An Ornament and a Promise

Discourses on Culture in Nineteenth-Century America

by Ryan T. A. Swihart

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ABSTRACT

An Ornament and a Promise: Discourses on Culture in Nineteenth-Century America

By Ryan T. A. Swihart; Advisor: Dr. Martin J. Burke

This work is a study of discourse in the United States on cultural matters during the nineteenth century. It identifies three main categories of discourse that characterized conversations about culture from the antebellum period through the end of the century. Chapter one investigates the use of moral language and metaphor in writings on culture and the tensions between increasing availability of art and literature to the public and increasing concern over who should be reading what toward what ends. Chapter two is a discussion of how the building of a "cultural infrastructure" in the United States was accompanied by efforts to position American civilization historically and to secure international prestige for American cultural achievements through museums, libraries and international fairs. Chapter three focuses on the intersection of culture with political and social issues, including censorship, social cohesion and the relationship of intellectual culture to traditional religion. Chapter four explores several instances of reaction in the late nineteenth century by American critics against what were seen as harmful trends in modernist art and literature which emanated from Europe.

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"The fine arts are to a nation what blossoms are
to a tree – at once an ornament and a promise."

Godey's Lady's Book and Magazine, March 1861

INTRODUCTION

I argue in this dissertation, first, that American writing about culture in the nineteenth century can be usefully categorized into three main persistent and relatively stable discourses.

By "culture" I mean what nineteenth-century American users of the term usually meant, beginning roughly in the antebellum era, when usage of the word began to expand beyond references to farming, e.g. "agriculture," "rice culture." Generally, culture meant a familiarity with or mastery of canonical literary and artistic works, intellectual achievement and refinement, or taste, and also the outward physical evidence of such. This meaning of culture also entailed familiarity with western history since classical Greece and Rome.[1]

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[1] More precisely: "CULTURE: **2.** Intellectual and artistic activity and the works produced by it. **3a.** Development of the intellect through training or education. **b.** Enlightenment resulting from such training or education. **4.** A high degree of taste and refinement formed by aesthetic and intellectual training." (*American Heritage Dictionary* 3rd Ed.); "CULTURE: **II. 5.** Refinement of mind, tastes and manners; artistic and intellectual development; the artistic and intellectual side of civilization. ⌈*Early 19th century*⌋ **6.** A particular form, stage or type of intellectual development or civilization in a society. . . ." ⌈*Mid 19th century*⌋ *(Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* 5th Ed.) ¶ Raymond Williams wrote that "culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language" in his concise but helpful etymology of the word in *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985). But in the United States, for the period I discuss, usage of the term was relatively stable, the exception being that agricultural meanings did not ever completely fade away. One might be for or against culture, see it as liberating or degrading, see it as liberating *and* degrading, think that it indicated a threat or a complement to Christianity, but it referred pretty

Culture was a normative term, one that indicated superior intellectual achievement either for individuals or for groups as big as nations or civilizations.

I employ the term "discourses" for its ability to include a breadth of public expression that stretched from book reviews in cheap newspapers to erudite monographs, from sermons to letters to the editor.

The three discourses on culture I identify are: one that focused on culture's relation to individual morality, one that understood culture as a matter of national prestige and sought to secure a place for American civilization in the narrative of world history, and, finally, one that proposed relationships between culture and American social and political problems. It will be important to remember throughout that we are discussing not, say, a discourse on novels or a discourse on the World's Fair. Rather, various discourses on culture were employed by contemporaries in discussions of these issues and events – as they could be employed for many others. My fourth chapter outlines the character of specific reactions to new ideas in painting and literature at the end of the century, reactions which employed all three of the primary discourses just mentioned.

I understand morality to be the relation of men and women to the idea of right and wrong and to the problem of the implementation of that idea in the world. History is the relation of men and women to exemplary, necessarily

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consistently to artistic or aesthetic or intellectual excellence or such personal achievement and education as readied an individual to appreciate these things.

subjective narratives about those who lived before, and also about *their* narratives. Society refers to the relations of men and women, as groups and as individuals, to, and with, their contemporaries. These are all perennial topics of interest, though they manifest themselves in different proportion to one another in different places, times and contexts. I hope to demonstrate how nineteenth-century Americans perceived that fully understanding and mastering these categories of concern depended in part on taking their relation to culture into account.

The second main argument of this dissertation, implicit in the organizational structure I have employed, is that the discourses mentioned above remained current for most of the nineteenth century. That is, while the America of "robber barons" and a closed frontier was materially almost unrecognizable from the America of Asher B. Durand and Ralph Waldo Emerson, the ways Americans discussed culture were strikingly similar. Each of the discourses I discuss lived in the language of conversations about culture for at least the last three-fourths of the nineteenth century.

I have tried to show how Americans wrote and argued about the notion that cultural refinement (or enrichment, or development) could be both desirable and widely achievable. To take one example: the problem of America's nagging sense of Europe's continued superiority in the cultural realm. Americans at mid-century revered their Constitution; the far-sighted among them could see that industrialization would continue to secure international

economic might; though tragic, the Civil War had revealed a momentous military capacity and solidified the authority of the federal government. And yet, in spite of all this, when it came to culture the United States could be rightly looked down upon by Europeans – and Americans of the nineteenth century both acknowledged and resented the fact. I will explore ways they addressed this problem. Likewise, the question of culture arose with reference to problems of private and public morality. Some observers thought that citizens' cultural development and sophistication could be the key to a healthier democracy. At the same time, others saw a commitment to culture as a path to moral degradation and social tumult.

As it had in the nineteenth, the meanings of "culture" would change again in the twentieth century. When late-twentieth-century academics spoke about the "culture wars" and when their students studied foreign "cultures," they often used the term differently than their grandparents had. My work, then, is about what certain Americans thought about the *elements* of culture as they saw them – things like great books and fine paintings – but it is also about the relationship of American readers and writers to a particular *idea* of culture.

My attempt throughout has usually been to take my sources at their word rather than to try to divine what they *really* meant. In many respects, the American society of the nineteenth century was a much more literate one than that of the twentieth or twenty-first, and I have seen little reason to as-

sume that my sources were incapable of clearly communicating their thoughts.

My research has consisted largely of reading hundreds of newspaper, magazine and journal articles. There is an imbalance in the sources toward large cities, namely New York, Philadelphia, Boston and Chicago, but whenever possible I attempted to locate and incorporate opinion from non-metropolitan areas, which often was surprisingly consistent with that found in cities. I explored both religious and secular publications, and the religious media I cite range from Quaker to Catholic to Unitarian and beyond. I was quickly disabused of assumptions about what a particular constituency – religious or not – would have to say about an issue, as I found thoroughly secular publications sounding alarms about the replacement of religion with culture or self-identified progressive magazines championing censorship by Anthony Comstock. Most of the publications cited enjoyed national circulation. Some of them catered to general audiences (e.g. *Harper's*) and some to more specialized ones (e.g. the *Architect and Building News*). What I find so interesting is that different audiences (religious, secular, expert, lay) all discussed culture as a meaningful element of American life.

This work is not really about "high culture" versus "low culture" or about "lowbrow" versus "middlebrow" versus "highbrow."[2] These distinc-

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[2] Joan Shelley Rubin's *The Making if Middlebrow Culture* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1992) suggests that culture worked in the ways that I have argued for in the first part of chapter three, but she places this development later (in the early twentieth century and interwar years) and sees it as a function of an emergent

tions actually did sometimes filter into nineteenth-century discourses on culture, but not often by these names.[3] For the most part to speak of culture in nineteenth-century America was to speak of what would later be called high culture. But it is only in retrospect that we can say that for much of the century novels were considered "lowbrow" or "low culture"; at the time arguments which dismissed such works were framed to deny them any claim to the distinction of "culture" at all. The word, to its advocates, referred to something that was better, something objectively good, something more than just useful. During most of the nineteenth century a phrase like "working-class culture" or "African-American culture" would have had little clear meaning. In the case of these two groups, the question would rather have been whether they could ever become cultured, whether they could acquire

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"middlebrow" culture. I see the idea of culture as a refuge amidst uncertain changes in the material and political world already developed in the nineteenth century, before "lowbrow," "highbrow" and "middlebrow" had been theorized or identified. Further, the ideas that motivated developments like the Book of the Month Club were already operative by the mid-nineteenth century. Lawrence Levine's important study *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1988) argues that the idea of some cultural products or performances being intellectually or spiritually superior to others came only late in the century, following (and closing) a freer period where distinctions among cultural expression were more fluid. While I find this argument helpful in some ways, and while Levine covers aspects of culture that I do not, e.g. the drama, my research indicates that, despite the mixed makeup of audiences for Shakespeare in the antebellum era, the sphere of culture had long admitted to being divided up into better and worse, superior and inferior. In the period Levine juxtaposes against a later time when low and high culture were prescriptively segregated, we already see frequent references to the importance and difficulty of choosing what to read, what to listen to, what to look at. (See, for just one instance, the *1787* passage that begins chapter one.) I think that the story of culture in the nineteenth century is less about a notion of high culture being imagined and then sequestered by elites and more about how the idea of culture, while unabashedly defined as something superior (aesthetically, morally and socially), was seen as theoretically accessible to all.

[3] The term "high culture" occurred from time to time, but "low culture" was not used.

culture. There would have been no suggestion that the hymns of the African American church or the entertainment preferences of steel workers were kinds of culture. Nor, for that matter, would terms like "consumer culture" or "culture of abundance" been readily comprehended. Things deemed culture were understood as qualitatively different; and the term usually implied the feasibility of judgments about, and the existence of hierarchies of, objective merit, both aesthetic and moral. And the aesthetic and the moral, as will be shown at length below, were decidedly *not* separable in the ways many twenty-first century Americans take for granted.

That culture could be an ornament seems simple enough. A sense of its presence could make things seem better, fuller, more purposeful, whether that meant public buildings, drawing rooms, or the image of the nation itself. Culture could be an ornament for a person, an outward signal of intellectual refinement or effort. Paintings and sculptures or facades and frescos could attest to the cultural achievement of a country at large, indicating that senators and city-dwellers did not live by business deals and bread alone. More complicated were the promises of culture, for, notwithstanding the epigram to this work, art (whether literary or visual) never was just *one* promise. And, as we shall see, there could be promises of uncertainty and danger as well as promises of success and progress.

1 "A PECULIAR FOUNTAIN"
CULTURE, MORALITY, AND THE EMERGENCE OF CRITICISM

> *"But the design of this discourse more directly leads me to urge the reading of Books, in particular. These are a grand magazine of knowledge, and contain the Learning and Wisdom of the ages. But, you must know, that Books are a peculiar fountain, from whence may be drawn either sweet waters or bitter, the waters of life, or the waters of death. For this reason you will allow me here to advise you, to take heed how you read."*
> —Nathaniel Emmons, 1787[1]

Artists and writers themselves have usually been ready to understand their contributions to society as important regardless of whether the broader public agreed. But by the early decades of the nineteenth century debates had begun forming even among non-artists about the role culture played in a democratic republic. What rules governed its development and delineated its proper territory? How were its offerings to be evaluated? Who constituted its audiences? What were its ends? Questions like these fueled the discourses on culture in the nineteenth-century United States.

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[1] Nathanael Emmons, *The Dignity of Man. A Discourse Addressed to the Congregation in Franklin, Upon the Occasion of Their Receiving from Dr. Franklin, the Mark of His Respect, in a Rich Donation of Books, Appropriated to the Use of a Parish-library* (Providence: Bennett Wheeler, 1787), 36, Early American Imprints, Series I, Evans: 1639-1800, no. 20344 (filmed). Emmons (1745-1840) was a prolific writer and speaker on moral and religious issues in the eighteenth century. A graduate of Yale, he involved himself with the movement called "new divinity," which argued for a more strenuous Calvinism. He was often occupied with reconciling free-will with predestination, and late in life had some involvement in the anti-slavery movement. See Allen C. Guelzo, "Emmons, Nathanael," in John A. Garraty and Mark C. Carnes, eds., *American National Biography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 7:508-09.he

This chapter will attempt first to present some of the questions prompted by technological innovations that made possible increased availability of cultural commentary in the United States. Second, I will address various expressions of concern about the perceived moral effects of widespread interaction between individual Americans and art or literature. Third, I will present evidence of the simultaneous belief that exposure to culture would prove beneficial rather than harmful.

TECHNOLOGY, MEDIA AND CALLS FOR GUIDANCE

As this dissertation attempts to analyze and interpret public discussions about the place and role of fine art and literature in the United States, some time must be spent first to chart the space in which that discussion mainly occurred, namely in newspapers, magazines and books. Conversations about culture certainly appeared in the eighteenth and early-nineteenth century, and I will cite some of these instances as evidence of both intellectual change and intellectual stability. I argue however that, before the public debates I discuss could reach the level of intensity and ubiquity that they achieved later in the century, technological innovations affected first the quantity, and eventually the qualities, of discussions about culture in America.[2] The aim if

[2] While I do not venture to judge whether the technological changes in printing and distribution of literature created or responded to a greater demand for reading material, it seems clear to me that increased capacity to print and distribute printed material in the 1820s was welcomed enthusiastically by readers across the United States. This and related issues, including the relative importance of printing press innovation as compared with improvements in rail transport and artificial lighting and the social ef-

this chapter is to show how, after certain important mechanical innovations reached the United States, drastically altering access to cultural material, debates over who should read or see what came to enjoy (or endure) a status as pressing moral issues instead of relatively peripheral concerns.

The most important of these innovations in the first half of the nineteenth century, for cultural purposes, were the arrival of the steam-powered printing press and steam-powered railroad transport. The steam press, first put into use in England in 1812, changed the speed of literary dissemination more dramatically than anything since Gutenberg. The number of impressions possible per hour increased from tens to hundreds, and eventually to thousands, and simultaneously the level of experienced craftsmanship requisite for operation of printing presses generally decreased in rough proportion. All of this meant that costs fell, allowing production and consumption of printed material to rise. The new technology appeared somewhat slowly in the United States, but (against the wishes of the English proprietors of the

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fects of mechanization for artisinal printers are treated in detail by Ronald Zboray in "Antebellum Reading and the Ironies of Technological Innovation," *American Quarterly*, 40, n. 1, Special Issue: Reading in America (March 1988): 65-82 and "The Transportation Revolution and Antebellum Book Distribution Reconsidered," *American Quarterly* 38 (1986): 53-71. Also see, for various elements of these larger issues: Anne Baker, *Heartless Immensity: Literature, Culture and Geography in Antebellum America* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006); Scott E. Casper and Joanne D. Chaison, Eds., *Perspectives on American Book History: Artifacts and Commentary* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002); David Hall, *Cultures of Print: Essays in the History of the Book* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996); Trish Laughran, *The Republic in Print: Print Culture in the Age of U. S. Nation Building* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); David Meyer, *Networked Machinists: High-Technology Industries in Antebellum America*(Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006). Patricia Okker, *Social Stories: the Magazine Novel in Nineteenth Century America* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2004); Larzer Ziff, *Writing in the New Nation: Prose, Print and Politics in the Early United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991).

technology) steam-powered presses were in use by the early 1820s and the *Mechanic's Magazine and Journal of Internal Public Improvement* rejoiced in 1830 at the introduction of "still another improvement in the printing press!! … a double power press throwing off 18 sheets per minute," which came to 1080 sheets per hour, roughly the rate which some English printers had achieved a decade and a half earlier.[3]

Such improvements increased the output of books as well as newspapers and magazines, and the results were of interest to everyone, not just mechanics and printers. In addition, printers were increasingly drawn by lucrative

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[3] "Bensley's Steam Printing Press," *The Christian Journal, and Literary Register* 7, no.12 (December 1823): 374, APSO; "Origin of Machine Printing," *American Mechanics' Magazine: Containing Useful Original Matter, On Subjects Connected With Manufactures, the Arts and Sciences* 2, no. 33 (September 17, 1825): 112, APSO. "Printing Presses: Improvements in Them," *Mechanics' Magazine, and Journal of Public Internal Improvement* 1, no. 3 (April 1830): 89, APSO. [Many of the newspaper and magazine articles and some of the books cited in this dissertation were accessed via online databases. So that a reader might more easily find something referenced in a footnote, I have included at the end of each citation the database I used to access the article cited. Volume, issue and page numbers are identical with those in the physical documents. Abbreviations for these databases are: AHN: *America's Historical Newspapers*; subscription required; http://www.newsbank.com/readex/?content=96. APSO: *American Periodical Series Online*; subscription required; http://training.proquest.com/trc/splash/aps/about_general.html. C-MOA: *Making of America via Cornell University*; free at http://cdl.library.cornell.edu/moa/. PQHN: *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*; subscription required; http://www.proquest.com/products_pq/hnp/. UM-MOA: *Making of America via University of Michigan*; free at http://www.hti.umich.edu/m/moagrp/.] In 1833, it was reported that "the *Times* [of London] prints four thousand sheets per hour, or more than a sheet a second." "The Triumph of Science and Arts," *Liverpool Times*, reprinted by *The Literary Cabinet and Western Olive Branch* 1, no. 2 (March 2, 1833): 12, APSO. I am indebted to Professor Andrew Robertson for pointing out to me during a dissertation seminar that this printing technology was actually more or less stolen by interested Americans. The *Times* of London, Robertson also noted, had no interest in seeing improvements in printing used to democratize print, which is just what happened in the United States. For Robertson's discussion of political rhetoric in antebellum America, see *The Language of Democracy: Political Rhetoric in the United States and Britain, 1790-1900* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995).

offers to run presses outside the eastern cities.[4] *Atkinson's Casket*, a magazine popular in the 1830s and which included a range of subject matter, from the serious to the trivial, described an almost exponential dynamism at work in the production and consumption of reading material, books in particular, by the 1830s: "If the multiplicity of books be a grievance, we have truly fallen on evil times; the American press is most wonderfully prolific, but it has not yet reached its acme; reading is an appetite which increases with what it feeds on, and access to books is now so cheap that the whole nation reads."[5] Another general interest publication spoke in 1836 about similar effects on periodical literature. "The publication of periodicals, and newspapers in such numbers and quantity," said the *Atkinson's Saturday Evening Post*, "may almost be said to form a new era. It is impossible but the effect from it, in some way, for good or for evil, must be strikingly felt. There is perhaps, in this country, more than ten times as many of these published as there was even ten years ago, and fifty, or even a hundred times as many as there was twenty years ago."[6]

By the 1840s American printers had begun to use a new kind of steam-

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[4] Bruce F. Denbo, review of Rollo G. Silver, *The American Printer, 1787-1825* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1967), *The Journal of Southern History* 34, no. 3 (August 1968): 444-445.

[5] "Rambles to the Booksellers' Counters," *Atkinson's Casket* 3, no. 3 (October 1833): 469, APSO. In most cases, Information and notes on the character of particular magazines is drawn from a mixture of my own observation and that compiled by American Periodical Series Online.

[6] "Periodical Literature," *Atkinson's Saturday Evening Post* 15, no. 804 (December 24, 1836): 3, APSO.

powered press that applied ink with rollers instead of pressing plates down onto paper, facilitating another profound advance in the quantity of production which resulted in even further reduction of the price to consumers of printed goods.[7] This capability, in concert with the absence of copyright protection for foreign works, resulted in a great explosion of cheap books. The combination of these two factors rendered ownership of books much more common than it had been in the earlier decades of the century. This meant both that individuals could have books of their own at home and that libraries of various sorts could expand their collections. By 1850 things had progressed such that

> to say of the American people that they are decided lovers of literature, would be to say what all with limited opportunities for correct observation are ready to admit. Evidence of this is seen in the annual increase of reading matter, furnished by the American press. . . . From the noble steamer that plies upon our waters, to the merchant shelves of our rude villages – from the humble study of aspiring youth, to the centre-tables that grace our sitting rooms, all, all groan under the oppressive weight of books, constantly increasing and augmenting their power.[8]

Technological change also made the periodical press the primary locus of discourse on culture, so much so, according to some, that "compared with

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[7] "The Power Printing Press," *The New York State Mechanic, a Journal of the Manual Arts, Trades, and Manufactures* 2, no. 23 (April 29, 1843): 177, APSO. Also see Ana-Isabel Aliaga-Buchenau, "Reading and Power in the Nineteenth Century" in *The Dangerous Potential of Reading: Readers & the Negotiation of Power in Selected Nineteenth-Century Narratives* (New York: Routledge, 2003); Ronald J. Zboray, *A Fictive People: Antebellum Economic Development and the American Reading Public* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), especially chapters 1-5.

[8] Rev. S. Steele, "Our Literature," *Wellman's Literary Miscellany* 2 (February 1, 1850): 275, APSO.

[the press], the schoolhouse, the bar, the pulpit, sink into insignificance."[9] Journalistic enterprises were financially constrained to give the readers what they wanted, and what they gave were fervent, frequent reviews of particular cultural products and lay sermons on what culture and its elements meant, how they worked, and what their characteristics were. As the one-year-old *New York Times* noted in 1852, perhaps without complete objectivity,

> newspapers are becoming more and more the medium of intellectual culture – the avenue for recorded thought. What will not be found in their crowded columns? History, speeches, political, forensic and theological, geography, maps, discoveries, anecdotes, biography, statistics, all the sciences, the doings of all nations and the wants of all men, commercial interests, adventures and prospects, and all the events and thoughts that illustrate the age, are here arranged under their appropriate heads, and stamped on the ephemeral, yet it may be immortal, page. If wealth be measured by the standard of how much labor it will command, then is every man in this country rich; for, in the single newspaper, how much labor his penny can buy![10]

As the quantity of printed material continued to grow, publishers also began to implement changes in the content and form of newspapers and magazines. In the 1850s newspapers began regularly to include sections devoted to general literary discussions and what we might call proto-reviews.[11] Serious discussion of literature had existed for several decades in the pages of

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[9] TWM, "Newspaper Criticism," *American Publishers' Circular and Literary Gazette* 2, no. 3 (January 19, 1856): 30, APSO. This article, to emphasize the power of newspapers, claims that the *New York Times'* circulation each week exceeds the total number of copies of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* sold.

[10] "Newspapers – Their Mission and Importance," *New York Daily Times*, February 28, 1852, 2, PQHN.

[11] I use the phrase "proto-reviews" here because of the predominantly descriptive nature of these texts, as opposed to evaluative element that came to be considered an essential part of reviewing later.

more costly quarterly reviews and in some of the more prestigious and expensive newspapers. More affordable papers, however, had been mostly devoid of comment on literature or art except for undisguised promotional efforts. Cheap newspapers in the United States in the antebellum era often included blurbs that were directly inserted by the publishers of the works themselves, meaning readers had little ready access to cultural commentary that could plausibly claim to be disinterested. In addition, information on books and visual art in the early antebellum period often floated in of a sea of commercial ads, criminal reports and recent maritime news.[12]

By the end of the 1850s, as ever more people were reading about reading in the popular press, newspapers had begun to segregate cultural content ever more rigorously. By the 1860s, several broadsheets of eight pages devoted an entire page to cultural matter. By the end of the century papers like the *New York Times* had established large, completely separate book review sections more or less as we know them today, along with similar though not as frequent space devoted to the visual arts. I interpret this physical separateness as an editorial judgment that books and pictures were not simply

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[12] For more on the newspaper and periodical industries in this period see Charles G. Steffen, "Newspapers for Free: the Economies of Newspaper Circulation in the Early Republic," *Journal of the Early Republic* 23, no. 3 (Autumn 2003): 381-419; Caroline Sumpter, "The Cheap Press and the Reading Crowd," *Media History* 12, no. 3 (December 2006): 233-252; Kenneth Price and Susan Belasco Smith, Eds., *Periodical Literature in Nineteenth-Century America* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1995); Jeb Byrne, "The Comparative Development of Newspapers in New Zealand and the United States in the Nineteenth Century," *American Studies International* 37, no. 1 (February 1999): 55-70; David Paul Nord, *Communities of Journalism: A History of American Newspapers and Their Readers* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006).

commodities, that their importance could not be translated with reference merely to price or sensation.

The improvements in printing, marketing and distribution of books, and eventually the wider availability of visual art, both in galleries and through reproductions and commentary, suggested that anyone could become cultured, that anyone could so form his or her mind to truly appreciate the virtues of intellectual achievement in the arts, both literary and visual. To judge from the eruption of commentary and reviews on all kinds of literature and art around the middle of the century in the nation's magazines and newspapers, this prospect proved extraordinarily attractive. And the press at this moment was well prepared to accommodate as well as to promote such new interests. Later journalists looked back with admiration at the early flexibility of the American newspaper business, which had adjusted to changes in both commercial circumstances and the tastes of audiences. "Neither in this country nor in England," wrote a reviewer of a journalism anthology in 1875, "have the most successful newspapers been conducted on any foregone theories. They have grown up, as grows the grass, open to the influence of the times and the seasons, enjoying the presence of the sunshine and the dew, *but taking their shape from the occurrences of the day, and giving expression to the spirit of the age, rather than following a prescribed course*…."[13]

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[13] "New Publications: *Views and Interviews on Journalism.* Edited by Charles F. Wingate," *New York Tribune*, July 27, 1875, 6:1. Emphasis added.

TWO TABLES SUGGESTING GROWTH OF CULTURAL COVERAGE IN AND CIRCULATION OF NEWSPAPERS AND MAGAZINES

TABLE 1: Cultural Commentary in the *New York Times*

	Book articles	*Arts articles*	*"Amusements" articles*
1863	150	9	--
1866	300	58	--
1873	275*	89	250#
1878	290**	115	450
1883	600**	105	520
1890	616**	181	600

TABLE 2: Book, Magazine and Newspaper Production and Circulation[14]

	1840	*1850*	*1860*
Value of books manufactured	$2,850,000	$5,900,000	$9,500,000
No. of non-political magazines	nearly 500	over 600	575
Avg. circulation of magazines			3,370 quarterly 12,000 monthly
Number of newspapers	138 daily 1,266 weekly	254 daily 2,048 weekly	372 daily 2,971 weekly

Table 1 above provides a partial look, in New York, of how coverage in the popular press of artistic and literary matters increased over time. Table 2 is compiled from census figures. And while Table 1 offers a limited view through the lens of one not-especially-authoritative newspaper, the growing interest in and availability of cultural fare it suggests extended outside Man-

[14] TABLE 1: Data from *New York Times Index* for the years indicated. The *New York Times* is cited here because of the ease of access due to the indexing of its articles. This data is meant to be suggestive rather than to make any comprehensive quantitative argument. Tallies are not in all cases exact, but can be +/- 15 for the larger counts. *Does not include excerpts from novels and poems, which were often separate, but voluminous. ** Does not include reviews of magazines and periodicals, which were in essence reviews of reviews. # Listings under "Dramatic". TABLE 2: U.S. Census figures as arranged by Carl Bode in *The Anatomy of American Popular Culture, 1840-1861* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959), chapter 8. Ainsworth Spofford reported in 1894 that "in 1883 there were published in the United States 428 reviews, magazines and other periodicals of this class; in 1893 there are no less than 1051" ("Directions and Volume of Our Literary Activities," *Forum* 16 (January 1894): 598, APSO.)

hattan. By the end of the century the Brooklyn Institute would offer a menu of over 500 lectures during the course of a year on subjects ranging from "History and Criticism of Greek and Roman Sculpture" to "Six Lectures on Russian Life and Literature," from "English Essayists and Reviewers" to "Fra Angelico and Fra Lippo Lippi."[15] Similar fare could be enjoyed in other cities like Boston, where an 1897 lecture series included talks on the arts of Egypt, Greece, Rome, the Byzantine world, gothic cathedrals, the Italian Renaissance and "the Art Lessons of Copely Square;" Chicago, where "the [Art] Institute [was] specially successful in its lecture courses;" and even Los Angeles, where the Art Association and the Los Angeles School of Art and Design hosted series of lectures on early art, beginning with the Greeks.[16]

But the rise of attention to cultural matters in newspapers and magazines

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[15] "Brooklyn Institute: Lecture for the Coming Season on Art, Literature, and History," *New York Times*, September 22, 1900, BR11, APSO. The lyceum movement and lecture circuits that were an important facet of educational efforts in the nineteenth century have been explored in detail by, among others, Richard D. Brown, *Knowledge Is Power: The Diffusion of Information in Early America, 1700-1865* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Mary Kupiec Cayton, "The Making of an American Prophet: Emerson, His Audiences, and the Rise of the Culture Industry in Nineteenth-Century America," *The American Historical Review* 92, no. 3 (June 1987): 597-620; Donald M. Scott, "The Popular Lecture and the Creation of a Public in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America," *The Journal of American History*, March 66, no. 4 (1980): 791-809; Carl Bode, *American Lyceum: Town Meeting of the Mind* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1968); C. David Mead, *Yankee Eloquence in the Middle West: The Ohio Lyceum, 1850-1870* (Lansing: Michigan State College Press, 1951); Dixon Wecter, "The Education of Everyman, 1870-1890," *The Huntington Library Quarterly*, 10, no. 2 (February 1947): 195-208.

[16] On Boston, O. M. E. Rowe, "Art for the People," *Congregationalist* 82, no. 9 (March 4, 1897): 299, APSO; on Chicago, Susan Hayes Ward, "Fine Arts," *The Independent, Devoted to the Consideration of Politics, Social and Economic Tendencies, History, Literature, and the Arts* 42, no. 2193 (December 11, 1890): 9, APSO; on Los Angeles, "Greek Painting: First of the Series of Art Lectures," *Los Angeles Times*, February 27, 1895, 8, PQHN.

and the increasing availability of cheap books were not always perceived as an unalloyed societal goods. Some commentators spoke and wrote as if the easy availability of books and periodicals had actually created as many problems as it alleviated. For instance, and as we will discuss at length below, the reading public predominantly preferred novels and romances, "light fiction" as it was often called at the time. While Carlyle and Wordsworth and Homer all sold, as did books on religions and the sciences, fiction dominated the field.[17] What was the real net gain, some asked, if the great quantity of literary material available did not seem to result in an increase in "serious" reading?

Much has been written by historians and theorists of literature, art and journalism about the development of critical philosophies and practice in the United States in the nineteenth century. A detailed analysis of the finer points of these debates would require more space than is available here and would shift our focus from the popular dissemination of general ideas too far toward academic distinctions that were unknown for the most part to the non-professional readership of the newspapers and periodicals under discussion.[18] Still, at least two points should be made for our purposes. First, the

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[17] For more on the primacy of fiction and the growth of review literature, as well as a thorough introduction and contextualization of recent related American scholarship, see James L. Machor, "Fiction and Informed Reading in Early Nineteenth-Century America," *Nineteenth Century Literature* 47, no. 3 (December 1992): 320-348.

[18] See for example: David Dearinger, ed., *Rave Reviews : American Art and its Critics, 1826-1925* (New York: National Academy of Design, 2000); Arthur J. Bond, "Applying

distinction between criticism and mere review literature – the former being more technically precise, executed usually by professional specialists, the latter being more oriented toward and accessible to a general audience – remained uncertain for much of the nineteenth century. Second, the focus here will not be primarily on the internal development of professional or academic criticism as a particular method of analysis, but rather on the less sophisticated, though more immediately consequential, phenomenon of general discussions in public forums about cultural matters by people who were relatively culturally aware but usually not specialists in the sense that would later come to be understood and expected.

Nineteenth-century debates about the qualities of criticism tended to focus more attention on the responsibilities of its authors *vis à vis* the public readership than on the theoretical subtleties later eras would come to expect

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the Standards of Intrinsic Excellence, Nationalism and Arnoldian Cultural Valuation in the Century Magazine," in *American Periodicals* 9 (1999): 55-73; Lawrence Levine, *Highbrow, Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991); James Machor, ed., *Readers in History: Nineteenth Century Literature and the Contexts of Response* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); Elizabeth McCausland, "Art and Art Criticism in America, 1823-1907," in *American Contemporary Art* (Spring 1946): 3-23; Helen McMahon, *Criticism of Fiction: A Study of Trends in the Atlantic Monthly, 1857-1898* (New York: Bookman Associates, 1952); H. Wayne Morgan, *Keepers of Culture: The Art Thought of Kenyon Cox, Royal Cortissoz and Frank Jewett Mather, Jr.* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1989); Vernon Louis Parrington, *Main Currents in American Thought: The Beginnings of Critical Realism in America, 1860-1920* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987); John Paul Pritchard, *Criticism in America: An Account of Critical Techniques from the Early Period of the Republic to the Middle Years of the Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1956); Roger B. Stein, *John Ruskin and Aesthetic Thought in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967); René Welleck, *A History of Modern Criticism, 1750-1950: The Age of Transition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965); Arlene Rita Wilson, "Art Critics and Criticism as Found in the Daily Press of New York City at the Turn of the Twentieth Century" (PhD diss., Case Western University, 1975).

to occupy those who styled themselves as "critics".[19] When we read of the need for criticism in the popular press, we see that in most cases calls for improvements or developments were presented as means to an end *other than* the need for the integrity or sophistication of criticism as a discipline, though the latter did indeed appear.[20] That being the case, I will take the liberty throughout of using the terms "criticism," "critics," and the like in the generalized manner that characterized use of such language in the contemporary sources under examination.

While critical commentary on literature and the visual arts developed along slightly different trajectories in the nineteenth century, both emerged in response to increased public interaction with cultural matter as well as the recognition that cultural commentary – communication to the public about art and literature in this case – was itself a sign of sophistication. When cheap newspapers sought to introduce critical literary content onto their pages around the middle of the century they had models from which to draw. To some degree editors in the popular press seem simply to have presented to mass audiences watered-down versions of what existed in more serious

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[19] For sense of these expectations, see Henry James's "Science of Criticism" (1891).

[20] For instance, in a late example: "I define critics as keepers of literature. It is their office to pass true sentence on all that is written, and subdue it to order and virtue." That is, criticism, while explicitly urged to distinguish itself from advertising, is addressed primarily as means to a larger social end: bringing "order and virtue" to "the deluge of publications without ceasing which claim to be judged and interpreted." William Barry, "The Keepers of Literature," *The Living Age* 223, n. 2887 (November 4, 1899): 312, APSO. My research in the primary source literature shows the term "criticism" itself had been part of American discourse since before the nineteenth century.

journals.[21] Art criticism or reviewing on the other hand remained by most accounts underdeveloped in the United States, especially as compared with England, until at least the late-1850s. The development of literary criticism largely predated mass interest, while in the visual arts criticism emerged more closely in step with larger public awareness and interest.[22]

Broadly speaking, what passed for criticism in the middle of the century differed from what would pass in later decades, which saw the full development of critical discussions in which experts addressed and invoked other experts. If the benefits of culture were to be realized for the American layman in the nineteenth century, the most pressing problem seemed to be not the further polishing of an internal dialogue among specialists but the effective

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[21] For an excellent guide to some of the tendencies and practitioners of early literary criticism in America, with a special focus on fiction, see Sergio Perosa, *American Theories of the Novel, 1793-1903* (New York: New York University Press, 1983). For more wide-ranging analysis of the development of literary criticism in the nineteenth century United States, and especially on the existence of review literature in the more exclusive periodicals, see John W. Rathbun, *American Literary Criticism, 1800-1860* I, 16-17, and for later years Rathbun, *American Literary Criticism, 1860-1905* II (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1979). Also, an older but useful set of interpretive essays can be found in Floyd Stovall, ed., *The Development of American Literary Criticism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1955), especially Harry H. Clark, "Changing Attitudes in Early American Literary Criticism: 1800-1840," 15-74, Richard H. Fogle, "Organic Form in American Criticism: 1840-1870," 75-112, and Robert P. Falk, "The Literary Criticism of the Genteel Decades: 1870-1900," 113-158.

[22] See for instance John P. Simoni, "Art Critics and Criticism in the Late Nineteenth-Century America" (PhD diss., Ohio State University, 1952): 2-8; David Dearinger, ed., *Rave Reviews: American Art and its Critics, 1826-1925* (New York: National Academy of Design, 2000); Carter Ratcliff, "Art Criticism: Other Minds, Other Eyes," *Art Journal*, April 18 (1974): 61-65; Elizabeth Gilmore Holt, *The Triumph of Art for the Public, 1785-1848: The Emerging Role of Exhibitions and Critics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983); Emily Julia Hagiland, "Art Criticism in America Before the Crayon: Perceptions of American Landscape Painting, 1825-1855" (PhD diss., University of Delaware, 2000).

communication of cultural discrimination to the general reading public. For every equation of simple popularity with cultural success, there were many more articles and lectures proclaiming that contact and availability were not the end but the beginning of cultural development, that audiences needed not only access but also at least a basic level of literary and artistic literacy.

The want of critical discrimination and direction revealed itself most acutely in the realm of visual art. Writing in 1867 for the literary publication *The Galaxy* (which a decade later would merge with the *Atlantic Monthly*) painter and poet Christopher Pearce (C. P.) Cranch admitted that "It is useless to ignore the fact that most of the art-criticism of the day, in this country, falls far below the standard of criticism on literature, even in the brief reviews of our daily newspapers."[23] In 1873, art critic James Jackson Jarves wrote that "American criticism, as yet, has no fixed purpose or principle. It is as variable and capricious as the winds."[24] In 1877 critic Phillip Hamerton still perceived a thorough skepticism in the public reception of professional criticism. Both "rude and simple persons" and "intellectual men," he found, "regard[ed] the critic as a fallible person, whose teaching is either to be rejected altogether or received with thoughtful caution."[25] An anonymous

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[23] C. P. Cranch, "Art Criticism Reviewed," *The Galaxy* 4, no. 1 (May 1867): 77, C-MOA.

[24] James Jackson Jarves, "American Art Criticism," *The Independent, Devoted to the Consideration of Politics, Social and Economic Tendencies, History, Literature, and the Arts* 25, no. 1284 (July 10, 1873): 870, APSO.

[25] Phillip Gilbert Hamerton, "Art Criticism," *The Aldine: the Art Journal of America* 8, no. 12 (December 1, 1877): 382, APSO.

writer for *Scribner's* regretted in 1879 that "art criticism, in this country, has reached about as low a level as it can find, without becoming execrable."[26] And as an example of the perceived need to cultivate public judgment, the *New York Post* offered a brief sketch of the American public's naïveté, which, along with the failures of critics themselves, completed the explanation of the nation's critical deficiency:

> Here is a gem of art criticism from a reception at the house of a prominent art critic in Paris the other day. The gentleman in question possesses a very charming female head by Chaplin. A newly-arrived American friend is in the act of inspecting the picture.
>
> "Ah," remarks the transatlantic visitor, "I have a much better Chaplin than that at home."
>
> "Indeed!" replies his host; "yet that picture is considered one of the artist's best works."
>
> "Well, perhaps mine was not any better when I bought it," was the rejoinder, "but my wife touched it up."[27]

This little story indicates both the insecurity Americans felt in relation to Europeans when it came to art and the understanding that much work remained to be done educating American audiences.[28] When the American reader faced a "boundless ocean," a "pathless immensity" of literary choices entirely on his own he also faced the danger that his efforts at cultural par-

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[26] "Art Criticism," *Scribner's Monthly* 18, no. 1 (May 1879): 135, APSO. *Scribner's* was well regarded for its illustrations and artwork as well as its political and historical writing, and later merged with *Century Illustrated* in 1881.

[27] "Art Criticism" reprinted from the *New York Post* in the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, December 23, 1883, 10, PQHN.

[28] One might look to Mark Twain's *Innocent's Abroad* to get a similar sense of the mixture of earnestness and ignorance that sometimes characterized Americans' cultural efforts.

ticipation would all come to naught.[29] This was not to say that Americans lacked the capacity for sound judgment; it was a frank recognition of a state of affairs in which mediocre books and pictures far outnumbered works of real merit (as they probably have in any age) and in which many factors seemed to work against the development of taste and critical discrimination, most importantly, spotty education and smart efforts by publishers and art dealers to push whatever they had on hand upon an eager public.

BITTER WATERS: THE MORAL DANGERS OF CULTURAL ASPIRATION

While a blossoming of available reading material met with broad enthusiasm, it also provoked alarm. In particular, the physical democratization of the printed word made some would-be cultural custodians uneasy since it seemed to mean a diffusion too of interpretive and prescriptive authority in regard to intellectual matters. Reading books meant new possibilities for personal improvement but also might open new avenues to vice and social confusion.[30]

The most heated controversy about culture during the first three quarters of the nineteenth century centered on the novel. Produced and consumed

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[29] Frederic Harrison, "On The Choice of Books," *Eclectic Magazine of Foreign Literature* 29, no. 6 (June 1879): 642, APSO.

[30] I arrived at the phrase "cultural custodians" independently. I later noted, however, and so make clear here, that Neil Harris in "The Gilded Age Revisited: Boston and the Museum Movement," *American Quarterly* 4, no. 14 (Winter 1962): 545-566, employed the phrase "custodians of culture" to refer to a slightly more limited group of people, "the rulers of the American art world" (546). My more liberal meaning generally takes in the self-appointed, the amateur moralizers, the occasional editorialist – those who might not have much objective claim to be "rulers of the art world."

in ever more prodigious quantities, novels seemed to present a host of formidable threats. They were thought to be unserious and frivolous, to trivialize intellectual pursuit, to distract impressionable minds, and to encourage or sanction immoral thought and behavior.[31] Throughout the century observers perceived a constant increase in the number of novels available. "Within recent memory," an alarmed *Harper's Bazaar* alerted its readers in 1868, "the production of *stories* has increased enormously, out of all proportion with the increase of grave and solid books."[32] And despite their tendency to happy endings where women got their men and heroes triumphed, novels were accused of privileging vacuous excitement and melodramatic plot at the ex-

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[31] Uncertainty about novels on moral grounds had been an eighteenth-century concern as well in Europe as Lynn Hunt has argued with reference especially to epistolary novels like Richardson's *Pamela* and Rousseau's *Julie*, which, along with philosophical works like Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, she ties to the development of empathy and the idea of unalienable individual rights, in *Inventing Human Rights: A History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007). Also see Erika M. Kreger, "'Depravity Dressed Up in a Fascinating Garb': Sentimental Motifs and the Seduced Hero(ine) in 'The Scarlet Letter,'" *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 54, no. 3 (1999): 308-335; Sarah M. Corse, "Nations and Novels: Cultural Politics and Literary Use," Social Forces 73, no. 4 (June 1995): 1279-1308; David T. Humphries, "Reading, Writing, and the Counting of Character in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America," *Reviews in American History* 32, no. 4, 518-525; Ann Schofield, "Sin, Murder, Adultery, and More: Narratives of Transgression in Nineteenth-Century America," *American Studies* 43, no. 2 (2002): 123-134; Mary Elliott, "When Girls Will Be Boys: 'Bad' Endings and Subversive Middles in Nineteenth-Century Tomboy Narratives and Twentieth-Century Lesbian Pulp Novels," *Legacy* 15, no. 1 (1998): 92-97; Gregg D. Crane, "Dangerous Sentiments: Sympathy, Rights, and Revolution in Stowe's Antislavery Novels," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 51, no. 2 (1996): 176-204; Janet S. Zehr, "The Response of Nineteenth-Century Audiences to Louisa May Alcott's Fiction," *American Transcendental Quarterly* 1, no. 14 (1987): 323-342; Susan K. Harris, "'But Is It Any Good?': Evaluating Nineteenth-Century American Women's Fiction," *American Literature* 63, no. 1 (1991): 43-61; Mary Kelley, "A More Glorious Revolution": Women's Antebellum Reading Circles and the Pursuit of Public Influence," *The New England Quarterly* 76, no. 2 (June 2003): 163-196.

[32] "Women's Novels," *Harper's Bazaar* 1, no. 24 (April 11, 1868): 375, APSO.

pense of sound moral content.[33]

Most American commentators agreed (again, over an extended period of time and with surprising consistency) on the contrary with English critic John Ruskin that "it is *not by the mode of representing* and saying, but by *what is represented* and said, that the respective greatness either of the painter or the writer is to be finally determined."[34] That is, the thought behind the writing was considered more important than deftness of the writing itself; and no matter how gracefully done, there could be no useful or great art that took vulgar or vicious matter as its subject.[35] As a *Brooklyn Eagle* writer said in 1867, "the great fault of the popular literature of our day [is] that it is too often prompted by low motive, ostentation or greed, and not by a disinterested desire to serve truth and humanity."[36] "The tendency of modern criticism," complained critic and *Crayon* editor William Stillman, "tends toward…giving

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[33] See Baym, *Women's Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and About Women in America, 1820-1870* for her analysis of what she calls an "overplot" in women's novels in the mid-nineteenth century.

[34] John Ruskin, *Modern Painters* (1843), reproduced in Frederick William Roe, ed., *Victorian Prose: Selected and Edited With Introductions, Bibliographies, and Notes* (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1947), 332. Ruskin's thought itself was in fact broadly open with regard to subject matter, but to less subtle practitioners of a conservative, intellectualizing sort of criticism the idea that there was beauty or value to be found in the depicting of immigrant workers or the telling of tales of marital infidelity never seemed plausible.

[35] For a concise discussion of Ruskin's work's influence in the United States, see Stephanie Wasielewski Fay, "American Pictoral Rhetoric: Describing Works of Art in Fiction and Art Criticism, 1820-1875" (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1982), 189-206.

[36] "The Duties of Writers for the Public," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, February 22, 1867, 4:2. Accessed via *http://www.brooklynpubliclibrary.org/eagle/*.

artists rank entirely according to their cleverness and technical ability." On the contrary, he asserted, "Sincerity is nobler than facility."[37] Consequently, the novel first met resistance that was generic: the form itself was considered unworthy of cultural approval, and the idea of a good, serious novel (or "romance" as novels were often interchangeably called) – of a novel as *literature* – struck cultural traditionalists as absurd.[38]

Novels, it was argued, were primarily meant to be entertaining, and it was well known that entertainment often tended toward sin and decadence: "If we should not like our daughters to frequent the company of rakes and Anonymas in real life, we can not consistently introduce them to such society in fiction."[39] Even worse, the novelistic form had long been most admired, opponents of novel-reading asserted, by the comparatively weak and frustratingly impressionable minds of the young and the female. *The Guardian, or*

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[37] William Stillman, "Feeling and Talent," *The Crayon* 1 (January 10, 1855): 17. Quoted in John P. Simoni, "Art Critics and Criticism in Nineteenth-Century America" (PhD diss., The Ohio State University, 1952): 105. In another article from *The Crayon* Stillman wrote, "Let it be remembered that the subject of the picture – the material objects from which it is constructed – are the essential parts of it. . . .You may have a kind of admiration for masterly treatment, and remarkable technical qualities, but that does not constitute love for Art." (Simoni, 109-110).

[38] See Nina Baym, *Novels, Readers, and Reviewers: Responses to Fiction in Antebellum America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), esp. 44. Also useful is Ana-Isabel Aliaga-Buchenau, *The Dangerous Potential of Reading: Readers & the Negotiation of Power in Selected Nineteenth-Century Narratives* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

[39] "Women's Novels," *Harper's Bazaar* 1, no. 24 (April 11, 1868): 375, APSO. Refer to Perosa, *American Theories of the Novel, 1793-1903*, 3-46, for discussion illuminating the duration and roots of the Anglo-American suspicion of fiction. As Perosa points out, critical ambiguity about the novel's impact on audiences preceded the antebellum intensification of disapprobation that emerged with the increased availability of books after improvements in printing and transportation technology.

Youth's Religious Instructor had warned as early as 1820 that "injurious reading is a source of corruption to young people. It will be immediately perceived I mean to reckon that reading which has a tendency to foster rather than to correct evil propensities. Most young persons are especially fond of novels and romances. Of this our circulating libraries are full proof, and the rapidity with which a new tale is known to sell, while a book of religion, or some other useful topic, is but seldom enquired after."[40] That we find similar sentiment in secular and religious press and over several decades, I think, is evidence of the enduring nature of the discourse of ambivalence and worry that surrounded reading in the United States in the nineteenth century.

Over time, the idea that young *women* especially relished novels combined with the idea that novels provided one of the only suitable genres for female authorship to further delay the novel's acceptance by critics as useful or ennobling literature. And while in the immediate post-Civil War period earlier female novels by Charlotte Brontë and Jane Austen and contemporary works by George Eliot received praise, the temptation to denigrate women's intellectual capabilities by associating them with the form persisted. In some cases, because of their longtime association, the literary genre and the gender of the author were efficiently employed to reciprocally demean one another.

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[40] "Novels and romances" *The Guardian, or Youth's Religious Instructor* 2, no. 11 (November 1820): 369, APSO. For more information on issues dealing particularly with children's literature and children's magazines, I recommend Pat Pflieger, "A Visit to *Merry's Museum*; or, Social Values in a Nineteenth-Century American Periodical for Children," PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 1987; and also Pflieger's website on children's literature and periodicals, http://www.merrycoz.org/BOOKS.HTM.

