arrives, "she found herself in a strange world" (645, 711). Howells emphasizes this strangeness and Annie's outsider status repeatedly. As she seeks to intervene kindly and responsibly in the lives of suffering others, her friends remind Annie that she must not overstep her bounds. "I think they would resent any outside aid," Dr. Morrell informs her when Annie suggests joining the nurses in their efforts among the mill-hands. "Ah, I'm always on the outside!" Annie declares in frustrated response (747). Annie feels the harshness of being a separate,



unconnected, strange self, and she thirsts for a way of cultivating—and understanding—her relationship to other human beings. The humanitarian dynamic, wherein she would play the role of selfless benefactress, offers the security of such self-definition. It is through that dynamic that Annie seeks to understand, and develop, her sense of self.

Annie's desire to play the role of humanitarian stems, in large part, from what Howells depicts as a deep insecurity about her place in the world. Through a close reading of her character we can better understand Peyser's assertion that Howells looked to morality and ethics as a way of restraining—or, one might say, creating—the self. Annie doesn't know who she is, and so she compares herself to others. Every little encounter, every conversation, provides her with fodder for comparison: her first encounter with Mr. Peck and his daughter Idella; her visit with her old friends; her exchanges with the Boltons, her estate's care takers. Annie is a worrier and a ruminator. She dwells on conversations, thinking about them over and over, well past the point (one expects) the person who delivered the worrisome words even remembers them. Anything can make her feel uneasy, as Dr. Morrell's laughter in an early scene does: "she did not like him laughing. She questioned if it were not undignified. She felt that it might be disrespectful" (705). Annie also cares inordinately about what others think of her. After Mr. Peck visits for the first time, Annie "felt the need of showing Mrs. Bolton that, although she had been civil to him, she had no sympathy with his ideas" (686). She is a self on the make, looking for purpose through philanthropy of some sort. Yet she seeks approval through the eyes of others. Instead of deciding on her own who she is and how she can be most useful, she reacts to everyone around her. For instance, Annie commits

to Mr. Brandreth's Social Union scheme—a plan to raise money for a settlement-house-like arrangement that would be funded by a play and a dinner that the working hands would not be invited to attend—when he asks for her help. Later, though, she feels shamed by her commitment when Peck tells her that he “could not join at all with those who were willing to lay the foundations of a Social Union in a social disunion” (682). Unlike the confident ideologues, Annie is bedeviled by doubts and is skeptical as to the efficacy of her own efforts. If the late-nineteenth-century transition from character to personality in American conceptions of selfhood is marked by a dependence on what others think of you, as Walter Susman contends, then Annie's preoccupation with the opinions of others puts her squarely in the personality camp.<sup>36</sup> It also, however, makes her ripe for transformation.

Closely related to Annie's insecurity is her harsh judgment of others. She makes up for a lack of self-regard by critiquing those around her. A reed in the wind, she feels better when she can “regain . . . a little of her self-respect by ridiculing the people she had met” (677). The narrator tells us that in response to the society of South Hatboro', the new summering folk who are pretentious in their fetishization of “culture,” “she was very censorious of them, as we are of other people when we have reason to be discontented with ourselves” (715). It is this discontent, I contend, that incites Annie's censorious eye. Hardly anything escapes her judgment. Of Idella's name: “she abhorred those made-up names in which the New England country people sometimes indulge their fancy, and

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<sup>36</sup> See Susman's essay “‘Personality’ and the Making of Twentieth-century Culture” in *Culture as History* (1984).

Idella struck her as a particularly repulsive invention” (679). Of Jack Wilmington, her friend Lyra’s nephew: “Annie instantly took a dislike to him, his heavy jaw, long eyes, and low forehead almost hidden under a thick bang” (707-8). In some ways Annie possesses one of the traits Barrish identifies as belonging to realist distinction: good taste. But the way she aggressively asserts herself as different from those who do not share her aesthetic preferences, such as the inhabitants of South Hatboro’, or even her friends the Putneys, whose dinner table she calls “pathetically old-fashioned,” betrays her deep-seated insecurity (722). Of the South Hatboro’ folk, she observes that “they were making a pretence of simplicity and unconventionality. . . . Everywhere Annie had found the affectation of intellectual interests, and the assumption that these were the highest interests of life” (715-6). Here we see the contrast between the genuine—presumably, Annie’s *real* embodiment of intellect, simplicity, and unconventionality—and artifice, that which is “pretence” and “affectation.” Because she stands on unsteady ground, not really sure about her own talents or place in the world, Annie clamps a steely grip on taste as a defense. She admits as much after her first meeting with Peck, whose unconventional ideas about humanitarianism and duty shake her to the core: “She ridiculed Mr. Peck’s appearance and manner, and laughed at his ideas to Mrs. Munger. She had not a good conscience in it, but the perverse impulse persisted in her. There seemed no other way in which she could assert herself against him” (688). A stranger in a strange land, the insecure Annie uses her barbed tongue to assert herself against those who threaten her. But her shrewd and catty judgments don’t quite do the trick, so it is

through the humanitarian dynamic that Annie most forcefully attempts to assert—and realize—herself.

At times Howells's sympathy seems to be more with the ironist characters whose amused detachment plays off Annie's earnestness—Dr. Morrell's eyes “twinkled sympathetically” as he teased Annie about her search for suffering among the more or less prosperous mill hands—than with the striving protagonist (746). Still, he takes Annie's dilemma seriously, devoting time and careful attention to the motives and desires, no matter how selfish, that move Annie to do what the ironists do not: grapple with tough questions, make an effort, take action. Even if Annie's humanitarian striving does arise from insecurity, and even if it is accompanied by harsh judgment of others and a desire for there to be hardship somewhere out there, it also helps to illuminate a number of central questions of real concern to Howells. Because she cares, and because she seeks to act, Annie helps to excavate issues that the ironist characters' detachment allows them to glance over.

It is Annie, more than any of the other characters in the novel, who mulls over the nature of humanitarian action. In order to grow in her role as humanitarian actor, she first has to come to terms with the fact that it is indeed humanitarian action, and not some kind of ideal justice, that she is capable of bringing about. This in contrast to what Julius Peck strives for: a just world where humanitarianism is no longer necessary. To be sure, Peck's proclamations about justice prompt Annie to reflect on what, exactly, she is doing through her charitable activities. Much of her self-critique of humanitarian practice as she originally envisioned it comes from what she learns in her interactions with Peck,

particularly his response to the Social Union plan. About that scheme, Peck asks, “Have they tried to interest the working people themselves in it?” One criticism he ventures about the Social Union is that the well-to-do people are of limited imagination; they envision a “charity” that they themselves would want but have not sufficiently tried to understand or adopt the point of view of those they’re trying to help. “These things are invented by well-to-do people who have no occupation, and think that others want pastimes as much as themselves,” Peck declares (680).

Beyond his specific critique of the Social Union, the minister also makes clear that he believes humanitarianism is only necessary because injustice exists, as we have seen. He is after something different from humanitarianism; in his ideal world, there would be no need for humanitarianism—just humanity, humane behavior. Peck holds out a just society as the true goal, making Annie feel that her small efforts at being a humanitarian do not attack the root of the problem. (They don’t.) The difference between humane behavior and humanitarianism is the role itself, a role that Annie strives, through most of the novel, to assume. The Peck/Annie contrast is one that gets played out in explorations of humanitarianism up to the present day. One could see the contrast between the two characters’ responses to human suffering as a literary representation of the contrast between human rights and humanitarianism that I discussed in the Introduction.

Much of Annie’s journey of productive self-definition in the novel is characterized by her coming to terms with the fact that she will do what she can, acting in response to what surrounds her rather than getting discouraged by the existence of an

ideal she is unable to attain. Humanitarian sentiment and action are abstract qualities to Annie, at least in the first half of the novel. She is trying to live out a role, to find objects for her munificence, rather than acting out of kindness in response to a specific situation. Applying Annie's situation to the philosophical conversation about reading in which Appiah and Rorty engage, Annie is dealing with humanitarianism at the level of essence and principle instead of living it in the present, in the context of a specific, contingent situation. As a result, she is at first better able to experience pity in the abstract than in the particular:

She would have preferred not to see or know the objects of her charity, and because she preferred this she forced herself to face their distasteful misery. . . . They filled her gentlewoman's soul with loathing; but if she kept beyond the range of the powerful corporeal odour that enveloped them, she could experience the luxury of pity for them. . . . She consoled herself as far as she could with the superstition that in meeting them she was fulfilling a duty sacred in proportion to the disgust she felt in the encounter. (746-7)

Here Howells suggests that Annie's sense of duty is tinged with masochism: she feels she is doing good when she experiences loathing and is able to overcome it. Pity is a luxury for her. With this depiction of Annie, Howells raises the question of motivation: is an act that is undertaken out of a sense of duty, not out of true kindness and love, truly humane?

The same question comes up in *The Minister's Charge*, and it is handled there by the ironist Sewell. Toward the end of the novel, Jessie Carver, Lemuel's love interest, comes to Sewell seeking advice. Lemuel has become romantically involved with Statira

Dudley, a working class girl whose sweetness and simplicity initially attract Lemuel, putting him at ease, but whose naiveté and ignorance eventually bore him and turn his sweetheart into a burden. He is, however, beholden to Statira, so that when he meets Jessie, a smart and intellectually curious art student, he is stuck, unable to act on his feelings for her out of a debt to Statira. Jessie seeks out Sewell's help because his sermons have touched her in the past. This is a notable instance of an ironist, not an ideologue, inspiring someone to change. Jessie tells Lemuel that Sewell has, in effect, turned her into a striver: he "doesn't leave you feeling how bad you are, but makes you want to be better" (218)—and she hopes, therefore, he can affirm her sense that to recede and let Lemuel act on his obligation to Statira is the morally correct decision. Jessie is looking for an unchanging moral rule to apply to the situation, but Sewell refuses to give it to her. "You said that we ought to act unselfishly," Jessie reminds the minister. "Yes," he replies, "but you must beware of the refined selfishness which shrinks from self-assertion because it is painful. You must make sure of your real motive; you must consider whether your sacrifice is not going to do more harm than good" (293). Here Sewell complicates the apparently self-evident principle of self-sacrifice by conflating a Christian emphasis on motive with a pragmatist emphasis on effects. In Sewell's philosophy, imagining the outcome of an act and considering the balance of general harm and good of that outcome are two important steps in clarifying one's motive. That is to say, if an act accomplishes more general harm than good, then it is likely that a desire for some private, individual good is the motive. Considering effects, then, can serve as a tool by which to judge motive. The scene between Sewell and Jessie illustrates a principle of

the kind of humanitarian selfhood present in all of Howells's types: it is contingent upon circumstance, not tied to a static set of laws.

Thus the unpredictable and the unforeseen, in addition to the ordinary channels of humanitarian service with which Annie struggles uncomfortably, also contribute to Annie's growth as a humanitarian striver. Where Annie truly seems to awaken to a different kind of humanitarian response is in her behavior toward Idella, Peck's neglected daughter. When Idella falls asleep in Annie's lap at the theatricals for the Social Union, and a working woman offers to relieve Annie of the burden, Annie replies, "'No, no; she isn't heavy; I like to hold her.' . . . Then something occurred to her, and she stared at amazement at herself" (767). Annie has realized that she loves Idella. This experience transforms the meaning of charity for Annie, taking it from a rather masochistic overcoming of loathing—as in conquering one's disgust of the "corporeal odour" of the poor—to *caritas* as a virtue, one born of love for one's self and one's kin that stretches outward into an altruistic desire to tend to mankind. From this point on out, Annie does not conceive of what she does for the girl as charity because it comes naturally. When she decides that she wants to raise Idella, or at least tend to her while Mr. Peck tends to his flock, she imagines framing her request to the girl's father as a favor to herself: "I believe I can make Mr. Peck see that it's a duty. I shall ask him to regard it as a charity to me—as a mercy" (790). Is Annie at her best when she's actually doing something for herself? Sarah Daugherty finds it to be the case that "Howells demonstrates that Annie's achievement of concrete good—her nurture of a real child—results more from self-interested motives than selfless ones" (35). This reading connects with the larger question



of the nature of abstract and specific humanitarianism. At the same time, the fact that Annie finds her humanitarian calling met in part by a privatized, maternal role—she doesn't get to join the public discourse by giving sermons, like Sewell or Peck, or by writing novels, like Tolstoy or Howells himself—raises the uncomfortable possibility that for Howells, the female humanitarian striver best set her sights a little closer to home.

I would contend, however, that Howells does not limit his heroine by having her discover what it means to care deeply for one beloved child. Rather, he uses Annie's relationship with Idella and Peck to probe the intertwined issues of family and responsibility as they relate to humanitarian practice. In discussing his care of Idella, Peck tells Annie that he feels he oughtn't to lift his own child up beyond others. "Surely, we are bound to provide for those of our own household," says Annie. "Who are those of our own household?" replies the minister. "All mankind are those of our own household. These are my mother and my brother and my sister" (796). Peck, in taking the teachings of Christianity literally, as Howells's ideologues are wont to do, mirrors Howells's complicated hero, Tolstoy. Though she is initially very much taken with Peck's austere breed of humanitarian action, Annie asks Dr. Morrell whether he believes that Peck is "a real philanthropist,"

"because I can't understand his indifference to his child. It seems to me that real philanthropy would begin at home. But twice he has distinctly forgotten her existence, and he always seems bored with it. Or not quite that; but she seems no more to him than any other child."

“There’s something very curious about all that,” said the doctor. “In most things the greater includes the less, but in philanthropy it seems to exclude it. If a man’s heart is open to the whole world, to all men, it’s shut sometimes against the individual, even the nearest and dearest.” (816)

Here, Howells uses Annie to investigate the shifting ground where humanity and love both dwell. It is she who brings the contradictions in Peck’s behavior to Morrell’s attention; her inquiries, rather than endorsing a narrow, privatized version of humanitarianism, expose the follies in the overly generalized, equalizing practice that Peck lives by. This scene illustrates the thesis of the above section on the ideologues: Peck’s example helps Annie to reflect and to grow. In addition to being a novel that deals “rather with humanity than with love,” *Annie Kilburn* is a novel that looks at the way humanity and love intersect (Howells qtd. in Christianson 175). To be an ideologue humanitarian, the novel suggests, is a kind of folly, not because it is smarter to maintain an ironic detachment, but because true change—both in oneself and in others—happens as a result of love: humanitarianism in the particular. This is a lesson, however, that Annie would not have learned had she not initially been a humanitarian striver, someone open to asking these questions and eager to figure them out. Her porosity to the world may make her insecure, but it also makes her incredibly flexible, moldable, and responsive to what is around her. Ideologues, so confident in their convictions, lack the necessary doubt and skepticism to grow as Annie does.

By the end of the novel Peck (and his idealism) are crushed by a train; he is killed just after resigning from his pastoral post and deciding to teach in a mill school. His

untimely death releases Annie from her impulsive commitment to follow him there and take care of Idella. Instead, Idella stays with her, a gesture of kindness on Annie's part not dictated by duty, but by love. Still moved by what Peck taught her, she finds a way to balance her ideals with the necessities before her. As she explains to Dr. Morrell,

Oh, we must continue to do charity. . . . But don't you see how much more complicated it is? . . . It was easy enough to do charity when it used to seem the right and proper remedy for suffering; but now, when I can't make it appear a finality, but only something provisional, temporary—Don't you see? . . . We ought to be fairer to people, and then we needn't be so good to them. (818)

But because the present necessity does dictate that “we must continue to do charity,” Annie does not abandon her goal to play the part of the humanitarian. Rather than take the place of humanitarian striving for Annie, motherhood helps her to understand the importance of that striving in a new light. In pragmatist fashion, Annie continues to pursue humanitarianism with her eyes wide open and her consciousness raised, all the while hoping that doing something, however provisional and temporary, is still significant in the now. Applying her sense of optimism and intuition to what she learned from Peck, Annie continues her work with the Social Union, her striving tempered by time, maturity, and confidence gained through experience. “She is really of use,” the narrator tells us, “for its [the Social Union's] working is by no means ideal, and with her wider knowledge she has suggested improvements and expedients for making both ends meet which were sometimes so reluctant to meet” (862-3). In the end, it is not Peck's austere idealism—or Tolstoy's, or Lindau's—that triumphs, nor does the detached

attitude of Dr. Morrell—or Putney, or Sewell, or the Marches—prevail. Annie finds a functional middle ground between idealism and complacency that allows her to contribute to her community and grow in wisdom at the same time. Margaret Vance, whose humanitarian strivings find a concrete outlet as *Hazard* goes on, arguably inhabits the same productive middle ground as Annie. But Howells devotes more narrative attention to Annie than to any other striver in his fiction. This has the effect of fostering an intimacy with Annie’s strivings, a sense of proximity between reader and protagonist that tacitly promotes the psychological value of the paces Annie goes through. Of Annie, the narrator reflects, “No theory is so perfect as not to be subject to exceptions in the experiment, and in spite of her conviction of the truth of Mr. Peck’s social philosophy, Annie is aware, through her simple and frank relations with the hands in a business matter, of mutual kindness which it does not account for” (862). Annie, at the end, sees beyond Peck’s ascetic assessments of one’s role in the world. His idealism lives on, to a degree, through Annie, but some of the ironists’ pragmatism has worn on her as well.

Howells takes seriously Annie’s declaration that “within the last four or five months . . . I seem to have lost my old point of view; or, rather, I don’t find it satisfactory any more” (817). Annie Kilburn is a humanitarian self who ponders her role, her choices, her mistakes, and her missteps. Not for nothing does Howells devote his novel to the story of a woman striving, through the structure of the humanitarian dynamic, to find herself. It is a story of self-realization that only a humanitarian striver—not an ideologue, who has the answers; or an ironist, who thinks there aren’t any—could engage in. Though Howells’s examination of this type is unique among his late 1880s, economic novels, it is

important to balance any readings of his take on humanitarianism from a more detached, ironic point of view with this story of self-realization: the tale of a woman who saw helping others as a path to becoming herself. This narrative found multiple expressions during the late nineteenth century and beyond, as the rest of this dissertation will explore.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Albion Tourgée's *A Fool's Errand* as Rhetorical Humanitarianism

. . . the moment [southerners] manifest a disposition to acquiesce cordially in the altered *status* of their former slaves, to treat them as freemen, and deal with them in justice and humanity, that moment will the Federal Government be free to leave them to manage their domestic affairs in their own way. It is to be hoped that they will learn to look at this matter aright, and lay aside the animosities toward the colored race, which now seem to have possession of their minds. This is their best policy from reasons of self-interest, as it is their duty from a humanitarian standpoint.

*The Philadelphia Inquirer*, July 25, 1865

“The life of the Fool proper is full of the poetry of faith,” Albion Tourgée declares in the “Letter to the Publishers” that opens his novel *A Fool's Errand* (1879) (5).<sup>37</sup> “He differs from his fellow-mortals chiefly in this, that he sees or believes what they do not, and consequently undertakes what they never attempt” (5). In *A Fool's Errand*, a novel based on Tourgée’s fourteen years in post-bellum North Carolina, the carpetbagger-cum-author tells the story of an idealist Fool who thought he could change things from the perspective of a seasoned realist who failed in his attempts to do so, thus commenting knowingly (if affectionately) on the Fool’s striving to see humanitarian justice done in

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<sup>37</sup> With the exception of the front matter quotations from the 1880 edition, all citations from the novel come from the 1961 edition, edited by John Hope Franklin and published by Belknap.

the Reconstruction-era South. Although *A Fool's Errand* is a memoir of sorts—Tourgée bases his protagonist's travails on his own experiences, and Comfort Servosse (said protagonist) is a stand-in for himself—it lacks the kind of introspection and focus on self-development that characterizes *Annie Kilburn* and realist novels more generally. Of all the figures in “American Callings,” Tourgée is the one most closely aligned to human rights, as opposed to humanitarian, discourses.<sup>38</sup> Like human rights activists in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries would do, Tourgée pursued change through legal, political, and bureaucratic channels. He organized Greensboro's first black school; edited and published a Radical Republican newspaper; represented North Carolina as a delegate to the 1868 State Constitutional Convention; and served a six-year term as a superior court justice, a position he used to fight the Ku Klux Klan. Later in his career he founded the National Citizen's Rights Association (a precursor of the NAACP), helped establish the first comprehensive anti-lynching law in the United States, and, most famously, was lead attorney for the plaintiff in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), the first constitutional challenge to state-mandated segregation.<sup>39</sup>

Tourgée's life and writing provide a model for how humanitarian impulses and insights can complement human rights work. Tourgée's biography fits the mold of the humanitarian adventurer that the Peace Corps Volunteer emblemizes: someone who

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<sup>38</sup> I thank Phil Barrish for helping me articulate Tourgée's difference from the other humanitarians in these terms. This is not to say that the other humanitarians *didn't* do human rights work. Addams did as well. These distinctions exist on a continuum.

<sup>39</sup> Mark Elliott's *Color-Blind Justice: Albion Tourgée and the Quest for Racial Equality, from the Civil War to Plessy v. Ferguson* (2006) is an excellent recent biography of Tourgée, the only one published since 1965, when Otto Olsen's groundbreaking work *Carpetbagger's Crusade: The Life of Albion Winegar Tourgée* appeared.

seeks an adventure driven by moral purpose in a culture different from his own. Historian C. Vann Woodward points out that, for a whole generation of northern men, the adventurous highpoint of their lives was their participation in the Civil War. Traumatic as they must have found it, some sought to prolong this encounter because, for one reason or another, the South got under their skin. About Tourgée, Woodward writes that he “simply could not put the South out of his mind” (xi). Tourgée was relentless in seeking out the discomfort, hardship, and intellectual puzzle the South presented such that “the encounter was renewed, tenaciously pursued, and obstinately prolonged” (Woodward xi). Tourgée was driven by the moral challenges of seeking reconciliation between the North and the South after the Civil War and fighting for the African Americans whose freedom was won, but whose rights were trammled by the habits and strictures of a society stuck in its ways and opposed to change. At the same time, he seemed to crave the personal, emotional challenges presented to him by living in what, at the time, was like a different country.

In his writing Tourgée does not focus on self-transformation the way many humanitarian adventurers do, but the work for racial justice he undertook was underwritten by an insight about the self. “We are selves,” Charles Taylor writes, “only in that certain issues matter for us” (34). One of the central convictions informing *A Fool’s Errand* is Tourgée’s belief that individual selves are created by environments and societies. In other words, the environment surrounding individuals structures what issues matter to them; it helps them establish a hierarchy of value that weighs state and nation, tradition and change. In the particular context of Reconstruction, a situation that posed a



humanitarian challenge to the nation as a whole,<sup>40</sup> Tourgée realized that selves on both sides of the Mason-Dixon had to be altered in order for humanitarian action to occur and humanitarian change to take hold. This meant more than changing minds. It meant changing deeply held convictions and ways of looking at the world, patterns established over a lifetime. With his novel Tourgée describes an orientation to the world that relies on and has faith in the potential of discourse to alter perspectives, to change selves. This perspective insists on the centrality of dialogue to that project, not as a replacement for action, but as a precursor and/or a companion to it. Working with the knowledge that selves are contingent upon the societies and discourses that surround them, Tourgée, like Howells, meditates on how best to inhabit the role of the humanitarian actor, and persuasion is central to his conception.

At the end of *A Fool's Errand*, after Servosse has failed to alter his southern neighbors' attitudes concerning racial justice and political participation, he receives a piece of conciliatory advice from a northern mentor: "I have often thought that St. Paul would have been more forbearing with his Jewish brethren if he had always kept in mind the miracle required for his own conversion" (388). By drawing a parallel between St. Paul, a converted Jew and Christianity's first evangelist, and Servosse, a carpetbagger and an evangelical proponent of radical Reconstruction, Tourgée's character Enos Martin

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<sup>40</sup> Though building a nation—which Reconstruction was intended to do—is not inherently a humanitarian project, the humane goal of providing economic and political rights to African Americans, for Radical Republicans and for the blacks concerned, at least, was inextricable from bringing the North and South together. The ideal of a unified nation where blacks and whites were both guaranteed the rights of citizens drew on the ideal of shared humanity. By the end of Reconstruction, in 1877, those in power who previously had insisted upon racial justice were willing to compromise on that point, however.

counsels patience. He reminds Servosse that radical change must be accompanied by a radically new way of seeing things, an alteration in vision akin to the way the scales fell from Saul's eyes. Similarly, the passage from the *Philadelphia Inquirer* that opens this chapter asserts that southern self-rule should be restored only upon evidence that southerners were "look[ing] at this matter aright" by setting aside their "animosities toward the colored race." Southerners too must adopt a new way of seeing. For both Tourgée in 1879 and an anonymous journalist in 1865, federal legislation alone would never be enough to effect the sweeping economic, social, and political changes that the Reconstruction they envisioned demanded. If new laws were to be followed, they had to be accompanied by a new perspective. Whether that change in perspective would be best brought about by logical demonstration, force, emotional appeals, or the passage of time was a vexed question, one which Tourgée took up with *A Fool's Errand*.

