

**BOYCOTT: LITERARY INTERVENTIONS IN THE AMERICAN
MARKETPLACE**

1820-1880

by

Jessica Conrad

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation investigates the ways in which nineteenth-century activists marshaled print culture to materially interrupt and reconstruct the marketplace in order to accomplish political ends. Reading literature such as abolitionist boycott poetry or domestic thrift treatises or temperance tracts forces us to recognize consumer resistance as a major mode of dissent, especially for disenfranchised or politically marginalized groups. In an effort to flesh out the relationship between consumer resistance, disenfranchised groups, and literary production over the nineteenth century, this project asks how, for whom, and to what ideological purposes writers staged interventions in the nascent free market. In four chapters I look at the ways in which theories of conscientious consumption and ethical labor were posited by domestic economy (chapter one), rhetorically employed in sentimental fiction and poetry (chapters two and three), and run aground in fictionalizations of utopian communities (chapter four). Overall, I trace how literature of diverse genres and authors of diverse backgrounds theorized the ills of the marketplace, how they rejected actual goods seen as contaminated and contaminating, and, finally, how such literature imagined resistance to an entire economic system that had come to define lived existence. Set between the market revolution of the 1810s and the conspicuous consumption of the Gilded Age, my dissertation recovers literature from the dismissively labeled “crackbrained”¹ abolitionist boycott movement, Free Produce; it explores understudied texts by important activists, such as African American poet and novelist Frances Harper; it adds non-fiction texts to literary criticism, such as domestic

¹ In Ruth Nuermberger’s *Free Produce Movement* (1942), she dismisses the movement as a “crackbrained” scheme (3).

economy manuals; and it reframes conversations on canonical texts of the American renaissance by reading them for their treatment of material culture in a material economy. My dissertation seeks to recover this literary movement of American consumer resistance for the purposes of deepening our understanding of how authors from radically different backgrounds affiliated literary form with modern market practices and the moral valuation of work and goods. I argue that when we read nineteenth-century consumer resistance literature, we are really reading about early approaches to the free market, a collective effort to define exchange value in terms of morality and ethics, and the ever-hopeful and long-denied quest for political autonomy.

INTRODUCTION

In an interview with NPR in April 2017, the founder of the gone-viral boycott, #grabyourwallet, Shannon Coulter, explained the impetus for the movement's founding at the height of the 2016 presidential election cycle: "If you're going to give money to the campaign of a guy who makes fun of disabled people, who questions the nationality of our country's first black president, who likes to grab women by the genitals, you are going to raise the ire of consumers."² That Coulter identifies *consumers* as those who would be offended is notable. Why, for instance, did she not say "citizens" or "voters"? Coulter's choice of words underscores an implicit assumption, and indeed the explicit reality, that *citizen* and *consumer* are inseparable terms, each codifying the other, and mutually mediated by more than politics—by ethics and emotions. The boycott's play on words, #grabyourwallet, re-appropriates Donald Trump's comments on "grabbing" women's bodies without consent by directing consumers to "grab" their collective source of power—money. The phrase hinges on the metaphorical and literal action of grabbing; to grab is both to seize and to touch. In fact, Coulter's statement crystallizes three principles that are central to the history of consumer activism in the US: first, that the people's buying power is an expression, or rather a seizing, of political subjectivity, as economic historians have argued; second, that to seize back is in some way to right an ethical wrong; and finally, and less often discussed, that the senses are central in invigorating citizen-consumer action.

² Westervelt, "#Grabyourwallet's Anti-Trump Boycott Looks to Expand its Reach," National Public Radio, Apr. 16, 2017.

The phrase “grab your wallet” testifies to the fact that the language of consumption still bears traces of the primacy of the senses even as transactions move increasingly online. In fact, interactions with the marketplace are predicated on a language of the senses inherited from early approaches to the newly developing market economy in the nineteenth century. In the 1820s to 1850s, activists who boycotted slave-produced sugar convulsed at the thought of the grotesque taste of sweets “mix’d with...the hidden curse of scalding tears” and “the red life-drops of [the] human slave.”³ “Eat!” and “Look!” antislavery activists commanded their readers, demanding consumers use their senses to confront the reality of an unjust system of labor and trade that tainted commodities circulating in a world of goods.⁴ Around the same time, from the 1830s to the end of the century, temperance reformers condemned the unregulated market for concealing the real properties of consumable goods such as alcohol, which they believed ought to be readily seen on the surface. As one pamphlet author bemoaned, “Would to God that...I could have *seen* strong drink *as it really is*, stripped of all the ornaments thrown over it by those engaged in traffic!”⁵ In fact, temperance activists based their message on a uniform maxim of sensorial avoidance: “touch not, taste not, handle not, the intoxicating cup.”⁶ In boycott texts such as abolitionist and temperance literature, consumers were taught to frame their interaction with the marketplace around the sensorial implications of touching, seeing, tasting certain goods. In the nineteenth century as now, *consumption* is inherently a play on words—to buy and to consume (to take into

³ Chandler, “Slave Produce,” *Poetical Works*, 111.

⁴ Chandler, “Slave Produce,” *Poetical Works*, 111.

⁵ “The Wine Cup and the Gallows,” 2, italics mine. National Temperance Society and Publication House pamphlet no. 91, 2, italics mine.

⁶ This maxim is repeated in countless tracts published by the National Temperance Society and Publication House. It borrows language from Colossians 2:21-23 (KJV): “Touch not; taste not; handle not; which all are to perish with the using.”

oneself). Consumers have learned to ‘grab’ or not grab certain goods per their moral implications to our bodies and to a system at large. Importantly, the rhetoric of beneficial or destructive consumption established in the nineteenth century was conveyed, not through hashtags, of course, but through the medium of print. This dissertation examines the role print culture played in shaping and spreading nineteenth-century consumer reform rhetoric.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND CRITICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Today, consumer resistance spreads on viral media, tweeted, retweeted, slapped with a hashtag and shared with virtual social networks. Resistance is a catchy consumer contagion. The immediacy lent to today’s resistance efforts by instant publication and dissemination as activist sentiments spread to personal and national networks may give the impression that consumer resistance is stronger and more common today than ever. Yet, as economic historian Lawrence B. Glickman reminds us, boycotts have never *not* been an integral part of American consumer behavior and political protest. It may actually be more appropriate to call it “an American tradition.”⁷

One major but often overlooked period within that “tradition” of activism is the nineteenth century. That century witnessed heightened reform efforts that stemmed from the confluence of a rapidly growing free market and pre-existing human rights abuses. The capitalist free market matured alongside the proliferation of unethical labor practices including slavery, factory worker exploitation, and the barring of women (or at least, white middle and upper-class women) from the workplace. So it is not a coincidence that reform-minded individuals responded to such conditions by working together to organize

⁷ Glickman, *Buying Power*, 3.

for change. Anne M. Boylan counts over 70 women's benevolent, mutual aid, and reform societies in New York and Boston alone during the first four decades of the nineteenth century, each emerging in three successive "waves" concurrently with social, economic, and religious developments in the early nineteenth century.⁸ At the same time that reform societies emerged in the third wave in the 1830s, poised to counteract the social ills of slavery, sex work, and the liquor trade,⁹ so too did an American literary identity rapidly develop. Literature and reform were intertwined not just chronologically, but ideologically and demographically. Best-selling authors such as Lydia Maria Child risked—and endured—public censure by publishing powerful polemics against slavery.¹⁰ Outwardly a-political authors such as Nathaniel Hawthorne moved in inherently political circles.¹¹ The particular set of conditions in the nineteenth century that gave rise to the capitalist free market also gave rise to literary activism.

This project returns to literature produced during the market revolution of post-Revolutionary years and immediately preceding the Gilded Age of heightened consumerism and conspicuous consumption. I examine literature produced in that temporal valley between an early commercial market, and its experimentation with cash

⁸ Boylan, *Origins*, 5, 17.

⁹ Boylan, 17, 32-37.

¹⁰ Karcher, *Lydia Maria Child Reader*, 13-14. Ironically, Child, an abolitionist and a boycotter of slave-produced sugar, suffered from a boycott of her own works by a reading public that was not ready to embrace the famous children's and domestic writer as a political radical.

¹¹ Nina Baym documents and responds to literary critics' characterization of Hawthorne as a writer consciously removed from politics in "Again and Again, the Scribbling Women" (*Hawthorne and Women*, 20-35). Baym ("Again and Again") and Claudia Durst Johnson ("Discord in Concord") point out Hawthorne's own contradictory a-political stance. While Hawthorne attempted to distance himself from the political arena, he wrote a campaign biography for his friend and later president Franklin Pierce. For a fuller treatment of Hawthorne's complicated political persona and his relation to consumer reform movements, see chapter four of this dissertation, "Farm Fantasies: Humans, Hauntings, and the Commodity in Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance*."

economies, and a later industrial capitalist boom, within which I specifically focus on literature that admonishes its readers to alter consumer behavior according to a code of morals threatened by unregulated trade or unconscientious consumption. The title of this dissertation identifies such literature as advancing or participating in “boycott,” a term not coined until the early twentieth century; to be clear, I use the term “boycott” as a contemporary shorthand for consumer resistance and reform in the nineteenth century. (If nineteenth-century activists had had such a term available to them, many might have self-identified as boycotters.) I read, for instance, poems by Elizabeth Margaret Chandler which implore readers, “oh press [the speaker] not to taste again” any food sweetened by slave-produced sugar because the act of physical and monetary consumption will “[her] conscience stain.”¹² Chandler’s language positioning taste and consumption as a vehicle for both sustaining the system of slavery and tainting the eater is similar to temperance reform rhetoric which admonishes consumers to “touch not, taste not” toxic substances.¹³ Reading literature of consumer reform can tell us about the role texts played in shaping attitudes toward a growing market economy. In all, what I have found is that literature works as a tool for registering pervasive anxieties about unethical market conditions and in turn exerts influence by either shutting down consumption (what is now called boycott) or motivating alternative economies (“buycott,” as these have sometimes been called).

Covering ante- and postbellum genres and forms ranging from sentimental fiction and sensationalized sermons to novels and pamphlets, this dissertation investigates the

¹² Chandler and Lundy, *Poetical Works*, 109.

¹³ Various tracts published by the National Temperance Society and Publication House reiterated the maxim to “touch not, taste not.” For a fuller consideration of this language, see chapter three of this dissertation, “Conjuring Consumer Resistance and Moral Capital in Frances Harper’s *Sowing and Reaping*.”

ways nineteenth-century activists (including those who did not identify themselves as activists) marshaled print culture to materially interrupt and ideologically reconstruct the marketplace in order to accomplish political reform. Reading literature such as abolitionist boycott poetry by Chandler or domestic thrift treatises by Lydia Maria Child or temperance tracts by anonymous authors forces us to recognize consumer resistance as a major mode of dissent, especially for disenfranchised or politically marginalized groups. Boycotts have a long-standing history in American activism, from the iconic revolutionary revolt against unfairly taxed tea in the eighteenth century, to the Montgomery Bus Boycott in the twentieth century, to current boycotts of Trump family brands, Monsanto, Israel, Amazon, and still many others, based on ethics of environmental, animal, and human and consumer rights. Today, as boycotts become a knee-jerk reaction to companies that are either too political (see: Nike) or not enough (see: Amazon, Facebook), consumers continue to cast votes with their wallets, votes which speak to varied, individual senses of consumer ethos. Yet the cultural memory of Revolutionary and modern boycotts forgets nineteenth-century consumer resistance and its rich print and material culture. As Glickman points out, “this common periodization [of looking only at Revolutionary and Civil Rights boycotts] omits the entire nineteenth century.”¹⁴ Further, he says, by “treating boycotts as intermittent, it produces a gap not only in our knowledge of the history of consumer activism but also in our understanding of the relationships among...boycotts.”¹⁵ In other words, boycotts are not particular to the eighteenth and twentieth centuries, nor are they discrete, unrelated, or temporary. Treating them as such creates the “gap” Glickman identifies. I would add that other

¹⁴ Glickman, *Buying Power*, xi.

¹⁵ Glickman, xi.

questions lie in that temporal and epistemological gap. For instance, what new knowledge about nineteenth-century literature and the relationships in and among print, material culture, and the marketplace have been left unanswered by critical oversight of a period we do not often associate with boycott but that we do romanticize as the birth of an American literature? This dissertation is an effort to answer that question.

Scholarship of nineteenth-century literature has not yet answered this question, which proves surprising given the radical nature of nineteenth-century consumer activism. Literature of consumer resistance and conscientious consumption in the nineteenth century effectively laid the rhetorical, political, and moral foundation for the ways consumers and activists engage with the free market today. This dissertation seeks to recover nineteenth-century American literature of consumer reform for the purposes of deepening our understanding of how authors often from different racial, gender, religious and political backgrounds affiliated literary form with modern market practices and the moral valuation of goods. Ultimately, I argue that when we read nineteenth-century consumer reform literature, we are really reading about an early approach to the free market, one that is constituted by a collective effort to define exchange value in terms of morality and ethics, and which represents, at least for women and people of color, an ever-hopeful quest for long-denied political autonomy.

In an effort to flesh out the relationship between consumer resistance, disenfranchised groups, and literary production over the nineteenth century, this project asks how, for whom, and to what ideological purposes some writers staged interventions into the nascent free market. I look at the ways in which theories of conscientious consumption were posited by domestic economy texts (chapter one), were employed in sentimental fiction and poetry (chapters two and three), and run aground in

fictionalizations of utopian communities (chapter four). Ranging from 1820-1880 and covering a variety of genres and forms, this work recovers literature on the Free Produce movement, which has been dismissed as “crackbrained”¹⁶; it explores understudied texts by important activists, such as African American poet and novelist Frances E. W. Harper; it adds non-fiction texts to literary criticism, such as domestic economy manuals; and it reframes conversations on canonical texts by Hawthorne by reading them for their treatment of material culture in a material economy. In four chapters, I trace how literature of diverse genres and authors of diverse backgrounds theorized the ills of the marketplace, how they rejected actual goods seen as contaminated and contaminating, and, finally, how such literature imagined resistance to an entire economic system that had come to define lived existence.

This is a study as much about the literature of consumer resistance as it is about literature as consumer resistance. This dissertation offers a critical contribution to scholarly conversations on literature and the marketplace in nineteenth-century America. Until now, scholarship on nineteenth-century consumer activism has largely remained the purview of historians.¹⁷ This disciplinary pigeon-holing makes sense but necessarily prevents deep study of literature about or by consumer resistance movements. My approach as a literary historian with interdisciplinary interests in print and material

¹⁶ In the first and only book-length treatment of abolitionist boycotts, Ruth Nuernberger’s *Free Produce Movement* (1942), Nuernberger dismisses the movement as a “crackbrained” scheme (3). Julie Holcomb’s *Moral Commerce* (2016) treats the rise and decline of transatlantic Quaker boycotts over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and, as such, helps to recover the important work of abolitionist boycotts such as that enacted by the American Free Produce Association treated here in chapter two.

¹⁷ See Glickman, *Buying Power*; and Faulkner, “The Root of the Evil,” 377-405. Literary critic Lori Merish’s *Sentimental Materialism* speaks to the political import of consumption and ownership but does not address the political import of *not* buying things, that is, deliberate non-ownership.

culture is to treat texts always as textual agents which operated on the cultural landscape. I thus seek to open up new points of view on the relationship between literature and the marketplace. That is, while previous studies have tended to ask how authors themselves engaged the literary marketplace, such as Michael T. Gilmore's seminal study of authors of the American renaissance and the literary market,¹⁸ my study asks how authors utilized literature to disrupt market trends or carve out niche markets for consumer resistance. Doing so uncovers not only the deeply anxious relationship between consumers and goods, but it illuminates the pivotal role of print in both articulating those anxieties and reframing interactions with goods along indexes of ethics both national and personal.

Ethical issues such as franchise, self-sovereignty, social justice, and alienation are central to the literature of consumer reform. Because of disenfranchised people's, primarily women and people of color, central role in reform efforts and their collective power of the purse, this literature is by default often written by the disenfranchised or disadvantaged to an audience of their peers. Temperance texts, for instance, insist on woman suffrage as necessary to the health of the nation. Domestic economy texts teach conscientious spending as a way of performing self-sovereignty as well as protecting the Republic. Abolitionist boycott literature is fundamentally concerned with social justice. And utopian communities, such as the fictional Blithedale, offer an implied critique of alienation. In this dissertation, I identify the following relationships between long-standing ethical issues and certain nineteenth-century literary forms or genres: African American franchise and anti-consumption in temperance literature; women's self-

¹⁸ See Gilmore, *American Romanticism and the Marketplace*, and *A History of the Book in America* series, vol. 2 and 3, eds. Gross and Kelley, and Casper et al, respectively.

sovereignty and thrift in domestic narratives; abolition and boycott in periodical poetry; and commodity consumption and alienation in literature of the American renaissance.

This project connects varied scholarly works in different disciplines and builds on them. From material culture studies, I rely on scholarship that establishes the centrality of material culture in shaping consumers' lives.¹⁹ From economic and political history, I draw on scholarship that argues the function of consumer activism in the creation of political subjectivities.²⁰ And from literary history, I am indebted to scholarship that explains the relevance of nascent market capitalism to a developing American literature.²¹ At the intersection of these disparate studies and disciplines is, I argue, compelling evidence of a fundamental approach to literature that is rarely seen today: namely, literature as a political vehicle that allowed writers to campaign for market interventions at the same time that it provided a space for working out anxieties toward the marketplace. By taking an interdisciplinary approach, my study allows texts and sub-genres often read separately and in different disciplines to speak to each other. When we put domestic writing, abolitionist boycott poetry, temperance literature, and seemingly apolitical canonical novels all under the umbrella of consumer reform, as this study does, their connections are made all the more compelling via a close reading of the common language used, the material objects treated in such texts, and the political goal intended. In all, then, this study uses an interdisciplinary approach to show how literature of

¹⁹ See Miller, *Materiality*; Brown, "Thing Theory," 1-22. On the material culture of early America see especially Jaffee, *New Nation of Goods*; Martin, *Buying into the World of Goods*; and Rigal, *American Manufactory*.

²⁰ See Glickman, *Buying Power*; Breen, *Marketplace of Revolution*.

²¹ See Gilmore, *American Romanticism and the Marketplace*; Merish, *Sentimental Materialism*.

consumer reform used the language of fear, anxiety, and distrust to mark certain material objects and advocated avoidance politics (non-consumption) to do political work.

Literature of consumer reform helps scholars understand Americans' historical relationship with the capitalist free market. Nineteenth-century literature challenges popular modern assumptions about consumerism and capitalism as inherent characteristics of American identity, views often held outside the academy. Certainly, an unregulated commercial market grew steadily in the decades following the market revolution, but a closer examination of literature produced during the period under study here (1820-1880) reveals a deep-seated anxiety toward unchecked, unconscientious consumption. In other words, America has not always been capitalist and Americans have not always (or ever) been monolithically indiscriminate consumers.²² In fact, at every stage of American history, some group or other has always worked against blind spending and the rise of markets not subject to democratic accountability. In the nineteenth century, when commercial capitalism burst upon the scene (or casually sauntered in, depending on which historian you ask), buyers began to raise questions they still ask today: who made this good, what and if that laborer was paid for his labor, where in the world did it come from, how did it get to their town, and should they let it into their homes or onto their bodies or into their bodies? We have only to name the myriad reform movements of the nineteenth century to begin to comprehend the unsettled reactions

²² I rely on Charles Sellers' timeline of the market revolution which posits that, urban markets notwithstanding, capitalism did not fully develop in America until the 1810s, after several decades of commercial development in the decades following the American Revolutionary War (*The Market Revolution*). It should be noted that while capitalism as we now recognize it did not develop in America until the nineteenth century, that is not to say the early republic was not cosmopolitan. See Jaffee, *New Nation of Goods*.

which were evoked by answering those questions. Thus, while America may eventually have earned its reputation as a nation of consumers, it has never been uncritically so.

DEFINING A GENRE OF CONSUMER REFORM

Literature of the nineteenth century registers those anxieties about rapidly growing, unregulated markets and expresses them in various genres, forms, and rhetorical modes. It does so in, 1.) domestic manuals and fiction that encourage pride in what we now call reducing and reusing; 2.) abolitionist boycott poetry that exposes the horror of consuming slave-produced goods; 3.) temperance fiction and tracts that preach against the damning evils of drink; and 4.) literature of the American renaissance that imagines commodities as preclusive to utopian communities. These texts are principally what I refer to when I speak of a “genre” of consumer reform, or boycott and conscientious consumption, though certainly others might be included.²³ They must be called a genre and not a form because they share rhetorical modes and literary patterns rather than sharing a static form such as novel, short fiction, or poetry. We can frame such a genre by identifying its patterns of rhetorical modes—specific messages to specific audiences with a specifically intended outcome, where that outcome is either conscientious consumption or non-consumption. For instance, domestic manuals written by women (and occasionally men) to women about what to buy versus what to make, or domestic fiction which narrativizes the struggles of making those decisions, is a specific expression of

²³ I do not call the category of literature defined here a *sub-genre*, though others may prefer to call it such. I resist the categorization of sub-genre because I do not subscribe to hierarchies of genres (implicit in the nominal difference between a genre and that which is *sub*, or subordinate to it). Such hierarchies are at best arbitrary and at worst a marginalizing force that downplays the significance of literature often by already marginalized groups.

conscientious consumption operating with the explicit purpose of effecting action. Or, abolitionist boycott texts written by reformers to other reformers as well as to the unconverted, consuming public, about why certain articles should be avoided is a genre of boycott with a similarly express purpose of effecting action. My definition of a consumer reform genre hinges on texts' action and agency, specifically the action of staging a literary intervention in the marketplace, as my title suggests, regardless of such interventions' legal success.

The texts that most obviously stage an intervention of the type I describe above are abolitionist boycott poetry and prose and temperance fiction and prose. Both espouse messages of avoidance, or "abstinence," rooted in principles of complicit guilt or personal and communal endangerment implicit in the act of consumption. In other words, abolitionist boycott and temperance argued that to purchase or to ingest/imbibe either slave-produced goods or alcohol signified complicity with the system and, moreover, contaminated the community. Both share an audience of fellow activists and the uninitiated alike—abolitionists to fellow abolitionists as well as to the unsympathetic (in an effort to awaken their sympathy), and temperance reformers to other social reformers as well as to those likely to buy the illicit article (so-called inebriates). Such rhetorical practices grew out of an era of social reform in the nineteenth century, which utilized print and material culture to campaign for changes in an already changing economic society. Alongside education, prison, and dress reform; abolitionism and temperance reform worked to reconstruct social reality through organized action that built edifices and authored editorials, that met in person and on the page. They did so prolifically: in addition to publishing bound books and pamphlets and participating in the culture of reprinting within the abolitionist periodical press circuit, *Free Producers* published over

40 original poems, by my count, in their own periodical which itself produced monthly issues steadily from 1846 to 1850 and 1853 to 1854, a respectable output during a time of intense saturation of and competition on the periodical market. Temperance literature saturated the market in even greater ways: hundreds of tracts (over 190 by the National Temperance Society and Publication House alone), over 300 narratives²⁴, and regularly published textbooks, advertisements, and editorials appearing at increasing rates from the 1830s to the 1870s (and beyond). The sheer numbers are staggering and, for nineteenth-century readers, impossible to ignore. But though abolitionism and temperance participated in the rhetorical strategies of fellow reform movements, (its members often belonged to more than one movement), not all reform movements advocated boycott or published extensively and in literary genres such as poetry and fiction on the topic of economic abstention. Thus, the genre of consumer reform literature is a particular mode of organized action by the two movements I have identified (abolitionists, temperance reformers) because their literary output was substantial and because their particular concerns stemmed from an understanding of material relations as foundational to a liberal social economy.

The genre of consumer reform also includes, I suggest, domestic manuals and domestic fiction by important authors such as Catherine Beecher and Louisa May Alcott because they wrestle almost at all times with concerns about spending—when and how and for what purposes should money, social capital, and labor be given or sacrificed. Both writers, in the end, embrace messages of strategic consumption designed to edify the consumer through moralistic readings of material culture that disdains reckless

²⁴ Karen Sánchez-Eppler counts at least 300 narratives in her chapter “Temperance in the Bed of a Child” (*Dependent States*, 70).

consumerism, enacting a kind of staving off of capitalist accumulation and conspicuous consumption: i.e. domestic economy texts are part of the genre of consumer reform literature because they advocate conscientious consumption which is a particular kind of consumer activism.

Likewise, certain texts considered as literature of the American renaissance, such as Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance*, can be read as operating within the genre of consumer reform via conscientious consumption and, at times, non-consumption (sometimes as the former because its optimism about the latter was unsustainable).

Michael T. Gilmore reminds us that "ample evidence exists to support [the] conception of American romanticism as a movement of dissent,"²⁵ and a movement also inherently of consumer critique, though few have paused to consider *The Blithedale Romance* from this angle, as I do in chapter four.

The differences within the above groups of authors, forms, and genres helpfully complicate our reading of such literature because its texts and authors do not conform to homogeneous categories or modes. For instance, I have at times spoken of abolitionist boycott and temperance reform in the same breath, but though they share several major actors and some major tenets, they are not fundamentally the same. Moreover, even within each movement are unstable elements that undermine the cohesiveness of the collective effort. Many of the more sober-minded teetotalers actively distanced themselves from the sensationalist and oftentimes "self-contradictory" Washingtonians,²⁶

²⁵ Gilmore, *American Romanticism and the Marketplace*, 6.

²⁶ David S. Reynolds and Debra J. Rosenthal note in their introduction to *Serpent in the Cup* that "Washingtonian discourse was often violent and lurid in its renderings of alcohol's ravages and people were eager to hear about the degeneracy and wickedness they supposedly protested" (4). Despite its being "egalitarian in spirit" by providing a space for the everyman to speak publicly, it was "riddled with contradictions and ambiguity" (4).

though both on the surface preached complementary messages. Moreover, some temperance reformers campaigned for legal regulation and prohibition while others were content with personal vows of abstinence—both, of course, practiced boycott. This study does not make pretensions to any monolithic homogenization of consumer activism and rhetorical critiques of the market. In other words, texts that fall under the genre of consumer reform do work in similar fashions with similar goals, but with differing levels of anxiety, diverse authorial backgrounds and publication networks, and sometimes antagonistic definitions of the ‘literary’. Such breadth of authors, texts, political agendas and artistic aesthetics is what makes this not strictly a genre endemic to reform movements, as we might first be tempted to label these authors and texts. Rather, the genre of consumer reform literature proliferated on the literary market in the mid-nineteenth century in enough literary forms and publication venues that its ideology was made accessible and ubiquitous.

A MORAL MATERIALISM

But lest I over-stress this genre’s continuities and divergences, which will become more apparent in the following chapters, it is important to note the implications of studying a range of texts together. In bringing together these various authors and texts invested in consumer reform, we witness the agentic role of literature in advancing a moralistic and consumer good-oriented (or, good consumer-oriented) approach to unregulated markets. Moreover, the genre’s wary attitudes articulated through descriptions of material objects effectively unsettle the boundaries among morality, materiality, and value. Such attitudes and approaches to material culture constitute what I

will later define as moral materialism. As the texts under consideration here show, morality and value are mutually constitutive in nineteenth-century approaches to markets.

Nineteenth-century readers and writers were deeply entrenched in a religious vocabulary of moralism that they carried with them into everyday habits, such as shopping at the market, cooking, or decorating one's home. The relationship between morality and the market was inexorably linked to the relationship between public and private spheres, as Amy Dru Stanley has theorized. In "Home Life and the Morality of the Market," Stanley contends that the moralistic sanctity characteristic of nineteenth-century separate spheres infused market society with moralist overtones which cast the family unit as one of independent male labor and dependent female labor. When male workers were denied the right to the wages of their own labor or when that labor was perceived as dependent (i.e. slavery and wage labor), the threat was to family and therefore national stability. Morality, then, was a social condition that drove material changes in the market economy, such as through campaigns for abolition and labor rights. Morality, however, was not only a tool for reifying gendered spheres but also and alternatively a tool for creating gendered subjectivity. As Lori Merish notes in *Sentimental Materialism*, consumer trends in the nineteenth century "derived from eighteenth-century pietistic Protestantism and the emerging political discourse of liberalism, about gender, about women's role in the public sphere, and the 'civilizing' power of an array of mediating material forms."²⁷ In short, buying power, which was imbued with pious relevance, constituted "subjective expression" and signified "civic identification." In this way, women's purchasing patterns importantly provided a vehicle for "subjective expressions" in a political domain from which they were

²⁷ Merish, 2.

disenfranchised.²⁸ This kind of carrying over of the precepts of Protestantism into newly developing precepts of consumption and production and “mediated,” as Merish aptly notes, by “material forms” including goods intended for exchange and consumption resulted, as I argue, in an approach to material objects that distrusted commodities for their moral inscrutability.

Therefore, this project as well as the texts it studies are also fundamentally interested in what it meant in the nineteenth century to know or perceive one’s material reality. The literature of consumer reform complicates eighteenth-century epistemological theories of sensationalism, theories which posited an understanding of reality based on sensorial experience of the world. Surrounded by a material culture that capriciously both communicated and obfuscated meaning, how could it be possible to have faith in one another’s ability to perceive the true make-up of commodities? Consumer reform literature wants desperately to provide a primer for reading objects. Together, these texts work toward an epistemology of materiality. Literature of consumer reform evidences a paradigm shift away from empiricism and confidence in the senses as the primary apparatus through which to discern reality and meaning. With the market revolution and expanding trade routes came commercial goods that did not announce their origin or come with a cruelty-free badge. Counterfeit goods and counterfeit money also proliferated in a market that offered no customer guarantee, no better business bureau, no infrastructure for verifying the ‘genuine article’.²⁹ Thus the proliferation of

²⁸ Merish, 2.

²⁹ See Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women*; and Mihm, *Nation of Counterfeiters*. Historians such as Halttunen and Mihm attribute the prevailing fears regarding the early free market to attendant proliferation of fakes and forgeries, especially in the form of counterfeit paper currency, confidence men, and sex workers. The anxiety I am tracing is related, for the distrust which I trace—of a system which

advertisements that try to set buyers at ease and profit off a demand for the ‘real thing’. Because fakes masqueraded as real and the real was hard to find, the commodity became, on the unregulated early free market, a black box of sensory confusion and contested meanings. Print culture evidences these concerns; the literature of consumer reform is part of the long quest for an honest market. Written in a period that began to doubt the ability to sense the honesty or real make up of goods, literature of conscientious consumption gives voice to such concerns and offers readers a guide to restoring object-literacy.

This genre posits an approach to the marketplace rooted in changing epistemologies of the senses and new developments in the capacity for human empathy. Borrowing from eighteenth century philosophies of sentiment and nineteenth-century modes of sentimentalism, consumer reform literature is predicated on sympathy, a phenomenon that Adam Smith worried was an incomplete sensation and, moreover, an unlikely one: “Though our brother is upon the rack, as long as we ourselves are at our ease, our senses will never inform us of what he suffers. They never did, and never can, carry us beyond our own person, and it is by imagination only that we can form any conception of what are his sensations.”³⁰ Smith disbelieves in the power of the senses to “inform” one of what another is truly feeling. That the limits of sympathetic identification were anticipated not coincidentally by Adam Smith suggests the inherently obfuscating role the capitalist system has on objects in circulation and by extension on the people who buy into the system of capitalism. The inability of one brother to empathize with another is perhaps because one is “on the rack” and the other “at his ease,” one laboring

obscures trade routes and profits off commodified humans—is only another, more nefarious symptom of a suspect market.

³⁰ Smith, *Moral Sentiments*, 2.

to produce the commodities which enable, through their sale on the capitalist free market, the other's "ease." However, he continues, "By the imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all torments, we enter as it were into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him and then form some idea of his sensations, and even feel something which, though weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike them."³¹ Therefore, Smith also hints at the power of literature to shake complacent readers from their "ease" and, by the power of imagination, to "even feel something" of the true value, the true make-up and meaning of an object, which is inexorably, materially tied up in its human producer as well as its abstracted means of production.

Inherently invested in sentimental tropes of sympathy through touch, consumer reform literature wants to push back against the desensitizing effects of commercial capitalism. Thus, one method of intervention by consumer reform literature is its depiction of the heightened emotional responses experienced by characters' or speakers' upon touching, tasting, hearing, or seeing commodity objects tainted by a market that sells bodies, that exploits labor, that allows the public to invade the private, and that opportunistically profited off addictive substances—a market, in short, that represented a severe lack of conscience. By framing their interactions with material objects, and commodities especially, in moralist terms, consumer reformers were also performing their own kind of "New Sense" of knowing true virtue, a concept posited in the eighteenth century by Scottish Calvinist Common Sense philosopher Francis Hutcheson, and with whose work many of the authors included here would have been familiar. Consumer reform authors want to impart that sense to readers in daily interactions with objects whose virtue is absent, hidden, or questionable. By describing the appropriate

³¹ Smith, *Moral Sentiments*, 2-3.

sensory responses to suspect goods on the market, such as alcohol or slave-produced sugar or exorbitantly priced ‘fancy’ goods, literature of consumer resistance attempted to rewrite and re-right the politics of sympathetic identification through the sensory nexus of material goods.

The primary genre convention of consumer reform literature seems to work toward defining (and also at times lamenting the inability to define) an object literacy. Throughout these texts, objects can be located on a metric of value according to their moral provenance and use, or what I call *moral materialism*. Throughout this dissertation, I study texts that sought to intervene in the marketplace through theorizing a moral materialism of consumerism. Writers such as Alcott, Child, Chandler, Harper, Hawthorne and others write about physical interaction with specific goods as if there were moral consequences to that interaction. In this kind of moral materialism, goods become receptacles and disseminators of moral or immoral action. To put it in syntactic terms, materiality (noun) is described by its moral qualifiers (adj.). This moral materialism was articulated especially in boycott rhetoric in the nineteenth century. Each of the chapters that follow unpacks the moral materialism of different authors or groups actively involved in consumer reform. These authors and texts identified desirable and non-desirable goods, the purchase of which it was believed could significantly alter personal or family success as well as political and social welfare at large. For many, commodities became (im)moral signifiers of labor, spiritual corruption, and national self-sufficiency. Domestic economy, which advised homemakers on what to buy and what to make, called for hyper-awareness of the use and construction of things in order to secure the material basis of nationhood. Temperance and abolitionist boycotts likewise excoriated consumption of goods to which guilt and trauma had been indexed (slave-produced

goods) or from which corruption and death emanated (liquor).³² Much was at stake in this approach to a world of goods: the definition of true value (especially opposed to so-called exchange value in a developing capitalist system); the sanctity of the domestic space (as both home space and the nation state); and even one's salvation or moral character, which could be compromised by unconscientious consumption of material goods.

CHAPTER OVERVIEWS

This dissertation offers a definition of a consumer reform genre and presents selected texts which represent the work that genre does. I have been selective in my choice of texts, limiting them to poetry, fiction, and prose published in their time. This necessarily leaves out other literary forms such as correspondence, manuscripts, advertisements and other ephemera. While all of those forms do appear here, such as advertisements for free produce stores or minutes of temperance conventions, they appear as contextual referents on the print landscape. I have limited the scope of this archive to published texts because I want to examine the cultural work of literature as a commodity talking about commodities; that means this study is by necessity primarily concerned with published, commodified books circulating in the marketplace. This discursive

³² Consider this language in "O Press Me Not to Taste Again" by Elizabeth Margaret Chandler, where consumption of slave-produced foods renders the consumer guilty by association and susceptible to a kind of residual bloody trauma etched there by the enslaved laborer: "Oh press me not to taste again/ Those luxurious banquet sweets!/ Or, hide from view *the dark red stain*,/ That still my shuddering vision meets./ Away! 'tis loathsome! Bear me hence!/ *I cannot feed on human sighs*,/ Or feast with sweets my palate's sense,/ While *blood* is 'neath the fair disguise./ No, never let me taste again/ Of aught beside the coarsest fair,/ Far rather, than my conscience stain,/ With the polluted luxuries there." (*Poetical Works*, 108-109, italics mine). Consider also this language in "Song of the Decanter" by Alfred Gibbs Campbell, where the object itself boasts of its corrupting influence: "There was an old decanter...its pale mouth sang the queerest strains to me... "[W]hile I killed the body, I have damned the very soul"" (*African American Poetry of the Nineteenth Century*, 105).

doubling and self-reflexive critique of production and consumption gives us a useful insight into how literature, high and low, understood itself as a cultural agent in the very marketplace it so often reacted to with fear, condescension, derision, or pious concern.

This dissertation offers an account of consumer reform literature. It finds that the genre makes claims about what counts as the right kind of interaction with the marketplace. Structurally, it follows a thematic format that progresses by degrees of intensity and commitment to consumer reform. It first considers basic tenets of consumption established by domestic manuals and fiction. The middle chapters examine non-consumption, or boycott, literature produced by abolitionists and temperance activists. Finally, the fourth chapter teases out visions of utopian societies completely removed from the mainstream market society and the attendant problematics of that removal. In other words, it looks at texts that told readers how to approach the market, then at texts that advocated non-participation with certain goods on the market, and finally at texts which imagined what it might be like to remove oneself from participation with the market altogether.

I begin by considering some of the basic approaches to consumption outlined in popular domestic manuals and domestic fiction. Chapter one, “A Homemade Sole: Domesticity, Morality, and the Market” reads the perennially popular *Little Women* as a domestic text situated on a literary landscape dominated by domestic economy manuals, specifically Catherine Beecher's *Treatise on Domestic Economy* and Lydia Maria Child's *American Frugal Housewife*. Scholars such as Gillian Brown and Lori Merish have pointed to the importance of consumption as central to social elevation, particularly within domestic fiction and the female *Bildungsroman* that charts upward social mobility

through learned behavior and learned spending.³³ This chapter builds on those analyses but pivots on the concept of learned spending by instead focusing on acts of non-spending, of thrift, of what we might now call a ‘reduce, reuse, recycle’ ethos that works in these texts in stark contrast to the learned spending of non-central characters. In other words, while domestic writing did concern itself with spending, my argument is that, more often, acts of non-spending or hyper-awareness of spending enables an ascent to selfhood and creates the moral integrity necessary to crafting a self-sufficient (though not subsistent) home and national space. Domestic manuals and fiction very carefully cautioned against unscrupulous spending, finding that selfhood and the stability of the family unit were often compromised by the purchase of the very commodities which were supposed to perform social elevation through a kind of conspicuous consumption. A showy new dress for Meg, a fresh lobster salad for Amy, a loaf of pricey bakery bread for Lydia Maria Child—all turn on their purchasers, wrecking savings and self-confidence, belying a destructive quality that undermines the exchange value of goods. By encouraging women to embrace thrift rather than trends and to opt for the homemade rather than market-bought, domestic writers offered a model of household production and consumption that could sustain its own unit without risking social disgrace but crucially also without the moral compromise of (over)consumption. Both replicating and revising national domestic tropes of nostalgia for an age of homespun and the duty to buy American, the domestic writing I consider in the first chapter refocuses the nationalist ideology of domestic economy as a thoroughfare to salvation and sovereignty through self-sacrifice. To that end, a pair of painted shoes, a homemade shoe sole, and other objects throughout these narratives come to signify the salvific and the sovereign inherent

³³ See Brown, *Domestic Individualism*; and Merish, *Sentimental Materialism*.

in the discourse of self-sacrifice. Goods of middling to no exchange value are imbued with unquantifiable use value (they are invaluable) through their ability to take on multiple uses (reuse) and their ability to confer on their users an accumulated sense of sovereignty and self.

While my first chapter establishes the moral configuration of spending and non-spending in domestic writing, my second chapter recovers texts that explicitly advocate boycott and that similarly operated on moral principles, specifically the principle of consumption as consent. In “Polluted Luxuries: Consumer Resistance, the Senses of Horror, and Abolitionist Boycott Poetry,” I treat a long-overlooked body of texts that merges the sentimental interests of abolitionist literature with economic critiques by early consumer resistance movements. Chapter two unfolds the unique positionality of abolitionist boycott literature, which is situated among the sentimental trends of antebellum literature while employing sensationalist language of consumer interaction with morally compromised goods, ultimately introducing into the literary landscape a complicated view of what readers and writers increasingly saw as a suspect “free” market. Writers such as Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, Elizabeth Margaret Chandler, and John Greenleaf Whittier imagine a world of goods haunted by the touch of enslaved laborers, and which, in turn, haunt consumers. By parsing out the language of abolitionist boycott literature alongside its historical and material cultural moment, I argue that such literature posits a very literal and as yet unaccounted for version of material relations that collapses the boundaries between consumer and producer, self and other, in ways that have horrific, haunting implications for market society, then and now.

Employing similarly sensational language to describe the moral consequences of consumption, temperance literature takes the focus of chapter three, “Conjuring Consumer Resistance and Moral Capital in Frances Harper’s *Sowing and Reaping*.” As in domestic economy and abolitionist boycott movements, print culture played a central role in spreading consumer reform rhetoric by imagining the life-altering and nation-changing implications of personal consumption choices, describing such choices in language that ascribed a morality to certain commodity objects and to consumers’ interaction with them. In temperance literature—such as tracts, sermons, and short fiction—objects associated with the liquor trade are assiduously branded as morally corrupt and corrupting, largely due to alarming rates of domestic abuse and homelessness. Bar counters, whisky tumblers, wine decanters, and beer bottles are described as sites of soul exchange, where one trades (likewise suspect) coin for drink, or are animated as weapons of disease and murder. Chapter three reads temperance reform’s particular brand of consumer resistance rhetoric through Frances Ellen Watkins Harper’s short postbellum temperance novella, *Sowing and Reaping*. As a didactic parable, *Sowing and Reaping* offers solutions to a materially immoral economy and a morally illiterate populace through preaching correct spending and productive labor. Harper’s approach to buying, selling, spending, and generally interacting with the marketplace is predicated on a moralist understanding of material objects, specifically the material accoutrement of the liquor trade. At stake is a kind of material literacy that pivots on the ability to correctly discern the moral make-up of objects, and, Harper’s text implies, perhaps the failure to do so sows, as the biblical wages of sin, death and destruction.

If temperance reformers saw death in a wine glass, it is my suggestion in chapter four that Hawthorne sees death at the end of the commodity consumption chain, with the

discovery of Zenobia's body as the culmination of a set of clues that make overt gestures to the global capitalist marketplace. Chapter four, "Farm Fantasies: Humans, Hauntings, and the Commodity in Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance*" transitions to more canonical works that take a less sentimental or sensational tone but a no less troubled approach to the commodity. *The Blithedale Romance* makes no explicit charges to its readers to abstain from purchasing commodities or even to avoid certain suspect ones. Instead, it narrates the initial optimism of retreating from market society in order to create an agrarian one and the struggles to do so, ending with the failure of the farm though not the destruction of the dream. *Blithedale* is a think piece on the allure of reform and the human errors in performing it. The sole novel of Hawthorne's written in first person, and drawn heavily from personal experience, it provides a counter to Alcott's likewise autobiographical *Little Women* discussed in chapter one, yet with the complicating layer of a narrator whose power of observation is as undeveloped as the reader-consumers other authors here tried to educate. Chapter four reads *The Blithedale Romance* from the outside in and backwards, examining the novel as a literary product set consciously apart from other kinds of mass-produced literature and then from the tragic ending of Zenobia's life back through the objects that lead Coverdale there, ultimately arriving at a reading of the novel as doubly troubled: by commodities and as commodity.

