

INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

ProQuest Information and Learning
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346 USA
800-521-0600

UMI[®]

7

**SLUMMING:
MORALITY AND SPACE IN NEW YORK CITY
FROM "CITY MYSTERIES" TO THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE**

by

ROBERT M. DOWLING

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University
of New York

2001

UMI Number: 3008822

Copyright 2001 by
Dowling, Robert Morris

All rights reserved.

UMI[®]

UMI Microform 3008822

Copyright 2001 by Bell & Howell Information and Learning Company.

All rights reserved. This microform edition is protected against
unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.

Bell & Howell Information and Learning Company
300 North Zeeb Road
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

Copyright 2001

Robert M. Dowling

All Rights Reserved

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in English in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

4 April 2001
Date

April 4, 2001
Date

6 April 2001
Date

Marc Dolan
Marc Dolan, co-Chair

David S. Reynolds
David S. Reynolds, co-Chair

Joan Richardson
Joan Richardson, Executive Officer

Supervisory Committee:

Marc Dolan

Morris Dickstein

David S. Reynolds

The City University of New York

Abstract

SLUMMING:
MORALITY AND SPACE IN NEW YORK CITY
FROM "CITY MYSTERIES" TO THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE

by

Robert M. Dowling

Advisors: Marc Dolan and David S. Reynolds

This dissertation provides a conceptual framework within which to understand textual interactions with morality and space in New York City from 1850 to 1930. Representations of the slums in fiction and documentary writing from the antebellum period to the 1920s transform from cynical narratives of urban dissipation to lyrical promotions of a cultural "Renaissance." Narratives that take place in neighborhoods characterized by cultural marginalization such as the East Side waterfront district, the Bowery, the Tenderloin's "black Bohemia," the Jewish Lower East Side, and Harlem, cannot be reduced to either vehicles for middle-class values or purely subversive expressions of radical or transnational democracy. Writers "slumming" in Manhattan were attempting to inform their audiences of the benefits and shortcomings of cosmopolitan urban life by textualizing the effects of marginal urban areas on New York society as a whole. The slums were initially blamed for shaking the moral foundations of New York's "respectable" citizenry; but by the turn of the twentieth century, they were celebrated for enriching the psychological and cultural attributes of intrepidly individualistic wanderers.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The old joke is that I began research for this project during my teenage years. Practically speaking, it began in my second year at graduate school in California, a time when my feelings of homesickness were so extreme that I found it infinitely therapeutic to write about New York City. For their encouragement and non-native insights, I would first like to thank the faculty of the American Studies graduate program at California State University at Fullerton, in particular Professors John Ibson, Karen Lystra, Allan Axelrad and Jesse Battan -- they were a group to write home about.

I would never have attended the City University of New York had it not been for an early discovery of David S. Reynolds and his work -- until that time, I never thought such research appropriate for "serious" academic discourse. Since then, he has been a constant source of enthusiasm and inspiration. Morris Dickstein was my official faculty "mentor," and from our first conversation over the phone, before I had even attended a seminar, I have found his to be a model intellect. I would especially like to acknowledge the efforts of Marc Dolan, who has been my guide, and in many ways, my conscience. Without him, I would never have explored roads which seemed at a distance to be blind alleys, but were ultimately grand concourses. Best wishes to him, his wife, and his future charges.

Thanks to the Graduate Center's Ph.D. Program in English for its continued financial and administrative support during my time there, particularly to those who thought my project worthy of the Lynn Kadison Award, which helped supplement a tight budget. The Graduate Center's Writing Fellowship was critical for finishing this study in a timely manner -- it shaved at least a year off of the time this project might have taken. I wish CUNY's Writing Across the Curriculum initiative its due success in future years. Administratively, Linda Sherwin has been a patient and helpful attendant of my progress -- thanks.

There are many people that I'm looking forward to reacquainting myself with after I deposit this, not the least of whom are my family. Many thanks to my mother, Janet Kellock, for her intellectual influence, her brilliance, and her faith; and to my wife, Joanne Huber Dowling, for her patience, her love, and especially her editorial acumen. Thanks to Evelyn Dowling, Janet Sands and her children, Susanne Magee and her family, Elisa and Eric Olds and their family to be, and my great friends at the Graduate Center. This dissertation is dedicated to my father, Richard O'Rahilly Dowling, who I hope is listening, and my daughter, Mairéad Dowling, who showed up at just the right time.

TABLE OF CONTENTS:

INTRODUCTION

Morality and Space in New York City, 1850-1930:
A Theoretical and Historical Backdrop

1

PART I: THE DOWNWARD CHANNEL, 1850-1900

Chapter 1: Among the Lower Million:
"City Mysteries" and the Soundings of Urban Morality

18

Chapter 2: "Under the Bridge and Beyond":
Helen Campbell on the Waterfront

49

Chapter 3: A Culture of Contradictions:
Stephen Crane and the Transformation of the Bowery

80

PART II: THE UPWARD CHANNEL, 1900-1930

Chapter 4: Marginal Men in Black Bohemia:
Paul Laurence Dunbar's and James Weldon Johnson's Tenderloin

109

Chapter 5: The Gentile and the Jew:
Hutchins Hapgood and Abraham Cahan on the Lower East Side

139

Chapter 6: "Nigger Heaven":
Carl Van Vechten, Claude McKay, and the Construction of Mythic Harlem

166

WORKS CITED

201

INTRODUCTION

Morality and Space in New York City, 1850-1930: A Theoretical and Historical Backdrop

In the half-century between 1790 and 1840, the population of Manhattan Island grew from approximately 33,000 to ten times that size. Coming into existence at the island's lower tip, the settlement expanded northward, swallowing up farmland and exploiting any resource that might be used for the growing needs of transportation, commerce and housing. By the 1850s, Manhattan was a city; by the 1890s, a metropolis; by the 1920s, the commercial capital of the world. This study is an attempt to give shape and form to one of the many discourses which emerge from New York's tempestuous ascension: the discourse of the slums. By looking closely at the the changing representations of slum life in New York writing, from the so-called "city mysteries" writers of antebellum New York to American literary realism and naturalism, and ending with the Harlem Renaissance, it is possible to revise the popular critical reception of "slumming" narratives. These texts are not exclusively vehicles for race, class, or gender antagonism or affirmation, but contain more all-inclusive narratives of social transformation and moral experimentation.

The term "slumming" here refers to privileged outsiders entering urban neighborhoods that were not only (and not always) impoverished but, in some ways more importantly, deemed morally depraved by New York society at large. Writers slumming in Manhattan -- on the waterfront, on the Bowery, in the Tenderloin, on the Jewish Lower East Side, and in Harlem, among many other New York neighborhoods and thoroughfares -- attempted to comprehend the growth of New York City by charting and codifying what Chicago sociologist Robert Park identified in 1925 as "moral regions,"

definable areas that the larger society imagines are characterized by moral turpitude. “Morality” is not being used for this study in terms of right or wrong exactly, but as representative of foundations of cultural knowledge that support a social milieu. Those foundations converge on both spatial and non-spatial landscapes, both in urban districts and in the consciousnesses of marginal individuals.

The Seventh Special Report of the U.S. Commissioner of Labor, which came out in 1894, defined slums as “dirty back streets -- inhabited by a squalid and criminal population; they are low and dangerous neighborhoods” (qtd. in Ward 83). But this still popularly accepted definition does not satisfy the parameters of “slumming” as I am using it. Considering the relationship between morality and space, a “respectable” citizen in a Fifth Avenue salon might also be slumming. William Dean Howells’s fictional editor Basil March from *A Hazard of New Fortunes* (1890), for example, understands that his reading public is as scandalized (and intrigued) by a millionaire as they are by a downtown brothel:

“true... those phases of low life are immensely picturesque. Of course we must try to get the contrasts of luxury for the sake of the full effect. That won’t be so easy. You can’t penetrate the dinner party of a millionaire under the wing of a detective as you could to carouse in Mulberry Street, or to his children’s nursery with a philanthropist as you can a street boys’ lodging house” (129).

Stephen Crane too notes that slumming occurs among the very rich as well as the very poor, contrasting the two respectively in his 1894 sketches “An Experiment in Misery” and “An Experiment in Luxury.” Additionally, James Weldon Johnson’s unnamed character in *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912) participates in this reverse

form of slumming, as well as Carl Van Vechten's Mary Love and Byron Kasson in *Nigger Heaven* (1926) and Claude McKay's Jake in *Home to Harlem* (1928); not to mention a sizable body of modernist slumming sequences involving conspicuous consumption that will not be covered in this study, notably Jay Gatsby's ritzy affairs in East Egg.

The lion's share of this dissertation, however, will concentrate on neighborhoods that are at least economically unstable if not "squalid and criminal." George Thompson's and John Vose's lower Manhattan, Helen Campbell's waterfront, Dunbar and Johnson's Tenderloin, Hutchins Hapgood's and Abraham Cahan's Jewish Lower East Side, and Carl Van Vechten's and Claude McKay's Harlem are all more or less economically viable, if under duress in a competitive and suspicious New York marketplace. More often than not, slumming texts foregrounded cultural, rather than economic, differences in the guise of immorality.

In the late nineteenth-century, when the culture concept was still nebulously understood, writers pointed to morality as a means to define group identity. "Culture is conscience," F. Marion Crawford wrote in 1894, "because conscience means the exercise of honest judgment, and an ignorant people can form no honest judgment of their own which can be exercised" (341). But how "ignorant" judgments are ascertained is dictated by exposure; and the range and depth of New York neighborhoods that might complicate one's judgments increased as the city's history progressed. Access to cultural difference, then, becomes the definitive feature of the modern sensibility. As Richard Rorty has maintained,

Most moral dilemmas are... reflections of the fact that most of us identify with a number of different communities and are equally reluctant to marginalize ourselves in relation to any of them. This diversity of

identifications increases with education, just as the number of communities with which a person may identify increases with civilization (“Postmodernist” 334).

Marginalization is equivalent to alienation in Rorty, but it can also involve elements of complicity. In his study of ethnic transiency, “Human Migration and the Marginal Man” (1928), Robert Park writes that “it is in the mind of the marginal man that the moral turmoil which new cultural contacts occasion manifests itself in most obvious forms. It is in the mind of the marginal man -- where the changes and fusions of culture are going on -- that we can best study the processes of civilization and progress” (166). A marginal man’s marginality, in other words, is defined by the complications, psychological and cultural, positive and negative, that follow the acceptance of that individual into their new surroundings.

The forbidden nature of slumming affords the practice a stinging potency. To provide an analogy, once isolation at Walden Pond has become an acceptable lifestyle in American popular culture, to make a life there is no longer experimental. The more socially abhorrent an illicit act, such as interracial sex, the more actively it will be pursued: the more reformers and the moralistic middle-class American impulse condemns an “immoral” district and its entertainments, the more rigorously they will be explored: the more a musical genre is criticized by the public (ragtime, blues, punk, rap), the more popular, and often creative, it will become. But only marginal individuals are capable of giving voice to these advancements, and only moral regions can transmit that voice.

Slumming, therefore, is a symbolic act, an act of epiphany, an act of fusing contradictions into a single cultural consciousness while at the same time generating creative social energy. This symbolic act of slumming in New York City produced a large

and infinitely telling body of literature that, though represented by every conceivable genre, addressed many similar concerns: individual relationships to social space, an evolving sense of cultural difference, the pathos of the “real,” and the ambiguous rewards of cosmopolitan heterogeneity.

By utilizing sources emblematic of this trend, this dissertation is meant to provide a synthesizing model for reading and understanding the textual relationship between morality and space in New York City. In short, I will argue that two fundamental systems were in operation in New York from antebellum “city mysteries” writing to the Harlem Renaissance: first, the movement of morals and manners through cultural “channels” from up to down on the socioeconomic scale, and then, inversely, from down to up by the turn of the twentieth century. And second, representations of morality and space progressed from broad geographical abstractions to clearly defined neighborhoods that substantially affected the minds of both the insiders who “belonged” and the outsiders who investigated them.

“Belonging,” of course, is an ambiguous category. It was a constable, ironically enough, that entertained both the popular novelist John Vose and (according to Vose) Charles Dickens by leading them through the rat pits and gambling dens of lower Manhattan in the 1840s and ‘50s; urban activist Helen Campbell, a prep school graduate, gave lectures to students and philanthropists on the subject of waterfront prostitution at the University of Wisconsin, Madison; Stephen Crane, originally from New Jersey, acted as a Bowery guide for visiting luminaries in the 1890s; Hutchins Hapgood, a Harvard graduate from old New England stock, chaperoned Henry James through the Lower East Side, James then collecting material for *The American Scene* (1907); and Carl Van Vechten, a white man from Cedar Rapids, Iowa, was a kind of freelance cabaret promoter

to the white elite during the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s.

In the eyes of their charges, they were “in the know,” “insiders” of places notoriously alien to their own kind. J. Gerald Kennedy writes in his remarkable study of textual interaction with cultural space, *Imagining Paris*, that “feelings of ‘insideness’ and ‘outsideness’ occur as more or less conscious responses to milieu; but we can also experience place as space which has penetrated to the level of the unconscious” (7). These penetrations into the unconscious reveal the effect of place on the priorities and motivations of wandering outsiders -- for our purposes, slummers in New York City. The guiding question of this study is how these penetrations are realized in both New York slumming narratives and New York society as a whole.

New York’s middle-class in the antebellum period regarded traditional morality as endangered in the everyday life of urban America. The same year Walt Whitman published *Franklin Evans* (1842), a moralistic temperance novel by the youthful poet -- written in response to the timely demand for anti-alcohol agitprop -- Charles Dickens’s *American Notes* appeared.¹ This was a highly-circulated travel narrative with a blistering account of conditions in the notorious Five Points area of New York City. But rather than backhanded brickbats aimed at the city using alcohol abuse as a scapegoat, a practice New Yorkers were well-accustomed to by the 1840s, Dickens’s was a direct assault. After *American Notes* appeared, the urban slum in New York was to become its most alluring tourist attraction. Many Americans felt profoundly betrayed by Dickens’s damning critique of the American democratic experiment. He was, after all, the most celebrated novelist in antebellum America, but American authors would soon follow suit. They

¹ Significantly enough, 1842 is also the year “city mysteries” was kicked off as a genre in continental Europe with the publication of Eugene Sue’s *Les Mystères de Paris*.

broadened their focus from intemperance to include gambling houses, brothels, street walkers, grogeries, police corruption, working-class theaters, and rat-worrying, among other carnalities. These so-called “city mysteries” novels were deliberately generated by a middle-class involved in the praxis of determining moral space, and subsequently provided the entering wedge into a larger discourse of marginal lifestyles.

With the waning influence of Victorianism on contemporary images of nineteenth-century New York, we are discovering that the city is shown in the popular urban fiction of the mid-nineteenth century as the ultimate proving ground for the success or attrition of the United States. Those elements of New York that required direct discourse and definition: the growing reliance on a perceived need for a moral center, the rapid increase of poverty, and the seeming loss of the original American ideal, were all uniquely engaged by this fiction. City mysteries writers took the first deliberate textual soundings of urban morality. They were born into a generation which powerlessly stood by as New York’s population sprang from 100,000 to 500,000. Cities across the country grew in kind, and the publishing world responded to their audience’s apprehensions. From the 1840s through the 1860s, over 400 urban novels were published, three times as many as were set in the West (Siegal 6). Authors and publishing houses were scrambling to meet their audience’s exigent demands for guidance. Men like George Thompson, George Foster, George Lippard, and John Vose, four vanguards of the popular urban form in American literature, did their best to help supply meet demand.

After the Civil War, textual representations of New York slum life began to reflect the growing popularity of the social sciences to address the issue of New York’s increasingly identifiable and morally problematic “lower” districts. The corollary in literary history is the transition from sentimentalism to realism, from a preoccupation

with plot-driven pathos to social concerns and unheroic character play. Sentimental and sensational modes of representing New York slum life spliced with the social sciences during America's Gilded Age into a new mode that might be called "moral realism," a fusion of the romantic and the pragmatic practiced by such reform writers as Charles Loring Brace, Helen Campbell and Jacob Riis -- a group whose explicit aim was nothing less than to change the face of urban America.

Campbell and Riis in particular argued their cases by intermingling Protestant gospel with sociology, stark melodrama with appalling statistics, romantic characterization with interviews, and caricatured settings with very specific sites of inquiry which readers were encouraged to explore for themselves. Poverty then became a provable, tangible lifestyle that had deeply-rooted and seemingly irreversible social effects. Like the sentimental or sensational text, characters in the new mode were rewarded for choosing the right moral path after experiencing a series of temptations, but the stories were "real" and the characters could be literally sought out at a neighborhood mission or downtown saloon. Moral realists condemned "low class" neighborhood cultures in favor of acculturation. And rather than being passive observers, they immersed themselves in the society of each site by exercising an inductive process of gathering material. Rather than rely on commonly held universal principles of social progress that promoted conclusions based on hearsay and preconceptions, they met the poor on their own ground.

But though texts like Campbell's *The Problem of the Poor* (1882) and Riis's *How the Other Half Lives* (1890) reflect an altruistic middle-class concern for the inhabitants of the slums, New York society and its slum reporters still retained their "moral interpretations of poverty" (Ward 43). A process of polarization was at work, regarded

as both necessary and repugnant by uptown New Yorkers. This was precipitated by increasingly isolated job sites, inadequate housing, and neighborhood displacement. Reform movements were organized to manage the crisis. The slums both emerged and were transformed during this period, and by the 1870s, the distinctive qualities of many neighborhoods that had been singled-out by moral suasion efforts were effectively incapacitated. If Paula Rabinowitz defines “slumming” in the 1930s as “more likely the regulation of working people’s desires than the expression of middle-class pleasures” which is manifested in “ritual encounters between those whose lives were privileged to observe, regulate, and detail the behaviors of others” (188), the 1870s and ‘80s were, in fact, the heyday of slumming as social regulation. By 1895, for example, the notorious Five Points area had been, as urban reformer Helen Campbell recalls, “long ago reduced to order and decency by forces working for good” (Campbell *Darkness* 51).

In the 1880s and ‘90s, more and more writers began to investigate these affected neighborhoods in uniquely introspective and realistic modes. Walt Whitman, Stephen Crane and Henry James, for example, have all descriptively revealed to what extent the middle-class had coerced the immigrant and laboring classes into the Victorian “cult of respectability.” All of them slumming on the Bowery -- Whitman in the late 1880s, Crane in the early 1890s, and James as late as 1907 -- found there a milieu that was being stripped of its cultural identity; the idiosyncratic Bowery lifestyle of the 1830s and ‘40s existed only residually. The moral reform efforts of the 1860s, ‘70s, and ‘80s, had given way to a culture of consumption. Entertainment venues in particular were guided by the principles of middle-class Victorian conduct. Consumer culture, such as might be found in New York’s theaters, dance halls, and museums, proved far more effective for bringing urban “low life” into the “respectable” fold.

Needless to say, moral suasion had its limits. Moral regions continued to crop up throughout the city, becoming increasingly self-contained and foreign. As commercial regionalism -- as seen on the Bowery and the waterfront -- gave way to ethnic isolationism -- the Tenderloin's "black Bohemia," the Jewish Lower East Side, Harlem -- it became transparently clear that the urban slums often had more power on the regulators of decency than those reformers had on them. With the immigration of the Chinese, the Italians, and the Eastern European Jews at the turn of the century, and blacks from the West Indies and the American South in the 1920s and '30s, the "slum" had become the "ghetto" in the popular usage of the term: "the residential segregation of ethnically defined migrants in the inner-city slums" (Ward 2).

Literary naturalists slumming in the modern city, as June Howard relates, began to recognize the "crucial difference between omniscience and omnipotence" (x). It was one thing to investigate slum life, and even to write about it, but if there was to be any change in moral perspective, it would be the privileged spectators even more than the objectified Other that would now do the changing. Howard continues,

The author and reader and the characters who represent them inhabit a privileged location [in literary naturalism], assuming a kind of control over forces and events through their power to comprehend them. Yet the privilege of the spectator, constructed by contrast, is necessarily vulnerable; fear and desire -- sexual passion and violence, the fatal spell of the commodity, the fascination of the Other -- constantly disrupt the design of safety. To venture any dealings with the powers that inhabit causality proves hazardous; characters who go slumming in the realm of determinism risk their freedom and expose themselves to the dangers of

paralysis and proletarianization (x).

Realist and naturalist writers like William Dean Howells and Paul Laurence Dunbar consciously rendered the impact of New York's neighborhoods on "outsider" sensibilities. Dunbar sardonically warns in 1902 that after a short time in New York, outsiders unaccustomed to the city will become intoxicated by "the subtle, insidious wine of New York." Singling out the Bowery, Broadway, and Central Park, Dunbar entreats the wise traveler to avoid such temptations -- they might "even go over to Jersey" (71). In contrast, Howells welcomes the new aestheticism offered by working-class street life, such as that which his character Basil March perceived while transversing the "shapeless, graceless, reckless picturesqueness of the Bowery" (159).

Indeed, as Amy Kaplan argues in *The Social Construction of Realism*, realism was as often as not "a strategy for imagining and managing the threats of social change -- not just to assert a dominant power but often to assuage fears of powerlessness" (8). There exists in many realist texts an "if you can't beat 'em, join 'em" sensibility; slumming becomes a means of unifying, for better or for worse, an otherwise fragmented urban environment. Commenting on Frederic Jameson's "strategy of containment" -- the means by which to isolate a working-class culture in order to destroy it, a strategy Helen Campbell and Jacob Riis most certainly employed -- Kaplan further asserts that "by containing the threats of social change, realistic narratives also register those desires which undermine the closure of that containment" (10).

Up to this point, there has been the glaring absence of African-American New Yorkers in the discourse. Aside from a short, and uncharacteristically sympathetic, chapter in Riis's *How the Other Half Lives* (1890) and Dunbar's caustic look at the Tenderloin, *The Sport of the Gods* (1902), African-Americans do not appear as either a

cause for concern or suitable for investigation. In Carrie Tirado Bramen's analysis of the aesthetics of the urban picturesque, she notes that "Picturesque perambulators rarely ventured into the black neighborhoods of the Tenderloin to comment on the 'quaint' atmosphere or the 'charming' visages. Blackness signaled the representational limit of the picturesque" (448). Immigrants were "colorful," African Americans were just "colored" (470). She further goes on to say that "the picturesque in its very origins uses the language of diversity to promote white supremacy" (452). And the new bohemian culture brewing in the somewhat artificial realm of Greenwich Village, Christine Stansell informs us, also rejected African-American participants (*American Moderns* 67). But African Americans were more than "Other" in turn of the century New York life; they were simply not around. This is not to say that racism was irrelevant to the lack of representation by white writers, but Manhattan's total black population in 1890 was a relatively scattered 25,674 (Osofsky 206n)² in a city of 1,441,216 (Jackson 923); in 1910 it was 60,534 (Osofsky 206n) in a borough of 2,331,542 (Jackson 921).³ The centers of African-American life were located in the black section of the Tenderloin and San Juan Hill, areas which combined took up no more than ten blocks; the only literary slummers who explored those areas were the blacks themselves.

As with Dunbar's *The Sport of the Gods*, James Weldon Johnson's *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* is, in part, a fictional treatment of the "black Bohemia"⁴ of the 1890s and the marginalization process that occurs there. But rather than substantiating Dunbar's claim that "there is no defense to be made for it" (95), Johnson

² This figure does include the relatively rural South Bronx that was a part of New York City before the consolidation of the boroughs in 1898.

³ The highest in Manhattan's history through the present.

⁴ The moniker James Weldon Johnson provides for the sporting lifestyle of the Tenderloin's black section, located along Sixth Avenue from Twenty-third to Thirty-third Streets (*The Autobiography* 82, *Black Manhattan* 73).

refuses to take sides. He acknowledges the dissipating effects the region has on his characters -- who drink, gamble, and play ragtime as vehemently as Dunbar's characters -- but like his white counterparts in the Village, the ghetto experience provides his ex-colored man with an enlightened understanding of American citizenship. Rather than defending the parochialism of smaller communities as Dunbar does, Johnson demonstrates how "low life" experiences cannot be reduced to good or bad; they add to our cultural identities in simultaneously jarring and stimulating ways.

This newfound appreciation for identity advancement in the slums was most deliberately articulated by New York journalist Hutchins Hapgood. After spending three years on the street beat under Lincoln Steffens at the *Daily Commercial Advertiser*, Hapgood attempted to "unify" New York by subverting its Anglo-German majority's renunciations of immigrant and working-class culture in lower Manhattan. In his series of sketches, *Types from City Streets* (1910), he acknowledges that it is not his choice of subject that will be criticized, but rather his affirmation of it:

[M]any respectable people think that there is something perverted or immoral merely in paying attention, unless the object for doing so is reform, to the "low" forms of human life. An attempt to tell the genuine interest and importance in the character, say, of a Bowery "bum," in the personality of an east-side truckman, in the obscure life of a little "speiler" girl, in the career of a Jewish pedler or a sweat-shop tailor; or in the keenly individualized personality of an habitual "grafter" of the lowlier types; interest in such things for themselves alone, with no sociological or reformatory purpose, is not commonly approved of in our community (*Types* 13-14).

He further goes on to explain that his reasoning behind depicting “low life” is that “there are certain moral, intellectual, and temperamental qualities in what are generally called ‘low’ persons which are admirable and attractive; and these qualities are easily experienced by anybody, except reformers and the... respectable man or woman” (14). And with the aid of “insider-informant” Abraham Cahan, he would mine the Jewish Lower East Side for cultural material that would both form the basis of his book *The Spirit of the Ghetto* (1902) and significantly rejuvenate his artistic sense of purpose. The Jewish Lower East Side provided Hutchins Hapgood and his readers with a source of imaginative inspiration.

His remarks, though subversive, did not exist in an epistemological void. At this point in New York’s literary history, it became the deliberate project of a small group of artists to enter into what was then a ghetto -- namely, Greenwich Village -- for the sole purpose of providing a new complexity to their work and to their own cultural consciousnesses. Even though, as Henry F. May writes of the Village’s embryonic years, “the massive walls of nineteenth-century America were still apparently intact” (May xi), the Whitmanic work of a small group of young intellectuals -- including Hutchins Hapgood, Neith Boyce, Randolph Bourne, Van Wyck Brooks, Alfred Steiglitz, Eugene O’Neill, and Edna St Vincent Millay -- would tilt into the newest creative space beyond the threshold of nineteenth-century discourse. In a sense, these thinkers were indicative of both the last gasp of nineteenth-century New York thought and the first glimmerings of the city’s twentieth-century cosmopolitan ethos. Greenwich Village in the 1910s was an ethnic working-class enclave -- mainly Italian and Jewish -- quite disconnected from highbrow intellectual interests. The formation of Greenwich Village was the deliberate establishment of a distinctly disestablishmentarian neighborhood spirit. As Christine

Stansell phrases it, the Village was comprised of “a coherent milieu with... gentleman at odds with their class, women at odds with their roles, and immigrants seeking conversations outside the ghetto” (Stansell *American Moderns* 14). From within this slum simulachrum, these “American moderns” sought to redefine American culture, with the moral ambiguities of immigrant and working-class life as their model.

Greenwich Village had national impact, but Harlem changed the western world. Gilbert Osofsky writes that by the 1920s, “as a by-product of their attack on traditional American middle-class values, which were constantly called ‘Puritanical,’ literary rebels and others discovered the Negro, America’s ‘outcast,’ and created a semimythical dreamland which they came to idealize -- ‘storied Harlem’” (180). During the Great Migration of blacks to northern cities following the First World War, a period when tens of thousands of African Americans exiled themselves from the violence and disenfranchisement taking place in the Jim Crow South, whites openly began to avail themselves of African-American life in New York. The white intellectual elite in New York was not turned off by racial Otherness at this time. On the contrary, inquisitive white writers poured en masse into the uptown neighborhood that had become the established black enclave, Harlem. One of these “literary rebels,” the flamboyant novelist and art critic Carl Van Vechten, took it upon himself to write the first novel based in what was then called the “New Negro Renaissance.”

In 1926 his controversially-titled *Nigger Heaven* appeared, an unrelenting critique of the new vogue of “primitivism,” which would later be mythologized in Claude McKay’s *Home to Harlem* (1928), along with “respectable” blackness and white slumming in Harlem. Though it is inarguable that “like so many self-proclaimed modernists writing in the wake of the Great War, [Van Vechten] based his artistic mission

on the rejection of middle-class values” (Worth 467), unlike Hutchins Hapgood and other rebellious “Victorians in the modern world,” Van Vechten’s certainty in Anglo-Americans overcoming their rigid past was equivocal at best. The modern American disdain for narrow middle-class respectability was combined in *Nigger Heaven* with an equally modern ethos of tragic pessimism. Van Vechten had little faith in the ultimate success of marginal groups in urban America. The ignoble underbelly that lurked beneath Harlem’s golden facade, he speculated, could prevail -- and history was to prove him right. As such, the call to “Go inspectin’ like Van Vechten” in Andy Razaf’s popular song “Go Harlem,” was tempered by a realistic understanding of the outsider looking in on a situation he was powerless to affect.

It is appropriate that such a volatile history is imbued with a broiling sense of progression through which social and textual changes occur. But it is a progression characterized by perpetual movement, if often two steps forward and one step back. Looking at a substantial stretch of time -- from the antebellum period to the 1920s -- a discernible pattern does come into focus. For one thing, New York slum culture went from evoking images of “Babylon” to achieving a “Renaissance.” But a number of broader and more familiar changes transpired over this period: it was a time and place in which the American pastoral sensibility gave way to an obsession with the inner-workings of the urban arena; regionalism and race became increasingly identified with ethnicity; the United States, of course, transformed from a producer economy to a consumer economy; and previous emphases on local communities gave way to, as Carrie Tirado Bramen has recently argued, a nationalization of urban aesthetics -- turn-of-the-century New York City became a cosmopolitan model for the the United States as a whole (Bramen 446).

The significance of New York slumming narratives is that the the discourse they cultivate, the discourse of the slums, incorporates all of these trends.

The channel of morality and manners descended downward over the course of the nineteenth century, favoring “respectability” over “low life”; but by 1900, the channel began its upward ascent. Textual interactions with New York slum life at first emphasized fundamental spatial distinctions, then concrete sites within the city, then cultural distinctions of those sites, and finally how those cultural forms affected individual consciousness. Logically enough, the next step was modernism, with its refined emphasis on psychological associations. The practice of literary slumming in New York from 1850 to 1930 both depended on and informed New Yorkers’s understanding of morality and its relationship to physical space. These “slumming” texts naturally corresponded with one another, and their interactions, between themselves and the city in which they were written, all contributed to the discourse of the slums. Though these texts served a variety of social functions -- popular entertainment, reform efforts, high literary aspirations, and journalistic exposé -- each was dependent on the others for both the New York they observed and the New York they helped to create.

PART I: THE DOWNWARD CHANNEL, 1850-1900
Chapter 1:
Among the Lower Million:
“City Mysteries” and the Soundings of Urban Morality

Are we in New York, in the nineteenth century? --or is it Rome, in the days of the Borgias?

-- George Lippard, 1854

New York in the 1850s was still coming into its own as a major metropolitan area. Throughout the previous decade, the city had increased its population by 92 percent, making it nearly 10 times its size at the turn of the nineteenth century. Approximately 515,500 people occupied Manhattan in the year 1850. As elevated railways would not be invented for another 15 years, most people lived in lower Manhattan, making the street congestion at the very least commensurate with today's. The Panic of 1837 resulted in mass poverty and affected the following decades by generating an increasingly chaotic conglomeration of gang activity, pauperism, prostitution and alcoholism. By this time the notorious Lower East Side, home primarily to new immigrants and freed slaves, had become indisputably the most frightful slum in the United States, and one of the worst in the world. The Five Points and Paradise Square areas, now Chinatown, were contained in about 86 acres, and hosted close to 270 saloons and as many dance halls, brothels, and cheap liquor stores. By nightfall, when the gaslights came on, barely illuminating the streets, prostitutes would begin their rounds -- through the Lower East Side and up into the areas inhabited by the wealthy New Yorkers, north of Bleeker Street and up Broadway. To the previous generation who had been raised with notions of New-World pastoral bliss, the escalation of urban culture in the United States, overtly manifesting itself in saloons, whorehouses and gambling dens, was the consummation of chaos.

The combination of revulsion and attraction many antebellum Americans

experienced concerning urban spaces inspired a rush of novels and sketches uncovering the mysteries of the new and incomprehensible environment. The “city mysteries” group of antebellum authors in American literature, led by George Lippard, George Foster, John Vose, and George Thompson, among others, produced a body of work charged with social energy and competitive on the book market with domestic fiction. Most accounts of the American city in the first half of the nineteenth century reflected the fervor aroused by liberal revivalism. These writers provide us with non-evangelical images of the cities from the 1850s, ones concerned with moral reform, but containing singular methods of discourse and varying ideological takes on the same subject -- the social impact of rapid urbanization in the United States, particularly in the case of New York City. The difficulty is in formulating a credible interpretation of these texts; in the antebellum period there was no “sociology of reception,” to borrow Christopher Looby’s phrase. Charting moral action, however, makes it possible to confront the effect the symbolic act of literary slumming might have had on its participants.

The ill-effects of urban progress and the development of a cutthroat, market-driven, entrepreneurial environment was strongly imbued into the American consciousness by city mysteries writers. The stark distaste for the specious rewards of progress is a fundamental thematic thread that each of these novels share. The inhumanity of the big city and its dissipated populace, largely defined in the press by over-crowded slums, domestic violence, abject poverty, homelessness, and a startling increase in crime, was rendered as an intrinsically urban phenomenon and not necessarily restricted to the cultural distinctiveness of any one class of people or section of the city.

The mushrooming proliferation of city mysteries novels set in motion what Leslie Fiedler calls “the provincial image of the city as Babylon” (483-484). This negative image

of urban space, Fiedler suggests, “presides over the main line of American city novels from Whitman’s *Franklin Evans*, through Crane’s *Maggie*, up to the fiction of Dreiser and the ‘muckrakers’....” (484) Regardless, as urban historian William Taylor remarks, New York “has sometimes exercised a veritable tyranny of place over the sensibilities of these artists. Even in their moments of repugnance, they are drawn back repeatedly to attempts at defining its aesthetic uniqueness...the city possessed...a kind of terrible beauty” (xvii). Though city mysteries texts dealt more abstractly with moral space than their successors, they triggered what would become the New York tradition of venting spatial and moral anxieties through writing. They identified ill-defined and transitory lines of demarcation which separated fundamental geographic abstractions. But by regarding physical space in terms of moral action, however generally, they offered the American public a new way of conceptualizing New York.

In this chapter, I will briefly discuss *The Gay Girls of New York* (1853), among other examples of George Thompson’s cynical characterizations of the depths of human morality; *Celio: or, New York Above-Ground and Under-Ground* (1850), George Foster’s beguiling treatise on moral relativism; George Lippard’s authorial interventions in *New York: Its Upper Ten and Lower Million* (1854); and John Vose’s gas-lit guidebook *Seven Nights in Gotham* (1852), for readers unlikely to explore New York’s vice districts for themselves. Along with a general discussion of the city mysteries as a notable genre in literary history, I will focus on the tension between the absences and presences of moral regions in the texts, and the implications of identifying moral regions in the cities or the countryside, uptown or downtown, in an upscale brothel or in the Five Points, in a back alley or in the sewage system.

David S. Reynolds in *Beneath the American Renaissance*, uncovers the

anonymously written *Confessions of a Novel Reader* (1855), a book published in reaction to the mounting mass of popular literature. Its author argued that these books shamelessly sensationalized the new urban scene. In the appendix was an assertion from the Chicago Tract Society that “The popular press is teeming with works of vapid or unhallowed fiction, or grossly immoral books and prints....” (qtd. in Reynolds 210) These pulp novelists, Adrienne Siegel insists, “consistently used hackneyed plots, cardboard characterizations, improbable situations, and platitudinous language” (7). They are accused of writing violent and erotic material which was purposefully wrapped in a veneer of conventional moral ideology in order to increase sales while avoiding public censure. “The sensationalist manages,” Janis Stout argues, “to point ‘an obvious moral’ while gratifying a ‘prurient curiosity’” (40). She goes on to say that, “The lurid sensationalism -- the devotion to the revolting or the degraded... offered thrill-seeking readers glimpses into urban low-life”(39).

Exactly how popular this new wave of fiction was is difficult to ascertain. It was not until 1895 that the Bookman report was established in order to keep track of book sales, and the records of most of the literature’s publishers are no longer available (Stout 9). Between 1842 and 1855, however, the United States’s population increased by eighty percent and, with the democratization of literacy, the number of American novels published increased 800 percent, thereby revealing that fiction sales expanded 10 times faster in the United States than those who were presumably buying the books (Reynolds 9). Popular urban fiction would have made up a substantial proportion of this book market. In the 1850s alone, 167 books of urban fiction were published, three times the number set in the West (Siegel 3). Approximately fifty percent of those took place in New York City. New York represented all of the potential and all of the anarchy inherent

in the mid-nineteenth-century image of the American city.

I will attempt to unearth some of the uniquely compelling qualities of these “sensationalist” novels by foregrounding their correspondences with the New York landscape, as opposed to their structural iniquities. They should be read as valuable historical artifacts, not as paragons of literary craftsmanship. Scholars currently disagree on the cultural work this writing performed. The debate is centered around whether these “city mysteries” novels can be considered texts of social subversiveness or, as I have mentioned, the antithesis of this: conventional moral tracts using violence and pornography to bolster the “norm.” Debunking compromise, Christopher Looby argues that “it is not enough to say [these works are] partly subversive and partly hegemonic,” but rather they invariably substantiate middle-class values (666). But it is often possible to isolate dominant cultural preoccupations represented in the texts and ascertain certain logical conclusions that do not reflect a solitary social viewpoint. It is crucial not to buy into the recent trends of literary historians who believe that literary works are constructed to fit into, as Andrew Delbanco skeptically professes in a recent *New York Review* article, “putatively eternal values that its professors are sworn to defend.” Literature, Delbanco goes on to say, “does not transmit moral certainty so much as record moral conflict” (35).

Immorality in antebellum New York City was conceptualized as a near physical disease. It may well have been socially constructed as such, but the fact remains that the idea of immoral behavior as a demonstrative symptom of a communicable physical ailment was seen as another epidemic seemingly as biological as cholera, dysentery, or tuberculosis. Before the exponential increase of urbanization -- and its subsequent overcrowding of the slums -- the United States had been less susceptible to epidemics than European nations. But by the mid-nineteenth-century, American cities were overrun

by communicable diseases, most notably the cholera epidemics of 1832, 1848, and 1865. In kind, the problems of prostitution, intemperance, and criminal activity became compounded with disease as a result of rapid urbanization.

The dominant fictional symbol of urbanization was the slum; so it was plausible to those living outside impoverished areas that the slum-dwellers were primarily to blame. As Archibald Allison, a British social critic of the period, remarked, “[in the slum] there is a certain proximity to sin, which virtue is rarely able to withstand, and which the young, in particular, are generally unable to resist. The progress of vice is almost as rapid as that of physical contagion” (qtd. in Ward 14). Allison’s analogy rings true for a “respectable” middle-class audience that appeared to be virtually immune to cholera. The medical explanations behind the spread of disease would not be understood until the end of the nineteenth century. Until that time, popular indictments of the slums viewed the causality of disease as “divine retribution” for moral transgression (Ward 28). With this in mind, I would submit that in order to understand the extent to which a city mysteries novel bolsters or subverts popular middle-class codes of morality, it is necessary to question the extent to which an author represents immoral action existing outside the purview of the slums.

City mysteries writers portrayed the new urban landscape as a perilously alluring place. If the victims moved too close, they would be devoured. Throughout this period, as now, aristocrats and tourists flocked to the lower regions of Manhattan to submerge themselves in the pure sensuality of experience. When Charles Dickens visited New York in 1842, with the intent of writing a book on his experiences in the United States, the spatial spectacle of choice was the notorious Five Points district, otherwise known as the “Bloody Ould Sixth Ward.” It would appear from historical treatments and contemporary

accounts that in that place and time there were few sources of excitement save sex, fighting, gambling, and excessive drinking. Regardless, books that both emulated Dickens's style and fed off of the fears of native New Yorkers, specifically the city mysteries novels of the 1850s, are consigned to the bargain bin of "sensationalism." Karen Halttunen contends that "[t]he problem with the term 'sensationalism' as scholars have used it, is that it tends to trivialize what is best understood as a powerful new way of confronting human evil -- whose power is evidenced, in fact, by these scholars own revulsion from the new narratives...." ("Early" 99)

Indeed, the "gross immorality" in these works appears to have affected the scholars of the early urban form enough to make them feel "revolted" and "degraded" to the point of discarding the possibility that what these new authors presented had some basis in social reality, high or low. Halttunen astutely asserts that the very term "sensation" implies a spurious high-brow/low-brow dichotomy and essentialism, as if human nature, particularly that of the masses, turns to this type of fiction to sate an internal, biological hunger (99). But city mysteries serve a more socially responsive function. As social theorist Peter Marris argues in his remarkable study of displacement, *Loss and Change*, the members of any society require the development of a foundation of common cultural structures of meaning in order to ground themselves within that community. The structures of meaning established in the United States previous to the rise of urbanization had three basic focal points: the family, the local community, and the church (Park "The City" 24). Once these social institutions lost their handle on the citizenry, they suffered a pain of loss that contributed to the development of a cultural response. One of these responses was the development of a new genre in American fiction, the city mysteries novel.