However, where the writer for the *Inquirer* wrote in the immediate, hopeful wake of the Civil War, looking forward to changes on the horizon, Tourgée published his novel once having made the decision to leave the South after a fourteen-year stint fighting for racial justice in North Carolina. During that same period, despite the efforts of Tourgée and others like him, southern governments and citizens adopted measures—poll taxes, literacy requirements, grandfather clauses, and convict labor, to name a few—that successfully negated the promises of freedom and political participation for African Americans that the Civil Rights Bill of 1866 and the passage of the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth amendments were meant to guarantee. It was the Hayes-Tilden compromise of 1877, however, that sounded the official death-knell of Reconstruction by granting

victory to Republican Rutherford B. Hayes in the disputed presidential election on the condition that the federal troops remaining in Louisiana and South Carolina cease interfering in southern affairs. Tourgée, then, penned his tormented novel about where to go after the failure of Reconstruction at the same moment that political and literary overtures to North-South palliation gained steam. Alongside the political concessions cemented by the North's guarantee of military non-interference arose a sentimental culture of reconciliation that, as Amy Kaplan and Nina Silber have both argued, promoted a "willed amnesia" in the Gilded Age: novels featuring North-South marriages, short fiction inventing a bucolic past for the South, and local color writing that commodified the regional in service to the national (Kaplan, "Nation, Region, and Empire" 242).<sup>41</sup>

Tourgée's was a voice of dissent in this period of vigorous national re-imagining that sought to paper over the rancor of the past. Unlike those who would forge a national culture on a foundation of forgetting, Tourgée wrote so that readers would remember what he understood as the reality of Reconstruction—and act on it. More than an activist, Tourgée was an evangelist for his cause, and he wrote prolifically to attempt to persuade southerners and northerners alike to adopt his views on the politics of racial equality because he knew that legislation alone would not change behavior. All told, Tourgée published fifteen novels (mostly of historical fiction), eight books of criticism, and hundreds of newspaper and magazine articles. Persuasion—how to do it,

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<sup>41</sup> See Nina Silber's *The Romance of Reunion* (1997) and Amy Kaplan's essay "Nation, Region, and Empire" in *The Columbia History of the American Novel*.

the difficulty of it—figured prominently as a problem and a promise in Tourgée’s interrelated literary and legal careers.

Critics, however, have neglected a full assessment of the role persuasion plays in the prescriptions for change outlined in *A Fool’s Errand*. Instead, they have focused on two other salient elements of Tourgée’s proposed course of action: recourse to force and belief in the power of rational exchange. The central tension in the novel comes from the interaction between these elements, which are born from two of the narrator-Fool’s conflicting convictions. First, the narrator suspects that it will take more than reason—a miracle, or perhaps, a miracle brought about by force—to change the minds of the conservative, power-wielding former slaveholders in the South, as Enos Martin reminds Servosse. At the same time, the Fool holds out hope that logical demonstration might bring those same southerners around to recognition of their duty toward the freedpeople, the “best policy from reasons of self-interest,” as the *Philadelphia Inquirer* would have it. Critics who read *A Fool’s Errand* as an expression of Tourgée’s theories of social change have tended to focus on one of these convictions without fully exploring how they overlap and influence one another. Alert to the Fool’s desire for external (if not divine) intervention, one group reads *A Fool’s Errand* as an endorsement of regional imperialism—a kind of humanitarianism by force, without dialogue or persuasion.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> In “Reconstructing Reconstruction: Region and Nation in the Work of Albion Tourgée,” Peter Caccavari asserts that “the solution offered in *A Fool’s Errand* is to destroy regionalism and replace it with nationalism by force, but by an informed force, one which understands the natures of both region and nation” (126). Robert M. Myers, in “Desirable Immigrants’: The Assimilation of Transplanted Yankees in Page and Tourgée,” explores the parallel between foreign colonial endeavors and the North’s relationship to the South. He finds that “Tourgée’s novel recuperates the colonialist project” and that in the novel “the only hope for

Gretchen Short most thoroughly draws out the novel's imperialist tendencies in her reading of *A Fool's Errand*. Contrasting the novel's vision of a "democratic, pluralistic, and cooperative" society with its means of getting there, Short finds that both the content of Tourgée's response to the failure of Reconstruction and the literary form of that response result in "indoctrination and exclusion" (243). Though "overtly, *A Fool's Errand* endorses the persuasive possibilities of public education and open debate," Short argues, the overwhelming thrust of the novel "is an appeal to imperial control (over education and Southern society in general) as a means of forcibly converting the South to the ideals of Radical Republicanism" (243).

A second group makes the case that Tourgée was a "child of the Enlightenment" who trusted in the power of appeals to right reason to dismantle the prejudice of intransigent white southerners (Thomas, "Tragedies of Race" 771).<sup>43</sup> Jeffrey W. Miller,

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'a nation unified in sentiment and civilization' is national education imposed by the North" (73, 70). However, it is Gretchen Short who takes on the issue of change by force most directly, in her essay comparing *A Fool's Errand* with Charles Chesnutt's *The Marrow of Tradition* (1901), as I explain.

Caccavari's, Myers's, and Short's arguments are consistent with an historical interpretation of Reconstruction at the beginning of a history of American attempts "to transform a defeated society through a sustained military occupation" that "foreshadow[s] significant parts of American foreign policy over the next century and a half," from the Philippines to Japan, Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan (Ayers par. 3).

<sup>43</sup> This assertion is rife in criticism on Tourgée, in essays dealing both with *A Fool's Errand* and other novels. In "Tragedies of Race, Training, Birth, and Communities of Competent Pudd'nheads," Brook Thomas draws out the implications of Tourgée's adherence to Enlightenment rationalism by comparing his 1890 novel *Pactolus Prime* to *Pudd'nhead Wilson* (1894). Other critics have since followed Thomas's lead by extending his characterization of Tourgée as Enlightenment rationalist to *A Fool's Errand*. Peter Caccavari, in "A Trick of Meditation," writes that in *Fool's* "Tourgée treats the division of the nation as an intellectual problem that to some extent can be solved by rational observation and explanation" (142); Jeffrey W. Miller, in "Redemption Through Violence: White Mobs and Black Citizenship in Albion Tourgée's *A Fool's Errand*," writes that "Servosse continues to agitate in a calm and reasoned manner because he believes that his plain-spoken logic will win out over the somewhat hysterical

for instance, asserts that *Fool's* is a dialogue “that compares [Servosse’s] cool, educated reason to the scattered ignorance of the South” (21). Those who observe the influence of Enlightenment rationalism on Tourgée’s thought draw on evidence from the author’s biography and his other novels to make their case. Even so, the notion that Tourgée “believed that by embodying right reason in his fiction he could educate the public and eliminate prejudice” has seeped into the conversation surrounding *Fool's* to become an unchallenged and under-supported commonplace attended by little to no consideration of what “right reason” even meant for Tourgée (Thomas, “Tragedies of Race” 771).

We need to do more to understand the relationship between Tourgée’s contradictory impulses toward force and reason. For Tourgée was torn. At once committed to rational dialogue and tempted by the surety of force, he also believed that humanitarian action has a rhetorical component: persuading others (in this case, former slaveholding southerners) of the necessity of change, converting them to a different way of seeing and being. Tourgée’s humanitarianism is rhetorical, his rhetoric humanitarian, because the kind of dialogue he endorses begins by recognizing a shared humanity. This rhetorical approach to humanitarian change, I will show, in some senses generates Tourgée’s opposing impulses even as it allows him to navigate them. Turning our attention to Tourgée’s use of empathetic persuasion—the effort to alter the point of view

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southern ideology of redemption. This subtext of enlightenment weaves throughout the book” (21); and, drawing on Tourgée’s non-fiction, political writing, Bill Hardwig contrasts Tourgée’s faith in “right reason” with what he argues is Charles Chesnut’s more sophisticated understanding of the relationship between justice, history, race, and prejudice in “Who Owns the Whip? Chesnut, Tourgée, and Reconstruction Justice.” The picture that emerges from Hardwig’s analysis in particular is one of Tourgée as a naïve believer in reason, which, as I argue in this essay, was not the case.

of one's antagonist by first understanding his or hers—provides a way to explore the interactions and overlaps between imperialist inclinations and a commitment to rational dialogue. Because Tourgée's use of empathetic persuasion has heretofore been given short shrift, I will devote most of this chapter to an analysis of the way in which Tourgée applies empathy in the novel. I will then analyze how the three avenues for change he explores (force, reason, and empathetic persuasion) interact.

### **Empathy, Habit, and Entrenched Ideas**

Reviewers around the country described the anonymously-authored *A Fool's Errand*, a best-seller by the day's standards,<sup>44</sup> as a call to action and an exposé of the violence of intimidation in the South. When Fords, Howard, & Hulbert printed a second edition in 1880, they included four pages of extracts from the reviews, introduced by the declaration that “the reception accorded to this anonymous book, both by press and public, has been so unusual, and the impression made by the work has been so marked, that these facts are worth recording” (1). Most of the praise came from the North, though reviewers were hopeful the novel would find an audience in the South as well. As the *Jackson Citizen*, of Michigan, declared, “If this book does not meet with a marvelous reception, and awaken profoundest comment North and South, then we will confess a total incapability to judge of what can play upon that most incomprehensible pipe, the

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<sup>44</sup> Otto Olsen puts the number of copies sold at 150,000 (224); Monte Olenick at “close to 200,000” (334); John Hope Franklin estimates “that the total sales may have finally reached 200,000” (xxi); and Jeffrey Miller writes that *Fool's* “reached almost one million readers and probably accounted for informing more readers about Reconstruction than any other source, at least until Thomas Dixon came along” (18).

Public” (4). The publishers also included a nervous *Raleigh Observer* note: “It is a powerfully written work, and destined, we fear, to do as much harm in the world as *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, to which it is, indeed, a companion piece” (2).

What kind of “harm in the world” were southern reviewers worried the novel would cause?; what sort of “profoundest comment” did northern reviewers anticipate? With its depiction of letters, newspapers, and face-to-face encounters, *Fool’s* homes in on the debate in the 1860s and 70s over the fate of African Americans conducted between two pairings of people: Republicans in the South and Republicans in the North, on the one hand, and southern Republicans and southern Democrats, on the other. It is a book, in other words, that listens closely to a conversation among white people about the future of black people.<sup>45</sup> This is not to say that Tourgée did not appreciate the importance of African-American agency. In fact, Tourgée’s novel *Bricks without Straw* (1880), published just one year after *Fool’s*, depicts extensively the black point of view in a way that *Fool’s* does not, drawing a nuanced portrait of black characters and showing them to be powerful actors in their political destinies.<sup>46</sup> While Peter Schmidt describes the change from *Fool’s* to *Bricks* as a “crucial improvement” because in the second novel Tourgée “attempted to rethink the role black leaders and their community would play in his

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<sup>45</sup> Caccavari observes that in *Fool’s* “African Americans serve largely as a backdrop for the story which is primarily about how whites attempt to solve the political, cultural, and racial divisions of the nation” (“Trick of Meditation” 139). Eric Foner (and W. E. B. Du Bois before him) has shown this dynamic to be historically inaccurate: “rather than passive victims of the actions of others or simply a ‘problem’ confronting white society, blacks were active agents in the making of Reconstruction” (xxii). Though Tourgée does portray a meeting of the Union League with both black and white Republicans in attendance, *Fool’s* does not concern itself primarily with depicting this historical reality.

<sup>46</sup> For analyses of *Bricks without Straw*, see Peter Schmidt, pp. 58-63; Carolyn Karcher; and Brook Thomas, *Civic Myths*, pp. 158-63.



narrative,” I would submit that Tourgée’s shift from white to black agency does not indicate a change of heart, but rather a change of focus (60). Tourgée’s chief concern in *Fool’s* is to analyze the problem of inter-regional (mis)understanding by attempting to work out the relationships among force, reason, and persuasion in getting white, property-holding southerners—former slaveholders<sup>47</sup>—to see anew.

The novel—part historical romance, part political tract<sup>48</sup>—combines plot-driven, high-drama chapters with non-narrative elements (letters, charts, essays, and newspaper articles, all drawn from Tourgée’s own experience) that meditate on the dilemma of promoting a progressive racial politics during Reconstruction. In *Fool’s* a former Union colonel, Comfort Servosse, relocates to North Carolina with his family. His aim is to do

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<sup>47</sup> In writing *A Fool’s Errand*, Tourgée’s intended audience was largely northern, Republican whites whom he wanted to enlighten as to why their attempts at reconciliation with the former Confederacy resulted in the abandonment of the cause of political justice for the freedpeople. Servosse’s audience, however, is more divided than that. Though he does address letters to northern lawmakers, he also, for much of the book, addresses himself to former slaveholders in the South. Servosse’s concern is twofold: to demonstrate to northerners that their approach was flawed and to persuade southern whites to reconsider their relationship to the blacks in their midst. “Southern whites,” of course, were not a homogenous group. For instance, at a meeting of the Union League Servosse meets Durfree, a white man who “belonged to a family of the strongest Union proclivities, who had faced far more danger in resisting and avoiding conscription than he would have been required to meet in the field,” and John Walters, a small businessman and Unionist whose staunch advocacy of the franchise for freedpeople provokes his irate neighbors to lynch him (121). It is not men like these, clearly, at whom Servosse’s powers of persuasion are targeted, but rather the aristocratic class of whites, a powerful minority in the South, who used to own slaves and who, in the 1870s, vehemently and violently sought to prevent the legislative changes of Reconstruction from becoming a lived reality.

<sup>48</sup> The novel’s unconventional form has drawn critical attacks from both those who fault Tourgée for his “flagrantly and luxuriantly romantic plot” and those who argue, in contrast, that “his fictions are fundamentally political tracts, and any analysis of them must be firmly based on the knowledge that they are significant as social criticism and not literary art” (Becker 61, Gross 113). For appraisals of *Fool’s* that find fault with the novel on aesthetic grounds (deriding either its romanticism or its didacticism), see George Becker, Ted Weissbuch, Theodore Gross, Otto Olsen, and Gretchen Short.

business while pursuing racial reform and inter-regional communication in an area beset by the same racial and political problems that roiled communities all over the South during Reconstruction.<sup>49</sup> Even though Tourgée's novel ends with a North-South marriage (between Colonel Servosse's headstrong daughter, Lily, and the son of an aristocratic southern family, Melville Gurney), a common trope of regional reconciliation in post-Civil War literature, the bulk of the novel emphasizes the obstacles, mostly in the form of political intimidation and violence, that Servosse is up against. Sometimes the intimidation is physical: upon leaving a meeting at which he expresses the view that black suffrage is inevitable, Servosse, riding on horseback, happens upon (and thereby avoids) a trap laid for him by angry members of the audience. At other times, the intimidation is social, as when Servosse and his wife are shunned because they invite a group of white, northern teachers who work at Freedmen's Bureau schools to join them for Thanksgiving dinner. Later in the novel, when Servosse becomes a critic of the Klan and its brutality, he too is persecuted by it. The book is a story of the failure of Reconstruction told through the experiences of a carpetbagging family. It is also a post-mortem of the period, analyzing the decision-making dynamics, ingrained prejudices, and communicative breakdowns that led to a failure to secure the rights of African Americans after the Civil War.

That the novel lends itself to contradictory readings of what Tourgée concludes from that analysis speaks to the paradoxes generated by the collision of Tourgée's

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<sup>49</sup> The novel never specifies where, exactly, the action occurs. Tourgée spent his time in the South in Greensboro, North Carolina, however.

commitment to justice with his keen sense of empathy. Empathy—identification with the other in order to understand his/her point of view—can, as Saidiya Hartman reminds us, slide easily into objectification. When a humanitarian actor identifies with the object of her sympathy, as for instance Harriet Beecher Stowe invites mothers to do in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (“If it were *your* Harry, mother, or your Willie, that were going to be torn from you by a brutal trader, tomorrow morning . . . how fast could *you* walk?”), she is likely to erase difference, to co-opt the suffering of the other (105). Hartman calls this “narcissistic identification” (4). To be sure, those concerned with the interplay between literature, ethics, and humanitarianism would do well to remain alert to Hartman’s admonition. It is an admonition Howells’s Annie Kilburn could have benefited from. Annie, for a brief period of time, finds her humanitarian calling in sponsoring trips to the seaside for ailing children of the Hatboro’ mill workers. When one child fails to be rehabilitated by the sea air and dies, Annie takes responsibility: “I’ve killed the child!” (749). The child’s death was not Annie’s fault, which she comes to realize as the novel progresses. More significantly, she also comes to realize that her investment in that child and her empathy with the family were selfish: “I did feel remorseful toward Mrs. Savor for a while, but I didn’t love her, and I knew that I only pitied myself through her” (819). Her outreach to and empathy with the Savor family were motivated by a need to create and constitute herself, the “narcissistic identification” Hartman describes.

Tourgée’s use of empathetic persuasion, however, is distinct from Hartman’s model. For one thing, Tourgée is struggling to identify with, or understand, the point of view of former slaveholders. These men, while different from Tourgée/Servosse in a

variety of ways, are not the racial or ethnic other whose selfhood is at risk of being obliterated by the humanitarian actor's identification with them. Furthermore, both Tourgée and Servosse use empathy not to stand in solidarity with suffering subjects, as Annie tried to do with the Savor family, but to engage in dialogue with agonistic partners. The parallel to Howells's novel would be if Annie had tried to empathetically identify with mill owners in an attempt to persuade them to treat their workers differently. If empathy traditionally functions as "I am you," as the title of Karl Morrison's study of empathy in western literature suggests, Tourgée's use of empathy takes the construct one step further: his empathy goes beyond "I am you" to "I am *not* you—but I could have been." In other words, in seeking to understand the origins of his antagonist's way of thinking, Tourgée identifies with former slaveholding southerners to the extent that he can see that he very likely *would have been* them had he been raised in similar circumstances. Tourgée's empathy, then, relies on recognition of profound difference and its contingency.

While this realization underscores commonalities between the two groups, it also drives home the insurmountable divide that culture and history have gouged between them. Anticipating by some years a public conversation among his era's social scientists about what role human beings can have in instigating change, Tourgée understood just how deeply culture, habit, and history shape belief and inhibit it. As William James would observe,

The currents [into the brain], once in, must find a way out. In getting out they leave their traces in the paths which they take. The only thing they *can* do, in

short, is to deepen old paths or to make new ones; and the whole plasticity of the brain sums itself up in two words when we call it an organ in which currents pouring in from the sense organs make with extreme facility paths which do not easily disappear. (*Psychology* 112)

James extended the neurological insight that making new paths is much harder than following old ones to human behavior, asserting “that any sequence of mental action which has been frequently repeated, tends to perpetuate itself; so that we find ourselves automatically prompted to *think, feel, or do* what we have been before accustomed to think, feel, or do” (*Psychology* 116). James’s exploration of habit lacked a systemic social application of his insights; it would take the combination of ideas like James’s with Spencerian Social Darwinism for William Graham Sumner to articulate his sociological theories in *Folkways* (1907), which uses a line from Castiglione’s *Book of the Courtier* as its epigraph: “Thus it is clearly seen that use, rather than reason, has power to introduce new things amongst us, and to do away with old things.”<sup>50</sup> Pursuant to those lines from the Renaissance, Sumner explored the role that social norms—what he calls “folkways”—have in preserving the status quo, and he questioned the role reason plays in change, just as Tourgée did twenty-eight years earlier. Even as James and Sumner expostulated on the restraining power of personal habit and social norms, however, Lester

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<sup>50</sup> Sumner wasn’t much of a reformer. In 1894 he published an essay titled “The Absurd Effort to Make the World Over,” which pretty much summed up his view on humanitarian action and reform. Even so, his insight into the power of use over reason to change point of view has been rearticulated by recent philosophers. For instance, in *Cosmopolitanism* (especially pp. 72-8) Appiah argues that “the reasons we exchange in our conversations will seldom do much to persuade others who do not share our fundamental evaluative judgments already” (72); he puts the power of “a gradually acquired new way of seeing things” above the power of a well-articulated argument (73).

Frank Ward decried their pessimism and caricatured the despair of Sumner and other laissez-faire sociologists in his essay “Mind as a Social Factor” (1884). For them, he wrote, “philanthropy is zeal without knowledge, while humanitarianism is fanaticism” (565). Ward thought otherwise. He saw a role for human creativity and compassion in developing institutions that would contribute to social progress, and he understood the impulse to do so as specifically human: “All of these altruistic sentiments [equity, beneficence, and benevolence] are wholly unknown, or known only in the merest embryo, to all animals below man, and therefore no such means of protection exist among them. They are strictly human, or anthropic” (570). Ward endorsed a “philosophy of *action*” in contrast to what he saw as a philosophy of apathy (573).

While in the classrooms of Harvard, Yale, and Brown, where they taught, James, Sumner, and Ward developed the ideas that would form the arguments of their major books, Tourgée used fiction to illuminate the options for change available to two regions with such profoundly different notions of justice and duty. Like Ward, Tourgée endorsed a philosophy of action, but his novel demonstrates that Tourgée understood, as James did, that habit is “the enormous fly-wheel of society, its most precious conservative agent” (James, *Psychology* 125). Tourgée’s diagnosis—what I term his “entrenched ideas thesis”—anticipates James’s by applying a similar insight to Reconstruction. The claims of his entrenched ideas thesis are as follows: after the Civil War, the North and the white South could not see eye to eye on the humanitarian issue of social, economic, and political justice for African Americans because they were two vastly different nations within a nation, and their widely divergent (though intertwined) histories made

communication nigh impossible. As Metta Servosse, the protagonist's wife, puts it: "We are so different, have been reared under such different influences, and have such different thoughts, that it does not seem as if we should ever get nearer to them" (101). While a popular discourse of reunion worked to dismantle this sense of two nations within a nation, Tourgée attempted to reinforce it, for the nation could move forward, he believed, only after recognizing and remedying, not denying, the divisions within. By my count, the basic contours of the entrenched ideas thesis are explicitly voiced nine times in the novel—by the narrator, by Colonel Servosse, Metta Servosse, and by various minor characters. At the end of the book Servosse explains his understanding of the problem of Reconstruction to Enos Martin. This articulation of the novel's argument contains most of the recurring premises of the thesis, and it is more or less representative of it. Servosse says,

The North and the South are simply convenient names for two distinct, hostile, and irreconcilable ideas,—two civilizations they are sometimes called, especially at the South. At the North there is somewhat more of intellectual arrogance; and we are apt to speak of the one as civilization, and of the other as a species of barbarism. These two must always be in conflict until the one prevails, and the other falls. To uproot the one, and plant the other in its stead, is not the work of a moment or a day. That was our mistake. We tried to superimpose the civilization, the idea of the North, upon the South at a moment's warning. We presumed that, by the suppression of rebellion, the Southern white man had become identical with the Caucasian of the North in thought and sentiment; and that the slave, by

emancipation, had become a saint and a Solomon at once. So we tried to build up communities there which should be identical in thought, sentiment, growth, and development, with those of the North. It was A FOOL'S ERRAND. (381)

Drawing from this passage and others like it, three premises of Tourgée's argument become apparent. First, the North and the South are two separate civilizations; this word, "civilization," is used over and over to emphasize the differences distinguishing the two regions. Second, individuals are shaped by the civilization, or culture,<sup>51</sup> into which they are born, and these early influences limit their ability to empathize with others. As a minor character remarks to the Colonel, "You can not understand why they [southern "Regulators," predecessors of the Klan] should feel so, because you were never submitted to the same influences" (109). And third, the thesis conveys despair at the possibility of change so long as dialogue between regions is forestalled by the power and practice of habit.

As an example of the way Tourgée applies the claims of his thesis to the plot of *Fool's*, take this early scene in which the author anatomizes differences in conviction between southern aristocratic women and Freedmen's Bureau teachers:

[The teachers], no doubt, thought they were doing God's service, and wondered why the earnest Christians who dwelt about them should regard the inhabitants of

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<sup>51</sup> Drawing on Brad Evans's work in *Before Cultures* (2005), I would argue that Tourgée understands the differences between North and South to be what we would call "cultural" differences, even though the word he uses repeatedly to describe the gulf between North and South is "civilization." As Evans argues, the term "culture" would not have been available to Tourgée. Using examples as various as the World Fair, Boas's museum exhibits, local color writing, and Howells's novels, Evans shows that before the word "culture" came into use in its anthropological sense (which happened around 1910), the concept of culture as a way of understanding and categorizing difference circulated at the end of the nineteenth century.



the Mission House with such open aversion and apparent hate. . . . They wondered at it for a time, and then blamed the good people of Verdenton, and thought ill of their religion; when it was not the good people who were at fault, nor their religion, but only the civilization of which they were the outcome. There was never a kindlier, more hospitable, or more religious people on the footstool, than those of Verdenton; only they were kind according to *their notion*, as everybody else is; hospitable according to custom, like the rest of the world; and religious according to education and tradition, as are other people; and the disjointure of opinion between them and the Yankee schoolmarms was all because the latter wanted to measure them by Northern ideas of these virtues, instead of accepting those they found there. . . . So they went on teaching, as they had been taught, those who had been all their lives thitherto untaught; and the others went on hating and defaming them because such a course was counter to their traditions, and those who did it were their hereditary enemies. And both, no doubt, felt that they were doing God's service with all their might. (119-120)

Here and throughout *Fool's*, Tourgée is intent on showing how entrenched ideas breed “hereditary enemies” who seem to be unable to reconcile their differing points of view, or even, in this case, to understand them.