LITERATURE AS CONSUMER RESISTANCE

At its core, this dissertation is a study on the uses of literature. Reading literature for its treatment of material objects and commodity culture allows us, finally, a fuller appreciation of literature as commodity. According to the metric of value I call moral materialism, consumer reform literature identifies itself as a moral article, a vessel of

ethical action. In *The Blithedale Romance*, Hawthorne's narrator has a bit of constructive criticism for temperance reformers:

But these good people [temperance reformers] snatch at the old, time-honored demijohn, and offer nothing—either sensual or moral—nothing whatever to supply its place....The space which it now occupies must somehow or other be filled up....The reformers should make their efforts positive, instead of negative; they must do away with evil by substituting good.³⁴

Coverdale misses an essential point of temperance reform, that it does supply an alternative: literature. The “doing away with evil by substituting good” was the modus operandi of consumer resistance literature, for it came to stand metonymically for the good it wished to enact. In one of her introductions, Lydia Maria Child calls her domestic manuals “safe” books that actively combatted a presumably ‘unsafe’ market in books, books that do not edify or do not promote critical approaches to the marketplace and life within market society.³⁵ Speaking for the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) at a national convention in 1875, Frances Willard touted literature as a cultural agent that could “go into all homes and touch the thought of all people.”³⁶ The role of literature, for consumer reformers, was to cross spatial and ideological borders, circulating into private spaces of home and individual thought. Moreover, it could physically reach out and “touch” readers in more edifying ways, certainly, than touching a glass of wine or quaffing a ‘touch’ of whisky. But for all its insistence on the centrality of the home space as the singular locus of change, consumer reform literature traversed public and private spaces. The WCTU set up “Literature-boxes in legislative and municipal buildings, rail-road stations, engine-houses, markets and barber shops, and

³⁴ Hawthorne, 120.

³⁵ Child notes, in the same tones I have pointed out throughout this introduction, that her “strongest anxiety has been to make the book *safe*” in her introduction to *The Family Nurse*, 3, ital. orig.

³⁶ Willard qtd. in Minutes of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, 12.

distributions through the post office,”³⁷ making literature’s presence manifest in communal spaces. Their texts asserted a material presence in people’s daily lives and exerted work on readers’ quotidian interactions with the marketplace. Literature of consumer reform worked hard to provide a good alternative to what were seen as bad commodities. As a technology of power, its goal was to curb impulses and instill behavior by demonizing bad commodities and moralizing good ones. The texts covered in the following chapters seek a better market, a truly free market populated with things made by free and paid laborers, stocked with goods that bestow something good in turn. They alert readers to perceived dangers lurking in the dishonest market made manifest in the dishonest good. And in doing so, they anticipate twentieth-century concerns about consumer rights, fair trade, and the moral and ethical integrity of the market.

That these concerns are the stuff of literature tells us something of the duality of texts as commodity and literature in the decades when, in the United States, both were beginning to define themselves. From Hawthorne’s derided derision of the “damned mob of scribbling women” to Willard’s boast that the WCTU had published over 32 million pages in a single calendar year, the authors here understood the literary marketplace as conducive to quick writing and expedited publishing where strength, or at least success, was measured in numbers. It is thanks to print culture scholarship in recent decades that we now know the machinery of the nineteenth-century literary marketplace privileged sentimental, sensational, easily reproducible forms in media such as periodicals that allowed those forms to proliferate in print and to be consumed in people’s homes and rehashed in their social lives. Literature of consumer reform could flourish there, in periodicals such as the abolitionist boycott newspaper the *Non-Slaveholder*, in tracts and

³⁷ Willard qtd. in Minutes of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, 12.

pamphlets such as those disseminated by the National Temperance Society and Publication House, in bound domestic manuals that lived on through edition after edition, as did Beecher's Treatise. Consumer reform literature usually took on a conventional, easily reproducible form such as household manual or rhyming poem or short, bombastic tract. The world of publishing and the political climate provided ripe conditions for spreading and sustaining rhetoric of consumer reform *in the form of a commodity*. Produced as a commodity entering a world of commodities, with which it sometimes shared the page, literature of consumer reform operated as a cultural product that both was produced and sought to produce—to produce actions, to elicit revised consumer behavior. Consumption of literature in the nineteenth century then becomes a kind of means of production itself, the commodity working on its consumer through easily digestible forms (a rhyming poem, a sing-song alphabet, a short pithy tract) that produce, when properly consumed, altered behavior which alters the scale of supply and demand. Literature of consumer reform staged an intervention in the marketplace through competing gestures with other commodities in ways that reveal dynamic approaches to nineteenth-century market society.

Chapter 1

A HOMEMADE SOLE: DOMESTICITY, MORALITY, AND THE MARKET

The opening scene of Solon Robinson's *How to Live: Saving and Wasting* (1860), one of the many domestic novels populating the literary market in the mid-nineteenth century, finds two women engaged in the distinctly unproductive act of gossip. They have found their neighbor Mrs. Savery guilty of staying indoors on a sunny day in order to repair a tattered pair of shoes, "practicing her domestic arts" prompted by the shabby "meanness" of "economy."³⁸ They speak in tones of judgment as thinly veiled as their names: Miss Doolittle idly chatting about Mrs. Savery who, despite the hinted accusation of poverty, is busy reaping savings. "I should be mortified to death if I was caught at such a piece of business," Miss Doolittle exclaims. "Why, she was making a pair of shoes....It was a pair of shoes for herself [rather than mending her husband's]. She had taken a pair of old shoe soles, from which the tops had been worn out, and had cut new uppers from an old pair of her husband's black lasting pantaloons."³⁹

Mrs. Savery's resourcefulness of means, which to many of her contemporaries may have come across as the mere thrifty "meanness" of frugality works in contrast to Miss Doolittle and her friend's opening dialogue precisely because it is a "piece of business," or, as the title of Robinson's chapter declares, "Economy Illustrated in a Pair of Shoes." The shoe-y piece of business illustrates the productive labor of women's work in domestic manuals and narratives, a labor that, as Jeanne Boydston has argued, adds to the capital of the home space by strengthening its economic standing in relation to

³⁸ Robinson, *How to Live*, 9.

³⁹ Robinson, 9.

volatile markets.⁴⁰ The shoes, which are “just as good looking as the old pair that [Savery] paid a dollar and a half for,” retain the function and fashion of the originals without incurring further costs. A selfless gesture to the welfare of the family unit as a whole, this is nevertheless women’s work for women, or for Mrs. Savery herself. The shoes are her own invention and for her own use, taken from her husband’s things and transformed into a possession of her own. Through “self-sacrifice,” the major tenet of domestic economy, Mrs. Savery makes not just a pair of working shoes but an autonomous self whose personhood and possessions are not dependent on her husband’s purse strings. As for many other women, fictional and real, in the nineteenth century, those purse strings are Mrs. Savery’s to pull or loosen, and it is in knowing when to do which that women in domestic writings craft selfhood and independence within and in spite of a growing market economy that, in removing women from ostensible spheres of production, placed women in a precarious position. Mrs. Savery’s household business models a kind of production through non-consumption that yields savings and self-sufficiency and which is the focus of this chapter.

Domestic texts such as Robinson’s narrate the process of crafting sovereignty through thrift, or personal governance made possible through concerted control of household goods. The use and procurement of objects in such texts is crucial to narratives of subjectivity, often for characters whose real-life counterparts were not counted as enfranchised members of the political economy then structured around them. By creating, controlling, and claiming the products of their labor, nineteenth-century women could maintain a level of visibility as laborers even as that ‘invisible labor’ contributed to the

⁴⁰ See Jeanne Boydston, *Home and Work*, for a fuller discussion on the historiography of terming women’s labor ‘invisible’ and ‘reproductive’ and why such terms miss the point of women’s work in the nineteenth century.

economic sufficiency of the family unit.⁴¹ Things like Mrs. Savery's shoes render the invisible visible and make liquid savings tangible. The sovereignty produced of sacrifice is rooted, as in Robinson's chapter above, "in a pair of shoes," or in a hand-me-down gown for Louisa May Alcott's Meg March, or painted shoes for her sister Amy, or "odd scraps" of home recipes for Lydia Maria Child's readers.⁴²

The objects—homemade, borrowed, handed down, or commodified—that animate domestic narratives act out the machinations of a capitalist economy on domestic society.⁴³ Publicly traded commodities may intrude into the private spaces of homes, but domestic economists such as Lydia Maria Child and Catherine Beecher offer advice on which items to avoid. And despite the thriftiness of economy, the homemade object is elevated to prized possession. For women in the nineteenth century, learning to navigate the nascent free market had direct impacts on their position not only as wives and mothers, but as heads of household management and as autonomous women. Objects—foods, clothing, furniture, books—were a readily available tool for 'illustrating' the perils of the market to consumers, users, and wearers, who both needed goods and were compromised by them. From Robinson's narrative to Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*,

⁴¹ Boydston, *Home and Work*, xix.

⁴² Alcott, *Little Women*, 72, 232. Child, *American Frugal Housewife*, 8. Each of the items referenced here will be discussed later in this chapter.

⁴³ I use the terms object, good(s), and commodity throughout this chapter not as interchangeable terms but as reflective of the different ways material objects functioned in the home and market. When referring to an object assigned an exchange value, I use the conventional assignation, *commodity*. *Goods*, however, are not always commodities in domestic texts. As will become clear, goods are sometimes those objects which perform a beneficial, or good, function for the human user of that good precisely because it is not marked with a false exchange value but qualified according to its use value. When speaking broadly of both commodities and goods, I use the term *object(s)*. When I say, above, "objects...that animate domestic narratives act out the machinations of the market," I am alluding to theories of object agency and circulation posited by Bruno Latour, *Science in Action* and *Pandora's Hope*; Arjun Appadurai ed., *The Social Life of Things*.

with many a domestic manual in between, objects used in the home tell of a rapidly changing market order, where fashions dictate and deaden, where thrift must thrive if one wishes to survive. When Mrs. Savery opts for what we now call ‘upcycling’ (the repurposing of goods that have lost their market value) rather than purchasing what are actually unneeded goods, her actions resist the buying impulse only then growing in a burgeoning capitalist system.⁴⁴ In championing thrift and conscientious consumption, domestic manuals and narratives staged an intervention in what their authors and readers feared, rightly, was a growing consumer culture that valued goods for their exchange rather than real value. Authors such as Lydia Maria Child and Catherine Beecher refuted definitions of value that treated goods in terms of monetary equivalence, arguing instead for what we have only today recognized as the invaluable inherent in practices of ‘reduce, reuse, and recycle’, while novelists Louisa May Alcott and Maria S. Cummins and their peers stridently warned against the devaluing of personal integrity that came with conspicuous consumption. When Meg metaphorically “sees the words ‘fifty dollars’ ...stamped like a pattern down each breadth” of a dress which has cost her more than the dress is worth in self-respect, she experiences buyer’s remorse in terms both personal and economic.⁴⁵ These concepts—buyer’s remorse, upcycling, conspicuous

⁴⁴ Mary P. Ryan shows that despite the existence of “interdependent economic networks” connecting small towns across the United States, “nineteenth-century residents of [upstate New York] seemed to inch slowly and haltingly from small-scale capitalist agriculture toward an industrial city” which by the 1860s enabled retail and leisure consumption. This process, she says, is representative of local economies across the country in the nineteenth century (*Cradle of the Middle Class*, 7-10). Stuart M. Blumin documents the interior furnishings of middle class, or “nonwealthy” homes and finds that while the first floors were usually furnished with quality goods, the upstairs were rarely fully furnished, *Emergence of the Middle Class*, 158-163. This partial furnishing indicates on the one hand the growth of the middle class and on the other an approach to home furnishing that did not yet feel the Gilded Age impulse to furnish and decorate every square foot of a home.

⁴⁵ Alcott, *Little Women*, 224.

consumption, conscientious consumption—are modern in name only, rooted instead in early market conditions that provoked reactions from women consumers who knew only too well how dependent their independence was on such conditions.

Women's search for a sure footing in a new market economy was a particular problem in the similarly young nation. The cultural effort to locate nation formation firmly, if only ideologically (certainly not politically, through enfranchisement of the domestic sphere's chief inhabitants), in the domestic space is precisely why writers like Child and Beecher declare thrift culture to be a quintessentially American thing, or, a distinctly American duty. This was not a new development in popular thought or practice. As Kariann Yokota has noted, from the 1780s to 1810s Americans rejected foreign goods when they could in favor of homespun in response to an "increasingly troubling" dependence on British manufacture in the early republic which in turn birthed a material "culture of insecurity."⁴⁶ In order to establish an independent American identity, Americans approached consumption and production as a deliberate posturing in relation to, against, or outside of British markets. In the coming decades, as Laurel Thatcher Ulrich documents, nineteenth-century efforts to preserve eighteenth-century homespun helped to create a narrative of national identity, the "myth" of the "age of homespun," which spurred, among other things, the arts and crafts movement.⁴⁷ Moreover, in the decades following the American Revolutionary War, the nurturing of a new republic fell to mothers and homemakers whose instruction was valued as a necessary and integral part of any self-sustaining nation. As conscientious guardians of the household, domestic

⁴⁶ Yokota, *Unbecoming British*, 94-95. Yokota clarifies that homespun endeavored to be a close semblance of fine British manufacture, meaning that early republic Americans sought distance from British markets while attempting to emulate its trends.

⁴⁷ Ulrich, *Age of Homespun*, see especially the Prologue and Introduction.

economists therefore continued the tradition of Republican Motherhood into later generations which found themselves enmeshed in systems of trade and exchange that flourished in the still young nation. Beecher's and Child's endorsement of thrift and recycling are nineteenth-century iterations of insecurities which plagued their parents as well as testament to the mythologizing zeitgeist of a frugal, resourceful, domestically en/gendered American identity.

Domestic economy texts reified that identity through preaching the tenets of household management to a specifically American, specifically female audience. Catherine Beecher, opening her wildly popular *Treatise on Domestic Economy* (1841) by invoking the language of the Declaration of Independence, calls on American women to own their position as orchestrators of the American experiment, for "to American women, more than to any others on earth, is committed the exalted privilege of extending over the world those blessed influences" of national (and moral) success.⁴⁸ On the American social landscape—a chaos of change, mobility, and "mingling," as Beecher describes it⁴⁹—a reliable system of household governance and ordering could protect as well as elevate. Earlier, Lydia Maria Child's advice manual, originally published simply as *The Frugal Housewife* in 1829, was rebranded the *American Frugal Housewife* a year later. Child claimed, "it has become necessary to change the title of this work to the 'American Frugal Housewife' because there is an English work of the same name, not adapted to *the wants of this country*."⁵⁰ Rather than writing off the title change as a matter of copyright, which would have been a slippery claim given lenient transatlantic

⁴⁸ Beecher, *Treatise on Domestic Economy*, 13.

⁴⁹ Beecher, 40.

⁵⁰ Child, *American Frugal Housewife*, copyright page, italics mine.

copyright laws, Child attributes the decision to national needs which change at country borders. Home economics, it seemed, was integral to fulfilling the national promise.

Insulated from the vicissitudes of the market but acting as an agent of democratic principles, the domestic space fostered processes of democratic individualism that women especially wielded. In running a tight ship, household managers steered themselves toward greater personal autonomy. As Jeanne Boydston has noted, “[i]n the management of her household [a woman] might establish the outlines of an autonomous social identity.”⁵¹ The nineteenth-century home operated as a site of “stable value” amid a sea of unstable markets, as Gillian Brown has called it,⁵² in which all the Mrs. Saverys could construct a homemade sole and a homemade soul. By considering the home as a site of self-making, I draw generously from Gillian Brown’s theory of domestic individualism in her book of the same name which finds that in nineteenth-century America autonomy and self-sovereignty were relocated to the domestic realm, in opposition to the market, because of the domestic space’s ability to protect “personal life” in the face of “market contingencies” which threatened to unsettle it.⁵³ In *Sentimental Materialism*, Lori Merish has similarly identified the complicated processes of subject formation for nineteenth-century women whose status depended on a duality of submission and assertion. Domestic fiction, she argues, provided discourses of consumption which “instantiate a particular form of liberal political subjection, in which agency and subordination are intertwined.”⁵⁴ It is the purchase and ownership of desired commodities, Merish contends, that act as expressions of political subjectivities in a

⁵¹ Boydston, *Home and Work*, 33.

⁵² Brown, *Democratic Individualism*, 3.

⁵³ Brown, 3.

⁵⁴ Merish, 3.

political economy that denied such to women. As scholars such as Boydston, Brown, and Merish have convincingly argued, in domestic literature ownership is the accumulation of self, where the purchasing or use of objects reflects, and often restores, value back onto the owner.

It is the nature of the value of such objects that is, in part, the guiding inquiry of this chapter. The question of value as I show below is nearly always a moral one if not always a monetary one—an important qualification in an age of market change and contested values, in everything from specie to spirituality. Mrs. Savery's upcycled shoe soles, for instance, save her a penny and a penance, depositing a sum of self-sufficiency in her soul's bank. What Merish calls *subjectivities* and Brown calls *sovereignty* or *self-governance* are both forms of cultivating selfhood and family independence through the consumption and ownership of (certain) commodities. In fact, acts of non- and conscientious consumption, hallmarks of thrift culture, are likewise operative modes of self-fashioning through the revaluation of goods according to their moral agency.

While scholars have acknowledged the importance of the private domestic space to the ideological construction of a national identity, as a space where the autonomous self (both male and female, adult and child) could flourish, any nineteenth-century author would be quick to point out the centrality of moral philosophy to the construction of self. An integral part of many college curricula, moral philosophy was taught via texts such as Francis Wayland's *Elements of Moral Science*. It was not only male college students who had the privilege of studying moral philosophy. Female seminaries and academies taught ornamental and decorative arts, but as the century progressed, female education increasingly mirrored that of their male counterparts. As Mary Kelley points out, "the authorizing value for a woman's education, however, now came almost exclusively from

a curriculum modeled on the requirements at male colleges” including moral philosophy.⁵⁵ Moral philosophy posited that an individual’s conscience must be cultivated and equipped with the proper tools of moral discernment in order to navigate the world, in all its political, social, and cultural contours. While man was innately equipped with a “moral sense,” that sense needed guidance and cultivation through reading and instruction. Nineteenth-century moral philosophy merged religion with secular ethics and profoundly influenced major schools of thought, including the Transcendentalists, who shared teleological and social ties. For reformers such as the conflicted Calvinist Catherine Beecher, according to Kathryn Kish Sklar, morality was less about piety than it was about a national social code of ethics, though it undoubtedly was both.⁵⁶

Morality, both independent of religion and a part of it, imbued all aspects of life in the nineteenth century, and especially in domestic matters. Because morality was a sense that had to be refined and taught, it makes sense that domestic economy texts relied on a vocabulary of morality and its synonyms, even when that vocabulary sometimes lacked precision. Household advice manuals and domestic fiction play fast and loose with words such as “evil,” “right,” and “good,” which stretch from bland descriptors to relevant moral qualifiers. Lydia Maria Child uses the word “evil” no fewer than nine times in the 1832 edition of *The American Frugal Housewife*, in most cases to describe over-consumption, poverty, and other monetary states; the word “moral” seven times; and “good” a healthy 101 times in the span of 141 pages: an average recurrence of the

⁵⁵ Kelley, *Learning to Stand and Speak*, 71-75. The curriculum for the final year at Mount Holyoke Seminary, for instance, included William Paley (72). The Greenfield High School for Young Ladies in Massachusetts and the Geneva Female Seminary likewise included Paley and Wayland in its curriculum (75).

⁵⁶ Sklar, *Catherine Beecher*, 84-85.

word “good” approximately every 1.4 pages. Beecher’s *Treatise*, about twice the length of Child’s, speaks of the “evils” of various national ills and household misdemeanors at least 96 times; “moral” 70 times; and matches Child with 101 instances of variations on the word “good.”⁵⁷ These figures do not include synonyms (such as well, great, wise) or superlatives (such as better, best) or antonyms (such as bad, evil, foolish), of which there are many. Reading these words, we are reminded of today’s use of ill-defined terms to describe grocery items such as “natural,” “pure,” and “organic” which channel the connotations of their nineteenth-century predecessors’ obsession with wholesomeness. Beecher’s and Child’s ubiquitous and vague vocabulary of morality indicates just how much such concepts mattered to readers and writers and just how developmental the words’ meanings were. As such, the proliferating use of the word “good” and its synonyms in narratives such as *Little Women* or manuals such as Beecher’s comes to mean something more than our bland contemporary denotation “satisfactory” which we might initially be tempted to read it as, if we fail to give the matter much thought. Rather, I argue, *goodness* is bound up in contingencies of value exerted from the market, from the pulpit, from the textbook, which in turn shapes the material apparatus of domestic lives.

Morality changes shape in the market economy, and changes the shape of the market economy, by imbuing secular choices with salvific stakes. A note on word choice: I use the word salvific, though I hesitate to use the word salvation, because the kind of moral edification described in nineteenth-century texts has its roots in religious terminology while being at the same time non-sectarian. The salvific nature of texts and the goods described in them stems from a general conception of morality not bound by

⁵⁷ These numbers were obtained through an OCR search of digitized editions of the texts.

sectarian divides.⁵⁸ Texts such as the ones I study here grapple with the goodness of ingredients, the evils of indulgence, the morality inherent in simple taste, as part of a search for knowable value. Daunted by a world of goods newly available and at more affordable prices that masked inferior quality, women consumers had to adjust their definitions of value to extra-monetary terms, while still appreciating the social cachet attached to price tags. To help reader-consumers differentiate between a purchase that might yield social capital and a purchase that might instead do damage to economic standing, domestic writing rendered consumption and use of commodities as behavior that was alternatively damning or salvific (both personal or social). Coding commodities as potential corruptors of the soul and glorifying a lack of ornamental dress as moral edification both domestic and national, household advice and domestic drama responded to unpredictable changes in the market by discussing it in terms they did know, that of morality and ethics.

What unfolds in mid-nineteenth-century domestic literature is a growing concern for the moral integrity of self and home (and by extension, the Republic), compromised by market contingencies and social hegemonies, which manifested in routine interactions with the stuff of life. This anxiety toward conspicuous consumption developed long before Thorstein Veblen's famously pejorative phrase became a common descriptor of modern consumer behavior. Antebellum and pre-Gilded Age anxieties surrounding consumer behavior were a reaction to social demands of increased consumption that grew with the expansion of the market and the proliferation of magazines, periodicals, and other print media which advertised seasonal trends to which readers were expected to

⁵⁸ For more on the non-sectarian yet religious literary and social landscape in the nineteenth century, see Claudia Stokes, *The Altar at Home*.

abide.⁵⁹ Texts by Beecher, Child, Alcott and the like posit what I read as a morality ethics of consumption, which is to say a conscientious consumption, bound up in narratives of morality, value, selfhood and autonomy: An accumulated sense of sovereignty and self through moralistic (non)spending. By singling out the “homemade sole” of my title and Robinson’s narrative, I draw on the twining of three things: (1) actualized self-hood (a sole self) made possible through an education in domestic economy; (2) the salvific nature of thrift and salvage (a homemade soul); and (3) the deliberate home origins of both of the former, or, the home as the site of production—of Self and the things that constitute it. The means of the production of selfhood are disseminated in these books through commodity critique that restores to consumers a sense of self that is both morally and economically sound because it refuses to separate the moral from the economic.

GENRES OF DOMESTIC WRITING

More than any of the other forms and genres examined in this dissertation, the sister genres of domestic manuals and domestic fiction were long-lived and ubiquitous, developing in their modern form in the eighteenth century and continuing through today. In the nineteenth century, domestic manuals generated what Kathryn Kish Sklar calls “manual mania”⁶⁰ equaled by the demand for domestic fiction heralded by the ‘feminine fifties.’ Child’s *American Frugal Housewife*, originally published in 1829, sold more than six thousand copies in its first year, with 35 editions over the next 21 years.⁶¹ Print culture’s dabbling in thrift culture constituted a response to significant shifts in material

⁵⁹ This resembles an early version of ‘keeping up with the Joneses’ with endemic roots in Smithian capitalism; see *Wealth of Nations*, 821, 274; see also Ann Smart Martin, *Buying into the World of Goods*, 9.

⁶⁰ Sklar, ed., *Treatise on Domestic Economy* by Catherine Beecher, v.

⁶¹ Geffen, ed., *American Frugal Housewife*, by Lydia Maria Child, vii.

conditions which forced the agrarian majority to make the rocky transition to cash markets, a transition that continued in the decades leading up to the Civil War.⁶² Child's manual offered practical advice for those who needed it, marketing her "cheap little book of economical hints" to "those who are not ashamed of economy."⁶³ Soon after, Catherine Beecher's *Treatise on Domestic Economy* (1841) took the literary market by storm in the first of what would be eleven other books she authored on the subject, many of which were revisions of *A Treatise*, including *The American Woman's Home*, co-authored with her sister Harriet Beecher Stowe.⁶⁴

Domestic manuals and domestic fiction proliferated simultaneously on the literary market, paring plain instruction with didactic narrative in ways that were both complementary and mutually reifying. They worked conjointly to infuse the literary market with "safe" books, to use Child's descriptor of her *Family Nurse*,⁶⁵ whose function was to rescue households from the dangers of impulse buying and to save families from the moral corruption of conspicuous consumption. In so doing, Child's objection to luxury goods and wasteful spending was meant to help create a "safe" Republic in which conscientious participants in the market economy might make up, reshape, and transform the body politic. Domestic fiction, meanwhile, fed the demand for its sister manuals by describing scenes of reading the manuals or cataloguing them as the contents of bookshelves. The young heroine of Solon Robinson's *How to Live*, for instance, brings a copy of Catherine Beecher's *Domestic Economy for Young Girls* to her

⁶² In her "Introduction" to Child's manual, Alice M. Geffen situates the book's publication within what she labels a depression ("[i]n the 1820s the country was in the midst of a depression," viii) though this periodization runs counter to established historical timelines of economic depressions and panics in the early nineteenth century.

⁶³ Child, *American Frugal Housewife*, 6.

⁶⁴ Sklar, ed., *Treatise on Domestic Economy* by Catherine Beecher, v.

⁶⁵ Child, *Family Nurse*, 3.

new situation. When the young daughter of the family spies it on the shelf, she begins reading from it a passage on the necessity of learning domestic economy for women of all ages, classes, and marital status. The young charge declares it “a very good” book.⁶⁶ As the girl continues to peruse the shelf, she spots Lydia Maria Child’s *American Frugal Housewife*, reads the full title, “to those not ashamed of economy” and decides, “that will suit us well.”⁶⁷ Ever determined to be successful in her own domestic enterprise, Meg March of *Little Women* also consults a home manual, a bit too practically and not quite pragmatically, as she pores over “Mrs. Cornelius’ Receipt Book as if it were a mathematical exercise, working out the problems with patience and care.”⁶⁸

In sentimental fiction, Beecher’s prescriptive “utopia of pots and pans,” as Philip Fisher describes Beecher’s ideal kitchen,⁶⁹ could be imagined more fully, with quotidian challenges and solutions experienced by sympathetically identifiable characters. Domestic manuals provided the instructions and motive for self-sacrifice, whereas novels like *Little Women* narrativized the struggles of it. Texts we label “domestic advice” or “domestic economy” manuals provided the rubric of behavior that texts we alternately call “domestic fiction” or “sentimental fiction” or “women’s fiction” acted out in ways that upheld and complicated the teachings of the former. Alcott’s novel, for instance, acts out in the domestic setting the trials of sacrifice demanded by domestic advice texts, precisely in the way that Nina Baym describes the female heroic tradition of woman’s fiction, where the female protagonist’s deprivation “indicates social corruption and whose triumph ensures the reconstruction of a beneficent social order.”⁷⁰ So Child and

⁶⁶ Robinson, *How to Live*, 60.

⁶⁷ Robinson, *How to Live*, 63.

⁶⁸ Alcott, *Little Women*, 218.

⁶⁹ Fisher, *Hard Facts*, 88.

⁷⁰ Baym, *Woman’s Fiction*, 12.

Beecher warn of the “social corruption” wrought of excessive spending, where, for Child, “extravagance” is the “prevailing evil” of the land.⁷¹ The redemption of the Republic—the “reconstruction of a beneficent social order”—lies in good home management, and it is women’s role as homemakers that is the chief reason “why American women should feel an interest in the support of the democratic institutions of their Country.”⁷² As such, non-fiction domestic manuals complement the genre conventions Baym identifies in women’s fiction. For every one of Child and Beecher’s pep talks on economy, there is conversely a sighing Amy or a solemn Meg ruing the unfairness that “some girls...have lots of pretty things, and other girls nothing at all.”⁷³ Put simply, it has been my observation that while one genre provided explicit instruction, the other modeled it. These intertextual moments of endorsement and illustrated use fortified the literary market while building up the home, such that Meg’s “new paradise” though beset with domestic trials was anyway not merely “a house” but a proper “home.”⁷⁴

Child’s, Beecher’s, and Alcott’s works are quintessentially illustrative of the morality ethics of self-actualizing conscientious consumption. Child’s *American Frugal Housewife* and Beecher’s *Treatise on Domestic Economy*, both published antebellum, helped establish the genre of domestic advice literature and provided essential instruction on consumer behavior and household production. Alcott’s runaway postbellum bestseller, published initially as a two-part companion series (*Little Women* and *Good Wives*, now published together under *Little Women*), narrativizes the challenges of growing up female in the mid-nineteenth century, which necessarily involved navigating the new market

⁷¹ Child, *American Frugal Housewife*, 89.

⁷² Beecher, *Treatise*, 1.

⁷³ Alcott, *Little Women*, 11.

⁷⁴ Alcott, *Little Women*, 218.

economy in the search for self. All three were widely read. I am not insensitive to the difficulty of choosing one novel to throw corresponding manuals in relief. There is no shortage of domestic novels to consult for fictionalizations of the ways conscientious consumption figured in narratives of female *Bildungsroman*. *Little Women* is but one of a corpus of domestic narratives that enjoyed prolonged success on the mid-nineteenth century literary market, joining other beloved now-classics such as Fanny Fern's *Ruth Hall*, Maria S. Cummin's *The Lamplighter*, Susan Warner's *The Wide, Wide World*, and E.D.E.N. Southworth and Catherine Maria Sedgwick's many novels. However, I have chosen *Little Women* to speak to fictionalizations of women's approaches to consumption for two reasons. First, because Alcott was subjected to extreme purchase avoidance and thrift at the hand of her father's failed farm experiment at Fruitlands.⁷⁵ This experience necessarily informs her semi-autobiographical novel and allows for a fuller, three-dimensional, realistic account of the struggles of poverty that works as a nice counter to the high-flung ideals of, especially, Beecher. Though I do not explicitly treat Alcott's experiences at Fruitlands here, it is always ever in the background. Second, I have chosen Alcott's *Little Women* because it does in one book what it takes several other domestic narratives to do in composite—and in lighter, more relatable terms. Where Susan Warner's *The Wide, Wide World* sermonizes, Alcott's *Little Women* sympathizes. Though Maria S. Cummin's *The Lamplighter* thrills, Alcott inspires. If Fanny Fern's *Ruth Hall* also inspires, Alcott's novel does so without vindictiveness. Importantly, nineteenth-

⁷⁵ Fruitlands, a Transcendentalist utopian community led by Amos Bronson Alcott and Charles Lane, was guided by principles of removal from commercial society including adhering to strict vegan diets and avoiding animal labor of any kind. It lasted seven months. Chapter Four of this dissertation, "Farm Fantasies: Humans, Hauntings, and Commodities in *The Blithedale Romance*" deals more closely with Alcott's brand of boycott and market removal.

century readers would have encountered many or all of these texts, contributing to an accumulation of knowledge, know-how, and self-worth in domestic life.

REDUCE, REUSE, RECYCLE

Domestic economy is the performance of self-sacrifice through conscientious consumption. That ability to choose not to buy was made possible through preservation or reuse of used materials. The emphasis on resourcefulness was not only good sense but an intervention in the tendency toward entropy in domestic states. For Child, “true economy of housekeeping is simply the art of gathering up all the fragments, so that nothing be lost... Nothing should be thrown away so long as it is possible to make any use of it, however trifling that use may be.”⁷⁶ Not coincidentally, this statement which opens Child’s manual alludes to the biblical story of the Feeding of the Five Thousand, in which Jesus provides sustenance to a large crowd with only five loaves of barley and two fish.⁷⁷ The allusion invites a comparison between Jesus’s miracle and the miraculously multiplying effects of economy; the moral connotations of economy as represented here are also worth noting. That “nothing be lost” allows value to be retained, and order to be maintained, so that all may be gained—self, family standing, moral integrity. Perhaps, even Child’s book itself, composed of “Odd Scraps,” as she calls one section, is itself an expression of “true economy” by preserving and making available the odds and ends of accumulated knowledge, made more useful because seemingly trivial.

Child’s ability to capitalize on her “Odd Scraps” of knowledge in book form is only the culminating expression of the kind of household production she encourages

⁷⁶ Child, *Frugal*, 3.

⁷⁷ John 6:12

throughout her book; the manual is a storage device for handy tips on how and what to make at home, of which some do and others do not end up on the market. Household production ranged from taking things to market in order to capitalize upon the specific products of labor, wherein household production created actual commodities, to cutting off participation in markets by creating homemade goods instead, wherein production functioned as do-it-yourself enterprise. Instruction includes directives in straight forward language for making all manner of things, including homemade lemon syrup so as not to buy an inferior product, or saving table scraps for mincemeat pies in order to avoid additional butcher's expenses, or how to make any number of common homeopathic remedies as preventatives to disease and the attendant pricey doctor's bills.⁷⁸ One way to make money off household waste? Store up old rags to take to market for resale to paper mills, for "paper brings a cent a pound."⁷⁹ Such tips on making and saving encompassed household production, thrift, and non-consumption in order to layout the right time and place for each. Whether capitalizing on the detritus of the home or crafting a homemade product so as not to lose capital on inferior or overly pricey goods, the intended effect of such household management was to build value into the home and family unit.

In addition to cataloging which odds and ends to bring to market and which market products to avoid, Child's manual distills advice on repurposing already purchased goods, extending the life of already purchased goods, or endorsing correct purchasing behavior in order to produce household necessities at no cost to the family wallet. These include, for instance, how to care for straw carpets (wash in salt and water), how to prevent color fading on most textiles (ox's gall), how to set the glazing on newly

⁷⁸ Child, *Frugal*, 20, 17, 21, 22, 24.

⁷⁹ Child, *Frugal*, 16.

purchased earthen ware (heat to boiling), how much and from whom to buy woolen yarn (“from some one in the country, *whom you can trust*. The thread stores make profits upon it, of course”), when to put out for mending (never), when to buy breads and cakes (also never).⁸⁰ *The American Frugal Housewife*, and other such manuals, is a storehouse of insightful edicts on the role of household production and labor as it related to things in the home and markets outside it. In other words, it uses the language of household production to treat the procurement, care, and maintenance of household goods and food stuffs as part of stabilizing economic sufficiency.

Though household production, in its earlier eighteenth-century agrarian iteration, was becoming unrecognizable and almost obsolete by the mid-nineteenth-century, domestic advice manuals such as Child’s refused to see the home space as comprehensively removed from sites of production. Rather, the home was a space of near constant employment that yielded returns that both met and transcended cash values, as catalogued above, from cash-for-rags exchange to preservation of investment through the preservation of household goods. Household production which often functioned as “purchase-avoidance work,” as Jeanne Boydston calls it,⁸¹ actively added to the capital of the family unit through certain condoned activities, such as mending and preserving.

As the market made geographic and demographic inroads to the young United States and cash began to beat out other modes of exchange, households increasingly participated in cash markets that stamped new definitions of value onto work. For lower middle and working class families, women’s handicraft was commodified as cheap labor, or “put-out work,” that sent the products of their labor away from home and into the

⁸⁰ Child, *Frugal*, 21, 9, 11, 11 (italics mine), 8, 9.

⁸¹ Boydston, *Home and Work*, 40.

market for only minimal returns.⁸² For women in the emerging middle class, household labor was likewise performed in the home, but its products were not recognized as products as such because they had no assigned cash value and were not actively traded on the market. Household production such as that performed by middle class women and children—including cooking, cleaning, laundry, care for and preservation of furnishings, as well, of course, as childcare and education—fell incorrectly under the category of reproductive labor, an assumption women’s historians have roundly disproved, arguing that work performed in and through the household did actively produce capital by increasing savings, performing labor that had real value on the market (such as cooking, cleaning, and laundry services), and strengthening the household against the whims of the market.⁸³ A wife’s household labor could return, Jeanne Boydston calculates, a “cash value worth twice her maintenance.”⁸⁴ But the point of the value of women’s work is that it went beyond quantifiable value, for as Boydston further notes, “the product of the labor of housework was the household itself.”⁸⁵

The labor of domestic economy, Child argues, is the “employment” of “saving money.”⁸⁶ Sometimes household labor was touted purely for its value as work. “Cheap as stockings are,” Child reasons, for instance, “it is good economy to knit them” because the making of them fills up “odd minutes of time” that ought to be gainfully employed, especially by children and the elderly.⁸⁷ “It is an *employment*” (italics orig.) Child emphasizes, one that adds to the value of the household by achieving the dual purpose of

⁸² See Dublin, *Women at Work*.

⁸³ See Boydston, *Home and Work*; Cott, *Bonds of Womanhood*; Jensen, *Loosening the Bonds*; and Ulrich, *Good Wives*.

⁸⁴ Boydston, *Home and Work*, 135.

⁸⁵ Boydston, *Home and Work*, 125.

⁸⁶ Child, *Frugal*, 3.

⁸⁷ Child, *Frugal*, 4.

providing an occupation by keeping occupied.⁸⁸ The knitting of stockings or the picking of berries to sell at market or any one of the many other household “employments” Child endorses effects an education in “morals and habits.”⁸⁹ Thus, household production, or, making money by saving it, was “an employment” that also produced lifelong skills and moral fiber, values made all the more valuable because they had no cash equivalence.

Because of changing “employments” in early nineteenth century labor markets, it was to the housekeeper that America needed to look for stability and safety in the storms of politico-economic change, as domestic economy texts argued. Catherine Beecher’s seminal text on women’s work in the nineteenth century recognizes this central role of female housekeepers in a new nation and economy where “everything is moving and changing” and women, whether acting as domestic servants or engaged in the management of them, are indispensable actors in “this great moral enterprise” of the United States.⁹⁰ A homemaker’s life is by job description tasked with ordering a disorderly state, and therefore answers the particular needs of the new and changing nation: according to Beecher, a homemaker’s life, “made up as [it] is of ten thousand desultory and minute items,” necessarily “demands system and regularity” in the face of internal and external vicissitudes where “this perpetually fluctuating state of society seems forever to bar any such system and regularity.”⁹¹ Beecher and other household advice authors responded directly to their own “anxieties, vexations, perplexities,” as Beecher identifies them,⁹² caused directly by changing labor markets and the growth of the middle class. Beecher spoke directly to what Brown calls the “vicissitudes of the

⁸⁸ Child, *Frugal*, 4, italics orig.

⁸⁹ Child, *Frugal*, 4.

⁹⁰ Beecher, *Treatise*, 16, 13.

⁹¹ Beecher, *Treatise*, 18.

⁹² Beecher, *Treatise*, 18.

market,” explaining to her readers that due to the “increasing number of those who live in a style demanding much hired service” (i.e. the middle class) and the simultaneously “[increasing] demands for female labor” in “our manufactories,” that there were now a class of people who desired domestic help but could not pay competitive wages.⁹³ These conditions led to a new set of duties for American middle class women: they must do the “hard labor” of managing their own homes.⁹⁴ Set against newly established cash markets, surges in population, increased availability of (often questionable) goods and services, expanded trade and social networks, and the double bind of separate spheres, Beecher’s “anxieties” reflect cultural responses to changing economic and social structures in the early and mid-century. Household managers, Beecher charged, must understand, respond to, and exert inestimable influence over “the perplexities and evils...resulting from the fluctuating state of society” around them.⁹⁵

Child likewise responded to such fluctuations by calling for a greater control of household production and a more conscientious consumption. To Child, reducing spending and increasing household production was a matter of national urgency with moral implications. While New England industrial manufacture expanded to ever greater levels of production in the 1820s, at the time of Child’s writing, driving down prices in northern markets, consumers felt the impulse to buy. But compulsive spending, especially conspicuous compulsive spending done intentionally to buy one’s way up the social ladder, could too easily reverse exactly that which it aimed to achieve. For Child, this was sacrilege. To live above one’s means, specifically by purchasing superfluous furniture and home goods for show, is

⁹³ Beecher, *Treatise*, 17.

⁹⁴ Beecher, *Treatise*, 18.

⁹⁵ Beecher, *Treatise*, 21.

false and wicked....More than that, it is wrong—morally wrong, so far as the individual is concerned; and injurious beyond calculation to the interest of our country. To what are the increasing beggary and discouraged exertions of the present period owing? A multitude of causes have no doubt tended to increase the evil [of rampant poverty], but the root of the whole matter is the extravagance of all classes of people....We shall never be free from embarrassment until we cease to be ashamed of industry and economy.⁹⁶

At stake is individual and national freedom, the latter because of the former. The national implications of one's personal consumer/ist decisions feature throughout the genre: in Beecher's *Treatise*, of course, but also in lesser known manuals such as Mrs. L. G. Abell's *Skilful* [sic] *Housewife's Book* and Eliza Leslie's *House Book*, as well as short lively narratives such as Eliza Warren's *How I Managed My House on Two Hundred Pounds a Year* and Robinson's *How to Live*. Child here states plainly what other domestic advice manuals echo throughout the mid-century, following almost with precision each market crash over the next several decades: that the freedom of the nation (and the individual) is dependent upon the salvific effects afforded by the industry of domestic economy.

