SECOND NATURE:

LITERATURE, CAPITAL AND THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT, 1848-1938

by

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A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Department of English
and the Graduate School of the University of Oregon
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

June 2010

University of Oregon Graduate School

Confirmation of Approval and Acceptance of Dissertation prepared by:

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Title:

"Second Nature: Literature, Capital and the Built Environment, 1848-1938"

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June 14, 2010

Original approval signatures are on file with the Graduate School and the University of Oregon Libraries.

An Abstract of the Dissertation of

Tristan Hardy Sipley for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in the Department of English to be taken June 2010

Title: SECOND NATURE: LITERATURE, CAPITAL AND THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT, 1848-1938

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This dissertation examines transatlantic, and especially American, literary responses to urban and industrial change from the 1840s through the 1930s. It combines cultural materialist theory with environmental history in order to investigate the interrelationship of literature, economy, and biophysical systems. In lieu of a traditional ecocritical focus on wilderness preservation and the accompanying literary mode of nature writing, I bring attention to reforms of the "built environment" and to the related category of social problem fiction, including narratives of documentary realism, urban naturalism, and politically-oriented utopianism.

The novels and short stories of Charles Dickens, Herman Melville, Rebecca Harding Davis, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Upton Sinclair, and Mike Gold offer an alternative history of environmental writing, one that foregrounds the interaction between nature and labor. Through a strategy of "literal reading" I connect the representation of particular environments in the work of these authors to the historical situation of actual

spaces, including the western Massachusetts forest of Melville's "Tartarus of Maids," the Virginia factory town of Davis's *Iron Mills*, the Midwestern hinterland of Sinclair's *The Jungle*, and the New York City ghetto of Gold's *Jews without Money*.

Even as these texts foreground the class basis of environmental hazard, they simultaneously display an ambivalence toward the physical world, wavering between pastoral celebrations and gothic vilifications of nature, and condemning ecological destruction even as they naturalize the very socio-economic forces responsible for such calamity. Following Raymond Williams, I argue that these contradictory treatments of nature have a basis in the historical relationship between capitalist society and the material world. Fiction struggles to contain or resolve its implication in the very culture that destroys the land base it celebrates. Thus, the formal fissures and the anxious eruptions of nature in fiction relate dialectically to the contradictory position of the ecosystem itself within the regime of industrial capital. However, for all of this ambivalence, transatlantic social reform fiction of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century provides a model for an environmentally-oriented critical realist aesthetic, an aesthetic that retains suspicion toward representational transparency, and yet simultaneously asserts the didactic, ethical, and political functions of literature.

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PUBLICATIONS:

Sipley, Tristan. "Back to the Slaughterhouse." *Reviews in Cultural Theory* 1.1 (March 2010). http://www.reviewsinculture.com

Sipley, Tristan. "Capitalism and the Environmental Dystopia." *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism* 17.3 (Sept 2006): 118-121

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first like to thank my advisor, Bill Rossi, for his extensive help in preparing this manuscript. His careful readings of my drafts and his expert editing advice pushed my prose to new levels. Furthermore, his warm and inviting nature always encouraged me to think deeply and share my ideas openly. I am grateful to my entire committee – Molly Westling, Harry Wonham, Enrique Lima, and John Foster – who all, in various ways, contributed to the development of this project, through seminars, written feedback, mentoring, and discussion. Learning is a social process, and this project would not have been possible without the influence from a broad community of scholars: particularly Suzanne Clark, Liz Bohls, Betsy Wheeler, and Deborah Shapple at Oregon; Amy Lang at Syracuse; and Leslie Heywood at Binghamton. I would also like to acknowledge my graduate student colleagues in the University of Oregon's theory reading group and environmental literature reading group. Our passionate debates were central to the formation of these arguments. Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to my immediate and extended families, and most of all to my fiancée and best friend, Gina Liotta. In addition to being a hard-working comrade in teaching and writing, she is also the kindest and most dedicated person I know. For all of the support she gave, she deserves to be recognized as a co-author of this dissertation.

For my Mother, an English Teacher,

And my Father, a Union Ironworker and "Friend of Forest Park"

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CHAPTER I

THE CULTURAL POLITICS OF ECOCRITICISM

> Because literary criticism and literature are produced within an identical set of historical limitations...the specific way in which a critical approach denies or represses History is very often the best guide to the way the literary work it analyzes denies or represses History.
>
> William Dowling

> Ecology is the crucial example of ideological struggle today.
>
> Slavoj Zizek

The first decade of the twenty-first century may be remembered as the era when environmentalism went mainstream. Amidst a backdrop of record temperatures, erratic weather patterns, and a steady increase in social and ecological disasters, the environmental movement's recognition of human impact on the biosphere has shifted from a controversial fringe complaint to a general consensus.[1] This emerging awareness has the potential to be radically transformative. Whereas earlier conservation movements focused on the protection of specific local ecosystems, the specter of global climate change calls into question the overall patterns of production and consumption that underlie our socio-economic system. The expansive and *totalizing* nature of contemporary capitalist accumulation demands a fundamental questioning of the

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[1]The widespread acceptance of global warming was signaled, among other cultural events, by the popularity of Al Gore's 2006 film *An Inconvenient Truth*, which became the fourth highest-grossing documentary in film history, won an Academy Award, and helped Gore receive a Nobel Peace Prize.

system's contradictions, thus creating the conditions for organized, international response.

But this mainstream recognition is a double-edged sword. For just as environmentalism emerges as a point of radical resistance, it is reintegrated into the dominant cultural logic. From hybrid cars to solar panels, organic groceries to energy-saving appliances, "earth-friendly" has become the trendiest of advertising slogans. *Business Week* hails the coming of the "Green Rush" and entrepreneurs scurry to profit by marketing a range of products to the newly eco-conscious bourgeoisie (Holland). This lifestyle activism – in reality a form of conspicuous consumption – places the onus for social change on individual consumers. Environmentalism is encouraged insofar as it remains within the parameters of the marketplace. "Green capitalist" orthodoxy becomes so triumphant that even a committed environmentalist like Bill McKibben can state, with the force of self-evident truth, "Shifting our focus to local economies will not mean abandoning Adam Smith or doing away with markets. Markets, obviously, work" (2). To the western imagination the only alternative to this micro-political, market-based reform is a vision of civilization's total collapse, as attested by the recent proliferation of apocalyptic books and films. We are allowed to choose our current society, with slight adjustments, or no society at all. In this so-called "post-historical" age, beyond the "grand narratives" of class struggle, attempts to resurrect the utopian ideal of a

completely new and better civilization are summarily dismissed as at best hubristic, at worst "totalitarian."[2]

The present study takes shape in the context of this philosophical impasse, which forces us to re-assess the now adolescent field of literary and cultural analysis known as ecocriticism. Emerging as a self-identified subset of literary criticism in the early 90s, ecocriticism drew on the lyric poetry of the British Romantics and the nature writing of the American Transcendentalists. In its initial stages, ecocriticism set out to 1) recover a neglected canon of nonfiction nature writing, 2) emphasize the artful depiction of rural or wilderness spaces, and, 3) base literary studies firmly in the bedrock of the natural sciences.[3] In recent years, the field has gone through a sustained internal critique, to the point that it is now commonplace to speak of a "second wave" ecocriticism, one that focuses on overlooked genres, examines urban and suburban environments, and integrates the theoretical lessons of cultural studies. Works by William Cronon, Dana Phillips, and Timothy Morton, among others, have problematized many of the assumptions about representation, place, and ecology that underlie the "first-wave" ecocritical project. Perhaps most importantly, environmental justice critics have complicated the field by interrogating the racist, patriarchal bias of much classic environmental writing while expanding the canon of environmental literature to include more texts by women and people of color (Buell, *Future* 112; Adamson).

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[2] On the "end of history" see Fukayama. On the ideological links between utopian thought and totalitarianism see Jameson *Archaeologies* xi-xvi and Zizek *Totalitarianism* 1-7.

[3] For a helpful taxonomy of the shift from first to second wave ecocriticism see Buell, *Future* 1-28.

An area that remains largely undertheorized, however, is the relationship between environmental writing and issues of class, labor, and economics. Although ecocritical anthologies will mention a thinker like Raymond Williams or Theodor Adorno in passing (indeed Williams is often credited as one of the first ecocritics[4]) only a handful of literary scholars currently work from a position that *systematically* combines theories of ecology and political economy. This disciplinary absence seems conspicuous, considering that Marxism has long influenced literary theory, and considering that a rich synthesis of Marxism and ecology *already exists* in the social sciences. As I will show, this silence is not coincidental, but in fact derives from the ideological positioning of ecocriticism vis-à-vis Marxism. A synthesis of these fields is forestalled by deep-seated methodological and political differences. Any attempt to read "nature" and "class" together in the literary text must begin from this structuring condition. In order to clear the way for a mutual theorizing we must first understand the institutional history that has fostered the lack we are seeking to address.

Red-Baiting Greens: Anti-Communism and the Emergence of Ecocriticism

Ecocriticism arrived on the academic scene during the "historicist turn" of the late 1980s and early 90s, when the study of Romantic literature was heavily influenced by cultural materialism and new historicism, divergent methodologies united in their emphasis on ideology critique. Critics such as Jerome McGann, Marjorie Levinson, and Alan Liu argued that the pastoral lyric was politically conservative insofar as it ignored or

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[4] See Head, "Beyond" 24. For more of Williams's work on connections between literature, socialism, and ecology, see entries on "Ecology" and "Nature" in *Keywords*, essays such as "The Red and the Green" and "Socialism and Ecology," and sections from *Marxism and Literature* and *Problems in Materialism and Culture*. See also Williams' own eco-social fiction, the *People of the Black Mountain* trilogy.

erased real socio-economic conditions, reconciling material conflict in the realm of a Neo-Platonic Ideal (Kroeber 15). According to McGann, the strategy of Wordsworth's poetry was to "erase" or "displace" its historical "particulars" in order to universalize its poetic claims (83, 85). The role of the literary critic, then, was to politicize such texts by reading them against the grain and re-inserting a historical awareness.

Ecocritics vociferously sparred with the new historicists in an effort to recuperate the proto-ecology of the nature poem. Two of the earliest ecocritical works, Jonathan Bate's *Romantic Ecology* and Karl Kroeber's *Ecological Literary Criticism*, explicitly positioned themselves against the work of McGann and Levinson. They chided Liu's claim that "there is no nature, there is only history" arguing that such an extreme social-constructivist position denied the reality of the natural world (Bate 15, 56). Rather than acknowledging their intellectual debts to these historicists (for turning literary analysis away from the textualism of deconstruction and back to context), Bate and Kroeber instead stressed a wholesale *break* with this paradigm.[5] At the root of this break was the issue of "Leftism." As Bate says of Liu: "The arguments are extremely subtle, at times brilliant, but the underlying vision is the crude old model of Left and Right…[a] model that is beginning to look redundant as Marxist-Leninism collapses in Eastern Europe" (3). Thus, while ecocriticism falls generally on the progressive Left, it actually begins as a *refutation* of the basic Left category of "class." According to Bate, new forms of

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[5] As Greg Garrard says, historicism is the critical position "that is most hostile to ecocriticism, and that nevertheless seems its *sine qua non*" (182).

ecological crisis have rendered Left/Right "class struggle" debates outmoded, uniting all beings in a movement that is "neither Left nor Right but Green" (3).[6]

Ironically, this rhetoric of gregarious political inclusiveness provides the perfect cover for silencing those critical commitments that are deemed exclusionary. Kroeber states that "Marxist new historicists" are trapped in a "Cold War mind-set" of paranoia and "oppositionalism," which is "manifested in the polemical character of their writings, violent to the point of apocalypticness" (3, 39-40).[7] Here Kroeber positions himself as the open and pragmatic scholar, as against the implacable and dogmatic ideology theorists. He then plays on this Cold War metaphor in order to assert both the elitism and irrelevancy of these critics: "Their preference for esoteric jargons may be read as symptomatic of a subconscious desire to escape from the responsibilities of involvement with real and 'hot' socioeconomic problems" (40). Leaving aside the anti-intellectualism of the claim that theoretical analysis impedes practice, we see that climate change is apparently a "Hot" (pressing) problem, while the struggle of workers against exploitation is an outdated "Cold" (War) issue.

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[6] Environmentalist rejections of "Leftism" frequently rely on the argument that because the Soviet Union was a major polluter, socialist theories are thereby discredited. This argument raises more questions than it answers: To what extent can we call the USSR 'socialist'? To what extent can we criticize their policies in isolation from the broader context of their embattled position within a global capitalist economy? To what extent does attacking Soviet polluters provide a rhetorical shield against the polluting practices of the West? See Foster, *Planet* 96-101 and Levins 163-196.

[7] The term "polemic," Donald Morton and Mas'ud Zavarzadeh argue, "is the dominant academy's name for 'nonknowledge'....polemic, in the liberal academy's view, is the 'other' of scholarly knowledge; it is therefore automatically illegitimate" (2).

Thus, these quintessential documents of early ecocriticism actually *reproduce* the very Cold War rhetoric they purport to transcend.[8] By rejecting class critique as "ideological," Kroeber represents his own methodological choices as nonideological: open, free, and flexible. Are these not strikingly similar to the terms the U.S. employed during the Cold War in order to transmogrify a conflict between capitalist and socialist economies into a clash between "free" democracy and "closed" dictatorship? This is not to suggest that ecocritics openly support capitalist regimes, but their arguments reproduce an anti-communist rhetoric in which class critique is "closed" and predetermined (infected with ideology), while interpretations that avoid this issue lie outside such conditioning. Thus Harold Fromm, editor of *The Ecocriticism Reader*, writes: "Today's vanguard intellectual must learn to live without grandiose cosmic beliefs, entertaining local, temporary, and flexible viewpoints that can accommodate themselves to quotidian realities" (456).[9] The call for interpretive "flexibility" sounds uncannily like the flexible accumulation of post-Fordist capital itself. Essentially, those criticisms that "accommodate" themselves to "reality" – those that work within the confines of the given socio-economic system – are judged to be reasonable, while those that relentlessly call into question the logic of that system are dismissed as "polemical."

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[8] As Helena Feder argues, Bate and Kroeber "never quite succeed in extricating themselves from the mindset of antagonism and oppositionalism, wishing to depose rather than supplement or form a coalition with the current critical regime" (45).

[9] Fromm's article is included in an "anti-Theory" anthology, which is fitting, since "Theory" has become an ecocritical code word for "Marxism." Consider a recent tirade by S.K. Robisch, published in the premier ecocritical journal *ISLE*, which bemoans the fact that ecocriticism has been invaded by "Orwellian groups" of "theory intelligentsia" (the likes of Andrew Ross and Slavoj Zizek) with their "ideologically-laden" discourses (698, 704, 700).

But perhaps this rhetorical flourish is simply a quaint historical remnant of early 90s culture wars. Whether it is or not, a deeper philosophical issue is at work here. For while ecocriticism's emphasis on the natural world would seem to place it in a tradition of materialist and scientific thought, on closer inspection the genesis of the field actually lies in the philosophical idealism of romantic natural theology (a movement that attempted to explain natural science through metaphysics), and in a genteel, moralistic, aestheticism that sought to combat the loss of a pre-industrial "organic community" with contemplation and "culture."[10] In defending romanticism against ideology critique, first wave ecocriticism recapitulates the philosophies of those very texts it defends, namely a neo-Kantianism that insists on the universality and disinterested autonomy of the creative work (McGann 69; Eagleton, *Aesthetic* 75). Inspired by this romantic view of the autonomy of art, first wave ecocritics overlooked the ways in which literature was shaped by its historical conditions, and spent more time emphasizing its intended moral effects: literature was not a part of the problem, it was the solution. This inaugurated what Michael Cohen calls "the praise song school" of ecocriticism. Under this paradigm, exemplary ecological art is that which can make us *feel* intensely about the natural world, and, by extension, the best scholarship is able to lead the reader to an appreciation of this art through the force and sophistication of its celebration.[11]

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[10] On links between natural theology and ecocriticism see Elder. While I do not mean to conflate a heterogeneous tradition that extends from Matthew Arnold to the British Leavisites and American Southern Agrarians, I do believe that general parallels can be drawn regarding their shared hostility to the scientific and materialist tradition and their "Tory" reaction to industrialization. See Jancovich.

[11] For example, Bate repeatedly states that McGann appears "annoyed" with Wordsworth's focus on nature (15). This word choice gets at the heart of the matter, for in calling McGann's critique a form of "annoyance," Bate casts as personal and emotional what in fact had been a systematic historical analysis.

Admiration is revealed not only in the content of ecocritical analysis, but also in its narrative style, which Cohen describes as "gracefully meditative," "lyrical," nearly religious," and "seem[ingly] beyond rational scrutiny" (par. 65). One is reminded of Matthew Arnold's famous "touchstone" method, through which readers suspend rational judgment and passively allow the artwork to overwhelm them. As Arnold says: "The great thing for us is to feel and enjoy [the] work as deeply as ever we can…If we are thoroughly penetrated by [its] power, we shall find that we have acquired a sense enabling us…to feel the degree in which a high poetical quality is present or wanting (336-7, 340). Is this not essentially what early ecocritics have asked of readers of nature writing: to allow the beauty of the description to fill them with an ecological sensitivity? The problem is that an appeal to intuition forestalls the possibility of "speaking back" to the text, or of establishing objective guidelines for understanding its structure and relationship to history. In effect, the text and the reader are placed in a mystical realm outside of social forces, an Ideal space in which Mind, Word, and Nature interact.

One might object to the charge of "idealism" by pointing out that ecocriticism often exhibits a rather hardnosed, empirical focus on the physical world. After all, ecocritics argue that the best art is that which leads the reader to a direct, embodied experience through exhaustive description. But this dichotomy is only apparent, for the "concrete" descriptions are actually abstractions, insofar as they disguise the processes that shape the interaction between subject and object. Instructive here is the distinction

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Attempts to understand the place of a Wordsworthian aesthetic within the larger socio-economic structures of the nineteenth century is transposed into a problem of tone. This paradigm has been critiqued extensively by Phillips and Morton, and I am generally indebted to their work. See for example Phillips' statements on the "appeal to intuition" (215-216) and Morton's playful parody of nature-writing ambience and its ecocritical reproduction (29-30).

made by Teresa Ebert and Mas'ud Zavarzadeh between "matterism," which fixates on immediate sensuous physicality, and a true "materialism," which includes "the worldliness of human practices" (40-41). Without socio-economic history, materialism becomes a "theology of corporeal," a kind of fetishism that parallels commodity fetishism: just as the commodity erases the history of its production and appears as a self-contained object, so too do "nature" and "the body" appear as objects separate from human social practice.

Thus while ecocriticism purports to deal with the materiality of the body and the environment, it often eschews material socio-economic and historical contexts, resulting in what Lance Newman calls an "idealist theory of social change." "The problem," according to most ecocritics, is "destructive habits of thought," and the function of literature is thus to "redirect human consciousness" ("Marxism" 3). So we use literature to attack "bad ideas" like "anthropocentrism" while failing to interrogate how our consciousness of nature – as well as nature itself – is conditioned by social structures. A truly materialist ecocriticism would acknowledge that since material reality determines consciousness, it is impossible to simply "change our minds" and make "ecological" choices short of revolutionizing the unsustainable mode of production that forms the horizon of our thought.

In recent years the "praise song school" has been greatly complicated by a turn toward continental philosophy. However, it could be argued that this turn has not altered the original ideological commitments of first wave ecocriticism so much as it has given them a more sophisticated language. Ecocriticism's basis in deep ecology – a philosophy that locates the sources of environmental crisis broadly in the humanism and

anthropocentrism of Enlightenment science – aligns quite well with poststructuralism, insofar as both reject the "grand narratives" of modernity in favor of localism, immediacy, contingency, and indeterminacy (Campbell, Opperman). A method that examines text without context is perfectly parallel to a method that examines nature without society. The pure textuality of deconstruction is the antithesis of the pure earthiness of deep ecology, but also its corollary, insofar as both elevate the particular over the whole and reject the supposedly "totalizing" project of Enlightenment rationality. No wonder, then, that today's prominent second and third wave ecocritics are Derridean and Deleuzean.

There is a widespread assumption that such philosophical skepticism is inherently progressive – that a liberatory politics demands an anti-foundationalist epistemology. But as Christian Thorne's *Dialectic of Counter-Enlightenment* shows, anti-foundationalism is not a "political guarantee" (13). Skeptics of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were often "authoritarian pragmatists" who "offer[ed] an exhaustive critique of knowledge in order to discredit the opponents of state and church orthodoxy" (11). Thorne shows that in this period, skepticism actually worked to "shut critique down" and justify the existing system (11-12). This same logic is used by the contemporary Right to forestall the climate change movement: "ultimately we cannot 'know' precisely if and when the planet will warm, or what the effects of this will be, and so we should continue as we are." The point here is not simply to dismiss poststructural theory as so much capitalist ideology, but to remember that counter-Enlightenment can lead to despotism just as easily as democracy. The romantic call of Wendell Berry's "Mad Farmer" to "praise ignorance, for what man / has not encountered he has not

destroyed," could be read as a forceful critique of techno-scientific exploitation, or as a nihilistic assault on the human capacity for reason. Similarly, as social ecologists Janet Biehl and Peter Staudenmaier have shown in *Ecofascism: Lessons from the German Experience*, environmental politics can lead to human emancipation, but they can also lead to authoritarianism. This is why it is vital that ecocriticism be based in a *social ecology* that accounts for human labor and social justice. Even with the increased "sophistication" of ecocriticism's theoretical turn, if it leaves behind a tradition of thinkers who address ideology and political economy, it risks weakening its conceptual apparatus and limiting its scope. Furthermore, if ecocriticism does not contain a consistent, systematic critique of capitalism, it risks tacitly supporting the very culture of corporate greenwash it sets out to dismantle.

Ecosocialism: The Unsustainability of Capital

Ecosocialism begins from the premise that social and ecological crisis are "profoundly interrelated and should be seen as different manifestations of the same structural forces" (Kovel par.2). Allen Schnaiberg's metaphor of the "treadmill of production" aptly describes how capitalism's need for infinite expansion stands in contradiction to a finite land base. John Bellamy Foster adds that "the treadmill of accumulation" might be a more accurate term, since the ever-increasing material throughput of capitalist production is predicated on an ever-increasing rate of accumulating surplus value ("Treadmill"). Marx's well-known general formula for capital, M-C-M', illustrates the self-expanding nature of capitalist accumulation. In order to cope with competition and counteract the falling rate of profit, individual capitalists

must continually expand technological development and resource extraction, and find new avenues for needless consumption (Pepper 91-93). This is the logic that, as Marx explains, drives "bourgeois production out of its old course and... compels capital to intensify the productive forces of labour...the law which gives capital no rest and continually whispers in its ear: 'Go on! Go on!'" ("Wage" 213). As capital expands and intensifies so too does the rate of material throughput. This mounting "waste stream" is fundamentally incompatible with life on a finite planet. While mainstream "ecological modernization" theorists fantasize that economic growth can somehow be de-coupled from increased production, ecosocialists repeat Marx's insight that the source of all value ultimately comes from workers and the soil (*Capital* 637).

Marx's concern with questions of ecology and sustainability are evident from his earliest writings. His doctoral dissertation (1841) dealt with the ancient natural philosophy of Epicurus, and one of his first experiences with political journalism (1842) involved the resource issue of wood theft and the subsequent enclosure of the Rhineland commons (Linebaugh). Marx explored these issues in more detail in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (1844), which state: "Man *lives* from nature, i.e. nature is his *body*, and he must maintain a continuing dialogue with it if he is not to die. To say that man's physical and mental life is linked to nature simply means that nature is linked to itself, for man is a part of nature" (*Young* 328). Central to the critique of alienation in this work is Marx's observation regarding the physical separation of workers from the land-base. The "ecological" Marx finds his apotheosis in the mature work of *Capital*, where he integrates an examination of the physical environment with theories of economic value. He writes:

> Labour is, first of all, a process between man and nature, a process by which man, through his own actions, mediates, regulates and controls the metabolism between himself and nature. He sets in motion the natural forces which belong to his own body, his arms, legs, head and hands, in order to appropriate the materials of nature in a form adapted to his own needs. Through this movement he acts upon external nature and changes it, and in this way he simultaneously changes his own nature. (*Capital* 283)

This passage introduces the concept of "metabolism" (*Stoffwechsel*), borrowed from the German soil chemist Justus von Liebig, in order to describe the exchange of energies between humans and environment that occurs through the labor process. Later Marx explains how the emergence of industrial capitalism ruptures this metabolic process, leading to increased pollution in cities as well as resource destruction in the countryside (Foster, *Ecology* 141-177). When Marx states that in changing "external nature" man simultaneously changes himself, he reveals a sophisticated *coevolutionary* perspective on the relationship between organism and environment, one that has become central to evolutionary biology (Levins and Lewontin). As Foster shows in exhaustive detail, Marx became increasingly interested in Darwinism, which he saw as a "basis in natural history" for his materialist social theories (197). A synthesis of natural science and revolutionary socialism was subsequently expanded by Engels, and continued in a diverse lineage of twentieth-century thinkers, from Rosa Luxemburg and Nikolai Bukharin, to Christopher Caudwell and J.B.S. Haldane (Foster, *Ecology* 226-256).

Though contemporary ecosocialists debate the extent to which Marx's writing was inherently ecological, they generally agree that he provides an important conceptual

framework for understanding environmental crisis.[12] James O'Connor utilizes the Marxist language of contradiction in formulating his influential thesis on the "second" contradiction of capitalism. Whereas classical Marxist theory posits a fundamental contradiction between capital and labor, O'Connor adds a "second" contradiction that centers on the *conditions of production*, or the land base and infrastructure. O'Connor describes this as "the contradiction between self-expanding capital and self-limiting nature" (10). The increased accumulation of surplus demands ever-expanding and intensifying levels of material throughput, a trend that is fundamentally at odds with a finite material world. In Teresa Brennan's temporal terms, the lag-time of nature – the time it takes plants and animals to grow – is incompatible with the constantly accelerated speed of capital. The attempt to "speed up" nature in order to make it more productive invariably weakens natural systems to the point of collapse. "Capitalist accumulation," O'Connor states, "destroy[s] capital's own conditions, hence threatening its own profits and capacity to produce and accumulate more capital" (166). Basically, by destroying its surroundings, capital contributes to its own destruction.

The second contradiction thesis provides an elegant structural theory to explain how capitalism can potentially self-destruct and give way to new social formations, due

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[12] Contemporary eco-Marxist debates center on the extent to which Marxist theory must be "greened" by grafting it with an ecological outlook. James O'Connor and those associated with the journal *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism* assert that a synthesis of red and green is *mutually* corrective. They argue that while the Marxist tradition makes an important contribution to environmental politics, it is also flawed by "Prometheanism" and an emphasis on production for production's sake. They hold that Marx and Engels, reacting against Malthus's pessimistic theories of natural limits, instead went too far in emphasizing human freedom from natural constraints (Benton 171). They also claim that Marx's comments on the natural world were scattered and unsystematic (O'Connor 159-60). On the other hand, Paul Burkett, John Bellamy Foster, and others from *Monthly Review* show that a corrective "greening" of Marx is both insufficient and unnecessary, as Marx had already "developed a systematic approach to nature and to environmental degradation…that was intricately bound to the rest of his thought" (Foster, "Theory" 372).

to its built-in disregard for the environment. However, as Foster and Burkett show, there is little evidence to suggest that ecological barriers threaten the system with total collapse (Foster "Capitalism"). Capitalist accumulation can continue inevitably "so long as there is not a complete extinction of human life" (Burkett, Par. 16). In fact, polluted environments don't appear to be a major problem for capital. Indeed, it could be argued that the system thrives and renews itself through destruction, creating new growth markets in waste management and pollution control (Klein). Moreover, the economic functionalism of O'Connor's argument leads to an implicit political passivity, a tendency to sit back and wait for the implosion. Also, the very idea of a *second* contradiction forces a dualistic perspective on social struggle: if there are two separate forms of crisis that engender two separate social movements (the first contradiction leads to labor movements and the second contradiction leads to environmentalism), then the theoretical basis for a fusion of red and green is undermined. Alternatively, Foster and Burkett hold that the fundamental contradiction underlying capitalism's ecological devastation continues to be the exploitation of labor, and thus a transformative social movement must be based in the struggles of working class communities. Rather than focus on a "second" contradiction, it makes more sense to conceptualize an "ecological contradiction" that is at once central to the labor process and to the functioning of capitalism as a whole: the mode of production that robs workers of their labor power is the same one that robs the soil of its nutrients, a mode that should be understood holistically as part of an integrated set of problems.

Nature in Critical Theory: Toward an Eco-Marxist Cultural Criticism

Having introduced the theoretical paradigm of ecological Marxism and its basic concepts, this study seeks to open a line of inquiry about the relationship between this paradigm and the analysis of literature. What can literature teach us about the commodification of nature and the physical restructuring of the earth in the age of capital? How does literature represent the relationship between labor and nature, and what does this representation tell us about our cultural logic? How is literature itself an *ideological product* of an unsustainable mode of production? On the other hand, how has literature been, and/or how could it be, an active force of resistance to socio-ecological destruction?

These are difficult questions, not only because ecocriticism has resisted socialist politics, but also because of a philosophical divide within the Marxist tradition itself. Historically, the concepts "Nature" and "Culture" stand on either side of a gulf between Classical and Western Marxism. For literary critics, the most influential strand of Marxism has come from the Western European tradition beginning with Georg Lukács and Antonio Gramsci, and continuing in varying forms in the work of German critical theory and British cultural materialism (Anderson 387). Central to their break from the Second International was a rejection of the notion that Marxism could or should be a natural science. This division was largely inaugurated by Lukács' critique of Engels, and particularly Engels' claim that the dialectic was an ontological property of nature (Vogel 17). For Lukács this was pure positivism and bourgeois reification. Instead, Lukács insisted that the Marxist dialectic was a method of social and epistemological analysis and not a natural science (*History* 234). However, as Foster points out, by denying "the

possibility of the application of dialectical modes of thinking to nature," Western Marxism left "little room...for a Marxist approach to issues of nature" (*Ecology* vii). Thus when Western Marxists do discuss nature, it is often as a mythical entity that must be defended against the encroachment of science and technology. Consequently, Marxist natural science is severed from Marxist cultural criticism. We are left, on the one hand, with a tradition of critics who analyze physical nature under capitalism, and on the other, a tradition of critics who analyze *representations* of nature under capitalism, without a language to examine the connection between the two.

An ecological Marxist literary criticism must suture these approaches by asking how literary representations of the relationship between nature and capital influence, and are influenced by, the material relationships between nature and capital; how a cultural text is a product not only of a specific socio-economic system but also a specific ecosystem; how the artistic rendering of human/nature interactions relates to the actual "metabolism" of environment and society. The first step in this process is to recognize that the physical environment, though a priori to human existence, is not "outside" of culture.[13] According to Steven Vogel, the limitation of critical theory has been its inability to follow through on the radical claim that nature is not "independent" (*Nature* 31). This nondualistic perspective has roots in critical theory itself, through Marx's reading of the Hegelian dialectic. On the surface, no philosopher could appear more anti-

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[13] The contradiction at the heart of critical theory is as follows: in *History and Class Consciousness* Lukács claims that the dialectic is a category of social analysis that should not be applied to the realm of nature, but then a few pages later he claims that nature itself is a social category. If nature is a social category, and the dialectic is a method of social analysis, then it is unclear why the dialectic is not applicable to nature. According to Vogel, Lukács fails to integrate the two sides of this dualism precisely because he does not follow through on his claim that "nature is social."

environmental than Hegel, who celebrates humanity overcoming the "bondage" of organic "First Nature" and transforming it into the "freedom" of an entirely developed "Second Nature."[14] However, if we stand Hegel on his feet, we can see his philosophy not as a prescription for the way things should be, but as a fairly accurate description of the way things unfortunately *are* under the regime of global capitalism. The concept of the "social construction of nature," far from Idealism, is meant quite literally: humans physically make, unmake, and remake the biosphere as they are themselves re-made in the process. "The nature that preceded human history," Marx writes in the *German Ideology*, "today no longer exists anywhere" (171). Certainly today, and perhaps since the industrial revolution, no corner of the earth has escaped the effects of human civilization, something made apparent by the phenomenon of climate change. Furthermore, much of what has long been considered "natural" – from the trees in the backyard to the hedgerows of the English countryside – is on further inspection a human construction. Even pockets of truly untouched space are social, not only because we encounter them filtered through human concepts, but also because they literally remain "wild" only through intensive regulations that hold the forces of development at bay. Spaces of untouched nature are islands in a sea of socialization. This is what Jameson means when he says that under late capitalism "nature is gone for good" (*Postmodernism*

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[14] "Man appears," Hegel writes, as the "antithesis of nature" insofar as he "raises himself up into a second world" (*History* 44). For additional references to the concept of "Second Nature" in Hegel see *Philosophy of Right* 108-09 and *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* 61, 279. Daniel Berthold-Bond has provocatively advanced an ecological reconsideration of Hegel. While in the typical caricature of Hegelianism the objective world is engulfed by subjective consciousness, in fact the reciprocal, co-evolutionary nature of dialectics means that the dictum "no world without self' is equally dependent upon the fact that there is "no self without world"; the truth is their dynamic, inseparable relationship within the whole. For another ecological interpretation of the Hegelian dialectic, see Bookchin.

ix), or what Neil Smith means when he says there is "no such thing as a natural disaster" ("Disaster"). This is not to imply that trees and animals cease to exist, but simply that they can no longer be understood as outside of the dominant social system (Hardt 187). Rather, they are a part of its internal contradictions.