Often when readers of an urban novel are introduced to the slums -- say, the Five Points area -- they would be confident that at some point, even if days go by, the characters in the book will be borne back to their domestic havens farther uptown or in the countryside. The readers were not, ultimately, interested in surprises. As Umberto Eco points out in his essay on city mysteries founder Eugène Sue, the narrative of Sue's *Les Mystères de Paris* (1842) "sets in motion a series of devices for gratifying the reader, the most completely satisfactory and reassuring of which is that all remains in order...." (140) In New York City, it becomes the implied *potential* for disorder, the unlikely event that the virtuous character will not return or will be ferreted away by a cellar-dweller on Orange Street for licentious purposes, that creates the narrative tension. Often these writers establish their heroes as untainted by the vice-ridden influences of the slum-dweller; others track the misadventures of morally precarious members of the middle class, and as it can be generalized that the mass of readers wish to relate to the characters and situations in order to maximize vicarious experience, they set up their readers to be as well; and still others ignore their audience's expectations altogether.

In the work of George Thompson -- the most graphically violent urban pamphlet novelist of the 1850s -- outsiders are prevented from experiencing any sense of moral or social order. Indeed, if there is to be any back-tracking to a more ordered sanctuary, it is to a brothel or a prison. Thompson's "yellow-jacket" novel *The Gay Girls of New York*, for example, has as its most sympathetic character a streetwise prostitute named Hannah Sherwood. Hannah is first introduced to us as a kind of action hero, the defender of a young, faceless seamstress, Lucy Pembroke. Pembroke is on the verge of getting viciously raped in the parlor of a brothel by a corrupt alderman, Wallingford, who has "choked her

until she was either insensible or dead, he knew not which" (15). Hannah then charges through the door to interdict. After the heroic prostitute has chastised the villain into meek submission, the proprietress of the house rushes in and grapples with her, ostensibly for Hannah's interference with Wallingford's rape. Of course the brawl wakes up the house and into the room come half-clothed and fully nude prostitutes side by side with their clients who are all of "respectable" standing. It is from *this* environment, a contextually respectable one, and not from Washington Square that Hannah and Frank Rattleton, her pimp and her lover, go slumming in the Five Points: "Let's go in Frank," she whispers, referring to a basement-level dive in the Points, "there may be something worth seeing in this foul den" (29).

The subtext of Thompson's city novels is that the reader, the writer, and the fictional characters themselves are all actively and inescapably engaged in the act of slumming. On the one hand, we enter the "coffee-and-cake cellars" and "all night houses" in the seedier neighborhoods which were generally patronized by the homeless, criminals of one type or the other, or people who, as Thompson phrases it, "preferred to loiter about those places in order to enjoy the facilities that were presented for the study of human nature" (28). But we are also taken into New York's Victorian homes, courtrooms, public parks, and genteel hotels. With Thompson, the readers and the characters are led into a nonspatial labyrinth of moral outrage. Ultraviolence and sexual perversion take on very political roles as he subverts the idea that poor people, immigrants, and blacks are more susceptible to moral contamination than the "respectable" middle class.

Christopher Looby argues that Thompson was an inherently conventional writer as social standing and the codes of domesticity are inevitably restored by the end of his novels, specifically in his *The House Breaker* (1848). Looby asserts that the book "is far

from being the subversive text that we might wish it to be"; and Thompson's message is that one should seek refuge in the domestic sphere, and that economically "your enemy is not the class that exploits your labor and keeps you in poverty but the dirty old man and the poor, vicious (sometimes black) criminal who violate[s] your home" (666). But Thompson's major work contains *no moral center whatsoever*; and a mid-nineteenth-century text that relies on no value-oriented base of operations -- such as, we will see later, uptown New York for John Vose or the pastoral setting for George Lippard -- is a profoundly subversive text. There is no invariable return to middle-class normalcy in Thompson because it is clear to the reader that urban horrors can appear at any time, in any environment. You are no safer in a middle-class drawing room than you are in the dingiest corner grocery on Water Street. Not even the author himself, from his own point of view, is to be trusted.

In *Gay Girls*, Thompson constructs a parody of the city mysteries writer in the form of Louis Michaud, a Barnumesque confidence man who inhabits a "low and noisy cellar" in the Five Points because, the character explains of himself, "I am an eccentric, and also because I am now writing a novel, and wish to acquire a thorough knowledge of human nature as is seen in the hovels of the poor as well as in the palaces of the rich" (93). Michaud's parodic working title is *The Midnight Torch, or, the Last Howl of the Doomed, being the Adventures of the Noble Ruffian of the Mysterious Secret Cavern*⁵ which is designed to "create a sensation that could only be equaled by the effect which would undoubtedly be produced by the occurrence of an European revolution..." (93)⁶

Michaud would later force Hannah to unwillingly perform sexual acts for his benefit and

⁵ This is not a very exaggerated parody of the real thing. The full title of Thompson's *City Crimes*, for example, is *City Crimes; or Life in New York and Boston, a Volume for Everybody: Being a Mirror of Fashion; a Picture of Poverty, and a Startling Revelation of the Secret Crimes of Great Cities*.

⁶ Thompson is no doubt referring to a claim of the time that Eugene Sue's *Les Mysteries de Paris* contributed to the European revolutions of 1848.

profit from her public appearances as a freak, her face having been horribly burned by vitriol. Not even here does the writer, as in the works of Vose and Lippard, offer the “moral center” that scholars like Looby suggest. The city mysteries author is reduced to a sideshow barker, a source it would be ill-advised to be in the same room with, let alone rely on for moral instruction.

Looby accuses Thompson of not “confront[ing] the ordinary systemic injustices of the social world,” but rather of strictly adhering to scenes that shock and “evoke in readers a response combining futile moral indignation, class resentment, and scandalized voyeurism” (653). When we read his autobiography *My Life* (1854), however, we detect a very conscious effort to categorize his life in terms of “systemic injustices” along with cultural and literary preoccupations, none of which stick to any one moral framework. Each chapter is written as a response to, respectively, temperance, pornography and women’s sexuality, the popular genres of violent tragedy, the city mysteries novel, the romantic melodrama, British comedy, the gothic novel and the captivity narrative, Barnumesque showmanship and literary Boston, the legal system and prison reform, and the symbiotic relationship between the popular press and the popular theater.

To take what is perhaps Thompson’s most prevalent theme, women’s sexuality, marriage is an institution that is a last resort for most of his female characters, *all* of whom show a strong sexual drive. Marrying for financial security, of course, was an incontestably common practice in antebellum America. “How often do we see,” Thompson writes in his novel *City Crimes* (1849), “old, decrepit men wooing and wedding young girls, purchased by wealth from mercenary parents! Well have such sacrifices to Lust and Mammon, been termed *legalized prostitution*. And does not such a system excuse, if not justify, infidelity on the part of the wife?” (171) There can be no

mistaking the rhetoric of the free love movement that was then a popular, though marginalized, alternative lifestyle. Thompson seems to be taking sides here on a moral level, but we see no consummation of domestic love in this work. Women are never expected to accept and restrict themselves to the domestic sphere. In *Gay Girls* he makes an aside that “A handsome woman without coquetry is like a gold-fish that lieth motionless in the water... we would as soon tolerate a *dumb piano!*” (78) This cynical view of female propriety in the public sphere does not lend itself to emergent middle-class moralism, to say the least.

In *City Crimes*, Thompson lets us in on a self-reflexive moment near the end of the narrative that, though calculated, is sound: “Have you noticed, reader, while perusing this narrative, that nearly all the characters introduced have been more or less tainted with crime? -- Even Sydney [the protagonist]... Alas! human excellence is so very scarce, that had we taken *it* as the principal ingredient of our book, we should have made a slim affair of it indeed” (181). In fact, when Frank Sydney (based, without a doubt, on Sue’s Rodolphe), a wealthy man who disguises himself as a denizen of the Five Points, is on his first slumming expedition, he comes in contact with a poor woman who is forced into prostitution by her dissipated husband. He engages her in an uncertain sexual act, one that she happily succumbs to. The reasoning, Thompson tells us, is that “we prefer to depict human nature *as it is*, not *as it should be*; therefore we represent thee [Sydney] to be no better than thou art in humanity” (7). Even his servant, given the ironic appellation “Honest” Dennis, accepts a bribe for an act that contradicts his master’s wishes. Thompson’s novels are peculiarly devoid of heroes, the moral mainstays of most popular narratives, in any established sense.

There are substantial (and probably not accidental) correlations between Eugène

Sue's *Les Mystères de Paris* and Thompson's *City Crimes*. The formula had been established by Sue a decade earlier than Thompson: a young, resourceful, and (most importantly) wealthy hero enters the slums for the purpose of redeeming the lives of its inhabitants and likely his own (Rodolphe for Sue, Sydney for Thompson). This hero makes the acquaintance of the most vile malefactor (the Schoolmaster, the Dead Man) in order to convert his followers and rid the city of his evil presence. In each case the aid of a particularly criminal blackguard is enlisted for this purpose⁷ (the Slasher, the Doctor); in each case a courtesan is defaced (sometimes literally), then delivered from ignominy (Fleur de Marie, Archer). The difference is that Sue is adamantly declaring a social program -- one related to the doctrine of Fourier -- while Thompson wishes simply to "show what awful misery exists in the very midst of all our boasted civilization and benevolence..." (94)

There is no explanation offered to justify Frank Sydney's slumming forays, though he suffers savagely for them, including a Kafkaesque torture scene involving slowly turning screws. He does tell us that Sydney feels he is taking part in a "holy mission of charity," but shows us little of what form that charity should take. Again, Sue is providing a solution: lead people to the country and away from urbanized commercial injustices. Thompson offers no program, but does demonstrate that immorality is to be found among each and every citizen of the republic, and that it is spatially ubiquitous.

In one of the opening sequences of George Foster's *Celio: Above-Ground and Under-Ground*, the author displays the spectacle of a major fire in the downtown area through the eyes of his title character. Valuables and belongings of every sort are abandoned on the open streets (and subsequently stolen) while teams of firefighters take

⁷ In the following chapter, I will discuss urban activist Helen Campbell adopting this method of reform: enlist a criminal to reform a criminal.

on the blaze. In the outset, the reader is outside the field of action, but the view soon comes into focus: "As we go on, the scene expands and grows more palpable. It is as if one could walk into the perspective of a pictured conflagration and gradually find all the individual elements of the general effect moving and transpiring before him, until he at length stood in the midst" (10). Foster's metaphor is clearly set up as a promise: from the beginning of the novel, the reader will be led closer to the flames.

George G. Foster was a reporter based in New York who worked under Horace Greeley at the *New York Tribune* in the 1840s. He was one of the first professional city reporters in New York, and his experiences inspired him to write numerous sketches on street life. The purpose of writing *Celio*, Foster insists in his preface, was to introduce a "new idea into fictional literature" (3). By exposing some of the effects of the city on its populace, he hoped to inspire "the whole world [to be] suddenly born again, and with a new heart, new perceptions, new impulses and new aspirations," at which time we will, "look back with incredible wonder at the dark and narrow chrysalis in which [humanity] was so long imprisoned" (4).

Foster offers a more concretized, though far more bizarre, theory of moral regionality than Thompson. Indeed, its engagement with the relationship between physical space and morality is the most deliberately defined -- and yet the most difficult to decipher -- of any of his city mysteries contemporaries. He begins his preface with a theory of social construction that sounds plausible enough. It is his contention that the spirit of moral good "will extend from soul to soul -- reaching upward and downward, as it goes, to bring all classes upon an electric level" (4). The "under-ground" that he refers to in his subtitle is, of course, the immoral element in New York. But that element is not exclusive to any one site or neighborhood; indeed, the "under-ground" that we are

accustomed to -- gambling dens, dance-houses, brothels, groggeries, etc. -- Foster regards as "neutral ground," along with "balls, theatres, concerts, Florence's, Delmonico's and the Opera" (16). By this he means that "Notwithstanding its isolation from the every-day world of so-called honest people, [the] underground universe has several points of contact with the other [above-ground], where they approach each other by gradually diminishing or increasing shades as to make it almost impossible to say where one ceases and the other begins" (16). And both the typical sites of "under-ground" activity and those of "respectable" society are populated by New Yorkers so diverse in occupation and moral make-up that "it is difficult to draw the line distinctly between rogues and honest men" (16). Indeed, he warns us not to take the popular use of the term "under-ground" seriously ("Probably three-quarters of the good eating throughout the city is under-ground") (32).

Morality itself is *literally* a physical property in Foster. Morality and space interact on a particle level, both in our individual physiognomy and in the New York landscape. The consciousness of the individual, once again, *literally* shares physical properties of good and evil with the city. The whole is composed of minute particles which, if properly understood would reveal the "truth" to the mystery of New York City: "The truth... in regard to the physical world, is that things are beautiful or ugly, delightful or disgusting, not on account of the materials of which they are composed, but in accordance with *the order in which the particles are arranged*" (68). This epistemological snafu is further complicated by his sense of evolutionary science. In short, the earth and the animals on it are in the process of becoming crystallized to rarefaction. We are in a stage of "transition" from the "*amorphous*": "imperfect, crude, opaque"; to "*crystallization*": "beauty, transparency, delight" (68). This distinctly

unmodern cosmology (should it be taken slanted?), should dictate our understanding of urban morality as well as our planet's evolutionary trajectory.

Moral space for Foster exists on this particle level in which the particles react to human interaction and geographic location. The city is naturally a more immoral location than not, as it produces a noxious atmosphere that stimulates the negative, "under-world," factor within us all: "There can be no doubt," he writes, "that the poisonous exhalations of a large city correspond not merely by accident but upon immutable mathematical and philosophic principles with the moral miasmas which are generated by its hot contacts and unnatural struggles" (67).

So both of Foster's "grounds" -- "above" and "under" -- exist within us all in varying proportions. And like us, the city itself is a vortex of good and evil particles which is reflected in the physical appearance of the urban landscape, including its streets and architecture. Gambling dens, for example,

are of all kinds, from the palatial and splendidly furnished establishment in Broadway or Park Place, with its sumptuous entertainments and costly wines, to the low three-cent drinking and raffling den in the Bowery, and the negro dance-house, brothel, and groggery combined, in the Five Points. In these places the various classes of persons who pass during the day for honest people, such as leading politicians, (but there is doubt how *they* pass), merchants, financiers, brokers, speculators, bank-clerks, &c. &c., down to poor desperadoes who live on almost nothing, and strive to eke out an existence by gambling for blown-up poultry, or forget it by drinking poisoned whiskey, become gamblers and of course swindlers at night, and thus from their victims, gradually discipline themselves for making victims

in their turn (16).

The theory is similar to twentieth-century notions of social construction. For example, as Richard Sennett points out in his discussion of the “multiplicity of [social] contact points,” “Each piece of the city mosaic had a distinct character, but the pieces were ‘open,’ and this was what made life urban. Individuals had the capacity and the need to penetrate a number of social regions in the course of daily activities, even though the regions were not harmoniously organized and may even have been at warring ends” (57).

Foster maintains that each of us has “in the same relative proportion,” physical properties that contribute to our moral constitution. So regardless of whether a “bad, lecherous” woman lives a life of dissolution, the moral portion of the community retains precisely the same physical properties whether they meet her at a “contact point” or not. The only difference is the arrangement. It is only at those “points of contact” -- in which various arrangements intermingle -- that our particles rearrange themselves and begin to reflect those of others. An oddball theory it might be, but the premise of social interaction devoid of class consciousness is prevalent in city mysteries texts. In George Lippard’s *New York*, for example, we are introduced to Ezekiel Bogart, abstractly set up as a kind of agent to quick fortune (perhaps a stock broker). In his waiting room, there are representatives of each of New York’s social stereotypes:

There was a sleek dandy of Broadway; there the narrow-faced vulture of Wall Street; there some whose decayed attire remind you either of poets out of favor with the Magazines, or of police officers out of office; one whose half-Jesuit attire brought to mind the Poseyite clergyman; and one or two whose self-complacent visages reminded one of a third-rate lawyer, who has just received his first fee; in a word, types of the varied and

contrasted life which creeps and throbs within the confines of the large city (60).

Naturally, in a city like New York, the points of contact are countless; it is virtually impossible to avoid the “under-world” mingling with the “upper.” Slumming, therefore, is an involuntary and perpetual act that defines the essential nature of New York City.

George Lippard was the most prominent city mysteries novelist. His city mysteries novel *New York: Its Upper Ten and Lower Million* conveys the seductive allurements of New York along with its destructive potential. Once the participants are exposed to the city’s beguiling aspects, they are susceptible to falling unchecked into its gluttonous lifestyle. As he gazes across the Hudson River from the Palisades on the New Jersey side, he observes that “A sadder battle-field, sun never shone upon, than the Empire City, in which millions are battling every moment of the hour, and battling all life long for fame, for wealth, for bread, for life.” But seen from afar it is a magnificent sight: “...looking to the east, or south-east, you see the broad river dotted with snowy sails, the great city, with its steeples glittering in the light, and with the calm, clear, vast Heaven arching overhead” (*New York* 10). City mysteries writers often employed such romanticized images of the city landscape in order to subvert their audience’s understanding of urban beauty soon after in their narratives; but as they themselves were entranced by their subject, contradictions in representation abound.

George Lippard was 29 years old when he wrote *New York* in 1853. By the time of his death one year later, he had written 23 books in 12 years and had made three or four thousand dollars a year on writing alone (Fiedler 243). He was the most widely read of the three authors in this study, and the most literary in terms of style. One writer of the time asserts that “The Lippard style...requires the writer to be born with St. Vitus’s

dance, to be inoculated with Delirium Tremens, take the nightmare in the natural way, get badly frightened at a collection of snakes, and write under the combined influences of these manifold causes of inspiration” (Reynolds *Beneath* 204).

In *New York*, Lippard brings to life scenes of mothers selling their daughters to men capable of ameliorating their financial affairs, priests engaging in all manner of infamous undertakings, rape, murder, drug abuse, alcoholism, illicit abortion syndicates, and glamorous orgies, among other things. But the presentation, as Leslie Fiedler points out, is not that of “gratuitous horror.” He remarks that “all is offered as a true revelation of *what really goes on inside*” (Fiedler 244). Lippard used horrific imagery to impose on his readership a structure of meaning for the city which was urging them to understand the force urbanization would have on their lives.

One of the first narratives in *New York* is that of Frances Van Huyden. She is the abandoned child of a man who won a duel to the death and subsequently went underground to avoid being indicted. Raised by a priest and an old woman who lived in the countryside (located where Spanish Harlem now stands), she was brought up with the values of the church. Once she became old enough, her mother, who had left her in the priest’s care while she traveled, brought her to the city. After she had been properly adorned with the best dresses and jewelry, she was deemed fit to experience her first high society party. “The festival was prolonged till day-break,” she reports, “and another followed soon. The atmosphere was new to me. At first I was amazed, then intoxicated, and then -- corrupted” (47). She rapidly grew accustomed to the moral liberties of the urban sphere and became known as the ‘Midnight Queen,’ a celebrated hostess in her own right. The city was a place where women could live and, as Foster remarks, “indulge [their] perverted and unnatural appetites to the full” (36).

Characters accustomed to the ordered community of the countryside experience in New York what Blanche Gelfant has termed “personal dissociation,” a comprehensive psychological theme in urban literature describing a symptom where, wrenched from the solid foundations of a localized community, a person becomes morally imbalanced. “To the dissociated person,” Gelfant writes, “adultery, perversions, or drink may seem to offer escape from inner tensions.” And since one can remain anonymous in the heterodox environment of the city, partnership in vice is dangerously accessible: “An illicit meeting or an orgiastic party can be arranged in a hotel room, in an apartment in some distant part of the city, or in a nightclub for only special patrons. The great urban population offers partners to one’s perversions” (Gelfant 39). At one point Lippard’s character Ernest, Frances’s sweetheart from rural life, visits the city and winds up attending an “orgiastic party” at her midtown mansion:

Drinking glass after glass of champagne, Ernest stood by the supper table, a silent spectator of that scene, whose voluptuous enchantment gradually inflamed his imagination and fired his blood. He seemed to have been suddenly transported from dull matter-of-fact, every-day life, to a scene in some far oriental city... he surrendered himself to the enchantment of the place, like one for the first time enjoying the intoxication of opium (36).

Moral turpitude in the city, Lippard professes, can be found in all economic classes, among men and women, and in both the public and private spheres. Though he spent the greater portion of his career in the pressrooms and lyceums of American cities, he adamantly argued that the countryside provided the only escape from the dissipation of urban life.

In *New York*, Lippard lulls the reader into meditating on the pastoral state: “Do

not think that there is such a creature as a bad man, or a crime in the world. But drink the summer air, -- drink the freshness of the foliage and flowers, -- lull yourself with the song of the brook, -- look at the blue sky, and feel that there is a God, and that he is good" (259). Urbanites, in contrast, are lost in a sea of strangers, and there it is dupe or be duped. If rural values include simplicity, chastity, honesty, hard work, and frugality, the city is perceived as being complex, promiscuous, alienating, and impossibly corrupt. In *New York*, Lippard perpetuates what Leo Marx has labeled "sentimental pastoralism" (passim). From this point of view, the city was considered the United States's most daunting enemy. If the urban writers were tuned in to the dark margins of New York, many of their perceptions of the countryside were incredibly innocent. George Lippard, in particular, focuses a great deal on the comparable benefits of avoiding the city and inhabiting pleasant rural communities:

You won't care who's president, or who robbed the treasury of half a million dollars. You'll forget that there's a Pope who washed his hands in the blood of brave men and heroic women. You'll not be anxious about the rate of stock; whether money is tight or easy, shall not trouble you one jot. Thus resting quietly at the bottom of your amphitheater in the country, you'll feel that you are in the church of God, which has a sky for roof, leaves for walls, grassy sod for floor.... (260)

Not only can the rural environment satisfy your material needs, but, correspondent with the off-the-grid polemics of Thoreau's *Walden*, the number of them is minimized. "The savage, starving in the snow, in the center of his desolate prairie," Lippard insists, "knows nothing of the poverty of the civilized savage... poverty in the city is not mere want of bread, but it is the lack of the means to supply innumerable wants, created by

civilization, -- and that lack is slow moral and physical death" (206). *New York* is a counter-pastoral text in the sense Raymond Williams has provided -- it consciously juxtaposes the proper, premodern, ancient imagery of Virgil and Theocritus (the ideal idyll) with identifiable, *actual* conditions that resemble the readers's image of the urban landscape (see Williams 13-34).

The extent to which slummers are culpable for moral indiscretion is crucial to understanding the goals of the city mysteries writer. In many cases, these writers engage in a form of Asmodean exposé⁸ which distances the readers, the characters, and the author from the subject -- thus relieving them from the guilt of engaging immoral space. John Vose's *Seven Nights in Gotham* (1852) is the most candid example of the pseudo-journalistic style of exposé. As such, *Seven Nights* is the most referentially rich of any other city mystery covered here. In parts, it sounds as if Vincent Price should perform the book-on-tape; in others, it sounds like a sociological treatise of the downtown area.

Up to this point in this discussion, city mysteries novels have been opaque visions of the city itself which relied primarily on disassociative theories of place. With Vose, we get a glimmer of what will characterize New York slumming narratives after the Civil War -- the realities of the urban poor, the landscapes associated with cultural marginality, and the use of the referent to enhance the readers's knowledge of the New York lines.

From the outset, the author defines precisely what his objectives are: to explore New York's most depraved haunts within the protective guidance of a former police officer familiar with each one's singular pitfalls. "There is in Gotham, around Gotham, and under Gotham," Vose declares, "sights which the ancient City of Babylon never

⁸ Asmodeus, Stuart M. Blumin informs us, "is a demon who, among other traits, possesses the ability to lift off the roofs of houses to discover the secret evils of those within" (72).

possessed -- sights which the general run of society are ignorant of, as much so, as the Bushmen in their jungles are ignorant of the existence of humanity" (8). The retired constable who leads the group, stamped with the Dickensian name Wigglesworth (Vose implies that he was the protective guide who led Dickens through the Five Points), advises them all to carry handguns and leave their wallets, watches, and assorted valuables at home. "As we are now going to a place where we shall meet desperate characters;" Wigglesworth warns, "to a wicked hole, full of dark, mysterious brutality, where we shall find an assemblage of villainy... let me warn you to be careful what you say, and one thing in particular, don't, for goodness sake, put on any *airs*" (30). The implication of moral superiority is extant, but to advertise it would be both cruel and dangerous.

This small group of investigators, unaccustomed to the seedy environment of the East Side, are led to various "dark holes in Gotham." Along the way, Vose sets up the New York slums as what J. Gerald Kennedy calls "the matrix of action" (22) -- the backdrop of narrative movement -- by assuming the role of a social scientist. He reports that in New York there were 30,000 young women and girl laborers; 200,000 hard daily male laborers; 70,000 paupers; 14,000 African Americans; 12,000 courtesans; 50,000 men who paid for their services; more than 1,500 brothels; 2,000 groggeries; hundreds of low dance halls; one tippling shop for every three people in the city; and a foreign population that made up one quarter of the city's whole (42-43). Though the presentation of such statistics is alarmist in nature -- lumping together the working-class, minorities, and immigrants with prostitutes, their clients, and low dance halls -- it accentuates a development in the urbanization process that appalled middle-class Americans, immorality as the definitive aspect of the expansive lower class. In addition, we are presented with facts, along with our fiction. The social realities of New York City add a

materialist texture to the narrative, a technique that realists would later adapt in more tentacular narrative schema. The numerical data infuses the story with the tension of disbelief; Vose provides statistics for shock value certainly, but he also informs the reader as to what he or she may not yet know — the *scope* of New York's underworld.

On the first night of seven, Vose's group tours tenement houses, the Bowery, a "Cock Pit" (a cockfighting establishment), and a gambling house on Water Street; on the second they witness a burlesque performance and a "Model Artist" theater (essentially a strip club); on the third they visited the "Golden Gem," a "spiritual store-house" where an occult organization perform a seance and consult with Fourier, Swedenborg, and Shakespeare, who all foretell the end of the world; on the fourth they visit the "Diving Bell," a low tavern located sixty feet below street-level; on the fifth gambling dens; on the sixth both high and low class brothels; and on the seventh a 'Rat Worrier,' where men from all stations bet on terriers who are bred to kill as many rats as possible in as few minutes as possible. On the final night they cruise Tompkins Square and an assignation house. In each case, the sights of urban squalor and depravity are located in identifiable and seemingly containable districts of contagion. At each stop the accepted method was to avoid direct contact with the locals. And like the narrator and his characters, the role of the reader is that of spectator, that urban type restricted from "knowing" New York by uptown tenets which forbid engaging the downtown milieu.

Vose is bringing to bear material from the New York outside of the parlors, the museums, and Broadway. He is engaging in the cultural phenomenon that William Taylor refers to as the "Gotham factor," meaning the relationship between culture and commerce in New York (80). "Explore Gotham," Vose promises,

and nothing is wanting in any department in representing its station. You

can find secret associations -- midnight assassins -- bold robbers -- old murders -- dark holes -- deep caverns -- mysterious forms -- depraved women -- unparalleled cruelty -- horrible suicides -- singular coincidences -- unhappy marriages -- interesting love tales -- broken hearts -- brilliant episodes -- dashing and yet villainous conspiracies -- scenes 'as are scenes' of poverty and splendor -- and a goodly catalogue of all that is truly of a marvelous nature (8).

He argues that the city novel should be written and read as an urban Baedeker, a guide to aid Americans in their understanding of the complexities of the vast city. Urban expose fiction was a manifestation of the need for continuous distraction, whether at Coney Island, in the palatial home of the aristocrat, or in the dens of infamy on the Lower East Side; but the genre was also conceived of to present a mimetic account of urban immorality in action. It was understood, by Vose and his audience, that this subject matter was endemic to the slums.

In his discussion on the future prospects of the United States, Alexis de Tocqueville adopts a metaphor to develop his speculations on the nation's potential. He describes a traveler observing the city from a hilltop. The details have been obfuscated by the shades, but the big picture looms large (137). The city mysteries novel was designed to sharpen the distorted image of the city, as seen from afar, for the benefit of the general public. In George Thompson's *New York*, immorality exists on varying levels and the spatial distinctions are discrete. In Foster, slumming is a physical state that occurs within us all individually, and within the city as a whole. In Lippard, moral safety is located in the countryside. In Vose, the slum is distanced from middle-class city dwellers living

uptown. Lippard's *New York* demonstrates to what extent the city *as a whole* is culpable, rather than, as is the case in *Seven Nights in Gotham*, deviance being a discreet pattern to be found specifically in the slums. With the exception of Thompson, physical and moral security is represented in each text, and there appear to be remedies for -- or at least quarantine from -- moral contagion.

The popular urban writing of the antebellum period, as represented in the journalistic urban exposés of John Vose, the bizarre cosmology of George Foster, the gothic world of George Lippard, and the cynically immoral pamphlet novels of George Thompson saw the phenomenon of slum life as instrumental in the understanding of the American subject. As Timothy Gilfoyle explains in his comprehensive work on New York prostitution, *The City of Eros*,

The popularity of these fictional and non-fictional accounts did not rest upon their pornographic imagery alone. Authors also embedded their characters in the geography and institutions of commercial sex. Broadway streetwalkers, Five Points prostitutes, opulent Church Street brothels, and model-artist exhibitions appear. Even specific locales like the Broadway theater, Pete Williams's dance hall, and Julia Brown's parlor house document the intimate details of this less than intimate world. There were the images of New York's antebellum nightlife, scenes residents and visitors witnessed daily. The inclusion of such a readily recognized geography gave these stories a sharp sense of realism, a resonance of authenticity, so often absent from earlier accounts of the metropolis (155).

Gilfoyle points out, to give an example, that in Thompson's novel *The Countess; or, Memoirs of Women of Leisure* (1849) the author makes characters of Madame Restelle,

mistress Amelia Norman, Kate Winslow, and Caroline Hastings, some of the most notorious prostitutes of the 1840s (143-44). Indeed, he never even bothered to change their names.

Each of these writers openly implored their audiences to regard them as “honest,” otherwise the force of their cultural impact would diminish: Foster’s characters in *Celio*, he informs us, “are drawn from real life” (4); “Fact is stranger than fiction,” George Lippard insists, “and every day reality more improbable than the wildest dreams of romance” (224). In Thompson’s autobiography, he supports this notion by boasting that he has “passed through adventures quite as extraordinary as any which I have drawn from the imagination” (5); and in *City Crimes*, Thompson applies the second person as a guilt-inducing device, writing that “we prefer to depict human nature *as it is* not *as it should be*; -- therefore we represent thee to be no better than thou art in reality” (7); and Vose, most emphatic of all, importunes that “from the commencement of our critical task, we have endeavored to describe things and scenes as we find them, exactly as they exist, without increase or diminution, for the reason that everybody is contented with the simple truth; the people at least, throwing overboard the critics” (105-06).

Luridness and realism coalesce in city mysteries in the way Frank Norris describes the naturalism of Emile Zola’s work. Rather than strictly adhering to a mimetic representation of things “as they really are,” Norris explains, in Zola “Everything is extraordinary, imaginative, grotesque even, with a vague note of terror quivering throughout like the vibration of an ominous and low-pitched diapason” (1106, 1107). On the one hand, city mysteries authors’s assurances that they are rendering things “as they are” are clearly plot devices to heighten the tension of the narratives. On the other, there is a strong commitment among city mysteries writers to convince their readers that the

city landscape “as it is” is reflected in their texts. Otherwise, their work would be consigned not to New Yorker’s “knowledge of the lines,” as Amy Kaplan explains William Dean Howells’s concept in his *A Hazard of New Fortunes*, but to the more marginalized category of “useless information” (Kaplan 48).

Thompson’s, Foster’s, Lippard’s, and Vose’s works belong to a unique genre that both contradicted the established understanding of morality and helped transform the discourse of morality into a social obsession. Instead of merely churning out cheap thrills for a masturbatory audience and dissembling their intent with moralistic clichés, many writers of the popular urban form were social critics, using a relatively newfound medium, the urban novel, to express both their own anxieties and those of their audiences. As George Foster attests in a description of his fictional newspaper *The Morning Dash*, “By alternately attacking all parties and public men, and exposing in turn the sophistries and hypocrisies of every popular delusion, it came to be regarded as honest....” And regardless of a moral community of “A great many pious people” who were horrified by it, “still, the great fact remained... every body bought it, every body read it. --Hence its power” (109).

In the act of locating distinct regions of moral difference, the city mysteries writers anticipated one of the central preoccupations of American literary realism and naturalism a half-century later, when moral regions were represented as being intrinsic parts of the consciousnesses of the narratives’s central participants. This is a contiguous stylistic thread among the city mysteries writers -- an engagement with the volatility of human nature and how it interacts with the new urban environment. The “key” to understanding *Celio*, Foster explains, is “that vice and misery are not the necessary result of human life in this world; and that were human nature not distorted, evil would not

exist... under the influence of favorable circumstances and beneficent social institutions, all might be good” (4). And though Lippard demands his readership to accept *New York’s* authenticity, the author “dares not tell all the truth; he can only vaguely hint at those enormous evils which are the inevitable result, -- not of totally depraved human nature, for such a thing never existed....” (259) On the East Side, John Vose writes, “all, all come forth, the vile, the noble, the despicable, the pure, the innocent and the vicious, to mingle with each other, and exhibit to the world the different lights and shadows of *human nature*” (6). It is true that the sunshine-and-shadow paradigm associated with city mysteries “displays an almost Manichean ambivalence about the new urban world” (Taylor 80), but it is equally true that their representations of the people who inhabit that world are often relativistic.

If the discourse of “human nature” is an ulterior motive for city mysteries writers, it is alternately not, strictly speaking, what Amy Kaplan calls a “fiction of the referent” (8). Though Gilfoyle is correct in his assessment of the interrelationship between sensational news and sensational fiction, references to the Bowery, the Five Points, the waterfront, et al., although they are present,⁹ tell us little about the specific cultural attributes of those districts. The morality systems that drive the agendas of their characters are rarely transparent. There is a staunchly naturalistic perception of moral action, but explanations of it go no further than, as Foster phrases it, “an irresistible wind” (135).

Kaplan opens *The Social Construction of American Realism* with this premise:

⁹ The most obvious one being on the Bowery, which will be covered at length in Chapter 3. But though Bowery culture was well-represented in working-class theaters during the 1840s and ‘50s, this was not rendered in texts that targeted the middle class. Ned Buntline’s novel, *The B’hoys of New York* (1850), for example, has few transparent referents to the Bowery and its cultural make-up. Indeed, the most remarkable aspect of this novel is its failure in describing the Bowery B’hoy. As late as 1856, journalist George Foster asked his audience, “Who are the B’hoys and G’hals of New York? The answer to this question, if it could be completely efficient, would be one of the most interesting essays on human nature ever written.”

“that the urban-industrial transformation of nineteenth-century society did not provide a ready-made setting which the realistic social novel reflects, but that these changes radically challenged the accessibility of an emergent modern world to literary representation” (8). And if this was true for the 1880s and ‘90s, it was more so for the 1850s, when urban life was in its adolescence. As Foster implies in his preface for *Celio*, if the reader is not pleased with his book, they should blame the convolutions of the city in and about which it was written (4).

By comparing city mysteries to literary realism, we can track the movement of moral understanding from spatial to non-spatial, from neighborhood to the cultural consciousnesses of the inhabitants of that neighborhood, from a physical map to a map of the mind. Janice Stout aptly argues that city mysteries literature, though it does “make clear the availability of a wide range of urban topics for realistic fiction... their exaggerations and conventionality prevented their becoming in any way a fiction of realism” (42). However, the urban realists fifty years later -- Stephen Crane, William Dean Howells, Henry James, James Weldon Johnson, Edith Wharton -- like Lippard, Vose, and Thompson, were also concerned with the very real social issue of expanding their contemporaries’s knowledge of New York’s moral regionality. It is this epistemological praxis that concerns us here. Amy Kaplan rightly defines realists as writers who “were less concerned with the *accuracy* of portraying ‘the other half’ than with the problem of representing an interdependent society composed of competing and seemingly mutually exclusive realities” (italics mine 11).

That same interdependency of urban spaces was acknowledged by city mysteries writers, but on a much more abstract level. Instead of isolating neighborhoods with clearly drawn lines of distinction from block to block -- what William Dean Howells called the

“knowledge of the lines” (Kaplan 48) -- city mysteries writers created lines separating much broader matrices of action, from the country to the city (Lippard), from uptown to downtown (Vose), within our own physiognomy (Foster), or or at least they recognized the discourse of the lines by belying their existence (Thompson). Epistemologically, the “knowledge of the lines” began in the 1850s. Their textual representations of them were simply presented on a larger, more abstract scale.

What comes into focus in the 1870s and ‘80s is the realization that moral systems are inherent to specific regions; that in order to understand those regions and overcome the problem of urban representation, one must engage the “lower million” on their own level -- in the streets, missions, and tenements in which “immoral” action is fully represented. In the following chapter, I will briefly discuss some of the problems faced by middle-class reformers up to the 1880s. Helen Campbell, a highly representative and influential reform writer, came to realize that in order to better the moral standards of the “lower million,” it was necessary to credibly represent them as they were. And she realized that in order to solve the problem of the poor in this way, the writer must completely immerse his or herself into their marginalized world.

Chapter 2:
“Under the Bridge and Beyond”¹⁰:
Helen Campbell on the Waterfront

“To know how the other half lives.” That is the demand made upon woman and man alike. Once at least put yourselves in the worker’s place, if it be for half an hour, and think her thoughts and live her starved and dreary life.

-- Helen Campbell, 1887

...[I]f Jesus were here I could quite imagine him walking the streets of New York by day and by night going down into subcellars and climbing rickety stairs into high attics, making his way into dens of iniquity and reaching down into the depths to save the lost.

-- J. Wilbur Chapman, 1906

Throughout New York’s process of modernization, geographic space became increasingly and more concretely defined by moral action. Unlike the abstract sense of morality and space that city mysteries writers proffered, after the Civil War, New Yorkers began to understand spatial determinations of morality in much more definable terms. Districts in which the “lower million” settled were isolated targets of middle-class expressions of disapprobation. As one mid-century journalist phrased it, “The physical and moral... are closely allied. The habit of living in squalor and filth engenders vice, and vice, on the other hand, finds a congenial home in the midst of physical impurities” (qtd. in Rosenberg 183). At the same time, intemperance and immigration were thought to create a perpetual cycle of immorality. “Immigration had brought European poverty to America. Intemperance created it here” (Rosenberg 39). Middle- to upper middle-class reform writers represented working-class districts such as the Bowery and the East Side waterfront as contagious influences on the larger society. From city mysteries to post-bellum reform, the emphasis of slumming narratives turned from knowledge-making to knowledge transmitting; the cultural channel between uptown and downtown was, to the

¹⁰ The title of Chapter 11 of Helen Campbell’s *Prisoners of Poverty*.

greatest extent, aimed downward.

The social separation of the mid-1800s did not immediately manifest itself in identifiable *ethnic* neighborhoods, as it would in the later years of the century, but rather in mixed populations whose residential locations depended chiefly on their proximity to the workplace. The resulting hodgepodge of ethnic, racial, and class inhabitants of these regions provided the city with “a rich mosaic of plebeian life” (Muller 119). As Robert Park attests of this period, “the city was not simply a physical artifact, but possessed a moral as well as physical organization, and these two mutually interact in characteristic ways to mold and modify one another” (qtd. in Sharpe and Wollock 10).

Ethnic neighborhoods would only emerge when jobs and industries became associated with specific ethnic groups -- garments for the Jewish, cigars for the Bohemians, etc. But through the 1870s, the waterfront region of New York, though perhaps mainly Irish, was still composed of workers and unemployed groups that largely allied themselves with trade and the lifestyle of the wharves rather than with any particular language, religion, or ethnic group. Manhattan Island was divided: prosperous neighborhoods formed a corridor down the middle of the island, with the poorest neighborhoods straddling the river banks. As Luc Sante remarks in *Low Life*, “Fifth Avenue was, after all, the the farthest one could get from either river” (50). Middle-class reformers still maintained, even through the 1880s, that the slums were the inevitable results of deviant individual lifestyles as opposed to group identity; David Ward reports that “popular indictments emphasized moral and personal relationships rather than structural and social conditions” (48). The underprivileged during the 1870s and early 80s, therefore, had become preeminently associated with both geographic space and individual interactions with that space.

And so the polarization of New York society was a physical reality, not simply a socioeconomic abstraction. As such, it was possible for reform writers to isolate the problem in terms of physical space and attempt to counteract its consequences. "It is instructive," Edward K. Muller professes, "that the emerging social separation accompanied emerging reform efforts designed to cope with poverty, disorderliness, crime, transience, and independent work behavior" (117). And it became increasingly obvious that older methods of reform needed updating to accompany the growth of the industrial city. Reform efforts after the war began adopting newer methods from the social sciences. A new "scientific philanthropy" emerged, combining social theory with religion and moral suasion. The goal was to apply radical methods in an attempt to ensure moral order in the decades to come. "With the new scientific philanthropy at their disposal," historian Aaron Ignatius Abell writes, "the churches could look forward to mighty triumphs. But first they faced the task of diffusing widely their social teachings" (87). One area these efforts would single out was New York's waterfront district on the East Side -- an obstinate locale that up to the 1870s had defied, albeit misguided, reform efforts by missionaries and social workers.

Helen Campbell was a New York writer and reformer who tangled with, and fell victim to, the central paradox of the urban industrial environment -- the disjunction between social unification and individual agency. "Society has no right to absorb the individual," she argues, "any more than the individual has a right to *be* absorbed or supported. His right is to his own personality and its best means of development, and all we can ask of society is that those means be made easier of attainment" (113-14). But the "means of attainment" Campbell discovers to promote the characters of disaffected New Yorkers involved, of course, incorporation and acculturation -- absorption. Rather than

allowing New York neighborhoods to crystallize into distinct and isolated sites, she was determined to coopt them into the moral fold. By textualizing the waterfront district of the 1880s, Campbell was attempting to reconstitute the area into her own society's image, regardless of some misgivings she may have concerning that society:

They [the poorer classes] are with us. The burden is ours and cannot be cast aside. It remains with us to train them into decent members of society, or to fold our hands and let the crowd of imbeciles and drunkards and criminals and lunatics increase years by years, till suddenly some frightful social convulsion opens the eyes that have refused to see, and disaster brings about what moderate effort could long before have accomplished (244).