Yet not all home industry is productive. Alcott grapples with exactly this struggle through the trials of Meg March Brooke, whose failed jelly enterprise is a lesson in domestic humility. Meg, who alone of the March girls can remember more affluent times, must do more with less. As Alcott's domestic archetype, Meg struggles to fit into the old and worn habits of domestic trials, and must learn, as Child's readers, to be not ashamed of embracing thrift. But as she matures and enters that domestic state for which she has long been preparing, Meg learns new lessons on the value of home production, and the need *sometimes* of consumption. She does not turn to domestic enterprise out of necessity or smart economy, but out of a desire to "see her store-room stocked with homemade

⁹⁶ Child, *Frugal*, 6.

preserves” for no other reason than the pride that they should look nice there.⁹⁷ Having ordered out for jars and sugar and gathered currants from her own tree, ripe for the picking, Meg embarks on a day-long jelly enterprise. Like any entrepreneur, she knows she must spend money to make money, but the outcome of her experiment yields an invaluable lesson in humble home production rather than aspirational returns on her investment. When her husband John returns home in the evening, he looks in to see “confusion and despair; one edition of jelly was trickled from pot to pot, another lay upon the floor, and a third was burning gaily on the stove....Mrs. Brooke [Meg], with her apron over her head, sat sobbing dismally.”⁹⁸ The jelly “gaily” simmers on, while Meg weeps over the failed domestic enterprise of jarring jams, a common receipt in domestic manuals and indeed “hadn’t she seen Hannah do it hundreds of times?”⁹⁹ The jelly turns on Meg, “baptizing” her pinafore and floor in its gooey sacrament to pious domesticity.¹⁰⁰ We can forgive John Brooke’s laughing response to “throw it out the window,” though Meg’s sensitivities bristle at his levity.¹⁰¹ Yet the message here is that some purchases are okay. “I’ll buy you quarts if you want it,” John reassures Meg, in attempts to calm the distressed housewife/entrepreneur, indicating that home enterprise for the sake of mere enterprise is valueless.¹⁰² For Meg had aspired to idealism in her domesticity, to maintain a “glorified bower” rather than a frankly operating home, committing the familiar sin of aspiration through material goods, be they homemade or not, for which she needs to be “baptized” in her errors.¹⁰³ Meg’s failure is an atonement,

⁹⁷ Alcott, *Little Women*, 218.

⁹⁸ Alcott, 220.

⁹⁹ Alcott, 219.

¹⁰⁰ Alcott, 220.

¹⁰¹ Alcott, 220.

¹⁰² Alcott, 220.

¹⁰³ Alcott, 218, 220.

and she learns a valuable lesson. Home production done out of necessary economy is salvific; incurring costs (ordering out for pots and jars and sugars) for the sake of saving money is counterproductive and damning. Domestic labor performed solely for self-gratification is not only a luxury, granted to those who can afford to set aside the cash and time to invest in home production as a mere hobby, but also wasteful, as Meg's disastrous attempt helps her (and her readers) to realize. Home industry ought to be productive, born out of need, not aspirational and wasteful as is Meg's misguided play at domestic economy, or else it veers too close to extravagance and heedless spending, the very root of the 'evil' that home economy sought to expunge.

The "evil of...extravagance," as Child describes the immorality of overspending,¹⁰⁴ is born out of market trends that favor the purchase of new imported or 'fancy' goods above recycled and reused ones. European fashions, sailing to the new world on the waves of global shipping and breakneck publishing, enjoyed hegemony in the young market economy that still preferred to buy manufactured textiles from overseas, despite exporting the raw materials from its southern states.¹⁰⁵ (New England manufacture would soon, but not quite yet, compete with British markets.) Ever anxious to protect the American people from themselves and their many sins, Child laments, "Our wealthy people copy all the foolish and extravagant caprice of European fashion."¹⁰⁶ Blind copying, the particular habit of unthinking consumers, is perceived as idiocy ("foolish and extravagant caprice") that bends to the fluctuations of trends rather than developing homegrown fashion and design. As one other household advice author cautions, women risk forfeiting cultural capital by thoughtlessly obeying sartorial whims:

¹⁰⁴ Child, *Frugal*, 89.

¹⁰⁵ Yokota, *Unbecoming British*, 64.

¹⁰⁶ Child, *Frugal*, 89.

“the charms of an accomplished woman become enhanced by a proper regard to her attire; but the slave of fashion is perhaps one of the most pitiable objects in creation.”¹⁰⁷ A slippery slope indeed from respectable taste to trendy objectification. Such trends proliferated in print, especially in ads taken out in periodicals which regularly described goods in terms of provenance and construction. Fancy goods, French textiles, etc. were given pride of place in retailers’ lists, as in the ads from *Godey’s Lady’s Book* in 1847, where local proprietorship contrasts with global trends and material construction, such as “Florence braid” or “Coburg straw” or “Parisian style tippet.”¹⁰⁸ Yet, as Abell’s and Child’s attitudes testify, the practice of importing or copying European fashions was also increasingly met with a pragmatic wariness and nationalist disdain. In fact, even *Godey’s*, which did originally model its fashion plates after French fashion magazines, ceased duplicating foreign drawings a short time after its inception in 1830.¹⁰⁹ But for Child the real crux of the issue of copying, and copying heedlessly, was ignorance of actual national differences in, of all things, law. Unconscientious consumers of fashions that were copied from foreign trends do so, Child warns, “without considering that we have not [European] laws of inheritance among us; and that our frequent changes of policy render property far more precarious here than in the old world.”¹¹⁰ Thoughtless consumption of European finery and fickle fashions was a risk, in every sense of the word—prone to loss and forfeiture of ownership.

¹⁰⁷ Abell, *Skilful [sic] Housewife’s Book*, 33.

¹⁰⁸ “No. 1 Lady’s Riding Hat,” *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, July 1847; “Oakford Fashions for Fall and Winter,” *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, July 1847.

¹⁰⁹ Kunciov, *Mr. Godey’s Ladies*, 6.

¹¹⁰ Child, *Frugal*, 89.

FOR THOSE WHO ARE NOT ASHAMED OF ECONOMY

Owning things was just as important to constructs of domesticity and domestic economy as non-consumption. Ownership and non-consumption are not opposing terms but are rather mutually constitutive of self-proprietorship. It is not about how much one owns, or the accumulation of goods, contrary to emergent capitalist tenets, but, for domestic writers such as Louisa May Alcott, it is all in the deliberate ownership of certain goods over others or in the choice to own good things and the edification wrought by prolonged ownership of old things. No one so perfectly crystalizes that moral as Alcott does to comical ends in *Little Women*. Alcott's March girls, like Child's readers, must also embrace thrift out of necessity, coming to terms, while they come of age, with a house full of recycled and reused things. From Amy's hand-me-down clothes which "quenched the vanities" to which she is prone, and Meg's recouped ball gown of "many-times pressed and mended white tarlatan," old things are vehicles of character formation that, through humbling their users, elevate their moral, and later social, standing.¹¹¹ Self-proprietorship is made more achievable through humbled ownership of old, still useful goods.

The ever-persecuted rising socialite Amy learns her fair share of public lessons in material humility. In one scene, the social aspirations of the youngest sister are checked by the albeit too forthcoming mentor, Jo, whose comments during a social call lead to lessons for both in the value of what we might today call 'up-cycling', or, improving upon the uses of an object (usually salvage) by repurposing it. Having agreed to the odious errand previously, Jo accompanies Amy on a string of social visits one busy afternoon. Amy sits prettily, performing the part of a respectable young lady quite

¹¹¹ Alcott, 40, 72.

perfectly until Jo, asked where her blue bonnet is from, answers “with unnecessary frankness” that the raw material has been repurposed for fashionable ends.¹¹² What was once a harshly colored hat is now a soft shade of blue: “Oh, Amy painted it,” she says aloud, “you can’t buy those soft shades, so we paint ours any color we like.” Unaware of her sister’s mortification at this admission, Jo continues, “Why, [Amy] wanted a pair of blue boots for Sallie’s party, so she just painted her soiled white ones the loveliest shade of sky-blue you ever saw, and they looked exactly like satin.” Never mind Jo’s “air of pride in her sister’s accomplishments,” Jo’s social faux pas is a comical moment of privately recognizing the need of thrift and the attendant need of public discretion in the face of possible social discrimination. Amy’s lesson, on the other hand, is the same that Mrs. Savery’s critics at the beginning of this chapter must learn the hard way, that it is high time to be “not ashamed of economy,” as the sub-title of Child’s manual (with Jo-like frankness) resoundingly states.

Deftly pitting Amy’s embarrassment against Jo’s pride, Alcott’s rendering of the scene sends a clear message. As Jo reasonably though insensitively puts it to Amy after the spoiled visit, their socio-economic standing is already quite obvious, therefore “it’s no use pretending” to higher standing by affecting ownership of newer, (and the implication is, stupidly) stylish things.¹¹³ Yet, Amy counters, Jo’s blunt tongue does damage by “[exposing] our poverty” in an “unnecessary way.” Of course, they are both correct. The awkward comedy of Jo’s rational but unfiltered honesty “exposes” for the reader the final lesson: that painted shoes and hats are not a pretense if they perform the same work as the material object for which they stand (if “they [look] exactly like satin” the equivalence is

¹¹² Alcott, 232. All direct quotes following in this paragraph also appear on page 232.

¹¹³ Alcott, 232. All direct quotes from *Little Women* in this paragraph also appear on page 232.

justifiably, rhetorically sound, and not a dishonest magic trick on par with the market ploys abounding in the corrupt marketplace).¹¹⁴ The lesson furthermore is that the up-cycling of old objects is useful and necessary for *maintaining* middle class social standing.

Amy's talent in painting old shoes and hats to look as well as their pricier, newer commodity counterparts will be reward enough for the middle-class child who must come to terms with her social standing. But the process of learning that is long and painful for Amy. Early on, in the pickled limes incident, Amy experiences the penalties for a pretension that is not honestly warranted or done out of the sincere making-do attitude that characterizes domestic economy. In the aptly titled chapter "Amy's Valley of Humiliation," a secret economy in the latest school trend, pickled limes, is found out, to Amy's chagrin and ultimate betterment. In the secret economy, pickled limes are traded under their teacher's nose as "debts of honor" between the girls.¹¹⁵ Amy, who woefully owes "at least a dozen," borrows credit from Meg to restore her social standing.¹¹⁶ Amy's borrowed social capital sours, however, when the slighted Jenny Snow rats Amy out and Amy suffers corporeal punishment for her crimes against the schoolmaster and her greater crimes against honesty and humility. Though Mrs. March objects to the method of punishment, she agrees that since Amy "broke the rules...she deserved some kind of punishment" in order to re-inscribe good behavior.¹¹⁷ The real crime is in "parading" and

¹¹⁴ On the proliferation of fakes, forgeries, and counterfeits in the nineteenth-century, see Mihm, *Nation of Counterfeiters*; and Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women*; and the section titled "Sensing Immoral Goods" in chapter three of this dissertation, "Conjuring Consumer Resistance and Moral Capital in Frances Harper's *Sowing and Reaping*."

¹¹⁵ Alcott, 57.

¹¹⁶ Alcott, 57.

¹¹⁷ Alcott, 61.

“conceit” as Marmee calls Amy’s pretended social airs, which is bought through contraband and is not an earnest display of “real talents and goodness.”¹¹⁸ Amy learns her lesson: “‘I see; it’s nice to have accomplishments, and be elegant but not to show off, or get perked up,’ said Amy thoughtfully.”¹¹⁹ Jo brings the lesson back into the material realm by summing up the ridiculousness of conspicuous consumption. It is not “proper to wear all your bonnets, and gowns, and ribbons, at once, [just so] that folks may know you’ve got ’em.”¹²⁰

KEEPING UP WITH THE MOFFATS

In an early market capitalism, writers and readers were not convinced that showy spending could actually elevate social standing in ways sociologists have shown it to have done in later eras.¹²¹ Instead, mid-nineteenth-century domestic writers agree that what Lydia Maria Child calls the “false and wicked parade” of conspicuous consumption in actuality “does not in fact procure a man valuable friends, or extensive influence.”¹²² In many domestic novels, materialism for the sake of social aspiration is condemned as a betrayer of corrupt morals in contrast to the moral edification of material restraint.

In another domestic narrative, Ellen Montgomery’s trials with the Dunscombes in Susan Warner’s popular *The Wide, Wide World*, for instance, stem from the combination

¹¹⁸ Alcott, 61.

¹¹⁹ Alcott, 61

¹²⁰ Alcott, 62.

¹²¹ Deliberately visible and excessive consumption for the purposes of elevating social standing, characteristic of the Gilded Age, is chiefly what Thorstein Veblen responds to in 1899 in *The Theory of the Leisure Class*; it is where he coins the term *conspicuous consumption*.

¹²² Child, *Frugal*, 5.

of her near-orphaned status and plain attire.¹²³ On board a steamer bound for her new home, practically alone and with no allies, Ellen overhears her escorts, Mrs. Dunscombe and her daughter, gossiping over the silliness of a simple white bonnet Ellen's dying mother had given Ellen to wear on the journey to her new home. The eavesdropped conversation is an education, the first of many, in learning the value of material objects as they pertain to self-confidence, self-integrity, and self-hood. Gripped with embarrassment at the unassuming white hat, Ellen spends the rest of the day hatless until a future benefactor, Mr. Humphrey, questions her about her uncovered state. When she explains the shame the bonnet made her feel, he counters that she rather ought to be ashamed not to wear it, for her mother instructed her to do so and, moreover, because it is insensible to cast off necessities, humble as they may be, simply because "some people that haven't probably half [her mother's] sense choose to make merry with it."¹²⁴ What Mr. Humphreys helps Ellen to understand (that her mother's gift ought to be cherished and used, and that simply because something costs less cents doesn't mean it has no sense), informs Ellen's learned approach to the market and to structures of social and family networks that tinged the purity of certain sentimental goods. The wearing of the bonnet, which undergoes a process of stigmatization and destigmatization, becomes a method of practicing obedience and, therefore, according to Warner's tale, self-becoming. For, over the course of the novel, Ellen can only come of age through emotional self-control and material self-sacrifice.¹²⁵

¹²³ There is a quick intertextual moment in *Little Women* when Alcott mentions Jo "reading and crying over "The Wide, Wide, World," up in the apple-tree" (93). As previously mentioned, domestic texts not only shared the literary stage, but often gave each other approbatory nods within each other's texts.

¹²⁴ Warner, *Wide, Wide, World*, 79.

¹²⁵ See also Crain, "WWW: The Wide, Wide, World's Web" in *The Story of A*. Of particular note in Crain's study of the maternal plot of literacy acquisition and female

The source of Ellen's and Amy's embarrassment is a sense of social parity that is bound to material signifiers of class, a troubling entanglement that domestic writers presciently forewarned their readers of even before it was articulated in sociological theories of conspicuous consumption. In Alcott's scene of social visit propriety and (non)-pretension described in the previous section, the end message is quite clear: the hypervisibility of conspicuous consumption for the sake of elevating one's social status is ridiculous. Jo's use of hyperbolic comedy to visualize the silliness of conspicuous consumption as the wearing at all times of all one's pretty things only makes the message that much clearer to her young listener. Amy, like those reading her story, must learn to reject "pretended social airs" that too often take the form of expensive things bought on credit rather than earned by industry and virtue. The lesson is reiterated throughout *Little Women* in various failed aspirations to ownership of new, unnecessary, flashy goods. While Amy's crime was "parading" ill-begot contraband and committing the "conceit" of false ownership, eldest sibling Meg is continually learning the economic consequences of extravagance.¹²⁶

Always one for a good moral (in the sense of Christian parables as well as secular Aesopian fables), Alcott describes those consequences in vaguely religious terms, where buyer's remorse is indicative of a committed sin. In one instance, the newlywed Meg quickly caves in to temptation and just as quickly learns from her transgressions. Though Meg habitually refuses her friend Sally Moffat's gifts of little trifling "pretty things" for their false testimony to unattained wealth, she does give in to the occasional impulse buy,

bildungsroman in Warner's novel is this: "Ellen's course through the world required the skills and materials newly necessary to the white middle-class girl's existence: reading and books" (146).

¹²⁶ Alcott, 61.

finding a kind of therapy in the moment of consumption which alleviates her feelings of “being poor.”¹²⁷ Importantly, however, the purchase only hastens her sense of “[feeling] wicked” afterward.¹²⁸ Meg’s lesson in the evils of consumption culminates in the purchase of a silk dress that masquerades as a “bargain.”¹²⁹ Meg falls victim to the temptations of fashion not long after she and John are married. “[T]hat autumn,” recounts the narrator,

the serpent got into Meg’s paradise, and tempted her, like many a modern Eve, not with apples but with dress....Sally had been buying silks and Meg ached for a new one—just a handsome light one for parties—her black silk was so common, and thin things for evening wear were only proper for girls....Sallie had urged her to [buy it], had offered to loan the money, and with the best intentions in life, had tempted Meg beyond her strength. In an evil moment the shopman held up the lovely, shimmering folds, and said, “A bargain, I assure you, ma’am.” She answered, “I’ll take it”....When she got home she tried to assuage the pangs of remorse by spreading forth the lovely silk; but it looked less silvery now, didn’t become her at all, and the words “fifty dollars” seemed stamped like a pattern down each breadth. She put it away; but it haunted her.¹³⁰

This moment brings together several key themes of conscientious consumption in domestic economy: the sin of un-conscientious consumption, the falsity of commodity objects, and the material imprint of value on things. Alcott’s language of temptation by a trespassing “serpent” and Meg’s capitulation in an “evil moment” directly invokes biblical parameters for assessing consumer behavior. That Meg’s coup de grâce is wrought by a monetary transaction is indicative of an approach to the marketplace that views it as a site of moral action and transaction, where certain purchases divest one of one’s moral earnings, where salvation and savings are concomitant indices of value. The marketplace, populated by false objects like the dress and false prophets like the

¹²⁷ Alcott, 223.

¹²⁸ Alcott, 224.

¹²⁹ Alcott, 224.

¹³⁰ Alcott, 223-224.

shopman, does not advertise value in the ways domestic writers such as Alcott defined value. Instead, buyers (especially and specifically women) had to rely on their powers of discernment to catch the lie in the “bargain.” Meg lacks the discernment necessary to navigate the moral ambiguities of the marketplace. The false testimony of the corrupt object is only made visible upon bringing it home, where “it looked less silvery now.” In seeing the dress in a new light, and a domestic one, Meg sees its exchange value “fifty dollars” “stamped like a pattern down each breadth.”

It is this moment of visible material transcendence where exchange value meets the material value of the object in ghastly, ghostly ways that precisely clarifies the difference between real and exchange value in nineteenth-century goods. It is also this disturbing black box of value/commodity/capital that so troubled Marx at almost exactly the same time (*Capital Volume I* appeared in German one year before volume one of *Little Women*, though it was not published in an English translation until 1887—Alcott seems to have had her finger on the pulse of economic theory). Meg’s lesson in commodity fetishism illustrates what Marx calls “the whole mystery of commodities, all the magic and necromancy that surrounds...the form of commodities” when the products of real human labor are assigned an abstract exchange value and consumed not by the producer but the purchaser.¹³¹ For Alcott, exchange value ought to match the use value. Meg’s dress costs more than the fifty dollars seen stitched into its fabric, and that is its appalling “necromancy.” Meg has paid for the dress at a significant cost to her moral standing. Having succumbed to the “evil moment” of “temptation,” Meg buys the forbidden fruit.¹³² The moment and the description of its effects suggests the inherent

¹³¹ Marx, *Capital*, 324.

¹³² Alcott, 224.

morality embedded in material objects. These lessons in what I have elsewhere called moral materialism are her burden to bear. Conscientious consumption is thus the exercise of a moral conscience that resists the secular consumption and display of goods that lack inherent moral value.

Meg's particular temptation in the above scene stems from a desire to match pace with her more affluent friend Sally Moffat, whose material signifiers Alcott consistently calls into question. In an important chapter, "Meg Goes to Vanity Fair," the eldest March daughter prepares to visit the Moffats and experiences vacillating pangs of jealousy and proper humility while packing up her old, thrifty things. Despite her fervent yearning to have nice objects like Sally Moffats' that might buy Meg entry into more exclusive social circles, her intuition surfaces: "Perhaps Meg felt, without understanding why, that [the Moffats] were not particularly cultivated or intelligent people, and that all their gilding could not quite conceal the ordinary material of which they were made."¹³³ The Moffats' false "gilding," wrought of fancy dresses and bonnets and gloves, fails to mask the "ordinary material" of their true construction. Inherent value again makes itself known to the conscientious observer.

Later, however, Meg forgets her right feeling and succumbs to the temptation of material pretension. Giving in to the desire to exhibit material markers of class at the Moffats' ball, Meg allows herself to be made up in a borrowed "sky blue dress, which was so tight she could hardly breathe, and so low in neck that modest Meg blushed at herself in the mirror."¹³⁴ That the dress does not fit physically portends the ill-fitting display of counterfeited social capital, the image of which is as revealing of its own

¹³³ Alcott, 72.

¹³⁴ Alcott, 76.

falsehood as it is of its immodesty. Laurie issues the final judgment “in his honest eyes” which, in their disapproval of the gaudy adornment make Meg “wish she had her old dress on.”¹³⁵ The “fuss and feathers” of extravagant display paint over Meg’s true appeal; as one guest remarks, “They have spoilt her entirely; she’s nothing but a doll, to-night.”¹³⁶ Spoilt and rendered object-like, Meg undergoes dissociation of self, finally declaring to Laurie in an uninhibited tipsy confession, “I’m not Meg, to-night; I’m ‘a doll’....To-morrow I shall put away my ‘fuss and feathers’, and be desperately good again.”¹³⁷

IT WILL DO ME GOOD

When Meg resolves to “put away my ‘fuss and feathers’, and be desperately good again,” she makes an implicit comparison between rescuing herself from the material objectification wrought by getting ‘dolled up’ and an inherent being/becoming good. Equally importantly, she rescues *herself*; in becoming good she is also *becoming*, or coming into being. If she is “not Meg” tonight, in all her borrowed finery, she may be tomorrow, and moreover the quality of her being will be “good.” I draw attention to Alcott’s use of the verb “to be” because it appears here as it does a number of times when characters identify “good” as a personal quality. It appears in the form of a linking verb, which, rather than describing a specific action, ascribes description to the subject instead. The action takes place before the being good: she will rid herself of the material qualifiers that make her like a material object and then “be...good,” as if to suggest that being good is a quality earned through performing certain prerequisites that have

¹³⁵ Alcott, 79.

¹³⁶ Alcott, 79.

¹³⁷ Alcott, 80.

inherently to do with the physical being. Meg will “be good” when she is her own being again. Being/becoming good—and *being* oneself—is the building and restoration of self through self-sacrifice, through divesting oneself of material finery that obstructs rather than performs elevation and self-proprietorship.

What Meg learns in her moment of doll-like alienation is what domestic texts overwhelmingly insist on: that self-sacrifice, be it through denying oneself the temptations of fashions or through the selfless labor of the household, is value-added self-betterment. In an 1866 domestic narrative, two characters conversing on the subject of domestic economy and the ways it can and must be taught equate the skill of self-sacrifice through domestic economy with self-help, an importantly reflexive action. Milly, speaking to Bertha, whose household management is Milly’s guide, says, “Your aunt [guardian] made you *self*-helpful, and this gave you wealth for your lifetime.”¹³⁸ Nineteenth-century values see self-sacrifice not as an erasure of self, but as the performance of it, a self-help and a means of making one autonomous. Moreover, the process of self-making through domestic economy is productive of capital that accrues interest over time.

For Louisa May Alcott, the bothersome burden of domestic duty learned in her teens matured into the reward of self-proprietorship in adulthood. Reflecting on her share of the household activities after the Alcotts had moved to Boston from their more idyllic Concord days, Alcott recalls “I was left to keep house, feeling like a caged sea-gull as I washed dishes and cooked in the basement kitchen where my prospect was limited to a procession of muddy boots.”¹³⁹ Quaffing the bitter draught of “the daily sacrifice of self”

¹³⁸ Warren, *How I Managed*, 42, italics mine.

¹³⁹ Alcott, “Recollections of My Childhood,” 261. All following direct quotes in this paragraph refer to page 261.

rather than quashing self, instead enabled for Alcott a still stronger perseverance of individual talent and personal success, for shouldering the mantle of domestic duty was an education in “the sweet uses of adversity, the value of honest work, the beautiful law of compensation which gives more than it takes, and the real significance of life.” That direct “law of compensation” which returns more value the more one gives, yielded real capital for Alcott who spun her home stories into the bestselling *Little Women*. The book, as Alcott herself describes it, was an experiment in a kind of cookery of its own, where “every experience went into the chauldron [*sic*] to come out as froth, or evaporate in smoke, till time and suffering strengthened and clarified the mixture of truth and fancy, and a wholesome draught for children began to flow pleasantly and profitably.” Like the “Odd Scraps” that both symbolize and organize Child’s manual, Alcott’s distilling of “keeping house” and other youthful experiences into a “wholesome draught” to be taken by children works, like domestic chores themselves, as a “profitable” labor that enriches both Alcott and her young readers.¹⁴⁰

Wholesome goodness is the circular product of becoming good through osmosis, through consuming wholesome things such as Alcott’s narrative or Child’s manual. Throughout such texts, moral descriptors of expensive commodities clarify such commodities’ lack of usefulness to characters and readers; they are commodities which cannot perform that process of, as for Meg above, being/becoming good. Things which objectify the user (such as Meg’s borrowed finery), things which inflict or result in physical harm (such as Amy’s pickled limes), or things which contain hidden costs (Meg’s pricey dress) must be refused, recanted, or returned. On the other hand, things

¹⁴⁰ Fittingly, Alcott also profited off a childhood of domestic labor by writing about it in her autobiographical novel *Work* (1873).

which elevate the user in social, economic, and moral ways are to be prized, from homemade stockings to hand-me-down clothes. The treatment of objects in works like Alcott's and Child's provides a rubric of assessing the real value of all manner of things—commodities, foodstuffs, hand-me-downs, upcycled salvage. But domestic texts' insistence on examining the ways only certain kinds of those things afford self-edification underscores a larger truth: that texts are things too.

Indeed, perhaps the most conspicuous object in *Little Women* is a text: John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*.¹⁴¹ A moral compass that guides the girls and organizes chapter headings, Bunyan's popular allegory of Christian trials and tribulations moves from an object in the hands of its young female readers to shorthand headings of chapters such as "Meg Goes to Vanity Fair," "Castles in the Sky," "Burdens," and "Amy's Valley of Humiliation." Appearing initially as a gift from Marmee in the opening chapter, the book immediately asserts its moral agency in the process of the girls' coming-of-age. Marmee presents the text as an object actant of salvation, which "will do [the reader] good" if she reads it daily.¹⁴² Bunyan's popular Christian narrative does not do the reader, here Meg, good by itself; it relies on her routine use to perform its function as a "true guidebook."¹⁴³ The transformation is nearly immediate: seeing Meg engrossed in her reading later that day, Beth exclaims, "How good Meg is!" and exhorts her sisters to do

¹⁴¹ The importance of Bunyan's text to Alcott's is widely noted. See Sicherman, *Well-Read Lives*, especially chapter one. On *Pilgrim's Progress* as a "paradigm of progress" (168) for readers in the early republic and early nineteenth century, see Davidson, *Revolution and the Word*; as contextual reinforcement of Susan Warner's *Wide World* which teaches "by example, how to live" (183), see Tompkins, *Sensational Designs*.

¹⁴² Alcott, 20.

¹⁴³ Alcott, 19. See Patricia Crain, *Reading Children*, especially chapter one, for a fuller discussion on the relationship between acts of reading and/as property ownership.

the same.¹⁴⁴ In the space of two paragraphs, “good” moves syntactically from an adverb that describes what the book does to a predicate adjective that describes Meg’s inherent qualities. That transformation is announced, to the sisters and to the reader, the moment Beth *sees* Meg doing her due diligence in reading the assigned text. As Patricia Crain has argued, the iconography of seen acts of reading perpetuates “an aspirational consumer economics of reading” that elevate the reader through private consumption of books as a leisure activity which both required social and cultural capital and helped accumulate them.¹⁴⁵ Meg may not be the iconic child-reading-in-a-window-seat perusing a luxurious, gilded-edge gift book, an iconography that proliferated in the late nineteenth century,¹⁴⁶ but her seen act of reading performs a similar “aspirational” elevation from untutored state to good child, reader, consumer (of literature here and, later, goods).

By embedding the consumption of a moral text within a secular novel, Alcott’s use of *Pilgrim’s Progress* also offers a lesson of salvation through bearing burdens that are inextricably tied to material comforts and class. That Alcott uses a religious text to preach a message about secular ownership and conscientious consumption (which often translates to non-consumption), is telling of the ways nineteenth-century consumers conceived the marketplace. ‘Secular’ and ‘religious’ or ‘moral’ have no clear linguistic or material borders in the nineteenth century. The immediate effect of reading Bunyan’s moral text is an increase in moral character that is indicative of true (middle) class values. How fitting that after receiving their books, the March girls are tested with their first exercise in self-sacrifice. On empty stomachs and in cold New England weather, the March girls donate their modest Christmas breakfast to a German immigrant family in a

¹⁴⁴ Alcott, 20.

¹⁴⁵ Crain, *Reading Children*, 3.

¹⁴⁶ Crain, *Reading Children*, 2-4.

scene that marks the March's class disadvantage and moral advantage. Giving their Christmas breakfast to the Hummels and going themselves without completes their good-ification, so to speak, from being done good by the reading of a book in the previous scene, to being good, to doing good to another. Mrs. Hummel addresses the March girls as "good angels," bearers of the holy gift of a hot breakfast.¹⁴⁷ This opening moment foreshadows the task of the novel as a whole, that of instilling and completing the process of making little women into good wives, and good people.

Texts, or at least the right kind, helped users to achieve, through private consumption, what conspicuous consumption failed to, and more. If the value of commodities was suspect because of their harmful effects on consumers in an unscrupulously consuming society, then books such as Alcott's, Child's, and Beecher's worked actively to disrupt that trend by ascribing heightened value to the role of books as commodities, and especially to domestic manuals and narratives. While literary production and consumption continued to increase apace in the decades of the mid-nineteenth century, prolific women writers of domestic texts singled out a particular lack in the marketplace and purposed to fill it. Beecher, opening her *Treatise*, comments on the need for domestic economy manuals, pointing out that she has written out of a need, out of a lack, and, more, out of a *suffering*: "How came the Author to write such a book? She answers, Because she has herself suffered from the want of such knowledge."¹⁴⁸ Domestic manuals and fiction could rewrite that suffering, turning the pain of self-sacrifice into the pride of self-proprietorship through moral becoming. And while self-sacrifice was often meant on material terms, requiring non-consumption and frugality,

¹⁴⁷ Alcott, 21.

¹⁴⁸ Beecher, *Treatise*, xxi.

readers could at least take comfort in the pride of possession of *books*. If there is any evidence that domestic manuals and fiction succeeded in instilling a rubric of approaching objects as moral agents in the process of self-becoming, then it is in the fact that almost every one of such texts takes that point to be obvious. As one domestic manual announces of itself, it is both the receptacle and embodiment of that which it does: It is a reference manual, a “treasury of useful knowledge,” “a store-house of useful facts.” And finally, it declares that “a work adapted to the common purposes of life, is of more *real value* than more pompous and erudite volumes.”¹⁴⁹ Like Meg navigating the flashy perils of “Vanity Fair” at the Moffats, books such as Alcott’s, Child’s, and Beecher’s worked on and within the literary marketplace to redefine that “real value,” asserting again and again that value is located on a metric of morality rather than superficial specie. Domestic readers, with book in hand, could fashion for themselves a homemade soul from the scrimped savings of their homemade soles.

¹⁴⁹ Abell, *Skilful [sic] Housewife’s Book*, 14, italics mine.

Chapter 2

“POLLUTED LUXURIES”: CONSUMER RESISTANCE, THE SENSES OF HORROR, AND ABOLITIONIST BOYCOTT POETRY¹⁵⁰

Oh press me not to taste again
Of those luxurious banquet sweets!
Or hide from view the dark red stain,
That still my shuddering vision meets.

Away! 'tis loathsome! bear me hence!
I cannot feed on human sighs,
Or feast with sweets my palate's sense,
While blood is 'neath the fair disguise.

No, never let me taste again
Of aught beside the coarsest fare,
Far rather, than my conscience stain,
With the polluted luxuries there.

—“Oh Press Me Not to Taste Again,”
Elizabeth Margaret Chandler, *Poetical Works* (1836)

“Polluted luxuries,” stained consciences, shuddering senses—these were compelling reasons to abstain from the products of slave labor which, in 1836, at the time of Elizabeth Margaret Chandler’s writing, already proliferated in an expanding American market. A Quaker poet and abolitionist, Chandler rejected the “luxurious banquet sweets” soured by the “human sighs” of the enslaved whose labor had cultivated the “polluted” sugar made such by the “dark red stain” of slavery. The speaker’s rejection is both moral (she wishes not to “stain” her “conscience”) and sensory/sensational (she is physically disgusted by the thought of ingesting “human sighs” and looking upon the “dark red stain” which causes her to “[shudder]” involuntarily). Pairing the ethical and the edible,

¹⁵⁰ An earlier version of this chapter appeared in *American Literature* 90.2 (Mar. 2018). The publication agreement, including rights granted to the author to reuse this material, can be found in Appendix B.

the speaker protests the vast system of slave labor, its products and profits, by locating activism in her daily dietary choices, refining a “palate’s sense” of morally made goods.

Her vow to “never...taste again” the edible traces of slave labor was one she shared with a dedicated group of abolitionist boycotters, self-styled “free produce” proponents including Quaker abolitionists and African American activists, who argued vehemently against the consumption of slave-produced goods as a matter of ethics and economics. The intent of the free produce effort was to redesign radically the landscape of the market into one that favored ethically produced goods (made by *free* laborers rather than enslaved laborers) by exerting pressure on slave-holders through the boycott of slave-produced goods. Marshaling the periodical press, abolitionist boycotters employed various literary forms, chiefly editorials and poetry, to perform the cultural work of economic and social reform. Often, their arguments were predicated on a language of the senses which compelled readers to identify, via consumption and physical interaction with objects, with the enslaved producers of those objects. In other words, free produce poetry and literature extended the trend of sympathetic identification to new levels of urgency by exposing the uncomfortable proximity between producers and consumers made palpable in commercial and private consumer habits. Poetic language such as Chandler’s, which imagines the horror of “[feeding] on human sighs” and the unpalatability of “blood [that] is ’neath” the material exterior of foods, put reader-consumers in imagined physical contact with slave producers. By imagining consumption in such proximal ways, free produce poetry collapsed entire systems of obscured trade routes and purchasing networks and played on readers’ fears both of the obscurity of that system and the closeness of their bodies to the bodies of enslaved laborers. In doing so, free produce literature blurred the boundaries of the sentimental and

the sensational, presaging the literary turn to sensationalism even while the reading public was still gorging itself on sentimentalism. For free produce literature, sensationalism was taken to be literal and thus deployed as a literature of the senses, intended to elicit a heightened emotional response, including the sensations of shock and horror. This chapter asks how free produce authors developed a sense of horrific consumption through literature, namely how authors described material objects in relation to or as the go-between for producers and consumers, and what such language implied about reader-consumer fears of a growing market awash with slave-produced goods. Ultimately, the literature of boycott seized on imagined fears of consumption in a market that, by devaluing human labor, revalued goods as bloody capital haunting the marketplace and threatening to contaminate consumers.

THE FREE PRODUCE MOVEMENT

“Oh Press Me Not to Taste Again” was just one poem of its kind to take issue with the production of goods within a slave economy. In fact, the poem was part of a corpus of literary works, chiefly poetry, by abolitionist reformers who actively boycotted slave-produced goods. Originally published in 1832 in Benjamin Lundy’s *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, it was later reprinted in a posthumous collection of Chandler’s poetry, *The Poetical Works of Elizabeth Margaret Chandler*.¹⁵¹ The poem was part of a host of free produce literature, including at least forty-two original poems published in the free produce organ *The Non-Slaveholder*, and pamphlets such as Hannah Townsend’s *Anti-Slavery Alphabet* (1846) which taught children to abstain from eating slave-

¹⁵¹ ELA [Elizabeth Margaret Chandler], “O Press Me Not to Taste Again,” *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, Nov. 1832, 13; and Chandler and Lundy, 109.

produced goods. Because of the culture of reprinting, free produce literature was echoed in other periodicals, thus reaching even wider audiences. “Oh Press Me Not to Taste Again,” for instance, was reprinted in the Ladies Department of Garrison’s *Liberator* in December 1832, one month after its original publication in Lundy’s *Genius of Universal Emancipation*.¹⁵² Free produce literature encouraged consumption of what were called *free* goods, as opposed to goods produced by enslaved labor, especially cotton textiles, tobacco, and food stuffs such as sugar, rice and sometimes coffee. Poet-activists such as Chandler, Frances E. W. Harper, Townsend, and John Greenleaf Whittier, whose work I discuss in this chapter, wrote or published multiple poems and letters that sensationalized the consumption of goods in an effort to persuade readers of the moral implications of ethically questionable consumer behavior. From the 1820s to the 1850s, free produce proponents often relied on the rhetoric of complicit guilt in order to promote commercial and physical abstention. Abstention is the nineteenth-century term for boycott, though I use both. Boycotters reasoned that purchasing and using a slave-produced good signified inherent approval of the slave system—literally, to buy into it. The movement argued for a free market economy that better met the definition of *free*, sanctioning the consumption and marketing of goods produced under labor conditions that provided remuneration of workers’ labor. Supporters were therefore engaged in the politics of economics, refusing to participate in markets built on enslaved labor and opting instead for locally produced goods or goods of traceable origins.

As a movement that offers key insights into consumers’ relationships with a growing market economy, the free produce movement at large stands as an interesting

¹⁵² ELA [Elizabeth Margaret Chandler], “Oh Press Me Not to Taste Again,” *Liberator*, Dec. 1, 1832.

though often overlooked moment in literature and history. Even during its time, the movement struggled to win acclaim from the mainstream abolitionist movement, mainly due to its strict guidelines on commodity consumption. As the supporters of the movement saw it, the boycott of slave-produced goods was central to the eradication of slavery, for it kept money out of slave holders' pockets. True commitment to such goals would have been radical and difficult, as slave-produced goods flooded the market and were available at much cheaper prices than goods from remunerated labor. For this reason, William Lloyd Garrison eventually gave up on the movement and instead focused on spreading abolitionist sentiment in the form of speeches and printed materials.¹⁵³ As if following Garrison's dismissal of the free produce movement, few scholars today have earnestly and critically engaged with the movement beyond noting its logistical impracticality.¹⁵⁴ Yet, the movement itself and its poetic contributions in particular, I

¹⁵³ For more on Garrison's break with the free produce movement, see editorials in *The Liberator*, such as "The Slave Produce Question," Apr. 9, 1847, 59, and "The Free Produce Question," March 1, 1850, 34, in which Garrison extends support to the movement but refrains from explicitly condemning the consumption and use of slave-produced goods. See also Garrison, "Free Produce Among the Quakers," *Atlantic Monthly*, October 1868.

¹⁵⁴ Historians have conducted most of the scholarship on the free produce movement, which has been taken seriously only recently. Ruth Nuernberger's *Free Produce Movement* (1942) is its only book-length study. In it, she dismisses the movement as a "crackbrained" Quaker scheme (113). Benjamin Quarles uncritically concludes a short section on free produce by noting that it was "not a vital issue" to abolitionists, black or white (*Black Abolitionists*, 76). Michael Bennett calls the movement a "modest goal" with "greater cultural resonance" in *Democratic Discourses* (15). Carolyn Williams glances at the boycott in "The Female Antislavery Movement" in order to flesh out the beginning stages of women's roles in abolition in general (161-163), while Margaret Hope Bacon gives a short chronology of the movement within the history of anti-slavery societies in "By Moral Force Alone" (276-281). Historian Carol Faulkner refers to Lucretia Mott's involvement in *Lucretia Mott's Heresy* (54-55, 98-99). Faulkner's article "'The Root of the Evil': Free Produce and Radical Antislavery, 1820-1860" is perhaps the only scholarly piece to explicitly call attention to the radical activism of free produce: she states that the movement constituted a "radical commitment to abolition and racial equality" which "[forced] reformers to confront the profound connection between northern consumers and slaves" (378, 379). Economic historian Lawrence B. Glickman

suggest, refined otherwise broad sentimental arguments against slavery into more precise moralistic and economic arguments that radiated from the sensory world of goods produced and consumed in the antebellum United States.

Abolitionist boycotts constituted a protracted, integrated effort on behalf of the antislavery movement which lasted as long as the American abolition movement itself and which produced general stores, auxiliary societies, a periodical, and a range of poetry and children's literature. Most often styled free produce, though sometimes also called *free labor* (not to be confused with the political party),¹⁵⁵ the movement began possibly as early as the mid-eighteenth century, with itinerant Quaker minister John Woolman.¹⁵⁶ Following Woolman's moral compunction to divest himself of personal guilt in supporting slavery, other Quaker ministers such as Sarah Harrison and Patience Brayton

does one better in *Buying Power*, which devotes an unprecedented (save Nuernberger's outdated work) entire chapter to the movement and its role in establishing consumer resistance modes and methods that laid the groundwork for modern consumer resistance campaigns.

¹⁵⁵ It should be noted that free produce, as I refer to it throughout this chapter, was not interchangeable with the Free Soil or free labor movement(s). As a movement that protested enslaved labor, of course free produce was inherently interested in growing labor debates of the mid-nineteenth century as well as abolitionist arguments. While not all abolitionists aligned themselves with free labor or Free Soil, their arguments against the forced labor of tens of thousands held in human bondage underscored an ideology of remunerated labor in the ostensibly free republic. It is important to note that not all abolitionists were free producers, and not all free producers were Free Soilers or free laborers. The slipperiness between these groups indicates the inchoate definitions of such parties as well as the period's overarching preoccupation with what "free" and "labor" meant—or what it should mean. For instance, free produce, by which I mean the abolitionist boycott movement, tended to use the terminology of "free labor," which, as a much larger nineteenth-century movement dedicated to remunerated labor of all classes of people, has been chronicled extensively by historians Philip Foner and Eric Foner, and others, and so will not be rehashed here. See Philip Foner, *History of the Labor Movement*, vols. 1-4; Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*; Jonathan A. Glickstein, *Concepts of Free Labor in Antebellum America*; and Jonathan Halperin Earle, *Jacksonian Antislavery & the Politics of Free Soil*.