In this sense a materialized Hegelian-Marxism provides an illuminating description of the current socio-environmental situation; it gives us a conceptual framework for imagining the Totality of the biosphere in the thrall of the Totality of global capital, and alters the language we use to talk about environmental problems. Under this paradigm it makes little sense to decry the "control" of nature. In order to live humans must "destroy" some part of nature, by consuming nutrients and expending waste (a "zero" ecological footprint is an impossibility), and in order to ensure continued survival they must regulate this metabolic interaction. The real question then is not "How do we let nature be," in a Heideggerian sense, but rather, how do we actively control our productions and consumptions of natures (Pepper 115). In other words, how do we rationally manage our use so as not to exceed the carrying capacity of the land-base? Though Marx speaks in the Baconian language of the "domination" of nature, Reiner Grundmann points out that "domination does not imply violation" (62). We might consider the "domination of nature" more properly to mean a domination of our *own* nature in the form of self-management (Berthold-Bond, "Hegel" 162). Grundmann continues, "a society which does not take into account the repercussions of its transformation of nature can hardly be said to dominate nature at all" (92). Capitalism has polluted the earth precisely to the extent that it is structured irrationally and has *failed* to "master" nature – that is, to integrate the material world in a sustainable relationship.

In this sense, the feeling of "alienation from nature" is really a misplaced feeling of alienation from the means of production (Vogel "Alienation"). As wage earners, we are not in control of our own labor, and thus we are not in control of our metabolic interactions with the biosphere. We then often project this feeling onto an essential "Nature," which we long to "get back to," rather than investigating how such a return is impossible from within an undemocratic and exploitative social structure.

Far from mere semantics, this redefinition of "control" has practical implications for literary analysis. The conceptual orientation of first-wave ecocriticism posited nature as a "wilderness," or an exterior space being encroached upon by society. In this view, the purpose of literature is to respectfully halt us in our tracks, humbling us before a mysterious and transcendent entity in order to make us more appreciative. But under the eco-social paradigm, ecological crisis is internal to our culture, and the purpose of literature is to help us objectively understand its metabolic structures.

On one level an ecological Marxist literary criticism would begin by looking to works that deal with the relationship between class and environment at the level of content. Such a theory would consider the class status or political affiliation of an author in relation to his or her descriptions of nature, and inquire into the extent to which class positionality influences the perception and representation of the physical world. Initially it would address literature that explicitly depicts labor with nature (in the mine, in the forest, on the farm, on the whaling vessel, etc.), and literature that thematizes connections between poverty and pollution. However, if we are searching for a *method* of analysis, then building a thematic canon of ecosocialist literature alone will not do. We must also seek to analyze the nature-society dialectic at the level of the artwork's formal properties.

The formal techniques through which literature both reveals and disavows its ecological immersion are illuminated through a Marxist interpretive paradigm. Consider Lawrence Buell's concept of "environmental unconscious," which is deeply indebted to Fredric Jameson's study *The Political Unconscious*. Jameson uses the psychoanalytic category of the unconscious to show how symbolic acts are mediated by social structures and ultimately connected to the "untranscendable horizon" of interpretation which is History (88). Writing after Althusser's critique of the traditional base-superstructure model, Jameson makes these connections in a cautious way. He emphasizes that the text's formal relations are not *identical* with social relations, or as he says, "superstructural phenomena" are not "mere reflexes" or "projections" of "infrastructural realities" (27). Instead, there is an unstable continuity, or semi-autonomy, between these spheres, as literature works upon and rewrites ideology. History is a suppressed "absent cause" which conditions all textual production, but appears to us only "through its effects" (88). Buell extends this formula to ecocriticism, using the neologism "environmental unconscious" to describe how the environment is the "enabling ground condition" for literature – how texts are "environmentally embedded at every stage [of their production and reception]" (*Writing* 22; *Future* 44). And yet, as an *un*conscious, this material condition is only ever partially expressed (the entirety of an ecosystem can never be brought forth into full, immediate consciousness). Individual texts can either "enable" or "occlude" this unconscious: they can activate or suppress their environmentality to varying degrees (24). Thus, the concept has both positive and negative valences: it describes how literary works attempt to erase their environmental

conditioning and/or awaken a "fuller apprehension of physical environment and one's interdependence with it" (22).[15]

Thus Buell's theory, like Jameson's, accounts for the continuity between text and context in a subtle and sophisticated way. However, while Buell aspires to a "mutual contructionist understanding of placeness" – in which society shapes environment and environment shapes society – there is a tendency to suggest that environmental orientation takes precedence over history: "Insofar as the where of existence precedes the what of social practice, a text's environmental unconscious is more deeply embedded even than its 'political unconscious'" (*Writing* 16; *Future* 44). The problem here is indicated by the word "more." It is one thing to argue that the physical environment is just as important as the economic system and its ideological apparatuses. But to say that it is more important is to construct a teleological and mechanistic causality in which nature is a kind of "super-base" that sits one level below the traditional economic base. In one sense this statement is true – the earth must exist prior to production. The danger lies in assuming a one-way determination. By overlooking the shaping influences of human social practice, Buell risks focusing exclusively on the determination of texts by environment rather than vice versa. What is required is a more reciprocal and dialectical approach (in keeping with Marx's method) which recognizes that "nature" itself is not a static "thing," but an ever-changing set of processes that are influenced by developments in human productive practices (Williams, *Marxism* 75-82). The concepts of political

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[15] For Buell, the relationship between literature and place, like the relationship between literature and politics in Jameson, is semi-autonomous. As Buell says, "It is never to be taken for granted that a literary image refers unambiguously to a specific place" (*Writing* 26). We cannot establish a direct correspondence between a depiction of a forest and an actual forest.

unconscious and environmental unconscious thus offer mutual correctives. Jameson posits a relationship between culture and socio-economics, with little attention to environment, while Buell posits a relationship between culture and environment, with little attention to socio-economics. A more complex and satisfactory formulation is offered by the triad "culture-society-environment" made possible through a synthesis of Marxism and ecocriticism.

As an example of such an approach, this study examines how a particular form of writing, narrative prose fiction, represents the "built environment" of urban and industrial space. Novels and short stories, perhaps more than other texts, reveal the contradictions of built space at the formal level, even as they register an awareness of biophysical processes. As Lukács recognized, the novel is the quintessential literary mode of "Second Nature," the built environment of the capitalist city that has transformed itself into an apparent set of "natural laws" which rule like "blind forces" (*History* 233). The novel deals in "the nature of man-made structures," a "world of convention" which has "become rigid and strange" (*Novel* 62, 64). In contrast to the ancient epic, the novel is the product of a "problematic civilization," a product of "homelessness" (29). If the hero of the epic was the representative of a place-bound community, the novelistic protagonist is an isolated, "homeless" individual, wandering over an empty space (31, 56). Whether or not Lukács' contrast is historically precise, it helps explain the conflicted status of the novel as an object of analysis within ecocriticism. First wave ecocriticism favored poetry and creative nonfiction because novels, focused as they are on character and plot, seemed inimical to the ecocritical project. As Dominic Head explains, "the tendency of the novel to focus on personal development, and on social rather than environmental matters (and

on time rather than place) is sometimes said to create an impression of alienation from the natural" (236). In many novels, setting functions as little more than a backdrop, lending verisimilitude or enhancing the theme. The only honest ecocritical reading of these works, it would seem, is to show how thoroughly anti-ecological they are.

However, this very "failure" is productive, insofar as the attitudes toward nature exemplified in the novel correspond with the dominant attitudes toward nature in capitalist society. As Lukács says, "Novels carry the fragmentary nature of the world's structure into the world of forms" (*Novel* 39). If most novels exemplify ambivalent and problematic attitudes toward nature, we might begin to examine how such attitudes relate to the novel's place within a system that grows through the destruction of ecosystems. Later in his career Lukács championed the political possibilities of the realist novels of Scott, Balzac, Tolstoy, and Mann. For Lukács the most "realistic" text is that which most exhaustively accounts for the Totality of socio-economic and historical forces. Indeed, he asserts that sprawling works of realist fiction grant the reader a privileged access to this Totality that they do not enjoy in everyday life (Howard 24-25).

To the extent that this method points us to works of fiction that include the Totality of biophysical processes, it provides a potentially instructive model for ecocritics. The realist plots of writers like Howells and James, in their movements across spaces and social classes, often remind us that individual encounters are shaped by social forces. Naturalist novels go the next step, connecting these social forces to mines, forests, slaughterhouses and farms. Examining the urban infrastructure that fills these novels as a form of "second nature" allows us to explore how the city is created through the exploitation of both labor and natural resources, as well as how the "ecological

contradictions" of that system are manifested in the structure of individual works. Such a critical project would further widen and deepen the model laid out by Raymond Williams, who, according to Head, strives for a "reinvigorated Lukácsian realism that will address the crisis of community which accompanies urban and industrial transformation" ("Beyond" 30). In *The Country and the City* Williams links changes in the landscape under industrialization to formal developments in the pastoral genre. He repeatedly shows, in dialectical fashion, how the "country" is constituted, materially and psychologically, by the city, and vice versa. The contradictions Williams traces through the literary canon find their material counterpart in the ecological contradictions of capitalism outlined by social scientists such as John Foster and James O'Connor. Thus to read the novel as the product not only of a particular socio-economic formation, but also of a particular environmental formation, is to see reproduced within the very structure and formal strategies of the work the conflicted relationships between ideology and the material world that sustains it. If the image of nature is threatening in the novel, this is because it instantiates the material contradictions of the unsustainable worldview of which the novel is a product.

Outline of the Present Work

Since an ecosocial reading practice must emerge from histories of ecosocial writing and material struggle, this theoretical introduction is followed by a series of close readings of environmentally-oriented works of fiction in the context of nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century literary, social, and environmental history. The destruction caused by the explosive growth of cities since the industrial revolution gave rise to an

array of political movements that constitute nothing short of an alternative history of environmentalism. Such material shifts provide important contexts for literary analysis, since these struggles informed, and were informed by, the fiction of the period, as writers from London to Chicago documented the changing environments of modern capitalism.

The first of these close readings, "From Manchester to Massachusetts: The Transatlantic Industrial Fictions of Dickens and Melville," begins by asserting the importance of a transatlantic paradigm. Though a majority of the dissertation focuses on the United States, I begin with the British context, not only because American writers were deeply influenced by the English literary tradition, but also because industrialization was a transnational process that increasingly united and homogenized disparate corners of the globe. Beginning with quintessential works of industrial fiction, this chapter argues that Charles Dickens' *Hard Times* (1854) imbeds a history of ecological exploitation in the landscape of "Coketown's" rural periphery, then crosses the Atlantic to examine Herman Melville's two-part short story "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids" (1855). By deconstructing British, upper-class, urban pastoral, I argue, Melville traces the hidden source of pastoral privilege to the social and ecological exploitation of a Massachusetts mill town.

The third chapter provides a further transition into the American context, by reviewing the history of U.S. urban reform movements in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era. Urban planning and industrial reform brought together a concern for labor conditions with an awareness of space and place. Although these heterogeneous initiatives for health and sanitation, park construction, neighborhood beautification, housing development, and factory regulation contained an ambiguous politics (ranging

from conservative, to liberal-progressive, to radical), they also helped reveal the connection between class stratification and the built environment. Turn-of-the-century literature intersected with these movements primarily through the opposed, but also intimately connected fictional genres of naturalism and utopianism. Ultimately this chapter presents naturalism and utopianism not as self-contained genres, but as competing philosophical outlooks that can be found throughout literary and cultural texts. As we will see, the dialectic of naturalism and utopianism appears consistently in literary treatments of the built environment.

An early example of naturalist aesthetics combining with the politics of environmental reform is examined in the following chapter, "Rebecca Harding Davis's Environmental Exposé." Through an extended close reading of the groundbreaking working-class novella *Life in the Iron Mills* (1861), I expand on Buell's analysis of nineteenth-century "toxic discourse" and argue that Davis combines genres of sentimentalism, romanticism, naturalism, and utopianism, in order to create a proto-environmental justice narrative. The novella illustrates the class basis of toxic exposure, and explores the fact that environmental crisis is also a crisis of perception. Nearly fifty years later, the ecosocialist novel comes into its own with the muckraking work *The Jungle* (1906). "The Ecological Contradictions of Upton Sinclair," examines how *The Jungle* maps environmental injustice onto class conflict, revealing how the polluted environment of the factory inordinately impacted the health and well being of the city's poor. However, Sinclair's attitude toward "nature" finally undermines his socialist project, as his almost psychotic fear of fleshly embodiment and animality betrays a

philosophical idealism that counteracts the materialist outlook on which his socialist politics depend.

Moving then from spaces of industrial exploitation to the potentially redemptive, albeit problematic, space of the urban garden, the next chapter, "Rethinking the Garden: Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Urban Political Ecology," examines the writer's heavily anthologized short story "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892) alongside her feminist utopian novel *Herland* (1916). Although ecocritics have found in Gilman's gardens a sinister call to "tame" and "dominate" nature, I suggest that these images, read in the context of her work on health and labor reform, offer a subversive critique of industrial and domestic pollutants as well as ideology of possessive individualism. The final chapter, "Proletarian Fiction and the Naturalist-Utopian *Aufhebung*," looks ahead to developments in the literary treatment of labor and nature in 1930s. Here I propose a "green" reading of Depression Era proletarian fiction through close readings of Mike Gold's short story, "Love on a Garbage Dump" (1928) and his influential New York City novel, *Jews without Money* (1930). Gold's semi-autobiographical narrative of a tenement childhood offers striking images of urban blight, a problem he confronts with the utopian image of a collective urban garden. If the naturalist trope of the urban jungle in Sinclair overemphasized the determinism of physical nature, and the utopian trope of the urban garden in Gilman overemphasized human mastery, then proletarian fiction's synthesis of utopianism and naturalism may point to an aesthetic of nature-culture mediation.

An Afterword, "Ecocriticism and the New Critical Realism," argues that when read together the combination of literary, social, and environmental histories challenges us to take up Fredric Jameson's aesthetic project of "cognitive mapping," creating and

promoting a didactic art that enables readers to make sense of the confusing, but very *real*, Totality of global capitalism. By revealing the contradictions in ideologies of an unsustainable system, such fiction would constitute a special mode of environmental sociology. While literature's "job" is not to change these contradictory structures, it may make them apparent in ways that provide a basis for transformatory material praxis. To move beyond this point is not the work of literary study, or even academic study, but rather of radical social movements and working people.[16]

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[16] At the political level this method would encourage coalition building between environmental and labor groups. While many working-class people have been hostile toward environmentalism, and vice versa, ecosocialists contend that this bifurcation is a "divide and conquer" strategy on the part of capitalists, an ideological ruse meant to obfuscate what are in fact basic connections between healthy ecosystems and the well-being of workers.

CHAPTER II

FROM MANCHESTER TO MASSACHUSETTS: THE TRANSATLANTIC INDUSTRIAL FICTIONS OF DICKENS AND MELVILLE

Although cities have existed since antiquity, it was only with the socio-economic and technological revolution of industrial capitalism that urbanism as we know it became the dominant form of human life on earth. During the early nineteenth century the European mega-city took shape, made possible by the accumulation of capital through centuries of colonial expropriation and the enclosures of common land. Decades later this phenomenon spread to the United States, and by the 1860s Charles Dickens's "Coketown" had become Herman Melville's western Massachusetts "Tartarus" and Rebecca Harding Davis's Virginia "town of iron-works." Factory towns like Pittsburgh and Milwaukee sprang up around the country, while older city centers like Boston and New York were increasingly industrialized. The litany of environmental ills resulting from this transformation is well known: air blackened with coal smoke, water filled with industrial chemicals and human waste, streets overflowing with trash, and people crowded together in unsanitary and uncomfortable dwellings. In order to provide the labor power necessary to run large factories, the already-exploding population was increasingly concentrated in cities, creating what Marx called the "metabolic rift" between humans and the land:

> Capitalist production collects the population together in great centers…[which] disturbs the metabolic interaction between man and the earth, i.e. it prevents the return to the soil of its constituent elements consumed by man in the form of food and clothing; hence it hinders the operation of the eternal natural condition for the lasting fertility of the soil. (*Capital* 637)

The forced migration of laborers left rural areas destitute and urban areas overpopulated, creating a problem not just of scale but also of density.[17] This extreme centralization of humans and natural resources set the stage for socio-ecological crisis (Cashman 146-48).

The problems associated with urban congestion were exacerbated by an utter lack of infrastructure and municipal services. Amenities such as sewer, running water, garbage collection, ventilation, open green space, and passable roads, were considered a privilege rather than a right, and where they existed at all, they were owned and controlled by private companies for profit. Local governments had little legal power or desire to regulate these often corrupt service providers (Melosi 25). In fact, rather than create new infrastructure, capitalist development often destroyed existing services, as the various functions of the city were subordinated to the drive for profit (Mumford 413-14).

The negative health effects of unregulated growth were of course not distributed equally among the population. As conditions worsened, "none suffered the repercussions of the environmental crisis more than the working class," who were forced by economic necessity to live and work in the most polluted areas (Melosi 10). The uneven geographic development of capital created what we would today call an environmental justice crisis, as disadvantaged groups – immigrants, people of color, and the poor – were

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[17] While "waste" is an inevitable byproduct of human existence, "toxicity" occurs when waste increases *quantitatively* to the point at which it can no longer be absorbed by the ecosystem, and a *qualitative* shift occurs. "It stands to reason," Martin Melosi explains, "that two factories in close proximity compound the stress on the environment. A single factory may be responsible for tainting a water supply, but two or more may make the water toxic" (8).

disproportionately exposed to environmental hazards. New technologies only exacerbated class stratification, as, for example the invention of the electric streetcar allowed the rising middle class to "remove themselves from the poorer parts of the city and live a more comfortable existence" (Melosi, 24). Friedrich Engels describes the problem of spatial segregation in what could be considered a masterwork of early environmental justice analysis, *The Condition of the Working Class in England.*[18] In this text Engels describes the separation of Manchester into a series of concentric zones, with the working class living closest to the city center, the "middle bourgeoisie" living slightly further away, and the "upper bourgeoisie" living near the countryside, "in remoter villas with gardens…in free, wholesome country air, in fine comfortable homes." Although the bourgeoisie were required to pass through working-class neighborhoods in order to do business in the city, "the thoroughfares leading…out of the city" were "lined on both sides with an almost unbroken series of shops" kept in pleasant appearance by petit bourgeois merchants. This "suffice[d] to conceal from the eyes of the wealthy…the misery and grime which form[ed] the complement of their wealth" (58). Engels thus reveals how architecture provided a visual and psychological buffer that kept the wealthy from reflecting upon the inequities that made their lifestyle possible. Space itself was thus ideological.

The environmental ills of the city were fiercely resisted on two fronts: through labor organization and through a growing environmental awareness on the part of urban reformers. The historical overlap of these two movements is significant, and while there

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[18] According to Mark Gottdiener, it was Engels, not Marx, who first applied concepts from Marxian political economy to urban spatial dynamics (xii).

may not be evidence to suggest that early labor movements and political radicals were self-consciously interested in ecological sustainability or engaged in direct dialogue with conservationists and preservationists, there is room to consider how these parallel movements launched common complaints against a common enemy. At the same time that conservationists began to take notice of capitalism's wholesale destruction of nature, laborers – faced with accelerated exploitation and influenced by the revolutionary fervor of the 1840s – began to organize.

Literary production impacted, and was impacted by these social movements. As Amanda Claybaugh shows, nineteenth-century social reform depended on a newly emerging print culture: magazine sketches, exposés, government blue books, medical reports, economic studies, cartoons, and photographs (2). The literature most intimately connected to these texts was the "novel of purpose" or "novel of reform," which included works by authors from Dickens and Eliot to Stowe and Twain, and was arguably the dominant literary mode of the nineteenth century – even authors who were personally indifferent or hostile to reform were immersed in its context and took it up as an object of representation (1-9, 31-37).

The twin struggles of labor organization and environmental restructuring were most directly addressed in the subset of social problem fiction focused on industry and urbanization. In these works, space is not merely a static backdrop for human action, but an active presence that shapes plot and character. Blanche Gelfant calls these works "ecological," and while her use of the term is figurative, it raises possibilities for further investigation. What *is* the relationship between the fictional representation of urban space and its actual ecological processes? Is it possible to speak of the way urban fiction

relates to the flows of matter and energy that, along with the flows of labor and capital, create the city itself? Is it possible to see the urban as a second nature, which is distinct from, and yet ever dependent upon, the first nature of the biosphere? Ecocriticism, long focused on rural and wilderness narratives, is just recently beginning to bring more attention to issues of urban ecology and urban writing. However, most of this attention has been focused on contemporary texts and issues (Bennett and Teague). This is perhaps with good reason: as Andrew Ross explains, the deplorable situation of urban environments today is largely the result of suburbanization since the 1940s, and especially anti-urban governmental policies since the 1970s (15-19). Furthermore, since the environmental justice movement that brought so much attention to urban health concerns arose out of the Civil Rights struggles of the 1960s, environmental justice criticism too has tended to focus on recent texts (Adamson).[19] However, the material and conceptual underpinnings of these policies initially took shape in response to the rise of the industrial city during the nineteenth century, and so this historical period deserves more attention than it has so far received. The notable exception to the presentist focus of urban ecocriticism is Lawrence Buell's *Writing for an Endangered World*, which investigates the way nineteenth-century "toxic discourse," found in the genres of "gothic" and "melodrama," registered a cultural anxiety regarding the environmental effects of industrialization (30-31). The only shortcoming of Buell's suggestive survey is that it is just that: a survey (for example on one page Buell deals with nine different writers). This

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[19] When environmental justice analysis does turn to nineteenth century literature, as in the case of Jeffrey Myers' *Converging Stories*, it tends to focus almost exclusively on the representation of agricultural slave labor rather than industrial wage labor.

experiment in nineteenth-century urban ecocriticism traces broad themes and raises questions for further inquiry, for example introducing, but not elaborating, the problem of narrative form as it is impacted by the contradictory impulses of reform-minded authors. Buell thus lays the groundwork for more in-depth study.

The Transatlantic Paradigm

In a provocative recent essay Ursula Heise has called for a "transnational" or "cosmopolitan" ecocriticism that, in distinction from much of the localist and "rooted" first-wave ecocriticism, would be more attuned to the world-system and to the ways socio-environmental crisis transcends specific bioregions and national borders. One aspect of this project would involve the consideration of non-canonical and non-western environmental writing, while a related approach would involve re-reading the classics of environmental literature with an eye to their global environmental contexts.[20] Yet another approach would be to trace transnational influences on an emerging environmental consciousness, viewing the proto-environmentalism of the nineteenth-century as a product of transnational exchange in response to a global crisis of capitalist modernity.[21]

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[20] In much the same way that postcolonial critics have situated European literature within a world framework in order to uncovered the hidden strands of imperialism in the most "domestic" of texts (Said), cosmopolitan ecocritics might link nature-writing's treatment of particular localities to the broader flows of bodies and materials over space. For instance, Lance Newman analyzes Thoreau's writings as a response not only to the natural world, but also as a response to the industrial conflicts of antebellum New England, which were part of a broader world system. In addition to penning the ecosocialist study *Our Common Dwelling*, Newman has also written extensively on transatlantic romanticism. See for example his Introduction to *Sullen Fires Across the Atlantic: Essays in Transatlantic Romanticism.*

[21] A transatlantic ecocriticism would be fostered by the more general transnational "turn" in literary studies in the past several decades. As David Armitage says, "We are all Atlanticists now." Consider, for example, the influential studies of Paul Gilroy and Joe Roach, or the recent publication of *Transatlantic*

We might go so far as to say that a transatlantic history is *necessary* for a full understanding of the representation of nature in industrial fiction. As Amanda Claybaugh argues, reform fiction was generated in the context of Anglo-American cultural exchange (2-3). Thus any survey of fictional responses to industrialization in the United States must begin with the genesis of the genre in England. Because the United States was fully industrialized several decades after Britain (by the 1830s in the former and the 1860s in the latter), American writers responded not only to their local material experiences but also to an established literary trope. It is well known that Charles Dickens, one of the foremost writers of urban and industrial fiction, was wildly popular in the United States by the time of his first visit there in 1842 (Bradbury 95-97). There is evidence to suggest that Dickens's novels influenced Melville, and it has been argued that Rebecca Harding Davis's depictions of industry in Wheeling, Virginia were a direct response to Elizabeth Gaskell.[22] In attempting to understand the ecological implications of American industrial fiction it will therefore be helpful to begin with its preceding literary counterparts across the Atlantic.

Anglo-American representations of factory labor provide a fascinating basis for comparison and contrast. On one hand, the "New World" and the "Old World" developed distinct mythologies of Nature, which arose not only from differing cultural practices but also from unique geographies ("wilderness" means something far different in America than it does in England). On the other hand, capitalist urbanization and

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Literary Studies: A Reader. Susan Scott Parrish argues that the European colonial exploration of the Americas actually helped *produce* the scientific advances of the Enlightenment.

[22] Whitney Womack suggests in particular that Davis's *Margret Howth* was a conscious rewriting of Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*.

industrialization were truly global processes that eradicated cultural and spatial differences; by mid-century a mill-town in Massachusetts potentially looked very much like a mill-town in northern England. The dominant economic system, like the climate, has little respect for national borders. In comparing American and British fiction we can therefore gauge unique cultural responses to the worldwide phenomenon of industrialization. Industrial fiction changes its form as it migrates from the world's first factory towns in the north of England to the rural factories of New England and Appalachia. Formally and ideologically, the contradictions of the sentimental-liberal response to industrialization in the novels of Gaskell and Dickens are brought into starker relief in the pessimistic "dark romanticism" of Melville, a move which paves the way for the proto-naturalist fiction of Rebecca Harding Davis, and later the class-inflected naturalist writings of London, Norris, Dreiser, Sinclair, Wright, and others. While many studies locate the origins of American naturalist fiction in late-nineteenth century France and the theory and practice of Emile Zola, a "home grown" American naturalism arose out of a transatlantic Anglo-American response to socio-environmental ills.

A comparative analysis of Dickens and Melville provides an understanding of the way cultural forms treat the physical environment in industrial fiction, and in particular the dialectical relationship between the built environment of the factory and the biophysical systems that surround and fuel it. These authors help us explain depictions of pollution as tropes and symbols that perform an important "cultural work" (making visible and understandable the popular attitudes about industry and nature at the time), but also as realistic references to actual spaces. Most significantly, they provide a

template for examining the intersection of nature and space with issues of commodification, labor exploitation, and class struggle.

British Industrial Fiction and the Silenced Environment

The politically turbulent early-Victorian era gave birth to what Thomas Carlyle called the "Condition of England" debate, a discourse that included both fictional and nonfictional responses to capitalist industrialization. Although social protest fiction existed before this time, the particular subset known as the "industrial novel" flourished in the period between the First Reform Bill of the 1832 and the Second Reform Bill of 1867 (Gallagher). The most prominent of these works included Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848) and *North and South* (1854), Benjamin Disraeli's *Sybil* (1845), Charles Dickens's *Hard Times* (1854), Charles Kingsley's *Alton Locke* (1850), and George Eliot's *Felix Holt* (1866). Such fictional texts were intimately related to nonfiction writing of Carlyle, Ruskin, Arnold, Mill, and Engels, as well as the investigative journalism of Henry Mayhew and scientific research of Edwin Chadwick. There was often, as Joseph Childers points out, "a blurring of generic lines and practices," as writers of fiction and nonfiction looked to each other for discursive strategies to address the problem of industrialization (78).

Creative artists have been accused of lagging behind British political reformers on matters of health and sanitation. While Dickens and other novelists would address these topics in the mid-1850s, much of the important political work had already occurred by the early 1840s: "The public health movement received some help from the world of literature," writes M.W. Flinn, "but it was never extensive, and came too late to be

effective in the early years of the campaign" (70). However, even if fiction played a minor role in political activity during the time (an open question) its historical and theoretical value lies in the way it reveals cultural attitudes about industrialization and makes visible the ideologies that both justified and resisted this process.

If the heterogeneous texts that make up early-Victorian industrial fiction can be said to embody something like a general political position, it could be described as a vociferous condemnation of the ills of laissez-faire capitalism, juxtaposed contradictorily with condescending attitudes of pity and disgust toward the poor and an often conservative reaction to the specter of proletarian uprising (S. Smith 203). Faced with Chartist agitation in England and revolution on the continent, liberal reformers sought to ameliorate the worst labor conditions in order to assuage class conflict, while neo-feudalists like Carlyle and Ruskin expounded nostalgically on the benefits the bygone guild system. Industrial novelists often focused on the physical symptoms of exploitation, but located the root causes, and solutions, in the realm of feelings and ideas. As Raymond Williams notes, "Sympathy was transformed, not into action, but into withdrawal" (*Culture* 109). "Withdrawal" may not be the most precise word, however, for these novels were in fact committed interventions on the part of the new middle class: a spirited form of liberal propaganda that attacked the inequalities of industrialization even as it simultaneously condemned union organizing and socialist political alternatives, and argued for a moderate, Christianized, "chivalrous" form of capitalism. The central working-class character of Dickens' *Hard Times*, Stephen Blackpool, is depicted as honorable for refusing to be involved with trade union agitation, while the proletarian father of Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* is seen as evil and degenerate insofar as he

becomes politicized; Macdonald Daly calls *Mary Barton* a "militantly" liberal novel (xxvii). While industrial fiction's exposure of oppressive conditions makes it politically subversive, its formal closure (through plots of criminality and marriage) ultimately has a reactionary significance. This contradiction between radical impulses and conservative reactions is not a "failing" on the part of individual authors, but is rather the result of the contradictory nature of the industrial discourse (Gallagher).

As we will see, these discursive contradictions arise not only from the determinations of the capitalist socio-economic system, but are also related to the natural environment itself, as it shapes, limits, and is worked upon by human culture. As a "condition of production" the land-base is a primary indicator of exploitation, and therefore it would seem obvious that descriptions of degraded landscapes appear in industrial fiction. However, the reader who approaches British industrial fiction hoping to find lengthy descriptions of ecological exploitation will be somewhat disappointed, for such representations appear only intermittently. This spatial erasure is part of the genre's more general omission of the labor process. While these novels deal with the socio-political debates surrounding the effects of factory production, there is often little depiction of production itself. As Ivanka Kovačević says, "It is...somewhat disappointing to discover that so few authors focus their attention directly on the process of industrialization" (15-16). She suggests that this silence is related to the inability of pre-established literary modes to make sense of this completely new phenomenon. Nicholas Bromell extends this observation to nineteenth-century U.S. literature, observing that, "work takes place everywhere yet appears to find cultural representation almost nowhere" (2). Furthermore, Franco Moretti points out that a key characteristic of

the classical European *bildungsroman* is that it "conspicuously places the process of formation-socialization *outside* the world of work" and thus refuses to define the characters through their labor (42, 25). Novelists concoct elaborate plot devices to avoid depicting their middle-class characters working, often setting events in the evenings or on weekends or holidays, or creating situations in which characters cannot or do not have to work. Even when proletarian characters become the focus of the novel, they are rarely depicted in the act of production.