### **Tourgée as Proto-Rogierian**

Though several scholars have duly acknowledged Tourgée’s emphasis on the power of entrenched ideas,<sup>52</sup> the question of how the novel itself, with both its content and its form, attempts to overcome the obstacle that Servosse identifies in the passage quoted above remains to be investigated. It is here that empathy becomes essential. I would like to suggest that, in thrall to the three rather bleak premises of his entrenched ideas thesis, Tourgée uses his novel to try to work toward inter-regional dialogue he worries might be impossible. So, in contrast to Howells’s novels, which stage the development of the humanitarian self in their pages but are not pointed entrees into a specific rhetorical situation, Tourgée’s book is, in and of itself, a rhetorical humanitarian effort aimed at those who disagree with him. It is a response to the very particular problem of what to do after the failure of Reconstruction. Tourgée theorizes how inter-regional dialogue might work in the non-narrative sections of the novel. He then carries it out in the romance sections. Take, for instance, the non-narrative chapter in which the narrator sets out to show the differences in thought and sentiment separating the North and the South. Using a table to assume an all-seeing, omniscient posture, the narrator breaks down assumptions on both sides of the Mason-Dixon, riffing one region’s impressions off the other’s:

ANTE BELLUM.

NORTHERN IDEA OF SLAVERY.

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<sup>52</sup> John Hope Franklin, Monte Olenick, Edmund Wilson, Robert Sommer, Peter Caccavari’s “A Trick of Meditation,” and Robert Myers all note that in Tourgée’s estimation, “the North and South were virtually two different countries,” but none thoroughly pursues that observation (Wilson 540).

Slavery is wrong morally, politically, and economically. It is tolerated only for the sake of peace and quiet. The negro is a man, and has equal inherent rights with the white race.

#### SOUTHERN IDEA OF SLAVERY.

The negro is fit only for slavery. It is sanctioned by the Bible, and it must be right; or, if not exactly right, is unavoidable, now that the race is among us. We can not live with them in any other condition.

#### NORTHERN IDEA OF THE SOUTHERN IDEA.

Those Southern fellows know that slavery is wrong, and incompatible with the theory of our government; but it is a good thing for them. They grow fat and rich, and have a good time, on account of it; and no one can blame them for not wanting to give it up.

#### SOUTHERN IDEA OF THE NORTHERN IDEA.

Those Yankees are jealous because we make slavery profitable, raising cotton and tobacco, and want to deprive us of our slaves from envy. They don't believe a word of what they say about its being wrong, except a few fanatics. The rest are all hypocrites. (138)

The problem with communication between the white North and South, Tourgée asserts, is that while they “thought they comprehended each other’s ideas,” “they no more understood or appreciated each other’s feelings or development than John Chinaman comprehends the civilization of John Bull” (137).

The table spelling out the caricatured point of view of each region drives home the gulf in understanding that the entrenched ideas thesis identifies. In his analysis of the table, Tourgée virtually racializes the differences between the North and the South (John Chinaman v. John Bull)—quite the opposite of what most reunion discourse, which underscored regional commonalities, attempted. But, significantly, Tourgée does not stop with merely drawing attention to a gulf between regions; he also tries to bridge it. After constructing his table, the narrator acts as an arbiter between the two regions as he stands back to deliver what he sees as the truth of the situation by showing readers where the North and South fell short in their assessments of each other. In so doing he attempts a partiality that does not minimize the sentiments of either side: “The South, as a mass, was honest in its belief of the righteousness of slavery, both morally and politically. The North, in like manner, was equally honest in its conviction with regard to the wickedness of slavery, and its inconsistency with republican institutions; yet neither credited the other with honesty” (139-40).

Crediting both sides with honesty is what Tourgée is after, and the method of communication he demonstrates and proposes is instructive. *Fool’s* argues that structural change only works when accompanied by a change in perspective. Though Radical Reconstruction wrought structural, legislative, and constitutional changes on the political culture of the nation, the aristocratic ruling class in the South was able to resist the implementation and realization of those changes both during and after Reconstruction. And when, in 1877, the North agreed that its troops would cease interfering with affairs in the South and that southern self-rule would be fully restored, even the struggle to make

sure the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth amendments were adhered to was abandoned. In *Fool's* Tourgée argues that the failure of Reconstruction was due to ignorance of just how great the divergence between white northern and southern points of view on the future of their nation and the fate of the freedmen was; the Reconstruction plan the North pursued “took no account of . . . the popular feeling in regard to the African population of that section” (133-34). The inclusion and analysis of the “northern idea/southern idea” table suggests that recognizing the North and South to be two separate civilizations is not a dead end but a starting point, an invitation to further communication and understanding.

Servosse himself exhibits such understanding throughout *Fool's*, for even as he vociferously disagrees with the politics of his aristocratic neighbors, he sympathizes with their plight. Living in their midst for fourteen years, Tourgée attempted to see the hardship of the Civil War and Reconstruction from a southern point of view. A contemporary of Tourgée's, writing in the *Boston Daily Advertiser*, judged him successful in this capacity, noting that the book “shows the good as well as the bad side of the South . . . the almost insuperable disadvantages under which they were placed, the cruel necessities to which they felt themselves driven, and the masterly strength exhibited” (Eliot par. 6). With his lengthy description of the landscape of Reconstruction North Carolina in *Fool's*, Tourgée makes it clear that he feels his neighbor's pain. In the passage, the narrator mourns alongside the southerner, bemoaning the fact that “sadness and gloom covered the face of the land. . . . time and the scath of war had wrought ruin in his home” (129). In another surprising passage, the narrator compares the Ku Klux Klan's activities with John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry; both, he writes, represent the

astonishing power and bravery that it takes to contemplate and enact acts of violence motivated by idealism. “In any case,” the narrator observes, “it [KKK raids] must be counted but as the desperate effort of a proud, brave, and determined people to secure and hold what they *deemed to be their rights*” (254). These white southerners saw such violence as necessary, Tourgée asserts, because they “felt themselves insulted and oppressed. No matter whether they were or not, be the fact one way or another, it does not affect their conduct” (253).

Tourgée recognized that changing someone’s point of view—which Servosse attempts by speaking out in his community and running for a seat at the constitutional convention and which Tourgée attempted throughout his career—must begin with empathizing with that point of view. And empathizing with someone’s point of view rests on the assumption of shared humanity. One of Tourgée’s biographers admired this quality in him:

Convinced of the essential goodness of people, Tourgée sought the origins and esteemed the sincerity of beliefs that he himself abhorred. He presented the clash between North and South as a clash between good and bad values, but not as one between good and evil men. Honorable men on each side were following the dictates of a conscience imposed by their respective societies, and Tourgée, while urging particular values, also sought to encourage mutual tolerance and understanding. (Olsen 227)

At once refusing to cede ground on the crucial issue of social justice for African Americans and identifying with, instead of demonizing, those who did not share his

views, Tourgée opens up what Kenneth Burke calls “the characteristic invitation to rhetoric,” where identification and division are put “ambiguously together” (25). A gifted speaker and communicator, Servosse takes it upon himself to narrow the gap between the northern and southern perspective on African-American rights, and he diagnoses the South’s obstinate resistance to change as a rhetorical problem: “You deem disagreement an insult, and opposition a crime” (96). According to Servosse, southerners reject dialogue.<sup>53</sup> The question becomes, then, how to initiate it despite such resistance.

As a student at the University of Rochester, Tourgée studied “literature, logic, and rhetoric (three subjects which he enjoyed and excelled in),” and it is likely that his exposure to rhetorical theory shaped his convictions that appeals to right reason cannot be voiced apart from the circumstance of one’s lived experience, that persuasion must appeal to passion, and that identification is crucial to rhetorical success (Olsen 9). The most widely-used rhetoric textbook in colleges up until the Civil War, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belle Lettres* (1783), was written by Hugh Blair, a figure in the Scottish Enlightenment.<sup>54</sup> Like both Cicero and Edmund Burke, upon whose ideas he drew, Blair was aware of the role that engrained ideas and circumstance play in human decision-making. Often taught alongside Blair’s volume was George Campbell’s *Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1776), which applied the insights of Scottish Common Sense Realism to

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<sup>53</sup> In her recent book *Fanatical Schemes* (2009), Patricia Roberts-Miller analyzes pro-slavery rhetoric in the 1830s and finds that slavers did in fact put forth “relentless efforts to suppress dissent” and “silence reasonable discussion of abolitionists’ claims” (31). Tourgée’s novel is set thirty to forty years after the objects of Roberts-Miller’s analysis were written, but Servosse recalls the rhetorical blackout she describes when he reflects upon the violence of war and the difficulty of enacting Reconstruction programs of racial justice.

<sup>54</sup> See Gregory Clark and Michael Halloran, p. 15, and James Berlin, p. 25.

rhetorical theory. Campbell insisted that appeals to the emotions are central to persuasion, and “this emphasis on emotion makes sympathy, the identification of speaker and auditor, an important part of rhetoric” (Berlin 23). *Fool’s* certainly reflects the influence of Blair’s and Campbell’s emphases on the importance of emotion and circumstance to persuasion. Even so, some scholars who draw attention to Servosse’s rationality seem to assert that Tourgée’s protagonist finds a way to rise above the fray of cultural conflict, as Miller’s reference to Servosse’s “cool, educated reason” and “plain-spoken logic” as opposed to “the somewhat hysterical southern ideology of redemption” suggests (21). In fact, Tourgée was neither cool nor detached. As Brook Thomas demonstrates, Tourgée believed fierce partisanship to be the duty of the citizen (*Civic Myths* 161-3). The key to understanding Tourgée’s take on right reason and Enlightenment rationality rests not in divorcing rationality from passion and emotion, but on understanding how Tourgée saw them to be united, just as the thinkers of the Scottish Enlightenment who influenced him did.

Tourgée’s prescription for change through empathy, therefore, weds reason and emotion. In this it resembles twentieth-century Rogerian argument, a rhetorical approach developed from psychologist Carl Rogers’s research on communication.<sup>55</sup> Disagreement and resistance to reason, Rogers believed, comes out of a sense of threat, for threat shuts down discourse and keeps both speaker and listener from considering alternatives.

Removing that sense of threat is crucial to true communication, and the way to remove it

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<sup>55</sup> Richard E. Young, Alton L. Becker, and Kenneth L. Pike introduced Rogers’s theories of communication to rhetorical theory when they included a chapter on Rogers in *Rhetoric: Discovery and Change* (1970).



is through empathy. The speaker, or writer, must make the listener, or reader, feel that he is understood and “induce him to believe that he and the writer share similar moral qualities” (Young et al. 275). This kind of understanding goes beyond the purely intellectual, entering into the territory of imagination—“seeing the world through his eyes,” just as Tourgée does in his North/South table or when he ventriloquizes the perspective of the aristocratic women who scorn the northern teachers (Young et al. 275). If such understanding is successful, it diminishes the offensive/defensive positions in argument that keep people from listening to one another. The first step in Rogerian argument is to get the listener or reader to feel that her point of view has been acknowledged and understood. The second is to delineate an area of validity, that is, a context in which the listener’s beliefs are true. For instance, in the table laying out northern and southern views on slavery, Tourgée suggests that *if* one believes the Bible is the word of God, and *if* one reads the Bible as sanctioning slavery, then Christianity would be an area of validity, a context in which his interlocutors’ beliefs were true. (Areas of validity serve as starting points that can later be revised or even dismantled as discussion progresses.) Such concessions help the writer or speaker begin to “either build or discover bridges” that create the conditions of trust necessary for real argument and communication (Young et al. 280). In these ways, *Fool’s* is a kind of proto-Rogierian argument aimed at recalcitrant white southerners. If we look at the novel in this light, we can understand Tourgée’s sympathy with former slaveholders and his attempt to toggle between northern and southern perspectives as a way of convincing his imagined

audience—both northern and southern readers—that he understands the context of their complaints.

### **Romance, Not Realism**

Furthermore, thinking of *Fool's* as an empathetic gesture offers a new perspective on Tourgée's use of romance, a choice widely decried both when the novel was published and since. Tourgée was a vocal critic of literary realism. Interestingly, his critique turned the realists' own terms against them by calling into question their claims to represent reality. "The 'realists' profess to be truth-tellers, but are in fact the worst of falsifiers" because they, in "failing to appreciate the moral grandeur of that underlying idea of devotion to duty," were not reflecting "reality" (Tourgée "The South as a Field for Fiction" 411, "Study in Civilization" 250). They were, instead, constructing a certain kind of reality, one in which it is rare that "characters have any feeling beyond a self-conscious sensibility which seems to give them a deal of trouble without ever ripening into motive or resulting in achievement" (Tourgée "South as a Field" 408). Tourgée made this observation in 1888, the year that *Annie Kilburn* was published. His reference to realist characters' "self-conscious sensibility" aptly describes Howells's striver, though his finding that such a sensibility "give[s] them a great deal of trouble without ever . . . resulting in achievement" discounts the connections between self-awareness and humanitarian efficacy that I have been arguing for.

Tourgée was intent on emphasizing the discontinuities between realism and his own writing, whereas I have been pursuing the claim that both Howells's and Tourgée's

novels investigate the important overlap between selfhood and humanitarian change. Tourgée felt that something other than realism was called for in order to tell the “true” story of the South. To his mind, “southern life . . . is earnest, intense, full of action, and careless to a remarkable degree of the trivialities which both [Henry James and William Dean Howells] esteem the most important features of real life” (“South as a Field” 406). Everett Carter counts Tourgée among the early realists because, like John De Forest, Tourgée “made telling the truth, as [he] saw it, about the Civil War and its aftermath a central motive for [his] fiction” (77). Carter calls *Fool’s* “an attempt to set the record of Reconstruction right,” and that it was (80). To agree with Carter on this point is not to concede that Tourgée was a realist, though; Tourgée very much wanted to “set the record of Reconstruction right,” but he was also convinced that realism was not the way to do it. In his mind, the realists were cynics. He described them as writers who “ridicul[e . . . ] all sentiment and sneer[. . . ] at every phase of the heroic” (Tourgée “Study in Civilization” 250). Tourgée sounds a note that critic Kenneth Warren echoes and refines. Warren argues that realism “assisted in the creation of a climate of opinion that undermined the North’s capacity to resist Southern arguments against political equality for African Americans during the 1880s and 1890s” in part because realists embraced an “aesthetic that acknowledged its inability to represent the needs of oppressed and debased peoples on the American scene, particularly African Americans” (13, 65). As we have seen, Howells was not equally adept at telling a story from the point of view of someone unlike him (e.g., Lemuel Barker, the farm boy) as he was at telling a story from the point of view of a middle-class liberal. But neither Warren nor Tourgée acknowledges the case I

tried to make in Chapter One, namely, that realists such as Howells made a contribution to humanitarian causes by telling the kind of story they were best poised to tell: the story of the exploration and construction of humanitarian selves. Warren's criticism, specifically, posits a connection between the genre of realism and the betrayal of political radicalism.

Tourgée, in contrast, insists that politics is distinct from genre, that genre can be harnessed to various political ends. Therein lies his hope that novels like his might make a difference; he never acknowledges the possibility that novels like *Annie Kilburn* might.<sup>56</sup> In his 1888 essay "The South as a Field for Fiction," Tourgée observes that American literature has become "distinctly Confederate in sympathy"; the heroes that capture the popular imagination are those of the "War of Rebellion" (405, 407). Tourgée's observation was prescient, anticipating a subset of plantation school fiction that served the cause of Confederate nationalism—from Augusta Jane Evans's *Macaria* (1864), to Thomas Dixon's *The Leopard's Spots* (1902) and *The Clansman* (1905), up through Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* (1937). Novels like these would help to build and promote the civil religion of the Confederacy, the story of a region wounded and humiliated, but still proud, noble, and brave. "The South as a Field for Fiction" warned the politically progressive that southern writers with values very different from theirs had begun to mine the South for romance and heroism. Tourgée wanted to counter

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<sup>56</sup> The struggle Tourgée to which committed his professional life was not the struggle Howells engaged in. Though both where, in my schema, humanitarians, Tourgée took on the issue of racial justice full bore, whereas Howells's concerns were more wide-ranging (issues of class, labor, and, as we have seen, humanitarian selfhood). Howells deals with race specifically in his 1891 passing novel *An Imperative Duty*, but one cannot put his efforts to contend with racial injustice in the same category as Tourgée's.

that trend by telling stories of heroism from a different perspective. He saw the South as a fecund field for fiction because the battle in which he was invested—the fight for freedmen to secure political and social equality—was filled with as much pathos, glory, and heroism as the Confederate lost cause. So, the garb he gave to his progressive ideas was that same garb a group of southern writers gave (and would give) to their conservative ones. The romance of Tourgée’s plot, with its emphasis on nobility and its inclusion of moonlit pursuits on horseback and other acts of daring, dresses up Tourgée’s thesis in dramatic, appealing raiment.

What if we were to view the romantic, plot-driven sections of the novel not as aesthetic failure but instead as rhetorical triumph, one step toward the empathy that the non-narrative sections argue is crucial for change? Doing so offers a new perspective on the novel’s form that generates appreciation for Tourgée’s rhetorical skill. Witting or not, the choice to tell the story of a carpetbagging family as romance was also the choice to communicate with southerners in a form in which they were already invested. With values like nobility, love, and bravery undergirding the plot, Tourgée’s novel was an appeal to southern readers who vigorously promoted the same values, albeit toward a different end. Tourgée sought to channel those impulses in another direction so that they would bolster the goal of ensuring equal social, economic, and political rights for African Americans. I would like to suggest that the plot-driven sections of his novel are Tourgée’s formal attempt to communicate to a southern reading audience in their own language, one way in which Tourgée carries out the proto-Rogerian theoretical prescription he outlines in the non-narrative sections.

## Empathy and Stagnancy

Reviewers at the time both noted and extolled the book's empathetic overtures, recognizing the potential for positive change in the stance theorized in the polemical portions of the novel and borne out by the plot, which painted the South in a sympathetic light. One wrote, "The author possesses the ability to put himself in the place of the characters representing the opposing factions, and from the stand-point of each, holding the other to account for the wrong admitted by both to have been done"; another, "With personal knowledge of the evil and the good of both North and South, the author teaches each side much of the other's way of looking at things" (*Philadelphia Times* and *New Haven Journal and Courier* qtd. in *Fool's* 1880 3). These reviewers recognized not only Tourgée's contribution to the effort to get southerners to "look at this matter aright," but also his complementary contribution: "teach[ing] each side much of the other's way of looking at things" ("From the South," *New Haven Journal and Courier*). They recognized, in other words, that for Tourgée, in order to foster true dialogue, collaboration, and real progress toward justice, seeing differently had to happen both south *and* north of the Mason-Dixon.

As we have seen, however, Tourgée recognized that in getting people to see things in a new way, one must contend with the power of ideas entrenched by history, culture, tradition, and circumstance. On the one hand Tourgée's insight about the power of entrenched ideas makes him profoundly compassionate toward those with whom he disagrees, for he is aware that different circumstances would have ingrained different

beliefs in his own moral schema. On the other, that same insight can lead to defeatist determinism, for if individuals are solely a product of history and culture, then beliefs might very well be intractable, impervious to reason. Tourgée floats this dismaying possibility in one of the novel's early scenes. In it, Squire Hyman, Servosse's neighbor, browses in the Colonel's library. Noticing the "abolition books" tucked away discreetly on the top shelf, he asks Metta whether he can borrow one. After he reads the book, Hyman, delighted to learn about and consider another point of view, returns to discuss it with Servosse. "It's a thousand pities we couldn't have talked these things over, and have come to the right understanding of them without this terrible war," he declares to the Colonel (90). This scene prompts critic Jeffrey Miller to declare that in the novel, "language carries immense power to alter the world"; the Servosses' library "clearly" "has the ability to enlighten and transform as well as inform" (22). This is the hope Howells (as well as Appiah and Rorty) had for fiction. But just as soon as the novel holds out literature and the "right understanding" it can bring as remedies to the nation's problems (a solution to which Miller's reading draws attention), Tourgée denies that possibility by adding the Colonel's stern correction: "That was quite impossible, Squire . . . We could never have agreed. I have learned enough of the former state of affairs here already to see that. Each party distrusted the other's sincerity, and despised the other's knowledge" (90). Identifying empathetically with his southern antagonists, Servosse argues that mutual distrust and rigid adherence to beliefs will always be impediments to communication and rational discourse, and though the possibility remains for an ideal situation that would enable both communication and rational discourse, the situation is

unlikely and distant because of all the history in the way. In this way empathy and the understanding it brings actually work to *erode* Tourgée's faith in the power of rational exchange, thus opening up the possibility of using force to change things, whether the South likes it or not.

Indeed, both Tourgée and his protagonist expressed frustration with the North's inability to ensure the survival of Reconstruction reforms. Servosse voices this view in a letter to his mentor, Enos Martin. Southerners would have made better conquerors, Servosse believes, for they "are born rulers," whereas the North "hesitates, palters, shirks" (171). "I begin seriously to fear that the North lacks virility," Servosse writes. "This cowardly shirking of responsibility, this pandering to sentimental whimsicalities, this snuffling whine about peace and conciliation, is sheer weakness" (171). By the end of the novel, Servosse concludes that the universal education necessary to provide the groundwork for sweeping social change must be "an act of sovereignty, an exercise of power" (389); "the remedy . . . must be applied from the outside. The sick man can not cure himself" (386). Passages like these provide fodder for readings of the book's endorsement of humanitarianism by force, and these readings are borne out by some of Tourgée's own writing. In an effort to frighten his readers into adopting a program of racial equality, in *Is Liberty Worth Preserving?* (1892) Tourgée wrote that "cities may be burned, railroads destroyed, and civilization in all its forms [will] be forced to do penance for injustice and oppression" if the South does not take steps to end racial injustice (19). And though much of that tract is devoted to an exercise of empathy, as Tourgée attests to the absolute sincerity of the belief held by "the dominant party of the South" that "denial



of the colored citizens' right and suppression of free speech are necessary to preserve the supremacy and domination of the white race," Tourgée's final judgment is clear: "Such sincerity counts nothing in favor of their justice or rightfulness" (24, 25). Empathy, in other words, has reached a dead end. Understand the opposing point of view he may, but such understanding "is no palliation of its wrong and no excuse for neglect of effort to obviate that wrong" (25). Tourgée is a cultural, not a moral, relativist.

The three strands that make up Tourgée's complicated engagement with the question of how best to pursue racial justice after Reconstruction—force, reason, and empathetic persuasion—thus intertwine and overlap and knot each other up. Tourgée does indeed have a faith in reason and dialogue, as evidenced not only by Servosse's own rhetorical prowess but also by the very fact that Tourgée writes to change minds in the first place. At the same time, Tourgée is convinced that any shift in point of view must begin with empathetic identification, putting oneself in another's shoes. Doing that leads Tourgée to understand, viscerally, the extent to which history and culture shape belief (what I call the "entrenched ideas thesis"). Such a realization contributes to Tourgée's despairing that things will ever change absent the application of a sustained, forceful effort applied from outside. Yet Tourgée's sympathy with his southern neighbors makes him resistant to such a course; he can see from their perspective. Finally, even as Tourgée argues that an empathetic mode of persuasion is necessary to bring about social change, he also raises the possibility that seeing eye-to-eye might simply lead to a stalemate, not a solution. One thread loops back into another, causing Tourgée to arrive at what appears to be a posture much like the pessimistic cynicism he faults the realists for.

By the end of the novel, Servosse is able to see things as his neighbors do, which does not mean that he agrees with them, but simply that he understands where they're coming from. In the space of two paragraphs, the narrator states that Servosse "could well see," "could see, too," "could perceive, too," "could well understand," "could understand, too," "began to see," and "could understand" how southerners could hold the views they hold: the chapter is a veritable flurry of empathy (325). In his later days, as Servosse settles down in the South, "there arose a spirit of mutual forbearance" between him and his neighbors:

they forbore to take offense at his views, and he forbore to express them; they excused his views because of his Northern birth and education, and he excused their acts because of their Southern nativity and training; they disregarded his political convictions because a method had been discovered to prevent their crystallizing into results, and he refrained from urging them because to do so was a useless travail. (340)

This is rhetorical stagnancy brought about by tolerance. In this scenario, people get used to each other, but their views do not change. They simply decline to express them anymore, thereby avoiding pointless disagreements. This is the state of non-argument, non-exchange of views—exactly the state that romances of reunion promoted. The stakes of the struggle have been mitigated, surrendered to the value of social cohesion.

The same ability that led Tourgée to understand the roots of his antagonist's point of view also led him to see just how deep-seated, and possibly intractable, that point of view was. Though he extolled the virtues of empathy, Tourgée also saw its limitations:

“The question to be asked with regard to any relation between the dominant class of a population to another, is not ‘Are they sincere in the belief in its righteousness or necessity?’ but ‘Is it just?’ There is no other test” (*Liberty* 25). In moments like these, the cause of justice by any means necessary—for Tourgée, that meant a program of nationalized education implemented by force—was more important than the cause of communication. Though it was read by upwards of 150,000 people, *A Fool’s Errand* did not, of course, solve the rhetorical impasse of Reconstruction. (And though he stuck it out for fourteen years, Tourgée did not remain in Greensboro to attempt to empathetically persuade his neighbors to abandon their racism.) But reassessing the book in light of Rogerian argument leads us to an important question. What are the limits of empathetic persuasion in a situation like Reconstruction, with so much at stake and so few shared values? Is there a point at which Burke’s “characteristic invitation to rhetoric” must be declined in favor of something else if we are truly to pursue the cause of justice? At times, in frustration, Tourgée thought so. Yet the fact that Tourgée continued to work for racial justice even after he left Greensboro indicates that he persisted in spite of his frustration and occasional desire to revert to force. It also speaks to the temporal dimensions of any project of humanitarian change: it cannot happen overnight.