Given the relatively restrictive sexual politics of the time, the idea that the "the gentler sex" especially sought out contact with the novel presented an alarming confluence of dangers. While many novels, especially those *written* by women, have been characterized by historians of literature as depicting pretty worlds with petty problems (worlds that mirrored the sequestered domesticity middle-class Americans liked to imagine their wives and daughters as both suited to and safely confined within), nineteenth-century opponents of the novel found disturbingly frequent tendencies among authors to make their books salaciously exciting.[41] Several equally efficient means might

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[41] While contemporaries often found antebellum and mid-century fiction too racy and vapid and therefore morally inert or harmful, later modern critics condemned this literature until the last third of the twentieth century on artistic and aesthetic grounds. The popular novels of the antebellum period were considered amateurish, unconcerned with form, clumsily-didactic, sentimental and moralistic. One of the best early (and still useful) articulations of the idea that the novel should be more than a tale and, though characterized by freedom, should be a work of fine art rather than a method of distraction is Henry James's 1884 *The Art of Fiction*. On the general effects on American literature and society of overly sentimental literature, see Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977) and also Douglas's study of early-twentieth century modernism *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995). ¶ The evaluation and analysis of fiction written (especially that by and/or about women) in the antebellum and mid-century years received a thorough revision beginning in the late-twentieth century. Scholars have since argued, among many other things, against the idea that women's fiction was somehow merely vacuous or petty, offering instead interpretations that emphasize the political and psychological complexity of such works. See: Caroline Field Levander, *Voices of the Nation: Women and Public Speech in Nineteenth-Century American Literature and Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Joyce Warren, ed., *The (Other) American Traditions: Nineteenth-Century Women Writers* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1993); Isabelle Lehuu, "Sentimental Figures: Reading *Godey's Lady's Book* in Antebellum America," in Shirley Samuels, ed., *The Culture of Sentiment : Race, Gender, and Sentimentality in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 73-91; Judith Fryer, *The Faces of Eve: Women in the Nineteenth-Century American Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976); Mary P. Hiatt, *Style and the "Scribbling Women": An Empirical Analysis of Nineteenth-Century American Fiction* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1993); Karen Tracey, *Plots and Proposals: American Women's Fiction, 1850-90* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000); Nina Baym, *Women's Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and About Women in America, 1820-*

effect such ends: a hint of sexual innuendo, a touch of violence, or perhaps even a solicitation of sympathy for a dashing, unrepentant villain. No matter how much authors of fiction may have insisted on the harmlessness of their tales, most of those who wrote reviews or letters to editors in response were disturbed by the seeming nonchalance of their fellow citizens given that gentle maidens and otherwise upright matrons might be induced to seek entertainment in perversions of an ideal moral order: "the vices which in actual life would appear odious and vulgar are in these books softened by the qualities attributed to the persons who commit them. The cheat, the gambler, and the seducer is depicted as a handsome, manly fellow; and his beauty and his skill in horsemanship are dangled before our eyes as reason for pardoning his

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1870 (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978). Baym notes, in discussing the contemporary contempt that would come to characterize writing about women and fiction, that "some male authors felt threatened by the apparently sudden emergence of great numbers of woman writers. Their distress showed itself in expressions of manly contempt for the genre, its authors, and its readers" (23). To illustrate the endurance of such contempt, I cite as an example a mid-*twentieth*-century characterization by Carl Bode, in *The Anatomy of American Popular Culture, 1840-1861* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959): "When the 1850s arrived, the moist but sparkling eye and the heaving bosom would become epidemic. The sentimental domestic novel would reign unchallenged, and unharmed by Hawthorne's now famous denunciation of its authors – 'a d------ mob of scribbling women.' But the forties were more masculine years, with a liking for richer fare" (149). For analysis of women, reading and literature in the nineteenth century beyond the realm of fiction and novels, see Alison M. Scott, "'This Cultivated Mind': Reading and Identity in a Nineteenth Century Reader," Mary Kelly, "Reading Women/Women Reading: The Making of Learned Women in Antebellum America," and Barbara Sicherman, "Reading and Middle-Class Identity in Victorian America: Cultural Consumption, Conspicuous and Otherwise," in Barbara Ryan and Amy M. Thomas, eds., *Reading Acts: U. S. Readers' Interactions with Literature, 1800-1950* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2002). For a discussion of proposed relations between fiction and social class in this period, see Michael Denning, "Cheap Stories: Notes on Popular Fiction and Working-Class Culture in Nineteenth-Century America, *History Workshop Journal*, no. 22 (1986): 1-17.

criminalities."[42] A letter to the editor from a *New York Tribune* reader a over decade later continued to express similar sentiments and indicated the consistency of this theme of complaint: "I suppose it will be claimed that in order for Thackeray to be 'true to nature' he must not only inform us that the characters in 'Vanity Fair' smoke and drink and fight duels, but he must also frequently fill their mouths with oaths. This must result in evil to many readers, because the characters of this author are made to swear in such a clever, jolly way, that profanity (viewed from the standpoint of 'Vanity Fair') appears like one of the fine arts."[43]

As a general rule then, indifference to moral content was *not* accepted as an author's unrestricted prerogative. As the self-consciously serious and conservative quarterly *North American Review* saw things, "If [a work of art] does not educate aright, it will educate wrongly, – it will not remain without influence. If the huge canvas fails to instruct, to elevate, to sanctify, it confuses, it lowers, it degrades."[44] And authors themselves, not just their books, were often considered fair game for criticism for most of the century. Both outright and veiled *ad hominem* critiques were neither unusual nor always distinguished from other analysis of texts, and an artist's character was often presumed to be deducible from his or her work. An 1856 opinion piece on the

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[42] "Women's Novels," *Harper's Bazaar* 1, n. 24 (April 11, 1868): 375, APSO.

[43] S. Alden Brace, "Profanity in Literature: To the Editor of the Tribune" *New York Tribune*, January 11, 1880, 5:4.

[44] "The Conditions of Art in America," *North American Review* 102, no. 210 (January, 1866): 1, APSO.

"Responsibility of Publishers" chided an author for describing "loose states of society" in Spain with "gusto" and seemed hardly satisfied on the issue of the author's character, even though in the book he attempted to distance himself from his story by an assertion of "his own impeccability."[45] An editorial comment in general-interest (and sometime critic of the religious press) *The Round Table* in fact stated plainly that a book was "a true daguerreotype of the soul. If that soul be vitiated – if the fountains of purity be poisoned – then whatever comes from that soul must be corrupt. A clean thing cannot emanate from an unclean."[46] The same figure occurred to a writer for the Quaker *Friends' Intelligencer* two decades later: "the books that do us good much have their origin in minds that are pure and true. . . . Remember these words of the apostle, 'Doth the fountain send forth from the same opening sweet and bitter water?'"[47] Titus Munson Coan, in the Philadelphia-based literary magazine *Lippincott's*, argued that "[the artist's] descent and parentage, his education, his career, and all the circumstances by which he has been developed or repressed, are of the first interest to the critic who wishes to know the roots as well as the flower."[48] As a result of the identification of creator

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[45] "Responsibility of Publishers," *The Independent, Devoted to the Consideration of Politics, Social and Economic Tendencies, History, Literature, and the Arts* 8, no. 388 (May 8, 1856): 148, APSO.

[46] "Women and Literature," *The Round Table: A Saturday Review of Politics, Finance, Literature, Society and Art* 5, no. 117 (April 20, 1867): 246, APSO.

[47] L.J.R., "Authors and Their Influence," *Friends' Intelligencer* 42, no. 36 (October 17, 1885): 563, APSO.

with work, cultural products could be proof of the author's immorality just as easily as irregularities of the author's character could discredit whatever he or she produced.[49] "It is a pretty safe general proposition," declared one writer, "that a man's essential character can be gathered from his work; . . . We maintain that a good book (in the ethic sense) means a good man."[50]

A writer for the *Chicago Tribune* came round to this point by way of a lament about the rage for biography he detected in the literary marketplace. Instead of reading the newest biography of Montaigne, he argued, readers interested in the character of the French author should instead just read his works: "if we did read them we should see that those works give the best pos-

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[48] Titus Munson Coan, "Critic and Artist," *Lippincott's Magazine of Popular Literature and Science* 13 (March 1874): 360, APSO. For a contemporary presentation of the opposite view, that an author's or artist's personality, background and so forth are of little importance in evaluation of works, see Rev. H. P. Cutting, "The Ethics of Criticism," *The Religious Magazine and Monthly Review* 49, no. 3 (March 1873): 228-238, APSO. This all sounds surprisingly similar, in some ways, to the debates over political correctness that would occupy many late-twentieth and twenty-first-century critics.

[49] This critical method endured throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, when similar formulations were abundantly employed in feverish efforts to discredit abstract painting by exposing its creators as rogues, fakers, and degenerates. Nevertheless, a criticism which took into account the real or supposed personal character of the author or artist was not universally accepted. For one example of a call for a focus only on the work itself and a disregard for the creator's character or intent, see M. G. Van Rensselaer, "Some Aspects of Contemporary Art," *Lippincott's Magazine of Popular Literature and Science* 22 (December, 1878): 706-718, APSO. For the tendency of antebellum authors to adopt a Romantic inclination to focus on biography and character of both canonical and other authors, see Leon Chai, *The Romantic Foundations of the American Renaissance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987).

[50] Richard Burton, "Originality in Literature," *Current Literature* 21, no. 5 (May 1897): 422, APSO. Richard Burton (d. 1940) was a college professor and author and the literary editor of the *Hartford Courant* from 1890-97. See "Dr. Richard Burton, Author and Teacher," *New York Times* April 9, 1940, 29.

sible picture of their author."[51] The same year, a meandering lecture delivered in London by English historian Frederic Harrison and reprinted in the American periodical *Littell's Living Age* for American audiences argued the necessity of cutting out frivolous reading and summoned the identity of book and author to support his stance. "Are all men desirable companions, much less teachers, fit to be listened to, able to give us advice?" It was a rhetorical question, the answer was no, and the implication was clear: choosing books could be as tricky as choosing men, "for what can a book be more than the man who wrote it."[52]

The special problem with fiction was as much its sheer dominance of the marketplace as the questionable content of any particular book. Audiences seemed to read novels to the exclusion of all else, and the immoderate rate of their consumption raised questions about how to dispose of limited time in one's day and space in one's mind. The bare formal elements of such debates were relatively unoriginal and for the most part enduringly static. As far back as the second decade of the century we can read about fiction's uselessness:

> Were the whole number [of novels] which the age produced divided into a thousand parts, it is probable that five hundred of these parts would be found so contemptibly frivolous, as to render the perusal almost a *criminal waste of time* . . . Of the remaining five hundred

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[51] J. K., "A Sheaf of Biographies," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, June 7, 1879, 11, PQHN.

[52] Frederic Harrison, "On the Choice of Books," *Littell's Living Age*, May 3, 1879, 259, APSO. Reprinted from *The Fortnightly Review*. *Littell's Living Age* specialized in the reprinting of foreign (mostly British) articles for United States readers.

> parts, four hundred and ninety-nine may be considered as *positively corrupting and seductive* in their tendency . . . Surely these representations can have no other tendency than to *mislead, corrupt, and destroy those who habitually peruse them*, and especially those who give them a favorable reception.[53]

> [Another publication judged that] novels produce a sad vacuity in the minds of their readers. They impart no knowledge of real value. Their votaries can talk forever, it is true, of the idle stories they contain and usually their knowledge is measured by the number of novels they have read. But after all, there is a dreadful vacum [*sic*] produced in the mind by this kind of reading . . . *What a waste of time it is, then, to pore the pages of romances, when there are other books of great value at hand.*[54]

A little later, in 1835, one critic analogized that "when the appetite has been accustomed to delicacies, the stomach refuses solid food, while the appetite itself decays with the very gratification of its desires; and it is the same in regard to the mind; if we indulge in the perusal of trifling, or impure, or sceptical books, it becomes assimilated to them in taste, and thought, and belief, – rejecting with increased aversion the serious and instructive, or the scientific and useful."[55] And by the first year of the Civil War much of this sentiment remained. A writer in for the *Friends' Intelligencer* opined, "it is really lamentable to consider how much reading there is to so little purpose; how many young men and young women there are, who spend some hours of almost

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[53] "On Novel-Reading," *Philanthropist, a Weekly Journal Containing Essays, on Moral and Religious Subjects* 1, no. 16 (March 27, 1819): 243-44. The preceding was quoted from "Miller's Retrospect of the Eighteenth Century" in *Philanthropist.* Emphasis added.

[54] "Novels and Romances," *The Guardian, or Youth's Religious Instructor* 2, no. 11 (November 1820): 370, APSO. Emphasis added.

[55] L., "Select Reading," *The Friend; a Religious and Literary Journal* 9, no. 12 (December 25, 1835): 93, APSO.

every day in reading, and go on year after year, – ten, twenty years, – becoming scarcely more intelligent than they were. . . . How many professional men are cheated and beguiled by novels and magazines, from the high path of their destiny!"[56] This writer did not wish, he said, to "deprecate reading only for amusement, in its place," but he probably would have agreed with a contributor to the Methodist-run *Christian Advocate* two decades later: "a light book once a month may do no harm, and even be useful when selected with care; but reading twenty or thirty a month is a good deal like taking opium."[57]

Implicit in these sorts of arguments lay one important understanding of the way that culture could be beneficial, namely that it required concentrated and conscious effort on the part of the person seeking its benefits. The acquirement of true culture receded further each time readers misused valuable time reading on a lark instead of to some particular worthwhile and identifiable end. American minds could never be molded into something finer if their relationships with visual and literary art were scattershot and guided by other than proper motives. And there was little time to waste since a quick fix was considered unlikely. "Cultivation of art" the late-nineteenth century suffragist and editor Mary Livermore recognized, "must be bred into a peo-

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[56] DEWEY, "Reading," *Friends' Intelligencer* 18, no. 42 (December 28, 1861): 662, APSO. Reprinted from an article in *The Christian Register*.

[57] "Women as Novel Readers," *Christian Advocate* 58, no. 49 (December 6, 1883): 774, APSO.

ple, and slowly assimilated by them."[58]

Eventually, the reading public's unslakable thirst for novels led to something like an admission of defeat by opponents of the form, opening the door for more expansive notions of evaluation. Long after the battle against novels had been effectually lost, a contributor to the *Ladies' Home Journal* achieved an admirably concise statement of reality: "we have thousands of novels every season sown broadcast over the land and we are asked, 'Shall women read novels?' She simply *will* read them."[59] Since both women *and* men insisted on reading novels, and since novels were assumed to directly and powerfully affect the moral sense of their readers, there slowly arose over time the practice of discerning good novels from bad. In this sense, astute observers seem to have realized that the power of fiction to excite emotion and thought could be employed toward good ends as well as bad, educational as well as vapid.

Though heated public discussions about visual art lagged chronologically behind those on literature, which had begun quite early (for instance see the quote at the head of this chapter), we find the themes of wastefulness and distraction inhabiting this discourse from the beginning. An anonymous 1839 contributor to the important literary publication *Knickerbocker* be-

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[58] Mary Livermore, "Art Education for Women," *Friends Intelligencer* 44, no. 25 (June 18, 1887): 399, APSO.

[59] A. N. Everett, "Shall Women Read Novels?" *The Ladies' Home Journal* 7, no. 4 (March 1890): 13, APSO.

moaned "the walls of private dwellings" which "instead of being enriched with a few works of a choice and rare character, are crowded with wretched portraits, and vile copies of old paintings, that have been purchased merely because they are *cheap*![60] Here we see too that cultural improvement formed an imperfect fit with the dictates of capitalist market economies. The value of art would have to be granted its own extra-economic criteria before any real cultural progress, as opposed to just a swift trade in visual objects, could be enjoyed.

One of the most important efforts to refine the artistic judgment of the public came in 1855 with the creation of the *Crayon*, the first serious large-circulation periodical to deal intensively with the evaluation and criticism of visual art. It garnered enthusiastic approval when it first appeared. *Putnam's Monthly*, a relatively conservative magazine of politics and culture which would later merge into *Scribner's*, opined that "we need such a journal as the *Crayon*, without any question, and there never has been a better time for starting it than the present."[61] *Crayon* editors William Stillman and John Durand understood their effort as one to preserve the very possibilities of artistic culture in the United States. "Art, which is Beauty's gospel," began the editorial of the inaugural issue, "lies inert under the cold necessities of a na-

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[60] "The Fine Arts," *The Knickerbocker; or New York Monthly Magazine* 14, no. 5 (November 1839): 420, APSO.

[61] "The Crayon," *Putnam's Monthly* 5 (March 1855): 335. Quoted in John P. Simoni, "Art Critics and Criticism in Nineteenth-Century America" (PhD diss., The Ohio State University, 1952).

tional childhood, and the cares and storms of a political first existence; but when the winter of discontent is made summer, it bursts out to gladden and beautify life. . . . To us, and to our generation, it is given to determine [beauty's] future in our country, whether free or healthy, or dwarfed and deformed. . . . To this glorious work of art-cultivation we have devoted this undertaking."[62]

"To Stillman," writes John P. Simoni in his study of nineteenth-century art criticism, "art was a social responsibility."[63] Yet by the time the *Crayon* ceased publication during the Civil war, the state of affairs in regard to pictures and American audiences had apparently *not* improved, at least according to the *New York Tribune*, which in 1863 bemoaned the existence of an irrational "picture mania" taking hold in the United States.[64] Similarly, editors at the *New York Times* judged that ill-considered buying of paintings had reached "epidemic" proportions and buyers' lack of discrimination seemed to rule at gallery sales, where "want of judgment, nay, even of the absence of ordinary caution in their purchases" was the norm.[65]

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[62] "Introductory," *The Crayon*, January 3, 1855, p. 1. Quoted in John P. Simoni, "Art Critics and Criticism in Nineteenth-Century America" (PhD diss., The Ohio State University, 1952). Also see Janice Simon, "The Crayon, 1855-1861: The Voice of Nature in Criticism, Poetry, and the Fine Arts" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1990); Emily Julia Halligan, "Art Criticism in America before the 'Crayon': Perceptions of Landscape Painting, 1825-1855" (PhD diss., University of Delaware 2000).

[63] John P. Simoni, "Art Critics and Criticism in Nineteenth-Century America" (PhD diss., The Ohio State University, 1952): 108.

[64] *New York Tribune*, April 4, 1863.

[65] "Art Matters," *New York Times*, April 2, 1866, 5:1.

Critics worried that Americans' relative unfamiliarity with the visual arts left them susceptible to errors of discrimination of several kinds. As historian H. Wayne Morgan has written, "cultural spokesmen also understood the pleasure inherent in art's new appeal, and some worried over the dangers of releasing those feelings into an expanding art constituency. They quickly sought to ally art's appeals to the spirit rather than the baser passions."[66]

For much of American history it has been argued that the separation of art from morality – the idea that art is in a sense morally inert – is not only untrue but perilous. The idea that aesthetics can be separated from morals, that the beautiful can be unlinked from the good, is one that has never, until perhaps very recently, garnered much sincere or widespread popular support. Rather the opposite has been true. While late in the nineteenth century American audiences would display a contentious relationship to various new schools of art, such as impressionism, abstraction and some forms of realism, many of the most heated earlier discussions were over the use of nude images in artistic works. And again here we find the grounds of objection to be moral rather than strictly aesthetic. While critics were willing to accept the necessity for artists themselves to understand the nude form so that they might better render clothed figures, most felt strongly that the effects of un-draped human bodies on the public could hardly be beneficial. A writer for the *Christian Advocate* complained that "on the walls or mantles of many of

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[66] H. Wayne, Morgan, *New Muses: Art in American Culture, 1865-1920* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1978), 46.

our wealthy homes we find paintings, or plaster casts, or statues, that exhibit the human form – male and female – in complete nudity. . . . A variety theater is little worse than these classic (?) paintings and statuary, and common decency ought to shut them out of sight."[67] The short-lived (1877-80) *National Repository* placed nude paintings on no higher moral ground than "photographs of a group of beauties," something everyone would have agreed was plainly pornographic. Such images "offend[ed] needlessly the delicacy of the American taste," and, even worse, failed to recognize that "sexual passion is implanted in all healthy natures, which it behooves us to keep under healthy subjugation," and that "in order to do this it is only wise to avoid temptation in every form."[68]

Though outcry over decency in visual art continued to arise from time to time throughout the century, the overall concern about the influence of painting and sculpture on the individual moral safety of American viewers was, when compared with concerns over harmful literature, less frequent and less vociferous. For whatever reason however, as we will see in chapter two, commentators' relative lack of alarm at increasing public interaction with visual art was not mirrored by any paucity of arguments for the immense positive moral *good* that it could bring about. Indeed enthusiasm for the crea-

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[67] W. R. Goodwin, "That 'Art Gallery,'" *Christian Advocate* 51, no. 36 (September 7, 1876): 282, APSO.

[68] "Art," *National Repository, Devoted to General and Religious Literature, Criticism, and Art* 1 (January 1877): 78, APSO; "The Nude in Art Again," *National Repository, Devoted to General and Religious Literature, Criticism, and Art* 5 (April 1879): 367, APSO.

tion of the nation's great art museums in the last quarter of the century would be grounded in just such hopes.

Beauty's power to deceive and disarm had long occupied Western thought, and nineteenth-century American thought about art, no matter how focused on particular issues of the day, must also be understood as contemporary applications of age-old sentiments. Plato had Socrates remind us in the *Republic* that stories that make the gods seem capable of bad things "are harmful to people who hear them, for everyone will be ready to excuse himself when he's bad, if he's persuaded that similar things both are being done now and have been done in the past by 'close descendents of the gods.'"[69] As for stories about human behavior, Socrates concludes, "I think we'll say that what poets and prose-writers tell us about the most important matters concerning human beings is bad. They say that many unjust people are happy and many just ones are wretched, that injustice is profitable if it escapes detection, and that justice is another's good but one's own loss. I think we'll prohibit these stories. . . ."[70]

The experience of reading or of viewing pictures – even while often taking place in a very public context – has to do with the interaction between a given cultural object and the mind of an individual. Also residing finally in the minds of individuals are any phenomena that we subject to moral judgment or description. If can we agree that the field of play for both moral ex-

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[69] Plato *Republic* 391e.

[70] Ibid., 392b.

perience and aesthetic experience is the individual consciousness, we can begin to see one reason why art and literature seemed both dangerous and promising. In 1881, Noah Porter, considered by a fellow academic "one who has at his command the resources of learning and of the most wide and varied culture,"[71] would have surprised no one when he concluded that "literature . . . must therefore be either ethically good or ethically bad. It cannot be morally indifferent. It must be healthful or injurious."[72] His reason for thinking so, he explains, is that our sense of morality, like our sense of aesthetic enjoyment or approbation, is essentially a function of the imagination. Morally speaking, we imagine things about the Ideal; fictional literature, operating in the realm of our imagination, cannot help but influence our understanding of our ethical context and duties. An anonymous *New York Tribune* reviewer of *On the Right Use of Books* agreed in 1879 that books "leave a lasting impression on the character."[73]

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[71] J. M. Hoppin, "Prof. Noah Porter's New Book on Reading," *New Englander and Yale Review* 30, no. 114 (January 1871): 110, C-MOA.

[72] Noah Porter, *Books and Readers, or What Books Shall I Read and How Shall I Read Them?* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1881), 97. After graduating Yale Theological Department in 1833 Porter (1811-1892) served as a pastor for about a decade and then in 1847 began an academic career as Professor of Moral Philosophy and Metaphysics at Yale. After long study, including time spent in Germany, he began in the 1860s to publish works often aimed against what he saw as the ills of materialistic philosophy gaining currency in Western thought. Porter is also credited with important curricular reforms at Yale. See Louise L. Stevenson, "Porter, Noah," *American National Biography*, 17:706-07.

[73] Review of William P. Atkinson, *On the Right Use of Books* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1879) in *New York Tribune*, December 3, 1878, 6:3. For a more detailed and broader discussion of the idea of character, nineteenth-century market culture and literary prac-

SWEET WATERS: THE REWARDS OF CULTURE FOR INDIVIDUALS

There was no reason, however, that these "lasting impressions" *must* be injurious – if culture could hurt, it could also help. Despite warnings about the dangers of cultural development for individual morals and manners, authors also hailed art and literature as means to moral improvement. And cultural cheerleaders tended to share their more worried counterparts' insistence on the existence, if not the nature, of the relationship between aesthetic experience and morality.

This was so much so that the notion of the relationship was more sometimes more assumed than explained. Many writers' opinions were as flowery and over-confident as their analyses were inexact, and we must sometimes listen for what they leave unspoken as well as for the overt messages they convey. Some discourse in favor of greater interaction between individuals and culture sounded prosaically practical; some verged instead on the spiritual. Sounding practical did not always mean being plausible, however; nor did spiritual always mean unrealistic. That is, I will make some distinctions here not so much between the final results envisioned in various formulations of culture's benefits, but between different ways of approaching the interaction between mind and matter, different ways of expressing what might happen at the intersection of American audiences and esteemed works of visual

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tices and norms, see Thomas E. Augst, *The Clerk's Tale: Young Men and Moral Life in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

or literary art.

Decidedly practical language infused works like Professor Porter's 1872 *Books and Reading, or What Books Shall I Read and How Shall I Read Them?* How shall one read books? Porter answered: read with attention, with a purpose, with a recognition of your own particular needs and your own particular ignorance. He marked out systematically the proper approaches to reading novels, poetry, philosophy, history, theology and works on "science and duty" and discussed the proper intellectual posture for one taking up a newspaper or magazine. This approach situates the benefits of culture at a remove; they have to be earned or achieved, intelligently sought and recognized, and then processed in a generally workmanlike manner.[74]

Editors at *The Critic*, a bi-weekly publication featuring many book reviews, thought American advice on reading tended to be more sound and more practical than that issued in other lands, England in particular. "As the British librarians have remarked on the direct and practical nature of the papers read before the American librarian[s] when in convention assembled, so the Americans have noted the merely literary, antiquarian and dilettante character of the papers read when the British librarians assemble and meet together. And so it is with the British books about books: they are rarely

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[74] For more on the popularity and prolific distribution of advice literature, see Isabelle Lehuu, "A Useful Recreation: Advice on Reading in a Time of Abundance," *Carnival on the Page: Popular Print Media in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 126-155.

practical, useful, intended for the average man and the general reader."[75]

One Reverend J. L. O'Neil, an American, later used an entire article in a late-century issue of *Current Literature* to drive home the importance of reading slowly and in little pieces, lest the mind be enervated or commence to wander. O'Neil employed a discursive tactic of stringing together aphorisms of famous readers and writers, from Alexander Pope ("A little learning is a dangerous thing / Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring"), to Charles Lamb ("We get no good / by being ungenerous, even to a book"), to longish, obtuse passages by Ruskin. In fact, by the time O'Neil got done recounting a tortured metaphor of "an Australian miner" his intent remained sternly practical, but his expression had become unwieldingly ephemeral. As was sometimes the case, faced with the dual tasks of dealing out useful advice and exciting the interest of the advisee the Reverend O'Neil offered counsel probably more inspirational than actionable.[76]

A notable feature of advice books and articles was the insistence that many different *forms* of literature could be mined for tangible cultural utility. Even Shakespeare promised immediate *practical* value, at least in the eyes of

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[75] "Books About Books," *The Critic* 3, no. 71 (May 12, 1883): 217, APSO.

[76] Rev. J. L. O'Neil, "How We Ought to Read…What We Ought to Read," *Current Literature* 15, no. 1 (January-June, 1894): 8, APSO. On the contrary, and somewhat against the advice offered above, these authors also asserted that one of the great things about the literary world of the United States was its *breadth*; in an interesting aside, they even specifically lauded the great profusion of indexes available from American publishers. While to some the useful benefits of reading must come slowly and piecemeal, others obviously assumed that easy access and wide variety were at least as important.

the *Shakespeariana* magazine, a decade-long effort backed by the New York Shakespeare Society. "First," noted the educator and anti-slavery orator Theodore Weld, Shakespeare in the schools could help protect "idiomatic English" by "beating back the floods that threaten to overwhelm it" and help Americans "withstand the rush into our language of vapid, foreign dilutions." Shakespeare's work, he argued, "quickens the pupil's thinking powers [and] trains him to the use of apt and telling words" and, importantly, cultivated in students a sense for deft discrimination in life as well as literature.[77]

Further, the moral benefits for culturally aware individuals were assumed to translate very practically into a broad range of *societal* benefits. Former *Unitarian Review* editor H. H. Barber, writing for the *American Magazine of Civics*, discussed statistics gathered from research on library initiatives in England, and hoped the same could be achieved in the United States. "The comfort and moral economy of a cheerful, well-lighted reading-room," he argued, "is overwhelmingly illustrated. In Manchester all persons of suitable age visited free libraries on an average of thirteen times a year, of whom three fourths came to read in the reading-rooms. Such a refuge from the perils of the saloon and the street is an immense benefaction in any neighborhood."[78] And, he continued later in a discussion of libraries in the

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[77] Theodore Weld, "Shakespeare in the Classroom," *Shakespeariana: A Critical and Contemporary Review of Shakespearian Literature* 3, no. 10 (October 1, 1886): 1-2, APSO.

[78] H. H. Barber, "The Free Public Library," *American Magazine of Civics* 6, no. 5 (May 1895): 476, APSO.

Midwest, "perhaps, more beneficent still would be the influence upon the vastly larger number who would frequent the library, and grow intelligent through the multiplied use of its reading facilities, and the help of its valuable reference department. The reaction upon the general intelligence of the community would make itself felt in the in the increasing intelligence of its workingmen and the higher standard of life this would bring among them. In short, it would insure economic progress."[79] What such expectations illustrate more than anything else is the extraordinary, sometimes almost comprehensive, range of individual and societal ills that culture could supposedly ameliorate. Advocates seemed ready for any audience and any counter-argument. If cost was a factor, one need only understand the extent to which any cost would be offset by better production and profits. If reading itself was regarded suspiciously when practiced by the lower orders, one must only remember that they would read anyway – and wasn't reading guided by a librarian or a reviewer better than otherwise?

In general, judging from the frequency and thoroughness of the articles in journals, magazines and newspapers, commentators tended to be more comfortable explaining the immediate practical benefits of reading and books than of looking and pictures. Books, after all, could tell one how to do something, could offer instruction either explicitly or with such obvious suggestion as to amount to explicit instruction. Visual art, on the other hand, al-

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[79] H. H. Barber, "The Free Public Library," *American Magazine of Civics* 6, no. 5 (May 1895): 480, APSO.

ways required something more ineffable to happen between the eye or mind of the viewer and the surface of the work in question, and far fewer articles on "how to look at art" appeared in the nineteenth century compared with the deluge of "how to read" manuals. The discourse on the values of art for the common man tended to sound more idealistic as a result, filled with notions of lifting up and refining the soul.

A *New York Times* writer in 1891 shared the hope that mere contact with visual art would produce happy results. Commenting on promising attendance at the Metropolitan Museum of Art over the last year, the paper concluded, "this means a very great popularity, and *popularity in this case is identical with usefulness.*"[80] We are a long way here from the thinking on the popularity of "light fiction," where popularity was decidedly *not* identical with usefulness. Many contemporaries trusted that the wide appeal of museums indicated cultural progress since supposedly disinterested collectors and experts had vetted museums' contents, whereas novels came to the public via publishers' colder calculus of markets and margins. Decades earlier, in 1860, an article in the *Southern Literary Messenger* had taken another tack, urging its readers to attend to the great accomplishments of former minds. "*Their potent magic*," the magazine asserted,

> is able to revive the unselfish deeds of heroic men, restore us to the venerable forms of patriots and sages, familiarize us with the public virtues by symbolic impersonation, elevate our minds from the re-

[80] P. Divver, "The Metropolitan Museum," *New York Times*, December 22, 1891, 4, PQHN. Emphasis added.

> gions of groveling instincts to the serene heights of everlasting truths, and give to every noble thought an untimation in speaking forms of grandeur and beauty. … we must mantle the rugged trunk of national growth, with the nourishing and adorning foliage of aesthetic culture, and prove to rejoicing humanity, that *the path of moral strength and virtue is also that of joy and beauty.*[81]

This writer expressed the widely held view that some good would come from concentrating on, or at least being introduced to, intellectual achievements of the past which, in this case, are assumed to have been in touch with, or to have represented nobly, the Ideal. Less concrete, more spiritual explanations such as this one tended to be vague about how exactly the move was made from "groveling instincts" to "serene heights". At the same time, however, cultural achievement was *not* extolled for its own sake. Whether or not great books and images were generally understood to have inherent value, most articles and conversations tended to focus earnestly on the consequences for audiences and students.

Discussing *The Grammar of Painting and Engraving* by French author Charles Blanc in 1873, the *Chicago Tribune's* book reviewer ascended from the "merely economic view" to a further level of abstraction by substituting an individual American's mind for something a bit more sweeping: "but there is a higher object to be obtained; we mean, of course, the culture of our people in those arts which ennoble the *national* mind – which adorn and refine the

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[81] "The Influence of the Fine Arts on the National Character," *The Southern Literary Messenger; Devoted to Every Department of Literature, and the Fine Arts* 30, no. 3 (March 1860): 202, APSO. Emphasis in original.

national life."[82] We see here that an important figure in discussions of morality and culture was the individual; in order to indulge in talk about something like "the national mind" the nation was imagined as a person. This translation seems to have struck authors as only natural.

This nation-as-person, the nation with a mind and a morality of its own, was a frequently employed figure in cultural commentary, but other images proved almost as popular. Time after time, commentators encouraged cultural awareness by applying figurative language and metaphor to their subject. Such linguistic maneuvering tends to make the strange appear familiar, to clothe the unusual or even the exotic in more recognizable dress. Two particular tropes tended to crop up with consistent frequency when writers or speakers discussed ways culture could enrich Americans' lives. The first imagined books and pictures as good company, the equivalent of friends or mentors whose temperance, taste and patience could be copied and absorbed. The second (which has already been introduced without comment above) was the figure of art and literature as food, nutrient or poison.

One typical mid-century article claimed that Americans ought to "turn to the fine arts as our *gentle and warm-hearted instructors.*"[83] A later contributor

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[82] "Art Grammar," review of Charles Blanc, *The Grammar of Painting and Engraving*, in *Chicago Tribune*, December 28, 1873, 9, APSO. Emphasis added. We see similar language in an issue of *Every Sunday* , May 6, 1871 in a discussion of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts: "A national mind is educated, in a large sense, by circumstances and events."

[83] "The Influence of the Fine Arts on the National Character," *The Southern Literary Messenger; Devoted to Every Department of Literature, and the Fine Arts* 30, no. 3 (March 1860): 202, APSO. Emphasis added.

to the popularly-oriented *Our Continent* admonished, "we are usually very careful to choose the friends and companions of our children. Do we not often forget that we are just as truly responsible for the books they read?"[84] And even as late as the World's Columbian Exposition at Chicago in 1893 the notion of profitable companionship with cultural matter, the idea of humanizing (and moralizing) the relationships between art and mind, still infused many discussions. Beginning with the "French adage" that "to understand all is to pardon all," the author of a *Chicago Tribune* report on art at the Exposition hoped it would encourage international harmony since, "as with individuals, . . . it is in *the art* of the Nations represented that there may be found the highest expression of characteristics."[85] In short, Americans could improve relations with other nations by understanding them, and the way to understand them was through their art. Just as critics argued that audiences could see the soul of an author or painter in his works, so also could they derive the character of an entire people by visiting its assigned room at an exhibition.

While we will return below to the various hopes heaped onto the Chicago World's Fair, I include this quote here to underline the sometimes almost fanciful level of confidence placed in cultural achievement. And this was, we must remember, not a view espoused in the pages of an esoteric literary magazine for a pre-selected audience of especially devoted cultural ad-

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[84] Almira L. Hayward, "Reading for Young People," *Our Continent* 1, no. 17 (June 7, 1882): 265, APSO.

[85] "Art Exhibit Grand," *Chicago Tribune*, April 30, 1893, 41, PQHN. Emphasis added.

vocates; it was a reporter's assertion in a daily newspaper, as casual as it was sweeping. The frequency of such expression in popular media speaks to the ubiquity of confidence in culture's power, in what it could do and achieve for American individuals, and therefore, in a nation thought to be singularly dependent on the cumulative moral fiber of its citizens, for the nation as a whole. "A nation is, after all," Charles W. Eliot reminded readers at the end of the century, "but the agglomeration of an immense number of individuals, and the moral condition of a nation can be nothing but the result of the morality prevailing among the individuals who compose it."[86]

In an earlier instance, a reviewer in the *New York Tribune* quoted an author, Professor William P. Atkinson, who had found that in books and libraries "are the finest minds giving us the best wisdom of present and all past ages; here are intellects far beyond ours, ready to give us the results of lifetimes of patient thought; imaginations open to the beauty of the universe, far beyond what is given to us to behold; characters whom we can only vainly hope to imitate, but whom it is one of the highest privileges to know."[87] Here personified cultural objects not only are available for our use but in fact *do things for us*; they remain practically useful repositories of facts or ideas, but they also become morally good actors in their own right: not just generously

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[86] "Some Reasons Why the American Republic May Endure," *Forum* 16 (October 1894): 129, APSO.

[87] "On the Right Use of Books," a review of William P. Atkinson, *On the Right Use of Books* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1879) in *New York Tribune*, December 3, 1878, 6:3. Emphasis added.

available, but generous.

Food and digestive analogies were even more ubiquitous than those invoking companionship.[88] The right diet of culture, in the right portions at the proper times, would have healthy results, and vice-versa. An 1862 article spoke of the "mental diatetics" that characterize good advice on books.[89] "The public, poor giddy-headed thing," wrote a contributor to *Current Literature* near the end of the century, "not seldom jumps at what is to its taste, swallowing it whole in a gusto of unthinking dietetic delectation."[90] The Reverend R. Heber Newton, in a series of lectures in 1885, employed what we might call a meta-physiological argument for the idea that "the true aim of culture should be not alone to build up a true intellect, but through it to build up as prefect an inner being as possible. Culture brings forth the man *fully grown, well formed, rich blooded*, firmly knit, alive all over."[91] Newton waxed

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[88] For an in-depth consideration see Steven Mailloux, "The Rhetorical Use and Abuse of Fiction: Eating Books in Late Nineteenth-Century America," *boundary 2* 17, no. 1, New Americanists: Revisionist Interventions into the Canon (Spring, 1990): 133-157; Janice A. Radway, "Reading is Not Eating: Mass-Produced Literature and the Theoretical, Methodological, and Political Consequences of a Metaphor," *Book Research Quarterly* 2, no. 26 (1986).

[89] J. L. Corning, "A Talk About Books," *The Independent, Devoted to the Consideration of Politics, Social and Economic Tendencies, History, Literature, and the Arts* 14, no. 708 (June 6, 1862): 6, APSO.

[90] Richard Burton, "Originality in Literature," *Current Literature* 21, no. 5 (May 1897): 421, APSO.

[91] "The True Aim of Culture: The First in a Series of Sermons by the Rev. R. Heber Newton," *New York Times*, November 16, 1885, 8, PQHN. An Episcopal minister like his father, Newton (1840-1914) practiced critical study of the Bible, employing literary and philological methodology to establish authorship and dates of Old Testament texts. A leader of the Social Gospel movement, which, writes Donald Armentrout, "insisted that

poetic toward the end of his talk looking forward to the days "when the intellectual life blossoms out into the moral life, and the moral life flowers into the religious life."[92]

"Suppose you sit down to a well-furnished table at a hotel to eat your dinner," *Merry's Museum for Boys and Girls* proposed:

> The waiter hands you a bill of fare, upon which is printed a long list of good and wholesome dishes, and then quietly waits until you order what you wish. You are not expected to eat every one, however attractive they may be, but rather to select what you like best, – enough to make a modest meal, – and let that suffice. But the selection is not all. If you expect to gain health and strength by your dinner, you must eat it in a proper manner; that is, slowly. Otherwise Nature's work is improperly done, and your food become a source of bodily harm, instead of a benefit. Now, it is precisely so with the food of the mind, which comes to you through books.[93]

In the use of digestive and friendship analogies as in much else, American thought seems perhaps to have been influenced either directly or indirectly by much earlier thinking. Comparisons with and lessons from the classical philosophers were relatively commonplace (though not always approbative) throughout the century in magazines and newspapers, and so one wonders how many students might not have read Seneca in his second *Letter from a Stoic*, where both figures are deployed:

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the teachings of Jesus … should be applied to society, social institutions, and economic life, as well as to the individual." See Donald Armentrout, "Newton, Richard Heber," *American National Biography*, 7:508-09. Emphasis added.

[92] "The True Aim of Culture: The First in a Series of Sermons by the Rev. R. Heber Newton," *New York Times*, November 16, 1885, 8, PQHN.

[93] "Books and Reading," *Merry's Museum for Boys and Girls* 59, no. 1 (January 1871): 37, APSO. The same article, I should mention, also asserts that "an excellent book is certainly excellent company."

> You should be extending your stay among writers whose genius is unquestionable, deriving constant nourishment from them if you wish to gain anything from your readings that will find a lasting place in your mind. To be everywhere is to be nowhere. People who spend their whole life traveling abroad end up having plenty of places where they can find hospitality but no real friendships. The same must needs be the case with people who never set about acquiring an intimate acquaintanceship with any one great writers but skip from one to the another, paying flying visits to them all. Food that is vomited up as soon as it is eaten is not assimilated into the body and does not do one any good. . . . And if you say, "But I feel like opening different books at different times," my answer will be this: tasting one dish after another is the sign of a fussy stomach, and where the foods are dissimilar and diverse in range they lead to contamination of the system, not nutrition.[94]

Nineteenth-century Americans' use of figurative language to express the functional dynamics and end results of cultural development indicates the conflict between, on the one hand, their trust in the existence of cultural benefits and, on the other hand, the difficulty of explaining in a straightforward way why such trust was legitimate. Speaking of books as good friends or of pictures as wholesome food was a perfectly unsurprising phenomenon when we remember that the media in which such explanations regularly appeared were oriented toward popular audiences whose level of familiarity with high culture ranged from relatively ignorant to educated but inexpert.

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[94] Lucius Annaeus Seneca, "Letter II," in *Letters from a Stoic,"* trans. Robin Campbell (New York: Penguin Books, 1969), 33-34. Some representative examples of reference to classical philosophers in popular nineteenth-century sources follows. Interest in such questions seems to have been strongest in religious publications: J. H., "The Stoic Philosophy," *The Philadelphia Monthly Magazine: Devoted to General Literature and the Fine Arts* 1, no. 9 (July 1829): 585-96; E. M., "Marcus Aurelius and Emerson," *Friends' Intelligencer* 41, no. 22 (July 12, 1884): 347-49; George F. Mull, "The Civilization of Ancient Rome Compared With That of the Present Age, On the Plane of Morality," *Reformed Quarterly Review*, July 1887, 273-94; J. Hogan, "Pagan Virtue, I. II. III. IV. V. VI.," *The American Catholic Quarterly Review* 18, no. 69 (January 1893): 1-18; Leonard Woolsey Bacon, "Was Jesus a Stoic?" *New York Evangelist* 71, no. 30 (July 26, 1900): 9.

Whether through the use of figurative constructions or literal, precise advice, nineteenth-century Americans made the moral well being of the individual one of their main discourses on culture. On the one hand, the rhetoric and actions discussed above point to an abiding belief in the fragility of individual moral safety and so, in a republic and in an economy increasingly centered on the primacy of individual will, of the nation's well-being as a whole. On the other hand, this fragility could be seen instead as a promising malleability; individual minds and morals could be as easily fortified as degraded.

Overall then, we see in the nineteenth century not pro- and anti-culture camps, but instead a broad discourse focused on the relationships between cultural matter and individual people that, whether worried or optimistic, granted profound powers to both literature and images. This was an inwardly focused discourse, which is why I think we see the widespread resort to analogies of health, diet and companionship – one needed to take care of oneself. Discussions of the relationship between culture and morality tended to measure progress or failure without comparative references to other nations or eras, except to illustrate how internal success or dissipation had developed in other cases. In the next chapter I will analyze a simultaneously occurring discourse whose participants looked instead outward, who argued less about the moral fortitude of America and Americans and more about the United States' cultural standing in the eyes of the world and the roster of historical civilizations.

2 "MIGHTY CAUSES ARE COMBINING"

NATIONAL PRESTIGE, HISTORICAL RENOWN, AND BUILDING A CULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURE

> *To say nothing of such extraordinary geniuses as Aristotle, Homer, Newton and Milton; there are now as many minds, (and their number is continually augmenting) who can exhibit as powerfully as the men of any age, the style and sentiment which shall affect the heart, form the conscience and judgment, elevate the taste and store the memory. …And this is not ephemeral, mighty causes are combining and steadily working to the production of this effect.* —The Zodiac, 1835[1]

> *That art is, and always has been, in a sense the exponent of the real character of a nation is a fact noted by philosophers and writers on arts for a long time.* —William Stillman, 1886[2]

An 1888 article in *The Century* by poet and nature-writer John Burroughs reveals two themes which had long pervaded conversations about culture in the United States: purposive historical awareness and an acceptance of the idea of

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[1] "The Powers of the Press, No. II," *The Zodiac, a Monthly Periodical, Devoted to Science, Literature, and the Arts* 1, no. 3 (September 1835): 35, APSO.

[2] William J. Stillman, "The Decay of Art," *New Princeton Review* 2, no. 4 (July 1886): 20, APSO. Stillman, as will be seen below, was active in various cultural matters, most importantly the founding and editing of the art magazine *The Crayon.* See also "Some of the Teachings of Modern Art," *American Church Review* 26, no. 1 (January 1, 1874): 51, APSO, whose author argued that "With every civilized people, art is an essential element. Like the flower of the plant it expands only at a certain maturing stage of life. Of whatever kind and character that is, the art of the nation also must be. As the flower might be called the essence of a plant, in the same manner is art the essence of a people's character and mental life – not, indeed, the only exponent of it, but certainly not an insignificant one. We may, therefore, justly say that the art of a people and the art of a given age exhibit the characteristics or the people of that age. If reflects popular modes of thought and feeling to no slight extent. Let a person think little or much of art, have a living interest in the same, or none, its value as an exponent of a people's character, and its reacting influences upon that character, cannot reasonably be denied or doubted."

identifiable national character: "the English have the sense of the power of conduct, the Italians the sense of the power of beauty, the Germans the sense of the power of knowledge or science, the French the sense of the power of social life and manners. All these things are needed for our complete humanization or civilization; the ancient Greeks came nearer possessing the whole of them, and of moving on all these lines, than any other people."[3]

Nineteenth-century American writers had long worried that their nation was not so "near to possessing the whole," that the young republic consisted only of tycoons and shopkeeps, tradesmen and newsmen – at best of efficient and plain-talking managers, at worst of myopic, stubborn ignoramuses. Such anxiety coexisted uncomfortably alongside the conviction that America was a special place and a special idea; the jibes from Europeans who considered Americans unrefined and uncouth were simultaneously accepted and resented, and American advocates of cultural development sought to strengthen their grounds for rebuttal. "Few problems have received more contradictory solutions," a contributor to the *Southern Literary Messenger* had asserted as early as 1860, "than that suggested by the consideration of the connection between the fine Arts and national fortune and development. The subject is one which is thrust upon the attention of the historical student, at

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[3] John Burroughs, "Matthew Arnold's Criticism," *The Century: A Popular Quarterly* 36, no. 2 (June 1888): 186, C-MOA. Burroughs's early works were noted for their similarity to those of Ralph Waldo Emerson. He was a close friend to Walt Whitman as well as to Teddy Roosevelt and John Muir. He played a major role in establishing nature essays as a genre. See Stanley J. Kunitz and Howard Haycraft, eds., *American Authors, 1600-1900: A Biographical Dictionary of American Literature* (New York: H.W. Wilson Co., 1966): 120-121.

every step of his investigation, and to the patriot, philanthropist, and lover of truth, none can scarcely be of more intense and hopeful interest."[4]

Americans coveted the prestige that accompanied great cultural institutions and achievements abroad and from history. Why could the United States not have aesthetic evidence of its might like the Louvre or the Parthenon? Why did a nation so rich, so productive, so purportedly dynamic and creative, have no great national collections and storehouses for cultural matter which could be employed to educate and enlighten the populace and that would demand international recognition and respect? The cultural adequacy of the nation as a whole depended on citizens' exposure to cultural objects and ideas. None of that would happen if art treasures and literary material remained either overseas or locked away in the private studies of the rich.

In the following chapter I will devote attention to large-scale efforts at cultural development during roughly the last quarter of the century. First we will turn to the Centennial Exhibition of 1876, which catalyzed and focused debate about the nation's cultural character. Second I will examine the World's Fair of 1893, mainly in reference to its exhibition of art, to see what had changed since the Centennial. I will then explore the motivation, rhetoric and accomplishment surrounding the creation of what would become great museums of art in New York, Boston and Chicago. Next, the opening of what

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[4] "The Influence of the Fine Arts on the National Character," *The Southern Literary Messenger; Devoted to Every Department of Literature, and the Fine Arts* 30, no. 3 (March 1860): 202, APSO.

is now known as the Jefferson Building of the Library of Congress in 1897 provides another opportunity to see how far and to what end the country had moved during its half century and more of efforts at cultural refinement, dissemination and representation. This last set of events surrounding the library is perhaps especially appropriate and interesting since it not only was a public project, but indeed was contemplated and completed not by acts of private citizens or municipalities but by official representatives of the American populace themselves. Finally, the development of what I refer to as a cultural infrastructure unfolded in less visible ways too, and I will attempt to give some sense of the nation-wide enthusiasm for art exhibitions and especially for public libraries. These developments took place even outside the major cities and speak to the ubiquity of the impulse for cultural development.

"FREEDOM FEAST": THE 1876 CENTENNIAL[5]

The great Crystal Palace at London in 1851 had begun the heyday of the nineteenth-century international mega-fair as an event centered around fundamentally cosmopolitan – even if imperially cosmopolitan – thinking.[6] Other nations caught on and the many important international expositions

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[5] "Opening Day: Inauguration of the Freedom Feast," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 10, 1876, 2, AHN.

[6] As will be noted below, London's Crystal Palace was not technically the first international fair, but it was the biggest and most extravagant and inaugurated a new sense of scale and scope for such events.

followed, all centered on progress and achievement in the arts, commerce, industry and government. The United States seriously entered the game in 1853 with the erection in New York of America's own "Crystal Palace" in what later became Bryant Park at Forty-Second Street and Fifth Avenue. Given the obvious imitation of London's effort, Walt Whitman's claims that the New York Crystal Palace was "unsurpassed anywhere for beauty . . . an original perfectly proportioned American edifice" seem exaggerated, but the edifice was nonetheless impressive.[7] By some accounts attendance failed to meet expectations, and large crowds outside the exhibition ogled and encouraged all the vulgar street-side charlatanry nineteenth-century New York could offer – "as you near the Palace . . . dissipation and marvelous humbuggery are great indeed" commented one out-of-town visitor.[8] Nevertheless, America's first important international exhibition did attract attention, and on balance it was positive. *The United States Review* promised that "lovers of

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[7] Walt Whitman, "Grand Buildings in New York City," *Brooklyn Daily Times*, June 17, 1857. Quoted in Linda Hyman, *Crystal Palace/42 Street/1853-54*, exhibition catalog (New York: City University of New York, 1974). For a general study of the New York exhibition, Charles Hirschfield, "America on Exhibition: The New York Crystal Palace," *American Quarterly* 9, no. 2 (1957): 101-116. Also see Jonathan Meyer, *Great Exhibitions: London-New York-Paris 1851-1900* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK: Antique Collectors Club, 2006); Ed Cutler, "Passage to Modernity: Leaves of Grass and the 1853 Crystal Palace Exhibition in New York," *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* 16, no. 2 (1998): 64-89; Robert C. Post, "Reflections of American Science and Technology at the New York Crystal Palace Exhibition of 1853" *Journal of American Studies* 17, no. 3 (December 1983): 337-356.

