Invisible Threads:

Fictions of Cotton in the Anglo-Atlantic Triangle, 1833-1863

By

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Dissertation
Submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate School of Vanderbilt University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
in
English

August, 2016
Nashville, Tennessee

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Among the host of insights I gained into myself over the course of my graduate career, I realized that I am a true social creature and a conversational thinker, hardly the prototype of the "lone scholar" who retreats into the sanctuary of her own mind and then reemerges with a complete dissertation. The isolation that is necessary to produce a long work of scholarship—just me alone with my thoughts and the blinking cursor—was often difficult beyond what I had foreseen. I am delighted at this opportunity to convey my heartfelt thanks to the many people who reached out to connect with me and who nourished me, emotionally and intellectually, throughout a process that was stimulating and exhilarating but also tremendously challenging.

I cannot thank my advisor, Jay Clayton, enough for his unstinting support. His professional guidance and scholarly acumen were indispensable as I navigated the graduate experience and explored my aptitude as a writer and critic. Above all, I am profoundly grateful for the genuine care and compassion he has shown me, from our first meeting through to our most recent. The quality of his personal investment, not just in my work but also in my health and happiness, anchored and sustained me. Without his intellect, candor, and kindness, I might not now be in a position to defend and submit this dissertation. I also want to extend my gratitude to Ellen Clayton for her hospitality and words of encouragement. Jay and Ellen welcomed me into their home many times during this last crucial semester of dissertation writing, and the Clayton household was the place where I marshaled my fortitude and confidence in order to make these final strides.

To Rachel Teukolsky I wish to express my sincere appreciation for her professional savvy and thoughtfully probing feedback. Her questions and suggestions spurred me to sharpen my critical capacities, and it was she who often helped me maintain and heighten my focus when I began to stray in less fruitful directions. I always emerged from our meetings invigorated and with new clarity, thanks entirely to her keen insights and advice.

Colin Dayan's power as an author of lyrical and evocative prose showed me early in my graduate career scholarship's potential to move and galvanize readers, both within and without the walls of the Ivory Tower. Her versatile and innovative example as a public intellectual has been a source of continual inspiration. I feel privileged to have benefitted from her generous guidance in my evolution as a thinker and writer.

While my project was in its incipient stages, my outside reader, Catherine Molineux, helped crystallize for me one of the central tenets of my study: that omissions in the cultural record are not just absences; they produce meaning even as they also suppress it. Catherine's incisiveness in that conversation is characteristic of her scholarly work, and I aspire to emulate the clarity and force of her writing.

In addition to my committee, I want to acknowledge the many colleagues and friends who buoyed me up by giving freely of their time and energy. Among my colleagues at Vanderbilt, Jane Wanninger, Jennifer Bagneris, Annie Castro, RJ Boutelle, Emily August, Megan Minarich, and Dan Fang were brilliant interlocutors, always willing to lend their intellectual energies to help me hone an idea. They were also my coffee shop writing buddies, and their presence across the table in a bustling café was an important source of moral support, helping to mitigate my sense of loneliness inside the dissertation process. I cherish my friendships in the greater Vanderbilt community and beyond for grounding me

and providing me with emotional sustenance. I especially want to mention: Ashira Blazer, Sunaina Likhari, Asha Krishnan, Ashley Carey, Gloria Han, Sofia Jimenez, Matt Soleiman, Michelle Pham, Alicia Brandewie, Freya Sachs, Raf Cevallos, and Aman Kahlon. To the wonderful people in this list, and to the dear colleagues and friends I named above, thank you for helping me lead a fulfilled and meaningful life during my time in graduate school.

I would be remiss if I did not also acknowledge my sources of institutional support at Vanderbilt. I remember the thrill of receiving the email notifying me that I had been accepted by the English Department and would receive a five-year graduate fellowship. Among the many people who have since facilitated my progress in the program, I must name Donna Caplan. From the day of my arrival on campus to now, she has had a hand in making sure that no undue administrative obstacles arose to obstruct my progress. In addition to departmental support, I was also fortunate to receive a Dissertation Enhancement Grant from the Graduate School, with which I partially funded my research trip to the British Library in London and the Working Class Movement Library and the People's History Museum in Manchester.

Beyond the English Department, I found a second home in Vanderbilt's Writing Studio, first as a consultant for two years and then for two more delightful years as the Arts and Sciences Writing Fellow. I feel so thankful for those years of additional funding for allowing me the time and space in which to develop this project. More than anything, I am intensely grateful for the work I was able to perform at the Writing Studio and the immense personal satisfaction I derived from it: joy at collaborating with a client to successfully overcome writing challenges, renewed confidence in my own skills as a writer, opportunities to continuously sharpen those skills, and membership in a community of

writers all striving for improvement. In particular, I want to thank Jennifer Holt, Gary Jaeger, John Bradley, Elizabeth Covington, Jeff Shenton, and Kristen Sullivan for making the Writing Studio such a conducive environment for facilitating our clients' writing processes and my own. I will truly miss it there.

My final thanks go out to my family: Katie, John, and Kathy Higgs. Every little sister worth her salt knows how to keep her big sister humble, and in this Katie has always excelled. In all seriousness, though, I am grateful to you, Kato, for the multiple occasions when you served as an emotional resource for me, grounding me through our sisterly connection and your insightful advice. To the other Dr. Higgs, my eminently practical dad, thank you for making only the occasional reference to my impending future as a juggler in Disney World (inside family joke). More importantly, I want to thank you for instilling in me a deep reverence for higher education. To my mom, thank you for imparting to me your commitments to social justice and equity, both through the set of ideals with which you raised me and through the example of the work you have performed on behalf of Planned Parenthood, CASA, and Meals on Wheels. To both of my parents, thank you for the unwavering confidence in me that you demonstrate in countless ways, sometimes through larger gestures than you might wish to perform (like offsetting the costs of data recovery when I am stupidly threatened with the loss of my dissertation file), but all the time through small gestures—a text to tell me you're proud, a phone call to check in and lift me up with your unassailable conviction that you raised a capable, intelligent, and kind person. Wherever I go from here, my fondest hope is to strive toward that standard, the one you set for me every day through your love and faith in me.

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INTRODUCTION

In 2013, NPR's *Planet Money* team undertook an investigative journalism project on a vast scale.[1] Inspired by economist Pietra Rivoli's book, *The Travels of a T-Shirt in the Global Economy* (2004), the reporters sought to render transparent the production processes by which a humble cotton t-shirt is born, processes about which most first-world consumers, who casually wear cotton products every day, know little to nothing. In the initial installment of a series of eleven short pieces, Alex Blumberg and Adam Davidson tell listeners: "You are going to be hearing about the world that is behind this t-shirt and almost every single piece of clothing that you wear on your bodies" ("Planet Money Explores the Economics of T-Shirts").

In this pursuit, the team came up with a t-shirt design, found a ready market for the product among avid NPR audiences,[2] and then tracked each step in the shirts' genesis. A veritable stable of journalists dispersed to several corners of the globe to report back, following the trail of the *Planet Money* t-shirt from a cotton field in Mississippi, to a spinning factory in Indonesia, to sewing factories in Bangladesh and Colombia, to markets for used clothes in sub-Saharan Africa. Their voices come together to weave a fascinating story about the implacable forces of global capitalism and the people at the whim of those forces—laborers working for distressingly low wages and manufacturers scrambling to

[1] *Planet Money* produces a weekly podcast and creates radio stories for *Morning Edition*, *All Things Considered*, and *This American Life*. The team's goal is to educate listeners about the state of the national and global economy through engaging, accessible human-interest stories.

[2] The team started a Kickstarter campaign, asking interested listeners to pledge $25. They anticipated that they might raise $40,000 and make 5,000 shirts. In the end, they raised $590,000 and made 25,000 shirts.

maintain a foothold in a constantly shifting industry—contingencies that together allow blithe Western consumers to have an array of cheap cotton goods to select among at their closest Target or Walmart.

The t-shirt's biography as told by *Planet Money* remains firmly situated in our present moment, but the profound cultural ignorance surrounding cotton that the team aims to correct has a much longer history. The deep historical version of the t-shirt's story might also begin in the Mississippi cotton fields, but in 1793 instead of 2013, for that was the year Eli Whitney invented the cotton gin. Whitney's single technological innovation reinvigorated the declining American institution of slavery and helped enable the explosive growth of the British cotton industry. A booming transatlantic cotton economy sprang into life, one that depended on the forced labor of slave workers in the cotton fields of the American South and the alienated labor of textile workers in the factories of Northern England and New England. The industry thus comprised a network of race- and class-based exploitation on an unprecedented scale,[3] and so its perpetuation depended too on the ability of consumers to justify purchasing its products. It became necessary to cultivate ignorance alongside cotton.

This justificatory logic and the omissions necessary for it to work are the focus of my study. My dissertation investigates a legacy of invisibility or partial visibility that began

[3] Throughout the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth, Europeans had of course been purchasing commodities like sugar, coffee, and tobacco that were based in labor expropriated from slaves. Cotton was different because it required two forms of intensive labor in two distinct locations: first the field, then the factory. By 1825, according to historian Douglas Farnie, "[f]or the first time in English history a raw material rather than a luxury foodstuff or beverage held the premier position amongst the country's imports. Cotton may have resembled in origin other colonial wares but it lent itself to a lucrative process of manufacture as they did not" (12-3).

in the nineteenth-century Anglo-Atlantic Triangle,[4] a legacy by which the culture acknowledges only certain aspects of the oppressively ubiquitous and ubiquitously oppressive cotton economy while conveniently obscuring others. Then, as now, cotton was simultaneously everywhere and nowhere. It was in the sheer muslin dresses donned by the most fashionable belles in London and Charleston, in the white cravats of their gallant escorts, in the rough osnaburg (or "negro cloth") trousers of the field slaves deftly extricating fluffy bolls from their prickly pods in Mississippi, in the calico dresses of the textile workers bending over their clanging power looms in Massachusetts, even in the paper on which the latest Dickens novel was printed and the currency with which it was purchased.[5] Yet, despite its material omnipresence, cotton's visibility in the cultural record is limited. Cotton is conspicuously absent from the major literary efforts by which the cultures of the plantation South, New England, and Lancashire produced themselves. I am interested in tracing the representational strategies by which this pattern of omission was managed. Understanding how the material realities of the cotton economy were mitigated or suppressed in the cultural consciousness at a point in time when the scope of the

[4] I use the term Anglo-Atlantic Triangle to designate a slightly different, narrower geography than what historians have usually meant in their use of the term. The Anglo-Atlantic Triangle is typically understood to include the African coast, the American Eastern Seaboard as well as the Anglo-Caribbean, and Britain. In my use, the triangle is restricted to the Southern Cotton States, New England, and Northern England, i.e. the Cotton Triangle.

[5] In his well-received global history, *Empire of Cotton* (2014), Sven Beckert furnishes a similarly comprehensive list of the often unlooked-for sites where cotton crops up in our everyday lives today: "Cotton is in the banknotes we use, the coffee filters that help us awaken in the morning, the vegetable oil we use for cooking, the soap we wash with, and the gunpowder that fights our wars (indeed, Alfred Nobel won a British patent for his invention of 'guncotton'). Cotton is even a component of the book you hold in your hand" (xii-xiii). We've come to rely more and more on cotton as the substance in which and by which we live our lives even as we've cultivated greater and greater degrees of ignorance.

industry was transatlantic can illuminate the similar mechanisms by which we in the first world maintain our ignorance in today's global economy.

For, while this pattern of elision is paramount in the canon of enduring literary classics that has come down to us, it was not monolithic in the larger, more diverse print culture. The Southrons, Yankees, and Britons who existed inside the transatlantic web of the nineteenth-century cotton industry had not become quite as adept as we at ignoring its unpleasant aspects. No doubt, this was in part because some of that unpleasantness was localized within each of the three geographies of the Cotton Triangle and was thus more likely to obtrude itself on the awareness of the population resident there. A precursor to today's vast global networks, the cotton industry in the antebellum transatlantic was at once too large to enable a holistic engagement with its products in all their dimensions and yet small enough to escape complete erasure by the kind of commodity fetishism Karl Marx famously describes in *Capital*. Marx represents the occlusion of production under the sign of capitalist consumerism as a *fait accompli* at the time of *Capital*'s publication in 1867. However, there are obscure but exceptional nineteenth-century literary sites that do render facets of the cotton economy visible, which indicates that consumer ignorance of production was not yet total or even universally deemed desirable.

Amid the sweeping changes wrought by industrialization, urbanization, imperialism, and globalization, a literature of production was still available to consumers curious to know something about the provenance of their goods. The shunting of production away from the realm of art and high culture onto marginal or middle-brow forms was one means by which the occlusion of production by commodity fetishism was still a work in progress, not an accomplished fact. By unquestioningly taking Marx at his word and by

concentrating on canonical nineteenth-century literature with high culture aspirations (the realist novel, for instance), scholars have tended to look at only a few strands in what was a much larger web. Locating the rare sites of partial visibility makes the omissions elsewhere in the cultural record stand out in relief, both in the canonical literature of the nineteenth century and in the scheme of our more totalized ignorance within the vastness of today's cotton economy.

* * *

Glancing back over centuries and even millennia, the extensive human networks that have formed around this humble fiber are astounding. Cotton's preindustrial history is robust, reaching all the way back to the ancient civilizations that flourished in the Middle East and in Latin and South America. From there, the arts of growing and weaving cotton proliferated into India, Africa, and Southeast Asia. It was only in the seventeenth century, with the intervention of the British East India Company in Indian markets, that light cotton fabrics found their way back to Europe, creating a flurry of consumer demand and tough competition with the domestic wool industry in Britain.[6] I restrict my study to cotton's industrial era, when it played a part in creating what we now call the developed world. Cotton was one of the chief forces that ushered in the Industrial Revolution as well as modern capitalism. Simultaneously, it helped revive the American institution of slavery, setting the collision course that resulted in the American Civil War. I use cotton's

[6] See Chapter 1, "The Rise of a Global Commodity," in *Empire of Cotton.*

movements and modes in the nineteenth-century Anglo-Atlantic Triangle to define the geographic and temporal parameters of my project.

First, though, it is important to glance a little further back in time to a moment on the African coast that might be termed the "primal scene" of the modern cotton industry: the exchange of a bolt of cotton cloth for a human being. Indeed, the high demand in Africa for cotton goods and other European textiles was instrumental in fueling both the circumatlantic slave trade and the nascent textile industry in Britain. English trader Captain John Adams's account, published in 1822, of his commercial interactions with African merchants at the end of the eighteenth century includes a section titled "Remarks on Goods Suitable to Barter in Africa" in its appendix; textiles and wearing apparel outweigh all other goods in Adams's list, which includes "English Manufactured Cotton Goods" among its subheadings (qtd. Foster 33). In the Prologue to *Lose Your Mother*, Saidiya Hartman expresses her horror and sheer incomprehension at the reductive equation by which "a boy came to be worth three yards of cotton cloth and a bottle of rum" (17). She later writes that such commodities "determined the worth of slaves and provided the measure of their existence" (68). Equating people with things, establishing thereby their exchange value, was essential for transforming people into the lifeless commodities they had to become to function as capital. Human beings thus died to the "social world of men" through their equivalence with so many bolts of cloth (67). It is with this transaction on the Gold Coast, not in the fields of American plantations, that the deep imbrication of the cotton economy with the slave economy begins.

The "English Manufactured Cotton Goods" among Captain Adams's inventory would no doubt have come from the vicinity of Manchester, the locale of the cotton industry's

birth and, along with it, the birth of the Industrial Revolution. Cotton spinning and weaving had been an increasingly important domestic practice in Britain since the early eighteenth century, but it had been a cottage industry, consisting of individual spinners and weavers working out of their own households with the aid of their wives and children. Toward the end of the eighteenth century, with a series of technological innovations that began to mechanize individual steps in the process of creating cotton fabrics, the industry moved out of the home and into larger and larger factories. The handloom weaver became obsolete, his artisanal skill no longer required. Instead, factories employed adult male laborers for the tasks that required brute physical strength, reserving the more fine work at the spinning and weaving machines for laborers who were likelier to have the "nimble fingers" necessary for such work (and who came a lot cheaper): women and children. Resentments started to simmer among the populations of displaced working-class men. Meanwhile, the plight of children in the factories, laboring long hours in unhealthy and dangerous conditions, roused the sympathies of reformers, and public controversies about the factory system began to brew.[7]

As cotton production took off in Northern England, British demand for raw cotton outstripped its ready availability in the global market. Eli Whitney's cotton gin righted this balance and established the American South as Britain's primary supplier of "white gold."

[7] For further background information on the British cotton industry, consult the works of historian Douglas Farnie, widely recognized as one of the foremost experts on the cotton industry in Lancashire. E. P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1963) is one of the seminal historical studies on the working-class movements that were born in response to the Industrial Revolution. However, a major limitation to Thompson's version of labor history is its masculinist focus. Anna Clark's *The Struggle for the Breeches: Gender and the Making of the British Working Class* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995) is an important counterpoint to Thompson's study.

The gin easily and efficiently separated cotton fibers from their seeds, a process that until then had been performed tediously by hand. With the advent of this technology, cotton cultivation in the United States boomed, feeding the reciprocal boom in cotton production in Britain. Between 1787, the year of the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia, and 1807, the year the British officially ceased participation in the slave trade, "America's share of the British cotton import industry went from zero to 60 percent" (Dattel 29-30). Of course, the demand for slave labor in the Cotton States increased in tandem.[8]

As the voraciousness of the British cotton mills continued to grow, the passage of the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act by British Parliament in 1807 created a crisis for owners of American cotton plantations, a crisis that was amplified by the introduction of cotton mills in New England. A new national market for raw cotton thus arose, further bolstering the need for slave laborers in the expanding cotton fields of the South. The plantation masters' solution was to reallocate the labor supply already at their disposal, resulting in the forced internal migration of a large portion of the slave population from the northernmost Southern states to the cotton-growing regions in the Deep South.[9] This

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[8] *Cotton and Race in the Making of America* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2009), by financial historian Gene Dattel, is a crucial contribution to antebellum and postbellum American history because Dattel refuses to treat cotton as "just as a Southern regional phenomenon," instead insisting on the complicity of the entire nation in profiting from race-based labor exploitation in America's cotton fields, both before and after the Civil War (xi).

[9] Historian Walter Johnson estimates that "one million enslaved people were relocated from the upper South to the lower South according to the dictates of the slaveholders' economy, two thirds of these through a pattern of commerce that soon became institutionalized as the domestic slave trade" (*Soul by Soul* 5). In his more recent study, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), Johnson contextualizes the Second Middle Passage as a crucial component in the history of the technological, economic, and social forces that transformed the swampy, untamed Deep South into the Cotton Kingdom.

demographic shift occasioned by the tremendous demand for cotton has become known as the second Middle Passage. It is from this moment in American history that the saying "to be sold down the river" originates.

With this series of events, the Cotton States, New England, and Lancashire commenced a fraught co-dependent relationship with cotton as the connective thread. In 1860, on the eve of the American Civil War, the Cotton States grew approximately 80 percent of the world's cotton supply.[10] Cotton accounted for 60 percent of the United States' total exports, supplying the fortunes of plantation masters in the South as well as merchants and brokers in the North. Britain was the primary consumer of America's "white gold;" 80 percent of the cotton manufactured in Britain originated in American cotton fields. Meanwhile, the New England mills were fed entirely with Southern cotton (Yafa 130).

For the purposes of this project, I take the British Abolition Act of 1833 as my starting point. With the official enactment of abolition in Britain, the nature of the transatlantic discourses around both slave labor and factory labor shifted. British abolitionists were newly enabled to adopt an air of self-righteous moral superiority, while American abolitionist rhetoric took on increasing intensity, in part due to the pressures of British scrutiny. Concurrently, British factory reformers adopted the rhetorical strategies of proslavery advocates, unfavorably comparing the unprotected status of Britain's "white slaves" with the comfort that America's black slaves allegedly enjoyed under the

[10] I drew this figure from Gene Dattel's article, "When Cotton Was King," published in *The New York Times* on March 26, 2011.

paternalistic care of their masters.[11] Yet neither abolitionists nor factory reformers questioned the economic centrality of the common substance over which American slaves and British factory workers alike labored: cotton.

As the legal counterpart to the Abolition Act in Britain, the American Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 serves as my endpoint. With emancipation in America, the shape of the textile industry would forever change, suddenly taking on global dimensions. Fears about what the eradication of slave labor in the American cotton fields would mean for the continuation of British industry prompted sudden expansion into Indian and African fields as sources of raw cotton. From the early years of industrialization, cotton operated within a distinctly transatlantic system of material and cultural exchange, until the American Civil War necessitated a drastic global restructuring of the textile economy and the systems of labor supporting it.[12]

* * *

[11] For a cogent discussion of the history of transatlantic tensions between the abolition movement and the movement for factory reform, see Catherine Gallagher, *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction: Social Discourse and Narrative Form, 1832-1867* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class.* Revised Edition. (London: Verso, 2007); and Marcus Cunliffe, *Chattel Slavery and Wage Slavery: The Anglo-American Context, 1830-1860.* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008).

[12] Sven Beckert offers a useful account of the global ramifications for the cotton industry of the American Civil War in his article, "Emancipation and Empire: Reconstructing the Worldwide Web of Cotton Production in the Age of the American Civil War" (*The American Historical Review* 109.5 (December 2004): 1405-38).

Between these dates, I explore the variety of cultural work that cotton's simultaneous ubiquity and invisibility in the social fabric of the Anglo-Atlantic performed. As a rich example, let me turn to one of the most interesting of the obscure texts that I uncovered: *The History of a Cotton Bale* (1863), a children's picture book published in England by a group calling themselves the "Successors to Newbery."[13] In rhyming iambic quatrameter with a colorful illustration to accompany each stanza, the story tracks the preparation of raw cotton, from its cultivation in the fields of American plantations through all the processing stages necessary to form it into bales ready for shipment to Liverpool. Especially fascinating is how the story negotiates the presence and actions of slave laborers, particularly given its year of publication, 1863, right smack in the middle of the Cotton Famine that descended on Northern England as a result of the American Civil War. Indeed, given President Lincoln's issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863, *The History of a Cotton Bale* might be read as one of the earliest nostalgic representations of American slavery. Taken alone, the poem itself is such a determinedly chipper account of cotton cultivation that it reads as an exculpatory representation of slave labor, designed to justify the system upon which the British cotton industry had been dependent for its growth. The illustrations, however, are more confused in how they depict the actions described in the poem and make for a nuanced visual accompaniment to the reading experience.

The poem repeatedly diminishes the slave laborers by referring to them via synecdoche or reducing them to their specific functions. The stanza explaining the planting

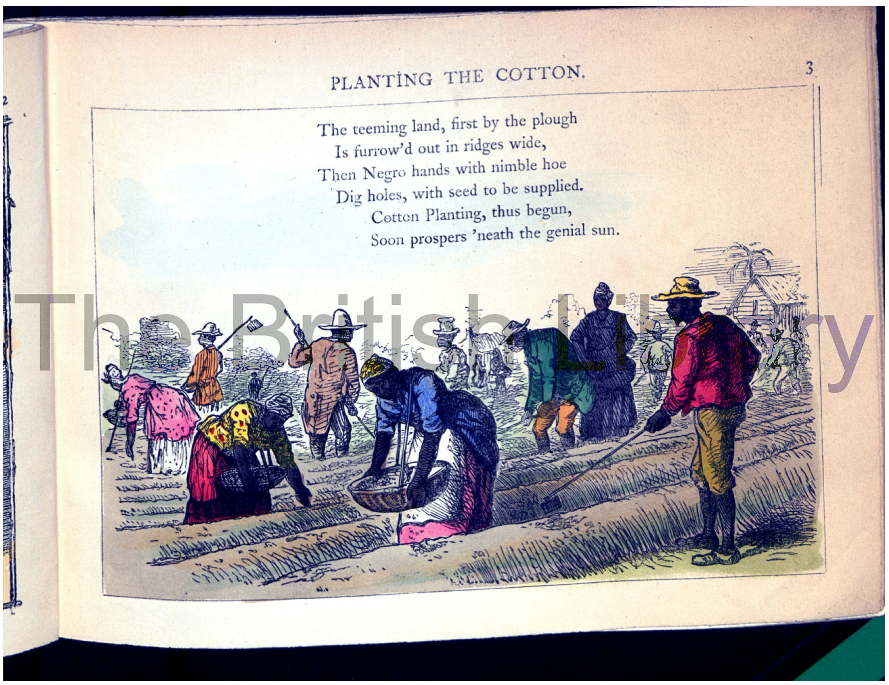
[13] These authors are claiming the legacy of John Newbery, a well-known publisher in the eighteenth century who became known as the "Father of Children's Literature." The Newbery Medal, one of the most prestigious awards in children's literature, is named for him.

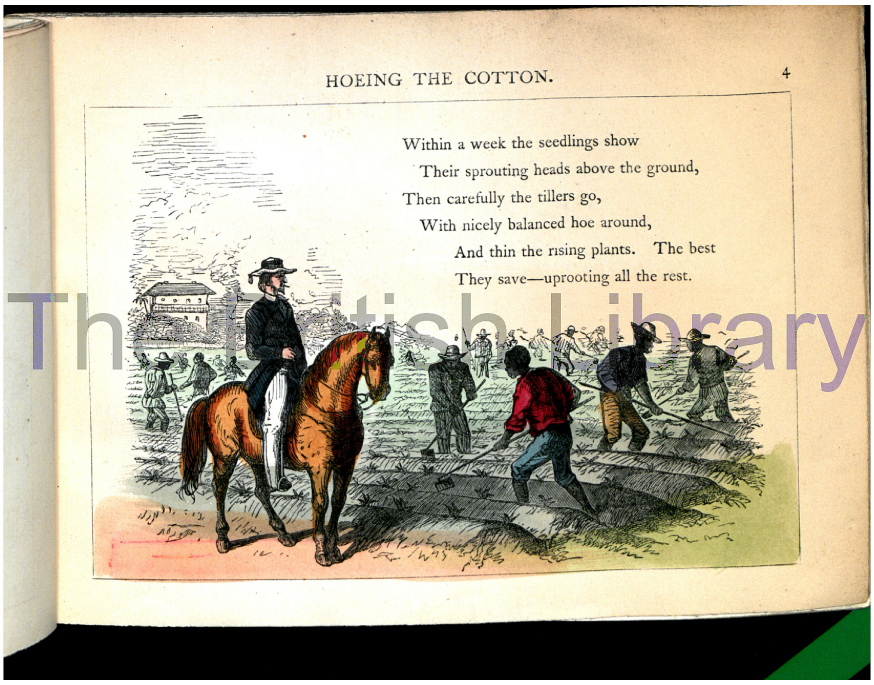
of cotton contains these lines: "The teeming land, first by the plough / Is furrow'd out in ridges wide, / Then Negro hands with nimble hoe / Dig holes, with seed to be supplied" (3). Notice the use of the passive voice and how the adjective "nimble" attaches not to the laborers but to the hoe they wield. More to my point, this is the first instance of several when the poem finds it convenient to reduce the field workers to disembodied synecdochal hands. (As I will discuss later, this use of synecdoche echoes with the ghostly "dusky fingers" that deliver to the Confederate poet, Henry Timrod, the cotton boll out of which he spins his dream of a Southern empire.) Meanwhile, the next stanza in *The History of a Cotton Bale* reads:

> Within a week the seedlings show
> Their sprouting heads above the ground,
> Then carefully the tillers go,
> With nicely balanced hoe around,
> And thin the rising plants. The best
> They save—uprooting all the rest. (4)

The slave laborers here are mere "tillers." They are their task, nothing more. For all the reader knows, "tillers" might be machines, not people. Nevertheless, there is surprisingly exact technical information conveyed through the poem's playful rhymes even as it contains and diminishes the presence of the workers who perform the actions it describes.

The illustrations serve to supplement and extend the poem's content in ways that often undermine its cheerful tone and careful elisions of the laboring slaves. Here are the corresponding images to the above lines:

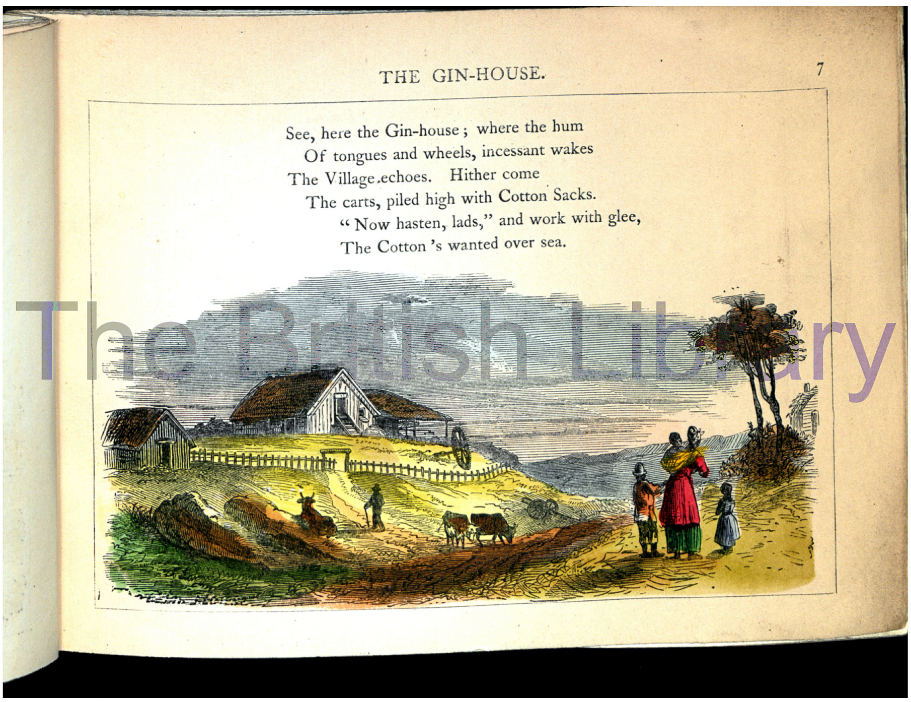




In the illustrations, even as the same dark hue is used to render the complexions of the workers, they nevertheless take on complete bodies in individualized poses. Their brightly colored clothing would almost make them cheering figures, except that their stooping postures register the physical toll of their labors. While the color in the foreground is rich

and vivid, the landscape of the plantation in the background fades away into dreary black and white, hardly a bucolic Southern paradise. Often, as in the second sketch, the figure of a white overseer looms above the workers, signaling that their labor is coerced and hinting at the potential for violence.

However, the illustrations do not consistently offer a more critical perspective than the poem. Compare, for instance, this rendering of the gin-house:



Unlike in the other images of enslaved people included in *The History of a Cotton Bale*, the slave mother and her children do not toil in this picture. Instead, they cluster prettily together, enhancing the harmonious effect of the tableau. In its composition, this image is a visual echo of popular pastoral landscapes in the picturesque style, which commodified scenes of agricultural labor into serenely aesthetic views for consumption by the privileged classes. Reference, for instance, this painting by the famous seventeenth-century landscape artist Claude Lorrain:

By mapping the conventions of the picturesque onto the plantation, the illustration from *The History of a Cotton Bale* presents the Southern landscape as it is fantasized in the proslavery novels I will analyze in my first chapter. It is also almost a perfect but uncritical rendering of the plantation as imagined by Dickens's villainous aesthete, Skimpole, in *Bleak House* (1852-3): "Take the case of the slaves on American plantations. I dare say they are worked hard, I dare say they don't altogether like it. I dare say theirs is an unpleasant experience on the whole; but they people the landscape for me, they give it a poetry for me" (295).[14]

It is notable that the pastoralized plantation landscape, complete with a quaint slave family that might have emerged right out of the solipsistic imagination of Skimpole, obtrudes at the moment the poem registers the dire need for American cotton in Britain.

[14] For a fuller discussion of Dickens's critique of the picturesque through his representation of Skimpole, see Rachel Teukolsky's article, "Pictures in Bleak Houses: Slavery and the Aesthetics of Transatlantic Reform," *ELH* 76 (2009): 491-522.

With a cheerfulness now tinged with desperation, the poem's speaker addresses the unpictured laborers inside the gin-house, urging them: "'Now hasten, lads' and work with glee, / The Cotton's wanted over sea" (7). Many Britons needed the picturesque version of the cotton plantation offered in the accompanying illustration just as much as any of the Southern plantation masters. Watching as the British national economy (and perhaps their own pocketbooks) suffered due to the cotton shortage that came as a direct result of the crisis over slave labor then convulsing America, they were eager to justify their country's economic dependence on American cotton. The text might equally serve to solace British parents' consciences as to edify their children. The fact that *The History of a Cotton Bale* was published in London by a group claiming the mantle of John Newbery, and not by a special interest group in Manchester, indicates how pervasive this justificatory logic was among the British public.

Nevertheless, despite the poem's elisions and the illustrations' ambiguities, together they form a surprisingly comprehensive whole; they complement and compensate for one another, supplying each other's deficits. The poem provides a surprising range of technical information embedded in catchy rhymes, while the illustrations confront the reader with the omnipresence of slave laborers throughout the cultivation process.

Of course, *The History of a Cotton Bale* stops short at the point where the cotton bales depart for England:

> "Hey, for the Seas!" and foreign skies,
> The boat is here, the Bales aboard;
> Now fav'ring breezes waft the prize,
> Where it may work and food afford
> To willing labourers of our Isle,
> On whom many plenty ever smile. (12)

This is a counterfactual, a desperate wish, for there was precious little cotton shipping to England at this point in the American conflict due to the efficacy of the Union blockade. Were we to follow a rare successful shipment, it would be on board a swift blockade runner, not the ponderous steamship "Georgia" pictured in the corresponding illustration, and the bales would pass through streets crowded with ill-nourished, unemployed workers in order to arrive at a Manchester factory likely operating at half capacity. While the authors of *The History of a Cotton Bale* were comfortable presenting a mediated vision of labor in the American cotton fields, they were not quite up to so bald a lie as would be required to continue their jolly tale with the bales' treatment at the hands of hungry men, women, and children in England's domestic mills. The "Successors to Newbery" revealed certain operations of the cotton economy across the Atlantic in order to suppress recognition of those closer to home.

* * *

As my quick glance through the pages of *The History of a Cotton Bale* might suggest, I want to investigate how the cultures within the Anglo-Atlantic Triangle constituted themselves in relation to and against one another through the fictions about cotton that they generated. Although I use geography to structure my dissertation in three parts, each focusing on one of the spatially distinct points in the transatlantic triangle—the American South, New England, and Northern England—I strive to consistently demonstrate the ways in which they were economically as well as culturally linked. Drawing upon a wide variety of texts, many of which are little known and understudied, I examine exemplary literary

and historical sites to arrive at new understandings of the three Cotton Cultures that emerged as nodes in the transatlantic network that was the cotton industry up until the American Civil War. Ranging from Southern plantation novels like John Pendleton Kennedy's *Swallow Barn* (1836) and Caroline Lee Hentz's *The Planter's Northern Bride* (1854) to a periodical publication by Massachusetts mill women called *The Lowell Offering* (1840-45) to British industrial novels like Frances Trollope's *Michael Armstrong, The Factory Boy* (1839-40) and Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* (1854-5), the texts I consider reveal as much as they conceal about the cotton economy. I am equally as, if not more, interested in the texts' omissions and what those omissions produce as I am in what the texts expose.

Through this study, I hope to supplement the historical scholarship that has examined this phase in the cotton industry's development by looking at the representational strategies that mediated the industry to the public. To date, the cotton industry has principally been the purview of the historian, but it is important territory for the literary critic to explore as well in order to help account for the variety of ways that representative voices from the period grappled with and made sense of the sweeping cultural changes that historians document. The existing histories of cotton all too often miss the human element—in other words, the human labor. They often read like a nineteenth-century it-narrative, with cotton being picked, transported, carded, spun, and woven in the passive voice.[15] Such accounts of the cotton industry also tend to be fact-oriented, seeking to understand just how large a role the cotton industry played in the

[15] See for instance Anthony Burton, *The Rise and Fall of King Cotton* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1984); Bertha S. Dodge, *Cotton: The Plant that Would be King* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1984); and Beverly Lemire, *Cotton* (London: Berg, 2011).

Industrial Revolution in Britain through comparative analysis of production statistics, for example. Given the emphasis on rendering the history of cotton quantifiable and therefore exact, such studies rarely indulge in interpretation.

There is a prevailing assumption that cotton isn't subject to representation, and therefore isn't literary. Scholarship on cotton to date has shown little interest in the kinds of questions that drive my project: How was cotton represented (or not), and to what end? What ideologies did the representation (or elision) of cotton sustain and enable? Where are the people who produced the cotton in the writing of the time?

If labor doesn't receive much attention in histories of cotton, neither does it figure significantly in histories of American slave culture. Eugene D. Genovese, in his ambitious and wide-ranging study *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (1972), discusses slave labor for only twenty-five pages out of nearly 700 and devotes a mere two pages to labor in the cotton fields. Underwriting Genovese's work, as well as that of other eminent scholars on slave culture,[16] is the assumption that culture and labor are mutually exclusive. Paul Gilroy furnishes a crucial insight to help explain the scholarly tendency to sidestep slave labor: "in the critical thought of blacks in the West, social self-creation through labour is not the centre-piece of emancipatory hopes. For the descendants of slaves, work signifies only servitude, misery, and subordination" (40). Yet the many slave songs from the field of labor that survived to be adapted and commemorated within the blues tradition attest to a thriving slave culture in the fields even under and in response to the duress of

[16] Labor also gets short shrift in David Brion Davis's most recent and otherwise impressively comprehensive study, *Inhuman Bondage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) as well as in Walter Johnson's *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).

coerced labor conditions. Cotton features prominently in such perennial favorites as "The Boll Weevil Song" and "Pick a Bale of Cotton," songs that celebrate and insist upon the historical reality of black labor even as they register and protest oppression.

Finally, it is notable that most of the work on the transatlantic cotton industry has been regionally specific, treating the Slave South, industrializing New England, or industrial Northern England in admirable depth but without capturing the sense of interdependency and interconnectivity for which I aim. One noteworthy exception is Sven Beckert's recent *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (2014). An ambitious project that begins with cotton cultivation in the ancient world and moves all the way forward to our present day, *Empire of Cotton* dedicates the bulk of its pages to developments in the nineteenth century. Beckert attempts to demonstrate how a lengthy cause-and-effect chain of events all over the world combined to create the cotton industry and gave rise to global capitalism. In a way, I imagine my project as the literary counterpart to Beckert's study. While he details the series of historical shifts that contributed to the development of the global cotton industry as we know it today, I examine how the cotton cultures in the nineteenth-century transatlantic interpreted those shifts for themselves. By looking back at the cultural response to the cotton industry's formative moments in the Anglo-Atlantic Triangle, I seek to shed light on some of the coping strategies by which we exist inside of the more dispersed structures of today's global cotton economy.

My first chapter, "The Absent Cotton Fields in the Literature of the Southern Plantation," opens with a look at how Southern plantation culture, the culture of the masters, built and sustained itself by refusing to acknowledge the cotton fields from which the masters derived the means by which to support their luxurious lifestyles. Nevertheless,

in many representations of the plantation, the pastoral mode associated with Southern agrarianism becomes tinged with industrial motifs, producing a fusion that I call the industrial-pastoral. From there, I turn to the slave narrative tradition to explain why the cotton fields also are absent there, with two key exceptions: Solomon Northrup's *Twelve Years a Slave* (1853) and John Brown's *Slave Life in* George (1854). Next, I analyze two poems by Henry Timrod, the Confederacy's unofficial poet laureate, to see how he maneuvers the South's relationship to cotton in order to prognosticate the South's triumph and envision its imperial future. Finally, I draw upon works by two Northerners, Frederick Law Olmsted's Southern travel writing and Lydia Maria Child's *A Romance of the Republic* (1867), to demonstrate how they end up upholding some of the South's myths about itself and perpetuate many of the same silences to do so.

Chapter two, "The Lowell Mill Girl and the Idealization of Factory Labor," takes *The Lowell Offering* (1840-5) as its main archive. The first magazine written exclusively by women, and mill women at that, the *Offering* quickly became famous at both a national and international level because of widespread fascination with its mill-girl writers. At this time Lowell's workforce was comprised primarily of single young women from New England farms; they were represented as, and often represented themselves as, embodiments of the Yankee industrious spirit and proud descendants of upstanding Puritan stock. After providing a historical overview of Lowell's founding and introducing the *Offering*, I situate its contents and its writers in national and transatlantic context. I look first at how they navigate their own positions as female laborers inside ongoing cultural discussions about domesticity as well as the most major hot-button issue of the day, slavery. I end by turning to the writings of Southern and British visitors to Lowell in order to understand how they

perceived the Lowell mill girl and how their perceptions of her were mediated and motivated by their cultural and political contexts back home.

My final chapter, "The Elusive Cotton Factory in Literary Manchester," traces the consistent elision of the cotton factory from the version of industrial Manchester that has come down to us. The factory is a strange absent-presence in works by two of the most famous nineteenth-century political economists, Friedrich Engels and Karl Marx, and in the two best-known industrial novels, Charles Dickens's *Hard Times* (1854) and Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* (1854-5). But the elusive quality of the Manchester factory runs even deeper than the canon, as I show by glancing across an array of industrial novels, including works by Frances Trollope, Benjamin Disraeli, and Charlotte Brontë, The one exception is Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna's *Helen Fleetwood*, and yet Tonna was the only one of the industrial novelists with absolutely no personal knowledge of the industrial North. Through omission or displacement, the institution that loomed large in Manchester's cityscape and played a major role in Britain's Industrial Revolution is greatly diminished in the cultural record.

In the Afterword, I cast my glance from middle decades of the nineteenth century forward to our current moment, sketching a through line between consumers operating inside the Anglo-Atlantic cotton industry of the pre-Civil-War era and consumers operating inside today's worldwide web of cotton. I end with a brief look at Cotton Incorporated's famous "Fabric of Our Lives" campaign, and in particular at one of its most recent manifestations: a series of commercials that feature trendy young female actors and singers, using their fresh star power to entice us with "the Touch, the Feel, of Cotton."

* * *

Listening to *Planet Money*'s stories about today's cotton industry, as the team attempts to make visible the often all-too-invisible connections between the consumer of an inexpensive cotton t-shirt in the United States and the people on several other continents who had a hand in its manufacture, I often heard uncanny resonances with my archive of nineteenth-century texts. Sometimes the effect was to open the temporal and technological gap between then and now, sometimes to shrink it. But no matter how distant or near that history loomed in my mind, the haunting of our purportedly post-industrial present by our industrial past was undeniable.

From a farm in the Mississippi Delta, Robert Smith comes to us with the first on-site story about "the birthplace of the Planet Money t-shirt." He rhapsodizes about the view that greets him: "On this fall day, the cotton looks like a snowdrift all the way to the horizon" ("How Technology and Hefty Subsidies Make U.S. Cotton King"). Smith talks with Toto, a laborer on the farm whose grandfather, George, also worked the Mississippi cotton fields. But whereas George picked painstakingly by hand, Toto drives a $600,000 machine, a John Deere cotton picker, that "feels the cotton plants and makes all the adjustments itself. Toto just sits there." Matter-of-factly, Toto states that he can "make a round and pick more than eight people in their whole lifetime." Smith points out that the cotton Toto picks with John Deere's mechanical fingers "is clean, it's pure, it's untouched by human hands," one of the reasons why cotton from the American South has once again come to dominate in the global marketplace ("How Technology and Hefty Subsidies Make U.S. Cotton King").

Tuning into their conversation, I think about Patsey, the memorable figure from Solomon Northrup's *Twelve Years a Slave*, who worked alongside Northrup in the Mississippi cotton fields and came prominently to his recollection when he wrote his narrative in 1853. Northrup acknowledges that he was never much of a deft hand at cotton picking himself and remembers Patsey for her grace and her adroitness, plucking more cotton bolls from their stubborn pods every day than two other laborers combined. He remembers too how this distinction raised her to the notice of their brutal master, Edwin Epps, who regarded her as some combination of a well-oiled machine and a "queen of the fields," his capitalist and sexual fantasies merged into the body of one woman.[17] Hers is the unfinished story that haunts Northrup's narrative; he escaped, but she would continue to live and, in all likelihood, die under the lash. Her fingers have now stilled, but I wonder about her children, and their children's children. Do they drive John Deere cotton pickers in the very fields where she walked, and worked, and endured repeated violation?

From the fields of Mississippi, Smith then takes listeners to a spinning factory in Indonesia. There is wonder in his voice as he sketches his impressions: "This building is as big as a football field, and there is seemingly nobody working here. It's just row after row of shiny metal robots. These are beautiful machines. They are immaculate" ("Planet Money Spins a Yarn and Makes a 'Perfect' T-Shirt"). My mind immediately goes to the Great Exhibition of 1851 in London, at which a grand display of British cotton machinery was given pride of place. Exhibition-goers goggled as, seemingly by magic, cotton was opened,

[17] Steve McQueen's acclaimed film adaptation of Northrup's narrative includes a striking scene in the gin house in which Epps satisfactorily eyes Patsey, who has just turned in 512 pounds of cotton from a single day's work, and says: "Queen of the fields, she is. […] Damned Queen. Born and bred to the field. A nigger among niggers, and God give 'er to me. A lesson in the rewards of righteous livin'."

carded, doubled, spun, warped, and woven by a series of fifteen machines occupying an entire room unto themselves. Significantly, the mechanized display erased the human presence of the textile worker. The autonomy of the machine, which was a fantasy then and is now a more imminent reality, has not lost its quality of uncanny fascination. The spectacular impact of "row after row of shiny robots" is still enough to inspire Smith's awe. Underwriting his expressions of enthusiastic amazement is relief that he has not walked into the Indonesian factory's nightmarish counterimage, a suffocating room full of dirty and degraded human workers.