From an ecocritical perspective, the result of this erasure of labor is that industrial novels tend to depict the socio-environmental *effects* of capitalist production – unhealthy bodies, polluted spaces – but rarely the *causes*. A novel may present us with a coughing worker, but will not often explicitly trace the cough to a smoke-emitting furnace. A prime example of this phenomenon is Gaskell's *Mary Barton*, one of the first, and perhaps the archetypal industrial novel; the reader may be startled to learn that the factory itself never appears in this work. There are indeed a fair number of "natural" descriptions: the workers take trips to the countryside, and a central character, Job Legh, is an amateur naturalist with a penchant for collecting insects. The novel begins in fact, not in the manufacturing district, but in the "charming" pastoral "Green Fields" on the outskirts of the city (5).[23] However, when we turn to the novel's industrial spaces the descriptions become much thinner. Though there is a brief but famous scene that graphically depicts the hovel of the impoverished Davenport family, there is little else to

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[23] This turn to naturalism and to the pastoral, as Raymond Williams and others have noted, may be seen as a generational reaction to the sudden and traumatic processes of industrialization (*Culture* 88). See also King and Secord.

suggest the day-to-day material existence of Manchester laborers or the work they do. If one refrains from filling in the gaps, and simply takes at face value what is available on the page, *Mary Barton* gives the sense of bodies moving through a blank space. It is only in the effect on these bodies that one senses the presence of industry at all, in frequent description of sickness, starvation and disability. In this way, the factory becomes an "absent cause," an unrepresented black hole around which swirl the human and environmental consequences of unregulated production. Therefore, *Mary Barton* provides a perfect example of industrial fiction's "silencing" of the working environment.

But why would depictions of polluted and industrial spaces appear only intermittently in novels? Perhaps the environment is silenced because of the genre's aforementioned contradictory political position, caught between reform and reaction, between materialism and idealism. Because these texts must reconcile conflict in the idealized realm of culture and feeling, they must *disavow the very concrete spaces they evoke*. The novel form, as it had been integrated into the ideology of the rising middle class during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, could not openly recognize the ecological unsustainability of capitalist production, any more than it could directly depict the active agency of the proletariat. In a sense, the novel is a material *product* of this unsustainability. The problematic depictions of nature in the fictional plot thus also correspond with the novel's problematic status as a physical embodiment of an unsustainable mode of production. Read in this way, industrial fiction offers a catalogue of socio-environmental exploitation that has been filtered through the distorting ideologies of the polluters themselves, providing a "veiled" environmental history, haunted by a muffled but ever-present ecosystem. Part of the work of the eco-social

literary critic is to read the environment back into these silences, by pointing to brief, disavowed moments of ecological awareness, to show, following the Althusserian Pierre Macherey, how literature works upon ideology to "uncover…what it cannot say," making the gaps and fissures of ideology apparent (94).[24]

Hard Times as Veiled Environmental History

> Art itself is a product of Nature.
>
> Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden*

> Never fear, good people of an anxious turn of mind, that Art will consign Nature to oblivion.
>
> Charles Dickens, *Hard Times*

A complex treatment of the environmental consequences of industrial processes emerges in Dickens' *Hard Times*. The text satirically refers to itself as a mill-town "guidebook," parodying the popular English countryside tourist books of the nineteenth century, the most famous being Wordsworth's *Guide to the Lakes* (8).[25] A month before Dickens began publishing *Hard Times* in weekly installments in his periodical, *Household Words*, he traveled by train to the industrial north of England to report on a worker's strike. Dickens had been involved in campaigns for factory reform, and it is clear from the placement of the novel's serialized chapters alongside nonfiction essays

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[24] The significance of the "not said" has long been central to Marxist, Feminist, and Postcolonial readings. See the Marxist-Feminist Literature Collective, and Bivona.

[25] Simpson claims that the word "guidebook" alludes to "the vast number of guidebooks available to mid-century travelers touring the English counties, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales" (56). Wordsworth's most popular publication during his own lifetime was not the poetry we find collected in present-day anthologies but the *Guide to the Lakes* – a kind of literary tour guide and amateur naturalist text first published in 1820 and reissued in at least ten different editions by 1859. See Bate 41-42.

that he viewed the work as a kind of journalistic intervention (Simpson 5). The effect of pollution on Dickens' psyche is revealed in the essay "Fire and Snow," written during a trip to the Midlands, in which he describes "a region of cinders and coal dust," where "the natural colour of the earth and all its vegetation might have been black."[26] Though he may not have been a proto-environmentalist comparable to Wordsworth or Ruskin, Dickens was clearly aware of the material importance of the natural world, as well as its emotional power on humans, as evidenced in the pastoral rhetoric that fills his social criticism. Paul Schacht asserts that Dickens was an "environmentalist," broadly defined, in the sense that, in opposition to evangelical moralists and classical political economists, he located the sources of poverty in the surrounding built environment rather than in any inherent mental or biological failings of the poor themselves (78). Thus, he stands in radical contrast to both the natural theology of Paley and the political economy of Smith and Malthus.

Dickens was also immersed in issues of urban development and health. Margaret Simpson relates that he was "an indefatigable proponent of sanitary reform," and supported measures to construct "a badly needed sewage-disposal system for London" 79). His periodical, *Household Words*, was deeply involved in factory legislation, and many of its contributors focused on issues of water and air pollution (79, 145, 155). One of the more notable was Henry Morley, who wrote more articles for *Household Words* than any other staff member, including Dickens himself. Morley was trained as both a physician and a cultural critic, and following his involvement with the *Journal of Public*

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[26] For reference connecting "Fire and Snow" to *Hard Times* see Simpson 79.

Health and his efforts to combat cholera he was invited by Dickens to write on issues of sanitation, infrastructure, and working-class health. Articles such as "The Quiet Poor" and "The War on Fever" were published alongside serialized chapters from *Hard Times*. Dickens even included a footnote in the novel's original manuscript directly referencing Morley's article "Ground in the Mill," an excoriating criticism of the inability of factory regulations to prevent gruesome injuries. In the pages of *Household Words* Dickens and Morley sparred with laissez-faire apologists such as Harriet Martineau, and Dickens' subsequent loss of friendship with Martineau marked, if not his solidarity with the working class, at least his increasing skepticism about capitalism's inherent "progress" (Fielding). Dickens had studied Edwin Chadwick's groundbreaking *Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain*, a text that called for more vigorous government intervention and resulted in passage of the Public Health Act of 1848 (Flinn 38). The influence of this and other studies are evident in the descriptions of urban blight throughout novels such as *Bleak House* and *Our Mutual Friend*.[27]

Like most industrial fiction, *Hard Times* makes sparing use of setting. Sprinkled throughout this roughly two-hundred-page novel are about a dozen references to what we could define as the "environment," ranging from short phrases to a few paragraphs. According to Kovačević, Dickens "fails to bring to life the…day-to-day existence inside the factory and out of it," gives "no adequate picture of the inside of a factory or an

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[27] See Steig. Lest we think that this awareness is the product of the "darker" more politically "mature" Dickens, it is worth noting that references to industrialization appear even in that most lighthearted of his early works, *The Pickwick Papers*. During a coach ride through the mid-country, Mr. Pickwick notices "the murky atmosphere, the paths of cinders and brick dust, the deep-red glow of furnace fires in the distance, the volumes of dense smoke issuing heavily forth from high toppling chimneys, blackening and obscuring everything around…all betoken[ing] their rapid approach to the great working town of Birmingham" (736).

everyday scene in a working-class home," and places little emphasis on the "effect upon the poor of their degraded living conditions" (115). However, a close inspection reveals that a handful of references, placed strategically throughout the work, conjure forth a silent physical environment and fulfill one of Lawrence Buell's primary criteria for an "environmentally oriented" work – that "the non-human environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history" (*Imagination* 7). The setting is not mere "backdrop," but rather has an agency and is integral to the rest of the narrative.

The infamous "Coketown" appears to be a composite of several industrial cities Dickens had visited or researched. References to cotton production suggest England's first and best known industrial center of the far north, Manchester, while descriptions of coalfields and ironworks are reminiscent of Birmingham and the "Black Country" of the Midlands (Simpson 78). The fact that Dickens visited the city of Preston while writing the novel further suggests a location for the novel (Dickens, "Strike"). Descriptions of the environmental consequences of manufacturing appear briefly but regularly throughout the text, and though they are interesting in and of themselves for their representational content, they also perform an important role in the plot and in the overall structure of the text.

Where exactly do depictions of industrialization appear in *Hard Times*? Significantly, the novel does not open in the factory, but rather in Thomas Gradgrind's schoolhouse. This is in keeping with the novel's central preoccupation, which is not a political critique of industrial capitalism, but rather a philosophical critique of

utilitarianism.[28] Throughout the novel Dickens contrasts the oppressive "Facts" propounded in the schoolhouse with the carnivalesque "Fancy" embodied in the nearby travelling circus, thus containing the politically charged issue of industrial labor within a sentimental critique of instrumental rationality. Five chapters later, however, the factory erupts as a destabilizing material presence, protruding into the center of this philosophical text. Dickens calls this chapter the "Keynote," indicating its overall importance to the work. The description begins:

> It was a town of red brick, or of brick that would have been red if the smoke and ashes had allowed it...[I]t 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 building 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. (17)

In this initial description the reader is immediately made aware of air, water, and noise pollution. Hints at the environmental conditions continue, from the "hot and dusty" streets that appear "to be frying in oil," to the "sulky blotch" of polluted sky that "lay shrouded in a haze" due to the "poisonous volumes" of chimney smoke (84-85, 126). At one point a laborer appears "to have been taking a shower-bath of something fluffy" which turns out to be the dust given off as raw cotton is prepared for spinning (92), an arduous process that often resulted in a chronic respiratory illness known as "carder's cough" (Simpson 165, 185). Later in the novel we learn that a young girl had become ill

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[28] It is well know that Dickens was a vehement critic of the utilitarian philosophies of Bentham and Mill, and especially their application to education. Dickens saw the essential relation between the instrumental rationality of utilitarianism and the economics of Adam Smith. However, as a "romantic" anti-capitalist, Dickens seems to have placed the philosophy at the root of the problem, rather than investigating the material basis of this mindset in the economic relation. See "Utilitarianism and the Science of Political Economy," in *Hard Times*, Norton Critical Edition, ed. Ford and Monod (315-327).

from the "sickly air" found in "working people's miserable homes" (207). The original manuscript suggests that Dickens initially meant the girl to have died in a brutal factory accident, and then later changed the cause to pollution-induced sickness (Simpson 222, 144-45). Although this revision may have been undertaken in order to soften the violence of the passage, its effect is to suggest the indirect violence of toxic exposure. Industrial cotton manufacture of the type performed in the novel "had few rivals as a source of occupational disease," causing a variety of lung disorders and "an unusual form of cancer" (Appleby 57-58). In its brief descriptive asides *Hard Times* registers an awareness of this environmental injustice, and begins to make an argument connecting the destruction of nature to the exploitation of labor. The pollution of Coketown, the narrator tells us, was "inseparable from the work by which it was sustained" (17).

At the level of characterization and plot, the relationship between the exploitation of labor and the degradation of the built environment is enacted through the novel's main working-class character, Stephen Blackpool. Stephen's daily routine is an apt illustration of the process of *reification*, whereby the alienation embodied in the assembly-line production process becomes a part of the subjectivity of the laboring people. The reader is first introduced to Stephen in the midst of pollution:

> In the hardest working part of Coketown; in the innermost fortifications of that ugly citadel, where Nature was as strongly bricked out as killing airs and gases were bricked in; at the heart of the labyrinth of narrow courts upon courts, and close streets upon streets, which had come into existence piecemeal...[I]n the last close nook of this great exhausted receiver, where the chimneys, for want of air to make a draught, were built in an immense variety of stunted and crooked shapes...lived a certain Stephen Blackpool, forty years of age. (48-49)

In this passage Stephen's character is constituted by the built environment. Descriptions of industry bookend the chapter whose title bares his name and the cycle of production is

synchronized with his movements. As Stephen leaves the factory late at night, the moon shines down, "casting…shadows of steam-engines at rest," and the "brightening" moonlight is said to reflect Stephen's improving mood (51). On one level this is a commonplace pathetic fallacy, enhancing emotions by projecting them onto the landscape. On another level, however, the description is a material reality. The novel maps shifts in Stephen's subjectivity as he leaves the workspace: when work ends for the night and the machinery is shut off, Stephen feels "the sensation of its having…stopped in his own head" (49). The machinery has worked its way into Stephen's subjectivity to the extent that he has become machine-like, with his movements and even his consciousness regulated by the external environment. The text exemplifies how the monotonous uniformity of physical space requisite for large-scale capitalist production – "the jail might have been the infirmary, the infirmary might have been the jail" – extends into the very bodies of the workers, "people equally like one another" (17). The workers' alienated labor constructs an environment which oppresses them, and ironically, their very alienation makes them passive in the face of this mighty second nature, rendering them unable to see themselves as active agents. While the commodities themselves find "their way all over the world," the workers are confined physically and mentally, yoked to a productive system that conditions their tiniest movements, even as it destroys their bodies through injury and sickness (17). Thus, through the relation it constructs between body and space, the novel links the exploitation of labor to the destruction of nature, showing these to be parts of the same process of capitalist development.

If *Hard Times* is primarily about the "human" political drama of labor and capital, the natural environment nonetheless lurks as a subtle presence in these conflicts. The

factory owner, Josiah Bounderby, casts his defense of the free-market in environmental terms. He flatly denies the ill effects of pollution, exclaiming that smoke is "meat and drink to us. It's the healthiest thing in the world in all respects, and particularly for the lungs" (96). In what is likely a reference to the Towns Improvement Clauses Act of 1847, which stated that mills must install equipment to counteract their smoke output, the narrator sarcastically comments that mill owners were "utterly undone, when it was hinted that perhaps they need not always make quite so much smoke" (Simpson 154-55; Dickens, *Hard* 84).

Environmental references appear not only in the context of bourgeois defenses of capital, but also in the context of working-class resistance. It seems more than coincidental that a reference to the river's "filthy waters" appears just moments before the novel shifts to an entire chapter about union-organizing and labor agitation (105). While this is not sufficient evidence to argue that the workers had an "ecological consciousness" (they do not organize *because* the river is polluted) it is enough to show that the text registers an anxiety about the relationship between nature and class-based resistance. The longer the novel focuses on the land, the more deeply it seems to draw forth political problems. The more time spent describing the ecosystem of Coketown, the more pronounced become the ecological contradictions. In this sense the description of the polluted river cumulatively calls forth the laboring bodies. In the political unconscious of the text the description of environmental destruction invokes its other, the resistance to exploitation in the form of collective labor.

Though socio-economic and ecological conflicts are generated on the factory floor, *Hard Times* begins to show how they transcend this immediate space of production

and create "risk" more widely throughout the society. This occurs when the mill-town's gothic environmental backdrop seeps into the central plot of middle-class domesticity. A chapter on the education and familial conflicts of young Tom and Louisa Gradgrind opens with a reference to the "smoke and brick" of Coketown and closes with Louisa leaving their home, "whence the fires of Coketown could be seen, making the distance lurid" (69, 73). In addition to providing a lurking "frame" for domesticity, the factory environment emerges subtly and momentarily throughout the domestic scenes that make up the bulk of the novel. The two environments associated with bourgeois characters in the novel are Thomas Gradgrind's home and the estate of the factory owner, Mr. Bounderby. Gradgrind's home, Stone Lodge, is located a several miles from Coketown, and this distance from the site of production is an index of Gradgrind's privilege (the further out of town one lives, the better off they are).[29] Dickens calls Stone Lodge an "uncompromising fact in the landscape" and its sharp angles and regimented Georgian design illustrate Gradgrind's utilitarianism and his positivist fetishization of "facts" in the educational curriculum (8). The home functions as more than a philosophical motif, however, for we are told that the structure contains "gas and ventilation, drainage and water-service, all of the primest quality. Iron clamps and girders, fire-proof from top to bottom; mechanical lifts for the housemaids, with all their brushes and brooms; everything that heart could desire" (8). The description of these amenities implies an argument about environmental inequality. Gradgrind's house is

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[29] Simpson writes: "Many middle-class families moved out of the smoky industrial centers and lived on the outskirts…Social separation was not only desirable as a sign of status and wealth," but also because it removed the inhabitants from "unsanitary conditions" (55).

clean, healthy, and comfortable thanks to a host of modern technologies that are produced by the industrial laborers, and yet that are not available *to* these laborers; Gradgrind's bourgeois philosophy is built upon a certain level of material comfort that is denied to the workers of Coketown. He lives in a healthy built environment that is constituted by the "not-said" – the systematic underdevelopment of his urban neighbors. The text explores the relationship between Gradgrind's philosophical and psychological position as an upper-middle-class ideologist for capital (as a leader of the Coketown school system), and the everyday habitat of his built environment.

Socio-economic stratification is made even more apparent in the description of the mill owner's estate. We are told that Josiah Bounderby lives "fifteen miles from the town" (much further than Gradgrind), in "a rustic landscape, golden with heath, and snowy with hawthorn in the spring of the year, and tremulous with leaves and their shadows all the summer time" (128). However, the railroad connecting Bounderby's home to Coketown traverses "a wild country, undermined by deserted coal-shafts, and spotted at night by fires and black shapes of stationary engines at pits' mouths" (128). This gothic scene "gradually softens" and "mellows" as the train approaches Bounderby's estate. The novel thus takes readers on a kind of "environmental justice tour" – educating us, through contrast, on the spatial dynamics of inequality and class conflict. In the description of a landscape scarred with coal-shafts and burning fires, the text vividly illustrates what Marx and Engels called the "subjection of the country to the rule of the towns" (*Manifesto* 46). By juxtaposing this frightening image with the pleasant atmosphere of Bounderby's estate, the novel reveals the class privileged underwriting pastoral nature.

As is becoming clear, Dickens' environmental insight is not so much in any close, thick description of a particular place, but in his depiction of the relationship between and across spaces, as well as his inscription of a historical consciousness onto the land. His later novel *Great Expectations* (1861), for example, exhibits not simply a contrast between urban gothic and rural pastoral, but rather an awareness of spatial interaction and change over time, as he focuses on the historically-contentious and ecologically-sensitive wetland space of the North Kent Marshes east of London. As the protagonist, Pip, moves back-and-forth between the marshland of his rustic youth and the London cityscape of his bourgeois maturity, his travels mirror the interplay of country and city in the Victorian era. The marsh of *Great Expectations*, with its "lonely, unvisited atmosphere" of "bleak and windswept" vistas and "remote villages," seems to be a barren wilderness, worlds away from the city of London (Paroissien, 27). But although it may appear wild, contextual research and a closer reading of the novel reveal that this was actually a thoroughly developed space that had been managed for centuries. According to archeological findings, the area had been settled since Roman times, and its infrastructure included an intricate system of sea-walls, dykes, and run-off channels (to prevent flooding), as well as a "system of drains and floodgates [that] served to protect the rich alluvial topsoil" (29, 139). In *Great Expectations* we are told that a character resides "at a sluice-keeper's out on the marshes," attesting to the continual presence of laboring human bodies in the remotest corners of the peninsula (118). Additionally, chalk and limestone were found to be plentiful in northeastern Kent, resulting in a bustling lime industry and cement works (Beeftink 110, 380). The centrality of this industry to the region is reflected in *Great Expectations*, where lime-kilns appear at

several key moments in the plot. The text alludes to the environmental impact of these structures when it describes "how the mud and ooze were coated with lime" and how the kilns gave off a "sluggish stifling smell" (385). These developments, along with the draining of marshes and fens, reduced "the open marshes to a regular and monotonous scene" (Taylor 130, 148). Thus the "monotony" that Pip finds in the marsh landscape is not "natural" at all, but is in fact a result of centuries of capitalist exploitation. Dickens subtly embeds an environmental history of a particular region within a standard bildungsroman narrative. *Great Expectations* reveals capitalist development written physically on the land.

Furthermore, the movement of characters maps the socio-economic relationship of country and city. The coastal marsh is presented not as a peripheral space, but rather as a "liminal" or in-between space: at the ecological level it is a unique combination of coastal and inland ecosystems, while at the geographic level it is a middle ground between the imperial power center and the colonial hinterland (located at the mouth of a major river, it is a kind of highway for that which goes out of the metropole and that which comes in from the colony). In *Great Expectations* the liminality of the marsh is reflected in the characters that use it to mediate their own temporal in-between-ness. It is never a destination in itself, but rather an area that characters pass through. The marsh is the "place of study" where Pip teaches his caretaker to be "less ignorant and common" – to move from one intellectual state to another (116). It is the place where Pip wanders as he contemplates transitioning from one occupation to another, as well as the place he literally travels through in order to move from the country to the city. The marsh is always a space "on the way" to somewhere else. But we might ultimately understand this

liminality in temporal as well as geographic terms. If *Great Expectations* is, as it has often been read, ultimately a novel about finance, economics, and social class, then the historical liminality underlying these characterizations could be the situation of the marsh within the development of modern capitalism: it is a space in-between stages of development. Like the wandering/wondering Pip, it is always "on its way," but "not yet" fully integrated into the economy. Pips "maturation" as a bourgeois gentleman coincides with his move to the city, and his subsequent wavering between a romanticized and vilified descriptions of the marsh thus serves as a political allegory for the uneasy and contradictory position of this exploited, and resistant space under the industrial system.

Similarly, in *Hard Times* the history of rural/urban antagonisms is signaled when we turn from Coketown to the surrounding countryside. "So strange to turn from the chimneys to the birds," the narrator muses, "so strange, to have the road-dust on his feet instead of the coal-grit" (126). When, near the end of the novel, two female characters walk in the countryside to take a "draught of pure air," we are presented with what at first appears as a typical pastoral scene: there are "larks singing" and "pleasant scents in the air," "fresh…grass" under foot, and "luxuriant…hedgerows," in short, "everything was at peace" (201). On one level this is pure nostalgia. By going into nature the girls seem to have returned to a prelapsarian world. It soon becomes clear, however, that this is not "pure" nature. Interspersed with these bucolic descriptions are traces of the region's industrial history. While off in the distance Coketown looms "as a black mist," the immediate "green landscape" itself is "blotted here and there with heaps of coal" (201). The periphery does not escape the circuits of industrial production. The narrator meditates as he gazes at dilapidated machinery: "Engines at pits' mouths, and lean old

horses that had worn the circle of their daily labour into the ground, were alike quiet" (201). This trope of technological decay and organic fecundity is heightened when the girls step over a "fragment of a fence so rotten that it dropped at a touch of the foot" and pass, "near a wreck of bricks and beams overgrown with grass, marking the site of deserted works" (201). In these images technology seems to be dominated by an encroaching organic nature, rather than vice-versa. Nonetheless, their very presence reveals a social history written in the face of the land. In Dickens the countryside is always already "second nature."

The novel's most prominent marker of environmental destruction is in the image of the "pits," the abandoned coal-mining shafts that scar the region. A particular pit known as "Old Hell Shaft" plays a central role in the plot, when, near the end of the novel, Stephen Blackpool falls into it and receives a mortal injury. "The lost man had fallen upon a mass of crumbled rubbish with which the pit was half choked up" (205). As Stephen lies dying from the fall he observes that the death toll from these pits makes them "crueller than battle" (207). He sardonically muses on the fact that the pits had killed many other working-class people before him, as he remembers reading "in the public petition...fro' the men that works in pits, in which they ha' pray'n and pray'n the lawmakers for Christ's sake not to let their work be murder to 'em, but to spare 'em for th' wives and children that they loves as well as gentlefolk loves theirs. When it were in work, it killed wi'out need; when 'tis let alone, it kills wi'out need" (207). Stephen here connects his own death from falling in the abandoned shaft to the death of laborers during the mine's operation. By combining images of dangerous coal pits and dangerous textile mills in the same novel, Dickens links problems of manufacture to their source in the

resource extraction industries, reminding us that a prerequisite for the mass production of commodities is the stuff of nature itself: the plant known as "cotton" and the fossil fuel required to run the spinning machinery, not to mention the flesh and blood of workers.

Not only does the overdetermined image of the pit call forth the complex totality of an unsustainable mode of production, but its placement and agency in the novel – as the killer of Stephen Blackpool – gives the pit an active presence at the formal level of the plot. Furthermore, its geographic placement *between* the mills of Coketown and the pastoral estate of the capitalist owner emphasizes spatially its significance as a site of conflict. It is more than coincidental that the "Old Hell Shaft" where the girls discover Stephen lies "midway between the town and Mr. Bounderby's retreat" (201). Compare this mediating space, presented near the climactic close of the novel, with a similar space in the very opening of the text, as Gradgrind takes a stroll and stumbles across Sleary's circus on the "neutral ground upon the outskirts of town, which was neither town nor country" (8). If the most direct model for Coketown was the city of Preston, as Simpson suggests, then this "neutral ground" would most probably be Preston Marshes, a "marshy ground…below the town" that had been a frequent gathering spot for labor agitators as well as for circuses and festivals (Simpson 58). If the sacrifice of Stephen in the coal pit is the climax of the novel, the entrance of the carnivalesque circus and the vibrant character of Sissy Jupe represent both the flashpoint of initial conflict and the catalyst for the plot's rising action. It is interesting then, that both of these important devices are situated within descriptions of politically-charged liminal spaces that mediate town/country interactions, and sit uncomfortably between the concepts developed/undeveloped and public/private. The peripheral marsh and the abandoned

mineshaft are both "second natures" in which natural ecosystems and human societies combine. Dickens' veiled environmental history presents a *spatialization of class conflict* around areas of natural resources. Like the "no man's land" of a battlefield, these spaces are a geographic pivot-point of class antagonism. Rather than mere "backdrops" for the conflict, that is, these spaces have material agency in the text as a result of their very ecological properties. It is the marsh's ecological status *as marsh* that makes it resistant to development, while the pit is dug and then abandoned precisely because mineral veins are discovered and then exhausted. The material properties and characteristics of these spaces are inseparable from their political implications. The natural environment itself is thus crucial to the political critique of *Hard Times*.

However, the politics of this novel are ultimately limited and contradictory. Just as the text raises social and ecological issues, it partially contains them by using images that naturalize the very forces of exploitation. Coketown is compared to "the painted face of a savage," with machines that emit "serpents of smoke" and appear "like the head of an elephant in a state of melancholy madness" (17). Later the text compares the humid atmosphere of the factory to "the breath of the simoom" (85), a sand-wind which blows across African and Asiatic deserts (Simpson 159). Beneath the offensive orientalism of these statements is a clumsy attempt to show that industry is a "foreign" entity that has invaded the land. However, in comparing machines to elephants and other animals the novel unwittingly equates industry with nature, employing a trope that would later dominate French and American naturalist fiction. Elsewhere we encounter a "forest of looms" and a "wilderness of smoke and brick" (53, 69). By using natural imagery to describe human-made structures, the text naturalizes industry. Capitalist development, in

the moment it is being critiqued, is simultaneously made to seem universal and inevitable (simply the "way things are"). The glaring contradiction here is that the very structures that are naturalized through these metaphors are themselves the agents of environmental destruction. The thing that kills animals is equated with an animal. This is an inaugural example of what we might call the ecological contradiction of industrial fiction, the fact that the destroyer of nature is equated with nature.

The negative association of factories with "wilderness" is consistent with the structuring of the novel according to agricultural metaphors, evidenced in the headings of the three parts: Sowing, Reaping, Garnering. George Bornstein explains that the novel's central metaphors are the "miscultivated field" and the "corrupted garden." Dickens uses the language of a "corrupted pastoralism" to attack "the socio-economic structure of Coketown for contradicting the order of nature" (159, 164). Dickens equates the factory with the wild forest because, for him, the ideal nature is a pastoral farm or garden. On one hand this is a forceful critique of an out-of-control industry that wreaks havoc on human bodies and the land base, where "wild" stands for "laissez-faire," and "cultivated" stands for regulation and oversight over the impact of production. On the other hand, these images are a dangerous simplification of the complex biophysical processes of intact ecosystems. In naturalizing the conflict between labor and capital (seeing it as something that exists "in nature" rather than something that is socially produced), the novel ideologically re-enforces the very exploitation it criticizes.

We may conclude by arguing that the treatment of nature in the novel is contradictory because the politics of the novel more generally are contradictory. Though *Hard Times* is a striking illustration of this fact, it is something we might claim more

broadly about the genre of industrial fiction, and ultimately about the liberal discourse on industrial reform. If one were to read *Hard Times* in its original serialized form in the periodical *Household Words*, one would find, adjacent one particular chapter, an anonymous article entitled "Smoke or No Smoke," which makes a very earnest and laudable condemnation of air pollution, and then scrambles desperately to come up with technological solutions to this problem. The author ends the article surveying a host of cutting-edge and even futuristic technologies: furnaces that consume their own smoke, heat pumped into the city via underground tubes, etc. This rhetorical desperation would be comical if it were not such a grave matter. The author concocts a range of technological "solutions" to the problem of pollution, while never questioning the root causes of private ownership and profit-based production. The one thing the essay cannot do is question the unsustainability at the very core of the capitalist system. Its logical acrobatics thus beautifully illustrate the ecological contradiction of modern culture. Having worked through the treatment of nature and economy in literature, we come to these discourses with fresh insight. For nowhere is the ecologically contradictory logic of industrial culture made clearer than in the narrative choices of the industrial novel.

American Industrial Fiction and the Culture of Nature

As we have seen, Dickens' particular interest as an environmental writer lies in his historical awareness of the human presence in the land and his *internalization* of the ecological contradictions within the social system. But what happens when we turn from the thoroughly developed island microcosm of England to "Nature's Nation" – the United States? What happens when the industry enters a geographic space where wilderness

seems to overpower civilization, and industrial fiction encounters a literary tradition of frontier pastoral? From the agrarian democracy of Jefferson, to the villages and forests of Irving, Cooper, and Hawthorne, to the transcendental proto-ecology of Thoreau, to Melville's sea and Twain's west, images of nature seem to dominate nineteenth-century American fiction. In contradistinction to the socially-oriented, urban, realist novel of Europe, the American "romance" depicts a mythological flight from society into the freedom of nature. If the operative binary in much European fiction is between a countryside and a city that are contained within a concept of civilization, American fiction often stages a separation between civilization itself and a frontier wilderness. How does this context change the literary exploration of industrialization and its effects on the natural world?

The first thing to remember is that this particular image of American literature is itself the construct of a specific critical history. The post-World War Two period, in which American writing was transformed into American "Literature," coincided with F.O. Matthiessen's sacralization of a handful of New England authors, and with the "myth and symbol" school of American Studies (for example in the work of Richard Chase), which identified "Nature" as a defining principle of the national canon: Europe may have had its museums and palaces, but the United States had its Grand Canyon. As Donald Pease explains, these critics operated through the creation of a series of

overlapping dichotomies: America vs. Europe, Wilderness vs. Civilization, New vs. Old, Private vs. Public, Romance vs. Realism, Imagination vs. History, Art vs. Politics.[30]

One implication of this arbitrary and ahistorical dichotomization is a severing of fiction from social criticism. Richard Chase's *The American Novel and Its Tradition* (1957) may have defined American literature by its "dissent," but this mainly took the form of a contrarian and vaguely anti-authoritarian irony, rather than an objective critique wedded to a practical political commitment. Though many post-war literary critics were politically on the Left, their archetypal interpretations were often de-politicized (Carton and Graff 318). Chase's study, for example, ignored authors such as Stowe, Wharton, and Dreiser because of "the widespread assumption that novels of direct moral persuasion and/or social determinism were somehow unliterary, almost illiberal" (McWilliams 74).[31] Furthermore, when the dichotomy separating art from politics is superimposed on the one separating wilderness from civilization, the result is clear: nature itself becomes de-politicized. A closely related implication is that artistic renderings of wilderness are cordoned off from the more commercial, lowbrow, or "nonliterary" urban forms such as the sketch, the journalistic exposé, the political pamphlet, the sentimental novel, the thriller, or the Horatio Alger story. It was this perspective that elevated *Moby Dick* to the

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[30] Donald Pease points out that the dichotomies created by postwar critics did not apply well to actual nineteenth-century writers, who wrote for commercial success as well as artistic fulfillment, who often blurred the line between generic categories as well as between the then-just-emerging categories of lowbrow, middlebrow, and highbrow, and who certainly wrote about the city as well as the country.