The mingling sentiments of repulsion and concern created an impedimental contradiction in the consciousness of New York's middle class. The "frightful social convulsion" could manifest itself in many forms -- a Socialist state, a nation of drunkards -- and unless concrete, pragmatic actions were taken, "decent members of society" would be corrupted beyond repair.

Campbell was born to Homer and Jane Campbell on the fourth of July, 1839. Homer was a New York lawyer for fifty years running and some time the president of the Continental Bank Note Company. Campbell insisted that his daughter be well-educated. Helen attended both New York public schools and private institutions for girls -- the Gammell School in Rhode Island and Mrs. Cook's Seminary in New Jersey. She was married in 1862 to Grenville Mellen Weeks, a surgeon who served aboard the U.S. ironclad *Monitor* during the Civil War. It was an experience that may have effected their divorce in 1871. Starting in the first years of her marriage, Campbell began publishing

children's stories, popular fiction, and one household economics textbook, *The Easiest Way in House-Keeping and Cooking* (1881). But her notoriety as a writer would culminate in a series of studies on the polarization and moral distinctiveness of the urban poor: *The Problem of the Poor: A Record of Quiet Work in Unquiet Places* (1882), *Prisoners of Poverty: Women Wage-Workers, Their Problems and Their Lives* (1886), and her sizable contribution to the co-authored¹¹ exposé, *Darkness and Daylight, or, Lights and Shadows of New York Life* (1895). The bulk of her data for these books was collected first-hand, and up to this point, virtually none of her work has been utilized for contemporary scholarship.

Like many middle-class women of the period, Campbell found that the only means by which to “reverse or to modify the effects of the polarization of urban society” was through “friendly contact” (Ward 57). In the post-war period, many middle-class women engaged the poor on their own ground. By acting on behalf of the moral virtues of the domestic sphere, middle-class women contradicted the cult of “true womanhood” by entering the public sphere at its grittiest level. Establishing the historical context of women's philanthropic novels of the 1870s, Debrah Carlin writes that “Perhaps the most important and influential venture female philanthropists undertook was that of ‘friendly visiting’ in the slums and tenements” (208). “Friendly visiting” was an extremely popular activity among frustrated and dynamic women, tired of being subdued by domestic respectability. It was a means to head off impending ennui, and at the same time an attempt to generate some spiritual “uplift” in an increasingly cynical urban environment. As David Ward writes, “the search for community was ultimately a search for order. Quite apart from these matters of style, efforts to distinguish the poor on the basis of

¹¹ Helen Campbell wrote approximately one-third of this enormous volume. The other contributors were Colonel Thomas Knox, a journalist; and Superintendent Thomas Byrnes, head of the New York Detective Bureau.

their deviancy were intended to bring the rich and the poor into friendly contact in order to reverse or modify the effects of the polarization of urban society” (57).

Campbell’s writing, like the city mysteries texts of the 1850s, was also informing New Yorker’s “knowledge of the lines.” But the moral region she discovered, the East Side waterfront district, was a more concrete site than those of her predecessors, one naturally isolated and distinct from its surroundings. Perceptions of immorality and space had evolved after the war from the country/city, uptown/downtown abstractions of Lippard and Vose. In Campbell’s work, the waterfront along the East River -- the notorious Fourth Ward -- is represented as being a definable, provable moral region with a well-established culture that agitates the moral order of Victorian New York.

Campbell describes the outer limits of the Water Street district in a way a New Yorker might characterize it today -- the weekdays overrun by financiers, the weekends deserted: “On weekdays the whirl of business life; the hurrying masses of preoccupied men...indicate only the American devotion to its god, the dollar. And on Sunday the utter absence of all ordinary sights and sounds; the deserted streets and warehouses, would seem to evidence the most careful keeping of the fourth commandment” (40). But she soon crosses the line into the Fourth Ward, and the atmosphere dramatically transforms. “[O]nly as Peck Slip is passed,” she writes, “does a suggestion of what is to come suddenly dawn upon one, as the whole character suddenly changes, and the sound of music from a sailors’ boarding house is heard...With Dover street and the great pier of the East River bridge ends the dominion of trade in its higher forms and a new trade, old as the foundations of the world -- the trade in men’s souls -- takes place” (40-41). Campbell depicts the social constructions taking place on the waterfront as an unrelenting matrix of immorality. It is rendered as a perpetual cycle of destructive behavior which must be

stopped dead in its tracks.

In her textualizations of the waterfront, Campbell rises to this reformist challenge by working to construct a new method of slum reform. She explains that rather than depend on dusty deductions producing outdated generalizations on the nature of poverty and the poor, she would immerse herself, for better or for worse, in the landscape and society of the slums. Thus, her “matrix of action” was not the industrial school or parlor discussions of the “low classes,” but the waterfront district itself.

Campbell was appalled by her discoveries: In *Darkness and Daylight*, she codifies the distinctions between the progressive modern metropolis and the slums: “Broad Avenues...Narrow lanes/ Beautiful Parks...Fetid Streets with festering filth/ Palaces of extravagance...Tenements where in defiance of every law, moral and sanitary, people crowd in like maggots in cheese/ Great universities...Grossest illiteracy/ Greatest churches... Garish saloons/ The noblest men and women who labor for the redemption of their fellows... The most hopeless specimens of degraded humanity” (qtd. in Miller and Miller 93).¹² It would be fascinating if such a dichotomy had been constructed by the other side, as the extreme subjectivity of the system is revealing: one group is “broad,” “beautiful,” “extravagant,” “great,” “and “noble”; while the other is “narrow,” “fetid,” “defiant,” “gross,” “garish,” “and “hopeless.” All but the last item concerns physical space, and the inhabitants are constructed as reflecting what is contained within it. Crossing such boundaries -- engaging the “other half,” up or down, on their own ground -- required leisure time and a disposable income; slumming, then, is a privilege.

New York’s privileged classes spent lots of of time discussing the rise of the poor, an occupation that both voiced their fears and affirmed their social standing. “To talk of

¹² This format was conceived of by Miller and Miller. They extrapolated on Campbell’s prose, which both implies and identifies such distinctions.

poverty,” Campbell writes, “and to take a theoretical interest in the social questions of the day is a fashion at present, and a fashion which has its foundation of good” (77). But Campbell argues that armchair theorizing about urban poverty yields few practical rewards. Rather than simply contributing to relief organizations and attending speeches by popular reformers like Charles Loring Brace, the moral majority should immerse themselves in the society of the “other half” (see Campbell epigraph). Reporting on a tenement she visits on Water Street, she entreats her audience to follow suit: “...whoever, even once, sets foot in a home like this, carries away a memory that must forever act as spur to lingering action, and keep vivid the thought of these smoldering elements of riot and revolt down among the slums” (77).

Campbell’s waterfront writing is both a call to responsible citizens to immerse themselves in the society of New York’s lowest socioeconomic echelons and a vicarious means for them to do so without dirtying their hands. But for the active reformer, one or two cursory visits to those problem areas with “smoldering elements” is insufficient, she argues, to enact any meaningful social response. Campbell’s *The Problem of the Poor* is a collection of galling memories designed to shock concerned but complacent middle-class New Yorkers out of their fireside wing chairs. Throughout the decade of the 1880s, Campbell assiduously collected provocative memories in New York’s opprobrious waterfront district. An overview of the waterfront’s spatial and moral distinction appears in her sketch, “A Region of Vice and Crime”:

Side by side with warehouse and factory are dens given over to all abominations. Here are sailors’ boarding houses, where poor Jack¹³ is fleeced and turned loose to ship again and earn painfully the wages that he

¹³ A sailor.

will return to use in the same fashion. Stale-beer dives are in every other basement; and from shaking old houses -- once the home of old New Yorkers who knew this as fashionable and aristocratic ground -- come the jingle of cracked pianos and the twanging of cheap fiddles. Women hideously painted and bedezined are here, their faces bearing an imprint of vice unspeakable; and here also children swarm at every point, *drinking in the influence of all phases of a life which even to look upon for a fleeting moment carries pollution with it* (italics mine *Darkness* 51).

The transformation of this previously “fashionable and aristocratic ground” is apocalyptic. Immoral action had effectively transformed the previously stylish homes and churches of old New York and replaced them with sailors’ boarding houses and stale beer dives. The implication is that it will consume the city entire; the slums’s polluting agency is not solely restricted to its inhabitants, but affects New Yorkers from all walks of life: “Often respectable men and women out of work drift into the neighborhood, falling always a little lower and lower...” (*Darkness* 108).

The waterfront area was located in the Fourth Ward which formed an apron around the Manhattan side of the Brooklyn Bridge. It contained thirty acres and housed around 17,000 people in the 1880s. The area had been awash with cheap groceries, rat pits, and stale beer dives for decades. Due to the growing population of transient sailors, prostitution traffic thickened exponentially; the Fourth Ward was, as Timothy Gilfoyle maintains, “the most significant and the poorest waterfront zone of prostitution” (218). It was the ideal location for proving the effectiveness of immersing oneself in the climate of poverty: “to learn the struggle and sorrow of the workers is the first step toward any genuine help” (*Prisoners* ii).

By definition, the waterfront was the centerpiece of the trade city, signifying plurality and opacity. The vortex of sailors and longshoremen from all parts of the globe swelling into and out of the shops and bars along the waterfront was in continuous motion. None of this was tied to any one ethnicity, class, race, or gender. One all-night missionary on Baxter Street vividly renders the diverse nature of the waterfront population:

The audience was gathered from neighboring alleys, narrow streets, saloons, dance-halls, and dives. Jews, Gentiles, olive-skinned Italians, and almond-eyed Chinamen, sat side by side. Sailors were in the majority. Dissolute women, both white and black, and a few loafers... A scattering of beggars and tramps sought refuge from the wintry blast. Several boys and girls, attracted by the singing, helped to fill the room (Campbell *Darkness* 194).

Reinforcing this during a walk along the waterfront, Campbell discovers “one of the most curious features of night life in New York, -- the sidewalk restaurants” (215). In these odd venues, “No one is turned away, and sailors, negro longshoremen, marketmen, and stray women, come and go, and fare alike” (*Darkness* 215). If New York was the quintessential American trade city, with all of its side streets and subcultures, the waterfront was its pitiless core. Comprehend it, and the remainder of the city would be an open book.

In the 1860s and ‘70s, well before Campbell arrives on the scene, middle-class New Yorkers became exasperated by the lowering moral standards on the waterfront, and expectations for reform there were high. Responsive to public demand, moral reformers poured into the area. But they abruptly found themselves ill-equipped to restrain the denizens of Water and Cherry Streets, and eventually resorted to artifice in order to keep

up appearances. In one sensational report, *The New York Times* broke an incriminating story about a group of Protestant reformers led by the Reverend A. C. Arnold. The missionaries had been bribing dive bar owners, rat pit proprietors, and gang members to pretend that they had been “saved” by the area’s Howard Street Mission, which was running prayer meetings in the worst dens (Sante 280). It was a desperate fraud, and Luc Sante reports that “The actual congregants at the saloon services were almost uniformly businessmen from other parts of town, and even these were less steadfast in their attendance, being driven out of Kit Burns’s [an infamous rat pit], at least, by the overpowering stench of rat and dog carcasses buried under the bleachers” (280). One businessman caustically referred to the carnival as “sheer humbug” (Bonner 32).

Kit Burns laughed openly when he caught word that a local saloon and brothel owner named John Allen was hosting prayer meetings. He remarked, “I’ve known Johnny Allen fourteen years and he couldn’t be a pious man if he tried ever so hard. You might as well ask a rat to sing like a canary bird as to make a Christian out of that chap” (Bonner 32). Actually, it seems that Allen’s initial involvement in reform was sincere. But after a few weeks, he found the clergymen’s rhetoric offensive. In a public statement on their treatment of prostitutes, he fumed:

I have not lived among them for seventeen years without learning something about them. Some of them have many virtues. They have feelings also, feelings which those missionaries should have respected but did not... One preacher cried, “Oh, God, we thank thee that these scarlet whores of Babylon have come to seek salvation.” Another pointed them out and exclaimed: “Behold the harlots whom we are going to take to Jesus...” (33)

The hosting of prayer meetings at Kit Burns's rat pit, located at 273 Water Street, drew a good deal of skeptical public inquiry, unwanted by both Burns and the missionaries. But it was Burns himself that precipitated an end to the meetings. One night after the clergymen and ladies had over-stayed their welcome, Burns announced to a group of reporters, "Them fellows has been making a pul-pit out of my rat pit and I'm going to purify it after them. Jim! Bring out the vermin" (Bonner 32). "Jim" heartily responded by flinging rats into the meeting while the gamblers howled hymns in grotesque mockery of the choir. This spectacle was so appreciated by his regular patrons that Burns mandated a nightly show. He referred to his ritual as one that "ratified" the meetings (Bonner 33). For the police, this was the last straw. Turning a blind eye to the abuse of respectable ladies and popular clergymen was out of the question. They shut the place down once and for all.

Moral reformers subsequently found themselves obliged to develop more savvy methods of acculturation -- enter Helen Campbell. Rather than rent out an immoral venue for moral suasion, a method that had virtually no impact on the population it was designed to convert, Campbell decides that it is necessary to engage the waterfront district on a more personal level. But in order to substantially effect change there, she requires the guidance of a respected local person who would be sympathetic to her altruistic purposes. It becomes necessary, she argues in *The Problem of the Poor*, to appropriate preexisting "insiders" sympathetic to the cause.

In his introduction to *Darkness and Daylight*, the Reverend Lyman Abbott praises Campbell's discussion of the Water Street Mission for its positive representation of helpful insiders. Referring to Campbell's work, he emphasizes the importance, and tradition, of applying the knowledge of insiders to convert their own people:

Her description of that mission makes evident that our Christian work in the outcast wards will never accomplish what it ought, until the outcasts themselves, who have been converted, are set apart to mission work among their fellows. Jesus ordained to the gospel ministry the twelve fishermen after they had received but a year's instruction from Him, and one of them had not fully recovered from his sailor habit of profanity; and Paul began preaching to the Jews a few days after he was converted to Christianity (50).

In this way, Campbell designs her work on the model of a biblical testament, and this is precisely how it is received. She devoted years of her life to converting the lost souls of the waterfront. One of the waterfront characters that she symbolically ordains in the text shares the singular fisherman's taste for bawdy language, and Campbell dutifully renders it in her text. The marginalized voice of the Fourth Ward tough preaching Protestant scripture is a redemptive thread that provides structure and purpose to her work. Here lies the fundamental logic of her representation. If she had foregrounded her own voice, it would read as just another sermon, ineffectual to those who require salvation most.

Enter Jerry McAuley. McAuley was a former waterfront rough, alcoholic, small-time pirate, and Catholic who was converted to Protestant Christianity while serving time at the Sing-Sing correctional facility. "There's no sham about it," McAuley testifies to his audience at the Water Street Mission, "I don't tell you I was a thief and a drunkard and a fraud to glory in it, but I want you roughs to understand what Jesus has done for me" (Campbell *Problem* 18).

McAuley was born in 1837 in County Kerry, Ireland. At the age of thirteen, he and his grandmother emigrated to the United States and, like many Irish of the period,

quickly found themselves inhabiting a crowded tenement flat in the Fourth Ward. And, like many young Irish in the Fourth Ward, he promptly developed a taste for the criminal life and the inviting atmosphere of the district's lower saloons. After five active years of crime, he earned himself a fifteen-year sentence at Sing-Sing, and remained there until 1864, at which time he was pardoned (possibly as a result of diminishing resources due to the war). He converted to Protestantism at Sing-Sing, but upon his release began drinking again and was soon back on the streets as one of the most feared (and consequently respected) toughs of the Fourth Ward. His conversion experience proved stronger than his inclinations toward crime, however, and he was finally and unalterably reformed at the Howard Street Mission. When Helen Campbell crosses the line into the waterfront district, it is McAuley that shows her the ropes.

Eight years after his release, McAuley opened his own mission at 316 Water Street, near the East Side docks. This is the stage on which *The Problem of the Poor* is enacted. The Water Street Mission is a uniquely effective setting; it is operated by a man who had himself struggled with alcohol, poverty, immigration, and the law. McAuley is the working-class hero of *The Problem of the Poor*, he is one of Abbott's Christ-ordained fishermen -- a device which allows us to perceive the text as gospel for the times. Campbell's attitude towards him brings to mind William James's revelation that in our search for heroes, we have forgotten that it is everywhere around us, existing beneficently "in the daily lives of the labouring classes" (290). But Campbell's account does not attempt James's call a decade later to cure the "blindness" of middle-class Americans. The "other half" is required to appropriate middle-class modes of living in order to "attain" the "right...to his own personality."

Commenting on "Otherness," the novel, and social space, Frederic Jameson makes

the assertion that “...these seemingly separate and homogeneous zones of social space becomes interesting for the novelist only when they are intersected by characters from the other class, by class interlopers or refugees, defectors or missionaries” (197). The *The Problem of the Poor* is not a novel, but its intrinsic subjectivity creates a fictional world engulfed in cultural poetics. McAuley represents all of Jameson’s marginal voices as fused into one clean, respectable, and happy whole. Campbell singles him out as a model of human potential in her attempt to understand converts and disaffected alike. If in the post-war era the dominant mode of moral suasion was, as Charles Loring Brace contends, “to connect the two extremes of society in sympathy, and carry the forces of one class down to lift up the other” (136), McAuley interlopes upwards as well as being a complicit receptacle for the downward current.

After five years in prison, McAuley confesses to Campbell that he “grew weakly” -- “I’d been used to the open air always, an’ a shut-in life told on me...” (81). In desperation, he sought refuge in the prison chapel where the services were conducted by Orville “Awful” Gardner, a reformed prize-fighter and gambler from the Water Street neighborhood. Back in his cell, he began to read the King James Bible, and in time came across a passage that, as he phrases it, “hit the Catholics” (31). It was Timothy, Chapter One, Verses One to Four, a passage he recites to Campbell from memory: “Now that the Spirit speaketh expressly that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; forbidding to marry and commanding to abstain from meats which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth” (32). Campbell significantly leaves out the line in Verse Two that reads, “Speaking lies in hypocrisy.” There is no way of knowing whether she makes the slip or he does, but the

idea that McAuley is indeed performing religious hypocrisy is not a connection that Campbell would wish her readers to make. The punctuation too does not coincide with the Bible's, which may indicate that Campbell had indeed committed the anti-Catholic passage to memory.

After reading this, the conversion story continues, McAuley impulsively kicks the King James about his cell. He then takes up the Catholic version for comparison. He discovers, though somewhat reluctantly, that he prefers the Protestant method of asking God to forgive his sins to the Catholic demands of ““penance an’ sayin’ so many prayers, an’ such like”” (32). The use of dialect here, more pronounced in fact than the writer has him sound generally, substantiates his role as working-class hero. Indeed, it is sustained throughout the conversion narrative. He denounces Catholicism in the unmistakable voice of the Irish Catholic. And again, when Campbell relates McAuley’s description of his mother performing traditional Catholic rituals that he finds ridiculously superstitious, she turns up the dialectical heat: “many’s the time, when she was tellin’ her beads an’ kissin’ the floors for penance, I’d shy things at her just to hear her curse an’ swear at me, an’ then back to her knees”” (29). Campbell allows that his Catholic devotion only came when he landed in the United States, where religion was more a matter of ethnic identity and pride than moral purpose; in other words, his early defense of Catholicism was the misguided act of a confused boy.

In the end, McAuley attributes the ““new look”” he discerns in Orville Gardner’s countenance to the revelations of the Protestant faith. He decides that he too ““wanted to be different”” (32). It is then that he becomes the ordained fisherman, Paul among the Jews. But the Water Street Irish do not take his conversion from Catholicism to Protestantism lightly. Routinely assaulted on the streets by Irish youths, McAuley is

accused of being a “turn-coat” by his community. Accompanying Campbell into a tenement of Irish families, he warns her, “Look out for your footing... It’s dreadful dirty here. The time wasn’t long ago that they’d pitch dirt out on you. I’ve gone home covered many a time. They’re mostly Romanists, an’ very bitter against a turn-coat, an’ the city missionary has a hard time in these places. I’d a kicked one down the stairs myself, twelve years ago” (76). A few moments later, out on the street, a gang of young Irish toughs approaches them yelling, “There’s McAuley the turn-coat!’... ‘Hi! McAuley and his band! Give it to them! Hi!’” (79) McAuley gallantly responds by charging “down through the crowd with an Irish whoop,” promptly dispersing the assailants (79).

“Unlike many men of his type,” writes historian Aaron Ignatius Abell, McAuley “avoided pious pretension and mission cant” (37); and along with his reform efforts within the neighborhood, “His influence upon the cultured classes was no less pronounced [than upon his Water Street converts]. They, too, were ‘converted’ in the sense that many of them resolved to devote their lives to the welfare of others” (37). To Helen Campbell, men like Jerry McAuley -- mythic working-class heroes who hold “the key to the regeneration of the masses” -- can reconcile contradictions between the romantic and the pragmatic in urban writing, and the individual and society in a maturing urban space. He is a marginal man, both Irish tough and Americanized Protestant, who exudes street-wise individuality while at the same time preaching the gospel of uptown moral voices for the benefit of the larger society. At each mission meeting Campbell renders in *The Problem of the Poor*, McAuley is on display. At one, he proudly booms to the congregation, “Clean, ain’t I, an’ respectable, ain’t I, an’ happy, as the blindest eye might see. That’s me, an’ yet I’ve been down in the gutter deeper than those fellows over there or one that’s here tonight” (Campbell *Darkness* 55). He is an arbiter of middle-class

morality and serves the practical purpose of emboldening reformers who might otherwise choose to avoid the more intimidating natives of the slums.

By demonstrating to her audience McAuley's romantically street-wise demeanor *and* his selfless loyalty to the city mission reform movement, Campbell splits the moral imperative of slum reform between "decent," "respectable" citizens and the street toughs themselves. She admits that well-meaning middle-class reformers do not have the skills to take on a working-class moral region. Middle-class reformers, she argues, must ally themselves with working-class heroes like Jerry McAuley:

Men of this stamp hold the key to a regeneration of the masses, such as organized charities are powerless to effect; and already some who believe in this fact are seeking to make their work easier and to give the substantial aid that it demands. The poor are the best missionaries to the poor, and he who has gone hungry, suffered every pang of poverty and known the sharpest temptation to sin can best speak words that will save men and women entering on the same path (191).

But when she later addresses him as "a priest to his people" (191), she ignores the most significant aspect of McAuley's philanthropy -- it is intrinsically Protestant. And if a thief, gambler, or alcoholic is to "turn honest," it is to be done through the guidance of the Protestant church.

In order to be moral in immoral spaces -- the prison, the waterfront, the tenement house -- Campbell deems it necessary for newly arrived immigrants and obstinate natives to abandon older religious forms and take on the "new look" that Protestantism offers. In kind, she provides a series of conversion testimonials from the congregation at the mission; liars, swearers, drunkards, tobacco addicts, gamblers, and thieves all testify in

Campbell's account. In one Water Street meeting Campbell relates, a German-Jewish woman rises and condemns her Semitic past. "I hated Christians," she confesses, "I say, dey should be killed every one. I would hurt dem if I could" (51). When a "Bible reader" gave her a copy of the New Testament, for example, she tore out the name "Jesus" everywhere it appeared. Admittedly, she contritely added, "It take a good vwhile" (51). In time, she was led to the mission where eventually she was converted, due to the provision of a clean and welcoming space and the promises of spiritual uplift. It is clear from her testimonial that without the Protestant church, she would have remained a sinner: "'Oh, my sins are so big! I want to lose dem. I want to love Jesus! I keep prayin', an' one day dey are all gone. Oh, I am so happy. You vill not believe. I do not ever vant to schvear any more. I do not vant tell lies; no, not any more. Gott is gut to me. I could not be vicket any more. Oh, pray for me, an' help me be gut'" (57).

The presumption, of course, is that swearing and lying are moral iniquities the Jewish religion has somehow failed to prevent; they must achieve salvation through the tenets of the Protestant faith. Immorality is perceptibly linked to Old World belief systems in these accounts, and again Campbell puts dialect to use in each of the testimonials as proof of redemption. The poor had to save themselves, according to Campbell, but first they needed to learn the "new look," whether in prison or the missions, and that new look is reserved for readers of the King James Bible. "Temporary relief for cases like this," Campbell intones, "... is merely palliative, and common sense must work with Christianity, if revolution and anarchy are not to be a national pastime" (79).

But the great migration of Jews to New York was just beginning in the 1880s; it is the Irish that "form a larger portion" of the morally unrestrained; "German or French

paupers being almost an anomaly” (Campbell *Problem* 214). The Irish in the United States, Campbell insists, have lost any redeeming qualities as a group they may have had in the Old World:

They are a class apart, retaining all the most brutal characteristics of the Irish peasant at home, but without the redeeming lightheartedness, the tender impulses and strong affections of that most perplexing people. Sullen, malicious, conscienceless, with no capacity for enjoyment save in drink and the lowest forms of debauchery, they are filling our prisons and reformatories, marching in an ever-increasing army through the quiet country, and making a reign of terror wherever their footsteps are heard (215).

Not only are they a threat to New York, but the slums have begun to hemorrhage Irish families into the countryside. And if the problem is not sufficiently addressed and resolved, the Irish “With a little added intelligence” can enact a Socialist revolution headquartered in New York. The Socialist leader in the slums, Campbell insists, “can sound every chord of jealousy and suspicion and revenge lying open to his touch” (215).

It is imperative, therefore, for the Protestant middle class to solve the problem of the poor. Clearly urban industrialism and its effects on popular morality are Campbell’s cardinal issues. Her contributions to the middle-class discourse on the poor and the privileged focus more on moral issues than economic injustices, and the habits and customs of the poor are condemned as deviant rather than situationally appropriate. Debrah Carlin acknowledges this as a general evasion by middle-class reformers, writing that “if the poor could learn the manners and customs of the middle class, could they ever attain the leisure to practice them that only economic security could provide? This

question was one that proponents of ‘social amelioration’ necessarily ignored, since its answer would represent a far more radical, and, indeed, threatening program of social uplift than manners alone” (211-212). The difference between Campbell and many of the “friendly visitors” Carlin discusses, however, is that instead of being “enclosed within [her] own room of privilege, gazing beyond [her] windows at the social spectacle outside...” (221), Campbell insists, as mentioned above, that philanthropists should spend long hours of enlightening visitation in the slums. “No attempt at an understanding of the labor question as it faces us to-day,” Campbell writes, “can be successful till knowledge of its underlying conditions is assured” (*Prisoners* i).

Addressing the housing problem, Campbell recounts a conversation she had with an anonymous newspaper editor, whom she refers to as “the Bachelor.” The chapter is structured as an argumentative interview in which their dialogue concerned various methods of civil service, including Campbell’s defense of immersion: “‘Have you ever been in one of these tenement houses?’” she asks him. “‘I have been by them,’” is the reply, “‘Is not that enough? I feel half poisoned for days afterward. Must I be wholly so, for that would be the result of going in? I am neither architect, builder, nor landlord’” (110). This last admittance implies that even if he were to visit the tenements, he is not expert enough to draw any valid conclusions. Campbell responds that regardless of formal training, if you criticize architecture, you must know the laws of “utility” that govern the standards of your criticism; otherwise, remove yourself from the discourse:

For a month I have been among the tenement houses, beginning with the quiet, pleasant ‘flats,’ both east and west, up town, and ending in the basements and cellars of Cherry and Front and all that labyrinth of downtown streets. I have seen lodging houses where a score of people lay on the

floor, paying three cents a night for this shelter. I have been in the old church where they crowd by the hundred at the same rate, and in rooms of a trifle higher pretensions where cot-beds with a pillow and single covering are ranged thick as they can be set. And I have been in rooms where a whole family herded together, seven, eight, or even nine people in a space fourteen by sixteen, eating, drinking, sleeping, performing every office of life in this common space, and their brutalized faces bearing the story of inevitable results, written in letters all may read at will (111).

The people who live in such conditions, she continues, “have become at last a standing army of menace to the whole political, social and moral life of the city” (114). Anticipating Jacob Riis’s work, she emphatically identifies her remedy as “*immediate legislation*,” compelling the erection of new houses on sanitary principles, needed alterations in existing ones, and the demolition of all unfit for human habitation” (114). And this conviction, along with the precise form this legislation should take, is to be informed by her experiences among the poor.

After the success of *The Problem of the Poor* in 1882, the *New York Tribune* commissioned Campbell to produce a series of articles on the state of women laborers in New York City. One year later, the series was collected in book form as, *Prisoners of Poverty: Women Wage-Workers, Their Trades and Their Lives* (1887). Campbell promises in her preface that the articles are “based upon the minutest personal research into conditions described” (i). “The “conditions” of the Fourth Ward have improved some, she reports, “Yet here, on this familiar battle-ground, civilization and something worse than mere barbarism still struggle. For which is the victory?” (127) Campbell now directs her attention to the women of the waterfront.

Campbell relates that the conditions of working women are so severe that they often seemed unreformable. According to the 1885 report of the Bureau of Statistics for Labor, there were 200,000 working women, not including domestic servants, in 92 different trades (*Prisoners* 10-11). And the trades are generally undesirable: "The city which affords the largest percentage of habitual drunkards, as well as the largest number of liquor saloons to the mile, is naturally that in which most women are forced to seek such means of subsistence as may be had" (11). Their men are mainly longshoremen, whiling away time until the next job appears, and squandering their earnings "by long seasons of drinking" (128). Waterfront women are a group who, Campbell sums up their lives, "scrub offices, peddle fruit or small office necessities, take in washing, share, many of them, in the drinking bouts [of men], and are, as a whole, content with brutishness, only vaguely conscious of a wretchedness that, so long as it is intermittent, is no spur to reform of methods" (128). In short, the main body of these women do not regard themselves as needing to be saved.

In addition to their resistance to moral suasion, on the East Side more than any other region, she reports, the conditions and occupational opportunities are the most discouraging in the city. Campbell emphasizes the moral implications of women working long hours for little money while at the same time providing and caring for a family crammed into a tenement flat. One chapter, "The Case of Rose Haggerty," demonstrates precisely what those implications are. Rose's parents were Irish immigrants, both died young of alcoholism, leaving her as a young girl with eleven siblings to support. Like many women in her position, she turns to prostitution to make ends meet. "It was a sailor from a merchantman just in," Campbell tells us of Rose Haggerty's first experience as a prostitute, "...she took his arm and walked with him toward Roosevelt street" (29).

But Rose's decision is not a moral discrepancy. Campbell does not condone her lifestyle, but (contrasting starkly with the blood and thunder sermonizers at John Allen's): "She has her trade, and it is a prosperous one, in which wages never fail. The children are warm and have no need to cry for hunger anymore" (29).

Like John Allen, she "lived among them," if not for seventeen years. And like Allen, she recognizes that "[s]ome of them...have many virtues." In Campbell's view, the question is not why they prostitute themselves, but rather how even "one [woman in the slums] remains honest when the only thing that pays is vice" (42). "It might be dishonor," Campbell sympathetically admits of Rose's experience, "but it was certainly food and warmth for the children, and what did it matter? She had fought her fight for twenty years, and it had been a vain struggle. She took his money when morning came, and went home with a look that is on her face to-day" (29). In *The Problem of the Poor*, Jerry McAuley explains women's situations environmentally:

You wonder why we don't have more women here [at the mission]. I'll tell you. When a girl has come up, a dozen in her room all her life, what can she know of decency or cleanliness? An' when she's down, she's down, an' no way to get her up, it seems. I puzzle and puzzle *why*, but it's only now an' again you get 'em steady... an' what's the reason? Every child that has to begin that way is born *in sin* an' *to sin*, an' steeped in nastiness and [sic] foulness from the very first day. An' when it comes to hundreds an' thousands of 'em down in these slums, an' good men an' women settin' by with their eyes shut, it tears the heart in you to think of it all (89).

As opposed to Crane's Maggie Johnson, the title character of his novella *Maggie: A Girl*

of the Streets (1893), McAuley regards females as largely resistant to the process of absorption into middle-class morality systems. But like Maggie, dissipated women are products of an environment which deprives them of personal agency. Through McAuley, Campbell renders environmental determinism as a mitigating factor for immoral women while at the same time bolstering the belief that women as a whole do not command the will power to overcome pernicious influences.

If for working-class women, prostitution is a viable alternative to starvation wages and subsequently leads to the popular association of waterfront women as “scarlet whores of Babylon,” for men the symbolic occupation that bonds their identities to the Fourth Ward, the cultural and economic mainstay of the district, is the maritime. Heroism and dissolution meshed in the picaresque figure of the sailor, and it influenced a great many waterfront youths to follow suit. “In spite... of all knowledge to the contrary,” Campbell finds, “nothing convinces the average boy that Jack’s life [the sailor’s life] is anything but a series of marvelous adventures in which he is generally the victor, and where the hardship is much more than made up for by the excitement and glory” (*Darkness* 434).

The sailor is the working-class apotheosis of the cult of domesticity and respectability. He is, after all, transient, homeless, and often unmarried. Sailors’s boarding houses were located at the center of waterfront life, and there was nothing, or more exactly no one, to prevent the lodgers from spending long hours and large paychecks during their time ashore. The waterfront boarding house is the sailor’s only permanent residence, hardly a respectable venue for moral guidance. But “Jack’s life” would be less likely to elevate middle-class anxieties if they were not contagious: “Women crowded here, sitting in rows on benches, or out on the sidewalk, waiting the return of sailors, for

those were the noted 'sailors' boarding houses' and for blocks around, far up Cherry street to the police station-house, and out into a region of dark alleys festering with filth, and narrow streets alive with masses of people, *spread the influence of these foul lives*" (italics mine 10). Just as it is Jerry McAuley's fate to emulate the Protestant piety and moral standards of middle-class decency -- while creating at the same time a marginalized version of waterfront codes of behavior -- some respectable citizens found the space and ruggedness of seamanship equally appealing. Each construction requires exposure and compulsion, and therefore the crossing of spatial and moral lines of influence.

The push and pull of cultural counteractions are most starkly embodied in a child's fecund imagination. Campbell posits children as exceptionally susceptible to the allure of the adventuresome, free-wheeling lifestyle. One case Campbell parabolically relates involves a boy whose lifetime goal it was to become a physician. In his formative years, he was compelled by a high-minded urge to "make everybody well" (436), and he volunteered at a hospital where he "followed the daily round of hospital physicians and surgeons with unflagging interest" (436). One day, the boy visited an elderly sailor, a "bronzed, wrinkled weather-beaten wreck" (436), who had just survived a near-death experience. The boy was intrigued:

"Tell me about it, please," the boy said. "Tell me every word of it," and the old sailor began.

"More, more," the boy urged at any stop, -- his shining eyes intently fixed on the old Sinbad's face. "I want to know everything about it."

"You can't unless you tries it yourself," said Jack at last. An' I wouldn't say as anybody'd better do that" (436).

But the impressionable youth was persistent, and after some time, the sailor's warnings gave way to enthusiasm: "'That's the right kind of boy!...I shall [depart] as soon as this thing is knit an' I'm set up enough to pass muster. You come along too, an' I'll make a sailor out o' you fit to command anything as floats'" (437). The ambitious youth subsequently rejected his vocation for medicine, and "to-day he is captain of a great ship and happiest when in mid-ocean" (437). Campbell warns against such capriciousness: "Something like this is the story of thousands who are drawn from remotest distances, and who answer the call once for all. Yet there is no life among workers that holds more certain hardship and privation, or often more utter brutality of treatment" (438). The clash between middle-class domesticity and the transient maritime lifestyle is a discouraging hindrance to the moral reform effort on the waterfront. "Jack's life" is seen here as tough competition for those born into the claustrophobic security of middle-class domesticity, as well as for a boy raised in the cramped quarters of the tenements.

Campbell illustrates a typical sailor's outlook as he disembarks in New York: "Jack's heart warmed as he saw the familiar names over the doors on South and Water Street: 'The Flowing Sea,' 'The Mariner's Home,' and the like. In these dens, where foul women waited and the bar offered every temptation, Jack found a home such as it was till he shipped again..." (440) In his early study of urban communities, *Metropolis* (1938), Howard Woolston depicts the American waterfront in another way: "Sailors and fisherman, dock laborers and ship builders, chandlers, commission men and agents make their homes there. These people, together with their families and neighbors, have an interest, not merely in the business of shipping, but also in the pleasure of living" (205). Campbell in contrast, provides only one affirmative utterance of waterfront culture: a crusty old salt responds unequivocally to a chaplain trying to nudge him toward reform:

“Oh, don’t talk about them things to me! I’ve been without ‘em sixty year, an’ I reckon I kin stan’ it for a year or two longer” (*Darkness* 449). This is but one short burst of contentment from an otherwise muffled voice. Documents from the late nineteenth century that celebrate waterfront culture are virtually non-existent. A serious search effort for such material may be long overdue.

In this sense, the act of slumming often informed the middle class more about the realities of their own communities than about the communities they discovered. Engaging the slums first hand, in other words, would not only complicate their understanding of poverty, but also the perceived security of their own privileged existence. The trick to moral reform was to isolate the desirable attributes of the larger society and spread them outward into the morally marginal regions of the city -- a method institutionalized in the Progressive era. The only effective means of “training” the poorer classes, Campbell argues, is not from the outside in, but rather from the inside out: “Such work as is done must be from within, out. Methods which touch merely the outside are but of temporary service” (*Problem* 248). By immersing herself in waterfront culture, she develops a knowledge base that would aid her and her compeers in the struggle to reform the urban poor; she discovers a system of morality that was to be effectively torn down. In time, she implies, New York would experience a series of cultural implosions, and in their wake the city would emerge a shining moral example to the rest of the nation. One neighborhood at a time, New York would become the city on the hill -- it would become a model American community, towering and knowable.

Campbell’s waterfront writing is dictated by the caprices of a marginalized voice. Her sympathies are split between improving the conditions of the poor -- in a manner

that would substantiate the hegemony of the urban middle class -- and a sincere admiration for the occasional waterfront denizen such as Jerry McAuley. McAuley, after all, would never have been an effective voice had he not been raised on Water Street. Instead of using dialect as a condescending device to deride the "lower million," as so many of her predecessors had done, she designed it to add credibility and authenticity to the only group she thought could truly solve the problem of the poor -- the poor themselves. By immersing herself in waterfront culture and writing about her experiences there, Campbell substantiates her audience's *a priori* assumptions about the region while at the same time posits the figure of the working-class hero, even the *criminal* class hero, as the "ordained fisherman" of the waterfront.

Campbell's work lies on the threshold between sentimentalism and realism in American literary history -- a period characterized by her brand of "moral realism." On the one hand, she is a persistent Protestant moralizer, and her parabolic tales of lower-class woe come straight from Lyman Abbott's pulpit. On the other, she is a part of a growing movement in the United States, one dedicated to rendering the lower classes in a humanistic light. In Campbell, prostitutes can be tough-willed fighters in a terrifying urban environment rather than "scarlet whores of Babylon"; her convicts can be reformers, her immigrants non-parochial. In some ways, like her contemporary William Dean Howells, Campbell "defected" from her middle-class foundation as a result of "dissatisfaction with reigning genteel conventions" (Burrows and Wallace 1179). She did so by adopting marginalized voices for conformist texts.

From the outset of her investigations, she finds herself grappling with ideological dilemmas: "One *ism* after another presented itself, seeming at first to meet the demand for truth; then paling and fading away under the light of investigation. Church people were

stupidly intolerant; Radicals equally so. Where I had belonged had long been a mystery to myself" (*The Problem* 7). But this introductory admittance in *The Problem of the Poor* does not prevent her from applying the only discursive mode for treating unanswerable questions familiar to her -- the gospel of the Protestant church. Hers is a moral realism that widens the parameters of the middle-class discourse of the slums, but maintains its inherent premise that the lower classes must adopt cultural codes from above in order to actuate salvation.

While writing *Prisoners of Poverty*, four years after *The Problem of the Poor* appeared, Campbell consciously attempts to strip her writing of sentimental rhetoric. She insists that "the one aim in the investigation has been and is to tell the truth simply, directly, and in full, leaving it for the reader to determine what share is his or hers in the evil or in the good that the methods of to-day may hold" (10). Recognizing the growing taste for realistic literary expression, she foregrounds interviews and mimetic detail, and deliberately tones down the romantic portrayals of working-class heroism on which *The Problem of the Poor* depends. At the same time, she eschews strict "scientific philanthropy" that had become an increasingly popular mode for writers of the slums in the 1880s (Burrows and Wallace 1176). Instead, she humbly affiliates herself with continental European naturalism, just then drawing the attention of the American literati:

Only a Zola could describe deliberately what any eye may see, but any minute detail of which would excite an outburst of popular indignation. Yet I am by no means certain that such detail has not far more right to space than much that fills our morning papers, and that the bald statement of facts, shorn of all flights of fancy or play of facetiousness, might not rouse the public to some sense of what lies below the surface of this fair-

seeming civilization of to-day (129).

Campbell understands here the need for writers of any stripe to accommodate the tastes of the age. Though divergent modes of expression, Zola's literary naturalism and Campbell's social writing follow contiguous trends in their stylistic concerns and subjective conclusions. "Flights of fancy" are being replaced in nineteenth-century American literature by "bald statement[s] of facts" while at the same time, as Frank Norris noted of Zola, maintaining a "vague note of terror" that smacks of romanticism (1107). Her nod to Zola may refer to his journalism, not his fiction, but many of the urban journalist's concerns were shared by writers of urban fiction as well. To borrow from my introduction, they are the individual's relationship to social space, the evolving sense of cultural difference, the pathos of the "real," and specifically here, the subject of the urban poor.