¹⁵⁶ Bacon, "By Moral Force," 246.

chose to abstain from the commercial products of slavery.¹⁵⁷ But collective boycott practices have roots across the Atlantic, in 1790s British abolition and the boycott of West India sugar. Responding to William Fox's call in 1791 to abstain from using sugar and rum that was produced in British slave colonies in *An Address to the People of Great Britain*, many Britons, especially women, stopped purchasing slave products. Because British abstention was situated at the discursive node of the tea table (that gendered and classed space of consumption and community), historian Julie L. Holcomb argues, it enjoyed greater success than did its American counterpart.¹⁵⁸ No doubt influenced by both vehement Quaker principles and global attention to the commercial products of slavery, free produce as it came to be known in nineteenth-century America did not take off as a veritable boycott movement until the 1820s. Both Carol Faulkner and Margaret Hope Bacon cite the influence of Quakers Elias Hicks and Elizabeth Heyrick who, in the first decades of the nineteenth century, wrote and spoke on boycotting slave-produced goods and profoundly inspired later leaders Lucretia Coffin and James Mott, who opened a fair-trade store as early as 1829.¹⁵⁹ The 1820s witnessed the first free produce stores and the beginnings of a collective movement organized by societies such as the American Free Produce Association (Philadelphia), the Female Association for Promoting the Manufacture and Use of Free Cotton (Philadelphia), and the Free Produce Association of Green Plain (Ohio).¹⁶⁰ By the 1840s, it had its own periodical, the *Non-Slaveholder*,

¹⁵⁷ Bacon, 277.

¹⁵⁸ Holcomb, "Blood-Stained Sugar," 613.

¹⁵⁹ Faulkner, "Root of the Evil," 378; Bacon, "By Moral Force," 277.

¹⁶⁰ The first free produce store was likely run by Benjamin Lundy, who advertised free produce goods as early as 1826 in his *Genius of Universal Emancipation* ("Free Labor Trade"). Women entrepreneurs quickly followed suit, such as Lydia White and Jane Webb, whose Philadelphia and Wilmington, Delaware, stores, respectively, were advertised in the December 1832 issue of Lundy's *Genius of Universal Emancipation*. See also Faulkner, "Root of the Evil," 385.

dedicated to circulating fair-trade ideology within abolitionist networks across the Northeast.¹⁶¹ It regularly advertised new imports of fair trade goods to local antislavery stores. Bacon counts as many as fifty-three free produce stores between 1817 and 1862.¹⁶²

Not only did the movement participate in a transnational history of consumer reform, it also constructed itself through print and social networks that connected black and white, male and female, reformers across the northeast. At the same time that free produce activists were building fair-trade structures in major American cities, they were also strengthening activist networks through print and oral networks. Free produce activist networks may have operated on a principle that Lawrence B. Glickman calls “long-distance solidarity.”¹⁶³ A key tool of consumer resistance efforts, long-distance solidarity allows citizens to form coalitions through markets, “making the near distant and the distant near,”¹⁶⁴ which may help explain why the close-knit circles of free produce supporters formed a community in a way similar to our understanding of the development of the print public. The movement was made up of integrated audiences of white and black, men and women, who collectively agreed that boycott functioned as a philosophical and practical form of resistance to slavery. African American William Whipper owned a store on 161 South Sixth Street in Philadelphia, while white

¹⁶¹ The *Non-Saveholder* ran monthly from January 1846 to December 1850, when it ceased publications due to low subscriptions, but picked up again after renewed subscriptions in 1853-1854. The periodical was published in Philadelphia by Henry Longstreth and initially edited by Abraham L. Pennock, Samuel Rhodes, and George W. Taylor, who pledged that all subscription proceeds (one dollar per copy, or five for six) “will be devoted to the cause of emancipation” (“Published Monthly,” Feb. 1846). Each issue concluded with a poetry section and advertisements for free produce stores.

¹⁶² Bacon, “By Moral Force,” 278.

¹⁶³ Glickman, *Buying Power*, xi.

¹⁶⁴ Glickman, xi.

abolitionist Benjamin Lundy owned one in Baltimore.¹⁶⁵ African American activists Henry Highland Garnet and Jacob C. White Jr. and Sr. spoke out in favor of free produce on lecture circuits spanning the Northeast.¹⁶⁶ Harper, one of the most prolific African American writers and speakers of the nineteenth century, was highly active in integrated networks; she wrote for, spoke with, and lived among both African American and white audiences.¹⁶⁷

Both African American and white free produce activists tended to use the same Philadelphia publishers, Merrihew and Gunn (later Merrihew and Thompson). Free producers participated in the larger social networks of abolitionist circles, though the movement generally radiated from the geographical locus of Philadelphia. For instance, Townsend's *Anti-Slavery Alphabet* was printed by Merrihew and Thompson for the annual Anti-Slavery Fair sponsored by the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society in 1846. Harper published *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects* through Merrihew and Thompson in 1857, in which her free produce poem "Free Labor" appeared. Twenty years prior, in 1836, Benjamin Lundy collected and published Chandler's poetry in *Poetical Works*. Many of her poems had been published initially through Lundy's *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, which reached African American and white audiences through the culture of reprinting. Others took the message with them in traveling lectures, as Harper and Garnet did.¹⁶⁸ Advertisements for stores, letters, meetings, and publications circulated in print networks spanning African American and white audiences. As these many overlapping social and print networks suggest, free produce spawned a geographic,

¹⁶⁵ Whipper, "Advertisement"; Earl, *Benjamin Lundy*, 308.

¹⁶⁶ Ripley et al., *Black Abolitionist Papers*, 137.

¹⁶⁷ Foster, *Brighter Coming Day*, 13.

¹⁶⁸ Ripley et al., *Black Abolitionist Papers*, 137.

print, material, and social presence that was not overlooked by fellow abolitionists and activists.

CONSUMPTION AS COMPLICIT GUILT

Free produce activists chose to boycott slave-produced goods on the grounds that slavery was principally an economic institution subject to the fluctuations of the market. In a correspondence titled “Duty of Abstinence,” a contributor to *The Non-Slaveholder* urged abolitionists to exercise the “power of choice” in the marketplace, writing that “slavery can only be suppressed by the destruction of its cause—the market now allowed to its productions.” The American Free Produce Association (AFPA) reasoned, “Numerous instances might be given of manufactures having flourished in one age and disappeared in the next, for no other reason than because there was no longer a demand for their products,” citing growing dry regions as one example of the power of collective abstinence, or boycott, of alcohol to alter supply and demand.¹⁶⁹

Activists saw each transaction in the marketplace as a political statement. On October 20, 1854, Harper wrote to Frederick Douglass that free produce “seems to strike at one of the principal roots” of slavery.¹⁷⁰ Leading free produce activist and publisher Lewis C. Gunn identified that root as “the love of money,” encouraged in an economy that devalued human life and labor in favor of cheap profits.¹⁷¹ “Oh, could slavery exist long if it did not sit on a commercial throne?” asks Harper.¹⁷² Advocates frequently appealed to economic logic: abstention from slave-produced goods disrupts supply and

¹⁶⁹ American Free Produce Association, “Associated Action,” 3.

¹⁷⁰ Harper, “Free Labor Movement,” *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, June 29, 1855.

¹⁷¹ Gunn, *Address to Abolitionists*, 3.

¹⁷² Harper, “Free Labor Movement,” *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, June 29, 1855.

demand, “[breaking]” as Gunn said, “the back-bone of the system.”¹⁷³ By and large, the boycott of slave-produced goods constituted consumer activism, boldly defining its purpose as “turning the stream of commerce” toward remunerated and fair labor practices.¹⁷⁴

Boycotts have always had political import in America, for the choice to use one material object rather than another, based on its method of construction, is a radical act that understands the political-economic implications in a world of goods, such as ours is and was. In the nineteenth-century world of goods and discourse of labor, consumers were materially and importantly active in shaping the body politic around those things they allowed to enter their body or to clothe it. Such choices could even make way for a kind of political subjectivity; this understanding of buying power was not without precedent. Not even a century prior to abolitionist boycotts, citizens took to their wallets as well as the press to express dissent in reaction to the Stamp Act of 1765 and the Townshend Acts of 1767-68, which prompted collective consumer resistance boldly proclaimed in nonimportation agreements. As T. H. Breen notes, “Private decisions were interpreted as political acts” in choosing to buy this or make that.¹⁷⁵ On a world stage set with what Breen has called an “empire of goods,” consumer choice became dramatic action.¹⁷⁶ The refusal to purchase imported teas and the choice to make domestic substitutes instead, for instance, constituted vocal political statements acted out through consumer resistance. Throughout America’s history, in fact, material social conditions

¹⁷³ Gunn, *Address to Abolitionists*, 3.

¹⁷⁴ *Non-Slaveholder*, “To Our Fellow Members.”

¹⁷⁵ In calling it an “empire of goods,” Breen is expanding on the common term “world of goods” still used by historians of the revolutionary era and early republic, *Marketplace of Revolution*, xv.

¹⁷⁶ Breen, xv.

have made way for political mobilization through consumer action. Consumer activism may well be what Glickman calls an “American political tradition” that is an integral facet of the nation’s history, though nineteenth-century boycotts get short shrift in historical attention to patterns of such resistance.¹⁷⁷ In the nineteenth century and beyond, buying power, as Lori Merish has argued, constituted “subjective expression,” signified “civic identification,” and was a particularly favorite tool for disenfranchised groups.¹⁷⁸ In this way, purchasing free produce goods provided an important vehicle for “subjective expressions” in a political domain from which African Americans and women—large portions of the buying public—were disenfranchised. As such, Whipper’s store, White’s and Garnet’s public speeches, Harper’s works, and Chandler’s poem that opened this chapter all enact political subjectivity through their messages of strategic material consumption. For them, consumption did not merely mediate political action; consumption *was* political action.

COTTON CONTRADICTIONS

I want to pause here to address the material construction of abolitionist boycott print culture and the possible contradictions inherent within it. To illustrate the complicated and possibly contradictory nature of free produce print culture, I ask the reader to consider an 1836 handkerchief imprinted with free produce rhetoric including a moment of epiphany in which a child resolves to “try not to eat any sugar or other things that slaves are compelled *to grow*” (italics orig).¹⁷⁹ At first touch, the handkerchief feels

¹⁷⁷ Glickman, *Buying Power*, 1.

¹⁷⁸ Merish, *Sentimental Materialism*, 2.

¹⁷⁹ “The Poor Slave,” broadside printed on fabric, ca. 1836, Boston Chemical Printing Company, Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera, Winterthur Museum Garden and Library.

like satin, which would point to the use of cotton alternatives in free produce print and material culture. When Rich McKinstry, then director of the Library at Winterthur Museum, Garden, and Library, first brought the handkerchief to my attention, we initially assumed it to have been made of silk. In the nineteenth century, silk was commonly grown in households and could be used as an alternative to cotton. In fact, nineteenth-century printed handkerchiefs were typically only made with one of four common textiles: silk, satin, cotton, or linen.¹⁸⁰ Conservators at the Museum have since determined the handkerchief to be made of cotton.¹⁸¹ This poses a potent, though ultimately unanswerable question: Was it made of free produce cotton?

Possibly. We know that committed free producers had access, limited and pricey though it may have been, to free produce cotton textiles. The AFPA records that it bought 21,477.5 yards of free produce printing cloth in one month alone during 1846.¹⁸² Free produce store owners took care to advertise not just the procurement of such textiles but the availability of them at stores. For instance, a prominent member of the free produce community, George W. Taylor, store owner and editor of *The Non-Slaveholder*, broadcast his commercial ethics directly on store receipts where customers could be assured that “Cotton Goods [are manufactured from material] procured directly from those Growers, who neither own nor hire slaves.”¹⁸³

¹⁸⁰ See examples throughout Collins, *Threads of History*.

¹⁸¹ Jeanne Solensky, email correspondence, June 6, 2018. Handkerchiefs manufactured by the same company were constructed with cotton. See “Primary Lessons No. 8,” in the Winterthur Museum Collections and also referenced in Eaton, *Printed Textiles*, 344-355.

¹⁸² *Non-Slaveholder*, “American Free Produce Association Correspondence,” Feb. 1846.

¹⁸³ Receipt, Free Labor Ware-House George W. Taylor, Feb. 4, 1866. The receipt is dated just under two months after the ratification of the 13th Amendment. Because slavery was still a reality for African Americans living in the South even after the ratification of the 13th Amendment on December 6, 1865, it is reasonable that free producers were still on the lookout for fairly produced goods.

Paper goods, however, are a bit trickier to trace. During the nineteenth century, the evolution of paper making followed the general march of industrialization felt in all industries. After the 1790s, Michael Winship documents, cotton grown and picked in the South “became the major vegetable fiber used for clothing in the Western world.”¹⁸⁴ That went for paper too. Rags from old clothing were collected, purchased, and ground into paper by any of the many paper mills across the country. Whether or not free produce printers in Philadelphia patronized local mills like the Conrad Sheetz (Schultz) Lower Mill or Walover’s Mill (both located in Merion County on the outskirts of Philadelphia), the paper materials likely consisted of cotton fibers shipped from slave states simply because that was the material available to local mills. However, there is a possibility that printers chose paper made from alternative sources. “All types of fibrous materials, including especially straw, but also wood and even wasp nests” were used to experiment with paper construction, Winship notes.¹⁸⁵ It is certain that printers could not have used all-wood pulp paper because such paper was not successfully developed and implemented until 1867.¹⁸⁶ Rather, they may have dabbled in a wood and rag mixture, where at least some of the materials may not have been produced by slave labor. Because publishers and printers purchased paper on a job-by-job basis due to costs, it is further possible that when abolitionist boycotters approached fellow boycotters who were also printers (such as Merrihew and Thompson) with their book order, they may have stipulated the use of only free produce materials.

This is, admittedly, wishful thinking. Simply the fact that slave-produced cotton textiles dominated the textile market indicates that paper was, even in admixture,

¹⁸⁴ Winship, “Manufacturing and Book Production,” 50.

¹⁸⁵ Winship, 51.

¹⁸⁶ Winship, 51.

contaminated by slave-produced cotton. How did abolitionist boycotters justify printing pamphlets on paper that was very likely made of slave-produced cotton pulp? They didn't. The publishers and printers who controlled the printing process did. Faced with accusations of hypocrisy, the AFPA issued a public announcement regarding their use of paper: "We are frequently interrogated as to the propriety of using paper made of cotton rags, the product of slave labor. Our predilections are averse to such use, *if it can possibly be avoided.*"¹⁸⁷ This alerts us to two things: first, that the AFPA was aware of such cotton contradictions, as I have here called them. Second, it offers a small reassurance that they "avoided" or attempted to avoid using slave-produced cotton pulp when they possibly could. However, the crux of their statement is more puzzling. They continue:

At the same time, we are prepared to say that we perceive an important distinction between the using of mere offal, for the formation of which slavery does not exist, and the using of cotton cloth for the formation of which it does exist. Whatever the rule may be, it should obviously be one which would generally apply to the use of the offal remains, in a similar degree valueless, of any article procured by any act of violence.¹⁸⁸

The "distinction" drawn by the AFPA hinges on the definition of value within a slave economy. Instead of reading the AFPA's response as one that undermines the greater political argument it sought to make through boycott, it should be considered further evidence of the contested nature of value in an early capitalist system. That offal is "valueless" is a statement Lydia Maria Child, as we have seen in her domestic writings, would disagree with, as would all printers, moreover. As discussed in the previous chapter, value was a suspect principle for domestic writers because exchange value did not match use value, where use value was the capacity of an object to confer moral elevation (or destruction) to human users. Here, however, value is understood as direct

¹⁸⁷ *Non-Slaveholder*, "Slave Cotton Paper," June 1846.

¹⁸⁸ *Non-Slaveholder*, "Slave Cotton Paper," June 1846, italics mine.

monetary exchange. In the above statement, value is predicated on the immediate production and sale of cotton textiles for clothing and dress, to the exclusion of indirect use or profit accumulated through re-use. When those original artifacts have ceased to perform any value for the wearer, whose initial act of purchase was the primary one in monetarily sustaining the machinery of slavery, then those textiles, now rags, are shorn of value. In other words, it has no value because the further sale of it no longer returns direct profits to the slaveholder who sold it in its first instance.

ABOLITIONIST BOYCOTT POETRY AS A GENRE

It is perhaps because of such puzzling contradictions and, moreover, the tendency to view boycott (by academics and by the general public) as only as valuable as it is effective,¹⁸⁹ that has contributed to a critical elision in nineteenth-century scholarship. While the political and historical significance of boycotts has been well documented, if not always defended, little understanding exists about the importance of boycott literature in general and free produce literature in particular. The latter may be unique, in fact, in its precise historical placement, as it developed concurrently with the market revolution, changing labor debates, the proliferation of moral reform societies, escalating sectional

¹⁸⁹ I have been asked an alarming number of times, both at conferences and in casual conversation, why such literature merits attention if it did not demonstrably and directly bring about either the Civil War or the end of slavery. To such queries I politely refer the inquirer to any high school history textbook which cautions that causation of historical events is very rarely the result of a single prior event. Our understanding of the complex concomitant factors leading to social, economic, and political change wrought by major events such as the passage of the 13th Amendment is made more complete through the study of related factors such as abolitionist boycott. I would parry also--Why study *Uncle Tom's Cabin* either, if direct causation is the criterion for merit? Thankfully, scholars like Jane Tompkins rescued novels like Stowe's from a century of such misguided thinking by championing the cultural work of such texts (see *Sensational Designs*). Free produce literature deserves the same respect.

conflict—and the American literary renaissance, of course. Others have painted fuller pictures than I have room to here of the complex relationships among those developments, but what remains missing from that landscape is the acknowledgment of free produce literature and an appreciation for its implications in all of the above categories.¹⁹⁰ A genre that grew out of abolitionist and free produce societies, it blossomed in the periodical press as “original poetry” for abolitionist newspapers as well as stories for “juvenile departments.” Poems and stories were often anonymous (in other words, likely written by women), though a few literary heavy-hitters lent a hand to the movement, such as Whittier and Harper. If we expand the rubric of literature to include all printed materials, then free produce authored a wealth of texts in nearly every form, from lengthy editorials to price reports and advertisements for stores.¹⁹¹ While poetry dominated free produce’s literary production, the novel seems to be the only genre not produced by the committed coterie of activist-writers.

¹⁹⁰ For more on the relationship between print culture and the marketplace, see *A History of the Book in America*, volumes 2 and 3, especially “Manufacturing and Book Production” and “Distribution and the Trade” by Michael Winship, “Religious Periodicals and Their Textual Communities” by Candy Gunther Brown, and “Speech Print and Reform in Nantucket” by Lloyd Pratt (vol. 3, edited by Scott C. Casper et al). For literature and the marketplace, see Gilmore, *American Romanticism and the Marketplace*. For studies on the various ways labor and the market revolution affected/was affected by society and culture, see Martin, ed., *Cultural Change and the Market Revolution, 1789-1860*; Stokes, ed., *Market Revolution in America*; and Rigal, *The American Manufactory*. For a history of moral reform societies in the northeast, see Boylan, *Origins of Women’s Activism and Sunday School*; see also Halttunen, *Moral Problems in American Life*. See also of course Charles’ Sellers’ seminal study of the market revolution, *The Market Revolution*.

¹⁹¹ See *Non-Slaveholder* (1846-1853) the movement’s primary periodical, for editorials, correspondence, price reports, poetry, and advertisements. Other periodicals printed similar texts, such as *The Liberator*, which, despite Garrison’s ambivalence, did publish free produce children’s literature in its “Juvenile Department.” Lundy’s *Genius of Universal Emancipation* likewise published frequently on the topic of free produce, including editorials, adverts, and original poetry.

There are various compelling reasons why we might begin to think of free produce literature, or more specifically, its poetry, as a genre unto itself. First, its poet-activists used written forms to articulate a shared ideology that worked both with and against larger abolitionist rhetoric; second, the literature tended toward specific forms such as poetry and editorial opinion pieces; and finally, its print public had a niche among reformist and abolitionist audiences garnered through periodical subscriptions and the culture of reprinting.¹⁹² Though free produce poetic genres vary, from dream allegories to odes to narratives, there is a coherence of aesthetic themes, bound together by the overwhelming use of the periodical press to disseminate poets' particular brand of sensationalized sentiment. What better venue to publish consumer reform rhetoric than through the periodical, a spatial "juncture," as Kenneth M. Price and Susan Belasco Smith argue, where "highbrow meets lowbrow, where commerce meets artistry"?¹⁹³ Even those poets, such as Chandler, whose work can be found in bound books were frequent presences in the abolitionist periodical press. These authors used verse to develop a poetics of consumption, of a kind that we miss in major antebellum poets not active in reform movements. As a genre that both preceded and coincided with a national literary renaissance, free produce poetry paired the functional and perfunctory quality of the poetic mode as rhetorical critique with the rise of a distinguished belles lettres, evidenced by the reprinting of celebrated poets such as Whittier, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and William Cullen Bryant in abolitionist boycott periodicals. Alternately stressing high literary standards and a kind of high ethical aesthetics, it fit well within mid-nineteenth-century periodical trends. And yet it worked in tension with the literary landscape and

¹⁹² See Meredith McGill, *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting, 1834-1853*, and *The Traffic in Poems: Nineteenth-Century Poetry and Transatlantic Exchange*.

¹⁹³ Introduction to *Periodical Literature*, 14.

reform efforts of the same era—precisely because it was both literary and reformist. Free produce poetry did the culturally important work of making a hard economic argument against slavery through the soft tissue of belles lettres. That friction—between the hard and the soft, between economic realism and literary imagination—makes free produce poetry not only interesting but abidingly relevant to critical understandings of the uses of both literature and consumer resistance. To understand abolitionist boycott poetry on its own terms, then, is to understand the relevance of literature to reform, to understand the significance of consumer politics to the reading public, and to understand the uses of poetic language to all these.

Some free produce authors have received scholarly attention, but not within the literary context of like-minded consumer activists. Chandler and fellow free producer Townsend in particular have been studied within the context of nineteenth-century women's and children's literature.¹⁹⁴ Those who have talked at any length about the free produce movement are historians without a sustained interest in literature. On the other hand, literary scholars interested in activist literature have not yet considered what the free produce movement's implications are for consumer-readers' and -writers' relationships with a world of ethically questionable goods. Despite the strong merits of these individual studies, their collective studies evidence a gap in scholarship on free produce literature.

¹⁹⁴ See Deborah De Rosa, *Domestic Abolitionism and Juvenile Literature, 1830-1865*, in which De Rosa argues that Chandler and Townsend's writings were part of a domestic abolitionist literature that nineteenth-century women developed in order to transcend gendered public and private spheres and to voice anti-slavery sentiments in a socially acceptable way. Martha Sledge ("A is an Abolitionist") specifically examines Townsend's *Anti-Slavery Alphabet*, a rhyming alphabet poem published and sold as a pamphlet at the 1846 Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society Fair. Sledge reads Townsend's alphabet poem for its politics of literacy; namely, its indoctrination of young children into an antislavery worldview.

SENSATIONAL SENTIMENTS

Peering into that gap reveals a striking use of both sentimentalism and sensationalism in ways that complicate our understanding of each. Poetry by Chandler, Harper, Townsend, Whittier, and anonymous others employs a language of heightened senses and sentiment in order to stress a sensory interaction with commodities intended to work as a guide to consumer behavior in antebellum markets. Free produce poets tapped into the rhetoric of complicit guilt to sentimentalize the sensory/sensational consumption of goods. Free produce literature, like abolitionist rhetoric, heavily relied on pure sentimentality. Yet free produce went beyond the emotional politics that characterized more popular works like *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Free produce poetry is different from the standard sentimental abolitionism of Harriet Beecher Stowe and others because it is concerned less with the compromised integrity of family structures in the system of slavery than with the ways in which domestic integrity is reliant on good consumer behavior. For instance, readers are implored to refrain from purchasing and taking into themselves and their homes the products of slave labor which in Chandler's poem "Slave-Produce" threatens to "dim" the "stainless and pure" northern white wearer.¹⁹⁵ Likewise, in "Oh Press Me Not to Taste Again," Chandler's speaker begs her reader to "hide from view the dark red stain" that tinges "luxurious banquet sweets" made with sugar cultivated by slaves.¹⁹⁶ In that poem, Chandler's speaker responds to the repulsive sight—and taste—of the stain by pledging "never" to "taste again" any commodity that likewise threatens "my conscience [to] stain."¹⁹⁷ Blending sentimental emotionality with

¹⁹⁵ Chandler and Lundy, *Poetic Works*, 111.

¹⁹⁶ Chandler and Lundy, 109.

¹⁹⁷ Chandler and Lundy, 109.

sensationalism's melodrama of criminality (the "stain" of stolen labor), free produce's brand of sentimentality located political action in the personal and collective consumption of goods which threatened to stain, in quite sensationalist terms, both the consumer and the nation.

Of course, the language of stains such as Chandler uses would have been cultural shorthand for slavery in the context of abolitionist rhetoric. In the correspondence records of the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society (PFASS), for instance, slavery is a stain upon the nation which must be expunged by righteous activism. Their work is a "great cause," a "holy cause" and a "sacred flame" supported by "fellow labourers" that seeks to expunge the "dishonourable stain" of slavery.¹⁹⁸ Many PFASS members were also members of the AFPA, which similarly saw slavery as a "stain." The abolitionist periodical press referred to slavery in terms such as "the great moral stain of America" and the "deep stain of degradation" on the nation.¹⁹⁹

Yet while abolitionist rhetoric glossed the stain of slavery in abstracted patriotic terms as a stain upon the nation, free produce writing literalized that stain on the very clothing abolitionists themselves wore or the sweets they leisurely ate. The language of stains in free produce poetry uses the sentimental expression of emotional and ethical distress, while couching speakers' responses to those stains as sensory reactions to what they see (literally and perceptually) as evidence of labor crimes. In other words, free produce poetry depicted the sentimental stains of slavery on sensationalized objects of slave labor. According to free producers, material goods could carry the physical and

¹⁹⁸ Glasgow Ladies' Anti-Slavery Society, PFASS Correspondence, 1834; PAS Minutes, 1794-1804.

¹⁹⁹ This language is especially frequent in *The Liberator*, *The Emancipator*, the *Independent Inquirer* (Battleboro, VT). "Deep degradation" found in *The Liberator*, Marshpee Indians, "Memorial," Feb. 1, 1834.

moral stain of slavery. In “The Cloak,” an anonymous poem for the *Non-Slaveholder*, a speaker reads the stain of slave blood in slave products, excoriating consumers who buy into the system:

We buy, we wear, we eat the food
Ting’d with the suffering negro’s blood. . .
We buy and sell, we eat and wear
The blood-stained produce of despair.²⁰⁰

Food and other products of slave labor are “ting’d” with the “blood-[stain]” of “despair,” visual and viscous traces of the profit-driven system of buying and selling which sustained slavery. Those goods are placed in physical contact with consumers through the acts of “wearing” and “eating,” which implicate consumers, the “we” who keep the wheels of forced labor turning. Chandler expounds on the sensorially offensive qualities of such products in “Slave-Produce,” named for the very thing(s) compromised by the stain of slavery:

Eat! They are cates for a lady’s lip, ...
Bearing no trace of man’s cruelty—save
The red life-drops of his human slave.

List thee, lady! and turn aside,
With a loathing heart, from the feast of pride;
For, mix’d with the pleasant sweets it bears,
Is the hidden curse of scalding tears,
Wrung out from woman’s bloodshot eye,
By the depth of her deadly agony.

Look! they are robes from a foreign loom,
Delicate, light, as the rose leaf’s bloom;
Stainless and pure in their snowy tint,
As the drift unmarked by a footstep’s print.
Surely such garment should fitting be,
For woman’s softness and purity.

Yet fling them off from thy shrinking limb,
For sighs have render’d their brightness dim;
And many a mother’s shriek and groan,

²⁰⁰ *Non-Slaveholder*, “The Cloak,” July 1846.

And many a daughter's burning moan,
And many a sob of wild despair,
From woman's heart, is lingering there.²⁰¹

Chandler mockingly beckons her reader to “Eat!” the blood-stained sweets dripping with the “red life-drops of [man's] human slave.” Treats and delicacies bear the “trace” of forced labor in the form of “scalding tears” and bloody “life-drops” extracted (“wrung out”) from the bodies of enslaved laborers, congealing in a “mix'd” confection. Even a dress of foreign provenance is corrupted in the global exchange of American slave produce, which *The Non-Slaveholder* routinely documented.²⁰² Textiles made by enslaved laborers threaten the “softness and purity” of ideal womanhood, woven together with the “lingering” “mother's shriek” and “daughter's burning moan” and “sob of wild despair” that signify the breakdown of composed womanhood for the enslaved, perhaps the most lamented cost of slavery in nineteenth-century literature. Chandler's speaker practically shouts her plea: “turn aside” and eat not the proffered treats; “fling...off” the offending garments. Both commands appeal to the reader-consumer's senses—ethical and physical. Goods are rendered unpalatable or unwearable when made by slave hands, whose own touch leaves the imprint of their “shriek[s] and groan[s].”

On the other hand, when laborers are free to collect compensation, the products of that labor are likewise free of the trauma of slave labor. In her poem “Free Labor,” Harper describes the pleasant sensations derived from her ownership of a free produce dress:

I wear an easy garment,
O'er it no toiling slave

²⁰¹ Chandler and Lundy, *Poetic Works*, 111.

²⁰² In “Manufacture of Free Grown Cotton,” for instance, readers as far away as Great Britain are urged to practice conscientious consumption, for “American slavery is principally supported by the demand of Great Britain for the cotton of the United States” (*Non-Slaveholder*, March 1846).

Wept tears of anguish,
In his passage to the grave.

And from its ample folds
Shall rise no cry to God,
Upon its warp and woof shall be
No stain of tears and blood.

Oh, lightly shall it press my form,
Unladen with a sigh,
I shall not 'mid its rustling hear,
Some sad despairing cry.

This fabric is too light to bear
The weight of bondsmen's tears,
I shall not in its texture trace
The agony of years.

Too light to bear a smother'd sigh,
From some lorn woman's heart,
Whose only wreath of household love
Is rudely torn apart.

Then lightly shall it press my form,
Unburden'd by a sigh;
And from its seams and folds shall rise,
No voice to pierce the sky,

And witness at the throne of God,
In language deep and strong,
That I have nerv'd Oppression's hand,
For deeds of guilt and wrong.²⁰³

Harper rejoices that on her “easy dress...shall be no stain of tears and blood.” It is unburdened by the cries of anguish, unstained by the blood of slavery, and unmarred by the tears of the enslaved because it has been made by compensated laborers. As the poem's speaker traces the folds of the garment, feels its light weight on her skin, and listens to the murmur of its ruffles, she reflects that she has “nerv'd Oppression's hand” by refusing to participate in its “deeds of guilt and wrong.” Her consumer resistance

²⁰³ Harper, *Poems*, 35.

touches the hand of oppression, returning the sting of enslaved labor back onto the hand that presses its bloody weight on other slave-produced dresses and their complicit wearers; her nerve strikes a nerve. The garment is orally, tactilely, and morally free of the unrequited labor of slaves. Harper's poem identifies a mode of interacting with material objects that relies on the senses to intuit—or to literally hear, see, taste, and touch—the working conditions that have produced the object. Because the dress is produced under fair labor conditions, Harper's dress only “lightly...[presses her] form”; it does not weigh heavily on her body or her conscience. Harper feels her “easy dress” to be “easy,” presumably because it is, by definition, “free from pain or constraint.”²⁰⁴ It is easy to wear precisely because it is not contaminated with slave blood or any of the material traces of slavery.

The preoccupation with blood-stained goods and “polluted luxuries” is deeply rooted in nineteenth-century concerns with health and contagion. Recurring cholera epidemics in particular posed an ongoing threat to the health of communities, and discussion surrounding the causes and prevention of the disease was varied. One medical practitioner called it “the pestilence that walketh in darkness” whose causes were “an absolute mystery.”²⁰⁵ Early theories of transmission subscribed to miasma theory, believing that cramped living conditions, lack of air ventilation, and general uncleanliness helped hurry the disease. The proliferation of periodical articles encouraging clean living conditions to combat the spread of disease evidenced the continuing alarm of contagion in the nineteenth century. An 1848 *Daily Picayune* article argued, “In all parts of the world cleanliness, free ventilation and temperance, united with

²⁰⁴ OED Online, s.v. “easy.”

²⁰⁵ Hawthorne, *Prevention and Treatment*, 8.

the ordinary comforts of life, are a never-failing preventative of the prevalence of cholera; and that filth and uncleanness abounding in cities and habitations of the poor and profligate...united with atmospheric gases, are the unfailing sources” of cholera.²⁰⁶ In fact, it was spread by contaminated water and food sources, though such knowledge was not available until the 1850s, with the publication of John Snow’s medical research which refocused health scares onto food, drink, and other materials, such as clothing and linen. For instance, in one of Snow’s documented cases, cholera claimed one man’s life after he wore the unwashed clothing of another man who had died of the disease some days previous.²⁰⁷ In another case, a woman died after handling the linens her recently deceased daughter had slept in. Therefore, the fear of cholera and other such water and food-transmitted diseases was rooted in both a fear of atmospheric contagion and a fear of direct contact with polluted substances. Importantly, then, free produce literature’s emphasis on the dire consequences of direct contact with slave-produced goods echoed real fears about transmitted diseases. The “polluted luxuries” of Chandler’s poem and of the free market in general threatened to transmit the disease of slavery to everyday consumers. Further, by locating the source of contamination within a tangible material object, free produce offered the reassurance of a preventative (namely, non-consumption) at a time when medical—and political—uncertainty dominated the marketplace of ideas.

THE SENSES OF HORROR

When handling, viewing, or consuming slave-produced goods, consumers’ senses were supposed to awaken to the material horrors of their economic choices. Buying into a

²⁰⁶ *Daily Picayune*, “The Cholera,” 1848.

²⁰⁷ Snow, *Snow on Cholera*, 5.

system of unfree labor inflicted a sense of horrific morbidity—or more precisely, a horrific materiality—upon the consumer, directly transmitted from the producer. One editorial in the “Ladies’ Repository” section of Lundy’s *Genius of Universal Emancipation* expressed consternation at consumers’ lack of visual and ethical discretion: “We cannot conceive how any gratification to the palate, how any sweetness, however luscious, can be a sufficient temptation to partake of it, or can stifle the *natural feelings of horror* that should arise, at the *sight* of what has occasioned so much wickedness and suffering.”²⁰⁸ Free produce poetry and rhetoric insisted on the intuited, or “natural,” “horror” resulting from physical and commercial interaction with slave-produced goods. That morally-compromised materiality, they argue, ought to be visible to discerning market-goers. Indeed, free produce literature reads like something out of a horror novel. In a letter to *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, Harper writes, “We enter the wardrobe and the sighs and groans of the slave are lingering around the seams of our clothes, and floating amid the folds of our garments.”²⁰⁹ A simple reading error replaces *seams* with *screams*; the meaning wouldn’t be far off. In free produce literature, screams linger around seams, the traumas of oppression press the wearer.

For some, the awakening of one’s senses to the horrors of slave-produce followed from an intellectual awakening. For instance, in an anonymous poem written for *The Non-Slaveholder*, “Little Lucy’s Dream,” a child fully feels the terrifying origins of her dress after a conversation with an enslaved child. Having fallen asleep, Lucy is converted to free produce activism through a dream in which she sees the beauty of a “leafy scene”

²⁰⁸ *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, “Sugar,” May 1832, italics mine.

²⁰⁹ Harper, “The Free Labor Movement,” *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, June 29, 1855.

juxtaposed with the toiling of slaves. While languishing in the woods, she stops two children to ask why they might not stay and enjoy the shade with her. They reply:

Massa must get in his crop...
All our labor robes the free,
And we toil—in slavery...
Little Lucy's eyes were down,
Resting on her cotton gown...
So unconscious had she been
Her mite added to the sin²¹⁰

Speaking directly to Lucy, one of the enslaved children explains that “Massa must get in his crop,” so that Lucy can go on wearing her clothes. Crying, Lucy looks down at her “cotton gown,” finally seeing with her own eyes the true construction of the dress. The labor of the slave child clothes the free white child, who awakens, not coincidentally through a dream, to the realities of labor and production. Later in the poem, her tears become “bitter,” “burdened” by her “crime” of proslavery sartorial choices. Her dream state allows her to awaken to just how “unconscious” she had been of the material horrors of her wardrobe.

Child readers of Townsend's *Anti-Slavery Alphabet* were taught the same lessons Little Lucy learns regarding the socio-economic world constructed around them, and by teaching children the ABCs of slavery, the book acculturated children into an abolitionist worldview at an early age. That kind of cultural work was part of an established American literary tradition, as Patricia Crain has argued. In *The Story of A: The Alphabetization of America from the New England Primer to The Scarlet Letter*, Crain traces the role of alphabet books and primers in early American print culture and educational practices, arguing that “the first step in literacy training” is alphabetization, or the “array of individual, social, and institutional practices surrounding the

²¹⁰ *Non-Slaveholder*, “Little Lucy's Dream,” July 1846.

internalization of the alphabet.”²¹¹ Instilling abolitionist sentiment in the next generation had to begin, then, with the letter “A.” William Lloyd Garrison understood this educational urgency of social change and impressed upon readers of his collection of *Juvenile Poems* that “The only rational, and certainly the most comprehensive plan of redeeming the world speedily from its pollution, is to begin with the infancy of mankind. If, therefore, we desire to see our land delivered from the curse of PREJUDICE and SLAVERY, we must direct our efforts chiefly to the rising generation.”²¹² The alphabet, the core of all curricula, was an essential means not just of literacy acquisition but of acculturation in early America. As Crain further notes, the “alphabet functioned to organize knowledge as it became a large-scale ordering tool” for cultural and societal projects.²¹³ *The Anti-Slavery Alphabet* takes its project to be an education in abolitionist economic ideology, ordering child behavior around principles of fair trade and tasteful consumption.

But to deliver the message of proper consumption to child readers, the consequences of improper consumption had to be rendered in sensory terms. This is nowhere more apparent than in Townsend’s *S* quatrain:

S is the Sugar, that the slave
Is toiling hard to make
To put into your pie and tea
Your candy, and your cake.²¹⁴

By arranging both *Sugar* and *slave* on the same line, the letter *s* comes to stand for two agents: sugar and slave. The capital *S* in *Sugar* loses its singular dominance when sharing the line with another *s* word: *slave*. The first two lines identify a double agent (sugar and

²¹¹ Crain, *Story of A*, 4.

²¹² Garrison, *Juvenile Poems*, 3

²¹³ Crain, *Story of A*, 55.

²¹⁴ Townsend, *Anti-Slavery Alphabet*, 13.

slave) and express the action (“toiling”). The last two lines rein in that action and bring it home by placing the sugar and, by proxy, its maker into the child’s food. The child reader, perhaps at one time excited by tasty desserts, learns to associate such foods with “toiling” and the very real slave who made the sugar that sweetens the food. The economic ills of slavery and the child audience’s economic duty to free produce become clear by the end of the alphabet. Slave labor is a national concern, argues *M*, the “Merchant of north / Who buys what slaves produce.”²¹⁵ Further, slave labor is “stolen” labor.²¹⁶ It is not only southern slave-owners who are responsible for perpetuating a national economy supported by slavery. It is for “his [the merchant’s] and for *our* use.” *S*, of course, further crystallizes the mutual culpability of Northern and Southern, adult and child, and their participation in a slave economy.

Such poems, for audiences young and old, were designed to facilitate a readerly awakening to consumer behavior by imagining the horrific sensorial properties of specific commodities. Reading about consuming goods produced under duress forced reader-consumers to confront the abject horrors of slavery by imagining their own ingestion of the enslaved’s life fluids. Consuming slave-produced goods meant consuming the blood, sweat, and tears of an enslaved person. Not only did material goods carry the haunting afterimage of slave labor, but the active consumption of those goods was rendered as cannibalistic. In Chandler’s “Oh Press Me Not to Taste Again,” the speaker shudders at the sight of the “dark red stain” embedded in sugary morsels.²¹⁷ The thought of eating those morsels, the speaker reflects, is akin to eating human flesh and the intangible “sighs” of suffering. If Harper can feel and hear the traumatic experiences of

²¹⁵ Townsend, 10.

²¹⁶ Townsend, 10, italics mine.

²¹⁷ Chandler and Lundy, *Poetic Works*, 109.

the enslaved through her dress (or rather, not feel them because the dress is free produce), Chandler can see them in the “blood [that] is ’neath the fair disguise” of some rather unappetizing “banquet sweets.”²¹⁸ To consume these sweets, the speaker fears, is to consume the slave.

In both Chandler’s and Harper’s poems and Townsend’s *Alphabet*, slave-produced materials bundle the trauma of slave labor, signified by anguished screams and the bloody afterimage of suffering persons. Further, the optic, aural, and tactile aura of textiles suggests something transcutaneous or transdermal in wearing the garment, as if wearing a slave-produced dress might “press [the wearer’s] form” heavily with sighs, cries, and tears, to borrow from Harper’s language.²¹⁹ Sentimentality here is more than heavy sighs or well-timed swoons; it does more, even, than make the reader emotionally “feel right” as Stowe said.²²⁰ Rather, free produce poetry sensationalizes the consumption of goods through a sensorially horrific consumption of the terrors of slavery. Consumers must feel, see, hear, smell, and taste right.

But it was not just goods, comestibles, and consumers’ sensory experience of them that threatened to visit the peculiar institution on the clothes and plates, the skin and tongues, of consumers. Capital itself—the go-between for laborer, commodity, and consumer—is tainted by its own role in the system of exchange. In John Greenleaf Whittier’s poem “The Yankee Girl,” the speaker is concerned that trade with the South may contaminate the North. In response to a Southern trader’s proposition, the eponymous Yankee girl righteously chastises the man:

“Go back, haughty Southron! thy treasures of gold
Are dim with the blood of the hearts thou hast sold;

²¹⁸ Chandler and Lundy, 109.

²¹⁹ Harper, *Poems*, 35.

²²⁰ Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, 624.

Thy home may be lovely, but round it I hear
The crack of the whip and the footsteps of fear!”²²¹

Money itself is contaminated with the heart blood of those whom that money has bought. The Yankee girl can see and hear, ostensibly from her white Northern vantage point, the stain that has tinged Southern gold. It loses its luminosity—“thy treasures of gold / Are [dimmed]”—by the trade in black bodies. When money buys flesh, that money is stained; when unfree labor produces commodities, the commodities are stained. In such an economy, slave blood contaminates the means, the production, and the accumulation of capital.

Perhaps the most frightening outcome of a market economy sustained by slave labor, however, is the invisibility of that stain. Though Chandler’s, Harper’s, and Whittier’s treatment of morally corrupt goods is premised on the ability to decipher that corruption in a glance or a touch, such legibility was not guaranteed in a global economy that continued to distance producer from consumer. In Whittier’s “The Ship-Builders,” nautical trade “helps to wind the silken chain / Of commerce round the world!” In the next instant, the speaker cries:

Speed on the ship! But let her bear
No merchandise of sin,
No groaning cargo of despair
Her roomy hold within.²²²

The plaintive “but let her bear” is a hopeful interjection and notably unanswered plea in the speaker’s otherwise jubilant ode to trade. Whittier foresees a modern concern with the “silken chain” of global commerce: what he later calls the “honest fruits of toiling hands” are passed over for rotten fruits of slave labor, which the tangled chain of production and

²²¹ Whittier, *Anti-Slavery Poems*, 32.