[8] J. A. K., "The New York Crystal Palace," *Prairie Farmer* 13, no. 10 (October 1853): 382, APSO.

the fine arts will be gratified."[9] *Gleason's Pictorial Drawing-Room Companion* considered the exhibition "an event of great moral magnitude," whose "glorious statuary and noble pictures" represented "the response of the New world to the Old."[10] Speaking collectively of various recent international exhibitions, the *North American Review* proclaimed that the "Crystal Palaces are the topmost, magnificent flowers of the sturdy tree of industry, . . . the icy crowns that glorify the mountains of the world's accumulated labors."[11] And though the 1853 event offered more exhibits on industry and commerce than on the fine arts, the cultural offerings at the fair nevertheless seem to have been of intense interest to observers, some of whom hoped that pictures would bestow social benefits upon their admirers. "But see, yonder is the staircase to the picture gallery. Oh! but this is worth a journey from the East, or even from the far West," exclaimed a reporter for *The Monthly Religious Magazine*. "These paintings," he continued

> nearly seven hundred in number, so beautiful, of so many ages, and of so many different schools, – must have been fully worth the cost even of the Crystal Palace. How much refining influence must there have on the myriads of visitors who have walked up and down these works of art! How much good must have been effected for so many thousands of Americans, intelligent, quick, but strangers to art, by bringing about them the works and the spiritual presence of Correggio, Dolci, Murillo, Rubens . . . and a hundred other artists.
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> In this gallery hangs many an illustrated page of history, before

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[9] "The Crystal Palace," *The United States Review* 2, no. 1 (July 1853): 293, APSO.

[10] "Moral of the Crystal Palace," *Gleason's Pictorial Drawing-Room Companion* 5, no. 15 (October 8, 1853): 237, APSO.

[11] "The Moral Significance of the Crystal Palace," *North American Review* 79, no. 164 (July 1854): 1, APSO.

> which persons can stand and wonder, and grow thoughtful and earnest.[12]

Whitman noted the "very large and copious exhibition gallery of paintings . . . hundreds of pictures from Europe, many masterpieces – all an exhaustless study."[13] Even a correspondent for the *Prairie Farmer*, though judging this "Gothamite imitative speculation" to be largely a watered-down derivative of traditional State fairs, admitted that an atmosphere of "taste and refinement" characterized the exhibition, with its "fairy dream-like palace" and "some little gems of art."[14]

Twenty-three years later, by the time of the hundredth anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, a general recipe for exhibitions had been firmly established, and it was almost a matter of course that the Centennial

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[12] W. M., "Thoughts on the Crystal Palace," *The Monthly Religious Magazine* 11, no. 2 (February 1854): 86, APSO.

[13] Walt Whitman, "A World's Show," in *Whitman: Complete Poetry and Collected Prose* (New York: Library of America, 1982), 1276.

[14] J. A. K., "The New York Crystal Palace," *Prairie Farmer* 13, no. 10 (October 1853): 382, APSO. The point of view represented in this article poses interesting research questions for students of international exhibitions and world's fairs. While most historians, including me, have understood the evolution of American interest in such events as efforts to imitate European developments J. A. K. presents the possibility that fairs in 1853, 1876 and even 1893 took as models domestic State fairs as much as other international exhibitions. Even if organizers viewed their efforts through an international lens, it seems possible that the mass public had a quite different point of view on these events, and that what they expected from them had been shaped not so much by the rhetoric of exhibition organizers as by previous experiences at smaller scale, more localized exhibitions. One article in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, September 13, 1877, noted that a national fair was being planned in that city "to take place in the first half of November and to follow hard upon the State fairs, which are being held allover the country," which at least is evidence of widespread recognition of the importance and ubiquity of State fairs.

Exhibition planned for 1876 in Philadelphia would follow in large part the template developed over the last quarter century. An article in 1876 recounting the planning and development of the fair explained that the "value of all former exhibitions, both national and international, to the peoples among whom they have been held, teach most convincingly the lesson that this mode offers the grandest means of celebrating an important event."[15] American awareness of recent international fairs is further suggested by the long section devoted to them in *Frank Leslie's Historical Register of the Centennial Exposition* (1877). Leslie not only traced the tradition of such fairs as the one at Philadelphia back through European history all the way to the ancient Romans, who he asserted were among the first to recognize the "usefulness of fairs" but also included descriptions and illustrations of events at London (1851, '62, '71), Cork (1852), Dublin (1853), New York (1853), Munich (1854), Paris (1855), Moscow (1872) and Vienna (1873).[16] These were variously categorized as "international expositions," "industrial exhibitions," "world's fairs," or "national industrial exhibitions." For Americans, the 1876 Centennial would have an elevated and unique significance because of its unprecedented size and scope (which Leslie also documented) and because it combined the traditional concerns of an international exhibition with a mo-

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[15] "Freedom's Festival: Of the American Centennial, the International Exposition, Its Inception, Rise and Progress, Review of Works, Past and Present," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 20, 1876, 1, AHN.

[16] *A Facsimile of Frank Leslie's Illustrated Historical Register of the Centennial Exposition, 1876* (New York: Paddington Press, Ltd., 1974), 1.

mentous national celebration. This made it a special kind of fair, even as its organizers understood and accepted that they would be judged mainly with reference to their predecessors.[17] The most visible recent fairs had been those at Paris and Vienna, both of which were widely covered in magazines and newspapers alike while they were open, usually to acclaim and admiration. American organizers had dispatched observers to the 1873 Vienna exhibition, the first fair to have a separate art building, in order to see how things were arranged and presented.[18] The United States exhibition of 1876 would be larger than any of the others had been and open for a shorter time than most; by Frank Leslie's estimation, Philadelphia offered seventy-five acres, outdoing Vienna's second-largest fifty-six.[19]

As preparations for the 1876 celebration got underway a curious debate

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[17] Ibid., 6.

[18] Christine Hunter Donaldson, "The Centennial of 1876: The Exposition and Culture for America" (PhD diss., Yale University, 1948): 37-38. Donaldson's dissertation presents arguments and analysis similar to my own in that she sees the Centennial as an effort to both prove and improve the nation's cultural awareness and attainments. Her work deals extensively with the plans for and response to the art exhibits at the centennial, and also includes (114-131) a somewhat cursory but nevertheless very helpful discussion of an "art movement" in the United States after the Civil War, which is part of the backdrop against we can see all the developments discussed in my Chapter 2. An official report commissioned by the United States was published on the exhibition at Vienna: United States Commission to the Vienna Exhibition, Robert H. Thurston, ed., *Reports of the Commissioners of the United States to the International Exhibition Held at Vienna, 1873*, published under direction of the secretary of state by authority of Congress, 1873. On Vienna being the first exposition to have a separate art building, James Leonard Corning, "The Art Gallery of the Vienna Exposition," *The Independent, Devoted to the Consideration of Politics, Social and Economic Tendencies, History, Literature, and the Arts* 25 (August 14, 1873): 1017, APSO.

[19] *A Facsimile of Frank Leslie's Illustrated Historical Register of the Centennial Exposition, 1876* (New York: Paddington Press, Ltd., 1974), 21.

formed around the diplomatic semantics of soliciting foreign interest. Though Congress explicitly intended the exhibition to be international – "An Act to provide for celebrating the one hundredth anniversary of American independence, by holding an international exhibition of art, manufactures, and products of the soil and mine" – the Secretary of State took great care to remind overseas American emissaries that the communications on the behalf of the President

> extended no "invitation" to foreign powers to participate in the exhibition. He was not authorized to do so, as and while he desires to attract as much attention and interest as possible thereto, he carefully confines himself to "commending" the celebration of the centennial anniversary of American independence. . . . It is presumed that you will not have failed to observe the guarded language of the President's proclamation, and the difference between it and that which would be used in extending an invitation to other powers.[20]

It seems that the Secretary meant to emphasize the absence of any suggestion that the U.S. would be helping defray the expenses which would attend other nations' participation. Communications back from the executives of other nations failed to notice the fine distinctions using "invite" and "invitation" freely. Nevertheless the message got through and America avoided committing public funds to subsidize other countries' expenses. Such caution seems less surprising when we see that Congress resisted appropriating public funds for the *American* portion of the exposition, even though hundreds of thousands had been outlaid for the country's participation at Paris and Vi-

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[20] "The Centennial; Shall It Be An International Exhibition? The Case As Presented by the President of the Commission," *New York Times*, March 9, 1874, 2, PQHN.

enna in the very recent past. This "serious and widespread opposition to any large expenditure by the nation" – the result of the Panic of 1873 and subsequent economic fallout – coincided with widespread contemporary public enthusiasm about the exposition.[21] In the end, though the federal government did help by issuing bonds, the Centennial was largely funded privately, by individuals and organizations, and also locally, by municipalities and state governments, each of which would have its own exhibit. Perhaps the necessity for local and state fundraising even tended to help increase interest and concrete support for the effort. Without intending to do so, the composite funding schemes for the exhibition presented an exhibit in themselves, a federalism of finance.

Despite predictable early scuffles over which city would host the Centennial, including suspicions by Philadelphia planners that New York had hatched a plan to "steal the vantage from the ground in this matter," most everyone who wrote publicly on the subject eventually agreed that small differences needed to be placed aside in the effort to present an impressive spec-

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[21] "The Centennial Anniversary of the Promulgation of the Declaration of Independence," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, February 26, 1870, 1, AHN; "No Retreat: The Centennial Emergency," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, March 26, 1874, 1, AHN. See also "Vienna Commission," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 15, 1874, 2, AHN: "The case of the Centennial during the last year, has not made that progress which its friends could desire; financial embarrassments throughout our country have checked the contributions necessary for the furtherance of the object, and sectional opposition to Congressional aid for a while had nearly overwhelmed the scheme; and the failure of the international exposition seemed imminent; but out citizens came nobly to the rescue, and with private subscriptions and State and municipal appropriations promptly made, created the reaction which causes the success of the project once more to appear assured."

tacle to the world and to Americans from all corners of the country.[22] Once it had become clear the fair would be held in Philadelphia ("the Mecca of American nationality" to one enthusiastic resident),[23] talk of national cooperation generally prevailed; "New York loved and trusted Pennsylvania in the old colonial days, and that love and trust is still unbroken," New Yorker Stewart L. Woodford assured a Philadelphia audience.[24] This genial spirit remained despite near-certainty that the host city, whichever it was, would reap great financial benefits. In efforts at good will, the people and the city corporation of Philadelphia worked in earnest to raise money (hundreds of thousands) well and early.[25]

The event itself was an immense undertaking in purely physical terms. Housing everything from paintings to industrial innovations, the Centennial's many buildings and columned pavilions presented a formidable scene, albeit one that would be mostly dismantled after six months of use. The art gallery covered almost two acres and was constructed of "brick, granite, and

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[22] "The Proposed Industrial Exhibition in New York," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 1, 1870, 4, AHN; "No Retreat: The Centennial Emergency," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, March 26, 1874, 1, AHN.

[23] "The Centennial Anniversary of the Promulgation of the Declaration of Independence," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, February 26, 1870, 1, AHN.

[24] "The Proposed Industrial Exhibition in New York," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 1, 1870, 4, AHN; "No Retreat: The Centennial Emergency," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, March 26, 1874, 1, AHN.

[25] "Report of the Director General," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 21, 1874 reported that the "State of Pennsylvania and City of Philadelphia" had spent $500,000 on the art building alone."

glass, and the law required that it should be perfectly fireproof."[26] The main exhibition hall, which alone was projected to cost around two million dollars, dwarfed the art building and created approximately twenty acres (or 871,200 square feet) of interior exhibition space.[27] In all, the grounds would include spaces to show off brick-making, locks, wells, "gas machines", furnaces, engines, art and sculpture, tea and coffee, butter and cheese factories, brewers' equipment, agricultural implements, pomology (the science of growing fruit), wagons, "women", log cabins, horticulture, hunting accessories and sewing machines, as well as separate spaces for American States and foreign nations.[28]

What though did American organizers and visitors hope would be the meaning of the whole affair? What, other than the perfectly natural idea of celebrating a hundred years of independence, would the Centennial accomplish? And how should the celebration be presented?[29] On the whole, the ar-

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[26] "The Centennial Celebration; The Assurance Of Success. Repayment Of The Stock. The Benefits Accruing To New-York. What Our Self-Respect Requires. The Propriety Of The Celebration," *New York Times*, December 22, 1874, 5, PQHN.

[27] For comparison, 871,200 square feet is roughly a little under half the total exhibition space at the modern Metropolitan Museum of Art in 2008.

[28] Nations represented included the Argentine Federation, Belgium, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, China, Demark, Ecuador, Egypt, Algeria, France, Germany, Great Britain (with Australia and Canada), Guatemala, El Salvador, Hawaii, Haiti, Honduras, Japan, Liberia, Mexico, Nicaragua, the Netherlands, Norway, Persia, Peru, Portugal, Siam, Spain, Sweden, Tunis, Turkey, Columbia and Venezuela.

[29] For a detailed argument about the strategies and theories that guided the Centennial organizers efforts to present the contents of the exhibition, which contextualizes the centennial's system of organization with reference to a wide range of Western thinkers,

rival of the centennial year of American independence seems to have been viewed as an opportunity to demonstrate the progress possible (in all fields) in a healthy democratic republic. In the words of the official United States Centennial Commission, it would be "an Exhibition of the natural resources of the country and their development, and of its progress in those arts which benefit mankind in comparison to those of older nations."[30] The *Philadelphia Inquirer* thought "the whole world should be bidden to view the giant-like strides which we have made in science and art, as a people, under the blessings of constitutional government."[31] More recently, art historian Kimberly Orcutt has argued that "the search for an underlying logic to the country's development spoke to the intellectual need for a triumphal account of American progress that would link the country's illustrious past to its troubled present as the nation dealt with the after-effects of the Civil War and the traumas of Reconstruction."[32]

Centennial enthusiasts also hoped the experience could unify the country in a new and fuller way. Perhaps because of their relative isolation, residents

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from Descartes to Foucault, see Bruno Giberti, *Designing the Centennial: A History of the 1876 International Exhibition in Philadelphia* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2002); Gary B. Nash, "Workshop of the World, Schoolhouse of History," in *First City: Philadelphia and the Forging of Historical Memory* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006): 261-313.

[30] United States Centennial Commission, Committee on Classification, "Report," 35. Quoted in Giberti, *Designing the Centennial*, 24.

[31] "The Proposed Industrial Exhibition in New York," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 1, 1870, 4, AHN.

[32] Kimberly Orcutt, "Revising History: Creating a Canon of American Art at the Centennial Exhibition" (PhD diss., City University of New York, 2005): 5.

of the expanding middle sections of the nation seemed especially taken with this idea. *Chicago Daily Tribune* editors insisted that "the best national use which can be made of the Exhibition will be more firmly to unite all sections of the Republic and to prepare the way for future progress by removing all the obstacles which are now blocking up that way."[33] Another optimist argued that "the alienations and animosities engendered by the civil war should be buried at Philadelphia. No sectional estrangement should survive the centennial."[34] This urgent rhetoric of reconciliation would in fact soon bear other fruit in the form of the political compromises of 1877, though its taste would be bitter indeed for the millions of formerly enslaved Americans who would be abandoned to a ruthless reassertion of racial hegemony in the South.[35]

To those who might wonder whether the country was up to the task, whether there existed "sufficient capacity and integrity in this country to

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[33] *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 6, 1873, 8:4.

[34] B. G. Northrop, "Education At The Centennial," *Christian Union* 11, no. 26 (June 30, 1875): 544, APSO.

[35] For an in-depth examination of the presentation of the events and lessons of the Civil War at the Centennial, see Susannah Gold, "Imaging Memory: Re-Presentations of the Civil War at the 1876 Centennial Exhibition" (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2004). On the various efforts to reconcile whites in the North and South with one another, often at the expense of African Americans, see David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001); Judith Ann Giesberg, "'To Forget and Forgive': Reconstructing the Nation in the Post Civil War Classroom," *Civil War History* 52, no. 3 (September 2006): 282-302; and Timothy Paul Caron, "'How Changeable are the Events of War': National Reconciliation in the Century Magazine's 'Battles and Leaders of the Civil War,'" *American Periodicals: A Journal of History, Criticism and Bibliography* 16, no. 2 (2006): 151-171.

successfully conduct a great exhibition," one common pattern of response pointed to the absurdity of such worries in the face of the innumerable commercial and organizational feats accomplished in the decades since Lexington and Concord.[36] Nevertheless, American observers often cast a nervous glance toward Europe, and a wish to prove American capabilities to the world at large colored much of the enthusiasm for the fair. The Centennial Commissioners from Illinois, whose addresses were regularly reprinted in local newspapers, agreed that Congress had "wisely decided that the birthday of the great Republic can be most fittingly celebrated by the universal collection and display of all the trophies of its progress. It is designed to bring together . . . not only the varied productions of our mines and of the soil, but types of all the intellectual triumphs of our citizens, specimens of everything that America can furnish, whether from the brains or the hands of her children, and *thus make evident to the world the advancement of which a self-governed people is capable*."[37] Philadelphians agreed that the Centennial would properly call attention to "a nation so rapidly risen from struggling to a position of power and prosperity, as at once to command the respect of all governments and the admiration of the world."[38]

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[36] "The Centennial; Shall It Be An International Exhibition? The Case As Presented by the President of the Commission," *New York Times*, March 9, 1874, 2, PQHN.

[37] *Chicago Daily Tribune*, November 16, 1872, 2:2. Emphasis added.

[38] "The Centennial Anniversary of the Promulgation of the Declaration of Independence," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, February 26, 1870, 1, AHN.

Certainly the Centennial succeeded if popularity was success. Though the gates officially opened at nine o'clock on its first day, the press reported over-eager fairgoers trying to force their way in early, the first of an "almost unbroken stream of visitors" that continued throughout the day.[39] Six months later, with the fair about to close, a group of citizens wrote to the Centennial Committee to request that, since "the Art Gallery was crowded from morning til night, and frequently it was not possible for visitors to obtain more than a passing view of splendid works of painting and sculpture there displayed," the gallery remain open even as workmen were boxing things up and dismantling the exhibitions.[40]

This must have been good to hear for supporters and organizers of the Centennial, who sincerely hoped that tangible benefits would accrue to the American populace itself, improving knowledge of practical matters as well as taste and discretion in intellectual and artistic endeavor. Writing in the *Christian Union* (a magazine once edited by Henry Ward Beecher and which would in 1893 become *Outlook*), public education advocate B. G. Northrop had looked back to Vienna and hoped that Americans would have the same experiences as those touted by the Austrian Minister in residence in Wash-

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[39] "Inaugurated: The Exposition Opened," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 11, 1876, 1, AHN.

[40] *Philadelphia Inquirer*, November 13, 1876, 4, AHN.

ington, Baron von Sharz-Senburn.[41] According to the Baron, "these exhibitions tend to the improvement of the public taste and the enlightenment of the minds of the people. . . . In former times," he continued, "the taste in Austria was bad. Not having seen beautiful productions, the people had no artistic judgment," nothing to give them "the right idea of the beautiful."[42]

Many more refined Americans would have recognized all too well those "former times," as the behavior of some among the republican multitudes in 1876 fell a bit short of "tasteful". Indeed mocking and mourning the sometimes indelicate behavior of American visitors would become something newspaper men and magazine columnists could reliably resort to at any time, and did. Complaints were registered that Americans in the art pavilion had the harmful habit of pointing out details of paintings to the detriment of the works themselves. "How," asked the *New York Times*, "can [the Centennial's Managers] save the articles on exhibition from the critical cane and explanatory umbrella of enthusiastic visitors?" This writer's complaints continued, and he culminated by suggesting a tension, in America, between cultural refinement and chivalry:

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[41] Birdsey G. Northrop (1847-1898) worked as minister after graduating from Yale and went on to serve on the Boards of Education in both Massachusetts and Connecticut, the latter for sixteen years. Considered to be the driving force behind the creation of Arbor Day his dual interests in forestry and education took him around the country on lecture tours as well as on a study trip to Europe in the late-1870s. See "Northrop, Birdsey G.," *National Cyclopedia of American Biography* (New York: James T. White & Company, 1909), 10:225.

[42] B. G. Northrop, "Education At The Centennial," *Christian Union* 11, no. 26 (June 30, 1875): 544, APSO. This statement also indicates the new of public availability of art, since Austria certainly had certainly long had more than its share of artistic treasures.

> As present, the Western statesman of the Democratic type wanders through the art department, punching a Madonna's nose with his umbrella by way of emphasizing his opinion that "thisyer woman ain't no beauty:" or tracing with the point of his jack-knife the outline of one of Constables trees, which he frankly admits is "a well-drawed oak." Persons . . . tap the marble statues with stout walking sticks, in order to ascertain if they are actual stone or imitation plaster; and hordes of thoughtful citizens from all parts of the country expectorate on polished pedestals in order to "avoid soiling the floor with tobacco juice out of respect for the ladies."[43]

The *Literary World* sneeringly declared, "one gathers rare amusement in the hosts that tread on his heels and entangle the buttons of his coat, in these spacious haunts of Art. . . . One pushing lady, glancing at 'Pan and The Bacchantes,' thus enlightens her companions: 'Pan and his Bacchanates.' Another, encountering the grim likeness of Julian the Apostate, cries, 'Oh, there is Julian the Apostle!' Not to be outdone by the rival sex, a man, facing the picture 'The Rising of Rienzi,' – 'Humph!' said he; 'The Risin' of Ryan's Eye!'"[44]

Clearly, many relatively cultured Americans were keenly self-conscious about their ruder compatriots' "poking propensities" before the eyes of the world.[45] But though some of this type of commentary sounds more like un-

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[43] "The Centennial Problem" *New York Times*, May 26, 1876, 4, PQHN. This was an oft noted problem. See for instance John V. Sears, "Art in Philadelphia," *The Aldine: the Art Journal of America* 8, no. 6 (December 1, 1876): 198, APSO, who admonishes his readers to remind their less refined countrymen that artworks are "only for the eyes".

[44] "The Centennial," *The Literary World; A Monthly Review of Current Literature*, November 1, 1876, 85, APSO.

[45] "The Fine Arts: Department of Sculpture," *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, May 20, 1876, 1. Quoted in Orcutt, "Revising History: Creating a Canon of American Art at the Centennial Exhibition" (PhD diss., City University of New York, 2005): 143.

charitable ridicule than factual reporting, the evidence suggests that Centennial audiences' tendency to render exhibits interactive did in fact present a real problem, and the art galleries, whose "beauty . . . [could not] fail to impress every beholder," were especially vulnerable to inappropriate attention from viewers.[46] Only about a week and a half into the exhibition, the Austrian exhibit actually had to be closed temporarily after being "defaced by marks from umbrellas, knives, &c."[47] Even before the Austrian incident, the *Inquirer* had reported that

> there are serious and well-founded complaints from all classes of exhibitors that visitors handle goods to such an extent that the latter are defaced, soiled or injured in other ways. In the art department scratches have been made on some of the finest paintings by boorish visitors, who undertake to trace with their canes or umbrellas on the canvas what they considered especially interesting features. Some of the statuary is blackened already with handling, and a few pieces have actually been picked with penknives by visitors who are anxious to ascertain what the material was. Orders have been issued directing guards to take into custody any person found acting in this rude and stupid manner.[48]

Americans' sensitivity to appearances of cultural inferiority came into play in another sense, and *Christian Union* felt forced to admit that, with re-

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[46] "Opening Day: Inauguration of the Freedom Feast," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 10, 1876, 2, AHN.

[47] "The World's Fair: A Large Attendance Saturday," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 22, 1876, 2, AHN.

[48] "The Exposition: A Fine Attendance Yesterday," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 16, 1876, 2, AHN. Besides being interesting instances of frustration with the host country's democratic audiences, episodes like these also suggest that Americans were actually learning how to physically interact with "art" and (slowly apparently) getting accustomed to the accepted etiquette of museums and galleries, including the ultimately simple and eminently reasonable, but not necessarily self-evident, rule that works on display should not be touched or prodded.

gard to the art itself, "our best is very good, but we cannot hope to compete in general with the first artists of the European schools. To that we may as well make up our minds at once and save ourselves the pain and disappointment."[49] The editor at *Appleton's* had "but one fear" in regard to the Centennial exhibition, "and that pertains to the art display." On the one hand, "it is a peculiarity of American art that its best results are of a character unsuited to the great spaces of a huge exhibition hall." On the other hand, "unfortunately, where our better painters hesitate to go, third and fourth rate men rush in . . . these half-trained men cover expansive canvases with historical and allegorical subjects, in which the tremendous story is expected to cover a multitude of errors in coloring and general execution."[50] A Special Correspondent for the *New York Times* admitted to some uncertainty before the exhibits opened, hoping that "the country may not be shamed before the face of strangers." He proceeded, however, to a blunt, adversarial, strategic evaluation of the effect of the placing of galleries: "the authorities have with great judgment placed our painters in juxtaposition with those representing Great Britain, with whom we are more able to contend than with those of France and Germany, who have also, with excellent discrimination, been placed in antagonism."[51]

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[49] "Art Notes," *The Christian Union*, October 13, 1875, 308, APSO.

[50] "Editor's Table," *Appleton's Journal of Literature Science and Art*, April 15, 1876, 503, APSO.

[51] Our Special Correspondent, "Art and the Centennial," *New York Times*, February 5, 1876, 5, PQHN.

Art critic Clarence Cook, writing for the *New York Tribune*, where he had formerly written a regular column on art, could not agree that the art exhibit had been well laid out: "a more dreary, aimless, and bewildering place . . . cannot be imagined," he reported.[52]

All in all a mixture of enthusiasm with tentativeness constituted the sentiment surrounding the American art exhibits at the Centennial of 1876. It was an important moment for the United States. The nation's own art would be on display, seeking the approbation of both domestic and European eyes. From the other side, this was a chance for America *as an audience*, to gauge and proclaim (or not) their critical and cultural abilities *vis à vis* the fine arts. The *American Architect and Building News*, among others, considered that the Centennial might be a good opportunity for American picture audiences to show they were no longer ready to praise and to buy just any foreign mediocrities that washed ashore.[53] It had been something of a scandal, since the 1850s at least, that large numbers of fakes were sold to American collectors, including not only aspiring-but-inexpert middle-class citizens buying from emulative reflexes but also wealthy patrons who spent lavishly in Europe only to find years later that they had been had. Montague Marks, critic for the *Art Amateur*, articulated a widely held belief when he admitted that, "the

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[52] "The Fine Art Department: American Pictures," *New York Tribune*, June 1, 1876, 8. Quoted in Kimberly Orcutt, "Revising History: Creating a Canon of American Art at the Centennial Exhibition" (PhD diss., City University of New York, 2005): 128.

[53] "The Fine Arts at the Centennial – VII: The French and Spanish Pictures," *The American Architect and Building News* 1, no. 33 (August 12, 1876): 261, APSO.

United States, to the mind of the average French artist or art dealer, is an excellent place to sell pictures . . . and therefore it may pay to be civil to Americans; [but] they laugh at us while they take our money.[54] "The American buyer's . . . money always commanded respect, but not so his judgment," concluded one twentieth-century historian of the nineteenth century art scene.[55] More optimistically, *The American Architect* agreed that the United States "ha[d] long had a reputation as an easy picture-market," but hoped that citizen art-lovers were "fast gaining credit for the taste and good judgment."[56] On the whole, however, Americans made a decent show of things in the art hall. Critics and visitors disagreed over successes and agreed over failures, to be sure, but the general consensus was that the nation had escaped embarrassment in its art if not in its visitors.[57]

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[54] Montague Marks, "My Note Book," *The Art Amateur: A Monthly Journal Devoted to Art in the Household* 29, no. 6 (November 1893): 32, APSO.

[55] Donaldson, "The Centennial of 1876: The Exposition and Culture for America" (PhD diss., Yale University, 1948): 119. Looking back from the end of the century, *Forum* agreed that the period after the Civil War was characterized by vulnerabilities of American art audiences and purchasers: "It was the prosperity that set in after the Civil War, coupled with the ignorance of many of those who acquired wealth at that time, which tempted the importation of foreign paintings." Gustav Kobbé, "American Art Coming Into Its Own," *Forum* 28 (May 1899): 299, APSO.

[56] "The Fine Arts at the Centennial – VII: The French and Spanish Pictures," *The American Architect and Building News* 1, no. 33 (August 12, 1876): 261, APSO.

[57] Orcutt, "Revising History: Creating a Canon of American Art at the Centennial Exhibition," thoroughly examines the often heated conflict between different schools of American painters (mainly New Yorkers still faithful to some version of Hudson River school aims versus a Philadelphia-centered crowd more interested in and influenced by contemporary European ideas and practices) who vied for space and control in the Centennial's Art Annex. For a study of American painters in Europe in the late nineteenth century, see Kathleen Adler, Erica E. Hirshler, H. Barbara Weinberg, et. al., *Americans*

Whether the proficiency of the United States in any *non*-artistic endeavor was either equal to or quickly approaching the best in Europe hardly presented a serious question; by 1876 this was as evident as anything could be. In many respects Americans appeared to possess essentially limitless reserves of unshakable confidence, buttressed as their assessments were by the philosophical belief that a meritocratic *laissez-faire* democracy must inevitably outdistance the rotting political leftovers of the European system. That free men created dynamic, innovative, profitable societies had been one of the lessons taken from the Civil War, which many plausibly had interpreted as a battle of modernity versus backwardness. No doubts then, plagued the exhibits of engines and buggies, of brewing technique and railroad materials and ironworks, for these things resulted naturally, as nineteenth-century Americans understood things, from the energetic application of political freedom and practical wisdom.

At the close of the Centennial, *Scientific American* attempted to take stock of the event as a whole. "A vast national enterprise," it was approvingly noted, "has not only been successfully carried through, but has included such a representation of the fruits of American industry and genius as has never before been seen."[58] While the article's author admitted that "we cannot yet point to special results due to the Centennial, we may at least be assured that

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in Paris, 1860–1900 (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2006). Published for the exhibition "Americans in Paris, 1860–1900" at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

[58] "The Close of the Centennial Exhibition," *Scientific American* 35, no. 22 (November 25, 1876): 336, APSO.

it has imparted to our people a valuable and healthy appreciation of the 'goodness which lieth abroad.' . . . On the other hand, it has opened the eyes of the world to the fact that we are ready to compete."[59] Finally, Americans, it was asserted, had "learned to compare our own work with that done in Europe; and having found where we are excelled as well as where we excel, we have stored up a sock of ideas, sure to bear rich fruit in the future."[60] One event in that prospective future would be the other most important international exhibition organized by the United States in the nineteenth century, the World's Columbian Exhibition of 1893 in Chicago.

THE CHICAGO FAIR: 1893 IN ART

> *"Surely the most impressive thing about the Fair was not what it gave but what it promised."* —Harriet Monroe, 1893[61]

Among historians, the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893 has often been conscripted to support various interpretations of the racial and social failures of the late-nineteenth century. To many late-twentieth-century

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[59] "The Close of the Centennial Exhibition," *Scientific American* 35, no. 22 (November 25, 1876): 336, APSO.

[60] Ibid.

[61] Harriet Monroe, letter to the editor, reproduced in "Impressions of the World's Fair," *The Critic: A Weekly Review of Literature and the Arts* 20, no. 614 (November 25, 1893): XVIA, APSO. Harriet Monroe (1860-1936) wrote freelance criticism and reviews for Chicago and New York newspapers, was a frequent correspondent of Robert Louis Stevenson, served as art critic for the *Chicago Tribune* and wrote the "Columbian Ode" which was read at the official opening of the World's Columbian Exposition. Later she founded *Poetry* magazine, which was an important publisher of modernist literature for the generation around World War I. See Kimberly Markowski, "Monroe, Harriet," *American National Biography*, 15:679-80.

scholars, the Fair was an instance of coarse, arrogant, colonialist objectification of international others. What, to take one example, made it acceptable for women from the South Seas to lounge shirtless, in zoo-like environs, gawked at by fastidiously buttoned-up white visitors? "On the Midway at the World's Columbian Exposition," according to historian Robert Rydell, "evolution, ethnology and popular amusements interlocked as active agents and bulwarks of hegemonic assertion of ruling-class authority."[62] From here, topics from race relations to imperial military expeditions may be pursued, and have been repeatedly.[63] And on these grounds, with hindsight, judgment is easy: on its face the Fair was tinged with racism, as were many public events in the United States in 1893, three years before *Plessy vs. Ferguson* and well into the Jim Crow era; likewise, the Fair did nurture colonialist fantasies, seven years before America's splendid little war against Spain.

But one could almost forget, reading much of the historical literature, that the fair in 1893 also offered an art exhibition the likes of which the

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[62] Robert W. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 41.

[63] See for example: Wim De Wit, James Gilbert, Robert W. Rydell, and Neil Harris, *Grand Illusions: Chicago's World's Fair of 1893* (Chicago: Chicago Historical Society, 1993); John P. Burris, *Exhibiting Religion: Colonialism and Spectacle at International Expositions, 1851-1893* (Charlottesville, University Press of Virginia, 2001); Robert W. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair*; Curtis M. Hinsley, "The World as Marketplace: Commodification of the Exotic at the World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago, 1893," in Ivan Karp and Steven Levine, eds., *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* (Washington, D. C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1991); Erik Trump, "Primitive Woman–Domestic(ated) Woman: The Image Of The Primitive Woman At The 1893 World's Columbian Exposition," *Women's Studies* 27, no. 3 (1998): 215-258; Pamela Potter-Hennessey, "The Sculpture at the 1893 Chicago World's Columbian Exposition: International Encounters and Jingoistic Spectacles" (PhD diss., University of Maryland, 1996).

world had never known, in variety, in scale, in attendance numbers, in ambition.[64] And the art exhibits at the Columbian Exposition – so relentlessly documented and commented on by contemporaries, so freighted for them with meanings about culture generally and its place in the United States – present an unusually rich opportunity to listen to the ideas that invigorated debates over fine art and high culture in the late-nineteenth century. There is more to see in the World's Fair than oppression and imperialism, and I will argue here that the fair provided occasion for the expression and implementation of important aspects of cultural discourse in America.

An American of the twenty-first century will be very unlikely to have seen anything on the scale of the World's Fair, unless she may have attended the Olympic Games. But even an Olympiad – where vast amounts of money go toward building and arranging stadia, cafeterias, lodging, transportation routes, security procedures and so forth – pales beside the sheer scope of the enterprise at the White City. For while the Games give a fairly exhaustive representation of human sport, the Columbian Exposition and its predecessors sought to represent virtually everything else.[65] Having already men-

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[64] An exception is Carolyn Kinder Carr, "Prejudice and Pride: Presenting American Art at the 1893 Chicago World's Columbian Exposition," in *Revisiting the White City: American Art at the 1893 World's Fair* (Washington, D. C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1993), 62-123. Besides the insightful analysis and research that characterize this chapter, *Revisiting the White City* is extremely valuable and helpful for its comprehensive listing and nearly comprehensive reproduction of the works of art on view at the fair.

[65] We might also say Disney World achieves this scale but, despite its obvious immensities, it differs in the sense that no disinterested parties I'm aware of have argued for its usefulness in terms of serious cultural or moral enrichment.

tioned the efforts at breadth common to world expositions in our discussion of the Centennial, I will here merely attempt to begin to give an impression of the nature of the art exhibition and its audiences in Chicago.

Inside the classically-inspired Palace of Fine Arts, which after the Exposition became the Field Museum of Natural History, every effort had been made to render the display of art as comprehensive as possible. Most countries in the world displayed works, with the most objects coming from European and American artists. To survey just the titles and creators of every object on view, one had to work through a 500-page booklet of unleaded nine-point type. There were over 700 "black and white drawings" alone, not to mention thousands of oil paintings, at least 375 of them forwarded just from the New York Selection Committee.[66] And these numbers represented not a "collection," such as museums have and much of which is at any given time in storage; all the items were displayed at once in the vast halls, separated by nation and by medium.

For a small price, patrons could choose from among numerous guidebooks and pamphlets promising not only to list the exhibited works but to recommend, by explaining certain routes and strategies, methods to maximize one's viewing pleasure and profit. Indeed, such guides were thought to be of utmost importance due to the size of the entire exhibit. Without help, visitors might fall into "mere gallery gazing," which one guidebook author,

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[66] "Art Exhibit Grand," *Chicago Tribune*, April 30, 1893, 42, PQHN; "Art Works Chosen," *Chicago Tribune*, January 23, 1893, 9, PQHN.

Professor Charles Farrar, reminded his readers was "beneath earnest people, and almost disrespectful to the artists whom we more and more wish to honor."[67]

The earnest efforts to help visitors through the art palace take us back to an idea laid out in chapter one, that the important meeting of picture and viewer would be richer and more beneficial the more the viewer could be informed and guided by deferring to experts' judgments. Contemporaries talked of systems of "checking off" sites at the Fair, including those at the art exhibit. This was just what it sounds like, and today one can see visitors' efforts recorded in extant catalogues of the art palace. Records such as these suggest that visitors indeed took care before entrance to decide what most they would like to see. One lady, a relatively casual art lover from the looks of her catalogue, dutifully checked off every building dedicated to an American State but seems only to have planned on visiting two paintings, both very popular with audiences and much discussed by critics. The first was a French picture of Pope Leo XIII, reputed to be the only portrait he sat for, and the second was "The Flagellants," one of the great successes of the Fair, by the American Carl Marr.[68]

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[67] Charles S. Farrar, *Guide to the Best Paintings in the Fine Arts Building of the Columbian Exposition (Guide to the Fine Arts Building of the Columbian Exposition, Showing the Definite Location of Five Hundred of the Best Pictures* (Chicago: The Graphic Company, 1893), 3-4.

[68] W. E. Hamilton, *The Time Saver: A Book Which Names and Locates 5,000 Things at the World's Fair That Visitors Should Not Fail To See* (Chicago: W. E. Hamilton, 1893), 47, 52.

Despite the abundance of guidance offered, audiences at the art exhibit found a systematic approach not only demanding, but perhaps unrealistic, given the perceived unaccountability of tastes. At the art palace, reported the well traveled western journalist John Hanson Beadle for the *Idaho Statesman*, "I think myself that one enjoys a picture more if he studies it out before learning the name. First comes a group and standing before some painting in which there is, to my eye at least, more color and art than beauty, they exclaim 'Why what a messy mixed up thing it is! It's a shame to put such a thing here! Come on girls, it's horrid!' The next group stand in silence till the catalogue is consulted and the title read, then they gaze a while and warmly approve."[69] In *The Century World's Fair Book for Boys and Girls*, prolific author and *St. Nicholas* editor Tudor Jenks described the experience of one of his fictional adolescent fairgoers:

> They issued several useful little handbooks to the Fair. "The Time Saver," "The Nutshell Guide," "Gems of the Fair," "What to See and How to Find It" were some of them and by reading these one could be fairly sure of not overlooking many of the "best" things in the trade exhibits. But in the Art Galleries such books can be of little use. The pictures Phillip looked at pleased him for various reasons. . . . No two boys or men would feel just alike; and you can no more let another pick out your pictures than you can let a stranger order your

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[69] J. H. Beadle, "Variety of Criticism: Works of Art as Seen Through Different Eyes," *Idaho Statesman*, September 5, 1893, 4, AHN. Beadle (1840-1897) left his home in Indiana and completed law school at the State University of Michigan in 1867 but after a year of practice switched to journalism as a career. He worked first in Cincinnati and then in Utah for the *Salt Lake Reporter* for almost a decade. Later he contributed essays and editorials to various magazines and newspapers and published *A Hoosier Abroad*, his account of his travels to Canada and Europe in the late-1880s. See "Beadle, John Hanson," *National Cyclopedia of American Biography* (1922), 18:344.

meals.[70]

"Phillip," in this case, though he may have questioned the utility of the guidebooks, revered the artists themselves: "As the boy went through the galleries he felt a strong sense of gratitude to the hundreds of skillful, keen sighted men who had studied nature and mankind until they could show him in an instant's glance just how things were and are the whole world round."[71]

This seemingly simple statement gathers together several strands of thought: reverence for the past, the idea of natural genius and mastery in the arts, the belief (on the other hand) that artistic success depended on hard work, and the idea that art reveals eternal verities. Following up on the first and last points in the list, we see in the organization of the art exhibits at the fair two complementary aims. It sought first to show the development of art in the world "retrospectively" from an art-historical vantage point and with an eye toward evaluations of progress, and second to show the present state

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[70] Tudor Jenks, *The Century World's Fair Book for Boys and Girls: Being the Adventures of Harry and Phillip with Their Tutor, Mr. Douglass at the World's Columbian Exhibition* (New York: The Century Co., 1893), 134, 137. Also note again here the dietary language. Another revelatory example of instruction for youths encountering visual art is Charles H. Caffin, "How to Study Pictures," *St. Nicholas* (November 1904), which discusses similarities and differences among pictures of Mary and Christ Enthroned by Cimbue, Giotto, Botticelli and Memling with reference both to historical developments and aesthetic properties. Tudor Jenks (1857-1922) was trained as a lawyer at Columbia and practiced on and off during his other occupation as writer and editor. Most of this works were for children or adolescents and he was editor at *St. Nicholas* for fifteen years (1887-1902). He was the grandnephew of Wendell Phillips and also related to Oliver Wendell Holmes. Some of his many other books were *Imaginations; or Truthless Tales* (1895), *In the Days of Chaucer* (1904) and *In the Days of Shakespeare* (1904). See "Jenks, Tudor," *National Cyclopedia of American Biography* (1935), 24:284.

[71] Jenks, *The Century World's Fair Book for Boys and Girls*, 137.

of art and how it had lately developed from the Centennial in 1876. We see here concern with both national prestige and historical renown; that is, the United States wanted to be judged with reference both to her contemporary and her historical rivals.

By most accounts the World's Fair presented the American case more thoroughly and more plausibly than had the Centennial. The *Chicago Tribune* felt comfortable stating, "American artists have made every effort to show that their work is deserving of a place in the foremost rank and it may be expected that the opening of the galleries in which it is shown will mark an epoch in the art history of the country. Never before has there been such a showing of American art, for it is distinctively American. . . . After the exhibition has been seen there will be few who will not admit that there is an American school of painting, and one of which Americans have every reason to be proud."[72] Another writer went out of his way to defend the American exhibition against a critic who claimed that it presented no serious historical paintings and that the pictures "were bad in composition and in color" by noting that the critic (not mentioned by name) only succeeded in showing himself "ignorant of the tendencies of art at the present time," and especially that American painters tended to produce fewer historical paintings not only because they had less history to work from, but also because American art

[72] "Art Exhibit Grand," *Chicago Tribune*, April 30, 1893, 41, PQHN.

had developed not "in an atmosphere of romanticism but of realism".[73] Critical evaluation of the artistic success of American efforts at the Fair, on this view, implicitly assumed at least basic familiarity with ideas about contemporary aesthetic theory and art-historical periodization.

Expectations for and evaluations of the mass of visitors to the Palace of Fine Art were as various as they were revealing. Some observers distinguished fairgoers of 1876 from those of 1893, accusing the latter of being more ready merely to enjoy themselves and less inclined toward education. But such attitudes were in the minority. Of those who peopled the galleries in Chicago most appeared to approach the event with serious intent, especially, again, in comparison with Centennial celebrants. A newspaper man named J. B. Harrison, perhaps remembering the umbrella-wielding *faux pas* noted in 1876, wrote that, "The general aspect and deportment of people at the Fair are interesting and encouraging to students of our civilization and to all patriotic Americans. All are orderly, well-behaved, unobtrusive, evidently comfortable, and evidently able to take care of themselves while enjoying the show."[74]

We remember, reading excerpts like these, that the sophistication of American audiences was as much on display and fair game for evaluation as the art and architecture at the fair. Whether true or not, most reports de-

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[73] "The Fine Arts," *Chicago Tribune*, January 25, 1893, 27, PQHN.

[74] "Review of the Fair," *Chicago Tribune*, October 8, 1893, 32, PQHN.

picted Americans at the Fair as harboring hopes for self-improvement. The wide availability and thorough nature of the guidebooks mentioned above support the impression of an audience attuned to opportunities for learning and enlightenment. Public comment in the press suggests the same. The *Forum* opined, "it is well . . . to make as clear as possible this distinction between the mere pleasure and the instruction which a sight of the Fair will afford. . . . I think the American public likes even better to inform and cultivate than to amuse itself; . . . I think that to lay stress upon the educational value of the Fair is to use the best means of persuading all Americans that they ought to visit it."[75] The complete absence of cynicism here calls attention to itself: the American public do not need to be tricked into improving themselves with promises of frolic; on the contrary, what they want *most* is to improve themselves. There was every reason to hope that individual experiences and national progress would work symbiotically: "while the Fair will cultivate the nation," the same author continued, "it will stimulate personal virtue by the force of striking examples of admirable personal conduct, and will give us a fresh trust and confidence in the American people and its institutions."[76] One of the most interesting aspects of nineteenth-century Americans' relationship with culture was the earnest, buoyant character of their trust in its promises. Such trust was not unique to the discourses on the country's international

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[75] "The Artistic Triumph of the Fair Builders," *Forum* 14 (December 1892): 529, APSO.

[76] Ibid., 541.

exhibitions. As we shall see below, since well before the Centennial it had infused calls for more permanent testaments to America's cultural maturity.

What specifically were those audiences supposed, ideally, to get from the great display of art? And were appearances as important as substance? The main *educative* reasons for seeing the art and architecture at the Fair (the latter being thought an aesthetic marvel in its own right) were to enhance one's personal appreciation and taste, and to come away convinced of the United States' unembarrassed and legitimate place in the historical and contemporary stories of world art.

Americans spectators often exhibited a tendency to note the quantitative in their praises. Eugene Parsons, writing for *The Open Court* magazine, made sure to mention that "at the Paris Exposition of 1889, less then six thousand works were exhibited. At Chicago the number exceeds eight thousand . . . and most of the exhibits from foreign nations are larger and better than at Paris."[77] Many of those who visited shared this particular brand of satisfaction. Journalist Willis John Abbot, for instance, writing for *Christian Union*, also stood ready to risk superlatives, this time emphasizing the Fair's unmatched inclusiveness. "Perhaps I, in my turn, may be accused of bombast when I go on to declare that the art exhibit will be the most representative display of contemporary art ever made, in this or any other country. Yet I think the assertion easily supported. Never before has there been a world's

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[77] Eugene Parsons, "Fine Art at the Columbian Exposition," *The Open Court: A Quarterly Magazine* 7, no. 321 (October 19, 1893): 3841, APSO.

fair to which all nations have come upon perfectly equal footing – except perhaps the Centennial, which the Chicago fair will far outdo."[78]

Forum magazine reported, on seeing the architectural preparations just before the Fair in 1892, that "judged from the artistic point of view . . . it is much more successful than any that has ever been created in this or another land. It is not only comparable to the beautiful Paris Exhibition of 1889, and not only equal to it; it is greatly superior."[79] Moving on to even more extravagant praise, the author of this article also called attention to a sense of historical achievement and the cultural presence of the artistic past: the Fair "I am unafraid to say, has not been paralleled since the Rome of the Emperors stood intact."[80]

Time and again the two beacons of comparison were nineteenth-century Paris and the classical civilizations of the Mediterranean. And when these were invoked they were invoked less in a spirit of competition than as a plea for inclusion. Even when "bombast" might have carried writers to assert the absolute superiority of the Fair, the Fair itself in turn served merely as one proposition in an argument not for the setting apart of American civilization on cultural grounds, but for its inclusion in the historical-artistic canon. "If," wrote Alice French of Davenport, Iowa, elegantly relating her experience of

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[78] Willis John Abbot, "Art at the World's Fair," *Christian Union*, April 29, 1893, 807, APSO.

[79] "The Artistic Triumph of the Fair Builders," *Forum* 14 (December 1892): 527, APSO.

[80] "The Artistic Triumph of the Fair Builders," *Forum* 14 (December 1892): 527, APSO.

the architecture at Chicago, "at the first cast of the eye I wished for something more daringly American, more original, that passed before it had time to shape itself into a regret, and I was glad that we had been content to accept the universal traditions of beauty and to adapt them to our own purpose."[81] As we will see in the next section, any idea that hostility or raw competitive nationalism dominated American attitudes toward art does not hold up in the face of obvious reverence for other nations and cultural epochs.

THE GREAT MUSEUMS

The stories of the founding of America's most prominent encyclopedic art museums have been told by various historians of particular institutions and no attempt here will be made to duplicate their efforts.[82] Most treatment of

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[81] Alice French, letter to the editor, included in "Impressions of the World's Fair," *The Critic: A Weekly Review of Literature and the Arts* 20, no. 614 (November 20, 1893): XVIA, APSO. It is likely that this is the Alice French (1850-1934) who was born in Andover, grew in Iowa, attended Vassar and later became an arts correspondent and critic for magazines including *Atlantic Monthly* and *Scribner's*. She was a close friend of Andrew Carnegie and also a novelist who wrote mostly about rural and Southern life. See Michael B. Dougan, "French, Alice," *American National Biography*, 8:462-63.

[82] See for example: Steven Conn, *Museums and American Intellectual Life, 1876-1926* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Elizabeth Gilmore Holt, *The Triumph of Art for the Public, 1785-1848: The Emerging Role of Exhibitions and Critics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983); Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge* (New York: Routledge, 1992); Kenneth Hudson, *Museums of Influence* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Joel J. Orosz, *Curators and Culture: The Museum Movement in America, 1740-1870* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1990); Calvin Tomkins, *Merchants and Masterpieces: The Story of the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: H. Holt, 1989). On a comparative discussion of museum architecture over the course of the nineteenth century, see Jay Cantor, *Temples of the Arts*, Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin 28, no. 8 (1970): 331-354; Michael R. Clapper, "Popularizing Boston, 1865-1910: L. Prang and Company and the Museum of Fine Arts" (PhD diss.,

the genesis and completion of museums like the Metropolitan in New York, the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and the Chicago Art Institute focus more than I will here on the administrative and financial realities and troubles of these enterprises. I on the other hand would like to pay specific attention to widely distributed and consumed opinion and analysis through which we can see, if not always what the general American reader thought about the museums in question, at least what sorts of ideas were presented to him as important or interesting. Again, we should remember that in the competitive newspaper and periodical climate of the nineteenth century publishers had to defer in varying degrees to the perceived demands of their readers. If the public had no interest whatever in the policies, procedures, aims and intentions behind the creation of the Metropolitan and its peers, we simply would not find reference to such matters appearing so ubiquitously, from the sophisticated *North American Review* to the *Idaho Statesman.*

Earlier efforts to build and sustain serious art museums provide additional evidence of a growing public interest. The most promising venture preceding the large museums founded in the 1870s and after was the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford Connecticut, founded in 1842, which, unlike the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia (1805) New York's National Academy of Design (1825) or Boston's Athenaeum, which began annual art exhibitions in 1827, "offered a permanent public gallery of fine

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Northwestern University, 1997); Michael O'Hare, "The Audience of the Museum of Fine Arts," *Curator* 17, no. 2 (1974): 126-158.

arts."[83] Upon its opening, writes Wadsworth historian Eugene Gaddis, "the best-selling poet Lydia Huntley Sigourney (1791-1865) . . . exclaimed, 'May the benevolence that protected and completed this fine structure, dedicating it to those objects that elevate national character, be rewarded by the progress of knowledge, the refinement of taste, and the permanent improvement of this people, and their posterity.' Such was the firm moral purpose of the age."[84] Nevertheless, this "monument of taste and liberality," as the *New-York Observer* called it, failed to live up to expectations and by the 1850s was in decline.[85] The Wadsworth's failure to thrive largely resulted, in the opinion of its first curator, sculptor Edward Sheffield Bartholomew, from its managers' insistence on charging admission (which at twenty-five cents was roughly equivalent to the twenty dollars the Metropolitan or the Museum of Modern Art would ask in the early twenty-first century). Bartholomew published an open letter to the Trustees of the museum in the *Hartford Daily Courant* explaining that "any attempt to restrict the benefit of such institu-

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[83] Eugene Gaddis, "'Foremost on this Continent: A History of the Wadsworth Atheneum," in Linda Ayres, ed., *The Spirit of Genius: Art at the Wadsworth Atheneum* (Hartford, CN: Hudson hills Press, 1992), 11. Other museums founded in the last third of the century and that would later be important included the Corcoran Gallery (1874), the Philadelphia Museum of Art (1877, in the Centennial's Memorial Hall), the Detroit Museum of Art (1885, in 1919 re-named Detroit Institute of Arts), and the Cincinnati Art Museum (1886). There seems not to have been an agreed spelling for "athenaeum" in the nineteenth century.