As I have pointed out, Tourgée is the odd man out in “American Callings.” Though he is moved by the same impulses that animate the other humanitarians in this project, he works in a slightly different register. In concluding this chapter I want to suggest that the pessimistic note at the end of *A Fool’s Errand* also offers an opening because it indicates how the cultural work realist novels do can complement Tourgée’s

political agenda. To return to the ground of Chapter One, Howells's "social" novels explore multiple dimensions of the humanitarian self. In all cases, those selves, be they ironists, ideologues, or strivers, share a lot in common. They are progressives. They are also white, and they live in the northeast. Howells is not working across a cultural impasse in his depiction of these characters, as Tourgée is in striving to communicate with white southerners whose views diverge from his in significant ways. Still, the project of self-refinement that Howells's humanitarians engage in is an important one, both at the level of narrative and at the level of mimesis. That is to say, Annie's example could inspire nineteenth-century readers to similar heights and depths of self-exploration through the humanitarian dynamic. Tourgée's project is in some ways more difficult. He hopes not only to get like-minded people to push the limits of their commitment to humanitarian justice, but also to work on undoing—and redoing—the self-creation that led to the calcification of racist, limiting beliefs in the first place. These are long-term goals that depend on a lot of groundwork. In order for the changes Tourgée hopes for to stick, the South needs more people like him. It needs more Freedmen's Bureau teachers who challenge the assumptions of conservative white women in the South, more Comfort Servosses who stand up to the Klan. It could probably make do with some Annie Kilburns, as well. Novels like Howells's can complement projects like Tourgée's because they have the power to alert sympathetic, but uninvolved, people to what kind of social justice work needs doing and provide a model for self-construction within that context. Meanwhile, Tourgée's rhetorical sally in *A Fool's Errand* provides a model for the kind of dialogue most likely to lead to change, even if such dialogue is only a first step.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Sentiment, Science, and the Self in Jane Addams's Humanitarianism

A curious parable concludes a chapter late in Jane Addams's memoir *Twenty Years at Hull House* (1910). Addams relays the story, originally told by a member of the Chicago Woman's Club, as follows:

She said that when she was a little girl playing in her mother's garden, she one day discovered a small toad who seemed to her very forlorn and lonely, although as she did not in the least know how to comfort him, she reluctantly left him to his fate; later in the day, quite at the other end of the garden, she found a large toad, also apparently without family and friends. With a heart full of tender sympathy, she took a stick and by exercising infinite patience and some skill, she finally pushed the little toad through the entire length of the garden into the company of the big toad, when, to her inexpressible horror and surprise, the big toad opened his mouth and swallowed the little one. (201)

What is the moral of this tale? One interpretation would be to read it as a critique of humanitarians, those individuals with hearts "full of tender sympathy." The parable argues that humanitarians should stop attempting to "do good" because such well-intended interference can result in unintended violence and calamity: frog eats frog. Read in this fashion, the parable anticipates censures of humanitarianism that both pre- and post-date Addams's work, from Thoreau's assessment of philanthropy as condescending, patriarchal intervention to critiques of humanitarianism articulated in postcolonial and

literary studies that illuminate its disciplinary dimensions.<sup>57</sup> Addams, however, creatively misreads the parable.

Though she does take the woman's tale as a warning, Addams's interpretation of the frog parable is distinct from the reading limned above. "The moral of the tale," she writes, "was *clearly* applied to people who lived 'where they did not naturally belong'" (201, emphasis added). In other words, Addams felt the story "clearly" applied to her, a middle-class settlement resident living in a working-class corner of Chicago. The difference between the first reading I proposed and Addams's is significant. In Addams's interpretation, the sentimental humanitarian who edges the frogs closer together falls out of the picture. Instead of seeing herself as the little girl, Addams identifies with the smaller frog. She thus interprets the woman's story as a warning to her, yes, but not as a warning about the unintended effects her actions as a humanitarian might have on others, but as a warning about the effects her actions might have on *herself*. In Addams's rendition, the woman tells the story to warn her to stay in her own corner of the garden or

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<sup>57</sup> As I indicated in the Introduction, critiques of humanitarianism writ large (reform work, philanthropy, charity, benevolence) abound in literary criticism. I will engage with some of those critiques more closely later in this chapter, but for now this footnote will indicate, metonymically at least, the arguments of scholars who have shown the ways in which humanitarian practice has become increasingly suspect in recent decades.

Critics in postcolonial studies have argued that humanitarianism is and has been complicit in projects of imperialism (see Slaughter and Harlow). Others, applying postcolonialism's insights to domestic reform efforts, have demonstrated that sentimental humanitarianism, in addition to providing a venue for the transformation of the agent-self, has also functioned as a method of control over the identities of the "aided" others (see Wexler, Sánchez-Eppler, Stoler (ed.) and McGerr 79). A related argument critiques nineteenth-century women's reform on the grounds that its agents relied too much on sympathy and surface solutions, neglecting a thoroughgoing analysis of structural and systemic injustice and thus never embarking on truly radical projects of change (see Carlin and Berlant "The Subject of True Feeling"). Finally, Lauren's Berlant's abundant work on sentimentality has called into question many of the bromides extolling the virtues of compassion, feeling, empathy, and sympathy (see *The Female Complaint*, "The Subject of True Feeling," and her introduction to *Compassion*).

else face being swallowed up by the neighbors among whom she lives. By responding to the parable in her memoir, Addams turns the warning into an affirmation of her desires: “I protested that was exactly what we wanted—to be swallowed and digested, to disappear into the bulk of the people” (201). Critics who analyze this passage have followed the author’s interpretive lead, overlooking the parable’s critique of humanitarianism to focus instead on Addams’s view of humanitarian selfhood as communal,<sup>58</sup> and in so doing, they have neglected a fascinating slippage in Addams’s rendering. In her reinterpretation and appropriation of the woman’s story, Addams ignores what seems an obvious parallel between herself as a reformer and the little girl who changes the garden’s ecosystem. Addams does not align herself with the actor who, motivated by “tender sympathy,” indirectly causes the death of the very frog she tried, misguidedly, to help. She instead identifies with one of the acted-upon frogs. If read in the context of her work at Hull House and the balance between the subjective and objective aims of settlements she theorized in her writing, Addams’s telling elision of the interventionist little girl can be seen as her response to a critique of humanitarianism that would view it as a willful act of power ultimately harmful to its purported object.

Hull House began as a cultural outpost in a poor, heavily-industrialized immigrant quarter on Halsted Street in Chicago’s nineteenth ward. Middle-class white women (the “residents”) went there in order to live and work among the poor (the “neighbors,” mostly European immigrants). The residents and neighbors worked in partnership to

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<sup>58</sup> See Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Jane Addams and the Dream of American Democracy*, p. 153, and Herbert Leibowitz, “The Sheltering Self,” p. 131.

build and improve community by offering reading groups, civic “clubs,” continuing education classes, lectures, parties, theater, art exhibits, and language instruction—to name just a few of Hull House’s activities. Though it never abandoned education, as it evolved Hull House also became a hub of political activity and social work. Doing both human rights and humanitarian work, the residents lobbied for legislation that would protect workers, organized garbage collection in the neighborhood, investigated nefarious industrial practices (such as sweat shop labor), and ran a postal service (so that immigrants would not have money stolen when they sent remissions home).

Addams’s coming of age as a reformer took place during what Laura Wexler calls “the afterglow of sentimentalization,” the decades after 1870 when the production of sentimental novels slowed, but the implementation of sentimental ideas in institutions (schools, prisons, hospitals) took hold (19). The late nineteenth century was also a period when reform and charity became increasingly professionalized, organized, scientific, and de-personalized. Yet Hull House, institution though it was, maintained a person-to-person intimacy that Addams defended on grounds at once scientific and subjective. In the summer of 1892, three years after she had co-founded Hull House with Ellen Gates Starr, Addams was asked to address the Ethical Culture Societies’ summer school at Plymouth to discuss the settlement movement. Her address comprised two parts, one devoted to what she called the “subjective necessity” for social settlements, the other devoted to their “objective value.” The former explored the effect working in a settlement could have on the middle-class residents; the latter took account of the value of the settlement for the community. That the settlement could benefit the residents while also bettering the



community, that in fact the two aims were intertwined and inextricable, was always a major underpinning of Addams's commentary on settlement work. Above all, "Hull-House was soberly opened on the theory that the dependence of classes on each other is reciprocal; and that . . . the social relation is essentially a reciprocal relation" wrote Addams in her first memoir (64).<sup>59</sup>

In this chapter I will show that Addams's insistence upon reciprocity distinguishes her vision of humanitarianism's impact on the self from more sentimental discourses of reform during the period. The layered interpretations of the frog parable provide a metaphoric entry point for exploring this distinction. Addams's was not a gross misreading. Though she does not explicitly identify with the little girl, it would be straining the bounds of credulity to say that when Addams theorizes the humanitarian dynamic, she absolves herself of agency entirely. Rather, as my analysis of her writing will show, Addams's understanding of the humanitarian dynamic requires a kind of dual identity—both girl and frog, agent and object. Addams, I will argue, saw herself as part of a humanitarian dynamic, not above it and unaffected by it, as the little girl in the story is. The purpose of this chapter is to pursue the implications of her creative misreading for Addams's role in refining the narrative of self-development in a way that goes beyond the sentimental truisms of her day.

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<sup>59</sup> In a parallel move, sociologists Susan A. Ostrander and Paul G. Schervish argue that the social relation of philanthropy is more complex than the donor-recipient dyad suggests. Their article "Giving and Getting" (1990) emphasizes the agency of the recipient in shaping the relationship.

In pursuing those implications, this chapter emerges from and builds on the explorations of humanitarianism in Chapters One and Two. Where Chapter One established the centrality of the humanitarian striver type in Howells's social fiction, here I explore in greater detail exactly what value the striving he describes offers individuals and society. A striver herself, Addams engaged with humanitarian practice at multiple levels, as the frog parable suggests. She was active agent in humanitarian reform efforts and a person very much changed by those efforts, but she also wrote copiously to elucidate and refine her theories of reform. She is therefore capable of taking a step that neither Howells nor his character Annie Kilburn ever quite took: creating an environment in which she attempted to replicate, for other strivers, the challenges and insights that led to her deep understanding of the relationship between individual humanitarian efforts and progressive social change. Her method emerged out of a view of the world not unlike that of Albion Tourgée, who insisted upon the intractability of ideas entrenched by culture and history. Addams, too, was well aware of the way society molds its individuals, so she sought to intervene in that process by changing environments in order to realize a more democratic, cosmopolitan American society. My analysis of Addams's contribution to humanitarian theory begins by showing the way in which Hull House grew out of her experience suffering from neurasthenia (often construed as a kind of nineteenth-century identity crisis/depressive episode) as a young adult. Going further, I will suggest that she skillfully and intentionally drew on the discourse of neurasthenia to legitimize settlement work and young women's participation in it. The next section explores Addams's

conceptualization of humanitarianism as a scientific means of creating a more just, democratic American society.

### **Neurasthenia and the Rhetoric of Selfishness**

In “The Subjective Necessity for Social Settlements,” one of her two addresses to the Ethical Culture Societies in 1892, Addams made the connection between humanitarianism and neurasthenia explicit by proposing that labor in a settlement house would provide a vital outlet for and renewal of the energies of educated young women. My aim in this section is to explore the way neurasthenic discourse shaped Addams’s understanding of humanitarian practice and to show how she successfully deployed elements of it as part of her public argument for settlement work.

Neurasthenia was a major cultural phenomenon in the late nineteenth century, more a constellation of symptoms linked by a diagnosis than a somatic disease with a cause and a cure.<sup>60</sup> Christened by neurologist George Beard in 1869, the condition was categorized by a widely varying cluster of symptoms, including, but not limited to, sick headache, ringing ear, atonic voice, deficient mental control, depression, bad dreams, insomnia, dyspepsia, “heaviness of the loin and limb,” flushing and fidgetiness,

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<sup>60</sup> In *American Nervousness, 1903* (1991), Tom Lutz views neurasthenia as a site of confluence of cultural, ethical, and economic discourses. He examines the way that different cultural producers responded to their own neurasthenic crises, arguing, for instance, that pragmatism evolved out of William James’s dealings with neurasthenia, as did Theodore Roosevelt’s endorsement of the “strenuous life.” Lutz mentions Addams only in passing, a regrettable oversight, for it is clear that she conceived of Hull House and humanitarian labor more generally as a cure for the sufferings of neurasthenics. Her conviction that young women could find themselves by working in the service of others shaped the age as much as James’s pragmatism or Roosevelt’s endorsement of the virtues of the outdoors.

palpitations, vague pains and flying neuralgia, spinal irritation, uterine irritability, impotence, and hopelessness (Sicherman 33).<sup>61</sup> Tom Lutz's list of neurasthenics reads like a who's who of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century culture, including not only such well-known sufferers as Charlotte Perkins Gilman and William James, but also Edith Wharton, Jack London, Theodore Dreiser, George Santayana, Josiah Royce, Kate Chopin, Owen Wister, Frank Norris, Ambrose Bierce, Willa Cather, Charles Chesnutt, Mark Twain, Richard Harding Davis, W. E. B. Du Bois, William Dean Howells, Sarah Orne Jewett, Jacob Riis, and Charles Eliot Norton (*American Nervousness* 19). Who *wasn't* a neurasthenic? Though some, including Lutz, have argued that neurasthenia was a disease of the elite, F. G. Gosling has shown convincingly that although it may have been the well-to-do and famous who sought the most renowned specialists to treat their disorder, working class individuals too suffered from what was diagnosed as neurasthenia (15). It was, as commentators have noted, a disease ascribed to the pressures of the industrializing, modern United States,<sup>62</sup> "with its railway, telegraph, telephone, and periodical press intensifying in ten thousand ways cerebral activity and worry" (Rockwell qtd. in Gosling 13). Striking a note of exceptionalism, many declared it a uniquely American disease.

In order to get at Addams's complex engagement with the question of humanitarian selfhood, her dual identification as humanitarian actor (little girl) and object

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<sup>61</sup> See F. G. Gosling, *Before Freud* (1987); Lutz, *American Nervousness*; and Barbara Sicherman, "The Uses of a Diagnosis" (1977) for histories and explications of neurasthenia. Gail Bederman also deals with it closely in her chapters on G. Stanley Hall and Charlotte Perkins Gilman in *Manliness and Civilization* (1995).

<sup>62</sup> See Gosling pp. 12-14, Lutz pp. 4-6, and Sicherman pp. 34-5.

(smaller frog), it is helpful to examine the effects of Addams's immersion in the culture and rhetoric of neurasthenia on two different levels. First, how might her immersion in the culture and rhetoric of neurasthenia have shaped her ideas about the self and identity? And second, how was Addams able to draw on that same neurasthenic discourse in framing the imperatives of her own project?

Bound up with cultural norms as it was, neurasthenia was not experienced or treated the same way in all cases. It was a highly gendered disease. Neurologists believed that women developed neurasthenia when, exposed to the pressures of the age, they took on too much, particularly too much intellectual labor. One now-notorious solution, developed and popularized by S. Weir Mitchell (and made infamous in literary history by Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper") was the "rest cure": bed rest, milk feeding, massage, electric shock therapy, and a ban on intellectual intercourse. Men developed neurasthenia as the result of too much intellectual labor as well, but the cure for them consisted in getting out of doors and into the wild: the west cure.<sup>63</sup>

In her memoir, Addams is characteristically terse about her experience with neurasthenia, noting only that she entered Dr. Mitchell's hospital in 1882 to treat her "nervous exhaustion," a condition with which she "struggled for years" (49). (She left the hospital before completing the course of Mitchell's treatment.) She is much more forthcoming when recounting the period she refers to as the "snare of preparation," the eight years between graduating from Rockford Seminary and founding Hull House. It

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<sup>63</sup> See Gosling p. 46, Michael Kimmel pp. vii-viii, and Bederman p. 87 for brief treatments of the gendering of neurasthenia.

was during those eight years of travel and study in Europe and after a visit to Toynbee Hall, the East London settlement, that Addams conceived of her plan to establish a settlement house upon her return to Chicago. That is to say, hers was a plan hatched in the context of her experience of feeling overeducated, overprivileged, and overfed. Addams's neurasthenia led her to empathize and identify with the other young American women she saw in Europe. In them she observed a tendency similar to her own, an inclination to "feel nervously the need of putting theory into action" ("Subjective Necessity" 22). "You do not know what life means when all the difficulties are removed," Addams pictures the comfortable girls declaring; "I am simply smothered and sickened with advantages. It is like eating a sweet dessert the first thing in the morning" (*Twenty Years* 52).

When Addams made a case for the importance of social settlements before the Ethical Culture Societies in 1892, she drew attention to the waste that was the undirected energy of compassionate, worldly young people. Like the discourse surrounding neurasthenia, which understood the disease as being a manifestation of lack of nervous energy, Addams's claims relied on an economic understanding of energy. Where Mitchell argued that women could restore the energetic imbalance by resting, Addams drew on political and evolutionary thinkers to counter the claims of the rest cure, arguing instead that an individual's energy could be restored only by directing it outward, to others. She began her observations of listless American adolescence with a quotation from John Stuart Mill: "There is nothing after disease, indigence, and a sense of guilt so fatal to health and to life itself as the want of a proper outlet for active faculties" (qtd. in

“Subjective Necessity” 20). Young American women are suffering not because they selfishly overexert themselves, as Mitchell claims, but because they lack such an outlet and are “being cultivated into unnourished, over-sensitive lives” (“Subjective Necessity” 17).<sup>64</sup> Drawing then on Thomas Henry Huxley’s observations in an evolutionary context, Addams paraphrases the scientist, explaining that “the sense of uselessness is the severest shock which the human system can sustain, and that if persistently sustained, it results in atrophy of function. These young people have had advantages of college, of European travel, and of economic study, but they are sustaining this shock of inaction” (“Subjective Necessity” 21-22).

With Hull House Addams hoped to provide some direction, an outlet for young women who, like her, and like her fictional analog Annie Kilburn, grew up with a strong sense of moral obligation but no idea how to channel it. Describing her plan for Hull House in the pages of her memoir, Addams focuses not on the effect it would have on the denizens of Halsted Street, but on the privileged women who would work there: “I gradually became convinced that it would be a good thing to rent a house in a part of the city where many primitive and actual needs are found, in which young women who had been given over too exclusively to study, might restore a balance of activity along traditional lines and learn of life from life itself” (59). This was the settlement’s

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<sup>64</sup> Though Addams often positioned cultural learning as an artificial substitute for genuine humanitarian action, that contrast belies the way that her education at Rockford Seminary gave her the training that she would need to found and run Hull House. Sarah Robbins has shown that, in particular, Rockford fostered an intimate, collaborative community among women that stressed social learning. See her essay “Rereading the History of Nineteenth-Century Women’s Higher Education” (1994) for further exploration of the way Addams’s formal education at Rockford shaped her work at Hull House.

subjective value. In Addams's case, neurasthenia overlapped with an identity crisis ("who am I and what is my role in the world?") that she resolved with a negation of selfhood ("it doesn't matter who I am, but how I can serve others"). With this approach to service and the self, Addams adapted the Christian imperative that to find oneself, one must first lose the self—in Matthew 16:25, Christ promised that "those who lose their life for my sake will find it"—to a modern, secular context. Addams's theories of the subjective/objective balance in humanitarian practice replace the religious motivation indicated by the phrase "for my sake" with a firmly anthropocentric commitment to other people.

Critics writing today have trivialized the quest for meaning and purpose that characterized Addams's neurasthenia even as they recognize the relationship between neurasthenia and self-searching. For example, James Hurt calls Addams's period of self-searching, during which she traveled to Europe to find cultivation and purpose, a "prolonged adolescent identity crisis" (197). Louis Menand derisively describes Addams's intention that the young women grow through their work at Hull House "social work as therapy" (309). And Barbara Sicherman generalizes more broadly about neurasthenics, asserting that "for many middle-class men and women neurasthenia incorporated elements of today's fashionable identity crisis" (45). She notes that William James's neurasthenia resolved itself once he entered into professional life as a professor of psychology, that Addams's was mitigated upon the founding of Hull House, and that Charlotte Perkins Gilman's was resolved when she separated from her husband and pursued an independent career. Hurt's suggestion that Addams's neurasthenia and self-searching constituted some kind of adolescent phase and Sicherman's intimation that



neurasthenia was a fashionable indulgence comparable to today's so-called "quarter-life crisis" underestimate the importance of the relationship between self-searching and creative, socially-productive work that is evidenced by James's, Gilman's, and Addams's life experiences, while Menand's quip diminishes both the need for and the impact of reform work. With their remarks, Hurt, Sicherman, and Menand dismally recall the discourse surrounding neurasthenia during the late nineteenth century, which chided women for their selfishness.

I would like to propose that Addams's reluctance to expound upon her experience with neurasthenia and to theorize about the self explicitly, as well as her fantasy of humanitarian service as akin to digestion into a larger body (pace the frog parable), are all part and parcel of her assimilation of Mitchell's view that focus on the self causes the disease. In other words, though the mark that neurasthenia made upon Addams's thinking and the trajectory of her career is much greater than the brief mention of it in her memoir suggests, neurasthenic discourse itself circumscribed the degree of self-reflection the experience of the disease brought about. Reading Mitchell's writing on neurasthenia and the rest cure, one cannot help but be struck by the misogyny underlying his assessment of the female neurasthenic condition. His description of a cure for neurasthenia is joined by persistent accusations against the women he is treating. Not only did these women get themselves into the mess they are in by taking the selfish step of going to college, say, or undertaking intellectual tasks, but also they exacerbate their condition through the self-indulgence the condition brings about. Thus, one of the hallmarks of Mitchell's rest cure was separating women from the home care they had received, not to mention the

affection and companionship. He saw it as necessary to wean them from the “daily drama of the sick-room, with its selfishness and its craving for indulgence” (Mitchell 37). For these women, a “state of weak health has become a long and almost, I might say, a cherished habit” (Mitchell 37). Mitchell relates that he has “seen a few people who were ennobled by long sickness, but far more often the result is to cultivate self-love and selfishness” (30-1). In Mitchell’s view, selfishness was both cause and effect of neurasthenia, and he was there to rid them of it. Louise Knight notes that Mitchell “hoped to make being ill so unpleasant that his female patients would abandon what he believed was the cause of their disease, their selfishness. . . . The coup de grâce consisted of his lectures about being less selfish in the future” (120).

On one level, Addams, a woman with more than her fair share of a self-berating Puritan conscience, took Mitchell to heart. According to Knight, she “saw her illness as he did, as a moral defeat, a sign of her inability to lead the life of sacrifice to a family that she had chosen and that was her duty” (120). Knight draws evidence for this conclusion from Addams’s commonplace book. When reading Emerson, Addams engaged in a cycle of self-criticism followed by self-reproach for even focusing on the self in the first place: “Emerson condemns self-preoccupation, she wrote in her commonplace book; it is ‘another form . . . of selfishness.’ ‘Talk too much of myself and motives, am in danger of self-pity’” (qtd. in Knight 121). And in her own memoir, an exercise in self-examination Addams was loath to undertake, she chides her young self for her rudderlessness, declaring that at the end of her second European sojourn she realized that “so far from

following in the wake of a chariot of philanthropic fire, I had been tied to the tail of the veriest ox-cart of self-seeking” (60). Here, self-seeking is something shameful.

Even as she imbibed the admonition that one avoid selfishness at all costs, Addams also—and here we proceed to the second level of her engagement with neurasthenic discourse—made savvy use of Mitchell’s discourse by adopting the rhetoric of selflessness as one of the central appeals of her argument for women’s rightful place in civic work. In order for the public to buy her argument, however, it is imperative that she first indicate that she knows what selfishness is. To that end, in *Democracy and Social Ethics* (1902) Addams revisits her wandering period and seethes with an obsession with not being selfish. She looks back on “self-willed childhood” as a stage one grows out of on her way to “family obligations”; she refers to the “selfish aims” that distract people from their familial and social claims; she thinks of the “self-pity” that follows in the wake of a recognition of selfishness (a double whammy of self-awareness); and she calls “individual development” “selfish” (with reference to Ibsen’s Nora, who left her husband) (75-6). The shadow of Mitchell’s derision of female selfishness falls long here, but Addams does not lie docile beneath it. She uses all these declamations of the bane of selfishness to strike out against the claim that “woman’s public efforts are merely selfish and captious, and are not directed to the general good” (77). Recognizing and responding to the culturally dominant, gendered discourse surrounding neurasthenia, Addams makes a case for why doing something that might seem selfish to parents and the public—taking leave of one’s familial obligations out of a calling to pursue a broader, social claim—is in fact selfless.

Even as she condemned selfishness, Addams rested her defense of Hull House and settlements in general on the benefit of such work for the actor. This is the argument she makes in “The Subjective Necessity for Social Settlements.” Addams goes so far as to declare the unfulfilling lives of the privileged to be as impoverished as those of the materially poor: “this young life, so sincere in its emotion and good phrases and yet so undirected, seems to me as pitiful as the other great mass of destitute lives. One is supplementary to the other, and some method of communication can surely be devised” (22). This is a pretty remarkable declaration, both because of the alarming equivalence it places between two kinds of suffering<sup>65</sup> and because of its intimation that the poor and destitute have as much to offer the purportedly privileged as the privileged can offer the poor.