²²² Whittier, *Anti-Slavery Poems*, 304.

consumption threatens to hide and obscure.²²³ The “groaning cargo” (which may be either enslaved bodies or the products of unfair labor) still calls out, yet whether the speaker-consumer will be able to hear it is unknown. The obscuring of trade routes, origins of production, and problematic labor conditions were a real concern for many consumers in the new market economy. As Carol Faulkner reminds us, “Within a generation, antebellum women had traded their homespun for garments made of cotton grown by slaves in Georgia, spun and woven into fabric in Massachusetts, and cut and sewn in New York City. This shift provoked a range of anxieties among women, as well as in society at large.”²²⁴ Boycott poetry registers these anxieties in imaginative ways, describing the objects of unfair labor conditions as things that confer horror to the user. In free produce poetry we see a group of writers actively engaged in identifying and describing the “sighs” one might hear “mid [the] rustling” of a slave-produced cotton dress (as in Harper’s “Free Labor”) or the “red life-drops” that stain sugary sweets (in Chandler’s “Slave Produce”). The *Non-Slaveholder*’s promise to offer trustworthy goods and their continual publication of reports from local and global sites of production were a direct response to such concerns. In its inaugural issue, for instance, the editors warn, “The consumer, without some assistance, can seldom ascertain, with satisfactory clearness, whether the articles he purchases are actually the products of free labour [*sic*] or not.”²²⁵ Thus there was a need for free produce stores and a dedicated network of free produce activists who could promote knowledge of such goods, their importance, and where to find them. While Chandler and Harper are literate consumers—that is, able to

²²³ Whitter, 304.

²²⁴ Faulkner, “Root of the Evil,” 386.

²²⁵ *Non-Slaveholder*, “To Our Fellow Members of the Religious Society of Friends,” January 1846. The reason behind the British spelling of “labour” is unclear; the article was written by members of the Philadelphia Society of Friends.

read the traumatic origins of commodities in and through their material composition—Whittier’s verse above foreshadows a future in which consumer literacy falls victim to sprawling networks of untraceable trade.

The total sum of the real horror of a market society driven by slave-produced goods, then, for abolitionist boycott poets, is in essence this breakdown of distinguishable categories of consumer, commodity, and producer. As Whittier’s fears in “The Ship-Builders” suggest, the widening scope of the market economy produces, in Julia Kristeva’s language, “a terror that dissembles.”²²⁶ The seemingly “stainless and pure” garment that tempts the Northern consumer in Chandler’s “Slave-Produce” hides “many a mother’s shriek and groan / And many a daughter’s burning moan, / And many a sob of wild despair”²²⁷; it is in short, as all slave-produced goods, a thing that dissembles. It is the abject receptacle of slave labor. The abject, of course, takes us “where meaning collapses.”²²⁸ In free produce poetry meaning breaks down around consumed commodities, where objects that ought to be inanimate are animated by slave blood, where the forcibly expelled bodily fluids of the producer may be ingested by unwary consumers. In free produce poetry, “‘subject’ and ‘object’ push each other away, confront each other, collapse, and start again—inseparable, contaminated, condemned, at the boundary of what is assimilable, thinkable: abject.”²²⁹ If, as Kristeva claims, great literature always “unfolds” over the contest between subject and object, over the border battle, over the threat of collapsible boundaries and assimilated bodies, then abolitionist boycott poetry has been sorely neglected.

²²⁶ Kristeva, *Power of Horror*, 4.

²²⁷ Chandler and Lundy, *Poetic Works*, 111.

²²⁸ Kristeva, *Power of Horror*, 2.

²²⁹ Kristeva, 18.

Commodities, full of the abject, are sites of the in between. By this logic, the marketplace itself is the context of the abject. But in free produce poetry commodities represent the market in miniature, bundling in their material properties the vortex of exchange. In between producer on one side and consumer on the other, in between subject and object, the blood-stained commodity is expelled by the enslaved producer and ingested by the free consumer. The cannibalistic consumption of expelled life-fluids of the enslaved, black laborer is itself a product of an unregulated free market, one which is guided by the invisible hand of competition rather than the visible stains of the remnants of unpaid labor. The horror of capitalism, for free producers, is the breaking down of all recognizable categories—the innate value of objects versus their dissembling exteriors, the geographical categories of north and south, the racial categories of white (if the reader or speaker happens to be white, though free produce was an integrated effort) and black, even the capitalist differentiation between consumer and producer. In this swapping of life juices, “I” becomes “you,” North gets uncomfortably close to the South, free person becomes enslaved, and (for white authors Chandler, Townsend, and Whittier) whiteness mingles with blackness. How apt, then, that Chandler titles her poem “O Press Me Not to Taste Again,” which homophonically implores “oppress me not.” The title pairs oppression with the sensory closeness (“press”) and consumption (“taste”) of slave-produced objects. Though Chandler’s sentimentality here comes across as white sympathy, the more important point she makes is that the consumption of slave-produced goods—bought, sold, and traded on a capitalist free market which lacked transparency—threatens to oppress everyone caught up in such a system. The consumption of the abject creates or produces horror; as such, the only kind of capital that can be accumulated in

such an economy is *horror*. Free produce poetry sees a market society that is haunted by its own capital.

Twining capital, capitalism, and the abject, free produce poetry suggests that this early consumer resistance movement presciently anticipated some of the most prevalent concerns addressed by modernity while hearkening back to that most conspicuously troubling consumption: cannibalism. Abolitionist boycott activists identified the sensory trauma of “eating the Other” well before bell hooks raised the alarm for modern audiences.²³⁰ As I have tried to show, free produce poetry posits a very literal version of material relations that collapses the boundaries between consumer and producer, self and other, in ways that have horrific, haunting implications for market society. If the material and moral stain of slavery can enter the homes and bodies of unconscientious consumers, as abolitionist boycott poetry suggests, the very fabric of market society collapses upon itself, erasing distinctions among producer, consumer, commodity and body. The implications of such breakdowns raise provocative questions we are only beginning to answer about the relationship between consumer and producer in the nineteenth century, about the contamination of the market, and about the physical interaction between person and consumable object, ultimately offering a new view of market society in nineteenth-century America.

²³⁰ hooks, *Black Looks*.

Chapter 3
CONJURING CONSUMER REFORM AND MORAL CAPITAL IN FRANCES
HARPER'S *SOWING AND REAPING*

“But you know on this...business, you and I always part company. You are always up in the clouds, while I am trying to invest in a few acres, or town lots of *terra firma*.”

“And would your hold on earthly possessions, be less firm because you looked beyond the seen to the unseen?”

—Frances Harper, *Sowing and Reaping* (1876-77)

Frances Ellen Watkins Harper's readers knew, of course, that the answer should be, “No, my hold would be greater.” Just a few paragraphs into her Reconstruction-era temperance novella, *Sowing and Reaping*, Harper introduces the major conflicts of the story by framing them as a moral debate between friends on best business practices which arrives at the above question. Instead of answering as he should, John Anderson replies that he believes his material, or “earthly,” possessions would be less tangibly his if he, like his friend Paul Clifford, made business decisions based on morals. If he “let conscience interfere” as Clifford does, he would risk economic failure, or a loss of accumulation of capital represented by the “town lots” he seeks.²³¹ As the novel plays out, Anderson enjoys a short-lived boom after opening a swanky saloon but his fiscal investments corrupt his conscience and, in the end, he dies “a pauper in his soul, and a [*sic*] bankrupt in his character.”²³² Paul Clifford, who on the other hand “believes in lending a helping hand” fiscally and sentimentally, does risk economic capital by refusing to partner with Anderson even when his grocery is failing.²³³ But precisely because Clifford is able to “look beyond the seen” gilding that characterizes material

²³¹ Harper, 96.

²³² Harper, 171.

²³³ Harper, 97.

possessions bought from the profits of the liquor trade, he triumphs in the end by reaping not just economic capital but moral wealth as well. As the novel concludes, we are told that “Paul Clifford’s life has been a grand success, not in the mere accumulation of wealth, but in the *enrichment* of his moral and spiritual nature.”²³⁴ Thus, this opening moment reveals three tenets of temperance reform literature that I want to consider in this chapter: seen versus unseen value, ownership of capital, and moral sentiment.

While Paul Clifford and John Anderson debate good business sense in the first scene, in the next scene the two main women characters debate the wisdom of turning down a marriage proposal based on temperance values. Jeanette cannot fathom why Belle Gordon would turn down a suitor, Charles Romaine, simply because he occasionally imbibes. To Belle, it is a matter of liberty and self-respect. She defends her decision: “I feel that the hands of a moderate drinker are not steady enough to hold my future happiness,” and later, “The man who claims my love and allegiance must be a victor and not a slave.”²³⁵ The accusation that Romaine might not have steady enough hands to “hold” on to conjugal prosperity, echoes Clifford’s hint that his friend’s “hold” on material possessions may be stronger if the man who held them had the ability to sense deeper and greater value beyond the “seen,” in the first instance, and beyond the tasted, in the second. Like Clifford, Belle possesses a heightened sense that can discern the inherent qualities of objects. Her cousin finds this annoying. As Belle confides in Jeanette her concerns for her family and friends’ susceptibility to the bottle (having herself been the daughter of an alcoholic), Jeanette interrupts, “Oh Belle do stop, what a train of horrors you can conjure out of an innocent glass of wine.”²³⁶ The irony here, and which

²³⁴ Harper, 175, italics mine.

²³⁵ Harper, 100, 102-103.

²³⁶ Harper, 101.

the novella meditates on throughout its chapters, is first that those “horrors” are very real and not a conjuring trick; and second, that Belle is not the one performing some sort of paranoid sorcery, but rather the liquor trade itself is complicit in “conjuring” or concocting quaffable horror. Belle’s moral vision allows her to see those horrors and consequently avoid further physical interaction with glasses of wine and what they contain. By refusing to consume wine, she herself is the “victor” who earns moral integrity and economic stability. Those who cannot discern the “unseen” “horrors”—or, threats to physical, economic, and moral wellbeing—risk becoming “slaves” to the trade, as Charles Romaine indeed does. The doubling of the senses as both physical and metaphorical ripples throughout the book as characters make decisions to see, taste, or touch objects associated with the liquor trade. Belle is as determined in her non-consumption of alcohol as Clifford is of non-participation in its business. By novel’s end, they have married. Together, they wield a material literacy that sees the “horrors” in a wine glass; they resist ‘enslavement’ to the bottle and therefore keep their lives and liberty; they spend their money and labor in selfless pursuits that reap moral capital worth more than tainted economic capital.

This chapter looks at Harper’s short postbellum temperance novella, *Sowing and Reaping*, which captures some of the more profound arguments for temperance reform by aligning market regulation with freedom itself, set within the religious framework of moral parables. As an African American activist and public figure, Harper’s life and works reveal the many, varied, and interesting intersections of temperance reform across race, gender, and religious sects. But beyond the intersectionality of temperance, which has been studied elsewhere,²³⁷ this chapter is rather concerned with the ways in which

²³⁷ See Reynolds and Rosenthal, “Introduction.”

Sowing and Reaping offers solutions to a materially immoral economy and a morally illiterate populace through modeling correct spending and productive labor—essentially, how it models boycott.

Scholarly attention to temperance literature has not matched the deluge of print it engendered in its own time. Though recent years have witnessed an uptick in studies on temperance, scholarship has not yet fully taken stock of the role of temperance fiction as a reform genre with significant implications for consumer attitudes and approaches to a new market economy. Until the late 1990s few scholars issued calls for greater critical appreciation of the literature of nineteenth-century American temperance, to which scholars such as David S. Reynolds, Debra J. Rosenthal, Karen Sanchez-Eppler, Thomas Augst, Glenn Hendler and others responded.²³⁸ Reynolds and Rosenthal's edited collection of essays, *The Serpent in the Cup*, is a strong indicator of collective scholarly recognition of the importance of the genre, though there hasn't been a similarly expansive study of temperance culture and literature since its 1997 publication. As Reynolds and Rosenthal observe in their introduction, temperance fiction was widespread, from Hawthorne to William Wells Brown, from Poe to T. S. Arthur.²³⁹ A survey of most canonical texts will reveal some allusion to temperance.

Yet its ubiquity is not the only reason temperance fiction—specifically, literature that grew directly out of the temperance movement—deserves attention. It participated within the culture of nineteenth-century reform, borrowing rhetorical strategies from abolition and women's rights. Temperance's contributions to reform rhetoric added new

²³⁸ See essays by Reynolds, Rosenthal, Sanchez-Eppler and others in *Serpent in the Cup*; Augst, "Temperance, Mass Culture, and the Romance of Experience"; and Hendler, "Bloated Bodies and Sober Sentiments."

²³⁹ Reynolds and Rosenthal, "Introduction," 3.

dimensions to shared discourses of emancipation and equality by reframing enslavement as racially transcendent and by positing women's rights as a social necessity. As Rosenthal and Reynolds remind us, "For abolitionists, the enslavement of southern blacks was paralleled metaphorically by the drunkard's enslavement to the bottle. For feminists, man's injustice against women was often figured in the image of the oppressed wife, brutalized by an intemperate husband from whom she could not escape because of the legal difficulty of procuring a divorce."²⁴⁰ Further, much African American temperance literature drew direct parallels between temperance and abolition. For instance, Robert Levine and John Crowley read William Wells Brown's *Clotel* and Frederick Douglass' *Narrative*, respectively, as evidence of temperance as a racially transcendent issue that called for a freedom from the bottle at the same time that both writers called for freedom for the enslaved.²⁴¹

However, as Debra J. Rosenthal, DeVanna S. Fulton, and Carla Peterson argue, slavery and race were not always the hallmarks of temperance literature written by African Americans, especially postbellum. In fact, *Sowing and Reaping* deliberately and carefully "[avoids] any mention of race."²⁴² *Sowing and Reaping* and Harper's earlier short story, "The Two Offers," use what Rosenthal calls "deracialized discourse" to gently correct our still pervasive assumption of whiteness in the place of neutrality.²⁴³ Both Rosenthal and DeVanna S. Fulton read *Sowing and Reaping*'s lack of racial markers as part of Harper's integrationist agenda; moreover, Fulton claims that race becomes "insignificant to the context of the narrative."²⁴⁴ Carla Peterson understands

²⁴⁰ Reynolds and Rosenthal, 5.

²⁴¹ Crowley, "Slaves to the Bottle"; Levine, "Whisky, Blacking and All."

²⁴² Rosenthal, "Deracialized Discourse," 153.

²⁴³ Rosenthal, 153-154.

²⁴⁴ Fulton, "Sowing Seeds in an Untilled Field," 211.

Harper's moves to gesture toward the universality of temperance reform, and helpfully suggests readers treat the characters "not as either white or black but as both/and."²⁴⁵

Despite these subtle differences in argument, all three scholars are careful to attend to the racial realities that Harper and other African American temperance reformers faced.

For this very reason, I believe the novella's print context complicates any pretensions to racelessness or deracialized discourse. Published in the *Christian Recorder*, a Philadelphia-based African American periodical, *and* published concurrently with the collapse of Reconstruction, *and* written by an African American woman, the novella necessarily invites broader readings of its work as a cultural agent not only of temperance reform but of racial uplift and women's rights. Its lack of racial markers suggests a deliberate racial ambiguity, perhaps even the kind of flexibility that Peterson reads, while its publication venue suggests a racially unambiguous, that is, specifically black, audience. If the habit of white authors' blindly "enforcing racelessness in literary discourse," as Toni Morrison has said, is in fact "itself a racial act,"²⁴⁶ consider how much more of a "racial act" are Harper's 'racelessly' staged characters.

Sowing and Reaping follows several pairs of characters whose consumer behavior determines their destiny. Grocer Paul Clifford mirrors suffragist Belle Gordon's antialcohol policy; both refuse to participate in the liquor trade in any way, both, incidentally, agree on the role of women as influential partners, and both are eventually rewarded with love and domestic prosperity. Even when business looks grim, Paul Clifford declines financial assistance from his friend and barroom owner John Anderson, whose own gaudy and decadent lifestyle is overshadowed by domestic troubles. Money

²⁴⁵ Peterson, "Frances Harper, Charlotte Forten," 45.

²⁴⁶ Morrison, *Playing in the Dark*, 46.

does not buy happiness for Anderson and his wife, for “he loved money, and she loved display, and their home was often the scene of the most pitiful contentions about money matters.”²⁴⁷ By the novel’s end, Anderson lies on his deathbed, possessed of “houses, money and land” but divested of moral character and happiness.²⁴⁸ Those who frequent his trade fare no better, especially Charles Romaine and Jeanette. He and Jeanette marry, but because of their inability to sense the danger lurking in the wine glass, both pay dearly. After battling the serpent in the cup, Romaine falls off the wagon and dies a drunkard’s death, leaving Jeanette widowed and alone with her sorrows. There is, however, a happy ending for former drunk Joe Gough, whose name and plot line were likely meant to recall popular Washingtonian lecturer John B. Gough.²⁴⁹ Having received kind words and a new suit from Clifford, Gough is able to obtain employment. His wife, Mary, likewise is the beneficiary of Belle’s charity, a basket of food stuffs purchased from Clifford’s store. Together, Mary and Joe Gough are able to restore their home and elevate themselves and their family in social standing, effectively reaping cultural capital from the temperance charity of Paul Clifford and Belle Gordon. The novel’s antialcohol heroes fare the best. Having finally married, Clifford and Belle organize their domestic and public lives around a moral code.²⁵⁰ They themselves continue to sow and reap rewards: Belle “elevated the tone of society in which she moved” and Clifford is “a grand success, not in the mere accumulation of wealth, but in the enrichment of his moral and spiritual nature.”²⁵¹

²⁴⁷ Harper, *Sowing and Reaping*, 166.

²⁴⁸ Harper, 171.

²⁴⁹ John B. Gough (1817 to 1886) was a prominent orator and member of the popular temperance group, the Washingtonians. His *Autobiography* (1845) pulled on both rags-to-riches and conversion narrative conventions.

²⁵⁰ Harper, 175.

²⁵¹ Harper, 175.

Sowing and Reaping is a tale of empowerment through correct spending and honorable labor, a modern parable of “sowing” a moral monetary trajectory and “reaping” rewards, both morally and economically. In the novella, the biblical parable of “sowing and reaping” takes on a commercial connotation, where to sow charity reaps what I will later define as moral capital far more sustaining and rewarding than economic capital easily squandered. Key to decoding the commercial landscape in edifying ways is one’s moral literacy of everyday commodities, or, one’s ability to correctly discern the dangers of the decanter. Jeanette’s refusal, for instance, to acknowledge the “horrors” that Belle sees in a wine glass impairs Jeanette’s ability to foresee her own sorrows.²⁵² By novel’s end, Jeannette’s once prosperous union has ended in widowhood. Harper’s approach to buying, selling, spending, investing, and generally interacting with the marketplace is, as I argue in the following pages, predicated on a moralist understanding of material objects. To fail to understand the material world in such a way results in death, disease, and the loss of capital—economic, cultural, and moral.

In this chapter, I read Harper’s novella as a key to decoding the role temperance and its literature played in framing a moral consumer code for the newly emergent market economy, a code that marked certain commodities as immoral or detrimental and that advocated boycott of those goods. Just one of hundreds of temperance tales, *Sowing and Reaping* makes use of conventional genre tropes: the upstanding teetotalers, the reformed drunkard, the decadent excess and untimely end of the rum-seller, and the sensationalist demise of promising characters into a drunkard’s grave. Yet its authorship by one of the leading African American woman activists of her time and its print context in a long-running African American periodical, the *Christian Recorder*, signals the raced and

²⁵² Harper, 101.

gendered complexity of the temperance movement as a whole. In fact, as I discuss below, the boycott of alcohol had higher stakes for African American reformers, functioning as an anti-prejudice tactic that could have implications for whole communities, even while being a powerful tool of economic elevation through commercial enterprise. Importantly, the movement shared, across race and gender lines, a morally-minded consumer-based approach to reform: it identified “bad” objects in order to encourage good consumer behavior and, by extension, good business in an unregulated market. By abstaining from alcoholic goods and eschewing interaction with that particularly “evil” business, temperance reformers such as Harper believed that freedom from the bottle made men and women free to retain capital and accumulate moral capital in a market society that valued both. For African American consumers in particular, the boycott of alcohol functioned as an important method of racial uplift.

FLOODING THE MARKET

When one writer dramatically titled his tract “Our National Curse,”²⁵³ referring to drinking habits in the United States, he was not being entirely hyperbolic. Americans were hitting the bottle. Temperance activists looked around them and saw a nation of drunkards. As W. J. Rorabaugh documents in *The Alcoholic Republic*, “between 1800 and 1830, annual per capita consumption increased until it exceeded 5 gallons [of pure

²⁵³ Taylor, “Our National Curse,” 1881. All references to tracts published by the National Temperance Society and Publication House use the publication date of the anthology issued by the organization (1881). Original publication dates for individual tracts are not provided in the anthology, nor are consecutive page numbers, using instead pamphlet numbers and internal pagination. Therefore, I use the anthology publication date here and throughout, and I provide the page numbers printed in the original.

alcohol]”—a “veritable national binge.”²⁵⁴ Americans were not drinking light beer either: “During the first third of the nineteenth century the typical American annually drank more distilled liquor than at any other time in our history. The beverages they drank were for the most part distilled liquors...whiskey, rum, gin, and brandy. On the average, those liquors were 45% alcohol, or 90 proof.”²⁵⁵ That translates to at least two ounces of pure ethanol per day, or the rough equivalent of three glasses of wine a day, or four to five beers a day. Comparatively, Americans today drink less than half that.²⁵⁶ Observing the effects of excessive alcohol consumption—addiction, delirium tremens (withdrawal), homelessness, joblessness, domestic abuse—led many to conclude that alcohol was bad, evil even. Judging by consumer trends, reformers’ language which painted alcohol and the material culture associated with it as demoniacal was impactful; following the advent of the temperance movement, consumption dropped dramatically after 1830 to just over one gallon per capita by 1855.²⁵⁷ While other factors helped influence the downward trend in consumption, chiefly higher federal taxation of distilled beverages, the temperance movement played an important role in shaping consumer attitudes toward the liquor trade.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁴ Rorabaugh, *Alcoholic Republic*, 8. In the nineteenth century, America out-paced many European nations in terms of hard alcohol production and consumption. Only Scotland and Sweden had comparable figures. Scotland, Sweden, and the U.S. were all “distilled spirit strongholds. These nations were agricultural, rural, lightly populated, and geographically isolated from foreign markets; they had undercapitalized, agrarian, barter economies” and surplus of grains (11).

²⁵⁵ Rorabaugh, 8.

²⁵⁶ According to data reported by the National Institute for Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism and collected from the National Alcohol Beverage Control Association and the Alcohol Epidemiologic Data System, per capita consumption of pure ethanol in the United States was 2.3 gallons in 2014 (Haughwaut, LaVallee, and Castle, “Surveillance Report #104”).

²⁵⁷ Reynolds, “Black Cats and Delirium Tremens,” 22.

²⁵⁸ Rorabaugh, 8.

The print landscape charts the changing responses to alcohol consumption over the course of the century, and the evolution is drastic. In 1835, George Cheever's damning temperance tale *Deacon Giles' Distillery* was met with public censure and landed him in prison for libel. By the time Harper published *Sowing and Reaping* serially in 1876-77, the temperance tale had become a distinct genre, with other temperance literature such as tracts and sermons stoutly flanking its rank.²⁵⁹ Public opinion had swung in favor, if not of total abstinence, then certainly of temperance literature. The forty-year interim between Cheever and Harper had witnessed the short-lived but popular Washingtonian Society and their raucous, if at times ironic, experience meetings²⁶⁰; the 1851 passage of the partially prohibitory Maine Law which was followed by similar legislation in twelve other states; and the swelling surge of temperance tracts into the print landscape by a number of temperance societies.

Temperance reformers combatted the flood of alcohol by flooding the market with reform literature. The sheer mass of temperance texts is staggering: "By 1851 the American Tract Society reported the distribution of nearly five million temperance pamphlets; thirteen tracts had been issued in quantities in excess of one hundred thousand copies."²⁶¹ The swell of temperance print culture led Frances E. Willard, president of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), to estimate in 1880 that the National Temperance Society and Publication House had published over 32 million pages that year

²⁵⁹ On the rise of temperance literature, see Reynolds and Rosenthal, Introduction to *Serpent in the Cup*, 3.

²⁶⁰ For descriptions of experience meetings, see Reynolds, "Black Cats and Delirium Tremens," in which Reynolds reads stories of the intemperate temperance man as a subgenre of temperance literature, which he calls the "ironic mode" (23). See also Castiglia and Hendler, Introduction to *Franklin Evans, or the Inebriate*, xxxiv-xxxvi, for Whitman's tongue-in-cheek account of the "enthusiastic" sensationalism of Washingtonian experience meetings (xxxv).

²⁶¹ Rorabaugh, 196.

alone, many of which took the form of tracts, narratives, and textbooks.²⁶² The output was not only high but also far-reaching: “people who lived in remote places were exposed to the most advanced ideas about liquor, as presented in pamphlets, magazines, and newspapers.”²⁶³ Temperance fiction, poetry, and prose dominated the print landscape throughout the nineteenth century.

Temperance utilized tracts, sermons, textbooks, fiction, and first-person narratives to condemn the demon drink. The storylines of such narratives were rather formulaic, including some combination of conventional tropes: the upstanding teetotalers, the reformed drunkard, the decadent success and untimely end of the rum-seller, and the sensationalist demise of promising characters into a drunkard’s grave. Titles of tracts such as “The Fatal Draught” and “Consequences, or, A Bowl of Punch,” and many more, called out objects of the liquor trade in an attempt to both identify offending goods and inscribe them as such.²⁶⁴ Many pamphlets directly implored readers to reconsider their consumption of alcohol as a “direct contribution toward sustaining an establishment” and trade “whose dark foundations rest on the murdered souls of hundreds of...fellow-men.”²⁶⁵ Sentimental and moralistic, the language of temperance texts called on readers’ sense of right and wrong to argue against spending money in the liquor trade.

In an attempt to regulate the proliferation and circulation of morally threatening goods, and goods which could divest or subvert moral integrity, concerned citizen-consumers banded together within reform societies such as the WCTU, of which Harper was a member, to argue in public and in print, in prose and in fiction, for the boycott of

²⁶² Minutes of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union at the Seventh Annual Meeting in Boston, 12.

²⁶³ Rorabaugh, 196.

²⁶⁴ Stryker, “The Fatal Draught”; Dunning, “Consequences, or, A Bowl of Punch.”

²⁶⁵ Cuyler, “Stumbling,” 2.

alcohol. Throughout the nineteenth century, moral reform societies acted out and acted for the kind of consciously ordered, morally navigable world they believed in, at times even monitoring the behavior of individuals in the community.²⁶⁶ Therefore, as activists, reformers took a hands-on approach to crafting a morally ordered material reality, by which I mean they oftentimes fixated on material objects as things that should or should not be part of a morally constructed world, including all the accoutrements of the liquor trade. Alongside fairs, petitions, and charitable spending; literature emerged as a major vehicle for reform societies' collective action. As I have discussed in previous chapters, reformers and reform societies in the nineteenth century used literature to describe morally appropriate or inappropriate objects and to prescribe consumers' relationships to them. Just as abolitionist boycott literature read the inherent evil of slavery in slave-produced goods, temperance literature reads a host of ills in a wine glass. In fact, the two movements shared an ideological approach to consumption and its function in a purportedly free democratic republic.²⁶⁷ That shared approach read consumption as political participation in, or deliberate abstention from, suspect systems of trade, such as the trade in slave bodies on the one hand or alcohol on the other. Many antislavery activists also supported temperance reform, including Frederick Douglass whose *Paper* treated antislavery and temperance as twin concerns by 1853.²⁶⁸ Harper, of course, was active in both movements. As the twinning of antislavery and temperance rhetoric

²⁶⁶ See Dunbar, *Fragile Freedom*, 51-52, for an account of the ways members of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia policed its members' home lives.

²⁶⁷ Consumer resistance movements throughout American history have, of course, their distinct differences, but nineteenth-century movements share an approach to consumption that "developed a philosophy, practice, and vocabulary of consumer activism that twentieth-century (and contemporary) activists, including those in the [modern] consumer movement, employed and modified," argues Glickman in *Buying Power* (64).

²⁶⁸ Levine, "Whisky, Blacking and All," 93.

indicates, major nineteenth-century reform movements were inherently invested in answering what it meant to be free, and what a ‘free’ market society ought to look like—even if that meant the freedom to regulate it.

A BLOODY TRADE

Temperance reformers, black and white, imagined a marketplace of goods laced with moral signifiers that either elevated or condemned consumers through their purchase. In *Sowing and Reaping* and other temperance literature, the spending of money functions as consent or dissent, either supporting a dishonest and dangerous trade or subverting that trade by converting cash into domestic prosperity and community charity. Spending habits were steeped in moralist language of ‘good’ and ‘bad’, ‘right’ and ‘evil’, indicating the inexorable relationship between consumer behavior and moral definitions of a growing market economy. Bad spending could cost the spender his moral integrity, his freedom, his life, or even his salvation. Temperance tales argue that the purchase of a material object is never a straight exchange, but rather a (im)moral investment.

In temperance literature, a glass of wine is never just a glass of wine, but is rather a stand in for death, disease, poison, pauperism, and widowhood. The metaphorical poison turned literal is no better illustrated than in George Cheever’s early temperance tale, *Deacon Giles’ Distillery* (1835), in which the clergy are complicit in selling amoral, evil substances by the barrel. In the frontispiece, barrels labeled “death,” “poverty,” “sickness,” “grief” lay scattered in the foreground while demons work the machinery of the distillery in the same warehouse as Deacon Giles’ Bible shop (fig. 1).²⁶⁹ According to temperance reformers, dram-shops, rum-sellers, saloons, and barrooms were in the

²⁶⁹ Cheever, *Deacon Giles’ Distillery*.

business of blood, flesh, and souls. Dram-shop keepers were not only “‘licensed’ to sell death by measure” but did so in a “moral slaughter-house,” lambasted one tract author.²⁷⁰ Authors insist overwhelmingly that to consume liquor, especially in commodity form, is to purchase damnation. In a bizarre conflation of commodity and person, the liquor trade “makes merchandise of the souls of its victims.”²⁷¹ To produce and consume alcohol was to trade in human souls and human blood.



Figure 1. Frontispiece, *The Dream: or the True History of Deacon Giles' Distillery and Deacon Jones' Brewery*, by George B. Cheever. New York: Thomas Hamilton. Courtesy the Library Company of Philadelphia, 1859.

²⁷⁰ Theodore Cuyler, “A Shot at the Decanter,” 1, 3.

²⁷¹ Taylor, “Our National Curse,” 3.

The bloody costs of the liquor trade take center stage in a pivotal scene in T. S. Arthur's best-selling 1854 novel *Ten Nights in a Bar-room and What I Saw There*, which follows the lives of small town inhabitants in the few years after the opening of a saloon. When bar-room owner Simon Slade unthinkingly throws a tumbler across the crowded barroom, it hits the angelic child of town drunk Joe Morgan, resulting in little Mary Morgan's death. The trade and the objects associated with it, here a tumbler glass, wreak havoc on the lives of loved ones. Ann Slade chastises her husband, "If you don't have [Joe Morgan's daughter's] blood clinging for life to your garments, you may be thankful."²⁷² Mary's death completes the process of staining Slade and the clothes he can purchase with moneys earned in disreputable trade. Conversely, Harper's Paul Clifford in *Sowing and Reaping* deliberately avoids complicity with the trade in blood by refusing capital associated with the liquor trade. Even when pressed by economic necessity, he refuses to "touch [that] money, for it is the price of blood."²⁷³ Meanwhile, Arthur's Simon Slade wears his bloody complicity on his now 'stained' clothing.

While Simon Slade is the primary agent in causing Mary Morgan's death, in other temperance tales the bottle itself is condemned as the perpetrator of violence. John Cruikshank's 1848 cartoon series "The Bottle," published in T.S. Arthur's temperance tale collection *Six Nights with the Washingtonians*, illustrates the agentic properties that objects of the alcohol industry were sometimes seen as possessing. In the series, "The Bottle" is introduced as an object of social consumption, though it quickly becomes an object to which husband and wife turn in distress, and finally stages its last act as a weapon of murder: the husband kills his wife "with the instrument of all their misery"

²⁷² Arthur, *Ten Nights in a Bar-room*, 81.

²⁷³ Harper, *Sowing and Reaping*, 118.

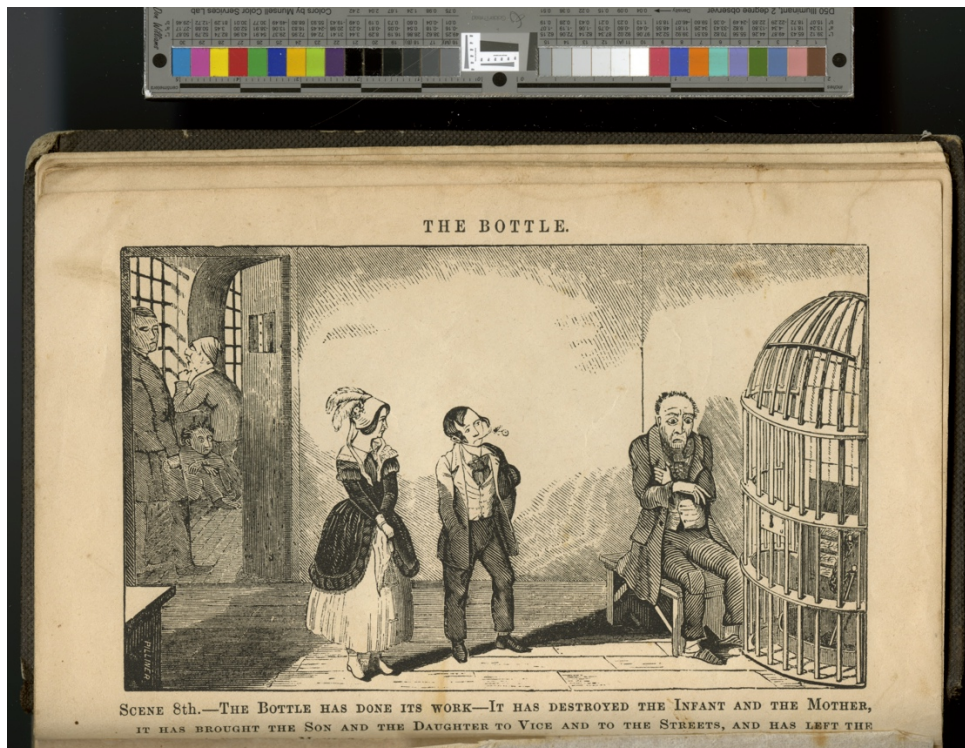
(fig. 2).²⁷⁴ “The bottle has done its work,” the series concludes, “it has destroyed the infant and the mother, it has brought the son and the daughter to vice and to the streets and has left the father a hopeless maniac” (fig. 3).²⁷⁵ The transformation is clear: the bottle moves from a human-manipulated object of voluntary consumption and use to a fully motivated subject which exerts “its work” upon objectified human users. What looks initially like an object becomes in the end a subject; what looks like a human subject becomes in the end an object. The object subjugates the human through the process of consumption; the human ingests that which the object contains, liquor, and in turn forfeits his will to that of the bottle’s. A kind of objectification via osmosis, the bottle poses a greater threat to human consumers than mere loss of wages—rather, the loss of humanity itself.

For some reformers, it was this confusion over subject and object, human and thing, that further indicted the liquor trade, for if it was impossible to tell who committed crimes—the alcohol or the alcoholic—and, further, if alcohol blurred the lines between human and object, the safest recourse was to remove the offending substance from circulation. One temperance tract author mulls over the question of locating blame in “Who Killed the Man?” a pamphlet in which one man, after an evening of drink, stumbles across train tracks next to a public house and is killed.²⁷⁶ The author, anxious to locate the blame for the drunkard’s death, runs through a list of possible perpetrators: The human consumer; or the inanimate object, the train; the tavern keep at his last stop; the first to sell him drink; the granary and barley farmers who supply the market; the halls of legislation where liquor licenses are granted; enabling friends and

²⁷⁴ Cruikshank, “The Bottle,” Scene 7th.

²⁷⁵ Cruikshank, “The Bottle,” Scene 8th.

²⁷⁶ National Temperance Society and Publication House, “Who Killed the Man?”



Figures 2 and 3. Scene 7th and 8th, “The Bottle,” by John Cruikshank. Printed in *Temperance Tales; or, Six Nights with the Washingtonians*, by T. S. Arthur. Philadelphia: W. A. Leary & Co., 1848. Courtesy the Library Company of Philadelphia.

acquaintances; his childhood home, his father's table. The answer finally arrives at the sight of a bottle sitting upon his father's table: "and on that father's table stood the bottle and the glass."²⁷⁷ Thus, the bottle triggers a network of actors which together result in a man's death. The entire trade, including its material objects and its human enablers, shares complicity in allowing the unchecked circulation of criminal goods.

Not only did temperance reformers fear the liquor trade could animate objects into agentic subjects, but they also warned that human users were susceptible to loss of subjectivity through their consumer behavior. In one National Temperance Society pamphlet, "The Two Pictures," men and women who spend money on drink are contrasted to others who instead save their money by refusing to allow it to circulate in the liquor trade. In a dram-shop "stand a row of men and women—at least a row of *things* with the duds of men and women hanging over their shoulders, but both manhood and womanhood are well sucked out of them by this time."²⁷⁸ On the other hand, people who frequent, or use, savings banks are full of life: "real men and women...and the shine of it in their faces."²⁷⁹ "Real" men and women contrast with objectified shells of humans dumbly lined up to buy the humanity-destroying draught. Importantly, monetary investment is what separates "real" humans from the "things" they might become. If, as on the other hand, consumers invest their cash in savings accounts, they retain the "shine" of real people. The retention of capital is the sustenance of life. As this and other pamphlets argue, the process of dehumanization begins with a monetary transaction; the result of improper consumption is the divestment of humanity, the rendering of humans as things.

²⁷⁷ National Temperance Society and Publication House, "Who Killed the Man," 3

²⁷⁸ Arnot, "Two Pictures," 1, italics mine.

²⁷⁹ Arnot, 1.

For conscientious consumers such as Harper, the alarming implication of a trade that often turned humans into things was, further, that trade's ability to wring money from the bodies of the addicted. In a speech to the International Council of Women in 1888, Harper describes the bloody trade in alcohol in terms of its method of profiting. In the liquor trade, moneys are extracted from the bodily fluid and harm of consumers and their families by morally bankrupt traders in alcohol "who increase their possessions through wrong-doing, who uphold prosperous sins, and virtually say, 'Let us make money, though we extract it from blood and tears'." ²⁸⁰ Here, monetary denominations are composed of human fibers, the "blood and tears" of those victimized by the trade. For Harper, the liquor trade is bloody not just because the purchase of addictive substances may result in abuse and death, but also because it takes money from already existing bodily fluids: "Let us make money, though we extract it from blood and tears" *not* "though it may *cause* blood and tears." Thus, the trade has already been implicated in its harmful effects even at the outset. All the more reason, she and other reformers argued, to distance oneself from the trade in alcohol.

So Harper did. A life-long fighter for black and women's rights, Harper modeled the kind of activist behavior that elevated the recognition of black and women's intellect and furthered the reach of consumer resistance efforts. She was textually prolific and publicly vocal, publishing three novellas, one novel, at least one short story, several volumes of poetry, a handful of periodical articles, and maintaining a rigorous lecture career from the 1840s through the 1890s. Temperance reform, antislavery, black education, and women's rights all benefited from Harper's activist efforts. She held an official appointment as speaker for the Pennsylvania Antislavery Society in 1857 and

²⁸⁰ Harper, "The Neglected Rich," 119.

1858, was Superintendent of Colored Work for the WCTU from 1884 to 1886, held several teaching posts, including at the Union Seminary school of Columbus, Ohio, and co-founded the National Association of Colored Women in 1896. A highly esteemed speaker, she was invited to deliver lectures at the Women's Rights Convention of 1866, the Equal Rights Association of 1869, the International Council of Women in 1888, among others. Additionally, she advocated universal suffrage, both African American male suffrage as well as women's suffrage broadly. Realizing the centrality of money to moral reform, she donated generously to various antislavery societies, even scolding William Still for questioning why she gave so much and saved so little for herself.²⁸¹ Harper's charitable donations enacted the kind of 'good' spending that undergirded consumer reform rhetoric. And she remained an anti-alcohol activist throughout her life.

FREEDOM, FREEDMEN (AND WOMEN), AND TEMPERANCE

Harper's *Sowing and Reaping*—a racially complicated, gendered tale of consumer resistance and moral restoration—was the product of a robust reform movement that crossed demographic and temporal lines. While temperance sometimes meant something different for different groups of people, it purported to serve universal interests. Grand ideals asserted that temperance reform (which for some meant federal legislation) could free the nation from the grip of economic dependence, domestic contamination, and moral degradation. As scholars have long noted, women were particularly drawn to the temperance movement, appealing as it did to nineteenth-century ideals of home and

²⁸¹ In an epistolary response to Still, Harper retorted, "Let me explain a few matters to you. In the first place, I am able to give something. In the second place, I am willing to do so," qtd. in *A Brighter Coming Day*, ed. Foster, 16.

family.²⁸² Inebriety posed serious threats to domestic peace and prosperity. Women flocked to the cause in the 1870s, following the “Women’s Crusade” which heralded the founding of the most influential women’s temperance society, the WCTU. Women’s championing of the temperance cause was closely linked to woman suffrage, for in order to enact legislation of prohibition women needed legal recognition as full citizens of the United States.

Because of its emphasis on enfranchisement and rights to domestic property, the movement also had strong roots in African American uplift campaigns. Yet for black activists, temperance had higher stakes—intemperance posed greater threats to black reputation and prosperity while temperance, black reformers argued, promised great rewards. The relationship between blacks and alcohol in the nineteenth century was complicated by alcohol’s instrumentality in the slave trade and by its raced exclusion from black freedom of consumption.²⁸³ As intricately tied as it was to the triangular slave trade, alcohol had been quite literally an instrument of enslavement. In pre-Revolutionary Rhode Island and Massachusetts, for instance, as Kenneth Christmon notes, the demand for slave labor to sustain the two states’ high number of stills was so high that “these two states became the leading importers of Africans and the leading exporters of rum.”²⁸⁴ More generally, as a spirit distilled from sugar, the major cash crop of the transatlantic slave trade, alcohol was inexorably linked with the entire history of enslavement in America. Further, ante- and postbellum laws restricting the ownership of stills and

²⁸² See Epstein, *The Politics of Domesticity*; Parker, *Purifying America*; and Boylan, *Origins of Women’s Activism*.

²⁸³ See Christmon, “Historical Overview of Alcohol in the African American Community,” (324-328) for a brief history of the relationship between African American alcohol consumption and laws surrounding consumption in the nineteenth century.