[84] Eugene Gaddis, "'Foremost on this Continent A History of the Wadsworth Atheneum," in Linda Ayres, ed., *The Spirit of Genius: Art at the Wadsworth Atheneum* (Hartford, CN: Hudson hills Press, 1992), 14.

[85] "Wadsworth Athenæum and Other Matters in Hartford," *New-York Observer and Chronicle* 23, no. 4 (January 25, 1845): 14, APSO.

tion[s] to the few, does injustice to the masses and stands in the way of the accomplishment of the intentions of their founders. . . . So long as the Wadsworth Atheneum Gallery is shut to all but such that pay a fee for admission it must fail to do all the good it might."[86] The Wadsworth hardly stood alone in having to balance the desires for a calm, uncrowded atmosphere and for income from admissions against a proclaimed mission to bring art to the people. But whatever the reason, the Atheneum at Hartford, while still able to offer "most vivid and agreeable impressions" to visitors, suffered from declining attendance and inadequate maintenance from the late-1850s until the 1880s, when John Pierpont Morgan stepped in with funds to restore and improve its collections and buildings.[87] By then the movement toward grand public art museums permanently open to the public had gained momentum and Boston, New York and Chicago were writing a new chapter in the story of America's relationship with the visual arts.

On the eve of the beginning of serious work toward the Metropolitan, the tone of *Appleton's* editors was widely shared in the periodical literature: "next to mitigating the poverty of helpless and infirm persons – relieving them from hunger, and protecting them from cold – certainly we should rank

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[86] Charles A. Buckley, *Wadsworth Atheneum: 110 Years*, exhibition catalog, Wadsworth Atheneum (Hartford, CN, 1952), 8.

[87] "The Athenæum Gallery," *Ballou's Pictoral Drawing-Room Companion* 17, no. 8 (August 20, 1859): 122, APSO. On the decline of attendance and upkeep see Gaddis, 14-17.

an effort to make all classes acquainted with the beautiful and curious manifestations of the human mind, and the lovely and interesting works of men's hands. For this purpose, we must have the means of general and special instruction in art, in its broadest sense."[88] It is important to note that here the emphasis is on education and dissemination, not on production. The Emersonian impulse from earlier in the century, which had sounded the call for native artists and thinkers to strike out on their own to unleash an independent American genius, had cooled a bit. When Joseph Choate, one of the key initial backers of the museum, asserted in 1870, echoing the sentiments separately articulated in *Appleton's*, that "knowledge of art in its higher forms of beauty would tend directly to humanize, to educate and refine a practical and laborious people," he had relatively little interest in the nationality of the pictures hanging in his proposed treasure house. Art, accessing as it purported to do timeless ideals, need not arise *de novo* from home soil in order to do its work for home audiences.[89] A lecturer on the ideal character of the promised new Art Institute in Chicago agreed that "museums should be for the study and comparison of the art of different countries and epochs."[90]

This attention to the education and improvement of the public without

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[88] "Museums of Art as a Means of Instruction," *Appleton's Journal of Literature, Science and Art* 3, no. 42 (January 15, 1870): 80, APSO.

[89] Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 54.

[90] "Art Institute Course of Lectures: A. Barthelemy Speaks Upon 'The Influence of Art Museums,'" *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 26, 1892, 3, PQHN.

regard for the place of production both reflected and guided ideas about the role that art should and could play for modern civilizations. A certain cosmopolitanism with regard to arts and letters characterized American intellectual life for most of the century. In general such openness conflicted very little or not at all with calls for native cultural achievement. It would not be until the end of the nineteenth century that protest against reverence for and patronage of certain foreign cultural creations began to appear, in response to naturalism, to modernism in the visual arts, and to the growing momentum of efforts to decouple, or at least rethink the relations between, aesthetics and morality. Until then, opinions expressed as early as 1819 can stand fairly to represent the enduring balance of opinion on such matters:

> But we are now sufficiently numerous, rich, and powerful to aim at higher degrees of learning and refinement, to add to our present solid and free character the ornaments of taste, the enjoyments of belles lettres, the decoration of the arts, the pleasures of mental cultivation, and the varieties of emotion drawn from the productions of the imagination, and the inspiration of the Muses. We do not wish to follow in the corrupt track of any perverted foreign taste. We would not endanger our republican institutions and simplicity, by the introduction of any principles or habits from abroad, which are at war with their proper influence, or their perpetuity. But learning, science, the arts, courtesy of manners, refinement of sentiment, elegance of taste, colleges and universities, rhetoric and philosophy, music and poetry, eloquence and accomplishments, are not to be denounced as anti-republican, and driven from our nation as the vices of aristocracy and monarchy, and incompatible with the safety of the inheritance left to us by our patriots and sages. The name liberty must be sadly perverted when it is made to cover and attach on the improvement of manners and taste, and to oppose the progress of literature and philosophy.[91]

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[91] "Libraries," *The Western Review and Miscellaneous Magazine, a Monthly Publication, Devoted to Literature and Science* 1, no. 4 (November 1819): 249-50, APSO.

With this in mind, we can more easily apprehend the dangers of reading the wrong messages into calls for American cultural improvement. The reasoning behind the resultant efforts had little or nothing to do with anything we could recognize as nationalism if that word is to remain tied to any precise and useable concept. On the other hand, the arguments for American cultural development could very plausibly be described as patriotic. From the way they talked, we can detect at least a hint of patriotism in the quests undertaken by the wealthiest Americans to acquire treasured art from Europe; perhaps a love of country really flavored how they understood their acquisitiveness, or perhaps patriotic rhetoric only served as a convenient veneer. Whatever the case, those outside the donor-collector classes who advocated cultural growth expressed either deep reverence or grudging acceptance of the importance and necessity of the traditions and ideas of other places and times. Debates and exhortations about art and literature and the nation in the late-nineteenth century were choreographed for a broad stage; their principles framed problems and solutions as arising not in the context of the United States in the nineteenth century only, but in the context of a long history of creation, thought and development. Without this perspective it would have been very difficult for an American in 1870 to understand what possible importance cultural issues could have.

So when Americans surveyed their cultural landscape, very few who re-

corded their ideas for posterity before the very end of the century sought a cleansing or refusal of European creations or even influences. Rather what we find is acceptance of the idea that there were things that were good, that ought to be desired, but that were absent from the American scene. Instead of replacing great foreign achievements, American cultural advocates sought to absorb and understand these and, if possible, to equal them. As George Fisk Comfort wrote in his 1870 book *Art Museums in America*,

> a museum of art in a large and wealthy city should illustrate the history of the origin, the rise, the growth, the culminating glory, and the periods of decline and decadence of all the formative arts, both pure and applied, as they have appeared in all lands and in all ages of the world. True art is cosmopolitan. It knows no country; it knows no age. Homer sang, not for the Greeks alone, but for all nations and for all time. Beethoven is the musician not of Germans alone, but of all cultivated nations. And Raphael painted, not for the Italians alone, but for all, of whatever land or age, whose hearts are open to sympathy with the beautiful in art. An ideal museum must thus be cosmopolitan in its character; and it must present the whole stream of art-history in all nations and ages, as represented in the three great arts, of architecture, sculpture, and painting.[92]

Furthermore, to some extent emulative urges by Americans were powered more by imaginative perceptions of Europe's cultural state of affairs than by the facts on the ground. *Atlantic Monthly* located the American movement for art museums not in efforts to catch up from far behind but in a general movement of which Europe and the States were both part. "It is suf-

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[92] George Fisk Comfort, *Art Museums in America* (Boston: H. O. Houghton and Company, 1870), 5, M-MOA. Comfort, a Wesleyan graduate, spent the Civil War years studying in Europe and upon returning became Professor of Languages at Allegheny College. In 1872 he took a post as Professor of Aesthetics and Modern Language at Syracuse University. See James Grant Wilson and John Fiske, eds., *Appleton's Cyclopedia of American Biography* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1888-1900), 1:701.

ficient to mention a fact, which is not generally known," the journal's editors reminded readers, "that many of [the] establishments which we are accustomed to consider of great antiquity are comparatively modern."[93] Noting that the coincidence of expansion of collections and their openness to the public was even in Europe largely a nineteenth-century phenomenon, the authors concluded that in Europe "art is more substantially promoted now that it ever was before; and its example [far from being something to make America cringe in comparison] is very encouraging to us who are trying to establish museums in this country."[94]

Of course, as has been noted, the best art and literature in the world would remain socially inert without a populace who appreciated them and benefited from them. Those who sought support for large and vastly expensive museums put forward arguments framed more often than not in the rhetoric of public interest, and different facets of this phenomenon require discussion here. First, what was the nature of the argument from public interest? Second, what circumstances suggested its necessity or its usefulness to those who employed it?

In 1870 American artist and art critic Eugene Benson outlined the first part of the argument from public interest. "The subject of an art-museum," he asserted, "cannot be discussed too often, as it cannot be too well understood

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[93] "Modern Interest in Art," from the *Atlantic Monthly*, reprinted in *New York Times*, August 3, 1873, 3, PQHN.

[94] Ibid.

by the guardians of civilization and the conservators of the means of culture. Museums of art are the best means of fostering and cultivating the historic sense; they afford us examples of the finest and rarest and most curious expression of the social life of the past; they nurse the sentiment of reverence; they beget tolerance, and afford pleasure."[95] But we must look to another part of his article to see *why* and *how* this was supposed to happen. Benson continued:

> a museum of art would afford us adequate instruction in the vestiges of the ancient civilizations – a solemn and beautiful teaching – it would foster reverence, without which man is barbarian, and obnoxious to every fine and noble sense of the difference of things. We are a raw and noisy and obtrusive people; but place one generation of us under the influence of the past, let us see something grand and beautiful, not made by our hands, yet made by the hands of men, and perhaps we shall feel the sweet flower of humility break through our pride, and diffuse its gracious influence over us.[96]

Several ideas of interest reside within in this passionate brief for museums. First, the opening clauses articulate widely shared agreement about the importance of historical understanding. But we see in addition that the "instruction" supposed to unfold upon interaction with the achievements of the past meant something more than just mechanical acquisition of knowledge. And, as we try to see what that is, we also begin to see the possible dangers of associating the argument from public interest too closely with desires for

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[95] Eugene Benson, "Museums of Art As a Means Of Instruction," *Appleton's Journal of Literature, Science and Art* 3, no. 42 (January 15, 1870): 80, APSO. Benson also wrote regularly for the *New Evening York Post.*

[96] Ibid.

increased democratization. It would appear that the process of cultural raising up was in fact somehow tied to a state of humility – in Benson's words "reverence without which man is barbarian." "Culture," explained another writer from the 1870s, "means all which reduces the brute in man to a state of subjection. . . . The act of learning is an act of reverent obedience to the divine behest, uttered through every fiber of our mental constitution."[97] One way to interpret this formulation is to see the calls for intellectual "reverence," "humility" and "subjection" as arguments *against* the temptation to rest on America's commercial, military and republican accomplishments and *for* culture as necessary. Satisfaction, for those who thought like Benson, was misplaced if it preceded some minimum level of cultural achievement. A cultured America would not materialize automatically as a by-product of other successes but would require a separate understanding and acceptance, which could only begin with the formation of a properly respectful attitude toward past culture.

Conversations surrounding the opening of large museums in different cities in large part echoed one another, and this widespread uniformity supports seeing each event as a particular articulation of more general national hopes. In the wake of the World's Fair in Chicago, the Chicago Art Institute moved into the building that had once housed the World's Congresses on

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[97] Alexander Winchell, "Science, Religion and the Classics," *New Hampshire Sentinel* 80, no. 52 (December 26, 1878): 2, AHN.

Michigan Avenue. The eagerly awaited transfer and transformation turned out to be fortuitous from a public relations angle, coming as it did after consistent and often fervent praise for the exhibits at the Exposition's Palace of Fine Arts. A citizen of Chicago, S. H. Kerfoot, enthusiastically called the new Art Institute a "Mecca of philanthropy" and marveled at "how much wiser, how much better, how much broader, how much loftier, how much more refined, how much more religious, how much more exalted, how much more educated in every way we all, men, women and children, become by frequent pilgrimages."[98]

To get to this point of "wider culture for the city of pork and push" had required a long journey.[99] At least as early as 1868, the *Chicago Tribune* had asserted that "Chicago has now reached the point where, as an assured metropolis of commerce, manufactures and influence, she can afford to devote much of her energy and wealth to the growth and culture of aesthetic tastes."[100] As was often the case everywhere, such desires existed far in advance of any substantial realization. In 1875 the Department of the Interior released a report on American art museums and counted only twenty-seven for the entire nation, with only New York, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts and

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[98] S. H. Kerfoot, "Praise for the Art Institute," letter to the editor, *Chicago Tribune*, October 27, 1894, 14, PQHN.

[99]"Chicago's Art Institute, One of the Best Equipped Institutions in the Country," *New York Times*, March 10, 1895, 13, PQHN.

[100] "Growth and Patronage of Art," *Chicago Tribune*, January 14, 1868, 4, PQHN.

Connecticut having more than one.[101] Several of the collections listed should probably be deemed quasi-public rather than truly public, housed as they were in colleges such as Yale and Vassar.[102] (As noted above, many of the ambitiously founded athenaeums, like the Wadsworth, had briefly flourished but then fallen into disuse or neglect; and those that had remained active were so much smaller and poorer than the Metropolitan or Boston Museum would become as to amount to a difference in kind as well as scope.) Just a little over a decade later, Chicagoans could enjoy visiting exhibits of Millet and Corot, and argue that at the Art Institute, now up and running though not yet in its grand Michigan Avenue home, "there is always a succession of fine works in the galleries."[103] By 1895 even New Yorkers were calling the Art Institute "one of the best equipped institutions in the country" and the *New York Times* noted the "intensity of the newly-awakened art life that centers about the Chicago Art Institute." The writer of this article went on to claim that an "art furore" had gripped Chicago ever since the Columbian Exposition.[104]

The museum's popularity after 1893 continued to please and encourage

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[101] This report listed only an "Art-Gallery of the Illinois Industrial University at Urbana" as finding its home in Illinois, strangely omitting the Academy of Design in Chicago which regularly received notice and praise in the popular press.

[102] "American Museums and Collections," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 3, 1875, 5, PQHN.

[103] "Painters at the Art Institute," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, January 12, 1888, 3, PQHN.

[104] "Chicago's Art Institute: One of the Best Equipped Institutions in the Country," *New York Times*, March 10, 1895, 13, PQHN.

its supporters as the general public flocked to the Institute, with about 2,000 visitors regularly arriving for each of three free admission days offered every week. Such a response suggests that men like William French, the director of the Institute, proved more ready to make good on promises of public benefit than had the founders of the Metropolitan, who for years resisted the operation of the museum on Sundays, the only day most people with jobs had for looking at pictures and sculpture. In Chicago, the *Times* reported, "the visitors on free days are made up of every class of society," and "the absence of any attempt at mischief is a subject of especial remark among the attendants." (Crowd-shy Chicagoans with spare cash could still choose to avoid the masses, as attendance on paid-admission days averaged only about 350.)[105]

In Chicago the conflicts over the presentation of an elite group of works to a broad public never reached the pitch that New Yorkers witnessed. Debates over the mission and audience of the Metropolitan intensified after the collections were moved into the present-day site of the museum in 1879-1880, after a little under a decade spent in much smaller downtown locations (first on lower Fifth Avenue then on Fourteenth Street). As with almost all museum discussions, that surrounding the Met had always been filled with rhetoric of public benefit on a broad scale. *Harper's Bazaar's* enthusiastic account of the opening ceremonies at the Central Park location was typical:

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[105] "Chicago's Art Institute: One of the Best Equipped Institutions in the Country," *New York Times*, March 10, 1895, 13, PQHN.

> [the opening of the new building] marked a significantly new era upon which art has entered among us. . . . How great a work it is to put such objects as these within the reach of the people, they will grow to understand the more they understand them. What the blossom of the seed thus sown will be, one hardly dares to conjecture. Even in the material view of it, the bread cast upon the waters must return, although art has so long been regarded as the plaything of the rich, and not as anything bringing either mental or monetary revenue to the mass.[106]

"The mass," however, found little more than words by way of a welcome into the halls of art. By the mid 1880s argument over access to the museum on Sundays had become common. In 1886 the Central Labor Union (said to represent 50,000 "workingmen") submitted a resolution to the Metropolitan's trustees as well as those at the Museum of Natural History:

> *Whereas*, It being a standing complaint that the working population do not show sufficient interest in matters of refinement and culture; and
> *Whereas*, It being impossible for working men and women to visit the public places established for the purpose of furnishing all with the means by which their knowledge and appreciation of such things may be increased, largely because on the only days when the working people have the opportunity for such diversion and improvement the libraries, museums and art galleries are closed; and
> *Whereas*, The working people have to contribute the larger share toward the maintenance of these public institutions; therefore be it
> *Resolved*, That we, as representatives of many thousands of these unprivileged men and women, hereby demand that all public libraries, museums and art galleries be kept open Sundays and holidays.[107]

Calls such as these for wider access, though common, were widely ignored and even openly discounted. *Life* published a cartoon four years later depict-

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[106] "The Metropolitan Museum of Art," *Harper's Bazaar* 13, no. 17 (April 24, 1880): 258, APSO.

[107] "Open Museums on Sundays: The Movement Being Pushed Vigorously by Workingmen," *New York Times*, January 17, 1886, 4, PQHN.

ing a giant banner flying above the Metropolitan Museum which read: "The Poor Be Damned." The caption noted wryly that "the broad philanthropy and comprehensive benevolence of the trustees of this useful institution are fitly expressed in the above tender motto."[108] Trustee Joseph Choate expressed support for the idea in the fall of 1890, but added that opening the museum on an extra day would very likely result in extra expenses which would have to be "borne by the public."[109] Another petition with about 30,000 signatures calling for Sunday hours followed, and apparently in response to worries like Choate's about extra expenses, pledged several thousand dollars to the museum to offset additional costs. Opinion in the religious press was mixed on the issue. A group of "friends of the Lord's Day" presented a counter-petition of sorts calling for a continuance of respect for the Sabbath and warning that while museum-going itself might be a relatively harmless Sunday diversion, open museums would soon lead to openings of al sorts of less-desirable establishments: "to open the museums on Sundays seems to [the petitioners] to be a perilous experiment, opening the way to Sunday theatres and operas, beer gardens, music and dance halls, and the other features of what is called a 'Continental Sunday.'"[110] Besides debasing the Lord's day, it was argued, such

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[108] "The Metropolitan Museum of Art," *Life* 16, no. 409 (October 30, 1890): 237, APSO.

[109] "They May Be Open Sundays: Prospects of a Change at the Two Big Museums," *New York Times*, September 25, 1890, 9, PQHN.

[110] "To Be Open On Sunday," *The New York Evangelist* 62, no. 21 (May 21, 1891): 10, APSO.

a tide of Sunday activity would eventually rob many working people of the guarantee of at least one day of rest per week.[111] Earlier, *Christian Union*, while claiming not to think that "the best way to guard against [the degradation of the Sabbath] is to prohibit everything our fathers would have prohibited," had still contemplated museum Sundays with some misgiving: "will the opening of the art galleries be followed by the opening of the theaters, and the sale of Sunday newspapers be followed by the sale of confections, groceries, fancy dry goods, etc., etc., until we have the Parisian Sabbath with all its demoralization?"[112]

In May 1891 the Metropolitan's trustees voted 12-4 to open the museum "from one o'clock til half an hour before sunset" on Sunday. In the years that followed, the change seems to have been embraced with enthusiasm by the museum-going public, who arrived by the thousands on Sunday afternoons. Criticism was sparse once Sunday museum hours became the norm and what grumbling appeared was actually more likely to come from art-lovers who resented the ignorance of the working-class crowds than from religiously minded Sabbath advocates. "None of the dire results predicted by the opponents of the movement have come to pass. The fight was worth making," opined the editors at *Life* in 1894.[113] Another writer reported that immedi-

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[111] Ibid.

[112] "The Outlook," *The Christian Union* 39, no. 10 (March 7, 1889): 290, APSO.

[113] "Pleasant Statistics," *Life* 23, no. 595 (May 24, 1895): 339, APSO.

ately after the Sunday policy went into effect "the [number of] visitors ran up to between twelve and fourteen thousand" and that by the fall of 1891 around 5,500 visitors would be found at the Met on Sundays.[114] The new need, this article continued, was for lecturers and improved guidebooks at the museum so that working people could engage more knowledgably with the artworks they encountered and to discern what distinguished the museum's holdings from "the chromos pictures that came with their pound of tea."[115]

In the debates over the opening of the Metropolitan on Sundays we see the manifestation of tensions between the theory that art could improve the populace at large and the real discomfort among elite New Yorkers about truly eliminating barriers between the public and the works of the museums growing collections of valuable cultural objects. We also see, as referenced in the last excerpt from *Christian Union* a continuation of larger debates over how exactly the experience of lay person with works of art should be mediated or organized. Though it was widely accepted that "beauty of line, of color, of form will appeal to anyone who has an eye and a brain," many would also have agreed that "opening the museum was a step forward; making it an educational center would be reaching the ideal."[116]

The Boston Museum of Fine Arts, though derided by one author as the

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[114] Rachel Dunkirk, "The Second Step Forward," *The Christian Union* 45, no. 6 (February 6, 1892): 263, APSO.

[115] Ibid.

[116] Ibid.

"latest born pet of our aristocracy of culture," enjoyed enthusiastic attendance by the general public in its first decades of existence.[117] And, for the most part, the controversies over Sunday openings or the character of unsophisticated crowds did not color the museum experience in Boston. In 1890, the Museum of Fine Arts was already opened free on Saturdays and Sundays, with Sunday admissions averaging between about 1,300 and about 2,200 – a smaller number than the Metropolitan enjoyed, but more reflective of Boston's smaller population than of any lack of general enthusiasm for the way the museum showed, in the words of *Independent* contributor and co-editor Susan Hayes Ward, that "art, literature and religion still go hand in hand in the good old town."[118] Like in New York, however, Boston's museum had many visitors who were uninformed on matters of aesthetics and art history. The author of a letter to the editor, recounting his observations after a Sunday visit to the Museum of Fine Arts, noted that "at least three-fifths of the number were men and young lads, and the majority of all present gave evidence that it would be quite necessary to explain the Parthenon was a very

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[117] GRETA, "Art in Boston," *The Art Amateur: A Monthly Journal Devoted to Art in the Household* 1, no. 1 (June 1879): 7, APSO.

[118] Susan Hayes Ward, "Fine Arts: The Museum of Fine Arts at Boston," *The Independent, Devoted to the Consideration of Politics, Social and Economic Tendencies, History, Literature, and the Arts* 42, no. 2182 (September 25, 1890): 7, APSO. Ward estimated an average of 1,317 visitors on Sundays; a writer to the *Boston Transcript* (February 8, 1892) estimated Sunday average attendance at 2,220. Ward and her brother, at the *Independent* were early supporters of Robert Frost and Emily Dickinson. For more on her accomplishments see Ingrid Satelmajer, "When a Consumer Becomes an Editor: Susan Hayes Ward and the Poetry of 'The Independent,'" *Textual Cultures* 2, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 78-100.

beautiful building erected in Athens before the time or Christ, and that with a large number it would not be superfluous to mention that Athens was in Greece and that Greece was in Europe."[119] But this writer pointedly went on to assure readers that "there was no pushing or interrupting" during gallery lectures delivered without "technical language" and with reliance upon "the simplest forms of expression.[120]

Despite different experiences with public attendance the three museums mentioned here shared some over-arching features, one of which was a fundamentally art-historical approach. This attempt to present an encyclopedic narrative of the progression of visual presentation, along with a rhetorical emphasis on public benefit, formed the essential features of the American museum movement of the late-nineteenth century. Museums like the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and the Chicago Art Institute were not about curiosities, not about local or regional peculiarities, but about the majestic march of Art through the ages up to the present. On this theory, one that has remained current despite various challenges, the most fulfilling appreciation of art comes largely through an ability to contextualize a particular work or artist. The works can be seen to be in conversation with one another and, through them, eras reconnect and illuminate the present. For all the confidence that nineteenth-century Americans often expressed about the new so-

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[119] L. T. Ames, letter to the editor, *Boston Transcript*, February 8, 1892. Reproduced in *The Christian Union* 45, no. 18 (April 30, 1892): 842, APSO.

[120] Ibid.

ciety they saw emerging around them, for all their hopes of progress through science, their views toward the artistic past were much more often reverent than dismissive. This created at least a theoretical distance between art and other societal and economic developments: the locomotive obviate the need for covered-wagon trains; the telegraph had eclipsed the Pony Express; but new art would not discredit old art, partly because what made new art valuable was its participation with and invocation of the values of past art. Everyone except a few of the most fervent or reckless proselytizers rejected the idea that any new style could render a Leonardo obsolete; true art did not admit to obsolescence.[121] The grandeur and scope realized by well-endowed museums like New York's Metropolitan, the Chicago Art Institute and the Boston Museum of Fine Arts by the end of the century may be seen as a physical manifestation of such historically grounded thinking. Neither small galleries with shifting contents nor magnificent but privately held collections would achieve the goal of placing the United States among the great civilizations past and present. And the intentional combination of openness with permanence that characterized the mission and evolution of the great museums served specifically American needs. On the one hand, supporters of mu-

[121] In the years before and after World War I, critics who disparaged abstract artists like Matisse and Picasso argued that the agenda of such painters was to do just this, to discredit both the technique and achievement of older styles. Just the opposite was true, in fact, as evidenced both by the classical skills of these artists and their repeated insistence that there was no substitute for learning to draw along time-honored lines regardless of any subsequent excursions into abstraction. (For an indication of Picasso's debts to the classical past I suggest viewing some of the first-century A.D. Roman wall paintings at the Metropolitan Museum.)

seums readily accepted certain ideas that were both old and foreign about what museums should do and what they should look like; on the other hand, the emphasis placed on the public utility of such establishments demonstrated an adjusting of older models. Those Americans who funded, planned and wrote about the development and promise of art museums for America in large part reconciled the urge to include the United States among nations with reputations for the preservation and encouragement of artistic excellence with a very strong desire not just to parrot Europe.

THE NATION'S LIBRARY

Like the story of publicly displayed fine art in the United States, that of a national library spanned the nineteenth century. In one form or another there had been a national library since the capital moved to Washington in 1800.[122] The British decimated the initial collection during the War of 1812. Later, former President Jefferson donated his personal library, said to be roughly 7,000 volumes. Another fire struck the collections in 1851 and reduced the number of volumes on hand from about 55,000 to about 25,000. Fire of

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[122] Though calls for a library whose mission was broader than just service to legislators and members of the judiciary and executive branches came quite early, it was not until after mid-century that the Library of Congress took really vigorous steps to become a resource foe citizens and researchers more broadly. "For example," writes John Cole in *Jefferson's Legacy: A Brief History of the Library of Congress* (http://www.loc.gov/loc/legacy/loc.html), "an editorial in the July 15, 1815, (Washington, D.C.) daily *National Intelligencer* pointed out: 'In all civilized nations of Europe there are national libraries . . . in a country of such general intelligence as this, the Congressional or National Library of the United States [should] become the great repository of the literature of the world.'"

course loomed as a perennial danger for most buildings in the United States in the nineteenth century, and commentators often complained about the hazardous conditions created by casually organized mounds of material lying about in various wooden crannies of the Capitol. If storage was a problem, so were use and access. "There is not in all its halls a solitary space where a member of Congress can spend a quiet hour in writing or reading," wrote a correspondent for *Century Illustrated*. "The readers are huddled together in narrow quarters, pursuing their investigations amid discomforts and deprivations . . . almost under the feet of the sight-seeing public who throng the library and the Capitol."[123] All in all the nation's collection of books and other material "literally groan[ed] for relief and a removal to a building of its own."[124]

A federal statute enacted in 1870 required that two copies of any written material claiming copyright protection be filed with the Library of Congress in Washington. While this meant relief for the Clerks of various U. S. Dis-

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[123] "The Proposed National Library Building," *Century Illustrated Magazine* 23, no. 4 (February 1882): 592, APSO.

[124] Our Washington Correspondent, "The Congressional Library," *Christian Union* 21, no. 16 (April 21, 1880): 365, APSO. Some valuable general histories of the Library of Congress include Carl Ostrowski, *Books, Maps, and Politics: A Cultural History of the Library of Congress, 1783-1861* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004) and *The Library of Congress and the Transformation of Literary Culture in America, 1782-1861* (PhD diss., University of South Carolina, 1997); James Conaway and Edmund Morris, *America's Library: The Story of the Library of Congress, 1800-2000* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000); Elizabeth J. Aiken, "High Culture, Low Culture: The Singular Duality of the Library of Congress," *American Studies* 42, no. 3 (2001): 43-61; Jane Rosenberg, *The Nation's Great Library: Herbert Putnam and the Library of Congress, 1899-1939* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1993); Henry Hope Reed, John Young Cole and Herbert Small, *The Library of Congress: The Art and Architecture of the Thomas Jefferson Building* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997).

trict Courts which had previously housed such material, the number of copyright registrations grew steadily from 1870 to 1890 from under 10,000 to almost 50,000 per year.[125] The collections included not only books but pamphlets, manuscripts, music, newspapers and magazines, and countless other ephemera which would prove immensely valuable for later generations of historians, antiquarians and scholars of all stripes.

By the last quarter of the century space was increasingly tight and calls were coming for a separate, permanent site to preserve and present the nation's texts, both on practical and aesthetic grounds. *Century Illustrated reported* in 1884 that expert opinion recommended against simply adding on to the Capitol, as had often been proposed. Such a plan, agreed "every architect who was consulted, . . . would not only ruin the appearance of the Capitol, but afford only a temporary, makeshift shelter for the books."[126] Indeed in 1878 a congressionally sanctioned commission had already "concluded that . . . the library, if enlarged, could not be made part of the Capitol without serious

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[125] Ainsworth R. Spofford, "The Library of the United States," *Forum* 14 (November 1892: 379, APSO. Spofford (1825-1908) is centrally important to the development of the Library of Congress. He had been a respected bookseller, essayist and publisher, as well as a friend of Emerson and other New England intellectuals, helping to introduce them to the western parts of the country, before becoming assistant Librarian of Congress in 1861 and then Librarian in 1864. He worked to improve the organization and collections of the library, was instrumental in the conception and passage of the crucial copyright legislation of 1870, and advocated for the Jefferson Building of the Library of Congress, the grand separate quarters discussed here. Spofford was replaced as head librarian after the new building opened, partly as a result of differences over the mission of the library and its collection, but stayed on as an assistant until his death. See John Y. Cole, "Spofford, Ainsworth," *American National Biography*, 20:487-88.

[126] "The Proposed Library Building in Washington," *Century Illustrated Magazine* 27, no. 4 (February 1884): 627, APSO.

detriment to its architectural effect, and other grave disadvantages."[127]

But to understand the story and importance of the Library of Congress, we should first situate it in the context of other large library projects initiated in the 1890s, most importantly those in Chicago, New York and Boston.[128] All three shared (a) an explicit orientation toward public service and (b) an intentionally imposing appearance closely attuned to historical aesthetic principles. These factors were also important elements at the Library of Congress, though of course it was conceived for a larger, national constituency.

Boston's public library, originally organized in 1848, moved into its modern home in 1895. Its Renaissance-inspired architecture echoed the elegant lines of Italian Renaissance design and the inscriptions on its outer walls stated its motives and intentions: "THE PUBLIC LIBRARY OF THE CITY OF BOSTON BUILT BY THE PEOPLE AND DEDICATED TO THE ADVANCEMENT OF LEARNING / THE COMMONWEALTH REQUIRES THE EDUCATION OF THE PEOPLE AS THE SAFEGUARD OF ORDER AND LIBERTY." The interior spaces are still graced today by the creations of Puvis de Chavannes, John Singer Sargent, James Abbott McNeil Whistler, Augustus St. Gaudens and other

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[127] Chauncey N. Dutton, "The Congressional Library Building," *The American Architect and Building News* 11, no. 338 (June 17, 1882): 285, APSO.

[128] While the New York Public Library would not open in its famous Fifth Avenue location until 1911, architectural planning and administrative plans for the consolidation of the Lenox, Astor and Tilden collections began in the mid-nineties and shared many features with the national, Bostonian and Chicagoan efforts.

well-regarded nineteenth century artists. The Chavannes murals, surrounded by expanses of both imported and domestic marble, had to one admirer "a beauty and tenderness of the light and delicate colouring" that "steals gratefully upon the senses."[129] Another observer hailed "one of the noblest decorated staircases known to modern art" and claimed it offered a strikingly successful demonstration that "great masters can combine both ["so-called naturalism" and idealism]."[130] The main reading room, illuminated by high decorative windows, moved one Bostonian to comment that the days of the "Boston book-worm" were numbered and must give way to the light-loving "book-bird". "Liking for the new Public Library," he concluded, would be nothing less than "a test of a person's culture."[131]

Long before the erection of its 1895 Copely Square building, Boston's library system had been a source of pride to city residents because it subsisted largely on public funds and because it included a well-developed family of over twenty branch locations, which to Bostonians made it truly and admirably public. In 1884, when the library held about 430,000 bound volumes, a writer for *The Literary World* already claimed that "the Boston Public Library

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[129] GRETA, "The Boston Public Library Decorations," *The Art Amateur: A Monthly Journal Devoted to Art in the Household* 34, n. 2 (January 1896): 48, APSO. Puvis de Chavannes was reported to have received $75,000 for his decorations, which amounts to over $2,000,000 in 2008 dollars.

[130] Cecilia Waern, "Puvis de Chavannes in Boston," *Atlantic Monthly* 79, no. 472 (February 1897): 251, 257, C-MOA.

[131] "Contributions to History and Discovery," *Current Literature* 11, no. 3 (November 1892): 306, 307, APSO. Reprinted from the *Boston Transcript.*

may not be perfect; it is certainly the most perfect public library in the country, the pride of Boston, and an inexhaustible treasure to all who care to make use of its splendid offer 'Open to All.'"[132] Reviewing the history of the library in 1895, future *Outlook* editor Elbert F. Baldwin noted that "this model institution belongs just as much to the poor and lowly North Ender as it does to the rich and aristocratic resident of the Back Bay. This is the secret of its great influence."[133]

Regardless of all this long-held satisfaction, the public seemed enthusiastic about the idea that a good thing could be made better with the construction of a magnificent new central library building. "It will render the library famous from the point of view of art as well as literature," hoped the *Congregationalist*.[134] The Chief Librarian himself agreed with this sentiment but went even further. "In the new building for the Boston Public Library," wrote Herbert Putnam for *Forum*, "there has been a definite and pronounced design to produce a work of art. Such a structure has in itself undoubted edu-

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[132] "The Boston Public Library," *The Literary World: A Monthly Review of Current Literature* 15, no. 18 (September 6, 1884): 292, APSO. "Open to all" was the final phrase inscribed on the building's façade.

[133] Elbert F. Baldwin, "The Boston Public Library," *Outlook* 51, no. 11 (March 16, 1895): 424, APSO. Baldwin (1857-1972) grew up in Cleveland and later graduated from Williams College before studying briefly in post-graduate programs at the University of Berlin. Beginning in the 1890s, he worked for the *Independent* and then for *Outlook*, where he would become Foreign Editor in 1922. He was married to the daughter of Senator William D. Washburn of Minnesota. See "Baldwin, Elbert F.," *National Cyclopedia of American Biography* (1947), 33:553.

[134] "The Decoration of the Boston Public Library," *Congregationalist* 78, no. 36 (September 7, 1893): 322, APSO.

cational value. . . . It represents chiefly a sort of apotheosis of the confidence which the American people have come to feel in the public library as a branch of education."[135] Summing things up in 1897, a contributor to *Congregationalist* wrote that it was "pleasant to chronicle the cordial cooperation of the public library officials stimulating a popular interest in art." Furthermore, "Nothing has stirred so much pride as the Public Library. Even the humblest citizen feels an ennobling sense of ownership."[136]

Whether or not the Boston building "represented an apotheosis," the ex-

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[135] Herbert Putnam quoted in W. I. Fletcher, "The Boston Public Library," *The Critic: A Weekly Review of Literature and the Arts* 25, no. 749 (June 27, 1896): 3, APSO. George Herbert Putnam (1861-1955), of the publishing Putnams, was instrumental in the establishment of a public library in Minneapolis and served as its first librarian on its opening in 1889. He returned to his native Boston to tend to his ill mother in 1892 and practiced law until he was appointed the chief librarian of the new Boston Public Library just after its opening in 1895. He testified in an important hearing on the uses and state of the Library of Congress in 1896, along with Ainsworth Spofford and Melville Dewey of the New York State Library, and took over as Librarian of Congress in 1899, a post he held for forty years. He played a large part in modernizing the institution, making it more accessible and focusing on immediate usefulness to the public as much as on amassing a collection for posterity. Putnam recognized that the (Melville) Dewey Decimal System would be inadequate for the needs of the Library of Congress and created more appropriate methods of classification. See John Y. Cole, "Putnam, George Herbert," *American National Biography*, 18:9-11.

[136] O. M. E. Rowe, "Art for the People," *Congregationalist* 82, no. 9 (March 4, 1897): 299, APSO. For scholarship on the aesthetic and historical importance of the Boston Public Library, see Sally M. Promey, *Painting Religion in Public: John Singer Sargent's Triumph of Religion at the Boston Public Library* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Teri Hensick, Kate Olivier and Gianfranco Pocobene, "Puvis de Chavannes's Allegorical Murals in the Boston Public Library: History, Technique, and Conservation," *Journal of the American Institute for Conservation* 36, no. 1 (Spring, 1997): 59-81; Walter Muir Whitehill, "The Making of an Architectural Masterpiece: The Boston Public Library," *American Art Journal*, 2, no. 2 (Autumn, 1970): 13-35; Martha Kingsbury, "Sargent's Murals in the Boston Public Library," *Winterthur Portfolio* 11 (1976): 153-172; and Julia Rosenbaum, "Displaying Civic Culture: The Controversy over Frederick MacMonnies' 'Bacchante,'" *American Art* 14, no. 3 (Autumn, 2000): 41-57, in which we can see all three of the major discourses on culture at work in a controversy around a particular statue at the Boston Public Library building during its first year.

citement it generated was representative of that surrounding libraries throughout the nation. Though not as old as the Boston library, Chicago also enjoyed a publicly oriented library and citizens interested to build a model home for what they envisioned as a model institution. As in New York, Chicago's Public Library also developed in an atmosphere of cooperation among the administrators of various private collections: in New York the Lenox and Astor collections, thanks in large part to over two million dollars from Samuel Tilden's bequest, would be combined to create the library on Forty-Second Street; in Chicago, a Public Library had existed alongside the Newberry, Crerar, and University of Chicago collections, and both the Crerar and the Newberry worked with the Public Library to optimize the use of their several collections and to address their several shortcomings.[137] For instance, "the University library . . . was found to be a great mass of undigested material, the contents of which no one seemed to know with any degree of exactness." The Newberry had a fine building, so fine in fact that its "extravagant

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[137] The Crerar Library's cooperation with the Public and Newberry libraries was reported in "The John Crerar Library," *New York Observer and Chronicle* 75, no. 16 (April 22, 1887): 622, APSO: "Having sympathetically reviewed the library section of John Crerar's monumental will [d. 1889], and carefully considered the library facilities and needs of the city, the directors unanimously decided to establish a free public reference library of scientific literature. Accordingly, the directors instituted a series of conferences with the Chicago Public Library and the Newberry Library. An elastic scheme was jointly adopted for dividing among them the available world of books. This cooperation will prevent unnecessary duplication and wasteful rivalry." The official website for the Newberry Library explains its history of cooperation with the others thus: "an agreement was made in 1896 to share responsibility for research strength. The Crerar would build research collections in science and technology, the Chicago Public Library in business, and the Newberry Library in the humanities" (http://www.newberry.org/general/generalinfo.html).

expenditure" monopolized funds and left a "meagre and unsymmetrical collection." The Public Library, on the other hand, while holding "the most generally useful collection," was "cramped for space" and "ill equipped for the purposes of the student."[138] On completion of the new building, the Chicago correspondent for the *Congregationalist* reported to readers that "In no event of the year have the people of Chicago taken greater interest than in the opening of the building which hereafter is to be the permanent home of the Public Library."[139]

Throughout the discussion about the library, two particular issues recurred. First, being in what was then still considered "the West" by both its own citizens and by Easterners, Chicagoans were conscious of comparison with older cities like Boston, New York and even Washington, as modestly developed as the nation's capital remained. Second, boosters repeated again and again, with what to modern eyes appears almost suspiciously insistent frequency, that the Public Library project had progressed to completion with "no whisper of corruption."[140] As to the former theme, several reports noted that the Chicago development was not only more cost-effective than other li-

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[138] "The Chicago Public Library," *The Dial* 23, no. 272 (October 16, 1897): 2, APSO.

[139] Franklin, "In and Around Chicago," *Congregationalist* 82, no. 42 (October 21, 1897): 569, APSO. For a more complete discussion of cultural building in Chicago in the nineteenth century, see Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Culture and the City: Cultural Philanthropy in Chicago from the 1880s to 1917* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1976). For an older but still informative account of the history of the Chicago library, see Gwladys Spencer, *The Chicago Public Library: Origins and Backgrounds* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1943).

[140] Ibid.

brary endeavors, but also compared favorably with Eastern counterparts in terms of substance. "Of course [Chicago's library] cannot vie with the architectural glories of the Congressional Library in Washington, and while it can boast some fine artistic embellishments, it has not Boston's mural paintings. But so far as general convenience and public utility go, the Pubic Library of Chicago is no doubt superior to that of Boston."[141] The Chicago Library's businesslike and yet approachable architecture, perhaps quieter and less imposing than that of its counterparts, suggested sensible solidity as much as delicate grace. This was after all a city whose thorough practicality citizens often proudly contrasted to eastern effeteness. The end, result, Eugene Parsons agreed, "is an evidence that the transition stage is passing in the culture of the West."[142]

The creation of a modern palace for the Library of Congress, then, was part of a larger movement, or perhaps three related movements. First, in the larger cities featured above efforts began in the 1890s to fund and create stately, beautiful homes for municipal and research libraries meant to serve as architectural statements as well as public resources. Second, a general enthusiasm for libraries caught on throughout the country, from east to west, in both cities and small towns. Third, under the guidance of Ainsworth Spof-

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[141] Eugene Parsons, "The New Public Library of Chicago," *The Critic: A Weekly Review of Literature and the Arts* 28, no. 814 (September 25, 1897): 177, APSO.

[142] Ibid., APSO.

ford, the Library of Congress became increasingly not just a legislative library but an institution that aspired to become a resource for the American people more broadly.[143]

At the end of the century the Library of Congress was installed, to much acclaim, in the building where it remains.[144] Upon completion the library sat on "about three and one half acres, or three city blocks, upon which were seventy residences when the ground was purchased."[145] Its marbled, wainscoted, vaulted interior stood prepared to house as many as four and a half million volumes, though its collection in 1899 numbered closer to one million.[146] For those who agreed that "one of the best and most enduring expressions of a people's attainment and quality is found its representative buildings" it must have been a gratifying moment.[147] William Brett, head of the Cleveland Public Library and father of the *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature*, proclaimed

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[143] For a concise recounting of this change in mission for the Library of Congress under Spofford, see John Y. Cole, *Jefferson's Legacy: A Brief History of the Library of Congress* reproduced on the Library's website at http://www.loc.gov/loc/legacy/loc.html. Cole also explains how there had been efforts by some leaders of the Smithsonian Institution to have that body take on the attributes of a national library, but these were largely abandoned with the appointment of Spofford and the rise of the Library of Congress to increasingly greater prominence from the 1860s to the opening of the Jefferson Building in 1897.

[144] The main library building completed in 1897 was officially named the Jefferson Building in 1980. During the twentieth century, two more buildings – the Adams and Madison – were added to the Library of Congress complex.

[145] Jennie S. Campbell, "The National Library at Washington: A Splendid Structure Near the Capitol – Utility and Beauty Blended," *New York Observer and Chronicle* 7, no. 9 (March 2, 1899): 273, APSO.

[146] Ibid.

[147] "The National Library," *New York Evangelist* 69, no. 13 (March 31, 1898): 8, APSO.

in *The Dial* that the Library of Congress "occupies one of the most noble structures on the face of the planet, by far the largest and finest building ever erected for library purposes."[148]

The library's boldest feature, its large circular reading room, departed from the rectilinear vision Boston had preferred. Later the New York Public Library's main Reading Room would match the Library of Congress's reading room on grounds of elegantly poised symmetry, but the domed, balconied interior in Washington went further, becoming a room ready for comparison with any piece of European splendor. Some who viewed the new Library must have thought the structure audacious – "an unfortunately aggressive appearance," wrote one critic – but in the end it seems to have succeeded in inspiring the reverence its backers thought due the nation's literature.[149] On the whole it strikes one that the library not only echoed (with its two wings joined by a central dome), but in many respects rivaled, the architectural grandeur of the Capitol itself, never mind its dwarfing the White House.

The idea that mighty causes were combining in nineteenth-century America, and that the record of world history would have to include a chap-

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[148] "The National Library," *New York Evangelist* 69, no. 13 (March 31, 1898): 8, APSO; William H. Brett, "American Libraries," *The Dial: A Semi-monthly Journal of Literary Criticism, Discussion and Information* 28. no. 333 (May 1, 1900): 346, APSO; William Becker, "Brett, William Howard," *American National Biography*, 3:9-11.

[149] Sophia Antoinette Walker, "Fine Arts: The Congressional Library," *The Independent, Devoted to the Consideration of Politics, Social and Economic Tendencies, History, Literature, and the Arts* 48, no. 2473 (April 23, 1896): 7, APSO. On the issue of comparison to Europe, Ms. Walker wrote, in the same article, "The outside of the building suggests at once the Grand Opera of Paris in the façade of its central pavilion, and the new Reichstag Building in its general appearance…."

ter on the United States which presented the nation as an equal contributor to western civilization, is eloquently portrayed in the Library of Congress's main reading room. High above its circular arrangement of desks and passages, a mural by Edwin Blashfield presents a visual argument for American civilization's international and historical importance. Arranged non-hierarchically, in circular fashion, around the center of the dome are twelve images representing Rome, Egypt, Judea, the Middle Ages, Athens and, among others, the United States. Here is the whole idea of international prestige and historical renown efficiently summarized – America as an equal contributor, neither admitting inferiority nor claiming superiority, to the cultural achievements that have shaped the last three millennia. As art historian Sally Webster has written, Blashfiled's mural "presents the United States . . . not in triumphant ascendance but as one nation among equals."[150]

The Library of Congress, long-anticipated and finally celebrated at the end of the nineteenth century by millions of Americans, represented physically the highest hopes of a cultural achievement for the nation. An atmosphere of quiet satisfaction with a job well done accompanied an eagerness for recognition on the world stage. As with the great fairs of 1876 and 1893, Americans hoped a national library would help to embed their republican civilization within a progressive narrative of human intellect and expression.

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[150] Sally Webster, "Evolution and Civilization: Foundations of the Decorative Program for the Library of Congress," unpublished paper delivered at the Annual Meeting of the American Studies Association, November 2005. My sincere thanks to Professor Webster for pointing out to me that the Blashfield mural nicely illustrated many of the ideas I have argued for in chapter two.

"It has been found in indispensable in every European capital," *The Century* has said twenty-five years before the completion of the American monument, "to have separate library edifices for the great collections of books gathered at the public cost and through the operation of the copy tax."[151]

Finally the United States had such an edifice. Most catalogues of the Library's merits at some point weighed America's building, and the ideas behind it, against European counterparts, and acts of raw measurement often infused comment in the wake of the building's completion. At a dinner hosted by the National Sculpture Society and the National Society of Mural Painters, Brooks Adams lectured broadly on "Art in America." At a certain point he came to that "which [he] chiefly wish[ed] to speak," namely, architecture. Though he would eventually express grave concern, wondering whether Americans had "any tale to tell save that we once were rich," he first spoke squarely for the accomplishments of the Library of Congress: "I agree that as a workshop this building approaches perfection. It is ample, it is light, it is convenient, while the rapidity of service can hardly be excelled. In the National Library of Paris it costs and hour to get a book; in the British Museum half and hour, in Washington five minutes. In Paris and London one works in dark and gloomy rooms, often crowded to excess; in Washington the reading rooms are numerous, cheerful and comfortable. All this and more may be

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[151] "The Proposed National Library Building," *Century Illustrated Magazine* 23, no. 4 (February 1882): 592, APSO.

said of the practical side of this building."[152] Adams suggested that on the whole America was ascending while Europe was on the "ebb," but nevertheless the above were intended as tepid compliments, and were tactically placed as rhetorical preparation for exhortations to other and nobler aims. To many other American observers though, the facts to which Adams referred provided grounds enough for satisfaction, and sometimes outright pride. There is no doubt that the hope of successfully imitating European cultural achievements (or what those were imagined to be) motivated American cultural striving. Since this represented an impossible goal in some respects, American observers often emphasized what could be stated on paper and proved: either the library in Washington was brighter and more comfortable than that in London or it wasn't; and if it *was*, then that was something at least that could be checked off the list.