The next subject of this study will be the United States's remarkable answer to Zola, Stephen Crane, and his texts's subjective interactions with another objectified New York moral region -- the Bowery. On the act of composing "subjective realism through the object," Paula Rabinowitz asks a puzzling question: "To whom do the objects speak, those bourgeois subjects slumming among them?" (197) A somewhat obvious answer is that the dialogue goes both ways. And when exposure amplifies via the proliferation of "subjective realism" such as Campbell's through men such as McAuley, the dialogue occurs within the objects's individual consciousnesses. Crane portrays the moral and religious absorption process as a pernicious solution to the problem of the poor. In the next chapter, I will discuss Crane's textual representations of the psychocultural effects of uptown interference with downtown morality. Later in the dissertation, we will see how this cultural channel will open "upwards" as well as "downwards."

Chapter 3:
A Culture of Contradictions:
Stephen Crane and the Transformation of the Bowery

I stood upon a high place,
 And saw, below, many devils
 Running, leaping,
 And carousing in sin.
 One looked up, grinning,
 And said, "Comrade! Brother!"
 -- Stephen Crane, "Black Riders," 1895

At the turn of the nineteenth century, an Indian path that ran from the southernmost tip of Manhattan to Harlem was put to use as a main thoroughfare from New York to Boston and became known as the Bowery. It quickly swelled into a celebrated urban boulevard, rivaling the already famous Broadway to its west. And with the construction of the Great Bowery Theater in 1826, the Bowery became a major center of theatrical life, both on the stage and off. It was packed to the point of bursting with cheap theaters, burlesque shows, dance halls, brothels, basement-level dives, and beer halls that seated up to 2,000 patrons. It competed with Broadway, but did not cater to a Broadway crowd; it was notoriously flamboyant and alive with action. It was the epicenter of working-class culture and openly advertised itself as such, basing its appeal on picaresque urban experiences and melodramatic spectacle.

By 1871, the year Stephen Crane was born, the Bowery as it had been known worldwide had all but disappeared. And with the construction of the Third Avenue elevated train seven years later, the Old Bowery was transfigured beyond recognition. The sun was blocked out by the tracks, and the streets were showered with hot oil and coal. When Crane published the vanity edition of his first short novella *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* in 1893, the edition that will be utilized for this chapter, the Bowery was

already the infamous Bowery, once again world famous but now for alcoholism, poverty, homelessness, and crime. The streets were filled with “hoboes” and rival gangs. The number of prostitutes drew sailors by the thousands. The area was no longer a bastion of radical democracy. Its inhabitants were helpless in a cycle of cultural prostration seemingly indefinite in origin. As T. J. Jackson Lears professes in his “The Concept of Cultural Hegemony,” “...most people find it difficult, if not impossible, to translate the outlook implicit in their experience into a conception of the world that will directly challenge the hegemonic culture” (596). For the majority, challenging the dominant culture was as unimaginable as the act of absorption was subconscious. The indisputably dominant middle-class culture -- generally referred to as “Victorian” -- distinguished by an allegiance to the cult of respectability and traditionally associated with Broadway and Fifth Avenue, had effectively wiped out its working-class counterpart on the East Side. It is in this atmosphere that Maggie and Jimmie Johnson, Crane’s tragic protagonists, reside.

Timothy Gilfoyle argues that Crane’s “treatment of the Bowery varies little from that of the literary ‘slumming’ missions found in the earlier ‘mysteries and miseries’ [or, city mysteries] of New York” (271). But in Crane, the physical environment and the cultural consciousness are rendered with impressionistic adroitness. Though the city mysteries writers confronted the challenge of “the accessibility of an emergent modern world to literary representation” (8), they did not concern themselves with site-specific cultural representation. We see in Crane’s Bowery writing a move away from the soundings of urban morality toward a more realistic and ultimately naturalistic representation of the marginalized subject. A culture comparatively unaffected by middle-class codes -- those that would have occupied the landscapes depicted in city mysteries -- was simply too alien to represent without resorting to caricature. But when Crane met the

Bowery characters he would later depict in his writing, he saw a reflection of himself.

By the 1890s, the evangelical voice Campbell infuses into her waterfront characters has developed into naturalized and conflicting codes of behavior. But these codes are more reflective of behavioral control than religious awakening. Middle-class efforts had born fruit, but the “cult of respectability” turned Campbell’s religious gospel into a gospel of consumption. New York entertainment spots, for example, including saloons, dance-halls, and theaters had become transformed by the tenets of respectability. If conversion to evangelical Protestantism was too much for Campbell and her contemporaries to ask of the city at large, the artifice of gentility was ultimately adopted by the “low” classes on the Bowery and throughout the city.

One of the finest explications of this transformation of the Bowery, both morally and spatially, has been furnished by, of all people, Henry James. While slumming in the neighborhood of the Bowery at the age of sixty, following his return to the United States in 1904, James attended a theater performance that closely resembled the fictional theater scenes constructed by Stephen Crane a decade earlier. James observed the “vertiginous bridge of American confectionery,” as he calls it, a bridge that transverses the gap between the Victorian codes being enacted on the stage and the level of the audience’s assent. He felt that these “almost ‘high class’ luxuries, circulating in such a company, were a sort of supreme symbol of the *promoted* state of the aspirant to American conditions” (196). The most fascinating dramatic action for James was not what was taking place on the stage but the unwritten dialogue between the audience and the notions of respectability the theater and, more importantly, the society at large was selling: “Nothing (in the texture of the occasion) could have had a sharper interest than this demonstration that, since what we most pretend to do with them is thoroughly to school them, the schooling,

by our system, cannot begin too soon or pervade their experience too much. Were they going to rise to it, or rather fall from it -- to *our* instinct, as distinguished from their own, for picturing life?" (199)

James observed a new social lesson, one diametrically opposed to Whitman's "great lessons of nature," lessons of unique cultural expression. "Were they to take our lesson submissively," James asks, "in order to get with it our smarter traps and tricks, our superior Yankee machinery?" (199) Venues of popular entertainment on the late nineteenth-century Bowery did not answer Whitman's call in *Democratic Vistas* for "variety and freedom" but enforced, James attests, "blank conformity to convention" (198).

Victorian culture in New York¹⁴ was in its infancy when the Bowery's cultural and physical boundaries began to define themselves. The tensions that emerged were clearly contingent upon a mutual exigency of identity as it related to cultural politics. Richard Butsch, in his "Bowery B'hoys and Matinee Ladies," acknowledges that "Middle- and upper-middle class Americans wished to distinguish themselves from the uncultivated working class at the very time when the working class was politically ascendant, at least rhetorically" (385). As a result, a Gramscian "war of position" clearly took place, a conflict for cultural hegemony rather than state power, in which codes of behavior were the primary mechanisms of attrition. Proper social markers for Americans with "respectability" included certain clothes, levels of education, speech patterns, and many other codified social graces. These were all learned behaviors, however, and adoptable by the "vulgar" masses. Once firmly established, middle-class New Yorkers became obsessed with protecting the status of Victorian respectability, at the expense of the indecorous

¹⁴I admit that "Victorian" is a highly unstable category, but I do not want the argument here to be obfuscated by semantics. I am using the term "Victorian" to identify the culture of middle- to upper-middle-class American Protestant moralism that manifested itself in a "cult of respectability" in the middle to late nineteenth century.

rabble. To ensure social order, they espoused this inhibiting value structure in order to regulate satisfactorily the behavior of the working class. By the 1890s, the Victorian ideology of respectability had become so entrenched in the New York social consciousness that it would have a sizable effect on the actions and value structure of the very working-class culture that despised them.

The “matrix of action” *Maggie* occupies does not sound a beginning but rather an ending; the B’hoys were stifled by the incorporation of Victorian codes of behavior, and Crane’s characters are prostrated by the contradictory effects. Though Crane does give lip service to the new consumer culture, he does not present it as a vehicle for personal individuation and cultural dissent, which processes, on the Bowery at least, are vestiges of a former time. *Maggie*, then, is not a story of rebellion, but of conformity.

If one takes into account the transformation of Bowery culture over the course of the nineteenth century, Jimmie, Maggie, and Pete can be viewed as fragmented relics of a culture drowned out by rampant urban American growth and its effects on the culture of New York in the form of middle-class Victorianism. The characters Crane designs are highly indicative of many Bowery issues. It has been argued that Crane’s knowledge of New York and the Bowery culture he represents is second hand, taken from Jacob Riis and the mass of Methodist moral reform tracts that abounded during that period (Benfey 63). I will show, however, that Crane’s novella is charged with a social energy that could only have come from an artist significantly familiar with the Bowery and its past. Though Crane may have begun to conceptualize *Maggie* in Syracuse, before he had experienced New York life to any substantial degree, in every chapter there exists salient references to the city’s signature “respectable” culture and how it was both loathed and emulated by many of the Bowery’s inhabitants.

Victorians themselves are not meant to be portrayed here as hobgoblins or bugaboos. Crane certainly points to no group or individual as inherently evil; they are all products of a naturalistic environment that is beyond rational action. As a likable character from Crane's sketch "An Experiment in Luxury" wisecracks, "Nobody is responsible for anything. I wish to heaven somebody was, and then we could all jump him" (*Portable* 167). Though there was no doubt a very real cultural conflict between vying groups, there is an aura of inevitability in the effect of urbanization on the Bowery, whether it be at the hands of the Victorians or some other cultural force. What immediately follows is a brief account of the development of the historically resonant subculture that Crane and others have drawn from for their portraits of New York life, the Bowery B'hoys and G'hals. Following that, I will demonstrate how Crane's Bowery tales -- along with some other Bowery writing, including Walt Whitman's elegiac essay "The Old Bowery" -- reflects the suppression, not the ascendance, of that singular culture.

While still a teenager, actor Frank Chanfrau ate regularly at the Broadway House, a small eatery on Grand street on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. At lunch one afternoon, he overheard a boisterous young man howl to the waiter, "*Look a heah! Gimme a sixpenny plate ev pork and beans, and don't stop to count dem beans...!*" He was Mose Humphreys, a printer at the *New York Sun* and one of the "fire boys" of the mid-1830s. Over a decade later, the playwright Benjamin A. Baker would get wind of Chanfrau's comical mimicking of the then famous Bowery B'hoy's style of speech. Baker promptly composed a dramatic sketch for Chanfrau to perform on the popular stage. They showed it to William Mitchell, the proprietor of a Lower East Side venue,

Mitchell's Olympic Theater. Mitchell criticized the play, or, more specifically, Baker's writing, remarking that "the characters are good, but what a bad piece!" Months later, coming up short for a new idea, he nevertheless suggested to Chanfrau that the actor give Baker's play, then entitled "New York As It Is," a trial performance (Brown 284).

When Chanfrau strolled onto the stage with a swagger and a sneer, the clamorous audience fell into a hushed silence. This was unheard of since they generally greeted their favorite actor with lusty applause, but the fact is, as drama historian Allston T. Brown notes, the audience "didn't recognize Chanfrau. He stood there in his red shirt, with his fire coat thrown over one arm, the stovepipe hat...drawn over one eye, his trousers tucked into his boots, a stump of cigar pointing up from his lips to his eye, the soap locks plastered flat on his temples, and his jaw protruded into a half-beastly, half human expression of contemptuous ferocity" (284). Chanfrau ripped the cigar from his mouth, spat on the stage, and bellowed, "*I ain't a-goin' to run wid dat mercheen no more!*" The audience was no longer silent. As reported in the *New York Herald* the next day (April 18, 1848), the crowd "climbed up to the stage boxes, and all seemed bent on genuine frolic. The police and officers connected with the theater were rendered powerless...." A mob of people pushed in from the street, but at length the police got it under control: "[they] hereupon commenced to clear the front of the stage amid the most deafening cheers," the *Herald* continues, "and some of the young 'B'hoys' were to be seen springing forward on the heads of their different groups of friends, from the stage, whom they joined in the pit, amid continued laughter" (qtd. in Buckley 392).

Under its new name, "A Glance at New York in 1848," the play was performed for forty-eight consecutive nights, selling over 40,000 tickets, making it, up to that point, the most popular play in American history (Buckley 392-393). The B'hoy subsequently

became a widely known dramatic presence on the American stage, and the stage was one of, if not the most, influential cultural vehicles of the time. William Dean Howells was wholly beguiled by its reception: “Some actor saw and heard things spoken with the peculiar swagger and whopperjaw utterance of the B’hoy of those dreadful old days...and he put them on stage and spread the poison of them all over the land, so that there was hardly anywhere a little blackguard boy who did not wish to act and talk like Mose” (*Criticism* 271). Though this response appears to be the censure of a hopeless traditionalist, Howells appreciates the impact the play had on his own consciousness: “other things have come and gone,” he grants, “things of Shakespeare, of Alfieri, of Cervantes, but those golden words of a forgotten dramatist poet remain with me” (*Criticism* 271).

The Baker sketch, then, was an unintentional power play of cultural credibility. The Mose character empowered the “lower million” with both a defiant attitude and a comic voice. It gave them a sense of cultural power and legitimacy. Gay Wilson Allen, in his critical biography of Walt Whitman, demonstrates how the role of the B’hoy’s “bravado” was an influence on the poet, and shows this characteristic as highly reflective of early American culture: “In fact the Americans as a whole were a swaggering, brawling nation of exhibitionists, as the folklore of the period plainly reveals” (63). Along with Captain Stormalong, “the Sea-going Yankee”; Daniel Boone; Mike Fink, “King of the Mississippi Boatmen”; Davy Crockett, “King of the Wild Frontier”; Paul Bunyan; and Pecos Bill, Mose “the Fireman” became a figure of mythic proportions.

Invoking these antebellum subalterns makes it possible to decipher better Crane’s cryptically impressionistic image of Bowery culture. As William Dean Howells rightly observes, Jimmie Johnson, Maggie’s younger brother in Crane’s *Maggie*, was “an

Ishmaelite from the cradle, who, with his warlike instincts beaten back into cunning, is what the B'hoy of former times has become in our more strenuously policed days" ("New York" 154). Indeed, contrary to some recent scholarship that views Crane's characters as demonstrative of a new urban type, most of the social traits shared by Jimmie Johnson and Pete in Crane's *Maggie* were typical of the B'hoy of the 1830s and 40s. In Keith Gandal's essay "Stephen Crane's *Maggie* and the Modern Soul," Gandal is less accurate than William Dean Howells's assessment of Crane's characterization of the transformation of the Bowery in the forms of Jimmie and Pete. Gandal writes that

Crane perceives in the turn-of-the-century slums, not vice, but an alternative morality and moral inspiration. The slums had generally appeared to the middle class as a moral foil, an ethical morass short on character; Crane discovers there instead a more advanced culture of consumption and a heterodox hero of self-esteem, the swaggering Bowery tough (759).

In fact, the attributes of Bowery culture resonant in Crane's characters have roots over fifty years old. Pete, for example, is described as having "an enticing nonchalance," with his hair "curled down over his forehead in an oiled bang," and a red scarf tied around his throat (25),¹⁵ while Maggie, like her G'hal counterparts, is a seamstress infatuated with the theater. If one recalls Chanfrau's performance while reading the following scene from *Maggie* -- Crane's dramatic introduction of the character Pete -- the comparability between stage and fictional characters is even more vivid:

Down the avenue came boastfully sauntering a lad of sixteen years,
although the chronic sneer of an ideal manhood already sat on his lips. His

¹⁵ All references to Crane's work refer to the Library of America edition, unless otherwise noted in the citation. The "oiled bang and "red scarf" constituted a fashion statement remarkably similar to the B'hoys "soaplocks," long locks of hair that hung in front of their ears and were slicked down with bear grease or soap, and their penchant for wearing red shirts and scarves.

hat tipped over his eye with an air of challenge. Between his teeth a cigar stump was tilted at the angle of defiance (8).

The analogy Howells proffers likening Crane's Jimmie to the B'hoys is, then, perhaps even more applicable to Pete, who will ultimately contribute to Maggie's metamorphosis from seamstress to street walker. At the same time, Crane makes Jimmie an admirer of fire engines, which seems to testify to the author's intent to evoke Bowery history as the B'hoys were extreme in their fascination with fire fighting. "A fire engine," comments Crane, "was enshrined in [Jimmie's] heart as an appalling thing that he loved with dog-like devotion. It had been known to overturn a streetcar" (23). To the B'hoys, fighting fires was a contact sport. Any activity, including socializing with their female counterparts, the G'hals, was immediately broken off by the sound of a distant fire signal. Those familiar with the Lower East Side would know at that point to keep their heads about them.

The B'hoy became recognizable as a distinct type in the popular consciousness of mid-nineteenth-century New York at a time when the establishment of urban "types" was vital to the evolution the city's identity (Buckley 359). The B'hoy character became a widely known dramatic presence on the American stage, and the stage was one of, if not the most, prevalent cultural vehicle of the time. The B'hoy became recognized in the popular consciousness of mid-nineteenth-century New York as a distinct type and, as drama historian Peter Buckley recognizes, "types became convenient building blocks both for new forms of cultural production and for a new knowledge of the city" (359). But much like the case with the rich and visible New York gay culture in the 1920s (Chauncey 335), the famed Bowery B'hoys of the 1840s would gain too much press in the eyes of the dominant culture and faced a subsequent backlash.

For instance, reporting directly after the Astor Place Riots for *The Home Journal* (May 12, 1849), journalist N.P. Willis complains of the personal affronts men of “good society” had to endure at their hands: “If the English tragedian wishes to see the company that he offends, he has only to follow the well-dressed idler down the Bowery and observe the looks he gets from Mose and the soap-lockery as he goes along... Let but the passive aristocratic party select a favorite, and let there be but a symptom of a handle for the B’hoys to express their dissent and the undercurrent breaks forth like an uncapped hydrant” (qtd. in Buckley 296). The antagonism, not surprisingly, was not one-sided. A B’hoy character in popular writer Ned Buntline’s *The G’hals of New York* (1850) is seen railing in disgust against the Victorian lack of respect for his position in society. Complaining to his sister about their bad financial luck, their father having lost everything, he is dumbfounded by the general lack of compassion: “Gas! Will our rich ‘quaintances recognize us in our rags as they used to do when we were proud and dressed like them? Will they even *speak* to us? No! They turn from us as though they thought we were going to rob ‘em; and if you meet ‘em in the street, they turn their eyes another way, and hurry past you as if you had the small pox, and they were afraid o’ ketchin’ it!” (16) Parodying the B’hoys’ irreverence in *The B’hoys of New York* (1848), one of Buntline’s characters, a newspaper editor self-styled as “THE B’hoy of New York,” decides to change the title of a proposed article on lewd female exhibitionism from “SHAMEFUL” to “Chaste and Beautiful Representations of Ancient Statuary” in order to, he vociferates, “Give the Puritans a dash!” (11-15)

But no writers of that period captured the spirit of life among the B’hoys. Writing nearly a decade after Ned Buntline wrote his *The B’hoy of New York* (1850), George Foster pleaded to literary men to write about them with more determined authenticity:

“...nothing has been adequately done to begin imparting to our literature the original and rich wealth lying latent in the life and history of Mose and Lize.” “New York As It Is,” he felt, had a “slight” plot and the events he refers to as “meager” and “commonplace” (177). Buntline’s novels stigmatized the B’hoy as the confidence man and the G’hal as the painted woman. And John Vose in his *The B’hoys of Yale; or The Scraps of a Hard Set of Collegians* (1878) depicted the B’hoys as immature fraternity boys trying to learn as little and drink as much as possible. One of the boys was actually from the Bowery neighborhood. Vose describes him as a “bully” who only wanted to “get tight!,” “go on a *time!*,” and “raise the d --l somewhere” and “similar spirited propositions peculiar to that lively locale...He was ‘awful papers’” (3). And Walt Whitman himself, writing as late as 1888, acknowledged the lack of literary representations of the singular working-class theater crowd of old:

For types of sectional New York those days -- the streets East of the Bowery, that intersect Division, Grand, and up to Third Avenue -- types that never found their Dickens, or Hogarth, or Balzac, and have passed away unportraited -- the young ship-builders, cartmen, butchers, firemen (the old-time “soap-lock” or exaggerated “Mose” or “Sikesey,”¹⁶ of Chanfrau’s plays,) they, too were always to be seen in these audience’s, racy of the East River and the Dry Dock (“The Old Bowery” 1214).

New York had always been, as he says, “sectional,” but there were no substantial textualizations of the phenomenon, particularly for the B’hoys. “Behavior at the Bowery,” Richard Butsch concludes, “was cited by middle-class newspapers and magazines as examples of how not to behave” (386).

¹⁶ The B’hoy character in folklore who was Mose’s trusted companion.

But the expressive characteristics of the B'hoys, had been appropriated in both Melville and Whitman, who discovered in the B'hoy a refreshingly American articulation. Indeed, the character Henry Jackson in Melville's *Redburn* is described as dressing like a Bowery B'hoy (Reynolds, *Beneath* 285), and much of the credit for the characteristics of Whitman's "I" in *Leaves of Grass* can be attributed to the B'hoy. "[Whitman's] whole persona," David S. Reynolds argues, "wicked rather than conventionally virtuous, free, smart, prone to slang and vigorous outbursts -- reflects the b'hoy culture" (*Walt* 155). Nineteenth-century reviewers labeled Whitman the Bowery B'hoy of Literature and "Mose Velsor," the name most commonly associated with the B'hoys in the popular press, is used as a pseudonym for many of the poet's newspaper articles (Reynolds, *Walt* 105, 103). Whitman's choice characteristically disregards the period's increasingly virulent modes of cultural discrimination.

As a protective rather than a purely egotistical measure on the part of the Victorian middle class, the dissemination of their culture was enforced in all conceivable media. The most powerful aspect of Crane's Bowery writing in general, and *Maggie* in particular, is his ability to recognize this phenomenon of cultural incorporation in urban America and render it transparently in his text. The irony in his scenes on Victorian melodrama, for example, both toward the culture that creates it and the culture that buys into it, demonstrates that "if the stage is not 'realism' then by implication the novella *Maggie*, which tells these truths, *is* realism" (Orvell 129).

In his sketch "An Experiment in Luxury," Crane provides us with his take on cultural dissemination. While dining at his wealthy young friend's house, the narrator reflects on the derisive view of the very rich by the Christian middle class and the complementary condescending view of the very poor:

Indicated in this light chatter about the dinner table there was an existence that was not at all what the youth had been taught to see. Theologians had for a long time told the poor man that riches did not bring happiness, and they had solemnly repeated this phrase until it had come to mean that misery was commensurate with dollars, that each wealthy man was inwardly a miserable wretch. And when a wail of despair of rage had come from the night of the slums they had *stuffed this epigram down the throat* of he who cried out and told him that he was a lucky fellow. *They did this because they feared* (italics mine *Portable* 175).

What is being taken to task here is the age-old custom of the church's designating the poor as unfortunates and the rich as selfish, unhappy gluttons; "And, in the irritating, brutalizing, enslaving environment of their poverty," Crane insists, the poor "are expected to solace themselves with these assurances..." (*Portable* 167) The "youth," as the focalizer of the story is called, is surprised by how functional and happy the wealthy family are. Further, there is no inherent love for the poor in the espoused vision, he learns; the espousers are simply terrified of the "other half" confronting their situation on their own terms.

This parable suggests the Victorian fear of a consumer class with access to and control over any and all consumable products. If the Bowery culture as epitomized in the antebellum years was being drummed out of existence because of what Victorians perceived as the threatening nature of subcultural activity, the culture of the Gilded Age's nouveau riche is equally condemned. The friend in "An Experiment in Luxury" openly addresses the problem the narrator is grappling with: "...it is impossible for me to believe that these things equalize themselves; that there are burrs under all rich cloaks and

benefits in all ragged jackets, *and the preaching of it seems wicked to me*” (italics mine *Portable* 167). Both the B’hoys and the barons, in other words, were being demonized by the popular media of the time. The youth’s experiences with the ultra-rich, therefore, was a form of reverse slumming.

This cultural posturing and antagonism was a manifestation of the new, broader consumer culture, which Keith Gandal describes as providing “a sort of moral inspiration” (13) to slummers exploring the Bowery. But for the Bowery population itself, acculturation served as a dampening force, rather than a liberating one. In Pete’s courtship of Maggie, for instance, he escorts her to a number of amusements that had burgeoned throughout the city to accommodate a growing body of consumers with increasingly standardized tastes. These include music halls, dance halls, theaters, dime museum freak shows, the Central Park Menagerie, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Crane portrays the theater in particular as offering “an atmosphere of pleasure and prosperity,” which “seemed to hang over the throng, born, perhaps, of good clothes and two hours in a place of forgetfulness” (70). Happiness is equated with distractions and vicarious experience, a historical transformation that might be seen as the inception of the future culture of television, video games, and the internet. As Maggie for the first time blissfully takes in the emollient scenes on stage, “No thoughts of the atmosphere of the collar-and-cuff factory came to her” (33). The stage manifests “personal dissociation” discussed in the first chapter of this study, but without indulging actively in “adultery, perversions, or drink” (Gelfant 33).

Crane presents this continual fall into dreaminess as a manifestation of cultural coercion. Maggie idealizes Pete, an actor in life who adheres to a bogus self-image of respectability. She is duped into trusting the facade. When she falls, her neighbors

envision her as the Eve-like character that Crane designs her to be, and children “ogle her as if they formed the front row of a theatre” (65). Similarly, George Kelcey in Crane’s second Bowery novella *George’s Mother* (1896) is overwhelmingly jealous of Maggie’s attentions towards Pete, both of whom make appearances in the later novella. Like Pete, George aspires to be both Bowery tough and chivalric gentleman. And, like Maggie, George sees his beloved through the lens of popular drama. In his day dreams, George superimposes Maggie’s form onto the mass-produced images of staged melodrama. And with a nod to the importance of photography, he places the couple “In scenes which he took mainly from pictures, this vision conducted a courtship, strutting, posing, and lying through a drama which was magnificent from a glow of purple” (109).

The standard venue for impressing young ladies on the Bowery was, indeed, the theater -- and the paramount theatrical form in both *Maggie* and the New York it represents is the moral-reform drama. Initially developed by Moses Kimball and P.T. Barnum for museum theaters, moral reform dramas were deliberately designed to address the needs of a middle class attentive to Protestant standards of decency (Butsch 383). If the theater had been a primarily working-class space in the opening decades of nineteenth-century New York, by the 1860s it drew a decidedly Victorian audience that determined its content and conduct. Middle-class values, as a result, were simultaneously acted out on the stage and absorbed by the audience.

The consequent metamorphosis of theatrical space seems paradoxical in that consumption and respectability, previously oppositional paradigms (Butsch 375), were now inextricably intertwined. It is by showing how these oppositions play off of one another that Crane’s work and its sociological contribution is brought into crystalline clarity. The mimetic nature of the exchange between buyer and seller, for instance, is made

remarkably comprehensible. The central thematic irony of *Maggie* has been identified as "the self-righteous condemnation of a woman who is good by the very society responsible for her downfall" (Brennan 64), but there remains some question why this would be true historically. It is important to expose the origins and nature of this type of cultural dialectic, not just its manifestations, especially since foolish inconsistency seems to be the central aspect of Crane's *Maggie*.

Maggie Johnson is, among other things, used as a control in the Zolaesque experiment of looking at the New York popular theater as a means of understanding both the issue of class cultural consciousness and the popularized understanding of womanhood. Each time Maggie exits the theater, she

departed with raised spirits....She rejoiced at the way in which the poor and virtuous eventually overcame the wealthy and wicked. The theater made her think. She wondered if the culture and refinement she had seen imitated, perhaps grotesquely, by the heroine on the stage, could be acquired by a girl who lived in a tenement house and worked in a shirt factory (37).

Crane is being ironic, perhaps even cruel here, in describing the exaltations of his heroine in this way, but his analysis of class aspiration nevertheless rings true. Most New Yorkers were complicit in this culture of conformity; they had been nurtured to accept "refinement" as the ultimate state of being. Contemplating her suitor, rendered pretentious by the narration, she observes instead that he "was extremely gracious and attentive. He displayed the consideration of a cultured gentleman who knew what was his due." In addition, she "perceived that Pete brought forth all of his knowledge of high-class customs for her benefit. Her heart warmed as she reflected upon his condescension" (31).

.

Of course, while she is dreamily imagining a fantasy constructed by a culture truly at odds with her own, Pete is, in one of the few truly funny scenes of the book, chivalrously badgering the wait staff: “‘Say, what deh hell? Bring deh lady a big glass! What deh hell use is dat pony?’” (31)

The theater scenes in *Maggie* demonstrate with mimetic accuracy the trend towards what Richard Butsch calls the “taming” of the Bowery theatergoer. In contrast to Whitman’s lusty description of early Bowery dramatic performances -- in which the audience and the players interacted to create one large performance that transcended the limits of the play itself -- the theatergoers of Maggie’s world give themselves fully to one-way, passive entertainment. Refinement in late Victorian New York had become the status quo in the theater, if it had not yet completely taken hold of the music hall. The mores imposed on Victorian women in the streets of New York -- avoid eye contact, dress down so as not to attract attention, maintain emotional self-control, etc. -- were swiftly transferred to the theater. Emotive expressions such as anger and laughter were no longer tolerated. Often dress codes were established, and hissing, drinking, eating, arriving late, and leaving early were forbidden at most venues.

In short, the proliferation of middle-class etiquette effectively “feminized” the theater, concurrently making it a feminine space while rejecting audience participation and ardency (Butsch 395). Proprietors increasingly changed the atmosphere of their venues to accommodate this new cult of middle-class female respectability, and they quickly came to understand that women, as Ann Douglas has argued, had supremacy over consumer culture (7). In 1866, a gentleman’s magazine *Spirit of the Times* complained that many men succumbed to the “bore of attending dull or even good performances for the sole purpose of escorting their Mary Janes” (qtd. in Butsch 392-393). Whitman, in his nostalgic essay

"The Old Bowery," poetically, though perhaps too sentimentally, acknowledges this refinement of the theater experience:

So much for the Thespian temple of New York fifty years since [1830s and 40s], where 'sceptered tragedy went trailing by' under the gaze of the Dry Dock youth, and both players and auditors were of a character and like we shall never see again (1216).

In Pete and Maggie's music hall as well, the reader is brilliantly introduced to the giving way of Bowery tastes to Victorian culture in the later decades of the nineteenth century. The crowd contains, Crane writes, all of "the nationalities of the Bowery," who "beamed upon the stage from all directions" (30). In the spirit of radical democracy, a singer appeals to the Irish workers in attendance by describing in one of her songs "a vision of Britain annihilated by America, and Ireland bursting her bonds." She then climaxes the performance with "The Star-Spangled Banner," and "instantly a great cheer swelled from the throats of this assemblage of the masses, most of them of foreign birth. There was a heavy rumble of booted feet thumping the floor. Eyes gleamed with sudden fire, and callused hands waved frantically in the air" (32). Crane then juxtaposes this display of old Bowery behavior by smartly commencing with a cadre of dancers "attired in some half-dozen skirts" causing Maggie to wonder "at the splendor of the costume" and to lose herself "in calculations of the cost of the silks and laces" (31). At the finale of the show, the prima donna of the dancing troupe "fell into some of those grotesque attitudes which were at the time popular among the dancers in the theatres uptown, giving to the Bowery public the diversions of the aristocratic theatre-going public at reduced rates" (31-32).

During all this, the audience is being attended to by little boys with "costumes of

French chefs” selling “fancy cakes”¹⁷ under gilded chandeliers, a spectacle substantiating the “vertiginous bridge of American confectionery” Henry James reports. Among the performers, a pair of girls listed as sisters -- for rather obvious reasons of propriety -- sing a duet “which,” Crane ironically puts in, “is heard occasionally at concerts given under church auspices” while dancing in a way that “can never be seen at concerts given under church auspices” (32). The continuous and telling juxtapositions of old Bowery and new Victorian culture are served up to his readers, then, just as Crane’s boys in French chef hats serve up sweets to the fictional laborers.

Material consumption is not the only proselytizing mode we see in *Maggie*. In one scene, Jimmie Johnson, Stephen Crane’s Bowery-style anti-hero hero, is strolling past a mission church on the Bowery when he has an epiphany that calls to mind Stephen Daedalus on the strand. The revelation is one that allows him to “clad his soul in iron.” An evangelical preacher is sermonizing to a Bowery audience. The sermon refers to sinners and is entirely one-directional; the missionary addresses his audience as “you.” “Once a philosopher asked this man why he did not say ‘we’ instead of ‘you,’” Crane writes. The man replies simply, “‘What?’” (20) Language is, of course, restricted by the boundaries of permissible discourse. The sermonizer is a saved man and the audience damned because they have not yet been fully acculturated into what is perceived as the only cultural paradigm -- the Victorian, the Christian, the respectable. The philosopher animadverts a system that has no viable alternative. Jimmie, however, feels that he personifies an alternative culture inconceivable to this flock. The dialectical nature of the episode is clear to Crane; “A reader of words of wind-demons,” Crane writes, “might have been able to see the portions of a dialogue pass to and fro between the exhorter and

¹⁷ Butsch reports that “The indulgent nature of matinees and ‘cream cakes’ distinguished it from the museum theater as a ‘woman’s place’ and indicated that it was an early facet of the culture of consumption” (390).

the hearers" (20). Jimmie stands alone, a minority oppositional voice.

Maggie, somewhat dislocated in the Bowery world, is a figure under the gaze of her tenement's "philosophers," characters Crane assigns to deliberate over the nature of their condition. The young Maggie's initial deferment of Bowery behavior stumps them: "None of the dirt of the Rum Alley seemed to be in her veins," Crane writes, "The philosophers, upstairs, downstairs, and on the same floor, puzzled over it" (24). How is it, they ask themselves, that a girl born and raised in the Bowery can have escaped the then perceived stigma of Bowery existence? In many ways this is the most self-reflexive point in the book. Crane himself is directly questioning his own motives for making Maggie such an anomaly. The novella, though singled out by many critics as the most artfully crafted Bowery tale ever written because of its combined expressionistic and realistic aspects, provides an acceptable heroine for mass consumption. Had the heroine been the more G'hal-like Nell, the street-smart but ultimately loathsome friend of Pete's, no one would have read her death as tragic; in fact, few middle-class readers would have picked up the story at all.

Crane makes a scene of degradation palatable to his audience -- the middle-class reader -- by recycling the tragic circumstances of a girl who blossoms in a mud puddle, then meets a fateful death. Crane submitted to constant concessions of this kind throughout his career, as did many writers defer to the Victorian moral standard in the world of publishing. Even so, Richard Watson Gilder, the editor of *Century Magazine*, was characteristically appalled when he read the 1893 edition of the book. In 1896, D. Appleton and Company forced Crane to edit out all of its unseemly language before they would agree to publish it (Wertheim iv). The book market was not dissimilar, then, to the theater in regard to censorship and gentrification.

In *Democratic Vistas*, written in the year of Crane's birth, Whitman foresees a future America that is hyper-democratic " -- the main thing being the average, the bodily, the concrete, the democratic, the popular, on which all the superstructures of the future are to permanently rest." This hyper-democracy, he argues, is to be propagated by the written word. Whitman was well aware of the prodigious potency of cultural dissemination. "For the convertibility of America and democracy," Alan Trachtenberg relates in his essay, "American Studies as a Cultural Program," "represents for Whitman a definite (though not an inevitable) historical process. It also represents, that mutuality of terms, a role for culture, a role Whitman is able to articulate as a 'distinct cultural programme,' a 'programme of culture' (as he calls it) based upon 'a radical change of category,' 'in the distribution of precedence.' He would redeem the world by purging of its discriminations, its class distinctions, its disdain for the low and vulgar" (175).

Whitman, in characteristically prophetic language, both celebrates and warns against the possibilities of the future of the United States. The present "culture," he implies, has a very narrow base. The poet's ideal future may make room for the social sphere represented in the past. Whitman records this notion in his sketch "The Old Bowery"(1885). Reminiscing about the Bowery theater experience in the 1830s and '40s, he writes,

Recalling from that period the occasion of either Forrest or Booth [two popular actors of Bowery affiliations], any good night at the old Bowery, pack'd from ceiling to pit with its audience mainly of alert, well dress'd, full-blooded young and middle aged-men, the best average of American-born mechanics -- the emotional nature of the whole mass arous'd by the

power and magnetism of as mighty minds as ever trod the stage -- the whole crowded auditorium, and what seeth'd in it, and the flush'd from its faces and eyes, to me as much of a part of the show as any -- bursting forth in one of those long-kept-up tempests of hand-clapping peculiar to the Bowery -- no dainty kid-glove business, but the electric force and muscle from perhaps 2000 full-sinew'd men...Such sounds and scenes as here will surely afford to many old New Yorkers some fruitful recollections (1213).

This is a passage written by a near fanatic of urban celebration; "Whitman," Morris Dickstein aptly writes, "assimilates the city to the rhythm of physical activity, not just the movement of the body but the systole and diastole of its inner pulsations" (187). His democratic vision was one that was clearly marked to be, Whitman mourns, "taboo'd by 'polite society' in New York...." (1213)

Somewhat typically, perhaps, Whitman's plea for cultural tolerance in *Democratic Vistas* contradicts his earlier 1845 *Brooklyn Star* article "Miserable State of the Stage" in which he damns the low vulgarity of the Bowery Theater, the Chatham Theater and, significantly, Mitchell's Olympic as 'nauseating' just three years before the premier of "New York As It Is." In fact, in 1847, while editor for the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Whitman wrote his editorial entitled, "Why Do the Theatres Languish? And How Shall the American Stage be Resuscitated?," Pleading for a reformation of the theater experience in regard to morals and manners, damning the very age that he fondly recalls later, he argues for an American voice on the dramatic stage, an American voice free from the influences of the Europeans, but not one free of convention:

As to the particular details of the system which should now supplant

theatricals as they now exist, the one who in greatness of purpose conceives the effort only can say... That effort must be made by a man or woman of no ordinary talent...liberal in disposition to provide whatever taste and propriety may demand...Until such a person comes forward, and works out such a reform, theatricals in this country will continue to languish, and theatres be generally more and more deserted by men and women of taste, (rightfully too) as has been the case for eight or ten years past (152).

Though, as Reynolds reports, Whitman “once joked that he considered it a fall from grace when, in his journalism days during the forties, he got press passes to sit among more sophisticated types on the parquet, or first level, of the New York theaters” (*Walt* 157), and much later, while conversing with his friend Horace Traubel “He spent far more of his time...talking of the old antebellum performers than of the more stiff, distanced performance scene of the modern day” (*Walt* 563) in 1885, Whitman writes that “[a]while after 1840 the character of the Bowery...completely changed. Cheap prices and vulgar programmes came in” (1214). Indeed, it was not until the 1840s, the years of his disillusionment with the theater experience of the Lower East Side, that his B’hoys became national figures, no longer restricted to the scope of Manhattan, no longer a limited urban type. And it was at this time that he wrote:

Of all “low” places where vulgarity (not only on the stage, but in front of it) is in the ascendant, and bad taste carries the day with hardly a pleasant point to mitigate the coarseness, the New York theatres (except the Park) may be put down (as the Emeralds may say), as the top of the heap! We don’t like to make these sweeping assertions in general- but the habit of

such places as the Bowery, the Chatham, and the Olympic theatres is really beyond all toleration (qtd. in Reynolds *Walt* 166).

The contradictory nature of Whitman's opposing identities -- the "low" perspective and that of "respectability" -- was equally pronounced in the life of Stephen Crane.

The son of a methodist minister, Crane too held contradictory views on the dogma of "respectability." He was especially ambivalent towards prostitution: he had not, for instance, pressed charges on Doris Watts, a prostitute who tried to blackmail him; he testified in court on behalf of Dora Clark, a prostitute who was arrested in his company; and he probably married Cora Stewart, a seasoned madam. But as Laura Hapke asserts, "Crane never resolved his ambivalence about the unchaste woman, a tension between idealization and condemnation which his work on prostitution embodies" (67). He could not fully accept, or fully deny that a prostitute could survive society's imposed and enforced judgments.

Nevertheless, Crane himself assented to cultural restrictions that he openly rejected. The implication in the 1893 edition is that Maggie is killed by her client, a "huge fat man in torn and greasy garments" who "laughed, his brown, disordered teeth gleaming under a gray, grizzled moustache from which beer-drops dripped..." (72). The grotesque man follows her until they stand together: "At their feet the river appeared a deathly black hue" (72). In the D. Appleton edition, Crane has Maggie commit suicide, a trope of the Victorian melodrama: "She went into the blackness of the final block...At the feet of the tall buildings appeared the deathly black hue of the river" (144). He made these changes to appease his more respectable readership, to expose the hypocrisy of the Bowery characters, and because he himself was equivocating. By having Maggie commit suicide, Crane could both punish her as a fallen woman and allow her to achieve

redemption by contrition, thereby allowing the book to end on a sentimental note.

The overwhelming force of the sentimental and the respectable unleashed in the novella are not only the product of determining institutions -- the church, the family, and the home -- but the grotesque imposition of middle-class mores onto the slum's inhabitants. No other aspect of the novella is as much a testament to Crane's genius. He creates for us a transparent portrait of an extremely complicated cultural consciousness. Each of the primary characters in the novella contributes to Maggie's fall. Each takes the side of popular morality over familial and neighborhood ties. In one scene, even Jimmie consciously broods over whether or not to forsake his sister in favor of his position in society:

Of course [he] publicly damned his sister that he might appear on a higher social plane. But, arguing with himself, stumbling about in ways that he knew not, he, once, almost came to a conclusion that his sister would have been more firmly good *had she better known why*. However, he felt that he could not hold such a view. He threw it hastily aside (*italics mine* 57).

In a similarly self-reflexive moment, it "occurred to him vaguely, for an instant, if some of the women of his acquaintance had brothers" (43). Jimmie does not forgive or help his sister, but he is incapable of explaining to himself why. His actions, indeed, run counter to his own constructed identity. Nevertheless, his Bowery self is clearly weaker than the identity that has been constructed for him by the "well-dressed men...of untarnished clothes" he so ardently deplors (21).