It is Addams’s conviction that one kind of life “is supplementary to the other” that separates her understanding of the humanitarian dynamic from more colonialist, sentimental renderings. Sentimentalism and colonialism intersect when it comes to reforming the self through the process of reforming others: “the energies [sentimentalism] developed were intended as a tool for the control of others” as well as an “aid in the conquest of the self” (Wexler 15). In this dynamic, the colonialist agent’s identity depends on her ability to transform needful “others” into replicas of her middle-class self,

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<sup>65</sup> The implication here is that the middle-class residents suffered from neurasthenia while the working-class neighbors suffered from the ill effects of poverty. However, as I mentioned above, Gosling has shown that people in the working class suffered from neurasthenia as well. Addams’s writing provides no conclusive evidence that Hull House targeted neurasthenia among both populations, but it is an intriguing possibility—and I thank Sarah Robbins for suggesting it to me—that Hull House was a venue where residents and neighbors together dealt with the industrially-caused symptoms of neurasthenia.

a critique Michael McGerr extends beyond the specific colonial setting to Progressives as a whole. Addams, on the other hand, sees the process of transformation through the humanitarian dynamic as mutually constitutive, as the next section will explore in greater detail.

Addams likewise responds to the accusation of solipsism by owning up to it, to a degree. Expressing his notion that working for the public good is in fact a working out of private problems, Thoreau writes, “I believe that what so saddens the reformer is not his sympathy with his fellows in distress, but . . . his private ail” (51). He then goes on to suggest that if that ailment is tended to, the do-gooder will “forsake his generous companions without apology” (51). For Thoreau, this thought experiment is evidence that reformers waste their time by looking outward instead of inward. Better they fix themselves, at which point they will have no need (or desire) to engage in the façade of do-gooding. By theorizing the connection between self-development and humanitarianism, Addams offers a response to this particular critique. Acknowledging that humanitarian labor is in fact often a response to a “private ail” constitutes part of her argument for the relevance of humanitarian practice. By wedding self-realization with the purpose of serving others, Addams provides a compelling rebuttal to those, like Thoreau, who would discredit humanitarians by pointing to the “selfish” motives behind their purported “selflessness.” Humanitarianism is a method for righting the self, and Addams does not pretend otherwise. As a humanitarian benefited by—indeed, transformed by—her work with and on behalf of others, Addams is at once the little girl in the parable and the smaller frog.

## **Humanitarian Selves and the Evolution of a Cosmopolitan American Democracy**

In her writing Addams emphasizes the process of creating a self that comes into being through the relational practice of humanitarianism, a practice that occurs across boundaries, both class and cultural. This relational understanding of selfhood coincides with Addams's evolving definition of "cultivation," a reorientation that marks the distance she traveled from searching after self-transformation in Europe to finding it on Halsted Street. In a curt dismissal, Tom Lutz calls Addams one of the "haughty few" whose neurasthenia led to a belief that it fell upon the middle class to "civilize the masses," an assertion he supports by citing the fact that Hull House offered reading groups to study Anglo-American literature (28). Addams did indeed think immigrants might appreciate reading George Eliot. But this, to my mind, is evidence of Addams's democratic spirit, not of her elitism, since it confirms that she believed "'high' art as capable of meeting the needs of working-class audiences as those of the educated middle class" (Bufkin 35). Moreover, Addams believed that middle-class individuals could—and should—be recreated through contact with the working class, especially immigrants in the close quarters of American urban centers.

Over and over, Addams stresses the effect that settlements had on the people in and around them, the way the social chemistry they fostered could give birth to new selves. In one of her descriptions of such instances, Addams writes about an event hosted by the Social Extension Committee at Hull House, a group whose job it was to give parties for people in the neighborhood who didn't appear to be socially well-connected in

order to “bring them in contact with a better type of Americans” ( “Objective Value” 33). Though this phrase would seem to indicate that the committee’s soirees had both a classist and a colonialist bent, promoting the emulation by working-class immigrants of those “better type of Americans,” the white native-born middle and upper class, it is change in the other direction that Addams remarks upon at length when describing the group’s successes. After an evening when the Social Extension Committee hosted a group of Italians, “one of the committee said to [Addams], ‘Do you know I am ashamed of the way I have always talked about “dagos,” they are quite like other people, only one must take a little more pains with them’” (*Twenty Years* 231-2). Addams continues, reflecting,

to my mind at that moment the speaker had passed from the region of the uncultivated person into the possibilities of the cultivated person. The former is bounded by a narrow outlook on life, unable to overcome differences of dress and habit, and his interests are slowly contracting within a circumscribed area; while the latter constantly tends to be more of a citizen of the world because of his growing understanding of all kinds of people with their varying experiences.

(*Twenty Years* 232)

Because of Hull House, an Irish-American came into contact with Italian immigrants and learned that “they are quite like other people.” Addams regards this encounter as successful not because the woman from the Social Committee was able to change the Italians in some way, making them more “American,” but because she was able to meet the Italians where they stood, as they were. The party was a success because “untiring

pairs of [Italians] danced the tarantella; they sang Neapolitan songs; one of them performed some of those wonderful sleight-of-hand tricks so often seen on the streets of Naples; they explained the coral finger of St. Januarius which they wore” (*Twenty Years* 231). Though the Irish-American woman declared she realized the Italians were “quite like other people,” Addams’s description of the scene makes clear that the humanitarian triumph here has to do not only with the recognition of a shared humanity but also with a mutual recognition of difference. Without disregarding the importance of Hull House’s “objective value,” Addams also saw in settlement work a subjective value, self-transformation of benefit to the humanitarian agent. The objective/subjective divide is not, therefore, as clear as her separation of them into two distinct Ethical Culture speeches might make it seem. The subjective facets of settlement work also had an objective value: transforming citizens, en masse, to create a different kind of world. Like Albion Tourgée, who maintained the hold of culture and circumstances on of one’s beliefs, Addams possessed an intuitive grasp of the relationship between individuals and the societies that shaped them. Her move, then, was to change the cultural climate. Addams believed that by creating an environment favorable to the kind of encounter she relates in the passage above, settlements could cultivate many “citizen[s] of the world” with “growing understanding[s] of all kinds of people” (*Twenty Years* 232).

The kind of growth Addams hopes for is particular, directed, and predetermined. In her reading of the above passage, Francesca Sawaya proposes that “the museum visitor and the tourist represent the exemplary forms in which understanding can be attained” (25). This reading, which provides evidence for Sawaya’s larger claim that Addams’s



project of reform and self-transformation is open only to those who have the luxury to experience European travel and museum-going in the first place, misses Addams's redefinition of "cultivation" (25). Where once cultivation meant "send[ing] our young people to Europe that they may lose their provincialism" and "send[ing] them to college that they may attain the cultural background and a larger outlook," Hull House provided a new stage where cultivation could happen in a more sustained fashion (*Twenty Years* 232). It is not the tourist, she who comes and goes, who represents the figure of cultivation, but the resident: she who lives in close contact with other people and changes because of that contact. In this way the settlement house resident foreshadows the Peace Corps Volunteer, a humanitarian adventurer who seeks out prolonged contact with difference. Addams does not deny that tourism and travel can be enlightening. At the same time, she suggests that cultivation can be found in the crowded quarters of an immigrant neighborhood in Chicago, just as it can in the halls of the Uffizi or Smith College.

By the time Addams penned *Newer Ideals of Peace* in 1907, the loosening of prejudices described in the "dago" passage above had become the marrow of her method for fostering what she referred to as "cosmopolitan humanitarianism" (*Newer Ideals* 76). In order to understand the centrality of the self to that goal, it is important first to grasp the distinction Addams makes between humanitarianism and other manifestations of the reformist spirit. Addams writes that the settlement "must be grounded in a philosophy whose foundation is on the solidarity of the human race, a philosophy which will not waver when the race happens to be represented by a drunken woman or an idiot boy"

(*Twenty Years* 87). Hull House begins by embracing the privileged and the wretched alike, what Addams calls a “sense of humanity” (*Twenty Years* 84). For her, as for Walter Besant, whom she cites as the source of her observation, humanitarianism is to be distinguished from other modes of “doing good,” for the sense of humanity is “a thing fuller and wider” than philanthropy or benevolence (*Twenty Years* 84). Addams always bristled at the use of the word “philanthropy” to describe Hull House’s activities:

Working people live in the same streets with those in need of charity, but they themselves, so long as they have health and good wages, require and want none of it. . . . Hull House makes a constant effort to secure these means for its neighbors, but to call that effort philanthropy is to use the word unfairly and to underestimate the duties of good citizenship. (“Objective Value” 45)

Addams’s vision of humanitarianism as a replacement for philanthropy and charity, coupled with her emphasis on the good it does the actor, might have mollified even Thoreau, who, tongue in cheek, declared that philanthropy is not *truly* “love for one’s fellow-man in the broadest sense” because it neglects the betterment of people like him: “I never heard of a philanthropic meeting in which it was sincerely proposed to do any good to me, or the like of me” (49). Addams’s humanitarianism, however, rests on the belief that humanitarian practice does “do good” for the people who practice it. By way of that benefit, it also does good for the world.

Addams was never blind to the problems attending charity and philanthropy. In “The Subtle Problems of Charity,” an essay originally published in the *Atlantic* in 1899 and then incorporated into *Democracy and Social Ethics* (1902), Addams critiques the

charitable practices and blindspots of her time by assuming the point of view of a young woman on a “friendly visit”—a common nineteenth-century charitable practice wherein a philanthropic agent, the visitor, spends time with a poor family in their home in order to ascertain whether they are “deserving” of aid or not, to report back on the details of their daily lives (cleanliness, thrift, temperance), and to influence them for the better through her own example.<sup>66</sup> Overlaying Addams’s keen self-awareness and self-criticism onto the experience of a woman called by duty to tend to the less prosperous, the essay offers a candid appraisal of the flaws inherent in the charitable relation. Addams uses the conceit to reveal how charity workers are often chauvinists in their devotion to middle-class values, “ruthlessly forc[ing their] conventions and standards” upon the poor (“Subtle Problems” 73). At the same time, she demonstrates how thoughtful engagement in charity might enlighten the agent to the harm of forcing her values on others, regardless of fit or usefulness. The sensitive visitor would recognize “that she has no right to say these things . . . that her untrained hands are no more fitted to cope with actual conditions than are those of her broken-down family” (“Subtle Problems” 64). For example, reflecting on the disjuncture between her own view of “the imprudence of early marriage” and the necessities that face the family she visits, or her kneejerk reaction to saloons in contrast to the husband’s memories of “all the kindness he has received there,” Addams’s friendly visitor “discovers how incorrigibly bourgeois her standards have been, and it takes her

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<sup>66</sup> See Deborah Carlin, “What Methods Have Brought Blessing,” pp. 208-210; and Robert Bremner, *The Discovery of Poverty in the United States*, p. 52, on the friendly visit. Addams counters the view that only the “deserving poor” should receive charity in “The Subtle Problems of Charity,” especially p. 72.

but a little time to reach the conclusion that she cannot insist so strenuously upon the conventions of her own class” (“Subtle Problems” 68, 67, 68).

Addams suspected that there was something to be gained by humanitarianism, even though she detested the lack of equality in a relationship where one person (the giver) is always construed as conferring aid upon another (the recipient) (“Subtle Problems” 62). This does not mean that she adopted a method of reform that “stresses individual agency and conscience rather than any substantial changes within the capitalist economic system,” a criticism present-day readers make of sentimental humanitarianism (Carlin 220). Addams did look forward to another kind of relation among human beings, a day when structural changes would make society truly democratic such that the need for charity would disappear. Part of her agreed with Howells’s Reverend Peck in *Annie Kilburn*, whose criticism of charity in favor of structural change foreshadows present-day critiques of sentimentalism. Peck was after justice, a world where “there shall be no more asking and no more giving, no more gratitude and no more merit, no more charity, but only and evermore justice” (Howells, *Annie Kilburn* 804). At times Addams thought it “reasonable to say that nothing could be done until industrial conditions were made absolutely democratic,” an observation consistent with Lauren Berlant’s observation that “sentimentality from the top down softens risks to the conditions of privilege by making obligations to action mainly ameliorative, a matter of not changing the fundamental terms that organize power, but of following the elevated claims of vigilant sensitivity, virtue, and conscience” (“Subtle Problems” 74, *The Female Complaint* 35). Yet ultimately Addams settled on a position of compromise. She believed that one needn’t make a

choice between structural change and ameliorative actions and that humanitarian practice has a heuristic function.

Addams writes, “while the painful condition of administering charity is the inevitable discomfort of a transition into a more democratic relation, the perplexing experiences of the actual administration have a genuine value of their own” (“Subtle Problems” 74). Howells turned those “perplexing experiences” into narrative with *Annie Kilburn*, a novel that shows how Annie’s efforts to turn her philanthropic impulses into concrete action yield increased knowledge of both social inequities and the self. Part of the value of charity work, Addams believed, is precisely that: it opens the eyes of the middle-class agents to the gross injustices around them and to the socially-contingent basis of their own values. She writes, “the young charity visitor who goes from a family living upon a most precarious industrial level to her own home in a prosperous part of the city, if she is sensitive at all, is never free from the perplexities which our growing democracy forces upon her” (*Democracy and Social Ethics*, hereafter *DSE*, 64). The very “perplexities” of the humanitarian relation are educational, leading the humanitarian practitioner to a deeper, more incisive understanding of the tension between America’s commitment to democracy and its ongoing class hierarchies. Humanitarianism, then, is more than ameliorative; it also wakes people up, putting them face to face with the need for structural change. Social reformers learn from being alongside the poor, from being a part of the movement, whereas she who analyzes the situation without participating in it “avoids the perplexity, and at the same time loses the vitality” (“Subtle Problems” 74). Beth Eddy reflects this sentiment of Addams’s when explaining why she objected to the

word “philanthropy”: the term “failed to capture the ways in which one must enter into the lives of others in order to understand their worlds and to be of any genuine help at all. Once philanthropists started to actually live with the neighbors to whom they sought to extend charity, they were likely to find that they learned more and received more from the relationship than they brought to it” (35). Philanthropists and charity workers would become humanitarians. This emphasis on reciprocity, where the changes the humanitarian actor undergoes are as much as a step toward justice as the objective value of reform work, distinguishes Addams’s proposals from traditional charity and philanthropy.

Furthermore, Addams couches her defense of humanitarianism in scientific terms in a way that bolsters the credibility of her practices by wedding them to the values undergirding reform during the period. She argues that her practices are even more scientific and useful than dominant methods because they take feeling and emotion into account. In effect, she one-ups scientific reformers by making a case for why sentiment is scientific. “We sometimes say that our charity is too scientific,” Addams writes, “but we should say . . . that it is not scientific enough” (“Subtle Problems” 72). Using the metaphor of parenting approaches to a young child’s crying at night, Addams illustrates what “not scientific enough” means. Though two parents, one sentimental and one scientific, may respond in the same way to the sound of their child’s cries—by staying in the room with the child—the differing rationale behind their decision is significant. The scientific parent draws on rules when he decides to sit there while his child cries himself

to sleep; he acts “from dogmatic conviction” and is “sure he is right” (*DSE* 66, 67).<sup>67</sup> The “soft-hearted” parent, in contrast, stays with the child “simply because he is sorry for him and wants to comfort him” (echoes of the little girl from the frog parable, with a “heart full of tender sympathy”) (*DSE* 66, *Twenty Years* 201). Though Addams doesn’t exactly endorse the “soft-hearted” parent’s motivation, she does criticize what she calls the “pseudo-scientific and stilted stage” of charity that the tough-love parent represents (“Subtle Problems” 73). She writes, “we have learned to condemn unthinking, ill-regulated kind-heartedness, and we take great pride in mere repression . . . . The pseudo-scientific spirit, or rather the undeveloped stage of our philanthropy, is perhaps most clearly revealed in this tendency to lay stress on negative action” (“Subtle Problems” 73-4). Humanitarianism that subscribes to scientific methods of righting the world without taking into account sympathy and tenderness becomes nothing more than a rote application of principles. Writing during “the afterglow of sentimentalization,” Addams presents her case for why even the most scientific reform efforts cannot turn their back on the place of sympathy in promoting social change (Wexler 19).

As an alternative to overly scientific reform efforts, then, Addams promotes a Deweyan conception of humanitarianism that underscores the elucidation of principles and theories from practice, not the other way around. Scientific reformers have learned to “distrust the human impulse as well the teachings of [their] own experience” to the

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<sup>67</sup> As noted above, these passages first appeared in an essay published in the *Atlantic* and were later incorporated into *Democracy and Social Ethics*. “The Subtle Problems of Charity” is reprinted in the *Jane Addams Reader*, edited by Jean Bethke Elsthain, so I cite that accessible and standard version when I can. However, sections of the essay central to my argument here were edited out, which is why I alternate citations from the essay with citations from the 1920 edition of *Democracy and Social Ethics*, which reproduces Addams’s original essay in full.

detriment of their goals, for in order to be vital and useful, reform cannot disregard either one (*DSE* 68). The reformist spirit, she suggests, should be pragmatic, not austere and principled; convictions and morals must be applied “to life itself” and “convictions shall not be unrelated to action” (*DSE* 68). If they follow this pragmatic dictum, individuals will become “cultivated” through their interactions with others. The reformer will have “socialized her virtues not only through a social aim but by a social process” (*DSE* 69).

Addams saw herself as more scientific than the scientific reformers because she enlisted sympathy and “the human impulse” toward the greater purpose of promoting the evolution of a democratic society. While she viewed social progress through an evolutionary lens, she felt that her peers had been “singularly slow to apply this evolutionary principle to human affairs in general” (*DSE* 65). Doing so was one of Addams’s major contributions to theories of reform. In her view the world wasn’t static; individuals, ethics, and human relationships all evolved in response to the challenges and demands of the present. This forms the basis of her argument in “A Modern Lear,” an essay in which she explores both sides of the labor-management conflict generated by the Pullman Strike of 1894.<sup>68</sup> Reflecting the influence of both pragmatism and evolution on her thinking, Addams writes, “the virtues of one generation are not sufficient for the next”; “a task is laid upon each generation to enlarge their [virtues’] application, to ennoble their conception, and, above all, to apply and adapt them to the peculiar problems presented to it for solution” (“Lear” 170, 171). Ethics are not transhistorical, but instead are a matter of fit with a given set of circumstances. But how to arrive at that

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<sup>68</sup> The essay was so controversial that it was not published until 1912.



fit? In reference to the rare individual in the industrial situation who stands up for the worker and exercises benevolence, Addams asserts that “progress must always come through the individual . . . who varies from the type and has sufficient energy to express this variation” (*DSE* 158-9). Humanitarian practice is Addams’s proposed method for generating mutations to the norm so that American society will evolve toward true democracy and justice.

Addams’s emphasis on the humanitarian agent, then, is not so much solipsism as it is a kind of social engineering. Howells’s Annie Kilburn spent months upon her return to Hatboro’ trying one kind of reform out, and then another, in her effort to put her humanitarian sentiments to practical use. With Hull House, Addams sought to provide an outlet for exactly that sort of impulse: a specific, targeted way for young women who felt the calling of duty to others to put their energies to use. Less a place where middle class women would go to “find themselves,” Hull House functioned as a kind of humanitarian technology<sup>69</sup> that would generate the qualities in both “residents” and “neighbors” that Addams found most conducive to achieving a more democratic society, and ultimately world peace. She had a definite outcome in mind. As William James would in “The Moral Equivalent of War” in 1910, Addams proposed an active, dynamic alternative to war.<sup>70</sup> She calls for “more aggressive ideals of peace,” not “non-resistance,” which connotes passivity. Instead, “the words ‘overcoming,’ ‘substituting,’ ‘re-creating,’

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<sup>69</sup> I thank Sabrina Starnaman for first suggesting that phrase to me.

<sup>70</sup> See Carl Burghardt, “From Hull House to the Hague,” for an analysis of Addams’s pacifist rhetoric. He explores the way that Addams tried to make peace more appealing by redescribing it: “peace was ‘creative,’ not dull, uninteresting, or passive” (396).

‘readjusting moral values,’ ‘forming new centres of spiritual energy’ carry much more of the meaning implied” (*Newer Ideals* 3, 8). Addams’s method of achieving peace is generative, creative. She emphasizes that humanitarianism and peace can be attained through “cosmopolitan affection,” an altered perspective, and a new kind of self, opportunities for which abound in the “poorer quarters of a cosmopolitan city” (*Newer Ideals* 11). Like Howells’s Reverend Peck, ultimately Addams looked forward to a world beyond Hull House and its resident/neighbor distinction. The poor, she writes, note the “difference between the emotional kindness with which relief is given by one poor neighbor to another poor neighbor, and the guarded care with which relief is given by a charity visitor to a charity recipient” (“Subtle Problems” 64). She, along with Annie Kilburn, felt called to help bring that world about. She therefore conceived of her mission to be building a world of neighbors, where no aid would be coming from “outside.” Addams drew on both sentimental and scientific discourses when she charted the course toward the attainment of that goal, using one vocabulary to balance the other and thereby make a case for the centrality of the self to humanitarian endeavors. Returning now to the parable that opens this chapter, it ought to be clearer how Addams is at once little girl and frog. She viewed humanitarianism as a transformative process from which the initiating agent is never exempt.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### American Humanitarianism Goes Abroad

“To the Philippine Teachers”

O'er boundless seas and to a foreign land

A chosen and devoted band you go;

And those of you upon whose heads the snow

Of age has fallen labor hand in hand

With those who still in youth's prime vigor stand

The selfsame task to carry out, to sow

The seeds of truth and culture; and you know

This is a noble duty, wisely planned.

So let no fear of failure fill your hearts,

Or dash your courage, or your spirits grieve;

And let no petty doubts becloud your brain,

Remember, while you try to do your parts,

That, if one single spark of light you leave

Behind, your work will not have been in vain.

E. E. Schneider (*The Log of the Thomas*, 1901)

On July 23, 1901, a group of 500 American teachers set out from San Francisco to the Philippines. Dubbed the Thomasites after the ship that carried them over, they were

the civic arm of the American military occupation of the Philippine islands that had begun in 1898. The teachers hailed from all over the country. While the poem “To the Philippine Teachers” evokes religious calling when it describes the Thomasites as a “chosen and devoted band,” the motives of these men and women who followed their American callings in signing up for the cross-Pacific journey were various: economic, patriotic, personal. Like a high school yearbook, the log of the *U.S.S. Thomas* creates a sense of camaraderie among the teachers as well as a sense of purpose: “to sow / The seeds of truth and culture.” And like high school graduates stepping out into the world, the teachers optimistically anticipate both the minuteness and the significance of their future labors: “if one single spark of light you leave / Behind, your work will not have been in vain.” Sixty years later, in what has become an iconic phrase, President John Kennedy asked Americans to consider what they could do for their country. The Peace Corps was one answer. In addition to offering Americans a peaceful way to serve abroad, the organization held out the promise of self-transformation through the experience of cross-cultural humanitarian action. “You help others, but you also help yourself,” observed one Volunteer (*United States Toughest Job*). Recent PSAs represent the Peace Corps experience as a secular calling that beckons potential volunteers to cross the globe: “Life is calling. How far will you go?”

Throughout “American Callings,” the figure of the humanitarian adventurer has been in our peripheral vision, skirting the edges of the analysis. Howells’s character Annie Kilburn, I explained, anticipates the humanitarian adventurer because of the way she follows her call to service away from Rome back to the United States, a place that felt

like a foreign country to her. Albion Tourgée followed a trajectory similar to that of future humanitarian adventurers when he went to live in North Carolina after the Civil War in that following the call of moral purpose led him to a community and a culture distant from his own. By promoting residence as opposed to travel as a model for understanding difference, Jane Addams too looked forward to humanitarian adventurers like Peace Corps Volunteers. This chapter will now shift the peripheral figure of the humanitarian adventure to the center, using the Peace Corps Volunteer as a point of comparison for the turn-of-the-century individuals and characters.

Going to the Philippines, joining the Peace Corps: humanitarian voyages both, both drives to leave “one single spark of light.” And in both cases, war (or the threat of it) created the opportunity for cross-cultural, humanitarian adventure. Cold War politics and Kennedy’s perceived need for more culturally sensitive, committed civil servants led to the birth of the Peace Corps. From the group’s incipience, the U.S. government made a concerted effort to separate PCVs from military occupation and from any kind of covert activity.<sup>71</sup> Though they represent the United States, PCVs also have a great deal of autonomy as individuals. Part of their job, crystallized in the Peace Corps’s second goal, “helping promote a better understanding of Americans on the part of the peoples served,”

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<sup>71</sup> When the Peace Corps was first founded, in 1961, the CIA seized upon the group as ideal for inserting their operatives into the third world under the guise of young development workers who were in a position of trust in their communities. Working against Kennedy’s express orders, the CIA, Sargent Shriver believed, planted agents in one of the first Peace Corps training groups. But Kennedy and Shriver put an end to that practice immediately, knowing that any association with intelligence gathering would jeopardize the existence of the fledgling Peace Corps. See “Kennedy and the Peace Corps: Idealism on the Ground.”

is to represent their country by representing themselves.<sup>72</sup> The Thomasites, on the other hand, were part of the colonial apparatus in the Philippines even though they considered themselves “an army, not of conquest, but of education” (Log of the “Thomas” 11). While the Thomasites labored to educate Philippine children and coexist in villages and towns, the U.S. military mounted attacks against insurgents.