As we shall see in the following section, one of the highest hopes for the Library, that it would "offer a common meeting-ground, and bring about a closer cooperation of all the forces which make for the betterment of social conditions, for a higher civilization," was in fact an earnest hope for culture in

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[152] Brooks Adams, from an address delivered to the National Sculpture Society and the National Society of Mural Painters in New York in 1899, excerpts of which were reprinted as "Art in America," *The American Architect and Building News* 64, no. 1223 (June 3, 1899): 77, APSO. Though mostly overshadowed by his brother today, Brooks Adams (1848-1927) was an active and respected writer and thinker in the late-nineteenth century. His earliest efforts were directed toward political reform, and he wrote on political as well as economic issues for *North American Review* and *Atlantic Monthly* in the decades before the publication of his *Law of Civilization and Decay* in 1895, which appears to have been the opening salvo in an ever growing dismay about western civilization in general and democracy in particular. Later he worked in the Teddy Roosevelt Whitehouse. See David Quigly, "Adams, Brooks," *American National Biography*, 1:70-71.

all its forms.[153]

SPREADING THE WORD: MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES ACROSS THE NATION

Despite the unquestionable cultural centrality of large cities in the mid- and late-nineteenth century, efforts at cultural improvement appealed to the nation as a whole and spurred the development of a wider cultural infrastructure. In the second half of the century, municipalities and states from Maine to California engaged in programs of cultural construction and diffusion by organizing libraries and museums. If the results looked comparatively unimpressive next to big-city counterparts, the intent and the sincerity behind them were no less remarkable as part of general American striving for cultural enrichment. Nation-wide efforts to place good books and pictures within the reach of the non-urban, non-eastern citizenry were only marginally concerned with the larger historical and international issues that fueled the other developments discussed in this chapter, but they represented a cultural ripple effect. Urban efforts to achieve international cultural prestige were widely reported and commented upon in newspapers and national magazines and placed the idea of cultural development on the agenda for local communities across the country. American towns and villages emulated and learned from the great American cities as the latter had emulated and

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[153] William H. Brett, "American Libraries," *The Dial: A Semi-monthly Journal of Literary Criticism, Discussion and Information* 28. no. 333 (May 1, 1900): 347, APSO.

learned from Europe.

Ripley Hitchcock, a respected critic and publisher, represents the general tenor of sentiment; he seemed almost to weave an explanation for the cultural activity he saw around him from the old threads of Manifest Destiny.

> Where the vineyards of Nicholas Longworth clothed the hilltops above Cincinnati within the memory of living men now stands a spacious art museum, and close beside it there will be an art-school building more generously appointed than any other in our land. In St. Louis, where French traders gathered with their furs since the opening of the century, a new art museum supplements the work of a school whose pupils profit by the latest lessons of South Kensington and German art centers, as well as by the academic teachings of Paris. Chicago, with citizens still living who watched the Indians depart, is building for her Art Institute a new museum. The money is ready for art museums in Milwaukee and Detroit. The Minneapolis Society of Fine Arts has established an art school of ambitious plans. The "first white male child born in Kansas" is trustee of a State Art Association, and men who fought for "Free Soil" are now collecting autotypes and cases. These plain facts have an eloquence of their own. Their story is told again in the art societies, exhibitions, and lectures of minor cities throughout the middle West and beyond. History has recorded the period of chasing or being chased by the red man, of clearing forests and breaking prairies, the marvelous growth of agriculture, commerce, and manufactures, and the resultant wealth. But of the working of that most abstract of all ideas, the art feeling, little has been told. And now it is suddenly made manifest that the most active among the current phases of that formative condition which we call American art is the movement in progress throughout our West.[154]

Not all the discourse on culture outside the great cities painted so majestic a picture, but the evidence makes clear that the idea of culture as a national good extended beyond circles of eastern elites and declared Europhiles. From

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[154] Ripley Hitchcock, "The Western Art Movement," *Century Illustrated Magazine* 32, no. 4 (August 1866): 576, APSO. Hitchcock worked as a correspondent for the *New York Tribune*, then as an editor for publishing house D. Appleton & Co., then as an editor and Director at Harper & Brothers. See "Ripley Hitchcock Dies," *New York Times*, May 5, 1918.

Minnesota to Georgia, newspapers kept up-to-date on museum developments in the largest cities. The opening of the Metropolitan on Sundays, the appearance of the new Boston Museum, the contents of individual exhibitions, and the speeches of museum managers all found their way into the press in areas as distant as San Francisco and Dallas and as out of the way as Bismarck, North Dakota.

"The bareness of Western life is the staple topic on which our visitors from Europe and the East talk," stated the *Chicago Daily Tribune* in 1875, almost two decades before Chicago's entrance onto the world stage during the Columbian Exposition, before the city had quite established itself as a cultural player of any moment.[155] "Everybody is making money, or trying to make money, they say, and no one has leisure for books, and culture, and art. The sweeping statement has some truth in it; but the element of verity grows less every year. . . . There are a dozen art-sales in this city where there used to be one."[156] Creating an art museum, however, remained a daunting, capital-intensive enterprise, subject to increasingly competitive demand for a limited supply of meritorious (or at the very least genuine) works. Regardless of sincere efforts, a relative scarcity of resources and expertise in the nineteenth-century art market meant that many western dreams of museums that would be smaller-scale Metropolitans remained only dreams until the twentieth century. In numerous cases, the effects of civic enthusiasm were mixed;

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[155] "Art in the West," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 16, 1875, 4, PQHN.

[156] Ibid.

boosterism probably outran honest or competent evaluation of works in many towns, as it often did even in large cities. What we note here, however, is not necessarily the extent to which smaller cities across the Middle and West of the country actually did deliver great art to their populaces, but that the discussions they had about such intentions closely resembled, even at times seemed to mimic, conversations in Boston or New York, where desires cohered more closely with material realities.

Libraries were another matter. Within reason, anyplace could have one, and nearly every town seems to have created one.[157] It must be remembered that the mere physical availability of books remained a pressing concern in the nineteenth century, even given extraordinary technological advances in printing and a great profusion of publishing houses. Some had suggested, in fact, that the copyright law instituted in 1870 requiring two copies of books to be deposited in the Library of Congress was inadequate, since it presented little practical value for someone in San Francisco or Peoria. A writer for *Overland Monthly* noted that the United Kingdom required *five* copies of works seeking copyright protection to be deposited – one each in the British Museum in London, the Bodleian in Oxford, University Library in Cambridge, University Library in Edinburgh and Trinity College Library in

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[157] The movement to build and stock and staff libraries that will be discusses here predates the great contributions of Andrew Carnegie, which began only in the very last years of the nineteenth century. I hope the evidence here suggests that the enthusiasm with which Carnegie's support was sought and received after he began his massive program of library donations preexisted his efforts.

Dublin – to increase accessibility.[158] Libraries multiplied exponentially the number of people with access to a given book, and while this remained the central reason for their promotion and support in cities of any size, the need felt in smaller, more removed locales was even greater than somewhere like Philadelphia or Washington, where public libraries were partly supplemented by private collections and book shops. Lamenting the state of "the wives of farmers; – poor things, whom strenuous toil and monotonous life have driven into melancholia," with never a moment to "get away from their own sordid lives and lose themselves in the world of imagination," the *Friends' Intelligencer* in 1893 hardly worried about the domes or gilding of the Jefferson Building.[159] Instead, they were "inclined to say 'drop everything else, if necessary, and get books to the people in the country villages.'"[160] "The highest and greatest product of civilization is culture," wrote Young Citizen in the *Charlotte Observer*, and "a citizen needs more than knowledge of political candidates and the process of buying votes."[161] Ever on the lookout for lassitude of any kind, Theodore Roosevelt agreed that "in country life it is necessary to guard not against mental fever, but against lack of mental

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[158] Edward S. Holden, "Great Public Libraries in the United States," *Overland Monthly and Out West Magazine* 30, no. 176 (August, 1897): 120, APSO.

[159] "The Free Library as a Factor in the Social Movement," *Friends' Intelligencer* 50, no. 40 (October 7, 1893): 628, APSO.

[160] Ibid.

[161] Young Citizen, "A Young Man's Observations," *Charlotte Observer* 8, no. 35 (August 11, 1895): 3, AHN.

stimulus and interests."[162]

Happily then, and thanks in large part to legislative support from municipalities and states, William Brett could estimate that between the centennial year – when the first survey was taken of library resources in the United States and the American Library Association (ALA) was founded – and 1900, the number of books in libraries across the country had increased from about twelve million to about forty million.[163]

During this period, from the 1870s through the 1890s, the nature of the conversation about libraries changed from one characterized by longing and urgent need to one of confidence and congratulation. In 1877 the *Prairie Farmer* had reported that "the great want experienced by cultured men and women in a small town is that of books, periodicals, etc., which, individually, they are not able to buy."[164] While *The Dial* announced in its first issue in 1880 that readers "would be astonished at the number of public libraries of all kinds recently established throughout the West," the *Christian Advocate* in 1883 reminded its audience that "young people who live in villages or small towns often hear with envy of the great city libraries, which are free to all,

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[162] Theodore Roosevelt, "Civic Helpfulness," *Century Illustrated Magazine* 60, no. 6 (October 1900): 939, APSO.

[163] William H. Brett, "American Libraries," *The Dial* 28, no. 333 (May 1, 1900): 347, APSO.

[164] "Organizing Book Clubs," *Prairie Farmer* 48, no. 50 (December 15, 1877): 398, APSO. Reprinted from *Scribner's Magazine*.

and have a hunger for more books."[165] By 1896, on the other hand, *The Literary World* celebrated the fact that "this is an era of libraries. . . . Even very small towns rejoice in the movement."[166]

The use of the word movement is not an accident. Between the end of the Civil War and 1890 Vermont, Ohio, Colorado, Illinois, Wisconsin, New York, Indiana, Iowa, Texas, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Michigan, Nebraska, California, Minnesota, New Jersey, Montana, New Mexico, Missouri, Kansas, Wyoming, North Dakota, South Dakota, Pennsylvania and Washington all passed legislation enabling funds for public library systems. Nine other states followed suit before the turn of the century.[167] "In Massachusetts in 1890," writes library historian Kenneth Carpenter, there were "103 towns without free libraries . . . at the end of 1898 there were eight such towns, representing less than one-half of one percent of the population.[168]

The library movement in the United States in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, moreover, involved more than just shelving and collec-

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[165] "The Library," *The Dial: A Semi-monthly Journal of Literary Criticism, Discussion, and Information* 1, n. 1 (May 1880): 16, APSO; "How To Form A Book Club," *Christian Advocate* 58, no. 42 (October 18, 1883): 666, APSO.

[166] "Public Library Limitations," *The Literary World: A Monthly Review of Current Literature* 27, no. 1 (January 11, 1896): 8, APSO.

[167] Kenneth Carpenter, *Readers and Libraries: Toward a History of Libraries and Culture in America* (Washington, D. C.: Library of Congress, 1996), 32-33; George S. Bobinski, *Carnegie Libraries: Their History and Impact on American Public Library Development* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1969), 6. Bobinski cites U. S. Bureau of Education, *Statistics of Libraries and Library Legislation in the United States, 1895-1896* (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1897), 525-526.

[168] Carpenter, *Readers and Libraries*, 36. Carpenter cites *Ninth Report of the Free Library Commission* (Boston: 1899), 3-4.

tions. Following their counterparts in many other occupations, American librarians made themselves into professionals. The formation of the American Library Association 1876 initiated an era of change for how books were managed and offered for public use. Over the next twenty-five years, librarians and would-be librarians throughout the nation both solicited and offered advice and instruction, through conferences, articles, courses and personal connections. As a fortuitous side-effect, when the time came for the reorganization of the Library of Congress, men like Ainsworth Spofford and Herbert Putnam had accumulated enough experience to conceive and manage the massive undertaking.

So in some sense the Library of Congress presented just the final accomplishment of a larger story, most of whose episodes were more modest but, both *en masse* and in the eyes of particular communities, no less important. All the subtle shades of argument about morals, national prestige and social improvement were bandied about, but at the end the effort to create and support public libraries in as many corners of the country as possible was animated by the simple idea that the more people had access to an organized selection of books at no cost, the better.

We can glimpse both the broad character of the movement and the general enthusiasm for it in a further excerpt from *The Dial*: "native ingenuity has filled the towns and villages with a large variety of organizations, formed for circulating books. They vary from the simple book-club started by some

zealous women among a few families, to the large public library that supplies the wants of a city; and not infrequently the latter has in short time grown, through many stages, from the nucleus given by the former. . . . it will be a favorite task of THE DIAL to give all the information and assistance it can to those who support and manage these institutions."[169] *Century Illustrated* also sought to make sure readers knew of its longstanding support, "from almost its first number," for "a general free library movement," reprinting in 1893 an excerpt from an 1882 issue in which the magazine had already understood that "the taste for good reading is the true door to culture."[170]

If almost everyone shared the most basic sense of urgency, debates still cropped up among library supporters, most often on the question of library contents. Helene Louise Dickey, writing to the editors of *The Bookman*, for instance, agreed that the magazine had been correct in judging that a German-language *Iliad* would probably have a lonely life in a "village library," but disagreed with the editors' opinion that Milton would be indigestible for the "workingman."[171] *Forum* printed a long article on "books and readers in

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[169] "The Library," *The Dial: A Semi-monthly Journal of Literary Criticism, Discussion, and Information* 1, n. 1 (May 1880): 16, APSO. It is interesting to note that this is the first number of *The Dial*. To know the balance between editors' commercial and social concerns while harnessing their fledgling publication to the enthusiasm for libraries might be impossible, but their making of the point, for any reason, helps makes the author's.

[170] "A General Free Library Movement," *Century Illustrated Magazine* 45, no. 5 (March 1893): 794, APSO.

[171] Helene Louise Dickey, 4213 Ellis Avenue, Chicago, IL, "[Letter to] Editors of The Bookman," *The Bookman, A Review of Books and Life* 6, no. 6 (February 1898): 523-24, APSO;

public libraries" recommending a balance between "books that the people will read" and those whose "intrinsic merit will justify the public support of a library upon grounds of public policy."[172] While emphasizing the importance of taking into account community-specific tastes, the author also offered a helpful list of perennial favorites like the still "most popular" *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *The Scarlet Letter*, and the works of Walter Scott, whose popularity seemed only to increase over time, "while the number of the readers of Dickens [was] diminishing." "The most noteworthy of modern developments" the article continued, "is the growing use which is made of works upon the fine arts."[173]

Choosing books was only one concern however. Once the contents of a library were decided upon, or once mechanisms for making such decisions were in place, myriad practical issues remained, including how to protect books from dampness, dust, insects and fire, how to catalogue works, and what effect small membership fees had on the usefulness of libraries. The annual meetings of the ALA became essential seminars for librarians and at Buffalo in 1883 included "delegates from distant States, from as far as Omaha

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[172] C. B. Tillinghast, "Books and Readers in Public Libraries," *Forum* 16 (September 1893): 60-62, APSO.

[173] Ibid. Carpenter, in *Readers and Libraries*, notes that in Boston, as elsewhere, "the most durable and influential competitor of the goal of the universal library [one that privileged breadth and variety in a collection] was the view that libraries should consist solely of the good books" (16).

at the West, and from all portions of the Northern and Middle States."[174] At the meeting two years earlier in Washington, D.C., lectures on "arrangement of reading rooms and methods of heating, lighting and ventilation" were augmented by the enthusiastically received news that a "great boon to literary men and the reading public," the [Poole's] Index to Periodical Literature, "was approximately completed in manuscript form and would appear in print, brought down to 1881, within little more than a year."[175]

The Ladies Home Journal, with less fanfare but just as earnest an approach, sponsored an anticipatory series of articles on "The Twentieth Century Village" in 1898, one of which was dedicated to "Starting a Village Library." The editors characterized the series as one "not of ideal theories, but of practical suggestions capable of being carried out in the smallest communities."[176] Given the limited financial end educational resources in many parts of the country in the nineties, this was just what communities needed most. Accordingly, village readers were treated to concise paragraphs laying out the basic elements of "The Officers That Will Be Necessary," "A List of States That Give Aid," "The Work Of The Library Committee," and "Plans

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[174] "The Librarians in Buffalo," *Zion's Herald* 60, no. 35 (August 29, 1883): 276, APSO.

[175] "The Washington Library Convention," *Christian Union* 23, no. 8 (February 23, 1881): 176, APSO.

[176] Neltje Blanchan, "The Twentieth Century Village; Third Article – Starting a Village Library," *The Ladies' Home Journal* 15, no. 11 (October 1898): 28, APSO.

For Financial Support," among other topics.[177] With an eye toward the future, this primer singled out services to child readers as "The First Necessity Of The Library," and indeed articles were sometimes published addressing themselves directly to the young and encouraging them to pool their pennies and organize reading societies of their own.[178] "Suppose," a like-minded contributor to the *Christian Advocate* suggested, "some of you boys and girls who have a little money to spend every year for such things unite your forces and form a book-club. . . ?"[179]

Advocates for children's book clubs in small towns of course did not think that their efforts or successes would help enhance the cultural standing of the United States on the world stage. For the village librarian or Midwestern art-lover temples of culture like the Chicago Art Institute or the Library of Congress, while a source of national pride, were to be emulated mainly in spirit. But this resulted from necessity rather than indifference. When Andrew Carnegie's dollars had most of their effect in the beginning of the next century every effort would be made to construct and maintain buildings whose outward appearance would represent a community's commitment to culture, just as did the large metropolitan enterprises. The audiences

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[177] Neltje Blanchan, "The Twentieth Century Village; Third Article – Starting a Village Library," *The Ladies' Home Journal* 15, no. 11 (October 1898): 28, APSO.

[178] Ibid.

[179] "How to Form a Book-Club," *Christian Advocate* 58, no. 42 (October 18, 1883): 666, APSO.

would be different and smaller, but the impulses were similar.

In these many different ways, the urge to make artistic and literary achievement a permanent and a tangible feature of the American landscape, for audiences both foreign and domestic, characterized another central discourse on culture in the nineteenth century. This was a more outwardly focused discourse in many respects than the discourse on culture and morality discussed in chapter one. While discussions of projects like the World's Fair in Chicago or the Centennial or the Metropolitan Museum did indeed employ arguments for moral improvement, they did so on a larger (and perhaps vaguer) scale – the "nation," "the people," "our civilization" were the elements in play for those interested in the place of the United States on the world historical stage. And while the guidebooks and sermons discussed in chapter one focused with precision on the essentially invisible relationships of individual people with individual works, the discourse explored in this chapter was concerned with establishing a concrete cultural infrastructure which would simultaneously represent and facilitate cultural progress.

The next chapter will discuss how very slippery the idea of progress could be in the second half of the nineteenth century. While the first chapter focused on morality and this one on history and presentation, the next will explore how participants in a third (again, simultaneous) discourse on culture concerned themselves with the role for culture inside a national society experiencing abrupt and often troubling material and intellectual changes.

3 IDEAS OF ORDER

CULTURE, SOCIAL MEANING, PUBLIC MORALITY

> *That which really balances and conserves the social and political world is not so much legislation, police, treaties and dread of punishment, as the latent, intuitional sense, in humanity, of fairness, manliness, decorum, &c. A highest and widest aim of democratic literature may well be to bring forth, to cultivate, brace, and strengthen this sense, in individuals and society.* —Walt Whitman, "Democratic Vistas"[1]

Material and intellectual developments of the nineteenth century like telegraphic communication, transcontinental travel, Darwinism, mass media, mass political organization and social disquiet in both agrarian and industrial sectors bewildered many of those who lived through and tried to explain them. In many ways, nineteenth-century Americans perceived such changes as both momentous and trying. Yet merely to describe any particular era in history as either turbulent or stable is at best a beginning, a reminder more than a revelation; in most ages, anxious men and women mingle with roughly equal numbers of the unthreatened or serenely unaware. So, while many people who wrote about their times in the late-nineteenth century tended to find them extraordinary, the period would have felt to most Americans like a mixture of tradition and novelty, though they sometimes disagreed over which was which. What should appear to historians as unique is not *that* things were changing, but which things were changing and what so-

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[1] "Democratic Vistas," in *Whitman: Complete Poetry and Selected Prose* (New York: Library of America, 1982), 989.

lutions Americans imagined could alleviate the particular difficulties they detected?

Chapter one examined a nineteenth-century discourse concerned with culture's effects on individual morality. Chapter two argued that Americans participated in a concurrent discourse framed largely in historical terms, with an eye toward the international stage and toward creating cultural scaffolding to promote and sustain a more cultured citizenry. This chapter will present evidence for a another discourse, one that combined the inward-looking emphasis of that discussed in the first chapter with the attention to forces larger than the individual discussed in the second. This third discourse assumed a relationship between culture and public morality and debated its effects on the domestic social fabric in the United States. Chapter three, then, will explore how American thinkers and writers hoped cultural development and experience might work either to ameliorate or exacerbate pressing contemporary issues like societal cohesion and unity, the relationship between religious faith and secular learning, and the proper boundaries of state-sanctioned censorship. The first part of this chapter will discuss the attractive force of the idea of culture as an impetus to social unity. The second and third parts will explore ways in which culture could be seen rather as a threat to cherished ideas of, religious tradition social norms, or public morality.[2]

[2] The efficient and, for my purposes, accurate phrase "public morality" was suggested to me by Dr. Sally Webster in an October 2007 conversation.

SEARCHING FOR A CENTER: CULTURE, STABILITY, SOCIAL COHESION

> *Pride, competition, segregation, vicious willfulness, and license beyond example brood already upon us. . . . We sail a dangerous sea of seething currents, cross and under-currents, vortices – all so dark, untried – and whither shall we turn?* —Walt Whitman, "Democratic Vistas"[3]

By the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the violence of the Civil War had been muted into the compromises of Reconstruction and the fevers of sectionalism were largely replaced with the frenzy of mass party politics and industrial expansion. Political corruption appeared to many endemic, and social isolation somehow perversely seemed to emerge from a society in which individuals' economic fates were ever more tightly linked. Change seemed constantly to accelerate, public discourse to descend to new levels of crassness, and in general volatile forces moving too fast for human intervention (Whitman's "seething currents" and "vortices") both pushed people along and crashed them violently into one another. Progress was praised and investigated; this week's virtuous statesman was next month's crook; today's safe bet was tomorrow's financial disaster; last year's dress was immediately recognizable as such. In the words of University of Kansas Professor William H. Carruth, "one year brings announcements of achievements and discoveries which the next year reverses and ridicules."[4] *National Repository* concluded

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[3] "Democratic Vistas," in *Whitman: Complete Poetry and Selected Prose* (New York: Library of America, 1982), 989, 990.

[4] W. H. Carruth, "The Inventory of a Century," *The Dial: A Semi-Monthly Journal of Literary Criticism, Discussion and Information* 31, no. 365 (September 1, 1901): 131, APSO.

"that our social system is in many particulars sadly out of order can not be doubted."[5] The *Friends' Intelligencer* lamented in 1875 "the fierceness of dispute, the bitterness of spirit, the animosity and enmity that exist between parties and sects."[6]

Against such tumult, culture, in the way that nineteenth-century Americans conceived it, appeared as both an object of and a means to greater social stability. The real importance of culture resided in the virtue it purported to bestow; the glories of Dante's verse or Attic urns rested largely on their participation in and invocation of ideals of perfection that stood fast amidst change. "A search for what is beautiful for its own sake," wrote an 1865 contributor the *New Englander*, "frees Æsthetics . . . from the whole world of utilitarian ideas and lifts it into a world of its own, where it exists from its inherent loveliness and nobleness."[7] Put another way, ideals like truth and beauty were imagined as fixed objects toward which to progress – and unlike technology or commerce their very nature was never to suffer the indignity of alteration: true art "knows no country; it knows no age," as George Fisk

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Carruth (b. 1859), a native of Kansas studied in his home state and also at Berlin and Munich. He received a PhD from Harvard in 1893, served as Chair of Germanic Languages and Literature at the University of Kansas, was a frequent contributor to the *Dial* and *Open Court* and a respected author of several textbooks on German writers. See "Carruth, William Herbert," *National Cyclopedia of American Biography* (1917), 14:486.

[5] "Literature," *National Repository, Devoted to General and Religious Literature, Criticism, and Art* 4, no. 6 (December 1878): 570, APSO.

[6] "Drawing Conclusions," *Friends' Intelligencer* 32, no. 32 (October 2, 1875): 511, APSO.

[7] "Principles of Art," *New Englander* 24, no. 93 (October 1865): 674, APSO.

Comfort had written.[8] "What is needed in the discussion of truth," wrote the editors of the *New-York Observer and Chronicle* at the end of the century, "is the sense of its eternity. Truth is timeless. God once created a world, but he never yet created a truth."[9] Another commentator added, "the truths to which [culture] attains, universal as they are in their application and value, must be proclaimed as far as possible to every individual, be he lowly or exalted."[10] Cultural advocates hoped that the United States could join other great world civilizations as heirs of artistic and literary excellence; and they hoped to reap the social as well as the intellectual benefits of communing with history's best minds and noblest ideas. William Stillman wondered, in the *New Princeton Review*, "how far the strain of modern life, the inordinate inequalities of society . . . might be modified by restoring the arts, as far as cultivation can accomplish it, to the influence they held in the life of Greece in 500 to 400 B.C., and more or less as long as the Greeks remained free."[11] Even at the very end of the nineteenth century, a poem in *Atlantic Monthly* by John Vance Cheney (librarian at the Newberry Library in Chicago) extolled the "Eternity of Art":

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[8] Comfort, *Art Museums in America*, 5.

[9] "Editorial" *New York Observer and Chronicle* 74, no. 37 (September 10, 1896): 395, APSO.

[10] George Teddy, "Culture and Conservatism," *The Nassau Literary Magazine* 41, no. 8 (February 1886): 367, APSO.

[11] William J. Stillman, "The Decay of Art," *New Princeton Review* 2, no. 4 (July 1886): 20, APSO.

Secure the honey cell,
The spider's web is strong;
A song – there's none can tell –
It may live long and long.

For laggard hours or fleet
May bring no harm to art;
Once sweet, forever sweet,
Life holds it to her heart.[12]

The thought and writing of English poet and critic Matthew Arnold infused the wide-ranging discourse on art and society more than any other, in both direct and indirect fashion, to the extent that when authors employed his ideas and catch phrases they sometimes seemed to assume mention of their originator was unnecessary. "It was Matthew Arnold," wrote Randolph Bourne, looking back from the first months of World War I, "read and reverenced by the generation immediately preceding our own, who set to our eyes a definition and a goal of culture. . . . And it was an ideal that appealed with peculiar force to Americans. For it was a democratic ideal everyone who had the energy and perseverance could reasonably expect to acquire by . . . that orientation of soul to which Arnold gave the magic name of culture."[13] By the later decades of the nineteenth century, whether consciously or not, many Americans who sought to craft or to understand the relation between culture

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[12] John Vance Cheney, 'The Eternity of Art," *Atlantic Monthly* 84, no. 506 (December 1899): 753, C-MOA.

[13] Randolph Bourne, "Our Cultural Humility," in Morton Dauwen Zabel, ed., *Literary Opinion in America: Essays Illustrating the Status, Methods, and Problems of Criticism in the United States in the Twentieth Century* 1 (New York: Harper and Row, 1937), 68. Originally published in *The Atlantic Monthly*, October 1914, 503-507.

and society were speaking Arnold's language. In an 1895 review of a collection of his letters, the *Chicago Daily Tribune* noted that "crude but true hearted America could understand him, though he could not understand us."[14] His terms and phrases were discussed and employed in cultural discussions in newspaper and periodicals. The press energetically covered his speaking tour of the United States in 1883 and the public attended his lectures. Commentators at the time anticipated his being "able to judge whether the American people are all 'Philistines,' or whether we are a civilized and a cultivated Nation, as we claim to be."[15] Henry James wrote of Arnold during this same American visit: "When there is a question of his efficacy, his influence, it seems to me enough to ask one's self what we should have done with-

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[14] "Matthew Arnold's Letters," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, December 14, 1895, 9, PQHN.

[15] "Matthew Arnold: He Arrives and Talks," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 23, 1883, 3, PQHN. For an expended discussion of Arnold's time in the U. S. and his reception by American audiences, see Jaap Verheul, "Wandering Between Two Worlds: Matthew Arnold and American Civilization," *European Contributions to American Studies* 41 (1986): 33-46. For other recent scholarship, see Gage McWeeny, "Crowd Management: Matthew Arnold and the Science of Society," *Victorian Poetry* 41, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 93-112; Laurence W. Mazzeno, *Matthew Arnold: The Critical Legacy* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 1999); Dillon Johnston, "Cross-currencies in the Culture Market: Arnold, Yeats, Joyce," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 95, no. 1 (Winter 1996): 45-78; Katherine Bahr, "The Function of Matthew Arnold's Criticism: Resolution and Independence," *Nineteenth-Century Prose* 34, nos. 1-2 (Spring-Fall 2007): 89-114; Amanda Adams, "The Uses of Distinction: Matthew Arnold and American Literary Realism," *American Literary Realism* 37, no. 1 (Fall 2004): 37-49; Christopher Lane, "The Arnoldian Ideal, or Culture Studies and the Problem of Nothingness," in Amanda Anderson and Joseph Valente, eds., *Disciplinarity at the Fin de Siècle* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002): 283-311; Linda Ray Pratt, *Matthew Arnold Revisited* (New York: Twayne, 2000); J. Arthur Bond, "'Applying the Standards of Intrinsic Excellence': Nationalism and Arnoldian Cultural Valuation in the Century Magazine," *American Periodicals: A Journal of History, Criticism, and Bibliography* 9 (1999): 55-73; Jim McWilliams and Cicero Bruce, "Matthew Arnold's Visit to St. Louis," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 50, no. 2 (September 1995): 225-31.

out him, to think how much we should have missed him, and how he has salted and seasoned our public conversation. In his absence the whole tone of discussion would have seemed more stupid, more literal."[16] James had, from across the Atlantic, summed up what many American cultural aspirants felt toward Arnold in the second half of the century: that he set the tone and the bar, gave America an image and a theory of the relations between culture and society which appeared both tangible and worth pursuing.

Arnold had stridently invoked the idea of culture as a cure for society's divisions and problems since the 1860s, and his ideas on the dangers of inequality resonated with special force in the industrialized world that America was fast becoming. "[Culture] is of use," he argued, "because, like religion – that other effort after perfection, – it testifies that, where bitter envying and strife are, there is confusion and every evil work."[17] Arnold believed that, "inequality . . . [had] the natural and necessary effect, under present circumstances, of materialising our upper class, vulgarising our middle class, and

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[16] *English Illustrated Magazine*, January 1884. Reproduced in Leon Edel, ed., *Henry James, Literary Criticism: Essays on Literature, American Writers, English Writers* (New York: Library of America, 1984), 731. William Dean Howells also admitted – though he did not insist upon as James did – the usefulness of Arnold for Americans in *Criticism in Fiction*. The critical writings of both authors has been explored in Robert G. Davidson, "The Master and the Dean: The Literary Criticism and Aesthetics of Henry James and William Dean Howells, 1859-1897" (PhD diss., Purdue University, 2002).

[17] Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, in P.J. Keating, ed., *Matthew Arnold: Selected Prose* (New York: Penguin, 1987), 225. *Culture and Anarchy* was originally published in England in 1869. Arnold quotes James 3:16 here, which in the KJV reads "Where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work."

brutalising our lower class. And this is to fail in civilisation."[18] Many Americans thought, along with Louis Judson Swinburne, writing for *Lippincott's*, that "in a period when materialism was ascendant and force worshiped, Mr. Arnold has vindicated the right of reasonableness, calm reflection, and the spiritual graces and amenities of life."[19]

Culture could also, like politics and commerce, be a way for Americans to define themselves as individuals or groups. The difference would be that, through the changeless ideals thought to infuse culture, Americans could rise above the natural contentiousness and division that seemed inherent in democracies and capitalisms. Rich and poor, liberal and conservative, labor leader and mogul, all could stand both humbled and ennobled before great art and literature. And again, these are essentially Arnoldian ideas. Culture, he had written,

> seeks to do away with classes; to make the best that has been thought and known in the world current everywhere; to make all men live in an atmosphere of sweetness and light, where they may use ideas, as it

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[18] Matthew Arnold, "Equality," in *Mixed Essays, Irish Essays, and Others* (New York: MacMillan and Co., 1883), 65.

[19] Louis Judson Swinburne, "Matthew Arnold in America," *Lippincott's Magazine of Popular Literature and Science* 7 (January 1884): 90, APSO. It should be pointed out that Arnold's reception by American audiences during his lecture tour of the States in 1883 was not entirely cordial on all accounts. He was criticized at times for his dress, his arrogance, his ignorance of American life and manners, and the volume and accent of his speaking voice. As Howard Mumford Jones pointed out in "Arnold, Aristocracy and America," *American Historical Review* 49, no. 3 (April 1944): 397, Arnold noted in a letter that "Harper's Magazine goes so far as to say that just because I am irresistibly agreeable to read I ought never to speak." The observation by Harper's indicates both the wide familiarity with Arnold's ideas among American readers and their preference for taking those ideas on their not their author's terms. (Jones cited Arnold Whitridge, ed., *Unpublished Letters of Matthew Arnold*, (New Haven, 1923), 53-54.)

> uses them itself, freely, – nourished, and not bound by them.
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> This is the *social idea*; and the men of culture are the true apostles of equality. The great men of culture are those who have had a passion for diffusing, to make prevail, from one end of society to the other, the best knowledge, the best ideas of their time.[20]

This line of thinking proved attractive even as different groups or individuals pursued or promoted culture for different reasons and found different messages upon its attainment. For instance, middle-class Americans committed to polishing their lives and setting themselves apart from their working-class neighbors might nevertheless agree that public galleries ought to be open on Sundays in the hope of some slight enlightenment for the nearly hopeless masses. Likewise, the true connoisseur, who understood privately that the ideas of the newly rich were ultimately vulgar, who resented their squandering thousands of dollars buying crude pictures from unscrupulous dealers, still could agree that ignorantly desiring good art was at least better than ignorantly desiring other things. "The profuseness of [uninformed] purchase," one *New York Times* columnist could hope after the Civil War, "is but a feature of the transition state [and] will soon right itself, as tastes become cultivated and judgments ripen by comparison, and are influenced by fair and honest criticism. The admirers of true art amongst us are nevertheless steadily on the increase."[21]

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[20] Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, in *Matthew Arnold: Selected Prose* (New York: Penguin, 1987), 226.

[21] "Art Matters," *New York Times*, April 2, 1866, 5:1. Emphasis added. I might add here that, though social quiescence was one more of the beckoning, elusive promises of a culturally mature America, culture cannot be simply reduced to economics or politics. We

We have already, in our discussions of the Centennial and the World's Columbian Exposition, seen evidence of the hopes that higher cultural attainment would bring reconciliation in the face of division, with special reference usually given to healing the wounds lingering after a costly civil war.[22] There would be no Northerners and no Southerners standing in front of a Raphael or immersed in the pages of Virgil. All would recognize something that was, conveniently, both uplifting and shared. But the sectional divide was far from the only case where culture might be employed as a remedy. Many writers and thinkers earnestly believed that an appreciation for and striving toward artistic and literary culture could go a long way toward soothing social ills of all sorts.

In the socio-economic realm, the late-nineteenth century saw the emergence of powerful trade unions as well as widespread agrarian unrest, all in opposition to the supposed greed and perfidy of the money-holding classes of

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cannot explain the efforts at cultural enrichment in the United States in the nineteenth century as efforts at "social control". Arguments for art museums or for improved literary criticism in periodicals were never quite the exclusive prerogative of any class or constituency. Even if they had been, they were too clumsy and unreliable for purely political maneuvering.

[22] Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2001), while attempting specifically to trace the roots of Pragmatism, argues convincingly for the generalized, decades-long influence of the Civil War experience on American intellectuals. In some sense I argue in this chapter against his assertions that the Civil War and the social and political changes of the late-nineteenth century resulted mainly in a widespread distaste for absolute truths. While I think he makes his case that the members of the "club" he focuses on – Oliver Wendell Holmes, Charles Pearce, William James, John Dewey – were moved by the jolting experiences of the period to embrace various pragmatisms and to suspect the idea of fixed truths, I think other evidence reveals a tendency among the majority of writers and thinkers either to remain complacently accepting of old ideas of permanence or to cling even more closely to them.

the United States. Of course things like maximum-hours legislation or radical monetary reform were unlikely to be palatable to the middle classes, magnates, or those just temperamentally conservative. But though the mighty and the modest might never agree on monetary or legislative matters, all but the most radical in both groups recognized prolonged, intensifying divisiveness and the material demands made by the modern world as real dangers. Activist editor and critic Benjamin Orange (B. O.) Flower worried in *The Arena* that "the craze for money [had] anesthetized the public conscience."[23] "Division of labor," a contributor to *Unitarian Review* wrote in 1887, "tends to make a man merely part of the machine, and by its confinement the whole day leaves him no chance for culture."[24] *Outlook* admitted that "under the stress of modern conditions, present activities absorb time and strength to the full, pushing out the cloistered traditions of finer and simpler tastes."[25]

To some minds literature offered an escape from such strife without any messy transfers of income or regulatory red tape. "Literature," a *Godey's Magazine* writer still insisted almost at the century's end, "is the greatest of all democratizing forces. The liberation of man from despotries and serfdom has found its most tireless and skillful architect in literature. It will not stop

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[23] B. O. Flower, "The Menace of Plutocracy," *The Arena* 7, no. 34 (September 1892): 508, APSO.

[24] John C. Kimball, "Labor Troubles," *The Unitarian Review* 27, no. 4 (April 1887): 338, APSO.

[25] "The Spectator," *Outlook* 56, no. 5 (May 29, 1897): 248, APSO.

now with the foundation of a few republics and constitutional monarchies. The freedom of man is not yet consummated."[26]

A contributor to *First Century of National Existence*, a series of extended essays by "an eminent corps of scientific and literary men" quoted the famous Unitarian thinker William E. Channing:

> "God be thanked for books," says the clear, pure and eloquent Channing, in his address to young men and working men, which has found an echo in millions of hearts and homes – ". . .*They are the true levelers*. They give to all who will faithfully use them the society of the best and greatest of our race. No matter how poor I am – no matter though the prosperous and fashionable may not enter my obscure dwelling – if the Sacred Writers will enter and take up their abode under my roof, if Milton will cross my threshold to sing me to Paradise, and Shakspeare [*sic*] to open to me worlds of imagination, and Franklin to enrich me with his practical wisdom, I shall not pine for want of intelligent friendship."[27]

This idealistic passage is remarkable for a number of reasons. First, it casts doubt upon any other prospective "levelers." Second, more subtly but even more strikingly, we find at the end of the excerpt that the primary "want" of the dissatisfied is for "intelligent friendship" – i.e., *not* decent wages or voting

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[26] Chelifer, "The Justification of Slum Stories," *Godey's Magazine* 131, no. 784 (October 1895): 430, APSO. (See chapter four for more on "slum novels".)

[27] *The First Century of National Existence; the United States as They Were and Are, by An Eminent Corps of Scientific and Literary Men* (Hartford, CN: L. Stebbins, F. Dewing & Co., 1875), 507. Emphasis added. Some of the "eminent corps" included George B. Prescott, a technical specialist in telegraphy and author of popular articles and books on the subject; map-maker D. A. Heald; life-insurance executive Jacob L. Greene; Civil War historian Thomas P. Kettell; artist and travel writer Thomas Addison Richards; editor of the American Journal of Education and U. S. Commissioner of Education Henry Barnard; and Dr. L. P. Brockett, author of *Women's Work in the Civil War* (1868). Channing wrote and worked in an earlier era. My use of this passage is not a comment on Channing himself, who may or may not have approved of this presentation of his words, but on the ends to which they are put by these later writers.

rights. The subject has been finessed so that the matter of "how poor I am" seems lost in the celebration of the wonders of literature, and the problem of one's run-down dwelling has been reduced to whether or not its door is darkened with famous heads. Formulae like this ingeniously offered something (a) unusually valuable and (b) basically immaterial, and therefore *radically accessible*, as Arnold had said, "from one end of society to the other." This sort of idea was in fact an old one. In his essay "History," for instance, Emerson had declared that "he that is once admitted to the right of reason is made a freeman of the whole estate. What Plato has thought, he may think; what a saint has felt, he may feel; what at any time has befallen man, he can understand."[28] Even at the end of the century some were still of the mind that "all the world reads Shakespeare; all men love Longfellow. Is there any insuperable obstacle to a fellowship of social institutions?"[29]

With this in mind, we find a third strain of thought in the longer excerpt above: whether rich or poor, high or low, agreement can exist on the merits of the likes of Milton, Shakespeare and Franklin. The statements of almost all commentators on culture over a long period took for granted the idea of a relatively stable canon, discernable for those able to combine refined tastes with deference to the past.

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[28] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "History," in Carl Bode, ed., *The Portable Emerson* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1981), 115.

[29] "Editorials: The Twentieth Century," *The Independent, Devoted to the Consideration of Politics, Social and Economic Tendencies, History, Literature, and the Arts* 53, no. 2718 (January 3, 1901): 48, APSO.

As early as 1852, the Reverend Orville Dewey, in a speech to the Mercantile Library Association of the City of New-York on "The Laws of Human Progress and Modern Reforms," had also sought to shift the understanding of change and progress to cultural ground. "Why" he began, ". . . must reforms be taken up with violence?" And continued, "why degenerate into partisan strifes? Why do we not calmly engage in them as if they belonged to the order of the world? It is said, I know, that all revolutions, all great changes for the better, have been violent, and probably must be so. . . . But revolutions in *opinion*, have their place *exclusively in the mind*. They are to be carried on by writing books, not fighting battles; by the agency of clear thoughts, not furious passions."[30] These comments of course came before the Civil War, before Bloody Kansas, in the aftermath of the Compromise of 1850 when some hope remained that the most intractable of all American problems might still be resolved at the ballot box or on the floor of the Senate. But Dewey would not be the last to argue that the only conflict that mattered – i.e., *not* the immoveable "order of the world" – resided properly in the realm of thought and argument. Immediately after the Civil War in fact, when we would perhaps expect a more chastened outlook, Frederic De Peyster, writing on the "moral and intellectual influence of libraries," could assert with surprising confidence that "[the] devastating war, which the

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[30] Rev. Orville Dewey, *The Laws of Human Progress and Modern Reforms: A Lecture Delivered to the Mercantile Library Association of the City of New-York* (New York: C. S. Francis & Company, 1852), 12-13.

people of all the States can now scan in its fearful and yet glorious consequences, was a war of opinions!"[31] "This nation," he continued, "is governed not by force, but by ideas. What the history of the last four years shows is the tremendous force and supremacy especially of moral ideas."[32] Certainly numerous moralistic arguments on slavery and other issues helped precipitate and sustain the Civil War, but it is also true that what "the history of the last four years" had actually suggested were the ultimate limits of ideas in the face of munitions, manpower, railroads, and political endurance. Many Southerners, after all, perceived the war as a defense of the moral foundations on which the nation had been founded, yet their moral stance had finally to be tested not in debate but in violence. After the Civil War the North chose to remember a moral struggle over the evil of slavery or the sanctity of the Union, just as the South began to construct the potent idyll of the "lost cause"; but neither conception would have emerged without the *collapse* of a cultured "war of opinion" into massive bloodshed between 1861 and 1865.[33]

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[31] Frederic De Peyster, *The Moral and Intellectual Influence of Libraries on Social Progress,* (New York: The Society, 1866), 12-13. De Peyster was an important force in cultural affairs in New York in the nineteenth century. He was closely involved with the management and finance of the New-York Historical Society, the New York Society Library and other institutions, and also authored several works on culture in the United States. See "Frederic De Peyster Dead: The End of a Useful and Honorable Career," *New York Times*, August 19, 1882, 5.

[32] Ibid., 85.

[33] For various recent historical interpretations of the origins and meanings of the "lost cause" see James McPherson, *This Mighty Scourge: Perspectives on the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 43-50; William C. Davis, *The Cause Lost: Myths and Realities of the Confederacy* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003); Thomas

But evasive as such a framing of the issues was, it is perhaps unsurprising that a people coming out of terrible physical violence looked for hope to ideas. It was a Victorian impulse, and it would linger until World War I largely discredited faith in Ideals and moved minds in the opposite direction, toward practicality, contingency and even cynicism.

Another factor lent credibility to the notion that immaterial cultural commitment might help a confused nation achieve a unity of purpose or at least a moderate level of stability: it had allegedly worked in the past. A favorite historical era for late-nineteenth century Americans became the Middle Ages, the supposed glory days of a Christendom with many interests but a solid core of shared belief.[34] The well-known socialist and lecturer Laurence Gronlund, in "Studies in Ultimate Society," quoted William Lecky, Eng-

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Lawrence Connelly and Barbara L. Bellows, *God and General Longstreet: The Lost Cause and the Southern Mind* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995); Gary W. Gallagher and Alan T. Nolan, eds., *The Myth of the Lost Cause and Civil War History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000); Gaines M. Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause and the Emergence of the New South, 1865-1913* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1980); Patrick Gerster and Nicholas Cords, "The Northern Origins of Southern Mythology," *The Journal of Southern History* 43, no. 4 (November 1977): 567-582; Rollin Gustav Osterweis, *The Myth of the Lost Cause, 1865-1900* (North Haven, CT: Archon Books, 1973).

[34] Studies on this trend include: Robin Fleming, "Picturesque History and the Medieval in Nineteenth-Century America," *American Historical Review* 100, no. 4 (1995): 1061-1094; David W. Hiscoe, "Whitman's Use of the Middle Ages," *American Literature* 51, no. 4 (January 1980): 477-492; T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1981). On some effects of this strain of thought as it played out in England, see Alice Chandler, *A Dream of Order: The Medieval Ideal in Nineteenth-Century English Literature* (London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1971) and K. L. Morris, *The Image of the Middle Ages in Romantic and Victorian Literature* (Beckenham, Kent, UK: Croom Helm Ltd., 1984). It is also always useful to refer back to Henry Adams's *Mont Saint Michel and Chartres* and "The Abyss of Ignorance," in *The Education.*

lish author of the 1869 *History of European Morals*:

> Lecky [says] "When we look back to the cheerful alacrity with which in former ages men sacrificed all their material interests to what they believed to be right, and realize the unclouded assurance that was their reward, it is impossible to deny that we have lost something in our progress."
>
> That "something" which we have lost – not compensated for by our own vast material progress – was, I say, the inner, underlying meaning of all robust faiths of the past, with all their myths and dogmas. I refer to the conviction of our belonging together, the sense of man's organic unity, of the solidarity of man. This it was that actually dominated the ancient Greeks, Romans, and Hebrews, as also the Christians during the so-called Ages of Faith.[35]

Gronlund on the next page goes on to present an argument with traces of similarity to the one put forth almost two decades earlier by Reverend Dewey. "The Christians of the Middle Ages," he reminds us, "showed themselves far broader-minded than the ancients, but manifested an equally strong sense of human solidarity by making human nature itself divine in Jesus, made God; thereby conforming all beings with a human countenance a supreme common dignity, and *providing prince and peasant with the same means to reach an identical glory.*"[36] Gronlund has simply used Christian theology

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[35] Laurence Gronlund, ""Studies in Ultimate Society, *The Arena* 18, no. 94 (September 1897): 352, APSO. The full title of Lecky's work is *History of European Morals from Augustus to Charlemagne* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1869). Gronlund's most widely read work was *The Cooperative Commonwealth* (1884). For his role in late-nineteenth century American socialist thought and movements, see P. E. Maher, "Laurence Gronlund: Contributions to American Socialism," *The Western Political Quarterly* 15, no. 4 (December 1962): 618-624; Mark Pittenger, *American Socialists and Evolutionary Thought, 1870-1920* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993); Charles Postel, "Confederation: Urban, Labor and Nonconformist Reform," in *The Populist Vision* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007): 205-242; Solomon Gemorah, "Laurence Gronlund: Utopian or Reformer," *Science & Society* 33, no. 4 (1969): 446-458.

where Dewey used great books. Though they differ in the details (and though we could hardly expect their authors to see eye to eye on much else), these arguments employ a similar rhetorical architecture. In the one case "prince and peasant alike" both attain "glory" through God; in the other the "poor" as well as the "prosperous and fashionable" enjoy "intelligent friendship" through literature. The promise, in each case, is that some immaterial participation or achievement can mitigate and soothe, if not entirely erase, the empirical gulfs separating humans in the material world.

Grondlund's essay eventually argued for the inevitable need for collectivism or socialism in the United States, so he'll only get us so far in regard to establishing the prevalence of the idea that *culture* in particular could do much to enhance the national unity. What we do see though is evidence of the widespread belief that in ages past men and women had in fact been able to overcome the kind of divisiveness and rancor that reportedly plagued the late-nineteenth century. The excerpt above also introduces the organicism that so often characterized the writing and thought of concerned commentators, the idea that parts related to one another and to a whole in a meaningful and purposeful manner. While the age was certainly more and more one of individuals, this in no way meant that unity of purpose would prove impossible. What was needed was for the diverse elements to work cooperatively and naturally together.

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[36] Laurence Gronlund, "Studies in Ultimate Society," *The Arena* 18, no. 94 (September 1897): 352, APSO. Emphasis added.

The rest of this chapter will discuss several particular instances in which we can see attempts of one kind or another to impose or create some sort of orderly social meaning through culture. In the first chapter we saw the ways in which problems of art were supposed admit to judgment on grounds of a socially relevant morality. What I hope to illustrate now are some of the ways in which Americans hoped that an ethically ordered world, or at least an orderly ethical world, might be effected with the help of art and literature. American writers and thinkers hoped that greater appreciation for the means and ends of culture could encourage social concord or heal social ills. Different from the idea (explored above in chapter one) that artistic and literary matter were themselves friends and companions, this strain of thought held that cultural improvement would encourage better relations among actual flesh and blood Americans, bringing men into fuller sympathy with one another. Such work having traditionally been the province of organized religion, an interesting and dynamic relationship developed between culture and Christianity (or between "Christian culture" and "intellectual culture" and other variations) during the late-nineteenth century.