Smith goes on to detail the spinning process in these terms: "I watched the machines suck up the cotton and pull it into a long, thick ponytail, an infinite ponytail sailing above my head, in and out, and suddenly these machines make it very thin" ("Planet Money Spins a Yarn and Makes a 'Perfect' T-Shirt"). His words triggered for me a creeping unease, and then I cringed as the accounts I'd read of "scalpings" in cotton factories returned forcibly to my memory, graphic imagery of human hair pulled inexorably into the machines and the bloody, sometimes fatal results. The metaphor that Smith thought would serve as a familiar and charming point of reference for his listeners has appallingly literal historical parallels. Even as he looks on in admiration at the "immaculate" process by which "shiny metal robots" stretch cotton into "an infinite ponytail" without the tarnish of human imperfections and frailties, his blithe words unintentionally evoke the specters of textile operatives whose bodies were maimed so that the cogs and wheels of the cotton industry could keep turning.

The quote from Friedrich Nietzsche that inspired my title, "invisible threads are the strongest ties," has found its way into popular culture distilled as a heartwarming aphorism

about the enduring power of love and human relationships. I see a more ambivalent meaning in his words. The gossamer filaments that connect us, in localized webs of kinship and friendship as well as in globalized networks of production and consumption, are indeed strong; they extend not just across space but also backward and forward through time. But Nietzsche does not say whether they endure for good or for ill. Cotton's fine fibers connect us to a thriving global economy with a robust transatlantic history, and we benefit by association with the human ingenuity that built and continues to drive the industry. However, those same invisible threads also entangle us in the unsightly underseams of cotton's vast social fabric. If we dare to look, they confront us with our complicity in the networks of human oppression by which the cotton industry grew and continues to flourish.

PART I

The Absent Cotton Fields in the Literature of the Southern Plantation

I begin with the American South, unique within the Cotton Triangle as the locus of cultivation. Two interrelated lines of inquiry run throughout the chapter. In the first case, the chapter surveys the literary terrain of the antebellum and Confederate South in order to interrogate how Southern Cotton Culture (with a big "C") understood and represented the culture of cotton (with a little "c"), i.e. the material and economic processes involved in planting, harvesting, and profiting from this particular staple crop. What patterns and conventions establish themselves in the literature in order to cope with and perhaps justify or critique the material and economic conditions of the Cotton Kingdom, in particular the reality of coerced labor? Inversely, the chapter also puts the question: How do these realities affect and limit where, when, how, why, or even if the culture of cotton gets represented in the literature of and about the South?

The second argument takes up a traditional subject for the literary scholar, genre, but draws upon nontraditional texts. Much antebellum and Confederate literature has been neglected by the American literary canon, in part because of issues of craft and style, but in larger part because much of it champions proslavery ideologies modern readers rightly find hard to stomach. This body of literature has been dismissed in some quarters as mere propaganda, completely lacking in literary and ethical merit. Whatever its demerits, however, this corpus nonetheless contains works that held tremendous cultural significance, defining the meaning of the South in the popular imaginary, both then and

since. Many of the texts of and about the antebellum and Confederate South were enormously popular at the time of their publication, sometimes on both sides of the Mason Dixon line, and were instrumental in constructing and reaffirming plantation culture.

On the level of disciplinary practices, this chapter asks: what are the challenges for the literary scholar in close-reading propaganda? (This is a question with which scholars studying the slave narrative tradition have contended for some time.) How can the critic submit propagandistic literature to rigorous analysis without being dismissive, invalidating and even mocking it? On a more immediate level, the chapter approaches its particular archive with the following questions: How do the different genres coming out of the antebellum and Confederate literary traditions lend themselves as propaganda for or against the South? What do they facilitate, and what are their limitations?

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In *Our South*, Jennifer Rae Greeson opens her discussion of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* with a provocative observation: "It is startling to notice how much Simon Legree's plantation—Stowe's very archetype of the Slave South—looks like Lowell, Massachusetts, or any of the other mill towns that had sprung up in the industrializing Northeast in the 1830s and 1840s" (169).[18] While I might quibble slightly with Greeson here, noting that Stowe is

[18] In *Our South*, Greeson explores how the South, as an "internal other," was essential to the nation-building mission of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century American literature (3). In her chapter on *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, she shows how Stowe innovated a distinctly American approach to the "novel of metropolitan modernity." By projecting the industrial North onto the Slave South, Stowe disrupted the city/country divide endorsed and produced by most contemporary British and European novelists; she thus "created a powerful new chronotope in which temporal progress into modernity figured as geographical movement

deploying the nightmarish vision of Manchester, which represented all the evils of industrialization in the popular American imagination, rather than the idealized dream of an industrial utopia as Lowell was frequently imagined at the time, her point is nonetheless useful. She astutely identifies one instance of what is actually a much larger pattern in antebellum American literature.

It is not terribly surprising, perhaps, that a New Englander like Stowe, writing from a context in which the cotton factory had become an important physical and cultural landmark, might overlay the industrial over the agrarian in her representation of the Southern plantation. What I find more remarkable is how many Southern writers did this too, a pattern that has gone unnoticed because, as a cultural production of the losing side, antebellum Southern and Confederate literature has received relatively little scholarly attention.[19] Many Southern plantation novels and Confederate novels represent the plantation through a surprising merging of the agrarian ideal with the industrial, producing an aesthetic mode that I call the industrial-pastoral. The nostalgic feudal lens borrowed from the likes of Sir Walter Scott that one might expect to find in these novels does dominate, but occasionally a rhetoric of industrial autonomy obtrudes; for a moment, the plantation bears an uncanny resemblance to a bustling mill town.

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to the southward" (173). What I found in the course of my reading was that Stowe was not the only American author to do so; many Southern writers also participated in this project.

[19] Lyde Cullen Sizer discusses in *The Political Work of Northern Women Writers and the Civil War, 1850-1872* how critics tend to class the fictions of Northern writers as "political novels," while often dismissing those of Southern writers as "propaganda" (5). This tendency is part of what Jay Fliegelman calls a "cultural history of winners," which has played a powerful role in canon formation (335).

John Pendleton Kennedy's *Swallow Barn; or, A Sojourn in the Old Dominion*, printed first in 1832 and then reissued with revisions in 1851, is one of the premier examples of the Southern plantation novel—"the literary origin of the plantation legend" according to William R. Taylor in his seminal *Cavalier and Yankee* (178). Kennedy's narrator, a Northerner visiting his distant relations in Virginia, describes his cousins' grand plantation house, the titular Swallow Barn, as a "great castle" upon first arriving (23). He thus sets the stage for a portrayal of plantation culture as the happy revival of European feudal structures in the American South.[20] Much of the novel's ideological work is performed through the characterization of the plantation master, Frank Meriwether, who is the prototypical Cavalier figure; a thoroughgoing gentleman with impeccable taste, he inhabits his lordly position as master with geniality and benevolence.

However, while Frank comfortably occupies his role as the quintessential Southern aristocrat, modeled, as Taylor has argued, after the literary figure of the English squire, his wife, Lucretia, occupies a strikingly adverse position (181):

> Every thing at Swallow Barn, that falls within the superintendence of my cousin Lucretia is a pattern of industry. In fact, I consider her the very priestess of the American system, for, with her, the protection of manufactures is even more of a passion than a principle. Every here and there, over the estate, may be seen, rising in humble guise above the shrubbery, the rude chimney of a log cabin, where all the livelong day the plaintive moaning of the spinning wheel rises fitfully upon the breeze, like the fancied notes of a hobgoblin, as they are sometimes imitated in the stories with which we frighten children. In these laboratories the negro women are employed in preparing yarn for the loom, from which is produced not only a comfortable supply of winter clothing for the working people, but some excellent carpets for the house. (39-40)

[20] I should mention, however, that Kennedy's representation of the feudal revival at Swallow Barn is multifaceted. While he does find much to admire, he also uses irony and humor to temper and undercut that admiration. See, again, William R. Taylor's *Cavalier and Yankee* as well as Jan Bakker, *Pastoral in Antebellum Southern Romance* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989).

Throughout this handful of lines, Swallow Barn suddenly bears an odd resemblance to a factory and its mistress to a factory foreman or manufacturer. The language is striking as it shifts in tone and style from brusque and practical to strangely Gothic back to brusque and practical. In contrast to the typical sentimentalizing language of romance, Kennedy's appraisal of Lucretia's well-oiled system of manufacture is efficient and direct enough to make any Northern businessman proud. Meanwhile, the incursion of the Gothic prompts associations with William Blake's "dark satanic mills," an unexpected congruence that both reveals the commonality of Blake's trope and further collapses the representational gap between plantation and mill.

How can Swallow Barn be both castle and factory? What Kennedy is accessing is the prevalent fantasy of the plantation as an autonomous microcosm, a self-sufficient world unto itself, cut off from the march of modernity and capitalism.[21] Mythically, Monticello was the preeminent example of this.[22] By insisting on the plantation's self-sufficiency, Southern writers like Kennedy were trying to quell anxieties about the South as an internal colony dependent on the Northern states and Europe to buy its agricultural products and in turn supply it with manufactures.

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[21] Another literary example is found in Caroline Lee Hentz's *The Planter's Northern Bride* (1854): "She went to the weaving and spinning rooms, where cotton and woollen webs were manufactured for negro clothing, and counterpanes of curious devices. Everything necessary for comfort and use was of home-work, and everything was done with a neatness, order, and despatch that surprised the young mistress of the plantation" (341). I will discuss this novel more fully below.

[22] The Monticello website repeatedly uses the word "self-sufficient" to describe the plantation. And to further demonstrate the pervasiveness of the myth, chef Alice Waters, one of the pioneers of the farm-to-table movement, is quoted as saying: "We desperately need to reconnect ourselves to the pastoral self-sufficient tradition that Jefferson built; nothing is more vital than returning this tradition to the very heart of American culture" (Masello, "Founding Farmer").

But, in quelling these anxieties by representing the plantation as a bustling hive of industry complete within itself, this prime Southern institution starts to resemble exactly what the South wants to repudiate. In both his major works, *Sociology for the South* (1854) and *Cannibals All!* (1857), Southern social theorist George Fitzhugh sets up the heartless Northern industrialist as the antitype of the benevolent Southern gentleman. Yet, as necessary as the industrial North was to white Southerners' conception of plantation culture as the converse of all things Northern—agrarian rather than industrial, adhering to a decorous and aristocratic chivalric code rather than the crass business ethos of the capitalist—there are nevertheless these moments in the literature when the distinction between plantation culture and mill culture blurs, producing a hybrid industrial-pastoral aesthetic mode.

While the Northern specters of the mill town and the factory haunt many a description of Southern plantations, Augusta Jane Evans's little studied Confederate novel, *Macaria; or, Altars of Sacrifice* (1864), is uncharacteristic in that it fully embraces industry as already subsisting at the heart of the South. One of the few original novels to emerge out of the South during the Civil War, *Macaria* was, in the words of literary critic Coleman Hutchison, the "signal publishing achievement of the Confederacy" (15). Nor was its circulation restricted to the South; the novel was swiftly reprinted in both New York and London, and it thus became a vehicle for airing pro-Confederate sentiments across national and international borders (Hutchison 64).[23]

[23] In his book *Apples & Ashes: Literature, Nationalism, and the Confederate States of America*, Hutchison is interested in how Evans uses a delocalized geographic setting but highly specific temporalities to position *Macaria* as a national, not just a Confederate, novel. While he mentions that *Macaria* emerged into a literary field primarily composed of reprints of popular British novels, he does not make the connections I do to show how Evans is

Quite unexpectedly, *Macaria* evokes as a Southern setting a site that would likely have been more familiar to its Yankee and British readers than its Confederate audience: a cotton factory. The novel takes place in the town of W——, located somewhere in the state of Georgia but not otherwise grounded in an identifiable, clearly rendered South; in this, *Macaria* is unlike most other antebellum and Confederate literature, which was typically local color fiction highly invested in place. The town of W——, Georgia, is interesting for my purposes because it manages to contain both the imposing mansion where the novel's heroine resides and, incongruously enough, a cotton factory surrounded by impoverished tenements in an area of town known as the Row. Evans introduces this unexpected side of W—— rather clumsily about halfway through the novel when Irene Huntingdon, the central character who serves as the novel's beau ideal of a Southern belle, suddenly starts manifesting charitable impulses toward the poverty-stricken inhabitants of the Row.

What is the daughter of a plantation master doing ministering to poor textile workers? For the reader familiar with the British industrial novel, it is as though two disparate genres suddenly collide. Indeed, scenes where Irene tends to an ailing consumptive named Bessie Davis prompt strange associations with Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*, in which the genteel protagonist, Margaret Hale, strikes up an unlikely acquaintanceship with a former factory woman dying of consumption, Bessy Higgins.

In rather overblown language, Evans describes Bessie Davis's conditions: "The dust and lint of the cotton-room had choked the springs of life, and on her hollow cheeks glowed the autograph of consumption" (256). Although Evans's dramatic language serves to generate momentary pathos for the dying woman, her aims are clearly not reformist or

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adapting British novelistic forms, the industrial novel and the social problem novel, to her own purposes and context.

radical. The novel is only remotely interested in the poor woman in that she provides a background against which Irene appears as a "ministering angel:"

> It was a strange scene. The poverty of the room—the emaciated form, with sharp, set features—the magnificently beautiful woman kneeling there in her costly festal robes, with the light of the tallow candle flickering over her diamonds, setting her neck and arms on fire—and the weeping girl and waling curly-haired boy, whose tearful face was hidden in the full flounces of blue *tulle*. (290)

The contrasts here between Irene's splendor and the squalor of the room and its inhabitants are practically obscene. What place do blue tulle and diamonds have in this scene of misery and want? The conditions of poverty only matter in so far as they provide a foil to Irene's beauty and purity; there is no impetus to change those conditions but rather to maintain them for the sake of the flattering contrast. Evans appropriates the feudal role of Lady Bountiful to a context that is not just Southern, but also industrial. In her ability to bridge the feudal and the industrial, Irene represents the hope that the South can modernize without changing its social structures.

Indeed, *Macaria* repeatedly uses the contrast between Irene and the poor factory workers to shore up her supremacy as a representative member of the Southern master class. When Irene contracts a dangerous illness rampant among the dwellers of the Row, her near death becomes the occasion for her family doctor to express the agonized query: "what is that whole confounded crew of factory savages in comparison with her precious life?" (270). Writers of the British social problem novel had been posing a related but inverted question, as, for example, when Dickens in *Bleak House* asks his readers to consider whether the death of a great lord is really so different and more meaningful than the death of a lowly crossing sweeper. But *Macaria* does not ask about Irene's value versus that of the factory workers in order to actually entertain the question; it hangs as an

unanswered rhetorical question because, in Evans's South, there is no standard of comparison, no common scale, that could measure a hereditary member of the Southern aristocracy against the lower social orders, or "savages," be they white or black.

Indeed, the difference between asking such a question in London versus in W——, Georgia, is that in the Slave South there existed a class and, importantly, race of people viewed as degraded even below Jo, the homeless crowing sweeper, who represents the nadir in Dickens's scale. But slavery, as several critics have noted, only gets mentioned three times in the entire novel,[24] and blackness is nearly invisible. Hutchison observes that the Huntingdons' house slaves appear in the guise of deracialized "servants" who work for the Huntingdon family out of pure devotion, and so Evans sidesteps the most incendiary national issue of her day (85). I would like to suggest that the novel instead works out its anxieties about the instability of racial hierarchies through Irene's interactions with the "factory savages," or "white slaves," whose contaminating influence is seen as threatening to her very existence.

Evans thus engages the allied genres of the industrial novel and social problem novel but rejects their associated political and social imperatives. In so doing, she explores a new kind of industrial writing that is for the South and of the South; she does not ignore industry nor lambast it as a Northern evil, but rather uses her heroine's expeditions to the Row to shore up traditional values about the inherent superiority of the Southern aristocracy.

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[24] In addition to Hutchison, see for instance Jan Bakker, "Overlooked Progenitors: Independent Women and Southern Renaissance in Augusta Jane Evans Wilson's *Macaria; or, Altars of Sacrifice"* (*Southern Quarterly* 25.2 (1987): 131-42), or Suzy Clarkson Holstein, "'Offering Up Her Life:' Confederate Women on the Altars of Sacrifice" (*Southern Studies* 2.2 (1991): 113-30).

Interestingly, it is on the steps of the cotton factory that the novel's climactic scene, in which Irene refuses the man she loves, takes place. The setting again prompts associations with *North and South*, in this case the climactic scene in which industrialist John Thornton first realizes his love for scornful Margaret Hale as they face down a group of angry workers on the steps of his factory. The setting is where all similarity ends, however; while *North and South* concludes with the literal and symbolic alliance of the business class and the gentle class through John and Margaret's marriage, Evans has no such end in mind for her class-crossed characters. As a member of the professional class, Russell Aubrey is not a suitable mate for the highbred Irene; she rejects him out of allegiance to her father, who staunchly ascribes to the hierarchies of plantation culture and views marriage as a tool for building and maintaining Southern dynasties. At the site of industry's tenuous foothold in the South, Irene tells Russell that they must henceforth "stand on the opposite shores of a dark, bridgeless gulf," taking a stand against the leveling forces of modernization while also laying claim to the factory as the harbinger of industrial progress on behalf of the Southern aristocracy.

As a consequence of W——'s placelessness, the town often feels like it pertains more to a fantastic nowhere-land rather than a readily recognizable South. Yet, by including a cotton factory in her Southern landscape, Evans tapped into an ideological battleground that was about to become an actual battleground. In July of 1864, only two months after *Macaria*'s publication, General Sherman's forces attacked the two largest of the South's fledgling cotton mills at Roswell and New Manchester, Georgia. A largely forgotten event in the history of Sherman's infamous march, the general ordered his soldiers to burn the mills and to round up the textile workers, all white and mostly women

and children, and forcibly deport them northwards. The goal was to get the factory workers across the Ohio River and compel them to sign pledges that they would not return south until after the war ended.[25] The irony here, of course, is that the Ohio River is most familiar as the natural boundary dividing the Slave South from the Free North; for the escaped slave, crossing the river meant crossing into freedom. Meanwhile, the Union army herded the Georgia textile workers across the river as though their trade marked them as property of the North.

As it turns out, Southern writers like Fitzhugh were not the only ones who saw industry as the exclusive province of the North. The removal of Georgia's textile workers was not just strategic, in that it disabled mills that were supplying materials to the Confederacy, but also symbolic, in that it aggressively asserted that the textile industry was the North's prerogative and delivered a demoralizing blow to the Confederacy's dreams of autonomy. All of which is to say that Evans's seemingly odd decision to situate a cotton factory in W—— was politically charged. Rather than rejecting industry as antithetical to her grand vision of Southern culture, she cannily appropriated for the Confederacy what both she and Sherman recognized as the source and symbol of the North's power over their Southern brethren: the cotton mill.

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[25] Trying to research the destruction of the Roswell and New Manchester mills brought me to some strange places, most notably websites and blogs maintained by Confederate sympathizers, for whom the incident is representative of Sherman's brutal usage of the South and its people. While it was difficult to find mention of the events in the Georgia mill towns in scholarly resources, there is a book by an amateur Civil War buff, Mary Deborah Petite, that attempts to thoroughly document the mills' burning and the subsequent treatment of the workers: *The Women Will Howl: The Union Army Capture of Roswell and New Manchester, Georgia, and the Forced Relocation of Mill Workers* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2008). Petite spent considerable time in archives and uses letters between Sherman and his commanding officers, among other resources, to help reconstruct the events. The ruins of the New Manchester mills are still hauntingly visible in Sweetwater Creek State Park.

While the cotton factory is an unexpected element in *Macaria*, it is also striking that the Southern institution essential to the textile industry—the cotton plantation—goes unrepresented in the novel's pages. The Huntingdon plantation, mentioned only a few times in passing, is twenty-five miles distant from W——; although the novel does stray as far away from its primary setting as New York, it never takes its readers out to those peripheral fields. As the daughter of a cotton factor, Evans may have been in a position to glean insight into the Southern cotton economy. However, if the stereotype of the sheltered Southern Belle holds true, it is also possible that Evans was reproducing the conditions of her own upbringing in her creation of the coddled Irene, cut off from the crass reality of the labor and business transactions required to sustain her lifestyle.

Either way, Evans is not alone in suppressing the realities of the cotton economy: the fields, the slave labor deployed in their cultivation, and the business of selling the cotton. Almost every antebellum Southern novelist—male and female—manifests a convenient blind spot when it comes to the realities of the economy operating beneath the fantasy of an agrarian, neo-feudal plantation culture that the novels set out to endorse and produce. While we often get renderings of majestic plantation houses inhabited by chivalric masters, refined mistresses, and their devoted "servants," the cotton fields and the slave laborers toiling there are markedly absent. Despite Southern politicians' boasts in the halls of Congress about the power of their alliance with King Cotton,[26] the conditions of the master class's allegiance to such a lord were too shameful or too tenuous to be openly acknowledged in the culture's fictions about itself.

[26] On March 4, 1858, Senator Henry Hammond famously declared before Congress: "No, you dare not make war on cotton. No power on earth dares to make war upon it. Cotton is king."

One notable exception to this trend of ignoring cotton's provenance occurs in *The Planter's Northern Bride* (1854), in which author Caroline Lee Hentz does take her readers on the trek out to the plantation's surrounding fields. As one might expect from the title, the novel revolves around the union of a Southern planter, Moreland, with the daughter of a Northern abolitionist. Despite her lifelong exposure to her father's propagandistic rhetoric, Eulalia is immediately drawn to the gentlemanly Moreland and agrees to return with him to his home deep in the Slave South, even in the face of her qualms about the horrors that may await her there. As might be expected, her first exposure to the peculiar institution is among Moreland's house slaves in his primary residence, which is situated some distance away from his plantation. Moreland's house slaves all vociferate their gratefulness for the care of their munificent master, and so Eulalia glimpses the kinder, gentler face of slavery in the affection that could, and often did, exist between the members of the master class and the slaves with whom they lived in the domestic intimacy of the household.

It is not until Moreland takes Eulalia on a venture to his country home and plantation that she truly understands his position as a planter and hers as his wife, as well as the necessarily fraught relationship to the slave laborers that this position entails:

> It was just before sunset when they arrived at the plantation, and Moreland welcomed Eulalia to her country home.
>
> And now for the first time she realized that she was the wife of a Southern planter.
>
> All around, as far as the eye could reach, rich, rolling fields of cotton, bearing the downy wealth of the South, stretched out like a boundless ocean of green, spotted with white, like the foam of the wave. (330)

At the sight of the white cotton, which she imagines as a calm and endless sea, the realization of her new identity as a plantation mistress washes over her. She experiences

the comfort and pride of controlling a portion of the "downy wealth of the South." But, immediately thereafter, the sight of a threatening wave of black, the slaves returning from their work in the fields, awakens her to the instability of her privileged position:

> Soon, returning in grand march from the fields, came the negroes, poising on their heads immense baskets, brimming with light and flaky cotton. Little children, looking very much like walking semicolons, toddled along, balancing their baskets also, with an air of self-importance and pride. Eulalia gazed with a kind of fascination on the dark procession, as one after another, men, women, and children, passed along to the gin house to deposit their burdens. It seemed as if she were watching the progress of a great eclipse, and that soon she would be enveloped in total darkness. She was a mere speck of light, in the midst of shadows. How easy it would be to extinguish her! (331)

This passage is revealing on multiple levels. Hentz is in a bind here, for she wants to combat conceptions of labor in the cotton fields as grueling and crippling; hence the light tone in her description of the black laborers cheerfully bearing the "downy wealth of the South" for their master's benefit. And, of course, the image of happy and willing slaves is here, as elsewhere in proslavery literature, meant to contradict antislavery representations of the cruelties and deprivations slaves suffered at the hands of their masters. However, in a novel that climaxes with the discovery and successful suppression of a murderous slave rebellion plot, Evans also wants to foreshadow coming events by conveying the threat that the enslaved masses pose to the master class.

The notable shift in tone from mocking playfulness to sublime terror midway through the passage is jarring and, on first reading, difficult to comprehend. Why would Eulalia balk so at the sight of contented slaves? If we consider that this is Eulalia's first real glimpse of slavery's labor potential, the change begins to make more sense. Perceiving the children's "self-importance and pride" in the cotton they bear as the rightful outcome of their labor unsettles Eulalia's euphoric sense of her own privilege and destabilizes the

ground upon which that privilege rests. For the first time, she has to confront the disquieting reality that it is only through the labor of others that the advantages and comforts of the white master class abide—and coerced labor is a shaky foundation upon which to stake one's identity, not to mention an entire social and political order.

A passage that began as a promise of slavery's continuance, in light of the slaves' cheerful participation in their own subjugation, swiftly devolves into an apocalyptic vision of rebellion, as though Hentz does not buy into her own propaganda. For if happy and willing slave laborers are both the justification for slavery and the guarantee of its future, it but takes a shift in outlook and demeanor for justification and guarantee alike to crumble—and how quickly contented smiles can become grimaces of righteous anger.

This passage works against itself in other revealing ways as well. Even as Hentz's figuration of the child laborers as "walking semicolons" works to dispel preconceived notions about the deleterious effects of labor in the cotton fields, the metaphor contravenes itself. The curve of the comma beneath the dot is the child's body, bent beneath the weight of the cotton. The passage thus unintentionally encodes the hardships of labor in its attempt at cuteness. The semi-colon metaphor has another potential resonance: in its function as a hinge signaling a close relationship between two independent clauses, the semi-colon would be an apt figuration for the role of cotton, and the labor entailed in its cultivation and production, as the linkage between the two seemingly disparate regions, economies, and cultures of the United States.

* * *

The slave narrative, several of which famously begin with the promise to present "a truth stranger than fiction," is the literary tradition most obviously and self-consciously poised against the plantation novel. Printed by abolitionist presses and frequently edited or transcribed by leading abolitionist activists, the major slave narratives of the 1840s and 50s have traditionally been read as northern abolitionist literature, not as a southern genre. In that the abolitionist movement shaped the parameters and conditions for their composition, publication, and reception, such definitive examples of the slave narrative genre as *The Narrative of Frederick Douglass* (1845) and Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) occupy an ambiguous position as both abolitionist polemic and early African-American autobiography.

Even when understood as a primarily autobiographical form, the slave narrative's geographical and cultural affinities are complicated; many former and fugitive slaves were understandably loath to identify as Southerners, preferring to distance themselves not just physically but also psychologically from the culture of their oppressors. Their narratives tell of a harrowing flight from the brutalities of the Slave South and call for the demolition of the cruel institution underpinning plantation society.

But, in that slave narratives take place largely in Southern settings, rendered with an eye to accuracy and exposure, they provide an alternate literary and historical vantage point on plantation life as a counterpoint to that of the plantation novel. Lucinda MacKethan, a prominent Southern studies scholar, speaks lucidly to this point: "Read together, the 'loyalist' plantation romance and the 'fugitive' slave narrative speak to one another as symbiotic southern genres, even if only contrapuntally." When placed in conversation, slave narratives and plantation novels have much to say to one another about

the realities versus the mythologies of the antebellum South, producing what MacKethan terms a dialectic: "To segregate these genres from one another is to miss, in all of them, half the story" ("Plantation Romances and Slave Narratives"). When it comes to inquiring how plantation culture represented itself, both to itself and to those outside its geographic and cultural purview, plantation novels and slave narratives, many of which were widely read by both southerners and northerners alike, are the dominant literary voices in the conversation.

But what, I ask, about the story neither genre tends to tell? While it is important, as MacKethan asserts, to position the slave narrative as a Southern genre in opposition to the plantation novel in order to see what the former reveals that the latter does not, I find that the genres are often allied in perpetuating certain occlusions, albeit for different reasons. The fields of labor are noticeably absent from the canonical slave narratives, despite their characteristic attention to the realities of slave life. Indeed, as a resource on the cultivation of cotton and the toil expended to plant, pick, and gin the "white gold," most slave narratives are nearly as silent as their fictional southern counterpart, the plantation novel. Only two texts stand out to me as exceptions to this pattern of omission, Solomon Northrup's *Twelve Years a Slave* (1853) and John Brown's *Slave Life in Georgia* (1854), both of which owe their exceptionality to the unusual circumstances of their authors. For while the writers of Southern romance maintained silence around the cotton fields in order to sustain the illusion of the master class's supremacy as inherent and unshakeable, the absence of the fields in the slave narrative tradition is attributable to the historical contingencies attendant on black authorship.

Because former house slaves were far more likely to have the powerful tools of literacy at their disposal, they were typically better positioned than former field slaves to tell their stories in the abolitionist presses. Harriet Jacobs, for example, learned to read and write under the instruction of her first mistress, a privilege for which she expresses her earnest gratitude in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (8). Even when under a master who discouraged or forbade education of his slaves, those in the household often had the resources to teach themselves at their disposal, namely access to reading materials and occasional leisure time in which to study them. Frederick Douglass recounts how his mistress in Baltimore taught him the basics of reading and writing until her husband prohibited his further education, at which point Douglass took advantage of his spare time and relative freedom of movement in the city streets to cleverly continue his instruction by challenging the white boys he encountered to best him at writing (33-4; 43).

The history of how Hannah Crafts, the author of *The Bondswoman's Narrative* (circa 1853-61), learned to read also reinforces the special position of house slaves, as well as the latent biases of literary critics. Discovered by Henry Louis Gates at an auction in 2002, *The Bondwoman's Narrative* quickly attracted notice from scholars of both American and British literary culture once Hollis Robbins recognized that Crafts had appropriated material from canonical British novels, most noticeably *Bleak House*, to her own uses.[27] In addition to reworking uncannily familiar plot elements and narrative styles, *The*

[27] Henry Louis Gates and Hollis Robbins edited a collection of scholarly essays, *In Search of Hannah Crafts: Critical Essays on* The Bondwoman's Narrative (New York: Basic Civitas, 2004), with contributions from leading Americanist literary critics. For more on Crafts in a transatlantic context, consult Daniel Hack's piece, "Close Reading at a Distance: The African Americanization of *Bleak House*" (*Critical Inquiry* 34 (2008): 729-53), or Rachel Teukolsky's article, "Pictures in Bleak Houses: Slavery and the Aesthetics of Transatlantic Reform" (*ELH* 76 (2009): 491-522).

Bondwoman's Narrative embeds entire passages drawn from major British authors in its first-person narrative about a slave woman's harrowing experiences under the Southern peculiar institution and eventual escape North, tweaking the British source texts to fit their new American setting. Some scholars were initially skeptical that a slave woman would be in a position to demonstrate such familiarity with the British canon and proposed that Hannah Crafts might be the pseudonym of a free black author or even a white author.[28]

However, Gregg Hecimovich's recent groundbreaking research has revealed that the authorial persona Hannah Crafts does indeed correspond with a historical person, a slave woman named Hannah Bond, who was at one point enslaved in a house where pupils from a nearby girls' school boarded. The school's curriculum required recitation from *Bleak House*, and so the echoes of the girls' lessons, resonating through the household, continue to echo in Craft's story. Another of Bond's masters, John Hill Wheeler (the Mr. Wheeler of *The Bondwoman's Narrative*), possessed an extensive library in which Bond may have browsed through the other works by major British authors that are referenced in her own literary composition (Bosman, "Professor Says He Has Solved").[29] While Hecimovich's findings certainly are exciting, there is a way in which scholars' celebrations of Hannah Crafts's identification with an actual house slave is another kind of echo. In that Hecimovich's research warrants praise of Crafts's impressive command of language and canny appropriations of British classics, such an acknowledgment repeats the abolitionist

[28] See, for instance, Celeste-Marie Bernier and Judie Newman, "*The Bondwoman's Narrative*: Text, Paratext, Intertext and Hypertext," *Journal of American Studies* 39.2 (2005): 153-154.
[29] Gregg Hecimovich has a forthcoming book, *The Life and Times of Hannah Crafts: The True Story of The Bondwoman's Narrative*, scheduled for publication next year.

community's celebrations of other literate house slaves to the exclusion of the many field hands who were not able to benefit from access or proximity to the tools of literacy.

The canonical status of Douglass's and Jacobs's narratives is at least in part owing to their active roles in the process of their narratives' composition. Unlettered field slaves, by contrast, had to rely absolutely on an amanuensis to transcribe their personal histories, opening their slave narratives to charges of inauthenticity from contemporaneous proslavery readers and even some literary critics in the earlier days of burgeoning scholarship on slave narratives. The reception history of the *Narrative of James Williams* (1838) is an exemplary case study. Originally a house slave in the home of a Virginia planter, Williams was "sold down the river" in 1833 to serve as a slave driver on an Alabama cotton plantation. An unlettered man, Williams dictated his story after his escape North to the anti-slavery activist and poet, John Greenleaf Whitter, who acted in the capacity of amanuensis. *Narrative of James Williams* was the first slave narrative that the American Anti-Slavery Society published and promoted.

However, following its publication, the editor of an Alabama newspaper issued a series of attacks on Williams, claiming that the narrative was fraudulent and that there were no such people as those Williams named in the county of Alabama from which he claimed to have escaped. Meanwhile, Williams had relocated to England in order to enjoy the relative freedom offered there, and so he was not present to defend himself. The American Anti-Slavery Society's faith in Williams's veracity was shaken to such a degree that its leaders removed his slave narrative from circulation without ever reviewing the

evidence the Alabama editor raised against it (Andrews 87-8).[30] The experience of being implicated in the charges of inauthenticity against Williams made the American Anti-Slavery Society much more cautious about the narratives it later published and endorsed, preferring to promote literate slave authors of whom it could be said, as William Lloyd Garrison did in his Preface to the *Narrative of Frederick Douglass*: "Mr. Douglass has very properly chosen to write his own Narrative, in his own style, and according to the best of his ability, rather than to employ some one else. It is, therefore, entirely his own production" (viii).

To the limited extent that the leaders of the American Anti-Slavery Society did come to Williams's defense, the telling language they used reveals another factor beyond literacy that helped determine which former slaves were granted access to abolitionist presses: class-based codes of appearance and comportment. In an article that appeared in the *Emancipator*, the executive committee of the American Anti-Slavery Society wrote of Williams that he had "a symmetrical figure, graceful in its movements [and] an intelligence that seemed to be the result of acquaintance with the style and usages of the best society of the South" (qtd. in Andrews 87-8). These writers tried to stake Williams's legitimacy on his social graces, likely acquired during his upbringing as a house slave in Virginia, rather than seeking out the facts of his enslavement in Alabama that could potentially exonerate him. Because of house slaves' close intimacy with the plantation master and his family, they often displayed "gentle" mannerisms that appealed to the sympathies of leading

[30] Several scholars have also uncritically accepted the charges of inauthenticity raised against the *Narrative of James Williams* as proven fact. For example, in *Slave Testimony* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), John Blassingame labels Williams's text "an outright fraud" (qtd. In Andrews 308, n40).

abolitionists and endeared them to audiences on the lecture circuits, as in the case of Frederick Douglass, of whose eloquence and gentlemanly demeanor so much was made. By contrast, field slaves were less likely to be acculturated in such a way that they could garner the approval of abolitionists.

Most fugitive slaves who successfully gained access to authorship during the crucial decades of the 1840s and 50s, when the most famous and widely read of the slave narratives were published, thus had no personal experience of labor in the cotton fields. Nor, due to the cultural distance maintained between house and field, did the majority of former slave authors have the incidental knowledge that might come from physical proximity to the fields and daily communication with the laborers. Within plantation society, there was a clear hierarchical divide between house slaves and field slaves, a divide premised principally on class-based differences but with an aspect of colorism too, since house slaves tended to be lighter skinned. The classed and raced values of the master classes thus trickled down through the plantation hierarchy to structure slave society. Indeed, many plantation masters further exacerbated and manipulated this internal schism within the slave community to their own benefit. In a culture in which leisure was the ultimate sign of superiority and hard labor was therefore deemed degrading, plantation masters could use the threat of field work to ensure docility within their households; the punishment for recalcitrant house slaves often involved shameful expulsion from the master's house to live and labor among the "lower orders" of slaves in the fields.

The Bondwoman's Narrative is again a useful text for understanding the extent of this schism and the ignominy that attached to hard labor, a bias that also helps to explain the silence around the cotton fields in the slave narrative tradition. Crafts's narrator,

Hannah, is at pains to distinguish herself as a house slave in the first pages of the text: "I was employed about the house, consequently my labors were much easier than those of the field servants, and I enjoyed intervals of repose and rest unknown to them" (6). Rather than lamenting the cruelties of her enslaved condition, Hannah instead opens by articulating her position as one of ease relative to that of the pitiable field hands. While on the one hand she seems to express sympathy for those less fortunate than herself, on the other her comparison serves to assert her own gentility.

Much later in the text, when she arrives at the cotton plantation of a subsequent master, Hannah devotes considerable space to describing the condition of the field hands in a style that continues to insist on her difference. In the remote voice modeled on Dickens's third-person, reform-oriented narrator from *Bleak House*, Crafts writes:

> Degradation, neglect, and ill treatment had wrought on them its legitimate effects. All day they toil beneath the burning sun, scarcely conscious that any link exists between themselves and other portions of the human race. Their mental condition is briefly summed up in the phrase that they know nothing. They know indeed that it is hard to toil unceasingly for a scanty pittance of food, and coarse garments; nature instructed them this far. (206)[31]

As in *Bleak House*, Crafts's narrative voice, while undoubtedly evocative of sympathy, speaks from a position of comfort and complacency, deriving a certain satisfaction that "their" degraded physical and mental condition is not one the narrator shares. This moment in both texts discloses the darker side of sympathy as a distancing mechanism that

[31] Crafts follows this passage almost immediately with a statement about the field slaves' inability to read, which shows how closely allied in her mind are their degradation and their illiteracy: "It must be strange to live in a world of civilization, and elegance, and refinement, and yet know nothing about either, yet that is the way with multitudes and with none more than the slaves. The Constitution that asserts the right of freedom and equality to all mankind is a sealed book to them, and so is the Bible, that tells how Christ died for all; the bond as well as the free" (206-7).

positions the sympathizer above the object of pity and can thus serve to support rather than dismantle hierarchies.[32]

However, Hannah's stance of remote sympathy collapses when her position as a house slave comes under threat. After hearing a false report that Hannah has been loosely spreading an unflattering story about her, Mrs. Wheeler pronounces the fitting punishment for Hannah's "baseness" as follows: "You shall depart from the house, and go into the fields to work. Those brutalized creatures in the cabins are fit companions for one so vile. You can herd with them" (210). Hannah passionately bemoans her fate, echoing her mistress's distaste for the field slaves with even greater vehemence and abhorrence: "doomed to association with the vile, foul, filthy inhabitants of the huts, and condemned to receive one of them for my husband my soul actually revolted with horror unspeakable" (211). She later adds: "Then to be driven in to the fields beneath the eye and lash of the brutal overseer, and those miserable huts, with their promiscuous crowds of dirty, obscene and degraded objects, for my home I could not, I would not bear it" (213). Keeping company with the field slaves is as horrific a thought for Hannah as enduring corporal punishment.

From the distance of the house, Hannah is able to perceive the factors in the field hands' environment that contributed to their development; in words she adapts from Dickens, she attributes their moral and physical deterioration to social conditioning: "Degradation, neglect, and ill treatment had wrought on them its legitimate effects" (205). However, once she is thrust among them, her sheltered complacency is disrupted, and she

[32] For an incisive account sympathy's often underhanded perniciousness, see Saidiya Hartman's *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) and Elizabeth Barnes's *States of Sympathy: Seduction and Democracy in the American Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

resorts to more severe and explicit language to assert that her difference from her new companions is essential rather than circumstantial. Her reaction becomes visceral, and the adjectives she uses to convey her extreme disgust—vile, foul, filthy, dirty, obscene, degraded—adhere to the field hands themselves rather than to their conditions. It is the prospect of exposure to this particular side of slavery—ignominious labor in the fields and contaminating association with the brute laborers—that prompts Hannah's second and ultimately successful flight for freedom. Despite all the mortifications she endured at the hands of petty masters and mistresses inside the households in which she has served, it is the impersonal and depersonalizing side of slavery as it manifests in the fields that she absolutely refuses to bear.[33]

The slippage in Hannah's mind by which the shame that attaches to a vile system of coerced labor becomes attached instead to those individuals trapped within it is, I suspect, a reason so few authors of slave narratives discuss fieldwork. For these authors, it was imperative to highlight the humanity of the slave, and I wonder if a prejudice against labor as degrading, imbibed from the master classes, did not prompt some former slave writers

[33] Similarly, Harriet Jacobs recounts how on multiple occasions her lecherous master, Dr. Flint, banished her from his residence in town and sent her to his country cotton plantation as the consequence for refusing his "generous" offers to make her life comfortable should she submit to his desires. Although he does not threaten Jacobs herself with the ignominy of fieldwork, placing her instead in the plantation house where her labors will be comparatively light, Dr. Flint makes clear that her two children, both by another white man, will not meet with the same consideration: "You must either accept my offer, or you and your children shall be sent to your young master's plantation [. . .]; and your children shall fare like the rest of the negro children" (84). The news that Dr. Flint intends to make good on his threat of sending her children to the plantation to be "broke in" is what finally resolves Jacobs in her plan to flee; as she says, "It nerved me to immediate action" (94). The mere idea of her children suffering the hardship and brutalizing influence of labor in the cotton fields is enough to spur Jacobs into taking a desperate risk to which even all of Dr. Flint's nefarious attempts at seduction or coercion had not driven her.

to dismiss field work and the laborers who performed it as subjects unsuited to that project.

But, as I mentioned above, there are two notable exceptions to this trend, Solomon Northrup's *Twelve Years a Slave* (1853) and John Brown's *Slave Life in Georgia* (1854), both of which contain lengthy discussions of labor in the cotton fields. Though neither work has attained the canonical status of that by Jacobs or Douglass, Northrup's narrative was far more popular at the time of its publication and is more familiar to present-day scholars than Brown's *Slave Life in Georgia*. This is owing, no doubt, to Northrop's unusual set of circumstances as a lettered freeman from the North who was illegally kidnapped into slavery. As Sue Eakin and Joseph Lodgson write in their introduction to a 1968 edition of *Twelve Years a Slave*: "He shared the experience of Southern slaves both as an outside critic and as a fellow Negro chattel. No other commentator on American slavery had those credentials" (xi).

His "credentials," as they put it, were his Northern education together with his skin color; the latter made him vulnerable to a direct experience of slavery's atrocities in a way no white observer of the Slave South could know while the former inclined abolitionist communities to embrace him as a creditable spokesman for their cause after his escape. Printed in the immediate wake of the sensation produced by *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in 1852, the popularity of Northrup's narrative was bolstered when Harriet Beecher Stowe drew upon it as corroborating evidence for the accuracy of her depiction of Simon Legree's Louisiana cotton plantation in her *Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1853) (Andrews 182). The same set of "credentials" also lent Northrup's narrative authority to the minds of early scholars, authority with which they did not readily credit other slave narrators. Ulrich B. Phillips, for

instance, who importantly helped define the field of antebellum American history, wrote: "Though the books of this class are generally of dubious value this one has a tone which engages confidence" (qtd. in Eakens and Lodsgon x).[34]

Originally from New York, Northrup was abducted in 1841 during a business trip to Washington, DC, and then sold into slavery. He spent twelve years toiling in the fields of cotton plantations in the Red River area of Louisiana, at which point he secured freedom with the help of friends and government officials from New York. With the aid of abolitionist David Wilson, he wrote and published his narrative and became prominent as a speaker on the antislavery lecture circuit. As a literate Northerner adhering to the Yankee ideology of the Protestant work ethic who became all too familiar with the brutalities of working in the Southern cotton fields, Northrop is unique among authors of slave narratives for his knowledge of field labor and for having the opportunity to convey that knowledge to an attentive audience.

Indeed, Northrup dedicates an entire chapter in *Twelve Years a Slave* to describing his experiences as a field worker on the cotton plantation of his cruelest master, Edwin Epps. Northrup opens the chapter with a gently-worded acknowledgment of his Northern audience's probable ignorance about the cultivation of the staple crop so fundamental to Northern industry: "in as much as some may read this book who have never seen a cotton field, a description of the manner of its culture may not be out of place" (123). The exceptional nature of Northrup's subsequent account, which he himself stresses here, sets in stark relief the absence of cotton cultivation in most other antebellum works about slavery, whether by white or black authors.

[34] See Ulrich B. Phillips, *American Negro Slavery* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1918), 445.

Contemporary readers and many subsequent scholars praised Northrup for the even, objective tone of his narrative, and his account of cotton cultivation begins as no exception, uncompromised by any "unbecoming" displays of emotion. Eakin and Lodgson, for instance, state: "Despite the obvious pressure to duplicate the fictional images in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Northrup presents a well-balanced narrative. His recollections include many dreadful episodes, but he presents much more than indiscriminate accusation. He gives a detailed, rather straightforward survey of his life as a slave" (xv). I am reminded of what William Andrews says about the American Anti-Slavery Society's assessment of James Williams, praising him for not using "denunciatory language" or "resentful expressions:" "[T]he executive committee, well meaning as it appeared to be, was a creature of its own guilty fear of slave runaways, its own assumptions about the proprieties of black-white discourse, and its own sense of how black subjectivity could undermine that discourse" (89). Underneath such praise of Northrup and Williams is a deep cultural anxiety about righteous black anger.