[31] The larger context for this attitude is of course the Cold War, which demanded that liberal American critics oppose the "closure" of totalitarianism with the supposedly free and open-ended, non-ideological "organicism" of American thought.

status of great literature while rejecting Melville's city novels like *Pierre* as "flawed" (1852).[32]

Though these divisions have been largely problematized by recent theoretical developments in American Studies,[33] they have lingered in the field of ecocriticism due to its focus on rural and wilderness spaces. Part of the work of an urban ecocriticism is thus to overcome this division, not only by focusing more attention on overlooked urban writing, but also by revealing how the so-called "anti-urban" literary canon is intimately connected, aesthetically and materially, to an urban context. The earliest examples of American industrial fiction straddle this divide between country and city, and between high and low culture. The short fiction of Herman Melville, for example, though distinctly "literary," also mixes and parodies both high and low forms and blends artificial pastoral with sensational exposé in order to critique the spatial and class divisions of an emerging industrial capitalist order. Sidney Bremer argues that the "symbolic contrast between rural America and urban Europe served both to deny the significance of America's own cities and to obscure the connective impact of industrialization on country and city alike," and for Bremer it is Melville who exposes the limits and inadequacies of this American-wilderness mythology. First, Melville reverses "the conventional moralistic associations" of the urban with vice and the rural with virtue, and second, he collapses "the distinction between [the] two environments," showing the "fundamental unity of Europe and America, countryside and city" (49-51)."

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[32] Wyn Kelley dispels the popular myth that Melville was simply an anti-urban writer in *Melville's City*.

[33] The post-Vietnam era "New Americanists," such as Amy Kaplan, Donald Pease, Jonathan Arac, Jane Tompkins, Phillip Fisher, Walter Benn Michaels, and Wai-chee Dimock, sought to embed literature more deeply in its historical and cultural contexts.

A good place to explore the transition from British to American industrial fiction, therefore, is Herman Melville's short story "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids," a text that is essentially a political allegory of the socio-environmental effects of transnational capitalist exchange. Reading Melville's fictional use of "Nature" in a transatlantic industrial context allows us to move beyond the myth of American wilderness.

Melville's Urban Pastoral and Rural Gothic

Melville's conceptions of urbanization and industrialization were directly shaped by transatlantic exchange. Born and raised in New York City (where he would live periodically throughout his life), Melville gained employment at age twenty as a cabin boy on a merchant ship traveling to Liverpool, England. As he later recounted in the semi-autobiographical novel *Redburn* (1849), the industrial city of Liverpool greatly affected him, demolishing his literary notions of a grand, old-world Europe and replacing them with images of "a modern Babylon…filled with noise, disease, poverty, starvation, human despair" (Bradbury 139). In *Redburn* he depicts Liverpool as a threatening vision of what the United States could become. In addition to these direct personal experiences, Melville is known to have read the work of Carlyle and Dickens, and was likely influenced by the British tradition of urban social-problem fiction. Merton Sealts points out that Melville "had been reading…Dickens since 1849," and, like other critics, finds

many points of similarity between Melville's short fiction and the "sketches and tales" of Dickens (89-90).[34]

Transatlanticism, class conflict, and urban/rural relations converge in "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids," a tale that is in fact two separate but interrelated sketches. Neither sketch focuses primarily on plot or character: the only character the reader gets to know in any depth is the highly unreliable narrator, an amiable, middle-aged American who lives in New England and owns a fairly large business selling seeds. In the first half of the story, the narrator visits the Inns of Court at London's Temple Bar, where he attends a dinner party with a group of bachelor lawyers. In the second sketch he travels to a secluded New England paper mill in order to procure cheaper supplies for his business, where he is given a tour of the factory and witnesses the oppression of female laborers.

What these two narratives lack in plot and character they emphasize in setting. Both are deeply about the *places* in which they occur. The first section begins with the phrase, "*It* [the Paradise] lies not far from Temple Bar," while the second section begins, "*It* [the Tartarus] lies not far from Woedolor Mountain in New England," (my emphasis). The repeated use of the word "it" initially establishes the centrality of place to the text, a

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[34] Sealts argues that "although no single work by [Dickens]...can be considered a primary source of a given piece by Melville," there are discernable similarities in characterization and plot (89). He writes: "Both nineteenth-century reviewers...and twentieth-century critics have seen resemblances between [Melville's] short fiction and the sketches and tales of...Dickens." The "forlorn clerk" Bartleby, for example, "could have easily come from the pen of Dickens" (90). While direct evidence is lacking that Melville had read *Hard Times*, we know that has family had received copies of Dickens' weekly magazine *Household Words* during the 1850's (187). He had definitely been influenced by *The Pickwick Papers, David Copperfield,* and *Martin Chuzzlewit* (66). Robert Gale suggests that Melville's dark descriptions of the American west in *The Confidence-Man* (1857) may have been influenced by the "sarcastic, mean-minded works of Charles Dickens, namely *American Notebooks* (1842) and *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1844)" (92). For a book-length comparative study of Dickens and Melville see Solomon, and for Melville's relationship to Carlyle see Giles.

sense that is heightened throughout by the use of a "guidebook" language, as the narrator takes "you" on a tour of these spaces. The contrast between the two spaces could not be clearer. While the "maids" suffer physically and mentally from the freezing New England winters and the conditions of the papermaking process, the "bachelors" enjoy a decadent feast in their cozy bourgeois apartment.

Kelley calls "Paradise of Bachelors" one of Melville's "most urban sketches," and in it, the symbol of Temple Bar is overdetermined with issues of class, property, and power. Not only do these lawyers operate in the interests of a judicial system that ultimately benefits the ruling class, they also "control a large section of prime land in the center of London" (217, 221). The stock literary device of the pastoral helps contrast this space with the factory. The bachelors' apartment is described as a "quiet cloister" with a "garden," and as "a city with a park…and flower-beds." It is compared to "oases in Sahara" and to "Eden's primal garden" (261, 264).[35] The narrator reveals the nostalgic longing common in pastorals when he compares the present-day inhabitants of Temple Bar – lawyers, clerks, and businessmen – to the original Knights Templar: "The genuine Templar is long since departed…the iron heel is changed to a boot of patent leather; the long two-handed sword to a one-handed quill" (263). Expressing the Victorian vogue for medievalism, the narrator bemoans the "worm of luxury" that has transformed the holy warriors into secularized men of leisure and business. In lines that may well have been

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[35] This description is based on Melville's firsthand experience visiting friends in London; in his journal he calls the dining room of Elm Court "The Paradise of Batchelors [sic]. Gale 340.

inspired by Thomas Carlyle, he launches a vehement critique of modern industrial capitalism coupled with an appreciative backward glance at the feudal order.[36]

The glaring irony, of course, is that Melville places this backward-looking nostalgia in the mouth of a capitalist character, just as he places his pastoral scene in the middle of one of the largest and dirtiest financial and industrial centers of the nineteenth century. The narrative negotiates this spatial incongruity by constructing a sharp contrast between the Inns of Court and the surrounding "stony heart of stunning London" (261).[37] Implicit in this separation is an ideological position: the bachelors believe that they actually inhabit a paradise, in part because they are physically removed from the site of production (cloistered away in the apartment), even as they exert control over this site of production through their social position as representatives of the legal and financial structures. Their spatial segregation ensures that they do not perceive the ongoing exploitation of labor. Thus they can believe that they inhabit a kind of Eden, where nature is harmonious and freely gives itself over to human use without the "curse" of a sweaty brow. Although there are actual laborers inhabiting this paradise, in the form of domestic servants who prepare the food for the banquet, the imagery of the text works to conflate these figures with nature, to the point that they become invisible, and the food

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[36] The narrator further displays this pastoral nostalgia – and an accompanying reactionary politics – when he views the "dear delightful" apartment and is suddenly moved to sing "Carry me back to old Virginny!" a racist minstrel song and a lament for the antebellum south (265). For debates on this lyric see Moseley.

[37] It is no accident that the original Temple Bar was an entranceway into the ancient walled city of London, and until the 1870s was a literal stone edifice that demarcated a boundary. Clive Ponting reminds us that one of the defining characteristics of the pre-industrial city was the presence of surrounding walls (297). As a symbol of defense and a barrier to delineate legal boundaries and regulate the flow of trade, Temple Bar itself stands as an overdetermined image in the story – as that which channels the flow of commodities into and out of the city, but also as that which divides and masks.

seems to bring itself to table. Melville playfully uses battle imagery to describe the feast, with a roast beef "marching" into the dinning room, overseen by an "old field marshal (I cannot school myself to call him by the inglorious name of waiter)" (267). The passive butler merely supervises food that seems to prepare and deliver itself. This formulation is reminiscent of the aristocratic country-house pastoral critiqued by Raymond Williams, in which Ben Jonson "looks out over the fields of Penshurst and sees, not work, but a land yielding of itself," or in the novels of Jane Austen, where minute details of architecture and grounds are lovingly and accurately described, but "the process of working is hardly seen at all" (*Country* 32). The descriptions of the apartment in "The Paradise of Bachelors" utilize nature imagery precisely in order to naturalize the unequal social relations on which the entire structure stands. The hyperbolic presentation combined with the contrasting diptych reveal the text as a self-conscious critique of the pastoral mode. Through the narrative persona, Melville seeks not only to condemn the pastoralization of the bachelor's pleasure dome, but also to understand it, by placing its nature ideology in relationship to an actual exploited environment that lurks in the background.

In contrast to the pastoral city, Melville uses gothic conventions to depict a dark, frightening, countryside. The second section of the narrative is based on Melville's experiences near Pittsfield, in the Berkshire Mountains of western Massachusetts, where he lived while composing the story.[38] As the narrator travels to the mill he leaves behind

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[38] Place names suggest that the journey the narrator makes is a fictional recreation of the five-mile trip Melville had made from Pittsfield to the Old Red Mill in the nearby hamlet of Dalton to procure paper supplies. See Lea Newman (286).

"bright farms and sunny meadows" and enters a "dusky pass" surrounded by "bleak hills" and "cloven walls of haggard rock" (271). In one of several allusions to Biblical Hell, the mountain pass is referred to as a "Dantean gateway" (271). Torrential streams, plunging waterfalls, and enormous, jagged outcroppings of rock, conjure up the Burkean sublime nature that frightens and affronts the viewing subject.

Though the story appears to present a wilderness that exerts power over humans, things are not so simple. On closer inspection the text registers an awareness of anthropogenic environmental destruction, of a nature at the whim of human production. As he travels the narrator notices "the ruin of an old saw-mill, built in those primitive times when vast pines and hemlocks super-abounded throughout the neighboring region" (272). The "vast pines" no doubt refer to the Eastern White Pine, the "majestic...hallmark of the central New England forest" that originally stood as tall as Pacific coast redwoods, and "captivated" the first European explorers to the region (Wessels 71). According to the narrator, all that remains of these huge trees is the "black-mossed bulk of those immense, rough-hewn, and spike-knotted logs, here and there tumbled all together, in long abandonment and decay" (Melville 272). Though a few groves of original old-growth trees would have existed in Melville's boyhood, most were gone by the time he wrote this story (Wessels 73). The text thus inscribes the history of economic and ecological exploitation in colonial New England that culminated in mass deforestation by the nineteenth-century (Cronon, *Changes* 122-126).[39] In fact,

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[39] The hundreds of miles of stone wall that today wind through second-growth forest attests to the fact that much of what we consider "wilderness" was, in Melville's day, actually open field and pasture. See David R. Foster and John D. Aber (9-11, 82-83) and Wessels (41-42).

the clearcutting of New England forests for agricultural, fuel, and shipbuilding peaked in the 1850s, around the time Melville lived in the Berkshires. A period of reforestation in the area followed in the 1860s, as the competition from westward expansion caused a decline in regional New England farming. Melville was therefore writing this story at a time when the land was as "tamed" as it would be in his lifetime. It could be argued, then, that the text's bleak, gothic landscape reveals not so much an awe in the face of overpowering wilderness, but rather a veiled, metaphorical description of a degraded, overdeveloped wasteland, a space rendered frighteningly barren by the loss of biomass and nutrients (Wessels 75).

At the center of this degraded landscape sits the "large, whitewashed building" of the paper mill (Melville 272). Given that Berkshire County was the national hub of paper production in the nineteenth century, with forty mills dotting the region, the paper mill in Melville's work stands not only for a specific historical referent, but more generally for an entire industry and its relationship to the bioregion (McGaw 9-10). If the "Paradise" sketch relied on a spatial *separation* between the pastoral apartment and the polluted city, then the "Tartarus" relies on a spatial *conflation* – on a merging and mixing of the industrial space with the surrounding natural environment. Ideologically, the reader is brought down to the proletarian "factory floor," where it becomes immediately clear that commodity production has environmental consequences, that capitalist value must be "wrested" from nature through labor, and that this affects the land as well as human bodies.

It is difficult to establish a direct link between the paper mill and the saw mill in Melville's story, given that deforestation resulting from paper production did not become

a serious problem in the United States until a decade after the text was published, since at the time of its composition paper was made primarily from cloth rags (McGaw 204-5). Nonetheless, beyond suggesting that Melville had an eerie foresight on this issue, we can point out that wood had been used to make paper in Europe decades earlier, and Melville, being a well-read international traveler, could have been aware of this. Furthermore, even before wood was used as a source for paper it played a role in the industry as a fuel source.[40] The story's reference to a "wood shed" with "scattered piles of wood all sawn and split" reveals that timber was important to the paper production process at this time (276). It is fair to say, then, that the placement of the sawmill and the aside about deforestation are not accidental, but structurally related to the narrative's formal movement toward the climax in the paper mill.[41] The formal movement of the narrative links the gothic landscape to the region's dominant industry.

Melville's dark vision of a wilderness integrated with mechanized production has subversive political implications. Michael Rogin points out that nineteenth-century factory owners frequently employed a pastoral ideology to justify the use of young female labor, by casting the work in terms of a harmonious, domestic "regularity" that would be achieved in the countryside:

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[40] By the 1850s Berkshire mills were moving away from water-wheels and toward steam power, which required the burning of fuel (first wood and later coal). Though there is a reference in Melville's story to a "colossal water wheel" that "sets [the] whole machinery a-going" (279), there may also be intimations of this shift in energy sources (McGaw 223).

[41] The mill would have also caused a fair amount of water pollution, as chlorine and other bleaches, dyes, and pigments used to treat the paper were dumped into adjacent rivers. Since mills required an enormous amount of water, owners soon recognized the inherent ecological contradiction: that they were undermining their own production by polluting the pure water they needed to run their operation. However, because their production levels were dictated by the need to increase profit, they merely expanded their search for new resources, rather than conserving their immediate surroundings (McGaw 206, 213-14).

> New England factory owners set their mills in nature, away from urban contamination. The owners benefited from cheap land and water power. The workers, absorbing nature's purity and subjected to factory discipline, benefited from pastoral harmony. The rural mills were virtuous, paternally governed communities, as their promoters presented them, adapting the republican order of the Puritans and the founders to an industrial age. (203)

If the American pastoral frequently involved a reconciliation of technology and wilderness in what Leo Marx calls the "middle landscape," there is no such reconciliation in Melville's short story. Instead, there is a violent disruption that negatively affects both the human society and the natural environment. Melville demolishes the myth of a virtuous industrialized countryside by "drain[ing] the local color out of the mill." Whereas apologists for industry had argued that development actually improved the landscape, that "nature was sterile without the fructifying hand of man," Melville reverses this argument, suggesting that mechanization has sterilized nature, as well as humans – as revealed in images of sexual impotence and barrenness.

Many critics have pointed to the abundance of sexual and female-gendered images used in the story, especially in relation to the landscape – from the womb-like hollow and the menstrual "Blood River," to the fact that the "nine minute" duration of the paper production process mirrors human gestation in miniature (283).[42] In these assessments the landscape is simply a metaphor for issues of sexuality, gender, and domesticity. But Melville's descriptions are more complicated than that, for in addition to operating metaphorically, they also depict an actual physical space in which the destruction of nature was coterminous with a gendered division of labor. Moreover, Melville's sexualized descriptions reverse the expected dichotomy of a lush nature versus

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[42] See for example Grover and Wiegman.

a destructive industry, instead depicting a barren landscape surrounding a highly *reproductive* mill. What the capitalist machinery produces, though, is not life, but a commodity, and it does so precisely by draining life from the surrounding (human and nonhuman) organisms and by inhibiting human sexual reproduction through the gendered segregation of work. In the story nature is not just a metaphor for gender issues then; rather, the text points to the fact that historical gender inequalities and the treatment of nature under industrial capitalism are materially intertwined – the treatment of the mill girls is structurally related to the pollution that emanates from the building.

As the narrator enters the mill, descriptions of pollution and exploitation only continue. A young boy named Cupid guides the narrator on a tour of the building, and when they enter the "Rag Room," where cloth is shredded to be rendered into paper, we are told that "The air swarm with the fine, poisonous particles, which from all sides darted…into the lungs" (279). When the narrator observes that the "stifling" atmosphere makes Cupid cough but does not affect the female laborers, the boy replies, "Oh, they are used to it." (279). Historical evidence tells us that paper-mill workers often developed respiratory illnesses from inhaling lint, and contracted other diseases from recycled fabric. This was in addition to direct injury or death by accidents involving the large, complex papermaking machinery that had replaced handmade processes by the 1840s (McGaw 102, 311-344). The text connects the "pallid" white faces and "consumptive" appearance of the girls to the paper-making process, both metaphorically, insofar as the "blank" stares of the girls mirror the "blankness" of the paper, and literally, insofar as their blank expressions arise from the monotony of the labor itself, while their pale faces are a result of exposure to the polluted environment of the mill space (Melville 277, 280).

While the ghostly appearance of the workers abounds with symbolism, we should not forget that it is also a literal expression of labor conditions.

When the narrator sees the massive paper machine his reaction is a mix of terror and admiration. He asks, "Does it never stop – get clogged?" to which Cupid responds, "No. It *must* go. The machinery makes it go just so…the pulp can't help going" (284). When he hears this the narrator remarks, "something of awe now stole over me, as I gazed upon this inflexible iron animal…what made the thing I saw so specially terrible to me was the metallic necessity, the unbudging fatality which governed it." Given that Berkshire mills were just being mechanized in this period, we can understand the statement as an expression of amazement with the emerging technology. On a broader level, the image strikingly encapsulates the entire industrial capitalist mode of production. The surplus value necessary for the capitalist treadmill depends on an ever-greater material throughput. The iron "necessity" the narrator finds in the machine is a more general statement on the necessity of capital to expand and accelerate on its search for profit, leaving polluted ecosystems and broken bodies in its wake.

Through his exposure to these socially and ecologically destructive production methods the narrator begins to understand the material connection between the situations of the Massachusetts mill girls and those of the London bachelors. On learning that many of the rags used to make paper come from London, he remarks: "Tis not unlikely…that among these heaps of rags there may be some old shirts, gathered from the dormitories of the Paradise of Bachelors" (280). As he watches the paper production he muses about the "strange uses to which those thousand sheets eventually would be put," including their use as "lawyers' briefs" (284). We are presented, then, with essentially a narrative of

commodity circulation: the *waste* of the bachelors, in the form of their worn-out shirts, becomes the raw material the maids use to produce paper, which is then sold back to the bachelors in order to fulfill their duties as subjects of the juridical ideological state apparatus. When he initially arrived at the Inns of Court the narrator had expressed concern that, whereas the original Templars fought battles, the new inhabitants of Temple Bar merely lounge about and consume. However, the story illustrates that both acts have a destructive component; if the violence of the original Templar was immediate and embodied in the act of battle, the violence of the new Templar is structural, and veiled through a global division of labor, in which the antebellum United States, as an industrializing "second-world" nation, receives the waste of, and manufactures the raw materials for, the British imperial center.

As Wyn Kelley explains, there is a "structural similarity" between the London Inns of Court and the Massachusetts factory (222). While the working-class women appear to have no lives outside of the mill, the bachelors, like Melville's forlorn clerk, Bartleby, "make their home in an office building." In both cases public and private space have been conflated and the home expunged, leaving the characters with "no domestic space to retreat to." The structural similarity between the factory and the court makes it possible to see the way in which the bachelors, while they enjoy a place of class privilege over the women, are also subjected to the same structural laws of capital and a somewhat similar (though in many ways different) alienating and dehumanizing experience. As Kelley point out, "The maids are obviously more miserable than the bachelors, more physically and visibly deprived; but the bachelors simply do not know that they are miserable too" (222). Melville reveals this in his ironically hyperbolic descriptions of the

Paradise, suggesting that its existence is too good to be true. The bachelors' discussion of their frequent vacations may reveal that they are able to "travel freely" over space, as opposed to the women who are confined to their workplace; however this freedom of movement is itself a measure of their rootless alienation (Kelley 269). To cope with their transient, hollow, insecure lifestyle, the bachelors ply themselves with food and alcohol and construct a sham community of co-workers. They are a part of the same "metabolic rift" that has separated country from city. Isolated from the natural world and beset with a kind of eco-psychosis, they create a reactionary, artificial pastoral to compensate for their insularity.

The narrator himself is implicated in this process of accumulation through environmental destruction. As a "seedsman" he appears as a kind of Johnny-Appleseed figure of fertility, spreading flora across the country. But the story tells us that in order to sell his seeds in the capitalist marketplace he must package them in envelopes, and is thus required to visit the Berkshire mill in order to procure an "incredible quantity" of paper (Melville 273). The logic here is that the narrator makes a profit by producing and distributing organic plant matter, part of the surplus of which he re-invests in order to purchase supplies from an industry that *consumes* organic plant matter. Put simply, trees are cut down to make envelopes, in order to sell more trees. In this expanding cycle of environmental production and consumption – one in which ecosystems would no doubt be negatively impacted – nothing of real "use value" is produced. The fact that the narrator seeks out a wholesaler for his paper reveals that he is primarily interested in growing his company and accumulating profits.

The story is all the more interesting in that its quest for formal closure dictates that our unreliable narrator disavow the ecological contradictions alive in the work. When the narrator learns that the mill girls are all unmarried, he suddenly thinks of the bachelors' privileged existence, and is filled with a "strange emotion" that makes his "cheeks look whitish" (286). This emotion can only be described as a shock of recognition – a feeling of estrangement or defamiliarization as he glimpses, in however distorted a way, the oppressive social totality of which he is a part. However, after he realizes this global socio-economic connection and feels his "strange emotion," he immediately leaves the building and retreats from the area, exclaiming that, "time presses me and I must depart." In this sense he is very much like the paper itself – a reified object caught in the wheels of the capitalist machine, pressed on inflexibly to the next appointment. Safely on his horse, he is "wrapped in furs and meditations" – furs that protect his skin from the cold just as the mediations protect his fragile ego from a recognition of his position within the socio-economic structure. We might say more accurately that he is "wrapped in ideologies." As he leaves the Tartarus he finds himself "alone with inscrutable nature," a nature that is mysterious and impossible to comprehend. Even though he has come face-to-face with the socio-environmental conditions of production, they remain mysterious to him. In Althusserian terms we might say that the narrator *sees* and *experiences* the exploitation but does not have *knowledge* of it.[43] His very refusal or inability to know is predicated on his class position. He cannot objectively understand and take seriously the implications of the links between the

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[43] Althusser sharply differentiates between the "perception" of truth and "knowledge" of it – that is, an objective, theoretical understanding of how it works and what its implications are. See "Letter on Art."

exploitation that occurs in the mill and the socio-economic position of the bachelors, because to do so would be to admit his own role in the system of exploitation and thus to voluntarily renounce his own position of power and privilege.

This situation colors the way we read the narrator's concluding statement: "Oh! Paradise of Bachelors! and oh! Tartarus of Maids!" Like the famous "Ah!" that ends "Bartleby," much hinges on whether we read the "Oh!" as an exclamation of epiphany, or as a resigned shrug-of-the-shoulders, an "oh well, what can we do?" It should be clear from the argument just made that even if this is a recognition, it is only a false or momentary recognition, which is then re-contained within the formal logic of the story as shaped by the psychology of the first person narrator. Melville's rhetorical brilliance lies in the way he allows the reader to fully inhabit this ideological position, and at the same time be estranged from it. This internal distance is achieved formally through the juxtaposition of the pastoralized urban site of consumption with the gothicized rural site of production. As he travels from the Inns of Court to the Massachusetts factory the narrator allegorically – and thus materially and politically – provides a critique of the geographical dynamics of class. His journey to the "factory floor" brings the reader face to face with the socio-environmental consequences of production. It is no coincidence that the representation of the point of production is also the most direct material interface with the natural world. Working-class people work with "stuff" – plants, animal and human flesh, waste, soil, rocks and minerals, water, fire, etc. – more often than the middle- and upper-classes, who work with products that have already been worked upon, transformed by human labor into something less recognizably connected to their basis in the natural world: desks, paper, adding machines, facts and concepts, etc. This is of

course not to romanticize the inherent "goodness" of the worker's connection to the land, for in fact their very alienation from the means of production assures that their work will be exploitative, dangerous, and less than fulfilling. The point, however, is to emphasize that an environmental analysis of literature must take into account the primary material human interface with nature under modern capitalism, which is through wage labor.

If "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids" is ultimately a politically despairing work, in which the mill girls have no agency and no resistance seems possible, it is also a work that maps the connections between ecological and socio-economic degradation and provides a starting point for an eco-social analysis of nineteenth century U.S. culture. Though far different in tone than Dickens' novel, Melville's story draws upon literary conventions inherited from Britain and Europe in order to make sense of the new phenomenon of industrialization. Furthermore, in its "concern with the problem of socio-economic conflict and mechanization" Melville's short story anticipates the socially-conscious realist and naturalist writers of the post-Civil War period (Rogin 57). In its conflicted depictions of environmental and socio-economic determinism it could even be said to set the stage for a tradition of homegrown American naturalism that would emerge more fully in the coming decades.

CHAPTER III

THE NATURALIST-UTOPIAN DIALECTIC: URBAN FICTION IN THE GILDED AGE AND PROGRESSIVE ERA

During and after the Civil War, the intensification and centralization of production under monopoly capitalism caused a drastic increase in environmental despoliation. While westward expansion resulted in the destruction of complex ecosystems, in urban areas of the northeast the influx of an industrial labor force from abroad, as well as from rural areas throughout the U.S., led to serious overcrowding and set the stage for socio-ecological conflict. It is no wonder then that the turn-of-the-century experienced an emerging environmental consciousness alongside growing class conflict. The age of the robber barons and laissez-faire capital meant the accelerated exploitation of labor as well as the intensified consumption of natural resources. Thus the same period that witnessed the development of urban green space and federally protected national parks, also saw a series of economic depressions that spurred violent conflicts between labor and capital and led to the formation of major labor organizations. The same era during which John Muir defended wilderness and Fredrick Law Olmsted designed his parks, was also the period of the rise of the Knights of Labor (1869), the American Federation of Labor (1886), and the radical Industrial Workers of the World (1905). Trade union membership quadrupled and socialism gained the deepest foothold it has ever had in the United States: Melvyn Dubofsky calls the years 1900-1912 the "golden age" of American socialism, with support oscillating between the electoral social

democracy of Eugene Debs's SPA and the revolutionary Marxism of Daniel De Leon's SLP (102, 112).[44]

A major link between labor action and environmental thought can be found in the theory and practice of Gilded Age and Progressive Era urban reformers. As Robert Gottleib's groundbreaking *Forcing the Spring* indicates, the history of the environmental movement must include reforms in sanitation, urban housing, and occupational health. Gottleib's perspective runs counter to the standard leftist critique in which these reform movements are seen as conservative efforts to ameliorate the masses and diffuse revolutionary potential. It is true that such efforts were led by a cohort of professionals who often circumscribed their actions within the limits of profit and showed a condescending paternalism in their efforts to "clean up" the poor physically and morally. Stephen Germic's *American Green*, for example, explains how urban parks were developed in order to quell class struggle, offer a spatial fix for economic crises, and construct a unified national identity.[45] In the efforts of genteel reformers to construct pastoral landscapes in the inner-city, "lay a motive," as Alan Trachtenberg says, "to eradicate the communal culture of working-class and immigrant streets, to erase that culture's offensive and disturbing foreignness, and replace it with middle-class norms of

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[44] In the rural Midwest a parallel movement of radical agrarian populism occurred, when farmers, led politically by Henry George and William Jennings Bryan, and represented culturally in the regionalist fiction of Hamlin Garland, formed cooperatives and fought railroad interests.

[45] This was an act of double oppression, since parks were often created by removing indigenous and impoverished populations from the land. In order to construct New York's Central Park an estimated from 5,000 working-class African Americans were evicted from their homes (Germic 33-35, 79-106; Cronon, "Trouble").

hearth and tea-table" (111).[46] The construction of parks thus stands as a specific literalization of the more general progressivist urge to rescue the capitalist system from itself by mitigating the worst excesses of socio-economic strife.

The risk of such an interpretation lies in its potential to move too quickly from the claim that capitalists *deployed* parks ideologically to the conclusion that parks are inherently oppressive structures. In critiquing the bourgeois affiliations of park designers we should not dismiss altogether the drive for healthy living space. The fact that reformers increasingly sought to counteract the environmental chaos of capital should be seen as a partial victory for public space and urban commons. The standard social critique of urban park aesthetics overlooks the "City Beautiful" movement's more subversive British counterpart, the "Garden Cities" movement of Ebenezer Howard and Patrick Geddes, which had a genuine concern with the improvement of working class life. (Flanagan 68; Sweeting 108). Such an interpretation also overlooks the emergence of a more radical wing of U.S. "environmental justice progressives" driven by a commitment to healthy living environments for all. Out of the combined movements for women's suffrage, labor organization, and urban sanitary reform arose a group of activists who sought, as Gottleib says, the "reconstruction of neighborhoods" in "an effort to improve the total environment of the industrial city" (61). In *America Reformed*, Maureen Flanagan adds that these mainly female activists developed "a new attitude toward the built environment of cities and towns, re-envisioning a common welfare

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[46] Olmsted employed in his writing a class-inflected rhetoric in which the strife and danger of the "street" (i.e. "working class culture") was juxtaposed with the order, calm, and middle class domesticity of the sculpted park. See Trachtenberg 109-110.

fostered by a clean environment" (170). Settlement house workers, for example, were the first to build playgrounds for U.S. schoolchildren. These reformers "challenged the idea that a park should be a carefully sculpted site of middle-class leisure" and instead emphasized functionality, health, and access. There is evidence to suggest that the construction of parks and playgrounds was frequently supported, and sometimes even demanded, by the working class (68). The alternatives to such spaces were the crowded, unlit, and unventilated tenements, or the dangerous city streets. Though environmental justice progressives relied on mainstream scientific research to make their arguments, they often clashed with experts, exposing corruption and the politically motivated manipulation of data (174).

The most famous example of urban environmental reform is Jane Addams' Hull House settlement in Chicago. While Addams herself participated in the construction of urban parks and playgrounds, a range of other female Hull House residents combined labor concerns with issues of public health and environmental quality. Alice Hamilton, a founder of industrial toxicology and the first woman professor of Harvard Medical School, investigated the health effects of poisons in Chicago factories and used the evidence to agitate for improved conditions (Sicherman 4). Mary McDowell, the "Angel of the Stockyards," combined labor organization with waste disposal agitation, eventually forcing the creation of the Chicago City Waste Commission. She also helped support Upton Sinclair during his time researching Chicago slaughterhouses for *The Jungle* (Gottlieb 61-65; Melosi 102-3). Florence Kelley, an active Socialist Labor Party member and translator of Frederick Engels, became involved in reform as an Illinois state factory inspector, when she had the insight that labor exploitation in tenement sweatshops could

potentially be combated as a health problem (Sklar 265-68; Gottleib 62-69).[47] Though Hull House members provide the most famous examples of urban sanitary reform and its links to the left, these efforts were by no means confined to Chicago: Women's Municipal Leagues pushed for similar reforms in Boston and New York, and important movements emerged in such smaller cities as Indianapolis and Kalamazoo. In Pittsburgh, Crystal Eastman, one of the more radical settlement house organizers and a Debsian socialist, conducted a series of revealing studies on disease and occupational accidents in industrial spaces (Gottlieb 64).