A brief glance at *George's Mother* provides us with an additional telling example of this process of cultural discrimination and assent. The book, a kind of chronologically contiguous sequel to *Maggie*, is a study of a young man from the country who is caught

between three major cultural strains on the boulevard. One is his mother's moralistic devotion to the church and her constant appeals to him to attend mass with her; another is the alluringly violent and drunken life of the street and the friendships he rapidly acquires there; the last is a group of older drinkers who have Victorian aspirations but are far too dissipated to achieve respectability. All are essentially conformist alternatives. None is portrayed as satisfying. Crane explicitly reveals George's reluctance to join his mother at the local church: "In his ears was the sound of a hymn, made by people who tilted their heads at a prescribed angle of devotion. It would be too apparent that they were all better than he. When he entered they would turn their heads and regard him with suspicion. This would be an enormous aggravation, since he was certain that he was as good as they" (98). He is unconvinced here of his own equal standing with those he criticizes. Maggie faces a similar dilemma when she attends the theater. In fact, virtually all of Crane's major characters question their social and personal standing when they enter the various theaters of social construction.

Maggie's last word in the novella is the enigmatic utterance "Who?," a question that remains unanswered in the text, at least superficially. To address that question, I will again draw from T.J. Jackson Lears who writes,

To resort to the concept of cultural hegemony is to take a banal question -- "who has power?" -- and deepen it at both ends. The "who" includes parents, preachers, teachers, journalists, literati, "experts" of all sorts, as well as advertising executives, entertainment promoters, popular musicians, sports figures, and "celebrities" -- all of whom are involved (albeit often unwillingly) in shaping the values and attitudes of society

(572).

For Henry James, this exchange was realized in the popular theater he visited, but not limited to it. James thinks of the “odd scene [at the theater] as still enacted in many places and many ways, the inevitable rough union in discord of the two groups of instincts, the fusion of the two camps by a queer, clumsy, wasteful social chemistry” (199).

This “wasteful social chemistry” brewed in New York as a result of the governing society’s desire to bridle the effects of rampageous urban expansion. Unlike many European cities, New York in the nineteenth century promoted itself as a city free from economic class distinctions. In some ways I believe this was true and that the actual conflict was fought over cultural legitimacy and representation. Though Victorian and Bowery culture may have co-existed for a time in New York, the Victorian would rapidly come to determine the values, sentiments, and prejudices of civil society on the Bowery, as well as throughout the city. If we accept Alfred Kazin’s assertion that “the surest thing one can say about Crane is that he cared not a jot which way the world went” (68), it is equally true, as Hamlin Garland acknowledges, that Crane’s *Maggie* “grew out of intimate association with the poor” (Manuscript note 2). Describing Jimmie Johnson, Crane cuts a figure not unlike his own: “On the corners he was in life and of life. The world was going on and he was there to perceive it” (20).

The Bowery which Crane presents in *Maggie* is one that draws from a very real historical process: the modernization of slum dwellers whose cultural consciousnesses -- specifically in regards to Bowery culture as it survived over the decades -- conflicted with, and were ultimately determined by, nineteenth-century American Victorianism. In the second part of this study, I will begin with a discussion of another 1890s “moral

region" -- the Tenderloin's "black Bohemia." But rather than address the impact of middle-class morality on its denizens, I will show to what extent their region impacted "outsiders" who availed themselves to its influences. By the turn of the century, authors objectified the lifestyles of the morally marginalized and demonstrated to what extent it was propitious for the genteel classes to engage these spaces. In the early years of the twentieth century, New York writers began to represent subaltern cultural landscapes as sites of cultural regeneration. But rather than crossing moral boundaries with the intention of reforming or coercing "the other half" to accept "respectable" codes of behavior, it was the outsiders themselves who sought cultural acquisition. For better or for worse, the cultural channel by 1900 began to point upwards.

PART II: THE UPWARD CHANNEL, 1900-1930

Chapter 4:

Marginal Men in Black Bohemia:

Paul Laurence Dunbar's and James Weldon Johnson's Tenderloin

"Well, if they don't want to find out things, what do they come to N' Yawk for? It ain't nobody's old Sunday-school picnic."

-- Character William Thomas in Paul Laurence Dunbar's
The Sport of the Gods, 1902

The protagonists of Paul Laurence Dunbar's *The Sport of the Gods* (1902) and James Weldon Johnson's *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912) are both represented as taking up residence in a well-established New York neighborhood, one which harbored a society unique to the rest of the city.¹⁸ Textual interpretations of the area have been mixed in their appraisals. To some, the Tenderloin symbolized the worst of African-American culture; to others, it cultivated a sense of creative pride that would prove infectious to genteel white society, and ultimately improve African-American social standing in the United States. In his indispensable history *Black Manhattan* (1930), James Weldon Johnson reflects on the Tenderloin in a discussion of the place of the American Negro in boxing, horse-racing, and baseball:

[T]he New York of the upper twenties and lower thirties... was the business and social centre of most of the colored men engaged in these professional sports, as it was also of the genuine black-face minstrels, the forerunners of the later colored performers; wherever their work might take

them, they homed to New York. And because these men earned and spent

¹⁸ Unbelievably, Charles Nilon introduces the 1970 Collier edition of *The Sport of the Gods* by informing us that "Dunbar does not identify the section of New York in which the characters settle" (8). This is an outrageous oversight. On page 72 of that edition, we are told that the Hamiltons boarded on Twenty-Seventh Street, well within the confines of the Tenderloin. Though no cross avenue is indicated, we must assume that they have moved into the neighborhood best-known for its migrant African-American population (and, incidentally, its ragtime music). An even greater oversight is labeling Johnson's *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* a Harlem novel (8), a novel that frequently slips out of the narrative in order to provide documentary descriptions of the Tenderloin.

large sums of money, there grew up in New York a flourishing black
Bohemia (73).¹⁹

Rather than viewing the Tenderloin as harboring a “bohemian” culture in its commonplace meaning -- to revisit Christine Stansell’s definition, “a coherent milieu with... gentleman at odds with their class, women at odds with their roles, and immigrants seeking conversations outside the ghetto” (Stansell 14) -- Dunbar and Johnson supply us with a fictional account of an organic culture, one that formed spontaneously out of social currents whose architects abhorred the area’s moral message.

The “flourishing black Bohemia” Johnson outlines in *Black Manhattan* was a later interpretation of the area, more defensible in 1930 after the enormously popular reception of Harlem’s cultural renaissance. In contrast, the New York chapters of both Dunbar’s *The Sport of the Gods* and Johnson’s *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* consciously revolve around African-American drinking and gambling habits, cross-racial assignations, and many other “immoral” activities this “black Bohemia” offered urbanites in the 1890s. But if Dunbar’s Tenderloin novel charts the naturalistic slippery slope of a guileless country boy who evolves from well-meaning son and brother to gambling addict, violent drunk, and murderer, *The Autobiography* catenates the steps of a talented vagabond who stumbles into Tenderloin life and is able to take something productive from his experience -- the ability to play ragtime piano, for example -- and move on.

Both *The Sport of the Gods* and *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* can provide present-day readers of early twentieth-century American writing with a unique

¹⁹ Johnson refuses here to engage the subject of gambling and prostitution, historically the district’s most well-known pastimes; he prefers instead to address the “artistic effort” that emerged from the area’s population and revise, understandably, the image of a black Sodom to the image of a black Bohemia. “It is in the growth of this artistic effort that we are interested,” he writes. “the rest of the manifestations were commonplaces... The gambling clubs need not be explained” (74). This revision is consistent with the whole of Johnson’s life, which was openly dedicated to elevating the status of African-American cultural forms.

understanding of New York life in the 1890s -- the mosaic of cultures it contained, the transgressions of popular morality it actualized, the literary watersheds it signaled. *The Sport of the Gods* is a treatise on the pitfalls that a mythologized New York contains for the southern African-American migrant. The city itself becomes a fiction in this novel, and thus Dunbar provides us with an illusion within an illusion that will render southerners helpless in the face of rampant immorality. Johnson's *The Autobiography*, in contrast, was written a decade later and shows an increased sense of relativism concerning moral regions in New York. Remarkably, the novel includes only a handful of "New York" chapters. But by only dipping into Tenderloin culture, the narrator, the author, and the readers are all consigned to an outsider status that illuminates the effect of New York City on the nation at large. Johnson's novel, clearly pivoting on the New York chapters, outlines a familiar psycho-cultural (and, I might add, literary) pattern that we also see in *The Sport of the Gods*: subject enters an alien cultural context, experiences a cathartic release, followed by, in this order, a loss of control over repressed desire, a redirection resulting from new found cultural blueprints, and finally, a substantial personal transformation.

The decades immediately following the Civil War saw the bulk of New York City's black population shift from Greenwich Village, the center being the corner of Bleeker and Mercer, to the Tenderloin district, located from approximately Twenty-fifth Street to Fifty-fifth and from Fifth Avenue to Seventh. Once the center of white middle-class respectability, by the late 1870s it had turned into a major theater district, and the subsequent army of pleasure-seekers chased the residents uptown. This gave landlords two choices: either turn the brownstones into multiple-family tenements for the crush of

immigrant arrivals from southern and eastern Europe, or lease them out to brothel owners and gambling proprietors who could afford higher rents (Gilfoyle 204). Needless to say, they chose the second option, and subsequently the Tenderloin became, seemingly overnight, the most infamous center of gambling and prostitution in New York's history.

Within the greater Tenderloin, there was a black section along Sixth Avenue in what is now Chelsea. This region catered to African-American musicians, gamblers, stage performers, and prostitutes, as well as white "slummers," and frequenters of the "black and tans," racially integrated bars that often provided interracial assignations and drew a great deal of public scorn. Many African Americans moved to the Tenderloin district for its racial tolerance and professional opportunities. The Great Migration of African Americans escaping the horrors of Jim Crow and lynching was just beginning at the turn of the century, but it would not truly pick up steam until the center of African-American life in New York moved from the Tenderloin to Harlem.²⁰

In 1902, the year *The Sport of the Gods* appeared, the black population in New York was still largely unknown to its white counterpart. In 1890, African Americans made up a mere 1.56 percent of Manhattan's population. It is due to this absence that one journalist in 1887 reported in the *New York Freeman* that "the northern white man knows practically nothing of the Negro" (qtd in Osofsky 41). The first substantive textual contribution to an understanding of black New York was Jacob Riis's *How the Other Half Lives* (1890).

Riis's chapter, significantly titled "The Color Line in New York," depends largely on Spencerian racialism. He opens with this prediction of Negro New York: "Natural selection will have more or less to do beyond a doubt in every age with dividing the races:

²⁰ The Great Migration and the settlement of blacks in Harlem will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Six.

only so, it may be, can they work out together their highest destiny” (112). Consciously or unconsciously, Riis lies about the rise of the black population in New York over the decade of the 1880s. Though he claims that the number of African Americans in New York “quite doubled in number” over the decade, there were 19,653 in 1880 (Sante 227n) and 25,674 in 1890 (Osofsky 206), a less than a twenty percent increase of an already minuscule number. His motivations are surely stylistic: *How the Other Half Lives* is documentary sensationalism, and he provides documentary-style statistics with a sensational flare. It is doubtful that he is soliciting terror from his audience (in the way he does with the Jewish population), as he generally regards African Americans as an acceptable group disdainfully discriminated against by greedy white landlords.

For the most part, Riis is quite sympathetic to African-American New Yorkers. He regards them as a “clean” race (115) and finds the landlord class that rewards these clean tenants with higher rents than whites to be despotic and shameless (116). The cakewalk dances (where cakes were won in dance competitions) “are comic mixtures of elaborate ceremonial and the joyous abandon of the natural man” (118). Their “intellectual status is distinctly improving,” and they often as not attend church (118). The foulest African-American activities in New York, Riis conjectures, were consigned to the black-and-tan saloons,²¹ most of which could be found in and about Sullivan and Thompson Streets. Of mixed-race sex in these places, he feels that “there can be no greater abomination” (119). On the whole, however, the black man “may be seen to have advanced much farther and faster than before suspected, and to promise, after all, with fair treatment, quite as well as the rest of us, his white-skinned fellow-citizens, had any right to expect” (119).

²¹ Named for their openly mixed racial assignations.

This cursory glance at black Manhattan was the most highly circulated piece of writing on the subject up to that point in American history. It is, for Riis, a quite even-handed treatment. What is most glaringly absent is Riis's near total ignorance of the Tenderloin district,²² by 1890 well on its way to becoming the center of African-American cultural life in New York. When *The Sport of the Gods* appeared in 1902, the white imagination had a concrete reference for their imaginings of African Americans in New York, as did African Americans nationwide. In one review of the novel, the critic importantly asks, "Do we ever think of how such people live? It is a... whole stratum of society of which all of us are densely ignorant and of whose very existence most of us are wholly unaware" (qtd. in Osofsky 41). But Dunbar was not nearly as generous as Riis in assessing the future of black New York.

Dunbar's is not an uplifting tale. It is the heart-rending story of a shattered Southern black family, the Hamiltons, who try to make a new life for themselves in New York and fail. The novel begins in an archetypical post-bellum southern town. Berry Hamilton is the devoted father of two children, Joe and Kitty, and loving husband to Fannie. They had lived happily on their white employer's property until the day Berry is accused of stealing a sum of money, actually stolen by the employer's gambling brother. Berry is convicted of the crime and sentenced to ten years hard labor. Fannie, Joe, and Kitty, ostracized by the small community, move to New York's Tenderloin district, a place they know only from folklore. Within weeks of landing in New York, Fannie marries a wife-beater, Joe becomes a dissipated wreck and eventually commits murder, and Kitty finds in herself a Carrie Meeber-like talent for the stage. As Dunbar treats Kitty's rise to fame in unambiguously moralistic terms -- she becomes intolerably vain

²² Most of his chapter focuses on Mulberry, Thompson, and Sullivan Streets, which were swiftly (and Riis alludes to this) becoming old news to African-American New Yorkers.

and distances herself from her family's tragic fall -- *The Sport of the Gods* is unequivocally anti-New York. Ultimately, Fannie and Berry are reunited and journey back, their children irretrievable, to their small-town existence in the South.

William L. Andrews argues that Dunbar's handling of African-American culture tells us more about the publishing world at that time than African-American social realities. *The Sport of the Gods*, Andrews explains "indicates that Dunbar and his publishers, Dodd Mead of New York, were not willing to take a chance on a novel that dealt in a sober, even grim fashion, with contemporary socio-economic questions impinging on black Americans...." (xv) But for Dunbar, New York's cabarets, boarding houses, and side streets are the villains, not necessarily the people one finds in them, or the city's restrictive social impositions.

Those few African-American migrants who were just trickling up from the South at the turn of the century were regarded by New Yorkers, both black and white, as hicks from the sticks. They were generally seen as a "hoodlum element"; they were "rovers," "wanderers," "vagrants," "criminals in search of a sporting life" (Osofsky 21). Dunbar shows in *The Sport of the Gods* that this discrimination is largely stipulated by the southerner's tendency to transform themselves in a matter of years into caricatures of urbanity, rejecting the positive moral foundation of the rural South for that of the fashionable New York sporting set. Dunbar sets immigrants to New York into two categories: the wise and the foolish. The wise will recognize their love of the great metropolis, but will eventually escape: "he will go away, any place -- yes, he will even go over to New Jersey" (71). The fools, of course, remain:

They will stay and stay on until the town becomes all in all to him; until
the very streets are his chums and certain buildings and corners his best

friends. Then he is hopeless, and to live elsewhere would be death. The Bowery will be his romance, Broadway his lyric, and the park his pastoral, the river and the glory of it all his epic, and he will look down pityingly on the rest of humanity (71).

Dunbar articulates the wonders of New York here in starkly ironic terms. He means his audience to be repulsed by New York's most alluring sights. The city is portrayed as a hoax, a myth that tantalizes the rural immigrant and crushes their moral will. And by identifying New York's most famous offerings with traditional literary genres, he demonstrates how the popular conceptions of New York belie its corruption, as fiction belies the reality it represents. The implication is not necessarily that textual representations of New York have been manipulating the facts, but rather that the facts themselves have become fictionalized in the minds of the people who experience them. *The Sport of the Gods* was meant to act as a demythologizing agent for innocent would-be travelers, particularly those who have not yet been irretrievably seduced by the great metropolis.

This fictional consciousness is initially constructed in the minds of Dunbar's characters as a kind of revolt against their former selves. Joe Hamilton, Dunbar's palimpsest on which the New York type is set, grew up in an environment that defied most fictionalized accounts of rural benightedness. The novel begins there, at Joe's family home. The Hamilton household is respectably neat, run with a tempered hand by the parents Berry and Fannie, and the children Joe and Kitty are hard-working and well-dressed. The moral atmosphere is under control: they go to church, they go to work, they eat at home, and their only outings are to visit family and friends. Like New York, the southern countryside is rendered a space imposed upon by fictional representations.

Indeed, the novel's first sentence sets this theme in motion: "Fiction has said so much in regret of the old days when there were plantations and overseers and masters and slaves, that it was good to come upon such a household as Berry Hamilton's, if for no other reason than it afforded a relief from the monotony of tiresome iteration" (17). Dunbar himself is relieved not to be concerned with the belabored anti-southern sentiments of twentieth-century cosmopolitanism. His post-Reconstruction South is superior to the northern city, regardless of the injustices dealt to African Americans at the hands of Jim Crow. "[T]he South has its faults -- no one condones them -- and its disadvantages," he writes through the eyes of fictional New York sermonizers, "but... even what [migrants] suffered from these was better than what awaited them in the great alleys of New York" (160). To the Hamiltons, New York is a mythical place, and Dunbar ironically illustrates its false representation: "They had heard of New York as a place vague and far away, a city that, like heaven, to them had existed by faith alone. All the days of their lives they had heard of it, and it seemed to them the centre of all the glory, all the wealth, and all the freedom of the world. New York. It had an alluring sound" (68). Joe in particular is susceptible to this fictionalized version of the city, and as a result, he would be the first to accept its superficial veil.

Joe is obsessed with the *idea* of New York. He is consumed with a desire "to be a part of all that the metropolis meant" (74), and he searches for this meaning on the New York streets. On his first day, he gazes in revelatory wonder at the "manners" of the young men on the street. They are going places other than church or family visiting. He is less baffled by their motivations than by his own provincialism, "the knowledge that his horizon had been very narrow..." His southern upbringing had deprived him of a life. "Why should those fellows be different from him? Why should they walk the streets so

knowingly, so independently, when he knew not whither to turn his steps?" (74) He was determined to reject in toto his southern past so that "some day some greenhorn from the South should stand at a window and look out envying at him, as he passed, red-cravated, patent-leathered, intent on some goal" (74). The process of acculturation from hick to sport is rendered in Faustian terms. Dunbar remarks,

The first sign of the demoralisation of the provincial who comes to New York is his pride at his insensibility to certain impressions which used to influence him at home. First he begins to scoff, and there is no truth in his views not depth in his laugh. But by and by, from mere pretending, it becomes real. He grows callous. After that he goes to the devil very cheerfully (75).

James Weldon Johnson later mimics this, a trope of the anti-urban form, in his *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*. Though as we will see, his version of the sporting life was far more optimistic than Dunbar's, he writes that "New York City is the most fatally fascinating thing in America. She sits like a great witch at the gate of the country, showing her alluring white face and hiding her crooked hands and feet under the folds of her wide garments -- constantly enticing thousands from far within, and tempting those who come from across the sea to go no further. And all these become the victims of her caprice" (65). In particular, the Tenderloin was a "slough from which it takes a herculean effort to leap" (83).

Like Crane's Jimmie, Pete, and Maggie, Dunbar's Joe Hamilton is dissatisfied by his cultural roots and seeks to immerse himself to the point of forgetfulness in the culture of consumption. In this way Dunbar, like Crane, demonstrates how clothing and manners are romantic fictions, hiding reality in the way fictional representations of society do.

Romantic modes of fiction are exposed by both Crane and Dunbar -- and naturalists in general -- as psychologically and culturally debasing. The moral foundation upon which Joe stood in the South was to be rejected hook line and sinker and replaced by a false consciousness of urban gentility. Joe, however, was particularly susceptible to this pitfall. Back in the South, he was exposed to contacts with southern aristocrats and "came to imbibe some of their ideas" (19). "[T]oo early in life," Dunbar writes of Joe, he "bid fair to be a dandy" (19). This disposition places Joe in Dunbar's second category of migrants to New York -- the fools that stay. Crane's characters, in contrast, were already there.

These marginal aspects of southerners in New York are repulsive to Dunbar. The novel's first substantial treatment of a marginal southerner is the character William Thomas, a crass and arrogant African American who was raised in the South, but had long ago relinquished his status as a greenhorn. We witness Dunbar's disgust through the eyes of Joe's mother, Fannie, who is experienced enough to regard Thomas's contradictory consciousness as transparent in a way that none of Crane's characters were able to do: "Thomas was not the provincial who puts every one on par with himself, nor was he the metropolitan who complacently patronises the whole world. He was trained out of the one and not up to the other. The intermediate only succeeded in being offensive" (80). Throughout Joe's process of marginalization, he becomes in Dunbar's eyes, a "small-souled, warped being" (83). For the author and his audience, he was a pitiful example of "the jest of Fate" -- the sport of the gods. His immersion into Tenderloin life, rather than informing him as to the realities of an immoral region as it had with Campbell, "afflicted [him with a] sort of moral and mental astigmatism that made him see everything wrong" (83).

The social fiction of the New York lifestyle as a freeing, sporting one, is rendered within Dunbar's own fictional narrative, making Dunbar's story more "true" than the realities he represents. The racial message here is rendered in the scenes set at the Banner Club, a "black and tan" club where whites and blacks mingle freely. In the story, the Banner Club draws "the curious who wanted to see something of the other side of life" (95). "White visitors" enjoyed the club's environment as "visitors." They comprise people "who were young enough to be fascinated by the bizarre, and those that were old enough to know that it was all in the game" (95). There is no positive potential in the atmosphere of the Banner Club, "the place was a social cesspool, generating a poisonous miasma and reeking with the stench of decayed and rotten moralities" (95). Dunbar describes the scene in his own voice: "There is no defense to be made for it. But what do you expect when *false idealism and fevered ambition* come face to face with catering cupidity?" (italics mine 95)

The fact that "Joe heard things [at the Banner] that had never come within range of his mind before" is not a good thing for young African-American men. But for the whites, who understand the fiction, the game of it, it is relatively innocuous. For a white journalist named Skaggsy, slumming at the Banner is a source of rich material and nothing more. Condescendingly explaining his motivations to Joe and Thomas, Skaggsy remarks,

"You see a lot o' fellows say to me, 'What do you want to go down to that nigger club for?' That's what they call it, 'nigger club.' But I say to 'em, 'Gentlemen, at that nigger club, as you choose to call it, I get more inspiration than I could get at any of the greater clubs in New York'" (96-7).

Skaggsy is the most dangerous character in the book,²³ as he is one of the architects of New York's mythical facade. Though older blacks listening in on Skaggsy comprehend the white man's outrageous insincerity, Joe is "wide-eyed with wonder and admiration, and he couldn't understand the amused expression on Thomas's face, nor why he surreptitiously kicked him under the table" (97-8).

One regular at the Banner, nicknamed Sadness for his mournful countenance, is Dunbar's black philosopher of the dispossessed. He is sympathetic only in that he is honest about his immorality. When he substantiates the fiction of the sporting life to Joe, he does so with irony: "Oh, it's a fine, rich life, my lad. I know you'll like it. I said you would the first time I saw you. It has plenty of stir in it, and a man never gets lonesome. Only the rich are lonesome. It's only the independent who depend upon others" (115). The dramatic irony at work is clarified by Sadness's "peculiar laugh" and "a look in his terribly bright eyes that made Joe creep" (115). Joe's devotion to the New York myth was too strong for him to understand Sadness's sarcasm: "The only effect that the talk of Sadness had upon him was to make him feel wonderfully 'in it'" (115). Joe thanks him for helping him "lots," and Sadness yells back at him, "You lie... I haven't; I was only fool enough to try" (116). Joe dismisses the outbreak as the babblings of a drunk. Now, Dunbar writes, "he belonged to a peculiar class, one that grows larger and larger in New York and which has imitators in every large city in this country... [it is] a great hulking, fashionably uniformed fraternity of indolence... It was into this set that Sadness had sarcastically invited Joe" (117).

Inevitably, Joe is seduced by a Tenderloin succubus, Hattie Sterling. It was her charm more than any other influence that created the monster Joe becomes. In one of the

²³ This is true, regardless of the fact that he is the one man who proves capable of freeing Berry Hamilton from jail. He exposes Berry's former employer's brother as the culprit, but does so strictly to increase his newspaper's sales and to add to its spurious reputation as a voice for the disenfranchised (176).

final chapters, rather heavy-handedly entitled “Frankenstein,” Joe displaces the blame of his dissipation onto her: “‘You put me out -- you -- you, and you made me what I am.’ The realisation of what he was, of his foulness and degradation, seemed just to have come to him fully. ‘You made me what I am, and then you sent me away. You let me come back, and now you put me out’” (156). Predictably, he kills her, earning him a life sentence. If Crane’s sermonizers are depicted as ironically blind to their pernicious influences on the Bowery population, Dunbar openly agrees with his sermonizers assertions about emigrating north:

“Here is another example of the pernicious influence of the city on untrained Negroes. Oh, is there no way to keep these people from rushing away from the small villages and country districts of the South up to the cities, where they cannot battle with the terrible force of a strange and unusual environment? Is there no way to prove to them that woollen-shirted, brown-jeaned simplicity is infinitely better than broad-clothed degradation?” (160)

Rather than viewing marginal characters in a process of cultural development, Dunbar favors a pure sense of authenticity over Joe’s broadened horizon. Authenticity and sincerity are seen as moral imperatives in both *The Sport of the Gods* and *Maggie*. And regardless of whether you instinctually prefer Bowery culture, Victorian culture, Southern culture, or sporting culture, Crane and Dunbar represent those instincts as subconsciously absorbed from a variety of textual lies. By this time in New York history, Melvillean preferences and assumptions are indistinguishable. Whether you revolt or conform in New York, you will be lead into the same jumble of insincerities.

James Weldon Johnson's ex-colored man is born in Georgia around 1870 to a fair-skinned mulatto woman and a white southern gentleman. He is raised by his mother as a white child in Connecticut, where his father sends them to clear the way for a respectable marriage. In his early years he is unaware of both his illegitimacy and his racial status. Consistent with many first person narratives by African-American writers, the turning point in the young boy's life is when the truth of his inferior racial status is revealed to him. Upon graduating from high school, he decides to enter a black college, Atlanta University, but is barely there a week before his only money is stolen; and so begins a series of misadventures that lead him to Jacksonville, New York's Tenderloin district, Europe, and back to Georgia. In Georgia he witnesses a brutal lynching that fills him with such a profound feeling of shame that he renounces his blackness. At the end of the tale, we find him back in New York as, of all things, a prosperous white landlord. But his earlier experiences in New York's Tenderloin concern us here, a series of chapters that Johnson constructs to question white America's understanding of both the region's worth and the positive contributions of African-American culture to the United States.

The ex-colored man grew up through his most formative period relatively affluent and, unaware of his blackness, ill-prepared for the realities faced by African Americans at the end of the nineteenth century. Achieving this sense of preparedness seemed to have necessitated a certain level of personal dissipation. For more than a year he negotiated the pitfalls of the Tenderloin which within weeks had subsumed his fictional predecessor, Joe Hamilton. Having been trained a cigar manufacturer during a brief stay in Florida, the ex-colored man initially supported himself in New York by the same trade. Over time, however, his rapturous outings in the gambling clubs and cabarets of the Tenderloin took precedence. He inevitably revoked his respectable status as a skilled worker: "I at last

realized that making cigars for a living and gambling for a living could not be carried on at the same time, and I resolved to give up the cigar making”(82).

During a time he regarded as his “dark period” (83), the ex-colored man’s New York consisted of ten city blocks: Sixth Avenue from Twenty-third to Thirty-third Street with the blocks crossing one block west (82), a place where “Central Park was a distant forest, and the lower part of the city a foreign land” (82-83). Though Eloise Johnson claims that in the 1890s, “the Tenderloin was a vague area” (10), as opposed to its uptown complement San Juan Hill²⁴, Johnson marks it out as a clearly definable site. His textualization of slumming depends on this: by isolating the site within concrete physical parameters, he can more readily construct a distinction between the Tenderloin and the city as a whole -- both spatially and morally.

Although the ex-colored man is a mulatto and would later refer to some white strangers in the Tenderloin’s milieu as “slummers” (presumably as distinct from himself) it seems as if no one in the culture of the Tenderloin really “belongs.” Over the course of a year within its confines, he acquaints himself with “a score of bright, intelligent young fellows who had come up to the great city with high hopes and ambitions and who had fallen under the spell of this under life, a spell they could never throw off” (83). One Tenderloin habitué is given the nickname “the doctor” for having spent two years at Harvard Medical School. “But here he was,” the ex-colored man intones, “living this gas-light life, his will and moral sense so enervated and deadened that it was impossible for him to break away” (83). As Harvard Medical School had already begun to matriculate African Americans by 1865 (Randall Kennedy xix-xx), “the doctor” defies racial categorization. With this in mind, when the ex-colored man refers to the Tenderloin as a

²⁴ Located from Sixtieth Street and Sixty-Fourth between Tenth Avenue and Eleventh. It was named “San Juan Hill” with the Spanish-American War in mind; the analogy was made between that war and the race riots that regularly took place in the New York neighborhood.

“lower world” later in the narrative, it can be construed as racially-motivated condescension (Cataliotti 67), but its dissipating effects actually have equal-opportunity status.

Deterministic class associations are frustrated in Johnson’s *Tenderloin* as well. *Tenderloin* gamblers, for example, are not themselves intrinsically associated with poverty or the slums per se. Their standing in the *Tenderloin* is determined by the *Tenderloin*. Upon first entering one of the gambling clubs, the ex-colored man recalls “aristocrats of the place” who posed elegantly at the tables and “seemed to be practicing a sort of Chesterfieldian politeness towards each other” (67-68). Startled, the ex-colored man soon observed seedy men in linen dusters begging for fifty cents to get back in the game; these latter had literally lost the clothes on their backs and were provided dusters by the club’s management. At first he had trouble reading this unusual contradiction of congregated urban types, since up to that point he had been experiencing rigidly delineated boundaries of caste. It then becomes apparent that those same patrons exhibiting “Chesterfieldian politeness” could (and most likely would) be wearing linen dusters in a night or two. As the ex-colored man explains, “In my gambling experiences I passed through all states and conditions that a gambler is heir to. Some days found me able to peel ten- and twenty-dollar bills from a roll, and others found me clad in a linen duster and carpet slippers” (83). We are invited to witness a powerful act of citizenship here; in this novel, immoral action translates into socioeconomic wisdom.

Along with gambling, the *Tenderloin* gives the ex-colored man his initiation to ragtime piano. He was trained in classical piano early in his life and to him, ragtime is a revelation. Robert H. Cataliotti has recently argued that the ex-colored man’s process of acquisition was “closer to a white man appropriating the ‘novel charm’ of some exotic

music, than to a black man adopting and exploring a form of expression that connects him to African American culture” (67). Though in the tradition of textual representations of African-American musical culture this may be true, by this point in the narrative the ex-colored man is a racial and regional amalgamation. The acquisition of ragtime piano is one more addition to his inductive process of knowledge formation; it is his latest payment from a continuous process of cultural annuity, informed by his exposure to varying regional cultures -- New England, the South, Europe, and so forth. Exposure and influence, the ex-colored man himself admits, was the well-spring of his talents: “The fact is, nothing great or enduring, especially in music, has ever sprung full-fledged and unprecedented from the brain of any master; the best that he gives to the world he gathers from the hearts of the people, and runs it through the alembic of his genius” (73).

It was in the Tenderloin’s cabarets (or “professional clubs”) not its gambling establishments, that he would make his musical strides. In *Black Manhattan* Johnson makes the distinction between “honky-tonks” -- which were night clubs with black and white patrons which sold alcohol and provided both professional and amateur entertainment -- and “professional clubs” -- frequented almost solely by professional entertainers and athletes and their “satellites and admirers” (74). Though the difference between the two club types is negligible, it is at a professional club, modeled after Ike Hines’s (West Twenty-seventh Street), that the narrator of *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* receives his education in piano ragtime. The narrator of *The Autobiography* would, in fact, update his already well-developed musical talents by combining a preexisting knowledge of classical music with ragtime, a form strictly associated with African-American artists. Self-taught over long nights of exploring the Tenderloin, the ex-colored man discovers a highly marketable commodity and the apparatus to improve his

condition. "I finally caught up another method of earning money," he relates, "and so did not have to depend entirely upon the caprices of fortune at the gambling table. Through continuously listening to the music at the 'Club,' and through my own previous training, my natural talent and perseverance, I developed into a remarkable player of ragtime; indeed, I had the name at the time of being the best ragtime-player in New York" (83-84).

Ragtime was the most pronounced popular musical mode in the United States from the late 1890s to World War One. It combined the European tradition of crafted composition with signature African-American syncopated rhythms (Cataliotti 64). The ex-colored man gives himself full credit for inventing the hybrid of classical music and ragtime: "I brought all my knowledge of classical music to bear and, in so doing, achieved some novelties which pleased and even astonished my listeners. It was I who first made ragtime transcriptions of familiar classic selections" (84). "Ragging the classics," as it was called, "was a way for ragtimers to strike back at their academic critics" (Berlin *Ragtime* 70). Music critics, of course, were extremely vocal about the ill-effects of "ragging the classics." "We have musical unions in many of our cities," Edward Baxter Perry extolled in a 1918 review entitled "Ragging Good Music," "and one of the first rules they should pass is that any member found guilty of what is called 'ragging' a classic should be dismissed from the organization in disgrace, and never again permitted to appear in any reputable organization" (qtd. in *Ragtime* Berlin 70). But, as Berlin points out, the practice of co-opting classical and nationalistic music for popular forms is hardly unique in American history (71).

In Johnson's textual representation of the Tenderloin, then, there are glimmerings of cultural ascendancy. The ex-colored man, here, is engaging in a subversively creative act. Ragtime piano in the United States was widely considered both musically and

morally corrupt. There can be no doubt that the form was popularly associated with immoral social action. As Edward A. Berlin laconically sums it up: “The main lines of the offensive were: (1) ridicule; (2) appeals to racial bias; (3) prophecies of doom; (4) attempts at repression; and (5) suggestions of moral, intellectual, and physical dangers” (40). The music was compared with malaria, alcohol, and “a dog with rabies” (Berlin *Ragtime* 44). Though by today’s standards the sounds and lyrics seem quite tame, there are many parallels to be drawn between it and the current gangsta rap in terms of public reaction: Berlin writes that “whites [disapproved of the music] because they feared the effects of African-American music on impressionable white youth, and many African Americans did because they feared that their own youths would be corrupted by a music associated with brothels and cabarets, and because they found the texts of ragtime songs to be racially demeaning” (“ragtime” 976). There was a strong move to censor piano rags: in New York City, ragtime was banned from a free pier concert in the summer of 1902 and by 1914 in public schools citywide.

Johnson’s “Club” officially prohibited both drinking and gambling. We are told, however, that the ex-colored man could not afford the “Club” without first winning money at the gambling tables. The two establishments, the gambling clubs and the cabarets, were a part of one culture, but the cabarets were the focus of those “creative efforts” Johnson focuses on in his history: “It was in such places that early Negro theatrical talent created for itself a congenial atmosphere, an atmosphere of emulation and guildship” (*Black Manhattan* 78). More broadly speaking, Robert Park argues that marginal individuals can take advantage of the release they experience after having migrated and congregated in new moral regions. “This release,” he writes, “is followed in the course of time by the reintegration of the individuals so released into a new special

order” (“Human” 161). One such “new special order” found its home in the Tenderloin cabaret.

The ex-colored man boasts that “It was no secret that the great increase in slumming visitors was due to my playing” (84). “Among other white ‘slummers’” who frequented the cabaret at which he played ragtime, he met the wealthy white man that he would give the appellation “my millionaire.” His millionaire “bore the indefinable but unmistakable stamp of culture” (84). He provides the ex-colored man with a means to recommence his temporarily stagnated pattern of mobility: “Through [ragtime] I... gained a friend who was the means by which I escaped from this lower world. And, finally, I secured a wedge which has opened to me more doors and made me a welcome guest than my playing of Beethoven and Chopin could ever have done” (84). But the workload was severe at times, and it can certainly be argued that this wedge was a self-serving one, rather than a means for the uplift of the African-American community. Cataliotti writes, “Just like the stereotype of the happy darky driven ‘mercilessly to exhaustion’ by a white ‘tyrant,’ the ex-colored man is content with his pay, looks upon his subjugation as a ‘familiar and warm relationship,’ and finds in that tyrant an assimilationist model” (68). But the “changes and fusions of culture” Park highlights, serve to inform and enliven the musical hybrid the ex-colored man invents.

The ex-colored man decides to cash in on an older manifestation of radical chic. The millionaire seemed to have access to an inexhaustible fortune. The money, along with a degree of cultural acceptance, enabled him, like Prince Rodolphe in Eugene Sue’s *Les Mystères de Paris* (1842), to wander freely in the underworld and discover its most entertaining talents. The man propositions the ex-colored man to play at a fashionable New York soirée for the benefit, apparently, of those who would never get the

opportunity to hear ragtime if it remained within the restricted confines of the Tenderloin. Though the guests in this upper-class parlor party are “all decidedly blasé,” (86), the ex-colored man begins his session with one of his “liveliest ragtime pieces” and in no time he observes that “the effect was surprising.” All talking, eating, and cynicism broke off; the audience was entranced (87). His millionaire has successfully brought the Tenderloin to the Fifth Avenue salon.

This form of salon slumming was not restricted to imported musical talents from morally marginalized spaces. The very act of reading about the Tenderloin no doubt provoked a sense of cultural “release.” Johnson shows the chic New Yorkers enjoying ragtime in an upscale parlor as one avatar of the readers themselves: “These were people -- and they represented a large class -- who were expecting to find happiness in novelty, each day restlessly exploring and exhausting every resource of this great city that might possibly furnish a new sensation or awaken a fresh emotion, and who were always grateful to anyone who aided them in their quest” (87). One reason Johnson designed his short novel to reflect the first person autobiography was because, as Eugene Levy attests, “For whites, reading a black man’s autobiography often served as a vicarious substitute for personal contact with blacks” (130).

Taking up a narrative such as this one supplanted the experience of engaging in the sordid nightlife of the Tenderloin, laboring in the close atmosphere of a cigar factory, or participating, passively or aggressively, in a southern lynching. The millionaire voices his satisfaction, and perhaps Johnson’s, when he tells our narrator at the end of his first parlor performance, “Well, I have given them something they’ve never had before” (87). So this was a form of slumming in three ways: 1) the ex-colored man himself was once again exposing himself to a significantly alien culture; 2) the modish New York socialites

got a taste of African-American culture without having to actually enter into it; and 3) for readers not familiar with the Tenderloin, white or black, the experience of reading *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* was in itself a secondary form of slumming.

There is the bitter taste of “co-optation and distortion” by whites from the entertainment industry in the cabaret atmosphere of the Tenderloin, as Cataliotti rigorously argues (66). The ex-colored man reports that one type of white person in the “Club” “was made up of variety performers and others who delineated ‘darky characters’; they came to get their imitations first hand from the Negro entertainers they saw there” (78). Along with musicians, minstrels, thespians, and athletes, the ex-colored man informs us, the cabaret was also a place where whites would come during a night of “sight-seeing, or slumming” (78). Though Ike Hines’s, for example, is a refuge from the greater Tenderloin, as we have seen above, it also “enjoyed a large patronage of white sightseers and slummers and of white theatrical performers on the lookout for ‘Negro stuff,’ and, moreover, a considerable clientele of white women who had or sought to have colored lovers” (176). But in the novel their presence is not wholly intrusive, which in some ways foreshadows Johnson’s later acceptance of Carl Van Vechten’s Harlem escapades. In fact, there is a distinction made between whites with apparent “insider” status, and those to whom the club milieu was more alienating. Some would only peer in for a minute or two to satisfy a minor curiosity, others would stay all night, including a number of single white women:

They were all good-looking and well-dressed, and seemed to be women of some education. One of these in particular attracted my attention; she was an exceedingly beautiful woman of about thirty-five; she had glistening copper-colored hair, very white skin, and eyes very much like Du

Maurier's conception of Trilby's 'twin gray stars.' When I came to know her, I found that she was a woman of considerable culture; she had traveled in Europe, spoke French, and played the piano well. She was always dressed elegantly, but in absolutely good taste. (79)

In short, the race, the class, and the gender of the woman, whom he later refers to as "the widow," all combine to illuminate the very limits of those categories of "definition," and exemplify the marginal characteristics of the Tenderloin's cultural milieu. But for the ex-colored man (and needless to say a white middle-class audience) most profoundly alarming of all is her open, sexually-charged relationship with a black man. He learns that the widow bestowed jewelry on her escort, and she paid for him to dress himself at the most expensive New York tailors. He also ascertains that the man was not alone, that there were many like him. "More that I learned," he admits, "would be better suited to a book on social phenomenon than to a narrative of my life" (79). The point here is not that her companion was not being reduced to a (perhaps racially-motivated) object of sexuality (even prostitution) but that the white, upper-middle to upper-class woman was an "insider" in the vortex of the club's social action.

Even the scene of her own murder makes her seem as if she "belongs" as much in the purview of the "Club" as the ex-colored man, who by this time was something of a celebrity there. She is shot in the throat by her companion after spying the ex-colored man with her drinking champagne and presumably thought the worst. The ex-colored man had been warned that "the pair had lately quarreled and had not been together at the 'Club' for some nights," and if he was seen with her, the escort, "generally known as a 'bad man,'" might fly into a jealous rage (89). Regarding this as a jealousy killing complicates the escort's motives. If it was money he was after, why cut off the supply?