Northrup does to a certain extent tread delicately around this fear. Over the course of several paragraphs, written largely in the passive voice, Northrup proceeds to relate how the cotton is planted, grown, and picked. He begins: "The ground is prepared by throwing up beds or ridges, with the plough—back-furrowing, it is called. Oxen and mules, the latter almost exclusively, are used in ploughing" (123). In the same dispassionate manner, he includes in his explication offhanded mentions of the regular corporal punishments the slaves endure throughout the extended processes of planting and harvesting. For instance:

> During all these hoeings the overseer or driver follows the slaves on horseback with a whip, such as has been described. The fastest hoer takes the lead row. He is usually about a rod in advance of his companions. If one of them passes him, he is

> whipped. If one falls behind or is a moment idle, he is whipped. In fact, the lash is flying from morning until night, the whole day long. (124)

By contrast to the sensationalistic detail with which other slave narratives and abolitionist literature often depict corporal punishment, the casualness with which Northrup discusses whippings, such that they are just another step in the process of cotton cultivation, serves to chillingly underscore the regularity and frequency of the proceeding. Yet, Northrup's cautious use of the passive voice in his descriptions of both the planting and the punishing removes credit for the labor from the slave and responsibility for the cruelty from the overseer. In his caution, Northrup here betrays a sense that it would be presumptuous and unbecoming, or at least perceived as so by his abolitionist audience, to recognize the black man's labor and condemn the white man's cruelty outright.

Then comes a striking moment in Northrup's chapter: "There are few sights more pleasant to the eye, than a wide cotton field when it is in bloom. It presents an appearance of purity, like an immaculate expanse of light, new-fallen snow" (125). The chapter descriptions at the narrative's beginning, which provide a breakdown of the topics each chapter covers, register this moment as follows: "Tasked according to Ability—Beauty of a Cotton Field—The Slave's Labors" (xxxii). The appeal to the reader's aesthetic sense is jarring, following immediately after Northrup's matter-of-fact descriptions of labor and torture in the very fields he aestheticizes, producing an ironic disjunction between the cotton fields' "appearance of purity" and the brutal reality of coercion underlying all that loveliness and ostensible innocence. Northrup thus takes the stereotypical imagery often used to render a cotton field's beauty—for instance, Henry Timrod's "snows of Southern summers," discussed later in this chapter—and evacuates it, displaying the mechanisms by which aestheticization can serve as obfuscation. He produces a variation on the classical

maxim "Et in Arcadia ego" (Even in Arcadia is death). Under the guise of his seemingly ingenuous offer to sketch for his Northern audience a beautiful scene with which they are likely unfamiliar in person, Northrup issues a subtle challenge to the comfort his readers usually find in the aesthetic, prompting them to instead recognize the ignorance they thereby cultivate.

A subtle shift then occurs; from a kind of "how-to" technical guide, the mode in which he begins the discussion of cotton cultivation, Northrup slides into something resembling more "a day in the life of a field hand," as he registers the subjective experience of the slave for the first time in the chapter:

> The day's work over in the field, the baskets are "toted," or in other words, carried to the gin-house, where the cotton is weighed. No matter how fatigued and weary he may be—no matter how much he longs for sleep and rest—a slave never approaches the gin-house with his basket of cotton but with fear. If it falls short in weight—if he has not performed the full task appointed him, he knows that he must suffer. And if he has exceeded it by ten or twenty pounds, in all probability his master will measure the next day's task accordingly. So, whether he has too little or too much, his approach to the gin-house is always with fear and trembling. (126)

I am reminded, though by way of contrast, of the gin house illustration from *The History of a Cotton Bale* (1863) that I analyzed in my Introduction. Rendered in the picturesque mode, the illustration aestheticizes the gin house as a charmingly rustic structure with no function beyond enhancing the peaceful pastoral surroundings in which it is situated. Against such a vacuous idealization, Northrup exposes the gin house's utility within the economy of the plantation and imbues the site with the abject terror with which the slave subject beholds it.

It is in the gin house that the cotton is weighed, simultaneously measuring the planter's potential profit and the value of the slave who picked it. A clumsy hand in the cotton field, Northrup reports that he often failed to bring in the two hundred pounds that

were the average expected haul of most field workers, and so the gin house was the location of his subjection to frequent flogging.[35] It is appropriate that, when a Northern acquaintance arrives to secure Northrup's release, the words with which the man pronounces Northrup's freedom are: "Throw down that sack. Your cotton-picking days are over" (237).

Like Northrup, John Brown also undertakes to educate his readers about cotton cultivation as a corrective to ignorance, though in a far more explicit fashion without even the pretense of humility or subtlety. Born in Virginia, Brown was separated from his family and "sold down the river" to the cotton fields of Georgia at the age of 10. He was thus just one among the hundreds of thousands swept up in the forced internal migration of a large portion of the slave population to the Cotton States that ensued after the 1807 ban on the international slave trade. Brown spent over two decades on the Georgia cotton plantations before escaping north to Canada and then sailing for England in 1850, where he made a living as a carpenter and occasionally spoke on the abolition lecture circuits.

Had Brown remained in America, it is improbable that his story would have reached the public, at least not in the form of a narrative published and promoted by the American Anti-Slavery Society. As an unlettered field slave, he would most likely not have been an attractive candidate for endorsement by an abolitionist community that had learned caution after the James Williams affair. But the leaders of the British Foreign Anti-Slavery

[35] One of the most notable figures populating Northrup's narrative is Patsey, who was so evocatively portrayed by Lupita Nyong'o in Steve McQueen's film adaptation of Northrup's narrative. Patsey was exceptionally dexterous and could pick as much as five hundred pounds of cotton a day. This knack did not secure her from punishment; quite the opposite. Because each laborer was tasked according to ability, Northrup tells how Patsey would be beaten for pulling in twice as much cotton as he did. Her prominence among Epps's slaves also did not serve her in other ways, for it made her the target of Epps's licentiousness and his wife's bitter jealousy.

Society did not have the same cause for skepticism. What is more, perhaps, they had time on their hands. While the abolitionist community on the American side was still ramping up for the big fight, in Britain there was no longer the same pressing need for antislavery activism. By the 1850s, the British Foreign Anti-Slavery Society's activity had diminished, but its leaders were still eager for involvement.

Brown found a keen ally in Louis Alexis Chamerovzow, Secretary of the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society. Brown dictated his story to Chamerovzow, and their collaborative compilation was published in London as *Slave Life in Georgia* in 1854. However, Brown's narrative emerged into a literary field already saturated with major antislavery hits like *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and the narratives of celebrated former slaves like Frederick Douglass and William Wells Brown. *Slave Life in Georgia* therefore enjoyed only moderate success, going into a limited second edition, but never creating the splash made by some of the slightly earlier narratives by the more prominent escaped slave celebrities.

Slave Life in Georgia's lack of popularity is likely also attributable to its authoritative and even critical tone, so uncharacteristic of the slave narrative genre. Instead of approaching his abolitionist audience in the guise of a humble and grateful supplicant, Brown takes it upon himself to enlighten and even correct his readers. Having told his story through to his successful escape attempt, Brown does not simply leave off and allow his readers to experience uncomplicated sympathy at his plight and to distill from his tale whatever conclusions they might. Rather, he devotes several chapters to an expert disquisition on the state of American slavery, beginning with a chapter dedicated to describing "The Cultivation of Cotton, Tobacco, and Rice."

Despite an incisive comment he makes earlier in his narrative—that "in the Slave States labour is made shameful" (47)—this is an ideology Brown refuses to endorse and endeavors to render transparent. He expresses pride in his agricultural expertise but does not for a moment falter in his to condemnation of the institution under which he acquired it. For Brown, the term "slave labor" is only shameful in so far as "labor" is modified by "slave," and even then the burden of shame falls not to the slave but rather to those who profit by the slave's subjugation. In his ability to parse labor from slave labor, and to insist that the ignominy of the latter fall to the master rather than the slave, Brown is thus able to make distinctions that many of his contemporaries—black and white alike—could not or would not see.

Brown opens this remarkable chapter on cultivation by establishing a direct cause-and-effect relationship between the English textile industry and slave torture, demonstrating the breadth of his economic understanding and reminding his British readers that being at a geographic remove does not absolve them of responsibility for the crimes occurring in the American cotton fields: "When the price [of cotton] rises in the English market, even but half a farthing a pound, the poor slaves immediately feel the effects, for they are harder driven, and the whip is kept more constantly going" (143). His narrative then takes on the quality of a technical manual as, with exacting detail, he describes the tools, procedures, and stages entailed in cotton cultivation. He clearly takes pride in the specialized knowledge he gleaned during his time in the fields and is even so bold as to offer his knowledge for the edification of his middle-class British audience. Throughout, he refuses to root and restrict slavery, and its corrupting influences, within the confines of the American South. Brown makes connections between practices on the

Southern plantations and the British market, insisting that his readers remember the provenance of "the bales which anyone may see lying on the wharves in Liverpool" (148). This approach would likely not have endeared him to his target readership; British abolitionists were more accustomed to receiving gratitude from fugitive American slaves, not to fielding pointed reminders about their country's ongoing complicity in slavery's perpetuation.

Brown's ensuing description of cotton cultivation is extraordinary not just for its level of technical detail but also for his attention to the bodily experience of the laborer. His account is the only one I have seen that registers the pain and physical toll of the work itself. The whip does fly, but that is not the only cost to the laborer's health and wellbeing. For example:

> The cotton plant does not begin to grow very fast until the roots strike the sub-soil, which they do in about three weeks or a month. Meanwhile, all hands—men, women, and children—have to thin out the plants by hand-picking, a most painful process, because of the constant stooping. They are compelled to go across a thirty, forty, or fifty acre field without straightening themselves one minute, and with the burning sun striking their head and back, and the heat reflected upwards from the soil into their faces. (145)

The field "hands," Brown reminds us, are not just hands but whole men, women, and children who feel the scorch of the sun and whose backs ache with stooping. About the process of picking, he writes: "Many people think it is a very light, pleasant occupation, but it is not; for let alone the large quantity that each slave must pick every day, the bole of the plant when split by ripeness, pricks the fingers, even when you are very careful, and lacerates the flesh round the nails so as to cause great soreness" (146-7). The fluffy fiber, with its appearance of soft purity, is not innocuous; it comes at great physical expense. Brown's use of the second-person mode of address here is the only such instance I have

come across. With the "you," he tries to compel his readers to imagine that the pain he describes is theirs, that their own hands bleed and smart at the laceration of the cotton boll.

Having demonstrated his expert insight into cotton cultivation, both as an objective practice and a subjective experience, Brown makes another daring rhetorical and stylistic shift from technical manual to a cross between economic treatise and jeremiad, two genres rarely deployed separately within the frame of the slave narrative let alone melded within that frame. Brown's anger is unmistakable, and he does not spare even antislavery activists from its lash, unstintingly revealing the gap between their professed ideals and their consumer practices. With clarity, concision, and conviction, he makes the economic and ethical connections most literature at the time took pains to deny or suppress:

> I would not advise the anti-slavery party to leave off arguing out the question on moral grounds; but I would urge them to pay a little more attention to the commercial part of the subject. [S]o long as anti-slavery people, or those who profess anti-slavery sentiments, continue to use slave-grown articles, the slaveholders will keep on, thinking their professions are hollow. I do not see how the system is to be put down except by undermining it. I mean by underselling it in the markets of the world. […] The chief difficulty is procuring a sufficient supply of free-labour Cotton. […] I have been spoken to by many gentlemen who are interested in this subject; but they complain of the indifference of the anti-slavery public, who will not pay a small advance on the price of an article made of free-labour cotton […]. But they will cry over the sufferings of the poor slave, who labours under the lash, from morning till night, in the cotton, rice, or sugar-cane fields, and who, when the commodities rise ever so little in price, soon has the figure scored into his flesh, and so finds out the markets have improved. I am quite convinced that if slavery is to be put down, one of the most certain means—if it is not, indeed, the only one—is to reduce the value of its products in the markets […]. This cannot be done all at once; but it can be done. To do it well, it must be set about in right down earnest, and systematically; and I intend to devote the rest of my days to doing my part. (169-70)

I wanted to let Brown speak at length here, because his narrative has so long been overshadowed by slave narratives whose messages were more convenient for their contemporary abolitionist audiences. To the extent that *Slave Life in Georgia* has been

consulted by scholars since, it has most often been approached as a valuable historical record of slavery in the Deep South. But Brown was an astute and incisive cultural critic, and it is in this capacity that I would like to recognize him here.

* * *

Another noteworthy exception to the resounding silence most antebellum Southern and Confederate literature maintains around the South's most lucrative export is the wartime poetry of Henry Timrod. Again, I examine a virtually unique exception to the rule of omission because it highlights the otherwise overwhelming silence about the extent to which cotton cultivation and its exchange in national and transatlatlantic markets sustained the Southern way of life. With the Civil War on the horizon, it became expedient for the South to compromise its own powerful myths about the South's exemption and abstention from the sordidness of capitalism in order to court—and, if need be, compel—its primary transatlantic trading partner to charge into the fray as an ally of the Confederacy. As might be expected, Southern statesmen issued numerous appeals to England on the basis of perceived cultural similarity. But they did not stake their success on the tugging of English heartstrings alone; English purse strings were also central to Confederate strategy, which could be summed up in one word: cotton. Counting upon English dependence on Southern cotton, and on the crippling effects to the British economy should that cotton not be forthcoming, the Confederacy felt confident that it would have a

powerful ally in Britain, whether through cultural affinity or, if necessary, economic coercion.[36]

Reconciling the Confederacy's capitalist strategy with the South's agrarian mythos would be no small feat. The novel, with its realist proclivities, was clearly not up to the task. Even the sentimental romance, the novelistic mode perhaps least driven by the hard-hitting methods of realism, largely chose to deal with cotton cultivation and slave field labor deployed therein by not dealing with them at all. The law of omission was the prevailing strategy of the Southern plantation novel and, as we shall shortly see, even defined the approach of many Northern authors writing about the Southern plantation. Poetry, with its array of defamiliarizing devices that could yoke together disparate concepts, offered the potential to overleap the widening gap between ideal and reality

On the eve of the Civil War, Henry Timrod was a tutor in the home of a wealthy plantation holder in South Carolina. He had been publishing poems in regional periodicals such as the *Southern Literary Messenger* for over a decade but had not as yet achieved wide recognition. When the war broke out, Timrod's ill health prevented him from serving in the Confederate army. Unable to fight alongside the boys in gray, he instead demonstrated his dedication to the Southern nation through poetic offerings. Published in prominent Charleston newspapers, his wartime poems effused patriotism and prophesied the glory of the Confederate state, winning him instant acclaim among his compatriots and an unofficial title: Poet Laureate of the Confederacy.

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[36] One of the most important sources on the Confederacy's attempts to court or coerce a British intervention is still Frank Lawrence Owsley's *King Cotton Diplomacy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1931).

Presciently, even before there technically was a Confederacy, let alone Confederate foreign policy, Timrod began the delicate work of bringing soon-to-be Confederate economic strategy into accord with the mythologies of Southern plantation culture. His 1860 poem, "The Cotton Boll," begins by apostrophizing the very geopolitical commodity so conspicuously absent from other Southern literature of the time:

> While I recline
> At ease beneath
> This immemorial pine,
> Small sphere!
> (By dusky fingers brought this morning here
> And shown with boastful smiles),
> I turn thy cloven sheath,
> Through which the soft white fibres peer,
> That, with their gossamer bands,
> Unite, like love, the sea-divided lands (125)

The agency and subjectivity with which apostrophe endows the cotton boll is here juxtaposed with the depersonalizing effects of synecdoche, as the slave who brings the poet the subject of his extended meditation gets reduced to "dusky fingers" and "boastful smiles," all strategically contained within a neat parenthetical phrase. This is as close as Timrod ever comes to a mention of race-based slavery or recognition of an enslaved subject.

Of what, exactly, do those smiles boast? Is the reader to understand that the person to whom the "dusky fingers" belong is exhibiting pride in the cotton boll as the product of his or her own labor? If so, this moment of synecdochal dissociation is also the closest Timrod comes to a discussion of slave labor and cotton as the product thereof. The poet's interpretation of the smiles as boastful implies the slave's contentment with his/her mean lot and amounts to a simultaneous justification and denial of the reality of coerced labor. Yet, as we saw in the case of John Brown, it is entirely within the bounds of reason for the

slave to take pride in physical labor while denouncing the cruel and unjust institution that mandates it. As an inveterate Southern gentleman, Timrod cannot conceive of Brown's mindset as lying within the realm of possibility. With Brown in view, what the "boastful smiles" actually serve to demonstrate is the extent to which Timrod's logic is hampered by his Southern training.

Having so boldly taken cotton up for poetic treatment, Timrod wastes no time before adverting to its transatlantic connections, conceiving of the "soft white fibres" latent within the boll as "gossamer bands" that "unite, like love, the sea-divided lands."[37] In ten short lines of verse, he has thus acknowledged what so many other Southern writers had so carefully ignored—cotton and its central position inside a matrix of transatlantic exchange—even as his language transforms and inoculates that knowledge, in effect suppressing it all over again.[38] Via metaphor and simile, Timrod transfigures the South's trading partnership with England into a partnership of marriage, with "bands" of cotton, rather than gold, to signify the union. He neglects to mention, of course, that this marriage is in fact a *ménage a trois*, with New England as a significant participant within the triangular partnership.

This fine feat of inoculation so efficiently discharged, the poet for the moment turns his attention away from the transatlantic to terrain closer to home. As the "tangled skein" the boll had contained "unravels in [his] hands," the poet's vision expands accordingly to

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[37] Timrod is using a poetic strategy in the tradition of John Donne's "The Flea," yoking together very large things via a very small thing.

[38] Here and elsewhere in the chapter, I am using "inoculation" in the Barthesian sense: "admitting the accidental evil of a class-bound institution the better to conceal its principial evil. One immunizes the contents of the collective imagination by means of a small inoculation of acknowledged evil" (150).

take in the whole of the Southern landscape. In addition to cotton fields flashing white in the sun, his vision encompasses:

> pastures rich and fields all green
> With all the common gifts of God.
> For temperate airs and torrid sheen
> Weave Edens of the sod. (127)

The bucolic and the tropical both inhere in this passage; Timrod claims pastoral landscape as the God-given property of the South while also deploying the pastoral to tame the negative connotations of tropicalism. Nor does he stop there, but goes on to claim every other variety of American terrain, along with its natural resources and associated aesthetic mode (picturesque, sublime, etc.), as also appertaining to the South: wheat fields of "billowy gold," "broad rivers," "a hundred isles," "a hundred luminous bays," "vast mountains" with "plumed peaks cloud-crowned," and an "unhewn forest." As though courting his future title of poet laureate of the Confederacy, he concludes his survey of Southern topography with an ardent exclamation: "No fairer land hath fired a poet's lays/Or given a home to man!" (128).

Grand as has been his vision thus far, it still does not mark the full extent of his contribution to the South's self-perceptions, for he humbly admits that he has been treading well-trod literary and ideological ground up to this point ("these charms are already widely blown!"). He has been following in the footsteps of no less a writer than William Gilmore Simms, the preeminent Southern man of letters "round whose tuneful way/All Southern laurels bloom" (128). Indeed, Simms is one of the major progenitors of the cavalier myth, so central to antebellum Southern ideology. Timrod does well to allude to Simms here, as he prepares to extend and adapt the Southern mythologies Simms was instrumental in constructing to suit the political exigencies of Timrod's current moment.

Following directly upon his mention of Simms, Timrod articulates what his particular contribution is to be: a carefully maneuvered acknowledgement of the South's wholesale participation in a transatlantic capitalist system, which it is increasingly expedient for Southerners to feel comfortable admitting and, before too long, leveraging:

> But who shall utter all the debt,
> O Land wherein all powers are met
> That bind a people's heart,
> The world doth owe thee at this day,
> And which it never can repay,
> Yet scarcely deigns to own!
> Where sleeps the poet who shall fitly sing
> The source wherefrom doth spring
> That mighty commerce which, confined
> To the mean channels of no selfish mart,
> Goes out to every shore
> Of this broad earth, and throngs the sea with ships
> That bear no thunders; hushes hungry lips
> In alien lands;
> Joins with a delicate web remotest strands;
> And gladdening rich and poor,
> Doth gild Parisian domes,
> Or feed the cottage-smoke of English homes,
> And only bounds its blessings by mankind! (129)

Here, Timrod applies the power dynamics of the cavalier myth to global commerce. Just as the noble and paternalistic plantation master extends his benevolent care to his helpless slaves, who so often repay his munificence with base ingratitude, so does the South proffer its generosity and altruism, in the form of its most lucrative export, to a thankless world. Timrod manages to repudiate words like "commerce" and "mart," recasting selling cotton and amassing profits as a demonstration of the master's beneficence, not just toward his slaves, but "hungry lips/In alien lands" everywhere.

Providence, he avers, will surely never permit such a noble nation to falter:

> In offices like these, thy mission lies,
> My Country! and it shall not end

As long as rain shall fall and Heaven bend
In blue above thee; though thy foes be hard
And cruel as their weapons, it shall guard
Thy hearth-stones as a bulwark; make thee great
In white and bloodless state;
And haply, as the years increase—
Still working through its humbler reach
With that large wisdom which the ages teach—
Revive the half-dead dreams of universal peace!

Yet, for all this talk of noble largesse and universal peace, the poem ends on an image of destruction:

save
These sacred fields of peace
From stain of patriot or of hostile blood!
Oh, help us, Lord! to roll the crimson flood
Back on its course, and, while our banners wing
Northward, strike with us! till the Goth shall cling
To his own blasted altar-stones, and crave
Mercy; and we shall grant it, and dictate
The lenient future of his fate
There, where some rotting ships and crumbling quays
Shall one day mark the Port which ruled the Western seas. (131)

In practically the same breath, the poet pleads for the preservation of the South's cotton fields, the "sacred fields of peace," even as he gleefully foretells the ruin of Northern quays and ships that are no doubt instrumental inside the Cotton Triangle. Figuring the archetypal Northerner as a Goth is a curious move, presumably intended to reinforce Southern perceptions of the Northern capitalist as barbaric by way of contrast to the refined Southern gentility, this time associated with the Roman patrician rather than the English cavalier. Having wrecked the infrastructures necessary for Northern shipping and trade, the South can expect to rise to dominance in the North's stead. And, indeed, this is precisely where Timrod's more famous poem, "Ethnogenesis," picks up.

"Ethnogenesis" continues the ideological work of "The Cotton Boll," though, as Christopher Hanlon notes in his chapter on "Henry Timrod's Global Confederacy" (one of the few existing scholarly discussions of Timrod's poetry), it is the more confused poem of the two (159).[39] Written in February of 1861 in a paroxysm of enthusiasm during the first Southern Congress in Montgomery, "Ethnogenesis" claims to both describe and enact the birth of the Southern nation. While "The Cotton Boll" ends with the ruination of Northern ships and ports, "Ethnogenesis" begins by imagining the Confederacy stepping in where the North no longer can and constituting itself through a newly expanded trade network: "At last,/A nation among nations; and the world/Shall soon behold in many a distant port/Another flag unfurled!" (100). Timrod here conflates the extension of trade with the extension of the Southern empire.

Cotton again occupies a central place in "Ethnogenesis," though in this case Timrod figures it as a blanket or a shield sheltering and protecting the South rather than a vast, if potentially fragile, web:

> THE SNOW OF SOUTHERN SUMMERS! Let the earth
> Rejoice! beneath those fleeces soft and warm
> Our happy land shall sleep
> In a repose as deep
> As if we lay intrenched behind
> Whole leagues of Russian ice and Arctic storm! (101)

Though "the snow of southern summers" is one of Timrod's more enduring images, the figurative language he then goes on to use as he continues to qualify cotton's place in the South is mixed, producing strange discord and presumably unintended catachresis: in a single breath, cotton somehow transforms from a "soft and warm" blanket into an

[39] Hanlon provides a skillful discussion of how Timrod imagines the Confederacy's national and international ascension. I build on Hanlon's work to consider the specific role of Southern cotton in Timrod's scheme for the South's global conquest.

unyielding wall of ice. Metaphors that should be comforting and reassuring clash, producing instead disquieting awkwardness and disjunction. In the feeling he evokes here, if not in his intended meaning, Timrod again proves prescient, though unfortunately so in this case. For the Confederacy essentially does hunker down behind its cotton, stockpiling loads upon loads in warehouses and hoping thereby to force England's hand. By the war's end, rather than the "rotting ships and crumbling quays" that Timrod predicted would be the outcome for the North, it is the South's cotton supplies that will lie moldering in warehouses and on docks.

From its rather mixed treatment of cotton, the poem meanders into a discussion of Southern righteousness versus Northern corruption, but only continues to produce unintended irony. Timrod begins by analogizing the North's position to that of Lucifer when he rebelled against God, forgetting, it seems, that the Confederate states are in fact the self-proclaimed and self-stylized rebels in this scenario. He then declares that, in addition to having God on its side, the South has nature at its back as well:

> the very soil
> And all the generous wealth it gives to toil,
> And all for which we love our noble land,
> Shall fight beside, and through us (102)

The irony here, of course, is that Timrod has never toiled in the soil for a day in his life, nor have many of his fellow Confederates. If a near relationship with the Southern soil is to be the guarantor of the penchants of Providence, that particular scale is going to tip in favor of the black slaves and poor whites whose labor is the true foundation of Southern agrarianism.

Timrod then proceeds by issuing a series of stereotypical contrasts between Northerners and Southerners.

On one side, creeds that dare to teach
What Christ and Paul refrained to preach;
Codes built upon a broken pledge,
And Charity that whets a poniard's edge;
Fair schemes that leave the neighboring poor
To starve and shiver at the schemer's door,
While in the world's most liberal ranks enrolled,
He turns some vast philanthropy to gold (102-3)

Hanlon speculates that the allusion to Christ and Paul is Timrod's somewhat oblique way of reminding readers that the Bible does not condemn slavery (159). His ensuing characterization of the heartless and hypocritical Northern "schemer" who stockpiles capital while the poor die for want around him is a familiar one. His contrasting account of the Southern code of honor is also familiar:

And on the other, scorn of sordid gain,
Unblemished honor, truth without a stain,
Faith, justice, reverence, charitable wealth,
And, for the poor and humble, laws which give,
Not the mean right to buy the right to live,
But life, and home, and health!
To doubt the end were want of trust in God,
Who, if he has decreed
That we must pass a redder sea
Than that which rang to Miriam's holy glee,
Will surely raise at need
A Moses with his rod! (103)

Hanlon writes: "As a reference to the archetypal liberation story of the Bible, this is surely an unfortunate move on Timrod's part" (159). Indeed, the story of Exodus as an analogy for oppression under and promised liberation from Southern slavery was about to be immortalized in song; according to my research, the earliest recorded mention of the traditional black spiritual "Go Down, Moses" claims the song originated in 1862 as a rallying call among a group of Contrabands, the term used for escaped slaves who enlisted in the Union Army.

While "The Cotton Boll" ends in with an elated prediction of impending destruction in the North, "Ethnogenesis" ends with an equally elated vision of the South as a conquering champion, demonstrating economic and ideological supremacy not just nationally, but globally:

> Could we climb
> Some mighty Alp, and view the coming time,
> The rapturous sight would fill
> Our eyes with happy tears!
> Not only for the glories which the years
> Shall bring us; not for the lands from sea to sea,
> And wealth, and power, and peace, though these shall be;
> But for the distant peoples we shall bless,
> And the hushed murmurs of a world's distress:
> For, to give labor to the poor,
> The whole sad planet o'er,
> And save from want and crime the humblest door,
> Is one among the many ends for which
> God makes us great and rich! (104)

As Hanlon insightfully observes, Timrod here figures the South's system of coerced labor, not cotton, as the Confederacy's greatest export (159). His vision is distinctly proto-imperial—with the demise of New England and the spread of Southern dominion, the South might become a New Britain.

Again, Timrod's predictions are prescient, but ironically so. As previously discussed, the cotton industry will indeed go global after the Civil War, branching into India and Africa as new sites for cotton cultivation and distributing the demand for field labor throughout a network far exceeding the transatlantic Cotton Triangle, with initially disastrous results for the American South. With its presence and power in the cotton industry greatly curtailed, for the time being, at least, the South would no longer be in a position to hail cotton as its security or promote the system of slave labor through which it had successfully cornered the market in raw cotton.

* * *

Against the brag and bluster of a Henry Timrod, journalistic writing that provides a Northern perspective on the South might be expected to provide a bracing counterbalance. And, indeed, the title of Frederick Law Olmsted's 1861 account of his Southern travels, *Journeys through the American Cotton Kingdom: A Traveller's Observations on Cotton and Slavery in the American Slave States*, suggests that Olmsted intended it as a refreshing counterpoint to the pretensions of Southern self-representation. The "Cotton Kingdom" of his title references the (in)famously bombastic statement that Senator James Henry Hammond of South Carolina made before Congress in 1858: "No, you dare not make war on cotton. No power on earth dares make war upon it. Cotton is King." Olmsted's reference has a mocking quality that signals *The Cotton Kingdom*'s aim at deconstructing the South's self-perpetuated mythologies. While in some ways *The Cotton Kingdom* delivers on this promise, it is rife with tensions and contradictions that, when interrogated, limit its intended effect as cultural critique.

Often credited as the father of American landscape architecture, Olmsted is best known as the designer of Central Park, among many other noteworthy American public parks and gardens. However, even prior to his wide recognition for his landscape designs, Olmsted enjoyed prominence as a journalist and social critic. Most notably, his detailed account of the pre-Civil War South in *The Cotton Kingdom* earned him wide acclaim in both the Northern United States and Britain as a commentator on the American crisis and the social and economic conditions that spawned it. Review after review in the American and

British press praised Olmsted for the wealth of "evidence" and "facts" he had amassed: the *North American Review*, for instance, applauded Olmsted for providing "not estimates or conjectures, but detailed facts," while the *Westminster Review* deemed his "accumulated evidence" irresistible (qtd. in Masur NY Times article).

And, indeed, *The Cotton Kingdom* continues to serve as a rich repository of factual information for historians of the antebellum South. Arthur Schlesinger, Sr., the well-known social historian who edited the 1953 edition of *The Cotton Kingdom*, declared it "the nearest thing posterity has to an exact transcription of a civilization which time has tinted with hues of romantic legend" (ix, quoted in Rybczynski 196). More recently, Walter Johnson, a leading scholar on the history of American slavery, draws heavily upon Olmsted in his comprehensive new study, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (2013), a detailed and fascinating look at the multifarious forces that transformed the Mississippi Valley from "virgin territory" into a matrix of cotton fields.

From the literary critic's perspective, Johnson demonstrates admirable skill at interrogating and interpreting the words of many of the primary sources he cites. However, the texts he selects for close reading reveal a fundamental bias; he does not subject Olmsted's account, or the accounts of former slaves, to the same close analysis and scrutiny as he does those of slaveholders. At times, he quotes Olmsted in concert with—indeed, in almost the same breath as—slave narrators, as though their voices authenticate and vindicate one another, obviating the need for close reading. Only the words of white, wealthy Southerners receive detailed inspection, as though they were the only chroniclers of the South who had motives for mediating or manipulating its depiction, and as though close reading is a tool whose only application is cutting through sophistry.

Olmsted himself described *The Cotton Kingdom* in anthropological terms as "a work which assumes to relate calmly and methodically, the result of a personal study of the condition of the people of a certain State" (2:312-2). But, whatever value Olmsted, his contemporary reviewers, and some modern-day historians place in *The Cotton Kingdom*'s facticity and objectivity, the work presents a very different front to the reader who approaches it as a representation, rather than a direct reflection, of historical reality. For the literary critic, *The Cotton Kingdom* is fascinating less as a triumph of fact and more as a rich, but also confusing and somewhat unwieldy, amalgamation of literary genres that contributes to, rather than dispels, the layers of fiction surrounding an oft-idealized, as well as vilified, "lost" culture. As a generic hybrid of sketch, travelogue, sociological/ethnographic study, and antislavery polemic, *The Cotton Kingdom* is an ambitious project that tries to accomplish multiple kinds of cultural work at once, with the result that it is far more messy than its reception history would seem to indicate—a "loose, baggy monster" fit to contend with any nineteenth-century novel.

Olmsted's writing career began when, after a walking tour through England in 1850, he published his observations of the English terrain and its inhabitants under the title *Walks and Talks of an American Farmer in England* (1852). In the same year, in light of this work's modest success and Olmsted's declared interest in the slave economy, *The New-York Daily Times* (now *The New York Times*) commissioned him to travel extensively throughout the South as a special correspondent and survey the Southern landscape, both physical and cultural. Olmsted departed in December of 1852 and travelled for three months through Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia. His dispatches ran in the *Times* until 1854, appearing under the pseudonym "Yeoman." In November of 1853, Olmsted set off for another

journey, a six-month-long trek beginning in New Orleans and then continuing on into Texas. The *Times* again ran his reports, this time under the header "Letters from the Southwest." Finally, from May to August of 1854, Olmsted journeyed through the interior Southern states. His commentary on this portion of his travels appeared in 1857 as a series of articles titled "The Southerners at Home" in the *New York Tribune*.

Olmsted's journalism from each successive portion of his intensive Southern sojourn subsequently provided fodder for three individual volumes: *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States* (1856), *A Journey through Texas* (1857), and *A Journey in the Back Country* (1860). In the preface to *A Journey through Texas*, Olmsted casts himself in the role of cultural mediator, describing the intent of his Southern writings as "further to promote the mutual acquaintance of North and South" ("Preface"). However, there is reason to doubt the purported amicability and mutuality of this informational exchange. The publication and reception histories of the three volumes suggest that a very different alliance was being forged, one that sought to cross the Atlantic rather than the Mason Dixon Line. Seeing as all three books were published simultaneously in New York and in London, their purpose might better be described as promoting the mutual acquaintance of the North and Britain via their common knowledge and disapproval of the South.

This purpose was to receive explicit articulation in *The Cotton Kingdom*. In January of 1861, sensing that Olmsted's account of the antebellum South would hold fresh interest and force for both American and English audiences in light of the new reality of secession, Olmsted's English publisher broached the idea of abridging and condensing the Southern trilogy into one work. Olmsted's New York publisher was quick to get on board. Olmsted himself was also keen on the proposal but was too busy with the Central Park commission,

which he had landed in 1858, to concurrently take on the book project. He proposed to Daniel Goodloe, a native North Carolinian and editor of *The National Era*, an antislavery newspaper published in Washington, D.C., to undertake the task of trimming and merging the three earlier books into one. Though Goodloe pruned away over half of the material they contained, *The Cotton Kingdom* was no slight work; in the end, it consisted of two hefty volumes, each over four hundred pages.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, a bewildering publication and editing history ends in a bewildering text. While the Southern trilogy had been generic hybrids—sociological tract meets literary sketch meets travelogue—,Goodloe's excisions tended to diminish the narrative and episodic quality of Olmsted's earlier writings in favor of their more fact-driven documentary style. The resulting text is primarily ethnographic reportage leavened with only the occasional local-color anecdote. *The Cotton Kingdom* thus disowns its source texts' self-aware engagement in creative and subjective representation for a pretense of nearly unadulterated objectivity. Olmsted's contribution to the final product was a new introduction titled "The Present Crisis," which attempts to reframe the whole as antislavery polemic and make explicit the implicit argument against slavery that was always latent in the earlier writings.

After a dedication tellingly addressed to a preeminent Englishman, John Stuart Mill, Olmsted opens with what appears to be a gesture of amicability and understanding for the North's neighbors across the Mason-Dixon line, similar to that with which he opened his Texas volume. Ever attuned to the logic of the land, he begins:

> The mountain ranges, the valleys, and the great waters of America, all trend north and south, not east and west. An arbitrary political line may divide the north part from the south part, but there is no such line in nature: there can be none, socially.

> While water runs downhill, the currents and counter currents of trade, of love, of consanguinity, and fellowship, will flow north and south. (1:1)

The tacit threat of annihilation via assimilation lurking behind this language of love that acknowledges no boundaries, topographic or otherwise, is not long in emerging into the open; in short order, Olmsted continues on to describe the desirable and inevitable outcome of the South brought under the "yoke of freedom" (1:2). What Olmsted presents as an innocuous reading of the landscape is actually his opening gambit, serving to reconfigure (or gerrymander, if you will) the nation's topography in order to suit his rhetorical project.

Just as quickly, Olmsted reveals that his target audiences are not those to whom his opening lines would seem to appeal, his fellow Northerners together with their Southern brethren, but rather Northerners and, most especially, their English progenitors: "It is said that the South can never be subjugated. It must be, or we must. It must be, or not only our American public is a failure, but our English justice and our English law and our English freedom are failures" (1:2). With this first expansive "we," Olmsted ropes England into the political and cultural contest between the American North and South, interpellating the British as always already on the side of the North. With all the subtlety of a suggestive nudge combined with a conspiratorial wink, he adds: "Where the hopes and sympathies of Englishmen will be, we well know" (1:5). However, his aplomb rings a little falsely: if British loyalties are really so securely aligned with the North, why bother penning this urgently titled introduction ("The Present Crisis") at all?

Having established an "us," Olmsted constitutes a "them." He proceeds to ventriloquize the South via free indirect speech, mocking the very tendency toward bravado into which he himself has just erred:

> The necessity to labour is incompatible with a high civilization, and with heroic spirit in those subject to it.
>
> The institution of African slavery is a means more effective than any other yet devised, for relieving a large body of men from the necessity of labour; consequently, states which possess it must be stronger in statesmanship and in war, than those which do not […].
>
> The civilized world is dependent upon the Slave States of America for a supply of cotton. […] Such a monopoly under such circumstances must constitute those who possess it the richest and most powerful people on earth. The world must have cotton, and the world depends on them for it. Whatever they demand, that must be conceded them; whatever they want, they have but to stretch forth their hands and take it. (1:5)

Free indirect speech, which in fiction is a radical strategy for destabilizing the divisions between author, narrator, and character, becomes, in polemical writing, a reactionary strategy for constituting and policing difference, seemingly allowing a third party to speak while simultaneously ensuring the reader retains ironic detachment. In other words, it becomes a strategy for setting up a straw man. One wonders why Olmsted didn't avoid this particular logical fallacy by quoting any of the Southern statesmen—Senator John Henry Hammond springs to mind, for instance—who had indeed been tempted into publicly issuing similar aggressive and overconfident statements.

In response to this imagined expression of Southern hubris, Olmsted avers: "These fallacies, lodged in certain minds, generated, long ago, grand ambitions, and bold schemes of conquest and wealth. The people of the North stood in the way of these schemes. In the minds of the schemers, labour had been associated with servility, meekness, cowardice" (1:5-6). Here, we have John Brown's assertion about how Southern ideology renders labor shameful paired with language that also finds an echo in some of the literature reviewed above, this time in Timrod's "Ethnogenesis" when he characterizes Northerners as grasping schemers. While North and South differ in their characterizations of labor, it appears that

both sides can agree that scheming in order to acquire wealth is reprehensible. Published in the same year, "Ethnogenesis" and *The Cotton Kingdom* here unconsciously engage in a classic game of finger pointing. Two texts published at cross-purposes for different audiences, this moment of simultaneous accord and discord is another uncanny moment of cleavage, demonstrating the extent of the rhetorical battle over certain loaded terms that happened concurrently across genres developing in separate contexts.

The main argumentative thrust of Olmsted's introduction receives articulation as follows:

> My own observation of the real condition of the people of the Slave States, gave me, on the contrary, an impression that the cotton monopoly in some way did them more harm than good; and, although the written narration of what I saw was not intended to set this forth, upon reviewing it for the present publication, I find the impression has become a conviction. (1:8)

Thus Olmsted repurposes his earlier writings, outlining for his reader the inevitable conclusion that he asserts was latent all the time. Well might Olmsted want to spell out his principal claim; the multiple threads of logic that develop in the mass of pages following the orderly introduction belie and exceed the coherence of the frame. But if there is one point the introduction and the body of the text both serve to illustrate, it is that Olmsted is neither an unbiased nor a disinterested surveyor of Southern culture. Additionally, it is crucial to note that in this quotation, and at many other points throughout *The Cotton Kingdom*, Olmsted lodges a clear and powerful objection against the cotton economy, but he forgets to also oppose the system of slavery undergirding it, thus perpetuating the elision central to so much proslavery writing.

Over the course of its two lengthy volumes, *The Cotton Kingdom* does fulfill its promise to take on many of the ideological constructs central to Southern plantation

culture, though that work is often more incomplete and less subversive than its style and presentation might seem to indicate. Popular myths about Southern gentility are among Olmsted's foremost targets, as signaled in the introduction:

> But, much cotton is produced in the cotton States, and by the labour of somebody; much cotton is sold and somebody must be paid for it; there are rich peoples; there are good markets; there is hospitality, refinement, virtue, courage, and urbanity at the South. All this is proverbially true. Who produces the cotton? who is paid for it? where are, and who are, the rich and gentle people? (13)

Against the myth of the Southern Cavalier, whose urbanity and refinement is in part hereditary (through bloodlines leading back to the original English Cavaliers) and in part environmental (due to a leisurely lifestyle cultivated by abstention from labor), Olmsted erects two counter-constructs: the Southern plantation master as a backwards backwoodsman or a vulgar nouveau riche.

On many of the plantations he visits, especially in the more recently developed Mississippi valley region, he encounters slaveholders leading a rough, hardscrabble lifestyle. The uncouth rustics he depicts are hardly the genteel and sophisticated Southrons of wide repute.[40] Although *The Cotton Kingdom* breaks out into dialogue only rarely, the text makes the rare notable exception and disrupts its documentary style in order to record some of Olmsted's conversations with a few "gentlemen" of this ilk. Olmsted has one such plantation master deliver himself as follows: "'I aint a bettin' man. But I am a cotton man, I am, and I don't car who knows it. I know cotton, I do. I'm dam if I know anythin' but cotton. I ought to know cotton, I had. I've been at it ever sin' I was a chile'" (1:279). The style in which Olmsted renders this slaveholder's words turns the man's boast about his

[40] As a useful reference on the historical figure of the uncouth Southerner, see Grady McWhiney's *Cracker Culture: Celtic Ways in the Old South* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama, 1988).

deep knowledge of cotton into a pointed commentary on the ignorance bred by the South's cotton monomania.

Whereas in most antebellum literature, by Southerners and Northerners alike, members of the slaveholding class express themselves in perfect, unaccented English, what is remarkable here is how closely Olmsted's emphatic stylization of this slave master's speech resembles stereotypical renderings of slave speech. Counting on his audience's familiarity with the literary conventions for portraying slave speak, Olmsted appropriates those conventions to imply that this breed of slaveholder is hardly more refined than the prototypical slave. Nowhere in this antislavery text does Olmsted object to negative stereotypes of slaves. Rather, he uses those associations to debase the stereotype of the master, producing a stark contrast to the slaveholder's reputation for sophistication while conserving a cultural hierarchy that places the uneducated slave laborer at its nadir.

In another appropriative move, Olmsted lends further force to his characterization of the plantation master as a boorish backwoodsman scarcely more civilized than his slaves by describing the South through the terms of westward expansion. Claiming that the South has far fewer infrastructural and cultural resources at its disposal than the North, he writes: "The whole South is maintained in a frontier condition by the system which is apologized for on the ground that it favours good breeding" (2:326). In this quotation and elsewhere, he uses the label "frontier" as a slur, casting the South in the light of the territory usually designated by that term: the Wild West. Far from the urbane Cavalier, the slaveholder in this setting appears as a rough-and-ready frontiersman, eeking out an existence on the edges of civilization. Olmsted here cross-appropriates popular regional

essentialisms, overlaying the rugged associations affiliated with the "uncivilized" western territories over the prototypical Southern setting and character.

The other type of slaveholder Olmsted positions against the popular image of the refined Southern gentleman is the new-moneyed plantation master riding high on the tide of the latest cotton boom. Olmsted looks askance upon these cotton profiteers. His tone toggles between amusement and contempt as he adverts to the "swellhead aristocrats" who are the byproduct of the scramble to convert the fertile Mississippi Valley into profitable cotton fields:

> The farce of the vulgar-rich has its foundation in Mississippi, as in New York and in Manchester, in the rapidity with which certain values have advanced, especially that of cotton, and, simultaneously that of cotton lands and negroes. Of course, there are men of refinement and cultivation among the rich planters of Mississippi, and many highly estimable and intelligent persons outside of the wealthy class, but the number of such is small in proportion to that of the immoral, vulgar, and ignorant newly-rich, than in any other part of the United States. And herein is a radical difference between the social condition of this region and that of the sea-board slave States, where there are fewer wealthy families, but where among the few people of wealth, refinement and education are more general. (1:158)

This passage is another example of the trend remarkable throughout *The Cotton Kingdom*: Olmsted's knack for exposing certain of the truths about the plantation South that are elsewhere often swaddled in silence, but in such a way that he tacitly shores up many of the social structures his text seems designed to challenge. In the first sentence, Olmsted offers a rare instance of an overt reference to the Cotton Triangle; he mentions the Southern cotton lords in the same breath as the cotton lords of the industrial North in both America and England, demoting the majority of plantation holders from aristocracy to cottonocracy. In speaking of "the rapidity with which certain values have advanced, especially that of cotton, and, simultaneously that of cotton lands and negroes," Olmsted deploys the word "values" such that it resonates in dual registers, overlapping its economic and cultural

definitions. He thus insists on the cotton lords' economic codependency and cultural interchangeability, regardless of whether they preside over a Southern plantation or a Northern factory, collapsing the spatial, commercial, and social barriers that have buffered plantation masters from unflattering comparison with their Northern counterparts.