²⁸⁴ Christmon, 324-325.

consumption of alcoholic beverages by enslaved and free African Americans were not unusual, in part motivated by white fears of mass revolt.²⁸⁵ Actual consumption patterns by blacks in the mid-nineteenth century show limited use, mostly ceremonial, and few instances of drunkenness; at the height of the temperance movement, “African Americans had the lowest mortality rate due to alcoholism of any ethnic group.”²⁸⁶

While African American’s relationship with alcohol in the nineteenth century was problematized by alcohol’s role in the slave trade and softened by low consumption rates, African American participation in the liquor trade was further complicated by the promise of economic gain for business owners. Caterers and restaurateurs, for instance, stood to gain considerably from the sale of beer, wine, and spirits; a gain that was viewed by some as one of the most effective methods of racial uplift. George T. Downing, owner of the Sea Girt Hotel, a popular hotel and restaurant in Rhode Island (just one of his several successful businesses), identified entrepreneurship and education as equally effective in the cause of racial uplift, arguing that “[s]ociety is deferential; it defers to power. Learning and wealth and power are most potent in society...Let us first get wealthy, intelligent, and wise” in the pursuit of equality and justice.²⁸⁷ Money and brains, in other words, were the key to seizing rightful and true power in a system that seemed to regard little else as valuable. Downing himself was a respected member of the African American elite and a vocal activist for integrated schools and equal economic opportunities. His Sea Girt Hotel, though specializing in ice creams and fancy delicacies, likely also served alcohol. The hotel’s floor plan, however—which was divided into a

²⁸⁵ Christmon, 326.

²⁸⁶ Christmon, 328.

²⁸⁷ Foner and Walker, eds., *The Proceedings of the Black State Conventions, 1840-1865*, vol. 2, 212.

gentleman's sitting room, an "ice cream and refreshment saloon," and women's saloon "in the rear"²⁸⁸—may indicate an attempt to control patrons' behavior through the separation of genders, common in finer establishments, thereby maintaining a refined environment.

While the sale of alcohol in black-owned businesses complicates African American temperance reform, the underlying effort stemmed from similar beliefs regarding the socio-economic status of African Americans. Downing's championing of entrepreneurship as a major mode of racial uplift taps into some of the very same tenets of temperance as racial uplift. Speaking at the 1855 National Council of the Colored People in Rochester, New York, Downing exclaimed, "We are a set of paupers, relying upon charity and any menial occupation that may be thrown our way; the fault is entirely with ourselves."²⁸⁹ Downing later expounded on the real crux of power and uplift as that "which, though silent, has its weight—it should be most potent: that power is moral character."²⁹⁰ His view on moral character was a common one. Thus, the Downings and the Harpers of the nineteenth century may have opted for different means, but they agreed on the ends: uplift through personal ownership of one's moral character.

Because abstaining from alcohol brought with it its own cachet of moral character, temperance was a steady concern for many African American communities both ante- and postbellum. For antebellum free men and women, temperance was an action-oriented rebuttal to proslavery arguments and an economic preservation of community. In antebellum Northern black communities, moral reform such as

²⁸⁸ *Frederick Douglass's Paper*, "Colored Enterprise," July 27, 1855.

²⁸⁹ *Frederick Douglass's Paper*, "Selections. National Council of the Colored People," July 27, 1855.

²⁹⁰ Foner and Walker, eds., 209.

temperance became a primary focus following regional emancipation and national economic changes.²⁹¹ The pursuit of “respectability” grew alongside and within an emergent middle class—black and white—that could arguably elevate blacks to equal standing with whites, socially and economically.²⁹² This was precisely the due deference that Downing sought through enterprise and education. But at the heart of the politics of respectability was a fundamental need to defend black freedom when legal cases such as the Dred Scott decision (1857) made it clear that such freedoms could be stripped away at any moment. Literary production, moral reform societies, religious rhetoric all, in general, helped to serve the purpose of racial uplift through a politics of respectability; temperance literature, in particular, by Frances Harper and others embodied arguments of resistance and uplift through demonstrating black intellect and literary skill. In all, moral reform, including temperance and its literature, was an anti-prejudice tactic.²⁹³

Moreover, moral reform functioned holistically in African American reform discourse. It is difficult to separate temperance reform from other reform efforts of black activists as all were seen as mutually edifying, all working toward the goal of elevation. An early example of organized reform efforts, the black-led, black-founded, and interracial American Moral Reform Society (1836-1841) identified four central, related concerns: “Education, Temperance, Economy, and Universal Liberty.” Though short-lived and plagued by factious in-fighting, the AMRS was important in establishing a clear connection between reform movements such as temperance and slave-produce boycott

²⁹¹ See Dunbar, *A Fragile Freedom*.

²⁹² See Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*.

²⁹³ See Minutes of the Third Annual Colored Convention, 1833; Levine, “Whisky, Blacking and All”; Dunbar, *Fragile Freedom*, 59; Rael, “Market Revolution and Market Values,” 22. On the politics of respectability and the ‘black elite’, see Silcox, “The Black ‘Better Class’”; and Gatewood, *Aristocrats of Color*.

and placing those movements firmly within the interests of African American communities while also trying to achieve universal (i.e., interracial) reform. At their first meeting, the society's president, William Whipper, outlined the related moral imperatives of temperance, antislavery, and boycott:

We shall advocate temperance in all things, and total abstinence from all alcoholic liquors.... We shall advocate universal liberty, as the inalienable right of every individual born in the world, and a right which cannot be taken away by government itself, without an unjust exercise of power. We shall exhibit our sympathy for our suffering brethren, by petitioning Congress to procure the immediate abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia, and her territories.... We shall dissuade our brethren from using the products of slave labour, both as a moral and Christian duty, and as a means by which the slave system may be successfully abrogated. We shall endeavour to pledge all the ministers and elders of our churches to the cause of Moral Reform. We hope to train the undisciplined youth in moral pursuit, and we shall anxiously endeavour to impress on our people everywhere, that in moral elevation true happiness consists.²⁹⁴

For the AMRS and many others, temperance, abolition, boycott, and proper moral behavior work collectively to uphold and ensure “universal liberty,” implying the importance of free black's behavior to the populace at large. The Jeffersonian pursuit of happiness, so fundamental to American principles of freedom and citizens' rights, is here one of “moral elevation”; thus, true freedom—the hard opposite of slavery endured by “our suffering brethren”—is the reward of moral behavior, within which right consumer behavior is inexorably located. Moreover, the urgent anxiety expressed in Whipper's final line points to the perceived imminent repercussions of failing to navigate the market and daily life in clearly moral terms. Frances Harper was likely influenced by these views as her uncle and guardian, William Watkins, was one of the AMRS's founding and most active members, along with other black elites with whom Harper had lasting

²⁹⁴ The Minutes and Proceedings of the First Annual Meeting of the American Moral Reform Society, 9.

acquaintance (e.g. Robert Purvis, James Forten Sr. and Jr., and William Whipper).

Indeed, Harper's life work—speeches, writings, letters—testifies to the interconnectedness of reform movements, despite the very real interpersonal issues that prevented some groups from coalescing into a coherent universal reform effort.

Following the Civil War, temperance reformers of all races demanded that one abolition be followed by another. To African American activists in particular, emancipation from “King Alcohol,” almost as pernicious a nemesis as King Cotton, would further ensure freedom while strengthening the economic success of black industry. Conducting oneself and one's business according to precepts of temperance, as such arguments went, made it possible for black entrepreneurs to hold more strongly onto their earned wealth by not risking losses (social *and* economic) through saloon ownership. Postbellum, it is not surprising that intemperance, or enslavement to the bottle, might pose an alarming threat to hundreds of thousands recently freed from human bondage. In that tenuous freedom, black temperance became a necessity for maintaining the intellectual and moral integrity of their communities.²⁹⁵

The pressure of respectability abounded both inside and outside of black-authored texts. Speaking through the mouthpiece of his white abolitionist character Georgiana in *Clotel*, William Wells Brown keenly observes that “the necessities of the case require not only that you should behave as well as the whites, but better than the whites” for such is the case with oppressed groups throughout history.²⁹⁶ Brown's fictional white speaker echoes actual white reformers who cautioned African Americans to consider racial

²⁹⁵ Some communities went so far as to police behavior, including the consumption of alcohol, in attempts to maintain moral codes of conduct. See Dunbar, *Fragile Freedom*, 51-52.

²⁹⁶ Brown, *Clotel*, 157. Included in “behaving better” was being “temperate, industrious, peaceable, and pious.”

representation before engaging in drink. In his pamphlet “Freemen, or Slaves?” white temperance reformer George W. Bungay’s own views offer a salient example of such prejudice:

If [the black man] drinks he cannot take care of himself, and the drinker brings disgrace not only upon himself, but upon his entire race, for those who do not like the black man will say: “See that poor drunken negro; he cannot take care of himself. I told you he was not fit to be free; better place him in the hands of his old master, and let him take care of him. See how he wastes his money for rum; how he lounges about the groceries and taverns; how he staggers and sprawls in the sun! He will have to be supported by the State, because he is not man enough to take care of himself.” This is the argument which the drunken freedman puts into the mouths of those who are not in favor of his freedom, but would prefer to see him a slave.²⁹⁷

As Bungay’s language indicates, whites’ problematic assumption of racial representation put the onus on blacks to prove themselves worthy of the emancipation for which they had long argued, petitioned, and fought.

African American temperance activists shared Bungay’s view, to some extent, of alcohol as an enslaving substance. Specifically, enslavement to the bottle was perceived as yet another form of white slave-ownership. Belle Gordon’s resolution to marry “a victor and not a slave” to the bottle is representative of the dichotomy between non-consumption as freedom and addictive consumption as slavery.²⁹⁸ In her 1892 reconstruction-era novel *Iola Leroy*, Frances Harper extends this sentiment through an older character and emancipated slave, Aunt Linda, who exclaims, “[It] does rile me ter see dese white men comin’ down yere an’ settin’ up dere grog-shops, tryin’ to fedder dere nests sellin’ licker to pore culled people. Deys de bery kine of men dat used ter keep dorgs to ketch de runaways.”²⁹⁹ Here, it is as if the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act retains its

²⁹⁷ George Bungay, “Freemen or Slaves?” 2.

²⁹⁸ Harper, *Sowing and Reaping*, 102.

²⁹⁹ Harper, *Iola Leroy*, 159.

power and reverses geographic directionality to catch newly, legally emancipated slaves in the postbellum South, which was really an extension of catching self-emancipated runaway slaves in the antebellum North. Aunt Linda continues, “I’d be chokin’ fer a drink ‘fore I’d eber spen’ a cent wid dem, a spreadin’ dere traps to git de black folks’ money.”³⁰⁰ Aunt Linda’s mode of self-emancipation is boycott. Her abstention works on multiple levels: by denying herself the physical consumption of alcoholic beverages, she liberates herself from would-be enslavers’ “traps” while also subverting their acquirement of black capital.

SENSING IMMORAL GOODS

Before she gave Aunt Linda voice in *Iola Leroy*, Harper had already narrated in *Sowing and Reaping* the consequences of alcohol consumption. In addition to divesting consumers of their hard-earned cash, alcohol corrupted consciences through user’s physical interaction with the substance. But the real issue for moral reformers such as Harper was consumers’ inattentiveness to the moral signifiers of commodities. They could not see the “traps” as clearly as Aunt Linda could. This frustration and alarm were acted out in temperance narratives by Harper and others who narrate the grim outcomes of characters who fail to sense the dangers of alcohol. While alcoholic commodities were literalized quite sensationally as bloody death and damnation in temperance literature, not all of its fictitious characters were observant of this fact. It is this keen sense of moral corruption to which Harper would have all consumers awaken.

In *Sowing and Reaping*, physical interaction with and commercial endorsement of—buying, selling, touching—spirits are attended by moral consequences, as barroom

³⁰⁰ Harper, 159.

owner John Anderson fails to learn. Often, characters' monetary complicity with the liquor trade figures the trade in sanguinary terms, as grocer Paul Clifford does when he refuses to solicit financial assistance from barroom owner John Anderson: "[He] said to himself, 'No, I will not touch his money, for it is the price of blood.'" ³⁰¹ Clifford, whose habit of making charitable donations has put his own business at risk, chooses to distance himself tactilely and financially from the liquor trade. To "touch" money that has helped supply the demand for drink is to pay its price in "blood." Later, we learn what this bloody capital has bought—and cost—John Anderson. While his business flourishes, his home and life itself deteriorate. We are invited to "enter his home" where we will find "wealth, luxury and display, but not...love, refinement and culture." ³⁰² His business finally costs him his life after he is warned by his doctor, "I cannot ensure your life a single hour, unless you quit business" for "the curse that John Anderson had sent to other homes had come back darkened with the shadow of death to brood over his own habitation." ³⁰³ Likewise, Harper describes the home of a "retired whisky dealer," Mr. Glossop, as one of lavish display, stocked with material goods dripping with the blood of his consumer victims: "Could all the misery his liquor had caused been turned into blood, there would have been enough to have oozed in great drops from every marble ornament or beautiful piece of frescoe that adorned his home, for that home with its beautiful surroundings and costly furniture was the price of blood." ³⁰⁴ And yet visitors to his home are duped by the false display of capital, morally ignorant of his crimes and materially illiterate. In this elliptical transaction, one sows immoral commerce and reaps death.

³⁰¹ Harper, *Sowing and Reaping*, 118.

³⁰² Harper, 165.

³⁰³ Harper, 170-171.

³⁰⁴ Harper, 108-109.

Throughout the novel, readers are clued in to the moral bankruptcy masked by expensive material objects. Home interiors such as Anderson's and Glossop's symbolize the false gilding that hides compromised souls. Readers are taught to read exterior coverings as equally suspicious, as in the case of women (probably of the night) who visit the saloon, "women whose costly jewels and magnificent robes were the livery of sin, the outside garnishing of moral death."³⁰⁵ In John Anderson's saloon, liquor is "served in beautiful and costly glasses."³⁰⁶ In *Sowing and Reaping*, as in domestic writing and abolitionist boycott literature, expense does not equate value. Rather, Harper's readers are taught to distrust expensive goods and ask instead what moral work it does, whether it be part of the "network of sin" that comprised the liquor trade.³⁰⁷

In *Sowing and Reaping*, liquor itself emanates an aura of horror that only the morally wise can discern. The novel's heroine Belle Gordon is mocked by her less discerning cousin Jeanette for Belle's ability to "see" the immorality of liquor: "I don't believe Belle ever sees a glass of wine, without thinking of murder, suicide and a drunkard's grave."³⁰⁸ Belle's prescient vision allows her to identify the material source of moral death and decay. "Murder, suicide and a drunkard's grave" are indexed to the materiality (or liquidity, more accurately) of liquor, which when imbibed or economically endorsed releases its immoral, deathly toxins. In an early scene, Jeanette commands Belle to "stop" speaking, for "what a train of horrors you can conjure out of an innocent glass of wine."³⁰⁹ Jeanette's moral blindness fails to recognize the consequences of intoxication and addiction as anything more than a conjurer's trick. As the novel's action plays out,

³⁰⁵ Harper, 107.

³⁰⁶ Harper, 107.

³⁰⁷ Harper, 107.

³⁰⁸ Harper, 114.

³⁰⁹ Harper, 101.

readers learn that Belle is right to see a “train of horrors” emanating like an aura from a “glass of wine.” This scene is followed later, in the novel’s conclusion, by the death of Jeanette’s husband, Charles Romaine, who indeed finds himself interred in a drunkard’s grave, “slain by wine,” in yet another moment of object agency.³¹⁰ In a poignant twist, Romaine himself seems momentarily to read the dangers emanating from drink, having experienced addiction before. In his final scene, he *sees* wine being poured into a glass for him and recklessly “[checks] back his scruples” and quaffs the proffered wine, prompting a fatal binge. He sees, he knows, he drinks anyway; though his sight brings with it epistemological truth, he consumes the enslaving substance, resulting in his physical death, completing the process of moral death. Throughout the novel, alcoholic goods are signifiers for morality by acting and causing one to act immorally. Belle’s temperance excoriates consumption of liquor, from which, the novel argues, corruption and death inevitably emanate.

Characters and consumers like Jeanette represent moral material illiteracy which is a particular characteristic of consumers who were befuddled by a dishonest trade. Unchecked production and sale of liquor resulted in consumers’ misreading of the material object. As one pamphlet author lamented, “Would to God that...I could have *seen* strong drink *as it really is*, stripped of all the ornaments thrown over it by those engaged in traffic!”³¹¹ Commercial regulation becomes the purview of moral reformers the moment trade “[throws]” deceitful “ornaments” over the (im)moral truth of an object. Accusations of dishonesty and impurity in the liquor trade proliferated in temperance tracts that aligned the legal trade in alcohol with the weighty crimes of theft and murder:

³¹⁰ Harper, 173.

³¹¹ National Temperance Society and Publication House, “The Wine Cup and the Gallows,” 2, italics mine.

“[Drinking] is intrinsically as disgraceful and wicked as the murder, theft and debauchery it produces, no competent reasoner can doubt,” which prompted reformers to question, “Is it possible to assign any valid reason why there should be a law for the punishment of theft and no law for the suppression of selling liquor?”³¹² The legality of such a trade and the momentary enjoyment of its products are precisely what obscures consumers’ visual, aural, and tactile literacy.

A further reason that consumers could not properly discern the moral makeup of alcoholic goods was the trade’s concerted effort to hide it under a false veneer of exchange value. The liquor trade, as Harper described it, gave “false values and fictitious estimates” to its true costs, which included one’s health, prosperity, and moral and social standing.³¹³ Speaking at the Centennial Temperance Convention, Rev. A.G. Lawson exclaimed that “the people need a correct profit-and-loss account and an honest balance-sheet” to make clear the dire costs of a deceitful trade.³¹⁴ The liquor traffic followed a standard inverse correlation between sellers’ profits and consumer losses: For every tavern-keeper “getting rich...a great many people are getting poor” the narrator of T. S. Arthur’s *Ten Nights* observes.³¹⁵ This alone is not necessarily what poses a problem; the problem is that the goods consumed do not possess any inherent value: “[The tavern-keeper] does not add to the general wealth. He produces nothing. He takes money from his customers, but gives them no article of value in return—nothing that can be called property, personal or real,” Arthur’s narrator explains.³¹⁶ He does not contribute to the

³¹² National Temperance Society and Publication House, “May I Drink at All?” 4; Van-Dyke, “The Legal Prohibition of the Liquor Traffic,” 2.

³¹³ Harper, “The Neglected Rich,” 119.

³¹⁴ Lawson, “The Need of Temperance Literature,” 192.

³¹⁵ Arthur, 119.

³¹⁶ Arthur, 119.

moral integrity of consumers nor does he sell commodities which signify the accrual of capital. The transaction yields only a fleeting experience, made valueless because it was inherently made up of false value.

The accusation of dishonesty and false values placed the liquor trade within the more generally troubling trend of forgery. Forgery was a real concern for nineteenth-century audiences, so to accuse the liquor trade of dabbling in it or something very like it would have had immediate connotations. Specifically, it would have brought to mind prevailing issues in determining the correct value and veracity of paper currency, the very thing (capital) that kept commodities such as liquor flowing throughout the market. As the nation transitioned from gold to paper currency, and even well afterwards, concerns abounded as to the real value of specie and how to determine, visually, the worth of a note when counterfeits easily masqueraded as the real.³¹⁷ Stephen Mihm has referred to the illegibility of bank notes as “hieroglyphs” which nineteenth-century people struggled to decode amidst “ten thousand different kinds of paper that [by 1850] continually changed hands, baffled the uninitiated, and fluctuated in value according to the whims of the market.”³¹⁸ Such uncertainty would have plagued consumers’ relationships with the marketplace. In other words, “the rhetoric and reality of banking and counterfeiting raised unsettling questions about the foundations of the capitalist system” itself.³¹⁹ And as Karen Halttunen further argues, what was at stake in a world of forgeries, counterfeits, and hypocrites was that “ultimately, by undermining social confidence among men and

³¹⁷ The causes for these concerns were many, including the nascent and therefore still inchoate bank power, fluctuations in market values, the easy reproducibility of paper money which flooded the market with counterfeits, and the lack of governmental regulation of currency. For more on the evolution of currency and its counterfeits in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century America, see Mihm, *Nation of Counterfeiters*.

³¹⁸ Mihm, 6, 3.

³¹⁹ Mihm, 9.

women,” the resultant “powerful anxieties” might “reduce the American republic to social chaos.”³²⁰ If bar-room owners and whisky distillers were no better than con men, selling false products at false values and profiting off guileless consumers, then temperance literature illustrates how these “powerful anxieties” could color every angle of the marketplace.

A world of false values masked by shining veneers was exactly what nineteenth-century theories of moral philosophy combatted by instilling an enlightened awareness of the moral constructs of everyday life. Early theories of moral philosophy, such as those articulated by William Paley and Francis Wayland, posited that an individual’s conscience must be cultivated and equipped with the proper tools of moral discernment in order to navigate the world, in all its political, social, and cultural contours. Paley, whose *Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy* (1785) was a mainstay in Cambridge’s curriculum, posited a theory of theological utilitarianism which held that man’s role in society ought to be guided by an inherent moral virtue which seeks to “[do] good to mankind, in obedience to the will of God” for the sake of civil society.³²¹ In his *Elements of Moral Science* (1835), Wayland, extending and revising Paley’s theory of moral philosophy, argued that man’s actions came down to conscience, or his “moral sense”: “By conscious, or the moral sense, is meant that the faculty by which we discern the moral quality of actions, and by which we are capable of certain affections in respect to this quality. By faculty is meant any particular part of our constitution, by which we become affected by the various qualities and relations of the [material world] around us.”³²² Wayland then goes on to discuss the role of the senses in perceiving the

³²⁰ Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women*, xv, xvii.

³²¹ Paley, *Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy*, 25.

³²² Wayland, *Elements of Moral Science*, 49.

correlation between the external and internal morality of men's actions. Wayland's text was required reading at Brown, where he lectured, but was enjoyed by readers widely throughout the early and mid-nineteenth century.³²³ The point of such moral proficiency was to strengthen the democratic landscape, or, more broadly, to prevent chaos and anarchy—exactly what a market full of fakes and false values threatened.

The emphasis on one's ability to sense the moral or immoral composition of commodities was not only rooted in moral philosophy which sought to cultivate one's moral literacy of the world, but also, of course, in biblical teachings. Temperance reformers' common refrain to "touch not, taste not, handle not the intoxicating cup" lifted language directly from Colossians 2:21-22: "Touch not; taste not; handle not; which all are to perish with the using" (KJV). Prolific tract author Rev. Theodore L. Cuyler adds a dash of sentimentality to scripture by admonishing his readers to "*touch not* the bottled devil, under whose shining scales damnation hides its adder sting!"³²⁴ The admonition to refuse to touch, or even to refuse a 'touch' of whisky, highlights the act of eschewing sensorial complicity with the liquor trade which, as Harper and other's tales describe, are attended by moral consequences. Further, many tracts cite Romans 14:21: "It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor anything whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak." Curiously, though, few tract authors, if any (none that I have seen in all of the collected National Temperance Society tracts), comment upon the edict

³²³ Texts by Paley and Wayland were an integral part of most college curricula in the early and mid-nineteenth century, and Catharine Beecher promulgated similar views at her Hartford Female Seminary. Concepts of morality were fostered from a young age and reinforced into adulthood. See also Kelley, *Learning to Stand and Speak*, chapters 3 and 4 for a history of girls' and women's education in the early nineteenth century, which included learning moral philosophy.

³²⁴ Theodore L. Cuyler, "Our Stumbling Brother," 4, italics orig.

to avoid animal proteins.³²⁵ Rather, the purpose in citing this scripture is to argue, succinctly in the words of Cuyler, that “the legal liberty of a conscientious man is never to be exercised where a moral evil will inevitably flow from such exercise.”³²⁶ Thus, one’s freedom, or liberty, comes with its own obligations to ensuring others’ moral safety. Religious leaders and temperance advocates could argue biblical defense of temperance, despite pro-wine eucharist debates, by dismissing all interpretations of wine or alcohol consumption in the Bible as, as one minister termed it, “exegetical finesse” and that in fact “the weight of the specific passages of Scripture on the subject is enormously on the side of total abstinence.”³²⁷

Harper’s protagonist Belle Gordon couches her objection to alcohol in terms that pair moralism with respectability. In an attempt to explain to her cousin Jeannette why she refuses to touch alcohol and why she disapproves of the habit in others, she exclaims, “I object to intemperance not simply because I think it is vulgar but because I know it is wicked.”³²⁸ Belle believes drinking to be tasteless, but she possesses epistemological certainty (she “[knows]”) that it is inherently evil, or “wicked.” In her later novel, *Iola Leroy*, Harper stresses the moral imperative of total abstinence in more clearly religious terms, even from alcohol that has not been commodified. Subscribing to similar views as Cuyler, Harper clarifies that it is not only salable alcohol that poses a threat, but homemade alcohol as well. In preparation for dinner, Aunt Linda offers Robert and Iola a glass of her homemade wine, which the two decline on moral grounds. Aunt Linda

³²⁵ Though certainly some did embrace vegetarian diets, such as Frances E. Willard, though her diet did not change until the 1890s.

³²⁶ Cuyler, “Our Stumbling Brother,” 1.

³²⁷ John W. Mears, “The Church and Temperance,” 126. Other scriptures temperance advocates tended to cite included Proverb 20:1, 1 Corinthians. 6:9-10, Habukkuk. 2:15, Romans. 14:21, Ephesians. 5:7, 11.

³²⁸ Harper, *Sowing and Reaping*, 101.

protests that wine must not be “so bad” since “de Lord put it here.”³²⁹ Though Aunt Linda’s wine is free of the contaminating traces of white economic dominance, it is nevertheless a dangerous substance for, citing Proverbs 23:32, it “bites like a serpent and stings like an adder,” reminds Robert. To touch and taste alcohol of any variety could stain one’s moral conscience and “bite” right back.

GOOD BUSINESS AND VALUABLE LABOR

If alcohol was inherently evil, according to Harper and others, then trade in such a substance was exponentially so. To combat the proliferation of such immoral materials, temperance reformers and moral reformers at large advocated a kind of redistribution of goods to those who were victimized by the purportedly immoral trade. Reform societies contributed charities to families put at risk by alcoholism, in essence redirecting moneys and goods away from bad businesses and into needy hands. Philanthropy functions in Harper’s novel in a similar way, establishing a new trajectory of moneys away from the liquor business, making profitable labor possible, and paving the way for the acquirement of capital for reformed drunkards and their families. Instead of consuming liquor and sowing one’s money in that dishonest business, Harper’s novel argues, one should sow charity. Charity operates throughout the novel as a form of honorable work, contrasted with the easy, labor-free business of liquor. John Anderson, representative of the ills of the liquor trade, practices lazy capitalism: “he was willing to do almost anything for money, except work hard for it.”³³⁰ The lazy saloon owner was a common type in temperance fiction, described as greedy, heedless men (none, if any, listen to the

³²⁹ Harper, *Iola Leroy*, 185.

³³⁰ Harper, *Sowing and Reaping*, 166.

remonstrances of their wives), men who are “too lazy to work”³³¹ but profit off the addictive vices of their fellow townsfolk, which constituted a dishonest transaction that was seen by many as downright theft. By contrast, Paul Clifford refuses to join his friend’s venture, exclaiming, “I wouldn’t engage in such a business, not if it paid me a hundred thousand dollars a year. I think these first class saloons are...a great curse to the community.... You cannot keep that saloon without sending a flood of demoralizing influence over the community. Your profit will be the loss of others.”³³² Interestingly, whether by editorial lapse or deliberate choice, “others” is printed without a possessive apostrophe, inviting a misreading of “others” to mean ‘the profit belonging to others’, when it literally signifies ‘other people’. But, as temperance literature across genres argues, the liquor trade results in both—loss of capital and loss of lives. Clifford, like Belle Gordon, has a special kind of foresight that sees in liquor the moral decay it wreaks upon addicts, costing not only their cash but their lives.

Instead of engaging in the liquor business, Clifford continues his grocery and charity work, seeking to abate the “curse” that has been visited upon the drunkard Joe Gough. After pledging his allegiance to temperance, Gough visits Clifford who funds a shave and a suit for the reformed drunkard as an act of confidence that Gough will use this assistance to obtain a job, thus bettering his social standing and self-respect. Clifford receives pleasure in return when “he saw a *return* of self-respect [to Gough], and was glad to see its slightest manifestations, and it was pleasant to witness the satisfaction with which Joe beheld himself in the glass.”³³³ This moment works in contrast to the earlier “investment” John Anderson makes by giving liquor to a child in hopes that the child will

³³¹ National Temperance Society and Publication House, “Little Lizzy.”

³³² Harper, *Sowing and Reaping*, 105-106.

³³³ Harper, 151, italics mine.

develop an unquenchable taste for liquor.³³⁴ Clifford's charity to Joe Gough is paralleled by Belle Gordon's charity for Joe's wife, Mary. Upon seeing Mary's scanty cupboard, Belle immediately "stepped into the nearest grocery [Paul Clifford's] and replenished her basket with some of *good* the [*sic*] things of life."³³⁵ In this moment, charity is an act of spiritual replenishment that is achieved materially through purchasing the good things of life. Notably, these good things come from Clifford's antialcohol store, a commercial space morally and financially free from the ills of liquor. Paul Clifford and Belle Gordon's charity is an economic labor that redirects the flow of capital away from the liquor industry and into the domestic interests of the needy. Paul Clifford and Belle Gordon reap from charity a kind of moral capital in surplus of any "investment" made in the liquor industry.

Charity functions in *Sowing and Reaping* differently than it did in reform methods of other groups; it is not only a successful conversion technique for the Goughs, it is moreover a means of securing social and moral capital for Belle Gordon and Paul Clifford. According to some (male) temperance reformers, charity did not and could not do the work of complete moral conversion, for, as one reverend put it, temperance ideology alone, not charity, "strikes at the root of three-fourths of the poverty to which your Dorcas societies are but slaves and poultices that must be renewed every season at least."³³⁶ It is not surprising that, given the generic difference between male-authored Washingtonian experience narratives and women-authored temperance tales and tracts, most charitable efforts of the temperance movement were spearheaded by women's

³³⁴ Harper, 133.

³³⁵ Harper, 125, italics mine.

³³⁶ John W. Mears, "The Church and Temperance," 131.

societies: inebriate asylums, hospitals, etc.³³⁷ Harper, however, envisioned a more complementary, double-pronged, dual-gendered approach to conversion and capital, placing Belle Gordon and Paul Clifford's separate efforts on the same plane of reformative effectiveness. It is their work, together, that promotes the success of the Goughs and it is their union, together, that ensures a next generation of conscientious consumers.

If Belle Gordon could buy 'good things' from Clifford's store, then the liquor trade must necessarily traffic in bad things. The bad things of the liquor trade were invariably conflated with the bad business of the liquor trade itself, indicating a preoccupation with assessing the moral (good or bad, right or evil) value of certain trades. As one pamphleteer had it, rum-sellers and their ilk engage in business that is decidedly *not good*, for it does not promote education, or lower taxes, or "multiply churches," or give to charity. Instead the trade directly results in the necessity of charity for drunkards, widows, broken homes, or those otherwise victimized by the trade.³³⁸

To further their assessment of liquor trade as bad trade, temperance reformers collected data to build an economic argument that cast it in a financially dubious light. Even as early as George Cheever's *Deacon Giles* (1835), economic arguments against the trade were central to temperance reform. In his text, Cheever claims that the United States loses in excess of 100 million dollars per annum to the liquor trade.³³⁹ Exactly what backs this statement is not clear, but in addition to the loss of intellect and moral integrity

³³⁷ Washingtonian experience narratives were performative narratives of conversion, staged at Washingtonian "experience meetings," and often relied on dramatic flourishes of tone and language to narrate one's experience of conversion to temperance. For more on the generic form of experience narratives see John W. Crowley, "'Slaves to the Bottle.' For women's work in charitable organizations, see Boylan, *Origins of Women's Activism*.

³³⁸ Thayer, "Objections to a License Law," 4.

³³⁹ Cheever, 4-5.

is the perceived loss of capital. Frequently, national statistics on costs of pauperism attributable to alcoholism, liquor trade-related litigation, and the like were co-opted, and often exaggerated, in an effort to put a dollar amount on the costs of the trade. The drive to assess monetary damages prompted one pamphleteer to estimate an excess of taxation at “\$728,000,000 more for liquor than the cost of the United States Government in ordinary times.”³⁴⁰ Costs were calculated both nationally and individually. Citing the Temperance Almanac of 1869, Rev. Thomas Lape uses national debt figures to extrapolate personal estimates: “In 1867 the official report gives the value of sales by retail liquor dealers at \$1,483,491,865; that is, equal to \$43 for every man, woman, and child in the country. This is equal to about one half the entire national debt, and more than ten times the total value of all the church property in the United States.” He goes on to lament the invisible costs to each person: “Again: were it possible to ascertain the amount of woe and sorrow, in time and throughout eternity, that this liquor business produces, no arithmetic can calculate it, no mortal powers can declare it!”³⁴¹ The quantitative assessment of the costs of the trade give way to the immeasurable qualitative. In other words, the economic argument bolstered, at the same time that it was subordinate to, the immaterial, the moral.

For temperance reformers, the relationship between spending and personal welfare was quite clear. Each transaction functioned as an investment; spending money on alcohol was akin to investing in one’s own deterioration. Theodore L. Cuyler rendered the argument in these metaphorical terms: that a bar is, or is like, a “bank for losings,” where people sow, to use Harper’s terms, their money and themselves, and reap nothing

³⁴⁰ Lape, “Statistics of Intemperance,” 7.

³⁴¹ Lape, 7.

but loss. New York has “six thousand” such banks, “one on nearly every corner.” The geographic prominence of bars competes with the geographic presence of banks (and, in the above tract, churches), an edifice literally standing for savings and economic prosperity. At Cuyler’s banks for losings, “good money” goes in, deposited for a return investment in physical deterioration (“redness of eyes, and foulness of breath”) and moral compromise (“remorse of conscience”).³⁴² For each deposit there is a loss, sometimes even a physical manifestation of such losses: one man leaves the bank with “the word drunk written on his bloated countenance,” while another man “[enters] in a bran-new [*sic*] coat, and [comes] away again as if the mice had been nibbling at his elbows.”³⁴³ The transformation of objects and people as they invest in intemperance makes clear the loss of money, possessions, and conscience. Finally, just as John Anderson’s money drips with the blood of those he has robbed in *Sowing and Reaping*, here money is exchanged in the bank for losings, where “greenbacks [are] turned into black eyes and red noses.”³⁴⁴ In the world of alcoholic goods, money is stolen, improperly invested, and even transmogrified into that which it has either cost (blood) or produced (“black eyes and red noses”).

Inevitably, the question of whether or not the liquor business was *good*, in terms moral and social, turns into a question of what kind of labor is desirable in a prosperous, morally upright civilization. Language in temperance tales and tracts obsesses over “honest” work, broadly defined in opposition to the “dishonest” trade in liquor. In order to separate honest workers from the dishonest, and, presumably, to encourage potential laborers to choose the right profession, nineteenth-century advertisements used that very

³⁴² Theodore L. Cuyler, “A Bank for Losings,” 1-2, italics mine.

³⁴³ Cuyler, 1.

³⁴⁴ Cuyler, 2-3.

language of honest work to attract patronage. Temperance coffee houses, for instance, were often marketed to “workingmen,” a term denoting respectability of profession rather than social class. An 1882 advert for the Model Coffee House (fig. 4), offered as an alternative to saloons, invited only “workingmen,” which are defined as “Clergymen, Editors, Bankers, Merchants, Manufacturers, Mechanics, Carpenters and Masons...every man who works, either with his head or his hands.”³⁴⁵ Not explicitly excluded are those who had been variously described by the same reform group as “manufacturing drunkards” and “making merchandise” of souls, but the understanding is implicit. The message here is that dealers in alcohol are not working men, just as John Anderson is not, and are thus not contributors to the economic machinery that functioned to sustain a region.

³⁴⁵ Advert for the Model Coffee House appears on the back cover of “Prohibition a Constitutional Law, an Address” by Hon. John P. St. John, Phila: Garrigues Brothers, n.d. Temperance reformers sometimes went into the coffee shop business as a way of offering an alternative to saloons. Coffee houses could function on the physical and economic landscape, carving out a space that was free of the traces of the liquor trade. In addition to the Model Coffee House, there was also a Workingman’s Central Coffee House on Fifteenth and Market that was converted into a prayer meeting space on Sunday afternoons (Second Annual Report of the WCTU of Phila, 1877: 8; also “A Substitute for Saloons” in Campbell Scrapbook Collection, HSP, v.55 p.144).

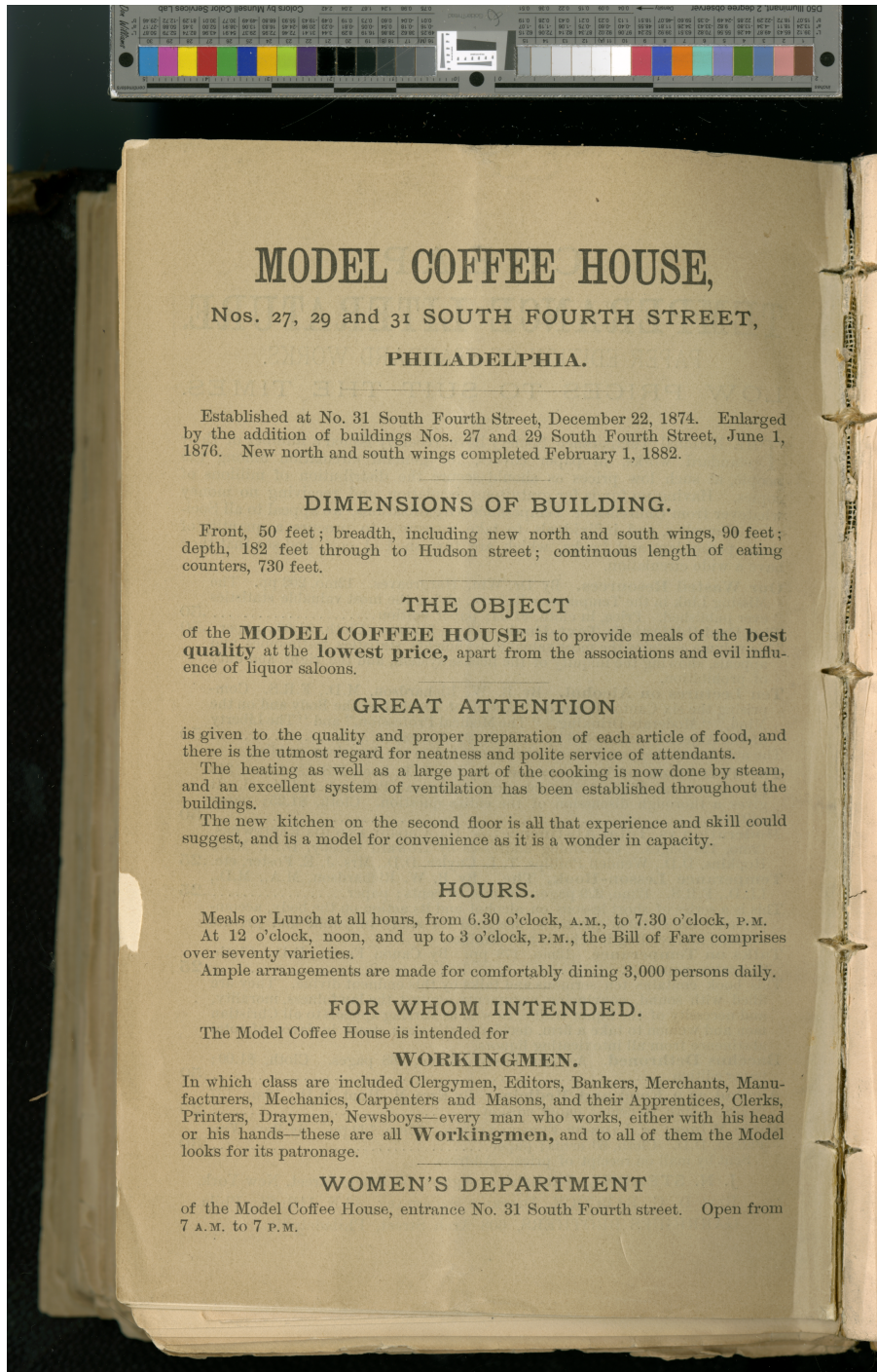


Figure 4. "Model Coffee House," in "Prohibition a Constitutional Law, an Address" by Hon. John P. St. John. Phila.: Garrigues Brothers, n.d. Courtesy the Library Company of Philadelphia.

By contrast, simply repurposing moneys initially earmarked for liquor consumption could enact (re)productive labor by fortifying moral integrity and accruing capital. In John William Kirton's "Buy Your Own Goose," husband Eli and wife Lizzie, "only work-people," accumulate capital and rescue Lizzie's mother from the work-house by Eli's boycott of alcohol.³⁴⁶ One Christmas season, after Eli gives up going to the grog shop, he surprises his family with a luxurious holiday meal that he would not have been able to afford if he had not deliberately refused to buy alcohol. By continuing to avoid the grog-shop, Eli and Lizzie's home is "transformed into a little paradise."³⁴⁷ They furnish a spare room in the house, further accumulating capital, which is then used to house Lizzie's mother until her death—a charitable gesture which further shores up happiness and prosperity. Through household transformation, Eli's labor of abstention is transformed into productive labor, or, labor which produces earnings which enable the family to secure their socio-economic standing. Moreover, their elevated socio-economic standing is the result of a moral decision; moral elevation in this case engenders socio-economic elevation. In other words, the morally-motivated labor of antialcohol boycott allows the accrual of multiple forms of capital—economic, cultural—which together form what I call moral capital, or an overall elevation of stature, not altogether quantifiable by earthly forms of worth.

MORAL CAPITAL

The term "moral capital" as it has been used heretofore has limited applicability to concepts of capital depicted in *Sowing and Reading* and other temperance literature.

³⁴⁶ Kirton, "Buy Your Own Goose," 6.

³⁴⁷ Kirton, 4.

As the term has been used by political scientists and historians, it describes a cachet of respect garnered by politicians, political figures, or institutions through popular opinions of that person or institution's moral standing. My definition of moral capital diverges slightly from this premise and instead borrows from concepts of cultural capital developed in sociological studies, specifically those advanced by Pierre Bourdieu, as I will explain below.