Or, if he believed that the ex-colored man may take his place, why not kill him? Zygmunt Bauman's lecture on the distinction between a "tourist" and a "vagabond" can help shed some light on the psycho-pathology of the widow's murderer: the widow was playing the role of the "tourist," and the companion the "vagabond." A tourist's journey is voluntary, Bauman explains. Their existence relies upon mobility and sensation-gathering and continuous movement seems to provide a sense of security -- if you don't like it one place, keep moving (90). Vagabonds are on the move as well, but they are the oxymoronic "involuntary tourists." They are on the move because they *have to be*, and they fantasize about community.

The tourist relishes the ill-fated vagabond's habitat and, Bauman insists, "the darker the background, the brighter the shine" (94). The analogy is exaggerated in the novel by the widow's (possible) perception of herself as a pale figure in "black Bohemia," glamorously sipping champagne in a club occupied mainly by black men and women. Vagabonds and tourists, Bauman continues, are alter-egos (92) -- the tourist is the sun and the vagabond the moon. And when the sun of the widow ceases to shine on the moon of the companion, the moon plunges into an existential darkness. Compounded with feelings of base jealousy, feelings any human being might experience, the complex tourist/vagabond relationship intensifies the killer's emotional response -- like Othello toward Desdemona -- and results in murder. And as Bauman is specifically commenting on the "major, principal division of *postmodern* society," (emphasis mine 93) the ex-colored man can be construed as documenting a phenomenon in which the Tenderloin's participants foreshadow a nationwide condition.

Given this scene, compounded by the cultural variety Johnson renders, does the author want us to see the Tenderloin as an area to avoid or discover? The ex-colored man,

after all, flees the scene of the crime and subsequently abandons the Tenderloin as well: “Just which streets I followed when I got outside I do not know, but I think I must have gone towards Eighth Avenue, then down towards Twenty-third Street and across towards Fifth Avenue. I traveled, not by sight, but instinctively. I felt like one fleeing in a horrible nightmare” (90). Keeping in mind the district’s parameters (Twenty-fifth Street to Fifty-fifth Street and from Fifth Avenue to Seventh) and the address of the “Club” (West Twenty-seventh Street), his route is significant: first he runs to the nearest border of the Tenderloin -- Twenty-seventh Street and Eighth Avenue, now fashionable Chelsea, but then a neighborhood heavily identified by working-class waterfront culture. He then runs down to Twenty-third Street, past the bottom line of the Tenderloin and then over to Fifth Avenue, where the Tenderloin gives way to New York’s most affluent section. There he is found by his millionaire who secures his safety and sweeps him away on a tour of Europe.

A brief look at Johnson’s actual autobiography *Along This Way* (1933) can help resolve the seeming contradiction between the ex-colored man’s perceptions of the Tenderloin in *The Autobiography* and Johnson’s morally innocuous, though culturally uplifting Tenderloin in *Black Manhattan*. Given that *The Autobiography* is in part the story of a race traitor (in the end, the ex-colored man passes as a white landlord in New York) and that *Black Manhattan*’s purpose is largely to actualize a feeling of cultural uplift and legitimacy for the African-American community, Johnson betrays a sense of personal uncertainty regarding the Tenderloin’s legacy. “On the one hand,” Bernard Bell professes, “Johnson’s professional background sharpened his analysis of color and class differences in the United States; and on the other hand, it reinforced his conservative middle-class prejudices” (86).

After *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* was published in its second edition, where he was given credit as the author, Johnson received numerous letters from a confused public inquiring about various periods of his life. “That is, probably,” he admits in *Along this Way*, “one of the reasons why I am writing the present book” (239). By the time Johnson moved to New York to write songs for Broadway with his brother and his friend Bob Cole, the Tenderloin he describes in *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* no longer existed. In 1901, Johnson moved into the Marshall Club (260 West 53rd Street), where African-American New Yorkers enjoyed “a fashionable sort of life that hitherto had not existed” (171). This was bohemia as Christine Stansell understands it in *American Moderns*, a “coherent milieu” that “supplied young men and women materials to turn... alienation into professionally appealing innovation” (14, 18). But as Greenwich Village, the subject of Stansell’s study, was “not for blacks” (Stansell 67), black bohemians congregated farther uptown at the Marshall, and black New York’s moral region had moved even farther uptown to Harlem. The Marshall boasted “excellent food,” “well-dressed colored men,” and parlors in which to “loungue and chat” (171). Its habitués were hardworking and highly professional musicians, composers, performers, and managers, there to make a name for themselves on Broadway.

Ragtime too had gone the way of many popular forms. After the twenties and the birth of jazz, ragtime dipped into virtual obscurity with few exceptions, notably “‘the forgotten’ Scott Joplin” and, “inappropriately,” Irving Berlin’s *Alexander’s Ragtime Band* (Berlin *Ragtime* 173). By this time in the history of New York music, syncopated rhythms were “not such a startling novelty” (*Along This Way* 175). The new audience was a Broadway audience, a general American public not in the habit of complicating their experiential foundation, but of escaping from their quotidian lives. In contrast to the

Tenderloin, the Marshall and its thereabouts was centripetal in its cultural effect, not centrifugal: “the Marshall came to be one of the great sights of New York. But it was more than a ‘sight’; its importance as the radiant point of the forces that cleared the way for the Negro stage cannot be over-estimated” (*Along This Way* 177).

“As the Marshall gained popularity,” Johnson writes, “the more noted theatrical stars and the better paid vaudevillians deserted the down-town clubs and made the hotel their professional and social rendezvous” (176). And his description of Ike Hines’s in *Along This Way*, the model for the “Club” in *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, corresponds with that of the Marshall, though his choice of words is revealing: “It was principally a club for Negroes connected with the theater, but it drew the best elements from the various circles of Bohemia -- except the gamblers” (176). Johnson includes here the gamblers among the “best” of Tenderloin society. The ex-colored man could only comfortably afford Ike Hines’s if he won at gambling, that is, until he began performing ragtime.

There is no condescension here; the immoral connotation of gambling is inextricable in a region in which immoral action -- gambling, drinking, ragtime piano, cross-racial sexuality -- is inextricably intertwined with cultural production; in *Black Manhattan* he writes, “It was in such places as this that early Negro theatrical talent created for itself a congenial atmosphere, an atmosphere of emulation and guildship. It was also an atmosphere in which artistic ideas were born and developed” (78). In the narrative, “such places” served to afford Johnson’s main character with an exposure to sporting life that ultimately cultivated his talent.

Johnson’s meeting with H.L. Mencken, as he recalls it in *Along This Way*, is remarkably informative in terms of Johnson’s authorial intent. Mencken was an author

who, Johnson reveals, had “made a sharper impression” on Johnson “than any other American then writing....” They talked in Mencken’s office at the magazine *Smart Set*, where Mencken was an editor, for nearly forty-five minutes: “I [Johnson] had never been so fascinated at hearing anyone talk. He talked about literature, about Negro literature, the Negro problem, and Negro music.” He told Johnson that he felt African-American authors were making a mistake “when they indulged in pleas for justice and mercy, when they prayed indulgence for shortcomings, when they based their protests against unjust treatment on the Christian moral or ethical code, when they argued to prove that they were as good as anybody else.” Instead, Mencken argued, ““What they should do... is to single out the strong points of the race and emphasize them over and over and over; asserting, at least on these points, that they are *better* than anybody else.”” Johnson’s response to this lecture brings together all of the ambiguous threads -- “I called his attention that I had attempted something of that sort in *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*” (Along 305).

In the chapter that follows, any equivocation as to the enriching possibilities of entering into “moral regions” is left behind. The relationship between Abraham Cahan and Hutchins Hapgood is symbolic of the growing partnership between marginalized neighborhoods and the genteel class. As a “Victorian in a modern world,”²⁵ Hapgood completely disavows his Victorian past and discovers in the Jewish ghetto a culture that demands textualizing and explication. In *The Spirit of the Ghetto* (1902), published in the same year as *The Sport of the Gods*, Hapgood is unambiguous about his desire to revise the traditional view of Jewish New York as was rendered by Jacob Riis twelve years earlier in *How the Other Half Lives*. Riis depicted the Jewish Lower East Side as a wounding influence to American entrepreneurial morality, one that was growing into

²⁵ The title of Hapgood’s autobiography is *A Victorian in the Modern World* (1939).

proportions that would drastically affect New York's social economy. It too, like Dunbar and Johnson's "black Bohemia," should be isolated from the larger New York society. Like Dunbar, Riis saw nothing but the worst in his subject. But unlike Johnson, Hapgood was deliberate in his response.

Chapter 5:
The Gentile and the Jew:
Hutchins Hapgood and Abraham Cahan on the Lower East Side

How individuals and groups who represent what might be called the underdog, when they are endowed with energy and life, exert pressures towards modification of our cast-iron habits and lay rich deposits of cultural enhancement, if we are able to take advantage of them.

-- Hutchins Hapgood, 1910

“That the Ghetto has an unpleasant aspect,” Hutchins Hapgood wrote in 1902, “is as true as it is trite” (5). In his *The Spirit of the Ghetto* (1902), Hapgood left himself open for a thorough drubbing by the Progressive watchdogs of turn-of-the-century New York (and later academics who like to see their oppressed populations in terminally oppressed postures). He explains in his preface of *The Spirit of the Ghetto* that further delineation of depravity and destitution in the slums is not going to be “the subject of the following sketches” (5). After decades of American journalism drudging up the “lures and snares” of tormented and immoral spaces, most notably the Lower East Side, Hapgood finds moralizing urban exposé a hackneyed mode of writing, a kind of kitsch. Kitsch, in the words of one scholar, is a form that is “filled with representations of familiar, formulaic, and sentimental stories....” (Mitchell 229) Umberto Eco defines kitsch as a styleme which produces a pretested effect, “an imaginative device which provides solutions to a real situation according to a predetermined plan” (136). In short, it meets most of its consumers’ expectations, precisely what Hutchins Hapgood was dedicated to avoiding, and precisely what the main body of famed slum investigator Jacob Riis’s work was: kitsch.

Hapgood’s *The Spirit of the Ghetto* was the first book-length treatment of New York’s Jewish tenement district (Rischin vii). This makes it one of the most exciting

journalistic experiments in American history. It was also a critical success, due, in part, to the disgust Americans felt while witnessing the Dreyfus Affair and its exposure of Old World anti-Semitism. Christine Stansell has convincingly argued in *American Moderns* that, though anti-Semitism was certainly on the rise in turn-of-the-century New York, a new Bohemian sensibility, finding its origins in genteel society, was also responsible for a growing sense of relativism among the elite. She refers to this phenomenon as the “philo-Semitic perspective.” It is not a pure form of relativism, she writes, particularly in the work of Hutchins Hapgood: “For all Hapgood’s declarations of newfound comradeship, the immigrants do not yet appear to be compeers so much as characters in the metropolitan theater.” “Still,” she continues, “the philo-Semitic perspective, for all its limitations, opened up that theater to a new idea of a possible America” (25). And by the late 1890s, Jewish writers like Abraham Cahan and Anzia Yezierska, among others, would answer the call of the “philo-Semites” and produce a body of fictional and journalistic prose that would open a cultural channel between the ghetto and the uptown gentile population.

But as Hapgood was writing from the gentile’s perspective, Stansell finds his Jewish subjects somewhat innocuous and tame, lending a certain condescension to his reportage of them (25). But it can be argued that had he introduced the Jews to the New York public as forceful agents of change in American society, he would be fueling Jacob Riis’s fire. This dilemma calls to mind Stephen Greenblatt’s theory of “exchange.” In *Shakespearean Negotiations*, Greenblatt outlines the possibility of tracing subtle sets of exchanges of “social energy”; what is possible through this process, a process of negotiation, is contingent upon what has historically preceded the work in question (3). Hapgood sacrifices emphasis on the political instrumentality of the Lower East Side in

favor of delineating the complex mechanisms of their society, mechanisms that might stimulate New York's cosmopolitan climate. But if the social advancement of the Jewish population was considered dangerous, as Riis clearly argued in *How the Other Half Lives* (1890), then what Hapgood was showing was more threatening than it may at first appear, lending a further connection to Greenblatt's idea. If we compare the process of Jewish advancement in Riis and in Hapgood, for example, though Hapgood's may seem a classic rags-to-riches paradigm, it is precisely the social action Riis was beseeching his readers to hold in check.

Jacob Riis has been recently heralded as a harbinger of "an alternative ethics" (Gandal 7), a ground-breaking social theorist who confronted "the willed ignorance of the middle and upper classes, who knew that there was human misery in their city but preferred to believe that it was deserved, perhaps even chosen, by its victims" (Sante x). And some scholars have argued that Riis's stereotyping and racism are a pose to ingratiate an otherwise reluctant audience, suspicious of such subject matter -- the Lower East Side Jews, for example -- particularly if seen through the lens of the immigrant Other: "Having known first hand the prejudice directed against the immigrant, Riis apparently decided that he could best retain the sympathies of middle-class readers by establishing a fictional bond with them" (Giles 17). To reposition our understanding of Riis in this way appears to be the only approach that would allow for further Riis studies. But Riis's ethnic chapters in his remarkably successful treatise on tenement life in the New York slums, *How the Other Half Lives*, are less than sympathetic to their subjects. As Ronald Sanders observes of Riis's ethnic characterizations, "the Jews are nervous and inquisitive, the Orientals are sinister, the Italians are unsanitary" (Sanders 92).

How the Other Half Lives was published during the early stages of Eastern and

Southern European immigration to the United States. From 1880 to 1910, approximately 1.4 million Jews alone would make New York their home. They comprised nearly a quarter of the city's population, the remainder unaccustomed to cultures hailing from farther east than Berlin. In the decade rendered in *How the Other Half Lives*, 1880-1890, three out of four Jews resided on the Lower East Side, about sixty thousand total. By 1920 there would be four hundred thousand (Jackson 620). Eastern European Jews found comfort, such as it was, in this neighborhood where block upon block of five-story walk-ups were inhabited by individuals and families who shared a common language, ate the same foods, and practiced (or deliberately did not practice) the same religion. Given their vast numbers, shtetl-like parochialism, cultural isolation, and predominating devotion to Eastern European Orthodoxy, assimilation seemed unlikely to the Anglo-German majority.

Riis entreated the Christian middle class to wrest the tenement districts out of the hands of the immigrant population, as it was both "the Christian thing to do" and morally sound business practice (*Gotham* 1183). He bolstered these arguments with photographs and illustrations that handled precisely the same subject matter -- the problem of the poor -- as illustrated reform literature throughout the century had done, and he belabored his book with sentimental tales from the ghetto which were well-grounded in the American mind. Umberto Eco theorizes that purveyors of kitsch "after surprising the reader with what they did not yet know" -- Riis's trademark mortality statistics, tenement blueprints, and shocking photographs -- "the author reassures him with what he knows already" (137). "Jewtown" and "The Sweaters of Jewtown," in particular, do little to enlighten his audience as to the benefits of harboring a domestic Jewish population: he depicts the Jews of the Lower East Side as being penurious, deceitful, litigious, argumentative,

fanatically religious, and greedy. Sound familiar? It is a reassuring list for an irritable native population shocked by the crush of new arrivals escaping from their inhospitable homelands -- Russia, Poland, the Ukraine, the Baltics. Riis was not in the business of convincing his readership to appreciate the cultural contributions of such a population. He wanted his audience to raze their homes to the ground, and they did.

How the Other Half Lives was popular for a number of reasons. As Ted Burrows and Mike Wallace point out in *Gotham*, the publication date could not have been more perfectly timed. Ward McCallister's *Society as I Have Found It* had just appeared -- a sycophantic nod to New York's wealthiest financiers, a group the general reading public found detestable at the height of the Gilded Age. McCallister seemed to offer no tangible vision of a better New York, whereas Riis confronted the city's worst problem areas head on. *How the Other Half Lives* is also a paragon of the sunshine-and-shadow tradition, Burrows and Wallace continue, and "Riis's literary strategy came straight from Dickens's *American Notes*, one of his favorite books" (1182). Dickens's *American Notes*, however, had been notably *unpopular* in a city that felt its favorite writer had betrayed it. Much like Riis, the great British novelist emphasized the horrors of New York, but Dickens alienated his American audience rather than empathizing with it. *American Notes*, published in 1842, had come too early. The negative imagery of Riis's jeremiad seemed enervating to audiences grown weary by urban growth. Privileged New Yorkers were compelled to impede its effects, particularly in regard to immigrant enfranchisement.

Jews were to become "Americanized," a term that implied not only the rejection of an older culture for a newer one, but the "initiation" of a people into a democratic society increasingly consumer-oriented and actuated by industrial growth (Ewen 15). But as the immigrant population rose, David Ward tells us, "various immigrant groups were

presumed to possess different innate or hereditary aptitudes for democracy” (15). Randolph Bourne would later respond to this popular notion of political atavism in his essay “Trans-National America”:

Let us cease to think of ideals of democracy as magical qualities inherent in certain peoples. Let us speak, not of inferior races, but of inferior civilizations. We are all to educate and be educated. These peoples in America are in a common enterprise. It is not what we are now that concerns us, but what this plastic next generation may become in the light of a new cosmopolitan ideal (95).

Ward and Bourne are referring to a pseudoscientific theory of culture and politics which proliferated in the United States, primarily in moral reform literature, and it reached its zenith in the works of Jacob Riis.

That New York society as a whole had pegged the Jewish ghetto -- like the waterfront, the Bowery, and the Tenderloin -- as a turn-of-the-century corollary to Robert Park’s later “moral regions” is apparent in Hapgood’s preface for *The Spirit of the Ghetto*:

The Jewish quarter of New York is generally supposed to be a place of poverty, dirt, ignorance and immorality -- the seat of the sweatshop, the tenement house, where “red lights” sparkle at night, where the people are queer and repulsive. Well-to-do persons visit the “Ghetto” merely from motives of curiosity or philanthropy; writers treat it “sociologically,” as of a place in crying need of improvement (5).

The first paragraph of the entire book, this passage remarkable in its categorical responsiveness to Riis’s work. The character of the place is defined by “poverty, dirt,

ignorance and immorality” in its spatial relation to the “the sweatshop, the tenement.” The passage clearly points to Riis and his view of the ghetto’s qualities. As Riis wrote in his own introduction:

The boundary line lies there because, while the forces for good on one side vastly outweigh the bad -- it were not well otherwise -- *in the tenements all the influences make for evil*; because they are the hot-beds of the epidemics that carry death to rich and poor alike; the nurseries of pauperism and crime that fill our jails and police courts; that throw off a scum of forty thousand human wrecks to the island asylums and workhouses year by year; that turned out in the last eight years a round half million beggars to prey upon our charities; that maintain a standing army of ten thousand tramps with all that that implies; because, *above all they touch the family life with deadly moral contagion*. This is their worst crime, inseparable from the system. That we have to own it the child of our wrong does not excuse it, even though it gives it claim upon our utmost patience and tenderest charity (*italics mine* 6).

The period’s trends toward “curiosity,” “philanthropy,” and the social sciences as a means of ghetto improvement, which Hapgood points out, are all intrinsic to Riis’s characterization here. In contrast, Hapgood is determined “to report sympathetically” on the value systems and cultural contributions of the East Side Jewish population. Hapgood’s purpose in *The Spirit of the Ghetto* is to outline reasons for crossing physical moral boundaries, and to explicitly point out why “East Canal Street and the Bowery have interested [the author] more than Broadway and Fifth Avenue” (5). In other words, he is encouraging his genteel contemporaries to go slumming.

With *The Spirit of the Ghetto*, Hutchins Hapgood's implicit project is to undo everything Riis had accomplished 12 years earlier. As he writes in his preface, he is attempting to provide a cultural study of the Lower East Side in which "a 'Gentile' [reports] sympathetically on the character, lives and pursuits of certain east-side Jews with whom he has been in relations of considerable intimacy" (5). He was, in truth, extremely successful in forming relations with first-generation Jewish immigrants. Hapgood, like Riis,²⁶ solicited the aid of these insiders to aid in his investigations, Jews familiar with both Hapgood's world — middle- to upper-middle class, Anglo-Saxon, Ivy League — and the world he would observe. But his greatest influence for conceptualizing this forty-five block space in lower Manhattan and the culture it contained, was the writer and newspaper editor Abraham Cahan.

What is most remarkable about Cahan's influence on Hapgood is that it was a predominantly textual one. Hapgood was struck by Cahan's ability to render Jewish life as he himself saw it while slumming in the district, less concerned with the social dysfunctionality of an area whose every block housed over 2500 people, and more with the relationship between the immigrant and the rest of the city. Cahan portrayed newly arrived Jews on the Lower East Side in precisely the same way Hapgood perceived himself — absorbing the influences of the other group, struggling with the language and the marketplaces, taking in new and exciting forms of entertainment that were not offered back home. Those things that struck Americans as darkly foreign on the Lower East Side, seemed distinctly American to the new immigrant. Home for the New York Jews was, of

²⁶ In his graphically descriptive chapter "Jewtown," Riis is guided through the Jewish Lower East Side — specifically the neighborhoods around Ludlow, Hester, Orchard, and Broome streets — by Max Fischel, a man Riis later described as "a little old round, happy Jewish boy" (qtd. in Rischin "Abraham" 18). Riis assures us that Fischel was "one of their own people who knew of and sympathized with my mission." Fischel's insider-status enabled Riis to get close to his subjects, adding some indigenous authority to his study. "Without that precaution," Riis implicitly warns us, "my errand would have been fruitless; even with him it was often nearly so" (96).

course, Eastern Europe; for Hapgood, Hastings-on-Hudson. In short, Cahan's writing provided Hapgood with a model for cultural adaptation and acceptance in a society which, for the rest of New York, seemed to be doing neither.

Hapgood was obsessed with realism as a mode of textual representation. By representing ghetto culture in a realistic manner, rather than sermonizing about moral discrepancies, it would be possible to make converts of the genteel society in New York. At this time in New York writing, there was a dearth of literature that represented the "other half" as a positive, or at least tolerable, presence in New York society. In short -- as we have seen on Campbell's waterfront and Crane's Bowery -- there was no means by which the lower classes could channel their own influences upwards. In the final decades of the nineteenth century, the Yiddish stage had been the most highly advertised forum for cultural exchange. But the channel needed to be constructed by gentiles themselves in order to attract a gentile audience. The valve of this channel was first released in the offices of the New York *Commercial Advertiser* between 1897 and 1901 under the auspices of its city desk editor, Lincoln Steffens.

Steffens became the city editor at the *Commercial Advertiser* immediately after quitting his editorial position at the the *Evening Post* in 1897. In no time, the paper changed from being an organ of genteel exclusivity into boasting some of the most creative and stylized newspaper reportage in the country. The atmosphere in the newsroom there is reported to have been exceptional in its combination of youthful energy and prodigious intellectuality. From 1897 to 1901, Steffens directed his staff to compose feature articles reflecting his sense of the city as "a romance, to be explored with the assiduousness of a scholar examining a hitherto unknown manuscript, and written about with the imaginative

fire of a poet” (Sanders 80). The typical *Commercial Advertiser* reporter, Ronald Sanders notes, was an “engaged bohemian, ready to linger on in a slum tenement even after the police had made their call, prone to intense conversations with drunks on park benches, not averse even to get involved in saloon brawls – all for the sake of a story” (80).

Rather than choose his staff from the “professional” journalistic class, Steffens preferred instead to solicit articles from aspiring essayists, novelists, and playwrights who found on the New York streets an endless flow of inspirational material. Ronald Sanders informs us that the main body of *Commercial Advertiser* reporters were “renegades from the genteel academic posts that had been offered them” (80). The *Commercial Advertiser* was balanced on a literary threshold; the romantic world of the nineteenth-century novelist had been deliberately and successfully conjoined with the everyday grind of urban reporting, but without the biblical cant of a writer like Helen Campbell. Goals to reform an immigrant population -- to transform them into respectable and pious citizens -- had given way to a political aesthetic, one in which the “Americanization” process was demonized by the staff of the *Commercial Advertiser*.

Abraham Cahan was hired by Steffens in 1897 and found himself a lone Jew in a crowd of privileged gentiles, mostly recruited from Harvard University. By this time in his early forties, Cahan had already spent the previous twenty years or so covering the Jewish Lower East Side as a reporter and editor for the Yiddish papers. Regardless, Moses Rischin contends, his years at the *Commercial Advertiser* “comprised a seminal period in his journalistic apprenticeship” (“Abraham” 10). One of the rewards of this apprenticeship was establishing his friendship with Hutchins Hapgood, also on Steffens’s staff, a man who found in Cahan the intellectual intensity and seriousness of purpose that he himself was striving to achieve. According to Hapgood, Cahan had little trouble

winning over his new colleagues: “He formed a striking contrast to the young Harvard men; he gave them his point-of-view, and absorbed theirs; he taught them to understand something of the great East Side of New York, of its picturesque human characters and customs” (*Types* 110). Cahan returned the compliment, referring to Hapgood as “the only Gentile who knows and understands the spirit of the Ghetto” (qtd. in Rischin xxviii); in contrast, he saw Jacob Riis, by then a star police reporter for the *New York Sun*, as a man of outdated ideas (Rischin “Abraham” 14).

What Cahan perceived in Hapgood, born of seventeenth-century New England stock, was an American counterpart to the Russian intellectual class -- inquisitive, iconoclastic, and unencumbered by material temptations (Sanders 89): “Devoid of cunning, sincere, somewhat temperamental, and with a genuine and tender love for good books,” Rischin informs us, “‘Hutch,’ like a Russian nihilist or a sincere artist from the Montmartre quarter in Paris, hated all cant or ceremony” (Rischin “Abraham” 22). Reflecting on his interest in the Jewish quarter in an early essay for the *Atlantic Monthly* (June 1900), Hapgood elucidates the appealing qualities of “Russianness,” and how it manifests itself right in downtown New York: “The intellectual impulse of the Ghetto, no matter what its manifestation, is the spirit of Turgenev and of Tolstoi, a spirit at once of realism in art and of revolt in political opinion” (“Realism” 839). Writers with this type of sensibility were precisely the kind Steffens had in mind for the *Commercial Advertiser*. Cahan embodied all of these attributes and passed them on to Hapgood.

The *Commercial Advertiser* ran stories that appealed, possibly for the first time, to both the reading public uptown “who wanted to peak across the ‘Social Gulf’” and the subjects themselves, who found affirmation in the fact that their lives were deemed newsworthy (Stansell 25). Its positive takes on immigrant life and the potential of urban

cosmopolitanism was unheard of up to that point, though its grit proved lacking after only a couple of years. Hapgood later accused Steffens of turning stuffy overnight, cow-towing to the editor-in-chief and sacrificing time on the paper to work on his own material (*Types* 110-11). Whatever the case, his top writers, still in the mode of urban celebration, continued to seek out New York stories. Hapgood's *The Spirit of the Ghetto*, which originally appeared as essays in various publications between 1898 and 1902, was one of these spin-off projects emerging from the pages of the *Commercial Advertiser*. And perhaps its single most important sketch, at least from a literary point of view, is his portrait of Abraham Cahan entitled "A Novelist." In it, Hapgood provides a model for reading as slumming to his Anglo-Saxon peers.

He begins the piece by arguing that Cahan's most important writing is his work in English, as most of his work for the Yiddish papers was "exclusively educational" (230) -- informing his readers about the political necessity of Socialism, the implications of scientific discoveries, and emergent literary movements. He rejects Cahan's journalism as "less intrinsically interesting" than his stories because they generally lack the "strange and picturesque information" that fiction contains, simply because fiction deliberately designed and not dictated by the caprices of the streets. And when Cahan switched from Yiddish to English, he abandoned the journalistic sketches popular among his former colleagues in favor of fictional narratives, which were exceptional for "the sincere way in which they present a life intimately known" (230-31). By writing in English, this "life intimately known" could be passed on to gentile outsiders uptown. And rather than adopting the then popular American literary modes, "he felt that Americans as a class were hopelessly 'romantic,' 'unreal,' and undeveloped in their literary tastes and standards" (234). Cahan brought to the American readership an obsession with "truth"

that characterized Jewish culture: "Love of the truth, indeed, is the quality which seems to a stranger in the Ghetto the great virtue of that section of the city" (235).

This "passion for truth" that resounded in the cafes, vendor lines, and street corners of the Lower East Side was carried forward into the American book market, lending an authentic quality to reports from the immigrant district that American realists up to that point had been incapable of rendering. Hamlin Garland in his call for an "indigenous literature" -- literature that springs straight from the culture produced by its spatial setting -- had already endorsed the cultivation of writers like Cahan, arguing in *Crumbling Idols* (1894) that "we have had the figures, the dates, the bare history, the dime novel statement of pioneer life, but how few real novels! How few accurate studies of speech and life! There it lies, ready to be put into the novel and the drama, and upon the canvas; and it must be done by those born into it" (16). Having been "born into it," Cahan had an advantage over Anglo-American writers: he was not slumming. His "truth" was founded on personal experience as well as cultural observation. But he also had an advantage over his colleagues in the ghetto press, as he had an integral knowledge of his genteel readership due to his experiences at the *Commercial Advertiser*. He had immersed himself in the Anglo Other and planned, like Hapgood, to convince them to accept a previously oppositional voice.

The sketches that Cahan produced for the *Commercial Advertiser* were more informative than literary. They provided readers with brief glances at ghetto life that, taken as a whole, were remarkably cogent in their observations, but may not have solicited widespread acclaim. The only means by which Cahan was capable of winning over a gentile audience,²⁷ therefore, was by transcending the simple journalistic sketches of

²⁷ He was successful at this to a certain extent. As early as 1896, William Dean Howells praised his novel *Yekl* when it first appeared, referring to Cahan in the *New York World* (July 26), as "a new star of realism" (qtd. in Richards vii).

Lower East Side life (and the realistic dramas by playwrights such as Jacob Gordin) and infusing his work with some of the more universal themes of Western literature. He wished to address, along with ghetto life, the more inclusive aspects human experience. Hapgood reveres this method, contending that

If Cahan's work were merely the transcribing in fiction form of a great number of suggestive and curious "points" about the life of the poor Russian Jew in New York, it would not of course have any great interest to even the cultivated Anglo-Saxon reader, who, tho he might find the stories curious and amusing for a time, would recognize nothing in them sufficiently familiar to be of deep importance to him. If, in other words, the stories had lacked the universal element always present in true literature they would have been of very little value to anyone except the student of queer corners (237).

As mentioned above, Hapgood explains that the Jews's adherence to realism is determined by the influence of such Russian literary giants as Tolstoy, Chekhov, and Turgeniev. And like those writers, Cahan confronts the greater questions of mankind, along with its particularities. Though Cahan's work is specific to the life and culture of the ghetto, Hapgood suggests, it informs the reader as to the inherent truths of the district while at the same time rendering those truths "sympathetic by the touch of common human nature...." (237)

According to Hapgood, then, Cahan's English language work includes two categorical elements: "information" and "human nature," which are engaged in a "struggle for... mastery throughout his work" (237). His best stories, Hapgood argues, foreground human nature through the vehicle of his "special information" (237-38). The materialist

elements of the fiction -- the palpable, the experiential, the sensual -- do not give way to the generally human qualities so much as propel them along. The orthodox religious practices, the marriage arrangements, the generational conflicts, the influences of the rabbi, the abeyance of the holidays, the education of immigrant women are all "treated more as a background on which are painted in contrasting lights the moral and physical forms resulting from the particular colonial conditions" (238).

Hapgood targets Cahan's short novel *Yekl* (1896),²³ as a novel that "gives a great deal of information about what seems to me the most interesting section of foreign New York" (244), and subsequently his finest work to date. In short, he believes that *Yekl* is more social documentary than novel, a belief that creates a kind of textual hall of mirrors. Hapgood, more than anything, wants a *textualization* of the ghetto. He wants texts as well as experiences to construct the image of the Lower East Side in order to complicate his own consciousness along with the consciousnesses of his benighted gentile class. Additionally, he is looking for a literary model that demonstrates the inherently Jewish "love of truth."

Yekl, possibly the first novel in the English language that had Lower East Side Jews as its protagonists, dissects the motives and tendencies of two immigrant Jews in New York whose stories were paradigmatic of the Eastern European immigration experience. *Yekl* is a typical young Jewish man from Lithuania who travels to New York to establish himself and earn enough money to finance his wife and child's trip to the United States. After a time in Boston, he lands a job in a Lower East Side sweatshop. He strikes up a relationship with Mamie, a Nell-like "Americanized" young woman whose flamboyant dress and manners, along with her outspoken contempt for "greenhorns," convinces him reject his traditional past. Nevertheless, he earns enough to both spend on

²³ The novel on which the film "Hester Street" was based.

his new lover and honor his promise to his wife back home. Upon the arrival of his wife Gitl and their boy Yossele, he repents his decision: "his heart had sunk at the sight of his wife's uncouth and un-American appearance" (34). Though she is initially revolted by the unorthodox lifestyle of American Jews, she comes to the realization that in order for her and Yossele to survive in the New World one must both shed traditions that are socially limiting and maintain some Old World values that are crucial to surviving in a foreign land. In the end she divorces Yekl, who had indiscriminantly Americanized himself into self-destruction. Ultimately, she decides to marry a more cautious immigrant who has both conviction in his Semitic teachings and the ability to adapt himself to the requirements of his new environment.

Cahan's American audience largely considered the moral environment in *Yekl* repugnant. At that time, Hapgood explains, stories from the ghetto were generally deemed "unpleasant." And "Unpleasantness" in fiction could be found in two ways: "the formal theme, the characters, the result -- things may come out unhappily, vice triumphant, and the section of life portrayed may be a sordid one" (248), and "the quality of deadness -- a lack of sensitiveness to the vital qualities, to the effects of spring, to the joy in mere physical life..." (249). In terms of the latter, "the antithesis of this kind of thing," Hapgood defines by contrast, is the poetry of Walt Whitman and, indeed, *Yekl*. In short, *Yekl* is guilty of the first offense, which is precisely what makes it a work of originality.

The Jews in *Yekl* are not restricted to the roles assigned them by gentile renderings of moral disruption. They are multidimensional, some likable, some not; some successful, some not. Even wealthy German Jews uptown found that the sympathy and complexity of the Eastern European Jews in Cahan's writing "deprecated literature which portrayed the life of those Jews who still have distinctively national traits and customs" (251).

“Feeling a little ashamed of the Russian East Side Jew,” Hapgood goes on, “they object to serious literary portrayal of him” (251-52). As Anzia Yezierska would later assay in many of her New York stories, those who had successfully triumphed over the environmental forces faced by New York immigrants, often chose to dissent from their ancestral roots to avoid being associated with the “unpleasantness” of urban reality.²⁹

Gitl’s transformation resembles the cultural balancing act that takes place in the minds of Crane’s Bowery characters. Like Crane, Cahan shows how the complete acceptance of a dominant voice can lead to a tragic and destructive undermining of that which was good in one’s subordinate culture. But unlike Crane, Cahan demonstrates how a process of *partial* acculturation is a healthy way to refresh stale cultural forms. On the whole, Yekl is an unsympathetic character, likable only when he remembers his Lithuanian past in nostalgic terms. For the most part, the reader is invited to laugh at his hyperbolic obsession with baseball, boxing, American slang, and bachelorhood. But behind the humor is the tragic sense that the United States has suckered him into its consumerist veneer and will promptly divorce him as he has divorced his wife. His immigration experience is a failure, precisely because he was so blinded by American myths that he could no longer see what was good about his former self. Gitl, on the other hand, is the immigrant success story. She has adopted customs in New York without which she would always be considered a greenhorn, yet maintained enough of her culture that she would take pride in her past -- thus giving her the self-confidence which survival in New York requires. Profiting from a divorce that would have been unthinkable had they remained in Lithuania, we are told that Gitl and her new husband, Mr. Bernstein, will open a grocery store; they will realize the American dream.

This is precisely the formula that Hutchins Hapgood believes uptown New

²⁹ See, in particular, her story of Jewish upward mobility in New York, “The Fat of the Land” (1920).

Yorkers should adopt while experiencing the Lower East Side. Cahan does not take a stand, in *Yekl* at least, on Orthodox Judaism per se, but he does regard it as too static to survive for long in a place like New York. In kind, Hapgood expresses his boredom with well-established genteel cultural forms, but still regards himself as “a Victorian in the Modern World.” Modernity to Hapgood implies a cosmopolitan sense of cultural acceptance and adaptation -- doing this rejuvenates the spirit, a term Hapgood loosely applies to culture. The modern American consciousness is defined by its multiplicity, and to reject new additions to the fold, such as the community which was burgeoning on the Lower East Side, is distinctly unmodern. In *The Spirit of the Ghetto*, Hapgood is openly advertising acculturation in reverse -- he is an immigrant writing home to his people.

“The Spirit of the Ghetto,” Hapgood reinforces in his 1917 essay “The Picturesque Ghetto,” “is the spirit of seriousness, of melancholy, of a high idealism, which, when interpreted by the sympathetic artist, illuminates even the sweat-shop, the push-cart market, and the ambitious businessman” (qtd. in Rischin xxiii). He declares that on the Lower East Side “the old and the new come... into close contact and throw each other into high relief” (9). Hapgood was discovering that oftentimes it is easier to discover what your social identity *is not* in order to comprehend what it *is*, and ultimately how it can be improved. Improving one’s character by entering into the ghetto is a notion that is remarkably distinct from Charles Loring Brace’s ideal vision of bringing “the two extremes of society in sympathy, and carry the forces of one class down to lift up the other” (136). Rather, he sets out to demonstrate how the class presumably on top would do well to consider social uplift from below. As Anglo-Jewish author Israel Zangwill writes of *The Spirit of the Ghetto*,

It is a criticism of life, and moreover a criticism tending toward sweetness

and light. For it is the work of no prejudiced Jew but the work of an outsider of culture, able to interpret what he sees: to understand its ratios: and finally to define the deep springs of idealism that transfuse the ghetto with a poetry that the larger American life often loses.... (qtd. in Rischin "Abraham" 23)

In contrast with the systems of acquisition and appropriation we find in the works of Brace, Campbell, and Riis -- it was now possible, thanks in part to the influential atmosphere of the *Commercial Advertiser* and its later manifestations like *Yekl* and *The Spirit of the Ghetto*, for the cultural channel to open "upwards" on the socioeconomic scale, as well as "downwards." The social impact of "second wave" immigration -- that of Eastern and Southern Europeans -- was beginning to be represented in a positive light.³⁰

Taking his cue from Gitl's successful method of partial adaptation, Hapgood renders immigrant women as particularly noticeable in their tendencies to both acculturate and maintain the sensibilities of their home countries. But as Hapgood reports of his fictional source, Cahan had dramatized in *Yekl* that even orthodox women were "beginning to pick up some of the ways of the American woman" (72-3). In *Yekl*, Gitl achieves just enough Americanization to survive in her new surroundings. Her mentor is Mrs. Kavarsky, an older lady of her tenement who had moved to the United States long before *Yekl*. Over the course of the novel, Mrs. Kavarsky slowly breaks the cultural threads that prevent Gitl's progress. She convinces Gitl to stop wearing a wig or a handkerchief to hide her natural hair. Soon, she gets her to stop depending on God to save her. Only she can save herself, and the way to do that is by keeping her husband: "go and *try* to make yourself agreeable to him and the Uppermost will help. In America one must take care not

³⁰ Obviously, anti-Semitism in New York continued to grow, despite the efforts of writers like Cahan and Hapgood. The culmination of these sentiments being the 1920 and 1924 immigration restriction statutes.

to displease her husband” (57). But it is also incorrect, she teaches her, to act the submissive housewife. “When you talk like a man I like you,” she tells her, adding that “husband hates a sniveller for a wife.” (65, 66). Mrs. Kavarsky sums it up, “when one lives in an *edzecate* country, one must live like *edzecate peoples*” (57). By the end of the novel, “the rustic ‘greenhornlike’ expression was completely gone from her face and manner, and... there was noticeable about her a suggestion of that peculiar air of self-confidence with which a few months life in America is sure to stamp the looks and bearing of every immigrant” (83).

Hapgood points to two distinct “classes” of Jewish immigrant women: the “ignorant orthodox Russian Jewess” and the “educated class of Ghetto women” (72). The first follow Talmudic law to the letter, every act was in deference to her husband and rabbi, she wears colorless clothing and hides her natural hair under a plain brown wig. The second class is highly political, subscribing to a hybrid ideology of socialism and anarchism, the former in response to the conditions under which immigrant women labor, the latter characterized by “convictions about freedom and non-resistance to evil, and all the other idealistic doctrines for which these Anarchists are remarkable” (78). These women pose a threat to the complacent internal obsessions of “their American sister,” Hapgood argues, and “are more apt to abound in the sense of something outside themselves....” (72)

Hapgood finds in the “educated class of Ghetto women” a model for female professionalism that American women might do well to adopt. They become doctors, lawyers, and authors; their devotion to feminist causes is focused and effective: “The passionate feeling at the bottom of most of their ‘tendency’ beliefs is that woman should stand on the same social scale as man, and should be weighed in the same scales” (85).

Intellectually, they possess a seriousness that resonates with the Russian spirit. Hapgood relates one occasion in which an educated married couple from New York conversed with two Russian nihilists about Byron. The Americans “made light” of his poetry, and the Russians praised him with “warm enthusiasm.” After the two nihilists took their leave, the Americans referred to them as “interesting” and “amusing.” An immigrant Russian woman who overheard the conversation was openly offended by the American couple’s flippant condescension: “[She] dilated on the frivolity of a race that could not take serious people seriously, but wanted always to be entertained; that cared only what was ‘pretty’ and ‘charming’ and ‘sensible’ and ‘practical,’ and cared nothing for poetry and beauty and essential humanity” (83).