TWO FAITHS: CHRISTIANITY AND CULTURE

> *The fear of the* LORD *is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction.* —Proverbs 1:7

Since at least the 1870s, both the religious and secular periodical press often explicitly addressed the issue of whether culture could serve in place of relig-

ion or at least deliver many of the benefits that attended religious piety. Most writers tended to take a defensive stance in favor of Christianity's singular and inimitable import. In one such case the *New Englander* editorialized, in an article titled "Culture as a Substitute for Christianity," that, while there were "those who would substitute for Christianity what they are pleased to term culture . . . a product of the scientific and literary tendencies of the day," nevertheless "the religious element must not only be present in a complete culture, but must be *supreme*."[37] The author added that "a merely intellectual and esthetic culture has been found impotent to elevate mankind, and consistent with the grossest moral corruption."[38] "It should not be forgotten," a contributor to the *Duluth News Tribune* reminded readers, "that intellectual culture, no matter how full of 'sweetness and light,' can never be made a substitute for faith."[39]

Few Americans publicly advocated the precisely opposite view; most remained committed to both the concepts and the rhetoric of traditional religion.[40] The idea that religion had no place in society, or that it could be re-

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[37] "Culture as a Substitute for Christianity," *New Englander* 4, no. 163 (November 1881): 773, APSO.

[38] "Culture as a Substitute for Christianity," *New Englander* 4, no. 163 (November 1881): 773, APSO.

[39] "Among Our Books: To Be Able to Speak About Books Not a Credential of Culture; Literature more than a Diversion – Cannot Take the Place of Religion," *Duluth News-Tribune* 22, no. 32 (February 1, 1891): 6, AHN.

[40] To use the term "traditional religion" here oversimplifies things, since quite often Catholic and Protestant periodicals took time in articles on any topic to address the faults of their fellow Christians. For instance, Protestant writers often argued that in

placed substantially and satisfactorily by something else, never found wide public expression.[41] But the fact remains that, when it came to social benefits and spurs to good behavior, many Americans talked about culture in ways that echoed discussions of the earthly goods afforded by religion. In addition, the vigor with which the primacy of Christianity was defended against perceived encroachment by culture sometimes proved more telling than the guarded assertions of culture's most ardent proponents. In fact by the 1880s the Christian periodical press, widely read throughout the century, seems to have perceived a need to reassert the importance of faith for the achievement and retention of meaning and order in the country. At the same time many writers sought common ground with cultural pursuit.[42]

We may classify the publicly expressed opinions on the relationship between culture and Christianity into two main categories: (a) both were good but there was no truly valuable culture uninformed by Christianity and (b) culture presented real threats to Christianity. A frequent sub-argument accompanying the second view was that dependence on culture was impractical, in the sense that it could never achieve the universality that was the es-

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one respect Catholics were just like the classical Greeks: both were revoltingly idolatrous.

[41] For a valuable general discussion of belief and atheism in America, see James Turner, *Without God, Without Creed: the Origins of Unbelief in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985).

[42] For a recent study of American artists' presentation of religious themes and images and the relationship of such imagery to broader social developments, see Kristin Schwain, *Signs of Grace: Religion and American Art in the Gilded Age* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007).

sence of the Christian mission: delivering salvation even unto children, criminals and the ignorant.

To rail against the threat of culture-without-Christianity was, to some extent, to admit its attractive powers. Almost all articles that attacked attempts to position secular culture as a premier societal ideal began by granting that the urgency of the situation flowed from culture's wide appeal. "Now that art, in its broad range and varied character, is becoming a prominent element in sound, polite, and varied education, and is being wrought into the drill and culture of our schools, it may be well to study its relations to Christianity," announced the *National Repository* in 1879.[43] "It hardly needs to be said," began *Scribner's*, "that the tendency of modern culture is away from Christianity. . . . With a multitude of minds, more or less intelligent, culture stands in the place of any sort of cult. To these the perfection of the human being, through the development of his native powers and the harmonization of those powers by discipline and happy use and control, seems a dream quite possible to be realized. Turning their backs to faith, they give one hand to science and the other to art, to be led upward and onward in 'the path of progress.'"[44] For many more religious Americans this situation described a sad

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[43] This article appears first anonymously as "Christianity and Art," *National Repository, Devoted to General and Religious Literature, Criticism, and Art* 6 (October 1879): 318, APSO, and later, in almost identical form, as B. Hawley, D. D., "Christianity and Art," *Christian Advocate* 55, no. 27 (July 1, 1880): 419, APSO. I do not know whether Dr. Hawley lifted the article, or authored both, or neither.

[44] "Culture and Christianity," *Scribner's Monthly* 16, no. 3 (July 1878): 432, APSO. For an

mirage, for while culture might claim the allegiance and attention of a growing multitude of Americans it could never adequately replace Christian faith.

As so often in nineteenth-century cultural discourse, history provided an irresistible trove of apparently educative examples. For those aligned against the rising influence of culture at the cost of Christianity, the past looked rife with lessons about what followed on privileging art over true religion. Favorite examples of the emptiness of cultural achievement were the polytheistic classical Greeks and Romans, whose learning and refinement accompanied debased moral behavior. For all their philosophical and literary merits the classical civilizations, thought many religious critics, worshiped mainly at the altar of the self, and this proved to be a constant complaint about the aims and offers of secular culture. "[Greece's] literature has come down to the present day bearing the dignity of the name 'classical.' It is read by all who would study the finest models of style. But as the moral element died out of this culture, the grossest forms of vice more and more prevailed," wrote biblical scholar George B. Stevens for *New York Evangelist.*[45] "Greece," he continued, "became like a gorgeous palace glittering with beautiful dis-

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extended discussion, see also "The Antagonism of Religion and Culture," *New Englander* 31, no. 119 (April 1872): 201, APSO.

[45] George B. Stevens, "Christianity and Culture," *New York Evangelist* 54, no. 27 (July 5, 1883): 6, APSO. Stevens, a Yale Divinity School graduate, received a Ph.D. from Syracuse University the year this article was published. After a brief time in Europe and earning another degree at Jena he returned to the U.S. and served as Professor of New Testament and Criticism and Interpretation at Yale. See James Grant Wilson and John Fiske, eds., "Stevens, George B.," *Appleton's Cyclopedia of American Biography*, 5:671-72.

play, gilded and tapestried, with carpets of velvet and couches of ease; and a palace whose tables were spread with luxurious and dainty viands, but a palace in which the devotees of pleasure lay day after day, enfeebled with debauchery and indulgence. The proper epitaph for Greece is: Died of Self."[46] This is not merely reflexive conservatism. The core of the Gospel message is redemption through selfless sacrifice. Modesty distinguished the true Christian more than accomplishment; sincerity was prized far above refinement; pride paved the road to ruin; not to know oneself, but to know God was the true Christian's sacred mission. If the end of culture was to be a better person mainly by knowing more, acting better, thinking higher thoughts, then the pursuit of culture was irreconcilable with Christian life not only because of its supposed perfidious effects but also because of its stated ends. "Culture is centered in self," asserted *Scribner's*. "Self is the god and self is the model of all culture. Greece and Rome had plenty of culture, and are still our teachers in art, but the beauty that looked upon them from every hill and gate and temple could not save them from their vices."[47]

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[46] George B. Stevens, "Christianity and Culture," *New York Evangelist* 54, no. 27 (July 5, 1883): 6, APSO.

[47] "Culture and Christianity," *Scribner's Monthly* 16, no. 3 (July 1878): 432, APSO. The secondary literature on the relationships between culture, Christianity and the classics include John Dillenberger, *The Visual Arts and Christianity in America: The Colonial Period Through the Nineteenth Century* (Chico, CA: The Scholar's Press, 1984); Wendy E. Helleman, ed., *Christianity and the Classics: The Acceptance of a Heritage* (Lanham, NY: University Press of America, 1990); Edwin A. Miles, "The Young American Nation and the Classical World," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 35, no. 2 (April-June 1974): 259-274; Caroline Winterer, *The Culture of Classicism: Ancient Greece and Rome in American Intellectual Life, 1780-1910* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002); Brian

I have earlier discussed at length the perceived dangers that cultural participation posed for individuals' moral sense. Here we find a different concern: not that the self might be ruined by moral neglect or carelessness, but that the self might be focused upon too intently, that effort and vision would turn away from the certainties of religious faith toward the never-ending work of self-improvement for its own sake.

In addition to being deleterious morally, the abandonment of religion for culture also just seemed gloomy and disheartening. Perversely, some Christian writers noted, the more one learned, the more he suspected the unplumbable depths of his ignorance. Did not an increasingly voluminous and specialized knowledge about the world mean that the man of secular culture must endure always more uncertainty as he saw the little corner of his experience shrink in proportion? "Amid this wilderness of evidence of all kinds, the man of culture not unnaturally gets dazed and paralyzed by the cross-claims on his judgment," agreed *The Eclectic Magazine of Foreign Literature*, which reprinted "Will Culture Outgrow Christianity?" from England's *Spectator*.[48] "The mistake of believing that we can have any success in making ourselves perfect is, indeed, a noble one," granted Ernest Crosby in *The An-*

Fehler, "Classicism and the Church: Nineteenth-Century Calvinism and the Rhetoric of Oratorical Culture," *Rhetoric Review* 24, no. 2 (2005): 133-149; Norbert M. Samuelson, "Culture and History: Essential Partners in the Conversation Between Religion and Science," *Zygon: Journal of Religion & Science* 40, no. 2 (June 2005): 335-350.

[48] "Will Culture Outgrow Christianity?" *The Eclectic Magazine of Foreign Literature* 45, no. 1 (January 1877): 131, APSO.

dover Review, and "the endeavor to pierce the veil by sharpening then using our faculties is a manly exercise, but it must fail in the end." He concluded, "at the very moment of . . . discovery the intellect cannot but feel its weakness. The pleasure of a fine thought rises above the realm of logic. We can reach a short distance into the mysteries of nature around us, but as our sphere of knowledge grows, the surface of the unknown must necessarily increase. . . . Culture has no answers for the deepest questions in life. It sets before us the impossible task of perfecting ourselves, but it provides no consolation for failure."[49]

Even were this ultimate lack of certainty barely tolerable for the intellectually ambitious who had committed themselves fully to the pursuits and perils of cultural development, for the common person, the great majority of laborers and housewives, a different problem presented itself. One great appeal of Christianity was, to religious minds, its simplicity. I have pointed out earlier that its champions considered culture to be radically accessible, its doors opened to anyone willing to open his mind. To those alarmed at culture's perceived bid to displace religion, however, the spiritual benefits of fine pictures and literature were realistically only to be enjoyed by the very few. An essential beauty of Christ's message was its inclusiveness: no schooling was necessary, just the acceptance of the message of the Gospel and, in best case scenarios, the leading of a Christ-like life. And in practical terms, what

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[49] Ernest R. Crosby, "Culture, Creed and Christianity," *The Andover Review: A Religious and Theological Monthly* 10, no. 59 (November 1888): 467-68, 472, APSO.

cultural reveries could ever replace the efficient moral utility of the Golden Rule?

In addition to being out of reach for the majority of Americans whose schedules and abilities would never allow for true cultural fulfillment, culture also made promises that it could not keep and created false hope. Art, argued some religious writers, including many who managed a tepid respect for it, could never be reconciled with the democratic imperatives either of American society or Christian belief. One writer for the generally culture-friendly *Universalist Quarterly* in 1884 set out to convince the refined "that the Gospel is fitted to satisfy, to the utmost, the rational desires of the most capacious intellect and meet the demands of the highest culture."[50] But as he prepared the ground for his main arguments he felt obliged to grant that "Christianity is adapted to all classes of men, those in low and in high social position, the poor and the rich, the boorish and the refined, the ignorant and the learned. . . . The poor and the illiterate are the blessed recipients of its priceless treasures. It is the bread and water of salvation to all earth's needy children. That is its superlative glory."[51] While this article argued forcefully that the cultured person need not abandon religion, it mostly avoided the question of whether the relatively ignorant believer might be harmed or helped by seeking wider intellectual advancement. As we will see below, many answered this question

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[50] J. S. Lee, "Christianity and Intellectual Culture," *The Universalist Quarterly and General Review*, no. 21 (July 1884): 235, 234, APSO.

[51] J. S. Lee, "Christianity and Intellectual Culture," *The Universalist Quarterly and General Review*, no. 21 (July 1884): 235, 234, APSO.

with enthusiastic affirmations, but for those more suspicious of culture's influence "the relation of religion . . . to modern culture [was] not difficult to describe or define. One word summarize[d] and revealed it. That word [was] – conflict."[52]

Culture, it was insisted, always led its adherents toward fantasies of autonomy, encouraged overconfidence in the powers of human thought and progress, which were dangerous for the university professors and potentially deadly for un-lettered laymen. Those who perceived and joined a debate over secular/intellectual culture versus Christian culture combined the traditional religious concern for the meek of the earth mandated in the Gospel message with fears like those recounted in chapter one, about the particular vulnerabilities of the ignorant and the young.

Interestingly, however, calls to protect the general public from the distractions of culture were often overshadowed by efforts to dissuade the *already*-cultured from abandoning traditional religious faith and practice. Defenders of Christianity's place in American moral and social life sought to demonstrate a harmonious, complementary relation of culture to Christianity. They insisted that culture was necessary, but not sufficient, for the complete life. It is hard to discern from this remove why religiously oriented writers focused much of their energies on educated audiences. Perhaps they assumed that the audience for magazines like *Scribner's, The Christian Advo-*

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[52] Auguste Sabatier, "Religion and Modern Culture," *The New World: A Quarterly Review of Religion, Ethics and Theology* 8, no. 29 (March 1899): 91, APSO.

cate, or *The Independent* were middle-class people whose relative leisure and education gave them the time and inclination to listen to culture's promises of fulfillment and self perfection. Perhaps they imagined these readers as examples to the wider community, and less vulnerable than emulative inferiors. It is clear, in any case, that the stance of those who feared the complete ascendance of intellectual culture tended to be conciliatory, tended to ask not for renunciation, but moderation – not that culture be abandoned, but that Christ be included. In the scores of articles, essays and books that addressed the relation between culture and religion in the late-nineteenth century, a clear majority sound defensive; their authors appear to have sensed that, at that particular moment the momentum, if not the ultimate advantage, belonged to the museums, the universities and the publishers, not the pulpit.

"The Gospel must be preached to the poor and ignorant, but not only to them," begins a representative attempt to reconcile culture and Christianity in 1880. "Christ's message to John in prison has sometimes been taken in too narrow a sense, as implying that he addressed himself almost exclusively and by preference to the uncultured class of the community. In fact he preached to and won converts from all classes."[53] No doubt exists about the truth of the second assertion, that early converts were diverse. But it is hard not to imagine this writer for *The Independent* having hoped readers would decline to examine his first claim too closely, as Christ's message to the Baptist in

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[53] "Christianity and Culture," *The Independent, Devoted to the Consideration of Politics, Social and Economic Tendencies, History, Literature, and the Arts* 32, no. 1641 (May 13, 1880): 14, APSO.

prison actually seems rather explicit: "Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, and said unto him, 'Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?' Jesus answered and said unto them, 'Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: the *blind* receive their sight, and the *lame* walk, and the *lepers* are cleansed, and the *deaf* hear, the *dead* are raised up, and the *poor* have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.'"[54] One could pile up similar examples indefinitely: the high being brought low, the meek inheriting the earth, the rich man and the eye of the needle, the highly cultured state of Christ's persecutors. But leaving all that aside, the last sentence from Matthew quoted above seems especially relevant, for many of those who had left religion behind for culture can be assumed to have done so because they felt that its simplicities and its austere strictures *were* offensive to the fully developed western mind of the nineteenth century. "Paul," *Friends' Intelligencer* noted, "describes them exactly when he says, 'they do not wish to retain God in their thoughts.'"[55] The Dean of the College of New Jersey (later Princeton University), lecturing on the excesses and errors of the Transcendentalists, observed that "the modern tone of unbelief was that Christianity could not satisfy the highest intelligence, and that as the higher intelligence of the age did not accept Christianity it was not creditable to accept it." And he regretted "this dashing air of

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[54] Matthew 11:2-6, KJV. Emphasis added.
[55] "The New Paganism," *Friends' Intelligencer* 53, no. 6 (February 8, 1896): 88, APSO.

confidence of the educated unbelievers."[56]

Efforts to win back the culturally sophisticated had to address such thinking head on, and did. One popular tactic was to show how Christianity had accompanied or aided intellectual and cultural development historically. Some noted how early Christians, especially Paul, enjoyed great success in the intellectualized Greek world. Others aimed closer in time and place. The president of Princeton reportedly used the occasion of the school's sesquicentennial to remind listeners that "historically and genetically, the universities of Northern Europe, which are the prototypes of our American colleges, were the outgrowth of Christianity."[57] Further, continued the *New-York Observer* editorial that recounted the president's address, it was "no matter for surprise that the cross should thus promote culture. For Christianity gave men new ideals, new thoughts, new venerations, and as President Patton took occasion to say, 'popularized philosophy,' since the 'Christian's creed was metaphysic.'"[58] Revealingly, the editors noted that such talk, to an audience of "the best brains as well as the warmest hearts . . . required, then, some courage."[59] Two decades earlier, in Cincinnati, one Rev. C. W. Wendte had worked from

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[56] "Polite Literature and Christianity: The Breach Between Them More Decided and Outspoken Than Ever," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, February 12, 1894, 2, AHN.

[57] "Editorial: Culture and the Cross," *New York Observer* 74, no. 44 (October 29, 1896): 667, APSO.

[58] "Editorial: Culture and the Cross," *New York Observer* 74, no. 44 (October 29, 1896): 667, APSO.

[59] Ibid.

Matthew 4:4 ("Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God") toward an idea of "Art as a revealer of the Divine to mankind," with "Beauty" explained as "God's word to the imagination of man."[60] These are old and venerable ideas, though hardly specific to Christianity; in such small ways reconciliation often involved compromise. Presbyterian minister Francis E. Marsten gave much less ground, but still presented a genealogy instead of a confrontation: "It may be a question in some quarters whether Christianity is born of culture or culture is the child of Christianity. But to the mind and heart in contact with Jesus of Nazareth there can be no question but that life and love came to light in him."[61]

Trying a different tack, other mediators reminded readers of the unimpeachable intellectual talents of some of Christianity's greatest promoters and explicators.

> Turn with me, briefly, along our era, to the past, ignoring the fact that advanced education was originally found wallowing in the filth and wickedness of the ancient idolatries and superstitions. In the first century the religion of Christ made remarkable progress. It had taken root in Italy, Spain, and many parts of Asia and Africa. Teachers arose whose learning and ability have never lost their lustre. Clement, Cyprian and Ignatius, along with Gnostic philosophers and theologians of divers shades of opinion, had behind them numerous believers. The apostles and many of their followers were gone. . . . There was a demand for teachers who could meet trained antagonists. No time was lost. So earnestly was the work done, and so successfully, that in the second century, Iræneus, Justyn Martyr, Tertullian, Origen, Melito, Hippolytus, Dyonysius, Claudius, Bordesanes,

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[60] "Art Education," *Chicago Tribune*, May 26, 1878, 4, PQHN.

[61] Francis E. Martsen, "The Better Culture," *New-York Observer and Chronicle* 75, no. 38 (September 23, 1897): 389, APSO.

> Agrippa Castor, and multitudes of trained men sprang up who boldly taught. . . . The learned carefully disciplined and instructed others in their favorite tenets; so that Christianity early associated itself with the choicest preparation as a successful means of diffusion.[62]

These figures all distinguished themselves not only for piety but for learning, rhetorical style or philosophical expertise. The list of excellent Christian minds could have been greatly expanded, right through to Calvin, or even perhaps to the American Puritan divines. The point was that no conflict could plausibly be said to exist between cultural achievement and Christian faith; in fact, Christianity seemed to have been especially attractive to some of the great minds of world history. Later on, Newton, Macaulay, Daniel Webster, Matthew Hale, Milton, Raphael, Christopher Wren, Handel, Wellington, and even Washington were duly called into service as great men of firm faith. The message was: if you are greater than the fathers of the church or the masters of science and philosophy or the hero of your own nation, then by all means ignore and abandon Christianity and live by culture alone; if you

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[62] Rev. J. Samuel Vandersloot, "Intellectual Culture a Failure Without the Leaven of Christianity," *Reformed Quarterly Review*, April 1881, 229, APSO. Clement, Bishop of Rome, or "presiding cleric" (d. circa 101); Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage (d. 258); Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch (d. 98-117); Iræneus, Bishop of Lyon (d. circa 200); Justin Martyr, philosopher/apologist (d. circa 165); Tertullian, "most important and eloquent theologian in the West at the end of the second century" and "earliest writer of Christian Latin" (d. circa 220); Origen, philosopher/theologian possessing "a rare mastery of philosophical debate and classical literature" (d. circa 254); Melito, Bishop of Sardis (d. circa 190); Hippolytus, Roman theologian, historian and Biblical commentator (d. circa 236); Dionysius, Bishop of Alexandria and "a very well educated man" (d. circa 264); Apollonaris Claudius, Bishop of Hierapolis in Phrygia (d. second century); B⌈a⌋rdesanes, Syrian (d. circa 222); Agrippa Castor, apparently an anti-Gnostic writer (d. ?). (Quotations and most information from John McManners, ed., *The Oxford Illustrated History of Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); notes on Claudius, Bardesanes and Agrippa from The Catholic Encyclopedia, http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/index.html.)

are just a well educated, sophisticated person, then be proud join a long line of your fellow intellectuals in the faith.

But was there really room for the old religion in the face of vast scientific, technological, philological and archaeological advances of the modern era? Indeed, answered a contributor to *Christian Advocate*, readers should recognize that "progress is the condition of spiritual stability, as the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews intimates. Thus permanence and progress, immutability and change, are correlative ideas in both religion and in science. It is only the permanent which changes, and the permanent improves in the forms of its manifestation to the growing mind of the human race."[63] Despite their seeming mysticism these statements indicate the perception that in an age of "conviction that universal and unceasing progress is the world's law" Christianity needed to associate itself with that progress in order not to appear outmoded or irrelevant.[64] "Call the roll of even the great philosophers and scientists," Rev. Charles Parkhurst challenged an audience in 1894, "and you will be obliged to associate with the most illustrious names the Name that is above every name."[65]

Another writer a decade earlier had already felt the impending conflict,

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[63] W. I. Gill, "Relations of Religious and Intellectual Progress," *Christian Advocate* 58, no. 51 (December 20, 1883): 804, APSO.

[64] Gill, "Relations of Religious and Intellectual Progress," *Christian Advocate* 58, no. 51 (December 20, 1883): 804, APSO.

[65] "The Future of the Human Race: Our Coming Morals Will Be As Fine As Our Coming Health," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, July 8, 1894, 9, AHN. Parkhurst was well known in the 1890s for his efforts to fight political corruption in New York City.

and protested that it was "not fair to either [Christianity's] past history or present facts to set it, as some are attempting to do, in opposition to what is termed 'culture,' meaning by the term the intellectual and moral growth of society and its advancement in literature and art."[66] *National Repository* agreed, beginning an extensive defense by noting that "in tendency the genius and spirit of Christianity are educatory and culturing." The author moved then down the familiar lane of a cultural genealogy, even pointing out that the "'wise men of the East,' by their personal presence and by the costly offerings they brought to the infant Jesus, indicated and foreshadowed the intellectual genius and culture" that would come to characterize Christian history.[67] The effort to get culture and religion on the same team even went so far as to apply cultural standards to religious faith: "a Christian is led to such feelings and deportment as are ennobling and refining."[68] That is, not only can culture and Christianity coexist, but the latter is a reliable means to the former.[69]

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[66] W., "Christianity and Culture," *Christian Advocate* 48, no. 26 (January 26, 1873): 204, APSO.

[67] "Culture and Christianity," *National Repository, Devoted to General and Religious Literature, Criticism, and Art*, no. 7 (June 1880): 511, APSO.

[68] "Culture and Christianity," *National Repository, Devoted to General and Religious Literature, Criticism, and Art*, no. 7 (June 1880): 511, APSO.

[69] The sources examined for this research could be skewed in one sense. It is likely that the secular and religious press examined represent the liberal end of the spectrum of religious thinking on culture. Their audiences were likely already relatively educated, politically savvy and members of the middle classes. I expect that there was a more virulent rejection of the promotion of secular cultural development outside this discursive

I have said that few ventured openly or completely to disavow traditional religious faith in favor of secular cultural insight, but there were some interesting exceptions. In the late-1870s Felix Adler returned to New York after several years of study in Germany and publicly departed from Reform Judaism and his own family's rabbinical tradition to found the Society for Ethical Culture. By the late 1880s there were Societies in Chicago, Philadelphia, St. Louis, Baltimore, Washington, Toledo, Cincinnati, San Francisco, "and many other places."[70] The "culture" in these organizations' name meant not fine art and literature in the ways they have been discussed throughout up to this point, but rather something closer to the later usage of the term as a more general reference to the relationships and deeds of human beings in a given context. That said, the idea of ethical culture fits into our story because, rather than seeking or promoting intellectual culture *per se*, Adler's idea was that various achievements of intellectual culture – mainly sociological theory, German philosophy, philology, and the historical analysis of comparative religions – could be put to use to construct and apply a new secular gospel of

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milieu, which may have opposed intellectual culture on more fundamental grounds of worldliness and which remained uninterested in theorizing compromises in the ways in evidence above. I have judged this possible strain of thought to lie outside the immediate purview of my investigations, though I believe this gap is an important one that ought to be addressed and which could eventually create a fuller picture of the relation, both real and perceived, between culture and Christianity.

[70] "Annual Convention of the Union of the Ethical Culture Societies," *The Open Court, a Quarterly Magazine (Devoted to the Science of Religion, the Religion of Science, and the Extension of the Religious Parliament Idea)* 1, no. 21 (November 24, 1887): 592, APSO.

social welfare unfettered by dogma or theological factionalism.[71] While this chapter has focused on Christianity thus far, Adler's efforts highlight the larger question of whether traditional revealed religion generally could amiably coexist with an increasing resort to intellectual and scientific approaches to the problems of a modernizing society. It is also important to keep in mind that what Adler and ethical culturists advocated was not a reformation of religion as it existed, not more liberal but reconcilable theological amendments to Judaism or Christianity, but a more thorough abandonment of the old-style religions in general as ethical and social guides. Adler sometimes pointed out doctrinal inconsistencies in the Bible and reminded audiences that it was in fact not *a* book, but "made up of many books written at different periods of history" including many "narratives of barbarism, bru-

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[71] Among the many studies on Adler and the ethical culture movement are: Ellen Salzman-Fiske, "Secular Religion and Social Reform: Felix Adler's Educational Ideas and Programs, 1876-1933," PhD diss., Columbia University, 1999; Joseph Nathan Chuman, "Between Secularism and Supernaturalism: The Religious Philosophies of Theodore Parker and Felix Adler," PhD diss., Columbia University, 1994; Gilles J. Harp, "'The Church of Humanity': New York's Worshiping Positivists," *Church History* 60, no. 4 (December 1991): 508-523; Marvin Sterling, "Felix Adler on the Existence of God," *Journal of Humanism & Ethical Religion* 4 (Fall 1991): 77-94; Joseph Blau, "The Place of Felix Adler in American Thought," *Journal of Humanism & Ethical Religion* 1 (Fall 1988): 7-12; Daniel Ross Chandler, "Felix Adler: From Reform Judaism to Ethical Culture," *Religious Humanism* 20, no. 4 (Autumn 1986): 182-194; Robert M. Hemstreet, "Felix Adler: Artist of the Ideal Good," *Religious Humanism* 19, no. 1 (Winter 1985): 11-22; John Stephen Mikulaninec, "A Study of the Political and Economic Theories Propounded by Felix Adler," PhD diss., New York University, 1977; Michael A. Meyer, "Beyond Particularism: On Ethical Culture and the Reconstructionists," *Commentary* 51, no. 3 (1971): 71-76; Howard B. Radest, *The Story of the Ethical Societies in the United States*. New York: Frederick Ungar, 1969; N. J. Demerath III, "Irreligion, A-religion, and the Rise of the Religion-Less Church: Two Case Studies in Organizational Convergence," *Sociological Analysis* 30, no. 4 (Winter 1969): 191-203.

tality and crime . . . written far back in barbarous ages."[72] Adler argued for the necessity of his "New Ideal" – "to approach the goal of a Kingdom of Heaven upon earth, not by the miraculous interference of the Deity, but by the laborious exertions of men, and the slow but certain progress of successive generations"[73] – from three main premises: (a) traditional religions and sects within those religions had been subject to endless, often violent conflict for millennia; (b) no final answers could ever be found for the questions religions spent so much time addressing, for instance life after death; (c) churches and religious groups were doing too little to ameliorate the terrible social ills rampant in an industrializing nation, especially in its largely unregulated cities.[74] (This last claim was frequently and fervently challenged by members of various churches.) Christianity and the other religions, whatever their contributions to the world had been, were distractions and abstractions in the face of the real hunger and poverty and disease that defined the life of the ur-

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[72] "Many Books, One Literature: The Bible Good as a Teacher, Says Prof. Felix Adler," *New York Times*, November 27, 1893, 3, PQHN.

[73] Felix Adler, *Creed and Deed: A Series of Discourses* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1877), reprinted by Arno Press, 1972, 96.

[74] With reference to (a): "It seems that differences in creed are constantly increasing, and will continue to multiply with the growth and differentiation of the human intellect. We perceive that every attempt to settle problems of faith has thus far signally failed, nor can we hope for better results in the future. . . . It were better to insist less upon right belief and more upon right action." Adler, *Creed and Deed*, 1, 2. With reference to (b): "If all the arguments that are commonly adduced in support of the doctrine of a future life fall short of their object, it is but just to add that every argument to the contrary is equally devoid of foundation. The doctrine of immortality cannot be disproved. Of the nature of soul we are in absolute ignorance; we know nothing; what is more, we can know nothing. At this point we touch the utmost boundary of human reason, and must be content to write mystery of mysteries" Adler, *Creed and Deed*, 31-32.

ban poor, mainly because of their insistence on the importance of the world-to-come over the earthly world. At the same time Adler was willing to "turn to the works of the great religious teachers and see if we cannot get something we can use. Our position toward them is just the same as that of the modern painter toward the great masters."[75]

Depending on where one stood, Adlerian ethical culture could look like either a common-sense application of traditional religious tenets or an outright attack on Christianity and Judaism alike. On the one hand its ends were more or less coextensive with New Testament admonitions; on the other hand Adler and his allies insisted that the dogmatic Christian emphasis on the supreme importance of the afterlife rather than life on earth had unfortunate, even wicked, consequences, sanctioning indifference to earthly distress and cruelty since all would be made right beyond the grave. He also idolized Baruch Spinoza ("distant generations will name him anew: Benedictus – Blessed!") whose name to many had long been synonymous with pantheism.[76] Christians understood life and action on earth through a prism of promises (and threats) about what happened after death; ethical culturists envisioned a "virtue for virtue's sake" that could flower outside a dogmatic system of promised rewards and punishments. "It follows from what we have said," wrote Adler in *Creed and Deed*, an 1877 collection of his essays and lectures

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[75] "Many Books, One Literature: The Bible Good as a Teacher, Says Prof. Felix Adler," *New York Times*, November 27, 1893, 3, PQHN.

[76] Adler, *Creed and Deed*, 149.

that served as a sort of manifesto for his movement, "that the belief in immortality should not be inculcated as a dogma in our schools of religion, and above all that the dictates of the moral law should in no wise be made to depend upon it for their sanction."[77] Adler gave long lectures on eternal life, the nature of the soul, the existence of a personal deity, and other traditional matters of theological attention, always to arrive at the same basic conclusion: one ought to believe what one's conscience or preference dictated on such matters, but stop there – since no proof could be given on such topics, they were matters unfit for social application to the myriad very real material problems demanding concrete moral commitment. To advocates of ethical culture, reason demanded adherence to humanitarian dictates very like those in the Christian Gospels but likewise counseled humble acceptance of the ultimate opacity of strictly theological questions.

To religious believers, ethical culturists seemed brashly to demand religion and redemption without reference to a personal God, and Adler's secular creed often aroused indignant criticism even as he professed himself "not unfriendly" toward the church, and as his social work was often grudgingly appreciated.[78] "The Christian method of elevating humanity is *first* to bring men into the Kingdom of GOD" insisted *Christian Advocate*; "when that is done, and they are properly instructed, they will become honest, frugal, phil-

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[77] Adler, *Creed and Deed*, 33.
[78] Felix Adler, "Modern Scepticism and Ethical Culture," *Forum* 16 (November 1893): 383, APSO.

anthropic, intelligent, patriotic, and will be sustained in all these qualities by the hope of securing the approbation of CHRIST, doing good to their fellow-men, and laying up treasure in heaven. . . . Let the infidels work out their schemes if they can. The Christian minister should preach and practice the Gospel ecclesiastically, doctrinally, practically, devotionally, and emotionally."[79]

Overall the Ethical Culture movement failed to gain a widespread constituency, though its advocates were often both fervent and capable. From the historian's perspective, however, the questions it raised point to the ongoing difficulties of the application of the tools of intellectual culture to practical social problems in the United States. As we will see in the next section, the tension between Christianity and culture was only one of several debates over the proper purview of culture as it competed over social turf with more traditional ways of conceiving moral and ethical issues.

CRITICISM IS NOT ENOUGH: DEBATES OVER CENSORSHIP AND ART

Art has no privilege under the law when it affects public morals. —Anthony Comstock, 1887[80]

[Anthony Comstock] would put trousers on Apollo. —Life, 1887[81]

In many cases and to many people, and despite its being frequently ex-

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[79] "To Enlighten the Clergy," *Christian Advocate* 65, no. 50 (December 11, 1890): 821, APSO.

[80] "Anthony Comstock on Art," *New York Times*, December 20, 1887, 1, PQHN.

[81] "The Cabinet Row," *Life* 10, no. 256 (November 24, 1887): 290, APSO.

pounded on in the press, criticism of art and literature could still seem rather removed from the goings on of daily life. At times though, under certain circumstances and for certain people, the evaluation of cultural material proved to be anything but a trivial matter.

In March 1873, placed between notices about a minister wanted for forgery and a widow's legal battles, the "News of the State" column in the *Hartford Daily Courant* mentioned that "Anthony Comstock, of Stamford, is to be appointed special agent of the post office department with a view to the execution of the amended law respecting the transmission of obscene publications through the mails. He serves without pay."[82] Comstock had actually been at this work for almost two years before his purview expanded to include the entire nation after the passage of legislation in Congress.[83] In the decades that followed, he and his Society for the Suppression of Vice (SSV) would police first New York and then the country in feverish efforts to rid

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[82] "News of the State," *Hartford Daily Courant*, March 14, 1873, 1, PQHN.

[83] For some useful studies on Comstock and related issues see: Margaret A. Blanchard, and John E. Semonche, "Anthony Comstock and His Adversaries: The Mixed Legacy of This Battle for Free Speech," *Communication Law and Policy* 317 (2006): 317-366; Wayne E. Fuller, *Morality and the Mail in Nineteenth-Century America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003); Lynda Nead, *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity, and Sexuality* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992); Nicola Beisel, "Morals Versus Art: Censorship, the Politics of Interpretation and the Victorian Nude," *American Sociological Review* 58, no. 2 (April 1993): 145-162; Nicola Beisel, "Class, Culture, and Campaigns Against Vice in Three American Cities, 1872-1892," *American Sociological Review* 55, no. 1 (February 1990): 44-62; Paul S. Boyer, *Purity in Print: The Vice Society Movement and Book Censorship in America* (New York: Scribner, 1968); Jane Chapp, *Art Censorship: A Chronology of Proscribed and Prescribed Art* (Metuchen N.J.: The Scarecrow Press, 1972); Richard C. Johnson, "Anthony Comstock: Reform, Vice, and the American Way," PhD diss., University of Wisconsin, 1973.

the country of unsuitable readings and pictures. While we have seen that questions of individual morality had long been closely tied to questions of proper cultural consumption, the last quarter of the nineteenth century witnessed the participation of the state and its legal machinery in expansive new ways. While the government played roles in the transformation and maturation of the Library of Congress and in the development of the1876 and 1893 world's fairs, the discourses on culture in the nineteenth century were for the most part affairs of the press and the public rather than the state. Promotional and fund-raising tasks characterize state participation in the other developments mentioned thus far, but here, with Comstock and the SSV, we see the entrance – many would say the intrusion – of government power into the cultural realm as regulator, even as Comstock and his like-minded allies mostly understood themselves as protectors and guardians rather than as shapers of cultural norms. This section should help illuminate how widespread concerns over the content of books and pictures manifested itself in policies of public morality. Furthermore, the instance of the SSV and its efforts sheds light on the inherent conflict between a democratic culture supposedly committed to open access to information and the idea that the best culture was most fully (and safely) appreciated by superior minds.

Comstock and his supporters found little comfort in the mass of "How and What to Read" books circulating in these years, and always remained convinced that stronger measures were in order. The SSV enthusiastically

reported annually, if not more often, on how many tons of objectionable material it had seized and destroyed and on the legal battles it had won against recalcitrants. And for the most part Comstock enjoyed almost universal praise; only a few commentators wrote publicly in defense of abstract First Amendment rights.[84] If intellectuals and art-lovers tended to see Comstock's zeal as a little uncouth, they nevertheless largely agreed that the obvious indecency he warred against was indeed a real enemy. Indeed, Comstock's rise as moral guardian was first made possible largely by the "munificence and influence" of the banker and patron of the arts Morris K. Jessup, later president of the Metropolitan Museum, who was instrumental in the founding of the New York SSV.[85] That same year Comstock reported in a letter to Congressman Clinton Merriman of New York that he had "seized and destroyed: obscene photographs, stereoscopic and other pictures, more than 182,000; obscene books and pamphlets, more than five tons; obscene letterpress in sheets, more than two tons; . . . obscene negative plates for printing photographs and stereoscopic views, about 625," and on and on.[86] Given such re-

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[84] One notable exception was a letter to the editor by Courtlandt Palmer, "The Comstock Postal Laws: A Reply," *Scribner's Monthly* 23, no. 3 (July 1881): 459-63, APSO. This detailed, scathing reply to a *Scribner's* defense of Comstock indicates an admirable openness on the part of the magazine's publishers. For a more extended discussion of censorship and civil liberties-based objections in the nineteenth century, see Mary M. Cronin, "The Liberty to Argue Freely: Nineteenth Century Obscenity Prosecutions and the Emergence of Modern Libertarian Free Speech Discourse," *Journalism & Communication Monographs* 8, no. 3 (2006): 163-219. For a wide-ranging historical overview of censorship efforts, see Paul S. Boyer, *Purity in Print: Censorship from the Gilded Age to the Computer Age* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002).

[85] "Suppressing Vice…" *San Francisco Daily Bulletin*, July 6, 1889, Supplement 3, AHN.

sults, the editors at *The Independent* concluded that "every father or mother in the land who wants his children to grow up pure and untainted owes a debt of gratitude to Anthony Comstock."[87] The early enthusiasm for Comstock's and the SSV's efforts indicate the existence of a broad agreement that the government had interests, indeed duties, to hunt out and eradicate obscenity and indecency, and that huge quantities of such material could be uncontroversially classified as such.

In the late 1870s, however, Comstock began gradually to forge ahead into more liminal territory as he expanded his prosecutions to test more vigorously the border between art and vice. To some observers he then began a slide into absurdity, into prudishness and hubris that seemed almost obscene themselves. He also made criticism and cultural expertise seem relevant in a new way as opponents argued that where art began the search for vice by definition ended. It is upon this aspect of the Comstock's activities and the reactions to them that I hope to add to the large historical literature addressing the man and his deeds in the late-nineteenth century. As we shall see, both sides in the growing disagreement over the purview of the SSV and the policing of public morality insisted that context was key, and that similar premises could lead to stridently contradictory conclusions.

The first serious questioning of the SSV's vigor and scope seems to have

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[86] "Miscellany: Obscene Literature," *Philadelphia Medical Times* 3, no. 46 (August 16, 1873): 736, APSO.

[87] *The Independent, Devoted to the Consideration of Politics, Social and Economic Tendencies, History, Literature, and the Arts* 25, no. 1286 (March 20, 1873): 370, APSO.

emerged in 1878. In October of that year, a shop-owner on Fulton Street in New York found himself confronted by Comstock's representatives, who demanded he remove a reproduction of Austrian Hans Makart's depiction of "Charles the Fifth's Entry into Antwerp." The objectionable elements were the "scantily-dressed" maidens at the head of the Emperor's procession, though the *National Police Gazette* (which specialized in sex and scandal stories) noted that "there is nothing in their action, in their faces, or in the arrangement of the drapery, to suggest lewdness."[88]

Thus commenced a debate that would continue to develop through the end of the century and beyond, and some of the lasting elements of the discourse appeared here for the first time – most importantly, the focus on the audience and the circumstances of sale rather than the picture or book itself. "Mr. Comstock made the point," continued the *National Police Gazette*, "that what may be a perfectly proper picture in a gallery may be altogether improper in a show window."[89] This distinction makes the debate an interesting one to follow, even as it points to the core functional difficulty of Comstock's aspirations: he sought to be censor not only of objects, but of intentions; not only of cultural material but of cultural meanings.

The artist in question had appeared in the columns of American art

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[88] "Comstock's Cranks: The Illustrations Agent of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Morality Prohibits the Exhibition of Works of Art," *National Police Gazette* 33, no. 60 (November 16, 1878): 11, APSO.

[89] "Comstock's Cranks: The Illustrations Agent of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Morality Prohibits the Exhibition of Works of Art," *National Police Gazette* 33, no. 60 (November 16, 1878): 11, APSO.

commentary and in American galleries before 1878, but in 1875 Hans Makart had been labeled as "unknown on this side of the Atlantic" by *The Independent*, which also judged that his pictures bore "too near a resemblance to the theatrical shows which cannot be tolerated by a pure and well educated artistic taste."[90] This evaluation overstated Makart's anonymity, and awareness of him had certainly increased after the reception of his work at the Centennial Exposition. At Philadelphia his "Venice Paying Homage to Catherine Carnaro" and the group of pictures called "Abundancia" were favorably reviewed by critics and popular with audiences, the former being in the opinion of John Sears of the art journal *The Aldine* "generally . . . accepted as the great picture of the exhibition."[91] *The American Architect* agreed during the Centennial that "['Venice Paying Homage to Catherine Carnaro'] is the one modern work that easily leads the list of the combined contributions of civilized nations."[92] Another reviewer after the Centennial remembered how Americans admired "Hans Makart, admitted to be the Rubens of modern Germany."[93] It was this kind of popularity that had led the Fulton Street

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[90] "Fine Arts," *The Independent, Devoted to the Consideration of Politics, Social and Economic Tendencies, History, Literature, and the Arts* 27, no. 1404 (October 28, 1875): 6, APSO.

[91] John V. Sears, "Art in Philadelphia: Hans Makart at the Centennial," *The Aldine: The Journal of Art in America* 8, no. 9 (May 1, 1877): 283, APSO.

[92] "The Fine Arts at the Centennial – IV: The Austrian, Scandinavian and Danish Pictures," *The American Architect and Building News* 1, no. 30 (July 22, 1876): 236, APSO.

[93] "Hans Makart," *The Aldine: The Art Journal of America* 9, no. 9 (May 1, 1879): 282, APSO.

shop-owner Andrew J. Hope to acquire and display a reproduction of Makart's "Charles the Fifth": "I purchased . . . a watercolor copy of Makart's great historical painting . . . which is at present all the rage at the [1878 Paris] Exposition. I took pride in showing it to the public."[94] *The Aldine* agreed that "no picture attracted more attention, or was more worthy of it, at the last Paris Exposition, than Makart's "Entry of Charles V. into Antwerp."[95] A correspondent for *Lippincott's* on the other hand worried that the same picture, in which "the nudity of the women mingled with clothed personages" represented an "unworthy attempt to achieve popular success."[96] A *New York Times* Special Correspondent in Paris considered the Charles V painting "the very finest of the Exhibition."[97] But an 1879 lecturer at the Boston Art Club found Makart's works "the most vicious things in modern art."[98] Leaving aside the debate over aesthetic merit, the relevant point for our purposes is that by the late-1870s a window display of Makart's works would have been likely to draw attention of one kind or another.

The reaction to the seizure of the Makart reproduction in 1878 occa-

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[94] "Comstock's Cranks," *National Police Gazette* 33, no. 60 (November 16, 1878): 11, APSO.

[95] "Hans Makart," *The Aldine: The Art Journal of America* 9, no. 9 (May 1, 1879): 282, APSO.

[96] L. Lejeune "The Paris Exposition of 1878," *Lippincott's Magazine of Popular Literature and Science* 22 (November 1878): 612, APSO.

[97] "The Austrian Paintings," *New York Times*, July 21, 1878, 10, PQHN.

[98] GRETA, "Art in Boston," *The Art Amateur: A Monthly Journal Devoted to Art in the Household* 1, no. 1 (June 1879): 7, APSO.

sioned similarly divergent opinions. While many writers continued to support Comstock's efforts and heartily agreed with him that reproductions were not due the same leeway as original art, grumbling began among the secular critical press about where the line was finally to be drawn between art and vice. Editors at *The Aldine* wrote about what later generations would come to call a "chilling effect" on free speech: "if the same picture was reproduced in THE ALDINE, it might subject it to suppression in the mails, and our readers would be deprived of that issue. Perhaps it is better not to run the risk."[99] (Later, in 1894 the head of Little Publishing Company in New York went so far as to submit books to Comstock *before* offering them for sale to the public; "I wanted the law on the subject," he said.)[100]

English art critic Philip Hamerton, for whom Makart's image of Charles V had been the "most important picture in the whole [Paris] Exhibition of 1878," was one of several to note that the nearly-naked maidens in the painting faithfully recalled an historical peculiarity of Antwerp, namely that of "exhibit[ing] all that was most beautiful in the city" during triumphal processions, including "handsome young damsels of the most respectable families, in a state as near to nudity as possible."[101] Another critic wrote that

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[99] Ibid.

[100] "Comstock as Censor," *Liberty (Not the Daughter but the Mother of Order)* 10, no. 2 (June 2, 1894): 4, APSO. Reprint from the *New York Sun.*

[101] Philip Gilbert Hamerton, "Continental Painting at Paris in 1878," *Princeton Review* 1 (January–June 1878): 489, APSO.

"such an eye for color has not been born since Veronese."[102] Hamerton and others also cited remarks by Albrecht Dürer to support the historical legitimacy Makart's seemingly risqué depiction.

Regardless, the picture never went back up in Mr. Hope's Fulton Street establishment, and several factors seem to have contributed to the fading of the story of its removal from columns of magazines and newspapers. First, Mr. Hope was not an art dealer; he admittedly deployed the image of Makart's painting to draw attention to his business as a "confectioner."[103] The use of fine art images for commercial ends was not of primary concern to those who supported and promoted the arts in America, whose rhetoric and goals were, if still generally utilitarian, much more abstract and grandiose. The idea that the value of art stood mainly outside the crude reckonings of the commercial marketplace meant that many cultural advocates never saw much place for art on Fulton Street in the first place; decades before Walter Benjamin wrote about works of art in ages of mechanical reproduction, concerned observers already seem to have felt more comfortable having art sequestered in museums and galleries, where its aura might be preserved. Second, as has been noted, the promise of art for the people was often honored in word only. In New York, where the Makart incident occurred, the Metro-

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[102] M. G. Van Rensselaer, "Some Aspects of Contemporary Art," *Lippincott's Magazine of Popular Literature and Science* 22 (December 1878): 706, APSO.

[103] "Comstock's Cranks…," *National Police Gazette* 33, no. 60 (November 16, 1878): 11, APSO.

politan Museum would for almost two more decades refuse to open on Sundays, despite the prevalence of social-uplift rhetoric among its founders and supporters. Art was to be reverenced and even enjoyed by ordinary people, but not necessarily left for them to manipulate. A few critics argued that this was a slippery slope and would end with censorship of the museums, but the majority were much less worried. Finally, though the sexual content of Makart's picture was relatively tame, there does seem to have been agreement that works of art were sometimes vulgarly translated by amateurs whose intent was indeed to trade on their suggestive content. The Makart incident occupied the border between sanctioned and condemned categories of cultural experience.

Notably, Comstock's agents seem not to have pursued the seller of the water-color reproductions that Hope displayed. This omission helps us to identify different phases of Comstock's efforts against unsuitable art. In the case of the Makart picture, the end user, so to speak, was the target. In his next and much more controversial foray into the world of art, Comstock began to take aim at what he understood as the source.[104]

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[104] Comstock does seem to have taken some further censorial action in 1878, though references to it in the press are surprisingly scarce. Henry Ward Beecher reported, in the *Hartford Daily Courant*, that "the pressure of the Anthony Comstock element has led the managers of the New York Loan Exhibition to withdraw Bouguereau's 'After the Bath' from the picture saloon." ("Personals," *Hartford Daily Courant*, November 13, 1878, 2.) Bouguereau, a Frenchman, was fairly well known and admired by Americans in the late seventies and his work had been seen both at the Centennial and in New York and other cities. His works shown abroad also received comment in the press. The picture in question is certainly one of Bouguereau's more naturalistic nudes, though not obviously obscene or lewd by 1870s or 1880s standards. If the suppression of the picture at the Loan Exhibition indeed occurred, it is a striking instance, almost

"Everybody knows," asserted the *New York Times*, "what sort of pictures KNOEDLER & CO. sell; they have no relation to vice or to the stimulating thereto; the best proof of which is that they are not sought for by persons of vicious life or inclinations."[105] About this information everyone more or less agreed, but the seizure of photographic reproductions of paintings from the long-established and highly respected (and still in business in 2008) Fifth Avenue art dealer Knoedler & Co. brought Anthony Comstock, the SSV and the question of decency in art to a broader public forum than before and kindled a heated debate that would last a decade. The *Times*, which would become a relentless opponent of Comstock's excesses, suggested that he "had exercised an uncultivated and awkward discrimination and had committed an unwarrantable assault upon the domain of legitimate art."[106]

The Knoedler case, which concluded with a guilty plea by the art dealer and a fine of fifty dollars, set in place the general lines of the discussion over state intervention in matters of art.[107] Comstock and his supporters claimed

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the only one I have found, of serious efforts either to censor original works of art (rather than reproductions) or to influence what was displayed inside clearly reputable museums and galleries. There are references to Bouguereau's works at the Loan Exhibition, but the picture referred to as "At the Bath" seems, as described in the press, slightly different than "After the Bath." (See Fuller-Walker, "The Loan Exhibition," *The Aldine* 9, no. 7 (January 1, 1879): 231, APSO.)

[105] "Mr. Comstock's Work: Beginning a Prosecution Against a Prominent Art Firm," *New York Times*, November 13, 1887, 3, PQHN.

[106] Ibid.