However, the very fact that the comparison is an unflattering one in Olmsted's mind is revealing. In order to reduce the vast majority of Southern plantation masters to the level of Northern factory owners, he maintains a series of binaries that reproduce the "immoral, vulgar, and ignorant newly-rich," whether Southern or Northern, as the antitype to the refined and educated Southern gentleman modeled on the aristocratic Englishman. Here and elsewhere, Olmsted betrays that he is actually quite taken with this latter stereotype; indeed, he reifies it as the ideal. In other words, he does not question that Southern myths about gentility promote an ideal—he merely questions the frequency with which this ideal is in fact realized. In the same way he maintained a racialized cultural hierarchy in his depiction of the country bumpkin slaveholders, he reinvests in the very class structures created and shored up by the stereotype of the gentlemanly slaveholder that he seems to want to dismantle. This is the smoke and mirrors effect of *The Cotton Kingdom.*

Myths about Southern hospitality come in for a similar treatment. Throughout *The Cotton Kingdom*, Olmsted again and again stresses the lack of resources, in particular the dearth of cultural resources, available to families residing on the larger cotton plantations. The landed estate that is supposed to be the sign and source of plantation culture's aristocratic claims is instead a major contributing factor to the South's suspension in a perpetual frontier condition. Well into the second volume of *The Cotton Kingdom*, Olmsted

makes an explicit cause-and-effect connection between the limitations of the plantation lifestyle and the Southerners' reputation for hospitality. In their isolation, these plantations provide little access to

> the conveniences and luxuries belonging to a highly civilized state of society […]. It is rare that a plantation of this class can have a dozen intelligent families residing within a day's ride of it. Any society that a planter enjoys on his estate must, therefore, consist in a great degree of permanent guests. Hence the name for hospitality of wealthy planters[.] (2:232).

Southern hospitality, then, is ultimately self-serving; while this purported hospitality might appear to arise from generous impulses, it is really a means for fending off what is otherwise a lonely, even brutalizing, existence.

Even more insidious than hospitality for the sake of social stimulation is hospitality for the sake of cultural indoctrination. Fairly early in his travels, Olmsted strikes up a conversation with a Southerner who first mentions an institution that becomes central to Olmsted's argument against the alleged Southern monopoly on hospitality. Listing the virtues of the particular plantation Olmsted intends to visit, Olmsted's obliging companion mentions that there are "a number of show plantations" in its vicinity:

> I asked what he meant by "show plantations." "Plantations belonging to rich people," he said, "where they had everything fixed up nice. There were several places that had that name; their owners always went out and lived on them part of the year, and kept a kind of open house, and were always ready to receive company. He reckoned I might go and stay a month round on them kind of places on —— river, and it would not cost me a cent. They always had a great many Northerners going to see them, those gentlemen had. Almost every Northerner that came here was invited right out to visit some of them […]."
>
> (It was not till long afterwards, long after the above paragraph was first printed, that I fully comprehended the significance of the statement, that on the show plantations it would not cost me a cent.) (I:230)

What Olmsted's cryptic parenthetical foreshadows is the shock and indignation he later expresses after having to pay for room and board at almost every plantation that does not

deem itself a "show plantation." This passage keenly exposes how the reputed hospitality for which Southern plantation masters enjoyed such wide acclaim was really a deliberate guise allowing the planters and their guests alike to buy into plantation culture's fantasies about itself.

The marked hospitality that Northerners in particular enjoy at these plantations reveals itself as Southern cunning, a strategy for exporting Southern dogma back across the Mason Dixon line. I use the phrase "reveals itself," for Olmsted does not offer his own commentary here. Using free indirect speech to render his hapless companion's prattling is a crafty maneuver; it gives the speaker, as a representative of plantation culture, just enough rope by which to hang himself and allows Olmsted to court the appearance of impartiality as a guileless bystander. Olmsted thus places the most damning evidence against Southern hospitality in the mouth of a white Southerner even as his use of the third person slyly signals a stance of ironic and critical detachment to his reader.

The real work of the plantation of course does not happen on the premises of the "show plantations," "the exhausted soil of which will scarcely produce sufficient to feed and clothe the resident slaves, whose increase is constantly removed to colonize those richer fields of the West" (2:232). This brings me to the central elision of *The Cotton* Kingdom: while Olmsted is capable of incisively criticizing the ways plantation culture both literally and figuratively shunts the cotton fields to its margins, the irony is that his own text never goes there either. In all its many pages—enough to rival even the heftiest nineteenth-century novels—*The Cotton Kingdom* avoids the actual cotton fields of the South as pertinaciously as any of the Southern fictions it seems designed to counteract. Olmsted even goes into great detail in describing sugar and rice cultivation—but never cotton

cultivation. For all that he wants to critique Southern plantation culture, he still upholds values in favor of aristocracy that unite him with the Southern masters in suppressing realities like slave labor. The work of slaves in the cotton fields is what sustains the hierarchy, but for a writer like Olmsted who is still invested in the beau ideal of the gentleman, an ideal that transcends the South to encompass high-class Northerners was well, this dependency cannot be exposed.

* * *

If there are moments when the industrial proves surprisingly consonant with representations of plantation culture in Southern and Confederate literature, the reverse is often true in Northern literature; many Northern writers also demonstrate unexpected ideological investments in the Southern pastoral. Lydia Maria Child's *A Romance of the Republic* (1867) announces itself as a generic cross-pollination of Northern and Southern forms: realist anti-slavery novel meets romance. In her introduction to the only existing scholarly edition of *A Romance of the Republic*, Dana Nelson positions Child in relation to major Southern writer William Gilmore Simms's definition of romance; in the preface to his 1853 novel *The Yemassee*, Simms theorized the romance as "a substitute which the people of the present day offer for the ancient epic," a genre that "does not confine itself to what is known, or even what is probable" (qtd. in Nelson xii). Nelson gives Child credit for adapting the romance to a new set of parameters and plot conventions, suggesting that this move has political implications: "With dramatic irony, then, Child presents in her 'romance' events that do often *seem* beyond the realm of possibility but that were grounded mostly in

fact" (xii). What Nelson points to is the way, at the level of plot, the novel merges two different literary traditions emerging from two (supposedly) disparate cultural contexts, thereby formally reflecting one of the novel's central arguments: the complicity of both the South and the North in the perpetuation of slavery.

This formal amalgamation of Northern and Southern genres manifests itself in other ways, as well, though in ways that complicate Child's image as anti-slavery crusader. Specifically, in her descriptions of landscapes, Child engages the pastoral mode with enthusiasm equal to, if not greater than, that demonstrated in the writings of her Southern contemporaries. Child's descriptions of the novel's only plantation setting, Magnolia Lawn, are lavish and awash in sentiment:

> The plantation was in gala dress. The veranda was almost covered with the large, white, golden-eyed stars of the Cherokee rose, gleaming out from its dark, lustrous foliage. The lawn was a sheet of green velvet embroidered with flowers. Magnolias and oaks of magnificent growth ornamented the extensive grounds. In the rear was a cluster of negro huts. Black picaninnies were rolling about in the grass, mingling their laughter with the songs of the birds. The winding paths of the garden were lined with flowering shrubs, and the sea sparkled in the distance. Wherever the eye glanced, all was sunshine, bloom, and verdure. (114)

The incorporation of the "negro huts" and the "picaninnies" as just two more pleasant details among the abundance of descriptors that together compose this picturesque scene of "sunshine, bloom, and verdure" brings to mind words Dickens places in the mouth of the parasitic Skimpole in *Bleak House*, which I quoted earlier in my introduction: "Take the case of the slaves on American plantations. I dare say they are worked hard, I dare say they don't altogether like it. I dare say theirs is an unpleasant experience on the whole; but they people the landscape for me, they give it a poetry for me, and perhaps that is one of the pleasanter objects of their existence (295)." What produces the telltale Dickensian ring of irony in this quote is the dissonance between Skimpole's acknowledgement of the

unpleasant realities of slave life, in particular the forced labor, followed by his blithe dismissal of those realities as less significant than the aesthetic pleasure he takes in contemplating a landscape dotted with black bodies at their labors, just as the inclusion of a few shepherds or rustic country folk might lend character to a traditional pastoral landscape.

And, indeed, it is also possible to construe Child's exaggerated pastoral descriptions of Magnolia Lawn as productive of irony, though such a move requires a greater interpretive effort than in the case of the Dickens quotation. Magnolia Lawn is the home of Gerald Fitzgerald, the novel's unprincipled villain. Gerald lures Rosabella Royal, the eldest of the two tragic "mulattas" whose misfortunes constitute the novel's plot, into a sham marriage after learning that, unbeknownst to her, she is of mixed blood. Magnolia Lawn is the scene of Gerald's crime against Rosabella; knowing that his marriage to a woman whose heritage makes her a slave is null and void according to Southern law, he weds the daughter of a wealthy New England business connection and brings her back to Magnolia Lawn as its mistress, despite Rosabella's continued residence there. Given the context of Gerald's betrayal, one might attempt to give Child the benefit of a generous reading, whereby her use of the pastoral could serve to set up an ironic juxtaposition between the beauty of the Southern landscape and the ugly social crimes legally perpetrated there under the system of slavery.

But this interpretation does not quite satisfy. Child's descriptions aestheticize slavery and its byproducts in ways that the novel does not render problematic. Even if we accept that the quoted passage does help establish a tension between the physical and the cultural Southern landscapes, this does not mean that the passage is self-reflexive about its

inclusion of the hovels and slave children among its ornamental flourishes. On the contrary, the passage seamlessly incorporates them into its vision of a bucolic Southern plantation. The huts "cluster" in an artistic arrangement in the background, just as though their purpose in being there is to enhance the scene's composition rather than provide the bare minimum of shelter to the notably absent field laborer. The slave children (are made to) gambol in the grass, blissfully and aimlessly "rolling about" together in a way that calls to mind a group of frolicsome puppies. It is as though their only purpose in life is to convey their simple delight in their beautiful surroundings to an amused observer, rather than pass the time, without the attendance of the absent adult workers, until they are grown enough to labor themselves. And, in the world of the novel, where the plantation serves only as a vivid background against which to dramatize the most romantic of slavery's crimes, setting the scene is indeed the only purpose of the slave quarters and the unattended children. The ugliness of slavery has no place there.

The plantation in *A Romance of the Republic* thus pertains to the world of romance even more fully and consistently than in the three Southern novels considered earlier. Notably, cotton receives a treatment in the novel similar to that of the "negro huts" and "picaninnies." The earliest description of the plantation contains one of the few mentions of the raw material which is presumably the source of the capital required to sustain Gerald's luxurious lifestyle and establishment: "The cotton-fields were all *abloom* on Gerald's plantation, and his stuccoed villa, with spacious veranda and high porch, gleamed out in whiteness among a magnificent growth of trees, and a garden gorgeous with efflorescence" (79, italics mine). Excessively floral descriptions characterize Child's writing throughout the novel, and here she transforms cotton into just another blossom in

a field already lush with a riot of flowers. No Southern writer could devise a more seemingly innocent way to incorporate cotton into the landscape, without so much as a hint at the staple crop's central position in the Southern economy or its cultivation by means of slave labor.

Even more interesting, perhaps, than Child's deployment of the pastoral in a Southern setting is her use of a similar mode in her depiction of a Northern setting toward the novel's end. After nineteen years of separation, the two sisters, Rosabella King (née Royal) and Floracita Blumenthal (née Royal), are reunited when both happen to vacation with their families in the same part of the New England countryside. Delightful outings as one big, happy family ensue, and the novel indulges in a descriptive digression:

> No familiarity could stale the ever fresh charm of the scenery. The beautiful river, softly flowing in sunlight through richly cultivated meadows, always seemed to Mr. Blumenthal like the visible music of Mendelssohn. Mr. King, who had been in Germany, was strongly reminded of the Rhine and the Black Forest, while looking on that wide level expanse of verdure, with its broad band of sparkling river, framed in with thick dark woods along the river-range of mountains. The younger persons of the party more especially enjoyed watching Mill River rushing to meet the Connecticut, like an impatient boy let loose for the holidays, shouting, and laughing, and leaping, on his way homeward. Mrs. Delano particularly liked to see, from the summit of Mount Holyoke, the handsome villages, lying so still in the distance, giving no sign of all the passions, energies, and sorrows that were seething, struggling, and aching there; and the great stretch of meadows , diversified with long, unfenced rows of stately Indian corn, rich with luxuriant foliage of glossy green, alternating with broad bands of yellow grain, swayed by the breeze like rippling waves of the sea. These regular lines of variegated culture, seen from such a height, seemed like handsome striped calico, which earth had put on for her working-days, mindful that the richly wooded hills were looking down upon her picturesque attire. There was something peculiarly congenial to the thoughtful soul of the cultured lady in the quiet pastoral beauty of the extensive scene. (346)

This is indeed the Northern counterpart to Child's descriptions of the Southern plantation; the pastoral infused with the industrious (and industrial) spirit of New England. Rather than the plantation in "gala dress," evoking the image of a Southern belle, we have the

landscape personified as a working girl: the effect of the cultivated land is "like handsome striped calico, which earth had put on for her working-days."

How appropriate that the earth dons calico, a local product. No doubt hundreds of actual working girls are manufacturing just such a fabric in one of the nearby cotton mills, situated in one of the "handsome villages, lying so still in the distance, giving no sign of all the passions, energies, and sorrows that were seething, struggling, and aching there" and likely powered by the very same Mill River that the young Kings and Blumenthals so enjoy watching as it rushes along. The passage truly is a striking example of the pastoral-industrial, a Northern mode that provides a foil to the industrial-pastoral that occasionally crops up in the Southern plantation novels. Indeed, as we will see in the next chapter, Northern industrial culture often drew upon pastoral representational strategies to ameliorate industry's troubled reputation. The pastoral was a crucial ingredient in American industrial exceptionalism.

PART II

The Lowell Mill Girl and the Idealization of American Factory Labor

The frontispiece of *The Lowell Offering* (1840-45) is ripe for analysis. In contradistinction to the prevalent iconography depicting factory women inside the mill at their work, the *Offering*'s cover pictures a simply and modestly clad young woman, with an

open book in hand, out for a leisurely stroll in the fresh air. In the background, the three primary New England institutions—the factory, the church, and the schoolhouse—arrange themselves on the banks of a river, the schoolhouse a visual echo of the much larger "school of industry," a popular epithet for the factory. In the foreground, trees and shrubs form a proscenium arch, their leaves and fruit clustering picturesquely to provide a frame. On the right, the hint of a trellis and the shadowy angle of a roof assert themselves amidst the foliage, indicators that this is not wholly a country setting. On the left, a beehive sits prominently on a wooden table, and it is toward the hive that the young woman directs her pensive gaze. The relationship of background to foreground is such that the factory is on the same visual line as the hive and appears relatively the same size. Above the scene but still within the arc of the trees, the words "Lowell Offering," rendered in ornate capital lettering, hover to form a parallel arc.

As a rendering of what I call the pastoral-industrial, the *Offering*'s frontispiece demonstrates that the industrial and the pastoral do not always work at cross-purposes. For, indeed, what is the pastoral but the aestheticization of labor? It is thus a fitting mode through which to negotiate and ameliorate industry's image problem. Were it not for the buildings in the background, which declare the setting as contemporary New England, the dreaming mill girl at her leisure amidst the leaves and fruit that frame her simple loveliness could easily be mistasken for the conventional pastoral type of the dreaming shepherdess. Instead of producing disjunction, the prominence of the factory in the scene, with the beehive as a symbolic and visual counterpart, updates and recontextualizes the pastoral.

For this chapter's exploration of New England's cotton culture, I take the city of Lowell, Massachusetts, as my case study and *The Lowell Offering* (1840-1845) as my central

primary text. With its shining reputation as an industrial utopia peopled by fine Yankee farm girls, Lowell was emblematic of America's greatest hopes for itself; the small but growing industrial center on the banks of the Merrimac stood for the promise that this newly minted democratic nation could industrialize and still maintain its core republican values as well as the population around which those values had been centered in national rhetoric: yeoman farmers. *The Lowell Offering* (1840-1845) was a periodical magazine written by some of Lowell's mill women that quickly achieved national and even transatlantic fame. Through their literary endeavors, its writers sought to demonstrate that intelligence and traditional feminine virtue were not at odds with a compulsion to engage in factory labor, at least not for the proud daughters of Puritan New England.

I begin with a historical overview of Lowell's rise to prominence and the cultural significance with which the city and its female operatives soon became laden. I then introduce the *Offering* and describe its trajectory before moving into a discussion of the ways the magazine endeavored to feminize and domesticate the industrial zone of the factory. From the obfuscation of actual labor conditions in the mills, I segue to a consideration of how the *Offering*'s writers also obscure their material, economic, and political relationship to the other laborers who poured out the sweat of their brows in service to the cotton industry: black slaves in the American South. The metaphor of white slavery serves as my lynchpin into a discussion about the reactions of Southern visitors to Lowell, some of whom expected to find evidence confirming the relative humanity of the Southern slave institution while others felt the attraction of Yankee industrial ingenuity (and lithesome Yankee young women). I conclude with a look at how certain prominent British authors redeploy their accounts of visiting Lowell and their assessments of the

Offering within the context of British factory reform. Due to Lowell's usefulness as a polemical juxtaposition to Manchester, these British writers demonstrate a surprising willingness to accept and propagate the myth of American industrial exceptionalism, of which Lowell was thought to be representative.

* * *

The historical Lowell, Massachusetts, is difficult to discern through the layers of ideology and myth that immediately coalesced around the city upon its founding and persist into the present day. In current popular histories about Lowell there is a tendency to champion the glorious "Camelot on the Merrimac" in similar language to that deployed in the glowing descriptions penned during its early decades of operation, when the city was often lauded as a manufacturing center with a social conscience.[41] As suited the political or social exigencies of the many and various contemporaneous writers who provided accounts of the city and its celebrated mill women, Lowell was hailed as both exceptional within as well as representative of the American industrial system; as both a beacon of technological and social progress and an oppressive, dissolute blight on the physical, political, and cultural landscape. The "City of Spindles" became as effective and flexible a repository for narratives of Yankee exceptionalism as the City on the Hill. In its prominence as a New England landmark and its malleability as an American symbol, Lowell

[41] See, for example, William Moran's *The Belles of New England: The Women of the Textile Mills and the Families Whose Wealth They Wove* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2002).

thus served as a crucial site through which to negotiate distinctions between national as well as transatlantic cotton cultures: North versus South, and New England versus England.

Lowell's story begins with an act of transatlantic industrial espionage masked as industrial tourism. Francis Cabot Lowell, for whom the town was named, built the first power loom in the United States after memorizing plans during a two-year tour of Britain from 1810 to 1812, during which he visited cotton factories in the guise of a tourist come to marvel at British technological ingenuity. After Francis Lowell's untimely death in 1817, his partners, who dubbed themselves the Boston Associates, followed his plans through to fruition and incorporated the Merrimack Manufacturing Company in 1822. They decided to honor Francis Lowell's legacy of "re-invention," as they termed his act of intellectual piracy, by lending his name to the fledgling town springing up around the new factory (Miles 220).

From the beginning, Lowell was conceived as the American alternative to smoky, squalid Manchester with its droves of impoverished and sickly workers. Particularly notorious in the transatlantic imagination was the Manchester mill girl; thanks to the attentions of numerous well-intended investigators and reformers, who sought to shock the British public with the degraded moral condition of Manchester's workers in order to garner public support for factory legislation, the Manchester mill woman became typecast as wanton and dissolute. Friedrich Engels, for one, wrote in *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1845):

> The moral consequences of the employment of women in the mill are even worse [than the physical consequences]. The collecting of persons of both sexes and all ages in a single workroom, the inevitable contact, the crowding into a small space of people, to whom neither mental nor moral education has been given, is not calculated for the favourable development of female character. […] A witness in Leicester said that he would rather let his daughter beg than go into a factory; that

> they are perfect gates of hell; that most of the prostitutes of the town had their employment in mills to thank for their present situation. Another, in Manchester, "did not hesitate to assert that three-fourths of the young factory employees, from fourteen to twenty years of age, were unchaste." (157-8)

Reports of this kind abounded in Britain.[42] The evidence was usually anecdotal hearsay, as in the above passage from Engels. But regardless of whether or not the charges of sexual laxity among the female operatives were true,[43] they were issued frequently enough that an abiding cultural stereotype was born.

The stereotype was powerful enough, in fact, to reach across the Atlantic and weigh on the minds of Lowell's founders. In order to ensure that Lowell would not follow the negative example of Manchester's notoriety, the Lowell factory system was designed on principles of paternalistic oversight, the first instance of industrial social planning in the United States. As Harriet Robinson later recalled in her memoir about her days in the Lowell mills, the system functioned under the "then new idea, that corporations should have souls, and should exercise a paternal influence over the lives of their operatives" (7). The Boston Associates built not only mills but also, crucially, boardinghouses. Their decision to exercise protective stewardship was critical in order to attract the variety of workers for whom Lowell quickly became famous: the Lowell "mill girls." While men

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[42] As a further example, Peter Gaskell, in *The Working Population of England* (1833), wrote: "[T]he female population engaged in manufactures, approximates very closely to that found in tropical climates; puberty, or at least sexual propensities, being attained almost coeval with girlhood" (68-9).

[43] Some evidence suggests that there might not have been much truth in reformers' assertions, or at least that "sexual immorality" was no more prevalent among Manchester mill women than among other British working-class women. In *Victorian Working Women*, Wanda Neff reports: "A general looseness in morals was proved [in parliamentary papers] by the number of illegitimate children born to girls in certain mills. An examination of the figures, however, indicates that they could be matched in any agricultural district, and surpassed among servants, as the Government records themselves proved" (54).

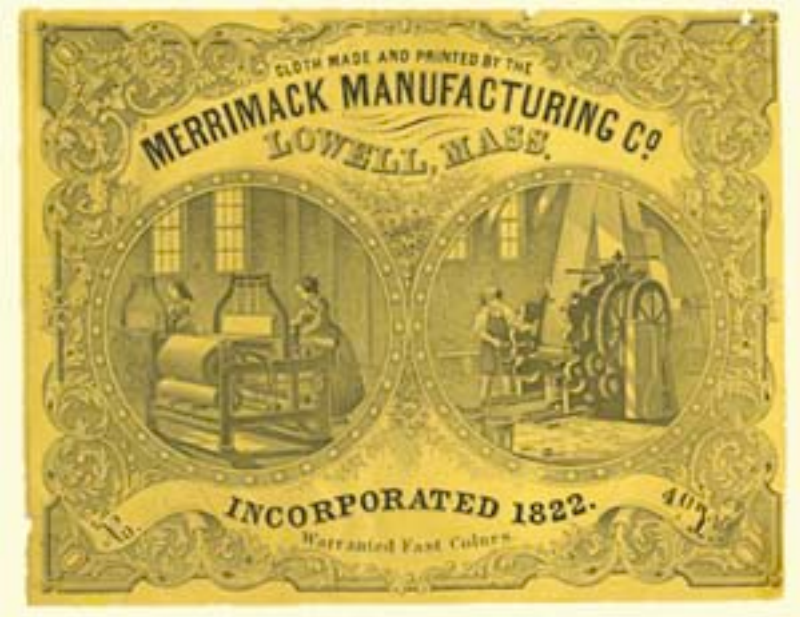
formed about a third of the work force, a considerable majority of the operatives were women. Drawn from farms all over New England, these workingwomen were praised as embodiments of the Protestant work ethic. In order to accommodate this fresh and phenomenal new labor force, the corporations designed a supervisory system that extended beyond the factories into the boardinghouses:

> As the overseer in the weaving or spinning rooms was responsible for the working habits and conduct of the girls in his domain, the boardinghouse-keeper—usually a "respectable" widow with a family—was answerable to the Corporation for the moral and physical well-being of the girls in their hours outside the thick mill walls. Residence in the Corporation boardinghouse was mandatory for unmarried female operatives, but it was partially subsidized, a rare form of capitalist benevolence. (Eisler 22)[44]

The Lowell factory system thus sought to provide a controlled environment, free from the moral taint associated with the stereotype of the slatternly Manchester mill girl, in which the Yankee farm girls would retain both the purity and vigor they were supposed to have brought with them from the country.

The Boston Associates recognized in their farm-girl operatives not only a new source of labor but also a marketing opportunity. Beginning in the 1840s, the Merrimack Manufacturing Company cloth label depicted two tidy young women gently administering to their looms: "This was the first time women employees were used to suggest the quality and refinement of the product—a public relations device the Bell Telephone Company would use so effectively ninety years later" (Eisler 22).

[44] Benita Eisler, who has led a varied career as an intellectual, journalist, and photographer, opens her anthology of selected works from the *Offering* with a brief but informative history of Lowell, its female workers, and their magazine.



The two workingwomen in this image, and others like it, bend gracefully to their task, the curving lines of their bodies in aesthetic harmony with the lines of the machines they tend. Their demurely downcast eyes as they concentrate on their delicate work allow the viewer's gaze to linger without challenge. Their quiet sex appeal is being used not just to suggest the quality and refinement of the textile product on which they appear but also to sell consumers on the concept of the Lowell industrial system.

And it was not just in advertisements and on labels that mill women figured prominently inside the Lowell corporations' public relations campaign to clean up the cotton industry's negative reputation. The iconic status of the Lowell "mill girl" was also in large part due to the favorable reports circulated by the many literary and political luminaries who visited the city. By 1833, Lowell's acclaim was such that President Jackson and Vice President Van Buren paid a visit, for which occasion the mill owners got up a grand spectacle in their visitors' honor. Multitudes of mill women, numbering 2,500 in all,

were the main focus of the display and were paraded before the august visitors as a source of national pride and a sign of Lowell's exceptionalism.

All costumed in matching white dresses provided by the corporations and carrying identical green parasols, the female operatives did not fail to make the desired impression on the president: "Very pretty women, by the Eternal!" Jackson purportedly exclaimed, his pro-labor politics appeased and his appreciation for the female form amply satisfied (qtd. in Robinson 82). Amal Amireh comments astutely on the success of this event: "Paradoxically, the unprecedented public spectacle of thousands of American wage-earning women presented to antebellum America the least threatening work-force imaginable. […] By distancing men from wage labor and factories, New England manufacturers attempted to reconcile their countrymen to industrialization" (3).[45] Later in the day, Jackson toured the mills and observed the young women, *still* in their pristine white leisure outfits, at their labor; as if the parade weren't enough, the corporations were clearly contriving to impress upon the president the presence of genteel femininity in the factories, thus attempting to combat associations of factory labor with physical and moral degradation.

Following in Jackson's footsteps, a veritable parade of some of the most famous literary and public celebrities of the nineteenth century filed through Lowell. Emerson,

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[45] In *The Factory Girl and the Seamstress: Imagining Gender and Class in Nineteenth Century American Fiction* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 2000), Amireh claims "these two figures originated in non-literary discourses and came to literature already invested with political meanings" (xv). Her first chapter, "Inventing the 'Mill Girl,'" opens by exploring how the Lowell mill girl was represented in nineteenth-century political writings and then moves to show how those representational strategies became reflected in literature, arguing that fiction allowed for more ambivalence and nuance. While I wholeheartedly agree with Amireh's emphasis on treating the Lowell mill girl as an invention rather than a reality, her insistence on non-fiction, political writing as the precedent for literary writing about the factory girl gives me pause. I would argue instead for mutual inflection between the non-literary and the literary.

Thoreau, and Poe lectured at the public Lyceum in Lowell in front of crowds of eager mill girls assiduously taking notes. John Greenleaf Whittier, the well-known American poet and antislavery activist, made Lowell his home for a brief period in the mid-1840s. He offered the following paean to the mill girls during his time in residence:

> Acres of girlhood, beauty reckoned by the square rod,—or miles by long measure! the young, the graceful, the gay,—the flowers gathered from a thousand hillsides and green valleys of New England, fair and unveiled Nuns of Industry […]. Who shall sneer at your calling? Who shall count your vocation otherwise than enobling? (Whittier 40)

In his playful conceit about appraising the beauty of Lowell's workingwomen, Whittier conflates the female laborers with their product—the square rod was the unit by which textiles were measured. (His formulation "acres of girlhood" also evokes the aestheticized acres of cotton from my previous chapter.) By figuring the women as "fair and unveiled Nuns of industry," Whittier celebrates their availability to the admiring gaze of the male visitors admitted into their industrial sanctuary while also representing the women themselves as undesiring; he thus contains and disarms their sex appeal.

Also important to notice here is how Whittier treats Lowell's mill women as an undifferentiated mass. Usually, masses of working people are thought to be threatening to the social order. But in Whittier's poetics, as in the spectacle of droves of identically costumed female workers parading before President Jackson, the women's sheer numbers and lack of individuality are a primary source of their appeal; they manage to represent the might of American industry while also not posing a threat to the masculine social and political order.

Industrial tourism, a trend all over New England as well as Northern England, reached its apex in Lowell. The mills were as much tourist attractions and public relations

machines as they were industrial complexes, and the women who worked inside them were engaged, consciously or not, in symbolically loaded public performances. Davy Crockett visited Lowell in 1834 and recounted his experience there in his travelogue, *An Account of Col. Crockett's Tour to the North and Down East* (1835). He claimed he came not to ogle the "'mile of gals'"—tongue in cheek, he said he "left that to the gallantry of the president"—but instead to admire the "power of machinery" (Crockett 91). But even he couldn't resist commenting on the young women's appearance at their work, albeit with more critical awareness of the corporations' machinations than his more gallant (or libidinous) compatriots. Walking down the middle aisle of a weaving room and glancing at the rows of women working at their machines to left and right, he noted pointedly: "Some of them were very handsome; and I could not help observing that they kept the prettiest inside, and put the homely ones on the outside rows" (Crockett 92). Even when the visitor was not quite so august a personage as the president, the women's labor in the Lowell mills was as carefully and artfully staged as in the advertising images.

Describing his visit to Lowell, Crockett positions himself as an emissary from the South: "I wanted to see how it was that the northerners could buy our cotton, and carry it home, manufacture it, bring it back, and sell it for half nothing; and in the mean time, be well to live, and make money besides" (Crockett 91). Crockett is a clear proponent of Yankee industry and the Protestant work ethic. He concludes his description of the wonders of Lowell: "I regret that more of our southern and western men do not go there, as it would help to do away with their prejudices against these manufactures" (Crockett 95).

Of course, the "King of the Wild Frontier" was not exactly the quintessential Southern gentleman. Yet, a number of his more typically aristocratic Southern brethren

also traveled to Lowell and sent their accounts back down home. Some went looking for ideological support for the Southern way of life; these travelers sought evidence that the "white slaves of the North" were indeed, as was suspected among the plantation class, in a sorry condition compared to the coddled Southern slaves who were supposed to exist under the shelter of their masters' munificence.[46] Other Southrons, impressed like Crockett by the efficiency of the industrial system, went to Lowell to observe its operations, hoping to borrow a little Yankee ingenuity and precision to improve the management and boost the yield of their plantations.

By the 1840s, Lowell had also become an obligatory stop for any British or European traveler on an American tour. Eminent British abolitionist Joseph Sturge came through town in the company of John Greenleaf Whittier. Dickens, Harriet Martineau, and Anthony Trollope all recorded their pleasant impressions of Lowell and its female operatives. Somewhat surprisingly, all of these British visitors bought right into the myth of American exceptionalism propagated through the image of Lowell as an industrial utopia and of its mill women as cheerful, intelligent, and maidenly Yankee farm girls. Situating the image of a clean, bright, and robust Lowell mill woman against her dirty, dull, and wan counterpart back in the Old World had cultural expediency for British authors recounting their impressions of the "Manchester of America."

There can be no doubt that conditions in the Lowell factories and boardinghouses were considerably better than those in the Manchester mills and slums and also exceeded working and living conditions even elsewhere in industrial New England. Nevertheless there is ample evidence to suggest that Lowell's reality and its public image did not always

[46] In a later section, I will discuss in more detail the incendiary national and transatlantic issue of "white slavery."

agree. Some of the most damning evidence is actually furnished by the City of Spindle's most vocal supporters who, in attempting to dispel skepticism about the greatness of the Lowell factory system, go several steps too far and wind up warranting it. Take, for instance, Reverend Henry Miles, Lowell's first historiographer. In *Lowell, As It Was, and As It Is* (1845), in order to deny the notoriously unhealthy atmosphere in cotton mills, Miles places responsibility for any ill effects of factory labor squarely at the feet of the female operatives:

> Some come with the seeds of disease already growing within them, and they find that their constitutions would soon break down by continued labor. Others, freed from the guardianship of parental care, are greatly imprudent in their diet, or dress, or exposure to cold and damp air. It will not be expected but that others still, will feel that devotion to fashion which is characteristic of the sex, and will contract a serious, perhaps fatal cold, through a neglect to provide themselves with a warm shawl, or a pair of stout shoes. Moreover, there is something in the monotony of a mill-life which seems to beget a morbid hankering for little artificial stimulants of the appetite, and the tone of the stomach is frequently deranged by a foolish and expensive patronage of the confectioner. Painful instances, likewise, have occurred, where the hope of relieving an embarrassed parent, or of helping a struggling brother through college, excited too strongly by the ability of earning fifteen or twenty dollars per month, has overtasked the energies of am ambitious young woman, and she has sunk beneath her self-imposed burden. (Miles 124-5)

The Reverend Miles cannot refute the presence of ill health among the operatives, so he instead disputes the causes. He would have it that illnesses among female workers are solely due to the feminine vices—constitutional weakness, frivolity, acquisitiveness, ambition—but the very excessiveness of his defense renders it factitious.

As theaters of industry, attracting tourists from far and wide, the Lowell mills were roomier than factories elsewhere. But they were also designed to be profitable manufacturing centers, and thus certain conditions that were not conducive to the health of workers but that facilitated the production process were maintained. The air was kept close and humid to prevent the fine cotton threads from breaking but also creating ideal

conditions for disease to breed and spread. As in factories elsewhere, "cotton dust" hung in the air and entered the lungs of the operatives, causing byssinosis. Letters and testimonials from mill women speak with alarming frequency of friends who sickened and took time off to go convalesce at their country homes but then never returned. Even when such accounts do not impute blame to work conditions—as when one operative speaks of a dear friend who "consumption had selected for its victim," making consumption the deliberate agent of destruction—that such tales of grief and loss are common among the mill women strongly suggests that Lowell was not quite the workers' paradise it was cracked up to be.

To the extent that the Yankee farm-girl operative, who modeled the Protestant work ethic and dedication to self-improvement of her Puritan forbears, ever partook of reality, her lifespan was a short one. By the dawn of the Civil War, the Lowell "mill girl" was no more, replaced by increasing numbers of immigrants who brought with them from the Old World the family model of industry. The immigrants' lowered expectations, conditioned by the relatively poorer standards of work in Europe, as well as xenophobia among the mill owners meant decreased wages and a marked decline in the Corporations' sense of paternal responsibility. But the Lowell "mill girl" lived on in cultural memory and continues to be the figure around which the tourism industry in present-day Lowell centers.

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While it was certainly true that tourists' accounts, especially those by literary and political celebrities, played a major role in spreading the fame of the Lowell "mill girl" as an icon, the mill women were not entirely dependent on prominent national and international figures for their reputation. *The Lowell Offering*, a magazine featuring original work written by female operatives, emerged in 1840 and ran until 1845. Initially, the magazine appeared under the patronage of Reverend Abel C. Thomas, who acted as editor until 1842. In October of 1842, Harriet Farley and Harriet Curtis, both former mill women and regular contributors to the *Offering*, took over the editorship, and then in 1843 they also began to oversee its publication. The *Offering* thus became not only the first periodical written exclusively by women, but also the first periodical edited and published by women.

As a population comprised overwhelmingly of Yankee farm girls raised to take great pride in their Puritan ancestry, many of the young women who flocked to Lowell subscribed to traditional New England ideas about not only the moral uprightness of a strong work ethic but also the value of education and self-improvement. Besides regularly attending evening Lyceum lectures by the likes of Poe and Emerson and enthusiastically patronizing Lowell's circulating libraries, many of the young women formed groups among themselves for composing, reading, and reviewing their own literary compositions: "By the early 1840s there were no less than seven Mutual Self-Improvement Clubs in Lowell" (Eisler 33). It was out of one of these improvement circles that the *Offering* emerged.

As the literary production of factory women, the *Offering* had the potential to be extremely controversial. Over the course of the thousands of pages the *Offering* amassed, its contributors and editors often demonstrate their awareness that the magazine's mere existence was a challenge to the status quo. It invited the working-class woman to develop

a literary voice, an intersection of potentially incendiary nineteenth-century identities: the factory worker crossed with the woman who writes. Remarkably, their efforts were celebrated more than they were derided. In fact, as Sylvia Jenkins Cook points out, "the literariness of these first American factory women was undoubtedly used as a promotional tool by their employers" (4).[47] As evidence of the Lowell mill women's exceptional intellectual activity, the *Offering* could be used to bolster claims about the exceptionalism of the Lowell factory system. Precisely because the magazine demonstrated the presence of "mind amongst the spindles,"[48] and because such a demonstration was deemed revolutionary, it quickly became a cultural phenomenon, garnering much acclaim as well as some skepticism from audiences on both sides of the Mason Dixon line and both sides of the Atlantic.

For the modern-day reader, the magazine's offerings seem innocuous enough, perhaps even trivial and trite: moralizing tales, sentimental fiction, didactic anecdotes about small-town life in New England, effusions about the glories of nature, apostrophes to Fancy or Vanity or Science, historical and bibliographical sketches, etc. Indeed, a number of labor historians and feminist critics have expressed disappointment at the *Offering*'s

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[47] Cook is careful to balance this admission by pointing out that the women's literariness "was not easily contained or restricted by manufacturers' boosterism" (4). Cook's larger discussion of the *Offering* in her book, *Working Women, Literary Ladies* (2008), focuses on the writers' experiments with form and genre, which she agues presaged later developments in realism, in an effort to refute the scholarly tendency to sniff at the *Offering* as lowbrow and low quality.

[48] "Mind amongst the spindles" was the title given to a selected edition of pieces from the *Offering* that was published in London in 1844 by Charles Knight at the instigation of Harriet Martineau.

failure to directly challenge traditional class and gender politics.[49] Even at the time of its publication, the *Offering* was criticized on some fronts for its conservative social and political mores. In fact, because the *Offering* declined to publish any pieces that were obviously critical of the factory system, a suspicion arose that its editors were in the pockets of the corporations. An angry public debate over the magazine's allegiances injured its popularity and ultimately led to its cessation in 1845.

For all its conservatism, the *Offering* is rife with tensions and contradictions, some of which are already apparent in the very first issue. In the "Editorial Corner" with which Reverend Thomas concludes the issue, he states:

> The objects of the publication are, to encourage the cultivation of talent; to preserve such articles as are deemed most worthy of preservation; and to correct an erroneous idea which generally prevails in relation to the intelligence of persons employed in the Mills. This number is wholly the offering of Females. (1(Oct 1840): 16)

This passage raises more questions than it answers. Who is the *Offering*'s intended audience? Who is doing the deeming in determining which articles are worthy of publication? Preservation for what purposes? Why was it so important to Thomas to stress that the authors were all women?

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[49] For one, Philip Foner, the distinguished labor historian, divides the writings of New England factory women into two categories, "genteel" and "militant," in arranging his anthology, *The Factory Girls* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977). Cook points out: "Foner's use of the words 'genteel' and 'militant' for his two groups of factory women suggests more than two politically opposed sets of responses to the factory system. The label 'genteel' makes an implicit association of literariness with bourgeois class values and thereby hints at a betrayal of working-class loyalties" (42). On the ambivalence of feminist critics toward the *Offering*, see Kathryn A. Cady, "'Ann and Myself:' Rhetoric, Sexualities, and Silence at Lowell" (*Southern Communication Journal* 77.1 (January-March 2012): 24-44).

On the one hand, Thomas suggests that the magazine is for the operatives themselves, a forum to showcase and develop the talents they already possess. Yet, he also identifies an audience outside the mills, presumably a middle- and upper-class audience, who wrongly believe the working classes occupy the position they do in the socioeconomic strata because they are unintelligent. To further complicate the problem of audience, Thomas then proceeds to write: "The Editors do not hesitate to say, that they anticipate for it a favorable reception at the hands of those who have at heart the interests of that important and interesting portion of our population, whose intellectual elevation and moral welfare it aims to promote" (1(Oct 1840): 16). This quotation panders to a different middle-class audience, the kind that is charitably inclined. To appeal to this readership's condescension, Thomas contradicts his previous statements about the intelligence already manifest among Lowell's working population, instead suggesting that working people are in need of intellectual and moral uplift. The problems that would plague the *Offering* later and eventually lead to its cessation are thus present already in the first issue; it was never clear to the working population of Lowell if the *Offering* was really for them and advocated their interests and so, even as the magazine achieved recognition farther afield, it was always met with a certain mistrust at home that sometimes bordered on outright hostility.

Also in the inaugural issue, Thomas states in no uncertain terms: "Communications of a sectarian character, in either religion or politics, are inadmissible" (1(Oct 1840): 16). Of course, the magazine was already issuing a political statement merely through its existence. And, in the interest of furthering that statement, Thomas didn't always toe the apolitical line; defense of the intellectual and moral tendencies of the operatives was one political subject on which Thomas permitted the writers to expound. The article that most

emphatically demonstrates this politicized stance on the subject of the mill women's intelligence and rectitude is one of the most well-known pieces in the *Offering* and almost certainly the most cited piece by scholars.[50]

Titled simply "Factory Girls" and written anonymously by "A Factory Girl" (who was really none other than Harriet Farley herself, future editor of the *Offering*), the article opens the second issue of the *Offering* with a bang. Farley boldly takes to task Orestes A. Brownson, a notable factory reformer, who, in his attempts to denigrate the system, crossed the line into denigrating the workers themselves, specifically the female workers. "She has worked in a factory, is sufficient to damn to infamy the most worthy and virtuous girl," is the claim from Brownson with which Farley launches her denunciation. She deems him a "slanderer," and avers that "in spite of toil, restraint, discomfort, and prejudice, […] many virtuous, intelligent, and well-educated girls" have been drawn to Lowell for the chance to earn an independent wage (1(Dec 1840): 17). Farley issues this generalization cautiously, for she also speaks back against the tendency to lump all of Lowell's female operatives into an undifferentiated mass:

> The erroneous idea, wherever it exists, must be done away, that there is in factories but one sort of girls, and *that* the basest and degraded sort. There are among us *all sorts* of girls. I believe there are few occupations which can exhibit so many gradations of piety and intelligence; but the majority may at least lay claim to as much of the former as females in other stations of life (1(Dec 1840): 18).[51]

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[50] Amireh, Cook, and Foner, among others, all allot space to discussions of Farley's "Factory Girls."

[51] This tension between making claims on behalf of her fellow workers and resisting sweeping generalizations that treat a single worker as representative of the entire class would become a recurring theme and obstacle for Farley in her later editorials.

This article is a powerful moment in the *Offering*, as "A Factory Girl" talks back to one of the members of the larger public who is turning the popular image of the "factory girl" to his own ends.

But, while "Factory Girls" is noteworthy for its attempt to regain for female workers some control over their own images and for its insistence upon their individuality, it is nevertheless a controversial piece, which is part of the reason it has received relatively close scholarly attention. The article is emblematic of a larger trend and dilemma in the *Offering*: in order to defend their reputations as factory women, the writers often end up defending the factory system as well—in direct inverse to Brownson's formula, which conflates critique of the system with critique of the system's victims. Farley asserts: "We are under restraints, but they are voluntarily assumed [...]. Neither have I ever discovered that any restraints were imposed upon us, but those which were necessary for the peace and comfort of the whole" (1(Dec 1840): 17). She goes on to say that "it is because our labor is so unremitting, that the wages of factory girls are higher than those of females engaged in most other occupations," and it is precisely this promise of higher wages that attracts "so many worthy, virtuous, intelligent, and well-educated girls to Lowell" (1(Dec 1840): 17). Yet, even as Farley here claims that unceasing toil in exchange for relatively generous remuneration is what these erstwhile farm girls knowingly signed up for when they came to work in the factories, numbers of her fellow female operatives had in 1834 and then again in 1836 two strikes to protest long hours and insufficient wages; both were quashed by the corporations. During the years of the *Offering*'s publication, more and more

Lowell workingwomen were becoming involved in activism for the Ten Hours Movement.[52] Clearly, Farley does not speak for all when she maintains that "we" cheerfully assume the "necessary" restraints of factory work.

When Farley took over as editor, her propensity to apologize for the corporations became more and more pronounced, and she almost immediately began to receive pushback from within Lowell's working-class population. Under Thomas's guidance, several different authors had contributed pieces that represented aspects of the factory women's lives in Lowell. However, for the first couple years that Farley was at the helm, it was only in her editorials that direct discussion appeared about Lowell, its working-class population, and their work. Though Harriet Curtis was technically co-editor, her role as a guiding hand appears to have been minimal. All of the editorials were written by Farley alone, with the exception of the very last, to which Curtis appended a brief, page-long message in her own name (after Farley discoursed for five full pages). Curtis was dismissively dubbed "junior editress" by a local news organ, demonstrating the common perception that she exercised little influence inside the editorial partnership (*The Voice of Industry* 1.29: 2). It seems quite clear that Farley was the controlling force behind the *Offering* during her time as co-editor.