Rethinking the environmental inflection of progressive reform also necessitates a reassessment of the theory that supported their practice, namely the philosophy of environmental determinism. This position has been largely discredited as a reflection of and justification for racist and imperialist policies, as it provided a "natural" explanation for the "fitness" of societies (Peet). The idea of "determinism" in general is often seen as a constraint on human creativity and freedom, and thus as a vehicle for oppression. There can be no doubt that deterministic arguments were mobilized in the service of insidious social policy. However, if environmental determinism has been "a pretext for ethnocentricity, imperialism, and racism...it has also," as Lawrence Buell says, "no less strikingly, been invoked as an antidote *to* these" (*Writing* 130). Environmental determinism would seem to be a constraint only if the environment itself is static, and if there is a unidirectional movement from determining environment to determined

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[47] Environmental concern had first pushed Kelley toward an activist life, when, as a child, she traveled with her father to the mills of Pennsylvania and saw the "terrible" effects of the newly-developed Bessemer steel production process on the workers and the land of the Alleghenies (Sklar, 44).

organism. Upon further investigation, both of these presuppositions appear to be faulty. First, environments are in fact malleable and chaotic, and are more accurately described as "processes" rather than as "things." Second, a co-evolutionary approach suggests that organism and environment are co-constitutive: creatures shape their surroundings as much as their surroundings shape them. From this perspective environmental determinism carries an optimistic and subversive edge, emphasizing human possibility rather than limitation. If "the significant factor for human growth" is "the surrounding environment rather than innate characteristics," says Flanagan, then we are actually closer to the 'nurture' side of the nature-versus-nurture debate (68). To suggest that characteristics are not inherent, but are rather co-effected in relation to an outward environment, is to suggest that these characteristics can be altered. This is the way many urban reformers utilized the environmental determinist philosophy, through a kind of "reform Lamarckism," which argued that a change in environment would lead to a change in the individual. When the nineteenth century investigative journalist Jacob Riis wrote that "all life eventually accommodates itself to its environment," he did so in order to criticize the deplorable conditions of tenement houses and agitate for their reform (123). Riis seems to say that *since* all life accommodates itself to its environment, we must alter this environment if we want to improve people's lives.

Seeing the environment as a cause of inequality is thus not necessarily "deterministic," but is rather a way of linking oppression to larger socio-economic structures. Take for example the nineteenth-century urban reformer's conception of disease: the "miasmatic" argument that sickness is caused by noxious vapors. Modern germ theory reveals that diseases are caused by microorganisms that spread in unsanitary

conditions. Miasma theory, on the other hand, held that the conditions themselves, and in particular the foul air created by wet, decomposing matter, spontaneously generated disease. Scientifically flawed though the concept of miasma was, it inadvertently led to health improvements through increased hygiene, and helped shift popular opinion away from conceptions of disease that were metaphysical (disease as divine intervention) and individualist (disease as an imbalance of bodily humors) to those that were materialist and social. Though germ theory was a great medical breakthrough, it may have inadvertently contributed to a social justice setback, insofar as it "shifted attention away from the physical environment" and toward a myopic focus on the disease itself (Duffy 213). As the medical field became hyper-professionalized, the "cause" of disease was no longer identified as a tenement house, a factory, or a garbage pit, but instead as a microorganism. With the "germ" as the culprit, it became more difficult to blame the institutions that created the conditions under which the disease was spread.

In opposition, settlement house workers like Alice Hamilton "never lost sight of the social environment as a cause of illness" (Duffy 213). The female urban reformers associated with settlement house movement provided a socio-environmental argument that combined labor activism with issues of sustainability and health. In doing so they paved the way for a more radical critique of pollution, one which both inspired, and was inspired by, the literary fiction of the time.

Naturalist Degradation Reconsidered

If the nineteenth century witnessed the emergence of environmental consciousness and organized labor as twin responses to capitalist exploitation, it also

marks a moment when a more fluid relationship existed between literary writing and other forms of knowledge. Prior to the compartmentalization of academic disciplines in the mid-twentieth century, an intimate connection existed between literature and the social and natural sciences. As Stephen Schryer points out:

> The differentiation of sociology and literary studies that began in the mid-1930s is particularly striking given that the two disciplines often overlapped in the United States in the early decades of the twentieth century. Before the emergence of the New Criticism and functional sociology, many sociologists incorporated methods and assumptions of novelists into their work and vice versa (666).[48]

As an alternative Schryer examines the Chicago School sociologists, who borrowed heavily from fiction in order to study urban communities. These scholars mimicked the descriptive writing style of novelists such as Zola and Dreiser, and they used literature as an object of analysis and a pedagogical tool, teaching courses with titles like "Study of the City through Literature and Art" (Cappetti, 28). In turn, their investigations influenced writers such as James T. Farrell and Richard Wright. The convergence of social science and literary naturalism created what Carla Cappetti calls "a more subjective sociology" and "a more objective literature" (199). Social science used literature to account for the particularities of lived experience, while literature used the social sciences to function as a form of realistic documentary evidence. Of particular interest to ecocritics, however, is the fact that the Chicago school grounded their approach in the natural sciences. In their influential anthology *The City* (1925), Robert Park and his colleagues introduce the term "ecology," emphasizing how human behavior

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[48] The 1930s saw the increased professionalization of sociology, while at the same time the New Critics increasingly sought to remake literary study into a scientific discipline precisely by isolating the technical skills of "close reading" from the interdisciplinary tools of the cultural historian. In both cases the reification of disciplinary boundaries led to an increasing isolation of these fields from each other and from the general public they were meant to serve.

is determined by the environment as well as by socio-economic structures. Unfortunately, rather than examining actual ecological conditions, they use the term "ecology" mainly as a metaphor: the city is an "organism" and social groups are likened to vegetation. The Chicago school thus "naturalizes" social relations, making their analysis insufficient at best and oppressive at worst. Nevertheless, their attempt to synthesize the natural, the social, and the cultural, paralleled and exhibited some of the same contradictions as the fiction of the period.

At the turn of the century literary representations of urban space were dominated by the aesthetics of naturalism, as seen in the works of popular and prolific writers such as Stephen Crane, Jack London, Frank Norris, Theodore Dreiser, Edith Wharton, and Upton Sinclair. Though there is a general consensus that American naturalism was directly influenced by the work of French writer and critic Emile Zola, scholars have also made a case for the "home-grown" qualities of the genre (Lehan 49). Naturalism is typically identified as a "pessimistic" and "deterministic" subset of realism. While it borrows from realism a focus on the quotidian and a commitment to the mimetic correspondence between text and world, it focuses not on the parlors of the bourgeoisie but the slums of the poor. Deeply influenced by Darwin and Spencer, naturalism explored human characters as instinctual beings driven by heredity and environment.

Initially celebrated by progressive cultural historian V.L. Parrington as "the honest voice of a generation bewildered and adrift," naturalism increasingly fell out of favor during the tenure of the New Criticism for its "defects of form and style" and its quasi-journalistic violation of the boundaries between high art and mass culture (Pizer, 10). Since the 1980s there has been much reappraisal of the genre, as scholars have re-

examined the political implications of the genre, albeit with a greater skepticism toward mimetic correspondence and a greater awareness of the complex relationship between language and ideology.[49] Although naturalist authors were resoundingly critical of industrial capitalism, and although many were self-identified socialists, the aesthetic mode has found little favor with literary critics on the Left. The seminal Marxist critique of naturalism comes from Lukács, who saw it not as a positive outgrowth of realism, but rather a lamentable decline toward the solipsistic interiority of high modernism. Lukács maintained that the realism of Scott, Balzac, and Tolstoy was aesthetically and politically superior to the later naturalism of Flaubert and Zola.[50] This is because while the former uses "narration" to reveal the underlying "essence" or "hidden social forces" behind a situation, the latter fixates fetishistically on surface-level "description" ("Realism" 37). For Lukács realism is superior because it exhaustively accounts for the abstract totality of socio-economic and historical forces, and because it immerses readers in the lives of developing characters, thus engaging them in an active process of meaning-making. In the supposedly "frozen" description of naturalist prose, on the other hand, "the characters are merely spectators" and "the events [are]...only a tableau" (*Writer* 116). While naturalists may employ a more elaborate and detailed use of setting than realists, for Lukács this setting remains incidental to the plot (113-115). In this way naturalism partakes of an objectivist fallacy: through the detached gaze of the often ironic and condescending narrator, readers perceive reality as something alien to themselves, rather

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[49] See Sundquist, Pizer, Howard, Fisher, Michaels, Kaplan, Seltzer, Bell.

[50] Lukács' positive assessment of realism reiterates positions first held by Marx and Engels themselves, for example in Engels' famous statement that he learned more about social formations from Balzac than he did from historians and political economists. See Baxandall.

than something that is actively produced through labor. In this way, naturalism, like positivist science, re-enforces the antimony between subject and object.

This is not to suggest that Lukács is against description *per se*: he points out that all works contain a combination of narration and description, and argues that description is actually an important development in the novel's attempt to make sense of an increasingly complex capitalist society. Balzac, for example, included a "precise description of the filth, smells, meals, and service" in order to capture the subtle gradations of a character's class position (117). Lukács is simply concerned with what seemed an inordinate amount of description in naturalism, and with the way this description appears to take on an "independent significance" from the lives of the characters (133). The "basic danger" of too much description lies in "details becoming important in themselves" (132). Underlying Lukács' objection to this *thing-ness*, is his belief that objects and spaces, by themselves, are not the stuff of literature:

> Boxes and orchestra, stage and parterre, backstage and dressing-room are in themselves inanimate, absolutely unpoetic and void of interest...only when a theatre or a stock exchange provide the arena for human ambitions, a stage or a battlefield for men's struggles with each other, do they become poetic. (136)

For Lukács, a "poetry of things" is a contradiction in terms, since literary significance lies only in "the poetry of men in struggle" (136, 126). He goes so far in his aesthetic celebration of self-creating man as to accuse naturalism of "inhumanity" (140). He dismissively refers to naturalist description as "the dance of the gnats," enlisting a diminutive animal metaphor to identify literature's "petty" aspects (131).[51]

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[51] A quote borrowed from Friedrich Hebbel

It would be easy, from a deep ecology perspective, to accuse Lukács of being hopelessly anthropocentric and modernist. However, from a position that is more sympathetic to the general thrust of a critical realist project, it could simply be said that his humanist epistemology fails to account for nonhumans as active agents on whom human social life depends. Though the realism Lukács celebrates may reveal the *social* essences determining the acts of individual characters, it would seem to have less to say about the environmental constraints placed upon social formations: in realist plots we are reminded that a parlor presumes a furniture factory, a kitchen presumes a slaughterhouse, and a journey across town presumes a streeetcar; but seldom are we taken a step further and reminded that the furniture factory presumes a forest, the slaughterhouse presumes livestock, and the streetcar presumes fossil fuel. Rather than investigating the way such texts formally elide the ever-determining biosphere, Lukács omits it from his conception of Totality. His aesthetic rejection of naturalism, which rests on his more general mistrust of the natural sciences, risks compromising the depth of his realism, as it overlooks the material reality of the earth.

As the example of Lukács suggests, cultural critics have neglected to relate naturalist fiction to the actual environment. Richard Lehan points out that one could read influential contemporary studies of naturalism without knowing that the genre was primarily concerned with the issue of environmental determinism. Instead, critics like June Howard and Walter Benn Michaels see in the figures of nature reflections of the dominant socio-economic structures of the period. Michaels discovers in naturalist narrative the logics of capital itself, while Howard finds cultural responses to the urban immigrant. Conversely, Lehan begins from the premise that naturalist authors were

primarily concerned with the relationship between humans and the natural environment. Eric Link concurs, arguing that American naturalists, "brought late-nineteenth-century fiction out of the drawing room and into the open air" (165).

These competing positions on naturalism would seem to mirror disputes between ecocritics and cultural materialists on romantic nature poetry. The difference is that few ecocritics have rallied in defense of naturalism, perhaps because such fiction tends to focus not on wilderness but on the built-environment. "More obviously than any other literary genre," writes James Giles, "naturalism in the United States was…a literary reaction to the rise of the city" (3). Naturalist fiction rarely depicts "wild" nature free from human influence. Even an ostensible wilderness tale like London's *The Call of the Wild* is, on further scrutiny, littered with signs of human development and pollution associated with the gold-rush development of the Yukon. This is all the more reason, though, for an ecocritical consideration of the genre.

Naturalism was concerned with showing how new commercial processes interrupted our relationships with the land in ways that were culturally as well as ecologically destructive (Lehan 61). The influential work of Zola, for example, had shown readers how capitalism displaced humans from "anything like a natural environment" and rendered them "more and more distanced from the rhythms of the natural life" (59). Frank Norris's *The Octopus* extended this focus and revealed that, "what used to be a symbiotic relationship between city and countryside has broken down" (63). The capitalist economy, symbolized in the octopus tentacles of the railroad, created ecological ruptures and systematic underdevelopment, at the same time that it integrated and homogenized vast regions of the country. During this process the land

itself was both an ally and an enemy to capitalists, as it presented both *opportunities* and *limits* to development (Henderson xi). In this sense there is a "biological basis of economics," and it is this basis that Norris's fiction, according to Lehan, "clearly documented" (64).

This is not to say that in turning to environmental questions we should overlook for a moment what Howard calls the two "inescapable aspects" of nineteenth-century American life and of naturalist discourse: the dominance of market relations and the growth of an urban immigrant proletariat (71). The challenge for ecocritics is to hold on to the important ideology critique of Marxists and new historicists, while also reassessing the nature of "nature" in these novels. Nowhere is it clearer than in naturalist fiction that the class struggle is also always a struggle over space. We might take Lukács' argument that the realist novel documents the nuances of class formation under capitalism and extend it to argue that it is precisely naturalism's emphasis on description that makes the physical and geographic relations of the system visible. While naturalist writers did not consciously put forth an environmental ethic in the tradition of Thoreau, Muir, and Leopold, they do often provide fictional documentation and incipient critique of the ecological devastation wrought by industrial capitalism.

The main contradiction of naturalist fiction – and for our purposes it is a productive contradiction – is the way this literary genre (like the sociology of the period) set out to criticize the excesses of capitalism, and ended up naturalizing this very system. Malcolm Cowley argues that there is a tendency in naturalism to confuse the natural and the social; in Norris, for example, "wheat was not a grain improved by men from various wild grasses and grown by men to meet human needs; it was an abstract and elemental

force like gravity" (417). In this formulation human labor is removed from the production process and agribusiness. The inability to recognize that wheat is not generated spontaneously, but is rather produced *by* humans *from* nature, is itself an indication of man's alienated labor. In this way the descriptive method fatalistically "capitulates" to capital by depicting it as an unstoppable force (Lukács, *Writer* 146). While it is true that the biology of grain is, and should be recognized as, something like an ultimate limit (as much as genetic engineers would hope differently), it by no means holds that the mode of production itself is natural and inevitable. In fact, it is the very mismatch between the biology of the wheat crop and the industrial mode of production that renders such a system unsustainable.

As another example of the naturalization of socio-environmental degradation, consider the trope of "The Brute" central to so much naturalist fiction. Authors such as Frank Norris capitalized on the pre-existing stereotype of an urban working-class "wild man" who represented the animalistic violence lurking beneath the surface of middle-class manhood. According to Howard, fear of the Brute was most directly a fear of proletarianization and class warfare.[52] Even reformers who tried to help the working-class partook of this "animal" stereotype, which signified the Otherness and inferiority of the (primarily immigrant) workers. But perhaps the "bestial" state of men depicted in naturalist fiction results not only from their separation from the means of production but

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[52] The other important link between the worker and the "savage" is related to the nativist, ethnocentric reactions to immigration. Since, by the 1880s, the urban proletariat was made up largely of immigrants from southern/eastern Europe and Asia, labor activism came to be seen as a "foreign" imposition on U.S. soil. The slum came to be seen as a frightening and luridly fascinating "internal colony" within the Anglo-American city, and naturalists took on the role of explorers and "tour guides" escorting middle-class readers into this foreign and "savage" space. See Giles 3-4.

also from what O'Connor calls the conditions of production. Before the rise of capitalism a majority of humans lived as subsistence farmers, and so humans and animals had a *working* relationship with each other and with the land base. Only through enclosure and industrialization was this connection severed. Thus, as John Berger points out, seeing animals as alien and inferior "Others" is itself a historically specific result of capitalist development. And so, ironically, the middle-class mentality that equated workers with "beasts" was an ideological reflection of capital's own simultaneous exploitation of humans and nonhumans: capitalism *did* make "beasts" of laborers, in the same way that it made "beasts" of nonhuman animals – it denied both groups their agency and instead saw them as mere commodities.

These various "naturalizations" of a system that is socially and environmentally unsustainable constitute what we could call the *ecological contradiction of naturalist fiction*. In calling the factory a "jungle," the railroad an "octopus," and the alienated laborer a "beast," it rhetorically conflates the Second Nature of the built environment with the First Nature of the biosphere: the thing that destroys the ecosystem is depicted as in symbiosis with it. But if the naturalists took a feeling of political helplessness and projected it onto the landscape, turning the "exploitation of capital" into the "vast indifference of nature," this may be because the environment is at the heart of the contradiction of capital; like labor, the environment is both exploited by capital, and capital's ultimate master – the necessity and precondition for capital's existence. "Nature" is used in contradictory ways in fiction, I am arguing, because the biosphere stands in a contradictory relation to capital, as both that which must be destroyed and that which must be maintained. Naturalist fiction, in its descriptive emphasis on the *places* of

capitalist development and its contradictory move of both condemning and naturalizing such development, makes apparent these ecological contradictions, and thus is, in its very "failure," a revealing window into the eco-cultures of modernity.

And yet there is a further complication in American naturalist fiction, which rests on the fact that in most of these novels the system is not entirely "naturalized," because the texts themselves are not entirely given over to pessimistic determinism. In actuality the genre is driven by a tension – Howard calls it a "dynamic opposition" – between these theories and the authors' commitments to political reform (30). In naturalist fiction, Donald Pizer explains, pessimistic determinism is almost always coupled with an emphasis on human dignity and a commitment to political progress (*Realism* 10-11). This contradiction has long been seen as a formal flaw. As early as 1930 V.L. Parrington lamented that naturalists would move from a "concern over a devastating milieu" to a "desir[e] to change that milieu to the end that men may achieve happiness," transforming the writer from an objective observer to "a partisan to a cause" (37). Malcolm Cowley particularly faulted proletarian naturalism for a formal inconsistency that arose from its attempt to wed a pessimistic philosophy with a progressive politics: "When the conversion [of the workers to communism] took place…the novel broke in two" (430). A famous example of this would be Sinclair's *The Jungle*, which is roundly criticized for formal inconsistency because the naturalist description of factory life gives way to utopian socialist polemic.

Rather than seeing "pessimistic" determinism and "optimistic" reform as antinomies and thereby seeing naturalism's inclusion of these categories as mere inconsistency, perhaps we can critique the very idea that determinism is "pessimistic."

For as we have already discussed in the context of progressive urban reformers, it is only possible to view determinism as inherently "pessimistic" if the environment is taken to be static and unchanging. By combining environmental determinism with reform, naturalist writers, following urban reformers, may have foreshadowed an understanding that the environment itself is malleable, and that a focus on the environment can be a progressive call to action. There is, after all, a "fundamental structural similarity," as Howard says, "between naturalism and progressivism" (160). Take, for example, Stephen Crane, who may have been directly influenced by the work of Jacob Riis (Giles, 17). According to Crane, his novel *Maggie, A Girl of the Streets* "tries to show that environment is a tremendous thing in the world and frequently shapes lives regardless." Many would take this to be an indication of his pessimistic determinism. And yet he goes on to say, "If one proves that theory one makes room in Heaven for all sorts of souls (notably an occasional street girl) who are not confidently expected to be there by many excellent people" (Stallman 594). Crane focuses on the dynamism of the environment in opposition to the stasis of moralistic and theological convention. Against those who would say that Maggie's "fall" into prostitution is a result of her innate poor character, Crane asserts that she is the product of polluted and unwholesome surroundings, and thus deserves justice in the form a reconstructed space. While is it problematic that Maggie can receive this justice only in the afterlife, her allotment into Heaven allegorically gestures to a utopian longing for an immanent retribution in the form of a new earth.

Ecotopian Management

The optimistic inflection of naturalism's environmental focus brings us to an equally popular genre of fiction during the period, which is in some ways a close cousin to naturalism and in others its dialectical opposite – the genre of utopian fiction. The turn of the century is generally regarded as a "golden age" of this genre: utopian ideals were fed by technological innovations, political turbulence, a new wave of religious millennialism, and the influence of Spencerian social evolution. Utopian writing, as Jean Pfaelzer says, "constituted an unparalleled literary expression of social anxiety and political hope, a cultural event closely corresponding to the militant struggles for industrial, agrarian, and feminist reforms that characterized the turbulent decade" (*Utopian* 3). Edward Bellamy's socialist utopian novel *Looking Backward*, published in 1888, became one of the most popular and influential texts of the nineteenth century, generating reading clubs, fan magazines, and inspiring a host of novelistic imitators, as well as a full-fledged political movement: the "Nationalist" Party. Other well-known writers who tried their hand at utopian literature included Ignatius Donnelly, Mark Twain, William Dean Howells, Jack London, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman (both Howells and Gilman were supporters of Bellamy and were directly influenced by his work). To their names we would have to add the literally hundreds of lesser-known exponents of the genre, from the staggering bulk of utopian literature published between the 1880s and the end of the century.

Chronologically the vogue for utopianism precedes and eventually gives way to naturalism. The high point of utopian fiction, according to Pfaelzer, occurred in the decade between 1886, with the political upsurge of the Haymarket Riots, and 1896, when

McKinley's election reestablished "conservative hegemony" and pushed the United States into an imperialist phase (*Utopian* 3). Since the 1893 publication of Crane's *Maggie* is often marked as the approximate "beginning" of American naturalism, we might say that during the last decade of the century the literary mood turned from the optimism of the utopians to the pessimism of the naturalists as the possibilities for radical political change were squelched. However, rather than placing these movements in a linear, directly causal literary history, we might view naturalism and utopianism as dialectically related. While these two modes of writing are clearly distinguishable and should not be conflated, they are nonetheless inseparable, particularly in terms of their spatial orientation.

As with naturalist texts, utopian fiction contained thick description and a focus on environment determinism. While the descriptions of urban space in naturalism tended to focus on polluted urban chaos, utopian novels depict pastoral, park-like spaces of managed greenery. Rather than a pessimistic "plot of decline" showing characters increasingly degraded by their environments, utopian narratives employed a "plot of improvement" where characters prospered by attuning themselves to their environment, or, as was more often the case, attuning the environment to themselves. While naturalism emphasized how humans were at the whim of their environment, utopianism seemed to depict an environment totally under human control.

The thoroughly pastoral nature of utopian fiction relies on Jefferson's earlier agrarian ideal of reconciliation between wilderness and civilization. But in a post-1860s era dominated by industry, utopian fiction went a step further, fusing pastoral agrarianism with the city and advanced technology, and creating a compromise between urbanism and

nature that Leo Marx, in *The Machine in the Garden*, called the "middle landscape." Thus urban parks and gardens make up much of the setting in utopian fiction. As Donald Burt points out, "the citizens of utopia typically lived in park-cities – clean, pollution-free, and gardenlike" with tree-lined streets and rooftop gardens (175).

The utopian image of a manicured landscape appears to many critics as thoroughly anti-ecological. According to Burt, the presentation of "nature domesticated and controlled," reveals the "exploitative optimism" and lack of ecological awareness of the utopists (182). Utopian fiction often depicted hubristic plans to master the environment for human use through such shortsighted policies as the elimination of supposedly "undesirable" species, the transformation of forests into "productive" agricultural land, and even the alteration of weather patterns and climate. Burt concedes that a small group of writers depicted wilderness preservation and displayed skepticism toward the "improvement" of nature (182, 176, 179). Overall, though, the verdict is that most utopian fiction glorified the human management of nature and was thus ecologically oppressive.[53]

Given the depths of these criticisms, we would certainly not want to take nineteenth-century utopian fiction as a literal blueprint for social or environmental policy.

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[53] Moreover, these ecocritical rejections of managed nature in utopia are only a subset of the broader critiques of the genre's reproduction of dominant bourgeois values. The authors of these texts tended to be white, middle-class, Protestant men, whose egalitarian visions were undercut by a frequent dismissive attitude toward women, racial and ethnic minorities, and the working-class. Although they set out to depict socialist societies with full economic equality, these writers also unconsciously "accepted as 'givens' contemporary ideas often used to justify capitalism" (Pfaelzer, *Utopia* 118). Finally, as Marxists from Engels to Caudwell have pointed out, the utopians constructed societies that were temporally static and ahistorical, and contained no realistic explanation about *how* one might get there from here. In this way utopians resolved material contradictions in an idealized realm, thus fostering escapism and passivity, and actually contributing to political reaction.

It must be remembered, though, that as much as this fiction provided a fantasy of the future, it also often purposely satirized and critiqued the present, and particularly the dominant ideology of competitive individualism. Pfaelzer, building on a counter-tradition of Marxist utopian analysis running from Ernst Bloch to Fredric Jameson, argues that the hopeful, future-oriented work of utopia "reinforces a creative and rebellious subjectivity" (25).[54] The ideal society is a *camera obscura* through which readers can view their own society in a defamiliarized way, an admittedly artificial construct that serves as a heuristic tool and a stimulus for protest. The critical power of such work derives from a consideration of the particular conditions it is set against. It is telling that Burt's measure of an "ecological" utopia is whether or not it includes a depiction of wilderness preservation, a standard by which most of these texts are bound to fail. But what if we interpreted utopian parks in the context of urban reform and class-based environmental justice? Like naturalism, utopianism was intimately linked to the politics of urban spatial reform, and in particular to issues of sanitation (3). The utopian writer Charlotte Perkins Gilman was involved with the settlement house movement at the same time that activists like Alice Hamilton were investigating issues of occupational health, and there is reason to believe that issues of urban spatial reform found their way into her descriptions, and those of others like her. In this historical context the park may seem more positive. If images of parks and gardens are juxtaposed with wilderness they will appear static and domineering, but if these same images are juxtaposed with a polluted river, a dangerous street, or a factory belching smoke, they will appear as

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[54] See Jameson: *Archaeologies*; *Political* 271-290; "Reification" 130-148; *Marxism* 116-159; *Valences* 410-434

progressive alternatives. In this way utopian park-cities may be said to reveal a desire for healthier, more fulfilling and sustainable urban communities.

This is not to deny the ideological function of park representation, but rather to hold this fact in tension with a positive reassessment. As an example of the contradictory impulses of utopian nature, we need only turn to the representative text of the genre, Bellamy's *Looking Backward*. Near the end of the novel the spokesperson for the utopian society attempts to explain their history to the protagonist through a parable of optimistic environmental determinism:

> Let me compare humanity in the olden time to a rosebush planted in a swamp, watered with black bog water, breathing miasmatic fogs by day, and chilled with poison dews at night. Innumerable generations of gardeners had done their best to make it bloom, but beyond an occasional half-opened bud with a worm at the heart, their efforts had been unsuccessful. Many, indeed, claimed that the bush was no rosebush at all, but a noxious shrub, fit only to be uprooted and burned....[F]inally, during a period of general despondency as to the prospects of the bush where it was, the idea of transplanting it was again mooted, and this time found favor...So it came about that the rosebush of humanity was transplanted, and set in the sweet, warm, dry earth, where the sun bathed it, the stars wooed it, and the south wind caressed it. Then it appeared that it was indeed a rosebush. The vermin and the mildew disappeared, and the bush was covered with most beautiful red roses, whose fragrance filled the world. (204-205)

This allegory is certainly ecologically suspect. For one thing it constructs a hierarchy of good and bad nature: rosebushes are good, "shrubs" and "vermin" are bad. Furthermore, the description uses miasma theory to vilify "swamps" as unhealthy and unproductive, and in doing so displays the very cultural bias that aided in the mass destruction (or "improvement" as it was called) of wetland areas throughout the western world. And yet, read in the context of late nineteenth-century urban environmental reform, the passage points to the ways in which space could be actively restructured in order to improve human health and quality of life. While Bellamy's comparison of humanity to a plant

would seem to naturalize oppressive social relations, his insistence that the dying plant can be saved through transplantation reveals that he sees the environment not as an inflexible "iron cage" of determinism, but rather as a malleable source of possibility and change (Takaki ix). Bellamy goes on to differentiate between the 'regular gardeners' who tend the rosebush while leaving it in the same place, and a smaller group who advocate for transplantation and are thus "condemned" as "theorists and daydreamers" (204). Bellamy's metaphor creates a dichotomy between the philanthropists and ameliorative reformers who would give aid to the working-class while leaving their overall forms of existence unchanged, and radicals who call for a restructuring of the basic conditions of urban life. Bellamy's parable of the transplanted rosebush thus provides a striking metaphor for what socialists, labor leaders, suffragists, sanitarians, and settlement house workers were actually trying to accomplish at the time.

In naturalist fiction the city is a jungle. In utopian fiction the city is a park. One mode naturalizes human relations while the other humanizes natural relations. One disguises a manmade Second Nature as an immanent First Nature that entirely determines and constricts human freedom, while the other depicts a First Nature entirely transformed into Second Nature, to the point where the world appears to exist solely as a result of human will. Both forms thus reveal a contradictory and ultimately insufficient attitude toward humanity's relation to the material world. Yet it is precisely these contradictions that make such neglected texts important for ecocritical analysis, because they reveal the contradictory cultural responses to the emergence of an unsustainable system.

The dialectic of freedom and determinism that runs throughout naturalist and utopian fiction is only one overt instantiation of a more general socio-environmental

dialectic operating in cultural texts. In *The Political Unconscious* Jameson goes so far as to argue that *all* works of culture simultaneously manifest "ideological" and "Utopian" moments. Because popular texts, like utopian novels, are products of an oppressive class structure, they will always carry ideological justifications for that structure; and yet, because these texts are also products of a potentially social and cooperative species, they will always carry, even if *in absentia*, an emancipatory longing for collective unity. An ecological Marxist analysis must therefore engage (as the Frankfurt School has done) in the *negative* critical operation of uncovering the text's ideology, while at the same time it must reveal the text's radical, forward-looking nature. These are not two "choices" offered to the critic, but a "unified perspective" (282). This analysis holds true for both the literary representation of the built environment and the "text" of the actual built environment itself (a term which is not meant to deny its materiality, but rather to recognize it as an object of interpretation and point out that its materiality is also figurative). When Raymond Williams, in *The Country and the City*, gazes at the metropolis, he is dismayed at "how much must be moved if there [is] to be any change," but also impressed with this symbol of human potential: "This is what men have built, so often magnificently, and is not everything then possible?" (5-6). The image of the city – which today may stand figuratively for the earth itself – is surely a marker of the unsustainability and alienation of human civilization under modern capitalism; one need only read the work of Mike Davis to be thoroughly convinced of this perspective. But it is also an indication of the very sociability and organization that are the precondition for a sustainable human society. If the utopian idea of the earth as one big urban garden – a global Second Nature – is ecologically sinister in its desire for

control, it is also an indication of the human longing for reconciliation between human modes of production and the land base. In the context of urban environmental justice, the symbol of the park or garden suggests that "control" is not necessarily the control *of* nature, but rather the control of the thing that destroys nature, and that this is not inherently oppressive but in fact may be the necessary and desirable alternative to the anarchic drives of capital. A dialectical analysis that combines the "ideological" and the "Utopian" may help us more broadly to reconsider the idea of the "mastery of nature" itself, which is always ideological, but also always potentially utopian. In this way we might set out to master ourselves and better manage our socio-economic relations, in order to enjoy a sustainable relationship with the material environment.

CHAPTER IV

REBECCA HARDING DAVIS'S ENVIRONMENTAL EXPOSÉ

> Let us therefore, in company with the owner of money and the owner of labour-power, leave this noisy sphere, where everything takes place on the surface and in full view of everyone, and follow them into the hidden abode of production, on whose threshold there hangs the notice 'No admittance except on business.' Here we shall see, not only how capital produces, but how capital is itself produced. The secret of profit-making must at last be laid bare.
>
> Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume I, Chapter 6: "The Sale and Purchase of Labour-Power"

After being "rediscovered" and reprinted by the Feminist Press in the 1970s, Rebecca Harding Davis's *Life in the Iron Mills, or the Korl Woman* (1861) is today belatedly but securely recognized as a seminal text of U.S. labor literature. This "*Uncle Tom's Cabin* of American Capitalism," as one review has called it, is frequently included in anthologies of fiction by women and working-class writers. The critical reception of the text has followed a pattern similar to that of second and third wave feminist criticism in general: following its recovery the novella was initially lauded for its realistic and detailed uncovering of working-class realities and its subversive gender implications, while in recent decades it has been scrutinized more intensely for problematic representations of race and disability, and for a pastoral conclusion that formally closes off the text and perhaps ultimately serves a conservative function.