[107] Demot Enmot, "Our New York Letter," *The Albany Law Journal: A Weekly Record of the Law and Lawyers* 37, no. 14 (April 7, 1888): 283, APSO, notes the legal conclusion of the case in the Court of Sessions and the imposition of the fifty dollar fine. "Men must

that Knoedler's spotless reputation and the upstanding nature of his usual clientele were no excuse.[108] They asserted that some pictures sold by Knoedler fell eventually into the hands of purchasers who appreciated flesh over art, and that in any case photographic reproductions should not receive the same consideration as original works. SSV president Samuel Colgate outdid Comstock himself in his furious response to critics of the Knoedler seizures: "Mr. Comstock has been lied about and maligned, especially about the seizure of those pictures recently. If any pure lady or gentleman had seen them they would have thrown them in the fire before their children should have seen them. If our children have to be debauched by pictures which were sold by men who ought to be in the penitentiary, I say let art go. Let us fight for our children who may be stabbed and morally ruined by such things."[109]

Comstock however, whose expressions were generally calmer than his colleague's, agreed that the same image would be lewd to crude minds but not to cultured ones. This mattered, as *The Independent* noted, because "if [pictures like those seized] were sold only to art students there would not be money enough in them to pay postage for sending them. They are made for

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hesitate," Enmot added, "to look upon the naked truth in these days lest Anthony Comstock may apprehend."

[108] Nicola Beisel, in "Morals Versus Art: Censorship, the Politics of Interpretation, and the Victorian Nude, *American Sociological Review* 58, no. 2 (1993): 145-162, provides an extensive analysis of the Knoedler affair. As Beisel notes, the Knoedler case is especially interesting because, "since Knoedler customers and Comstock supporters were of the same social class" this issue cannot be understood as simply a matter of class anxiety or clashing class interests (146).

[109] "Anthony Comstock on Art: He Establishes a Branch Association in Baltimore," *New York Times*, December 20, 1887, 1, PQHN.

popular sale."[110] Those who claimed that the SSV's censorship efforts had overstepped proper bounds neatly turned Comstock's focus on the intent and understanding of the viewer against him by claiming that the real moral corruption was Comstock's own – that only vicious minds would perceive vice everywhere, as he seemed to. *Life*, in this vein, argued that "causing works of art to suggest indecent ideas to other people has always been one of [Comstock's] favorite freaks. Not satisfied with the filth of his own mind he persists in forcing others to look at things from the same point of view."[111]

These are stories of cultural discourse because of the different intellectual destinations arrived at by contestants who had departed from the same premises. Comstock believed that there were indeed hard cases, where the moral content of a work of human creation was not clearly acceptable or unacceptable. In such cases, context had to be considered; thus nude sculptures in museums were all right but inexpensive photographic reproductions of the same were outside of the bounds of art and fair game for the censors.[112] Those sympathetic with the ends and means of the SSV tended to agree that in such cases of uncertainty the qualification for any prospective arbiter should be

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[110] "Anthony Comstock's Case," *The Independent, Devoted to the Consideration of Politics, Social and Economic Tendencies, History, Literature, and the Arts* 40, no. 2041 (January 12, 1888): 11, APSO.

[111] "How About Anthony Comstock," *Life* 10, no. 256 (November 24, 1887): 290, APSO.

[112] For a detailed treatment of the subject of nude images in American art and culture see Alyssa Picard, "'To Popularize the Nude in Art': Comstockery Reconsidered," *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 1, no. 3 (2002): 195-224.

moral character, not critical expertise. In an annual report to the public in 1887, reported *Christian Union*, "Mr. Comstock concluded his report by ably answering the objections that he was not competent to criticize art. He said he very likely was not; that he was not pretending to criticize questions of art, but questions of morals, and upon this point he did claim to be able to judge. . . . [Furthermore,] *artists* . . . *were the last men* to render a decision as to what would be the impression conveyed by the same pictures to ordinary men and boys."[113] Some who viewed actions like the one against Knoedler & Co. as excessive tended to think that the most orderly and reliable arrangement would be to have art critics or artists decide where art ended and thus where material became eligible for censorship. Even *The Chautauquan*, a reliable supporter of the SSV, suggested that perhaps "if lovers and patrons of art, too, are not to lose their confidence in the management of an engine of reform whose period of usefulness they had hoped was far from being past, those who are in a position to give advice may well urge that the judgment of the competent shall be sought before the verdict of the law is demanded in condemnation of what may be evil only to 'him who evil thinks.'"[114] Nevertheless, though Comstock was and is derided as both a bully and a prude, he seems genuinely to have understood his efforts as wholly compatible with the

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[113] "Anthony Comstock Vindicated," *Christian Union* 37, no. 4 (January 26, 1888): 116, APSO. Emphasis added.

[114] "Art on Trial," *The Chautauquan: A Weekly Newsmagazine* 8, no. 6 (March 1888): 380, APSO.

First Amendment, as well as with moderate notions of artistic freedom in general.

Comstock's crusade would have had a different character, and been less controversial, if the availability of art and literature and the urge toward cultural achievement generally had not been steadily accreting over the course of the century. That cultural sophistication was becoming an increasingly desired feather in the national cap meant it was more important than ever to have some reasonable idea of what was and was not culture/art/literature because these things were becoming privileged and protected in substantial ways. Something named "art" or "literature" enjoyed certain immunities. Once that title was granted, at least temporarily, objections could only amount to matters of taste: to dislike was an inalienable option; to condemn or suppress was going too far.

As noted, the Knoedler case in New York ended in the relative anti-climax of a guilty plea. A little later (just before Princeton students mocked Comstock by draping a nude statue when he lectured there) another legal case developed in a Philadelphia which played out more fully in court, and raised again the level of attention, and disapproval, directed at Comstock and his allies.[115] Though several art dealers were indicted in a Philadelphia court after Comstock and his agents had bought photographic reproductions they considered obscene, Comstock had to endure two indignities at trial. First

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[115] "Painful Modesty. A Statue of a Gladiator, in a Hall Where Anthony Comstock was to Lecture, Clothed in a Red Flannel Bifurcated Garment," *Missouri Republican*, March 31, 1888, 3, AHN.

the Assistant District Attorney refused to recommend conviction to the jury, claiming that the pictures at issue were "simply representations of the highest style of art," and that "the man who cannot recognize that fact ought to be moved out of the city."[116] Next the judge reminded the jury that not all nude images were lewd and that those in this case did not appear to his honor to be so. The jury unsurprisingly acquitted all the defendants, and after Comstock sought to explain himself to the court, the judge quipped that "perhaps there is a higher standard of virtue in New-York than we have in Philadelphia," a recognizably ironic rebuke since New York enjoyed a reputation as the vice capital of the nation.[117]

After the Philadelphia case, mockery of Comstock became something of a minor national pastime. Newspapers and magazines throughout the country weighed in to defend art against the legal imposition of the state. None of this discouraged Comstock though. He objected to poster advertisements for an exhibition in New York which depicted an American Indian and an unsatisfactorily robed Columbia; he "took measures against" a statue of Hermes at

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[116] "Comstock Defeated. The Court Rebukes Him for Making Trouble for Philadelphia Merchants," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, January 21, 1888, 3, AHN.

[117] "Comstock's Art Researches. He Gets Snubbed by a Philadelphia Judge and Jury," *New York Times*, January 25, 1888, 5, PQHN. The idea that Comstock's crusade was absurd partly because of its focus in hopelessly jaded New York endured. Over decade later, Philadelphians still returned to this motif: "It is well-known throughout the land that the youth of New York is guileless and green. That from earliest infancy he is taught and brought up in the strictest moral atmosphere. … Thus do [Philadelphians], with humble minds, delight to preserve the innocent juvenility of New York from the snares and delusions and temptations of the allegorical." ("Anthony Comstock Has Relented, Isn't It Queer? How Citizens of New York Must Stand the Shock, Dear! Dear!" *Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 2, 1899, 2, AHN.)

an exhibition in New York; he seized and sought to suppress Fielding's *Tom Jones*, Bocaccio's *Decameron*, Balzac's *Droll Stories*, Jean Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions*, Ovid's *Art of Love* and other works from book dealers; his agents raided and destroyed paintings on the walls of the Tenderloin Club in New York; he prosecuted George Richmond, publisher of "an English translation of Gabriele d'Annunzio's *Triumph of Death.*[118] By 1899, Comstock was said to be "throttling the genius of the western world," "crippling art" in the United States, and driving culturally ambitious men and women to flee to more liberal Europe.[119]

Of course, the majority of Comstock's and his partners' efforts were directed at material that most of the public was either pleased or indifferent to see suppressed, as the prevailing view held that looking at and reading the wrong images or texts could be morally harmful in many ways. It is tempting then to dismiss Comstock's efforts as having very little to do with the

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[118] On the exhibition poster: "Anthony Comstock Has Relented, Isn't It Queer? How Citizens of New York Must Stand the Shock, Dear! Dear!" *Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 2, 1899, 2, AHN. On the statue of Hermes: "Cranky Comstock," *Macon Weekly Telegraph*, March 4, 1889, 6, AHN, reprint from the *Boston Post.* On Fielding et. al.: "The Morality of Tom Jones, Etc.," *The Critic: A Weekly Review of Literature and the Arts* 21, no. 645 (June 30, 1894): 444, APSO; "Fielding Put On trial," *Liberty (Not the Daughter but the Mother of Order)* 10, no. 4 (June 30, 1894): 4, APSO, reprint from the *New York Sun*; "The Literary Prude," *New York Times*, September 21, 1894, 4, PQHN. On the Tenderloin Club: "Tenderloin Club Pictures Seized, Anthony Comstock Says They Are Improper – A Door Boy Arrested," *New York Times*, March 16, 1894, 9, PQHN (This was article reprinted many times, for instance in the *Omaha World Herald*, March 17, 1894 and the *Charlotte Observer*, March 18, 1894). On d'Annunzio: "The Triumph of Death," *The Critic: A Weekly Review of Literature and the Arts* 27, no. 790 (April 10, 1897): 256, APSO.

[119] "Pleads Free Art," *Dallas Morning News*, April 1, 1899, 6, AHN. Reprint from *Chicago Times-Herald.*

discourses on matters of higher culture with which we have been concerned. On the contrary, however, we find that there is only one point at which Comstock runs into widespread criticism, and that is when he is seen to over-step his bounds and make of himself an art or literary critic. While Americans greatly appreciated anyone who could help keep pornography out of their children's hands, many balked at ceding control over the contents of exhibitions, museums, collections or respectable sellers of art and literature. But though rebukes of Comstock became more frequent and less restrained as the years went on, commentators and critics also remained suspicious of any wholesale dismantling of barriers between the general public and works of art and literature. (For example, I have found no instance in the contemporary magazine or newspaper press of anyone rejecting the idea that originals and reproductions presented very different cases.) Instead, especially in the earlier controversies, the main (sometimes the only) defense offered as proof that a Comstock target was innocent was that either he or his clientele were upstanding citizens. So despite the democratic rhetoric that buttressed arguments for art museums, exhibitions at world's fairs, public libraries and all the rest, many of the discourses in evidence were characterized by a shifting ambivalence, an unstable mixture of desires to spread culture with desires to sequester it.

While debates over Comstockian censorship occupied popular attention in the 1880s and 1890s another strain of discourse had begun to form among

commentators on art and literature, many of whom had been tireless advocates for cultural development. The creation of and enthusiasm for monuments to culture like museums and libraries, the continued improvement in the quantity and quality serious criticism, and the increasingly free access for the public to fine art all indicated cultural progress in the United States in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. As has been demonstrated above, progressive elements of the various discourses on culture in America existed alongside a fundamental (though not fanatical) conservatism in the form of a reverence for the past and a preference for stability. These two important features of American cultural discourse would themselves soon come into conflict with some of the emergent theories and practices of modernism in the arts.

4 FROM PROMOTION TO PROTECTION
AMERICAN DISCOURSE IN REACTION TO MODERNIST IDEAS IN ART AND LITERATURE

It is not difficult to convince anyone that it is a long distance from the spirit of the day in which Emerson and Hawthorne and Thoreau wrote. And can one be accused of going far astray in suspecting that the sun does not shine, nor the morning break, as it used to in those days? —Livingston Hunt, 1895[1]

The essential claim of "modernity" is to assert the absolute independence of art, and to defy any sort of condition of limit, whether of tradition, philosophy, morality, or even good sense. The artist, they tell us, is an angelic being who is a law unto himself, and the world has merely to gaze at his gambols, and to enjoy his enjoyments, as we do with some rare and diverting beast at a show. —Frederic Harrison, 1893[2]

For most of the century many of those who wrote and thought about art and literature and their place in American life had expressed at least a guarded optimism. Despite intermittent and very earnest concern about the moral consequences of cultural development, interest in art and literature had continued to increase among the reading public and among those who addressed themselves to it in newspapers and magazines. Nevertheless, in the last decades of the nineteenth century, a heightened sense of worry and defensiveness had begun to appear in cultural commentary published in the United States, some of it in reaction to changes in art and literature themselves.

Part of the American cultural project, as we have seen, had been to im-

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[1] "The Decay of Spirituality in Our Literature," *The Critic: A Weekly Review of Literature and the Arts* 24, no. 716 (November 9, 1895): IVA, APSO.

[2] "Decadence in Modern Art," *Forum* 15 (June 1893): 436, APSO.

port and apply, with adjustments where necessary, institutional and theoretical ideas and practices from Europe. But since the 1860s art and literature had been changing rapidly in Europe, and in time the pace of change proved unsettling, and the direction of change unpalatable, for some American cultural promoters. The effort in America had been to bring the nation culturally up-to-date, to integrate the Western tradition of excellence with American society and consciousness. But as American advocates had focused on educating a public via Milton or acquiring Raphaels for museums, artists and authors themselves had increasingly been pursuing new forms and theories and seeking to infuse American life not with time-tested cultural values but with a spirit of new artistic exploration and expression. And so, while museums and libraries were springing up across the country and as American criticism improved and expanded, it started to seem conceivable that the United States had not only something to strive toward, but something to protect. This was accompanied by a rhetoric skeptical of the wisdom of emulating Europe in matters of culture. One writer reflected that

> it has seemed to us that art was something we had left behind us in going into exile, and we have looked across the ocean and said: How shall we get this art? And we have continued under the impression that art methods and an art ideal must be imported from France.
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> It is an error. . . . We have, without sufficient reasoning, placed France in the position of authority, and we have gone to school to an artificial procedure to a practice in decay. The adoption of this course in America is a threatened disaster.[3]

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[3] Ada Cone, "The Art Problem in the United States," *The Living Age* 231, no. 2992 (November 9, 1901): 338, APSO. This article was also published in other magazines including the *Contemporary Review*.

An 1896 article by an English critic featured in the American *Eclectic Magazine of Foreign Literature* outlined the major problems I will examine in greater depth below: "the dogma that acquits the artist of any moral responsibility is probably accountable for the gravest outrages of modern art, but there are at least two other prevalent notions which are prolific sources of insipidity and ugliness. These are that art is quite independent of subject, and that there is nothing ugly in nature."[4] This chapter will address three theories or ideas that were perceived to threaten the cultural accomplishments made during the nineteenth century and to embody the problems mentioned above: "art for art's sake," literary naturalism, and modernist visual art.[5]

"BEAUTY ALONE IS NOT EXCUSE ENOUGH FOR BEING": THE CONTENTIOUS IDEA OF ART FOR ART'S SAKE[6]

> *On the other hand, a thoroughly healthy and sane art must find in itself its chief reward.*
> —The Bookman, 1895[7]

The concept called "art for art's sake" had appeared in the American press by the 1870s and by the 1890s had risen to some prominence in debates over the

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[4] Cosmo Monkhouse, "The Worship of the Ugly," *The Eclectic Magazine of Foreign Literature* 63, no. 5 (May 1896): 668, APSO. Reprint from *National Review.*

[5] Conventions about proper subject matter and appropriate formal execution have always of course been honored at least in part in the breach. And the modernism Americans saw as a mainly *French* threat had endured remarkably similar objections in France. But the American reaction was no less virulent for its being unoriginal. For a concise but sophisticated analysis of European reactions to realist painting and literature I recommend Linda Nochlin, *Realism* (New York: Penguin, 1971).

[6] "The Question of Art," *Friends' Intelligencer* 54, no. 45 (November 6, 1897): 764, APSO.

[7] Edward Fuller, "Art for Art's Sake," *The Bookman; a Review of Books and Life* 1, no. 4 (May 1895): 241, APSO.

character and place of culture in the United States. Englishman Grant Allen, appraising the general state of the conversation for the *North American Review* in 1896, noted that a "school of critics has for some twenty years been dinning in our ears its poor little formula of 'art for art's sake,' in season and out of season."[8] As with many of the discourses discussed above, the question of the meanings of art for art's sake evolved in multi-faceted and complex ways.

First, the phrase itself meant different things depending on who employed it. Its origins dated to the eighteenth century, when it was used to argue for the freedom of art from political or social strictures. Art for art's sake, in this sense, meant simply that art ought not be required to serve the interests either of political expediency or of popular or religious notions of morality. That said, there was no assertion in the earliest uses of the phrase that art was somehow amoral, that it had no higher purposes, or that it could not err by being vulgar or harmful to both artists and their audiences. Rather, art – literary or visual – should be granted its own sphere, should be allowed the freedom to develop by its own dictates, should not be understood as a tool of church, state, or commerce. In the course of summarizing some of the thinking behind art for art's sake, Gene H. Bell-Villada, in *Art for Art's Sake & Literary Life: How Politics and Markets Helped Shape the Ideology & Culture of Aes-*

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[8] Grant Allen, "Novels Without a Purpose," *North American Review* 163, no. 477 (August 1896): 223, APSO. This article was reprinted in *Current Literature* 20, no. 5 (November 1896): 408.

theticism, 1790-1990, has pointed out that "about the time of Voltaire's death in 1778 . . . an alternative aesthetic, under which rules are generated not by external authorities but by the individual work or artist, was emerging slowly into view. Art for art's sake in this respect has its ultimate roots in certain Enlightenment thinkers' critique of the status quo."[9] Later, Immanuel Kant and Friedrich Schiller developed such ideas further and provided the "mother lode" that nineteenth-century thinkers from Ruskin to Poe to Baudelaire would draw on for their own assertions that art be subject primarily to aesthetic standards. Still, Bell-Villada would have readers remember that "art for art's sake in Schiller's view is a necessary first stage on the road to the equally necessary goals of truth, morality and social character. One uses art not to teach morals and truth; one uses art for art's sake as a sensuous grounding for morals and truth. In the pioneering case of Schiller, the later formula *l'art pour l'art* must be extended to the bolder and more complex *l'art pour l'art et ensuite pour le vrai, le bien et le social*, or art for art's sake, and the for the sake of the True, the Good, and the Social."[10]

Such qualification implicitly challenges the later association of art for art's sake with the outright encouragement of immorality or the dissociation of art from any higher ideals. Indeed early assertions that art must be understood and pursued for its own sake had instead only insisted that art be al-

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[9] Gene H. Bell-Villada, *Art for Art's Sake & Literary Life: How Politics and Markets Helped Shape the Ideology & Culture of Aestheticism, 1790-1990* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 14.

[10] Ibid., 20.

lowed to approach and express truth and beauty by artistic or aesthetic avenues rather than by religious or political ones. "It has been assumed," wrote Edgar Allen Poe in his posthumously published (1850) essay "The Poetic Principle,"

> tacitly and avowedly, directly and indirectly, that the ultimate object of all Poetry is Truth. Every poem, it is said, should inculcate a moral, and by this moral the poetical merit of the work is to be adjudged. We Americans especially have patronized this happy idea, and we Bostonians very especially have developed it in full. We have taken it into our heads that to write a poem simply for the poem's sake, and to acknowledge such to have been our design, would be to confess ourselves radically wanting in the true poetic dignity and force: – but the simple fact is that, would we but permit ourselves to look into our own souls, we should immediately there discover that under the sun there exists nor can exist any work more thoroughly dignified, more supremely noble, than this very poem, this poem *per se*, this poem which is a poem and nothing more, this poem written solely for the poem's sake. . . . It by no means follows, however, that the incitements of Passion, or the precepts of Duty, or the even the lessons of Truth, may not be introduced into a poem, and with advantage, for they may subserve incidentally, in various ways, the general purpose of a work: but the true artist will always contrive to tone them down in proper subjection to that Beauty which is the atmosphere and the real essence of the poem.[11]

Before Poe, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, much read in nineteenth-century America, had as early as 1817 expressed similar sentiments in *Biographia Literaria*: "now, till the blessed time shall come, when truth itself shall be pleasure, and both shall be so united, as to be distinguishable in words only, not in feeling, it will remain the poet's office to proceed upon the state of associa-

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[11] Edgar Allan Poe, "The Poetic Principle," *Home Journal*, August 31, 1850, 1. The essay was also included in *Works of the Late Edgar Allen Poe* , 4 vols. (New York: J. S. Redfield, 1850-1856). For a thorough analysis of Poe's essay and its relation to broader literary and social contexts, see Kenneth Alan Hovey, "Critical Provincialism: Poe's Poetic Principle in Antebellum Context," *American Quarterly* 39, no. 3 (Autumn 1987): 341-354.

tion, which actually exists in general; *instead of attempting first to make it what it ought to be*, and then to let the pleasure follow."[12] These anti-didactic formulations predate the real eruption of the idea of art for art's sake into public discourse outside relatively limited artistic and critical circles, but it is helpful to begin with the origins of the phrase and its implications for its earliest proponents and theorists in order to properly evaluate the nature of the reaction against art for art's sake as it reached its highest pitch in the last decade of the nineteenth century. How did sentiments akin to Poe's and Coleridge's, which had germinated first among admired Enlightenment philosophers, come to be so feared and reviled in the United States at the end of the 1800s?

Theorists of art for art's sake understood themselves to be saving the arts from vapidity and dullness, helping poems and paintings escape impressment into service as mere instruments to effect morality or order. For artists interested in art for art's sake, culture could indeed work on society and individuals in broadly beneficial ways, even morally enlightening ways, but only if it were left to arrive at such effects on its own terms. The movement as viewed by its proponents merely argued that if audiences wanted to

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[12] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, Chapter 22. Reproduced in George Benjamin Woods, ed., *English Poetry and Prose of the Romantic Movement* (Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1929), 385. Emphasis added. For additional studies on Coleridge's philosophy and his influence on American writers, see John J. Duffy, ed., *Coleridge's American Disciples: The Selected Correspondence of James Marsh* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1973); Catherine Miles Wallace, *The Design of "Biographia Literaria"* (London: George Allen and Undwin, 1983); Tim Milnes, "Eclipsing Art: Method and Metaphysics in Coleridge's Biographia Literaria," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 60, no. 1 (January 1999): 125-147; John Beer, "William Ellery Channing Visits the Lake Poets," *The Review of English Studies* New Series 42, no. 166 (May, 1991): 212-226; Clarence D. Thorpe, "Coleridge as Aesthetician and Critic," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 5, no. 4 (October 1944): 387-414.

get something out of a sculpture or a novel, then they must allow these to be both developed and judged *as* sculptures or novels, not as sermons or tracts. To insist on terms other than these, their thinking ran, would be just as absurd as to insist a hammer be judged by the sound rather than the force of its blow.

But in large part this seemingly reasonable approach failed to convince those who expected art to fulfill many and important promises. If art were simply pursued and judged for its own sake, what use really was it to the general public? How would it not remain only a specialized and trivial diversion of an elite few? Why bother creating grand museums, for instance, or spend the money to grace libraries with paintings and murals by celebrated artists? Why take the time and space in newspapers to reproduce copious amounts of poetry? Twentieth-century scholar R. V. Jonhson, in his study *Aestheticism*, has outlined the logical conclusions one might arrive at through a thorough commitment to art for art's sake: "another way of interpreting art for art's sake, then, is to see it as an attempt to regard all artistic expression in the same way that we may regard music and non-representational graphic art. . . . The logical tendency of art for art's sake – whether anyone actually follows it our or not – is, on this interpretation, not merely away from moral didacticism, from any comment on life, but away from meaning as such."[13]

Art for art's sake was widely rejected in American public discourse in the

[13] R. V. Johnson, *Aestheticism* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1969), 17.

late-nineteenth century because of its seeming insistence that art need not take anything into consideration except itself, that any useful moral that emerged represented an inessential bonus. Art for art's sake sounded irresponsibly anti-utilitarian and arrogantly autonomous. "The modern critics tell us that beauty is an end in itself, that the moral law has nothing to do with it" wrote Princeton art professor Henry Van Dyke.[14] "The claim of independence for art leads to the most absurd conclusions in the realm of art," he continued.[15] "The claim is one that is not made for any other department of life. The men who claim this liberty really claim degradation. Take away the moral law and you rob and impoverish the artist."[16] This was not a specifically turn-of-the-century sentiment. *Christian Union*, as early as the Centennial year, had already sensed something frustratingly absolutist in the concept. According to its maxims, one author argued, "when we look at a picture its story or its beauty is to be as dross to us, while with judicial severity we scrutinize its technical correctness and balance. The subject of a poem, tale or picture may be uninteresting, ugly, repulsive or impure, but this is to be a secondary consideration – in fact, it should not be considered at all."[17]

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[14] Henry Van Dyke, quoted in "Dr. Van Dyke Talks on Art: Relation to Ethics Discussed by the Princeton Man Before the Twentieth Century Club," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, November 17, 1900, 2, PQHN.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid.

[17] "The Nature and Tendency of the Absolute," *Christian Union* 14, no. 2 (July 12, 1876): 22, APSO.

It was not, then, generally accepted that art should proceed exclusively on its own terms. Something must be the point beyond a given work itself if there was to be anything practically redeeming in it. *The Independent* said as much when discussing the Paris Salon of 1877, which included forty-five works by Americans. "Paris is nothing but a city of art, and its art is only for the sake of art. It accomplishes nothing, means nothing, and if all the art it has produced were obliterated the world would lose nothing necessary to its progress or comfortable existence."[18] And England, according to the same reviewer, was in no better shape:

> the criticisms on the Royal Academy Exhibition in London, in the leading English journals show that art in England, which was never before so munificently patronized, is, like that of France, in its decadence. It is because the artists have no high or ennobling motive to spur them on in their work. They never before knew so well the technical rules for expressing their feelings, if they had any feelings to express. But they have learned that art was for art's sake, and they have become *blasé* from lack of a worthy motive.[19]

When we remember that these were the same years in which visual art in particular was coming into increasingly high esteem, years when the New York and the Boston museums were beginning to grow, we encounter something seemingly paradoxical. On the one hand the arts were being revered with a whole new intensity in the United States, even explicitly vaunted as a social good; connoisseurship had begun to emerge among the upper classes;

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[18] "Fine Arts," *The Independent, Devoted to the Consideration of Politics, Social and Economic Tendencies, History, Literature, and the Arts* 29, no. 1487 (May 31, 1877): 6, APSO.

[19] Ibid.

critical technique was increasingly sophisticated. All this would seem to point to a recognition that culture offered something special that was all its own. But on the other hand we find grumbling like that noted above, which seemed to insist that art should submit to evaluation on grounds imposed upon it from other spheres. This tension was characteristic in of much nineteenth-century cultural discourse.

The situation only became more confusing as the century progressed. The autonomy suggested by art for art's sake was attacked as nonsense on grounds that any good art had finally the same goal as any good preaching, though they arrived at the goal – truth – by different means. A columnist for *Liberty* reflected that "all good art and all good sermons have a common foundation in truth. The difference between them is that one teaches it didactically while the other teaches it artistically. One constructs an argument, the other paints a picture. One appeals to the reason, the other to the imagination. But truth is their common object. . . . Hence that art is bad art and that sermon a bad sermon which teaches a lie, which promulgates an error, which lends external allurement and fleeting attraction to that which is internally rotten and internally repulsive."[20] For their part, many writers or painters would have readily agreed that truth played a part in the meaningfulness of their work, but they still resisted the idea that good art be judged by any one standard, on the grounds that truth was *an* element of artistic achievement,

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[20] "Is Art Independent of Truth?" *Liberty (Not the Daughter But the Mother of Order)* 5, no. 17 (March 31, 1888): 4, APSO.

not its sole and sufficient criterion.[21]

Though some earlier comment understood the skirmish over art for art's sake in stark terms, the 1870s and 1880s were largely a time when debate on the issue remained relatively fluid because of the lack of clearly defined rhetorical positions and tactics on either side.[22] As the 1890s arrived and the idea, or at least the phrase, moved even more prominently into general public discourse in cultural journals and in newspapers, the perceived urgency of the problem increased proportionally. In general, the arguments both for and against art for art's sake were more subtle and more civil before the last decade of the nineteenth century. The provocative aesthetic absolutism of someone like Oscar Wilde seems to make most sense when we see it in context of

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[21] This would not hold for the most radical of realist painters however, who were more than happy to have their work judged on grounds of truth; they understood themselves as scientifically recording the world in an unbiased and "objective" manner (see Cochlin, *Realism*). In response to such views, an entirely different debate began to emerge in the eighties which decried the failure of naturalistic novelists and realistic painters to be *too* interested in the truth; this would also be a complicated issue, as it turned somewhat on the difference between truth and Truth. In the fight against the Zolas of the cultural world, some of the same critics who opposed art for art's sake held that art that was indeed art must do much more than just present a literal representation of life.

[22] For instance a letter to the editor by "EMT" in *The Critic* 3, no. 71 (May 12, 1883): 221, APSO: "Can any one tell just when this phrase became the peculiar cognizance of the poetic dilettanti? Those who assert this principle most vehemently and personally would have us understand that it is with them a matter of first nature and intuition; that the feeling for art kindles and directs all their inspiration; that, should they disobey this feeling or attempt to reconcile it with any consideration of humanity or ethics, very promptly would Apollo tweak their ears, and charge them with profanation of the sacred things of poesy. It appears that they would abhor not so much an intellectual vacuum as the possible presence of didacticism. The more morality, the less art, is their argument – as though between morals and art an impossible gulf had been fixed. [After some mention of Keats' ideal and a quote from Spenser – "Beautie is not, as fond men misdeem, / An outward shew of things that only seem" – she concludes:] Even the most splendidly reckless of the Elizabethans did not think it beneath the dignity of the poetic art if now and then a homiletic meaning appeared behind the debonair fable."

increasing efforts on the part of traditionalists to discredit ideas that had risen to notice as rather tame and moderate suggestions for adjustment. By the end of the century when Wilde proclaimed "there is no such thing as a moral or immoral book" and "all art is quite useless" in his preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, things had reached a level of polarization that left opponents engaged as often in caricature as in analysis.[23]

Those aligned against the idea of art for art's sake tended to see it as somehow related to other looming menaces to American minds and society, most often "aestheticism," "decadence," and "naturalism."[24] "There is a line to be drawn," declared *Friends' Intelligencer*:

> it is that line which divides pagan from Christian. We know we are saying what offends the "canons of art" as held by many; nevertheless we say it, because we believe they are altogether wrong. "Art for Art's Sake" is a snare to the feet. All that is beautiful to the eye is not good, as everyone knows by experience. Beauty alone is not good enough for being. If Art is to be justified in any true sense it must be because it contributes, little or much, to the betterment, the elevation, the purification of the mind. Art devoid of an ethical quality has

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[23] Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in *The Complete Oscar Wilde* (New York: Crescent Books, 1995), 11. Studies of Wilde's aestheticism, his English context and his experiences in the United States include: Mary Warner Blanchard, *Oscar Wilde's America: Counterculture in the Gilded Age* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); Linda Dowling, *The Vulgarization of Art: The Victorians and Aesthetic Democracy* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996); Stephen Paul Regan, "The Idea of the Beautiful in Late Victorian Literature: John Ruskin, Walter Pater, Oscar Wilde, and the Poets of the Eighteen Nineties," PhD diss., University of Toronto, 1983. Charles Harmon Cagle, "Oscar Wilde in Kansas," *Kansas History* 4, no. 4 (1981): 227-245.

[24] While of course each of these has been separately explicated at length by scholars with the privilege of hindsight, what we are trying to understand here are instead the ideas of mostly non-experts – earnest, intelligent, cultural amateurs who faced what seemed like a coordinated barrage, from several directions but with shared insidious strategic aims, on traditional notions of excellence and purpose in the literary and visual arts.

> no right in a public gallery, or anywhere outside a museum collection. Art which accompanies and supports the merely animal in humanity has no claim to favor.[25]

Here we find common nineteenth-century refrains (that subject matter mattered and that the ends of art must be more than aesthetic) combined with the immemorial religious idea that very often the dangerous and the attractive coincide, without which coincidence temptation to immorality would be hardly as common. We cannot, the argument runs, count on the morally repugnant always to present itself as such, and must on the contrary recognize that one of its oldest and most reliable disguises is in what is beautiful or exciting to the eye or ear.

And further, we find claims not just that art insisting on being judged only for its aesthetic achievement offended morality, but that in doing so it necessarily degraded art itself. "What if," asked a contributor to *The Independent*, "a morally vile novel have all the splendid attractions of genius hung over its pages, shall that fact redeem it from absolute condemnation? We may praise its verbal style, its excellent composition, as we might the cunning of a great thief, or the supreme courage of an outlaw; but we cannot say the artist has not sinned against his art."[26] "It is sometimes said," reported *Current Literature*, "that anything handled in an artistic way becomes beauti-

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[25] "The Question of Art," *Friends' Intelligencer* 54, no. 45 (November 6, 1897): 764, APSO.

[26] Maurice Thompson, "Novels and Morals," *The Independent, Devoted to the Consideration of Politics, Social and Economic Tendencies, History, Literature, and the Arts* 49, no. 2555 (November 18, 1897): 2, APSO.

ful in the process. But how can handling make the hideous attractive? If it does, or seems to do so, what becomes of our severe love of 'the truth'?"[27]

For one contributor to *North American Review*, art for art's sake was "the theory that art has nothing to do with morals, a dogma formulated by Kant and Lessing, but debased to uses which it would have given them a nightmare to foresee, by the long and loathsome series of aesthetes, decadents and diabolists."[28] Further, "it seems evident," Hazeltine continued later in his essay, "that the phase through which literature is passing in these closing years of the century is transitory, like the unsettled state of public consciousness which it reflects. We must put a stop to the invasion of books and newspapers by diabolists, and to the intrusion of anarchists in politics, or organized human society must cease to exist."[29] This passage illustrates how critics often linked political or social well-being with the state of the cultural sphere in a way that sounded grave and yet somewhat vague. For instance an author in *The Critic* found deterioration in art linked somehow with changing commitments to and hopes for the most sacred of American ideals: "although devotion to materialism would seem almost a sufficient answer, by itself, to the question we are asking, there is another and even more pervading cause for the poverty of high literature in America. This is nothing less fatal to it than

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[27] "Hypocrisy for Art's Sake," *Current Literature* 21, no. 6 (June 1897): 523, APSO.

[28] Mayo W. Hazeltine, "As to Age-End Literature," *North American Review* 160, no. 463 (June 1895): 748, 750, APSO.

[29] Mayo W. Hazeltine, "As to Age-End Literature," *North American Review* 160, no. 463 (June 1895): 748, 750, APSO.

the disappointment which we as Americans feel in the inadequate fulfillment of the promises of democracy. . . . We seem to have lost the belief that we once had in the magnificent ideals set up by the Declaration of Independence."[30]

It remained unclear whether societal shortcomings had caused artistic failures or vice versa, but many agreed that "decadence in art is a sure sign of some organic change taking place in our moral sense."[31] Brooks Adams had little hope that noble art could emerge in late-nineteenth century America: "no poetry can bloom in the arid modern soil, the drama has died, and the patrons of art are no longer even conscious of shame at profaning the most sacred of ideals. The ecstatic dream, which some twelfth-century monk cut into the stones of the sanctuary hallowed by the presence of his God, is reproduced to bedizen a warehouse; or the plan of an abbey, which Saint Hugh may have consecrated, is adapted to a railway station."[32] The idea that society

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[30] Livingston Hunt, "The Decay of Spirituality in Our Literature," *The Critic: A Weekly Review of Literature and the Arts* 24, no. 716 (November 9, 1895): IVA, APSO.

[31] Frederic Harrison, "Art and Shoddy: A Reply to Criticisms," *Forum* 15 (August 1893): 718, APSO.

[32] Brooks Adams, *The Law of Civilization and Decay: An Essay on History* (New York: Vintage Books, 1959), 308. Recent and older works on Adams include: Petri Tapani Kuokkanen, "Prophets of Decline: The Global Histories of Brooks Adams, Oswald Spengler and Arnold Toynbee in the United States, 1896-1961," PhD diss., Tampereen Yliopisto (Finland), 2003; James William Holland, "The Mugwumps and Modern America: An Analysis of Change, 1870-1918," PhD diss., Georgia State University, 1995; William A. Williams, "Brooks Adams and American Expansion," *New England Quarterly: A Historical Review of New England Life and Letters*, 25, no. 2 (June 1952): 217-32; R. P. Blackmur, "Henry and Brooks Adams: Parallels to Two Generations," *Southwest Review* 5 (1940): 308-334; Michael D. Clark, "Martial and Imaginative Val-

in general was undergoing major adjustments – to some observers deterioration and coarsening – merged easily with an idea that the arts were declining in tandem. Did the age produce the laxity and perversion of art for art's sake or was it the other way around? The question could be argued from either angle though never definitively. But a consistent theme was that all was not well, that the cultural state of affairs in the United States was, despite much hard work, either stalled or getting worse. As we shall see, the threat of radical aesthetic autonomy seemingly insisted upon by advocates of art for art's sake was only one among several perceived problems.

LITERARY NATURALISM

> *[The public] will study moral and physical monstrosity for remedial purposes, but it does not want to impart to them the immortality of art. There ought to be a chasm between the sensational newspaper and literature, not only in manner, but in matter.* —Current Literature, 1898[33]

Art for art's sake was criticized as being unconcerned with truth, as attempting to sequester art in a self-referential world where the only obligations for the artist were aesthetic ones. But in a demonstration of the contradictions and complications that often characterized nineteenth-century American discourses on cultural matters, another important artistic theory, naturalism, was condemned in large part just for its supposed commitment to presenting

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ues: The Greater Appeal of Brooks Adams' Man of Fear," *Midcontinent American Studies Journal* 11, no. 1 (1970): 54-64; Mina J. Carson, "The Evolution of Brooks Adams," *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly* 6, no. 2 (Spring 1983): 95-116.

[33] "A Comment on Realism; The Outlook," *Current Literature* 23, no. 4 (April 1898): 302, APSO.

the truth whole and unvarnished. This was the idea, noted above, that nothing in nature was ugly. To opponents of naturalism, beauty may have been truth, but truth was by no means a guarantor of beauty.

To some extent, critics employed "naturalism" more as a potent epithet than a category of critical analysis in the late-nineteenth-century United States. As an idea it seems not to have been widely or well understood; definitions of it as a style or a philosophy varied, even among supporters and practitioners.[34] "The critical debate from the mid-1870s to the outbreak of World War I over the nature and value of realism and naturalism," argues literary historian Donald Pizer, "seldom included discussion of formal characteristics of these modes of expression – of specific devices of narrative technique, for example, or of prose style."[35] Literary naturalism's advocates understood it to stand for a kind of radical truthfulness, not only accurate but undiscriminating, unflinching and contemporary – the *whole observable* truth. They repeatedly announced their commitment to the idea of empirical truth

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[34] Scholars continued to debate the definitions and meaning of naturalism over the course of the twentieth century. Some helpful examples include: Donald Pizer, *The Theory and Practice of American Literary Naturalism: Selected Essays and Reviews* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1993); Charles Child Walcutt, *American Literary Naturalism, A Divided Stream* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1956); Lars Åhnebrink, *The Beginnings of Naturalism in American Fiction: A Study of the Works of Hamlin Garland, Stephen Crane, and Frank Norris with Special Reference to Some European Influences* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1961); Lee Clark Mitchell, *Determined Fictions: American Literary Naturalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989); Stephen Allan Germic, "Nature, Naturalism, American Exceptionalism: Nineteenth Century Designs to Obscure Class and Crisis" (PhD diss., Wayne State University, 1997); R. Clinton Ohlers, "The End of Miracles: Scientific Naturalism in America" (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2007).

[35] Donald Pizer, ed., *Documents of American Realism and Naturalism* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1998), 3.

and their rejection of any duties to some reality outside the realm of material experience. Their works sometimes consciously avoided traditional narrative devices and presentations, seeing these as unwarranted impositions upon the raw facts. Where art for art's sake would leave the world behind, naturalism would embrace it unconditionally. Those alarmed by naturalism's apparently growing influence saw unhealthy pessimism and unholy determinism, both of which were usually associated with French writers.

In 1888 the editors of the American journal *Littell's Living Age* reprinted an article from England's *The Nineteenth Century* in which Frederic H. Myers argued that a closer look at seemingly healthy French literature would reveal an underlying sickness.[36] "[France's] living savants probably form as wise, as disinterested a group of intellectual leaders as any epoch of her history has known . . . and if the love of truth, the search for truth, fortifies a nation, then assuredly France should be stronger now than under any of her kings or her Cæsars."[37] But the trouble, Myers explained, was that to congratulate France on this success one had to accept the world as fundamentally good, so that more intimate knowledge about it was unconditionally a good thing. But, all too frequently, our acquisition of some knowledge instead only opened our

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[36] Occasionally I have found it useful to reference articles published outside the United States. I think it is reasonable, in some cases, to include these as part of American discourse since they were being read by American audiences and chosen for republication by American editors.

[37] "Frederic H. Myers, "The Disenchantment of France," *Littell's Living Age* 177, no. 2293 (June 9, 1888): 603, APSO.

eyes to something we'd rather not, perhaps *should* not, have seen. Once having lost the illusion of a good world, a true religion, an ordered meaningful politics, French authors, Myers argued, subsequently fell prey to "pessimism, and the strange desire to represent the world as ugly and brutal, governed by blind instincts."[38] The Anglo-Saxon world, he insisted, should see in France a "warning note": "like causes elsewhere must produce like effects; and there will be other great nations whose decline will not be long delayed."[39]

Traditionalist critics tended to agree that among nations France had fallen furthest into a "polemical type of realism, or Naturalism."[40] And, of all Frenchmen, Emile Zola drew more attention than anyone else.[41] "'Zola'," reported *The Critic*, "has become a synonym for everything that is bad."[42] In reviewing *L'Assommoir*, a dark story of a working-class family's descent into

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[38] "Frederic H. Myers, "The Disenchantment of France," 607.

[39] "Frederic H. Myers, "The Disenchantment of France," 614.

[40] "A Comment on Realism," *Current Literature*, April 1898, v. 23, n. 4, APSO p. 302. Reprinted from *The Outlook*.

[41] Additional scholarly literature in English on Zola's and naturalism's reception in the American critical community and the press more broadly includes: Gwendolyn Jones, "Zola's Publications in English in the United States," *Frank Norris Studies* 14 (Autumn 1992): 8-11; Zena Meadowsong, "Natural Monsters: The Genesis and Deformation of the 'Experimental Novel,'" *Studies in American Naturalism* 2, no. 1 (Summer 2007): 3-17. Also see the older but still very useful account of the press's violent reaction to Zola's fiction and how views on the author were more moderate in some cases after Dreyfus Affair, Herbert Edwards, "Zola and the American Critics," *American Literature: A Journal of Literary History, Criticism and Bibliography* 4, no. 2 (May 1932): 114-129.

[42] *The Critic: A Weekly Review of Literature and the Arts* 12 (May 26, 1888): 255-56. Quoted in Lars Åhnebrink, *The Beginnings of Naturalism in American Fiction: A Study of the Works of Hamlin Garland, Stephen Crane, and Frank Norris with Special Reference to Some European Influences* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1961), 36.

despair, debt and alcoholism, *Harper's* declared "we would as soon introduce smallpox into our homes."[43] The *Nation* considered Zola's works guilty of "moral baseness unvaried by even a gleam of rectitude."[44] To *Atlantic Monthly* Zola's "nauseous" fictions "arouse[d] physical repulsion."[45] And *North American Review* looked at the Frenchman's novels and saw "foreign purveyors of infection."[46] Even Henry James, who later would become a defender and admirer of Zola, wrote in the *New York Tribune* in 1876 that "the real, for [Zola] means exclusively the unclean, and he utters his crudities with an air of bravado which makes them doubly intolerable."[47]

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[43] *Harper's Magazine* 59 (July 1879): 309. Quoted in the informative and helpful account of changing opinion, from negative to less negative, about Zola in the late-nineteenth century among American novelists and critics, William G. Frierson and Herbert Edwards, "Impact of French Naturalism on American Critical Opinion, 1877-1892," *PMLA* 63, no. 3 (September 1948): 1007-1016.

[44] *Nation* 29 (September 1879): 213. Quoted in William G. Frierson and Herbert Edwards, "Impact of French Naturalism on American Critical Opinion, 1877-1892," *PMLA* 63, no. 3 (September 1948): 1007-1016.

[45] *Atlantic Monthly*, May 1880, v. 45, p. 696. Quoted in William G. Frierson and Herbert Edwards, "Impact of French Naturalism on American Critical Opinion, 1877-1892," *PMLA* 63, no. 3 (September 1948): 1007-1016.

[46] *North American Review* 131, no. 284 (July 1880): 79. Quoted in William G. Frierson and Herbert Edwards, "Impact of French Naturalism on American Critical Opinion, 1877-1892," *PMLA* 63, no. 3 (September 1948): 1007-1016.

[47] "Letters from Paris: Son Excellence Eugène Rougon," New York Tribune, May 13, 1876. Reproduced in Leon Edel, ed., *Henry James, Literary Criticism: French Writers, Other European Writers, The Prefaces to the New York Edition* (New York: Library of America, 1984), 861. In August 1903 James would publish a long essay in Atlantic Monthly which, while not wholly uncritical, explained and defended Zola's literary achievement, with special praise reserved for *L'Assommoir*. Some of the many other contemporary attacks in the American press on Zola's work and character were found in: *Nation* 24 (March 1877): 160-162; *Atlantic Monthly* 34 (June 1877): 761-763; *Literary World* 10 (June 21, 1879): 202; *North American Review* 131 (July 1880): 79-89; *Critic* 1 (July 16, 1881): 189; *Nation* 34 (March 16, 1882): 233-234; *Critic* 2 (March 11, 1882):

Soon, writers against naturalism and its alleged pessimism and determinism had begun to employ the convenient shorthand "Zolaism" in their attacks. Zola not only insisted on showing the darker sides of life, but of tracing the causes of immoral behavior not only to individuals' failures but to broad social ills, with some apparent reduction of personal responsibility. Many American cultural commentators found Zola's minute depictions of unsavory lives, immoral acts and individual helplessness in a world of material forces beyond human control at odds with the idea that literature should be both spiritually and practically useful.[48] Zola's infamy even spread beyond cultural commentary, and we find his name used almost as an adjective to invoke grisly or immoral events having nothing to do with literature, as when a West Virginia report on a local case of adultery and barely-prevented incest bore the headline "A Startling Tale: Zola's Spiciest Outdone in Our State by the Extraordinary Complications of Two Families."[49]

Yet even Zola's claims to have relentlessly rendered the actual were sometimes called into question. "It grows clear, too, that Zola has the worst fault charged against the Romanticists; he is not true. . . . The great show of

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72-73; *Critic* 3 (March 10, 1883): 104; *Literary World* 13 (June 3, 1882): 175. See also Anthony Cummins "The First Generation Reception of the Novels of Emile Zola in Britain and America: An Annotated Bibliography of English Language Responses to his Work, 1877–1902," *French Studies* 62, no. 2 (2008): 222-223.

[48] The United States was not alone in its discomfort with Zola. His works were actually banned officially in several European countries during this period. See for instance John McNair, "Zolaizm in Russia,": *Modern Language Review* 95, no. 2 (April 2000): 450-462.

[49] *Wheeling Register*, June 30, 1885, 1 AHN.

photographic accuracy which Zola often makes is delusive, and the impression produced on the readers is as misleading as if it had been conveyed by an old fashioned romancer."[50] The *Kansas City Star* accused Zola of "idealization" in his depiction of mining machinery in *Germinal*, making him a traitor to his own articulations of naturalist theory.[51] Another writer referred in the *Bookman* to Zola and his followers as a "Pseudo-Realists" and argued that their problem was "not that they deal with humanity in its darker aspects, but that they deal only with these aspects. . . . They may paint what they see, but they do not see the whole."[52] Likewise, the *Literary World* contrasted the then-much-loved Russian novelists, who had begun to be translated into English in the 1870s, with the work of the despised Zola, and hoped American artists would veer toward the former as they chose models for their own work:

> compared with such realism [that by the Russians] the brutality of Zola is forever intolerable. The difference is that in the most realistic of the Russian novels, from Gogol to Dostoyevsky, the characters are men and women, however degraded; . . . they are human and not animated embodiments of the cardinal sins. In a word, the Russian masters describe the world they see with sympathetic appreciation; Zola and his compeers content themselves with the revolting externals of vice. There are not wanting signs which indicate a distinct tendency toward realism in English and American fiction; let us hope . . . that it will be the poetic realism of Turgenief and Tolstoi rather than the

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[50] "A Comment on Realism," *Current Literature* 23, no. 4 (April 1898): 302, APSO.

[51] "The Naturalism of Zola," *Kansas City Star*, October 5, 1902, 18, AHN.

[52] Edward Fuller, "Art for Art's Sake," *The Bookman: A Review of Books and Life* 1, no. 4 (May 1895): 242, APSO.

than the brutalizing naturalism of Zola.[53]

The reaction against the perceived dangers of Zolaism also provides an interesting perspective on what could at first glance appear to have been a larger cooling of enthusiasm toward French culture, one not untouched by nationalist overtones or generic artistic isolationism. Many Americans revolted by naturalism expressed a dismay that France, long the beacon of culture, the center of artistic refinement, had abandoned the values and traits that Americans had so sincerely admired and fervently emulated. Loredo Taft, an American sculptor addressing the Art Union of Central Illinois, summed up this view in a speech at the Union's annual meeting.

> We do not want *modern* French art, with its littleness and license. We are not a nation of libertines.
>
> But we do want its *perfection of technique*, its *wonderful drawing*, its *intense realism* that takes one outdoors when he paints a landscape, and keeps him there until it is done. We can have no characteristic American art until we have learnt that same fidelity to nature. Why, if our prairies could only be painted as they really are, what wonderful admiration they would excite among those trained to appreciate the faithful transcripts of nature! . . . Millet was great."[54]

Two Frances are recognized here: the mid-century France of Millet and the later France that seemed to have lost its way. The second paragraph provides

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[53] "Masters of Russian Literature," *Literary World* 17 (October 2, 1886): 327. Quoted in Lars Åhnebrink, *The Beginnings of Naturalism in American Fiction*, 39. Interestingly, as Robin Buss has pointed out in the introduction to his translation of *L'Assommoir* (New York: Penguin, 2000) Zola achieved popularity among the Russians before becoming accepted in France, let alone in Britain or the United States. For a more detailed analysis see Dale E. Peterson, *The Clement Vision: Poetic Realism in Turgenev and James* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976).