In today's political economy, moral capital refers to a tool used by politicians and public figures. John Kane offers this definition in *The Politics of Moral Capital*:

Political agents and institutions must be seen to stand *for* something apart from themselves, to achieve *something* beyond merely private ends. They must, in other words, establish a moral grounding. This they do by avowing their service to some set of fundamental values, principles and goals that find a resonant response in significant numbers of people. When such people judge the agent to be both faithful and effective in serving those values and goals, they are likely to bestow some quantum of respect and approval that is of great political benefit to the receiver. This quantum is the agent's moral capital.³⁴⁸

Abraham Lincoln, Nelson Mandela, and John F. Kennedy, for instance, wielded moral capital. Moral capital, moreover, twines with political capital, imbuing each of the factors that contribute to political processes, systems, and outcomes associated with a politician or public figure's administration.³⁴⁹ In other words, moral capital is still a kind of political capital per Kane's terminology; and, moreover, it is not available to private, individual citizens outside the public eye. Because moral capital is publicly earned, it is the particular accrual of public figures and institutions—the Lincolns, Mandelas, and Kennedys of the world. Under Kane's definition, then, Frances Harper, a well-known public spokesperson for a number of reform movements, may be said to have moral capital, but private members of the temperance movement could not. As an institution,

³⁴⁸ Kane, *Politics of Moral Capital*, 10, italics orig.

³⁴⁹ Kane, 10.

organized groups such as the WCTU may have had moral capital, as Christopher Leslie Brown evaluates early abolitionism to have had (even before formal organized antislavery efforts), in his study of British abolitionist sentiment in the 1780s.³⁵⁰ But the nameless individuals who independently made up the temperance movement, and especially the imagined characters in fictional narratives, cannot wield moral capital per this definition. This seems a glaring omission and one which my understanding of moral capital within the temperance movement seeks to correct.

Because temperance activists believed in the combined power of boycott and philanthropy to return dividends both personal, economic, and social; their approach to capital is better understood as an extension of cultural capital. Cultural capital is the accrual of assets that a culture deems valuable (or valueless) and which serves to demarcate class borders. But this definition is still not quite enough, as it misses the moral tenor that imbues accumulation of assets in nineteenth-century temperance literature. Bourdieu's concept of objectified cultural capital, however, gets us a little closer to an understanding of the function of moral capital as it plays out in temperance literature. Objectified cultural capital refers to the process whereby the material objects one possesses perform the social work of reifying or shifting class identification.³⁵¹ However, where cultural capital promotes social mobility through the accrual of education, taste, material belongings and etiquette, moral capital enables social mobility via personal elevation accrued through moral choices. Moreover, moral capital, like cultural capital, "is convertible, on certain conditions, into economic capital."³⁵² When characters such as Paul Clifford or Belle Gordon reap material and spiritual wealth

³⁵⁰ Brown, *Moral Capital*.

³⁵¹ Bourdieu, "Forms of Cultural Capital," 243.

³⁵² Bourdieu, 243.

through acts of boycott and charity, motivated by an elevated sentiment of moral rights and wrongs, even in defiance of social norms, they accrue what I call moral capital. Moral capital, for them, is the accumulation of social standing, economic capital, and personal happiness.

Eschewing corrupt monetary capital in favor of moral capital was a potentially poignant message for African American audiences a decade after the Civil War. Published concurrently with the collapse of Reconstruction, Harper's novel would have spoken to an audience sympathetic to strengthening social bonds and elevating the class status of African Americans across the country, as I have spoken of above. Belle's gift of "[elevating] the tone of society in which she moved"³⁵³ would have been morally encouraged and, where possible, enforced in certain religious African American communities in efforts to build moral capital through politics of respectability. Additionally, as a serial in the *Christian Recorder*, the novel's celebration of moral capital would have been paratextually supported. Generally, the paper spoke in favor of temperance, as did many religious periodicals, white and black. In the November 30, 1876 issue, in which chapter fourteen of *Sowing and Reaping* was published, the paper labeled liquor "a curse" as Harper does, treating it as evidence of "self-indulgence, and vice" that "cannot be too strongly condemned."³⁵⁴ As one contributor saw it, intemperance was not just intoxication but indulgence in any excess and a disregard for the Gospel:

Intemperance consists of more than an excess of intoxicating drinks; it consists of an excess of drinking, chewing tobacco, and smoking and fine dressing, and of ill temper.... Solomon says (S. of S. viii:6) "For love is strong as death, jealousy is cruel as the grave." We see intemperance when we look in our prison houses, and in our poor houses. There we see men and women and children whose parents

³⁵³ Harper, *Sowing and Reaping*, 175.

³⁵⁴ *Christian Recorder*, "Temperance Items," November 30, 1876.

never regarded Sunday school nor church: this is the fruits of their instructions.... May the time soon come when every man and woman who has a drop of African blood that runs in their veins may advocate the temperance cause.³⁵⁵

Intemperance here is not just indulgence in harmful substances but material gluttony as well. “Fine dressing” may look nice, but this kind of John Andersonian love of display results in imprisonment and poverty. The intemperate suffer a kind of spiritual poverty as well, having never benefited from the real “fruits” of “Sunday school [and] church.” Rather, black activists argue, uplift might be attainable if taking the Paul Clifford approach, for “Clifford’s life has been a grand success, not in the mere accumulation of wealth, but in the enrichment of his moral and spiritual nature.”³⁵⁶ Temperance in all areas of life was a means to accumulating moral capital that could edify African American communities.

CONCLUSION

Across genres and demographics, alcohol, in the abstract and the material, functioned as a signifier of impurity, debasement of character, domestic disorder, theft, and economic dishonesty. If materials of the trade were rendered literally and visually as agents of harm and evil, a concept which I have called moral materialism in the introduction to this dissertation, what were the implications of that construct for nineteenth-century readers and consumers? One overwhelming response, as Frances Harper’s work attests, was to define the relationship between literature and business/the market as materially reiterative. If bottles could embody evil and act as agents of harm, packaged literature—periodicals, tracts, novels—could morally intervene in a material

³⁵⁵ Burton, “The Temperance Question,” *Christian Recorder*, September 20, 1877.

³⁵⁶ Harper, *Sowing and Reaping*, 175.

world swirling with impure and dubiously ‘genuine’ artifacts that were the products of an unregulated marketplace. But though this configuration seems to imply that literature worked as a force for good and alcohol as a force of evil, that binary was of course complicated by moral reformers’ fight against licentious behavior, including reading and dissemination of licentious literature, and by temperance reformers’ endorsement of only certain kinds of business. The result is a very selective capitalism endorsed by temperance reformers.

Print was early understood to play an integral role in spreading reform efforts. To the American Moral Reform Society, print could trumpet the achievements of blacks by “[making them] known to the world.”³⁵⁷ By drawing attention to “our progress,” blacks hoped to strengthen claims to enfranchisement while also carving out a space in print culture that allowed black voices to reach black communities. But more than fostering an imagined community, print could change communities. The Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, for instance, used literature as a cultural agent that could “go into all homes and touch the thought of all people.”³⁵⁸ The role of literature was to cross spatial and ideological borders, circulating into private spaces of home and individual thought. Moreover, it could physically reach out and “touch” readers in more edifying ways, certainly, than touching a glass of wine or quaffing a ‘touch’ of whisky. But for all its insistence on the centrality of the home space as the singular locus of change, literature of reform traversed public and private spaces. The WCTU set up “Literature-boxes in legislative and municipal buildings, rail-road stations, engine-houses, markets and barber

³⁵⁷ The Minutes and Proceedings of the First Annual Meeting of the American Moral Reform Society, 8.

³⁵⁸ Minutes of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union at the Seventh Annual Meeting, 12.

shops, and distributions through the post office,” making literature’s presence manifest in communal spaces.³⁵⁹

The result of temperance and moral reform, as reformers’ arguments go, will be the fulfillment of America’s original democratic promise and the maturation of a market that serves the capital interests of all. Men and women, white and black, alike, stood to gain—economically, socially, morally—from the returns of temperance reform, as authors such as Harper claimed. These returns would usher in an exceptionalist vision of America. In her optimistically redemptive conclusion, Harper suggests the promise of moral social progress is the renewal of Eden and the coming of Paradise: “[i]f everyone would be faithful to duty,” as Belle Gordon and her now husband Paul Clifford have been, “even here” in a nation plagued by racial turmoil and gender stratification, “Eden would spring up in our path, and Paradise be around our way.”³⁶⁰ The mythic proportions of Harper’s conclusion contest the myth of an already Edenic America; whatever kind of Eden America was supposed to have already engendered, it has clearly failed Anderson, Romaine, and Jeanette specifically because of the moral havoc an unregulated market can wreak upon consumers’ interpretations of their world of goods. Eden, to Harper, is a multi-gendered, racially transcendent space of political agency and moral welfare, where proper readings of material goods and good, ethical work reap moral capital and domestic enjoyment. Yet the culminating effort of Harper’s novel seems to be that if liquor is allowed to linger unchecked, national domestic happiness and spiritual and commercial wealth are and always will be compromised.

³⁵⁹ Minutes of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union at the Seventh Annual Meeting, 12.

³⁶⁰ Harper, *Sowing and Reaping*, 175.

The only sure way to combat compromised morals and a compromised market was to boycott offending goods, Harper argues through *Sowing and Reaping*. To consumer activists such as Harper, boycott was absolutely essential in combatting the spread of moral contagion through immoral goods such as alcohol. Abstention from commercial and physical consumption further helped to ensure freedom to a nation which had only recently ruled that a universal right and had yet to enforce it. Alcohol in temperance fiction and tracts represented the still-present threat of enslavement, and no matter how casual, drinkers inevitably become “incapable slave[s]” to the bottle, subjugating human will to their distilled “master,” as one tract author cautioned.³⁶¹ Perhaps intemperance was perceived as a greater threat because it did not distinguish by race, class, or gender; anyone was susceptible to slavish consumer behavior: “[T]he man who is a drunkard, whether he be black or white, is a slave, and habit—the habit of drinking—is his master. It is a cruel master, for it takes his wages from him, and does not give him bread to eat nor clothes to wear in return for the money.”³⁶² Where slavery profited off unremunerated labor, alcohol steals earned wages. It is a transaction gone wrong, a dishonest trade, an uneven exchange. And the true exchange value for alcoholic goods was a self-defeating, self-inflicted enslavement of the kind that Lara Lagrange’s husband experiences in Harper’s other temperance tale, “The Two Offers”: from drink “he lacked the moral strength to *break his fetters*, and stand erect in all the strength and dignity of manhood.”³⁶³ Freedom, for temperance reformers, is not the freedom to consume indiscriminately; rather, indiscriminate consumption enslaves consumers. What consumer activists such as Harper seem to say, through their transactions or lack thereof,

³⁶¹ National Temperance Society and Publication House, “I Don’t Care for It,” 2.

³⁶² Alfred Taylor, “Our National Curse,” 1.

³⁶³ Harper, “The Two Offers,” 112, italics mine.

was that a free market economy ought not be free to operate with impunity. Freedom means the liberation of one's soul from the damning and damaging effects of alcohol consumption, an idea which was predicated on the moralist reading of objects floating, unregulated, through a rampantly growing consumer culture. As Harper extols at the conclusion of "The Two Offers," so said temperance literature at large: "[T]rue happiness consists not so much in the fruition of our wishes as in the *regulation* of desires and the full development and *right* culture of our whole natures."³⁶⁴

³⁶⁴ Harper, 114, italics mine.

Chapter 4

FARM FANTASIES: HUMANS, HAUNTINGS, AND THE COMMODITY IN HAWTHORNE'S *THE BLITHEDALE ROMANCE*

In the climactic scene of Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance*, a novel that charts the birth and death of a utopian commune, the novel's narrator, Miles Coverdale, makes a startling discovery: the lifeless body of Zenobia, the novel's enigmatic heroine, who leaves behind a trail of clues that are as revealing of her character as they are, I believe, of the novel's frustrated stance on commodity culture. Waking from a dream, Coverdale discovers Zenobia's "delicate handkerchief" lying on the ground and proceeds to follow "further traces" including a French shoe and gauzy garments floating in a nearby river to find the heroine's self-drowned body.³⁶⁵ The process of discovery is a dressing of Zenobia in reverse, a collection of objects that make her, and when shorn of them, that unmake her. Zenobia is made of market stuff. Importantly, she is the most solid character in a novel made up of insubstantial characters playing out a dream of reform. This moment of her undoing, her unmaking, breaks down into discrete material objects that act as clues not just to finding Zenobia but as clues to the whole unraveling of the utopian experiment of Blithedale. Further, the very materiality of these objects gives the lie to the entire enterprise that was Blithedale. For, as commodified objects and global intruders in the communal experiment, these clues materialize around the material relations of the capitalist market Blithedale explicitly eschewed.

³⁶⁵ Hawthorne, *The Blithedale Romance*, Vol. 3 of the *Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, 230-31. All page numbers refer to this edition, hereafter cited as CE with volume and page numbers.

While others have reflected on the significance of Coverdale's discovery of Zenobia's body in terms of narrative elision and gender,³⁶⁶ I want to look at the things that led Coverdale to Zenobia: her bequeathing of the hot house flower in the prior scene, the discovery of the handkerchief, the French-made shoe, the flowing garb floating in the water. That Coverdale calls this material detritus "traces" aptly signals the function of material objects as signs of use, difference, and absence.³⁶⁷ Zenobia's French shoe, for instance, bears traces of circulation in human-controlled markets (it is a French import) as well as that which it is not: a homespun, non-commodified object. It finally bears traces of an obvious absence: Zenobia's body. The material "traces" that precede Coverdale's discovery of Zenobia's body act as capsules for the novel's central interests in the natural versus the commodity, commodified nature, global versus local commerce, and immateriality itself. Indeed, the novel is a catalogue of humans and objects operating on a sliding scale of materiality: humans gaining and losing substance; things crafted out of nothing.

As the title of this chapter announces, I am interested in the treatment of objects in *The Blithedale Romance*, a novel that is so fixated on the in-between of materiality and immateriality, of dreams and fantasies, that tangible objects are thrown in stark relief

³⁶⁶ Mary Suzanne Schriber ("Justice to Zenobia," *New England Quarterly* 55.1 [1982]: 61-78) and Beverly Hume (Restructuring the Case against Hawthorne's Coverdale," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 40.4 [1986]: 387-399), for instance, read Coverdale's faulty narration as reason to believe Zenobia died at Coverdale's hands. For readings on of the gendered significance of Zenobia's death, see Baym, *The Shape of Hawthorne's Career*; and Pfister, *The Production of Personal Life*.

³⁶⁷ I am loosely applying recent material cultural theories of absence which can be read, among other things, as a trace, or, of a connection between what is present and what is absent. For an overview, see Meyer, "Placing and Tracing Absence." These recent studies borrow from Derrida's concept of the trace, specifically the concept that every sign also bears traces of that which it does not signify; a sign carries both its meaning and the absence of other meanings. These absences, or binary differences, can be called traces. See Derrida, *Of Grammatology*.

because of their sheer physicality. Earthen mugs, handkerchiefs, veils and gauzy garb, shoes, purses, the hot house flower—hard objects realize the abstracted concepts, the “fantasy,” of the novel and the utopian project it chronicles by providing, as the book itself does, “an available foothold between fiction and reality.”³⁶⁸ Among the natural and the organic environment of Blithedale, commodities like imported French shoes and Westervelt’s band of gilded false teeth,³⁶⁹ are imposters, interlopers from foreign lands, goods which masquerade dubious value, which infiltrate and weaken the reformist mission of Blithedale. In considering the objects that lead Coverdale to Zenobia, and by extension the material constructs that make up the small utopian community on the outskirts of market society, this chapter also therefore considers the materiality and immateriality of objects as they occur on, around, or between people. Objects—material, tangible objects—mediate the worlds of human actors and market values, fixing, rather than destabilizing, the relationship between both. This chapter is concerned with the ways objects show up, sometimes literally, in a community deliberately positioned on the ostensible outskirts of a commodity culture that depended on such goods to animate the newly emergent market society.

After reading *The Blithedale Romance* in 1852, Melville wrote his friend that the book was “an antidote” to the “dreamers” of reform then crusading for radical social change;³⁷⁰ dreamers such as Charles Fourier, George Ripley, Amos Bronson Alcott, Henry David Thoreau, and other men whose unbounded optimism was too often met with dismal failure (though less so in Thoreau’s case). I am speaking especially, of course, of the Transcendentalist utopian community Brook Farm, on which the fictional Blithedale

³⁶⁸ CE, vol. 3, 27, 2.

³⁶⁹ CE, vol. 3, 95.

³⁷⁰ Melville, “Who the Devil Ain’t a Dreamer?” 230.

is based and with which Hawthorne entertained more than a shallow dalliance. A moody rumination on the mesmeric properties of humans and objects, the novel has long confounded readers.³⁷¹ As both a titular romance and an “antidote” to it, the novel breaks down into a series of self-contained opposites: between dreams and reality, between community and commerce, between humans and objects.

This chapter reads *The Blithedale Romance* for the ways these tensions are, and in some cases are not, resolved, using the backdrop of nineteenth-century consumer reform to illuminate the novel’s conflicted stance on the dream of reform and the corruption of commodity objects. From earthen mugs to hot-house flowers, nature is molded, used, and made valuable on a stage of human actors and object actants.³⁷² At stake in Hawthorne’s treatment of material goods as they relate to the utopian community are definitions of value, inherent or exchanged, in the natural world mediated by humans acting and acted upon by a nascent market economy that informs both the content and the context of Hawthorne’s fiction.³⁷³ *The Blithedale Romance* is a novel about the (im)materiality of tangible objects as much as it is about their place in a materialist market society.

³⁷¹ Richard H. Millington speaks for contemporary and modern reviews alike when he describes the novel as an “off-putting book, with its maddening narrator, its elusive plot, and its powerful but self-thwarted characters” (Millington, ed., *The Blithedale Romance*, x).

³⁷² I take a Latourian approach to the relationship between humans and objects in the novel. The interplay between humans and objects in the novel is helpfully understood as a network of agents working with and upon each other. For a fuller discussion of Actor Network Theory, see Latour, *Pandora’s Hope*, especially chapter 6, “A Collective of Humans and Nonhumans.”

³⁷³ Scholarship on *The Blithedale Romance* has not yet considered such material cultural implications and tends instead to focus on the gothic elements of the text, as I explain below. It seems a natural next step to investigate the material culture of those gothic elements such as Zenobia’s veil (though veil is *not* the subject of this study), as they have inherently to do with enduring questions regarding human use of material objects which continue to be hallmarks of material culture studies.

The Blithedale Romance exposes what other texts in this dissertation have assumed: that the abstracted communications of objects depend on their *materiality* (I mean materiality in both the economic and physical sense). In other words, authors such as Alcott, Chandler, and Harper treat objects as being able to communicate something—immorality or morality, the stain of slave blood or the freedom from it, corruption or wholesomeness, disease or health—to their users, even if those users need to be taught how to recognize that which objects transmit. Their depiction of objects focuses more on what objects communicate rather than on material objects as material. Hawthorne's objects in *Blithedale*, on the other hand, are only able to communicate something if/when they take material shape. One way to understand the role of objects in the novel is through mesmerism, a recurring theme in *Blithedale*, which held that an invisible substance ("ether") made possible the communication among souls or between the living and the spirit world; through entering a trance, one could tap into that invisible substance and communicate with the unseen world. Thus, mesmerism was inherently about establishing a channel of communication between the real and the immaterial. This is why Coverdale describes Zenobia's "sphere" as that of a "mesmerical [*sic*] clairvoyant": Zenobia's body and the things she covers it with communicates something immaterial because of and in spite of the materiality of her figure.³⁷⁴ Furthermore, the novel's fixation with the tensions between sensory reality and idealistic visions of reform, between the hard work of change and the dream of it, speaks to enduring questions about the nature of intervention and of boycott that nineteenth-century authors and reformers grappled with. Therefore, this chapter takes stock of some of the larger themes of this

³⁷⁴ CE, vol. 3, 46, 47.

project, such as the ability of material objects to communicate meaning with human users and the relationship between textual objects and interventionist methods.

The scholarly tradition on Hawthorne's fourth and perhaps most perplexing novel has moved from classic studies of its transcendental ideology to compelling investigations of the gothic element, whether in female or object form (or both). While early studies (New Critical) of *The Blithedale Romance* tended to fixate on the novel's failures of form because it was too enamored of failed reform,³⁷⁵ more recent studies have shifted focus onto compelling internal and external elements to shed light on the slippery text. As early studies faulted the novel for its vying themes of romance and social reform, so have others found fault with Coverdale himself, reading Zenobia's death not as a suicide, as Coverdale would have his readers believe, but rather as murder. Mary Suzanne Schriber contends that the gaps in Coverdale's narration "do not necessarily add up to suicide," and rather indicate Hawthorne's "artistry" of concealing Coverdale's murder of Zenobia through the murky lens of first-person narration.³⁷⁶ Schriber's reading of Coverdale's conveniently faulty narration is plausible; however, other scholars have contended in likewise compelling terms the case for Zenobia's death as suicide.³⁷⁷ Whatever Zenobia's cause of death may be,³⁷⁸ scholars in recent decades have turned

³⁷⁵ Nina Baym helpfully chronicles the various early charges against the novel: "It is generally agreed that Hawthorne did not successfully blend the realistic details drawn from his participation in the Brook Farm community with the melodramatic plot; the book is too leadenly realistic for a romance, but too fantastic for a novel. Some critics deplore Hawthorne's misguided ambition to chronicle the real, while others regret the waste of first-rate social material" ("Radical Reading" 545-546).

³⁷⁶ Schriber, "Justice to Zenobia," 62.

³⁷⁷ Rita K. Gollin calls such a reading "bizarre" in "Hawthorne," *American Literary Scholarship: An Annual*/1982, 33.

³⁷⁸ Regarding the suicide/murder debate, my argument is less concerned with narrative interpretation, fascinating though Hawthorne's/Coverdale's slippages (whichever side of the suicide divide one is on) may be, and more interested in a literary historical and material cultural reading of the objects that lead to the contested event.

their attention to the figure of the veiled lady, the central character in Zenobia's tale about a young medium whose thinly veiled appearance drives a male admirer (a stand in for Coverdale) to convince her to cast off the diaphanous substance. When she does so, the young man is amazed to find she has disappeared. Ripe with sexual symbolism, the veil has proven as seductive to scholars as to Coverdale, with interpretations that read it in relation to mesmerism, the female body, the economic market, and Hawthorne's social circle.³⁷⁹ These readings—historicist, feminist, economic, biographic—seem all to agree that the figure of the veiled lady is indicative of the novel's various modes of ambiguity.

This chapter takes a different tack, reading instead the objects that lead to Zenobia rather than the object that has been already extensively discussed as a material indicator of gender and the market. I am nevertheless similarly interested in questions of market indices embedded in the material "traces"³⁸⁰ of Zenobia's (female) form. This study is indebted to previous scholarship on the veil as an object and the figure of the veiled lady, especially those such as Teresa A. Goddu's and Gillian Brown's, which convincingly argue for the centrality of the market in mesmeric objects and performance. That groundwork informs my reading of overlooked but no less significant objects in the novel. To be clear, though I draw on concepts of traces and mesmerism symbolized most obviously by the veil, this is not a study of the veil. This chapter instead locates what

³⁷⁹ In relation to mesmerism: Brodhead, "Veiled Ladies"; On female bodies and mesmerism, Russ Castronovo "That Half-Living Corpse" in *Necro Citizenship*, 101-50; the veil as index of the female body's relationship with the marketplace, Goddu "Unveiling the Marketplace" in *Gothic America*; on the veiled female body as representation of women's work, Gillian Brown "The Mesmerized Spectator" in *Domestic Individualism*; on the thinly veiled allusions between Zenobia, the veiled lady, and Margaret Fuller, Kesterson, "Margaret Fuller on Hawthorne" in *Hawthorne and Women*, ed. John L. Idol Jr., and Melinda M. Ponder.

³⁸⁰ CE, vol. 3, 231.

Goddu has called the “dislocations” produced of market economy³⁸¹ in the cast-off items that signal Zenobia’s and the utopian community’s demise.

While previous scholarship has offered rich interpretations of things and events that bookend the trail of clues Zenobia leaves behind—the story of the veiled lady which lies at the center of the narrative, and Zenobia’s death itself, which lies at the end—the clues themselves inform this study. Those clues exist within a conflicting framework of commercial exchange and utopian removal, and as such, necessitate a consideration of the novel within the larger picture of utopian removal in the mid-nineteenth century. That is why I also explore the historical context of utopian communities and their visions of abstention—boycott—of commercial goods tainted by a global system that, according to utopian precepts, fettered man to a lower plane of intellectual and spiritual existence. I am interested in the ways in which Blithedale’s mode of commercial removal acts as consumer reform and whether Zenobia’s material trail can help us trace the utopian community back to the commercial markets it sought to distance itself from. I read Zenobia’s clues in light of the novel’s context clues, from autobiographical encounters with utopian reform to the instability of value in nineteenth-century commodity objects, arriving finally at the object of the novel itself as a clue to understanding the role of the book in nineteenth-century reform.

HAUNTING TRACES AND MARKET VALUES

The trail of commodity clues leading to Zenobia’s dead body, stripped from her living body, is an unveiling of her—and the Blithedale community’s—inescapable material ties to the marketplace. Zenobia’s complicity with market society materializes

³⁸¹ Goddu, *Gothic America*, 94.

around commodified accoutrement. The dislocated market clues strewn about the corpse of the “queen” of Blithedale unveil a world of corrupt values and disingenuous materiality.³⁸² The novel problematizes the sentimental pursuit of a stable value that is knowable through the senses and that profits its user/consumer. Traditional studies of *The Blithedale Romance* have read it as a moral on the failure of utopian communities, where that failure is, Nina Baym recounts, “original sin, the heart’s inclination toward evil, [which] accompanies the reformers to their New Eden.”³⁸³ As Baym rightly points out, there is something lacking in that interpretation which overlooks the action of the novel. The culmination of that action, Zenobia’s death, effectively ends the utopian experiment. If the failure of the community is some “original sin,” that sin is evidenced in the forbidden fruit that leads to the fallen Zenobia—commodity is the original sin. This is consistent with the language of consumption and/as sin evidenced in consumer reform texts studied elsewhere in this dissertation, and where the failure to properly read the innate value of objects (or the incorrect assumption of an innate value), particularly commodities, threatens to visit harm on the user. Zenobia, taking that harm upon herself, drowns, signaling the death of the utopian enterprise.

For a community that defined itself in opposition to the market, principled by a removal from global economies and the invisible hand of capitalism, Blithedale fails even at its outset. In its opening moment of communal tea-taking, Blithedale both subverts genteel customs through serving homegrown tea in rustic mugs and yet makes allowances for such customs to creep back into the insular community by verbally signaling that members may revert back to their old habits later if they wish. After an uncomfortable

³⁸² CE, vol. 3, 13.

³⁸³ Baym, “Radical Reading,” 545.

journey to Blithedale, Coverdale and the others toast the commencement of their experiment over a cup of tea drunk from earthen mugs. Symbolic and simple, the moment gestures to the “every-day, common-place, dusty” accoutrement of farm life.³⁸⁴ Yet, tea from an earthen mug is beyond price. As Zenobia declares: “you shall be made happy with such tea as not many of the world’s working-people, except yourselves, will find in their cups tonight. After this one supper, you may drink buttermilk if you please. Tonight we will quaff this nectar, which I assure you, could not be bought with gold.”³⁸⁵

The ceremonial moment echoes the politics of tea and tea-taking in American history. In her analysis of American consumers’ complicated relationship with tea in the early republic, Kariann Yokota notes that tea-taking “connoted gentility, civility, wealth” and required “leisure time...and money.”³⁸⁶ In other words, it connoted the exact opposite of what the Blithedale community invokes in their taking of tea; they forthwith forfeit leisure and have already parted with their money. The moment is a ceremonial nod to the economic and aesthetic refinement signified by tea-taking only in order to upturn those significations by serving homegrown tea that “could not be bought with gold.” This is an extension of the historically political uses to which tea has been put. Yokota continues: “Because of its aura of aristocratic refinement, tea became the ideal object around which to organize political protests during the periods of heated tension between America and Britain” in the decades preceding and following the Revolutionary War.³⁸⁷ Likewise, because of its “aura” of refinement and protest, it is the “ideal object” to

³⁸⁴ CE, vol. 3, 130-131.

³⁸⁵ CE, vol. 3, 24.

³⁸⁶ Yokota, *Unbecoming British*, 96.

³⁸⁷ Yokota, 96.

introduce Blithedale's socialist removal and rejection of market values. It is an object of sociability turned socialist.

But not quite. The socialist co-opting of the material culture of tea still bears traces of capitalist free markets. For one, despite the emphasis on the organic composition of "earthen mugs," the mugs may yet have been commodity objects. For another, the interaction with "earthen" mugs has the opposite effect of enacting a removal from the market, for in using them Coverdale can only think of their higher-priced counterparts. While Zenobia serves the tea, Coverdale's thoughts turn to the material receptacle: "Though we saw fit to drink our tea out of earthen cups to-night, and in earthen company, it was at our own option to use pictured porcelain and handle silver forks again, tomorrow."³⁸⁸ In seeing the one material (rough earthen mugs), he also sees the other (fine porcelain and silver); the object bears, in material culture terms, a *trace* that effects through human use its connection to something physically absent but still inseparable from it. The connections evoked through handling the one object, to an absent other object makes the mug what Elizabeth Hallam has called a "relational entity": the earthen mug exists only in relation to its porcelain counterpart; it is "situationally constituted."³⁸⁹ Furthermore, the available "option" to use, handle, drink from objects assigned a higher market value allows Blithedale's members to opt out of the very homespun economy it purported to endorse. The opting out of homespun (which may not have been homespun in actuality) is an opting back in to the very commodity culture from which Blithedale inhabitants seek removal. Moreover, that the option exists at all indicates the presence of such goods already intruding into the space of their earthen

³⁸⁸ CE, vol. 3, 24.

³⁸⁹ Hallam, "Articulating Bones," 466, 467.

counterparts. Coverdale's verb choice also clarifies the relationship between humans and objects here as one of "use" and sensory "handling." Allowing the physical interaction with, the handling of, commodified goods visits the trace of the market upon these 'earthen people', tainting them before their project has even begun.

Even as it comes together over these principles of community and naturally harvested goods in the opening communion ceremony, Blithedale already begins to fall apart, for the image of an organic, subsistence commune is interrupted (before the tea, even) by the more vibrant image of Zenobia's hot house flower. Arrestingly beautiful, it rises in Coverdale's memory inexorably with the visage of Zenobia, simply dressed save for the ornament that comes to stand for the personhood, indeed the womanhood, of Zenobia herself. Coverdale recalls,

It was an exotic, of rare beauty, and as fresh as if the hot-house gardener had just clipt [*sic*] it from the stem. That flower has struck deep root into my memory. I can both see it and smell it, at this moment. So brilliant, so rare, so *costly* as it must have been, and yet enduring only for a day, it was more indicative of the pride and pomp, which had a luxuriant growth in Zenobia's character, than if a great diamond had sparkled among her hair.³⁹⁰

Here again Coverdale draws a distinction between invaluable earthen goods and goods deemed valuable by dint of their costliness. Yet the hot house flower is a contradiction in terms, being both of the earth and of human manufacture, ephemeral and yet lasting in memory. As a diamond is cleaned, cut, and set in a band or necklace, the hot house flower is, similarly, subject to human manipulation through horticulture, grown inside a man-made edifice, stuck with a price tag and sold on the market. Instead, the disposability of the object seems to further tighten Blithedale's, or at least Zenobia's, inexorable, unrelinquishable relationship with the marketplace—or rather, the

³⁹⁰ CE, vol. 3, 15, italics mine.

marketplace's eternal hold on Blithedale and its inhabitants. Daily, Zenobia must buy this exotic object, bring it back to Blithedale, and wear it not as ornament as it first appears but as self-making.

The existence of the hot house flower fixes Blithedale's relationship with the marketplace by its gendered presence. Later, Coverdale "wonder[s] how Zenobia contrived it—that she had always a new flower in her hair. And still it was a hot-house flower—an outlandish flower—a flower of the tropics" that likely could not grow in the harsh soil of Blithedale.³⁹¹ Not only does Zenobia manage to procure a hot-house flower each day, it is each day a different flower, "[u]nlike as was the flower of each successive day to the preceding one."³⁹² Where does Zenobia obtain these flowers that need to be replaced every day? Presumably, Blithedale is close enough to the village—Moodie visits from the village from time to time, Coverdale himself goes into the village at least twice. But daily? If Hawthorne had meant to imply that Zenobia plucks the flower each morning from the Blithedale garden, he would not have called it a "hot-house flower"; that is not what a hot house flower is. Furthermore, even if Blithedale had managed to set up its own hot house prior to the arrival of Zenobia and the others, it is unlikely there would have been room enough in the hot house to grow several species of tropical flowers and still have them survive. Instead, Coverdale implies that the flower is a product of her own body, "a luxuriant growth" of the female form. As Teresa A. Goddu has argued, "the gothic heroine embodies the very thing she is supposed to hide: the marketplace."³⁹³ In seeing the flower as "a growth," Coverdale intuits the entangling of the marketplace with Zenobia's physical and gendered "character" while also failing to account for the

³⁹¹ CE, vol. 3, 44-45.

³⁹² CE, vol. 3, 45.

³⁹³ Goddu, *Gothic America*, 94.

impracticalities of actual procurement of such a commodity. The market “grows” itself; it manifests on Zenobia’s form, *as* Zenobia’s form, signaling the embeddedness of Zenobia and by extension Blithedale, of which she is “Queen,”³⁹⁴ within a capitalist market.

The moment Zenobia relinquishes the flower for good, in her final gesture to Coverdale, she begins to die. It strikes Coverdale as a “discrowning” as of a queen defeated, usurped by her younger, purer sister.³⁹⁵ It is a symbolic divestment of her pride of place, but it is also the severing of an appendage in the first of several such wounds. Kissing her hand as she leaves, Coverdale remarks that it is deathly cold, and Zenobia remarks, “The extremities die first, they say.”³⁹⁶ Holding on to the severed appendage after she exits, Coverdale is impressed by the spectral afterimage of Zenobia. Her presence seems to linger, ghost-like, as if she were already visiting from the dead. “I was affected with a fantasy,” says Coverdale, “that Zenobia had not actually gone, but was still hovering about the spot, and haunting it... as if the vivid coloring of her character had left a brilliant stain upon the air.”³⁹⁷ As the brilliant flower so first impressed him in the opening scene, it here seems to cast the spirit of Zenobia all about it, a haunted and haunting object. It broadcasts “something alive in a dead object,” as Anfew Sofer describes the function of haunted stage props. On the stage of Blithedale, the hot house flower is “possessed by the voice” of its absent wearer through a “channeling” akin to mesmerism.³⁹⁸ Zenobia’s “stain” left upon the air traces the space to the absent Zenobia—a haunting. Zenobia’s death is signified in the divesting of object from subject, such that subject and object become destabilized terms, the object projecting the

³⁹⁴ CE, vol. 3, 141.

³⁹⁵ CE, vol. 3, 226.

³⁹⁶ CE, vol. 3, 227.

³⁹⁷ CE, vol. 3, 228.

³⁹⁸ Sofer, *Stage Life of Props*, 27.

impression of the former subject, the subject constituted only by the object. The flower is one of Hawthorne's self-contained opposites in the novel. The having of it disrupts the honesty of Blithedale's anti-commercial enterprise; the losing of it signifies Zenobia's relinquishing of self and loss of life, so that it both undoes one and constitutes the other.

Thus begins the succession of clues that lead to Zenobia's body. Falling into a stupor at Zenobia's revelation, Coverdale retreats into unconsciousness, though it is a "thin sphere" which bursts the moment his dreams become too active. Upon waking, he recalls with alarm Zenobia's "whole-souled gesture" of handing over the flower.³⁹⁹ The narrative curtain falls briefly,⁴⁰⁰ the chapter closes and another opens as Coverdale hastens to Hollingsworth's window. Entreating Hollingsworth and Silas Foster to come out and search for Zenobia, he shows them "a delicate handkerchief marked with a well-known cypher" which he has discovered and which has "filled [him] with a suspicion so terrible" he can hardly bring himself to utter it.⁴⁰¹ Having then set out to "ascertain the truth," the trio discover "further traces" of Zenobia's dark deed.

The next "trace" is a French-made shoe stuck in the mud by some footsteps. At the moment of the shoe's discovery, Coverdale recounts:

Silas Foster thrust his face down close to these footsteps, and picked up a shoe, that had escaped my observation, being half imbedded in the mud. "There's a kid-shoe that never was made on a Yankee last,"⁴⁰² observed he. "I know enough of shoemaker's craft to tell that. French manufacture; and see what a high instep!"⁴⁰³

³⁹⁹ CE, vol. 3, 227.

⁴⁰⁰ It is this narrative elision that has led some scholars to cast doubt on Coverdale's version of events, identifying Coverdale instead as Zenobia's murderer. See notes 364, 374, and 375.

⁴⁰¹ CE, vol. 3, 230.

⁴⁰² Editor's note in the Norton Critical Edition: "A shoe made of the finest leather ("kid"), too fancy to have been manufactured in America (on a Yankee "last," a foot-shaped mold or form used for building or repairing shoes)." Millington, ed., 158.

⁴⁰³ CE, vol. 3, 231.

Silas Foster, “obtuse as were his sensibilities” correctly reads the object as a commodity of foreign manufacture and moreover as Zenobia’s: “There never was a woman that stept [*sic*] handsomer in her shoes than Zenobia did,” he remarks.⁴⁰⁴

There are several points of interest here: first, that Coverdale failed to notice the shoe; second, that it is covered in mud; and finally, its provenance. That Coverdale fails to notice the shoe indicates the limits of his observational powers and suggests his complicity in a material economy. He cannot see that which he himself is embedded in. What he is not embedded in is the mud, the dirt, the soil of the earth that he and his compatriots had set out to cultivate and by so doing to cultivate an alternative economy not motivated by commodified products and profits. Rising, phantom-like from the muck, is a decidedly unnatural thing: a French shoe. It ought to have no place in the anti-commercial enclave of Blithedale. With her exotic hot-house flower and on-trend French shoes, Zenobia is more like a type taken from the fashion plates of *Godey’s Lady’s Book* than from the sturdy, earthy people of rural farm life. At the height of Blithedale’s work, its people are a motley mix of raggedly-clothed farm folk who put no stock in fashions. As Coverdale describes them:

Whatever might be our points of difference, we all of us seemed to have come to Blithedale with the one thrifty and laudable idea of wearing out our old clothes... Coats with high collars, and with no collars, broad-skirted or swallow-tailed, and with the waist at every point between the hip and the armpit; pantaloons of a dozen successive epochs, and greatly defaced at the knees by the humiliations of the wearer before his lady-love;—in short, we were a living epitome of defunct fashions... It was gentility in tatters... So we gradually flung them all aside, and took to honest homespun and linsey-woolsey.⁴⁰⁵

Blithedale’s inhabitants bring with them old clothes, clothes “of a dozen epochs” already wearing thin, with the “thrifty intention” of extracting from them their maximum use

⁴⁰⁴ CE, vol. 3, 231.

⁴⁰⁵ CE, vol. 3, 63-64.

value. When this wringing out is accomplished, when the material markers of class can no longer be used for such (they are a “gentility in tatters”), they turn instead to textiles crafted locally, textiles made “honestly” without the unneeded tinge of market value.

The turn to homespun is in fact a return. As Carol Faulkner reminds us, “within a generation, antebellum women had traded their homespun for garments made of cotton grown by slaves in Georgia, spun and woven into fabric in Massachusetts, and cut and sewn in New York City. This shift provoked a range of anxieties among women, as well as in society at large.”⁴⁰⁶ The market revolution happened quickly but it did not happen smoothly; with the exploitation of slave and wage labor came a world of ethically compromised goods born out of a system that hid corrupt practices and exacerbated class and racial conflict. For many nineteenth-century consumers, the unregulated free market was a threat to their ability to buy competently. Often, the provenance of an object was muddled by obscure trade routes and dishonest business practices, and many could not opt out of that system because its traces wound their way into everyday things—like shoes. Of course, the point of *Blithedale* is to opt out and thus to effect change on that from which it distances itself. Zenobia’s shoes are no less safe because Silas Foster can *tell* that they are French; their discernible provenance is no consolation, for they register the invisible market forces that dictate changing fashion trends which enslave consumers. That Zenobia leaves off “honest homespun” in favor of French shoes exposes the project to be as false as the market value assigned to such things.

Writers of the American Renaissance, like abolitionist boycotters, temperance activists, and domestic writers alike, viewed the market with cautious apprehension. As Michael T. Gilmore notes, “they were beset by fears of a world out of control; the actual

⁴⁰⁶ Faulkner, “Root of the Evil,” 386.

workings of the market seemed incoherent to them rather than rational and orderly.”⁴⁰⁷

One root of such fears was the rapid and unpredictable change in stable value systems.

“Under the market regime,” Gilmore continues, “value itself came to be regarded as subjective, determined not by the inherent properties of an object but by extrinsic factors such as opinion and desire.”⁴⁰⁸ Emerson in particular lambasted the early market economy for its trade in “‘fictitious’ commodities” and “artificial valuations.”⁴⁰⁹ Emerson in “Man the Reformer” describes the corruption of value which proliferates in the market economy: “The general system of our trade...is a system of selfishness...of distrust, of concealment” which evenly distributes “sins” to all those implicated in the chain of production and consumption.⁴¹⁰ He goes on, “we eat and drink and wear perjury and fraud in a hundred commodities,” suggesting the immoral, deceitful material makeup of exchange goods and the sensory threat posed by the con of capitalism.⁴¹¹

In *The Blithedale Romance*, that con is personified through the character of Westervelt whose chief identifying trait is his false teeth. In a rare moment of true sight, Coverdale deduces Westervelt’s character at once by his teeth, where there was “a gold band around the upper part of his teeth; thereby making it apparent that every one of his brilliant grinders and incisors was a sham.”⁴¹² This gilded forgery marks him as the mouthpiece of deception that sets in motion Zenobia and Priscilla’s removal from Blithedale, Hollingsworth’s jealousy, and the collapse of the project in total. Forgery was a real concern for nineteenth-century audiences, so to mark Westervelt by his sham,

⁴⁰⁷ Gilmore, *American Romanticism*, 21.

⁴⁰⁸ Gilmore, 22.

⁴⁰⁹ Gilmore, 22.

⁴¹⁰ Emerson, “Man the Reformer,” 3.

⁴¹¹ Emerson, “Man the Reformer,” 3.

⁴¹² CE, vol. 3, 95.

gilded teeth would have had immediate connotations. As a commodity object that has taken the place of a human body part, it embodies the “selfishness,” “distrust,” and “concealment” Emerson so detested in the free-wheeling free market. It is “selfish” in that Westervelt’s choosing of a valuable mineral to occupy so prominent a place on his visage was motivated by self-interest. It provokes “distrust” from viewers such as Coverdale who reads the object as exactly that kind of “concealment”⁴¹³ Emerson distrusts: a superficial covering up of both physical absences and moral deficits. The object, in other words, traces several absences: in signifying heightened exchange value it also signifies a lack of personal character, and in masquerading as teeth it signifies the absence of them. Moreover, as gold they hearken back (another trace) to an easier, if only because knowable, system of exchange value: the gold standard. Westervelt’s false gold teeth are a material reminder of the novel’s use of commodities to illustrate the contradictions between surface materiality and innate qualities.