Recently *Life in the Iron Mills* has attracted positive attention from ecocritics for its vivid depictions of industrial pollution. Lawrence Buell classifies the story as a work of environmental justice literature, and draws attention to its "gothicization" of pollution through the "Virgilian mode" of the "guided tour of the underworld" (*Writing* 43, 137).[55] Jill Gatlin argues that *Iron Mills* embeds the reader in a living landscape and documents the everyday life in a polluted sacrifice community. According to Lee Rozelle, this "propagandistic" text utilizes an *ecosublime* aesthetic in order to "incite ecological and social justice" (32). He calls it "a shock art that returns...readers to a recognition of the ecological referent" and links "human liberation with sustainability" (35).

What these important literary-environmental assessments have not yet fully explored is the relationship between the novella's treatment of pollution and its class character, as both a *critique* and a *product* of the emerging industrial capitalist system. I begin from the premise that environmental problems and issues of class are always intertwined, and I go on to explore how Davis's fiction grapples with the environmental dynamics of class stratification and exploitation. I situate this claim within debates about Davis's aesthetic innovations, reframing and expanding studies that have seen *Iron Mills* as a transitionary text between romanticism and realism, and even as a work of proto-naturalism. As an attempt to realistically portray the harsh physical environment of an industrial town, the text stands as an implicit critique of earlier, romantic representations of "wilderness" and their idealization of nature from a leisure-class perspective.

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[55] See also Buell's reference to *Iron Mills* in *Future* 120

Furthermore, as a pioneering work of naturalism, *Iron Mills* explores the philosophical problem of environmental determinism. Understanding the worker's disabilities and the degraded ecosystem as *produced* by the mill and its social relations allows us to complicate current disability studies critiques of the novella, and thereby more firmly make the case for its status as a documentary environmental justice text.

Ultimately, my analysis finds *Iron Mills* to spatially represent a perceptual problem based in class stratification. While Davis provides us with a realistic exposé, she does not assume that her middle class readers have experienced or will easily understand the reality of industrial production. Realism is never as straightforward and transparent as its postmodern caricature assumes. Rather, Davis continually confronts her audience and her own subject position, foregrounding perception as a problem – one that is as much a part of the mode of production as the space she attempts to represent. Thus, I ultimately argue that the narrative spatially represents a perceptual and epistemological impasse that is based in the material reality of class stratification itself. Davis's use of the commonplace nineteenth century device of the "descent into the underworld" (prominent, for example, in Jacob Riis's 1890 study of tenement life, *How the Other Half Lives*) may be problematic. But it is also the reflection of a material reality: the language of going "down" into the poor neighborhood and the site of industrial production presupposes that these spaces have been cordoned off from sites of affluence, comfort, and upper-class consumption. That is, it presumes a situation in which class differences have been enacted spatially – where oppressive ideologies are bolstered by spatial segregation. *Life in the Iron Mills*, much like Marx's *Capital* itself, seeks to penetrate surfaces in order to understand essences, to take us into the "hidden abode of production"

by a roundabout route, continually circling around the "secret" that conditions the novella's characters and their life situation. If Davis cannot directly name this secret, but only map its contours, this is no fault of hers, but rather of her literary medium, which is not to be conflated with political practice.

Placing the Mill

Place-sense is central to Davis's life and work. Jean Pfaelzer tells us that Davis was born and raised in "the wild mountains of West Virginia," spent many summers on a farm, had a familiarity with botany and geology, and developed a deep respect for "the relevance of place and atmosphere" to literature (*Parlor* 25). Pfaelzer suggests that much of Davis's short fiction deals in complex ways with the human relationship to nature, for example in "The Yares of Black Mountain" (1875), set in Cumberland Mountains of North Carolina following the Civil War. As the Reconstruction period ended, many writers suppressed the reality of resurgent racial violence in the former confederate states by creating nostalgic, idealized portraits of the Old South. An ideology of national unity was created by depicting a timeless, pastoral land emptied of human history. In contrast, Davis "populates and politicizes [the] Southern landscape" and refuses to "divorce nature from society" (Pfaelzer "Endangered" 229, 237)." As a counter to the romantic sublime, with its masculine and individualist overtones, Davis strategically utilizes discourses of domesticity and maternalism to make nature appear "familiar." And lest we think that this "domestication" renders nature a quaint backdrop, Pfaelzer further points out that Davis's story of the poor, rural Yare family satirizes local colorists for their reduction of

the complexity of rural existence to a series of aesthetic conventions. In doing so, she provides a meta-commentary on "the act of writing about nature" (230).

Life in the Iron Mills presents a different kind of "nature writing" – a literary documentation of the socio-environmental effects of industrialization. The novella is set in the northwest corner of what is today West Virginia, in the manufacturing town of Wheeling, a city that sits on the border between what was in Davis's time the southern slave state of Virginia and the Northern free state of Ohio.[56] The story tells of Hugh Wolfe, a Welsh ironworker, and his cousin Deb, a "hunchbacked" textile worker. During a night shift at the iron mill the overseer brings a group of visitors – including a local medical doctor and a northeastern intellectual – on a tour, whereupon they stumble across a sculpture of a woman made out of "korl" or refuse from the production of iron ore. On discovering that Hugh is the sculptor, the visitors begin philosophizing on the lowly mill worker's artistic talents, suggesting that he could be a successful artist if money was made available to educate him, though none intend to provide him with such funds. When the loving, disabled cousin Deb overhears this, she is prompted to pick one of the men's pockets in an attempt to help Hugh achieve his dreams, an act that lands both characters in jail, where Hugh takes ill, despairs of his situation, and commits suicide. Deb is then freed from jail by a benevolent Quaker woman, who rehabilitates her in the sunshine and fresh air of a rural commune.

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[56] Though very much in the South, Wheeling is located in the northern panhandle of the state, sandwiched between Ohio directly to the West and Pennsylvania a few miles to the East (and only sixty miles from the industrial center of Pittsburgh). This location means that the city combines southern social relations with northern industry, and chattel slavery and wage slavery. West Virginia broke from Virginia and was admitted into the Union in 1863, only a few years after the publication of *Life in the Iron Mills*.

In her biographical introduction, Tillie Olsen emphasizes the radical novelty of the story, stating that before its publication "there had been no dark satanic mills" in the "consciousness of literary America" (88, 165). Davis was ahead of her time in revealing the climactic changes industrialization wrought on human bodies and ecosystems. As Olsen says, Davis noticed:

> The factories and mills spreading over more and more of the landscape, thieving the farms; the coming of the first railroad, the Baltimore & Ohio; coal mine smoke beginning to stain the once pure mists over the Appalachians; the Ohio River darkening with wastes; the throngs and traffic in the streets, thickening; and always, night and morning, the workers on their way to or from the mills. (81)

In a similar vein, Pfaelzer situates *Iron Mills* as a piece of early muckraking journalism in which "Davis exposes the 'system' of the twelve-hour night shift – the disruptive result of the new heat-intensive Bessemer process," a steel-making procedure that involved forcing high-pressure air through molten iron in enormous crucibles. This new technology greatly increased the speed and scale of production, and Davis narrates the effects of this method – exposure to high heat, enormous outputs of refuse, long night shifts with few breaks – on the daily lives of the workers. Davis adds that the fictional mill in question produced "railroad iron" for use by the "Lower Virginia Railroad" (14-15). Thus she subtly links the exploitation that occurs within the mill to the destruction that occurs outside its walls as railroads expand westward and scar the landscape.

The opening pages of *Iron Mills* offer what is perhaps one of the starkest portrayals of industrialism in nineteenth century American fiction. The narrator looks out from the window of her middle-class home at the surrounding town:

> A cloudy day: do you know what that is in a town of iron-works? The sky sank down before dawn, muddy, flat, immovable. The air is thick, clammy with the breath of crowded human beings. It stifles me. I open the window, and, looking out, can scarcely see through the rain the grocers shop opposite. (11)

The depiction of fog and smoke that opens the story may surely be read as a metaphor and mood-enhancing device, but it is also the narrator's response to the daily fact of life in an industrial city: the poor air quality resulting from factory output. As Lawrence Buell says of the infamous "fog" that pervades Dickens's *Bleak House*, it is not only a symbol of mystery and intrigue, but also an actual comment on the human-made environmental problem of urban coal smoke (*Writing* 132). This sentimental literary convention has a basis in real experience, and deserves a "literal" reading that can restore the text's material dimension.

The narrator of *Iron Mills* emphasizes that a "cloudy day" does not mean the same thing in a "town of iron-works" that it would mean somewhere else, as inclement weather exacerbates the already oppressive air pollution. The smoke "rolls sullenly in slow folds from the great chimneys of the iron-foundries, and settles down in black, slimy pools on the muddy streets." The narrator details how this smoke covers various surfaces around the city, including the "faded poplar" trees and "the faces of passers-by." In acknowledging that soot covers the faces of the people as well as the trees, the narrator begins to connect the pollution of the ecosystem to the exploitation of the workers. She describes "skin and muscle and flesh begrimed with smoke and ashes; stooping all night over boiling caldrons of metal…breathing from infancy to death an air saturated with fog and grease and soot" (12). Here an implicit connection is made between the air quality and the health of the workers. It is an ecological referent that actually conjures for the

narrator the tale of labor exploitation she will tell: as she gazes at the "dirty back-yard and the coal-boats" she is reminded of "fragments of an old story" (13). Later in the story, environmental degradation follows the workers to their dwelling places, as the basement living-quarters are described as "damp – the earthen floor covered with a green, slimy moss – a fetid air smothering the breath" (16). Through its use of setting, the story effectively illustrates how the uneven geographic development of capital ensures that wealth and commodities are funneled out of the mill town, while the very workers who produce value are made to live in deplorable conditions.

In cataloguing industrialism's dual degradation of bodies and spaces Davis begins to construct what we could call an environmental justice argument. One of the main refrains of the environmental justice movement has been that certain segments of the population – the poor, immigrants, women, and people of color – are disproportionately exposed to environmental hazards. As a result of their socio-economic status these groups are in a sense "trapped" in dangerous, polluted spaces that are detrimental to their health and well being. *Iron Mills* conveys a similar point by combining gothic descriptions of pollution with an overall feeling of confinement. Not only are the working-class characters in the story confined to the mill town, Hugh is also eventually imprisoned in an actual jail. Furthermore, the entire sensory world of the narrative conveys a feeling of claustrophobia. Davis's invocation of animals in bondage, a "long train of mules, dragging masses of pig-iron through the narrow streets" and "a dirty canary chirp[ing] desolately in a cage," positions the environment itself as a kind of slave: the mule tethered to the harness and the bird trapped in the "dirty" cage are a counterpart to the humans who, although ostensibly "free," have no free "choice" about

their position within the industrial system (12). Davis's characters are free only in the Marxist sense that they have been "freed" from the control of the means of production – free to choose between working for pittance wages or starving to death. In the image of the "negro-like river slavishly bearing its burden day after day," the equation of industrialization and slavery is made most direct. The "dull" colored river is "shackled" figuratively to an industrial system that charts and surveys its utility for capital, and literally to a factory that pumps waste into its ecosystem. Davis draws a connection between this harnessing of the river's energy and the proletarianization of the workers, as she compares the river to the "slow stream of human life creeping…to the great mills." The implication is that the river and the workers are exploited in the same fashion: their natural states are sullied insofar as both are circumscribed by the logic of industrial production.

Some scholars have found in these images of spatial entrapment not an actual polluted environment, but rather an ideological discourse on U.S. race relations. Overt references to race and slavery are not simply avoided in *Iron Mills*, they are actively suppressed. By only depicting white workers, Davis erases the historical fact that in the border-states whites and blacks worked side by side. And yet, race is everywhere in the narrative, for example in the play of "light" and "dark" metaphors that appear throughout. Having no language to talk about class in this supposedly "classless" nation, socially conscious writers instead substituted the language of race. Eric Schocket finds in these troubling metaphors of slavery – the "negro-like river" – the racist origins of the American labor narrative. Davis utilizes a trope that Schocket identifies as "the irony of white servitude," the feeling of outrage the (white, middle-class) reader is meant to

experience upon discovering that a white wage laborer could be subjected to conditions similar to those of a black slave. Thus, the text's longing for an escape from the "darkness" of the mill town is the longing for an escape from a metaphorical association with the racialized body of chattel slavery.

Can we not, however, also read the blackness of soot as the literal blackness of soot? Jill Gatlin points out that Schocket "reduces environmental conditions…to merely a symbolic landscape" (74). As Gatlin's environmental justice critique makes clear, the descriptions of smoke, soot, and grime are "doubly referential," acting as metaphors for slavery as well as actual depictions of industrial toxins (74). Blackness thus refers not only to the social-historical fact of slavery but also to the environmental-historical fact of pollution. In this sense an appeal to escape from or eliminate the "blackness" of pollution is not necessarily a negative statement on race, but can also be seen as an appeal to health for *all human laborers* and for the environment in which they live and work.

The larger issue here is that in order for Schocket to accept this double referentiality he would have to acknowledge that the text's depictions of nature are not just metaphors for social relations, but are also realistic approximations of the actual biophysical world, and this is something he cannot do, given his larger project to diminish any link between realist exposé and political action. He argues that nineteenth-century labor literature's impulse to uncover and document exploitation and allow people to "see" the problem – the trope of "If they only knew" – is pure idealism and has no subversive political effects (19). Rather, representations of poverty in labor literature are merely fetishizations of suffering that serve to reproduce the epistemological reification that lies at the heart of capitalist society (24). If Schocket is correct, then *Iron Mills* can

have little value as an environmental justice text, for what would it matter if the novella depicted "realistic" conditions of factory labor, pollution, and human health? An environmental justice reading of *Iron Mills* thus necessitates a broader inquiry into its epistemological assumptions and generic classifications.

Life in the Iron Mills as Realism and as Naturalism

Iron Mills has long been celebrated for its vivid documentary realism. Pfaelzer situates the work within the realist tradition, asserting that its details correspond with actual situations in worker's lives: for example the description of women leaving the mill "half clothed...derives from the fact that early mill workers and miners often removed bulky garments because they posed a serious danger near machinery and hot furnaces" (*Parlor* 32). This historical perspective suggests that however allegorical the bodies and environments in the story may be, they deserve to be understood on their own terms *as* bodies and environments. Klaus Benesch contrasts the "reality" of *Iron Mills* with the "myth-laden, metaphoric grid" of Melville's "Tartarus" (161). Though Melville and Davis both take the reader inside the mill space (in a way that differentiates them from British industrial fiction), for Melville the mill girls never become anything more than a backdrop, one-dimensional figures aestheticized by the hyper-intellectual narrator. Davis's social realism, on the other hand, allows for a reoriented gaze and a fuller representation of the worker's life-world. Davis's realism is particularly important in her treatment of the natural world. Pfaelzer argues that nature, for Davis, "belongs to a discourse of realism" and is an explicit reaction to the nineteenth-century romanticization of nature ("Engendered," 241).

Furthermore, with its realistic focus on manual labor and the environmental extremes of the factory, *Iron Mills* can also be classified as a work of literary naturalism. According to Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *Iron Mills* "brilliantly dramatized the socioeconomic implications of environmental determinism" years before Americans were introduced to Zola's naturalism (903). This claim was extended and elaborated by Sharon Harris, who argued that *Iron Mills* is, "a pioneering document in America's transition from romanticism to realism," but also, "at its core…indeed a work of pure naturalism" (4-5). Harris finds in the novella's naturalism a sharp rejection of transcendentalist philosophy and romantic aesthetics popular in antebellum literary circles, in favor of a more realistic and critically engaged aesthetic. Hugh Wolfe's "plot of decline," for example, is a quintessential naturalist form and can be productively compared to works such as Norris's *McTeague* (1899) and Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* (1900). Although Davis combines this new mode of writing with dominant literary discourses of romanticism and sentimentalism, Harris suggests that these are always used ironically, and often for the purposes of easing her middle-class readers into this shocking new mode of representation. This point is updated and complicated by Sara Goodling, who argues that the story stages a synthesis of naturalism and sentimentalism.[57]

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[57] Though naturalism and sentimentalism are often thought of as unrelated (if not opposed), Goodling reminds us that naturalism is never free of sentiment, just as the sentimental is never free of a quasi-naturalist determinism. Goodling makes the historical argument that the journalistic style of naturalist fiction emerges in part from the focus on bodily description and the sympathetic identification with the oppressed that mark the sentimental novel. Though the theory of literary naturalism appeared to involve cool detachment and "pessimistic" determinism, in actual practice it was always somewhat engaged and optimistically committed to reform; conversely, sentimentalism always tempered its benevolence with a kind of resignation.

Situating *Iron Mills* as a form of naturalism has significant implications for an ecocritical reading of the text. It is no coincidence that both Harris and Goodling emphasize the text's depiction of the physical environment. If classical realism's exhaustive detailing of human life in drawing rooms and boardrooms provides a glimpse of the social Totality, naturalism's *extension* of realistic narrative to the mill, the hovel, the farm, and the jungle, endows the biophysical environment with a more active role in the text as a conditioning influence on human society. If classical realism maps the complexities of social relations, naturalism often reminds us that these relations have their basis in a material production that is always unavoidably an interaction with the earth. Naturalism, Richard Lehan argues, foregrounds "the biological basis of economics" (66). Thus it is ultimately in its naturalism, as a story about the shaping influence of the polluted environment of the industrial capitalist factory on the bodies and subjectivities of its human inhabitants, that *Iron Mills* becomes an important environmental justice text.

"Outside Outlines of a Night": Spatial Stratification and the Problem of Perception

The common modernist and postmodernist critiques of realism – espoused by theorists and artists from Barthes to Brecht – hold that the mode retains a naïve faith in mimesis. Avant-garde forms, so the story goes, foreground fiction's conscious shaping of reality, while realism pretends to simply reflect that reality, and thus ignores or hides its own shaping practices. Whether or not this claim is true in general, it certainly does not hold as a criticism of *Iron Mills*, for there is no such direct "transparency" in this text. If the story *struggles* to convey a sense of industrial life, it does so cautiously and

ironically, by continually emphasizing the problem of perception, especially across class lines.

As the narrator looks out of her window in the opening lines of *Iron Mills*, she remarks that she can "scarcely see" across the street "through the rain" (11). The common realist trope of the "window" makes observation possible while distinguishing the narrator from those she observes. However, this frame simultaneously creates the out-of-focus sensation of entering an unknown terrain. "Nature" here, in the form of fog and rain, becomes a metaphor for imperceptibility. The literal impediment to eyesight metaphorically re-enforces the narrator's lack of understanding of her subject. Even though she is physically located amidst the industrial chaos and is susceptible to its toxic dangers, her relatively protected class status means that she does not have complete mental or emotional access to the worker's space. It is her very *privilege*, then, that physically separates her from the space she is describing and thus distorts her vision.

As we transition from this frame to the central narrative, she apologetically comments that the tale she is about to tell is as "foggy" as the day itself (13). She says, "*If* I could go into this mill where Deborah lay, and drag out from the hearts of these men the terrible tragedy of their lives, taking it as a symptom of the disease of their class, no ghost Horror would terrify you more" (23, my emphasis). The use of the word "if" leaves it an open question whether or not the narrator can "drag out" this "tragedy" and make it legible. The very idea that there is such a terrifying tragedy presumes some awareness, and yet it is not something the writer is sure she can understand or communicate. "I can paint nothing of this," she says, "only give you the outside outlines of a night" (23). The narrator's signal that the story is not a full "painting" but a mere

"outline" should make the reader skeptical of the thick descriptions of working-class life that the narrator then goes on to provide.

The problem of perception is heightened in the relationship between narrator and audience. The "guided-tour" is made more disorienting because the narrator is caustic and off-putting. Amy Lang points out that the questioning first line of *Iron Mills* ('A cloudy day: do you know what that is in a town of iron-works?') "is not rhetorical but accusatory; clearly we do not know what such a day in such a town is." Lang writes, "Accustomed to being invited into the story – 'Let us enter the dwelling' – by a friendly narrator who resembles no one so much as ourselves [as, for example, in the great work of sentimental social criticism, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*], we are instead flatly shut out" (*Syntax* 75). Although Davis enacts a Virgilian leading of the reader down into the factory, the distancing effect created by an accusatory narrator actually holds up a world that is alien and opaque.

For Davis this perceptual blockage is clearly a problem of class. Her "dilettante" readers may be able to "see" the factory space, but they cannot understand what they see, and the reason for this, as Davis hints, is to be found in the very "clean clothes" of which the narrator wants them to "take no heed," as they come "down...into the thickest of the fog and mud and foul effluvia" (13). The clean clothes of the audience designate their class separation, which is enacted materially in the geographic distance between their middle-class dwellings and the polluting site of production. Here we have a potential environmental justice argument. The audience cannot fully 'know' because they are from the 'other side of the tracks' as it were. Even as the text creates a narrator who longs to pull the middle-class reader into this space and reveal its "secret" (the secret of

value production), there is an awareness that this alien world may be misperceived, precisely because the reader is physically separated from the toxic realities of industrial life. The narrator, since she at least lives in the town and experiences its routines, may serve as a medium between the mill and the foreign audience. However, the form of the text itself militates against the success of this translation, since the shift to an omniscient third-person voice in the body of the narrative means that the frame narrator has not actually entered the mill-space, anymore than the reader has. The 'story within a story' frame removes the reader even further from any certainty about the 'truth' of exploitation.

By the time we reach the middle of the text the crisis of perception has infected the plot, affecting not only the relations between narrator and reader, but also between the characters themselves. This can be seen most plainly in the late-night encounter between Hugh and the mill owner's brother-in-law, Mitchell, a "stranger to the city" who visits in order to "study the institutions of the South" (29). The gulf of class and education that separates these two men is manifested in their bodies and their worldviews. As Mitchell tours the mill and interacts with Hugh, his distorted perception of the mill workers is juxtaposed with Hugh's own misperceptions of the visitor.

Mitchell's "cool" and "anatomical" eye invokes the detached objectivity of an elite post-Kantian idealism, and prefigures scientific and medical discourses that would dominate later in the century. We are told that Mitchell is an "amateur gymnast" and "a man who sucked the essence out of a science or philosophy in an indifferent, gentlemanly

way" (29).[58] His little-described yet idealized body stands as the imaginary "normate," the invisible standard against which the "disabled" characters are judged, as he "survey[s]" critically" the "brawny muscles" of the "half-clothed" mill workers. The irony is that Mitchell's apparent objectivity actually belies his class bias. Although he sees "brawny muscles" on the workers, the narrator has already told us that Hugh, the only worker described in the scene (and an emblem for workers in general) is actually haggard and emaciated. Though the image of the bulky, muscular, industrial worker, full of health and vitality, would later be glorified by unionizing workers themselves, in reality mill labor was not a toning exercise. It was highly damaging to the body, not only in terms of accidents, but also in the slow day-to-day deterioration produced by repeating uncomfortable tasks in a polluted environment. As a gymnast and scientist Mitchell should be able to see this. But instead he sees what he wants to see. His perception of the workers as brawny reflects his own ideological positioning, which instructs him that workers *should* be brawny, i.e. that labor under capitalism should be its own reward. Furthermore, Mitchell's reference to the mill as a scene from Dante's *Inferno* reveals that the equally problematic counterpoint to the detached scientific taxonomizing of the mill is its high-culture aestheticization, insofar as both modes reduce the complexity of working-class experience to an abstraction. This portrait of an "outsider" who comes into a local community for his own curiosity or self-advancement is very similar to Davis's representation of the northern tourist in "The Yares of Black Mountain." In this sense Davis's satirical portrait of Mitchell aligns well with the environmental justice

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[58] Lang calls him "aristocratic," and his balanced even-handedness – "accepting all, despising nothing" – also marks him as the quintessential liberal subject (*Syntax* 76).

movement's distrust of outside "experts" who are often aligned with power as much as they are opposed to it (Coburn).

Though the interaction between Hugh and Mitchell takes precedence in this scene, the complicity of Mitchell's two accomplices, the benevolent Dr. May and the snide mill-owner's son, Kirby, are no less important. It is worth noting the anatomical references used to characterize these three men: Mitchell, the intellectual, is referred to as the "head" while the well-meaning philanthropist Dr. May is the "heart" and Kirby is the "pocket" (38). If, on one level, Davis's tripartite allegory of the body risks naturalizing the division of labor by casting society as an organism, on another level it links reification and social alienation to physical embodiment: the fragmented labor that these men perform contributes to their misperceptions. Class divisions and exploitative social relations begin in the fact of daily labor – in the interaction between human bodies and physical spaces. We find in these three men a parody of Emerson's idealist "One Man," which Davis *materializes* by revealing the tacit alliance between these three representatives of power, and their opposition to the workers (who, not coincidentally, are continually referred to as "hands").[59] While Kirby, the unsentimental capitalist, openly proclaims that he has no responsibility whatsoever to his workers, the kindly and sympathetic Dr. May – a stock figure of liberalism – protests that something must be done for Hugh, and yet he remains ineffectual. Perhaps one of the most striking scenes of cross-class misperception comes near the end of the text, when we learn of Hugh's

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[59] In "The American Scholar" Emerson recounts the fable that "there is One Man, – present to all particular men only partially, or through one faculty; and that you must take the whole society to find the whole man" (84).

imprisonment for robbery through the eyes of Dr. May, as he reads the morning paper: "'Nineteen years hard labor in penitentiary.' –Scoundrel! Serves him right! After all our kindness that night!" (50). Davis's narrative brilliance is to present this information to the reader through the eyes of the May family as they sit in their middle-class breakfast room, far from the mill and the prison. The character's misperceptions are brought into stark relief by the spatial distance and environmental difference. Even while these men control the means of production, their physical separation from the site of production results in the fact that they are unable or unwilling to completely understand the situation.

However, Davis's narrative is not simply a condemnation of bourgeois consciousness, but a critique of the way *all* human perception, including that of the working-class, is distorted under capitalism. When Hugh first sees Mitchell he is transfixed by the gentlemanly "atmosphere" about the man and takes "a quick pleasure in the contour of [his] white hand" (29). In a self-deprecating gesture Hugh does "obeisance" to Mitchell by "scraping away the ashes" from his own body (29). The great tragedy of this story, according to Sharon Harris, is the fact that Hugh, an artist of gritty realism (exemplified in his production of the korl woman), is persuaded to accept the romantic "vision of Beauty" embodied in the capitalist Mitchell (14). When Hugh is praised by the visitors for his artistic talent he feels "a consciousness of power" and of possibility stirring within him, a feeling that momentarily blinds him to the reality of his socio-economic constraints (Davis 47). The Edenic imagery that accompanies this aesthetic awakening, Harris argues, reveals that Hugh has been lulled into a false sense of freedom by his acceptance of a romantic aesthetic. Through his infatuation with the

idealized figure of Mitchell, Hugh accepts the liberal myth and misperceives his own situation. He has in fact been indoctrinated into a liberal ideology, which makes him abandon his prior "realistic" outlook and blinds him to his own conditioning. It is this misunderstanding that instigates Hugh's decline, as it sets him up for a traumatic fall when he subsequently realizes his entrapment. It is this failure of perception that precipitates the crisis and climax of the narrative, when Hugh, jailed for the theft of the wallet, commits suicide.

Neither Hugh nor Mitchell can "see" across class lines. Given that these two characters are the physical embodiments of class conflict, with Hugh being less an individual than a "type of his class," according to Lang, it is clear that their mutual misperceptions metaphorically reflect the epistemological crises that accompany the capitalist division of labor and the geographic as well as socio-economic issue of class stratification (*Syntax* 74). The problems of vision and representation in the novella, what Lang calls its "epistemological difficult[ies]," are generated by the socio-economic relations themselves (78). But if the cognition of these men is conditioned by their positioning vis-à-vis the mode of production, it is even more directly conditioned by their *spatial* relations, through which the socio-economic relations of exploitation are always mediated. Mitchell's body and mind are the products of a gymnasium and university – spaces of leisure and immaterial labor. Hugh's body and mind are the products of the mill space with its pollution and drudgery. The class-inflected perceptions and bodily conflicts of these characters cannot be divorced from the environments in which they occur.

The Environmental Construction of Disability and Class

Iron Mills is a text preoccupied with the body. The narrator who opens the story is imbedded and embodied: she tells us immediately that she feels "stifled" by the cloudy day. Although there are clues here and elsewhere as to her socio-economic privilege – she looks down on the street from the safety of her apparently middle-class home – she is also, Goodling points out, in a "precarious" position, "located" as it is, "in the midst of the marketplace" (2). She is separated from, but also situated within the space of poverty and pollution she describes. This place-conscious narrator can sense the environment: she can smell "the foul smells ranging loose in the air" (11). The trinkets that adorn her living room are covered in a layer of ash and smoke. From a class perspective she may be 'outside looking in,' but she is nonetheless physically at risk, as the sights, sounds, smells, and tastes of the production process potentially enter her domestic sphere. Like an early settlement-house dweller she is both without and within the working class neighborhood that is her subject.

As we turn from the narrative frame to the story proper, the attention to the body only continues. While the narration shifts from first person to a disembodied third-person, the bodies of Hugh and Deb become the primary focus. Deb is described as "deformed, almost a hunchback," "miserable…like a limp, dirty rag," and Hugh is "sickened with disgust at her deformity" (17, 23). Rosemarie Garland Thomson, in her groundbreaking disability studies analysis, describes Deb as "the wretched mill life made flesh." Her body "sum[s] up for Hugh and the narrator everything ugly, revolting, and confining about mill worker's lives" (96). Thomson finds a sinister motive in the text's use of Deb's body; she asserts that Deb's eventual retirement to the Quaker farm to be

"cared for by others" amounts to a denial of her agency, making her an "impotent" victim who is saved by the pure, able-bodied "benevolent" heroine. The rehabilitation of Deb's "impure body and soul" by the Quakers implies that her physical difference is something to be transcended, which is part of domestic fiction's larger hegemonic project of "highlight[ing] nondisabled heroines or narrators who prevail" while "their disabled sisters…stay on the narrative margins, degraded by oppressive institutions and ultimately sacrificed to the social problems the novels assail" (82).[60]

The only problem here is the assumption that the clean and healthy environment outside the city is "marginal" and that Deb's removal is therefore a "sacrifice." While there is clearly a certain victimization in the image of Deb being cared for by white, able-bodied, agrarian Quakers, it is nonetheless difficult, from an environmental justice perspective, to see how Deb's escape from the polluted mill to the healthy countryside is necessarily a marginalization (95). While a certain form of identity politics would argue that Deb's disability is a form of cultural difference that should be respected rather than "overcome," this position is complicated when we introduce the problem of disabilities that are not congenital but rather directly induced by the environment. In this sense "disability" is a social construct, not only because it is always defined in opposition to a particular imagined standard of "ability" (which masquerades as universal even though it is historically and regionally specific), but also because some disabilities are directly *created* by the built environment, in the form of accidents, bodily stress, and chronic

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[60] Thomson's overall argument in this chapter is that although the sympathetic portrayal of disabled characters in sentimental fiction is preferable to the outright vilification and exploitation of the American freak show, it nonetheless ultimately circumscribed these bodies within a discourse of liberal individualism and repudiated them as fearful objects to be eliminated or overcome.

illnesses. Because Thomson is particularly interested in the role of the sentimental, she spends little time on the proto-naturalist, environmentally determined body of Hugh, and Deb seems far less "marginalized" when compared to Hugh, whose body *is* literally sacrificed to the industrial machine.