In this way, whether by conscious design or not, Farley's voice came to regulate how the magazine represented the Lowell mill women to the considerable national and international readership the publication had by then secured. Farley writes her editorials

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[52] See Thomas Dublin, *Women at Work: The Transformation of Work and Community in Lowell, Massachusetts, 1826-1860* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979). In particular, reference his third chapter, "The Lowell Work Force, 1836, and the Social Origins of Women Workers," as well as his fourth chapter, "The Social Relations of Production in the Early Mills."

in the first-person plural, an unstable subject position that shifts from sentence to sentence; her "we" toggles between an inclusive, "we the people" kind of "we" that encompasses all Lowell's working women and an exclusive, almost royal "we" that insists on her authority as editor. As a white, middle-class man, Thomas occupied an obvious paternal position in relation to the magazine and its writers, a position the Lowell working-class population had no doubt been conditioned to accept and respect. By contrast, Farley's perhaps inevitable lack of clarity about her positionality as a woman and member of the working class who had attained a measure of power as editor did not serve to endear her to the local readership of Lowell mill people.

It is hard to say how much of the questioning and criticism of Farley's authority as editor was rooted in sexism, but it is evident that her attempts at neutrality spoke less and less to Lowell's working people. The increasingly defensive and beleaguered tone of Farley's editorials indicates that her authority did not go unchallenged. Her strategy for quelling criticism of her leadership is to engage in dialogues with an imaginary critical interlocutor, posing probing rhetorical questions with which she quibbles and to which she then provides answers, to her own apparent satisfaction:

> But do the superintendents, agents, etc., "the powers that be" over us, do they do all in their power to make us healthy and comfortable?' I know not. If they can have our mills better ventilated, or make any improvements which may conduce to the health and well-being of those under their care, we would earnestly and respectfully request them to do it. We know that the rooms are spacious and high—we know that the air is not dead and stagnant—the constant motion of bands and drums keeps it continually changing—we know that the mills are not too warm for comfort in Winter, and that few places are cooler in the middle of Summer; but, with all this, might there not be some improvement? At all events, there should be, upon every corporation, if not in every large boarding-house, a place for *bathing.* It is needed for cleanliness, health, and comfort. Let us have it. (3(May 1843): 192)

She wavers all over the place in this passage before landing on the solution of bathing-houses as the answer to all the health problems potentially associated with the mills and appears to think the case closed. If the corporations will but build a bathing-house at her behest, "then we shall not hear the remark which, *unkind* and UNTRUE as we know it to be, is never heard with indifference, 'THE OFFERING *has never done us any good*' [emphasis original]" (3(May 1843): 192). The ingratitude of the Lowell operatives who refuse to subscribe to the *Offering* and who question the magazine's (and Farley's) allegiances is a recurrent theme in Farley's editorials; she occasionally tries to signal that she has heard and taken to heart her critics' grievances but more often indignantly denies their charges, asserting her righteousness and good intentions.

At best, Farley was an idealist who fervently believed in the ultimate good of the social experiment that was Lowell; at worst, she was a sellout who refused to print legitimate criticism of the Lowell factory system and toed the line in her editorials in exchange for favors from the owners. There is some evidence to suggest that the latter version of Farley may be closer to the truth. According to Benita Eisler's brief history of the *Offering* with which she frames her selected anthology of its publications, when Farley and Curtis took over the editorial duties, they moved from their respective boardinghouses into a quaint cottage on the edge of town, prompting suspicions that their living situation was at least in part funded by the Corporations. Eisler indicates that there is reason to believe Farley's family received occasional monetary support from Abbot Lawrence, one of the mill owners. Even more damning rumors circulated, claiming that mill overseers helped collect subscriptions and that the owners arranged the purchase of a thousand dollars' worth of back issues in an attempt to float the magazine as it began to founder in its final year (38).

Whatever the truth of these assertions, the fact that they gained traction locally speaks to the rising dissatisfaction and unrest in Lowell. Sarah Bagley, an early contributor to the *Offering* who became one of its most outspoken detractors, issued the following indictment in the pages of a more radical newspaper, *The Voice of Industry*, for which she briefly served as editor:

> The very position of the Offering as a factory girl's magazine, precludes the possibility of neutrality, therefore, we must come to one of two conclusions, either that it has been under the influence and control of the manufacturing powers, or that it has not been an organ of the operatives, and we leave it with the sagacity of our readers to discover the difference. […] [T]o the last, we find a lurking disposition to exculpate the manufacturer and friends of the system from all blame for the existence of what it pleases to denominate "*necessary evils*[.]" (1.29: 2)

That Bagley's disinclination to brook the *Offering*'s accommodationist agenda was indicative of a larger trend is evidenced by the substantially increased numbers of Lowell workers who signed petitions in support of the Ten Hour Movement: from around 1,600 signatures in 1843, numbers jumped to a whopping 4,000 by 1846 (Dublin 113). The *Offering* plainly could no longer sustain claims to speak to and for the majority of operatives, which, by Bagley's logic, meant it must be speaking on behalf of the Corporations. Despite Farley's belated concessions in allowing freer discussions of labor issues toward the end of the magazine's run, it was too little, too late; amid the public controversy about its questionable loyalties, the *Offering*'s demise could not be forestalled.

Despite the controversy surrounding its cessation, however, the magazine held and still holds major cultural significance. What is clear from Thomas's inaugural "Editorial Corner" through to Farley's final words is that the *Offering* has an anxious stake in controlling the image of Lowell and its mill women that was circulating locally, nationally, and internationally. While its success in doing so on the local level was limited, on the

national and international levels it was a sensation. The magazine could boast subscribers from all over the United States and even a solid number in England as well as France. Even before it ceased publication, the *Offering* already had a transatlantic afterlife: in 1844, Harriet Martineau persuaded Charles Knight to publish in London excerpts of the *Offering* under the title *Mind Amongst the Spindles*; this publication was then reprinted in Boston in 1845. While there were periodicals by mill women that emerged in Lowell in the late 1840s and early 1850s, they were all short lived and none of them amassed the following that the *Offering* had. Because of its phenomenal influence, the magazine remains an important repository of information about how Lowell and its mill women functioned in the nineteenth-century cultural imaginary. But, like so many of the antebellum texts I consider here, the *Offering*'s silences communicate just as much, if not more, than its actual words. I will plumb certain of those speaking silences in my continued discussion of the *Offering* below.

* * *

As was likely the experience of many 19th-century readers, I first encountered mention of the *Offering* in Dickens's *American Notes for General Circulation* (1842), in which the celebrity author momentarily hits the pause button on his invective against American coarseness and boorishness to issue a glowing description of his visit to Lowell. He dedicates some space in the chapter to praising the *Offering*, noting with approval that "many of its Tales are of the Mills and of those who work in them" (Dickens 82). With this expectation in mind, I turned to the *Offering*, anticipating that the periodical would rupture

the resounding silence about cotton mills and factory labor that I was confronting elsewhere in my research. However, after having combed through all 2,000 plus of the *Offering*'s pages, I sat back in befuddlement and couldn't help but wonder if Dickens and I had somehow read a different publication. With a very few exceptions, the mills are strikingly absent from the pages of the *Offering.* Dickens seems to have filled in this central gap with what he expected or wanted to find, and, as I shall discuss later, he was not alone in his misperception.

While certain prominent readers of the *Offering* managed to locate the cotton factory where it does not in fact figure, projecting their own expectations onto the magazine (and often wresting it to their own particular political ends), other contemporaneous readers were struck by the absence of the mills. Many of Farley's editorials are defensive in tone, responding to what seems to have been a barrage of both well-intended advice from subscribers as well as harsh critique from detractors. In the editorial for the January 1844 issue, she ventriloquizes some of her audience's reactions: "We do not like stories, especially love stories—the community is growing sick of them, and perhaps we could find better didactic articles in works of a higher order than yours. What we want is a knowledge of your factory life, statistics with regard to it, and a description of the operatives, and their labors, as they really are" (4(Jan 1844): 72). Farley is ardent about resisting readers' tendencies to reduce mill women to a single, unified class of beings whose experience and knowledge is limited to the cotton factory. Other contributors often echo her sentiments, and their point of contention is a valid and important one. But, by so frequently insisting that they were more than just factory girls, the writers miss

opportunities to realize their potential cultural and political clout as textile workers with direct knowledge of factory labor and working conditions.

The demand Farley's readers evinced to know more about the Lowell women's labor and the conditions in which it was performed registers the dearth of such information available elsewhere, especially rendered from the perspective of the workers themselves. The readers' curiosity also reflects a very particular and brief cultural moment before the expansion of the cotton industry helped usher in global capitalism and before total ignorance about the means of production was essential to or possible for the mentality of the consumer. When the fabrics one wears are manufactured by a Yankee farm girl who hails from the next town over and who proudly proclaims the same Puritan heritage as the consumer, ignorance is not easily sought. Nor, as evidenced by some *Offering* subscribers' eagerness to learn more about factory labor from the laborers themselves, is it even consistently deemed desirable. The writers of the *Offering* were not only positioned to speak into the silence about factory labor; they had an audience of middle-class consumers keen to listen.

On the rather rare occasions when the stories in the *Offering* do take Lowell as their setting and Lowell workingwomen as their subjects, the plots often unfold within the domestic zone of the boarding house rather than the industrial space of the mill. In her article, "Texts, Commodities, and Genteel Factory Girls," Katja Kanzler writes astutely about the reasons behind the marked preference for the boarding house that the *Offering*'s writers so often demonstrate:

> The dominance of the boarding house as a setting results not only from its easy metaphorization as "home" (fashioning its all-female community of factory girls and matron into 'family') but also because it lends room to those two activities with

> which the women could most effectively tap into discourses of feminine authority—reading and writing." (Kanzler 559)

The boarding house is the site of the writers' intellectual labors; it is there that they actually demonstrate the presence of "mind amongst the spindles" during their few and precious leisure hours away from their looms.

But, as Kanzler goes on to argue, the emphasis on the boarding house also serves more subtle purposes that prove disappointing for modern-day readers who hope to find in the *Offering* the signs of the incipient women's and workers' rights movements:

> The frequency with which Lowell's heroines, or their families, are stricken by mysterious, and at times fatal, diseases place physical suffering and sacrifice at the center of the factory experience. This gender-inflected motif effectively displaces suffering from the factory to the boarding house. Sentimental literary conventions offer factory authors a projection space for the suffering endured in the workplace (the long working hours, the severe conditions, the accidents) as the factories themselves remain invisible and social protest unspeakable within the confines of a feminine literary voice. (Kanzler 570)

As a domestic space, the boarding house is a crucial site from which the writers draw "feminine authority," but it simultaneously limits the authority it confers, restricting the authors to subjects suitable to the traditional domestic sphere—which do not include the factory or factory labor. Conveniently, then, the boarding house can be made to stand in for the factory, thus helping to ensure that institution's erasure from the literature of the time.

However, on the extremely rare occasions when the writers of the *Offering* do actually describe the mills (only five or six instances in all of the *Offering*), I have observed that they tend to reverse the strategy of displacement that Kanzler identified, projecting the boarding house (i.e. "home") onto the mill. When these infrequent descriptions appear, they almost invariably make insistent mention of the plants cultivated in pots on the

windowsills of the mills. Take as an example this passage from an article entitled "Pleasures of Factory Life" that appeared in the second issue of the *Offering*:

> In the mills, we are not so far from God and nature, as many persons might suppose. We cultivate, and enjoy much pleasure in cultivating flowers and plants. A large and beautiful variety of plants is placed around the walls of the rooms, giving them more the appearance of a flower garden than a workshop. It is there we inhale the sweet perfume of the rose, the lily, and geranium; and with them, send the sweet incense of sincere gratitude to the bountiful Giver of these rich blessings. (S.G.B 1(Dec 1840): 25)

This writer is particularly invested in the way the flowers bring nature into the factory (the garden in the machine). Thomas, however, has further ideas about the ideological significance of the plants in the mills. He seizes the opportunity to comment extensively on the above passage in his editorial for the same issue:

> We have been greatly pleased with the taste and care displayed in the introduction and culture of plants and flowers, in all the Corporations. These children of nature, whether growing wild or receiving the fostering attention of man, are "apt to teach;" and the lessons they inculcate are of the purest and more pleasing character. And it is highly gratifying to see them exalted to companionship in the sitting-room and parlor, when they most need shelter from the blighting frost. It is especially gratifying to behold them thriving beneath the kindly care of the female operatives in our factories. (1(Dec 1840): 32)

One striking element in this passage is the comparison Thomas establishes between the sitting-room/parlor, that most genteelly feminine of household interiors, and the factory. The common presence of cultivated plants in both settings is the lynchpin upon which the comparison turns. Thomas manages to transform the Lowell mill into a homey interior in which the women workers nurture the "children of nature" like angels of the household in training. He assuages cultural anxieties about women's work that is non-reproductive;[53]

[53] Herman Melville's "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids" (1855) comes to mind here. The titular "tartarus of maids" is a paper factory in which the celibate female workers labor their lives away, their production a nightmarish and monstrous form of reproduction.

tending to the "children of nature" on the window sills of the factories, the Lowell mill women are not forgoing their procreative responsibilities through their labor but rather exercising and honing their maternal instincts for future use.

The writers of the *Offering* (as well as visitors describing their tours of the the Lowell mills, notably Dickens, who also mentions the plants) often slide easily between discussions of the neat and pretty plants to the neat and pretty machines and their neat and pretty operatives, and vice versa:

> The rooms are high, very light, kept nicely whitewashed, and extremely neat; with many plants in the window seats, and white cotton curtains to the windows. The machinery is very handsomely made and painted, and is placed in regular rows; thus, in a large mill, presenting a beautiful and uniform appearance. I have sometimes stood at one end of a row of green looms, when the girls were gone from between them, and seen the lathes moving back and forth, the harnesses up and down, the white cloth winding over the rollers, through the long perspective; and I have thought it beautiful.
>
> Then the girls dress so neatly, and are so pretty. The mill girls are the prettiest in the city. (Susan 4(Aug 1844): 238)

These smooth transitions, overlapping the images of the flowering plants, the machines, and the factory women, serve to feminize the industrial zone of the mill.

As is so often the case in representations of Lowell, an implicit contrast with Manchester is at play here. British mills were masculine spaces, not because of the gender identity of the workers, but because of the gendered assumptions about technology. Visitors to British mills often used their descriptions of factory interiors as occasions to celebrate and marvel at the masculine ingenuity demonstrated by and made manifest in the machinery. In the *Offering*, however, the machines themselves take on stereotypically feminine qualities: "The dressing-rooms are very neat, and the frames move with a gentle undulating motion which is really graceful" (Susan 4(Jun 1844): 169). The elegant and nimble movements of the machines mimic that of their operatives, and vice versa. Lucy

Larcom, a contributor to the *Offering* who later went on to distinguish herself as a published poet, recalled her time in the Lowell factories in her autobiography: "I could look across the room and see girls moving backwards and forwards among the spinning-frames, sometimes stooping, sometimes reaching up their arms, as their work required, with easy and not ungraceful movements" (Larcom 181). Together, the machines and their workers perform an intricately choreographed ballet. And, indeed, just as the art of ballet consists in maintaining the illusion of effortlessness, metaphorizing mill work as a beautiful dance masks the realities of the women's labor.

This seamless partnership of machine and human also recalls critiques of the factory system by British reformers, who frequently claimed that factory work reduced laborers to mere cogs. The repeated motions of the machines and operatives, beautiful in their precision and synchronicity, as described in the above passages and others like them, do not refute reformers' claims. Rather, such descriptions aestheticize the transmutation of human into machine by transposing the feminine beauty of the former onto the latter and lending a machine-like quality of thoughtless ease to the repeated motions of the women's labor. Such very pretty cogs!

Ideological associations of femininity and domesticity with the descriptions of plants in the Lowell mills coexist with the seemingly unlikely subsistence of the pastoral at the heart of industry. In his landmark survey of 19th-century American literature, *The Machine in the* Garden, Leo Marx famously traced a pattern of industrial disruptions of peaceful pastoral scenery as American literature registered the sudden and shocking rise of industrialization. According to this metanarrative of American identity formation, the bucolic pastoral ideal and the industrial machine are always in tension, a tension the

literature exposed but did not resolve. Some of the *Offering*'s contents are in keeping with Marx's argument. The authors, many of whom grew up in the New England countryside before venturing to Lowell, frequently write longingly about the rural settings of their childhoods. Though few of these writers say so outright, there is the implication that arrival in the comparatively vast City of Spindles demarcated the loss of their wild and carefree New England girlhoods. Their nostalgia for their years of childish innocence, when they romped freely through their native fields and woods, often finds expression through the pastoral mode.

However, on the handful of occasions when the industrial machine is acknowledged in the *Offering*'s pages, the writers gamely attempt a reconciliation between the pastoral and the industrial. I have already mentioned how the author of "Pleasures of Factory Life" effuses about flowering plants giving mills "more the appearance of a flower garden than a workshop" (S.G.B. 1(Dec 1840): 25). Another contributor likens the Lowell factory to a "greenhouse" (Susan 4(Jun 1844): 169), and still another says "one might almost imagine themselves in a summer house" (L.T.H. 5(May 1845): 110). These writers show us, quite literally, the garden in the machine; this is the industrial-pastoral mode I discussed earlier, used to establish Lowell's exceptionalism as a site where the industrial and pastoral achieve synthesis. Nature does not halt at the threshold of the Lowell mills to stage a standoff with industry; rather, it is bid to enter and to flourish under the nurturing care of the female operatives. The happy marriage of the pastoral and the industrial thus hinges upon the domesticating influence attributed to the Lowell mill girl. It is she alone who can tame nature into a flowery bower within the very walls of the factory, a picturesque setting in which to perform her seamless *pas de deux* with the industrial machine.

Yet, even as they officiate the union of the garden and the machine, the above writers also unintentionally register some of the unpleasant realities of their working conditions by comparing the Lowell factory to a greenhouse. Factories were kept warm, humid, and stagnant in order to discourage the delicate cotton threads from breaking—not a comfortable or healthy environment for the workers, but one in which hothouse flowers would most certainly thrive. The muggy and ill-ventilated cotton factory as documented by factory reformers lurks behind these descriptions of the feminized, domesticated, and beautified Lowell mill.

* * *

It is fascinating to consider that the women of Lowell, celebrated for their minds and their graceful femininity, sweated as they labored in the sweltering mills on the same material over which slaves had perspired as they labored under the brutal sun in the South's cotton fields. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this material connection between Southern slaves and New England textile workers is never acknowledged in the pages of the *Offering.*

Nor, due to the *Offering*'s avowed anti-sectarianism, did its writers claim the political affiliation that a significant minority of working-class individuals professed: abolition. British abolitionist Joseph Sturge reported after his visit to Lowell in 1841 that he had been told "many hundreds of the factory girls were members of the Anti-slavery society" (143). For workingwomen, participation in the abolition movement was not just about opposing the evils of slavery but also about asserting their own political power and ameliorating their social standing; as historian Edward Magdol as argued: "These working-

class signers thus asserted their rights as workers and as women virtually at the same time that they joined the protest against enslavement of black laborers" (83).

The workingwomen who signed antislavery petitions were also negotiating their class status by positioning themselves among the ranks of middle-class women activists whose voices were prominent in the movement. Leading female anti-slavery activists like Angelina Grimké spurred a sensational and sentimental "family politics" campaign that attacked slavery on the grounds that it was harmful to the domestic family unit. This line of argument not only came to dominate the abolition movement in the 1840s but also contained the seeds for the nascent American women's rights movement (Husband 13).[54] Abolition was thus, at least in part, a means for working-class women to access middle-class femininity, which, despite all its restrictions, offered relative political and cultural power compared with the calumny often associated with working-class womanhood.

Given the *Offering*'s stated mission to correct public misconceptions about the lack of decency and intelligence among mill women, it might be supposed that advocating for abolition and thus participating in a movement increasingly the milieu of respectable middle-class women would have been appealing. Instead, Farley locates her feminine gentility and that of her fellow writers in their abstention from political subjects:

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[54] In her article, "'The White Slaves of the North': Lowell Mill Woman and the Reproduction of 'Free Labor'" (*Legacy*, 16.1 (1999): 11-21), Julie Husband situates the writings of the *Offering* in the context of anti-slavery reform, specifically the family politics campaign spearheaded by leading female abolitionists. Husband argues that the authors of the *Offering* use metaphors of slavery in order to "promote an understanding of wage labor as a positive alternative both to […] the slavish dependence rural life and family life could entail" (13). She notes that the writers resist direct comparisons between themselves and slaves but does not delve, as I do, into the tensions and contradictions at play when the contributors refuse to be labeled as "white slaves" yet repeatedly draw upon other metaphors of slavery.

> With regard to politics we, as females should do, remain entirely neutral; but we acknowledge no other restrictions. [W]e come before our readers with no manacles upon our wrists, no fetters upon our feet, no chains upon our limbs, no muzzle upon our lips.
>
> The Abolition of Intemperance, Slavery, and War, is now discussed in the different publications dedicated to those subjects; neither are we capable of assisting in their discussion[.] (4(Nov 1843): 24)

Remarkably, in her attempt to assert the "freedom of the press" existing under her editorship while simultaneously defending the propriety of consistently steering clear of controversial hot topics like abolition, Farley deploys a series of metaphors that reference slavery. And not just one metaphor of bondage, but four in a row.

It is hard to imagine that in antebellum America one could mention chains and fetters without summoning the immediate synecdochic association to the unfortunate black slave. Farley's language unconsciously registers the horrors of slavery even as she refuses to take a position against it. The fact that she does not recognize this tension speaks to the symbolic cachet of the slave, especially inside conversations about the new industrial working class. She evokes the slave as the ultimate emblem of freedom denied in order to establish her difference from such an object of abjection, to celebrate that she and her fellow writers are not so trammeled. However, the sheer excess and gratuitousness of Farley's metaphor betrays anxiety that the relationship between the industrial worker and the slave is a closer one than she would like to acknowledge.

In his seminal work, *The Wages of Whiteness* (1991), historian David Roediger identifies the antebellum period as the cultural moment when the words "white" and "worker" became paired in the American consciousness (Roediger 20). Many historians have thoroughly traced the rhetoric of class that emerged at this period with reference to republicanism. However, few until Roediger had considered how this rhetoric was raced as

well as classed and thus needed to be located in the context of slavery, which was "present historically in no other nation during the years of significant working class formation" (Roediger 44; 46). For Roediger, "white slavery" is the key term for mining the complex relationship between class and race in antebellum America, more salient than "wage slavery," which has since dominated in the discourse of labor historians.

At the time Roediger first published his study, scholars had tended to treat "white slavery" and "wage slavery" as synonymous terms. He argues for the necessity of distinguishing them from one another and focusing on the former because it explicitly uses race (and, implicitly, racism) to argue against capitalist abuses and oppressive class structures (Roediger 72). The "white slave" metaphor uses the black slave as the ultimate symbol of degradation, a degradation to which it is implied the white worker should never be subject on the basis of white supremacy, if for no other reason. "White slavery" figured heavily in the rhetoric of both factory reformers and pro-slavery ideologues—the former deployed the term to decry the white worker's subjugation while pro-slavery advocates gleefully seized upon it to argue for the benevolent paternalism of the slave institution by way of contrast with the heartlessness of capitalism. This unexpected rhetorical confluence between opponents of the factory system and advocates of slavery was one of the central reasons labor reform and abolition came to be seen as competing discourses.

For the workers themselves, however, "white slave" was a fraught label. Roediger writes: "Racism, slavery and republicanism thus combined to require comparisons of [industrial workers] and slaves, but the combination also required white workers to distance themselves from Blacks even as the comparisons were being made" (Roediger 66).

He later adds: "To ask workers to *sustain* comparisons of themselves and Black slaves violated at once their republican pride and their sense of whiteness" (Roediger 86).

And, indeed, many of the mentions of slavery in the *Offering* occur in moments when the writers disavow direct comparisons between themselves and black slaves as affronts to their American independence and dignity. Take, for example, this excerpt from an article titled "The Spirit of Discontent," which stages a dialogue between Ellen, an unhappy mill woman, and a first-person narrator, also a mill worker. In response to Ellen's list of grievances about mill labor, the narrator counsels acceptance of their lot as the way to assuage the less pleasant aspects of factory existence:

> "Up before day, at the clang of the bell—and out of the mill by the clang of the bell—into the mill, and at work, in obedience to that ding-dong of a bell—just as though we were so many living machines. I will give my notice to-morrow: go, I will—I won't stay here and be a white slave."
>
> "Ellen," said I, "do you remember what is said of the bee, that it gathers honey even in a poisonous flower? May we not, in like manner, if our hearts are rightly attuned, find many pleasures connected with our employment? Why is it, then, that you so obstinately look altogether on the dark side of a factory life?" (Almira 1(April 1841): 113)

Rather than take on the "white slave" metaphor directly, the narrator counters with another metaphor that seems to have had a lot of traction at the time: the worker as industrious bee. While the slave is degraded because (s)he is a chattel whose labor is not his/her own, the bee flits freely from flower to flower, voluntarily gathering nectar for the good of the collective hive. With its classical and pastoral roots in Virgil's *Georgics*, the industrial bee metaphor summons associations with cheerful (and presumably white) shepherds and shepherdesses and thus had obvious appeal for a New England that still wanted to imagine itself as agrarian.

Actually, though, once the metaphor is probed, the "industrious bee" begins to bear a rather close resemblance to the "white slave." The "worker bee" can easily be made to serve in a critique of capitalist exploitation: it is the beekeeper who reaps the honey, not the diligent drones in their buzzing hive.[55] If, as Roediger says, the "white slave" metaphor tended to collapse under pressure, so too did the metaphor the writers of the *Offering* chose to signify themselves as honest and free workers, most notably with the hive prominently featured in the illustration on magazine's frontispiece, with which this chapter opened its analysis.

In a more hard-hitting example of a contributor to the *Offering* challenging comparisons of factory workers to "white slaves," the author of "A Week in the Mill" eschews metaphor:

> Much has been said of the factory girl and her employment. By some she has been represented as dwelling in a sort of brick-and-mortar paradise, having little to occupy thought save the weaving of gay and romantic fancies, while the spindle or the wheel flies obediently beneath her glance. Others have deemed her a mere service drudge, chained to her labor by almost as strong a power as that which holds a bondman in his fetters; and, indeed, some have already given her the title of "*the white slave of the North*." Her real situation approaches neither one nor the other of these extremes. Her occupation is as laborious as that of almost any female who earns her own living, while it has also its sunny spots and its cheerful intervals, which make her hard labor seem comparatively pleasant and easy. (5(Oct 1845): 217)

This writer is as wearied of the "industrial utopia" metaphor for Lowell, and of her role in sustaining that illusion of factory life, as she is of the opposite extreme in public rhetoric

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[55] There was literary precedent for using the "industrious bee" to critique exploitative work as far back as Mary Collier's poetic epistle, *The Woman's Labor* (1730):

> So the industrious Bees do hourly strive
> To bring their Loads of Honey to the hive;
> Their sordid Owners always reap the Gains
> And poorly recompense their Til and Pains. (lines 243-46)

about mill work: the "white slave of the North." The later issues of the *Offering* contain several instances of this kind of "real talk," as the writers attempt to dispel all of the popular myths about their employment rather than selectively embracing and perpetuating those that reflect positively on their public image. The above author has recognized that the metaphorical transformation of Lowell into an industrial utopia and of its female workers into modern-day shepherdesses minding their obedient looms instead of sheep is as harmful to her interests as the metaphor that aligns her with black slaves; both obfuscate her lived reality. However, by October of 1845, when Farley yielded enough to publish passages like this one, the magazine was already on its deathbed; it was too little, too late.

Although the writers of the *Offering* resisted direct metaphorical comparisons between themselves and black slaves, they nevertheless freely borrowed metaphors of chains and shackles, seemingly without recognizing the contradiction inherent in their emphatic rejection of the former and blithe appropriation of the latter. They wanted to utilize the metaphor while denying the metanymic implications with which it already came laden, an impossible line to draw. As discussed above, Farley is of course a prime exemplar of this synecdochic dissonance, and she is not the only such example. In a piece titled "A Familiar Letter," one author adapts the chains metaphor to reprise a familiar theme in the *Offering*:

> I rejoice that the time has arrived when a class of laboring females (who have long been made a reproach and by-word, by those whom fortune or pride has placed above the avocation by which we have subjected ourselves to the sneers and scoffs of the idle, ignorant and envious part of community,) are bursting asunder the captive chains of prejudice;—that the thick clouds of darkness which have long brooded over the Mills are fleeing before the splendor of light[.] (Dorothea 1(Mar 1841): 61)

Here, the "captive chains of prejudice" stand in for the ignominy the Lowell mill women had suffered in the public eye until the *Offering* enlightened the world as to their true intellectual and moral state. (In another interesting act of erasure and denial, notice how the dark clouds of pollution hovering over the mills get turned into another metaphor for the negative image that the magazine has dispelled!) The chains metaphor is an odd one to use here, really—it is unclear how exactly a bad public reputation would be an impediment to personal liberty. In a rather backward way, the fact that the author feels empowered to draw upon the metaphor of bondage and even to apply it where it isn't completely apt to her meaning all serves to reinforce her distance from the slave; she can freely (mis)handle the metaphor as she likes and ignore the context in which it does have clear applications; denial is her white privilege, and vice versa.[56]

Still another piece in the *Offering* employs the chains metaphor to more ambiguous purposes. A poem called "My Country's Flag" contains two successive stanzas that read as follows:

> My country's Flag! wave, wave on,
> Till aristocracy shall cease,
> And every eye shall greet the dawn,
> Of liberty, the morn of peace!
> Till every being on our soil
> Shall eat the free reward of toil
> And every chain, and serpent-coil,
> Before thy silken folds shall flee,
> And God's own image stand forth free.
>
> My country's Flag! what varied thought
> Betakes me, while I gaze on Thee!
> What images are interwrought
> With thy auspicious motto—Free!

[56] Of course, metaphors of chains and bondage were common in nineteenth-century literature, so to a degree this writer and others in the *Offering* are deploying common clichés. But the clichés become particularly loaded in the mouths of factory workers.

In contrast with myself, 'tis pain,
Because I may not break the chain
Which holds me back from yonder plain,
    Where knowledge grows on every tree,
    For every favored devotee. (Adelaide 1(April 1841): 15-6)

Upon an initial read, the first stanza seems to be a stunning acknowledgement of the material conditions of slavery, stunning because so rare in the context of the *Offering.* The chains appear to make metaphorical reference to the slave's condition as an unfree laborer and perhaps also literal reference to the actual chains with which slaves would be bound on auction blocks and in coffles. However, the second stanza prompts a revision of the first. There, it is the writer herself who is metaphorically fettered by unequal access to resources for the cultivation of knowledge, presumably due to the limitations of her class status—the chain that holds her back is the compulsion to labor for her living, which limits the time she may dedicate to pursuing knowledge, a frequent subject of discussion in the magazine.

Reread in this light, the first stanza begins to look like a Marxist critique of the alienation of labor and of the establishment of hierarchical class structures under capitalism. This line of argument, too, is quite rare in the pages of the *Offering* and is an exception worth highlighting and touting. But, welcome though this critique of capitalism is in a magazine otherwise engaged in a robust defense of the factory system and all it stands for, the poem's commentary on class-based oppression is also disappointing in that it comes at the expense of an antislavery argument. For the first stanza to be consonant with the second, only the Marxist interpretation of the first stanza is viable. Thus, in the experience of the reader, the poem articulates a critique of slavery only to then invalidate it as incommensurate with and less important than the poem's class critique. In this way, the author's use of the chains metaphor functions much like the "white slave" metaphor in the

mouths of factory reformers: the slave is summoned momentarily and then made to disappear again as serves the rhetorical maneuverings of the writer.

* * *

Among Southern advocates for the slave institution, the factory system held surprising appeal beyond just the rhetorical purposes to which proslavery propagandists were able to turn "white slavery." As I mentioned in my previous chapter, major Southern social and politico-economic theorists like George Fitzhugh defined capitalism as anathema to the plantation lifestyle. According to this ideology, Southern aristocratic identity was in part premised upon the leisurely pace of life on a plantation, as opposed to the harried pace of the industrial North. But, in order to argue for the economic efficacy of slavery, Southerners also needed to promote the efficiency of the plantation,[57] resulting in an ideological tension such that there are moments in the literature of the antebellum South when the cheerful bustle of the plantation resembles the bustle of the Northern mill. And, indeed, as plantation masters voyaged North in the decades leading up to the Civil War and made the obligatory stopover in Lowell, there witnessing the factory system in all its glory, the resemblance between plantation and mill in some cases became a very intentional one.

As the counterpart to Frederick Law Olmsted's epistles documenting his observations of the Southern physical and cultural landscape, the *Southern Literary Messenger* ran a series of "Letters from New England," written by "a Virginian," from

[57] For a full discussion of the Southern planter's embracement of clock time and what this meant for the South's relationship to capitalism, see Mark M. Smith, *Mastered by the Clock: Time, Slavery, and Freedom in the American South*, Chapel Hill: The University of South Carolina Press, 1997.

November of 1834 to April of 1835. In the letter published in the February issue, the author expresses his disappointment that the New England mill towns he visited belied his negative expectations:

> It is the Southern opinion, that the large factories which have grown up in the North, within the last seventeen years, are of a very demoralizaing tendency: that so many persons—*such* persons too—cannot be housed together, and allowed the free intercourse unavoidable where the restraint is not for crime, without a large results of licentiousness and vice. I have long thought thus: and must confess I entered New England with a sort of *wish* (arising from my hostility to the protective system,) to have the opinion confirmed. In some places, I heard and saw confirmation strong: but in most—and those the chief seats of manufactures—my inquiries resulted directly otherwise. (1.6: 273)

Quite the victory for proponents of the factory system to have wrung out of a disgruntled Southerner the admission that even the factory in New England partakes of upright Yankee morality! This writer reveals that the degraded image of the mill worker that the *Offering* strove to repudiate had its appeal for Southerners. Resentful of protective tariffs that benefitted Northern manufacturers at the expense of Southern purveyors of the raw materials that fed the manufactories, this nameless Virginian looked to find evidence in New England of the moral (and sexual) corruption so strongly associated with the major British mill towns—a kind of rot at the heart of the capitalist enterprise that might foretell its demise.

The Virginian comforts himself by somewhat presciently predicting the collapse of the American industrial utopia. He projects that the "desire to conciliate favor to the system [that] keeps both owners and operatives upon *their best behavior* [emphasis his]" will eventually lapse into complacency. At that point, the mill towns "will shew themselves rank hot beds of vice; and make the lover of good morals grieve, that so many souls should ever have been seduced from the healthful air of the field, and forest, and rustic fireside, to

sicken and die in a tainted, unnatural atmosphere" (1.6: 273). Here we again see the overlap of labor reform and proslavery politics, as this member of the Southern master class bemoans the unhealthy working conditions in the factories, which he did not actually witness but insists upon as an impending reality. He draws an unflattering comparison between industrial labor in the close environment of the factory and agricultural labor in the open air amid the signs of picturesque rusticity—a vision of the agrarian ideal that could represent for this writer both New England's lost rural past and the South's bucolic present.

If the seeming success, both economic and social, of the New England factory system was disappointing for the above writer at an ideological level, other Southern visitors were more amenable to the system's appeal at a practical level. Yet another nameless Virginian author, in an essay called "Yankee Improvements in Virginia" and published in the *The Southern Planter* in 1845, argues for the utility of drawing upon the example of the industrial North to benefit the languishing South. Although *The Southern Planter* was a publication that tended to prioritize the pragmatics of agricultural improvements over ideology, it is nevertheless remarkable that this article found a home there, for the author somehow moves smoothly between quotidian agricultural advice and vast political and economic argument.

The author credits the time he spent in the North for the clarity with which he perceives the South. Over the course of six pages, amid technical discussions of various more or less effective farming methods, he rather casually proposes sweeping changes to the very foundations of Southern society. He writes of the potential for a little "Northern enterprise and industry" to "resuscitate the prosperity of the Old Dominion," a great state

that has fallen into degeneracy due to "the course of idleness and extravagance which has impoverished so large a portion of Eastern Virginia" (5.11: 241; 242). As compared to many a planter given to griping about the laziness of the slave population, this author locates responsibility for Southern indolence among the master classes. And not only does he venture to reveal the supposed aristocratic leisure of the planter as degeneracy and dissipation, he argues for the advantages of free labor, rather than slave labor, for nurturing industriousness at all levels of society (5.11: 243). All this, in between such mundane and detailed discussions as the use of fish offal to enrich the soil and the potential benefits of sheep pasturage. He manages to strike a tone that conveys both casualness and conviction; this combination, together with his expertise, differs starkly from the sensationalism so frequent on both sides of the debate over slave versus wage labor.

In a further controversial move, he goes beyond championing Northern industriousness and free labor as changes to the preexisting agrarian culture and economy in the South—he actually suggests that the South become a manufacturing power in its own right. In other words, rather than merely implementing Northern strategies to make the plantation—the institution at the center of the Southern economy—function more efficiently, he proposes decentering the plantation and complementing it with the factory. The common Southern view that the protective tariffs issued by the federal government are an unfair imposition and burden on the South he rejects as a "delusive dream" (5.11: 247). In the view of this idiosyncratic Virginian, if the South resents its status as an internal colony, it need only take its abundant resources and manufacture them for itself, making the plantation serve the factory from within the South rather than across the Mason-Dixon line. He thus anticipates the rise of the Southern factory in the twentieth century.

If Northern mill towns, and particularly Lowell, attracted practically minded Southern planters because of the ingenuity of the factory technology and efficiency of timed labor, Lowell had another source of appeal for the more romantically inclined Southerners: its famed mill women. In an article from 1845 called "The Factory System" that was first published in the *Louisville Journal* and then reprinted in *The Southern Agriculturist*, the author, who goes by the initials T.S.K., recounts his favorable impressions of a visit to Lowell.[58] Like others of his Southern brethren, he marvels that "the most perfect order, system, and regularity were everywhere exhibited" (5.2: 51). He is also impressed by the hustle and bustle pervasive in the factories he visits: "As we passed through the building, from floor to floor, everybody was busy at work. Ten thousand spindles whirled with unceasing motion" (5.2 51). However, he seems most impressed by, and dedicates considerable space to describing, the female workers:

> A thousand girls, and more, were busily engaged around us—fair and beautiful maidens from sixteen to eighteen or twenty years of age. Their straight, well-turned figures, tall and graceful, showed that they had just expanded into womanhood. The blush of modesty tinged their downy cheeks, their expressive eyes beamed with intelligence, and around their ruby lips played sweet smiles, so saucy and so tempting, that my heart swelled and thumped like a pheasant drumming on a log. (5.2: 52)

What is notable in this writer's depiction of the Lowell mill women is the extent to which he eroticizes them as he lingers over their girlish figures, their blushing cheeks, their beaming eyes, and their ruby lips that manage to be both sweet and tempting. The comparison of

[58] The editors for *The Southern Agriculturist* preface the piece: "We invite all those who are politically or otherwise unfriendly to the factory system, to read the following interesting article" (5.2: 49). Clearly, they are anticipating that most of their readers espouse similar prejudice to that expressed by the anonymous Virginian in *The Southern Literary Messenger*.

his beating heart to a pheasant drumming on a log clinches it, for the male pheasant's drumming was often thought to be a mating display.

The author continues his fervid homage to Yankee beauty, drawing a comparison between laboring women and women of leisure: "These females, with the fresh and rosy hues of health, and the bloom of youth upon their cheeks, would have formed a galaxy of beauty, by the side of whom the sickly-looking, pale-faced, cotton-stuffed, ball-room bells of other cities would seem like so many Egyptian mummies!" (5.2: 52). The term "bells" here cannot help but invoke the famed Southern belles, who, for this libidinous Southerner, literally and metaphorically pale beside their vivacious sisters in the North. To his ardent eyes, leisure, upon which Southern womanhood in particular was staked, becomes morbid lifelessness in contrast with the vitality (and desirability) the women of Lowell are lent by their labor. The sex appeal of labor is enough to convert this Southern gentleman to the wisdom of Yankee industry and to have him lancing barbs at Southern femininity and thus indirectly at fundamental tenets of plantation culture. Behold the power of the Lowell mill girl!

This author is certainly not the first male visitor to sexualize the female workers in his account of touring the mills. Indeed, Lowell had a reputation as a site where a bachelor could go to find himself a likely young wife, a rustic beauty who would be an ornament to any man's hearth but who also wouldn't scruple to give it a thorough scrubbing from time to time. This was a reputation the *Offering* helped to further. In many of the *Offering*'s stories that take Lowell as their setting, the virtuous mill-woman protagonist is rewarded for her strength of character by marriage to a successful young professional who catches sight of her in the streets or mills and is struck by her combined comeliness, intelligence,

virtue, and, importantly, her Yankee work ethic.[59] Aside from how overt T.S.K. is, with his frank appreciation for the female form and unsubtle language of mating, what makes his account interesting is that it documents the appeal of the Lowell mill woman, as a prime product and symbol of Yankee ideology, for the Southern gentleman.

While many of the romantic fictions about New England mill life, in the *Offering* or otherwise, achieve resolution by promoting their worthy mill-girl heroines into the New England middle class through marriage to a doctor or lawyer or mill owner's son, there also existed the fantasy of being whisked away to the exotic South by a debonair Southern gentleman. An article in the penultimate issue of the *Offering* is interested in establishing that the fantasy of marriage to a suave and prosperous Southerner had its origins in reality. Titled "Factory Romance," the piece opens with a series of epigraphs, all of them newspaper snippets about the romantic triumphs of Lowell mill women. The first of these, drawn from a local Lowell paper, goes as follows:

> **Factory Girls**. A rich southern man on a visit to this city, happened to find at work in one of the factories, a beautiful girl, the perfection of his ideal, to whom he at length was introduced, and finding her all he desired, by the consent of her friends, and amid the congratulations of many, she became his blushing bride, and has gone to preside over his home in the sunny South. The realities and romances of the factories are many and interesting.—*Lowell Vox Populi.* (Annette 5 (Nov 1845): 253)

The next epigraph, from *The Boston Traveller*, casts doubt on the truthfulness of this report and others like it. The author of "Factory Romance" takes issue with *The Boston Traveller*'s classist insinuations that the marriage of a wealthy Southerner to a mere mill woman could not possibly be real:

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[59] See, for instance, the tales "Prejudice Against Labor" (1 (Apr 1941): 136-45) and "The Country Lawyer" (1 (Apr 1841): 274-77).

> [The] Southron, who found here the "*beau ideal*" of his fancy, why should we doubt it with the Boston Traveller? Verily, he never has travelled through the mills of Lowell, or he would know that here very many might be suited to his taste, provided he was willing to see the same beauties and excellences in a Lowell factory girl that he could espy in another lady of more fortunate circumstances. (Annette 5 (Nov 1845): 254)

This paragraph reads almost as an advertisement alerting any other single Southern men of means that there are plenty of model wives for the asking in Lowell.

Regardless whether the marriage reported in the *Lowell Vox Populi* partakes more of fact or fiction, that such a union would be celebrated as a real-life romance is significant—through the magic that marriage works upon women's identities, the Southron's "blushing bride" has been transformed from a "white slave of the North" into a proper and prosperous Southern wife, perhaps even a plantation mistress with slaves of her own. And, indeed, who better to help oversee the efficient functioning of the plantation than a former mill girl? I am reminded of Lucretia in Kennedy's *Swallow Barn* (1832), whose suitability for her role as planation mistress is demonstrated not by her aristocratic refinement but rather by the strict oversight she exercises over the team of female slaves who busily spin, weave, and sew fabric with which to clothe the plantation's slave population. It is hard to imagine the prototypical Southern belle leaving the rarified environment of the ballroom to preside over Lucretia's pseudo-factory. By contrast, it is easy to see how the vital Lowell mill women in T.S.K's descriptions might be Lucretias in the making. What was hoped for through the union between a Southern planter and a Northern factory worker was the happy marriage of the plantation system with the factory system.

* * *

While the factory system and the women who operated inside it held attractions for Southerners, the inverse was also true: the South held certain appeal for mill workers. The novel *Norton; Or the Lights and Shades of a Factory Village* (1849), written by an author who went simply by "Argus," documents the call of the South for Lowell operatives. Opening with the arrival in Lowell of a mysterious, well-to-do Southerner travelling under the name Norton, the story at first reads like a fictionalized version of the romance between a Southron and a Lowell mill woman reported in the *Vox Populi*. Shortly after his arrival, Norton strikes up a conversation in the street with a demurely attractive mill woman, introduced as Miss Catherine Elliston. She recommends Lowell's various sights to Norton, and he asks if the mill women "carelessly sauntering up and down this walk" number among the town's "*curiousities* [sic]" (4). Norton and Catherine then have the following exchange:

> "I did not think of those when I spoke; but still, should you choose to designate them as curiosities, I will not object, and only say you will find the *curiousity* [sic] plentiful here, and of various characters. Perhaps you come to seek a wife, sir?"
>
> The stranger smiled. "I cannot say as to what my object really was, when I first contemplated a visit to your city. Amusement, for a time, might have been it; a desire to view your stupendous manufactories, and observe the working of their highly improved machinery might have been another; and then, above all, as you just suggested, it might have been to see the fair *demoiselles*, and get a wife."
>
> "You will find but little trouble, then, in the accomplishment of your plans, if the last was your object. Wives are to be had for the asking here." (4-5)

The speed with which Catherine jumps to the conclusion that Norton has travelled all the way to Lowell from the deep South to search for a wife speaks volumes about the town's reputation as hunting grounds for suitable helpmeets, as does Norton's offhand reply. It doesn't take a terribly prescient reader to predict that Miss Elliston herself will become Norton's spouse by the tale's end.