Perhaps one clue to decoding the novel’s stance on surface versus interior value is actually Hawthorne’s description of Margaret Fuller, for whom Zenobia is generally accepted as representative, in his *Italian Notebooks*. In the “inexplicably negative”⁴¹⁴ private description of one whom Hawthorne had publicly spoken of with respect, Hawthorne criticizes the discrepancy between Fuller’s innate qualities and affected appearance:

She had a strong and coarse nature, too, which she had done the utmost to refine, with infinite pains, but which of course could only be *superficially* changed... She was a great humbug; of course with much talent, and *much moral reality*, or else she could not have been so great a humbug. But *she had stuck herself full of*

⁴¹³ Emerson, “Man the Reformer,” 3.

⁴¹⁴ Kesterson, “Margaret Fuller on Hawthorne,” 66.

borrowed qualities, which she chose to provide herself with, but which had no root in her.⁴¹⁵

Calling Fuller “a great humbug” does not speak well of Hawthorne’s views on women, especially since he goes on to label her personality “defective and evil.”⁴¹⁶ Yet there exists a crucial tension between reality and superficiality that seems to be Hawthorne’s main complaint here, and indeed, in *Blithedale*. Her “strong and coarse nature” (probably only deemed so because she exhibited the kind of confidence and leadership skills we even today derisively and problematically call “bossy”) is yet marked by “much talent.” Her innate character is moreover composed of “much moral reality.” The whole assessment is premised on an assumption that innate qualities can 1) be discerned despite the exterior and 2) be of moral (or immoral) constitution. Her tendency to try to “refine” a raw moral talent by adopting a more socially pleasing facade fails, at least to Hawthorne, because he reads it as a sham show. Hawthorne cannot reconcile the innate qualities with the exterior artificiality. Unlike Zenobia whose hot house decoration seems a natural flowering of her internal character (even though it conspicuously is not), Fuller “had stuck herself full of borrowed qualities.” Hawthorne’s verb choice indicates a putting on, an adorning, a kind of tailoring by “[sticking] herself full” of “borrowed” (re)finery. Not only does this passage echo the transcendentalist condemnation of the “superficiality” of accoutrement (Emerson’s “fictitious commodities”), but it also relies on a relationship between inner/outer truth. It is that relationship which Coverdale struggles to parse out all through *Blithedale*.

That struggle is foreshadowed in a telling moment when the inner truth of their mission is revealed by throwing off an outer display. In an early scene, Coverdale is

⁴¹⁵ CE, vol. 14, 155-156, italics mine.

⁴¹⁶ CE, vol. 14, 156.

transfixed by the motion of Zenobia throwing off her flower which has wilted in the heat of the hearth fire (which is not coincidentally domestic). In that moment, he says “the presence of Zenobia [and her flower] caused our heroic enterprise to show like an illusion, a masquerade, a pastoral, a counterfeit Arcadia.”⁴¹⁷ In flinging off the flower, itself a counterfeit standing in for natural growth, both personal and floral, Zenobia flings off the dreamy veil of their entire project. It is a moment of irony, for in divesting her body of a false ornament, a commodity that is out of place—literally “outlandish”⁴¹⁸ in Coverdale’s estimation—in an anti-materialist social body, the action ought to serve as a disavowal of the corruption of market society upon natural things; and yet it only exposes their inability to actually disavow such things, to actually fling off the material vestments of a world corrupted by what Coverdale calls the “common evil” of capitalism.⁴¹⁹

Nevertheless, Coverdale, if not Hawthorne, is optimistic. When Hollingsworth asks, “Do you seriously imagine” that Blithedale will succeed, Coverdale replies in the affirmative: “Certainly, I do... Of course, when the reality comes, it will wear the every-day commonplace, dusty, and rather homely garb, that reality always puts on.”⁴²⁰ “Of course” it does not come because Blithedale’s “queen” herself will not wear, either materially or ideologically, the “dusty” “homely garb” required of true reformers.⁴²¹

At the same time that Coverdale searches for the inner truths of material substance, he is confronted throughout the novel by absence. Confronted with objects at every turn, Coverdale willfully reads substance into what is often a lack of it, insisting on the belief in innate value over the gothic hollowness of market commodities. That

⁴¹⁷ CE, vol. 3, 21.

⁴¹⁸ CE, vol. 3, 45.

⁴¹⁹ CE, vol. 3, 19.

⁴²⁰ CE, vol. 3, 130-131.

⁴²¹ CE, vol 3, 13, 130-131.

expectation of innate value or true substance is what Goddu has read as Coverdale's willful "sentimental" overlooking of what is actually a gothic object. As Goddu claims, "the sentimental can promise a world without mystery only once its representations are believed."⁴²² In other words, the material exterior of objects can be believed as truthfully conveying the inner meaning of the object only after the viewer/consumer buys into the represented reality. Coverdale must first buy into the projected meaning of objects before they can mean something. The market, however, is always ever "a place of grand illusion" that demands complicit investment by consumers (or viewers, or visitors) who must play along.⁴²³ Zenobia is, as Coverdale labels her, a "grand magician in the guise of a sentimental woman writer" who, as Goddu argues, demonstrates her ability to manipulate the marketplace in key scenes and gestures such as her performative telling of "The Silvery Veil" and her pawning of Priscilla off to Westervelt before her suicide.⁴²⁴ But, I argue, she is also herself manipulated by the market, bearing its material trappings in commodity form even on the outskirts of market society. Zenobia, disdainful of ready believers in a sentimental stable value, performs the market and forces Coverdale to confront the market even as he seeks to retreat from it. She performs, through her suicide, the ultimate quest for removal from, the ultimate boycott of, the market which she cannot exist without. Coverdale's reading of her suicide marks his "[investment] in sentiment,"⁴²⁵ or, his buying into stable and knowable market value, by casting her death as a story of unrequited love rather than reform gone wrong. Yet in her suicide, Zenobia

⁴²² Goddu, *Gothic America*, 109.

⁴²³ Goddu, 110.

⁴²⁴ Goddu, 112.

⁴²⁵ Goddu, 112.

unveils herself as the gothic object, a body shorn of its soul, an empty cipher that is valueless only because it is believed to be empty.

The language Hawthorne uses to describe the failings of Blithedale, represented in the end in Zenobia's suicide, come always back to the *real*, a materially discernible truth. The novel is troubled by dreams, fantasies, absence, because it wants for hard, tangible truths. It wants the real estate that it does not own, it wants the cottages that Coverdale day dreams about, the "pleasant bachelor parlor"⁴²⁶ and all its creature comforts that Coverdale leaves behind in the city, it wants the possession of its own land before it can reap profits—both hard earnings and liquid assets—of its labor, and it wants to accumulate possessions in domestic and leisure spaces ("pictured porcelain" mugs to supplant the "earthen" ones⁴²⁷). It wants the reassurance of hard capital even while it is haunted by it.

The fictional Blithedale, like its real-life referents, fails to materialize into any sustainable, *substantial* project. In sickness, Coverdale views Blithedale as "an insubstantial sort of business, as viewed through a mist of fever."⁴²⁸ Only a month or two into the project, both Hollingsworth and Coverdale admit the fated failure of their plans. Hollingsworth confides to Coverdale, "Your fantastic anticipations make me discern, all the more forcibly, what a wretched, unsubstantial scheme is this."⁴²⁹ Blithedale seems doomed to fail because of its insubstantiality, because of the inability to materialize returns on their labor. In keeping with its soft socialism, Blithedale seeks different kinds of returns than its capitalist counterparts. Namely, that is the cultivation of the mind

⁴²⁶ CE, vol. 3, 40.

⁴²⁷ CE, vol. 3, 24.

⁴²⁸ CE, vol. 3, 43.

⁴²⁹ CE, vol. 3, 130.

through the cultivation of the soil, where enlightenment is derived from exertion of the body, growth of crops, and use of the products of their own land and labor. Later, Hollingsworth confirms the plan is “full of defects” because of its intangibility: “I grasp it in my hand, and find no substance whatever!”⁴³⁰ Before killing herself, Zenobia pronounces Blithedale the “very emptiest mockery” of the system it hoped to establish.⁴³¹ Throughout, Blithedale is described as a place without substance. Indeed, it fails to harvest any crops, to build its own dwelling places, to cultivate—in short, to craft its own material reality. When Coverdale calls Blithedale a community of “colonists with an enterprise,” it is not a slip of the tongue.⁴³² That Coverdale views the group as performing a kind of imperial work upon the land with commercial interests is actually closer to the truth than any idealist visions of ‘living off the land’ it might have had. Blithedale is insubstantial because it *is* only a vision.

In a novel that charts the birth and death of a dream, a fantasy, an impossible reality, material objects lend realism to an otherwise airy tale, a story that is as hard to pin down as the reformist dreams that animate it. It is this very contradiction, the hard and the soft, the material and the ethereal, that complicates *The Blithedale Romance*, for the novel seems to suggest that everything, in fact, is both. The cancelling out of natural and/vs commodity gives Blithedale the sheen of a dream—a false reality. Their “counterfeit Arcadia” is marked by bad faith. Coverdale concludes, Blithedale “[dies], as it well deserved, for this infidelity to its own higher spirit.”⁴³³

⁴³⁰ CE, vol. 3, 132.

⁴³¹ CE, vol. 3, 227.

⁴³² CE, vol. 3, 140.

⁴³³ CE, vol. 3, 246.

REMOVAL AND REFORM

But though Blithedale died, it immortalized the very real efforts of contemporaneous utopian communities such as Brook Farm and Fruitlands whose reformist agendas offer yet another contradiction—that of removal from the socio-economic order and reformation of it. The “knot of dreamers” who make up Blithedale embark on a mission of complete utopian removal from the “selfish competition” and “false and cruel principles” that were the machinery of a commercial society.⁴³⁴ It is short lived; what begins in April is by the end of the year a barren ruin, the fading vision of an “Oasis” of “one green spot in the moral sand-waste of the world.”⁴³⁵ Its failures, representative of those of actual mid-nineteenth-century utopian communities, have prevented it and its real world referents from being appreciated as the radical enterprises they set out to be. Further because Blithedale’s mode of objection to commercial capitalism was to opt-out rather than to work to change the system from within, through targeted boycott of specific commodities, this distancing has led some to charge Blithedale’s members and the real-life people they represent with not actually practicing reform. It is my contention that Blithedale’s removal does stage consumer reform. First, as I detail below, in spite of their removal their mission is really to effect change from without. Second, the language of ‘exemption’ and ‘abstention’ which was used to describe the tenets of utopian communities was also short hand for consumer resistance, which we can better appreciate in light of contemporaneous utopian efforts such as Bronson Alcott’s Fruitlands. Finally, as I argue at the conclusion of this section, it is impossible to view schemes of removal as non-interventionist reform because they are

⁴³⁴ CE, vol. 3, 19.

⁴³⁵ CE, vol. 3, 37.

inexorably positioned both within larger ideological systems and within the print public, with which utopianists regularly engaged.

Despite the death that lies at the end of the novel and the end of the utopian enterprise, Blithedale begins optimistically enough, each member happily dedicated to their convictions that hoeing fields and tending house far from the corrupting influence of urban commercial centers will free them, and then the world, to achieve higher states of being. Their mission is “to make happier” the world, Coverdale says, to enact a “reformation of the world” through deliberate removal from the capitalist model that, by 1841, the year Hawthorne spent at Brook Farm, had begun to establish itself.⁴³⁶ Blithedale, like the Brook Farm it blatantly evoked, wants to perform the “business,” Coverdale’s word, of anti-business by relocating its members outside the urban commercial center to the rural periphery where materialism would have no place (he says, “[we sought] to give up whatever we had heretofore attained”) and where life, labor, and love would be the sole enterprise and the sole profit of their days.⁴³⁷ In effect, Blithedale’s business of anti-business is meant to perform a boycott of the corrupt and corrupting commercial capitalism that prevents man from ascending to a higher plane of existence.

Such lofty ideals formed the basis of a number of utopian schemes in the mid-nineteenth century, including most famously Thoreau’s sojourn at Walden Pond, though less known in his day to those outside the Transcendentalist Club. Communities such as George Ripley’s Brook Farm and Bronson Alcott’s Fruitlands, which were by no means mainstream, became more common in the mid-nineteenth century following serious

⁴³⁶ CE, vol. 3, 30, 39.

⁴³⁷ CE, vol. 3, 43, 19.

backlash against the new economic order brought about by commercial capitalism in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that to many seemed obtuse, threateningly monolithic, dehumanizing, and morally suspect, as previous chapters of this dissertation discuss. While Brook Farm and Fruitlands subscribed to Transcendentalism, other communes pursued religious perfectionism, experimented with wife swapping, or abolished enslaved labor—the Kingdom of Matthias (1830 to 1835), the Oneida Community (1848 to 1881), and the Nashoba Community (1825 to 1828) most prominently. At Brook Farm, transcendentalist ideals united disparate thinkers and reformers under the same utopian banner where they believed removal from emergent capitalist markets would stave off alienation by “securing to [laborers] the fruits of their industry.”⁴³⁸ Those “fruits” necessarily included intellect and heightened thought—a kind of cognitive capital. At Brook Farm, as C. L. (possibly Charles Lane) notes in *The Dial* (1844), its main scheme of “improvement over the world at large” would be brought about through mutual “association” among the like-minded, through “[exemption]” from “worldly” affairs, and through personal education.⁴³⁹ Brook Farm was loosely influenced by the theories of Charles Fourier whose belief that physical toil and hard labor, especially upon the land, produced clarity of mental thought and enlightenment. These are the theories that Coverdale finds seductive but ultimately incompatible (as did Hawthorne) with his disposition.⁴⁴⁰ In his final remarks to the reader, Coverdale concludes that “[m]ore and more, I feel that we had struck upon what ought to be a truth,” and yet he “could not toil there, nor live upon its products” which fail to prosper

⁴³⁸ Ripley, “Letter to Ralph Waldo Emerson,” 307.

⁴³⁹ C. L., “Brook Farm,” *The Dial*, 4.3, 1844, 351.

⁴⁴⁰ For Hawthorne’s decision to quit Brook Farm, see his letter to David Mack, May 25, 1842, in which he admits the “higher ends” of his life and career goals were better met in “the ordinary relation to society,” CE, vol. 15, 624.

precisely because the project did not from the outset fully remove itself, as I discuss below.⁴⁴¹ The Brook Farm community “sought to transform a social world distorted by the competition and inequality of an emergent market capitalism by creating an alternative economic model,” as Richard Millington notes.⁴⁴² It was active from 1841 to 1847, a full six years longer than Blithedale’s half year lifespan.

The short timespan of Blithedale more closely matches that of Fruitlands, the utopian community of Amos Bronson Alcott and Charles Lane, than that of the relatively long-lived Brook Farm. If we consider Blithedale as a fictional referent (if not a parallel) to Fruitlands, it may be easier to see the real, radical, interventionist agenda of a community like Blithedale. From June 1843 to January 1844, Alcott and Lane operated their small utopian community nestled on a few acres of land outside Concord, Massachusetts. The combination of un-arable land and too grand ideals caused Fruitlands to collapse rather quickly. The small community operated on the principle that only upon complete removal from social and economic institutions could one attain personal enlightenment. Eschewing concepts of private and public property, paid labor, and money, the community lived only on what was needed and nothing more. Their radical approach to production and consumption demanded the boycott of goods tainted by animal cruelty and goods implicated in a corrupt system of global trade. Specifically, they disallowed the exploitation of animal labor and the ingestion of animal by-products or non-local food stuffs: “Neither coffee, tea, molasses, nor rice tempts us beyond the bounds of indigenous production... No animal substances neither flesh, butter, cheese, eggs, nor milk pollute our tables nor corrupt our bodies.”⁴⁴³ Yet even the bare minimum

⁴⁴¹ CE, vol. 3, 245-246, 245.

⁴⁴² Millington, ed., *The Blithedale Romance*, 173.

⁴⁴³ Alcott, qtd. in Hankins, *Second Great Awakening*, 36.

proved hard to come by, and their vegan attitudes toward living creatures precluded an efficient method of living off the land.

Contemporary responses to such an “impracticable experiment,” as Alcott later called it though not unlovingly,⁴⁴⁴ were characterized by indifference and discredit. Some earnestly engaged with Lane and Alcott’s vision of reform yet denied its merit on grounds of sectarian difference.⁴⁴⁵ But more often than not, public announcements in the periodical press by Lane and Alcott before and during Fruitlands’ lifespan were often met with silence. There is no further mention of Fruitlands by name in *The Dial* after its founders’ introductory piece in 1843.⁴⁴⁶

The lack of public comment is still better than the way subsequent generations have treated the experiment. Early scholarship treated Fruitlands with unmasked ridicule and failed to contend with the experiment in the sincere tones with which it conducted itself. Richard Francis captures the tenor of early criticism by reducing the project to a catalog of goofy characters, from the Alcotts and Lane to “Joseph Palmer...a well-known local character who had served time for an offense connected with wearing a beard; Isaac Hecker, a New York baker and refugee from Brook Farm,...someone called Abram Wood, who preferred to be called Wood Abram; Samuel Larned, who claimed to have lived for a year entirely off crackers, and for another off apples; Samuel Bower, a nocturnal nudist, who eventually decided the climate was better in Florida; and three or

⁴⁴⁴ Alcott recalls that Fruitlands was “an impracticable experiment...at which I now smile, but it was full of rare and ripe experience which we shall never attain to again” in “Commonwealth Sketches: Rambles in Concord—II” (qtd. in E. K., *Springfield Republican*, May 8, 1869).

⁴⁴⁵ *Boston Daily Advertiser*, “Notices of New Publications,” Mar. 7, 1855; Hecker, *Questions of the Soul*.

⁴⁴⁶ Alcott and Lane, “Intelligence: Fruitlands” *The Dial*, July 1843, 135-136.

four others.”⁴⁴⁷ Francis acknowledges “the enterprise is asking for ridicule, and has received it,” before going on to correct that response. Such characterizations—caricaturization, really—may explain why history has been slow to favor Alcott, “the most Transcendental of all the Transcendentalists,”⁴⁴⁸ over Emerson and Thoreau.

Yet reception was not comprehensively negative. Ralph Waldo Emerson, with whom the Alcotts shared a long and familiar acquaintance in the Transcendentalist coterie, tempered his own misgivings about the “limitations and exaggerations” of so “tedious and probing and egotistical and narrow” a man as Alcott, in the same journal entry praising Alcott’s view of the “inequality of property,” lauding his “profound insight,” and praising him as a “majestical [*sic*] man” well deserving of his self-proclaimed ‘Orphic’ sight.⁴⁴⁹ Even Louisa Alcott, who had as much and more reason to complain of her father’s experiments in austerity recalls Fruitlands with a mixture of nostalgic whimsy and good-humored caricature in *Transcendental Wild Oats*. Louisa Alcott’s objections are rather personal than political, locating the main tension between the Charles Lane character, Timon Lion, and the Bronson Alcott character, Abel Lamb, whose superior morality is challenged by the tyrannical Lion. Lion, as Lane did, proposes the Lambs enter into a consociate family unit with him in order to sustain the communal project beset by agrarian trials and tribulations. When Lamb declines, he is excommunicated, left without property or assets to support his family and it is his wife Hope, through self-sacrifice and her willingness to take put-out work, who saves the family from destitution.

⁴⁴⁷ Francis, “Circumstances and Salvation,” 202.

⁴⁴⁸ Boller, *American Transcendentalism*, 117.

⁴⁴⁹ Emerson, *Journals*, vol. 6, April 1844, 506.

Fruitlands was a project of extreme removal—institutional, social, ideological—the point of which, like Brook Farm and its fictional Blithedale, was to achieve personal enlightenment. Fruitlands operated under the belief that strict “abstinence,” as they termed it⁴⁵⁰ (or boycott, as readers today might term it), from worldly commerce, animal products, and established social institutions, would enable personal reform. Brook Farm operated under similar modes of “exemption,” or a deliberate opting out.⁴⁵¹ Such principles have led some to interpret Fruitlands as non-interventionist because it did not adopt what activists might now call courses of direct action in those apparatuses and institutions it found preclusive to perfect reform. Anne C. Rose, for instance, contends “the behavior of these middle class utopians might well be considered an evasion of their social responsibility” and that while the members believed that “something was dreadfully wrong with the market economy,” they evaded the problem by “changing nothing except themselves.”⁴⁵²

The kind of “evasion” utopian reformers practiced was actually, in their own words, an “abstinence,” or deliberate non-consumption and non-participation in goods and institutions corrupted by market economy. We have seen in other nineteenth-century movements such as abolitionist boycott and temperance that the language of abstaining and abstinence more closely resembles deliberate boycott and consumer activism. Contemporaneous movements that adopted the language of abstention, non-participation, or removal sought to perform an interventionist agenda in the market economy; Fruitlands, Brook Farm, and the fictional Blithedale offer an extremist version of boycott

⁴⁵⁰ Charles Lane, “The Consociate Family Life,” *Herald of Freedom*, Sept. 8, 1843, 120; Alcott uses the term “abstain” on multiple occasions to refer to dietary discipline which all should adopt. See *Tablets*, 37; *Concord Days*, 89, 227.

⁴⁵¹ C. L., “Brook Farm,” 351.

⁴⁵² Rose, *Transcendentalism as a Social Movement*, 130.

by seeking wholesale removal as a form of protest against that which they sought to distance themselves from. Coverdale, waxing poetic on the ideals of Blithedale even in the ruins of its memory, testifies that however “difficult” the practices of abstention and removal would prove to be, its goal was “the reformation of the world.”⁴⁵³ Even in its place of seclusion and removal, it seeks to effect outer change.

Further, if we give credence to the charge that removal shuts down the possibility of intervention, then there arises a larger question: Can a boycott exist *not* as an intervention? That is, can one, no matter what state of transcendence one has achieved, fully step outside one’s social, economic, cultural, and political fabric, not just physically and materially but ideologically? What Alcott, Lane, and Ripley get wrong about removal and reform is the assumption that removal can take place outside of that which they seek to reform. In other words, their mistake is that removal is not and can never be removal as such—not a relocation outside a perimeter—but instead a working within by seclusion and cloister. Thus Coverdale’s “antidote” to “dreamers”⁴⁵⁴ like Alcott, Lane, and Ripley was the bitter draught of reality, a reminder of the inexorable material relations that bind the idealist to the capitalist. As Irving Howe notes of Coverdale’s politics, “what really distinguishes *The Blithedale Romance* is another kind of criticism double-edged, subtle and generally unnoticed...[that] the utopian community could not avoid functioning as part of the materialistic world it detested.”⁴⁵⁵ Abstention and removal is always already embedded in the social structures it seeks to distance itself from, and as such, communities such as Fruitlands and Brook Farm staged an intervention by dint of posturing itself in opposition to such structures. An allegedly non-interventionist

⁴⁵³ CE, vol. 3, 12.

⁴⁵⁴ Melville, “Who the Devil Ain’t a Dreamer,” 230.

⁴⁵⁵ Howe, “Pastoral and Politics,” 164.

reformist agenda is still and always interventionist because it cannot reach the point of distance which non-intervention requires.

Further complicating utopian communities' pretensions to non-interventionist removal is their participation within local and national imagined communities of print through which their tightly insular communal boundaries are made to expand—and to do reformist work. In advertising their efforts through the periodical press; Alcott, Lane, and Ripley send their visions of purported removal directly into the commercial centers they wish to critique. Bound books, pamphlets, periodicals house the language of reform; it is bound in an object, exchanged, consumed on the shared stage of the very worldly markets that projects such as Fruitlands eschewed. Not only did these communities exist in print through communications printed in *The Dial* where they already had the benefit of a receptive audience, but also in letters published in mainstream periodicals.⁴⁵⁶ It is a crucial irony of utopian communities that their message of ideological distancing can only spread through direct interaction with the literary market. While Alcott and Lane secluded themselves where “no public thoroughfare invades”⁴⁵⁷ they yet maintained a “thoroughfare” in the print public by advertising their scheme, expounding on their principles of social reform, and soliciting new members. The fact of a print presence at all underscores the necessity of interaction with certain markets (i.e. the literary market) even when deliberately avoiding other markets (i.e. food and labor). The Transcendentalist Club was small. It was geographically compact. Its social network

⁴⁵⁶ Alcott and Lane, “Intelligence: Fruitlands” *The Dial*, July 1843, 135-136; C. L., “Brook Farm,” *The Dial*, Jan. 1844, 351-357. A letter published in *The Herald of Freedom*, “The Consociate Family Life,” served as a manifesto for their vision (Sept. 8, 1843). Lane also engaged in printed correspondence with Quaker reformers in the *Boston Investigator* (“Correspondence,” Aug. 6, 1845).

⁴⁵⁷ Alcott and Lane, “Intelligence: Fruitlands,” 135.

thrived on Sunday gatherings and intimate correspondence. The textual existence of communities such as Brook Farm and Fruitlands outside of such informal gatherings and the narrowly circulated Transcendentalist press enacts an enlarging of the imagined community of reform to greater print publics. This textual sharing of their ideas suggests an implicit understanding of the need to engage the reading public if their reformist ideals were to spread. If Alcott and Lane's vision of paradise through worldly abstinence held firm, what must we make then of the printed, published, circulated textual lives of Fruitlands and its members' messages? What is a boycott if not always a deliberate staging, a purposeful, *proclaimed* intervention? Utopian removal staged a boycott of entire systems and some markets while proclaiming those intentions—and enacting their interventions—in the material form of print media, a point to which I return at the conclusion of this chapter.

APOLITICAL INTERVENTIONS

Hawthorne himself has been bit of a tricky character to read within the climate of moral and social reform that characterized America during his most active years (the 1850s). While other scholars have read Hawthorne's depiction of a failed and inherently flawed Blithedale as a criticism of utopian communities and of reform efforts more generally, there is still considerable ambiguity within the text and in Hawthorne's own life which leaves room to reconsider whether such criticisms preclude the novel's work as a consumer reform text. It is Hawthorne's own life that I consider below, in order to situate, through its author's own career, *Blithedale's* embeddedness within its political climate.

As a text that novelizes one such utopian community, *The Blithedale Romance* seems to struggle to fully appreciate the ideological implications of the very project it chronicles. Though Blithedale is modeled after Brook Farm, it shares some of the more poignant criticisms of Fruitlands: that it was made up of silly dreamers, that those dreamers could never coalesce into a functioning unit, that it lacked agrarian feasibility, and that it did not do enough to intervene in the markets it condemned. Coverdale, at once one of those silly dreamers and a critic of their scheme, is ultimately, however, a faulty lens through which to view Blithedale. His angle of vision perpetuates the critical ambivalence with which Hawthorne's contemporaries as well as modern critics approach communities like Blithedale. He, as they, simply do not know what to make of them.

Coverdale's ambivalence is really an inability to settle his response between two opposites: reverence for the project's goals and realistic acknowledgment of its logistical shortcomings. His observations of Blithedale vacillate (as did Hawthorne's of Brook Farm) between optimistic reverence and stoic realism. Even to the end Coverdale maintains a sense of nostalgic hopefulness tinged with personal defeatism toward the Blithedale mission. In the novel's closing pages Coverdale invites others to take up the mantle of reform in his stead, for "as regards human progress...let them believe in it who can"—Coverdale "earnestly" cannot, for to him Blithedale is all and only to do with his "irrepressible yearnings" toward Priscilla (or possibly Zenobia).⁴⁵⁸ Yet later in the same paragraph Coverdale exaltingly exclaims: "were there any cause, in this whole chaos of human struggle, worth a sane man's dying for, and which my death would benefit, then—provided, however, the effort did not involve an unreasonable amount of trouble—

⁴⁵⁸ CE, vol. 3, 246.

methinks I might be bold to offer up my life” for Blithedale.⁴⁵⁹ Coverdale praises the scheme as worthy of martyrs but undercuts that sentiment in the same breath. Blithedale is a noble cause that even those of sound mind might gladly give their lives for, as would Coverdale—just not his sweat and tears.

The valence of views in Coverdale’s observations, as well as the complicated politics of deliberate removal from political arenas, of the Blithedale project is more than critics have allowed Hawthorne himself. Following Hawthorne’s own careful crafting of a literary persona divested from the temporal trappings of contemporary politics, early critics were complicit in sustaining that projected authorial persona whose talent was his timelessness. F. O. Matthiessen and Fred Lewis Pattee’s categorical reading of Hawthorne as a ‘classic’ writer, for instance, relies on the premise of his non-politics, markedly in contrast to the sensationalist and sentimentalist literature with which he competed on the literary market (and usually lost). Their reading of Hawthorne has since fallen out of favor in the last few decades of feminist, Marxist, and new historicist scholarship.⁴⁶⁰

Yet the accusation persists that Hawthorne was not a political writer—and certainly not a boycott activist. Hawthorne may not have joined the print picket line to campaign for the regulation of alcohol or the abolition of slavery as writers such as Child, Chandler, and Harper did. He did, however, opt in to an opting out project—Brook Farm—and go on to novelize those experiences. In writing about reform, and through a narrator who experiences vacillating commitment to it, Hawthorne by default entered the arena of reform and provided readers the means of either or both sympathizing with and

⁴⁵⁹ CE, vol. 3, 246.

⁴⁶⁰ See especially Nina Baym “Again and Again the Scribbling Women” for a longer discussion of the critical legacy such arguments have had for our understanding of Hawthorne and the mid-nineteenth-century literary scene, as well as a reconsideration of Hawthorne’s disparaged and disparaging comment.

rejecting reformist projects. The persistent image of Hawthorne as an a-political author stems from Hawthorne's own carefully crafted aloof literary persona as well as the legacy of scholarship that has read him as such. Yet I would contend that works and authors that masquerade as non-political are the more suspect because of such appearances. As Nina Baym has pointed out regarding evidence of politics in Hawthorne's writing, some critics maintain that "always excepting the campaign biography, little in Hawthorne's writing...approaches...outright political expressiveness."⁴⁶¹ It was this determined evasion of political matters in his novels and short stories that led Hawthorne himself and a century of scholarship after him to define his work as high art, an artistic craft that transcended the vulgar realities of politics and achieved instead a higher truth. I will echo what Nina Baym has tactfully said regarding that history: "However one may agree with this or that academic political reading of Hawthorne's fictions, one has to wonder what cultural work they could have done, really and truly, in their own time if the culture itself was unaware that such [political] meanings existed—if, in fact [readers approached] Hawthorne's fiction contrariwise as sites with nothing whatever to say about public affairs."⁴⁶²

Blithedale's conflicted relationship with the politics of reform is further complicated by its embeddedness in the messy politics of Hawthorne's own career, which cannot be disentangled from antebellum elections. Hawthorne's mingling with the political arena is best remembered through his "Custom House" sketch based on his experience as a Salem Custom House surveyor. But by the time he published the sketch he had been ousted as agent after the turbulent 1848 election and the change in

⁴⁶¹ Baym, "Again and Again," 32.

⁴⁶² Baym, 32.

administration in Washington in 1849. Following a hot election that witnessed the clashing of the Free Soil party with the two-party establishment, the Whigs and Democrats,⁴⁶³ the election of Whig Zachary Taylor to the presidency personally affected the lifelong Democrat whose removal from the Custom House surveyorship resulted in “considerable public controversy.”⁴⁶⁴ It was only after these events that Hawthorne wrote and published “The Custom House.” After a retreat to western Massachusetts during which Hawthorne was primarily engaged in literary production, Hawthorne again engaged the political arena in the leadup to the 1853 election, first as a campaign biographer for Democratic nominee Franklin Pierce and then, after Pierce’s victory, as U.S. consul in Liverpool. As Pierce’s appointed consular officer, Hawthorne was stoutly loyal to the politician, even amid later accusations of Pierce’s being a traitor to the Union cause.⁴⁶⁵ Hawthorne published his biography of the president, *The Life of Franklin Pierce*, (the campaign biography to which Baym, above, alludes) the same year as *The Blithedale Romance* (1852).⁴⁶⁶

The campaign biography became an unlikely hero in Hawthorne’s pursuit of a literary career and in fact implicates the so-called a-political Hawthorne as a decidedly political writer. Though we remember well Hawthorne’s derisive comment about “scribbling women” as indicative of his struggle to compete on the literary market, it is somehow easily forgotten that Hawthorne did quite well—just not in the genre for which

⁴⁶³ See Jonathan Halperin Earle on the party politics of the 1848 election, *Jacksonian Antislavery and the Politics of Free Soil, 1824-1854*.

⁴⁶⁴ Millington, ed., *The Blithedale Romance*, 409.

⁴⁶⁵ Johnson, “Discord in Concord,” 109.

⁴⁶⁶ In the campaign biography, Hawthorne’s treatment of Pierce’s anti-abolitionist stance is one of measured respect less for Pierce’s actual leanings than for his friend’s “unbroken consistency” in the face of opposition (*Life of Franklin Pierce*, 110; see also chapter six: “The Compromise and Other Matters”).

we remember him. When Ticknor, Reed, and Fields debuted the campaign biography, it sold more copies than any other work published by the firm—just under 13,000 copies.⁴⁶⁷ Effectively, Hawthorne used the political arena to bolster another facet of his authorial persona, as “reviewers treated it and publishers marketed it as a ‘Hawthorne’ work,” one that incidentally aligned it more closely to the best-sellers with whom Hawthorne begrudgingly competed.⁴⁶⁸ National politics were clearly not beneath comment in Hawthorne’s oeuvre, including a short wartime sketch published in 1862. “Chiefly about War Matters” is determinedly bipartisan, though Hawthorne sided with the Union.⁴⁶⁹ Hawthorne’s measured bipartisan tone in the sketch speaks to his now increasing efforts to paint himself as a nonpolitical writer, an obvious and ineffective irony. Regardless of motive or political leanings, Hawthorne’s political publications have the important effect of staging political matters on the literary market.

In addition to his political career, Hawthorne’s social circle gives the lie to his own avowed non-politics. The way Hawthorne situated himself in relation to Concord reform (and the politics thereof) was indeed nuanced; like Coverdale, he was both participant and observer, both believer and critic. Following his entry to Concord society through the education reformer, abolitionist, and future sister-in-law, Elizabeth Peabody in the 1830s, Hawthorne remained a fixture of the eclectic group of thinkers and reformers. His relationships with individual members were as nuanced as his opinions on

⁴⁶⁷ Casper, “Two Lives,” 203.

⁴⁶⁸ Casper, 204. Casper suggests Hawthorne’s request to write the campaign biography was motivated by literary politics rather than national ones, and his skirting of the issue of slavery (Pierce was proslavery) was indicative of genre conventions, though Boyd has argued it is indicative of Hawthorne’s awareness of the incongruity of slavery to the book’s vision of an American utopia (Richard Boyd, “The Politics of Exclusion”).

⁴⁶⁹ Concord society reacted with disappointment that Hawthorne had not struck a more pro-union tone in the sketch. See Durst Johnson (107-109).

their varied interests. He highly esteemed Margaret Fuller, though he did pen some unflattering lines about her (as I discuss below). He counted Thoreau and Emerson among the great thinkers of their day, though he cautiously distanced himself from the Transcendental school in letters to editors, even if he did not in life.⁴⁷⁰ He confessed himself enchanted by Ripley's and Channing's ideas, to say nothing of his Brook Farm experience, however short-lived it was. He not only was the Alcotts' neighbor from 1860 until his death in 1864, he had actually bought and resided in their old Concord house, The Wayside.⁴⁷¹ For the author of *The House of the Seven Gables*, the choice could not have been a light one to take up residence in a home surely bearing the physical and psychical marks of the Alcotts' ownership.

Hawthorne and Alcott's relationship is telling of Hawthorne's equivocal self-positioning in Concord society. After Hawthorne and Bronson Alcott were introduced in the 1830s, their families maintained an acquaintance that Claudia Durst Johnson characterizes as "essentially a story of friendship" albeit "tangled" by interpersonal squabbles.⁴⁷² The Alcotts fell in and out of favor with the Hawthornes, though enjoying, at least from their children's point of view, a sound friendship for many of their neighborly years.⁴⁷³ Just before Hawthorne's death in 1864, however, there seems to have been some final rupture, purportedly due to tense relations with Abba Alcott, but

⁴⁷⁰ See the "Hall of Fantasy" (1843). Of Thoreau, Hawthorne wrote to the editor of Sargent's *New Monthly Magazine*, praising him as "a fine scholar" who wrote "sometimes...very well indeed" but cautioned that Thoreau was "somewhat tinctured with Transcendentalism," something Sargent's readers may not have been open to (CE, Vol. 15, 656).

⁴⁷¹ The Alcotts lived at The Wayside, which they called "Hillside," from 1845-48. Hawthorne later purchased it and lived there intermittently from 1852 onward, after the Alcotts had moved next door, to Orchard House. See the "The Wayside," nps.gov.

⁴⁷² Johnson, "Discord in Concord," 105.

⁴⁷³ See Julian Hawthorne, *The Memoirs of Julian Hawthorne and Nathaniel Hawthorne and His Wife*; and Louisa May Alcott, *Letters*.

probably equally to do with the general misalignment between Hawthorne's non-committal politics and the unmistakable progressivism of the Concord Transcendentalist community.⁴⁷⁴ Given such decisions as his choice of company, community, and dwelling place, one wonders, as Johnson has, "why, if Hawthorne found Concord society so distasteful, he chose to settle there in his declining years and to situate himself next-door to a man whose company, not to mention politics, he had usually found irksome" (107). Why indeed?

And why, furthermore, the short stint at Brook Farm and its engendering of a novel-length study by the celebrated short story author? Why the persistent close proximity—in person, in profession, and in print—between political issues of the day and Hawthorne's oeuvre? Perhaps what we have read as Hawthorne's non-politics is nothing of the sort. The specter of the a-political Hawthorne haunts the tradition of Hawthorne scholarship despite documented and acknowledged political trajectories in Hawthorne's career and social life, and despite the obvious political content of *The Blithedale Romance*. And still—scholars maintain Hawthorne's work bears no "outright political expressiveness" and is characterized by a persistent "ambivalence" toward such matters.⁴⁷⁵ These fictions seem determined to match the beloved image of the reclusive writer, one that we only hope, as Louisa Alcott did, to "catch glimpses" of behind the pages.⁴⁷⁶

What others have interpreted as a deliberate distancing—a forced separation between Hawthorne's authorial 'craft' and the mired politics of the mid-nineteenth century—is what I would rather argue is an indelible undercurrent in many of his works

⁴⁷⁴ Johnson, 107.

⁴⁷⁵ Baym, "Again and Again," 32; Goddu, *Gothic America*, 96.

⁴⁷⁶ Alcott, *Letters*, 57.

that Hawthorne, no matter the level of his skill, could not have avoided or completely written out. The seeming incompatibility between an aloof authorial persona and real-time politics are brought together in the pages of *The Blithedale Romance*. In fact, in *The Blithedale Romance*, that undercurrent of conflicting approaches to economic, social, and personal politics is the main current of thought in the novel—it gushes through, or alternately flows meanderingly, or still sometimes sweeps up its actors in a tide of melancholic musings that deposit them at the quite political shores of nineteenth-century market reform.

CONCLUSION

To return to the catalogue of clues that opened this chapter (the hot house flower, the French shoe), I will end by pointing out the obvious: that at the end of the accumulation of these objects—specifically they are commodities—is death. In casting off the commodified objects, Zenobia rids herself of market indices, even as she knows she goes to her death. Indeed, she goes to her death perhaps because of such actions. Zenobia has realized the concept of alienation in the extreme. In trying and failing to intervene in a ruling market economy, Blithedale, through Zenobia, brings upon itself the threat of capitalism to destroy the man—or woman. The question readers still grapple with, of course, is the extent of Coverdale's, and by extension Hawthorne's, defeatism. Will removal-oriented interventions in the market always fail? Certainly, Blithedale was bound to fail, for in pretending to be not a strategic intervention but an alternative, it could not protect itself from the penetrating influences of the market even at the same time that it protested them. What is rather more important than assessing whether something like Blithedale ever could have or could still work is the revelation a text like

The Blithedale Romance makes about attitudes toward market society, market economy, and the marketplace. In an era that was only newly capitalist, fears abounded regarding the provenance of goods, the honesty of work, the nature of specie and the materiality of value. These fears crystallize in the objects Coverdale finds scattered in the woods, on the river's bank, on Zenobia's form. They lead us, as we follow Coverdale following the clues, to confront the deathly horrors of the marketplace.

I have read the clues leading to the discovery of Zenobia's body as representative of material traces of the marketplace culminating in the death of the utopian enterprise by their inability to relinquish the human user from the commodified object, and by their culpability as sham, corrupted and corrupting objects. We see where these clues lead: to death, physical and ideological. But what do we make of the last remaining clue, the thing that survives, the final "trace" leading back to that "dream world"—the book?

The Blithedale Romance is a novel that is interested in containing opposites, in seeking substance while describing absence, in professing non-politics while set in the midst of reform, in retreating from the market while allowing its traces to infiltrate. By considering the tensions between retreat and reform, between professed non-politics and the political bent of Hawthorne's career, and between the materiality of clues and the material-economic truths they signify, we arrive finally at a reconsideration of Hawthorne's book as book. The fictional chronicle of a real-life experiment that sought to effect reform through removal, the book mediates between several worlds: reader and reformer, the literary market and the counter markets of reform, reform rhetoric and authorial imagination. As a novel, it resists peddling reform rhetoric in easily reproducible genres and forms typically used by reform groups at the same time that it delivers such ideology to a wider audience than would have been reached by a Ripley or

Lane or Alcott. Hawthorne states in his introduction to *The Blithedale Romance* that the function of the novel is its “ability to convey both the outward narrative and the inner truth and spirit” of reform. *The Blithedale Romance* is “the literary realization of an imagined world, just as Brook Farm itself was an attempt to realize an imagined world”⁴⁷⁷—thought made material, reform given form. If a “trace” links a materially present object with its absent counterpart, the literary, aloof, a-political novel traces the presence of the non-literary, the rhetorical, the muck and mire of politics. I have chosen to end this dissertation with a canonical text by an avowedly (though, as I have discussed, not actually) a-political author whose place in this study of nineteenth-century boycott literature is not immediately obvious. My purpose is simply this: to expose the ubiquitous trace of boycott—of market removal, deliberate abstention, conscientious consumption—in nineteenth-century literature. The texts in this dissertation offer scholars the “outer narrative,” the material relic of the “inner truth” of nineteenth-century consumer reform.

⁴⁷⁷ Baym, “Radical Reading,” 547.

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APPENDIX

A

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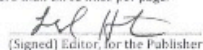
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