[54] Lars Åhnebrink, *The Beginnings of Naturalism in American Fiction*, 40. Emphasis added.

a syllabus for the course in art under which Americans studied for most of the nineteenth century at the feet of the French masters. These seemingly sudden transformations – from "poetic realism" to photographic, scientific naturalism and from France as model to France as threat – puzzled and disappointed some of the most ardent and tolerant of America's cultural advocates.

French naturalists, even Zola, did have their admirers and defenders, but they tended to be those, like Henry James and William Dean Howells, who were themselves artists committed to realism and open to experimentation in the art of the novel.[55] While acceptance of naturalism among novelists and

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[55] Howells characterized what he perceived as the happy ignorance enjoyed by detractors of modern fiction in "The Grasshopper: The Simple, the Natural, the Honest in Art," *Harper's Monthly* 76 (December 1887): 153-55: "It is delightful to meet one of them, either in print or out of it – some sweet elderly lady or excellent gentleman whose youth was pastured on the literature of thirty or forty years ago – and to witness the confidence with which they preach their favorite authors as all the law and the prophets. They have commonly read little or nothing since, or, if they have, they have judged it by a standard taken from these authors, and never dreamt of judging it by nature; they are destitute of the documents in the case of the later writers; they suppose that Balzac was the beginning of realism, and that Zola is its wicked end; they are quite ignorant, but they are ready to talk you down, if you differ with them, with an assumption of knowledge sufficient for any occasion. . . . It is part of their intellectual mission to represent the petrification of taste." Reproduced in Donald Pizer, ed., *Documents of American Realism and Naturalism* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1998), 85-6. ¶ For more on James and Howells and their relations to realism and naturalism, see Michael Kearns, "Henry James, Principled Realism, and the Practice of Critical," *College English* 56, no. 7 (November 1994): 766-787; Robert Weimann, "Realism, Ideology, and the Novel in America (1886-1896): Changing Perspectives in the Work of Mark Twain, W. D. Howells, and Henry James," *boundary 2* 17, no. 1, New Americanists: Revisionist Interventions into the Canon (Spring 1990): 189-210; John E. Bassett, "'A Heart of Ideality in My Realism': Howells's Early Criticism," *Papers on Language and Literature: A Journal for Scholars and Critics of Language and Literature* 25, no. 1 (Winter 1989): 67-82; George Lanum, "The Evolution of Howells's Realism: 'Suburban Sketches,'" *American Periodicals: A Journal of History, Criticism, and Bibliography* 12 (2002): 34-39; Anne-Claire Le Reste, "'The Reader Who Likes a Complete Image' vs. 'The Arbiter of Destinies': Henry James's *The Bostonians*, William Dean How-

some critics increased over time, resistance lingered, as evidenced by the sometimes hostile reaction to American experiments in the form.[56] Theodore Dreiser, Frank Norris and others would face some of the same sorts of criticism as had Zola: that they insisted upon a frank discussion of the sordid realities of life, especially sexual relations; that they suggested that guilt for the immoral actions of their protagonists rested in part with society at large rather than only in individual depravity; that their pretensions to "realism" were deluded or disingenuous.[57] As we shall see in the next section, some

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ells, and Realism," *Comparative Critical Studies* 4 no. 1 (2007): 87-104; Lyall H. Powers, *Henry James and the Naturalist Movement* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1971).

[56] Among these experiments were what were called "slum novels". Vaguely seen as a symptom of naturalistic tendencies, though not always by any means linked explicitly with the French style, dark tales of corrupt or destitute city-dwellers in the 1880s and 1890s enjoyed both wide audiences and critical ambivalence. Stories whose setting was urban misery were of course as least as old as Dickens, as several commentators noted. Dickens though, had at least felt constrained to pretend that his end in writing of the slums was the articulation of a social moral, as was pointed out by a writer for the sternly disapproving *Living Age* (Jane H. Findlater, "The Slum Movement in Fiction," *The Living Age* 225, no. 2920 (June 23, 1900): 756, APSO.) French-inspired modern fictions contrarily seemed to revel forthrightly in the ruinous fates of their subjects, not only exaggerating these for sensational effect but pitilessly and amorally disdaining to draw redeeming lessons for the reader.

[57] For more on Dreiser, Norris and American literary naturalism and its reception, see Christophe Den Tandt, *The Urban Sublime in American Literary Naturalism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998); Irene Gammel, "Twisted from the Ordinary: Essays on American Literary Naturalism," *Dreiser Studies* 35 no. 2 (Winter2004): 60-63; Joseph Karaganis, "Naturalism's Nation: Toward An American Tragedy" *American Literature* 72 no. 1 (March 2000): 153-181; Donald Pizer, "'True art speaks plainly': Theodore Dreiser and the Late Nineteenth-Century American Debate Over Realism and Naturalism," *Nineteenth Century Prose* 23 no. 2 (1996): 76-89; Donald Pizer, "Late Nineteenth-Century American Literary Naturalism: A Re-Introduction," *American Literary Realism* 38 no. 3 (Spring 2006): 189-202; Jared Gardner, "What Blood Will Tell: Hereditary Determinism in *McTeague* and *Greed*," *Texas Studies in Literature & Language* 36 no. 1 (Spring 1994): 51-75; Warren French, "Frank Norris and the 1890s: Naturalism and Decadence," *American Literary Scholarship* no. 13 (1975): 259-266.

American critics would find the similar faults in modern painting.

MODERNISM IN THE VISUAL ARTS

With regard to the visual arts in the United States, the decades after the Civil War were characterized by cosmopolitanism among American artists, an increase in availability of art for the public by way of exhibitions of both American and foreign art, and by the ready acceptance by American artists of new theories, techniques and styles generated in European countries.[58] American artists for most of the century had considered time spent studying in Europe an almost essential prerequisite to artistic development and critical and popular success. Nevertheless, this interest in understanding and assimilating the artistic expertise and sensibilities of Europe's contemporary masters along with its important traditions coexisted for the most part comfortably with perennial calls for artists to employ their European-polished talent to achieve a distinctively American excellence in painting and sculpture.

Not everyone agreed this was a happy state of affairs. The American artist in Paris, observed author Lizzie Champney in the *Christian Union*, "at once becomes an enthusiastic follower the master of his choice, adopting his style

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[58] For a general overview of the period under discussion see Brooklyn Museum, *The American Renaissance*, exhibition catalog (New York: Pantheon, 1980). For analysis of the variety and nature of American writing on art leading up to this period see William H. Gerdts, "The American 'Discourses': A Survey of Lectures and Writings on American Art, 1770-1858," *American Art Journal* 15, no. 3 (Summer 1983): 61-79.

without any attempt at discriminating between his excellencies and his faults."[59] While some artists and connoisseurs welcomed French and other European influences, many reviewers, commentators and the general public were less sanguine. Though far less immediate and forceful than the reaction against Zolaism, the American reception of modernist European developments in painting, beginning with impressionism, was still not wholly enthusiastic.[60] Indeed some commentators saw in modern French art the same perverse, harmful innovations said to characterize literary naturalism. James Hoppin, a minister, lawyer and frequent contributor to several cultural magazines, explained such a connection, as he saw it, in the *New Englander and Yale Review*: "[in the French school of painting] ugliness is welcomed if real, and sometimes if not real; indeed ugliness is a trifle preferred to beauty. The law of choice, which everyone must acknowledge is the law of the ideal

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[59] Lizzie M. Champney, "Modern French Art and Its Influence on American Artists," *Christian Union* 21 (March, 24, 1880): 272, APSO. Champney, née Williams, originally from Ohio, was married to Boston painter James Wells Champney, who illustrated many of her books. Her works include *In the Sky Garden* (1876), "a book of astronomical fables") and *Three Vassar Girls in South America* (1885). See James Grant Wilson and John Fiske, eds., "Champney, James Wells," *Appleton's Cyclopedia of American Biography*, 1:571.

[60] For analysis of how and why impressionism became widely loved in the United States several decades after it initial flourishing in Europe, see John Russell, "Delayed Impressions," *Art in America* 69, no. 1 (1981): 96-101. For more general studies on impressionism's reception see Kate Flint, *The Victorians and the Visual Imagination* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000); William H. Gerdts, *American Impressionism* (New York: Artabras, 1984); Michael Leja, "Monet's Modernity in New York in 1886," *American Art* 14, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 51-79; William H. Gerdts, "Chicago Is Rushing Past Everything": The Rise of American Art Journalism in the Midwest, from the Development of the Railroad to the Chicago Fire," *American Art Journal* 27, nos. 1/2 (1995-1996): 39-83.

in art, is viewed as a matter of no importance. It finds its counterpart in French modern novel-literature, and is not at all nice in what it takes."[61] In large part, it was a certain disinterestedness of representation – a "refusal to idealize or romanticize . . . motifs," as Nancy Mishoe Brennecke has noted in her study of Edouard Manet's reception in America – that troubled American audiences faced with the productions of literary naturalists and modern French painters, both of whom understood themselves mainly as realists, though they increasingly identified the real primarily with the contemporary, the momentary, the fragmentary.[62] "None of the clique [of impressionists]," wrote a *New York Times* reporter, "appears to have any definite end in view beyond that of eccentricity."[63]

The fiercest uproar against European aesthetic innovation in the visual arts would only erupt with the arrival of the post-impressionists and the cubists, and this would be a twentieth-century phenomenon for the most part, perhaps most visible at the 1913 International Exhibition of Modern Art (better known as the Armory Show).[64] Nevertheless, the periodical and

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[61] James Hoppin, "Tendencies of Modern Art," *New Englander and Yale Review* 10, no. 206 (May 1887): 465, APSO.

[62] Nancy Mishoe Brennecke, "'The Painter in Chief of Ugliness': Eduoard Manet and Nineteenth-Century America" (PhD diss., City University of New York, 2001), 4. For a more general discussion of these themes see Linda Nochlin, *Realism* (New York: Penguin, 1971).

[63] "Art in Paris," *New York Times*, April 27, 1879, 2, PQHN. A different passage from this article is also quoted by Brennecke.

newspaper literature of the last decades of the nineteenth century reveals an emerging critical rift between American ideas about art (which were sometimes simply European ideas a generation old) and the accelerating pace and increasing bravado of European invention. "Americans were wildly enthusiastic about French art," one art historian has written, "but the French art they admired and collected for their homes and fledgling museums was fashionable academic art that enjoyed the stamp of approval from the Salon and from ownership in respected European collections, as opposed to the avant-garde productions of Manet and his circle."[65] When American critics later sought to absorb the blows of full-scale modernism in the form of near-complete abstraction and intentional distortion that characterized some early twentieth-century European art, some would trace the roots of such regrettable developments back to the emergence of impressionism, which could be seen in retrospect as the initial salvo in a campaign to overturn traditional

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[64] Press reports of the 1910 Post-Impressionist exhibit in London, organized by painter and critic Roger Fry, also served as signs of decay for those who resisted modernist aesthetic ideas and practices. For instance, see "Post-Impressionist 'Art'," *New York Times*, November 27, 1910, Magazine Section, 3:1. Also, "The Cubists Dominate Paris' Fall Salon," *New York Times*, October 8, 1911, Magazine Section, 13:1; "To Stir Art Circles Here: Disciples of Matisse Movement Expect to Cause Sensation," *New York Times*, January 16, 1910, III, 2:6; F. A., "Post-Impressionist Problems," *The Living Age* 258, no. 3472 (Jan 21, 1911): 181, APSO; Robert Fowler, "Is Art a Failure?" *The Living Age* 274, no. 3556 (Aug 31, 1912): 542, APSO; Warren Barton Blake, "Crazy-Quilt Art," *The Independent* 73, no. 3342 (December 19, 1912): 1419, APSO; "The Insane Asylum as the Source of the Coming Craze in Art," *Current Literature* 50, no. 5 (May 1911): 505, APSO; "Is Post Impressionism a New Disease or a New Religion?" *Current Literature* 52, no. 5 (May 1912): 584, APSO; Marius De Zayas, "The New Art in Paris," *Forum* 46 (February 1911): 180, APSO.

[65] Brennecke, "'The Painter in Chief of Ugliness': Eduoard Manet and Nineteenth-Century America," 6.

aesthetic tenets, ones that nineteenth-century Americans had spent a long time learning to embrace and incorporate.[66] Indeed some late-nineteenth-century critics detected the onset of decline even earlier, and saw pre-impressionist, mid-century French realists, though admittedly skilled, as signs of trouble to come. "The 'realistic' school was bad enough," remembered one commentator, "but here, at least, painters limited their ideal to the exact reproduction of nature and possessed the undoubted merits of an execution which they tried to render as perfect as possible. Courbet's washerwomen . . . were repulsive enough, but it was because Courbet likes vulgarities, not because either drawing or coloring were faulty."[67] That is, the impressionists lacked not only taste but talent. The important critic Royal Cortissoz, head of art criticism at the *New York Tribune*, granted a level of skill to some impressionists, and even recognized a few like Claude Monet as true masters, but on the whole he too saw a decline when he looked at French art, one characterized in part by the increasing imposition of artists'

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[66] Art critic and painter Kenyon Cox delivered a classic formulation of this idea in 1913, the year of the Armory Show. "I wish I were not forced," he wrote, "to see that the easy slope to Avernus began as far back as the sixties of the last century. The lack of discipline and the exaltation of the individual have been the destructive forces of modern art, and they began their work long ago. Now all discipline has disappeared, all training is proclaimed useless, and individualism has reached the point of sheer insanity or triumphant charlatanism." Kenyon Cox, "The 'Modern' Spirit in Art," *Harper's Weekly*, March 15, 1913. Earl Harbert and Ellen Harbert in "Art Criticism in America, 1865-1880: The Early Voices of Dissent," *Journal of American Studies* 8, no. 2 (1974): 203-210 discuss the opposite camp, critics who vehemently opposed traditional art and vigorously defended and promoted a modernist approaches to painting. Also see Kate Flint, *The Victorians and the Visual Imagination* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

[67] "Art in Paris," *New York Times*, April 27, 1879, 2, PQHN.

outsized egos – "not imaginative, not based on spiritual insight" – as replacements for a former "marvelous totality."[68]

Impressionism as a general movement and Eduoard Manet in particular presented the first real modernist jolts to American aesthetic sensibilities in the realm of the visual arts. Manet was sometimes classified as the "king" or "acknowledged coryphæus" of the impressionists, and sometimes set apart from others thought to be more representative of the school like Monet, Camille Pissarro or Edgar Degas.[69] On the one hand, Manet attracted more pointed criticism than most of these others; on the other hand, he was more often identified as unusually daring and skilled, if nevertheless misguided. In particular, important non-impressionist works by Manet (e.g. "Olympia") were singled out for derision in the 1870s as "monstrosit[ies] in art" which were not "representations of anything whole or tangible," whose images failed to "enlarge our conception of the beautiful," and who replaced "the broad principles of human nature which underlie all art" with "the principles of catchpenny, buffoonery and indecency."[70] These were belated comments on Manet's innovations of the 1860s. But as his contemporaries' impression-

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[68] Royal Cortissoz, "Egotism in Contemporary Art," *Atlantic Monthly* 73, no. 439 (May 1894): 647, C-MOA.

[69] Theodore Child, "Gallery and Studio," *The Art Amateur: A Monthly Journal Devoted to Art in the Household* 14, no. 5 (April 1886): 101, APSO; "French Writers and Artists," *Appleton's Journal: A Monthly Miscellany of Popular Literature* 5, no. 13 (September 1878): 277, APSO.

[70] "French Writers and Artists," *Appleton's Journal: A Monthly Miscellany of Popular Literature* 5, no. 13 (September 1878): 277-79, APSO.

ism made its initial advances, first in France, then in England and the United States, the works which to later generations would be the epitome of unthreatening, approachable art were greeted by American observers with distrust and disdain as often as by curiosity or pleasure.

Several arguments animated criticism of impressionism as it was understood by its American audiences and critics.[71] Henry James, writing for the *New York Tribune*, regretted what he saw as the retreat from the "good old rules that decree that beauty is beauty and ugliness, ugliness."[72] American painter George Inness disparaged the impressionists' "scientific tendency to ignore the reality of the unseen" and their mistaken judgment that "the material is the real."[73] This criticism that the impressionists took nature as they found it and then identified unvarnished, "true" reproductions of what they experienced as "art" echoed those leveled at the literary naturalists, who as we have seen were accused of lacking the decency to look past the uglier aspects of life in favor of those that were uplifting both morally and aesthetically. Further, the tendency in impressionist paintings toward unconventional coloring led to accusations that the practitioners of the form were will-

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[71] William Gerdts, in *American Impressionism* (New York: Artabras, 1984), 30, has noted in a detailed discussion how "American critical evaluation of the [impressionist] movement was confounded by indecision as to exactly what Impressionism was."

[72] Henry James, "Parisian Festivity," *New York Tribune*, May 13, 1876. Quoted in Gerdts, *American Impressionism*, 30.

[73] George Inness, "Mr. Inness on Art-Matters," *Art Journal* 5 (1879): 374-77. Quoted in Gerdts, *American Impressionism*, 30.

fully distorting nature rather than faithfully representing it as had earlier French landscapists.

Another strain of disapproval focused on the unfinished and rough nature of impressionist works, which appeared to critics more like preliminary sketches than completed paintings. Impressionism looked to some observers as if it had been too easy. "What new dogma is this, then, that so long as color is heaped on in a vigorous manner, a picture must be accepted as complete, however crude and raw it may seem, however absolute is the evidence that the artist stopped before he had done?" asked the editors of *Appleton's* in 1878.[74] In a genuine, finished painting, the author continued, "one who looks at it sees textures, not paint, force by virtue of completeness and not by ruggedness, things and not guesses at things."[75] This too – the idea that modern works were essentially shams because they did not require painterly skill which manifested itself in traditional compositional coherence or spotless finishing – would be a theme more fully developed as modernism reached its peak of influence and invention in the twentieth century.[76]

Like Emile Zola, impressionism made its way into more general dis-

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[74] "Editor's Table," *Appleton's Journal* 5 (August 1878): 185-86. Quoted in Gerdts, *American Impressionism*, 44.

[75] "Editor's Table," *Appleton's Journal* 5 (August 1878): 185-86. Quoted in Gerdts, *American Impressionism*, 44.

[76] An interesting, thorough defense of impressionism, and especially of Claude Monet, in regard to the criticisms mentioned above, is Theodore Robinson, "Claude Monet," *The Century: A Popular Quarterly* 44, no. 5 (September 1892): 696-701.

course as well. Satire aimed at the impressionists and their works was scattered liberally throughout the newspaper pages of the 1880s and 1890s, and even lingered into the first years of the twentieth century. This body of work included cartoons, comical fictional tales and even a good deal of poetry. The main themes included the perceived conceitedness or presumption of impressionist painters, the inexact nature of their images, their unorthodox use of color, and their anti-establishment attitudes toward the critical and professional community. Almost all of these are present in an "Impressionist Poem," submitted first to the *New York Sun* in 1886 and then picked up and reprinted around the country:

Languid I lie on the peachblow grass,
Watching the cadmium cloudlets pass;
Shafts from the creamy sun descending
Break and spatter with glinting grace
Mountains, in no particular place
Starting or ending.

Wrapped in a rainbow colored fog
Sleeps the land; and each pool and bog
Shines like the skin of a dolphin dying.
Not a tree but is caught and kissed,
In an pallid absinthe mist,
Nimbus like lying.

Oh but to catch your changing moods,
Clotted cluster of violet woods,
Flat on the dim drab hillside pasted!
On my crying canvas, oh!
The solar spectrum entire to throw,
Ere the day's wasted!

Ultramarine, vermillion, gold,
In streaks and strata, crude and bold,
Into some kind of picture waken!

Then will the truth, as I see and feel,
Make academicians reel,
Or I'm mistaken.

Then will the critics, long color blind,
And the art world, ages and ages behind,
Hail, as wondrous rich accessions,
Human figures devoid of bones,
All earth's colors, without the tones –
In short, impressions.[77]

Another amateur poet focused later more specifically on the unorthodox color choices of the impressionists in her "Impressionist's Invitation":

Come out, my love, and stroll with me
Across the cobalt dunes;
We'll sit beside the sunset sea
That green-and-grayly croons,
That dies along the madder sands
In lines of scumbled foam;
And then we'll clasp our umber hands,
And mauvely wander home.[78]

A very popular fictional sketch made its way around the nation's papers in 1894, entitled "She Was an Impressionist but He Was an Iconoclast." This column-long tale has a suitor arrive at the studio of the woman artist he admires and has been stridently courting. He offers flowers to his beloved, and she accepts them like a credibly perverse impressionist: "Yellow chrysanthemums! O how lovely! I shall make a study of them standing on my window ledge with snow banked up outside and a skull beside them. I shall call it 'Death and Winter Close the Autumn Scene.'" The visitor looks around the

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[77] Henry Tyrell, "Impressionist Poems," *Dallas Morning News* , June 27, 1886, 5, AHN. Attributed to the *New York Sun.*

[78] Mercy E. Baker, "An Impressionist's Invitation," *Fort Worth Morning Register*, January 3, 1902, 7, AHN. Attributed to January 1902 issue of *Harpers Magazine.*

studio: "What a charming sketch of a – a snowscape that is." The painter replies: "That? O that is a morning mist on the mountains – I'm an impressionist you know." After several such exchanges the artist finally has to inform the increasingly bewildered gentleman that he's mistaken her latest unfinished work for the seat of a chair and has been sitting on it for half an hour.[79]

"Can you give me any good reasons for liking impressionist pictures?" asked another widely published joke. "Yes, indeed; they can be hung either side up with equally good effect."[80] Yet another: "Mr. Impressionist—'That's my last there on the easel. Now there is a picture, Squibs.' Squibs—'Yes, so it is. I can tell that by the frame.'"[81]

More serious, perhaps, were jokes that pointed to the impressionist aesthetic's tendency to undermine critical evaluation and confuse traditional standards of judgment, even for those who considered themselves cultured, capable observers of art. Along these lines, critics and reviewers often complained that advocates of impressionism condemned pictures too strictly verisimilar as unsophisticated and outdated. In the *Boston Transcript* and elsewhere we find this sketch: "Connoisseur—'It sounds mean to repeat it, but he declared your landscape did not look a bit like nature.' Artist—'Ah, that was high praise! The true Impressionist does not have to indulge in servile imita-

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[79] "She Was an Impressionist but He Was an Iconoclast," *Columbus Daily Enquirer*, December 23, 1894, 7, AHN.

[80] *Santa Fe Daily New Mexican*, February 7, 1895, 3, AHN.

[81] *Duluth News-Tribune*, April 15, 1896, 3, AHN. Attributed to *Harlem Life*.

tion of the object he depicts.'"[82] In a longer piece in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* a proud amateur collector's satisfaction slowly deflates as his more up-to-date friend explains that his newest acquisition fails because all its elements are immediately recognizable.

> Be calm, Blotterwink [the sophisticated comrade remarks]. You have been taken in. Why, man, where have you been living that you can't tell a real picture when you see it? You have admitted that the cows look like cows and the trees like trees. . . . Then, look at that sunset. Why, that's the kind of sunset you see every day. It's yellow, pink and red. It is not brown.
>
> I don't believe I ever saw a brown sunset, said Blotterwink.
>
> Of course not; nobody ever did. That's where the art is exhibited. I'll take you somewhere and let you buy a picture that will keep you wondering for a week whether it's a house on fire or a charge of heavy dragoons. When you find out I'll come and congratulate you.[83]

Many critics found this sort of situation all too accurate but not at all funny. To Cortissoz the impressionists' insistence that the burden of explanation rested no longer with the artist but with the viewer appeared more like a shirking of duty than an interesting adventure. In 1894 he recalled that

> Rousseau, Corot and Millet, proposed to paint nature so as to give as faithful a picture of her as possible; and in order to do that they knew that they could trust only to their eyes and feelings. They would paint in their own ways, they would give themselves free swing, but the first intention of their work would be to reproduce nature with truth. The impressionist's intention is somewhat the same, but he makes the following distinction. "This is as I see nature," he declares. "You may tell me that that is an oak, and that those flowers are daisies. Yonder bush may be one of roses. *Mais que voulez-vous?* I am no maker of catalogues. I do not pretend to tell you just what is there. I

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[82] "The Impressionist," *Fort Worth Morning Register*, November 19, 1899, 13, AHN. Attributed to the *Boston Transcript*.

[83] "His Wrong Ideas of Art; Liked Picture But It Was Too Far Removed from Impressionist School," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, July 31, 1898, 10, AHN.

> tell you what I see there, and what I see is so much tone. I leave it to your cleverness to translate my tone, my beautiful pigments, back to natural facts. Presto!" . . . It marks a step in the wrong direction, in the direction of personality resting satisfied with its own outlook.[84]

Such contributions to the discourse on modern art, whether meant to be amusing or not, point to a threatening shift in the relation of the public to cultural objects and to the idea of culture as something accessible and something permanent. These episodes in print suggest a situation in which the achievement of cultural sophistication or literacy might be only temporary, that the realm of aesthetic judgment and appreciation could be as changeable as that of politics or fashion. If this was true, then how could culture be the societal boon many hoped it would be, as we saw in chapter three? And what was the use of educating oneself along Arnoldian lines if that education could someday soon become inert?

The dismay many cultural commentators were just beginning to feel with impressionism was akin to a sense of betrayal: just as Americans were rising toward the cultural standards set by Europeans it seemed that the rules were changing suddenly and even irrationally. Americans interested in cultural development had gladly reverenced the Renaissance after it was pointed out to them that they should; they had read their Ruskin and then

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[84] Royal Cortissoz, "Egotism in Contemporary Art," *Atlantic Monthly* 73, no. 439 (May 1894): 647, C-MOA. This would become an even more contentious matter in the coming decade, when modern artists would be increasingly accused of charlatanry and fakery – the idea being that they just tossed some paint at the canvas and then convinced the public that what resulted was fine art if only the public were sophisticated enough to understand.

their Arnold; they had learned to discern an Ingres from a David; they had followed the rise and decline of the Munich school; they had enshrined serene images by Puvis de Chavannes in their own public buildings; and they had absorbed the idea that the technical aspects of art were ever evolving toward higher planes of refinement. Then they began abruptly to hear and read that the old ways needed overthrowing, that what was needed was a revolution in seeing and painting, that light itself was now to be the primary protagonist in pictures, that immediate impressions dashed off in an afternoon were to be privileged over carefully wrought, highly finished compositions, that historical subject matter was taboo.

The stirrings of uneasiness among those skeptical of such new developments and theories about visual art would seem prophetic in future years, as the works and the celebrity of full-fledged modernists came to dominate the art world. For culturally interested Americans of the 1880s the suggestion that a cult of primitivism would soon arrive along with advocacy for a complete abandonment of traditional representation would have sounded terrifying but unlikely, and yet this is just what they would face in the first years of the twentieth century. When such developments achieved their full force, a discourse of protection would sound its shrillest notes and would become more radically conservative than those of the nineteenth century by expressing more frankly suspicion (or even revulsion) about the idea that cultural progress had to be animated by outright rebellion against the past.

Art critic John C. Van Dyke employed the traditional rhetoric of the nineteenth century while discussing the relation of contemporary painters to the Old Masters: "the oft-repeated statement that there has been no progress in art for 300 years is not so very wide of the mark. We cannot, at the end of the nineteenth century, build or carve like the ancient Greeks, nor can we paint up to the Renaissance Italians. [The modern artist] knows he cannot reach up to them, to say nothing of advancing upon them."[85] "Both in art and dialectics," agreed a contributor to *Atlantic Monthly* in 1901, "we simply subsist on the old Greek methods. If we seem taller, perhaps, than they, it is because we stand upon their shoulders. They raised this structure of thought and life upon the common ground. We may make better buttons, and steam and fuss ourselves round the world in ways unknown to them; but all this has not a jot to say to true progress."[86]

The late-nineteenth century was the last period in American cultural history when the concept of aesthetic rebellion or departure from tradition would be so widely considered both unseemly and impractical. Even before World War I, the stability of cultural canons seemed to be faltering. Art critic Adeline Adams, face to face with the avant-garde work at the Armory Show, marveled at the apparently irrational forces of modernism: "it is as if man, having by ages of effort learned to walk upright should petulantly con-

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[85] John C. Vandyke, "A Century's Progress in Art," *Congregationalist* 86, no. 1 (January 5, 1901): 20, APSO.

[86] Theo Chapman, "A New Century and An Old Riddle," *The Living Age* 228, no. 2953 (February 9, 1901): 350, APSO.

clude that perhaps, after all, he would better achieve his adventures on all fours."[87] By 1913 it would seem to some observers as if the bottom was falling out of the American cultural project, and fretfulness verging on despair colored the early discourse on twentieth-century modernism, in the visual arts more than in literature, but there too.

But again, Americans around the turn of the century could not of course have predicted with much accuracy the state of cultural affairs that would so distress critics like Adams. Around 1900, the measure of the forces of modernism – of abstraction, distortion, anti-idealism – remained uncertain. Instead, taking into account the accomplishments of the last seventy or eighty years, cultural critics had reason to believe that the United States had achieved something approaching cultural maturity, so that the idea of unsavory developments in the form of impressionism or the art for art's sake movement or literary naturalism might appear not as inevitable realities to be stumbled into by inferior and blindly emulating American artists and audiences, but instead as choices that, upon careful consideration, might be rejected or mitigated with more certainty and confidence than would have been possible at mid-century.

For a while, in the last years of the nineteenth century and the first years of the twentieth, a reconciliation of tradition with novelty still seemed possible. Few observers of cultural affairs would have scoffed at the hopes ex-

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[87] Adeline Adams, "The Secret of Life," *Art and Progress*, April 1913, 926.

pressed many decades earlier in the *Southern Literary Messenger*'s examination of "The Intellectual and Moral Relations of the Fine Arts": "the plan of virtue, in this scene, is not, I repeat, total abstinence, but moderation. . . . May there be in us, and among us, restraint without sourness, freedom without licentiousness, refinement without effeminacy, virtue without stoicism, and religion without superstition."[88] This sober prescription from another era (1837) could still have sounded like useful, practical advice in the face of unsettling end-of-century developments.

One of the most widely noticed, clearly written and balanced appeals for such a reconciliation, and for a new understanding of the relationship of traditionally received masters and methods to new ideas of artistic practice, was fiction-writer Hamlin Garland's dramatically titled *Crumbling Idols* (1894).[89] In this work, comprised of twelve essays on both art and literature, Garland argued for an intelligent, dynamic moderation of just the sort recommended above. He eschewed over-simple attacks against perceived European influence while simultaneously arguing for the cultivation of a more healthy and less imitative relationship with America's cultural counterparts. He sought neither to worship a static past nor to accept uncritically the excesses of trends like French naturalism. A successful and useful new literature, he

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[88] "On the Intellectual and Moral Relations of the Fine Arts," *The Southern Literary Journal and Magazine of Arts* 1, no. 6 (August 1837): 481, APSO.

[89] *The Arena*, *Atlantic Monthly*, *The Century*, *The Chap-Book*, *The Critic*, *The Dial*, *Forum*, *The Independent*, *The Literary World*, *McClure's*, *Outlook* and *Scribner's* all had at least one review of *Crumbling Idols*. For a recent analysis of Garland's life and thought see Keith Newlin, *Hamlin Garland: A Life* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008).

wrote, "will not deal with crime and abnormities [e.g. Zolaism], nor with deceased persons [e.g. classical figures, medieval kings]."[90]

He asserted, as well, that defensive reaction aligned against the new in art and literature reflected not a fresh, admirably independent American insistence on cultural standards but instead just the same old facile imitation. He argued that American disapproval of modern ideas merely aped futile European disapprovals of the same ideas. To yearn in vain for a return to the "joyous dogtrot of [Pope's] couplets" at the turn of the twentieth century revealed not a cautious, principled conservatism but a benighted refusal to see that "life means change."[91] And, while this insistence that life meant change did *not* preclude the ability to guide change toward certain useful and enlightening ends, the reviews of *Crumbling Idols* make clear that this effort to stake out a sensible middle ground had been imperfectly perceived by readers. Garland was often portrayed in absolute terms either as an uncompromising prophet of the new or a scornful enemy of tradition. While his arguments actually conveyed a high degree of intellectual maturity, some critics dismissed Garland as a reckless iconoclast, arguing that "he adjure[d] the young men and women of America to turn their backs on the past."[92] Others, like a reviewer for the *Literary World*, found *Crumbling Idols* absurdly naïve:

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[90] Hamlin Garland, *Crumbling Idols: Twelve Essays on Art and* Literature (Chicago: Stone and Kimball, 1894), 28.

[91] Ibid., 40, 75.

[92] "Crumbling Idols," *The Critic: a Weekly Review of Literature and the Arts* 22, no. 656

> Mr. Hamlin Garland, as industrious readers of the current magazine well know, has been making some astonishing discoveries. He has found out somehow that the best literature comes out of the experience of life; that the poet should sing of the actual people among whom he lives; that the novelist should describe and set forth men and women so that we may recognize them as our fellow mortals; that art is progressive; that originality is desirable; and that genius is independent of conventionality. . . . But have not a very few of us, at least, had a hint of these truths before? . . . The only surprising thing is that he should for a moment think he is saying anything new when he proclaims with extreme *naïveté* these venerable laws of all literature."[93]

But Garland's "*naïveté*" is more justly understood as a frank faith in America's cultural potential which freed him from the specter of inferiority that inhabited so much nineteenth-century cultural commentary. He saw American culture as vigorous and maturing and safe from degrading European innovation, not as nascent and fragile and in need of panicked defensiveness.

Some commentators still insisted that hope for America's cultural future lay principally in a clear-sighted, faithful allegiance to the past. Some artists and authors argued for a precipitous embrace of the severest new ideas. Garland sought to remind both groups that the most revered creators of other ages both respected their particular cultural inheritances *and* refused to be shackled by them. "[Shakespeare] studied his time, and tried sincerely to state it in terms that would please those whom he considered his judicious friends. Thus he reflected (indirectly) the feudal age, for that was the domi-

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(September 15, 1894): 169, APSO.

[93] "Crumbling Idols," *The Literary World: A Monthly Review of Current Literature* 25, no. 11 (June 2, 1894): 164, APSO.

nant thought of his day. So Dryden and Pope, each at his best, portrayed his day, *putting his sincere and original comment upon the life around him*, flavoring every translation he made with the vice and lawlessness which he felt to be the prevailing elements of his immediate surroundings. In the main, they believed in themselves."[94] And so, the argument followed, should American cultural creators and audiences believe in *them*selves. "The question for America to settle," Garland insisted, "is not whether it can produce something greater than the past, but whether it shall produce something different from the past. Our task is not to imitate, but to create."[95] Garland was not a revolutionist, but he was exasperated by "conservative critics" who "safely praise Ruskin and Carlyle, and repeat an old slur on Browning or Whitman" and pretend to be protectors of culture.[96]

Cultural developments of the next two decades would polarize views and challenge the efficacy of attempts at compromise, a danger Garland himself implicitly recognized when he admitted that "a contest like that between realism and romanticism is not playful, it is destructive."[97] To traditionalist

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[94] Garland, *Crumbling Idols*, 47. Emphasis added.

[95] Ibid., 10.

[96] Ibid.

[97] Ibid., 139.

critics, impressionist or naturalist works were "not merely variants, they [were] flags of anarchy; they le[ft] no middle ground, apparently."[98]

In this climate of contention between looking forward and looking back, the occasion of the turn of the twentieth century inspired numerous articles and essays about the accomplishments and characteristics of the old century along with predictions and forecasts for what was likely to lay ahead for the nation in the next hundred years. As an *Atlantic Monthly* article put it, "the tendency to consider centuries as natural periods in the history of culture, and their termini as milestones, indicates a mental habit that is far from logical, but it is one that men do not easily resist."[99] Eiranaeus Stevenson of *The Independent* likewise agreed that it was "almost natural to look at the closing of a century as putting the period to this or that development in esthetics, and to take a proportionally solemn account of it in relation to the art-productiveness just beyond it."[100] A writer in *Living Age* admitted that a century was "a mere arbitrary point of our own fixing, in the whirling cycle. . . . But it strikes the imagination – it's a peg to hang one's hat on."[101] Tudor

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[98] Garland, *Crumbling Idols*, 139.

[99] "Three Centuries Of American Literature," *Atlantic Monthly* 87, no. 521 (March 1901): 411, C-MOA.

[100] E. Iranaeus Stevenson, "As the Century Ends," *The Independent, Devoted to the Consideration of Politics, Social and Economic Tendencies, History, Literature, and the Arts* 49, no. 2544 (September 2, 1897): 9, APSO.

[101] Theo Chapman, "A New Century and An Old Riddle," *The Living Age* 228, no. 2953 (February 9, 1901): 349, APSO.

Jenks explained to the young readers of *St. Nicholas* that "history gives to each hundred years a character of its own."[102]

And, as the evaluations of the nineteenth century and predictions for the twentieth appeared, a complacent and even congratulatory sense of an era well-lived infused most articles. This held both for works on culture and more generally. One writer predicted that, while it was "extremely doubtful" that the twentieth century would "eclipse or even equal the nineteenth in its material progress," the next hundred years would nevertheless "leave a legacy of general happiness, resulting from a higher and nobler civilization."[103] Editors at *The Independent* judged that over the last hundred years "the conscience of a great people ha[d] been educated for righteousness. Altruism is replacing selfishness as social force. A century of honor lies behind us. . . . Socially great problems are sure of being solved just ahead."[104]

In more particular regard to discourse on culture, the century's end prompted retrospective reviews of the development of art and literature over the last hundred years alongside similar works treating issues of science, technology, labor, politics and international affairs. A contributor to *The Arena* proclaimed that "now all is changed. Education has become widely dif-

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[102] Tudor Jenks, "The Dawn of the Twentieth Century," *St. Nicholas: An Illustrated Weekly for Young Folks* 28, no. 3 (January 1901): 243, APSO.

[103] B. O. Flower, "Laying the Foundations for a Higher Civilization: A Survey and a Forecast," *The Arena* 25, no. 2 (February 1901): 180, APSO.

[104] "Editorials: The Twentieth Century," *The Independent, Devoted to the Consideration of Politics, Social and Economic Tendencies, History, Literature, and the Arts* 53, no. 2718 (January 3, 1901): 47, 48, APSO.

fused throughout Western civilization. Contact with music, art, the drama, and literature has quickened the dull imagination of millions of toilers, who now hunger for more than bread."[105] "[Culturally], the nineteenth century has fairly held its own," concluded a writer for the *Chicago Daily Tribune* in 1900.[106] An earlier article in the same paper had agreed: "the closing years of the century have found the United States able to produce its own most popular fiction *and to hold an honorable place in the literature of the world.*[107] With regard to painting, art critic Kenyon Cox noted with pride that the "brilliant cosmopolites" Whistler and Sargent had indisputably become "a part of the art-history of the world."[108] And we read that by 1900 even impressionism (at least in Chicago where it was most popular) was being settled into an approved story of "Progress Made in Art" that began with David ("Classical Period"), moved through Gericoult and Delacroix ("Romantic" and "Revolutionary" respectively), to Millet ("Barbizon") and finally to Whistler ("Modern") and Manet ("Impressionist").[109] Such orderly, sometimes even teleologi-

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[105] B. O. Flower, "An Artist With Twentieth Century Ideals," *The Arena* 26, no. 1 (July 1901): 67, APSO.

[106] Justin McCarthy, "Story of the Nineteenth Century," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, December 30, 1900, 37, PQHN.

[107] "Celebrating the Twentieth Century," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 8, 1900, 6, PQHN. Emphasis added.

[108] Kenyon Cox, "Some American Figure Painters," *The Cosmopolitan: A Monthly Illustrated Magazine* 32, no. 6 (April 1902): 585, APSO.

[109] "Nineteenth Century Passed in Review: No. X, Progress Made in Art," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 17, 1899, 33, PQHN. I am indebted to Sally Webster for pointing out to me that Chicago, whose citizens came somewhat later than New Yorkers or Bostoni-

cal, arcs from classicism to modernism or impressionism dovetailed nicely with powerful ideas like progress and evolution.

This style of thinking had informed the performative and organizational ambitions of those who promoted and paid for the large museums and the world's fairs at Philadelphia and Chicago. Its essence was narrative; its point was to impart meanings that, ideally, would be both inclusive and coherent. There is a tension evident in the commentary on culture in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries between the idea that advances in the arts required a break from the past (most often, though not exclusively, expressed by modern authors and artists themselves) and the strong conviction that fine art, truly valuable art, must participate with and grow from what had come before (more often expressed by critics and reviewers). Conservative critics like Adams, Cox and Cortissoz, who would register shock and outrage when faced with Cezanne and Gauguin, Picasso and Matisse, could still at the turn of the century anticipate that any cultural corners to be rounded would open onto relatively benign if not wholly reassuring prospects. Cox in fact painted murals for the new Library of Congress, the new Appellate Court building in New York and several state capitols and would have had every reason to feel that, in spite of impressionism and everything

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ans or Philadelphians to the fine art game, became a center for impressionist collecting in both because of the presence of many impressionist works at the Columbian Exposition and because so many of the Old Masters had been snatched up already by Eastern collectors.

else, his commitment to a renewed classicism was winning the day.[110] And in some sense it certainly was, though we can see now that this was more an ending than a beginning.

The reactions against the developments discussed in this chapter employed all three of the major discourses on culture, but especially those of individual morality and historical perspective. On the one hand, naturalism was a moral danger to readers because of its alleged undermining of personal responsibility and its invitations to prurience. At the same time, this new literary theory threatened a particular idea of historical continuity that American cultural advocates held in high esteem. Acceptance of writers like Zola either indicated a wanton abandonment of timeless standards or revealed the promises of culture as a mirage. And if we look to the reception of impressionism – and especially at the discomfort audiences registered when faced with pictures not immediately intelligible – we see the beginnings of the deterioration of the idea of culture's radical accessibility, which had always been one of

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[110] For a thorough study of Kenyon Cox's life and ideas, see H. Wayne Morgan, *Kenyon Cox, 1856-1919: A Life in American Art* (Kent, OH: The Kent State University Press, 1994). On Cortissoz's thought see his own work *Art and Common Sense* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913 and also H. Wayne Morgan, *Keepers of Culture: The Art-thought of Kenyon Cox, Royal Cortissoz, and Frank Jewett Mather, Jr.* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1989). Also informative, though I think unfair to Cortissoz, is Hilton Kramer, "The Idea of Tradition in American Art Criticism," *American Scholar* 56, no. 3 (Summer 1987): 319-327.

its most attractive qualities. Nevertheless, these emerging suspicions and inklings of disillusionment were in large part preludes to more strident challenges to the cultural idea that would follow in the next decades.

CONCLUSION

After antebellum-era printers and publishers mastered technologies that made possible efficient production of affordable periodicals and books, discussions in print on culture increased in number and in scope. By the third quarter of the century an industrializing economy established the national wealth that would enable the envisioning and realization of a widespread, capital-intensive cultural infrastructure. These factors combined allowed culture a prominent place in discussions of society, history and morality for the remainder of the century. That said, the discourses I have tried to explain were in many ways operative before the point in time where my dissertation begins. Technology did not so much enable the discourses themselves as it amplified them and made them more relevant. In a world where few could own books and in a country which had not yet established itself as a political and commercial force on the international scene, cultural conversations could seem to have a rather limited import. But in a world where books and pictures were increasingly available to a broad public and in a country whose citizens had begun to reconsider themselves with reference to the great contemporary and historical civilizations, cultural conversations took on a new political, historical and moral urgency.

political, historical and moral urgency.

And yet, despite the remarkable change that characterized life in the United States in almost every respect from the antebellum period through the end of the century, the discourses on culture remained remarkably stable. On the whole, we find old ideas applied to new problems much more often than we find new ideas. Though sometimes of only limited interest as ideas in their own right, I find the discourses I discuss unusually valuable as evidence because of the obvious value placed on them by contemporaries. And though to some degree the ubiquitous and liberal application of these discourses on culture made them flexible to the point of imprecision, this is a fate shared by all interesting and publicly important discourses.

Could culture offer a realistic path to national unity? Could learning and intellectual refinement be welcomed without undermining or displacing traditional religion? What would be America's place in the pageant of world history? The gravity with which questions like these were posed sustained the heated disagreements over their answers.

My research has convinced me that culture was not as a rule considered something detached, without important connections to other pressing questions of the time, a separate sphere. Americans understood culture both as cause and as effect. It was conceived both as a remedy or harm in itself and as an indicator by which other issues could be gauged. At various moments and for various reasons over the course of the nineteenth century Americans saw

in culture something that could either augment or explain contemporary life. They were also tempted to divine from it the character and tendencies of their future. Culture's ornamental aspects added something crucial to America's and Americans' identity, suggested the possibility of a fuller, richer idea of the nation *vis à vis* its counterparts, and threw a new light onto the mirror of national self-inspection. Socially, it could be portrayed as an ill wind or as a blessed refuge. Historically and philosophically, the idea of culture provoked visions of what was to come – to some these were promises of timeless notoriety and prestige; to others they foretold decline and betrayal.

The identification of the three main discourses on culture in the nineteenth century – the moral, the historical and the social/political – offers tools with which to dissect or disaggregate a huge and diverse store of printed commentary spanning several decades. In some cases authors were aware of employing a particular discourse; just as often, authors mixed them together in ways that can seem jarringly imprecise to twenty-first-century readers, used as we are to ever increasing degrees of specialization and wary as we often are of attempts at synthesis. Arthur Schlesinger once wrote (in a different context) about how difficult it can be to discern moral from political principles. "Nor," he added, "in the impenetrability of one's heart, can one easily know when political motives are moral motives in disguise or when moral motives are political motives in disguise. *Still, the choice of disguise re-*

veals something about temperament and philosophy."[1] In some sense my investigations have been an effort to explore – both through and in search of the temperament of the times – the choices of disguise that characterized discourse on culture in nineteenth-century America. In the case of these discourses, it is not always easy to discern moral or political motives from aesthetic ones. Often writers appear to have been completely uninterested in any such attempt since their definitions of aesthetic, moral and political merit were, like ours, so closely interwoven.

I hope my work will contribute to our historical understanding of the nineteenth century in several more specific ways. First, I hope that the evidence and arguments presented above demonstrate the durability of ideas and the slowness, or at least the uneven nature, of change. It is often remarked that as Americanists we have comparatively little time to work with. Together with the reigning definition of history as "change over time," the brevity of the North American story encourages us to deal in decades or presidencies and to privilege differences from year to year – which of course are many and important. It is also true however that interesting things can and should be said about continuities and about what resistance we find in the record of the past to changes of perspective. I think that any observer of life in the late-twentieth and early-twenty-first centuries will grant that many of the cultural questions considered by nineteenth-century Americans

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[1] Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., "The Necessary Amorality of Foreign Affairs," *Harper's Magazine*, August 1971, 72-77. Emphasis added.

have remained relevant. That is not to say that that century's categories can be imported for analytical use into the present, but the objects of the nineteenth-century discourses on culture are still with us and we still think that art and literature (in whatever exotic forms we may encounter them today) are politically and socially important.[2]

Second, I think my work suggests that we should reexamine the measure of independence, in the nineteenth century at least, with which ideas operated with respect to political, social and technological developments. Discourses on culture were stable in the face of momentous change on multiple fronts. What other facets of American intellectual and social life enjoyed such relative permanence?

This work also sheds light on the relationship between Americans and both the facts and the idea of European civilization in the nineteenth century. On the whole, nineteenth century cultural commentators sought not inde-

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[2] For instance, in "'The Clarity of Things,'" *New York Review of Books* 55, no. 11, (June 26, 2008) John Updike writes: "the National Endowment for the Humanities, together with the American Library Association, has launched in 2008 a program that will supply classrooms and public libraries with reproductions of significant American art, one example on each side of twenty high-quality posters, forty examples in all, under the overall title Picturing America. It was my idea, invited to give the 2008 Jefferson Lecture in the Humanities, to use some of these forty works, with others, to pose the question 'What is American about American art?' The question has often arisen; it was asked in almost these exact same words in 1958, by Lloyd Goodrich, then the director of the Whitney Museum of American Art. His essay was titled 'What Is American —in American Art?'" ¶ Also see Rachel Cohen, "Looking at Poussin," a review of Poussin and Nature: Arcadian Visions, an exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, February 12–May 11, 2008, *The Threepenny Review* 114 (Summer 2008): 30-31, whose precise, step-by-step advice on how to look at a Poussin painting properly ("But you may not have months, and so here is what you must do. First. . . .") should sound very familiar to the historian of nineteenth-century cultural discourse. The impulse to guide others to the rewards of real cultural experience, though here it has retreated to a more specialized publication, still lingers.

pendence from but inclusion in the story of European culture. When this began seriously to change in the latter part of the century much of the discussion seemed to suggest that the United States had become the conservator of true European culture rather than that that culture had always been corrupt and foreign.

In addition I hope my research can contribute in some small way to the story of Americans' reactions to modernist painting. Many of the strains of argument that resisted and even scorned the aesthetic innovations of modernism in the early twentieth century were already fermenting by the 1880s or even before.

The examination of American discourses on culture in the nineteenth century also suggests a large area of overlap between the religious and secular press in the nineteenth century. In general, language and arguments in the secular press were more overtly religious than we find either comfortable or common today. Even more interesting, language and arguments in the religious press were less aligned in a purely confrontational manner with regard to the current events of the broader society. This last point I think speaks to an important and stark difference between the nineteenth century's intellectual universe and that of the late-twentieth and early-twenty-first centuries. In the nineteenth century both the religious and secular press consistently included often unpredictable commentary on cultural matters of all kinds. This is, I think, less true today.

Finally, this study suggests that qualitative cultural improvement and benefit were considered to be widely accessible to various groups of Americans. I think we see this clearly at work in the discomfort expressed by critics and the public alike with the sometimes hard-to-decipher aspects of modern art. It has not been my observation that the notion of culture as something superior and set apart from everyday experience developed only over time, leaving behind a happy era where high and low culture had been undifferentiated. The idea that some books or pictures or plays or music were better than others existed in American discourse long before any self-styled elite thought they could sequester "high culture" as their own special preserve.

Nineteenth-century American critics and audiences understood culture both as something unique and as something intimately connected to the most important aspects of individual and social life. All along, its ornaments were as alluring as its promises were provisional.

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