But their romance forms only a small part of the plot. Over the course of the novel, we learn that Norton's real name is Ned Church and that he used to be a laborer in a Lowell factory himself before he was coerced into committing a crime by his malicious overseer. He fled South and built a successful career for himself as a cotton factor, first in New Orleans and then in Galveston, Texas. No one in Lowell, not even his mother and sister, recognize him because his complexion has been so altered by the tropical Southern clime. In an interesting way, Norton's backstory is a reversal of the slave narrative. The South for him represents a sanctuary and a land of opportunity where he can shed his working class roots and achieve middle class respectability. His darkened complexion allows him to "pass" as Southern.

The main thrust of the plot involves Norton's attempt to save the reputation of his sister, Julia, who is also a mill worker. Julia is charming but capricious and does not quite possess Catherine Ellison's sterling virtue, which makes her easy prey for a libertine lawyer who pretends to woo her in order to lure her to her ruin.

In between trying (and failing) to prevent Julia's disgrace, Norton finds time to do some wooing of his own. In his conversations with Catherine, he uses the romance attached to the South as an exotic, semi-tropical locale to attract her: "He spoke to her of the South.—He told of its scenery, its climate, and its productions; he described to her a cotton field, a rice swamp, a tobacco plantation; its rivers, its bayous, its cane brakes, its trees, its flowers" (22). By speaking of the South's productions alongside its exotic scenery, Norton demonstrates his business acumen as an additional enticement to Catherine. Even as his exoticization of Southern locales emphasizes their physical distance from New England settings, as a cotton factor he makes a living by eradicating distance, both real and

imagined, in order to facilitate close economic interdependency between North and South. Needless to say, slavery goes unmentioned in Norton's Southern landscape, though buying and selling slaves for planter clients would likely have fallen under the purview of his services—cotton factors brokered all variety of goods for their clients, thus buffering plantation masters from direct involvement in the crassness of capitalist exchange.

Norton is the rare antebellum literary character with a working knowledge of the full extent of the cotton industry in the United States, in a position to make the material and political associations between the enslaved field laborer in Louisiana and the waged textile worker in Massachusetts. On this subject, the novel nevertheless maintains a determined silence. By the story's close, Norton marries Catherine and takes his new wife and his disgraced, pregnant sister back down South with him. Julia then conveniently dies, leaving Catherine and Norton to live in marital bliss and economic comfort on his earnings as a purveyor of Southern cotton—perhaps to the very Lowell mills in which they both used to labor. To have recognized the omnipresence of slavery in this narrative of rapprochement between North and South would have implicated not only the two regions but also the two lovers as profiting from its perpetuation and tainted the novel's happy ending.

In some ways, the marriage in *Norton* partakes of a fantasy similar to that entertained in the many factory romances that culminate in a marriage between a female laborer and a mill owner or mill owner's son, a union that represents the potential for working women to advance up the social and economic ladder from within the cotton industry.[60] A dedicated male mill worker could hope one day to be promoted to overseer

[60] See, for example, Clara Augusta's "The Factory Girl" (*Petersen's Magazine* 39 (1861): 230-4); the anonymously authored "Eleanor Mallows" (*Olive Leaf, and New-England Operative* 1.11 (Sept 1843): 81-84); George W. Goode's *Kathie, the Overseer's Daughter; or Love and*

and thus climb the ranks (or, in the case of Norton, leverage his working knowledge of cotton to become successful as a Southern cotton factor); marriage to a powerful man in the industry was the working-class woman's (largely illusory) alternative.

These are the fairy tales of the cotton industry: instead of the virtuous and beautiful young peasant woman, we have the virtuous and beautiful mill girl, and instead of the rebellious prince of the realm, we have the rebellious mill owner's son. The hero's family always opposes the match, but eventually love prevails, usually because the heroine receives an unexpected change in status when an unknown, wealthy relative bequeaths a fortune upon her; the class system is thus preserved intact. The tales that end in such fashion are sure to speak of the patronage the heroine shows her former co-workers, often encouraging her husband to improve their working conditions. Marriage within the industry thus becomes an opportunity for small-scale and localized reform, but, as with most fairy tales, the driving impetus is conservative. The minor improvements that the new power couple institute are ultimately in the interest of promoting and maintaining the factory system. After all, their "happy ever after" is contingent upon the system's continued operation in much the same way that Norton and Catherine's happiness is.

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Life at the Loom (New York and Lowell: Factory Publishing Co., 1887); Laura Jean Libbey's "Ionie, the Pride of the Mill; or, The Daughter of a Knight of Labor" (*The New York Ledger* 430-44 (3 Dec 1887 – 25 Feb 1888); also by Laura Jean Libbey, *A Master Workman's Oath; or, Coralie, the Unfortunate* (New York: J. S. Ogilvie Publishing Company, 1892); or William Mason Turner's *Maggie; or, The Loom Girl of Lowell* (New York: Norman L. Munro, 1883).

The "City of Spindles" was not just a draw for American tourists; the "Manchester of America" was also an obligatory stop for most British and European travelers embarked on an American tour. Dickens, Harriet Martineau, and Anthony Trollope all passed through Lowell and later directed published accounts of their experiences at a British audience. Writing in the context of British factory reform, these authors end up being complicit in producing and sustaining the myth of American exceptionalism as it was instantiated through Lowell. Americans and Britons alike positioned Lowell, with its purported happy blending of the pastoral and the industrial, as the foil to smoky, squalid Manchester. Two lacunae gape wide inside these prominent British authors' writings on Lowell: the interior of the mills, which these authors continually promise to deliver and never do, and the absent presence of the Manchester mill girl, who continually hovers on their texts' periphery.

Dickens was without doubt the most celebrated British visitor, as well as one of the earliest. His account thus established expectations for subsequent British travelers and set the tone for their reportage. He spent a day in Lowell during his trip through America from January to June of 1842 and dedicated an entire chapter in *American Notes for General Circulation* (1842) to recounting his experience traveling to and touring the city that had so quickly become renowned as the representative site of Yankee industry and ingenuity. His praise of Lowell, and particularly of the *Lowell Offering*, was endlessly quoted by other writers and reviewers and oft-cited in the pages of the *Offering* itself. His international clout as a literary celebrity and respected social reformer meant his positive review was the ultimate indicator of the *Lowell Offering*'s legitimacy and, by extension, that of the American industrial system.

While the authors of the *Lowell Offering* drew upon Dickens's name and words to bolster their reputation, Dickens in turn deployed their writings and images to further his own political and social agenda back on the other side of the Atlantic. Factory reform would not take off in the United States until the beginning of the 20th century,[61] but in Britain the movement had already long been thriving in public and political discourse. Over two decades before Lowell was even a dot on a map, British Parliament had been embroiled in debating factory reform and passing factory legislation, beginning with the Health and Morals of Apprentices Act of 1802. In the early part of the century, British reformers focused almost entirely on improving conditions and decreasing hours for children laboring in the mills. The reform movement's imagery and rhetoric centered around tear-jerking portraits of hapless orphaned children conscripted into grueling toil or graphic descriptions of tiny limbs crushed by merciless machinery. The Factory Act of 1844 was the first that regulated hours for women workers, as well as children and young people. This act thus indicates that a significant shift had taken place in the reform movement's strategy and ideology: alongside the image of a sickly and stunted child laborer, the stereotype of the physically and morally degraded mill girl appeared as a sign of the debased factory system and its harmful influence. However, while the child had been

[61] This delay was at least in part due to the pervasive notion that abolition and factory reform were competing discourses. After the Emancipation Proclamation and the termination of the Civil War, Reconstruction then took precedence on the national agenda. It was a tragedy in the early twentieth century that brought factory reform to the forefront in America: in 1911, the Triangle Shirtwaist Company in Manhattan went up in flames, killing 146 workers, who were trapped inside because of the then common practice by which manufacturers would lock doors in order to ensure against unauthorized breaks. The ensuing public outrage prompted the New York Legislature to take action and also motivated unionization efforts among laborers.

a passive victim crying out for paternal intervention and care, the mill girl was depicted as complicit in, if not wholly responsible for, her own degradation.

British factory reform was the immediate sociopolitical context into which Dickens's discussion of Lowell in *American Notes* intervened. For the sake of the implicit contrast with Manchester's notoriety, and particularly that of its workingwomen, it suits Dickens's purposes to embrace and perpetuate Lowell's shining reputation. As Katja Kanzer puts it: "Dickens takes his visit of Lowell as an opportunity to articulate a strong criticism of social conditions at home. In the process, he frames Lowell as a role model, an exceptional and exemplary place that should inspire reflections on social justice" (Kanzler 565). I am interested in the silences he becomes complicit in maintaining in order to preserve Lowell's mythology.

From the opening lines of the chapter, Dickens is careful to set his commentary on Lowell apart from the rest of *American Notes*, in which he largely portrays Americans as uncouth and their society as underdeveloped: "I assign a separate chapter to this visit; not because I am about to describe it at any great length, but because I remember it as a thing by itself, and am desirous that my readers should do the same" (72). While he does not spare the rest of America from cutting critique, it as though he turns off his critical capacity when approaching Lowell, and he asks his readership to do the same. Indeed, this reticence and refusal to "go there" becomes Dickens's strategy throughout the chapter.

Dickens's insistence on Lowell as "a thing by itself" is disingenuous, for this the city could never be. As the earlier portions of this chapter attest, Lowell already signified intensely in its own regional and national context. Writing first and foremost for his readership back home, Dickens exploits the fact that Lowell was also already laden with

significance in a transatlantic context. It would have been impossible to mention Lowell without conjuring the full range of symbolic associations it had accrued: to praise Lowell was to heap contumely on its inverse, Manchester; to evoke the image of the clean, healthy, and demure Lowell maiden was to summon her opposite, the slatternly, hectic, and indecent Manchester mill woman. Directing his own and his reader's critical gaze away from Lowell is actually a clever maneuver; in so doing, Dickens tacitly displaces any criticism onto Manchester.

He begins his description of his time in Lowell in an oddly defensive mode, declaring that he went over several factories and "saw them in their ordinary working aspect, with no preparation of any kind, or departure from their ordinary every-day proceedings." His anxiety to attest that he saw the reality of mill life in Lowell, not a neat performance rigged up for his benefit, reveals his sense of his British audience's skepticism and jadedness. After decades of intensive debate about factory reform, Dickens seems to assume that the British public will have little patience for wide-eyed optimism about the American system. He is at pains to establish the legitimacy of the positive impressions he will proceed to air, as well as the validity of his own credentials: "I may add that I am well acquainted with our manufacturing towns in England, and have visited many mills in Manchester and elsewhere in the same manner" (76). As I will further discuss in my next chapter, Dickens somewhat overstates his qualifications and familiarity with Manchester; by "well acquainted," he means that in 1838 he had stopped over in Manchester on his way to vacation in North

Wales. He did tour a couple factories while there, but that was the full extent of his personal acquaintance, about as intimate as he was with Lowell.[62]

Of the interior of the factories, Dickens has little to say, despite claiming to have "examined them in every part" (76). In the entire chapter on Lowell, he expends only two sentences in describing the physical environment in which he observes the mill women at their labor: "The rooms in which they worked, were as well ordered as themselves. In the windows of some, there were green plants, which were trained to shade the glass; in all, there was as much fresh air, cleanliness, and comfort, as the nature of the occupation would possibly admit of" (77). His first statement insistently returns the reader's focus to the image of a tidy mill girl, immediately deflecting attention from her surroundings. His last remark signifies little when it is remembered that "the nature of the occupation" did not allow for much "fresh air, cleanliness, and comfort," even under the best of circumstances. Dickens's realist penchant for rendering vivid descriptions of interior spaces is here suspended. Instead of the detailed picture of the factory setting of which he is capable, he satisfies himself with tautologies and vague half-truths. Of the actual labor the women perform in these mills, he is silent.

On the subject of the mill girls themselves, however, Dickens is more forthcoming. The workingwomen's manner of dress is the first detail he latches onto:

> They were all well dressed, but not to my thinking above their condition: for I like to see the humbler classes of society careful of their dress and appearance, and even, if they please, decorated with such little trinkets as come within the compass of their means. Supposing it confined within reasonable limits, I could always encourage this kind of pride, as a worthy element of self-respect, in any person I employed; and

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[62] See Philip Collins, "Dickens and Industrialization" (*Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 20.4 (Autumn 1980): 651-73).

> should [not] be deterred from doing so, because some wretched female referred her fall to a love of dress[.] (76)

Dickens's British context is apparent in the speed and ease with which he slides from a discussion of the respectable workingwoman's dress to the "fallen" workingwoman's dress. Several years before Elizabeth Gaskell in *Mary Barton* (1848) would write that Esther's status as a prostitute was "told by her faded finery," the type of the former-factory-girl-turned-prostitute, whose love of finery was both her undoing and the emblem of her disgrace, was already notorious in the British public imaginary. While Dickens does refute that the link between love of dress and prostitution is inherent, he nevertheless misattributes the erroneous claim that fancy dress is both the cause and the sign of the former workingwoman's disgrace. He places it on the lips of the factory-worker-turned-prostitute, heaping his mockery onto her head, rather than attributing it to the actual originators of that type: middle-class reformers.[63] The omnipresence of this figure inside British reform rhetoric is a convention way out of proportion with historical reality. She is largely an invention onto which Victorians could displace anxieties about urbanization and the increasing presence and visibility of the working class.[64]

The Lowell mill women, as Dickens presents them, pose little threat to the fashionable middle classes. He states: "These girls, as I have said, were all well dressed: and that phrase necessarily includes extreme cleanliness. They had serviceable bonnets,

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[63] Dickens's personal investment in reform efforts geared at "fallen women" is well documented, particularly his close involvement with the wealthy philanthropist Angela Burnett-Coutts and her project, Urania Cottage, which was a home for the redemption of prostitutes.

[64] Even the supposed omnipresence of the "common prostitute," let alone the factory-worker-turned-prostitute, was out of proportion with reality. See Judith Walkowitz's *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class, and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

good warm cloaks, and shawls; and were not above clogs and pattens" (76). In their "serviceable" bonnets, shawls, and clogs, the Lowell female operatives seem designed to evoke a nostalgic ideal of the countrified peasant class rather than a realistic image of the contemporary urban working class. By conflating orderly dress and cleanliness, Dickens here calls to mind Anne McClintock's discussion of the "Victorian obsession with cotton and cleanliness" in *Imperial Leather.* In her far-ranging consideration of soap as both a material product of empire and a powerful symbol in the Victorian imaginary, she speaks of the urge to represent "a purified working class magically cleansed of polluting labor." Exploring the effects of this culture of denial, she ultimately claims that "the middle class Victorian fascination with clean, white bodies and clean, white clothing" served to uphold "the uncertain boundaries of class, gender and race identity in a social order felt to be threatened by the fetid effluvia of the slums, the belching smoke of industry, social agitation, economic upheaval, imperial competition and anticolonial resistance" (McClintock 211).

Dickens positions the Lowell mill girls as just such a bulwark. In their orderliness and cleanliness, Dickens's American factory girls do not confront the viewer with the signs of their poverty; indeed, they appear immune to the depredations of the capitalist economy and of the unequal class structure on which it is premised. Their clean, white bodies erase the taint of middle-class consumer guilt. Moreover, in that they simultaneously summon a nostalgic, agrarian past and gesture toward a utopian, industrial future, they stand as an assurance of the class system's stability and perpetuity.

Consequently, Dickens is willing to concede their humanity, or at least he comes close: "They were healthy in appearance, many of them remarkably so, and had the

manners and deportment of young women: not of degraded brutes of burden" (76-7). As if mute beasts were the logical alternative to well-behaved women! He's not quite willing to say with absolute certainty that the laborers he observes have the full status of "young women," but he is satisfied that they make a good show of it at least. If there is any doubt as to who Dickens has in mind when he expresses relief that these female factory workers do not exhibit the deportment and manners of "degraded brutes of burden," his next words make that abundantly clear:

> If I had seen in one of those mills (but I did not, though I looked for something of this kind with a sharp eye), the most lisping, mincing, affected, and ridiculous young creature that my imagination could suggest, I should have thought of the careless, moping, slatternly, degraded, dull reverse (I *have* seen that), and should have been still well pleased to look upon her. (76-7)

As the negative image against which Dickens defines the Lowell mill girl, the figure of the Manchester mill girl in all her infamy suddenly looms large, trumping even the danger of a lisping coquette. The litany of negative adjectives with which he conjures the notorious figure of Manchester's shame places the blame for the dishonor she brings to herself and to the nation squarely on her own shoulders. Dickens would rather see a member of the working class aping the upper classes (for there is self-affirming flattery in that) than have to look upon a worker who is utterly worn down by her poverty.

Dickens's most frequently cited quotation about Lowell is the following rather qualified praise of the *Offering*:

> Of the merits of the Lowell Offering as a literary production, I will only observe, putting entirely out of sight the fact of the articles having been written by these girls after the arduous labours of the day, that it will compare advantageously with a great many English Annuals. It is pleasant to find that many of its Tales are of the Mills and of those who work in them; that they inculcate habits of self-denial and contentment, and teach good doctrines of enlarged benevolence. (83)

Though oft-cited in the pages of the *Offering* itself, this quotation is hardly offering unmitigated praise. The comparison to "a great many English Annuals" reflects the gendered scale of equality Dickens is using, since annuals were primarily marketed to female audiences and generally deemed to be trivial fluff. While his compliments about the *Offering*'s quality of writing are a bit dual edged, Dickens is clear in praising its content for its conservative qualities. His memory is a bit faulty, however, when he says that "many of its Tales are of the Mills." The *Offering* is nearly as silent about the interior of the mills and the labor its writers there perform as is Dickens himself.

Nor is Dickens alone in misremembering this characteristic of the *Offering*'s contents or in neglecting to provide his own description of Lowell's mills. During her tour of America in the mid-1830s, Harriet Martineau paid a visit to Lowell in the company of Emerson, who was there to lecture at the Lyceum. She later had a major hand in the dissemination and afterlife of the *Offering* in Britain. While she was confined to a sickbed in the early 1840s, she was sent several of the early issues of the *Offering* for her perusal. Martineau was so impressed that she brought the magazine to the attention of Charles Knight, who, in his capacity as superintendent for the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, had already published several affordable works aimed at working-class audiences. Martineau persuaded Knight to publish excerpts from the *Offering*, and the collection of selections appeared in London under the title *Mind Amongst the Spindles* in 1844. The miscellany is framed by a preface by Knight and a letter from Martineau describing her experience in Lowell and expressing her approbation for the *Offering.*

Throughout the preface, Knight takes his cue from Dickens, who he praises as the "writer whose original and brilliant genius is always under the direction of kindly feeling

towards his fellow-creatures, and especially towards the poor and lowly of his human brethren" (xii). Like Dickens, Knight commends the authors of the *Offering* for having the good sense to maintain modest aspirations and to write only what they know:

> They have no affectations of gentility; and by a natural consequence they are essentially free from all vulgarity. They describe the scenes amongst which they live, their labours, and their pleasures, the little follies of some of their number, the pure tastes and unexpensive enjoyments of others. They feel, and constantly proclaim without any effort that they think it an honour to labour with their hands. (ix-x)

Knight, too, was a highly selective reader of the magazine. These two major players inside both the literary world and the reform world prove adept at seeing only what they want to see in the *Offering*. The Lowell women's writings are useful to Dickens and Knight insofar as they can be made to suggest what the working class of England *should* be. Writing his preface for the British working-class readership at which his series' was targeted, Knight's tacit message is that British workers, like their Lowell counterparts of which he so approves, should be educated and mannerly but still know their place and be content to labor.

Knight also manifests a somewhat unexpected investment in the Puritan roots of the Lowell mill women. He is impressed by the "genuine patriotism in the tone of many of these productions, which is worthy of the descendants of the stern freemen who, in the New England solitudes, looked tearfully back upon their fatherland" (x). As the daughters of these hardy and resolute forbears who carved the American republic out of an untamed wilderness, the working women of Lowell are supposed to have inherited a firm faith in their independent wills and a commitment to the personal responsibility for self-improvement.

It can thus be asserted, as Martineau goes on to do in her framing letter, that the differences between the working population in New England and that in Northern England are due not to tangible economic or sociopolitical factors whose causes can be located in external systems but rather to intangibles like mental fortitude: "The difference is not in rank […]. It is not in the amount of wages […]. It is not in the amount of toil […]. The difference was in their superior culture. Their minds are kept fresh, and strong, and free by knowledge and power of thought; and this is the reason why they are not worn and depressed under their labours" (xviii). She thus puts the idealized Lowell mill girls to work in favor of conservative British politics. The daughter of a manufacturer, Martineau had launched her literary career with her widely read *Illustrations of Political Economy* (1832-4), a collection of stories designed to elucidate and disseminate Adam Smith's free-market principles and Thomas Malthus's ideas about overpopulation. The inherently superior working-class culture of which she claimed to have seen ample evidence in Lowell becomes a yard stick by which she can imply the inadequacies of the British working class, thereby preserving the factory system and the market from blame.

Anthony Trollope also toured Lowell, though he came through in the early 1860s in the midst of the American Civil War, due to which the mills there were not operating at full capacity. What cotton was being processed in Lowell had been shipped from Liverpool; meanwhile, a cotton famine raged back in Manchester. Perhaps due to the historical moment at which he visited, Trollope is less polemical in his presentation of his experience; he acknowledges that "visitors always see a great deal of rose colour, and should endeavor to allay the brilliancy of the tint with the proper amount of human shading" (252). While

his impressions of Lowell are entirely favorable, he is philosophical and measured in his praise as well as in his contrasting critique of Manchester:

> The Americans, in seeing and resolving to adopt our commercial successes, have resolved also, if possible, to avoid the evils which have attended those successes. It would be very desirable that all our factory girls should read and write, wear clean clothes, have decent beds, and eat hot meat every day. But that is now impossible. Gradually, with very up-hill work, but I still trust with sure work, much will be done to improve their position and render their life respectable; but in England we can have no Lowells. In our thickly populated island any commercial Utopia is out of the question. Nor can, as I think, Lowell be taken as a type of the manufacturing towns of New England. When New England employs millions in her factories, instead of thousands, […] she must cease to provide for them their beds and meals, their church-going proprieties and orderly modes of life. In such an attempt she has all the experience of the world against her. But I nevertheless think that she will have done much good. (250)

Indeed, by the time of Trollope's visit, the Corporations had begun to take advantage of the rising immigrant populations who were accustomed to the Old World standard of factory work, and the homegrown farm-girl operative for whom Lowell had become famous increasingly partook more of fiction than fact.

Although Trollope does present a more balanced perspective on Lowell than many of his compatriots, he nevertheless describes the female operatives in much the same terms as Dickens and Martineau (who repeatedly remarks on the women's lady-like appearance in her letter): "They are neat, well dressed, careful, especially about their hair, composed in the their manner, and sometimes a little supercilious in the propriety of their demeanor. […] They are not sallow, nor dirty, nor ragged, nor rough. They have about them no signs of want, or of low culture" (245). Through his use of litotes, he summons the Manchester mill girl like the photographic negative of the Lowell mill girl. The specter of the Manchester mill girl continued to haunt Britain, and, in Trollope's estimation, it was only a

matter of time before she would take up residence in industrializing America, even in the "commercial Utopia" of Lowell, which was as yet too young to have accrued any ghosts.

PART III

The Elusive Cotton Factory in Literary Manchester

Given the pains the mill-women writers of the *Offering* took to distinguish themselves from their notorious transatlantic counterparts in the Manchester mills, not to mention the many pages British authors amassed describing their visits to Lowell and praising the American industrial system, it is odd that there are no juxtaposing accounts by American authors about Manchester. A visit to the original "Cottonopolis" would seem to offer Americans an opportunity to report first-hand on the state of the British cotton industry, its factories, and its laborers and to reflect (or gloat) about the relative state of American institutions. Instead, the American literary celebrities who came through Manchester during their British tours are peculiarly silent about their perceptions of the astonishing "Warehouse City," so (in)famous the world over as the home of a newly wealthy class of industrialists and a newly miserable class of factory workers.

Harriet Beecher Stowe, undoubtedly the most major American literary celebrity of the nineteenth century, made a quick jaunt to Manchester during her four-month tour of Britain and Europe after receiving an invitation from Elizabeth Gaskell. Stowe later published a two-volume travelogue, *Sunny Memories of Foreign Lands*, containing the letters she sent home to her friends and family during her travels as well as newspaper excerpts detailing the different events at which she was honored. Strangely, although she recounts her positive impressions of Gaskell when they met in the household of a mutual

friend in London and declares her intention of accepting Gaskell's invitation,[65] Stowe's published letters contain no mention of her subsequent visit to Gaskell in her Manchester home.[66]

The silence Stowe maintains around her day in Manchester is especially strange since, in the addresses that she wrote for her husband to deliver to British antislavery societies on her behalf,[67] Stowe repeatedly draws the economic connection between the British cotton industry and the American slave institution, implicating Britain in the profitability of the cotton trade and thus in slavery's perpetuation:

> Great Britain took four fifths of the cotton of America, and therefore sustained four fifths of the slavery. […] [W]ithout the cotton trade of Great Britain, slavery would have been abolished long ago, for the American manufacturers consumed but one fifth of all the cotton grown in the country. The conscience of the cotton growers was talked of; but had the cotton consumer no conscience?

She then goes on to make the sociocultural and rhetorical connection between the oppressed British factory worker and the oppressed American slave: "The Christian feeling which had dictated efforts on behalf of ragged schools and factory children […] had caused the same Christian hearts to throb for the American slave" (Stowe, "Antislavery Society, Exeter Hall—May 16").

Curious that while in Manchester this valiant social crusader did not seize the opportunity to examine for herself the institution at the center of British reform efforts—

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[65] See Letter XXX in Volume II of Stowe's travelogue, *Sunny Memories of Foreign Lands* (Boston: Phillips, Sampson, and Company, 1854).

[66] That Stowe did in fact follow up on Gaskell's offer to visit Plymouth Grove, her home in Manchester, we know from Gaskell's letter to Charlotte Brontë describing Stowe's call. See page 288 in Ellis H. Chadwick's *Mrs. Gaskell: Haunts, Homes, and Stories* (London: Sir Issac Pitman and Sons, 1910).

[67] Stowe did not speak herself due to Victorian social codes around feminine propriety and public exposure.

the cotton factory—whose functioning sustained the American institution against which Stowe directed her own prodigious reform efforts. Although her heart might throb for both the British factory child and the American slave, it did not throb equally. Stowe evokes a familiar object of British sympathy in order to divert and harness those sympathies to her abolitionist cause. Although she acknowledges the intersection between anti-factory and anti-slavery activism, she promulgates the sense that factory reform and abolition had competing agendas. Moreover, her transatlantic tour was essentially a victory lap to celebrate the stunning success of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) and to further spread the word of abolition. The Manchester factories, with their thousands of impoverished workers, had no place among Stowe's "sunny memories" and might distract from her cause.

A lesser celebrity among his contemporaries, Nathaniel Hawthorne spent considerable time in Manchester during his four-year term (from 1853-1857) serving as U.S. consul in Liverpool. He is more forthcoming about his experiences in Manchester than Stowe, though not by much. In his *English Notebooks*, he records his first unprepossessing impression of the city with an air of nonchalant dismissal: "I had never visited Manchester before, though now so long resident within twenty miles of it; neither is it particularly worth visiting, unless for the sake of its factories, which I did not go to see. It is a dingy and heavy town" (63). Toward the end of his term as consul, Hawthorne moved his family to Manchester for seven weeks so that they could attend the Art Treasures of Great Britain Exhibition of 1857 and cultivate their artistic tastes in preparation for a trip to Italy.[68] He

[68] Manchester hosted the Art Treasures of Great Britain Exhibition from May 5 to October 17, 1857. Rather than a spectacular showcase for the technology of industry, the Mancunians mounted an anxious display of high culture as a defense against attacks deriding the cottonocracy as vulgar. The Art Treasures of Great Britain is to this day the largest art exhibition staged in Britain, and possibly even the world.

dedicates many pages of the *English Notebooks* to documenting his experiences at the Palace of Art Treasures but gives short shrift to the booming "shock city" whose bustling thoroughfares he navigated in order to access the Exhibition's treasures.[69] The most he has to say about Manchester itself is to lament that "the smoky and sooty air of that abominable Manchester affected my wife's throat disadvantageously" and to disparage it as a city "built only for dirty uses, and scarcely intended as a habitation for man" (315-6). Despite his earlier recognition of the cotton factories as the most interesting of the city's features, he never mentions them again.

Curiouser and curiouser, Stowe and Hawthorne are not alone in their reticence to speak of Manchester, the city whose name was synonymous with the British cotton industry, bearing both its glories and its afflictions. The major British authors who were writing during the era when Manchester suddenly emerged as a center of economic, political, and cultural power are also strangely unforthcoming about the institution at the heart of Manchester's shocking growth: the cotton factory. The canonical economic and literary texts of the period are either silent about the factory, or they speak in metaphorical displacements that distract the reader and obscure more than they reveal. From Engels and Marx to Dickens and Gaskell, the texts to which generations of readers have been directed for historical insight into Britain's industrial era all contain a stunning blind spot. Indeed, for all the scholarship on the classic industrial novels, literary critics have

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[69] Harriet Beecher Stowe, again a guest of Elizabeth Gaskell at Plymouth Grove, also attended the Art Treasures Exhibition in 1857. In a letter to her daughters, she calls the day "delightful" after expending a sentence in praise of Gaskell, and that is all the space she allots to her second Manchester experience. See Charles Edward Stowe's *Life of Harriet Beecher Stowe* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1890) pp. 313.

demonstrated a similar blind spot, for not one has yet commented on the glaring and repeated elision of the cotton factory from the nineteenth-century British literary canon.

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One of the only positive impressions of Manchester that Hawthorne records is of its "many handsome shops." Whirled past those rows of glistening storefronts in the "Exhibition omnibuses" he took every day from his lodgings in the suburbs to the Palace of Art Treasures, Hawthorne's exposure to Manchester was buffered and contained. In holding himself apart from the city's many sites of industry and never once registering the presence of a massive working population, he was no exception but was instead acting in accordance with a general rule. He had simply and intuitively accommodated himself to the sanitized lifestyle of the Manchester bourgeoisie that Friedrich Engels had so incisively described more than a decade earlier in *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1845).

The son of a German cotton factory owner, 22-year-old Engels first came to Manchester in 1842 at the behest of his father, who wished to ground his heady son in the practical experience of helping to manage a cotton mill in which the senior Engels was partner. The younger Engels was happy to comply, for he already held deep convictions about the evils of the class structure and saw Manchester as a potential combustion site for the nascent working-class movement. While he did spend some of his time in the Ermen and Engels Mill, as was expected of him, he spent considerably more time walking the streets of Manchester in the company of Mary Burns, the factory worker who served as his

local guide and with whom he formed a romantic liaison that would last until her death. So familiar did he become with Manchester's byways and alleys as well as its main thoroughfares that, when writing *The Condition of the Working Class* after his return to Germany in 1844, he would confidently assert: "I know [Manchester] as intimately as my own native town, more intimately than most of its residents know it" (54). This boast may seem unlikely, but rather than vaunting his own knowledge, this comment serves as a sideways swipe at Manchester's bourgeoisie, who, as Engels goes on to argue, so little know their own city.

The most famous portion, and justly so, of *The Condition of the Working Class* is undoubtedly the chapter on "The Great Towns;" after touching briefly on each of the other major metropolitan centers in England, Engels dedicates the bulk of the chapter to sketching a verbal map of Manchester and interpreting the meaning of its architectural and infrastructural characteristics for his readers. In an oft-cited passage, Engels pointedly observes that all of Manchester proper, with the exception of the commercial district at its center, consists of the working-class housing areas. Meanwhile the moneyed classes live in concentric circles of suburbs around the city, the wealthiest the farthest away,

> in free, wholesome country air, in fine, comfortable homes, passed once every half or quarter hour by omnibuses going into the city. And the finest part of the arrangement is this, that the members of this money aristocracy can take the shortest road through the middle of all the laboring districts to their places of business, without ever seeing that they are in the midst of the grimy misery that lurks to the right and the left. For the thoroughfares leading from the Exchange in all directions out of the city are lined, on both sides, with an almost unbroken series of shops [of] decent and cleanly external appearance[.] (58)

Engels thus reveals Manchester as a city quite literally built upon and by middle-class denial, a city constructed by design of the bourgeois collective conscious to protect the

"utter ignorance on the part of the whole middle class of everything which concerns the workers" (31).

Having so devastatingly disclosed the "hypocritical plan" upon which the city of Manchester stands, Engels goes behind the façade of the handsome storefronts to take his reader on a comprehensive walking tour, neighborhood by neighborhood, of Manchester's working-class districts in all their squalor and putrescence. He describes in vivid, even lurid, detail the condition of the cramped streets and confined courtyards clogged with piles and puddles of reeking refuse. He is especially interested in the living quarters in which Manchester's working people reside, most of which are in an alarming state of decay and overcrowded, with entire families sharing one small, close room. He even peremptorily enters some of these dwellings to catalogue the sparse and filthy belongings. Engels agrees with Hawthorne's snap judgment of Manchester as "scarcely intended as a habitation for man" insofar as the adjective "uninhabitable" recurs again and again in his descriptions. And yet, these hovels are people's homes, the homes of workers whose labor drives the national economy and enriches Manchester's thriving middle class.

Throughout Engels's description of the working-class districts, he tries, with greater success than most of his contemporaries, to condemn the industrial system for the degraded state of its laborers without sliding into blaming the laborers themselves. As an unexpected result, precisely because Engels is making an argument at the level of infrastructures and superstructures, he risks committing the same oversight with which he charges the bourgeoisie: the erasure of Manchester's working people. There are hardly any people populating the streets and living spaces of his Manchester; it is as though he is

wending his way through a post-apocalyptic ghost town full of the lingering signs of humanity (in the form of waste) but few living survivors.

Working people are more present in the rest of *The Condition of the Working Class*, as Engels "goes on to compose a systematic accounting of the effects of industrialization on the bodies, minds, and moral existence of those who have undergone such extremities of experience" (204). However, they are present in generalized masses, which does nothing to counteract the effects of the blanket dehumanization so widespread in Victorian representations of the working class. At no point does a working person distinguish herself as an individual in Engels's prose, though we know he formed at least one meaningful relationship with a member of the working class and likely others as well. Manchester needed and never got a Henry Mayhew[70] or even a Dickens (the Dickens of London, that is, who walked the city's streets and sought to represent its diverse inhabitants with some complexity in his fictions, not the Coketown Dickens, whose factory workers are notoriously unidimensional).[71]

Just as omnipresent in Manchester but even harder to locate than working people in *The Condition of the Working Class* is the cotton factory. While accompanying Engels on his

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[70] Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor* (1851) is a compilation of the numerous newspaper articles he published arising out of his extensive interviews with London's working people. Altogether, his book marks an attempt to thoroughly survey the occupations and depict the lifestyles of London's populous and diverse working population. Mayhew's representations were in fact so individualized that some of his interviewees later recognized themselves in his portraits (and not all were pleased).

[71] Indeed, the literary mode was perhaps better positioned to represent the individual worker than political economy, which necessarily operated at the big-picture level of the system rather than at the level of individual lived experience. But the industrial novel as a genre doesn't tend to represent the individual worker with much sensitivity or perspicacity either, which is one of the reasons for which it was regarded as second tier in the scholarly tradition for more than a century.

walking tour, the reader catches fleeting glimpses of factories and mills hovering in the background or jumbled in here and there among the tumbledown tenements. There is only one brief instance of anything resembling a description of the factories: "[In Ancoats] stand the largest mills of Manchester lining the canals, colossal six- and seven-storeyed buildings towering with their slender chimneys far above the low cottages of the workers" (69). That's it. The details are meager, especially given how Engels so exhausts his imagistic vocabulary when describing the murky alleys and decrepit dwellings that at multiple points he actually runs out of words. By the peak of Manchester's prosperity in 1853, there were 108 cotton mills in the city,[72] so factories must have been a dominant architectural feature, yet Engels hardly registers them in his anatomy of Manchester. Nor, despite being in a position to offer insider insight as a member of the managerial class, does he ever use his considerable descriptive and analytical skills to take his reader into the mills' interiors to anatomize the operations of the factory system at the site of labor. What better way to destabilize the factory system than from within the factory?

Instead, Engels focuses on the home, demonstrating a middle-class Victorian preoccupation with domesticity: "In a comfortless, filthy house, hardly good enough for mere nightly shelter, ill-furnished, often neither rain-tight nor warm, a foul atmosphere filling rooms overcrowded with human beings, no domestic comfort is possible." He then becomes uncharacteristically exclamatory: "And children growing up in this savage way, amidst these demoralizing influences, are expected to turn out goody-goody and moral in the end! Verily the requirements are naïve, which the self-satisfied bourgeois makes upon the working man!" (140). Even as Engels blasts the Victorian middle class for their smug

[72] See Robina McNeil and Michael Nevell's *A Guide to the Industrial Archaeology of Greater Manchester* (Telford: Association for Industrial Archaeology, 2000).

naïveté, he is drawing upon a bourgeois vocabulary, pitting domesticity and morality against savagery, and using bourgeois standards in his assessments of those categories. Like other middle-class Victorian observers of working-class culture, he takes as a given the moral imperative to preserve the nuclear family. However, the nuclear family was a relatively new historical formation that arose in large part as a social byproduct of capitalism, the very system Engels ultimately sought to dismantle.

Perhaps more to my point, by leaving the factory out of his picture of working-class life, Engels casts the mill as an anti-domestic zone and therefore as irrelevant to his discussion (in this, as we will see later when reading Gaskell, he is not alone). Yet, in a sense, British factories actually were domestic spaces in that they employed entire families, sometimes within the same mill. Indeed, a glance back across the Atlantic to Lowell, Massachusetts, puts this in perspective. The coming of the "Old World" family system of factory labor to America with the increasing influx of Irish, Scottish, and German immigrants was one of the causes to which contemporaneous commentators attributed Lowell's downfall; though such accounts are laced with xenophobia, they are nevertheless illustrative.

As I discussed in my previous chapter, Lowell enjoyed a glowing national and international reputation as an industrial utopia, with its factories metaphorized as homey domestic spaces in which New England's young women demurely tended their looms. While it is doubtful that this vision of Lowell was ever an accurate reflection of reality, it became an increasingly untenable fantasy over the course of the 1850s; drawn perhaps by the city's exceptional reputation, families of European and British immigrants began to move to Lowell, replacing the local labor supply of single Yankee women, upon whom the

city's mythological exceptionalism had been founded. From figurative domestic spaces, the Lowell factories became actual domestic spaces in which mothers and fathers worked with their children. The factory metaphorized as home had been a source for national pride and republican mythology, helping to distinguish the Yankee uprightness of American industry from Britain's dark, satanic mills. Ironically, when the American factory actually came to house the domestic family unit, it was deemed nightmarish and eschewed as un-American, the immorality of Manchester invading and disrupting the utopic idyll of Lowell.

Engels overlooks the mill as an important sociocultural and even domestic site. He could not see how the bourgeois vocation as a manufacturer that his family had carved out for him could be commensurate with the vocation he had chosen for himself as a communist intellectual and activist. Shortly after his return in 1844 to his family's home in Barmen, Germany, he wrote as much in a letter to Marx:

> I have allowed myself to be persuaded by the arguments of my brother-in-law and the doleful expression on both my parents' faces to give huckstering another trial […]. [H]uckstering is too beastly, Barmen is too beastly, the waste of time is too beastly and most beastly of all is the fact of being, not only a bourgeois, but actually a manufacturer, a bourgeois who actively takes sides against the proletariat. A few days in my old man's factory have sufficed to bring me face to face with this beastliness, which I had rather overlooked. I had of course, planned to stay in the huckstering business only as long as it suited me and then to write something the police wouldn't like[…]. Had I not been compelled to record daily in my book the most horrifying tales about English society, I would have become fed up with it, but that at least has kept my rage on the simmer. And though as a communist one can, no doubt, provided one *doesn't write*, maintain the outward appearance of a bourgeois and brutish huckster, it is impossible to carry on communist propaganda on a large scale and at the same time engage in huckstering and industry. (*Collected Works* 38: 15)

Yet, despite his certainty that it was impossible to act in the capacity of a bourgeois manufacturer while simultaneously advocating the interests of the proletariat, Engels would indeed resort to "huckstering" again in the near future. In 1850, he returned to

Manchester, where he would work in his father's mill for the next twenty years, eventually becoming partner himself. Somewhat ironically, one of his central reasons for readopting the mantle of bourgeois respectability, despite his distaste for the hypocrisy he saw in the act, was to fund the intellectual labors of the very man to whom he wrote the above words. Convinced that Marx was the greater intellect of the two, Engels made a willing sacrifice of his time, his energy, and his conscience.

The result was Marx's chef-d'oeuvre, Volume One of *Capital* (1867), a tome as weighty (and wordy) as any novel from the period. Yet, for all its many pages, *Capital* still maneuvers around a direct discussion of the cotton industry and the factory; this, despite the fact that Marx's research and even livelihood depended in part on funds derived from cotton manufacturing. After his deportation from Prussia in 1849, Marx fled with his family to London, where he would live until his death in 1883. Research for *Capital*, most of which Marx conducted at the British Library, consumed him during this time. Throughout the 1850s and into the 1860s, the Marx family lived in various degrees of poverty, managing to subsist off of Marx's sporadic journalistic efforts and the money Engels could spare from his engagement as a "brutish huckster" in a cotton mill up in Manchester.

Literary critic Peter Stallybrass, in his fascinating essay, "Marx's Coat," traces the peregrinations of Marx's best coat in and out of the pawn shop as he and his family clung to economic and social survival. Stallybrass highlights how Marx simultaneously mulled over his groundbreaking theory of commodity exchange by which a coat is deprived of particularity, materiality, and utility in order to become an exchange value, the product not

of individual human labor but human labor abstracted and congealed into commodity form. Stallybrass claims:

> In *Capital*, Marx's coat appears only immediately to disappear again, because the nature of capitalism is to produce a coat not as a material particularity but as a "supra-sensible" value. The work of Marx's *Capital* is to trace that value back through all its detours to the human labor whose appropriation produces capital. This leads Marx theoretically to the labor theory of value and to an analysis of surplus-value. It leads him politically to the factories, the working conditions, the living spaces, the food, and the clothing of those who produce a wealth that is expropriated from them. (184)

Stallybrass's reading of *Capital* is ultimately optimistic, offering the potential for redemption: "What Marx restores to [every commodity] is the human labors that have been appropriated in the making of it, the work that produced the linen of shirts and petticoats and bedsheets, the work that transformed bedsheets into sheets of paper" (200).

Yet, even as Marx discloses and tries to rectify the erasures and displacements that take place under a capitalist system of commodity exchange, he effects some surprising erasures and displacements of his own, beginning with the suppression of cotton in favor of linen. The first several chapters of *Capital* are the most famous, for it is there that Marx lays out his labor theory of value. He selects linen as the prototypical commodity form with which to illustrate the principles of commodity exchange: "Let us take two commodities, such as a coat and 10 yards of linen, and let the value of the first be twice the value of the second, so that, if 10 yards of linen = W, the coat = 2W" (132). This presupposition is the foundation upon which Marx proceeds to build his theory. Alongside the coat, linen thus emerges as *Capital*'s ur-commodity.

Linen is an odd choice here, standing in place of cotton as the more obvious exemplar of a nineteenth-century staple commodity. Stallybrass writes: "England, where Marx now lived, was the heartland of capitalism *because* it was the heartland of the textile

industries. Its wealth had been founded first on wool and then on cotton" (190). Indeed, it was the invention of a series of machines for the spinning and weaving of cotton in Northern England that had spurred and driven the Industrial Revolution, and thus the emergence of modern capitalism. In the Introduction to *The Condition of the Working Class*, Engels efficiently sketches the etiological chain by which the invention of the spinning jenny and the power loom led to the birth of the factory system, which then led to the unprecedented growth of industry generally and of the cotton industry specifically. Linen manufacturing, by contrast, played a subsidiary role: "Progress in the linen trade developed later, because the nature of the raw material made the application of spinning machinery very difficult" (Engels 23). Cotton remained by far the dominant industry in England throughout the years Marx was writing, a fact of which he was not unaware. In a later section of *Capital*, he includes two tables showing: first, the quantities (in lbs.) of textiles exported from England in 1848, 1851, 1860, and 1865; and second, the values (in £) made from the export of textiles in those same years (543). In every case, cotton exceeds by a generous margin the numbers for linen, wool, and silk combined.

The elision of cotton from the equations by which Marx demonstrates the operations of commodity exchange is odder still when we remember that he was living off the profits of the cotton industry at this time. Discussing Marx's reliance on the funds Engels sent down from Manchester, Stallybrass comments:

> We confront here a curious paradox in Marx's life. That is, while he undertook in a way that had never been done before an analysis of the systematic workings of capitalism, he himself depended mainly upon precapitalist or marginally capitalist practices: small inheritances; gifts; the writing of tracts that often had to be subsidized. But while he worked mainly outside the capitalist marketplace, he still lived during the period of which I write what can only be called a proletarian and at times subproletarian life. (191)

For me, the central paradox here is not the one Stallybrass identifies. Marx is being sustained by the cotton industry, but at a safe distance. His acceptance of the proceeds Engels derives from direct engagement in the "beastliness" of industry does indeed take the form of a generous gift exchange, thus buffering Marx from the taint of capitalism. Marx's erasure of cotton begins to look like willful denial, which he affords at Engels's expense and which is akin to the forms of denial he reveals as endemic to bourgeois consumerism.