The Thomasites could not cordon themselves off from violence because their presence in the Philippines was intimately connected to occupation. After Dewey ousted the Spanish fleet from Manila Bay on May 1, 1898, debate ensued in the United States about what action it should take in the Philippines: to annex, or not? The McKinley administration had gone to war with Spain over its rule in Cuba and withdrawn, victoriously, after one hundred days. Withdrawal seemed less advisable in the Philippines because of the islands’ strategic position amid Asian markets. The worry was that if the United States were to withdraw the way it had in the western hemisphere, other colonial powers would swoop in to replace Spain. Though little public support existed for annexing the Philippines and an outspoken anti-imperialist movement staunchly opposed it, McKinley bought the archipelago from Spain, signing the Treaty of Paris on December 10, 1898.<sup>73</sup> The U.S. then proceeded to occupy the islands under McKinley’s doctrine of

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<sup>72</sup> The first and third goals are: “Helping the people of interested countries in meeting their need for trained men and women” and “Helping promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans.”

<sup>73</sup> Counter to the idea that anti-imperialism was a position espoused by progressive and liberal thinkers alone, recent historiography has emphasized the role racism played in *resistance* to annexing the Philippines (Stuart Creighton Miller 15, Love 7). Going further, Eric Love calls for a “new optic” that, among other things, “should recognize and set aside assumptions, implicit in much recent work, that any past exercise of American imperial power abroad was morally wrong” (12). I would like to take up his challenge of applying a new optic to the texts I examine

“benevolent assimilation,” a colonial program that distinguished the American soldiers and teachers from imperial invaders and conquerors by emphasizing uplift, tutelage, friendship, and altruism. Despite the mollifying language, McKinley’s doctrine did not pacify the Filipinos, who had been fighting for their independence from Spain since 1896 and did not welcome another occupying force, no matter how “benevolent.” A war between Filipino insurgents and the American occupiers erupted in February of 1899, continuing well past 1902, the year that President Roosevelt wishfully declared the pacification successful. It would not be until 1946 that the Philippines would regain its independence.<sup>74</sup>

A corps of peace workers versus teachers alongside soldiers—the differences seem stark. Yet we impoverish our understanding of American humanitarianism if we fail to examine the relationship between turn-of-the-century colonialism and mid- to late-century international development. I say this not to move toward a reading of PCVs as neo-colonial (though there are those who would argue that, precisely), but to look at the colonial teachers in a new light by viewing them as anticipating a later form of American humanitarianism. This chapter, therefore, seeks to complicate understandings of the

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here; looking for the humane in what has commonly been understood as the exercise of empire does just that. However, I want to make clear that I agree with Love when he writes,

There is no questioning the inhumanity of the Philippine-American war, and no good can come of any attempt to diminish it. But historians must recognize that its catalyst, annexation, was an imperfect decision dictated largely by nearly impossible circumstances created at home by a divided and unpredictable electorate and abroad by a local and geopolitical situation that was volatile long before the Americans plunged the nation, somewhat blindly, into its maw. (14)

<sup>74</sup> For a military history of the Philippine-American War, see Stuart Creighton Miller’s *“Benevolent Assimilation”: The American Conquest of the Philippines, 1899-1903* (1982). For a social history, see Paul Kramer’s *The Blood of Government: Race, Empire, the United States, and the Philippines* (2006).

relationship between American colonialism and humanitarianism by tracing a through-line in the two traditions: the preoccupation with selfhood in the humanitarian endeavor. I argue that the Thomasites and those who wrote about them put into prose a specifically American identity that could be carried, along with mosquito nets and water filters, to foreign climes. It was a portable identity, at once cosmopolitan and American: cosmopolitan in its reach and interests, yet profoundly American in the quality of its expression. In these ways, their writing anticipates the Peace Corps writing with which this dissertation opened.

The connection to an explicitly American identity needs a little explanation, for rarely does patriotism figure as a PCV's primary motivation for joining the Peace Corps. Rather, the organization taps into a felt desire to do good for others, experience meaningful work, and have an adventure. All of this is undergirded by a cosmopolitan sense that one's duties to humanity do not stop at national borders. Likewise, the motives expressed by the Thomasites rarely included patriotism, and in their memoirs the Thomasites do not reflect on the patriotic purpose of their project. (Even the hokey poem from the log of the *Thomas* doesn't reference the United States.) But it is important to remember that the Peace Corps was a project born of Cold War politics, a profoundly nationalist bid for expanding influence in the developing world by improving the reputation of Americans abroad. Similarly, the Thomasites served a P.R. purpose as the kind, generous face of the American occupation. Though perhaps not intentionally, both the Thomasites and the PCVs furthered American global-political purposes by serving as role models. Later in the century, PCVs' self-reflective writing would be used by the U.S.



government to recruit new volunteers. Given this feedback loop where self-writing turns into government advertisement, writing by PCVs cements the ties between individual identity and patriotism. But writing by the Thomasites initiates them. The connection between PCVs and the Thomasites, then, is not just historical. It is also literary.

I will explore the literary-historical arc connecting the Thomasites and PCVs through analysis of both autobiography and imaginative fiction. A common place to begin investigating the American presence in the Philippines is Mark Twain's "To the Person Sitting in Darkness" (1901). Twain's essay reaffirms a familiar view of colonialism: pretty on the outside, ugly on the inside. Because I seek to complicate that view, I begin instead by looking at a group of humorous sketches about a bureaucrat in the Philippines, George Ade's "Stories of Benevolent Assimilation" (1899). Ade ridiculed the idea of assimilating Filipinos into the American body politic, and in so doing, he traced, in relief, the outlines of the humanitarian adventurer. Next, I will turn to two autobiographies written by American teachers working in the Philippines in the first years of the twentieth century. In reflecting on their daily labors, their larger purpose, and their place in both the Philippines and the United States, William Freer and Mary Fee provide an historical accompaniment to Ade's lampoon. I will read Freer and Fee's memoirs in order to show the developmental stages of the humanitarian-adventurer identity at the turn of the twentieth-century.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> I focus on the Philippines for two reasons. First, although arguably the United States had been engaging in imperialism for centuries, it was partly as a result of the Spanish-American War (in both Cuba and the Philippines) that the United States became a world power, thus inaugurating the "American century." Second, and more important to my purposes, I am interested in the tension between individual motives and patriotic purpose that the context of the

We can trace the emergence of the modern-day humanitarian adventurer, exemplified by the Peace Corps Volunteer, by paying attention to a shift in the way selfhood gets articulated in humanitarian autobiography. The trend is a move from defining a self through the purpose of changing foreign others to transforming a self by seeking out the challenge of cross-cultural humanitarianism. To paraphrase William James and Richard Rorty, respectively, the Thomasites' theories become "unstiffened" by their exposure to difference, thus casting their final vocabularies in doubt. It is from this position of doubt and openness, that of Rorty's "liberal ironist," that the identity of the American humanitarian adventurer takes root as it travels to foreign places. The difference between writing by the Thomasites and writing by PCVs has to do with motivation: the Thomasites experience change despite themselves, whereas the PCVs seek that change out. George Ade's "Stories of Benevolent Assimilation" provide a fictional window onto this shift, so I turn now to him.

### **Reading beyond Mark Twain; Or, Why We Should Care about George Ade**

In the archives of American literary history, Mark Twain's "To the Person Sitting in Darkness" (1901) has come to epitomize a prescient view on American imperialism at the turn of the twentieth century. This view recognizes that the bill of goods sold by

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Philippine occupation presents. The first group of American teachers to go to the Philippines were responding to a call to serve their country, and so in living their identities as teachers/colonials/humanitarians, the Americans always had to negotiate their patriotic purpose on the one hand and their personal motivations on the other.

I should say that I do not want to argue that the memoirs I analyze in this chapter are necessarily *representative* of American teachers in general, but simply that these particular stories told by particular individuals do seem to anticipate a humanitarian-adventurer identity that would gain broader prominence in the United States as the century wore on.

American imperialism—in Twain’s rendering: love, justice, gentleness, Christianity, protection to the weak, temperance, law and order, liberty, equality, honorable dealing, mercy, and education—are “merely an outside cover, gay and pretty and attractive, displaying the special patterns of our Civilization which we reserve for Home Consumption, while *inside* the bale is the Actual Thing that the Customer Sitting in Darkness buys with his blood and tears and land and liberty” (3). The United States, in Twain’s estimation, produced two products called “civilization”: one for domestic use, and one for export. And the export version was mighty shoddy. Twain, in other words, argues that humane values are the trappings, not the substance, of the American bill of goods; the United States cloaks imperialism in humanitarian rhetoric. This indictment of U.S. imperialism (more specifically, of the U.S. presence in the Philippines), has been seized upon by scholars as a literary-political touchstone. “To the Person Sitting in Darkness” is the go-to text for assessing and understanding the progressive view of American presence abroad at the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> The attention given this text is well merited. Twain was the most famous and outspoken spokesperson for anti-imperial sentiment in the United States at the turn of the century, so of course “To the Person Sitting in Darkness” (and other anti-imperial writings), rightly make up a central part of the archive of American anti-imperialism. Also, it is partly because of its prescience—Twain’s essay seems to anticipate American imperial incursions that occurred in the twentieth- and twenty-first centuries, including but not limited to Vietnam and Iraq— that the essay has become such a touchstone. Attention to Twain’s anti-imperial writings was renewed largely by the late Jim Zwick, an independent scholar who compiled comprehensive websites on U.S. imperialism (particularly BoondocksNet.com, now defunct) and reignited interest in Twain and anti-imperialism through his print scholarship, including *Mark Twain’s Weapons of Satire: Anti-Imperialist Writings on the Philippine-American War* (1992) and *Confronting Imperialism: Essays on Mark Twain and the Anti-Imperialist League* (2007). Perhaps in part due to Zwick’s work on Twain, one whole volume of the Oxford Mark Twain (1996) was devoted to Twain’s travel writing and anti-imperialist essays. Yet for all its pedagogical prominence, the essay has not often been taken up as a primary object of analysis for literary critics; it is mostly used as a

Though Twain may have been the most famous man of letters to offer his view of American presence in the Philippines during this period, he was not alone in writing about the endeavor through the lens of imaginative fiction.<sup>77</sup> Another was George Ade, a journalist from Indiana known for local color sketches about life in the Midwest. Ade paid close attention to American maneuvering in the Pacific, corresponding with his colleague and friend, journalist John McCutcheon, who was at Manila Bay when Dewey declared victory on May 1, 1898.<sup>78</sup> Though Ade would not go to the Philippines until 1900, McCutcheon's dispatches from the islands (which Ade wrote up more thoroughly for the *Record*) inspired him to employ his local color style to write a series of sketches depicting the encounter between Americans and Filipinos. Those sketches gave rise, a year later, to a musical. *The Sultan of Sulu*, first performed in Chicago in 1902, cheerily depicted the hijinks that ensue when a group of American military men and Yankee school marm arrive on the island of Sulu, in the Philippine archipelago, with the bizarre announcement that they now *own* the place. Although he called his musical a satire, and

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reference point. For appraisals of Twain's essay, see Adrian Gaskins, whose essay "Let U.S. Prey" focuses on the use of religion in furthering imperial aims; Peter Schmidt, whose book *Sitting in Darkness* emphasizes the connections between Twain's critique and dependency models of education; and Edward Huffstetler, who assesses what he calls Twain's cultural relativism in an essay titled "Mark Twain's Unique brand of Cultural Relativism."

<sup>77</sup> Many American writers took up the Spanish-American War as a subject, including Stephen Crane, who reported on the conflict, and William Dean Howells, whose short story "Editha" (1905) depicted the clash between romantic, idealistic views of war with the decidedly unaesthetic reality of it. The war also spawned a surprising number of young adult novels, most prominent among them Edward Stratemeyer's *Old Glory* series, which began with *Under Dewey at Manila* (1898). These books focused on adventurous young boys who head off on ships to fight in Cuba or the Philippines. Very few writers of literature aimed at adults, however, focused specifically on the American-Filipino encounter.

<sup>78</sup> Ade and McCutcheon met as students at Purdue, and McCutcheon helped get Ade his first job as a reporter for the *Chicago Record*. McCutcheon, an editorial cartoonist at the paper, illustrated Ade's "Fables in Slang" columns.

reviewers acknowledged it as such, it did not arouse anywhere near the ire that Twain's essay did. Unlike Twain's piece, it wasn't taken up by the Anti-Imperialist League as promotional material. Instead, reviewers called *The Sultan of Sulu* "clever," and it was met with success and applause.<sup>79</sup> Ade's musical, unlike Twain's essay, did not seek to inspire anger, but laughter. He was having fun with the logic of imperialism.

Though there is no evidence that Mark Twain and George Ade ever met, they did read each other's work. For Ade, it would have been nearly impossible to escape the influence of Twain, and it was through their common supporter, William Dean Howells, that Twain learned of Ade. In a letter to Howells (dated July 22, 1908) Twain wrote, "Thank you once more for introducing me to the incomparable Pink Marsh [one of Ade's characters and the title of a book]. . . . my admiration of the book has overflowed all

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<sup>79</sup> The musical was reviewed in dozens of papers across the country in 1902 and 1903, including but not limited to the *New York Times*, *Kansas City Star*, *Idaho Daily Statesman*, *Charlotte Daily Observer*, *Belleville News Democrat*, and the *Biloxi Daily Herald*. The reviews are remarkably similar to one another, as most of them do little more than summarize the plot, assess the performances and musical numbers, and attach a few adjectives to the musical. In most instances, the reviewers draw attention to the absurdity of the plot. This review from the *New York Times* is representative:

The things that occurred in real life in the southern portion of our Philippine possessions, as told in the newspaper reports—things that are still occurring there for that matter—furnish a groundwork for a very funny series of comic opera complications, and Mr. Ade has succeeded, even in his maiden effort at this sort of business, in constructing a very funny story of absurdities, which is seasoned with a good many very new and bright observations and very little slang. ("New Plays Last Night")

At the same time, many acknowledge that the musical was meant to be a critique: "Mr. Ade's plot is a clever satire on the logic of some recent administrative decisions," wrote the reviewer in Belleville, Illinois's *Daily News-Democrat*. Interestingly, however, the reviewers never expand upon the substance of that critique. Instead, the assessment of Ade's humor that many reviewers provide underscores a difference between Twain and Ade that I will explore: "Mr. Ade's slang is wholly lacking in brutality and is laugh-compelling in its breezy impudence. . . . His usual note . . . is of good-natured raillery, as one who realizes the bitterness of things, but whose heart is touched by it all, as he himself smiles and compels you to smile" ("George Ade, the Man Who Writes 'Fables'").

limits, all frontiers” (Smith, *Mark Twain-Howells Letters* 832).<sup>80</sup> Ade returned the compliment in a letter to a friend of his written decades later (dated April 21, 1941), “Regarding Mark Twain, I am disposed to pay him the same compliment that he once paid to one of my books in a letter to William Dean Howells. I will quote him and say that my admiration for Mark Twain has overflowed all limits, all frontiers. He is our great master humorist” (Ade, *Letters* 224).

Ade was not alone in thinking of Twain this way. Interestingly, though, William Dean Howells once disagreed. Howells had heralded Ade’s writing early on, observing in 1903 that “in Mr. George Ade the American spirit arrives. . . . It is, I think, Mr. Ade’s instinct of our solidarity and the courage of his instinct which has enabled him to go straighter to the heart of our mystery than any former humorist” (“Certain of the Chicago School” 739). Though Howells does not mention Twain directly here, the pointed reference to humorists past seems to allude to him. He took on the Twain-Ade comparison head on more than a decade later in a column bemoaning what he saw as Mark Twain’s shift from humor to satire. Reading Twain’s posthumously-published *The Mysterious Stranger* (1916) makes Howells observe that the “human predicament . . . is such as apparently to turn our beloved humorist to a satirist without hope and without faith” (“Editor’s Easy Chair” 442). Lamenting Twain’s shift to cynicism and the unworthiness of most of his successors, Howells observes, “there is no one but George

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<sup>80</sup> My thanks to Jack Brenner, whose 1966 article “Howells and Ade” led me to the Howells columns I cite here. His article makes the case for renewing scholarly attention in Ade.

Ade worthy to be named in the same breath with those master humorists [Twain and Artemus Wade]" (443).

But if Ade is Twain's worthy successor, he is, in Howells's view, also significantly different from him, and that difference has to do with his attitude toward the objects he laughs at. Howells observed that Ade is "of a candid complicity with the thing satirized" ("Certain of the Chicago School" 741). Ade, in other words, does not set himself apart from his object of ridicule but implicates himself in his satires, which, Howells seems to suggest, removes some of the bite from his writing. This difference between satire and humor is not only aesthetic. It makes a real moral difference. Howells writes, "Possibly we are going from bad to worse as we have always been; but we think we have been kept from the worst by the humorist's smile, not by the satirist's frown" ("Editor's Easy Chair" 444). In this section I intend to take seriously Howells's claim that "the humorist's smile" has more moral power to keep us from the worst than "the satirist's frown." This is a possibility that many critics, by neglecting Ade and privileging Twain, have failed to pursue.<sup>81</sup>

My purpose here, however, is not to offer an extended comparison of the two humorists, but rather to use the contrast I have established between Twain's and Ade's tones and the critical attention each has received as a warrant for analyzing another, even

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<sup>81</sup> It was common among imperialists and moderate Americans to bristle at Twain's accusatory tone common when "To the Person in Darkness" appeared in the *North American Review* in 1901. In an editorial from February of that year, the *New York Times* evinced disappointment in Twain for "discarding the grin of the funny man for the sour visage of the austere moralist" (qtd. in Powers 607). No one likes to be scolded. I hope in these pages, however, to make a case for assessing Ade as well as Twain that goes beyond the resistance to having your beloved funny man start to demand something from you. Instead, I want to suggest that Ade also provides a worthwhile critique.

less-noted body of work by Ade: his stories of benevolent assimilation.<sup>82</sup> These stories, which would lead to the *Sultan of Sulu*, ran in the *Chicago Record* from July 8 to October 18, 1899, to very little fanfare. They did not come across as a political statement, far less a screed. Much less popular than Ade's local color sketches, "Fables in Slang," the stories flew under the radar at the time, as they do now. Not until Perry Gianakos collected and published them together in one volume in 1985—in the Philippines, no less—did they appear anywhere but in the *Record*.<sup>83</sup> The oversight is astonishing, for I would argue that these stories offer a more sophisticated take on the situation in the Philippines than either Twain's essay or Ade's musical. They describe the attempts of an American bureaucrat, Washington Conner, to "assimilate" a Filipino family, the Kakyaks. As such they attempt to explore the process of benevolent assimilation through an imagined microcosm: one man, one family, one big government policy. What distinguishes Ade's stories of benevolent assimilation from his musical and from Twain's essay is their ambiguity, an unease absent from Ade's later musical. Washington Conner

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<sup>82</sup> Scholarly attention to Ade has been scant, the vast majority focusing on his local color humor. For work that addresses Ade's writing on the Philippines, see Perry Gianakos's introduction to Ade's stories. One prominent critic who acknowledged Ade as a moralist as well as a humorist was H. L. Mencken, who observed,

Here, amid a humor so grotesque that it almost tortures the midriff, there is a startlingly vivid and accurate evocation of the American scene. Here, under all the labored extravagance, there are brilliant flashlight pictures of the American people, and the American ways of thinking, and the whole of American *Kultur*. Here the veritable American stands forth, lacking not a waggery, a superstition, a snuggle or a wen. . . . Needless to say, a moralist stands behind the comedian. (qtd. in Gianakos 4)

For biographical information on Ade, see Fred C. Kelly's *George Ade: Warm-hearted Satirist*; Lee Coyle's biography *George Ade*; and Ade's letters, edited by Terence Tobin.

<sup>83</sup> The volume Gianakos put together is the only extant edition of the stories, and it is hard to come by, available in only forty-nine libraries world wide, according to the OCLC. (Compare that to the collected *Fables in Slang*, available in 487.)



does not—cannot—remain resolute in his purpose, and the stories demonstrate the flaws in that purpose. Yet they do not approach the outright condemnation of “To the Person Sitting in Darkness,” for when Ade laughs at Conner’s missteps and blind spots he laughs at himself and his culture, too. Given this ambiguity, the stories demand more attention than they have received. Looking closely at Ade’s stories can help us continue to come to grips with the way Americans reacted to and imagined the cultural encounter brought about by the Philippine-American War because it opens up a perspective heretofore lacking in the discussion surrounding anti-imperial American literature. Using the colonial encounter as a departure point, Ade’s stories prefigure the model of the humanitarian adventurer.

Ade’s stories bring into focus the experience of an individual American living in foreign circumstances with a mission to carry out. Conner, of course, is no humanitarian. Ade makes it clear that he is nothing more than a bureaucrat charged with goals he has not fully thought through. Additionally, Ade insists that the policy of benevolent assimilation is not humane at all. Yet even if Conner’s motives are not humanitarian, his presence among the Kakyaks takes the *form* of the humanitarian adventurer: one American living among strangers, trying to carry out a mission to *help* foreign others. (The fact that the Kakyaks do not need or want Conner’s help is one of the jokes. Ade and his audience are in on it, but the protagonist is not.) The method Conner uses, however—attempting to get others to be like him—is still dictated by the terms of the colonial endeavor. It goes one way.

In the close reading that follows, I explore how Ade sought to expose and ridicule the American colonial project in the Philippines through a series of vignettes that culminate in the failure of the protagonist to see his mission through. The stories anticipate the form of the humanitarian adventurer by throwing it into relief. That is to say, Washington Conner's failure becomes the goal of future humanitarians. Conner fails in his own mind because the Philippines and its people change him; future humanitarian adventurers desire to be changed. By exposing the folly of imitation as a method of humanitarian change and showing the way the environment, the culture, and the people have an impact on Washington Conner, even greater than his impact on them, Ade anticipates a new form of humanitarian action.

### **Ade's "Stories of Benevolent Assimilation"**

The stories begin with Washington Conner, "an agent, or a missionary you might say, representing the United States of America," earnestly explaining his purpose to the Kakyaks (Ade, *Stories* 12). This sets the stage for the breakdown of Conner's mission and the very notion of benevolent assimilation while allowing in doubt and insecurity, which create fertile ground for growing the humanitarian-adventurer identity. Conner's project, as he understands it, depends upon a one-way relationship between him and the Filipino family. He gives, they receive—and change as a result. Conner explains the phrase "benevolent assimilation" like this:

"A benevolent person," said Mr. Conner, pulling reflectively at his red mustache, "a benevolent person is one who has the disposition to do good to others and

make them happy. Assimilation refers to the act of bringing to a resemblance, likeness or identity. The plan of benevolent assimilation, for which I am the agent, contemplates the instruction of you islanders in all the details of our American civilization. We love you; therefore we are going to put before you certain examples and precepts to enable you to become similar to us.” (13)

When the family’s skeptical mother, Mrs. Kakyak, asks Conner why they should want to be like him, his response sounds the note of an exasperated parent: “Because we want you to.” Then he explains further: “it occurs to us that we have been designated by a wise Providence to take charge of you simple-minded islanders and educate you. You are the white man’s burden” (13). And so it goes, as far as Conner understands it.

Ade, however, nudges us toward a more complex understanding of the relationship between Conner and the Kakyaks. By framing the terms of Conner’s project with references to Rudyard Kipling’s poem “The White Man’s Burden” (1899), Ade complicates Conner’s overt statements of mission and provides a key to understanding the stories. When Conner tells the Kakyaks that they are the white man’s burden, the burden talks back. “We don’t want to be,” replies Mr. Kakyak. “Well, you are, just the same,” Conner says. “You have been described to us as ‘half devil and half child’” (14). The passive voice is important here. With it Ade indicates that Conner’s endeavors are being encouraged and underwritten by another power—Kipling, representing the British—who has already interpreted the situation for him. At the same time, readers can also take their cue for understanding the stories from the poem. “The silent, sullen peoples / shall weigh your gods and you,” read two lines of “The White Man’s Burden.”

These lines, the last two in the poem's penultimate stanza, flip the perspective from the certitude of the imperial mission to the frightening thought of being weighed and judged by the very peoples one has come to tame.<sup>84</sup> This line never appears in the stories. However, the adjective "sullen" does. Conner refers to the Filipinos as "the sullen people of this island"; Mrs. Kakyak nods "in sullen assent" (14, 29). We can see these uses of the word "sullen" as an allusion to the poem, an allusion that encourages us to look at benevolent assimilation from the Kakyaks' perspective. The stories, it seems to me, imagine the terms of the weighing Kipling forecasts. Yet Ade can only go so far. He does not tell the story of benevolent assimilation from the point of view of the Filipinos, for he cannot. At the time the stories were written, Ade had never even been to the Philippines.<sup>85</sup> Neither are the stories grounded in research or copious detail. Instead, Ade attempts to understand the Filipino point of view the only way he can: by imagining them to be like himself, imbuing the Kakyaks with a common-sensical Midwestern sensibility. Ade uses Kipling's poem as an interpretive frame for his stories because the text of the poem, like the text of the stories, imagines Conner's attempt to assume the white man's burden. At the same time, the subtext of both the poem and the stories is an attempt to listen to the silent, sullen peoples, even if the terms of that listening are not authentic. To be sure, Ade is limited by his perspective and his culture, which remains relentlessly

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<sup>84</sup> In her book *Shadowing the White Man's Burden: U.S. Imperialism and the Problem of the Color Line*, Gretchen Murphy calls into question the certitude with which readers commonly interpret the poem when they read it as the imperial ur-text. She shows that it was understood as much more ambiguous at the time it was written and received (see Chapter One). The lines I discuss here are indicative of that ambiguity.

<sup>85</sup> Ade visited the Philippines on a trip to Asia in 1900. No account of his travel there seems to exist.