We are never told if Deb's hunchback – Pfaelzer describes it as a "spinal deformity" – is genetic, or acquired through intense physical labor (33). It is clear, though, that the work makes her condition worse: "she was weak, aching from standing twelve hours at the spools" (Davis 19). As she sits listening to the "monotonous din" of the iron works a "stupor and vacancy…gnaw[s] into her face perpetually" (22). Whether or not her condition is biologically "inherent," her lived experience with it cannot be divorced from the mill space. Furthermore, Hugh's weak and sickly body – the body with which the text is most preoccupied – certainly exhibits what we could call an *occupational disability* (Miles). We are told that:

> He had already lost the strength and instinct vigor of a man, his muscles were thin, his nerves weak, his face (a meek, woman's face) haggard, yellow with consumption. In the mill he was known as one of the girl-men: 'Molly Wolfe' was his sobriquet…he fought sometimes, but was always thrashed, pommelled to a jelly. (24)

It appears that the damage done to Hugh's nerves and muscles is a result of his work environment, including his interaction with co-workers driven to alcoholism and violence by economic desperation. Harris points out that Hugh's "decline" is "environmentally induced" (9). Davis tells of his "squalid daily life, the brutal coarseness eating into his brain, as the ashes into his skin" (40). In addition to these direct references to the environmentally-induced deterioration of his body, Hugh is further marked as "disabled" through the macabre descriptions that cast him as the other

of the standard normate body: variously described as a man, a woman, an animal, and an extension of the mill's machinery, Hugh's myriad shifting identities mark him as a grotesque "extraordinary body," to use Thomson's phrase. Klaus Benesch calls Hugh a *cyborg*, because his identity, besides being trans-gendered, also transgresses the boundaries between human and animal, as well as organic being and machine. "As a 'living pun,'" Benesch explains, Hugh is "involved in a chain of symbolic reductions (from the machine to the girl-man to the animal to the life in the mills and back again), all of which underscore his ontological hybridity" (166).

As presented in *Iron Mills*, such hybridity is far from a postmodern celebration of the "free play" of difference and heterogeneity. It is rather a graphic illustration of the alienated, exploited, and dehumanized transformation of people into machines that Marx addresses in the 1844 *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*: under the capitalist division of labor the worker is transformed from a "man" into a series of abstract functions, a stomach, a pair of hands, etc. (*Early Writings* 281). This transformation is the biophysical basis for the mental and ideological process of reification, in which the various interrelated facets of existence are fragmented and compartmentalized, and humans are isolated from each other, as well as from themselves. Hugh's grotesque, hybrid body thus stands as a critique of alienated labor under capitalism.

This alienation involves not only a separation from control over the means of production, but also a separation from the natural world, or rather, a separation from both at once, since the control over the means of production involves control over one's interaction with the natural world. It is significant that Hugh, in a rhetorical move that further classifies this as a typical work of naturalism, casts his confinement in

environmental terms. As he gazes from the barred window of his cell, Hugh sees a dog walking down the street: "Only a dog," Hugh ponders through the free indirect discourse of the narrator, "yet he could go backwards and forwards just as he pleased…the very vilest cur, yelping there in the gutter…had been free to act out whatever thought God had put into his brain; while he – No, he would not think of that!" (55). Hugh asserts his humanity through a violent denigration of the animal. In this common naturalist trope, we are meant to feel the irony that the man has sunk "below" the "beast." And yet in the same moment the text not only heretically imparts divinity to animals (God puts thoughts into the dog's brain) but also recognizes that Hugh's determinism is not biological or evolutionary, but a form of socio-environmental determinism, a determinism of the built environment. Hugh is not innately "bestial," and this is not an atavistic awakening of the inner brute of the type we see in Norris's *McTeague*. In fact, the text is at pains to stress Hugh's inherent nobility. In this particular situation the dog is free in a way that Hugh is not simply because Hugh has been alienated from his species-being through his proletarianization.

Conversely, Hugh imagines his freedom from manual labor in environmental terms. He longs "only to escape – out of the wet, the pain, the ashes, somewhere, anywhere, – only for one moment of free air on a hill-side, to lie down and let his sick soul throb itself out in sunshine" (41). After he is imprisoned he gazes from his cell window at a fruit stand in the street, the "dark-green heaps of corn, and the crimson beets, and golden melons" (55). He longs for a non-alienated existence that he concretizes in images of nature.

Ultimately though, Hugh is killed by his degraded environment. Before he commits suicide, we are told that he has been "bleeding at the lungs" and has the "death cough," associated with consumption, the implication bring that he was already sick and dying (53). A disease-spreading environment has already sealed his fate. The despair resulting from the loss of his dream and the shocking realization of his exploitation and entrapment merely sped up the process that was already underway. When the time comes, the worker's own commodity provided the tool for the deed. It is no coincidence that Hugh kills himself by cutting his throat with a tiny piece of metal that he has spent days sharpening on the iron bars of his prison cell. The metal of the blade and the metal bars coalesce with the metal commodity produced in the mill. Hugh's prison cell is simply a more overt literalization of the prison he had long been in, both the real prison of the regulated working day, and the metaphorical "iron cage" of ideology.[61]

Radical Pastoral: The Utopian Conclusion

If the beginning of *Iron Mills* utilizes the trope of a Virgilian descent into a gothic landscape, its conclusion describes an escape from this abyss into a pastoral garden. Amongst the crowd of doctors and reporters in Hugh's cell following his suicide, there is only "one woman," a "Quaker, or Friend," who remains to comfort Deb after the others leave (62). She brings "a vase of wood-leaves and berries" into the cell and places them next to the body, and then opens a window, letting the "fresh air" enter and spread "the woody fragrance over the dead face." Through this highly symbolic act, Hugh is allowed in death the fresh air and contact with nature that he was denied in life. Though there is a

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[61] For a path-breaking use of this Weberian concept in American cultural studies see Takaki.

romantic defeatism in this ritual (Hugh can be celebrated only in death), there is also a subversive moment of recognition between Deb and the Quaker woman. Deb is greatly pleased by the act, and she suspects that the Quaker woman "knows" Hugh, because she extends to him, albeit symbolically, the right to an unpolluted environment. When Deb appeals that they not bury Hugh in the "town-yard…under t' mud and ash," where he will "smother," the Quaker woman promises that he will be buried outside of town "over the river" in the "hills" and "by the trees" where the "air blows." This merely symbolic act becomes materially important when the possibility of escape to a healthy space is extended to Deb herself. The narrative ends years later amidst the "sunshine and fresh air" of "wooded slopes and clover-crimsoned meadows," where Deb, "a woman, old, deformed," works alongside the Quakers (63).

There is a long tradition of viewing such pastoral, utopian conclusions as politically suspect – as an erasure or imaginary resolution of the charged issues brought forth in the body of the text. References to the rehabilitation of Deb's "impure soul" mark this as an idealized Christian landscape, leaving open the charge that the Quaker farm is not a real place, but merely a motif for moral and spiritual awakening. To make things more problematic, Schocket points out that Davis's pastoral is reminiscent of the writings of southern pro-slavery apologists.[62] It is certainly vital that ecocritics remain aware of the tendency for condemnations of industrialism to slip into nostalgic and

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[62] Her criticism of industrial wage labor uses descriptions that sound unsettlingly like that of agrarian slavery advocates such as George Fitzhugh, who's *Cannibals All! Or Slaves without Masters* argued that southern slaves enjoyed a better, because more consistent and paternalistically-regulated, standard of living than northern industrial wage workers.

reactionary support for an agrarian system that brings with it a set of unequal and unjust social relations.

Yet, one rejoinder to this line of argument is that *Iron Mills* encourages readers, after they have been brought through the disturbing naturalist core of the text, to view the pastoral conclusion skeptically. As Harris sees it, we are not to take the conclusion seriously, but rather to see it as a convention that Davis reluctantly (or strategically) used to "ease" her readers into and out of this shocking new mode of naturalist description. Harris may have a point, that the graphic power of the novella's middle section undermines attempts to see the conclusion as an easy resolution. And in fact the text does *not* actually end on the Quaker farm, but back in the town, where the frame narrator sits at her window, looking around the smoke-covered objects, including the troubling sculpture of the korl woman – that "rough, ungainly thing" with a "dumb, woful face" and arms "stretched out imploringly in the darkness" as if to ask "Is this the End…nothing beyond?" (64). The text thus closes not by illustrating the *fulfillment* of a need in the pastoral vision, but rather with a *demand* for that as-yet-unrealized fulfillment that has only momentarily appeared in the text. The "promise of the Dawn" alluded to the in the final sentence is not a fully realized presence, but merely an emergent potentiality.

Convincing as this reading may be, it relies in part on the assumption that the text "succeeds" to the extent that it self-critically disavows its own pastoral utopianism. But suppose we take this concluding shift to the pastoral seriously, even positively? If the fog and smoke of the book's opening passages can be read as literal environmental hazard, it seems equally plausible to read Deb's move to the countryside as literal survival, and

hence as a statement bearing on environmental justice. The scene may depict a flight from the problem rather than a call to alter the situation. But if the characters are taken, as I believe they should be, not as individual human people, but rather as textual figures for social conflict more broadly, then this "escape" to an alternative order can be read as critique.

For a defense of the utopian conclusion at the Quaker farm, we might look to a similar scene in that most influential of books, *Uncle Tom's Cabin.* In "The Quaker Settlement" chapter Stowe presents an apparently simple domestic scene that also stands as powerful political allegory. We open in the kitchen of a farmhouse, where the consummate mother, Rachel Halliday, asks her children to finish their chores with the words "Hadn't thee better," a phrase that does not command them, but rather reminds them of their responsibility to the household, thus assuming all are committed to the collective good. While the mother orchestrates this collective action, the father, we are told, stands passively off to the side, "engaged in the anti-patriarchal operation of shaving" (121-22). When the Quaker family sits to eat next to agricultural workers and runaway slaves, the kitchen table is transfigured into a horizontal space of equality and community. As Jane Tompkins' famously argues, "Stowe's image of a utopian community as presented in Rachel Halliday's kitchen is not simply a Christian dream of communitarian cooperation and harmony; it is a reflection of the real communitarian practices of village life." Nostalgic though this yearning for the "household economy" may be, its allegorical universalization entails a "radical transformation" of society and presents what Tompkins calls a "revolutionary potential" ("Sentimental" 521).

A similar reading is possible in the case of *Iron Mills*. Although the story ends with heavy-handed Christian rhetoric, the narrator earlier in the story chided hypocritical Christian "reformers." The difference is that the Christian figures at the end of the text are "Friends," with all of the political weight that this term entails historically, as a symbol of anti-slavery activism, pacifism, anti-statism, and voluntary simplicity.[63] Thus there is an implied opposition between the liberal reformers who preach self-renunciation, and the radical communitarian activists who *intervene with political action.* Davis clearly means for us to distinguish the wealthy town Church – referred to in the text as a "Gothic pile" – from the Quaker farmhouse (48). She clearly means to contrast the "Christian reformer" whose sermon Hugh cannot decipher, with the activist "Friends" who come to Deb's aid (49).

In this way we might view the "escape to the country" not as form of quietism, but on behalf of what Jameson calls the "utopian enclave," a radical *break* between the represented "real world" and the imagined utopian world. This "pocket of stasis" is the precondition for imagining political alternatives that allows the "utopian fantasy" to operate (*Archaeologies* 15). The utopian vision in Jameson's formulation is not an actual "blueprint" for an egalitarian society, but rather a negative heuristic, a standard against which the ills of the current society are critiqued.

Thus, in *Life in the Iron Mills*, the Quaker farm scene is a utopian moment that erupts within the text. But it is also merely the constellation of a utopianism that had been latent *throughout* the text, in the images of fruit, animals, fresh air, grass, and the

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[63] For a history of Quaker politics in this period see Jordan.

like – a standard of non-alienation (however idealized) against which the pollution and degradation of the industrial system is formally measured. Rebecca Harding Davis wrote with a great awareness of the spatial and environmental dynamics of class conflict, but without the aid of socialist concepts that might have given her criticisms more definite shape. It would be instructive here to contrast this narrative with the other great nineteenth-century text of working-class environmental justice, Engels' *Condition of the Working Class in England.* In the absence of these conceptual weapons Davis utilizes a millenarian anti-capitalist rhetoric, one that constructs a dichotomy of polluted-spaces of sickness and confinement vs. green-spaces of health and freedom. Hugh's naturalistically determined downward spiral and death-by-machine is contrasted with Deb's utopian escape to the organic, pastoral enclave. Viewed in terms of the social Totality, this environmental justice statement points the way to the radical socialist and proletarian fiction of the late-nineteenth and early twentieth century, foregrounding the relationship between humans and their land-base under the logic of capital.

CHAPTER V

THE ECOLOGICAL CONTRADICTIONS OF UPTON SINCLAIR

> I began to plan a novel which should portray modern industrial conditions, and show how they were driving the workingman into socialism. It was just after the big strike in Packingtown [...] I knew that this was a place where modern commercial forces held complete sway, and had the making of the entire environment.
>
> Upton Sinclair, "What Life Means to Me"

As a work that offers an urban, environmental justice alternative to the canon of wilderness-oriented nature writing, Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* is an obvious choice. The novel depicts – as Sinclair himself tells us in an autobiographical reflection – an environment that has been entirely re-made by human socio-economic forces, but which nonetheless remains dependent on extra-human biophysical processes. The work thus stands as a paradigmatic example of what we might call 'the literature of second nature' – a cultural form that dramatizes the dialectical tension between, and co-determination of, nature and economy. Though this classic muckraking novel hardly ever depicts "nature" in the traditional sense, its representations of the infamous slum neighborhoods and slaughterhouses of Chicago's Packingtown dramatically address a host of social and environmental problems, many of which continue to plague us today.[64]

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[64] Contemporary investigative narratives like Eric Schlosser's popular *Fast Food Nation* speak to the continuing relevance of *The Jungle* in addressing ongoing struggles for food safety and the rights of agricultural laborers. See for example the excerpt from Schlosser's text included in the Norton edition of *The Jungle*, in which Schlosser acknowledges his political and artistic debt to Sinclair's novel.

The Jungle's graphic descriptions of pollution have recently attracted attention under the rubric of ecocriticism. Prominent ecocritic Lawrence Buell identifies *The Jungle* as an example of a "toxic discourse" that can be productively read alongside the work of Progressive Era health reformers such as Jane Addams (*Writing* 43). Following Buell, Jill Gatlin makes an extended case for viewing *The Jungle* as an environmental justice text. According to Gatlin, Sinclair ironically critiques the literary convention of the "urban sublime," revealing how the trope of the 'sublime encounter with the city' casts urban space as impenetrable and unknowable, thus hiding the real forces of socio-economic and ecological exploitation (90). The novel thereby illustrates how epistemological obfuscation – the concealment of environmental hazard – perpetuates class-based injustice. Steven Rosendale goes further on the issue of class, contextualizing Sinclair within a tradition of "Left Ecology," and showing how the novel contributes to a body of scholarship on the relationship between labor struggle and environmentalism.

While I agree with these authors that *The Jungle* deserves attention as a forceful statement of class-based environmental justice, I also believe that things are not so straightforward. Based on historical and biographical evidence I will argue that Sinclair's work actually exudes a philosophical idealism that undermines the very socio-economic materialism on which his political message depends. This idealism manifests itself in an antipathy toward embodiment and animality that appears throughout his writing. Furthermore, this horror in the face of the materiality of existence aesthetically naturalizes the very socio-economic forces that oppress workers and degrade the environment. In other words, Sinclair's casting of the polluting factory as a "jungle"

works against the critique he is attempting to make. Such an interpretation, however, is not meant to *supplant* the received reading of Sinclair as a radical environmental justice writer, so much as to complicate that reading. For it this very formal and ideological "inconsistency" that makes the novel so fascinating for ecocriticism.

The conflict at the center of *The Jungle* over the question of the "natural" points to a host of extra-textual concerns. As we will see, Sinclair's personal ambivalence about biophysical processes – his strange ideas about health, sexuality, the human body, and animal life – point to a broader social anxiety about the place of nature in the industrial capitalist order. Cliff Boyer calls this motif, prominent in turn-of-the-century naturalist fiction, the "ecological paradox." The "ecological paradox" occurs when a character "expresses an intense desire for a more meaningful relationship with the land or environment," but simultaneously displays "behavior…[that] directly contradicts this desire."[65] For Boyer, fiction's conflicted attitude toward the environment exemplifies an "anxiety and ambivalence" about resource exploitation during the Progressive Era, when many reformers, such as the forest conservationist Gifford Pinchot, were directly involved in the very industries that they felt compelled to regulate. I would go further to suggest that the mental and individual situation of "paradox" is rooted in, and can be explained through, the material and social fact of "contradiction." Boyer's "ecological paradox" is the cultural expression of the more fundamental ecological *contradiction* between the land base and the capitalist mode of production, as an impulse to conserve

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[65] This formulation has much in common with Renato Rosaldo's concept of "imperialist nostalgia," in which the thing one longs for is also that which one is responsible for destroying.

resources pushes against the drive of capital for ever-greater geographic expansion and surplus accumulation.

This socio-economic and ecological contradiction is played out culturally in the pages of *The Jungle*. Sinclair consistently codes the factory space as embodied and material, a fact which he finds thoroughly disconcerting, especially when he compares it to an idealized countryside outside the Chicago city limits. The result of this formulation is that the text abjects the representational space of the factory and subsequently overlooks or erases the actual factory as a site of political struggle. Although *The Jungle* deserves credit as one of the first proletarian novels, and although it implicitly presents an argument for class-based environmental justice that many find preferable to certain brands of ecocritical wilderness fetishism, its consistent idealism, cast as an embrace of transcendent nature and a rejection of actual physicality, ultimately undermines the philosophical materialism on which its revolutionary socialist message relies. Rather than seeing the formal inconsistencies of *The Jungle* as an authorial "failure" however (a claim that unproblematically assumes a standard measure of aesthetic worth) I argue that these textual fissures are generated by ideological conflicts within Sinclair's conception of the environment, and more generally, the environment's position within the society that Sinclair inhabits. *The Jungle* is a cultural expression of a moment in which nature became almost fully subsumed under the industrial capitalist regime, and for the first time ever began to raise the specter of long-term, global, environmental crisis. As both a *critique* of this culture and a *product* of this culture, the novel speaks in a conflicted double voice, a voice that ultimately expresses the ecological contradictions of capital.

A Very Bad Novel: The Formal Break and the Ecological Contradiction

The Jungle is organized as a three-tiered structure. In the first and longest section the Lithuanian immigrant Jurgis Rudkus and his family arrive in the Chicago stockyard neighborhood of Packingtown, where Jurgis takes a job at a slaughterhouse, and where the reader encounters Sinclair's famously graphic descriptions of filth and exploitation. Following the standard naturalist "plot of decline" evident in works such as Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* and Norris's *McTeague*, the Rudkus family enters a downward spiral that takes up most of the novel: Jurgis is injured and then fired, he goes back to work at a worse job for less pay, he becomes involved in electoral fraud and political corruption, his family members begin to die from overwork and environmental hazard, he becomes an alcoholic, his wife is forced to sleep with the factory boss, he is imprisoned for attacking the boss, his son dies, etc. Following the traumatic death of his wife, Jurgis abandons both job and children and heads for the countryside. He spends the second, brief section of the novel as a tramp in the rural areas outside of Chicago, buying food and occasionally stealing from farmers, and communing with other vagrants. The final section describes Jurgis' triumphal return to Chicago, where he converts to socialism during a rally and begins to take part in labor agitation. As Walter Rideout says, Jurgis and his family are thus "composite figures," that allow Sinclair to address a range of social issues, from factory labor to prostitution, from prison reform to temperance, making *The Jungle* essentially a work of investigative journalism and political critique (Eby, 491).

One of the first issues that any reading of *The Jungle* must address is the lack of critical commentary on the work. If few theorists have addressed the relationship

between the environmental politics and the formal characteristics of the text, this is because few have treated it as an object of literary interpretation at all. Although *The Jungle* was one of the most popular novels in the U.S. in the first decades of the twentieth century, is frequently taught in high school and undergraduate courses, and is generally recognized as an important historical document (one of only a handful of modern novels that literally and directly led to political change), as a work of literature it has received at best an ambivalent reception.

Part of the reason for scanty critical attention is that *The Jungle* is typically seen as a rather "bad" novel, faulted for flat characters, sentimentality, formal inconsistency, and, most resoundingly, its polemical conclusion. In the end, *The Jungle's* naturalist "plot of decline," like those of many proletarian novels, gives way abruptly to a utopian "conversion narrative," in which the protagonist discovers socialism as the answer to society's ills. In Sinclair this conversion involves long tracts on socialist theory, couched first in the form of a speech and then a debate between two minor characters. The prose thus shifts from *narrative* to *exposition*. In addition to providing what Rideout calls "too easy a dramatic solution," critics have found fault with the ending's violation of the aesthetic unity of the text, as vivid naturalism gives way to a "preachy" socialist propaganda (Eby 491). This formal break, it is argued, reveals Sinclair's stylistic and ideological inconsistency.

Much recent cultural studies work has shown, however, that judgments about literary merit are historically relative, and often ideologically loaded.[66] It is not a universal standard of "taste" that Sinclair violates, but rather a specific preference dominant in the modern academy – an academy that, despite its claims to Kantian disinterestedness is impacted by society more broadly. For example, as Lawrence Schwartz relates in *Creating Faulkner's Reputation*, the novels of William Faulkner were elevated, during the Cold War, from obscure and idiosyncratic regionalist texts to "canonical literature" thanks in part to a vocal cohort of liberal anti-communist intellectuals eager to find a new "great" writer who had absolutely no ties to 1930s literary radicalism. Faulkner and the New Critics became the democratic, liberal-humanist antidote to "polemical" critics and novelists like Christopher Caudwell, Mike Gold and Richard Wright. Again, consider how the conclusion of Wright's *Native Son* formally resembles *The Jungle* in its shift from naturalistic narration to what is essentially an oration or political pamphlet, through the lengthy courtroom speech of Bigger Thomas's lawyer, the Jewish-American communist Boris Max. The so-called "formal violations" of these proletarian texts, then, are inseparable from their politics. Rather than artless digressions, their conclusions are consistent with the logic of the proletarian form as such – a form that by interrupting its own narrative questions the myth of the unified, isolated text, and points beyond the text to real-world struggle. The rejection of these texts as incoherent by the twentieth century academy is also a weapon in an ideological battle, not a neutral claim about aesthetics.

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[66] For example, feminist cultural historians have shown how the aesthetic dismissal of nineteenth-century sentimental fiction was driven by a masculinist bias in modern scholarship.

While claims about aesthetics are endlessly relative, claims about the text's relationship to social structures have some objective status. Thus, rather than engaging in value judgments about aesthetic quality, it is important to ask what the conclusion's formal "break" says about the culture that produced the novel, and specifically (for our purposes), what it says about that culture's treatment of the environment. Steven Rosendale suggests that this formal problem is central to an ecocritical understanding of the text. "While virtually all critics have heretofore understood this abrupt shift as an aesthetic failing," he says, "a critical perspective attuned to emerging Left ecology might find something altogether more admirable in it" (73). Rosendale points out that while the final lines of the text, with the socialists chanting "Chicago will be ours!" following an election victory, represent a transfer of the ownership of the means of production, they indicate nothing about a qualitative change in productive processes themselves. In this scene capitalism is conceptualized merely as a problem of property, rather than as an exploitative mode of production. As Rosendale says:

> Although a socialist takeover might result in a redistribution of the wealth created by production, there is no provision in the socialist theory propounded in *The Jungle's* closing pages for a revision of the mode of production, which would ostensibly continue its devastation of the environment under new management. Thus the political optimism that follows Jurgis's conversion is more than a stylistic break in the novel: it is a conceptual contradiction of a more serious nature. If the mode of production is itself despoiling, as the bulk of the novel suggests, it is difficult to imagine how the situation of the workers will be improved through the kind of appropriation proposed by the novel's finale – without, that is, a substantial revision of the technical basis of production itself. (74)

As Rosendale sees it, Sinclair intends for Jurgis's "political optimism" to ring hollow; given that Sinclair spent many pages describing the environmental degradation of industrial processes, his abrupt resolution by means of a mere property exchange seems

self-consciously artificial. For Rosendale, therefore, the novel's "formal flaw" is meant to comment on the shortcomings of certain brand of "productivist" socialism. Sinclair "embeds" a proto-ecological critique into his socialist novel and implicitly calls "for the left to recognize the non-neutrality" of technology (75). Ultimately, then, Rosendale casts the novel's conclusion as an environmentalist critique of the Left.

Compelling and convincing as this reading is, it is not the only possible ecological interpretation of the "break." Rosendale's point is complicated by Michael Folsom's argument that Sinclair himself was somewhat enamored of modern technology; although he attacked capitalist ownership, he "never questioned…the essential organization of large industry," and was highly impatient with those, such as William Morris and John Ruskin, who criticized the fundamentals of mass production (242-43). Rosendale's argument is also not particularly "formal": though he claims to be addressing a "stylistic" concern, the analysis mainly examines the content of the plot: the fact that the workers base their struggle in reformist electoral politics. Equally interesting, however, is what Rideout calls the "intellectual" atmosphere of the final chapters: the way they switch from thick description and embodied, place-based narration to a detached, free-floating disquisition, complete with oration, philosophical dialogue, platitudes, statistics, and reading lists. Apart from what these final chapters represent, the truth is that they just "feel" different, and it is in this "feeling" that the ideology of the text is manifested.

The cumulative effect of the conclusion's abstract language is to equate socialism with the world of ideas. Emotionally the reader has been taken from a visceral, material space of industrial capitalism, to a cerebral dream-land of communism. What we find here is a movement from philosophical materialism to philosophical idealism, from a

representation of the world as a struggle among forces to a representation that "descends," as Marx said in *The German Ideology*, "from heaven to earth." This is not to suggest that ideas are unimportant, for in fact, a novel is *nothing but ideas*. Nonetheless, *The Jungle's* dramatic shift in register detaches its concluding "ideal" from the earlier depictions of material struggles for survival, leaving the reader with little understanding of how one thing leads to the other. This stylistic shift is thus also a philosophical, and ultimately an ideological shift. This issue is vitally important to ecocritics, because it also entails a shift from real, material environments to an abstract and idealized concept of "Nature." Furthermore, I will show that this isn't really a "shift" at all, so much as the culmination of a latent idealism that is present throughout the novel, particularly in its treatment of animality and embodied daily labor. It is an idealism that actually counteracts the "message" of material socio-economic struggle this "activist author" is attempting to put forth. But in order to understand the ecosocial and environmental justice impulse that the conclusion works against, we must return to the beginning.

Sinclair's Promise: The Metabolic Rift and the Class Character of Pollution

The Jungle is often remembered for its vivid descriptions of urban blight. But as we will see, these descriptions do more than simply provide shocking, pathos-filled verisimilitude. Taken as a whole, this image complex actively links ecological degradation with a narrative of class exploitation. In the early scene of the Rudkus family's arrival in Packingtown, Sinclair provides a gothic, environmentally-inflected rewriting of the classic railroad journey from the country to the city. Whereas Dreiser's Carrie Meeber wonders at the glimmering buildings of downtown Chicago, the Rudkus

family looks out the car window at the "endless vista of ugly and dirty little wooden buildings," the "filthy creek" and the "volumes of smoke pouring from chimneys" (26). As they near the city they "note perplexing changes in the atmosphere" as the grass appears to "grow less green" and a "strange, pungent odor" begins to emerge (27). We find a world made entirely into second nature, for as the narrator tells us, "One never saw the fields, nor any green thing whatever, in Packingtown" (29). No space has been left untouched by human labor. For example we are told that the land under the tenements "had been 'made' by using it as a dumping-ground for the city garbage" (30). The very earth of Packingtown is constructed of refuse. But this is also second nature in the ideological sense, as defined by Lukács, in which the built environmental appears in an alienated and reified form, as a "wilderness" that is somehow biologically ordained and thus immutable.

The determinism of the space as it shapes and constricts the movement of characters marks this as a typical work of naturalism. Rosendale points out, however, that in the world of *The Jungle* the determinism of the "industrial environment…is not experienced universally but only by members of a particular class under a particular economic regime" (68). Sinclair's naturalistic descriptions are inflected with an awareness of the spatial dimensions of class conflict. As Christopher Wilson writes, "The workers' degradation seems…to stem from the poisonous world they inhabit" (Eby 518). Though Sinclair's horrific descriptions of tainted meat appeal to the belief that health hazards put an entire population (including the middle-class readership) at risk, the fact remains that such hazards are not distributed equally. Sinclair is at pains to remind us that the most vulnerable consumers are the producers themselves. Time and again the

novel illustrates how the protagonists' precarious economic situation and their ethnic immigrant status, combined with a lack of knowledge about corrupt practices, leads to their exposure to unhealthy environments:

> Their children were not as well as they had been at home [in Lithuania]; but how could they know that there was no sewer to their house, and that the drainage of fifteen years was in a cesspool under it? How could they know that the pale blue milk that they bought around the corner was watered, and doctored with formaldehyde besides? (75)

The Rudkus family undergoes a series of exposures to environmental hazards in the home, the workplace, and even in the city street (where Jurgis's infant son drowns in the mud). When Jurgis's aging father, Antanas, takes a job to help the family survive, he develops a chronic cough from working in a damp cellar and sores on his feet from exposure to chemicals (76-77). The contrast of this new environment is made starker when we learn that in Lithuania the family had previously lived as rustic peasants: the moment after Antanas dies as a result of his unhealthy working condition, we are reminded that "for twenty-five years [he]…and his son had dwelt in the forest together" (77). The immediate *juxtaposition* of the pastoral memory with the lethal polluted environment illustrates the importance of environmental conditioning to the text (more so than either representation would achieve in isolation). *The Jungle* as a whole is structured through a series of spatial contrasts and comparisons. It thus avoids the naturalist novel's tendency, decried by Lukács, to focus exclusively on spaces of poverty and degradation. More in the spirit of Lukács' classic realist novel – the "epic of modernity" – *The Jungle* ranges over various spaces in an effort to comparatively map the totality of capitalist relations in the greater Chicago area. We move from the kill-floor to the canning room, from a giant Bessemer steel mill to a reformer's "model

factory," from bars to brothels, from farms to prisons. Later in the novel, when a philanthropist takes in the destitute Jurgis, the reader briefly learns of the comforts of the super rich. These spatial relations are also always class relations – physical embodiments of differing occupation and levels of status. One of the most dangerous of these spaces is treated when Jurgis takes employment in the rendering plant, where bones and non-consumable animal waste are processed into fertilizer:

> The fertilizer-works of Durham's lay away from the rest of the plant. Few visitors ever saw them, and the few who did would come out looking like Dante, of whom the peasants declared that he had been to hell [...] Here they dried out the bones – and in suffocating cellars where the daylight never came you might see men and women and children bending over whirling machines and sawing bits of bone into all sorts of shapes, breathing their lungs full of the fine dust, and doomed to die, every one of them, within a certain definite time. (125)

Notice first of all the fertilizer works' spatial segregation from the rest of the slaughterhouse and the conspicuous absence of "visitors." As Nicole Shukin points out in *Animal Capital: Rendering Life in Biopolitical Times*, slaughterhouse tours (which we see occurring in the pages of *The Jungle*) were carefully shaped – "mimetically managed" – by the industry in order to present the image of efficiency and order and to promote meat consumption (95-96). In the case of the above passage the fertilizer works are not "on the tour." They are cordoned off so as to maintain the aesthetic simulacrum of a clean and healthy process. The language of the passage *partakes* somewhat in such aestheticization, through its references to "Dante," however its main purpose is to make visible this hidden and dangerous aspect of factory life. William Cronon points out that the manufacture of fertilizer was one of Packingtown's most hazardous jobs, and also one

of its most profitable.[67] It is simultaneously the most environmentally unjust and the most economically important of tasks. Thus the novel places issues of pollution and health at the very center of the conflict between labor and capital. The material known as fertilizer is both the result of violence (rendered animal carcass) and an agent of violence: the direct violence of a pollutant that fills the worker's lungs, and the indirect violence of an agribusiness commodity that helps that helps centralize and monopolize meat production. By drawing the space of the fertilizer plant into its narrative, *The Jungle* addresses labor exploitation and ecological destruction simultaneously.