In his quest for artistic realism, Hapgood discovers the most prolific realistic textual renderings of ghetto life at the Yiddish theater; and the finest form of Jewish social realism that *is* accessible to the gentile, Hapgood believes, is the Bowery theaters -- The Bowery by the turn of the century had transformed even further since Crane’s time, and any semblance of a unified and authentic cultural identity was essentially lost. Again, the seriousness of the Russian mentality is brought to bear: “In the midst of the frivolous Bowery,” Hapgood reports, “devoted to tinsel variety shows, ‘dive’ music-halls, fake museums, trivial amusement booths of all sorts, cheap lodging-houses, ten-cent shops and Irish-American tough saloons, the theatres of the chosen people alone present the serious as well as the trivial interests of an entire community” (113).

In contrast to Crane and Whitman’s “Old Bowery Days,” the Yiddish theaters were supremely democratic: everyone from a seamstress to an anarchist to a rabbi attended these performances. As a result, popular melodrama co-mingled with “a simple transcript from life or the theatric presentation of a ghetto problem” (114). Some of the

more intellectual playwrights would draw upon East Side life and culture to produce pieces known as “historical plunder,” and create a kind of hybrid realism which combined popular gags with stark mimesis. “It is the demand of these fierce realists,” Hapgood relates,

that of late years has produced a supply of theatrical productions attempting to present a faithful picture of the actual conditions of life. Permeating all these kinds of plays is the amusement instinct pure and simple. For the benefit of the crowd of ignorant people grotesque humor, popular songs, vaudeville tricks, are inserted everywhere (123).

The fusion of the popular and the real was what made these performances extraordinary, according to Hapgood. “the most interesting plays are those in which the realistic spirit predominates, and the best among the actors and playwrights are the realists” (135).

This seriousness of artistic and philosophic purpose is perhaps most redolent at the three most popular Yiddish theaters on the Bowery -- the People’s, the Thalia, and the Windsor. By 1902, there were seventy to eighty professional actors, nearly a dozen playwrights, hundreds of completed plays, and “an enormous Russian Jewish colony, which fills the theatres and creates so strong a demand that the stage responds with a distinctive, complete, and interesting popular art” (150). New York in the first years of the twentieth century was arguably the time and place when the Yiddish theater reached its historical climax, having first been invented, according to the actor Jacob Adler, in Rumania by a Russian Jew named Goldfaden in 1876. During the 1880s, the Russian state revoked the right of Jews to stage Yiddish dramas, and as there was no ghetto in London to speak of, the natural destination for Yiddish language dramatists was New York. By 1887, the year Adler moved to New York, two Yiddish companies were already well

under way on the Bowery (165). Hapgood historicizes Yiddish theater in New York in order to prove that there is a well-established and historically significant cultural event going on in the Lower East Side, and those who are unaware of this should make their way down.

The most admired proponents of realism on the Yiddish stage are the actor Jacob Adler and the playwright Jacob Gordin, both of whom are collaborating in a (ultimately failed) attempt to provide exclusively realistic dramas. The effort is doomed by an audience who generally demanded amusement as well as enlightenment (136). Even the artistically self-conscious Gordin, Hapgood discovers, infuses his plays with “clownish and operatic intrusions, inserted as a conscious condition of success.” “On the other hand,” Hapgood qualifies, “even in the distinctively formless plays, in comic opera and melodrama, there are striking illustrations of the popular feeling for realism, -- bits of dialogue, happy strokes of characterization of well-known Ghetto types, sordid scenes faithful to the life of the people” (137). But regardless of the seemingly contradictory elements of “art” and “amusement” that appear in all of the Yiddish plays with varying degree, we are informed that “they are yet refreshing to persons who have been bored by the empty farce and inane cheerfulness of the uptown theatres” (149).

Hapgood is not just sympathetic, but enamored with Jewish “Russianness” which ultimately manifests itself in the seriousness artistic purpose. Those same sentimental tastes that his Russian woman in the cafe deplored are considered equally despicable to Hapgood. Of course, it is impossible to say whether Hapgood would not have harbored these sentiments whether there was a Jewish ghetto in New York or not. But in his autobiography, *A Victorian in the Modern World*, he remarks that it was his experience at the *Commercial Advertiser* that made him appreciate “the real thing”: “When my working

experience began... as a reporter in New York City, I seemed for a long time to need contact with human beings who had no security; they were so near the line that, in association with them, I came up against what is called the real thing..." (111-12) He also discusses his relationship to Theodore Dreiser in terms that make the reader feel as if there was nothing before Hapgood's "attempt to call attention to the value of neglected or despised groups of people and their ways of thinking" (268). At the time of their first meeting, Dreiser had not appreciated this aspect of Hapgood's writing, that aspect that Hapgood himself thought most important. Though Hapgood "had read none of [Dreiser's] books," he felt a kinship with the great naturalist, equating himself with Dreiser as "a passionate propagandist for what might be called realistic writing...." (267)

New York's Jewish district, Hapgood argued, had not only provided virtuous models for updating the stale atmosphere of New York's literary establishment, but also its society at large. There *is* a patronizing tone to *The Spirit of the Ghetto*, as Christine Stansell suggests, but Hapgood was attempting to overstep generations of anti-Semitic stereotyping, and this required some hyperbole and journalistic oversight. Cahan's model of partial acculturation, and his devotion to "the real thing," was, in Hapgood's estimation, the spirit of American democracy. He found that by engaging the people and lifestyles of the Lower East Side, he was able to absorb influences that he would both adopt in his writing and his world view; and he implored his gentile audience to join him in experiencing the spiritually and artistically regenerative qualities found only on the vibrant thoroughfares of Manhattan's Lower East Side.

Regardless of whether Hapgood was romanticizing ghetto life -- and he was -- he offered his audience something different, a vivid portrait of an enriching cultural site that

existed right under their noses. And as a writer, he took away “the consciously held and warmly felt principle that literature should be a transcript from life” (235). Unlike the reformist prejudices of Riis, both Cahan and Hapgood informed their readers about a subject that had not yet been fully investigated -- the cultural contributions of the Jewish Lower East Side. We can perceive at this moment in history the slow acceptance and even appropriation of slum culture by the middle- to upper-middle class Anglo-German majority that had historically, as we have seen, been so reluctant to accept it.

Later in the century, young liberal-minded intellectuals like Randolph Bourne railed against the anti-American aspect of “Americanization.” In his 1916 essay “Trans-National America,” Bourne writes: “[T]he Anglo-Saxon element is guilty of just what every dominant race is guilty of in every European country: the imposition of its own culture upon minority peoples. The fact that this imposition has been so mild and, indeed, semi-conscious does not alter its quality” (97). Bourne argued that the farther an ethnic group was positioned from its “central cultural nucleus,” its language, literature, history, etc., the more desperate and threatening they would become. “It is not the Jew who sticks proudly to the faith of his fathers and boasts of that venerable culture of his who is dangerous to America,” he insists, “but the Jew who has lost his Jewish fire and become a mere elementary, grasping animal” (99). The cultural nucleus, he goes on to explain, is a centripetal force, one that maintains, enriches, balances itself. The ethnic population marginalized from its roots creates a centrifugal reaction that is fragmenting and unstable, “anarchical” (99).

Hutchins Hapgood had articulated this same concern nearly fifteen years earlier. He did so by providing an anecdotal model: a boy from the Lower East Side leaves his tenement home and joins a Bowery gang. On the Bowery, “his talent for caricature is

developed often at the expense of his parents, his race, and all ‘foreigners’; for he is an American, he is ‘the people,’ and like his glorious countrymen in general, he is quick to ridicule the stranger” (*Spirit* 27). Hapgood’s runaway boy “is an acquisitive little fellow, and seldom enjoys himself unless he feels that he is adding to his figurative or literal stock” (29). If this process of inculcation were carried to its logical conclusion, American culture would become perverted into a grotesque caricature of itself, one whose author might be identified as the popular press. Marginal voices would be shouted down by one, overwhelming bellow. Children would transmit cultural values with little variation.

In 1916, Bourne spoke of a “spiritual welding” (108) in the United States. He visualized the country as a patchwork of ethnic spaces that Americans should be prideful of. But this argument was articulated long before Bourne’s famous essay appeared. In 1902, Hutchins Hapgood wrote of a “*spiritual unity* such as, perhaps, will only be the distant result of our present special activities” (italics mine 37). In 1896, Cahan describes the ghetto as a “social cauldron -- a human hodgepodge with its component parts changed but not yet fused into one homogeneous whole” (*Yekl* 14). Cahan, Hapgood, and Bourne are proffering an argument that today may be considered kitsch. But in the context of turn-of-the-century ethnicity discourse, it was highly disputed; the Lower East Side Jews “still appeared to most of their social betters,” as Christine Stansell professes, “in the Victorian guise of ‘lowlife’” (15). ethnic neighborhoods had to be cultivated and appreciated by the larger community in New York. They must be endowed with the cultural “stock” that a boy on the Bowery would be proud to retain, not forced to reject as in the case of the corrupt -- “belligerent, exclusive, inbreeding” (Bourne 100) -- European model.

For the African-American population in New York, turn-of-the-century

Bohemianism was, in Christine Stansell's words, "not...so elastic" (25). But in the following chapter, I will discuss how it was ironically blacks in northern Manhattan that successfully transformed New York's perception of slum morality. Though like the Jewish immigrants downtown, African Americans poured into Manhattan at an unbelievable rate -- a phenomenon traditionally regarded with fear and loathing by New York genteel culture -- middle- and upper-middle class whites were to make Harlem the slumming capital of the world. Many whites downtown enthusiastically endorsed the efforts of the African-American founders of the Harlem Renaissance. And the first best-selling novel on the subject of the Harlem Renaissance was, indeed, written by a white man. By the 1920s, the upward channel was a floodgate flown wide open.

Chapter 6:
“Nigger Heaven”: Carl Van Vechten, Claude McKay,
and the Construction of Mythic Harlem

[T]here is a certain snobbishness in terming the less literate and less sophisticated, the more simple and more primitive classes of Negroes as “lower.” At least as literary material, they are higher.

-- James Weldon Johnson, 1929

Ain’t it hell to be a Nordic when you’re struggling with Ethiopian psychology?

-- Carl Van Vechten, letter to H. L. Mencken, 1925

By the 1920s, the positive contributions of slum life to both the individual consciousness and the society at large grew into mythic hyperbole. Neighborhoods in which cultural rebels sought “moral vacations” from the super-egotistic realm of the “Puritan conscience” gained reputations largely undeserved, or at least overrated. The legacy of Greenwich Village and the praxis of slum celebration was one that would have ominous overtones following the First World War, and would arguably contribute to a slum population desperately vulnerable to the ravages of the Great Depression. This mythicization of the slums, though generated largely from good intentions, masked the realities that nineteenth-century reformers had foregrounded decades earlier -- overcrowding, sanitation issues, the engenderment of vice in the forms of prostitution and gambling. The evangelical diatribes of these reformers had thrown out the proverbial baby with the bath water. Slowly this mode gave way, as we have seen, to a more relativistic understanding of cultural systems that existed in the slums; and following World War I -- an experience that signaled the death knell of Victorian dominance in the United States and Great Britain -- the pendulum had swung in the opposite direction.

The most symbolically resonant case of New York’s slum mythicization period was Harlem, and its loudest advocates drowned out pleas for help from social workers,

sanitation officials, and statisticians. Harlem historian Gilbert Osofsky writes that “at the very time Harlem was transformed into the city’s worst slum its image for most white Americans, and some Negroes as well, was just the reverse – a gay place inhabited by ‘a singing race....’” (151) It seemed as if Harlem might redeem a city, and a nation, which had been held in traditional Anglo-Saxon restraints since the beginning of its existence. “As a byproduct of their attack on traditional American middle-class values, which were constantly called ‘Puritanical,’” Osofsky concludes, “literary rebels and others discovered the Negro, America’s ‘outcast,’ and created a semimythical dreamland which they came to idealize --” (180). This “dreamland” was conceived out of a perception of racial and ethnic authenticity, in contrast to its deliberately contrived artificial counterparts in Greenwich Village and Coney Island.

The contradictory trends of slum celebration and social reality in the 1920s combined to form the myth of the slum, a myth that was utilized to act as a reconciling agent for an unreconcilable paradox – in the case of Harlem, the disjunction between its socioeconomic reality and its simultaneous appeal to both ambitious blacks and slumming whites. On the application of myth-as-reconciler for Harlem’s intrinsic ability to compel a white audience, Gilbert Osofsky writes, “it would be difficult to find a better example of the confusions, distortions, half-truths and quarter-truths that are the foundations of racial and ethnic stereotypes than the white world’s image of Harlem in the 1920’s” (180). In hindsight, the injurious implications of a mythic Harlem would be starkly comprehended. “All of us know,” Langston Hughes tells us, “that the gay and sparkling life of the so-called Negro Renaissance of the ‘20’s was not so gay and sparkling beneath the surface as it looked” (“When the Negro” 635). Though whites were enjoying the New Negro Renaissance, it distracted them from facing the social realities of urban blacks.

Mythic Harlem provided a reconciling element to the social injustices of racial prejudice and economic despair, which subsequently blinded New Yorkers to a critical situation.

The construction of a mythic slum space -- one in which social reality deferred to the philosophy of a more atavistic sense of personal freedom -- masked brutal environmental realities that demanded immediate attention. Both blacks and whites were guilty of perpetuating this process. It was during the Harlem Renaissance, more than any other period covered in this study, that "insiders" from the "other half" responded most to elite representations of them. In fact, they themselves made substantial contributions to the discourse. In the interest of nonconformity, white middle-class slummers and African-American culture advocates alike constructed, in the words of Alain Locke, "cruelly deceptive mirages" (qtd. in Osofsky 187) about the famously dilapidated brownstones of black Harlem.

In 1920, black Harlem occupied a rectangular space of approximately forty-five city blocks: from One Hundred and Thirtieth Street to One Hundred and Forty-Fifth south to north and from Fifth Avenue to Eighth east to west. The area housed around 73,000 people. Though the numbers of African-American residents uptown were widely scattered, this section was visibly a black city within the much larger, predominantly white one. About two-thirds of New York's African Americans lived within its borders (Osofsky 123). The Great Migration of African Americans moving to northern cities, the arrival of tens of thousands of new immigrants from the West Indies -- unfettered by the restrictive immigration legislation following the First World War -- and plunging Harlem real estate values following the recession of 1907, all combined to make Harlem both "a Negro world unto itself" (Osofsky 127) and the largest slum in New York history.

The region was vastly overcrowded, economically unstable, and intraracially

divided. In the decade of the 1920s alone, 120,000 blacks from downtown, the South, and the West Indies moved into the area, and as many whites left (Jackson 114). Harlem's death rate was 42 percent higher than that of the rest of the city, and infant mortality was twice as high there (over ten percent of infants in Harlem between 1923 and 1927 died either at birth or soon thereafter) (Osofsky 141). Remarkably, Harlem's real estate values climbed during this period, causing rent prices to appreciate as well. For landlords uptown, there was a "slum boom" (Osofsky 136). Needless to say, the combination of high rents and the surge of new immigrants created a glut in the job market and an ominous housing crisis. This was the period of the so-called "Harlem Renaissance." "The ordinary Negroes hadn't heard of the Negro Renaissance," Langston Hughes recalls in his 1940 autobiography *Big Sea*, "And if they had, it hadn't raised their wages any" ("When the Negro" 636).

The Harlem Renaissance was a deliberate enterprise to raise the status of African Americans in the United States; but as David Levering Lewis points out, there were two very distinct schools of thought³¹ in the middle 1920s as to what form this movement would take: the "genteel" and "overly literary" on the one hand, and the "demotic" and "bottom-up" school on the other (Introduction xxx, xxxii). By World War I, Lewis writes, "the African American had indisputably moved to the center of Mainstream imagination... a development nurtured in the chrysalis of the Lost Generation...." (Introduction xvii) A few years after the war, under the leadership of W.E.B. Du Bois, the NAACP along with the National Urban League conceptualized a New Negro Arts Movement as a public relations project which would be guided by the strategy of uplift. This movement included African-American civil rights leaders such as Du Bois, Charles Johnson, and

³¹ Lewis actually discusses the Harlem Renaissance in terms of three "stages": "The first phase ending in 1923... The second from 1924 to mid-1926... The last phase from mid-1926 to the Harlem Riot of March 1935" (Introduction xv). Only the second two phases will directly concern us here.

Jessie Fauset, and revolved around the offices of the NAACP's political organ, *The Crisis*, and the National Urban League's *Opportunity*.

This group -- what might be called the first wave of the '20s renaissance -- believed that African Americans would gain equality only after proving themselves to be a respectable and, more importantly, educable race. As Du Bois famously pronounced, "The Negro race, like all races, is going to be saved by its exceptional men... its Talented Tenth" (qtd. in Eloise E. Johnson 14). Many of these intellectuals, particularly Du Bois, felt that representations of African-American "low life" in fiction were injurious to the image of African Americans nationwide and would deter civil rights efforts.

By 1926, a "veritable Ministry of Culture... presided over Afro-America," a "Civil Rights Establishment" that black poet and novelist Claude McKay would regard as "that NAACP crowd" (Lewis Introduction xxix, xxxii). McKay later admitted that after meeting Du Bois for the first time, the leader "seemed possessed of a cold, acid hauteur of spirit" (qtd. in Lewis *When Harlem* 51). McKay was one of a number of new voices, largely returning home to Harlem from the "universe of the Lost Generation" in Paris (Lewis *When Harlem* 50). This second wave -- including McKay himself, Langston Hughes, Wallace Thurman, and Zora Neale Hurston -- defined the Harlem Renaissance in terms that defied genteel respectability and encouraged the more open, more savage aspects of their African ancestry. It was with this artistic signature that they wished to cultivate the image of the American Negro, rather than the calculating sociopolitical polemics of the older generation.

Du Bois himself acknowledged this divide in African-American thought in his 1926 address to the NAACP in Chicago. On the one hand, he professed, there are the more politically-minded African-American intellectuals who ask, "what have we who are

slaves and black to do with art?" On the other, there is the perhaps more optimistic view that finds relief in the new obsession with African-American art forms: "After all it is rather satisfactory after all this talk about rights and fighting to sit and dream of something which leaves a nice taste in the mouth" ("Criteria" 317). Though he admitted that "neither of these groups are right" (317), he held the opinion that African-American art without a social agenda was useless for advancing the social and political standing of African Americans in the 1920s. "I do not care a damn," he announced, "for any art that is not used for propaganda" (324).

White critic and novelist Carl Van Vechten's 1926 Harlem novel *Nigger Heaven* exists in the liminal space between these two directives; it is located in the trough between the waves. As a white man discovering the Other, Van Vechten tries to demonstrate in *Nigger Heaven* how the search for the "primitive" is an alienating principle for both white slummers and first wave blacks, though paradoxically, it was the most enticing aspect of Harlem life. Rather than seeing the novel as a "message that the Talented Tenth's preoccupation with cultural improvement was a misguided affectation that would cost the race its vitality" (Lewis Introduction xxxi), it is more clearly a narrative that equivocates over which of the waves is more practical for the future of Harlem. But two years later, the "low down" Harlem that Du Bois desperately tried to cover up would be most descriptively and lyrically rendered in Claude McKay's *Home to Harlem* (1928). It was this Harlem -- the Harlem that McKay's "Lennox Avenue Noble Savage" (Lewis Introduction xxxii) Jake in *Home to Harlem* adores: "'Good old Harlem! Chocolate Harlem! Sweet Harlem! Harlem I've got you' number down'" (14) -- the Harlem of lights, cabarets, and sex, that was to become the most painful signifier of a dream that would ultimately be, as Langston Hughes would later mourn, "a dream deferred."

No one white man did more to contribute to Harlem's popularity for white society during this period than Carl Van Vechten. Ann Douglas, in fact, locates the inception year of Harlem's literary renaissance as 1924, "in good part because it was in that year that Van Vechten immersed himself in Harlem life, and he did so [according to Langston Hughes's biographer Arnold Rampersad]... more completely than any prominent white man in New York had ever done...." (287) In 1924, Walter White, the "Negro of pale complexion but dark anger," first made Van Vechten's acquaintance through Alfred Knopf.³² Within a few weeks he had introduced his new friend to every conceivable milieu in the Negro Metropolis. Van Vechten in no time gained the audience and often long-lasting friendship of many African-American intellectuals and celebrities, including Langston Hughes, James Weldon Johnson, Jessie Fauset, Paul Robeson, and Wallace Thurman. The speed in which he effected change there was remarkable. Within three weeks of meeting the locally acclaimed African-American poet Langston Hughes, for example, Van Vechten had convinced his publisher, Alfred Knopf, to offer twenty-three year old Hughes a publishing deal for his first book of poetry.³³ Van Vechten was boundlessly important for his part in forming such social connections between black artists and the white elite. It was his talent for forming associations with the most prominent African Americans in Harlem which made him, for better or worse, the inventor of white New York's mythic Harlem, a Harlem that white society imagined was an innocuous but vital black haven defined by sex, self-expression and Jazz.³⁴

Not only did he offer friendship to Harlem's cultural elite, but financial advice and

³² Knopf had published White's *The Fire in the Flint* in 1924.

³³ *The Weary Blues* (1926).

³⁴ This is an image that Van Vechten created unintentionally. It is not one that appears in *Nigger Heaven*, as some critics of the period (who probably did not read the book) assumed.

public support as well; he was a natural promoter. He both hosted and attended many parties designed to unify black notables in an untraditional salon setting. He had the time of his life (he would later admit that he was drunk for most of the 20's). These parties were singular in their almost surreal blend of black and white culture. At one Van Vechten soiree in June of 1925, George Gershwin kicked off the evening playing show tunes at the piano, only to have Paul Robeson replace Gershwin with spirituals. Later that night, James Weldon Johnson recited "Go Down, Death." Theodore Dreiser all the while sat brooding in solitary silence (Kellner 200-01). The parties entered into New York folklore. Bringing to mind James Weldon Johnson's reverse slumming sequences in *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, a story (possibly apocryphal, though probably not) is often told that an African-American porter approached a wealthy woman at Grand Central Station and said, "Good morning, Mrs. Astor," To which she replied, "How do you know my name young man?" "Why, ma'am, I met you last weekend at Carl Van Vechten's."

In only a few years, Van Vechten was directly responsible for securing a place in the "Great White" book market for a number of key Renaissance texts, including, among others, a new edition of Johnson's *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1927), Nella Larsen's *Quicksand* (1928) and *Passing* (1929), and much writing by Langston Hughes and Countee Cullen. Harlem was not averse to his advances. One symbolic fact, telling as much about Van Vechten's habits as it does about Harlem's reception of him, was that if at any point in his rambles through uptown night spots he lost his valuable silver flask (which he must have done more than once), he would have it back in hand within a day (Douglas 287). Born in 1880, he was older than many of the youthful talents he supported, and as a result he took on a paternal role within their society. Paul

Robeson's wife Essie referred to him as "godfather," and the *Herald Tribune* adopted this appellation, reporting in 1925 that he was "the beneficent godfather of all sophisticated Harlem" (qtd. in Douglas 288). He was, in Ann Douglas's words, "a liaison and PR man extraordinaire between Harlem and white New York" (81).

In 1926, Van Vechten came out with *Nigger Heaven*, a social novel about Harlem life. Most African-American critics condemned it, though many of them were reacting to its inflammatory title, rather than its literary worth or social commentary. Regardless, this one volume probably sold more copies than all of the books by African-American writers during the Harlem Renaissance combined (Worth 466). Langston Hughes alludes to this, noting in his *Courier* review that "more Negroes bought it than ever purchased a book by a Negro author" (qtd. in Worth 466). Its popularity caught Knopf off guard; the book demanded nine printings in its first four months; the original 16,000 copies had sold out in a proverbial New York minute; it was translated into many languages and sold well in Great Britain and across continental Europe.

Nigger Heaven renders Harlem both as a charming addition to New York's cultural landscape and a tragic site of black segregation. The first half focuses on Mary Love,³⁵ a well-read librarian who longs to unearth the authentic Negro-cum-savage side of her emotional make-up while at the same time is on the look out for a respectable husband. Attending a house party at her wealthy friend Adora Boniface's Long Island residence, Mary becomes enamored with Byron Kasson, a handsome college student and would-be writer on vacation from the predominantly white University of Pennsylvania. After the weekend, Byron returns to school and Mary to Harlem. The narrative then follows Mary from intellectual gathering to intellectual gathering, where we here various

³⁵ The character Mary Love is a not-so-loosely based portrait of the author and educator, and *Crisis* editor Jessie Fauset; the fictional Mary owns an inscribed edition of Fauset's most acclaimed novel, *There is Confusion*.

positions on the “race question” and the emerging “Negro Renaissance.” Byron, of course, eventually moves to Harlem and they fall in love. His father, aware that his son has not taken advantage of his letters of introduction to respectable New York businessmen, revokes Byron’s regular allowance, forcing him to get a job as an elevator operator. He returns to Harlem despondent after his first day at work. “I forgot to warn you,” a Harlem acquaintance remarks, “You ought to speak in dialect. These low-class smokes haven’t any use for a fellow that puts on airs. You have to be a mixer” (194). Byron ultimately breaks his relationship with Mary having been seduced by the infinitely dissolute, and highly successful, Lasca Sartoris.³⁶ Like Mary, she was “golden-brown, his color” (179). Lasca is a cocaine user, an absinthe drinker, a sexual sadomasochist, and a dabbler in satanic ritual. She introduces him to all of these vices. Though Byron eventually returns to Mary with his tail between his legs, he has successfully adopted the “savagery” that Mary guilelessly covets. This cult of savagery, one that feeds the imagination of black Harlem and attracts its white audience, symbolically ends Byron’s career.

Regardless of the prepublication assistance of James Weldon Johnson, Walter White, Rudolph Fisher, and Langston Hughes, all of whom proof-read and contributed to the manuscript in one way or another, the novel elicited an enormous amount of suspicion from the black press. The most clearly divisive responses came from W.E.B. Du Bois, who hated it utterly, and James Weldon Johnson, who just as vigorously applauded it. Du Bois’s review in the December 1926 issue of *The Crisis* (of which he was the editor) begins with the sentence: “Carl Van Vechten’s ‘Nigger Heaven’ is a blow in the face.” “It

³⁶ Lasca. Bruce Kellner informs us, is “a full-blown portrait” of the “glamour girl” Nora Holt, who resided full time, as Lasca does, in Paris. Apparently, Holt never voiced a word of resentment toward Van Vechten for characterizing her as a dissipated man-eater. In fact, when the book came out she wrote: “The cries of protest from the Harlemites reach me even in Paris... Strange in such a short time you caught the attitude of the Negro toward the Negro and not one in a thousand of them will admit it” (qtd in Kellner 218).

is an affront," he continues, "to the hospitality of black folk and to the intelligence of the white." The title, as inflammatory as it seems, is not at issue for Du Bois. The *idea* of Harlem being a "Nigger Heaven" was. Or, I should say, Du Bois argued that the application of the term was both misleading and insulting. The term "Nigger Heaven,"³⁷ he specifies, "does not mean... a haven for Negroes -- a city of refuge for dark and tired souls" but rather, idiomatically speaking, it is a self-effacing term in the black vernacular that admits a tendency among Negroes to allow whites to force them into "a nasty, sordid corner" which "they in crass ignorance are fools enough to enjoy." A "Nigger Heaven" was associated with Negro foolhardiness, with stupidity and complacency, and, Du Bois writes, "Harlem is no such place as that, and no one knows this better than Carl Van Vechten" (*Writings* 1216).

Du Bois admits that he is indulging himself in semantic quibbling; "after all, a title is only a title...." (1216) So he proceeds by identifying two elements by which to judge a good piece of writing: its veracity to real life and its artistic merit. Neither of these, he contends, are present in *Nigger Heaven*. The book employs characters that are nothing but caricatures of Harlemites and a plot that is driven solely by one "wildly, barbaric drunken orgy" after another (1217). But significantly, if we consider the rise of Harlem as a mythic space, *Nigger Heaven* "is worse than an untruth because it is a mass of half-truths" (1216). Du Bois makes the distinction, for example, between the Harlem of the cabaret that Van Vechten depicts and the Harlem of the struggling African-American laborer:

The author counts among his friends numbers of Negroes of all classes. He is an authority on dives and cabarets. But he masses this

³⁷ "Nigger Heaven" is most commonly applied to the balcony seats where African Americans were consigned in segregated theaters and movie palaces.

knowledge without rule or reason and seeks to express all of Harlem life in its cabarets. To him the black cabaret is Harlem; around it all its characters gravitate. Here is their stage of action. Such a theory of Harlem is nonsense. The overwhelming majority of black folk there never go to cabarets. The average colored man in Harlem is an everyday laborer, attending church, lodge and movie and as conservative and as conventional as ordinary working folk everywhere (1216).

In the end, Du Bois contends, Van Vechten has produced little -- aside from some "laboriously stated facts, quotations and expressions" -- but "cheap melodrama." As a slummer, he is unartistic. He is "not the great artist who with remorseless scalpel probes the awful depths of life. To him there are no depths. It is the surface mud he slops in..." Ultimately, Du Bois's critique is a character assassination ("life to him is just one damned orgy after another, with hate, hurt, gin, and sadism" [1217]). He concludes by suggesting to his audience that if his audience desires to distract themselves with this kind of sensationalist trash, they should "try the *Police Gazette*" (1218).

The most glaringly antithetical response by an African-American critic to Du Bois's on the novel was James Weldon Johnson's *Opportunity* review, "Romance and Tragedy in Harlem." The first line of Johnson's piece was this: "From its intriguing prologue to its tragic end, here is an absorbing story" (392). Instead of reading Van Vechten's characters and themes as "caricature," Johnson defends the author's integrity: "Mr. Van Vechten is the only white novelist I can think of who has not viewed the Negro as a type, who has not treated the race as a unit, either good or bad... Mr. Van Vechten does not stoop to burlesque or caricature" (392, 393). And contradicting Du Bois's assertion that Van Vechten's novel contains no social or artistic depth, Johnson praises

the author's "scope," and his ability to comprehend "nearly every phase of life in the Negro Metropolis. [*Nigger Heaven*] draws on the components of that life from the dregs to the froth" (392). Rather than rely on the "*deus ex machina*" of white plot structure and character type, Van Vechten has "completely discarded and scrapped the old formula and machinery for a Negro novel" (392). And there should be no public outcry against the title, as there was in 1910 when Sheldon's play "The Nigger" came out. "Nigger Heaven," he writes in direct opposition to Du Bois, "is taken from the ironic use of the phrase made by the characters in the book" (393).

In addition, the scenes of "wildly barbaric drunken orgy" that Du Bois denounces, to Johnson "set off in sharper relief the decent, cultured, intellectual life of Negro Harlem" (393). Whether in the cabaret or the intellectual salon, Johnson submits, "It is all life. It is all reality" (393). Indeed, in this novel, "Van Vechten the satirist, becomes... Van Vechten, the realist" (396). *Nigger Heaven* is far from the "cheap melodrama" Du Bois feels it is: "He does not moralize, he does not over-emphasize, there are no mock heroics; there are no martyrdoms" (396). He concludes that "NIGGER HEAVEN is... bound to be widely read and... arouse much diverse discussion" (396). His last sentence is an adamant appeal to the readers of *Opportunity* to read it first, then discuss it.

How are we to decipher these two reactions, reflecting as a mirror does exact replicas of form and substance and subject matter, but inverted. Point by point the two discuss the book in the same terms, with the same organizational strategy: its artistic merit; its place in the tradition of white textual representations of the Negro race; its depictions of Harlem; its literary worth in regards to character development, realism, melodrama, the ending; and finally, the concluding recommendation ("drop it gently in a grate" [Du Bois]/ "read it first, then discuss it" [Johnson]). The easy answer is probably

the best answer here: each read what they wanted to read. Du Bois, the social activist, the separatist, the radical, saw in Van Vechten the epitome of a dangerous trend for Harlem and Harlemites -- that the New Negro Metropolis would come to dictate the image of African Americans nationwide, an image more inclined towards fun than fury. Johnson, on the other hand, had dedicated his life to uplifting the status of blacks in the United States by promoting their positive cultural contributions to the larger society, rather than its political puissance.

In an odd way, this split is a later parallel to the discourse between Riis and Hapgood on the Lower East Side. Though Du Bois is obviously an activist for racial justice, as opposed to the anti-Semitic Riis, the contradictions and ambiguities inherent in a definable moral space are unraveled in both, and each takes away their own strands of truth; one determined by socioeconomics, the other cultural effect. But the truth, of course, is elusive and can only be taken as a whole. *Nigger Heaven* is a great American novel if for nothing else than that it authenticated its complexity by soliciting such polar opposite reactions by two intellectuals like Johnson and Du Bois. But as with Crane's *Maggie*, it is possible to reconcile the paradox by admitting that there is more than one truth present, that responses will vary according to the audience's agenda.

If there is any consensus about Van Vechten, it is that he was not a racist. His biggest transgression was that he betrayed, as Emily Bernard writes, "a combination of naivete and arrogance [which] led him to believe he was unique, a white man who had transcended his whiteness" (xix). In fact, his early experiences with African Americans may have made him even more sympathetic to them than any sizable group deserve. His father, in particular, was one of the founders of the Piney Woods School for African-American children in Cedar Rapids, Iowa (where the young Carl grew up), and he

counseled his son to treat African-American laborers in the same manner he would treat any adult (Bernard xviii).³⁸ Once Carl enrolled at the University of Chicago, he spent a great deal of time in black neighborhoods, during the day in their churches and at night in their clubs. At this time, he seemed to have adopted an ideal image of African-American life. In a letter to Chester Himes at the age of seventy-six, Van Vechten explains that his youthful prejudices, benign as they may have been, disappeared after a revelation that, in fact, not all African Americans were angels:

You see, like everybody else who goes into this new world, at first I had a Messianic complex (My God, how DO you spell it). But one day I came home shouting, "I HATE a Negro! I HATE a Negro!" It was my salvation and since then I've had no trouble at all. From that point on I understood that they were like everybody else, that is they were thieves and cut-throats, generous and pious, witty and wise, dumb and foolish, et., etc. (*Letters* 259)

This realization must have come before his Harlem experiences in the 1920s. It was a time in which he confessed an "addiction" to African-American culture (Bernard xviii), but he belied the notion that African Americans should be treated as exceptional to the general standards of cultural influence. In a 1925 letter to Countee Cullen, we can glean what his racial views were immediately preceding his work on *Nigger Heaven*:

I think, perhaps, it is a little excessive to make such an arcanum of the Negro mind. I believe all races to be more or less human, and susceptible to what are known as human reactions -- I am speaking quite generally and include the Japanese and the Malays. In each case, however, these human

³⁸ His father, who died seven months before the novel was completed, was one of the many critics of the title. In a letter to Van Vechten he wrote, "Your 'Nigger Heaven' is a title I don't like... I have myself never spoken of a colored man as a 'nigger.' If you are trying to help the race, as I am assured you are, I think every word you write should be a respectable one towards the black" (qtd in Kellner 210-11).

reactions are modified by conditions (from within or without) which produce superficial differences in reactions. Thus conditions have created certain subtle differences in reactions between white Americans and American Negroes... I may be wrong; I often am, but I cannot help feeling that the distinction between white and colored psychology has been overstressed (*Letters* 86).

This early treatise on social construction reveals a great deal about Van Vechten's authorial intent in *Nigger Heaven*. It was meant to be a humanizing social novel, neither knee-jerk sycophancy nor traditional type-casting. African Americans are meant to exist all along the spectrum of human morality, and Harlem was to be portrayed as one rendition of that spectrum. The idea of a perceptible moral region to be marginalized in the public eye was anachronistic to Van Vechten, a formula for lecturing moralizers that had outlived their heyday.

Like Crane, Van Vechten applies color as an impressionistic stylistic device and "associates it with his characters," combining their "hopes and fears with aspects of the environment he creates" (Simoneaux 222). In the first cabaret scene with the Creeper and Ruby Silver (an obvious name for someone obsessed with material possessions but, unable to suit her needs, loads herself down with artificial accouterments), Crane-like impressionism is utilized to create a dizzyingly electric environment. The cabaret is called the Black Venus³⁹ : "...bodies in picturesque costumes rocked, black bodies, brown bodies, high yellows, a kaleidoscope of colour transfigured by the amber searchlight. Scarves of bottle green, cerise, amethyst, vermilion, lemon" (14). Outward appearances are being

³⁹ Probably modeled after Small's, a basement-level cabaret on Fifth Avenue that Van Vechten made his headquarters in Harlem. In a later scene, when the male protagonist Byron is discussing Harlem with white slummers, we see waiters doing the Charleston down the isles -- common sight in Small's. In addition, it was here that Van Vechten preferred to take his white guests as an introduction to Harlem's nighttime offerings (Kellner 198-99).

altered while at the same time they are exalted and glorified. The participants, like those of Crane's dance hall scenes, bivouac themselves in the Black Venus from the quotidian realities of their compeers outside -- commuting to their downtown jobs in the early hours of the morning -- what Van Vechten, through his male protagonist Byron's eyes, refers to as the "symbolic procession, the procession of an oppressed people."

Skin color is employed in many Harlem Renaissance texts to evoke behavioral and ideological difference as well as racial mixture. In *Nigger Heaven*, all of the myriad of racial combinations are present at the Black Venus. The Creeper observes there "Blues, smokes, dinges, charcoals, chocolate browns, shines, and jigs" (13). Skin tone provides the texture of the novel's setting. His female protagonist Mary witnesses at a Charity Ball "the variations in colour in the faces of men, the shoulders of women: black shoulders, brown shoulders, tan shoulders, ivory shoulders"; she was "fascinated" by this display (153). Color here is analogous to the diverse nature of the population in the minds of Van Vechten's characters, contrasting bluntly to the unified "pinks" downtown. The obsession of color is, of course, tied to race here in a way that it never was in Crane,⁴⁰ but the cabaret experience is also imagined as a kind of museum in which the flamboyant use of color is observed as a painting might be in a museum: "On the floor a scrawny yellow girl in pink silk, embroidered with bronze sequins in floral designs began to sing... The Creeper sipped his gin meditatively" (16). If the use of color illuminates the ideology and themes in Crane's *Maggie*, his "deterministic, fatalistic philosophy" (Simoneaux 222), then Van Vechten's color-laden sequences generally belie a sense of hope, celebration, contribution, progress. Langston Hughes wrote that in *Nigger Heaven*, Van Vechten wrought out "a whole rainbow of life above 110th Street that had never before been put

⁴⁰ Crane's lack of African-American characters in most of his New York writing seems to be at issue lately. It must be remembered that New York's African-American population in the 1890s, well before the 1890s - as I discuss in Chapter Five -- was extremely small.

into the color of words" (qtd. in Lueders 90).

In addition to the stylistic use of color in *Nigger Heaven*, animal metaphors, again evincing Crane's work, substantially contribute to the pathos of Van Vechten's cabaret scenes. The jazz bands that perform at the Black Venus act bestial and generate an audience response in kind: "The drummer in complete abandon tossed his sticks in the air while he shook his head like a wild animal" (14); "The band snored and snorted and whistled and laughed like a hyena" (14); "The jazz band vomited, neighed, barked, and snorted and the barbaric ceremony began" (212); "the saxophone cooed like a turtle dove" (245), and even Ruby, in the way Crane's Maggie had gazed at Pete in naive adoration, swoons over the Creeper's "great brown eyes, like a doe's" (15). But it's a far cry from the Bowery children "howling" and "circling" and "writhing" we find in Crane's opening sequence of *Maggie* (7). Instead of demonstrating environmental dehumanization, Van Vechten offers up a newer, perhaps less condescending, form of primitivism that his character Mary Love consciously wishes to emulate. It is related to the primitivism hailed by Alain Locke in *The New Negro*, and to the African sculpture that Mary has been collecting for a show at her library in Harlem.

Mary Love is enamored by the new primitivism on display in the cabarets, in the literature, and in the libraries and progressive museums. The newest artists black and white were all becoming unbound by their authentic, at its best unconscious, revisiting of a primitive past. In one of the most quoted passages of the book, Mary sums up her artistic goals:

Savages! Savages at heart! And she had lost or forfeited her birthright, this primitive birthright which is so valuable and important an asset, a birthright that all the civilized races were struggling to get back to -- this

fact explained the art of a Picasso or a Stravinsky. To be sure, she, too, felt this African beat -- it completely aroused her emotionally -- but she was conscious of feeling it. This love of drums, of exciting rhythms, this naive delight in glowing colour -- the colour that exists only in cloudless, tropical climes -- this warm, sexual emotion, all these were hers only through a mental understanding (89-90).

The rejection of civilized behavior and artistic estheticism was too conscious an act for Mary, who wished to engage art on its most visceral level. She found that deep down she had more in common with her respectable foils than with her more "savage" neighbors. "We are all savages," she remarks of Harlemites, "all apparently, but me!" She mourns this lackluster aspect of her character: "If she could only let herself go, revel in colour and noise and rhythm and physical emotion, throw herself into the ring with the others... how had she, during the centuries, lost this vital instinct?" (90, 91-92)

Mary's frustrations seem out of character. Throughout the novel she maintains a mien of respectability that does not invite images of her grinding to Jazz in a vermilion dress. Additionally, Mary is based on the "first wave" literary editor of *The Crisis*, Jessie Fauset, a woman who was not be as consumed with African primitivism as her later successors. To depict Mary desperately attempting to tap into her "savage" side is perhaps more an articulation of white male desires -- Van Vechten's, for example -- than those of a respectable African-American woman. The "constituent elements" of primitivism, as Abigail Solomon-Godeau informs us, "notably the dense interweave of racial and sexual fantasies and power" are at the same time "colonial and patriarchal" (qtd. in Louise Johnson 95). It is first co-opted by African-American men who then transmitted the esthetic downtown. "Primitivism" appears in *Nigger Heaven* as a co-

optation of the color and sex imagery of African art forms. Those forms are then superimposed onto Harlem's cabaret lifestyle which is rendered as sexually tempestuous and inherently violent.