What is more, there is a class politics encoded in Marx's choice of linen over cotton. As Engels documents, inexpensive cotton goods that offered little protection against England's damp and cold climate were uniformly worn by Manchester's working people: "Wool and linen have almost vanished from the wardrobe of both sexes, and cotton has taken their place." Cotton clothing was so associated with working-class identity that it became a source for working-class pride (as well as bourgeois mockery): "Fustian [a heavy cotton fabric] has become the proverbial costume of the working men, who are called 'fustian jackets,' and call themselves so in contrast to the gentlemen who wear broadcloth [historically made of wool] which latter words are used as characteristic for the middle class" (Engels 78). In Gaskell's *North and South* (1855), the stereotypically snooty Mrs. Hale asks: "[W]ho on earth wears cotton that can afford linen?" (46). The novel uses her character in this moment to articulate the class politics embedded in cloth and clothing, while also upholding her to gentle ridicule because of the narrow-minded snobbery and ignorance she demonstrates as a member of the Southern gentility frowning down at the Northern manufacturing class. Despite Mrs. Hale's assumption of class superiority, her real-life counterparts almost certainly wore cotton, though not outwardly. Over the first half of the nineteenth century, undergarments, or "underlinens," were increasingly made

not of linen or wool but of cotton, regardless of the consumer's class;[73] indeed, cotton "unmentionables" could be an apt symbol for middle-class consumer denial. By taking linen as his ur-commodity, Marx takes as a given the classed assumptions of the bourgeois consumer, revealing the lingering biases of class privilege that he held even as he rubbed elbows with London's proletariat on his way to the pawn shop.

Another surprising absence in *Capital* is the cotton factory. Because a central component of Marx's theory is that commodity exchange renders all labor homogenous, "human labour in the abstract," this means he treats the site of labor, the factory, as homogenous and in the abstract (128). Thus, for Marx, there is no meaningful distinction to be made between the cotton factory versus the linen factory or even the cotton factory versus the coal mine. Within his chapter on "Machinery and Large-Scale Industry," Marx devotes a brief subsection (a mere nine pages, in the Penguin edition) to "The Factory," writ large. The section primarily serves to reiterate his previously established argument that "there appears, in the automatic factory, a tendency to equalize and reduce to an identical level every kind of work that has to be done by the minders of the machines" (545).

For only one fleeting moment at the section's end does Marx attempt to discuss factories in a concrete and material way:

> Here we shall merely allude to the material conditions under which factory labour is performed. Every sense organ is injured by the artificially high temperatures, by the dust-laden atmosphere, by the deafening noise, not to mention the danger to life and limb among machines which are so closely crowded together, a danger which, with the regularity of the seasons, produces its list of those killed and wounded in the industrial battle. The economical use of the social means of production, matured

[73] See Alison Carter, *Underwear: The Fashion History* (Batsford: Dramatic Publishing, 1992), and C. Willett and Phillis Cunnington, *The History of Underclothes* (New York: Dover Publishing, 1992).

> and forced as in a hothouse by the factory system, is turned in the hands of capital into systematic robbery of what is necessary for the life of the worker while he is at work, i.e. space, light, air and protection against the dangerous or the unhealthy concomitants of the production process, not to mention the theft of appliances for the comfort of the worker. Was Fourier wrong when he called factories "mitigated jails"? (552-3)

For a discussion of material conditions, this passage is loaded with figurative language. Labor becomes an "industrial battle," the factory system is likened to a "hothouse," capital gets endowed with "hands" with which to perform the "systematic robbery" of the worker's life, and the French philosopher Charles Fourier pipes up to draw a comparison between factories and jails. There is a cacophony of mixed metaphors here, each of which gestures away from the material conditions Marx wants to describe, producing incoherence and distraction.

That Marx relies so much on metaphor in his approach to the factory is also strange on a structural level. In that metaphor functions via displacement, it operates analogously to commodity exchange. Marx is disturbed at how exchange value displaces the lingering trace of human labor in order to form the commodity fetish. But, in similar fashion, the signifier supplants the sign under the operations of metaphor. Given his distaste for commodity fetishim's occlusions, it is perhaps surprising that Marx isn't more wary of metaphor's tendencies to distract and dislocate.

* * *

Engels was not the only major nineteenth-century author to paint a Manchester in which cotton factories hardly appear. Nor was Marx the only important writer to turn, somewhat desperately, to figurative language when attempting to represent the material

realities of the factory. Given the cotton mill's prominence on the physical, economic, and cultural landscape, it received relatively little literary representation, even in the industrial novels that took Lancashire or Yorkshire mill towns as their primary settings. What is more, despite the industrial novel's claims to realism, when it does try to confront the cotton factory as the epitomization of the new industrial era, its authors anxiously reach for a bewildering assortment of metaphors, metonymies, similes, and allusions. As a result, the cotton factory, as figured in the industrial novel, is simultaneously underdetermined and overdetermined. The mill comes to form an ineffable absent presence at the center of a web of frantic figurations that claim to describe it but instead continually gesture away from it.

While a handful of literary critics have taken passing notice of the distracting use of metaphor to represent the cotton factory in one industrial novel or the puzzling absence of the cotton factory in another, no one has yet traced the telling pattern of displacement and elision across the subgenre.[74] I have found only one exception to this pattern among the industrial novels, and in an unexpected text: Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna's *Helen Fleetwood* (1841); one of the most trying of the industrial novels due to its determined Evangelical polemics, *Helen Fleetwood* contains one of the most thorough and straightforward accounts of a factory visit. Otherwise, from the earliest instantiation of the subgenre, Frances

[74] Priti Joshi came closest in her article, "'An Old Dog Enters the Fray;' or, Reading *Hard Times* as an Industrial Novel"(*Dickens Studies Annual.* 44 (2013): 221-41). Joshi's project is to challenge the classification of *Hard Times* as an industrial novel. To this end, she traces the conventions of the subgenre as established by Frances Trollope, Elizabeth Gaskell, and Charlotte Brontë in order to show how Dickens does not satisfy those expectations. Over the course of her analysis, Joshi briefly alludes to some of the difficulties that bar access to the factory in each novel, but she does not clue into the ineffability of the factory as a thoroughgoing pattern. In fact, as I hope to show, the absence of the factory is so consistent that it might well be identified as a convention of Victorian industrial fiction.

Trollope's *The Life and Adventures of Michael Armstrong, The Factory Boy* (1839-40), to one of the latest, Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* (1854), there is a repeated strategy of obscuring or ignoring the factory.

As this pattern emerged over the course of my reading, I was reminded of Engels struggling to understand how Manchester, a city that developed as "an outgrowth of accident," could so appear the deliberate result of bourgeois design, given how consistently the city's layout served to conceal the working-class neighborhoods from view of the main thoroughfares (59). I cannot help but wonder if a similar "unconscious tacit agreement" as that to which Engels in part attributed Manchester's city plan might not exist between the middle-class industrial novelists (57). Certainly, reaching for metaphors to describe the cotton factory was likely a mechanism by which to cope with the seismic changes wrought by the Industrial Revolution. But the extent of the pattern by which the industrial novels purport to reliably document industrial conditions while repeatedly failing to do so at the very site of industry points to a degree of cultivated ignorance and a lack of self-awareness that can only be sustained through the unspoken contract of middle-class denial, a similar social contract to the one that built Manchester.[75] Indeed, the "unconscious tacit agreement" between industrial novelists may be even more insidious than that between the Manchester bourgeoisie; the novels so convincingly present themselves as fact-driven, reform-oriented exposés that they formed not only their Victorian readers' perceptions of

[75] In her article, "Knowing Too Much and Never Enough: Knowledge and Moral Capital in Frances Trollope's *Life and Adventures of Michael Armstrong, the Factory Boy*," Carolyn Betensky points out that "middle-class narratives about working-class suffering track the flow of this knowledge [about the travails of the working class] and ignorance so avidly that attention to the question of who among the bourgeoisie knows—and who doesn't—could perhaps be considered a constitutive feature of the social-problem novel genre" (62). Indeed. I could thus even argue that these authors themselves have trained me to inquire into the state of their ignorance.

the industrial reality in their present moment but also many subsequent readers' perceptions of Britain's industrial past, among them more than a few literary critics and historians.

The first fully fledged industrial novel,[76] Frances Trollope's *Michael Armstrong* (1839-40) claims to expose "the bare, naked, hideous truth" of the British factory system, and thus seems an unlikely text against which to levy the charge of obfuscation (238). However, despite being one of the only authors to both tour cotton factories herself and to then draw upon those experiences to take her readers inside a fictional rendering of a factory, her descriptions are so rife with hyperbole as to achieve the opposite effect she intends, producing confusion where she claims to seek clarity. Her exaggerations are extreme enough that Charlotte Brontë, in an 1848 letter to her publisher, labels *Michael Armstrong* "a ridiculous mess" and upholds Trollope as a negative model against which to moderate her own cautious approach to the subgenre (qtd. in Joshi 231). Nor have many subsequent critics been kinder: Philip Collins refers to the novel as a "lamentable fiction," while Ivanka Kovačivić and S. Barbara Kanner deem it a "far-fetched extravaganza" (652; 157). While I admire the project some scholars have undertaken to redeem Trollope from such infamy and dismissal, that is not my task here.[77] Although Trollope's daring was

[76] Harriet Martineau's pro-factory tales, *Illustrations of Political Economy* (1832-4), the most famous of which is "Manchester Strike," did precede *Michael Armstrong*. The daughter of a manufacturer, Martineau betrayed a strong bias in that direction, using her tales to illustrate Adam Smith's free-market principles and Thomas Malthus's ideas about population control. Needless to say, she is not interested in disclosing the factory to view.

[77] In 2009, Brenda Ayres edited *The Social Problem Novels of Frances Trollope*, issuing scholarly editions of Trollope novels that had previously been difficult to access. For more on the significance of Ayres's act of recovery, see Elsie Michie's review, "Reassessing the Cleverness of Frances Trollope's Social Fictions" (*Nineteenth-Century Gender Studies* 5.3 (Winter 2009)).

impressive, and although she certainly deserves credit as an indefatigable social commentator, I nevertheless find to be just the charges of inaccuracy with which her detractors responded to her hyperbolic depiction of the factory.

In March of 1839, after having already published the first issue of *Michael Armstrong* in February, Trollope travelled north to Lancashire in the company of her eldest son, Thomas Trollope. Recalling their trip in his memoir, *What I Remember* (1887-9), Thomas stalwartly defends his mother's legacy: "My mother neglected no means of making the facts stated in her book authentic and accurate, and the *mise en scène* of her story is graphic and truthful." He follows this assertion with an interesting admission, stating that he "was more or less useful to her in searching for and collecting facts in some places where it would have been difficult for her to look for them" (8). Even for the bold Trollope, the gendered rules of propriety barred her access to certain industrial sights, and she had to rely on Tom to be her eyes and ears.

Noteworthy too is Thomas's mention that he and Trollope were conducted on their fact-finding mission by leading factory reformers, to whom they had been recommended by Lord Ashley, perhaps the foremost agitator for the cause. As Susan Walton points out in her article examining how Trollope flouted Victorian standards about what it was acceptable for a woman to see and comment on: "Frances's experiences of authenticity were mediated by what we might now call spin doctors, determined to mount a heart-rending performance for this famous female visitor to their terrain" (281). Between their efforts to impress upon Trollope the misery and horror of the factory system and her efforts to harrow up her readers' imaginations and activate their consciences with the plight of factory children, she overshot the reality effect. The factory as represented in

Michael Armstrong is a site of such utterly reprehensible and calculated evildoing that it belies itself, revealing Trollope's version of the factory as polemical distortion.

In the novel's opening pages, Sir Matthew Dowling, an unapologetically tyrannical mill owner, is persuaded to adopt Michael Armstrong, a local boy employed in his factory. This seeming windfall turns out to be a misfortune, for the poor boy immediately becomes an object of scorn and mockery in the household. His plight arouses the interest of Mary Brotherton, the novel's true protagonist, who is the daughter of a neighboring wealthy manufacturer. Up to this point, Mary has been living in contented ignorance about the evils upon which her family's fortune was built. Her curiosity piqued by her encounter with Michael, Mary begins to investigate the conditions in the nearby factories and is appalled to discover that droves of children are there slaving away under the supervision of brutal overseers. Meanwhile, Dowling tires of Michael and sends him away to the Deep Valley Mills, an industrial complex that Dowling knows is notorious for exceptionally cruel treatment of child laborers. Learning of this turn of events, Mary poses as a factory tourist in order to infiltrate the mill where Michael is now held captive. Although she does gain entry to the factory, her attempt to find and rescue Michael fails. She soothes her conscience by taking in Edward, Michael's brother who had been crippled in a factory accident, and Fanny, another child laborer in Deep Valley who Mary does manage to extricate from its terrible grasp.

The novel then leaps forward five years. Michael resurfaces after having escaped from Deep Valley and discovers that Dowling has in the meantime lost his fortune and died in disgrace. Mary weds Edward, and Michael unites with Fanny. The two happy couples

then leave the industrial nightmare of England behind them and retire to a castle in Germany to live in blissful ease off of Mary's sizeable inheritance.

When Mary enters a factory for the first time, Trollope goes in for thick description, trying to assault the senses of her readers with the industrial experience. She lays it on so thick, however, as to obscure that which she would reveal:

> The party entered the building, whence—as all know who have done the like—every sight, every sound, every scent that kind nature has fitted to the organs of her children, so as to render the mere unfettered use of them a delight, are banished for ever and for ever. The ceaseless whirring of a million hissing wheels, seizes on the tortured ear; and while threatening to destroy the delicate sense, seems bent on proving first, with a sort of mocking mercy, of how much suffering it can be the cause. The scents that reek around, from oil, tainted water, and human filth, with that last worst nausea, arising from the hot refuse of atmospheric air, left by some hundred pairs of labouring lungs, render the act of breathing a process of difficulty, disgust, and pain. All this is terrible. But what the eye brings home to the heart of those, who look round upon the horrid earthly hell, is enough to make it all forgotten; for who can think of villainous smells, or heed the suffering of the ear-racking sounds, while they look upon hundreds of helpless children, divested of every trace of health, of joyousness, and even of youth! […]
>
> [I]n the room they entered, the dirty, ragged, miserable crew, were all in active performance of their various tasks; the over-lookers, strap in hand, on the alert; the whirling spindles urging the little slaves who waited on them, to movements as unceasing as their own; and the whole monstrous chamber, redolent of all the various impurities that 'by the perfection of our manufacturing system,' are converted into 'gales of Araby' for the rich, after passing in the shape of certain poison, through the lungs of the poor. (98-99)

Priti Joshi's quick assessment of this passage is apt; she writes: "Trollope's sentences strain as she attempts to capture the sounds and smells that stultified the senses. Her clunky metaphor of the lungs of the poor acting as a filter that transforms not only cotton into textiles but also filth to gold falls flat, as does her allusion to Araby and her derisive citation about industrial progress" (228). Trollope's other metaphors were already clichés in the rhetoric about industrialization: the mill as a hell and its workers as slaves. Indeed, the comparison to slaves is part of what leads Trollope astray: "merging the discourse of anti-

slavery with that of vulnerable factory children […] created a problem of scale: the intense imagery of sadistic, brutal punishment of slaves encouraged a need to overstate the sufferings of those working in the factories" (Walton 276). Trollope's overstatements controvert her claims to accurate representation and impair her reader's comprehension of the factory.

But it is not just the questionable quality of the writing to which I am objecting here. Trollope's description is not merely overwrought; it suggests untruths. Beyond its convoluted imagery and syntax and its unsuccessful or clichéd metaphors, this passage is misleading because, as Catherine Gallagher points out, "it gives the impression that almost all factory hands were children" (127). Trollope erases the adult workers, in particular the adult women, who populated the factory.[78] In her efforts to represent industrial laborers as hapless unfortunates requiring the care of a paternalistic government, she casts them as droves of pathetic children. It strikes me that the entire novel almost takes as its controlling conceit the family metaphor of government, by which the working classes become artless children who need the ruling class to act in the capacity of a kind but firm father, guiding and reprimanding them when necessary. So while it would not be right to say that Trollope ignores the factory or sanitizes it, her vision of the factory is so highly colored by her Tory political imperatives that it loses any resemblance to an actual Manchester mill.

On the other end of the spectrum from Trollope's hellish factory, Benjamin Disraeli's *Coningsby; or, The New Generation* (1844) stands as perhaps the most exaggerated example

[78] In *Hidden Hands: Working-Class Women and Victorian Social-Problem Fiction*, Patricia E. Johnson reports: "Working-class women fueled the Industrial Revolution, making up as much as 60 percent to 80 percent of the workforce in light industries such as cotton manufacturing" (1).

of the dizzying variety of positively charged figurations that were wont to accumulate around the cotton factory. Disraeli wrote the novel immediately after a visit he made to Manchester in 1843, during which he spoke at the Manchester Athenaeum alongside Dickens. In that *Coningsby* is primarily concerned with the future of political leadership in England, it is perhaps best dubbed a condition-of-England novel, the larger subgenre under whose umbrella the industrial novel resides. Although industrialization is only a secondary concern, the novel's treatment of Manchester as an industrial site is nevertheless illustrative.

The novel's eponymous protagonist, Harry Coningsby, is the orphaned grandson of the Marquis of Monmouth, who, despite the strong disapproval that he had felt toward Coningsby's mother because of her common class status, agrees to fund the boy's education at Eton. There, Coningsby befriends Oswald Millbank, who, as his last name would suggest, is the son of a newly wealthy cotton manufacturer from Manchester. During a holiday, Coningsby has occasion to travel to Manchester and marvel at the technological ingenuity and advanced social engineering displayed in the mills. He also meets Oswald's sister, Edith Millbank, by whom he is immediately struck, as well as Oswald's manufacturer father, whose conviction that England should be led by a "natural aristocracy" rather than by hereditary peers has a strong influence on Coningsby's developing political ideals. Toward the novel's end, Monmouth dies, leaving Coningsby with little. Obliged to work for a living, Coningsby undertakes to study law. His diligence so impresses Mr. Millbank that, despite having previously dismissed Coningsby as an aristocratic dilettante, Millbank blesses Coningsby's marriage to Edith and withdraws his own candidacy for Parliament in order to back Coningsby as the Tory candidate for his constituency. However, despite Coningsby's

lesson in the moral imperative of individual will and effort, the novel does not quite follow through on its promise to dismantle the aristocracy in favor of the new, self-made capitalists, for at the last moment Monmouth's appointed heir conveniently dies, leaving the title and the estate to Coningsby.

Although Manchester is only a secondary setting in the novel, the relatively few pages that Disraeli allots to its description contain characteristic tropes through which the cotton factory figured in the Victorian imaginary. On the evening of his arrival, Coningsby is impressed by the scope of Manchester's industrial scene, especially the majesty of the factories: "[N]ow he was among illumined factories, with more windows than Italian palaces, and smoking chimneys taller than Egyptian obelisks" (143). If the factory was the "school of industry" in America, it was the "palace of industry" in Britain; the trope was so common that, as we will see, Dickens would later mock it in *Hard Times* (1854). Whether the factory was likened to an "Italian palace" or a "fairy palace," as was commonly the case, the comparison registered the massive scale of the factory, endowing the birthplace of the "natural aristocracy" with grandeur as well as historical and cultural legitimacy. But, curiously, it also served to cast the factory as foreign or otherworldly—as essentially un-British. Thus, the palace trope contains multiple contradictions; it most obviously expresses pride and wonder but also conveys underlying anxiety and suspicion, simultaneously owning and disowning the factory. Most significantly for my argument, the urge to project the cotton factory elsewhere, whether Renaissance Italy or ancient Egypt or a whimsical fairyland, avoids the institution's recent history as a British invention and its contemporary reality as an institution fundamental to the national economy.

Coningsby proceeds to tour several factories the next day, and the description that ensues is a bizarre concatenation of mismatched similes and allusions:

> He saw all […]. He entered chambers vaster than are told of in Arabian fable, and peopled with habitants more wondrous than Afrite or Peri. For there he beheld, in long-continued ranks, those mysterious forms so full of existence without life, that perform with facility and in an instant, what man can fulfil [sic] only with difficulty and in days. A machine is a slave that neither brings nor bears degradation: it is a being endowed with the greatest degree of energy and acting under the greatest degree of excitement, yet free at the same time from all passion and emotion. It is therefore not only a slave, but a supernatural slave. And why should one say that the machine does not live? […] Does not the spindle sing like a merry girl at her work, and the steam-engine roar in jolly chorus like a strong artizan [sic] handling his lusty tools, and gaining a fair day's wages for a fair day's toil? (115)

Reviewing some of the literary efforts around Manchester in order to frame his discussion of Engels, Steven Marcus puts it aptly when he says of this passage: "The fanciness, the hifalutin literaryness, the compulsive and factitious mythologizing all point toward the same considerations. They are means of guarding oneself against the impact of certain experiences, and they are equally means of supplying what experience has not given" (44). What Disraeli no doubt intends as high praise once again betrays confusion and anxiety, an inability or an unwillingness to assimilate the sights and sounds of the cotton factory into a cohesive description that corresponds to a recognizable or conceivable reality.

Once more, there is a contradictory impulse to both own and disown the cotton factory, an impulse that heightens as Coningsby gains entry to the factory's taboo interior. The machines resemble Afrites and Peris, exotic and fabulous winged creatures of ancient Persian mythology, but they sing in the voices of familiar (but perhaps equally as mythic) figures from Jolly England's recent, preindustrial past: the "merry girl" at her spinning

wheel and the "strong artizan handling his lusty tools."[79] These are of course the very class of laborer that the machines had rendered obsolete, but the novel offers the comforting palliative that they live on in the factory, albeit figuratively.

Disraeli registers cultural anxiety about the uncanny qualities of machines, their appearance of independence and sentience. His answer is not to dispel their mystery through realistic description and concrete explanation, but instead to further remove them to the realm of the mythic and the abstract. The comparison of the machine to a slave feels jarring given the frequency with which British reformers likened British factory workers to American slaves. Not only does Disraeli appropriate the metaphor to the machine, he then spins it into a positive comparison with less immediate historical associations. He does not evoke the toiling black slave of his contemporary American context; rather, given his mention of Arabian fable, the machine as "supernatural slave" evokes instead the fabulous Oriental slave, Aladdin's genie. With this move, Disraeli sidesteps the contentious cultural discourses around both black slaves and "white slaves," an avoidance strategy designed to circumnavigate controversial questions about forced or alienated labor. By summoning the Oriental slave, a quaint and fantastical figure that had so captivated the Victorian imagination, Disraeli also evades the realist call to provide a clear image of the machines or any understanding of how the machines actually work and how humans operate them. He

[79] Disraeli's rhetoric here is in keeping with his affiliation with the Young England movement. Helmed primarily by a group of Tory aristocrats, Young England promoted a nostalgic view of feudalism as the ideal political, economic, and social order. The myth of the merry laborer, going about his skilled work under the kind patronage of his liege lord, was grist to the Young England mill. Although not a member of the hereditary aristocracy himself, Disraeli became a leader and the most prominent spokesman for the movement.

implicitly bestows on the workers an unrealistic power by likening them to genie-conjurers, but at the same time he erases them in favor of the machines.

Indeed, up to this point, there are no actual human workers in Disraeli's factory. Coningsby briefly registers the human presence as follows: "Nor should the weaving-room be forgotten, where a thousand or fifteen hundred girls may be observed in their coral necklaces working like Penelope in the day time; some pretty, some pert, some graceful and jocund, some absorbed in their occupation; a little serious some, few sad" (115). Again, the insistent mythologizing. Manchester factory women were often depicted sporting ostentatious trinkets like coral necklaces, a taste that, to the eyes of middle-class propriety, was evidence of their vulgarity in more ways than one. However, Penelope is, of course, one of Greek mythology's premier models of sexual propriety and fidelity. With the allusion to Penelope, Disraeli thus combats prevailing Victorian assumptions about mill women's moral and sexual laxity. He also re-domesticates the workers through the comparison to a figure most famous for patiently waiting at home for her errant husband to return.

The list of adjectives Disraeli amasses to help the reader visualize the women workers could not be more at odds with Engels's report: "In the throstle-room of the cotton mill at Manchester, in which I was employed, I do not remember to have seen one single tall, well-built girl; they were all short, dumpy, and badly formed" (173). Although Engels was also ideologically motivated, the contrast serves to demonstrate how authors could shape the public image of the Manchester mill girl to their own purposes. Disraeli's selective gendering of the workers as well as his aestheticized and sanitized rendering of their appearance recalls visitors to the Lowell factories, who could not have produced a

more idealized vision of female operatives. To my mind, the inclusion of the mythical allusion makes his account even more suspect than those inspired by the Lowell mill women because of the insistence with which the allusion points away to a distant cultural referent. The need to distract and redirect the reader's attention suggests that there is something to suppress, something Disraeli does not want to acknowledge.

In their obvious extravagance and overcompensation, passages like these from *Coningsby* did not fail to elicit criticism even from contemporaneous Victorian readers. As I mentioned above, in *Hard Times* Dickens famously mocks the recurrent comparison in Victorian literature of the factory to a palace. The chapter that introduces readers to Stephen Blackpool, one of two mill-worker characters to ever populate Dickens's novels, sets the scene for Stephen's labors with the following oft-quoted line: "The lights in the great factories, which looked, when they were illuminated, like Fairy palaces—or the travelers by express-train said so—were all extinguished" (66). Dickens takes care not to adopt the simile for himself, but instead attributes it to the privileged traveler, who, overlooking that the glow of the factories' lights is a sign of the ongoing labor within, overlays that fleeting glimpse of an industrial site with a false veneer of beauty and whimsy. In a later more biting passage, Dickens again references the same motif: "The atmosphere of those Fairy palaces was like the breath of the simoom; and their inhabitants, wasting with heat, toiled languidly in the desert" (112). Marcus imagines this quote as Dickens's snappy rejoinder to Disraeli and writes with satisfaction: "It was worth waiting for" (41).

I wonder, though, if Marcus might not be a little too quick to credit Dickens's parody of overwrought metaphors as a sufficient riposte to Disraeli's compulsive and ostentatious

figurations. To begin, Dickens was not above resorting to such baroque prose himself when confronting the factory as a newly prominent feature on Britain's landscape. In his "Preliminary Word" to the first issue of *Household Words* (1850), in which he would publish *Hard Times* just a few years later, Dickens effused:

> [I]n all familiar things, even in those which are repellent on the surface, there is Romance enough if we will find it out […]. The mightier inventions of this age are not, to our thinking, all material, but have a kind of souls in their stupendous bodies[…]. The traveller whom we accompany on his railroad or his steamboat journey may gain, we hope, […] new associations […] with the ways of life of crowds of his fellow creatures among whom he passes like the wind; even with the towering chimneys he may see, spirting [sic] out fire and smoke upon the prospect. The Swart giants, Slaves of the Lamp of Knowledge, have their thousand and one tales, no less than the Genii of the East. (1: 1)[80]

Here, Dickens positions himself and his readership right alongside the self-deluded traveler whose studied ignorance he would later lambast, who "passes like the wind" through the blighted industrial landscape and uses the transformative properties of metaphor to alter the "repellent" signs of human toil into wondrous manifestations of magic.[81]

Four years later, it would seem, Dickens had become deeply suspicious of such metaphoric remediations. While there is satisfaction in hearing him apply his famous knack with caustic irony to undercut the bombastic metaphors and allusions that riddled both Disraeli's and Dickens's own earlier prose, there is work that he leaves undone.

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[80] I suspect that *The Arabian Nights* recurs in British writings on factories because it lent itself to the description of urban phenomena in a way that English folklore did not. The English folk tradition is grounded in rural settings and explains rural happenings. The *Arabian Nights*, by contrast, with its cityscape of wondrously vast palatial edifices filled with a clutter of fantastic objects, was better adapted to the phenomenon of the new industrial city.

[81] For informative discussions of Dickens's confused and confusing attitude toward industry, see Patrick Brantlinger, "Dickens and the Factories" (*Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 26.3 (Dec. 1971): 270-85) and Philip Collins, "Dickens and Industrialization" (*Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 20.4 (Autumn 1980): 651-73).

Dickens blasts the privileged traveler with the force of his sarcasm, but he does not pause to reveal what the "fairy palace" trope serves cover up: that often the factories are illuminated into the hours of darkness, lending them an otherworldly quality from afar, because there are still people inside working. He mocks the traveler's ignorance but does not dispel it, perhaps because his own knowledge was not much greater. Like most of the industrial novelists, Dickens had only a passing acquaintanceship with Manchester and its cotton factories.

Despite Dickens's boast in *American Notes for General Circulation* about the extent of his familiarity with Manchester's industrial environs, Philip Collins is dubious: "*Fairly* well acquainted, he might more justly have said, and acquainted only as an occasional, though intelligently observant, visitor" (652). Dickens visited Manchester for the first time in 1838, on his way to holiday in North Wales, and claimed in a letter he afterward wrote to a factory reformer friend that he had seen "the *worst* cotton mill and […] the *best*" during his brief time there (qtd. in Collins 656). Patrick Brantlinger, who otherwise defends Dickens against charges of ignorance about actual industrial conditions, nevertheless still points out that Dickens's declaration about having seen the worst factory is farfetched; he probably only entered model establishments run by proponents of the 10 Hours Bill (275). In his letter about his experiences in Manchester, Dickens continues: "[W]hat I have seen has disgusted and astonished me beyond all measure. I mean to strike the heaviest blow in my power for these unfortunate creatures, but whether I shall do so in the 'Nickleby,' or wait for some other opportunity, I have not yet determined" (qtd. in Collins, 656). But that blow never fell, not even in *Hard Times*.

If his representation of working-class figures in *Hard Times* is stilted and inadequate, as numerous critics have charged,[82] his approach to the factory is also lacking. What Dickens disputes through his mockery of the fairy palace trope in *Hard Times* is not figurative remediation in general, but euphemism specifically. He is disturbed, and rightly so, by its delusive effects on middle-class perceptions of reality. However, though he eschews euphemism as a strategy by which to cope with the less appealing aspects of industry, at least at this point in his career, this does not mean that he eschews figuration altogether. Quite the contrary. The most celebrated passage in *Hard Times*, the often anthologized "Key-note" chapter, unfolds a carefully constructed conceit by which Dickens renders industrial Coketown as an urban jungle:

> It was a town of red brick, or brick that would have been red if the smoke and ashes had allowed it; but, as matters stood it was a town of unnatural red and black like the painted face of a savage. It was a town of machinery and tall chimneys, out of which interminable serpents of smoke trailed themselves for ever and ever, and never got uncoiled. It had a black canal in it, and a river that ran purple with ill-smelling dye, and vast piles of buildings full of windows where there was a rattling and a trembling all day long, and where the piston of the steam-engine worked monotonously up and down, like the head of an elephant in a state of melancholy madness. (27)

He extends the conceit when in a later chapter the narrator briefly follows Stephen inside one of Coketown's cotton mills, and we get the barest glimpse of the factory's interior: "Stephen bent over his loom, quiet, watchful, and steady. A special contrast, as every man

[82] George Eliot was perhaps the first to articulate a criticism of *Hard Times* based on its unsatisfactory representation of working-class characters: "We have one great novelist who is gifted with the utmost power of rendering the external traits of our town population; and if he could give us their psychological character—their conception of life, and their emotions—with the same truth as their idiom and manners, his books would be the greatest contributions" (qtd. in Spector 365). In "Monsters of Metonymy: Hard Times and Knowing the Working Class," Stephen Spector mounts something of a defense of the *Hard Times*, arguing that precisely because Dickens's representations of Coketown's working-class characters are inadequate the novel thus reveals the glaring limitations of metonymy.

was in the forest of looms where Stephen worked, to the crashing, smashing, tearing piece of mechanism at which he laboured" (71). Instead of an enchanted fairy palace in an Arabian fable, Dickens transports us to a dangerous subcontinental jungle, complete with painted savages, coiled serpents, and maddened elephants crashing through the thick forest.

Critics, even those who otherwise put pressure on *Hard Times*, have tended to praise Dickens's urban jungle conceit. Take, for example, Stephen Spector, who writes astutely about the limitations of metonymy to represent working-class figures in the novel. His skepticism does not extend to Dickens's use of metaphor, however. Instead, Spector enthuses: "The [key-note] passage triumphs because Dickens imaginatively transforms the scene through the use of figurative language" (368). Joshi, in the same breath in which she notes that "*Hard Times* contains little in it of factories, machines, trade, market fluctuations, or even workers' lives," also writes that "Dickens first introduces his fictional industrial town Coketown in deft and inspired images" (233).[83]

Certainly, at the level of craft, Dickens's use of metaphor demonstrates more skill than Trollope's or Disraeli's; rather than the fragmented confusion of catachresis, there is

[83] Patricia E. Johnson goes even further in her article "*Hard Times* and the Structure of Industrialism: The Novel as Factory" (*Studies in the Novel*. 21.2 (Summer 1989): 128-37). Rather dubiously, I think, she asserts: "*Hard Times* uses the physical structure of the factory itself as both the metaphor for the destructive forces at work on its' characters lives and as the metaphor for its own aesthetic unity as a novel. […] [T]he shape of the novel recreates the dynamics of urban industrialism. In its firm outer framework—focused on the competing philosophies of Mr. Gradgrind's Utilitarianism and the circus's traditional humanism—which surrounds and contains an inner core of smoke and fire—represented by the stories of Stephen Blackpool, the industrial worker, and Louisa Gradgrind, the central female character—*Hard Times* imitates the closed economy of the factory system" (129). I find her argument a little tenuous. Moreover, it does not strike me as terribly useful—she claims to have found the factory in *Hard Times*, but the factory as a structural conceit isn't really the factory.

unity of vision in Dickens's rendering of his mill town and its factories. Dickens's consistency creates for a greater degree of coherence, pointing toward an implied argument: there are "urban jungles" within England that require as much attention as any of Britain's colonial outposts. His conceit does not disguise but rather attempts to reveal the menace of industrial development. Yet, its ultimate ends are the same as euphemism. More distracting than revelatory, his figurations persistently direct the reader's attention away from the factories and machines. Indeed, recent critical discussion of the "key-note" passage underscores my point. Kurt Koenigsberger and Tamara Ketabgian devote entire chapters in their books to an examination of Dickens's singular metaphor that likens the piston in the steam engine to "the head of an elephant in a state of melancholy madness." They both turn to anecdotes about actual elephants running amok in various menageries and circuses in order to historicize the Victorian response to the exotic jungle beast and situate *Hard Times* in its imperial context.[84] Adroit and fascinating as their readings are, Koenigsberger and Ketabgian follow the trail of the signifier, the elephant, away from the signified, the industrial machine. Dickens's response to the factory is to heavily metaphorize and, skilled a craftsman though he is, his conceit nevertheless functions the

[84] In *The Novel and the Menagerie: Totality, Englishness, and Empire* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2007), Koenigsberger argues that, by excluding the elephant from Sleary's circus and instead using the exotic jungle beast as a central trope, Dickens reaffirms English moderation and self-containment against imperial excesses. Tamara Ketabgian is interested in colonial excesses, specifically the peculiar affect that Dickens ascribes to his "melancholy mad elephants." In *The Lives of Machines: The Industrial Imaginary in Victorian Literature & Culture* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011). She opens her discussion of *Hard Times* by looking at how elephants were described in Victorian medical and natural historical texts as plodding, docile creatures that were nevertheless wont to explode into unpredictable violence. In these descriptions, Ketabgian hears allusions to the threat of distant colonial rage as well as the simmering rage of the domestic proletariat.

same way as the clumsiest of metaphors: to efface the signified and replace it with the signifier.

* * *

There was another option for reconciling oneself with the new reality of the factory, one that General Napier, who was stationed in Northern England from 1839 to 1842 to help quell Chartist unrest, articulated in a letter to the famed factory reformer Lord Ashley: "I endeavoured to avoid the contemplation of [the 'horrors of the factory system'], lest they should drive me into extravagance of thought and language" (Hodder 363). Certain of the more prominent industrial novelists, such as Disraeli at a slightly later stage in his writing career, Charlotte Brontë, and Elizabeth Gaskell, are of like mind to Napier. They do not envelop the factory in a haze of elaborate metaphors; rather, they simply and quite literally don't go there.

In the single year that transpired between the publication of *Coningsby* and the publication of *Sybil; or, The Two Nations* (1845), Disraeli apparently had a change of heart regarding the greatness of the British cotton industry. Perhaps he had become more conversant with the debates surrounding factory reform and read some of the parliamentary Blue Books documenting conditions in the mills. Whatever the case, the factories had lost much of their luster of romance in his eyes, and he had become convinced that industrial labor was largely degrading. He no longer imagines a magical and ennobling relationship between the machine and the laborer, akin to that between Aladdin and his genie; rather, in the words of his impoverished handloom weaver character, with whom he

plainly sympathizes: "Once [the laborer] was an artisan: at the best, he now only watches machines" (115). Nevertheless, Disraeli's response to his disillusionment was not to rend the veil from his reader's eyes by providing a sharply etched depiction of factory conditions; instead, he carefully navigates around the factories that infrequently appear on the periphery of his industrial settings.

The most renowned of Disraeli's novels, *Sybil* takes place in part in "the town of Mowbray, teeming with its toiling thousands," a likely analog for Manchester (106). Upon first venturing into Mowbray alongside two central Chartist characters, we catch a glimpse of some cotton warehouses, which are "not as beautiful as the palaces of Venice, but in their way no less remarkable." Unable, it seems, to completely relinquish the palace comparison, Disraeli applies it to the vast storage facilities, rather than the actual sites of labor, and tempers it with litotes. Of the actual factories we get a quick glance at some "tall chimneys and bulky barrack-looking buildings that rose in all directions, clustering yet isolated, [which] announced that they were in the principle scene of the industry of Mowbray" (85). With that, Disraeli deposits his characters together with his readers inside a busy and somewhat seedy working-class tavern to listen in on snippets of conversation between the lively patrons, a scene of local color with a hint of debauchery that Disraeli seemingly felt more comfortable sketching than the interior of a Mowbray factory. Rather than revising his earlier version of the Manchester mill, replete with its Peris and Penelopes, into something less ethereal and considerably more worldly, he adopts Napier's tack and

fastidiously avoids contemplating the factory system as it is, in all its turmoil and complexity.[85]

Beyond teeming Mowbray, the other site of cotton manufacturing in the novel is Trafford's mill, Disraeli's vision of an industrial utopia. Mr. Trafford is the youngest son of an ancient aristocratic family who decided to invest his energy and meager funds in manufacturing, to great success: "On the banks of his native Mowe he had built a factory, which was now one of the marvels of the district; one might almost say, of the country; a single room, spreading over nearly two acres, and holding more than two thousand work people." With its "roof of groined arches, lighted by ventilating domes at the height of eighteen feet," Disraeli lends Trafford's mill more the appearance of a great cathedral than a factory (182). As the goodly proprietor of the establishment, Trafford does not leave his laborers to fend for themselves in their hours outside the factory. He instead embraces paternalistic stewardship, building a village nearby to the factory, in the midst of which stands his own manor house: "The vast form of the spreading factory, the roofs and gardens of the village, the Tudor chimneys of the house of Trafford […], with the sparkling river and the sylvan background" all huddle harmoniously together in the untainted English countryside (183). Trafford's mill is thus Disraeli's fantasy of industrialized feudalism, a revival of the "baronial principle," "adapted to the softer manners and more ingenious circumstances of the times" (182). This is the British aristocrat's version of the republican idyll that Lowell was imagined to be. It contains echoes too of the bucolic,

[85] Disraeli does render some industrial sites more fully: the home of a handloom weaver who has been rendered obsolete by the factory, and the coal mines, for which he reserves all the "extravagance of thought and language" that he does not expend on the mills.

feudal-inspired vision of the Southern plantation that we find in American proslavery novels.

Even in this ideal form, however, Disraeli does not permit his readers to actually enter the mill. He holds out multiple teasers: we think we're going to follow the novel's protagonist, Egremont, into the factory, but instead we follow the titular heroine, Sybil, to the manor house; we then linger there in the company of Mrs. Trafford even when a party of neighboring aristocrats arrives, also wishing to tour the mill. Disraeli does not—cannot, I suspect—take us inside because his imagination fails him on the threshold; even as he quails before a representation of the industrial reality, he cannot conceive of a vision of factory labor that would be in keeping with the "sylvan background," the soaring architecture, or the feudal nostalgia of his industrial utopia.

Charlotte Brontë was the next major novelist to enter the fray of the condition-of-England debate with her industrial novel *Shirley* (1849). The novel does not rate highly within Brontë's own oeuvre, in part, no doubt, because she plays it very safe; *Shirley* lacks the edge and the immediacy of *Jane Eyre* (1847) or *Villette* (1853). Although it had been a decade since Trollope published *Michael Armstrong* and there had been numerous other iterations of the industrial novel subgenre to since appear, Trollope's immoderation and supposed immodesty had stayed with Brontë as negative examples. In a letter to her publisher in January of 1848, Brontë declared: ""Details, situations which I do not understand and cannot personally inspect, I would not for the world meddle with, lest I should make even a more ridiculous mess of the matter than Mrs. Trollope did in her 'Factory Boy'" (qtd. in Joshi 231). Trollope's intrepidity in seeking to understand and to see for herself the state of British industry was, it seems, offensive to Brontë's sense of

propriety and thus out of the question as she deliberated about how to conduct her own approach to the industrial novel.

Brontë's solution to her ignorance, which she could not or would not ameliorate, was to remove her novel to a past moment in Britain's history, just distant enough that not many could claim to have personal knowledge of it; she set *Shirley* in in her own native Yorkshire but during the Luddite riots of 1811 to 1812. This move seems a bold one, perhaps—turning to a period of documented violence and brutality on the part of both manufacturers and workers—but she has a solution for that too. Early in the novel, she sets the scene for the novel's industrial site, Robert Moore's textile mill, with scanty detail; it is a frosty dawn, and Moore summons his laborers to their work: "The mill-windows were alight, the bells still rung loud, and now the little children came running in, in too great a hurry, let us hope to feel very much nipped by the inclement air" (59). Watching these children scamper willingly, it seems, to their labor at 6:00 AM on a chilly February morning is the closest we ever get to the mill and its operations. The novel never describes the mill's exterior, let alone its interior, and never again registers the presence of Moore's active workforce. Brontë does not pause to reflect about the fact of these workers being mere children or about the early hour. She offers the vain hope that they don't feel the cold then moves briskly on. Similarly, when she shows the children at their breakfast a short time later, she pauses for one brief instant: "Let us hope they have enough to eat; it would be a pity were it otherwise" (60). She tosses out these abortive hopes but does not stay long enough to actually inquire into the small laborers' experiences of their work conditions.

Instead, Brontë uses this scene to highlight Moore's justly firm and gruffly paternalistic approach to his position as master: "Mr Moore stood at the entrance to watch them pass: he counted them as they went by; to those who came rather late he said a word of reprimand, which was a little more sharply repeated by Joe Scott when the lingerers reached the work-rooms. Neither master nor overlooker spoke savagely; they were not savage men either of them[.]" Brontë then issues what amounts to both a defensive justification for her decision not to represent the well-publicized horrific aspects of the factory system's earlier history as well as a snide critique of Trollope's blatant sensationalism:

> [C]oarse and cruel masters will make coarse and cruel rules, which, at the time we treat of at least, they used sometimes to enforce tyrannically; but […] I have not undertaken to handle degraded or utterly infamous [masters]. Child-torturers, slave masters and drivers, I consign to the hands of jailers; the novelist may be excused from sullying his page with the record of their deeds.
>
> Instead, then, of harrowing up my reader's soul, and delighting his organ of Wonder, with effective descriptions of stripes and scourgings, I am happy to be able to inform him that neither Mr Moore nor his overlooker ever struck a child in their mill. (59)

This is the most we ever hear of the proceedings inside the mill: an affirmation of what does not occur there. The author who so evocatively rendered young Jane Eyre's mortifications and privations at Lowood School here steers clear of representing a child's experience of labor in Moore's mill.

As for the Luddites, the dispossessed adult mill hands who turn their frustration into violence against the machinery that replaced them and eventually against the master who implemented it, the novel is remarkably uninterested in them. *Shirley* is first and foremost a novel about the woman question; it utilizes "an industrial lens to bring domestic issues that concerned [Brontë], the superfluity of women, into focus" (Joshi 232).

Industrial workers are valuable in the novel's economy insofar as their position is analogous to that of its two main characters, Caroline Helstone and Shirley Keeldar, both middle-class women struggling against the restrictions imposed on their gender. For Joshi, there is cause for celebration in this: "Brontë suggests that underlying [the gulf between classes] is a commonality shared by some, that physical privation and emotional hunger are equivalents" (232). I am far less sanguine; to claim that literal starvation and figurative starvation are the same strikes me as absurd and redolent of uninterrogated privilege. Like Bertha Mason Rochester, the disenfranchised workers are "dark doubles" for the novel's heroines, and like Bertha too they are disposable once they have served their purpose. By the novel's end, they are thus doubly obsolete—within Moore's new, technologically advanced mill as well as within Brontë's plot structure.

Elizakbeth Gaskell, whose novels *Mary Barton* (1848) and *North and South* (1854-5) rate alongside *Hard Times* as the most canonical of the industrial fictions, is even more circumspect than Disraeli in her limited representation of the factory. This, despite being the only industrial novelist to actually reside in an industrial center. She moved to Manchester after marrying the Reverend William Gaskell in 1832 and lived there until her death in 1865; she was thus resident throughout the decades of England's awakening conscience about industrial conditions, as the cotton industry flourished and the manufacturing class grew its influence and prosperity at the expense of the working class, all the way through to the years of hardship caused by the American Civil War. As a minister's wife, she had occasion to undertake charitable visits into laborers' homes, and thus observed working-class domestic life more intimately than any of her fellow writers of popular fiction (and arguably better than any of the amateur and professional investigators

who attempted to document working-class conditions, with the possible exception of Engels).