American. It is a paradox of the stories that Ade attacks Washington Conner's attempts at "assimilation" by representationally assimilating the Kakyaks to a Midwestern sensibility.

That Ade doesn't think much of Kipling's take on imperial duty becomes clear early in the stories, for much of the first few vignettes is devoted to making fun of benevolent assimilation and demonstrating its flaws through the eyes of the Kakyaks and through Conner's own thoughtless remarks. Benevolent assimilation goes hand in hand with "civilization," a seemingly progressive notion that gets debunked early on with this howler of Conner's: "As soon as this war is over we are going to start in and civilize all those who haven't been killed" (12). But if American colonialism is shown to be unaware of its own barbarity, Ade overplays the contrast between the Tagalog characters and the Americans. For Ade, the Kakyak family represents practical, natural living—life without artifice—in contrast to the "civilized," artificial way Americans live. This contrast is made explicit in the following exchange between Mrs. Kakyak and Conner. Mrs. Kakyak begins,

"It seems to me that this wonderful civilization, of which you are forever talking, consists of a huge assortment of ceremonies which are the outgrowth of artificial conditions and which are contrary to the natural instincts of any human being."

"Certainly," replied Conner. "The purpose of civilization is to repress and hold down the natural instincts, so that people may be governed by rule and precedent. . . . When you have become thoroughly civilized, Mrs. Kakyak, you will know what it is to approach a woman whom you thoroughly detest, kiss her

with feigned heartiness and beg of her to come and take tea with you at her first opportunity.” (60-1)

Though the contrast between the natural and easy-living Kakyaks and the uptight, rule-abiding Conner may seem overdone and artificial itself, if we see it less as a contrast between Tagalog and American culture and more as a contrast between political rhetoric and plain-living American values, it begins to make more sense. It becomes evident early on that Eulalie, the Kakyak teenage girl, embodies American values and virtues. Forced to hew to Conner’s lessons, she reflects to herself,

Why should not the Tagalos<sup>86</sup> be permitted to seek happiness in their own way, without the guidance or intervention of people living thousands of miles away? . . . the maiden was puzzled as to the merits of his case. She tried to believe that the tall stranger was sincere. Certainly he had the manner of sincerity, and yet she fancied at times that he was merely obeying orders and trying to bolster up a policy that did not fit at the joints. But she was very young and quite unsophisticated, and perhaps her judgment need not be projected into a controversy which belongs to statesmen and business promoters. (31-2)

In this and other passages, Ade accomplishes two things: he exposes the absurdity of American colonialism while also suggesting that a significant gap exists between American policy and American sagacity. Eulalie’s desire that the Tagalogs “be permitted

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<sup>86</sup> For some reason Ade always refers to the Tagalog people as the Tagalos. I am not sure whether this was an idiosyncrasy of his or whether spelling of “Tagalog” varied in the United States during this period. In my reading about the Philippines in *National Geographics* from the turn of the century, I haven’t seen others follow Ade’s style.

to seek happiness in their own way” echoes American founding principles. Ade does not play Filipino views off American views so much as play the Americans off their leaders, laughing at the disconnect between American ideals and American behavior.

Even though Ade cannot provide a real window into the Filipino perspective, what he does accomplish is valuable. In addition to exposing the absurdity of “benevolent assimilation,” another significant contribution of his stories is to lay bare the arbitrary quality of American customs and culture, thus opening up the possibility of cultural relativism, a central principle of present-day humanitarianism and a legacy of American pragmatism.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> I echo Cornel West in asserting that a strong connection exists between American pragmatism and the United States’ entrance on the world stage at the turn of the twentieth century. Is it a coincidence that it was in 1898, the year of the Spanish-American War, that James first publicly coined the term, at a lecture at Berkeley? (As Martin Kevorkian pointed out, quoting his colleague Coleman Hutchison, “such things may have a relation that is less than causal but more than casual.”) West sees John Dewey as seminal in bringing about this cosmopolitan turn in pragmatist thought. Though I would argue that the seeds for such internationalism were there as early as Emerson, West’s observations are nonetheless very important to my argument about the way Ade’s stories are shot through with insights into humanitarianism:

The coming-of-age of American pragmatism occurs just as the United States emerges as a world power. There is no direct causal relation between these two phenomena, yet it also is no mere accident. Dewey’s mature formulations of pragmatism were certainly encouraged by the entrée of America on the international stage of history. This entrée required not only “the end of American innocence,” i.e., an end to America’s naïve optimism and uncritical penchant for romantic simplicity, or a “revolt against formalism,” i.e., an engagement with a dynamic reality in a functional and contextual manner. It also forced American intellectuals to develop *a particular kind* of international and historical consciousness, a consciousness open to other streams of thought yet rooted in the American experience and capable of nourishing, sustaining, and guiding America through its coming crises and challenges. (85)

Where West, in his brilliant study of American pragmatism, emphasizes the role the intellectual elite (not only Dewey but Emerson, James, Peirce, Du Bois, and others) have had in shaping pragmatism, I want to suggest that we see the development of a humanitarian-adventurer identity as it is shaped by obscure autobiographers and forgotten writers like Ade as another cultural instantiation of pragmatist thought: pragmatism from the bottom up.

Much of the amusement generated by the stories comes from Ade's ability to loose American culture from its moorings, rendering it unstable. Such unmasking of the arbitrary is most evident when Conner tries to get the Kakyaks to dress like middle-class Americans, forcing imitation on them from the outside. His explanation of the codes of fashion and etiquette reveals the ultimately inexplicable nature of social custom. For instance, Conner tells Eulalie that she shouldn't let her shoulder show during the day. (She is wont to wear a garment that slips suggestively down one arm.) However, Conner adds, it is perfectly appropriate to let *both* shoulders show—but only at night. “In the evening it is more than all right—it is the only correct thing to do.” This seems illogical to Eulalie's mother. “Why should there be any difference?” she asks. “There are reasons, ladies,” responds the bureaucrat, “but I am not sure that they would appeal to your primitive understanding. Please don't expect me to tell you the reason for anything” (23). Here Conner responds to the women's questioning with high-handed confidence, but as they persist with their questions, his confidence becomes defensive. His culture, Conner realizes, seems absurd when it is trotted out in the Philippines, but he is the only one there to defend it against the scrutiny of his skeptical, would-be converts. When they laugh at the hat with the ostrich feather he asks Mrs. Kakyak to wear, his response turns from confident to authoritarian: “‘If you are to become one of us you *must* wear this kind of hat,’ said Conner, meeting her stubborn gaze” (24).

In these stories, cultural relativity becomes colonialism's weak spot. At the same time as Ade argues for the contingency of cultural norms, Conner's increasingly defensive response to the Kakyaks reveals the insecurity and fear at the heart of the



colonial endeavor. The Kakyaks, Conner finds, “were inquisitive. They asked many questions. They obtained a large amount of information” (36). But this information does not convert them to a new way of being. “The reader will therefore understand that the Kakyak family might be willing and anxious to learn all about Americans and still have little inclination to be Americans” (37). This breakdown between learning and being strikes fear into the heart of our bureaucrat, for he realizes that the Kakyaks are not docile objects to be molded according to his mission. Instead, they are capable of learning and assessing, judging and rejecting, continuing to be themselves while they refuse to be benevolently assimilated. “Mimicry is at once resemblance and menace,” Homi Bhabha reminds us, and here, Conner feels the menace: it comes from the Kakyaks’ resemblance to Americans in ways that threaten the Americans’ authority (86). For instance, Mr. Kakyak gives Conner a history lesson and draws a threatening parallel between the origin of the United States and the situation in turn-of-the-century Philippines:

You see the Filipino insur—rebels, I mean—have set up the claim that they have the same right that the Americans claimed in 1776. They have organized a provisional government, just as the colonies did. They are fighting for—well, what they conceive to be their rights. In what respect are they different from the thirteen colonies that rebelled against Great Britain? (47)

Mr. Kakyak self-edits, adapting his language to the lexicon of benevolent assimilation: “rebels,” suggesting disobedience to the rule of law, not “insurgents.” “Conceive to be” their rights, not “are.” He is savvy, skillfully communicating with Conner through the

American's language and mythology in order to resist the project of benevolent assimilation.

Ade represents the menace and uncanniness of mimicry in a scene where Conner demands that Mrs. Kakyak dress up in Victorian American attire. When Mrs. Kakyak emerges, the uneven border between mimicry and imitation, resemblance and difference, generates feelings of unease in Mrs. Kakyak, her daughter Eulalie, and Washington Conner. Colonial ambivalence is in full effect.

After nearly a half-hour Mrs. Kakyak came forth. The huge hat toppled on her head. The frightful clamping of her waist seemed to cause pain, for her face bore an expression in which grief, humiliation, anger and apprehension were clearly evident. The waist, with its tight sleeves, clung to the corset in many a wrinkle. The skirt stood out flaringly. Mrs. Kakyak's bare feet showed underneath. She stood awkwardly with her feet wide apart and her arms thrown into angles, like a jointed automaton.

"Oh mother, you're a sight!" said Eulalie who seemed undecided whether to laugh or cry. . . . "Please, Mr. Conner, don't be too hard on mother," she said, looking up at him with pleading in her dark eyes. "Please don't compel her to wear those ridiculous garments."

The missionary was embarrassed. (25)

Bhabha's phrase for such awkward resemblance, "almost the same but not quite," applies here (89). Mrs. Kakyak's forced mimicry creates "grief, humiliation, anger and apprehension." It embarrasses Conner. In the context of the stories themselves, this scene

drives home, through the striking visual image of a “jointed automaton,” what Ade sees as the preposterousness of Filipinos assimilating into or imitating American cultural norms. That Ade’s representation is shot through with a note of racist exoticism—when he puts Tagalogs in American clothes, the result is nothing but absurd—does not undercut the significance of the scene. Ade is indeed critical of his government’s policy of benevolent assimilation, and he uses the scene with Mrs. Kakyak in Victorian clothing to expose one of the faultlines in that policy: the ambivalence of the colonial encounter. Though Washington Conner wanted assimilation, what he got was mimicry. Benevolent assimilation, Ade suggests, is an oxymoron.

However, Ade’s stories do more than criticize, or break down, existing models of American presence abroad. Along the margins of the text we also see a reciprocal movement going on, a nudge to notice what is being built. According to the *OED*, in psychology, “assimilation,” the central imitative word of the stories and the conceptual true north of the McKinley policy in the Philippines, describes a “process whereby the individual acquires new ideas, by interpreting presented ideas and experiences in relation to the existing contents of his mind.” This process echoes James’s pragmatist model of truth, one in which new ideas are grafted on to old ones in contrast to throwing out old ideas in favor of the new.<sup>88</sup> Change is gradual, relativistic, and reciprocal. Ade’s stories show us a connection between pragmatism and humanitarianism. When Ade lampoons

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<sup>88</sup> As noted in the Introduction, James saw truth as instrumental. For him, ideas are true “just in so far as they help us get into satisfactory relation with other parts of our experience” (*Pragmatism* 34). No one, James believed, throws out all prior beliefs and replaces them with novelties. Truth is a matter of adaptation.

the project of benevolent assimilation, attempts to listen to what he imagines is the point of view of the Filipinos, and shows American culture to be contingent, it all works toward clearing the way toward a new understanding of the cross-cultural encounter, one that is reciprocal instead of one-sided. This notion of reciprocity, which we already saw in Jane Addams's theorization of the humanitarian dynamic, has become a central tenet of modern-day humanitarianism.

So, by driving home the idea that culture is contingent upon place and habit, Ade shows that selves are not inert. Assimilation works both ways; giver and receiver, instructor and pupil, are not static roles. Writing a report to his employers at the so-called "Bureau of Benevolent Assimilation," the "instructor and pioneer and missionary" concludes that "the Kakyak family is not greatly changed from what it was when I arrived here, one month ago" (65, 68). The missionary, however, is changing. He has become "too lazy to read" (69). He gets a tan. He discards his tie "for the sake of comfort and because Eulalie had begged him not to be ridiculous" (69). Now Conner is the one changing his behavior because what he is accustomed to seems "ridiculous" in this new place. If Conner sees this as failure—"Instead of inducing the simple islanders to adopt the American costume, he had permitted Eulalie to coax him into the slovenly habits of her people"—Ade finds it pretty funny, writing, "Could it be possible that the great missionary, who had come to assimilate the Tagalos, was being assimilated by them?" (70). Indeed. The effect that the Philippines have on Conner make him doubt both his mission and his ability to carry it out. When he stumbles upon Eulalie and her insurgent boyfriend, Josefo, discussing their plan to resist American rule (which is, ironically, the

ultimate imitation; Eulalie says to Josefo, “Mr. Conner has told us that we must be as much like the Americans as possible. If the Americans are loyal to their government, then I suppose we must be loyal to ours”), Conner decides his work is done (78). He gives up. His explanation, offered to an old college friend, places the blame almost entirely on the climate: “I gave it up because I didn’t want to be assimilated. I was wearing fewer clothes each week— gradually retrograding to the breechclout. The indolence of the tropics got into my bones, and I didn’t so much as attempt to get it out. I found the climate very enervating” (81). Frightened by these changes in himself, Conner flees the Philippines, rationalizing his failure away with a Lamarckian interpretation of the effect the climate had on him.<sup>89</sup>

Through Conner’s failure Ade demonstrates that assimilation is not foolproof, but permeable, incomplete, and fractured. The desire to assimilate others can backfire into one being assimilated himself. Of course, assimilation never completely happened for Conner. He ran before it could. If assimilation is defined as “the process whereby the individual acquires new ideas, by interpreting presented ideas and experiences in relation to the existing contents of his mind,” Conner’s experience falls short, for he is not open enough to the new ideas of the Kakyak family to embrace change. But Ade shows us that assimilation works at a cultural level almost without people noticing, turning to history to make his point. He does this by placing the American invasion and occupation of the Philippines in a series of colonial efforts. As Conner explains to the Kakyaks, “This isn’t

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<sup>89</sup> Although it contradicted the idea of racial fixity also prominent in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, Conner’s hypothesis was not uncommon among colonials at the time. See Ann Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge*, pp. 97-8.

the first time that we've tried this benevolent assimilation. We've assimilated Indians, Mexicans, and Chinamen, to say nothing of several millions of negroes, and when any one of them hung back, I'll tell you, it went hard with him" (15). Ade connects benevolent assimilation to a history of domination and violence. Yet that domination is not totalizing, he reveals.

In a suggestive episode, the Kakyaks' insightful questions elicit a response from Conner that shows just how incomplete "benevolent assimilation" really is, thus raising the question of who is assimilating whom, though this time at the cultural, not individual, level. The scene begins when one of the Kakyak brothers, Francisco, hears the American soldiers singing a song he finds interesting, and Conner leaps to sing it for him. "That's the most popular song in America," Conner says (39). Unable to explain the meaning of the lyrics, he tells the Kakyaks, "it is one of the many coon songs which are so immensely popular in my country. I suppose about three percent of the population in the United States goes in for Wagner, Brahms, Tschaiikowsky, Gounod, Verdi, and Mascagni; but the other ninety-seven per cent likes the coon songs" (40). "Why do you call them coon songs?" Mr. Kakyak asks. The following back-and-forth is worth quoting at length:

"Well, 'coon' is a familiar and slangy synonym for plantation negro, of whom we have several millions in our country. We get most of our songs in America from the illiterate type of country negro."

"But I should think that in the process of assimilation the negro would be compelled to take his songs from the white man," said Mr. Kakyak.

Mr. Conner hesitated a moment before explaining. “The negro is not yet fully assimilated,” he said. “It will take time.”

“But you say you are imitating him,” insisted Mr. Kakyak. “I thought that the darker race always took a secondary place and was dependent on the Caucasian, receiving instruction from him. That’s what you have told us. Yet now you confess that you get your songs from the negro. Who was it said, ‘Let me write the songs of a country and I care not who makes the law?’”

“You do not understand,” replied the missionary. “We may borrow our popular songs from the negro, but in the important matter of handling the dollars we are still on top, and will continue to remain there.” (40-1)

Even though Conner confidently asserts that the white population is “still on top,” Ade also has him admit that “ninety-seven per cent” of Americans prefer African-American music to European. So, in addition to striking a common chord of American race relations, Ade also shows that colonizers cannot help but be influenced by those they “assimilate.”<sup>90</sup>

At the end of the stories, Conner fails in the mission he set out to accomplish. He does not assimilate the Kakyaks. He cannot get them to be like him. Instead, he finds, to his great alarm, that *he* is becoming something like *them*. This recognition makes Conner

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<sup>90</sup> The landmark work of scholarship that takes up the issue of white appropriation of black cultural production is Eric Lott’s *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (1995). In his introduction Lott writes, “Ultimately, I am after some sense of how precariously nineteenth-century white working people lived their whiteness” (4). The precariousness of Conner’s cultural upper hand is what I am after in this analysis. At a time closer to Ade’s, W. E. B. Du Bois wrote (in *Souls of Black Folk*) about the significance of black cultural production as a way to create history.

go home with his tail between his legs as the Kakyak family joins the Filipino insurgency. With this ending Ade demonstrates that benevolent assimilation had the potential to change its actors as much as its objects. What was failure for Conner in 1899 is success for the Peace Corps Volunteer in 1963 (and 2010). If we look at Washington Conner as we would the negative of a photograph, we can see, in outline, the contours of an emerging American humanitarian identity. Where Conner comes to the Philippines to change others, the humanitarian adventurer would come to be changed, even as he seeks to help foreign others realize their own (and their community's own) potential. Where Conner preaches about his own culture, the humanitarian adventurer would be full of questions about the other culture. Where Conner insists upon the moral rectitude of his mission, the humanitarian adventurer would be full of doubt and open to the experience. Ade insists that the colonial encounter can alter identities, generating change (in this case, unwelcome change). In this he is much different from Twain, whose essay "To the Person Sitting in Darkness" resists the notion that the United States' presence in the Philippines is generative of anything. It is for this very reason that Ade is as instructive as he is: he heralds an identity to come rather than bemoaning the existing order.

The contrasts I am establishing here between Conner and the humanitarian-to-come are a little too easy. If Washington Conner exists at one pole of the possible humanitarian adventurer identity and the ideal humanitarian is at the other, the lived reality is somewhere in the middle. Indeed, the identity itself would come to be characterized by the very tension between the ideal and the ugly, Washington Conner version. As I noted at the beginning of this chapter, one of the characterizing tropes of the



humanitarian adventurer narrative and its attendant identity is its ambiguity. Ade is not so confident as to separate himself entirely from Conner, for he recognizes in Conner's sense of purpose and moral certitude a certain shortcoming of his own culture. Though the ideal may be clear, the way to get there is not.

Although most of his writing dealt with small-town America, Ade's keen understanding of the common folk did not go hand-in-hand with insularity. He made it a point to travel. As one newspaper article observed, "His theory is that anyone who wishes to unite with truth an understanding of the essential features of life in America should travel to other countries and then come back prepared to receive fresh impressions and make intelligent comparisons" ("George Ade, Author of 'Modern Fables'"). Ade came to understand his own culture better by exposing himself to another. Such worldly curiosity allowed Ade to write perceptively about the contingency of culture and place and instantiated, in literary form, the forbear of the Peace Corps Volunteer, who could be profitably described with Rorty's observations on the liberal ironist: she "spends her time worrying about the possibility that she has been initiated into the wrong tribe, taught to play the wrong language game" (75). Such worry is one of the hallmarks of the late-twentieth-century humanitarian-adventurer narrative.

In the next section of this chapter I will analyze memoirs of actual American teachers in the Philippines during the period Ade and Twain were writing. This analysis will allow me to continue to trace the development of the American humanitarian-adventurer identity in the twentieth century, showing that the most significant shift between the Thomasites and the PCVs had to do with self-definition: deriving identity

from remaking others, as Washington Conner attempted to do, shifts to remaking the self through the process of helping and interacting with others. The Thomasites, we shall see, both prefigure the PCVs and differ from them, for even though they experience change as a result of their experience in the Philippines, they have not yet made that change and the resulting cultural relativism part of their active motivation.

### **Real-life Washington Conners**

In her seminal study of European travel writing, *Imperial Eyes*, Mary Louise Pratt asks how diverse literary representations of travel and difference constitute a series of evolving ideologies that create the subject of Euroimperialism. Here I follow Pratt's lead, applying her methods to two memoirs by American teachers in order to show how they help constitute the identity of the American humanitarian adventurer. Mary Fee's *A Woman's Impression of the Philippines* (1910) and William Freer's *The Philippine Experiences of an American Teacher: A Narrative of Work and Travel in the Philippine Islands* (1906) are of interest not because the Fee and Freer are famous, nor because they were particularly gifted writers. Rather, it is because they strove to tell the story of their selves while they participated in a mission that would have a lasting change on the international posture and purpose of the United States. Alfred Kazin finds that "the deepest meaning of autobiography" has to do with the intersection of self and history, "history as our own fate" (83). Here the history of concern is the United States' turn-of-the-century foray into colonialism, an event that changed the course of global politics and the image of the United States in the world (among many other things). It also changed

the lives of forgotten Americans who put their experiences on the page in order to make sense of them. Raymond Williams has called literary production in general “a specific process of self-making . . . self-*composition*,” an observation that is crucial to keep in mind as we turn to these narratives (210). Writing autobiography is not the mere practice of recording an already-existing self; the practice of writing actually helps to create it.<sup>91</sup>

On the surface, Mary Fee’s and William Freer’s memoirs seem quite dissimilar. Freer’s volume fits into an earlier tradition of explorer writing. Much of his book is in the vein of the “traveler-as-expert,” harkening back to early *National Geographic* articles full of descriptions of different ethnic groups and detailed appraisals of the landscape.<sup>92</sup> Freer finishes his memoir with a map of the Philippines, a glossary of Spanish and Tagalog terms with their translations, a list of further reading, and an index. Fee’s has nothing of the sort; her writing is personal, reflective, more about her than about the

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<sup>91</sup> Letters would also be a fascinating archive to explore. Kimberly Alidio does so in her article “‘When I Get Home, I Want to Forget’: Memory and Amnesia in the Occupied Philippines, 1901-1904.” In that piece she examines the disparity between the public and private selves articulated by two American teachers in the Philippines, Mary and Harry Cole. Letters the Coles wrote to family members describe the fears and insecurities, where letters they wrote in their official capacity maintain the surety of their mission.

Jane Hunter’s study of women missionaries in China, *The Gospel of Gentility: American Women Missionaries in Turn-of-the-century China* (1984), also draws largely on letters. Hunter’s observation about why the letters are so interesting speaks to my project as well. She writes, “The novelty of their circumstances provoked missionary correspondents to articulate loyalties, prejudices, self-doubts, and cultural certainties that would likely never have been recorded, perhaps never even entertained, at home” (xv). To translate this observation into the terms of my project, the novelty of their circumstances loosened these women’s moorings, it “unstiffened” their theories. It is the opportunity mission work affords these women, not the work itself, that is important to Hunter here: being in a foreign place allowed them to go to intellectual places they would never have visited before. The same is true of humanitarian adventurers.

<sup>92</sup> In *The Blood of Government* Paul Kramer discusses the emphasis on numerical and statistical data in studies on the Philippines and points out that some travel narratives likewise bore the stamp of the positivistic, science- and statistics-oriented epistemologies so popular in the nineteenth century. See p. 183.

Philippines. She describes the day she set out on her journey as “symbolic of the spirit which sent young America across the Pacific—hope, brilliant hope, with just a cloud of doubt” (15). Freer, in contrast, writes his memoir to provide evidence that colonialism must persist:

The author trusts that the perusal of the following pages will result in a better appreciation of some desirable traits of Filipino character, in a stronger conviction of the un-wisdom of granting, at this time, any greater degree of self-government than the Filipinos already possess, and in a fuller understanding of the work that is being done in the public schools in the attempt to fit the people for the eventual exercise of complete autonomy. (vii)

Freer does not seem to be much of a humanitarian, and by our contemporary standards, he is not. But while acknowledging the differences in purpose, content, and tone between the two memoirs, I want to assert that what they share is still more important. Both Fee and Freer anticipate the humanitarian-adventurer narrative that would flower in the mid-to late-twentieth century. Even in what appears to be a straightforward, positivistic account of the colonial experience (Freer’s), moments of self- and cultural criticism crop up. Both Fee’s and Freer’s memoirs move through four discrete stages that persist in humanitarian-adventurer narratives written today: 1) wide-eyed enthusiasm, 2) self-criticism, 3) increasing sophistication accompanied by self-justification, and 4) imperialist nostalgia. Whether these stages correspond to lived experience is not the point. Rather, it is as the author looks back on her experiences that she creates them. Written for a public audience, the stages serve two functions. They are arguments for the

necessity of change, the idea that alteration of the self must be a key aspect of humanitarian work because it has a lasting effect on the actor, priming him or her to become more cosmopolitan and more pragmatist. At the same time, they are rhetorical justifications for failure, narrative explanations for why the author could not accomplish all she set out to do.