Like Mary, the character Byron Kasson finds his self-restraint limiting. His aloof mien of respectability -- acquired from a middle-class African-American upbringing and experiences among white Ivy Leaguers at Pennsylvania -- prevents him from engaging Harlem and working-class African-American society on its own level. During his stint as an elevator operator, his colleagues think little of him: "posin' an' signifyin', high-toned mustard-seed, amchy yaller boy, sheik from Striver's Row" ⁴¹ (192) The feeling was mutual: "You want to be a writer, he adjured himself, and this is probably first class material" (192), but "nevertheless, his immediate pendant thought was that he could never write about this life, that he could never feel anything but repugnance for these people, because they were black. I can't bear to think of myself as a part of this, he sighed...." (192) Byron's demur response to working-class African-American culture was counter-productive for an African-American writer in the midst of the New Negro Renaissance. Though first wave African-American leaders such as Du Bois were opposed to "low down" representations of African-American life, the demand for such texts grew over the decade of the '20s and would culminate in Claude McKay's operatic frenzy, *Home to Harlem*.

There was an enormous demand in the white publishing world for realistic narratives of the black underworld from both radicals and conservatives; in contrast, there was not much interest in its middle-class,⁴² or even Harlem's relationship to white New

⁴¹ A well-to-do street in Harlem which boasts a row of townhouses designed by the famed New York architect Stanford White.

⁴² Jessie Fauset's novel *There is Confusion* (1924) took place in a middle-class African-American setting in Philadelphia.

York. Again bringing Crane to mind, Byron conceptualizes a story in which a white boy has an affair with a black girl. The white boy's sister then meets a black boy and they fall in love. The story ends with the white boy killing his sister's lover. Byron's white character resembles Crane's Jimmie in their restrictive and destructive double standards -- that they can have such relations but not their sisters. But this is a played-out story by the '20s (as it probably was even by Crane's time). Mary feels that the plot is in danger of "becoming melodramatic, cheap even" (204). Like the criticisms aimed at Van Vechten, Mary does not believe that Byron is capable of thoroughly understanding the psychology behind the white characters's "motives" (204).

Nevertheless, Byron submits the piece to a number of white literary journals (with Mary's half-hearted approval). In the most realistic and well-written scenes in the book (probably because Van Vechten was writing about a world he knew better than any other), Russett Durwood, the fictional editor of the *American Mars* magazine,⁴³ summons Byron for a meeting to discuss his submission. The meeting remarkably resembles that which James Weldon Johnson had with Mencken more than ten years earlier. It turns out Mary was right from the beginning. Durwood explains that he has visited Harlem quite often and is familiar with many of its intellectuals and its cabarets. "The whole place, contrary to the general impression, is overrun with fresh, unused material," Durwood informs him. Durwood is presented as the arbiter of white literary fashion. Ethnographic material from an insider's point of view is scarce at this time in American literary history, he informs Byron, and he is determined to fill the void:

Nobody has yet written a good gambling story; nobody has touched the outskirts of cabaret life; nobody has gone into the curious subject of the

⁴³ Obviously a play on the *American Mercury* magazine, which makes Durwood H. L. Mencken, a close friend of Van Vechten's. His hair, like Mencken's was, is "parted in the middle" (221).

divers tribes of the region. Why, there are West Indians and Abyssinian Jews, religious Negroes, pagan Negroes, and Negro intellectuals, all living together more or less amicably in the same community, each group with its own opinions and atmosphere and manner of living; each individual with his own opinions and atmosphere and manner of living" (222).

"Nordic" writers are useless for capturing the full vitality of such a diversified space, Van Vechten (ironically) has Durwood explain. Unfortunately, from what he has seen, Negroes "continue to employ the old cliches and formulas that have been worried to death by Nordic blonds who, after all, never did know anything about the subject from the inside" (223). Byron is warned that these same Nordic types will dominate the Harlem scene too if African-American writers like him do not take advantage of their unique positions. He alludes to many possible subjects: Marcus Garvey, black servant girls, the "fast set" (223). Stop thinking in academic terms, is his final advice, just "pray and get drunk" (223).

Byron takes all of this personally; he walks away feeling humiliated and patronized. But from the professional publishing point of view, the talk was a practical one, as the latter hubbub over *Nigger Heaven* would attest. Byron would be required to defeat his own blindness to the rich subject matter that the Harlem "low-down" lifestyle provided. Van Vechten himself wrote candidly about whites co-opting the African-American subject for themselves. In 1926, the same year as *Nigger Heaven*'s publication -- when the uptown renaissance's second wave was just beginning to proliferate its more primitive envisionings -- Van Vechten self-reflexively wrote in the *Crisis*, "Are Negro writers going to write about this exotic material while it's still fresh or will they continue to make a free gift of it to white authors who will exploit it until not a drop of vitality

remains?" (qtd. in Worth 470)

Indeed in *Nigger Heaven*, Van Vechten represents the "Nordic blonds" from downtown as poised to mine Harlem for all it had. In one of the final scenes -- scenes which perpetuate the tragic circumstances that both prove Durwood right and annihilate Byron's mental stability -- Byron meets his friend Dick, who is chaperoning a couple of white literati from downtown at the Black Venus. Dick is a light-skinned African American who has successfully "passed" in the white world. He returns to Harlem only to impress his new colleagues as a white man who knows something about Harlem nightlife. When Byron asks what Dick is doing in Harlem, Dick curtly replies, "Slumming" (208). One of them, a novelist and columnist, is delirious with effusive appreciation for the scene at the Black Venus. He is condescending like Skaggsy in *The Sport of the Gods*, but with a lick of competitive danger. It is clear that he would love nothing more than to write about Harlem's cabaret scene. He even threatens to move uptown:

Well, it's wonderful up here... I had no idea it would be like his. It's as wild as a jungle. Look at that waiter dancing the Charleston up the floor... I think you are a wonderful people! Such verve and vivacity! Such dancing! Such singing! And I've always thought colored people were lazy! I suppose, he added reflectively, that it's because you're all so happy... oh, but this place is great! I could live up here. Is all Harlem like this? (209, 210, 215)

Of course, African-American social realists from the first wave would have, as we have seen, answered that question with a resounding "NO!", if they had even remained at the table. But Byron -- largely unfamiliar with the region -- is confused by the question; he

sees “too much, too much and too little” – “The question awakened a swarm of perverse, dancing images in [his] brain. They crowded about each other, all the incongruities, the savage inconsistencies, the peculiar discrepancies, of this cruel, segregated life... Yes, he replied, I suppose it is” (215).

Van Vechten’s application of the term “Nigger Heaven” is perhaps the best place to conclude an analysis of the goals and methods of this ambiguous novel. Lightheartedly complaining about the inevitable controversy over the title in a letter to James Weldon Johnson, Van Vechten was bemused by the fact that the *New York News* (a black-run paper), charged that “any one who could call a book Nigger Heaven would call a Negro Nigger” (89). “Harlem,” he reports to Johnson who was out of town at the time, “is seething with controversy. Langston [Hughes], the other night in Craig’s,”⁴⁴ suggested to a few of the knockers that they might read the book before expressing their opinion, but this advice seems to be regarded as supererogatory” (90). Twenty-five years later, in a letter to Charles S. Byrne responding to Byrne’s request that the 1951 Avon books paperback be published under a different title, Van Vechten held fast:

...[C]oncerning the title there was certainly some objection when the book first appeared, particularly from people who had not read the novel, and it is likely that there may be now. That is not the important fact which is that the book is called Nigger Heaven (a tragic and ironic title as any fool who reads the book may see) and no other title would do. That is what is for sale. If you offered them *Black Beauty*,⁴⁵ for instance they wouldn’t know anything about the contents and wouldn’t buy the book (*Letters* 241).

⁴⁴ A popular restaurant in Harlem.

⁴⁵ A late 1920s composition by Duke Ellington.

The Avon edition was, incidentally, removed from the shelves after its publication in February of 1951 “because of complaints over the title” (*Letters* 241n).

There are two direct references to Harlem as a “Nigger Heaven” in the novel. The first appears in the opening sequence during an assignation between “The Scarlet Creeper,” a man about Harlem who is known for his ability to attract women, and his latest conquest, Ruby Silver. He takes credit for the appellation “Nigger Heaven” as it pertains to Harlem specifically, remarking to Ruby, “Ah calls [Harlem], specherly tonight, Ah calls et Nigger Heaven! I jes’ nacherly think dis heah is Nigger Heaven!” (15). But even in an ironic sense this is not Van Vechten’s voice. “The Creeper”⁴⁶ is the designated caricature of the novel, a persona that white New Yorkers could have contrived *a priori* without the slightest exposure to Harlem life.⁴⁷ In fact, that same self-effacing usage of the term “Nigger Heaven” that Du Bois asserts, might be quite properly applied in this context, even by an African-American writer.

The other character that applies the term directly is Byron Kasson, an outsider from Harlem, regardless of his black status, who finds white New York to be too confident in its assessment of Harlem as a “Nigger Heaven” with all of its Du Boisean connotations. Once again, Van Vechten follows the pattern of most slumming narratives discussed in this study, in that he consciously enhances his “knowledge of the lines.” But this time, it is through the eyes of a racial insider who is cognitively mapping out his new environment: “They walked up Seventh Avenue in silence... As they approached One hundred and Twenty-fifth Street, the blacks began to predominate. Almost immediately

⁴⁶ Du Bois felt that the Creeper, otherwise known as Anatole Longfellow, was the only “promising figure” in the book. Van Vechten defines “creeper” in his glossary as “a man who invades another’s marital rights”

⁴⁷ Van Vechten himself admitted in a letter to Langston Hughes that had he not spent so much time in Harlem, the novel would have been much easier to write: “It would have been comparatively easy for me to write it before I knew as much as I know now, enough to know that I am thoroughly ignorant!” (*Letters* 82)

after they had passed that thoroughfare they met only Negroes. They had crossed the line" (148-49). The discovery of the line is just as disturbing to Byron as it was for Helen Campbell a half century before. But it is the white perception of the region as immoral and yet innocuous that Byron finds most unnerving:

Nigger Heaven!... Nigger Heaven! That's what Harlem is. We sit in our places in the gallery of this New York theatre and watch the white world sitting down below in the good seats in the orchestra. Occasionally they turn their faces up towards us, their hard, cruel faces, to laugh or sneer, but they never beckon. It never seems to occur to them that Nigger Heaven is crowded, that there isn't another seat, that something has to be done. It doesn't seem to occur to them either... that we sit above them, that we can swoop down from this Nigger Heaven and take their seats. No, they have no fear of that! Harlem! The Mecca of the New Negro! My God! (149⁴⁸)

In a strong effort to parallel the white view of Harlemites (the Creeper) with the reality of Harlem's destructive potential for well-meaning youths with high aspirations (Byron), Van Vechten shows by the end of the novel that the benighted view of Harlem as a "Nigger Heaven" may prevail over the enlightened view of Harlem as a powerful agent for social transformation. This may have been what rankled Du Bois the most -- the prediction, even more than the application. Robert F. Worth suggests that "[Byron's] tirade... might have been all right coming from a black author. From a white, it was probably all the more stinging for its fidelity to black sentiments" (465).

But Byron is as much a victim of his exposure to the lures of Harlem as he is of white misjudgment. The climax of the story, when seen in this light, is far from being the

⁴⁸ It must be noted, to avoid any confusion, that Du Bois incorrectly identifies this passage in his *Crisis* review as appearing on page 199, as opposed to 149.

“utterly senseless murder which appears without preparation or reason from the clouds,” that Du Bois took it for. In a deft narrative slight of hand, Van Vechten portrays the influences of Harlem as corruptive for respectable young Talented Tenthers like Byron. By the end of the novel, “primitivism” has completely subsumed Byron’s consciousness. He will probably be wrongly accused of killing a wealthy “bolito king,” Randolph Pettijohn, though the Creeper actually murders him in a jealous rage for appearing at the Black Venus with Ruby Silver. But we also know that Byron did plan to seek revenge against Pettijohn for having relations with his seducer, Lasca Sartoris. It is implied that even if the Creeper did not kill him, Byron would have. After Pettijohn collapses to the floor, Byron even fires a couple of shots into his writhing body. Harlem’s most superficially alluring aspects -- embodied in the flamboyant and ultimately despicable Lasca -- draw out a hidden, perhaps implicitly black, nature of ferocious instinct that may in fact cause the seemingly prosperous district to self-destruct. In this sense, Van Vechten’s novel plays more to Du Bois’s antagonism toward second wave primitivism than Du Bois ever imagined (if he ever even read the book).

Du Bois was correct in his assessment of the perfidious possibilities of whites publicizing a mythic Harlem.⁴⁹ No matter how sincere Van Vechten’s purpose, no matter how relativistic his imagination, *Nigger Heaven* ultimately fell into the genre that had been, in the character Russett Durwood’s words, “worried to death by Nordic blonds.” As Robert F. Worth has noted, “white reconnaissance missions into the black world, no matter how careful or conscientious, would always smell of sensationalism” (464). Byron’s plight was one that we can see over and over in New York writing, one that smacks of city mysteries prodigality. Byron’s father in a letter to his son sounds

⁴⁹ He is less accurate, when one takes into account the literary history covered in this study, when he contends in “Criteria of Negro Art” that “the only chance [a white writer] has to tell the truth of pitiful human degradation was to tell it of colored people” (324).

suspiciously like a Helen Campbell or a George Lippard: “Harlem is a great Negro city, the greatest Negro city in the world, and it is as surely as full of pitfalls for young men as all great cities are. Unavoidably you will encounter your share of temptations. You are to an unfortunate extent, as we know to our cost, *a slave to your appetites*” (italics mine 171). And Van Vechten in a special note to the short-lived Avon edition wrote that *Nigger Heaven* is “one of the oldest stories in the world, the story of the Prodigal Son, without the happy ending of that biblical history. In my book a boy from a small town is bewitched, bothered, and bewildered by a big time Lady of Pleasure and is unable to meet the demands made on his character by life in a big city” (qtd. in Lueders 89).

In the end, one’s fate is in the hands of moral stamina and self-restraint in New York, neither of which Van Vechten himself was accused of practicing. The lack of self-restraint demonstrated by the Harlemites is not a recommended remedy for middle-class claustrophobia. Byron’s resentful acquisition of savage African-American inspiration was his tragic undoing, as it might have been for Mary had she successfully adopted it. Indeed, Durwood’s mistake was that he had urged Byron to write about a topic that the young writer was ostensibly familiar with -- Harlem; but Byron was in fact more a product of the white Ivy League. The “savage inconsistencies, the peculiar discrepancies” of Harlem were conundrums Byron was ill-equipped to resolve. Racially, he may have been an insider, but the moral foundations on which indigenous Harlemites stood were inaccessible to him. The only difference between Byron and the slumming whites on a “moral vacation” is that the whites knew they were “slumming” and could always retreat -- as John Vose’s intrepid explorers did -- back to their genteel lives. Whites in Harlem, on the other hand, were on a “moral vacation” and they knew it.

The white publishing world's call for black writers to provide textual representations of Harlem's "exotic material" was answered in the middle to late 1920s by many "second wave" writers, such as Rudolph Fisher, Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, and Zora Neale Hurston. But the culminating "insider" mythologization of Harlem came in 1928 with Claude McKay's *Home to Harlem*. As early as 1923, McKay wrote to H.L. Mencken from France promising to "do a series of prose sketches of my contacts in America, using the most significant things, yet, leaving no subject, however degraded, untouched" (qtd. in Cooper "Introduction" xv). Rejecting the view that "Negro art... must be dignified and respectable like the Anglo-Saxon's," McKay rejoiced in the "Return to the Primitive": "Happily the Negro retains his joy of living in the teeth of such criticism: and in Harlem... expresses himself with a zest that is yet to be depicted by a true artist" (qtd. in Cooper "Introduction" xii). Textual interactions with slum life up to this point have been largely external, coming from outside the region's milieu. And if they had been present, as in the case of Cahan, they had not been entirely celebratory. Cahan attempted to render the Lower East Side at its most realistic, while it was Hapgood that did the promotional work. With Van Vechten and McKay, we see this paradigm in reverse. McKay was constructing an external image from within.

McKay's *Home to Harlem* was a deliberate attempt to poetically render Harlem at its most strikingly primitive. James De Jongh cogently argues that the distinction between *Nigger Heaven* and *Home to Harlem* is that the district is treated lyrically in McKay and descriptively in Van Vechten -- again, an inversion of Hapgood and Cahan's textual interactions. This literary distinction is most clearly understood if you compare Byron's acerbic complaints about "Nigger Heaven" above and McKay's protagonist Jake's rhapsody of Harlem's intense sensuality:

Oh, to be in Harlem again after two years away. The deep-dyed color, the thickness, the closeness of it. The noises of Harlem. The sugared laughter. The honey-talk on its streets. And all night long, ragtime and "blues" playing somewhere! Oh, the contagious fever of Harlem. Burning everywhere in dark-eyed Harlem... Burning now in Jake's sweet blood...

(15)

Those elements of Crane's impressionistic language that we find in Van Vechten are short-lived. His Harlem is plot-driven and intellectualized, a book rather than a canvas.

But as we have seen, Van Vechten did apply impressionistic stylistic devices, albeit comparatively less than McKay, in *Nigger Heaven*. The only redeeming feature of *Nigger Heaven* for Du Bois, for example, (contradicting his invectives against "low down" African-American writing) was the opening chapter -- an intensely colorful piece that renders Harlem cabaret life through the eyes of the Scarlet Creeper. Van Vechten actually bracketed his novel by employing dialect, rhythm, and color in both the opening chapter and the final chapter, each with the Scarlet Creeper in the foreground. McKay's novel, on the other hand, sustains the "low down" speech patterns, attitudes, and atmospheric delights of Harlem street life throughout his entire book. If Van Vechten's work exists in the trough between the two waves of the Harlem Renaissance's chronology, McKay's is on the crest of the second -- in *Home to Harlem*, "Primitivism" substantially outweighs social uplift.

McKay is more overt in his use of skin color as a technique to demonstrate ideological purpose. "Yallers,"³⁰ for example, become more "black" with sustained exposure to the Harlem cabaret. They absorb the primitive influences of the "black fellows" who allow savage instincts to dictate their music and dancing styles. In one

³⁰ Light-skinned blacks.

cabaret scene, lighter-skinned blacks in the audience become even more “abandoned” than the “black” dancers upon hearing song lyrics describing the triumph of dark-skin over yellow: “Yaller gal sure wants mah pa-pa,/ But mah chocolate turns her down,/ ‘Cause he knows there ain’t no loving/ Sweeter than his loving brown” (297). McKay speculates that “The yellow in the music must have stood out in their imagination like a challenge, conveying a sense of that primitive, ancient, eternal, inexplicable antagonism in the color taboo of sex and society” (297). They are competing for cool in the land of primitive tastes. Harlem’s touch is infectious in McKay, and any individual from whatever background, he implies, would come away with the same affectation of primitive blackness: “‘White,’ ‘green,’ or ‘red’ in place of ‘yaller’ might have likewise touched the same deep-sounding, primitive chord....” (297) Rather than seeing this as a demonstration of intraracial divide, however, McKay sees in the Harlem cabaret a collection of “New World Africans” whose color differences add to the splendor of the atmosphere:

It was a scene of blazing color. Soft, barbaric, burning, savage, clashing, planless, colors -- all rioting together in wonderful harmony. There is no human sight so rich as an assembly of Negroes ranging from lacquer black through brown to cream, decked out in their ceremonial finery. Negroes are like trees. They wear all colors naturally (320).

But McKay does not entirely abandon Harlem’s intellectual side. Like Van Vechten, he represents the dilemma of instinct and intellect in imagining the Harlem of the 1920s. But in the consciousnesses of McKay’s characters, instead of competing for power, instinct and intellect are perfectly compatible. His two main characters are Jake and Ray, Jake symbolizing instinct, Ray intellect. Like Cahan’s success stories in *Yekl*, the two pick and choose which of the other’s characteristics they might adopt. In Cahan,

Gitl's is a successful immigration experience because she maintains a balance between tradition and cultural acquisition; Yekl, on the other hand, shares with Van Vechten's Byron an ill-fated totality of cultural adaptation -- Yekl the caricatured "Yankee" and Byron the murderous savage. Jake and Ray are totalities in and of themselves, but when they interact, each is eager to learn from the other. From the moment they first meet as waiters on a Pullman train, they demonstrate the most unshakable form of friendship, the kind in which judgment is surpassed by understanding.

At first Ray, a Haitian exile, is overwhelmed with homesickness. Chased out of Haiti following the political upheavals in that country, Ray stumbles into "the quivering heart of a naked world whose reality was hitherto unimaginable. It was what they called in print and polite conversation 'the underworld'" (224). Jake takes issue with this term, as it implies that Harlem itself has an underworld. He grasps in a backhanded way that the "underworld" in New York is understood to be a region as a whole, rather than a hidden world beneath the visible city:

The compound word baffled him, as some English words did sometimes.

Why *under*-world he could never understand. It was very much upon the surface as were the other divisions of human life. Having its heights and middle and depths and secret places even as they. And the people of this world, waiters, cooks, chauffeurs, sailors, porters, guides, ushers, hod-carriers, factory hands -- all touched in a thousand ways the people of other divisions. They worked over there and slept over here, divided by a street (225).

Ray's observations of Harlem here would have struck the reformers of the late nineteenth century as precisely the reason such "underworlds" should be eradicated. They bleed

their influences outward and affect the whole of New York society. But in McKay's imagination, Harlem's influence on "polite society," is infinitely necessary, as working-class culture should function, McKay implies, in a democracy. Harlem's most primitive aspects are precisely what genteel New York requires to overcome its Pharysean insincerity. But rather than exposing their foibles -- as Edith Wharton had been doing -- he offers them an alternative. In one of the final passages of the novel, McKay insists that in Harlem there are

none of the well-patterned, well-made emotions of the respectable world.

A laugh might finish in a sob. A moan end in hilarity. That gorilla type wriggling there with his hands so strangely hugging his mate, may strangle her tonight. But he has no thought of that now. He loves the warm wriggle and is lost in it. Simple, raw emotions and real. They may frighten and repel refined souls, because they are too intensely real, just as a simple savage stands dismayed before nice emotions that he instantly perceives as false (337-38).

In spite of Ray's initial shame at being forced to reside in what New York perceived as an "underworld," his experiences with Jake teach him that authenticity in act and emotion is the path to psychocultural salvation -- but unlike Hapgood, the guide to this understanding is now the Other themselves. "Can't a Negro have fine feelings about life?" Ray's uninitiated friend Grant asks him. "Yes," Ray replies, "but not the old false-fine feelings that used to be monopolized by educated and cultivated people. You should educate yourself away from that sort of thing" (242).

In this contest of representation, *Home to Harlem* follows through with the theme

of McKay's 1921 poem "Baptism." In it, he boasts that he will enter regions in which "The yawning oven spits forth fiery spears" and "come out, back to your world of tears,/ A stronger soul within a finer frame" (*Passion* 125). *Home to Harlem* represents black Manhattan as a formidable region with an effectual culture against which the "desperate, frightened, blanch-faced, the ancient sepulchral Respectability" was futilely fortifying itself (300). *Home to Harlem* comes from an insider's point of view. Rather than steering his audience away from the lures of an immoral space, he is telling them that they must redefine their standards of immorality. The novel was destined, of course, to receive the same treatment as *Nigger Heaven* from first wave critics. Du Bois responded just as one might guess: "It looks as though McKay has set out to cater to that prurient demand on the part of white folk for a portrayal in Negroes of that utter licentiousness which convention holds white folk back from enjoying" (qtd in De Jongh 31). In fact, if Du Bois made an accurate assessment of either of these bestselling novels, this was it. McKay's Harlem became the Harlem of popular imagination -- within a decade after its publication, in the area of twenty Harlem novels by African-American writers followed suit (De Jongh 33).

Tragically, most of the black population in Harlem was like Van Vechten's Byron Kasson, outsiders moving to the "Mecca of the New Negro." Many were escaping Jim Crow and lynching in the South, many pouring into what was advertised as the ultimate land of Negro opportunity. In a sense, these people would symbolically share Byron's fate. As Langston Hughes would write in 1940, "Non-theatrical, non-intellectual Harlem was an unwilling victim of its own vogue" ("When the Negro" 636). They would be drawn in by the myth and live with the reality. Though black immigration there would persist well into the 1930s, mythic Harlem would disappear once slummers, white and black, no

longer found there a moral region worth exploring. "The '20's are gone," wrote Hughes in 1940, "and lots of fine things in Harlem night life have disappeared like snow in the sun... it became utterly commercial, planned for the downtown tourist trade, and therefore dull" ("When the Negro" 634).

Like Daniel Boone escaping from civilization and at the same time paradoxically expanding it, white slummers would search out new moral regions to plumb for experiential regeneration. In a 1926 letter to Louis Bromfield, Van Vechten wrote, "Now that I thoroughly explored Harlem, I think I shall take up the Chinese" (*Letters* 88), a threat which, the downtown Chinese may be thankful, he never carried out. Additionally, the Great Depression relieved most New Yorkers of their disposable incomes. A number of African-American cultural leaders were dead by the '30s -- Wallace Thurman, A'Lelia Walker, Rudolph Fisher, and Charles S. Gilpin, to name a few. The original Cotton Club and the Lafayette Theatre were closed down. Every African-American literary journal collapsed under the weight of the region's poverty. The "procession of the oppressed," of course, would remain. The Harlem that had existed all along overwhelmed its 1920s persona -- the Harlem of the social worker, the high mortality rate, the unromantic alcoholism, the drug abuse, and the bread line -- and this revised image would remain for decades to come.

WORKS CITED

- Abell, Aaron Ignatius. *The Urban Impact on American Protestantism, 1865-1900*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1943.
- Allen, Gay Wilson. *Solitary Singer: A Critical Biography of Walt Whitman*. New York: The MacMillan Co., 1955.
- Andrews, William L. Introduction. *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*. By James Weldon Johnson. 1912. New York: Penguin Books, 1990.
- Bauman, Zygmunt. *Postmodernity and Its Discontents*. New York: New York University Press, 1997.
- Bell, Bernard W. *The Afro-American Novel and Its Tradition*. 1987. Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1989.
- Benfey, Christopher. *The Double Life of Stephen Crane: A Biography*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992.
- Berlin, Edward A. *Ragtime: A Musical and Cultural History*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980.
- ---. "ragtime." Ed. Kenneth T. Jackson. *The Encyclopedia of New York City*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995: 926.
- Bernard, Emily. Introduction. *Remember Me to Harlem: The Letters of Langston Hughes and Carl Van Vechten, 1925-1964*. Ed. Emily Bernard. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001.
- Blumin, Stuart. Introduction. *New York by Gaslight and Other Urban Sketches*. By George G. Foster. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990.
- Bonner, Arthur. *Jerry McAuley and His Mission*. Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1967.
- Bourne, Randolph. "Trans-National America." Ed. Werner Sollors. *Theories of Ethnicity: A Classical Reader*: 93-108.
- Brace, Charles Loring. *The Dangerous Classes of New York, and Twenty Years Among Them*. 1872. Washington, DC: National Association of Social Workers Classic Series, 1973.

Bramen, Carrie Tirado. "The Urban Picturesque and the Spectacle of Americanization." *American Quarterly* 52.3 (September 2000): 444-477.

Brennan, Joseph X. "Ironic and Symbolic Structure in Crane's Maggie." Stephen Crane. *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*. 1893. Ed. Thomas A. Gullason. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1979: 173-84.

Brown, Allston T. *A History of the New York Stage: From the First Performance in 1732 to 1901*. Vol. 1. 1903. New York: Benjamin Blom, Inc., 1964.

Buckley, Peter George. "To the Opera House: Culture and Society in New York City, 1820-1860." Diss. SUNY, Stony Brook, 1984.

Buntline, Ned. *The B'hoys of New York*. New York: Dick and Fitzgerald, 1848.

Buntline, Ned. *The G'hals of New York*. New York: Dewitt and Davenport, 1850.

Butsch, Richard. "Bowery B'hoys and Matinee Ladies: The Re-Gendering of Nineteenth-Century American Theater Audiences." *American Quarterly* 46.3 (September 1994): 374-405.

Byrnes, Thomas W., Helen Campbell, and Thomas W. Knox. *Darkness and Daylight, or, Lights and Shadows of New York Life*. New York: A.D. Worthington and Co., 1895.

Cahan, Abraham. *Yekyl and the Imported Bridegroom and Other Stories of Yiddish New York*. Introduction by Bernard G. Richards. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1970.

Campbell, Helen. *The Problem of the Poor: A Record of Quiet Work in Unquiet Places*. New York: Fords, Howard, and Hulbert, 1882.

-- ---. *Prisoners of Poverty: Women Wage-Workers, Their Trades and Their Lives*. 1887. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1970.

Carlin, Deborah. "'What Methods Have Brought Blessing': Discourses of Reform in Philanthropic Literature." Ed. Joyce Warner. *The (Other) American Traditions*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1993: 203-25.

Cataliotti, Robert H. *The Music in African American Fiction*. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1995.

Chauncey, George. *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Mule World, 1890-1940*. New York: Basic Books, 1994.

Cooper, Wayne F. Forward. *Home to Harlem*. 1928. By Claude McKay. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1987.

Crane, Stephen. *Crane: Prose and Poetry*. Ed. J.C. Levenson. New York: The Library of America, 1984.

----. *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*. 1893. Ed. Thomas A. Gullason. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1979.

----. *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*. 1893. New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1896.

----. *The Portable Stephen Crane*. Ed. Joseph Katz. New York: Penguin Books, 1969.

Crawford, Marion F. *An American Politician*. New York: MacMillan and Co., 1894.

De Jongh, James. *Vicious Modernism: Black Harlem and the Literary Imagination*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

Delbanco, Andrew. "The Decline and Fall of Literature." *The New York Review of Books*, 46.17 (November 4 1999): 32-8.

Dickens, Charles. *American Notes*. 1842. Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1968.

Dickstein, Morris, "The City as Text: New York and the American Writer," *Tri-Quarterly* 83 (Winter 1991-92) 183-205.

Douglas, Ann. *The Feminization of American Culture*. 1977. New York: Avon Books, 1978.

-- ---. *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s*. 1995. New York: Papermac, 1997.

Du Bois, W.E.B. *Writings*. 1986. Ed. Nathan Huggins. New York: Library of America, 1996.

-- ---. "Criteria of Negro Art." 1926. *The Crisis Reader*. Ed. Sondra Kathryn Wilson. New York: The Modern Library, 1999: 317-325.

Dunbar, Paul Laurence. *The Sport of the Gods*. 1902. Introduction by Charles Nilon. London: Collier Books, 1970.

Eco, Umberto. *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts*. 1979. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984.

Ewen, Elizabeth. *Immigrant Women in the Land of Dollars: Life and Culture on the Lower East Side, 1890-1925*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1985.

Fiedler, Leslie. *Love and Death in the American Novel*. 1960. New York: Anchor Books, 1992.

Foster, George G. *Celio: or, New York Above-Ground and Under-Ground*. New York: Dewitt and Davenport, 1850.

-- ---. *New York by Gas-Light and Other Urban Sketches*. 1856. Introduction. Edited by Stuart Blumin. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991.

Gandal, Keith, "Stephen Crane's 'Maggie' and the Modern Soul," *ELH* 60: (Fall 1993): 759-85.

Gandal, Keith. *The Virtues of the Vicious: Jacob Riis, Stephen Crane, and the Spectacle of the Slum*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Garland, Hamlin. *Crumbling Idols*. Chicago: Stone and Kimball, 1894.

-- ---. Manuscript note concerning Stephen Crane's *Maggie*. Signed and undated. Two pages. The Berg Collection of English and American Literature. The New York Public Library. The Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundation.

Gelfant, Blanche Housman. *The American City Novel*. Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1954.

Giles, James Richard. *The Naturalistic Inner-City Novel in America: Encounter with the Fat Man*. Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1995.

Gilfoyle, Timothy J. *City of Eros: New York City, Prostitution, and the Commercialization of Sex, 1790-1920*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1992.

Greenblatt, Stephen. *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.

Hadley, Samuel H. *Down in Water Street*. New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1906.

Halttunen, Karen. *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle Class Culture*

in America 1830-1870. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982.

----- "Early American Murder Narratives: The Birth of Horror." Ed. Richard W. Fox and T.J. Jackson Lears. *The Power of Culture: Critical Essays in American Literature*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1993.

Hapgood, Hutchins. "Realism on the Ghetto Stage." *Atlantic Monthly* 85 (June 1900): 839-43.

----- *The Spirit of the Ghetto*. 1902. Moses Rischin, Ed. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967.

----- *Types from City Streets*. New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1910.

----- *A Victorian in the Modern World*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1939.

Hapke, Laura. *Girls Who Went Wrong: Prostitutes in American Fiction, 1885-1917*. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1989.

Howard, June. *Form and History in American Literary Naturalism*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985.

Howells, W.D. *Criticism and Fiction and Other Essays*. New York: New York University Press, 1959.

----- *A Hazard of New Fortunes*. 1890. New York: New American Library, 1965.

----- "New York Low Life in Fiction." Stephen Crane. *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*. 1893. Ed. Thomas A. Gullason. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1979: 154-55.

Hughes, Langston. "When the Negro was in Vogue." *Writing New York: A Literary Anthology*. Ed. Phillip Lopate. New York: Library of America, 1998: 632-639.

Ed. Jackson, Kenneth T. *The Encyclopedia of New York City*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995.

James, Henry. *The American Scene*. 1907. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1968.

James, William. *Pragmatism and Other Writings*. Introduction by Giles Gunn. New York: Penguin Classics, 2000.

Johnson, James Weldon. *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*. 1912. Introduction William L. Andrews. New York: Penguin Books, 1990.

-- ---. *Black Manhattan*. 1930. New York: Da Capo Press Inc., 1991.

-- ---. "Romance and Tragedy in Harlem: A Review of Carl Van Vechten's *nigger Heaven*." 1926. *The Selected Writings of James Weldon Johnson*. Vol.II. Ed. Sondra Kathryn Wilson. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995: 392-96.

-- ---. *The Selected Writings of James Weldon Johnson*. Vol.II. Ed. Sondra Kathryn Wilson. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.

Johnson, Louise. *Rediscovering the Harlem Renaissance: The Politics of Exclusion*. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1997.

Kaplan, Amy. *The Social Construction of American Realism*. 1988. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992.

Kazin, Alfred. *On Native Grounds: An Interpretation of Modern American Prose Literature*. 1942. New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1995.

Kellner, Bruce. *Carl Van Vechten and the Irreverent Decades*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1968.

Kennedy, Gerald J. *Imagining Paris: Exile, Writing, and American Identity*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993.

Kennedy, Randall. Introduction. Werner Sollors, Caldwell Titcomb, and Thomas Underwood, Ed.s. *Blacks at Harvard: A Documentary History of African-American Experience at Harvard and Radcliffe*. New York: New York University Press, 1993.

Lears, Jackson, T.J. "The Concept of Cultural Hegemony: Problems and Possibilities." *American Historical Review* 90 (June 1985): 567-593.

Levy, Eugene. *James Weldon Johnson: Black Leader Black Voice*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1973.

Lewis, David Levering. Introduction. *The Portable Harlem Renaissance Reader*. New York: Penguin Books, 1994.

-- ---. *When Harlem Was in Vogue*. 1979. New York: Penguin Books, 1997.

Lippard, George. *New York: Its Upper Ten and Lower Million*. Cincinnati: E. Mendenhall, 1854.

Looby, Christopher. "George Thompson's 'Romance of the Real': Transgression and Taboo in American Sensation Fiction." *American Literature* 65.4 (December 1993): 651-672.

Lueders, Edward. *Carl Van Vechten and the Twenties*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1955.

Marris, Peter. *Loss and Change*. 1974. New York: Routledge, 1993.

Marx, Leo, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1967.

McKay, Claude. *Home to Harlem*. 1928. Forward by Wayne F. Cooper. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1987.

Mitchell, W. J. T. *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.

Muller, Edward K. "From Waterfront to Metropolitan Region: The Geographical Development of American Cities." In *American Urbanism: A Historiographical Review*. Ed.s Howard Gillette, Jr. and Zane Miller. New York: Greenwood Press, 1987.

Nord, Deborah Epstein. "The Social Explorer as Anthropologist: Victorian Travelers Among the Urban Poor." Sharpe, William and Leonard Wallock, ed.s. *Visions of the Modern City: Essays in History, Art, and Literature*. New York: Heyman Center for the Humanities, Columbia University, 1983.

Norris, Frank. "Zola as a Romantic Writer." Pizer, Donald, ed. *Frank Norris: Novels and Essays*. New York: The Library of America, 1986: 1006-8.

Orvell, Miles. *The Real Thing: Imitation and Authenticity in American Culture, 1880-1940*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1989.

Osofsky, Gilbert. *Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto, Negro New York, 1890-1930*. 1963. New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1968.

Park, Robert E. "The City: Suggestions for the Investigation of Human Behavior in the urban Environment." Robert E. Park and Ernest W. Burgess. *The City: Suggestions for the Investigation of Human Behavior in the Urban Environment*. 1925. Chicago: The

University of Chicago Press, 1967: 1-46.

----. "Human Migration and the Marginal Man." 1928. Ed. Werner Sollors. *Theories of Ethnicity: A Classical Reader*. New York: New York University Press, 1996:156-167.

Rabinowitz, Paula. "Margaret Bourke-White's Red Coat; or, Slumming In the 1930s." Ed. Bill Pullen. *Radical Revisions: Rereading 1930s Culture*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press: 187-207.

Reynolds, David S. *Beneath the American Renaissance: The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988.

----. *Walt Whitman's America: A Cultural Biography*. 1995. New York: Vintage Books, 1996.

Richards, Bernard G. Introduction. By Abraham Cahan. *Yekyl and the Imported Bridegroom and Other Stories of Yiddish New York*. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1970.

Riis, Jacob. *How the Other Half Lives*. 1890. Introduction by Luc Sante. New York: Penguin Classics, 1997.

Rischin, Moses. "Abraham Cahan and the New York *Commercial Advertiser*." *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* xliii (September 1953): 10-36.

----. Introduction. *The Spirit of the Ghetto*. By Hutchins Hapgood. 1902. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967.

Rorty, Richard. *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth-Century America*. 1998. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1999.

----. "Postmodernist Bourgeois Liberalism" 1983. Ed. Louis Menand. *Pragmatism: A Reader*. New York: Vintage Original, 1997: 329-336.

Rosenberg, Carroll Smith. *Religion and the Rise of the American City: The New York City Mission Movement, 1812-1870*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1971.

Sanders, Ronald. "Reformers in the Ghetto." *Commentary* 40 (1965): 78-93.

Sante, Luc. Introduction. *How the Other Half Lives*. By Jacob Riis. 1890. New York: Penguin Classics, 1997.

----. *Low Life: Lures and Snares of Old New York*. 1991. New York: Vintage Books, 1992.

Sennett, Richard. *The Uses of Disorder: Personal Identity and City Life*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970.

Sharpe, William and Leonard Wallock. Introduction. *Visions of the Modern City: Essays in History, Art, and Literature*. New York: Heyman Center for the Humanities, Columbia University, 1983.

Siegel, Adrienne. *The Image of the American City in Popular Literature 1820-1870*. Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1981.

Simoneaux, Katherine G. "Color Imagery in Crane's *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*." Ed. Thomas A. Gullason. *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*. 1893. By Stephen Crane. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1979: 222-230.

Sollors, Werner. *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.

-- --. *Neither Black Nor White Nor Both: Thematic Explorations of Interracial Literature*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

-- --. *Theories of Ethnicity: A Classical Reader*. New York: New York University Press, 1996.

Stansell, Christine. *American Moderns: Bohemian New York and the Creation of a New Century*. New York: Metropolitan Books, 2000.

Stepto, Robert B. *From Behind the Veil: A Study of Afro-American Narrative*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1979.

Stout, Janis P. *Sodoms in Eden: The City in American Fiction Before 1860*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1976.

Taylor, William R. *In Pursuit of Gotham: Culture and Commerce in New York*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.

Thompson, George. *City Crimes; or Life in New York and Boston*. New York: William Berry & Co., 1849.

-- --. *Gay Girls of New York; or, Life on Broadway*. New York: [n.p.], 1853.

-- ---. *My Life: or the Adventures of George Thompson. Being the Auto-Biography of an Author.* Boston: Federehen & Co., 1854.

Tocqueville, Alexis. *Democracy in America.* 1832. Introduction by Richard D. Hephner. New York, Penguin Books, 1986.

Trachtenberg, Alan, "American Studies as a Cultural Program," ed.s Bercovitch, Sacvan and Jehlen, Myra, *Ideology and Classic American Literature*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986: 172-87.

Van Vechten, Carl. *Nigger Heaven.* New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1926.

-- ---. *Letters of Carl Van Vechten.* Ed. Bruce Kellner. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987.

Vose, John D. *Seven Nights in Gotham.* New York: Bunnell and Price, 1852.

-- ---. *The B'hoys of Yale; or, the Scraps of a Hard Set of Collegians.* New York: Beadle and Adams, 1878.

Ward, David. *Poverty, Ethnicity, and the American City, 1840-1925.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

Ed. Wertheim, Stanley. *The Merrill Studies in Maggie and George's Mother.* Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company, 1970.

Whitman, Walt. *Democratic Vistas.* 1871. 1885. *Poetry and Prose.* 1982. Ed. Justin Kaplan. New York: Library of America, 1996: 953-1018.

----. "The Old Bowery." 1885. *Poetry and Prose.* 1982. Ed. Justin Kaplan. New York: Library of America, 1996: 1209-1216.

----. "Why Do the Theatres Languish? And How Shall the American Stage be Resuscitated?" 1847. Ed. Holloway, Emory, *The Uncollected Poetry and Prose of Walt Whitman*, 2 vol.s. Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1992: 152-154.

Williams, Raymond. *The Country and the City.* 1973. New York: Oxford University Press, 1975.

Woolston, Howard. *Metropolis: A Study of Urban Communities.* New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1938.

Worth, Robert F. "*Nigger Heaven* and the Harlem Renaissance." *African American Review*. Fall 1995. 29 (3): 461-473.