Due to her adhesion to gendered and classed notions of propriety, however, her personal experience of the factories among which she passed her daily life was deliberately restricted. Indeed, when exhorted by a friend after the publication of *Mary Barton* to write another industrial novel from the perspective of a mill owner, Gaskell demurred: "How could I suggest or even depict modes of proceeding, (the details of which I never saw)? […] I should like some *man*, who had a man's correct knowledge, to write on this subject" (*Letters* 722; original emphasis). Her novels thus maintain the mill as a central blind spot.

Mary Barton was the first of Gaskell's published works, and, because it took working-class characters as its protagonists and even expressed sympathy for their economic and political struggles under the heels of the capitalist manufacturers, the novel won her immediate acclaim in some circles as well as enmity in others. Among literary critics, it has long excited interest because of its attempt to reveal, in Gaskell's words, "the romance in the lives of some of those who elbowed me daily in the busy streets of the town in which I resided" (3). In Raymond Williams's foundational work of literary analysis, *Culture and Society* (1958), in which he coined the term "industrial novel," Williams issues just praise of Gaskell for her evocation of working-class domestic life: "The really impressive thing about the book is the intensity of the effort to record, in its own terms, the feel of everyday life in the working-class homes" (94). Indeed, Gaskell depicts the home of the Bartons in such rich detail that scholars like Elaine Freedgood and Caroline Steedman

have been able to build fascinating cultural analyses around individual items decorating their rooms.[86]

But Gaskell does not expend the same descriptive skill on the factories. The only glimpse readers catch of a mill in the entire novel happens from afar and early in the plot as the titular heroine, Mary, looks on while a factory is engulfed in flames. The novel creates a vague impression of the building's vast size, but the ferociousness of the flames receives far more concerted descriptive effort than the edifice they are destroying. After this dramatic event, Gaskell never registers another factory in the Manchester of *Mary Barton*, let alone taking her readers inside to witness the operations and conditions.

Nor does *North and South* (1854-5), Gaskell's second industrial novel, do much to correct this oversight; the factories' looming silhouettes obtrude themselves in Gaskell's industrial scenery on occasion, but the novel repeatedly halts demurely on the threshold of the mill alongside its genteel heroine. Published in *Household Words* immediately after *Hard Times* completed its run, *North and South* takes as its protagonist Margaret Hale, the Southern-bred daughter of a pastor whose father has a crisis of faith and suddenly uproots the family to Milton-Northern, Gaskell's alias for Manchester.[87] Gaskell records Margaret's first, less-than-glowing impressions of the sprawling manufacturing city as a series of "long,

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[86] See Elaine Freedgood's *The Ideas in Things: Fugitive Meaning in the Victorian Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006) and Caroline Steedman's *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002).

[87] Because of the anger she had provoked from some of her manufacturer neighbors after the publication of *Mary Barton*, Gaskell took the caution of dubbing the city in *North and South* Milton-Northern rather than referring to Manchester by name as she had done previously. It's likely she need not have bothered, however, for *North and South* takes a far less controversial approach, focusing on middle-class characters and concerns and portraying working-class unrest with a much less sympathetic eye. Indeed, for these reasons, *Mary Barton* was for many years the preferred text of critics, who deemed *North and South* the less interesting of the two.

straight, hopeless streets of regularly-built houses, all small and of brick. Here and there a great oblong many-windowed factory stood up, like a hen among her chickens, puffing out black 'unparliamentary' smoke" (59). The unlikely comparison of the factory among the small houses to a "hen among her chickens" is oddly precious in a scene also described as "hopeless." The simile perhaps serves to underscore the pastoral as Margaret's point of reference, for she often contrasts smoky Milton unfavorably with her memory of her family's former home, the arcadian Helstone parsonage. The cutesy and thus belittling comparison demonstrates her inability to comprehend the industrial landscape, in all its magnificence as well as its squalor.

Like Gaskell herself, once established in Milton, Margaret proceeds to form acquaintanceships built upon acts of charity with certain of the factory operatives among whom she now lives. But she professes a determined lack of interest in the mills within which her new associates labor. When the haughty, new-moneyed mother of John Thornton, a neighboring mill owner, comes to call on the Hales at her son's behest, she encounters an equally as haughty and insistently genteel Margaret:

> "Do you know anything of Milton, Miss Hale? Have you seen any of our factories? our magnificent warehouses?"
>
> "No!" said Margaret. […] "I really do not find much pleasure in going over manufactories." […]
>
> "Very probably," said Mrs. Thornton, in a short displeased manner. "I merely thought, that as strangers newly come to reside in a town which has risen to eminence in the country, from the character and progress of its peculiar business, you might have cared to visit some of the places where it is carried on; places unique in this kingdom, I am informed. […]"
>
> "I am so glad you don't like mills and manufactories," said Fanny, in a half-whisper, as she rose to accompany her mother, who was taking leave of Mrs. Hale with rustling dignity.
>
> "I think I should like to know all about them, if I were you," replied Margaret quietly. (98)

In this scene, Margaret uses knowledge of the mills or the lack thereof to demarcate and protect class lines. Against Mrs. Thornton's prideful assertion of the manufacturing class's newfound eminence, Margaret asserts her own deliberate ignorance of and affected indifference to manufacturing as her prerogatives as a member of the gentility. Meanwhile, she also implies that Fanny's distaste, expressed in solidarity with Margaret, is gauche and improper; as the sister of a manufacturer, Fanny's eagerness to state her indifference and align herself with Margaret smacks of class pretension to Margaret, who polices those increasingly blurry boundaries with her pointed rebuff. She also suggests that, because Fanny lives off the profits of the cotton industry, Fanny's ignorance is hypocritical. Although Margaret is now also resident in close physical proximity to the mills, she claims economic and thus ethical distance from manufacturing, absolving herself of any personal responsibility for industrial conditions.

As a conspicuous consumer, however, Margaret is not so removed from the factories as she likes to pretend. Part of the novel's strategy for distinguishing Margaret is through careful observance of the class signs encoded in her clothing, but such details also betray her participation in industry as a consumer of cotton goods.[88] As with her declaration of apathy regarding the factories, Margaret professes "a measured lack of interest in dress […] as a means of asserting her class superiority over the vulgar tradesfolk of Milton-Northern" (Longmuir 245). But even as Margaret gets to remain above the supposed frivolity of

[88] For discussions of consumption and fashion in *North and South*, see Anne Longmuir's article, "Consuming Subjects: Women and the Market in Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*" (*Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 34.3 (2012): 237-252) and Christoph Lindner's piece, "Outside Looking In: Material Culture in Gaskell's Industrial Novels" (*Orbis Litterarum* 55 (2000): 379-96). Fashion historian Rachel Worth has also written about the novel's detailed attention to dress in "Elizabeth Gaskell, Clothes and Class Identity" (*Costume* 32 (1998): 52-59).

fashion, Gaskell devotes considerable effort to recording the understated elegance of Margaret's sartorial choices and their effects on her admiring viewers. Moreover, despite Mrs. Hale's flippant rhetorical question, "Who on earth wears cotton that can afford linen?", Margaret dons dresses made of cotton fabrics on multiple occasions, though Gaskell's descriptions are precise enough to suppress this connection; Margaret's cotton clothing appears in the guise of muslin, chintz, and gauze, the discriminating and sophisticated language of fashion that dissembles the fabrics' humble origins in raw cotton as well as their production history in a nearby factory in order to increase their consumer appeal.

Take, for instance, the scene in which John Thornton calls upon the Hales for tea and encounters Margaret for the second time. He gazes appreciatively at her in the midst of her family's comfortable parlor, not one discreetly luxurious feature of which escapes him, including the "chintz-curtains and chair covers:" "It appeared to Mr. Thornton that all these graceful cares were habitual to the family; and especially of a piece with Margaret. She stood by the tea-table in a light-coloured muslin gown, which had a good deal of pink about it" (79). A lightweight and fine cotton fabric, muslin had been a popular import from India throughout the eighteenth century, but the domestic British industry had increasingly cornered the market; with the introduction of more and more advanced machinery in the British factories, domestic muslin was finer than any produced by Indian handloom weavers (need citation here). All this Thornton, as a former draper turned manufacturer, knows well.

His desire for Margaret, as she pours his tea in her lightly blushing gown, is bound up in her ability to deny his professional knowledge, to wear her muslin gown with such elegant nonchalance that it becomes "of a piece" with her, precluding its prehistory as a

manufactured product. The fabric even takes on the slight flush of her body, so natural does it appear on her. This is no longer a mere cotton fabric, a commodity that Thornton's own mill might have cranked out by the pound; the material instead seems to begin and end with Margaret, gaining the appearance of immanence by association with her genteel femininity.[89] Thornton does not want to thrust his world and his knowledge of the factory upon Margaret. Rather, her appeal for him is in her ability to erase the taint of the factory. Through his bedazzlement and willingness to ignore the trace of her consumerism, Thornton demonstrates refined sensibilities that qualify him for inclusion in the developing industrial aristocracy and manifest his suitability as Margaret's eventual mate.

As the obstacle of their class differences erodes and their love-hate tension tips toward the former, Gaskell continues to preserve Margaret from the factory; her revision of her wrongful and snobbish dismissal of Thornton as a mere manufacturer does not include a revision of her stated lack of interest in seeing his mill. The novel's climactic scene, in which Margaret tries to shield Thornton from an angry mob of striking workers, prompting him to hope for the first time that she might return his regard, takes place in the courtyard of his factory complex. This is the closest she ever comes to an industrial site, at least physically.

However, interpersonally and eventually even economically, Margaret's relationship to the mill becomes increasingly intimate as the novel unfolds. Her ongoing

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[89] As important resources on female consumerism, see Krista Lysack, *Come Buy, Come Buy: Shopping and the Culture of Consumption in Victorian Women's Writing (*Athens: Ohio University Press, 2008); Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace, *Consuming Subjects: Women, Shopping, and Business in the Eighteenth Century (*New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); and Lori Merish, *Sentimental Materialism: Gender, Commodity Culture, and Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).

acquaintanceships among Thornton's operatives inspire in him the wish "to have the opportunity of cultivating some intercourse with the hands beyond the mere 'cash nexus,'" which is ultimately the novel's solution to the problems of class-based inequality (431). Personal attachment between a manufacturer and his operatives might not resolve all class tension, Thornton concedes, but there will at least be less rancor, a very partial fix for which Thornton seeks Margaret's ready approbation and for which the novel is willing to settle. And it is with reference to their mutual admiration for Margaret that Thornton and Nicholas Higgins, a disgruntled worker and Union leader, initially find a common ground upon which to found a cautious professional understanding. Her domesticating influence thus triangulates into the mill to facilitate relationships between men (in the form of a dining room, no less), and she never even has to risk the impropriety of setting foot inside. The domestic sphere can reach inside the mill in Gaskell's universe, but never the reverse.

In the novel's final pages, Margaret becomes in one fell swoop both Thornton's romantic partner and his business partner. Having conveniently come into some money through an unlikely inheritance, Margaret offers to finance Thornton's failing mill, and it is immediately understood between them that her business proposal is also a proposal of marriage. She is now a controlling but silent partner in a cotton factory, the interior of which she has never even glimpsed and about the operations of which she still knows next to nothing[90]—an uninformed investment if ever there was one.[91] Indeed, her attraction for

[90] Over the course of the novel, Margaret's initial total ignorance about conditions in the mills gets disrupted just enough through her conversations with Bessy Higgins so as to leave the reader with the hope that she will encourage Thornton to make certain minor improvements in the mill. Bessy is ailing and eventually dies from byssinosis, a condition almost exclusive to workers in the cotton industry caused by inhaling cotton particles, or what Bessy euphemistically terms "fluff." Anne Longmuir asserts that the novel "implicates Margaret by proxy both in [Bessy's] death and in the very industrial practices that

Thornton, her ability to wear a muslin gown as though it is an extension of herself with no prior history as a manufactured commodity, is predicated upon her continued ignorance and consumer denial. The novel's attempt at a neat resolution thus renders Margaret guilty of greater hypocrisy than that for which she once chided Fanny Thornton. The reader might well want to remonstrate with Margaret: "I think I should like to know all about [mills and manufactories], if I were you" (98).

* * *

I come at last to Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna, the novelist for whom I was careful to make an exception. And, indeed, tedious though her evangelical polemics are, her industrial novel *Helen Fleetwood* (1839-40) is remarkable for how thoroughly it renders the cotton factory, certainly more completely than any of Tonna's more celebrated contemporaries. That said, Tonna never actually visited a factory—in fact, she was quite emphatic on that point. Her accounts in *Helen Fleetwood* are drawn entirely from Blue

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[Margaret] condemns to Thornton" (244). At the same time, though, Margaret's conversation with Bessy serves to remove responsibility for unhealthy work conditions from the manufacturers and place it on the workers, a point Mike Sanders makes convincingly: "The reader learns that there is a ventilation system which will carry away the cotton fluff thereby preventing it from filling operatives' lungs, but its installation is apparently opposed by workers who value cotton fluff as an appetite suppressor[…]. If anything, the suggestions if that Bessy is more a victim of narrow-minded working-class attitudes than of her employers' cupidity" (325).

[91] American author Elizabeth Stuart Phelps offers a corrective to this problem in her novel, *The Silent Partner* (1871), which clearly references and mirrors *North and South* in certain scenes but is a departure in that its heroine demonstrates an avowed determination to understand, inside and out, the operations of the mills in which she inherits a silent partnership.

Books and other official Parliamentary documents. Ironically, the author who kept herself at the greatest remove from the factories in life ventured closest to them in her fiction.

Serialized in *The Christian Lady's Magazine* beginning just seven months after Trollope began issuing installments of *Michael Armstrong*, Tonna's novel chronicles the piteous downfall of the Widow Green, her four grandchildren, and Helen Fleetwood, a virtuous orphan in the widow's care. She thus centers her novel on a working-class family, producing "England's first proletarian novel" (Kovačivić and Kanner 173). [92] At the novel's outset, a series of unfortunate circumstances cause the widow to lose her home in the countryside. She moves the family, with the exception of her eldest grandson, to the manufacturing town, M., lured there by propagandistic pamphlets circulated by agents of the manufacturers that falsely advertise the benefits of life and labor in a factory town. In M., eight-year-old Willy, eleven-year-old Mary, and sixteen-year-old Helen enter the factories to support their sickly brother, James, and their elderly caretaker. Almost immediately the deleterious moral and physical effects of their new line of work are perceptible: Willy starts drinking, Mary becomes pert and intractable, and Helen begins to waste away. Meanwhile, unable to manage with the meager wages the children bring in, the widow must relocate the family to more and more squalid housing.

When Richard, the oldest grandson, visits from the country, he is shocked at their degraded circumstances and at the negative changes he observes in each of his family members. Especially concerned about Helen's obvious ill health, he seeks a better work environment for her and then, having become persuaded that even the best factory conditions were atrocious, resolves to remove her to the countryside. But he is not able to

[92] Ivanka Kovačivić and S. Barbara Kanner were among the first to attempt to rescue Tonna from the relative obscurity into which she had fallen and still remains.

act quickly enough. In the final pages, Helen unobtrusively dies a pious death, sanctified by her quiet suffering, and the remaining Greens return sadly to their native parish to carve out a frugal subsistence by honest agricultural labor. Still grieving Helen's loss, little Willy states, "I am sure it was the wickedness of the place, more than the work, that killed Helen," to which Richard replies, "But the work was enough to do it" (389-90).

There are striking moments in the text when Helen and particularly Mary, with her blithe child's perspective, describe the machines and explain the proceedings in the mill in which they work. Still, the novel never accompanies Mary or Helen to their work. There is the sense that to follow the girls into the mill and see them at their labor would sully our image of the pure Helen or even the increasingly irreverent Mary, so we instead hear about their labor while situated within the domestic setting of the Green household. Despite this accommodation for their (or our) delicacy, these moments are nonetheless exceptional inside the body of industrial novels. After their first day on the job, Mary says to her inquiring brothers:

> "[O]nly think boys, what it must be to see ever so many great big things, frames upon carriages on each side of the room, walking up to one another, and then walking back again, with a huge wheel at the end of each, and a big man turning it with all his might, and a lot of children of all sizes keeping before the frame, going backwards and forwards, piecening and scavenging[…]. Move, move, everything moves. The wheels and the frames are always going, and the little reels twirl round as fast as ever they can; and the pulleys, and chains, and great iron works over-head, are all moving; and the cotton moves so fast that it is hard to piece it quick enough; and there is a great dust, and such a noise of whirr, whirr, whirr, that at first I did not know whether I was not standing on my head."
>
> "How funny!" said James, laughing, "but what was your work like?"
>
> "Why you see, the frame goes sloping up so, and the bottom edge is not so high as this little table; and the upper edge has got two rows of little rollers, and over them several other rows, that stand up; and there are a great many cotton threads reaching from the bottom to the top of the frame; and while the machine moves about, the threads go running up, and twist round the little rollers above. Now the threads being thin and fine, they often break, and I have to keep a great

> watch, to get hold of the two ends when one breaks, and put them together, the same as in spinning." (96-7)

The run-on sentences, with clause after clause after clause and no logical break, convey Mary's sense of confusion while experiencing the factory's assault on her senses for the first time. In this, her syntax is reminiscent of Trollope's strained and bewildering sentence constructions. What is unique here, however, is Tonna's attempt to describe the specifics of Mary's particular position in the factory as a piecener, and to do so from the perspective of the laborer herself. Prevailing through the puzzle of Mary's convoluted syntax, there is technical language and procedural knowledge unavailable elsewhere in the fiction of Tonna's contemporaries.

Notably, it is in the company of Richard that the novel eventually embarks on its thoroughgoing tour of a factory. While searching for a healthier situation for Helen, Richard visits one of the best-managed mills in the vicinity of M. Refracted through his more mature (and male) understanding, the account of his visit is exhaustive and detailed. It begins with a methodical description of the first room Richard enters, the spinning room; I provide the passage at length to demonstrate the level of detail and the matter-of-fact style:

> The apartment, though large, was by no means high in proportion to its size; and along the ceiling, closely placed together, ran a number of black leather straps, attached to wheels and pullies, every one of which was in the most rapid motion, accompanied by noise sufficient to drown any voice not raised to a painful pitch. On the floor stood a vast number of frames, seemingly all iron, with just space sufficient between them to allow a passage for the operations of their attendants. These were chiefly girls, dirty, barefooted, and gloomy-looking, who cast a cold glance on the strangers, and persued (sic) their work, which consisted in watching the movements of innumerable cones of cotton, the threads being supplied by machinery, which also kept the spindles perpetually revolving, each when filled requiring to be replaced by another. The party walked round the room, but no variety appeared in the occupation: each frame exactly resembled the rest; each had its own leather straps running on their pullies; and its own wheel, or flier, fixed against the ceiling as it

> appeared, whirling round with the same rapidity, the same monotonous noise as its fellows. The same mechanical employment occupied each individual laborer—a human piece of mechanism, attached to those of iron and leather, passing to a fro within a confined space, with an air of vacant listlessness such as Richard had never beheld among any class of work-people. The air of the room, if air it might be called, which felt more like the absence of that refreshing element, was oppressive to a most sickening degree; its prevailing savior was that of rank oil, necessarily used in great quantities for the supplying the leather, and greasing the machinery; the temperature was dreadfully high, and a tightness came on [Richard's] chest, that rendered the operation of breathing quite laborious. Every minute brought an increase of these oppressive sensations, and glad he was when the manager, opening the door, conducted them into another apartment, divided by a wooden partition from the former. (313-4)

For seven pages, Tonna continues in this vein as Richard progresses from room to room, observing and reporting on every phase in the process of transforming raw cotton into thread. With straightforward imagery, Richard registers not just the machines—so often the stars of accounts of factory tourism—but also the workers: their physical conditions, dispositions, and the ways in which they interact with the machinery.

Innovative and richly suggestive writing this is not; clear and comprehensive it certainly is. Passages like this one illustrate Wanda Neff's assessment of the novel in her informative literary history of Victorian working women: "*Helen Fleetwood* is the most effective single literary agency in getting technical information before the general public. Only a writer who had a greater regard for truth than for art, who sacrificed the interest of her tale for what it taught, could be so willfully dull and, at the same time, so important" (Neff 87). While the "truth" of her depiction is debatable, based as it is on parliamentary documents that themselves were not above ideological and political motivations, there can be no doubt that Tonna prioritized accuracy.

And yet, for all this, Tonna never visited a factory herself—wouldn't have dreamed of it. From within her London home, her novelistic process relied upon Blue Books, which

she supplemented by imagination; as she wrote in the August 1838 issue of *The Christian Lady's Magazine*: "I have looked into various documents connected with the subject [factory children] and have realized in thought some of the cases[…]. I have gazed on a child, very dear to me by ties of blood and affection, and have pictured him to myself undergoing the horrors of which yet I can have but an imperfect conception" ("The Protestant," 189). With perhaps a sidelong glance in Trollope's direction, much like that Brontë would cast almost a decade later, Tonna demarcates the limits of her imaginative explorations in the early pages of *Helen Fleetwood*: 'Vivid indeed, and fertile in devices must the fancy be that could invent a horror beyond the bare, every-day reality of the thing! Nay, we will set forth nothing but what has been stated on oath, corroborated on oath, and on oath confirmed beyond the possibility of an evasive question." "[F]ertile in devices"—with this possible reference to Trollope's hyperbolic tendencies, Tonna almost seems to predict the anxious deployment of literary devices that Disraeli and Dickens will later manifest. She continues: "Neither will we lift the veil that piety and modesty would draw over the hidden atrocities of this diabolical child-market. Blasphemy and indecency may, they do abound, turning every mill into pandemonium; but it is not needful to sully our pages with either" (45-6). In Tonna's work, perhaps more than that of any of the other industrial novelists, there is a tension as she tries to parse out what level of knowledge is needful to capture the "horror [of] the bare, every-day reality of the thing" in order to motivate change and what level of knowledge it would be unbecoming for her to demonstrate and foist upon her reader.

Turning to official records was her solution to this bind—she could claim accuracy without having to claim direct, personal knowledge. Discussing the change in Disraeli's

outlook on the factories between *Coningsby* and *Sybil*, Steven Marcus issues an insightful argument that I think is actually much more pertinent to the case of Tonna. Speculating that Disraeli "had been doing his homework in Blue Books," Marcus asserts: "It was in fact easier to read about such things than it was to experience them directly. Articulated, written, and printed language imposed a preformed structure on them; the arrangement of an official report [...] interposed yet another formal structure between the immediate concrete realities of human experience" (45). This being the case, it is in fact no surprise that an author who never visited a factory, who did not possess even the incidental knowledge that might be acquired from living in the vicinity of a factory, should be the one to depict the factory most completely in her fiction. Tonna could position herself to enjoy physical, emotional, and moral distance from the factory, and so she did not feel the same compulsion to interpose that distance in her prose.

* * *

In 2004, the BBC adapted *North and South* as a four-part miniseries. The adaptation enjoyed such instant and immense popularity that the night the last installment aired, culminating in a long-awaited kiss between Margaret (played by Daniela Denby-Ashe) and Thornton (played by Richard Armitage), fans swamped the BBC's message boards with such enthusiasm that the site crashed. The series has since been widely available to fans of historical drama on Netflix. When, in describing my nascent project, I told friends and colleagues that *North and South* was one of my central texts, those who had never read the

novel but had seen the miniseries inevitably exclaimed: "Oh, of course! That's so perfect for you. The cotton factory is everywhere!" And indeed it is.

In the BBC's version, an imperious Margaret, newly arrived in Milton-Northern, goes in haste to Marlborough Mill to express dissatisfaction about her family's intended lodgings to Mr. Thornton, who has had a hand in securing them. Told to wait in an anteroom, she becomes impatient and impetuously enters the mill's interior. Coughing and brushing little flurries of floating white dust away from her face, she suddenly pauses in astonishment upon entering a vast chamber in which hundreds of looms lightly clatter away while numbers of men and women placidly tend them. The musical score becomes sweeping and expansive with lots of strings, while Margaret stares in open-mouthed awe. Through the cotton falling like big, fluffy flakes of snow, she perceives the commanding figure of Mr. Thornton, presiding over his realm.

The mood of romance and the tone of wonder are rent when Thornton abruptly barks a name and begins to pursue a fleeing male laborer, who had been about to light a cigarette, through the mill. The man trips and falls, and Thornton is upon him, beating him brutally. Margaret intercedes, her wonderment turned to horror, yelling, "Stop!" Toward the end of the last episode, as Thornton stands amidst his now silent and still machinery, he flashes back to the look of shock and disdain with which Margaret had regarded him in that charged initial encounter.

In between this latter moment and the former, the BBC adaptation gives the reader numerous other glimpses into the factory's interior. None of this, of course, is in the novel.

The cotton mill in BBC's *North and South* is not an inherently brutalized or brutalizing place. It is Thornton who interrupts Margaret's silent amazement in that early

scene, disrupting the peaceful flow of work under the gently falling cotton and introducing violence. With his reform through Margaret's winning influence, we can assume that the factory is reformed.

The compulsion the writers and producers of the film adaptation evidently felt to fill in Gaskell's omissions is fascinating. It suggests that the Victorian taboo around the factory is no longer with us, or at least, if there is still a factory taboo, it has shifted. No doubt, it helped that representing the Victorian factory, a thing squarely of the past, was what was required to fully bring *North and South* to the screen. It is hard to imagine a romance that begins in a realistically rendered Chinese or Bangladeshi factory inspiring the same gushing fandom. The cotton factory is still our dirty secret; it just has been displaced elsewhere, literally rather than metaphorically.

AFTERWORD

More than the biography of a cotton t-shirt, the much-lauded book that inspired *Planet Money*'s exploration of the modern cotton industry,[93] Pietra Rivoli's *The Travels of a T-Shirt in the Global Economy* (2009), is the story of Rivoli's own conversion from an economic pragmatist into an economic moralist. A Georgetown business professor, she began her journey as a staunch proponent of free trade who looked askance upon student protesters and their emotionally charged outcry against sweatshop conditions in Chinese factories. After her years following her t-shirt all around the world, she has become not just an advocate for trade, but a fervent devotee, confirmed in a new faith that trade is an engine for moral as well as commercial good. Her outlook on the cotton industry and its place in the global economy is now just as emotive as any naïve student's. But whereas the typical college-age protester wants to rage against the machine, Rivoli wants to consecrate it.

Rather than a race to the bottom,[94] the t-shirt's story as Rivoli tells it is really the narrative of human progress. It serves to illustrate what she deems an "unwitting conspiracy" between capitalist entrepreneurs and labor activists, a system of checks and

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[93] Roger Lowenstein, writing on behalf of *The New York Times*, raved about *The Travels of a T-Shirt in the Global Economy* when its first edition came out in 2004, hailing it as an "economics classic." In a somewhat bizarre comparison, he described her process: "Ms. Rivoli follows her T-shirt along its route, but that is like saying that Melville follows his whale."

[94] The term "race to the bottom" refers to the effect by which corporations give their business to factories offering the cheapest labor, leading to negative pressure on wages and work conditions. For a bracingly pessimistic counterpoint to Rivoli's optimism about globalization and trade, see Alan Tonelson's *The Race to the Bottom: Why a Worldwide Worker Surplus and Uncontrolled Free Trade are Sinking American Living Standards* (Cambridge: Westview Press, 2002).

balances by which the innovative forces of the competitive market are calibrated by the moral forces of conscience, religion, and politics; the result, she avers, is a dialectical equipoise that unerringly drives toward the improvement of the human condition (121).[95] More optimistically still, Rivoli represents the cotton industry's global networks as emissaries of world peace:

> The Texans, Chinese, Jews, Sicilians, Tanzanians, Muslims, Christians, whites, blacks, and browns who passed my T-shirt around the global economy get along just fine. Actually, *much* better than fine, thank you very much. All of these people, and millions more like them, are bound together by trade in cotton, yarn, fabric, and T-shirts. I believe that each of them, as they touch the next one, are doing their part to keep the peace.

She sentimentalizes this vast trade network as "my T-shirt's extended family" and concludes that "the bonds formed by my T-shirt can only be a force for good" (257).

Key to Rivoli's progressivist narrative is her assertion that, beginning with a series of exposés in the mid-1990s disclosing labor abuses in several Chinese and Indonesian factories to which Nike Corporation had outsourced production, the public consciousness of consumerism has evolved to unprecedented moral heights:

> The notion that apparel companies should be responsible for the conditions in their suppliers' factories—the so-called "supply chain"—was a novel and unwelcome idea to most companies. Indeed, the idea that a customer *could* be responsible for what happened behind the factory gates of its suppliers was unheard of. (126)

Here, she has staked her optimism on tenuous ground. While the suggestion of accountability must surely have been to unwelcome to the corporations, new it was not. Nor is consumer responsibility a novel concept. Far from it, as a glance through the nineteenth-century cultural record reveals. In the West, we have long been engaged in

[95] Rivoli does acknowledge an ongoing history of deplorable work conditions in the textile industry. But bad conditions are actually part of her moral scheme because they inspire the workers to demand better treatment and insist on their rights.

public negotiations around the extent to which we should and must acknowledge our shared consumer guilt.

In 1863, the British satirical magazine *Punch* printed this cartoon by illustrator John Tenniel:

Captioned "The Haunted Lady, or 'The Ghost' in the Looking Glass," the image features a stylish young woman in a dress shop trying on an elaborately frilled and flounced gown. Behind her hovers a hawkish shopkeeper, gleeful at the prospect of a sale. Below the image appears this line of text, clearly ascribed to the shopkeeper as she tries to reel in a potential buyer: "We would not have disappointed your Ladyship, at any sacrifice, and the robe is finished *à merveille*." At any sacrifice indeed—for in the looking glass there appears the young customer's ghostly double, an emaciated seamstress, exhausted or dead. The cartoon implies that it is at the expense of the seamstress's life, drained away in a

neighboring London sweatshop, that the young woman purchases her high-class fashionability.

Because the ranks of seamstresses were filled with shabby-genteel ladies fallen from the middle class and their occupation could easily be represented as properly feminine and domestic, the seamstress was a more sympathetic figure in the nineteenth-century imaginary than the mill worker or the field slave. But the plight of the latter figures was not always forgotten either. As early as 1789, *Columbian Magazine*, a miscellany published in Philadelphia, printed this ardent exhortation for more conscientiousness in the consumption of products based in slave labor:

> Those beautiful colors with which our ladies are adorned; the cotton with which they line their stays; the coffee, the chocolate on which they breakfast; the red with which they heighten their complexions—all these the hand of the miserable negro prepares for them. Tender women! you weep at tragedies, and yet what affords you pleasure is bathed with the tears, and stained with the blood of your fellow creatures! ("Arguments drawn from interest" 362)

Here, as in the Tenniel cartoon, the collective guilt for a vast exploitative system gets projected onto the female consumer. Indeed, it is no coincidence that this was the cultural moment at which consumption became gendered.[96] With developments in mass production came new forms and larger networks of labor expropriation, as well as new strategies to deflect blame for consumer complicity in that expropriation.

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[96] In *Sex and Suits*, art and fashion historian Anne Hollander identifies the Neo-classic moment at the turn of the eighteenth century as the point in time when the modern-day male suit, with its stream-lined silhouette and muted color-scheme, emerged: "From that short epoch […] dates the custom of putting only women into colorful ornamented fancies and dressing men in simple, dull-finished, undecorated shapes" (7). Male fashion thus became the somber, sedate background against which the brilliant flurry of female fashion showed in marked contrast. While female fashions shifted rapidly, male fashions became remarkably stable, producing the illusion of the male suit as natural and women's dress as comparatively unnatural/artificial, and also obscuring male practices of consumption. This shift enabled projection of anxieties about consumption onto women.

As we have seen, the scope of the networks, both of production and consumption, that comprised the transatlantic cotton industry meant that it was possible to shine a spotlight on only particular areas and practices while leaving the rest blanketed in darkness. Again and again in the texts I considered here, we saw evidence of this selective awareness. Of the all nineteenth-century texts I have read, Williams Wells Brown's *Clotel; or, The President's Daughter* (1853) is the only one to hold all three nodes of the Cotton Triangle within its sphere of representation. A novelized amalgamation of Brown's own experiences under the institution of American slavery together with personal anecdotes he heard from other fugitives, *Clotel* sweeps from the Deep South to the Free North and finally lands in industrial Manchester.

Although Brown's main characters are all house slaves, he allots an important moment to a minor field-hand character. There is a brief interlude when Brown pauses his plot to stopover on a cotton plantation owned by a sanctimonious preacher who is an especially cruel master. While showing his farm to a party of Northerners, the hypocritical preacher encourages his field hands to take a drink of whiskey with him, hoping thereby to sustain the illusion for his visitors that his slaves are contented. He turns to a field worker named Jack, the "cleverest and most witty slave on the farm," and encourages him to "give us a toast on cotton." Jack gets the final word in the chapter with this glib parable: "The big bee flies high,/The little bee makes the honey;/The black folk makes the cotton,/And the white folks gets the money" (115). This is a stunning moment in the literature, as a field slave not only receives representation but also becomes vocal, talking back to the master and unveiling the purported benevolent paternalism of the slave institution as a capitalist sham disguising a racialized scheme of labor exploitation. He also overturns the positive

valence of the "industrious bee" metaphor, with which the writers of the *Offering* had been so taken as a means to represent themselves; in his mouth, any positive associations shrivel and show themselves as appendages of social control, instilling industriousness but also complacency. With a quick twist, Jack reveals the seemingly cheerful "worker bee" as a disaffected laborer unjustly alienated from the means of production.

In a similarly fleeting but striking moment, we join the titular character, Clotel, as she travels in a stagecoach disguised as a Spanish gentleman and listens in on a conversation between a supercilious minister from Connecticut and a straight-talking Tennessean. Quite unexpectedly, Brown awards the Southerner an important victory against Northern hypocrisy. Piqued by the minister's stance of disdainful piety, the Tennessean tries to deflate him:

> You talk of your "holy religion"; but your robes' righteousness are woven at Lowell and Manchester; your paradise is high per centum on factory stocks [...]. If you could, you would turn heaven into Birmingham, and make every angel a weaver, and with the eternal din of looms and spindles drown all the anthems of the morning stars. (167)

The charge that Yankee capitalists worshipped first and foremost at the altar of mammon was of course not an unusual one for Southerners to launch. But in the context of Brown's novel, between Jack's discussion of coerced slave labor in the cotton fields and the allusion here to expropriated labor in the New England mills, the accusation carries new weight within an acknowledged system of both Southern and Northern exploitation. Interestingly, Brown ventriloquizes through a white Southerner to bankrupt the pretense at moral superiority of the Northern consumer.

For all that Brown is an exceptionally incisive and daring cultural critic, there are nonetheless places even he cannot bear to look, painful truths that remain unutterable. He

ends his tale by taking us on a voyage to Manchester, but in order to engineer a happy ending, not to continue the work of connection and exposure. George, a handsome house slave, is imprisoned after participating in Nat Turner's Rebellion. He manages to escape and flee North and then sets sail for England, the country Brown regarded as the ultimate beacon of freedom, where a former slave could be "recognised as a man and an equal" (32). After landing in Liverpool,

> he obtained a situation as a porter in a large house in Manchester, where he worked during the day, and took private lessons at night. In this way he laboured for three years, and was then raised to the situation of clerk. George was so white as to easily pass for a white man, and being somewhat ashamed of his African descent, he never once mentioned the fact of his having been a slave. He soon become a partner in the firm that employed him, and was now on the road to wealth. (196)

While Trollope's *Michael Armstrong* and Gaskell's *Mary Barton* contrive to end well by whisking their protagonists away from the hopelessness of Manchester, either to a luxurious German castle or to a cottage in blameless Canada, Brown achieves resolution by entangling his character in Manchester's industrial web. Although Brown does not say so, there can be little doubt that George attains a position and eventually a partnership in a cotton firm. He whitewashes himself and takes his former master's surname, becoming George Green, a captain of industry and commander of "white slaves," through whose labors he begins to amass a comfortable store of wealth.

George Green exists inside an intensified version of the quandary that many former American slaves faced: in order to enjoy the rewards of his liberty, he buys into an industry that begins with the brutal coercion of black laborers in the fields and ends with the alienation of white laborers in the factories. While it must have been the rare former slave

who ascended into the ranks of wealthy manufacturers,[97] most former slaves encountered a version of this bind as consumers. By exercising their purchasing power and crafting fashionable public images, men and women like William Wells Brown, Frederick Douglass, and William and Ellen Craft asserted their humanity and equality in the face of ingrained racial prejudice in the United States and entrenched class prejudice in Britain; however, in a market flooded with the products of slave labor—most notably the products of the cotton industry—they thus also participated inadvertently in the very economies of oppression from which they had so narrowly managed to escape. It was near impossible to cultivate an image of respectability without indirectly investing in slavery's perpetuation. This is the truth Brown is understandably loath to speak. There was no way to exist outside the oppressive structures of the cotton economy; there was—indeed, is—only inside, to varying degrees of comfort depending on the level of consumer denial. The bind of the black consuming subject in the nineteenth-century Anglo-Atlantic is a powerful version of the same bind that constricts the consuming subject in today's global economy.

In the years following the Emancipation Proclamation, American cotton planters faced a crisis as they tried to maintain their dominance in a global industry that suddenly included countries like Egypt and India as competitive markets for raw cotton. Southern cotton cultivation shifted from a foundation in slave labor to reliance upon a still oppressive system of sharecropping that heavily favored owners at the expense of their tenants, many of whom were former slaves and children of former slaves. And so slavery's legacy persisted well beyond its official legal end.

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[97] In his earlier travelogue, *Three Years in Europe* (1852), Brown tells an anecdote about an acquaintance of his, a fellow fugitive slave, whose story parallels George's and also ends with triumphant ascendancy into Manchester's industrial class.

With the advent and increasing availability of synthetic fabrics in the middle of the twentieth century, cotton faced yet another market crisis. Anxiously watching the drastic decline in demand for cotton goods, a group of American growers got together in 1970 and established Cotton Incorporated, a remarkable and revolutionary marketing organ intended not to push a particular company's product or an individual brand but to create the first ever brand for an entire commodity. In order to do so, Cotton Incorporated had to figure out how to fight American cotton's image problem, one that went back decades, indeed centuries, to find its roots in the cotton fields of the antebellum South. Describing this challenge, the corporation's first president, a New York executive named Dukes Wooters, purportedly said: "I needed to get rid of the image that cotton had of blacks in the field with a hoe" (qtd. in Jacobson and Smith 163).

From the beginning, then, Cotton Incorporated's stated mission was to change how we feel about cotton, to sell positive affect and thereby banish cotton's dark history from our cultural memory. The now famous Cotton Incorporated Seal, created in 1973, features a cloud-like, pure-white cotton boll standing out like a resplendent beacon of light against a neat, black background:

The Seal of Cotton effectively exorcises the ghostly presence of the "dusky fingers" that offered up the cotton boll for Henry Timrod's meditative contemplation. There is just the image and the word of cotton, united in tranquil ever-presence.

Of course, Cotton Incorporated must combat our awareness not just of cotton's oppressive history, but also its ongoing oppressive present. These days, the fields of Texas may be populated by mechanized cotton pickers manufactured by John Deere that practically operate themselves, but coerced human labor and even child labor are still the norms in the cotton fields of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.[98] The crashing power looms of New England have perhaps been silent for a century, but in Bangladesh the soft cotton fabric that we will soon wear intimately against our bodies flies beneath the fingers of young women who make a mere $68 a month;[99] this sum is a significant raise from the previous minimum wage of $39 a month, the Bangladeshi government's concession after a factory collapsed in April of 2013, killing more than a thousand workers and igniting strikes and protests.

Against the ripple effects of these global realities, Cotton Incorporated seeks to buffer us in fluffy clouds of positive sentiment, to wrap us in cotton wool, in both the literal and the figurative sense of the phrase. The advertising agency of Ogilvy & Mather (O&M) has for decades been the marketing genius behind Cotton Incorporated. In 1987, O&M hit upon the slogan that quickly became and still is cotton's byword. In focus groups, O&M's researchers began to notice a striking pattern, that when speaking of cotton interview

[98] For more information, consult the website of the Cotton Campaign, a global coalition dedicated to ending state-run systems of forced labor in Uzbekistan's and Turkmenistan's cotton-growing regions.

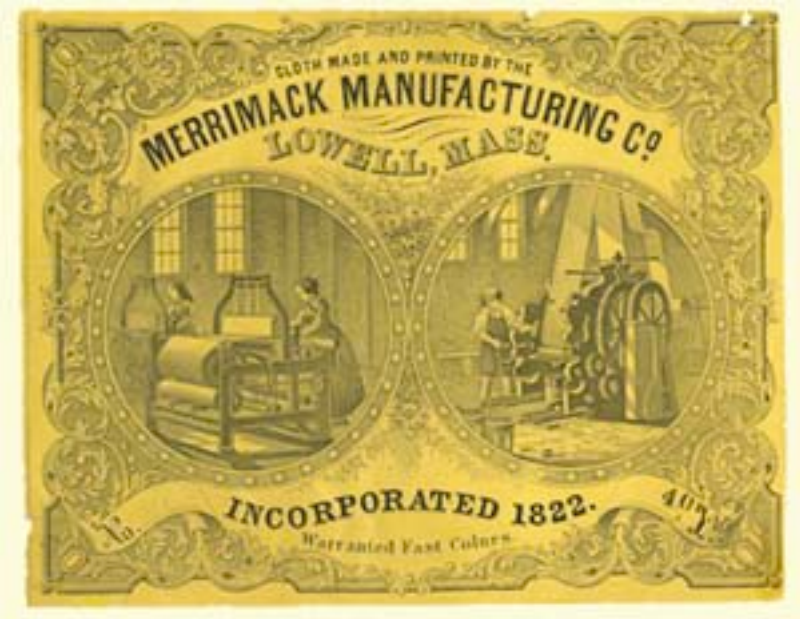
[99] Such was the case in December of 2013, at least, when *Planet Money* reported back from Bangladesh.

subjects would caress their own arms and use a vocabulary at once tactile and emotional (Jacobson and Smith 186). Cotton achieved its apotheosis with the phrase: "The Touch, the Feel, the Fabric of Our Lives."

The Fabric of Our Lives Campaign was a runaway success throughout the 1990s. Cotton Incorporated then retired the campaign for a short span, just long enough to breathe new life into it with a recent series of commercials featuring a rotating cast of young female singers and actors, beginning with Zooey Deschanel and Miranda Lambert in 2009, then Colbie Caillat, Jazmine Sullivan, and Leona Lewis in 2010, Emmy Rossum and Camilla Belle in 2012, and most recently Hayden Panettiere in 2013. In the first installment, we see indie queen Zooey Deschanel as she goes about her life in stylishly hipster fashions—all cotton, of course. With her creamy skin, dark hair, and wide blue eyes, Deschanel is the poster child for sexy innocence, a modern-day Snow White. We join her as she performs in a swanky lounge setting, muses lyrics at her piano, browses in a record store, and picks out sweetly feminine outfits in a spacious, light-infused closet. All the while, a voiceover of her warbling a little ditty in her pleasant contralto plays in the viewer's ear: "The touch, the feel of cotton/The fabric of my life."

Each of the commercials follows this basic format, showcasing a star as she performs daily activities while wearing a series of cotton ensembles perfectly curated for her particular image and aesthetic. The jingles vary too depending on the singer's chosen style, from indie rock to country to R&B to pop. Every commercial ends in a different but beautifully organized, resplendently lit closet while the star selects among a sensuous array of colorful frocks.

Watching this new iteration of Cotton Incorporated's campaign to give consumers the "warm fuzzies" over cotton, I could not help but notice the continuity with as well as the difference from the label of Lowell's Merrimack Manufacturing Company:



In both instances, the bodies of young women are being used to eradicate cotton's taint. But whereas the label uses the figure of the laborer, the demure Lowell mill girl, such a strategy would be unimaginable today. Instead, the omnipresence of the female consumer in advertising attests to our increasing physical and emotional distance from the world's cotton factories and the women who operate them. We don't use the figure of the fashionista as the repository for our collective guilt anymore. Rather, she obscures and eclipses "the 'ghost' in the mirror," the textile workers who ply their needles not in sweatshops in London but instead in China, Bangladesh, and Colombia. The influence of the young female consumer's freshness and beauty serves to cleanse us all.

The commercials function also to convince us of cotton's democratic inclusivity and love of diversity. The range of personal aesthetics the campaign accommodates, not to

mention the careful inclusion of two women of color, suggests that cotton can accept and embrace us all. I am reminded of an earlier Cotton Incorporated commercial from the late 1990s that featured a series of actors, women and men from multiple age brackets and racial/ethnic backgrounds, all clad in denim; a message appears in the same white font as that in the Seal of Cotton: "How different can we be when we all love to wear the same thing?"

We no longer bother to hide cotton's ubiquity from ourselves. Cotton Incorporated's campaign to win over our minds through cotton's soft embrace has been so successful that we don't feel the urge to deny it anymore. Like the young women in the recent Cotton Incorporated commercials, when I open my closet and comb through its contents, "the Touch, the Feel of Cotton" is everywhere at my fingertips. It beckons, gentle and forgiving. But now, as I survey my wardrobe, "the Fabric of Our Lives" begins to sound not just like a tender sentiment or a catchy slogan, but also like an eerie and inescapable truth. The warmth of cotton's touch can be chilling.

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