The first stage in the evolution of the humanitarian-adventurer identity is a wide-eyed sense of excitement the authors convey by waxing enthusiastic about the task before them. Such excitement gets dulled later on in the memoirs and is often contrasted to an increasing sense of world-weariness. Describing her departure for the Philippines, Fee writes, “To me the occasion was momentous. I was going to see the world, and I was one of an army of enthusiasts enlisted to instruct our little brown brother, and to pass the torch of Occidental knowledge several degrees east of the international date-line” (12). The humanitarian-adventurer identity owes something to both romance and to an American missionary tradition, as we see in this quotation. Yet even here there is a before/after irony embedded in Fee’s words. She writes from a position of wisdom, looking back on her earlier, naïve self, who firmly believed in ideas like “the torch of Occidental knowledge.” But irony gives way to full-blown earnestness once Fee gets into the thick of her descriptions. The author’s penchant for the kind of adventure Tom Sawyer would seek out becomes apparent once she is ensconced in Capiz, the village where she taught: “Meanwhile we rather luxuriated in the sensations of romance inspired by living in a town surrounded by a hostile population and protected by soldiery. It was very, very new, and we made the best of it” (178). Danger is exciting—luxuriating,

even—to Fee. Though Freer is, on the whole, less personal and forthcoming in his writing, his memoir too shows the traces of the “go get ‘em” spirit. In a passage describing a boat ride between villages, he links the novelty of his own discomfort with the greater purpose of his mission:

I tried to imagine that I was thoroughly uncomfortable and unhappy; but I could not. There was a joyousness in action, a zest in travel under those strange conditions, that was exhilarating; and particularly so when I remembered that I was having an active, even though a small share, in so magnificent an undertaking as the building up on an efficient school system for an unenlightened but receptive and capable people; and though wet and hungry I was glad I was there.  
(209-10)

These passages bespeak the “adventurer” in “humanitarian adventurer.” The humanitarian adventurer is exhilarated by “zest in travel” and “strange conditions”; he is motivated by “magnificent . . . undertaking[s].” But as the identity evolves, this early stage of exhilaration gets posited as a preliminary state in the writer’s moral and intellectual development.

A necessary step in the construction of the humanitarian-adventurer identity is the growth that comes from self-criticism, which is the second stage. Amid her effusions about setting off for the Philippines, Fee contrasts her early perspective with what she would later learn, noting that though details waiting to be interpreted were all around her, “I was not at that time sufficiently educated to read them. . . . I was delighted to be going away to foreign lands upon so fine a ship” (11). Delight and excitement, in other words,

obscure the signs that her sophisticated self would notice later. This subtle contrast between her initial enthusiasm and what would come later gets picked up again when she observes that the experience of teaching abroad gave her occasion to reflect on her own culture and its norms: “To an American of analytical tendencies a few years in the Philippines present not only an interesting study of Filipino life, but a novel consciousness of our own” (232). The humanitarian adventurer assumes a self-critical posture and shows through writing that the experience abroad has taught her lessons about herself and her own culture. In this Fee echoes George Ade’s theory that one who really wants to understand the United States “should travel to other countries and then come back prepared to receive fresh impressions and make intelligent comparisons” (“George Ade, Author of ‘Modern Fables’”). Though Freer is on the whole less reflective than Fee, he too comes to see his countrymen through different eyes as a result of his time in the Philippines. In his case, observing the relations between Americans and Filipinos makes him critical of what he sees as an American tendency to form quick racial judgments:

There has been among some Americans here a carping and antagonistic spirit displayed toward Filipinos, which reflects little credit upon our national consistency or charity. We have a habit of uttering generalities about one race on the authority of a single instance; whereas, with our own, the tendency is to throw out of consideration those single instances in which the actual, undeniable practice of the American is a direct confutation of what his countrymen declare is the race standard. (115)

Though Freer stops short of cultural relativism here—remember, his declared purpose in writing his memoir is to convince the American public that the Filipinos are not yet fit to govern themselves—his choice to include the above observation shows that he considered being able to identify shortcomings among his own people part of the way the Philippines opened his eyes.

Once the humanitarian adventurer opens herself up to the possibility of criticism, evolution, and change, the third stage in the development of the identity is a retreat from the wide-eyed stage. Previously full of hope and resolve, the humanitarian adventurer comes to occupy a position of sophistication from which she finds reasons for inaction. She makes use of what Pratt might call a “strategy of innocence,” a way in which the European travel writer rhetorically figures herself as an innocent observer. In the following passage Fee describes her response to a group of starving people in Capiz:

I confess that in my unsophistication I went out among them consuming [sic] with fine altruistic zeal. A woman with a starving child in her arms begged of me in the plaza. Instantly my purse was out, and instantly I was mobbed by the howling, filthy crowd. My purse was almost torn out of my hand, my hat was knocked over my eyes, and a hundred eager claws tugged and pulled at my garments. I had fairly to fight my way out of the mob, and learned to bestow no more alms in public. Then I took to throwing pennies out of the window, and found as a consequence that there was no rest day or night from the wailing and howling in the street. Little by little the fountain of my philanthropy dried up, and I contented



myself with giving what I could to the Church to be bestowed in regular channels.

(188)

The rhetorical purpose of this passage is for Fee to justify why she has let up in her independent attempts to alleviate suffering.<sup>93</sup> Fee uses this passage as an object lesson, tracing her evolution from possessing “fine altruistic zeal” to the moment at which “the fountain of [her] philanthropy dried up.” The way Fee tells the story, she had no other choice but to harden her heart and look away. The crowd was “howling, filthy”; the people, vicious and animal-like, had “a hundred eager claws” that “tugged and pulled at my garments.” Fee is relentless in depicting herself as helpless in the face of this kind of assault, and she wants readers to learn a lesson along with her: “to bestow no more alms in public.” Even throwing pennies out of the window, however, is a bad idea, for “there was no rest day or night from the wailing and howling in the street.” So, she withdraws. How could she do otherwise? Here and throughout her memoir, Fee paints herself as a seasoned, wise truth-teller: “The poor people among the Filipinos live in a poverty, a misery, and a happiness inconceivable to our people who have not seen it” (235). As witness to the events she describes, she is in a position of authority, for her knowledge is knowledge gleaned from experience and dependent on sight. This knowledge allows her to distance herself from her earlier enthusiasm and naiveté, and it authorizes some of her more blatantly insensitive and racist utterances. Sounding something like Howells’s

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<sup>93</sup> Fee’s rhetorical response here is the obverse of liberal guilt, which Julie Ellison describes as “a position of wishful insufficiency relative to the genuinely radical” (345). Yet both Fee’s response—“it’s not my fault”—and liberal guilt, a cultural structure of feeling we associate with the late-twentieth century (even though Ellison, in her book *Cato’s Tears*, shows that its roots go much earlier), perform similar functions. They make the white subject feel better.

Isabel March, who rationalized away the suffering she and Basil witnessed in New York City, Fee suggests that the Filipinos are not civilized enough to feel pain as an American would: “in spite of these ills he [the Filipino] is happy because he has not developed enough to achieve either self-pity or self-analysis. He bears his pain, when it comes, as a dumb animal does, and forgets it as quickly when it goes” (236-7). In passages like these Fee depicts herself as a hard-boiled woman who has come to terms with the reality of the circumstances surrounding her; these passages are rhetorical strategies of innocence because they seek to justify inaction even as they decry ignorance.

Fee puts strategies of innocence to use while also drawing attention to her privileged role in the colonial situation. In one passage Fee reflects on all the tasks that Basilio, her servant, did for her: checking roof leaks, fixing windows, shining floors, running errands, bringing her rubber boots to school for her when it rained. “And while a great many small coins went from me to him,” she writes, “I could never see that the pay was proportional to his care” (239). Fee recognizes that her servant has given her care that far exceeds the remuneration she tosses his way. In a self-protective gesture, though, she makes it clear that Basilio does not deserve credit for his generosity because he was only obeying orders. Fee writes, “Yet there was no difficulty in comprehending it [Basilio’s generosity]. Pilar (my landlady) had told him to take care of me, and he was obeying orders. If she had told him to come up and *bolo* me [kill me with a “bolo,” a machete] as I slept, he would have done it unhesitatingly” (239-40). Even though Basilio’s helpfulness exceeds Fee’s remuneration, Fee robs him of all agency in the

exchange, for, in her view, Basilio is only following Pilar's instructions. This intellectual move saves Fee the burden of indebtedness.

The curious blend of anger, impotence, and vulnerability that Fee's writing makes manifest surfaces in later humanitarian-adventurer narratives as well. Where Fee is rather matter-of-fact about her inability to help the poor and her reliance on others, later in the century, such awareness often generated guilt and depression. Moritz Thomsen, author of *Living Poor* (1969), writes of "depression, a feeling of hopelessness" in large part due to his initial inability to speak Spanish and his lack of progress in development work in Ecuador (29, 26). He refers to "a time of growing depression, guilt, and restlessness" and "a time of vague depression, dissatisfaction, sadness, a neurotic apprehension" (120, 138). Another example of anger and vulnerability comes from one of the most honest and widely-read Peace Corps narratives, George Packer's *The Village of Waiting* (1984). The book hums with a low-grade irritation at Togo, Packer's host country, and irritation at himself for being there. "I was well aware of my potential for irrelevance," Packer writes. "In 1982 reports of drought and hunger . . . didn't lead me to conclude that the thing the continent needed most was a Renaissance studies major who could teach the relative pronoun" (51-2).<sup>94</sup> By noting his own "irrelevance," Packer protects himself against the criticism of others.

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<sup>94</sup> The Peace Corps Volunteers who served with me in Togo twenty years after Packer's tour hated the memoir, accusing Packer of being a culturally-insensitive quitter. (He left before his two years were out. But Packer's no quitter; he keeps returning to Africa in his capacity as a journalist and has engaged more thoroughly with Togo than any of us probably did.) In truth, I think his memoir frightened us. It did too good a job of depicting "the vulnerable anger that lay beneath the surface of even the most placid African days" (55). It showed us the Washington Conner sides of ourselves.

The fourth and final stage in the development of the identity of the humanitarian adventurer is what Renato Rosaldo has termed “imperialist nostalgia”: “a particular kind of nostalgia, often found with imperialism, where people mourn the passing of what they themselves have transformed” (69). Related to Pratt’s strategies of innocence, imperialist nostalgia is a posture adopted to absolve its subject of guilt and responsibility in effecting the changes imperialism has wrought. Fee’s memoir is suffused by this structure of feeling. Near the beginning of her memoir, she reflects on the changing Philippines:

Eight long years have slipped by since that [first] night, and in that time a passing-bell has tolled for the Philippines which we found then. Who shall say for many a year whether the change be for better or for worse? But the change has come, and for the sake of a glamour which overlay the quaint and moribund civilization of the Philippines of that day I have chronicled in this volume my singularly unadventurous experiences. (44)

Here Fee situates herself as a preserver, not a destroyer, of the Philippines as she found them. She writes about her “singularly unadventurous experiences” “for the sake of a glamour” that existed then, even if it has vanished. In the midst of her memoir as well, Fee is not free from a sense of sadness at the changes overtaking the country:

On the walls of churches and conventos too are found pictures in oil, often gloomy, full of tortures and death, as Spanish paintings incline to be, yet essentially true art—pictures which it is to be hoped will survive the inundation of American commercial energy. The extract-of-beef advertisements and the varied

“girls” of all pursuits have found their way into the Philippines; and the Filipino, to our sorrow be it said, takes kindly to them. (199)

Again Fee posits herself as the defender of the way the Philippines once were (although in this instance, ironically, it is the Spanish colonial presence she feels ought to be preserved) and places the blame for change squarely on the Filipinos themselves. If the Philippines become homogenized and commercialized, it is because the Filipino has “take[n] kindly” to “American commercial energy.” Yet even this changed Philippines is one that Fee longs for, and this longing positions her as a defender of the country she has sought to change. During her stay in the Philippines, Fee returns to Chicago for a brief trip, where, she asserts, she was more frightened for her life than she ever was in Capiz. Her Philippine homecoming is a relief: “And through and through a grateful system I felt the lifting of the tremendous pressure, the agonizing strain, competition, and tumult of American life. Thank Heaven! there is still a mañana country—a fair, sunny land, where rapid transportation and sky-scrappers do not exist” (249). Yet.

Even Freer, otherwise so utterly convinced of his purpose, laments the changes he is helping to bring about: “In our tutoring of the Filipinos, let us hope that we shall not too completely ‘Americanize’ their children,” he writes (278). And although Fee appears to be blissfully ignorant of her own role in presenting American culture as something worth imitating, she observes that imitation has had inimical effects on Filipino culture: “It will be some time before what real talent they [Filipinos] have will make itself felt in any line, because it will take a great deal of tactful handling to make them reveal their natural artistic trend instead of falling into imitation of Europe and America” (93).

Fee worries that she and others like her have done too good a job of convincing the Filipinos that European and American forms of art are worth imitating. Though Fee has contributed to the state of affairs she decries, by decrying it, she makes herself innocent of it.

It is a bleak irony that recovering “native” ways of doing things would later become a stated mission of the Western humanitarian. Only seven years after Fee’s memoir was published, volunteer teacher Catherine Spencer told the *New York Times* that she planned to help the people of Jolo revive their traditional weaving methods (“Forsakes Society”). And half a century after that, humanitarian adventurers would work against the one-way relationship their own predecessors had cultivated. One early Peace Corps Volunteer serving in Chile described the kind of development work he was engaged in like this: “we are not trying to build *things*, which makes the job difficult to evaluate, but trying to build a spirit of self-reliance and self-respect in a people who have never developed this and have always been done for and not given credit for being able to help themselves” (78).<sup>95</sup> Here the imperialist nostalgia Fee and Freer experienced gets

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<sup>95</sup> In a scene from *Living Poor* (1969), Thomsen has a wry laugh at himself when he recounts an exchange with Segundo, one of the farmers in the town where he lived.

“Do you seriously believe,” Segundo asked me, “that as a complete stranger to this country you can come walking in here where we have been raising chickens all our lives and tell us how to do it better?”

“Yes, exactly,” I said, “that’s the whole idea.”

“Ay, *caramba*,” he said, shaking his head and marching out the door. (89)

One lesson of the Peace Corps that volunteers recount in their narratives is how their experience helped them to *unlearn* the lessons of the Peace Corps. In other words, living among the poor teaches Volunteers to disregard whatever they may have been taught their mission was. With this scene, Thomsen shows readers how he learns a little humility. And yet, Thomsen goes on to explain how his suggestions for raising chickens did wind up working better, in the short term at least, than the Ecuadorians’ methods. What are readers to take from this?

translated into a new sort of humanitarian practice that focuses on sustainability and self-reliance against an emotional and intellectual backdrop of ignorance and naiveté. This Volunteer's "teach a man to fish" approach assumes quite a bit: that the people he is coming to work with "have always been done for," that they have never developed self-respect. It casts him, the humanitarian agent, as the person who can resurrect what he perceives as the trampled spirit of the indigenous Chileans among whom he lives. This is, again, a strategy of innocence: the man seeks to take credit for the change he effects without taking responsibility for his role, or the role of people like him, in creating the situation he has traveled so far to redress.

The four stages of the humanitarian adventurer's identity (wide-eyed excitement, self-criticism, sophistication and hardening of the sympathies, and imperialist nostalgia) surface in writings by Peace Corps Volunteers and other travelers who, like these teachers, write in order to create and make public their renewed self-understanding. What is less explicit in Fee's and Freer's early-twentieth-century narratives than it is in later humanitarian-narratives is a pointed emphasis on self-transformation. Though both Fee and Freer are aware of the risk posed to Filipino culture by imparting American ideals through tutelage, imitation, and rote education, neither teacher dwells at any length on the change they themselves experienced as a result of their time in the Philippine islands. Yes, their memoirs chronicle a kind of evolution. Yet neither writer sought that evolution out, making it the express purpose of their voyage. They experienced change despite themselves. Washington Conner went to the Philippines charged with the task of benevolent assimilation, and he left the Philippines because he feared being assimilated

by them. The real-life Washington Connors expressed no such fear. Fee and Freer went to the Philippines as part of “a chosen and devoted band” who sought “to sow / The seeds of truth and culture,” as E. E. Schneider, who penned the poem “To the Philippine Teachers” for the log of the *U.S.S. Thomas* in 1901, put it. The poem also exhorted the teachers to “let no fear of failure fill your hearts, / Or dash your courage, or your spirits grieve; / And let no petty doubts becloud your brain” (60). The rhetorical identity of the humanitarian adventure is predicated on change and evolution of the adventurer self, yet self-transformation is not the outcome Fee and Freer desire. Their mission—about which they had very few “petty doubts”—is directed outward.

So if the Thomasites are precursors of the PCVs, they are also distinct from them, perhaps because the notion of self-transformation as a desirable end had not yet entered the national imaginary. Yet it is clear that Fee and Freer saw themselves as distinct from other Americans, and saw that distinction as significant. Across all four stages of the humanitarian-adventurer identity, the teachers establish a contrast between those with enough vim and vigor to live up to their role, and those without it. In other words, they contrast the new selves they have become with Westerners who are too weak or soft to fully participate in the task before them. In Freer’s memoir, this takes the form of a contrast between Americans living in Manila and those, like him, who live in the provinces. In the seemingly obligatory chapter about how hard it is to do things like cook and wash one’s food in the Philippines (the “I’m so hard core” chapter, as I think of it), Freer describes his method of showering before taking a jibe at city-living Americans: “Of course, Americans residing in Manila know nothing of such methods as these, but we



of the provinces think they do not know much about the Philippines anyway” (45). His comment anticipates the metaphor at the heart of William J. Lederer and Eugene Burdick’s best-selling novel *The Ugly American* (1958). In that book, which criticized American foreign policy in Southeast Asia on the grounds that the culturally-insensitive Foreign Service Officers there were doing a terrible job representing the United States, there are (“ugly”) Americans who get things done, and then there are Americans who hunker down in the capital and go to cocktail parties.<sup>96</sup> Lederer and Burdick argued that the U.S. government should do more to support and foster the ugly Americans. With his comment about Americans in Manila who know nothing about the Philippines, Freer, humanitarian adventurer that he is, establishes himself as an ugly American. For Fee, the contrast takes the form of a tougher-than-thou look at women (and, incidentally, men) who simply are not cut out for the role she has adapted to:

The Philippines are no place for women or men who cannot thrive and be happy on plain food, plenty of work, and isolation. Nor is there any sadder lot than that of the American married woman who is unemployed. Her housekeeping takes very little time, for the cheapness of native servants obviates the necessity of all labor but that of supervision. There is nowhere to go, nothing to do, nothing to read, nothing to talk about. She has nothing to do but to lie in a steamer chair and

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<sup>96</sup> In the brief campaign speech at the University of Michigan in which Senator Kennedy first called on young Americans to serve their country abroad (this was in 1960, before the genesis of the Peace Corps and just before the election), he echoed Lederer and Burdick’s arguments, describing certain Foreign Service Officers he had seen abroad as being “unconscious of the fact that their role was not tennis and cocktails” (“Kennedy and the Peace Corps”).

to think of home. Most women break down under it very quickly; they lose appetite and flesh and grow fretful or melancholy. (246)

Interestingly, the kind of ennui Fee describes here is exacerbated by the colonial situation. It is because the women Fee singles out can rely on servants that they find themselves without a task, without a purpose. Here we see the traces of a missionary-like pride in Fee's abstemiousness and drive.

The zeal for adventure along with the distinction between the teachers and their city-bound compatriots are central to the teachers' professional identities. These traits help make Freer and Fee, two teachers living in villages, cultural diplomats. Because of their energy, their enthusiasm for adverse circumstances, and their sense of mission, these self-selected humanitarian adventurers are more than just teachers; they are role models. The U.S. government itself shares this insight, as a passage Freer cites from "Report of the Census of the Philippine Islands" (vol. iii, pp. 644-5) makes clear:

Socially, and in intellectual influence, he [the teacher] is the successor of the man who for centuries was the controlling influence in these primitive communities of the Philippines [the Spanish friar]. He has been the quiet mediator of modern ideas, and far transcended the role of a mere pedagogue. He has won the affection and respect of the Filipino people as, from the nature of their callings, the soldier and the merchant could not do. If the children of the Philippines had learned nothing from books, the personal influence of the American teacher would still have justified his employment. (qtd. in Freer 99-100)

The census report does not spell out what kind of “personal influence” the teacher possesses or how he or she could wield such influence, apart from mediating “modern ideas.” This passage promotes colonialism, describing a transfer of power and influence from one colonial arbiter to another. At the same time, in it I also see the roots of the Peace Corps’s second goal, “Helping promote a better understanding of Americans on the part of the peoples served” (in other words, making people like us better). Just as Kennedy would argue for the Peace Corps’s value in a Cold War context because of the good-will diplomacy the volunteers could generate by making friendships with people in the host countries, at the turn of the century, the U.S. government saw its teachers in a similar light. Freer understood himself to be fulfilling a purpose that went beyond his professional role in the classroom. That role included influencing individual Filipinos in a way that only he, because of his contact with them, was capable of. It also included generating good will among the Filipinos for Americans. As a teacher setting out to the Philippines seven years later observed,

Do you know . . . the Moros of Jolo have so far come into contact with hardly any other Americans than soldiers? As far as we shall be able, we are going to try to show them that Americans possess other traits than an ability to fight, and this we hope to make the women and children realize when we have succeeded in cultivating their friendship. . . . At the start we can hardly hope to attempt more than to get acquainted and show the people that we are seeking only to do them good.” (“Forsakes Society”)

She continues, “When it comes to results, we cannot expect to accomplish more than the blazing of a trail for others.”

This is good-will diplomacy in its infancy, and it did blaze a trail. Half a century later, Peace Corps Volunteers would set out to the developing world in order to, in the words of one early volunteer, “prove to the rest of the world that all Americans are not rich or imperialistic or snobs” (Luce 5). And by all appearances, it has worked. As the Peace Corps Country Director in Chile observed in the early 60s, “Our volunteers have made literally thousands of friends who now know and appreciate Americans as they never had a chance to do before” (Luce 130-1). The humanitarian adventurer defines herself against “other” Americans and holds her own behavior up as a model of the best of her country. Improving the United States’ status in the eyes of the world was, and is, one of the missions of the humanitarian adventurer. Freer understood it to be his, dedicating his memoir “to those Americans, who, by noble example, by benevolent ministrations and by unselfish labor under trying conditions, are teaching the best Americanism to the Filipinos” (v). Both Thomasite writing and Peace Corps writing establishes a link between selfhood and nation without explicitly defining that self as patriotic or nationally-identified. The usefulness of the humanitarian-adventurer identity comes from its flexibility.

Writing by humanitarian adventurers at the turn of the century anticipates, if not influences, the form the humanitarian identity would take at the end of the twentieth century. With that relationship acknowledged, I want to be clear: no one humanitarian adventurer is like any other. Every story is unique. Some present-day writers share more

in common with Freer than they do with Fee; they write ethnographies that become autobiographies, self-knowing through telling the story of another people and place. Others are, like Fee, more self-reflective. Some Peace Corps writers take a page from Twain's book. Their experiences abroad make them look so critically at their own country that they cannot bear to return. This is what happened to Moritz Thomsen, who died in Ecuador in 1991, more than two decades after finishing his Peace Corps service. And others, like Ade, poke rueful fun at themselves and their host countries. It is important to remember, too, that these writers are not always a particularly likeable group. Their self-congratulation (and self-indulgence, and self-satisfaction) can be pretty tough to take. However, they do share something important in common: an ability to balance their identities as Americans with their identities as cosmopolitan humanitarians, people who reach beyond borders to effect positive change in the world.

Such a balance is specific to the humanitarian-adventurer identity I have explored in this chapter. Americans who decide to serve their country by serving international others are a specific bunch, distinct in motive from other Americans living abroad (e.g., conscientious objectors, solo travelers, human rights observers, NGO workers, corporate employees, missionaries). They work to promote the image of the United States through their humanitarian labors. I have attempted to show the way Americans humanitarian adventurers dwell in a place of openness, responsiveness, and doubt. That place, too, is where pragmatism lives. Cornel West states that he is "convinced that a thorough reexamination of American pragmatism . . . may be a first step toward fundamental change and transformation in America and the world" (8). A tall order. Yet it is my hope

that reading literature about humanitarian selfhood as an instantiation of pragmatic thought can help critics of programs like the Peace Corps recognize the cultural openness and relativism inherent in it. I also hope that the connection might help us recognize the promise in pragmatism, considered by many to be a politically impotent philosophical stance.

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Self-transformation brought about by cross-cultural humanitarianism is the phenomenon I have been tracing in “American Callings.” For Howells it meant attempting to use his fiction to increase empathy between one class and another, struggling to give a more textured rendering to the ideas of Christian socialism he found so compelling. In Tourgée’s case, becoming aware of the historically-contingent nature of the self meant that he could understand the point of view of his antagonist and use persuasion to try to lay the rhetorical groundwork for genuine humanitarian change. Addams saw self-transformation on both sides of the humanitarian dynamic as building a foundation for a more just, more equitable American democracy. And where Ade poked fun at his character Washington Conner for naively believing that he could (and should) “benevolently assimilate” the Kakyaks, Mary Fee and George Freer came to question American culture and their own privileged status in the Philippines even from within the colonial apparatus. Without disregarding the critiques made of humanitarian practice—the fact that it is predicated on inequality, that it can be hierarchical, that it often accompanies imperialism or serves as a cloak for imperialist motives—I have argued for the ethical value of a dynamic that encourages self-awareness and cultural awareness

alike. This is not to say that we as Americans ought to give up on working toward more vigorous, visionary, revolutionary interventions in the status quo. There will always be a need for such strong positions, for changes *to* rather than *within* the system. But those who advocate for revolutionary change as the only means of arriving at a more just, more equitable society, dismissing humanitarian efforts as quiescent, accommodationist, surface solutions—good, sure, but not good enough—do so at a great cost. One kind of change can't happen without the other. The reflection brought about by humanitarian practice encourages attention to the place self and society intersect. Humanitarianism changes society by changing selves.

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