Sinclair then uses the image of fertilizer to connect the exploitation of labor on the factory floor to the commodification of nature through broader structural changes in capitalist agriculture. The narrator observes that after the processed bone and offal is mixed with various chemicals and fillers, "the farmer in Maine or California or Texas would buy this, at say twenty-five dollars a ton, and plant it with his corn" (125). Sinclair then sarcastically contrasts this processed fertilizer, purchased by the farmer and "spread out on several acres under the open sky," with the "hundreds and thousands of tons" of "*pure*" fertilizer that sit in the Packingtown warehouse, "covering the floor several inches deep, and filling the air with a choking dust" (126, my emphasis). This sardonic description speaks to the socio-ecological crisis that Marx identified as the "metabolic rift." Under this process of forced urbanization, "capitalist production collects the population together in great centers" and thus "disturbs the metabolic interaction between

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[67] In fact profits were earned not from the meat itself, says Cronon, but "from things that butchers threw away." The cost of dressing and shipping beef was so high, and the retail prices needed to be so low (to compete with local butchers) that "only by selling by-products could the packers turn this losing transaction into a profitable one" (251).

man and the earth" (Foster, *Ecology* 156). The reason farmers must purchase a processed fertilizer commodity in the first place is because industrial monocrop agriculture has exhausted soil fertility, while natural fertilizers (in the form of human and animal waste) have been removed from the countryside and funneled into the city. Marx's conception of metabolic rift illustrates how polluted cities and barren rural fields are two halves of the same production process. Capitalists then seek a "technological fix" to this problem through the increased use of hazardous materials. As we will see, Sinclair's narrative only acknowledges one half of this problem: while the descriptions of urban pollution are fairly accurate, the farmland outside the city is cast as a bucolic paradise, a representation that does not square with historical records on Chicago's rural periphery, and that actually undermines Sinclair's socialist politics. Nonetheless, Jurgis's slaughterhouse labor, and its connection to regional and national circuits of exchange, illustrates the remaking of the environment by modern agribusiness, and the effects of this spatial reconstruction on the health of the working class. The narrator observes that the continual "speeding-up" of labor under new scientific management, which "seemed to be growing more savage all the time," caused danger and distress for both the human laborers and the animals (107, 11-12). If Sinclair's characters sometimes seem one-dimensional, this is perhaps because the text's primary concern is not with creating fully-developed human subjects, but with representing the flows of matter and energy through space, in order to provide a cognitive map of a strange and traumatic new era. With this novel, we have truly entered the age of biopolitics, in which the (re)production of nature itself becomes central to the functioning of capital.

Ecosocial Bildungsroman

The main formal technique Sinclair uses to connect a narrative of immediate and embodied daily struggle to a larger socio-political critique is to graft his naturalistic exposé onto the plot of a bildungsroman, or novel of formation. This is particularly interesting because the bildungsroman has been persuasively identified as a most "capitalist" and "anti-ecological" form. In the classic nineteenth-century bildungsroman, a series of events are held together by the subjectivity of the individual protagonist – usually a young male in the style of Goethe's Wilhelm Meister – who journeys and develops both physically and intellectually as the narrative progresses. It has been argued that the bildungsroman was the quintessential literary form of the rising capitalist class (Watt). Franco Moretti attributes the wild success of the genre to its ability to represent a fusion of the two antagonistic poles of bourgeois thought: individuality and conformity. This is achieved by depicting a protagonist who becomes a "free" individual precisely by internalizing the dominant social order and seeing it has something that is entered into voluntarily (16, 68). While the ecocritic Ursula Heise argues that the bildungsroman is a genre particularly suitable to the articulation of environmental risk, it could just as easily be argued this form is profoundly *anti-ecological* insofar as it formally embodies the ideology of bourgeois possessive individualism, the logic of a fundamentally unsustainable mode of production (139). We might say, then, that there is an ecological *tension* within the bildungsroman, which Sinclair heightens and complicates in his work by foregrounding the role of material processes.

Sinclair adopts many techniques from this most bourgeois of art forms, but appropriates them in the service of a working-class environmental justice literature. Thus

Jurgis develops not into the pliant bourgeois subject, who willingly "consents" and learns what Moretti calls the "comfort of civilization." Instead, through his suffering in the slaughterhouse, he undergoes an experiential education in the harsh realities of pollution and political economy. If, in the classical bildungsroman, "the 'meaning' of events is always and intimately linked to the solution of the mystery," then, in *The Jungle*, the mystery is the complexity of the industrial capitalist system itself (Moretti 70). The solution is the realization that this system is not universal and timeless, but is in fact historically situated and can potentially be changed or even eliminated through organized struggle. Sinclair adopts the entire structural framework of the arch-genre of the bourgeoisie, but then fills that structure in with a proletarian content. He mobilizes the bildungsroman in the service of an ideology directly opposed to the one typically associated with the genre. If, "the classical bildungsroman narrates 'how the French Revolution could have been avoided'," then *The Jungle* narrates how a new revolution can become possible (64). Formally Sinclair accomplishes this by interspersing his linear narrative of the life of Jurgis with reportage-like asides on the living conditions in Chicago. The language assumes a kind of "appearance" vs. "essence" formula, as an initial surface narrative is revealed to contain a hidden truth about socio-economic inequality. It is this quality that, for Ursula Heise, gives the bildungsroman its ecological inflection, "in the victim's gradually deepening realization of the danger to which he or she is exposed" (139).

One of the most striking examples of this technique comes in the novel's first scene, the wedding celebration of Jurgis and his young Lithuanian bride, Ona. Typically, the bildungsroman concludes with a wedding, an event that serves as a mechanism for the

melding of the bourgeois individual with modern capitalist society. As Moretti states, the marriage is "a metaphor for the social contract" – it is the ritual through which the individual willingly "consents" to "limit his freedom" (22). *The Jungle* subverts this formal tradition by *beginning* with a wedding. If the standard wedding scene enacts a conservative closure, Sinclair's reveals the fissures in this seemingly tidy arrangement. As the narrator introduces the party guests he intervenes with disturbing asides:

> There is Alena...for instance, who has danced unending hours...Alena is the beauty of the evening...she wears a white shirt-waist, *which represents, perhaps half a week's labor painting cans*...Then there is Jadvyga Marcinkus...who is dancing with her Mikolas....You would smile, perhaps, to see them – *but you would not smile if you knew all the story....[Mikolas] is a beef-boner, and that is a dangerous trade...twice now, within the last three years, Mikolas has been lying at home with blood poisoning.* (13-14, my emphasis)

Each of the characters is introduced first in terms of their relationship to the wedding party, and then in terms of their relationship to Packingtown. We learn that the violin player, Tamoszius, mastered his instrument "by practicing all night," after working all day on the "killing beds," and that cousin Marija, the party organizer, "works in a canning factory, and all day long she handles cans of beef that weigh fourteen pounds" (9, 11). Here the narrator looks under the pleasing domestic surface of the wedding party in order to reveal its harsh reality: these wedding guests are all exploited laborers. If a hallmark of the bildungsroman is that characters are defined not by their occupation but by their emotional and familial relationships,[68] then *The Jungle*, conversely, presents characters who are defined primarily by the labor they perform. Jurgis in particular, as

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[68] As Moretti says, "By not defining himself in a single sphere of life, the novelistic protagonist ceases to be definable as a 'role'": merchant, minister, mother, etc. (42). "The most classical *Bildungsroman*," Moretti writes, "conspicuously places the process of formation-socialization *outside* the world of work" (25).

the anti-bildungsroman hero, is *entirely* defined through work and economics. Most of the novel is a depiction of wage labor, and although there are a few scenes of domestic life, these are always defined from within the novel's overall world of "work" – whether in factory, saloon, tenement, or alleyway, we can never forget that we are in Packingtown, a place defined by its mode production.

The climax of the wedding scene comes when the hosts learn that poor, starving guests have been eating the food without honoring the traditional ceremony of leaving gifts and money offerings for the bride and groom. The economic system of Packingtown has led to naked self-interest and to a breakdown of tradition. If the wedding that typically concludes the classical bildungsroman represents the protagonist's arrival in the "homeland" of a stable community, the disrupted wedding that opens *The Jungle* reveals that the stable community is disintegrating. From an ecocritical perspective, though, these asides have another use: in connecting characters to their labor they also necessarily connect them to their metabolic relationship to second nature: as nature has been incorporated into the productive processes. Through the narrator's comments about the laboring lives of the characters, the reader is continually confronted with issues of health and sustainability, with representations of material production and consumption. The naturalistic and "muckraking" aspect of the novel thus continually re-introduces the presence of the *material*, transforming the text into not just a *socialist*, but an *eco-socialist*, bildungsroman. Contradictions emerge, however, when Sinclair appears horrified by the very material presences his formal strategy invokes.

The First Form of Disavowal: Sinclair's Hog Heaven

> It was all so very businesslike that one watched it fascinated. It was pork-making by machinery, pork-making by applied mathematics. And yet somehow the most matter-of-fact person could not help thinking of the hogs; they were so innocent, they came so very trustingly; and they were so very human in their protests – and so perfectly within their rights! They had done nothing to deserve it; and it was adding insult to injury, as the thing was done here, swinging them up in this cold-blooded, impersonal way [...] One could not stand and watch very long without becoming philosophical, without beginning to deal in symbols and similes, and to hear the hog-squeal of the universe. Was it permitted to believe that there was nowhere upon the earth, or above the earth, a heaven for hogs, where they were requited for all this suffering? Each one of these hogs was a separate creature [...] And each of them had an individuality of his own, a will of his own, a hope and a heart's desire... (36-37)

This famous and oft-quoted passage from *The Jungle* appears to be a profound early statement on animal rights. The passage makes the claim that animals do indeed have "rights"; that they have a capacity not only for suffering but for feeling "insulted"; that they are a proper subject for "philosophy"; that they are unique "individuals" with personalities; and even that they have a place in heaven.

One would be intrigued to learn then, that Sinclair was not quite fond of animals, and in fact intended this passage as a bit of satirical humor.[69] The idea that hogs had rights was apparently so absurd to Sinclair that he assumed readers would get the joke. Though Sinclair became a dedicated vegetarian, this seems to be more for health reasons rather than for any empathy for the animals. Indeed, Sinclair had a general aversion to "flesh": not only did he abstain from eating meat, but he ate as little food as possible, since he viewed over-consumption as the root of illness. He became a zealous critic of gluttony and embraced a "spirit of intense asceticism" that led not only to vegetarianism

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[69] Personal email correspondence with Steven Rosendale, March 21, 2007.

but also to a regimen of fasting and a puritanical denial of any but the blandest and most basic foods – he was known to subsist for periods of time on nothing but unprocessed wheat grain (Little 18). In a 1910 article for *Cosmopolitan* entitled "Starving for Health's Sake" Sinclair praised the wonders of the fast in curing nearly all his ailments, and suggested that denial was the key not only to physical, but also moral and spiritual reform.

Sinclair's relationship to food, which is of necessity a relationship to nature, is brought into focus in comparison with a similar formulation by the archetypal nature-writer, Henry David Thoreau. Louise Westling argues that Thoreau, for all of his concern for the natural world, sometimes shrinks in horror from too close an association with "brute" animality and physical contact ("Ambivalence" 262-66; *Green* 39-53). In the "Higher Laws" chapter of *Walden* Thoreau admits a certain shame associated with hunting and fishing, remarking that there is something "essentially unclean" about a diet of "flesh" (143). Beyond an argument for vegetarianism, though, this chapter is really a tract on asceticism, abstinence, and purgation. Thoreau proclaims that he is "inclined to abstain" not only "from animal food," but "*from much food of any kind*" (144, my emphasis). He asks the reader how he or she "can live this slimy beastly life, eating and drinking" (146). By the end of the chapter we realize that an anxiety over consumption is really an anxiety over embodiment in general, and through embodiment, the human connection to its status as animal. Thoreau writes: "We are conscious of an animal in us, which awakens in proportion as our higher nature slumbers. It is reptile and sensual, and perhaps cannot be wholly expelled; like the worms which, even in life and health, occupy our bodies" (147). Although Thoreau the naturalist is resigned to the fact that this animal

is always with us, Thoreau the spiritual ascetic remarks that, "He is blessed who is assured that the animal is dying out in him day by day, and the divine being established" (147). In this formulation the "divine" is the polar opposite of the "animal." If animality is encountered in the physical act of consumption, then the road to the divine will be through abstinence, stasis, and ultimately disembodiment.

Thoreau's angst-ridden conflation of consumption, embodiment, and animality, prefigures Upton Sinclair's position decades later. As a result of suffering from a sickly constitution, Sinclair threw himself into nearly every health fad the Progressive Era offered. He visited the famous sanatorium of Dr. John Harvey Kellogg in Battle Creek, Michigan, where his body was subjected to strange experimentation. He "listened solemnly while Dr. Kellogg read off the number of billions of bacteria per gram in the contents of the colon of a carnivorous person" (Arthur 108). Sinclair studied with the body-builder and raw-foodist Bernarr Macfadden, a man who referred to human waste as "the filthiest of all dirt" (Little 21). Both men inculcated in Sinclair a sterile, clinical gaze of basic bodily functions as essentially disgusting and improper – a thing to be strictly regulated with the help of modern science. We might say that these men suffered from what Simon Estok calls "ecophobia," an "irrational and groundless hatred of the natural world," manifested in an aversion to their own physical species-being.

As might be expected, Sinclair's attitude toward sexuality was at best, detached, at worst, puritanically fearful. According to Scott Derrick, Sinclair "adopted a regimen of…abstinence, arguing…that sexual activity ought to occur only for purposes of reproduction" (92). Sinclair believed that sexual intercourse sapped the body's "vital forces" and was thus merely a necessary but unfortunate "marriage duty" (Arthur 62).

When his son fell seriously ill in 1903, Sinclair's "terror of having another child" led him to resolve "absolute abstinence," a decision that eventually put such a strain on his marriage that his wife was driven to thoughts of suicide (Harris 62). In the novel *Love's Pilgrimage* he describes the dreaded "animal intimacy" that comes with intercourse. Sinclair even refused what he referred to as "petting," calling it a "silly and animalistic" practice. During an uncomfortable winter living in a frigid cabin, Sinclair described going to bed with his wife, "like two animals which crawl into the same hole" (63).[70]

Fascinating though this biography may be on its own terms, it extends beyond the personal and idiosyncratic, and points to the cultural logic of the turn-of-the-century period. Sinclair's casting of bodily pleasures as negative, his nearly psychotic self-regulation, encapsulates the Progressive Era fascination with scientific management, fitness, and "cleanliness." According to William Little, Sinclair's obsession with the pure body expresses "progressive culture's rage to clean up…[to] eliminated waste from every *body*" (17-18). This fixation on "health" and "cleanliness," though perhaps laudable in the context of settlement house workers' struggles for environmental justice, in the language of a writer like the hypermasculine and occasionally anti-Semitic Sinclair, shades into a disturbing politics. In one essay Sinclair makes derogatory comments about overweight people being lazy and unproductive, and elsewhere suggests that such bodies should be controlled by the state through exercise and diet, as a way of "molding the race" ("Raw Food" 140; "Divorce" 316). Is it any surprise then, that he,

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[70] As might be expected in Western patriarchal culture, Sinclair codes both sexuality and animality as essentially feminine. In a short play entitled *The Naturewoman* (1911) he describes the heroine as filled with "a continual overflow of animal health […] mov[ing] about the room like an animal in a cage" (Arthur, 125).

like many, was enthusiastic about eugenics, or that his mentor, Bernarr Macfadden, was a supporter of Mussolini's fascist regime (Little 38)? While this is not to suggest that Sinclair had any direct affiliations with fascism – he was a committed socialist involved with laudable struggles for equality and movements for the environmental reform of factories – his ideas about the body and about nature carried with them a reactionary politics that undermined his very efforts at social justice. This contradiction plays out in the pages of *The Jungle*.

Although Sinclair's abnegation of food and sex reveals a deep disgust for the physical world, it is nonetheless a subject to which he incessantly returns in his prose, like Foucault's Victorians, who, the more they prudishly censored sexuality, the more they revealed their perverted fascination. As the combination of Darwinian science and mechanized mass production threw the status of the individual human subject into increasing crisis in the later nineteenth century, literary texts like the naturalist novel sought to police the boundaries between humans and animals, as well as between humans and machines (Selzter). For Sinclair the animal constitutes a problem to be dealt with thoroughly in prose.

Images of meat proliferate in *The Jungle*, not only in the scenes of industrial killing, but also in those of consumption. In the wedding scene that opens the novel, guests munch "contentedly at meat-bones and bologna sausages," while one of the servers bares "a great platter of stewed duck" (7-8). It is a feast in which "no one goes hungry" and "even the dogs" leave "happier" (7). In its fecundity and carnivalesque exuberance this introduction is an ethnic, working-class pastoral. But it is also a scene in which the characters become animalized. We are told that when Marija "opens her

mouth, it is tragical, but you cannot help thinking of a horse" (11). Brute labor has apparently rendered her horse-like. The mighty Jurgis, who can lift a "two-hundred-and-fifty-pound quarter of beef," first appears to the reader "frightened as a hunted animal" (6). Through handling animals at the factory all day, Jurgis seems to have become animal-like himself. These images of animalistic workers in all of their meaty (and meat-eating) physicality set the tone for the rest of the first section of the novel, as the reader moves from wedding festival to slaughterhouse.

The references to slaughterhouse workers as animals are too numerous to catalogue. Ona's eye was like that "of a hunted animal"; Jurgis "lived like a dumb beast of burden"; he "lifted up his head and began to sniff the air like a startled animal"; "the people in the streets "swarmed...as busy as ants," etc. (138, 168). Women and children feature frequently as animals in the novel, and one of the only allusions to sexuality is made in animal terms; when Jurgis spends the night with a prostitute the only description we are allowed is, "He went upstairs into a room with her, and the wild beast rose up within him and screamed in the jungle from the dawn of time" (209). In reference to workers, animal metaphors are frequently used to convey a sense of entrapment, such as a worker being "yoked like a horse," Jurgis refusing to "go into that wild beast pen from which he had just escaped," or a worker being stared at by tourists like "some wild beast in a menagerie" (118, 171, 130). Cumulatively these images suggest that industrialism has "lowered" workers to the "level" of animals, a formulation that problematically re-

enforces a hierarchical and binary separation between humans and animals, and thus, by extension, between humans and the rest of the natural world.[71]

This type of animal imagery, a commonplace of naturalist fiction, re-enforces what Buell calls a "discourse of determinism," whereby oppression is seen as a state of nature. Packingtown itself is of course the "jungle," and a "wilderness" (28). The labyrinthine fertilizer works are compared to the "great caves of Kentucky," while the molten metal of the steel mill becomes a "great red snake" (125, 198). This social Darwinist language removes agency and makes exploitation appear inevitable. Thus it is not a wealthy capitalist who exploit Jurgis, it is a "pack of vultures" (171). It is only a short step from removing human agency to removing material agency in general: it is not men who slaughter the pigs but 'Fate': "*it* had swooped upon him...*it* cut his throat and watched him gasp" (37, my emphasis). By removing human agency from the exploitation of animals by man, or the exploitation of man by man, Sinclair constructs a closed system in which there is no hope of struggle. Through its naturalist language the novel thus serves the reactionary function of universalizing, and thus implicitly justifying, the industrial capitalist system.

Behind these disturbing metaphorical conflations lies the specter of the actual animals that inhabit the built environmental of the slaughterhouse, an image that deeply troubles the narrator. Yet if the surface "message" of the text seems to be one of animal rights, the treatment of the animals themselves counteracts this message. As the Rudkus

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[71] As Jurgis continually "runs up against the machinations of corporate systems," writes Alfred Hornung, "his initial active will is progressively reduced to animalistic reactions" (29). This description belies a shortsightedness on the part of the critic as well as the author. Whether or not the animal merely 'reacts,' as an automaton, while the human solves problems and makes choices with an independent will, is never up for discussion. See Derrida, "And Say the Animal Responded?" in Wolfe, *Zoontologies*.

family rides the train into Packingtown, they begin to hear in the distance, "A sound made up of then thousand little sounds…it sunk into your consciousness, a vague disturbance, a trouble […] It was only by an effort that one could realize that it was made by animals, that it was the distant lowing of ten thousand cattle, the distant grunting of ten thousand swine" (27). By placing this statement immediately following a description of the blighted landscape, the narrative creates a train of associations, from "smokey" air and "yellow" grass to the cattle and pigs themselves, thereby subtly categorizing the animals as a kind of living pollution – not just an agent of pollution, but pollution itself (27). It is the animal's animality that has blighted the landscape. Thus, nature has been rendered unnatural (27).

The collective vocalization of these animals "disturbs" the narrator's "consciousness" in part because it represents a lack of order, a breaking of bounds. Soon after we hear of a "chute" that leads from the holding pens into the slaughterhouse with its, "river of hogs, all patiently toiling upward" (35). The fluidity of the hogs, channeled like water, conveys all the more horribly their fleshly nature: "In these chutes the stream of animals was continuous; it was quite uncanny to watch them…a very river of death" (34). Later we hear of animals "breaking lose" and "running amuck" (111). These passages of disturbingly out of control animal movement are on one level a realistic description of the slaughtering process, and an expression of horror at the mass industrial treatment of animals. In this sense the text is ethically sympathetic with the animals' plight. However, the narrator's disturbance is projected onto the bodies of the animals themselves, rather than onto the dangerous surroundings or the intangible system of

profit-based production that creates such horrors. In these moments it is not the industrial system, but rather the unruly hog flesh that disrupts Sinclair's humanist proprieties.

Ultimately, then, while key passages in the novel link the exploitation of labor with the oppression of animals, Sinclair's inter-species environmental ethic is in tension with his gothic descriptions of animals themselves. One might argue that it is not animals *as such* that bother Sinclair; he is simply, and correctly, expressing disgust with slaughterhouse conditions. He is horrified and outraged not at an essential animalness, but at the state of animals under industrial capital. I wholeheartedly agree that this is what the text probably intends – but not what it does. Effectively, the text conflates animals and laboring human bodies, and associates these with the naturalized factory space itself, which is seen as "bad." In this rhetorical slippage the critique of capitalism becomes indistinguishable from a horrified rejection of manual labor and the physical environment. But this is only the first step in the novel's construction of an anti-materialist ideology. The second vital step comes when the text offers an image of "escape" from the messy, animalized world of the urban factory – an escape into "Nature."

The Second Form of Disavowal: Pseudocountryside

If we divide the plot of *The Jungle* into three sections – the downward spiral of urban factory life, followed by an interlude of rural escape, followed by Jurgis's return to the city and "rebirth" as a socialist – then it is interesting to note that of approximately fifty animal references in the text, only about fifteen fall outside of the first section, with

the most extended and memorable passages occurring within the first one hundred pages of a three hundred page book. The work thereby casts an evolutionary narrative – albeit one that is simplistically humanistic, rather than truly Darwinian – as the plot "progresses" from animality to the pinnacle of humanness. Indeed, by the time Jurgis reaches his socialist conversion in the final chapters, not only have all of the animal descriptions been left behind, but so has nearly all concrete description of the surrounding environment or of bodily processes. The animal is thus the abject, an element that cannot be tolerated within the system and must be expunged.

Ironically, the climax of this abjection comes at the moment of Jurgis's entrance into pastoral nature. Near the end of the first section, at the very depths of his financial, physical, and emotional crisis, he witnesses the gruesome death of his wife in childbirth – as the wet nurse comes to him looking "like one of the workers on the killing-beds. Her hands and arms were smeared with blood" (180). Jurgis snaps and, in a fit, flees from his house. Quitting his job and abandoning his children, he hops an outbound freight train. As the train rushes from the city into the countryside Jurgis undergoes dramatic inner turmoil:

> He had been a fool, a fool! He had wasted his life, he had wrecked himself, with his accursed weakness; and now he was done with it – he would tear it out of him, root and branch! There should be no more tears and no more tenderness: he had had enough of them – they had sold him into slavery!...So he went on, tearing up all the flowers from the garden of his soul, and setting his heel upon them...He was going to think of himself, he was going to fight for himself. (203)

Though the syntax of the sentence literally suggests that the "they" who sold him into servitude are the "tears and tenderness"' (his own feelings), the fact that he has just cast off the domestic sphere leads to the not-too-subtle implication that his "slavery" involved

his family as well. By comparing his feelings of weakness to roots and branches and his soul to a flower garden, Jurgis equates emotion and empathy with the physical world from which he must sever his being. And let us not forget that this entire soliloquy takes place as Jurgis rides on the roof of a locomotive, symbolic of industrial mechanization as well as masculine virility. As Scott Derrick aptly puts it, the environments of the city and slaughterhouse are "characterized by threatening fecundity…an anxiety-inducing profusion of life, especially of children…The narrative's implicit fear of a world swarming with disreputable life and the sense of being entrapped by it eventually coalesces into a fear of family life, and, within the confines of the family, misogynistic fear of women" (86). It is just this social and material "entrapment" that is disavowed by a flight to the countryside. At the end of this first section we witness the birth of the patriarchal, egocentric, self-reliant individual, a birth predicated on a violent rejection of the natural environment, the animal, the physical body, the feminine, and the domestic. All of these categories are conflated and posited as impediments to the "pure," disconnected and disembodied white- male individual.

After such a passage it is no wonder that Jurgis's entrance into the hinterland rings hollow. Here Jurgis is said to be a "free man…a buccaneer," full of "wanderlust," and "the joy of the unbound life," for he would "be now his own master" (207). As a tramp Jurgis wanders from farm to farm, sleeping in haystacks and taking occasional jobs as a farmhand, only working long enough to pay off a meal: "Before long there came raspberries, and then blackberries, to help him save his money; and there were apples in the orchards and potatoes in the ground" (207). In this Edenic landscape the food seems to offer itself readily to Jurgis without the post-lapsarian curse of labor. Scott Derrick

calls this the "masculine freedom of rural life" (88). Along the way Jurgis meets other hobos – all middle-aged males who quit their jobs and fled the city – with whom he shares stories and generally has a good time. In short, Sinclair creates a male homosocial paradise – a clean and well-ordered "nature" without much harsh weather, and without the burden of women, children, or animals. Conversely, Chicago is constructed as a polluted space, but also one filled with women, children, animals, and the general messiness of relationships, emotions, sexuality, and bodily contingency. Thus the narrative seeks to clean up the social ills and material contradictions it has represented by erasing materiality all together.

The amazing contradiction of *The Jungle's* rural/urban binary is that *the city is equated with nature and the countryside with culture*. In moving to the country Jurgis must tear nature from his being, because "nature" in this novel is associated with the city. Or, to be more precise, we might say that "nature" appears in both spaces, but whereas in the city it is material nature, in the country nature is ideal and idealized. In *The Society of the Spectacle*, Guy Debord links this sham-nature with the process of urbanization itself: "As it destroys the cities, urbanism institutes a pseudo-countryside devoid not only of the natural relationships of the country of former times but also of the direct (and directly contested) relationships of the historical cities" (125). As Debord recognizes, the modern "countryside" is a product of industrialization and is immanent to the laws of capital. What we think of as the countryside is produced, both physically and ideologically, by those who hold power in the metropolitan center. Thus Sinclair's moment of bucolic escape is truly disconcerting when juxtaposed with the reality of how Chicago was transforming its hinterland.

For a deflation of Sinclair's pastoral one need only look to William Cronon's magisterial work of environmental history, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West*. In a profound application of Walter Benjamin's notion that "there is no document of civilization which is not also a document of barbarism," Cronon calls the industrial infrastructure of modern Chicago a "mausoleum" to the death of the surrounding prairie and northern forest ecosystems. What the structures of urban Chicago represent is the expropriation from the land that made such a centralized metropolis possible: the eradication of tallgrass prairie for wheat farms, the clearcutting of white pine forests for lumber, and the mass slaughter of bison for meat, leather, and sport (with the added economic benefit that their demise left an ecological niche that could be filled by beef cattle). This massive ecological destruction is the reality of "country" outside of Chicago.

But if a mausoleum is meant to remind people of the deceased, in this case it serves the peculiar function of erasing memory. The natural world undergoes a "second death," as its first death is systematically expunged from cultural consciousness. *The Jungle* performs a similar function. Under the guise of an exposé, the novel performs a triple erasure: first, it portrays the industrial factory as a reified "thing," a part of nature rather than of dynamic historical processes; second, it unrealistically portrays a pastoral rural space outside the city; and third, it severs these two spaces conceptually. Even as the plot binds these spaces together, with Jurgis, a figure for both labor and capital, travelling back and forth between the two locations, the text works against any identification of co-dependence between them.

Conclusion: Back to the Factory!

Following his hobo's retreat, Jurgis returns to Chicago revitalized and primed for activism. It could be argued that his temporary escape to the rural is what radicalizes him, as Steven Rosendale suggests when he argues that Jurgis's sojourn in the ecologically healthy countryside allows him to conceptualize an alternative to the pollution and labor exploitation of Packingtown. Here Jurgis's recognition that "the [country stream] was free," leads him to a critical awareness of the commodification of water in the city (204). His newfound ability to map the relationship between spaces enables him to embrace organized resistance to capitalism, such that this rural interlude constitutes the novel's "utopian moment," the fissure in the text that reveals a brief vision of a radically alternative society.

This interpretation of the radical potential of pastoral interludes would seem to be supposed by comparison with Rebecca Harding Davis's *Life in the Iron Mills*, which presents a similarly utopian-pastoral moment in an otherwise bleakly naturalist text. Although Davis's rural escape comes near the novella's conclusion, the frame narrative briefly and subtly returns us to the enclosed space of the polluted urban apartment. Thus both pieces of fiction embed a pastoral interlude within the narrative, effectively challenging the industrial capitalist order otherwise dominating the narrative. One might even say that Sinclair's text is formally more radical, as well as more directly political. For whereas the frame narrative of *Life in the Iron Mills* circumscribes its utopian impulse, the stylistic breakdown of *The Jungle* into the polemical form of socialist manifesto points outside the text to praxis. Yet closer inspection reveals that the pastoral moment serves different purposes in these two texts. In Davis's *Iron Mills* the retreat to

the Quaker farm performs the subversive function of destabilizing the voice of the individual, middle-class frame narrator with an image of collective rural labor and environmental health. But in *The Jungle* the erasure of the material city through an idealized pastoral subsequently shifts the rest of the novel into an abstract register. It is not as if Jurgis comes back to a thickly materialized city. Rather, his return from the countryside initiates the beginning of the novel's disembodied socialist polemic. Through the pastoral retreat the industrial factory (and all that Sinclair conflates with it) has been removed from the text's consciousness.

The upshot of this shift in voice, I believe, is that the text seeks to address a material problem – the socio-economic and ecological exploitation of the factory system – with an idealistic response, a flight into the realm of mind. The category of "nature" is central to this shift, insofar as it is seen as something to be overcome. The argument goes as follows: capitalism has made humans beastly and turned them toward a state of nature; therefore, in seeking equality we must move away from nature and toward culture. The irony here is that in the process of making a social justice argument about pollution, *The Jungle* upholds a nature/culture binary, which, in material and spatial terms is the very binary that creates the problem in the first place! It is capitalism's centralization of the work-force, its draining of humans from the countryside, and its severing of the social metabolism, that has created the very "wilderness" conditions of Packingtown. Rather than seeing the rural periphery as participating materially in this process, Sinclair seeks refuge in the countryside as a static metaphysical Ideal. Thus the central contradiction of the novel: its vehement critique of urban pollution is achieved at the expense of a rhetorical strategy that reinforces the country/city dichotomy and constructs 'Nature' as a

space outside of the socio-economic system. While *The Jungle* is surely an honorable novel about the exploitation of labor, its "aversion to the body" contradicts its radical potential (Derrick, 87). By purging the animal and the body from his social program Sinclair constructs an abstract utopian vision that is ultimately detached from the lived-realities of daily struggle, what Donna Haraway calls the "on-the-ground-work that cobbles together non-harmonious agencies and ways of living" (7). Furthermore, and perhaps most importantly, in its literary abjection of the material space of the factory floor, *The Jungle* also implicitly negates the agency of organized labor. Is it any wonder that the novel ends not with a strike, but an election victory? The conclusion's formal idealism works hand-in-hand with a depiction of a liberal-reformist content that negates grassroots, working-class struggle.

While it would be too much to claim any direct social effects arising from the novel's formal structure, it is interesting to note that the public reception of *The Jungle* led only to very gradualist changes, changes that mainly benefited middle-class consumers. While Sinclair meant for his novel to dramatize unsafe working conditions, the middle-class reading public was much more concerned with the depictions of meat contamination. Within months of the novel's publication, an outcry over unsanitary meat processing led the federal government to pass the Pure Food and Drug Act, which requires ingredient labels on all food commodities. As Sinclair famously lamented, "I aimed at the public's heart, and by accident I hit it in the stomach" (*Jungle* 351)." Thus, although *The Jungle* is frequently praised for its political effectiveness, it is remembered as a text of healthful consumerism rather than of working-class solidarity. Might there be a relationship between the reception of *The Jungle* and its ideology? Drawing a direct

line may be problematic, but the parallels are illuminating. But while *The Jungle* exhibits the failure of a dematerialized radicalism, this very "failure" compellingly reveals the ecological contradictions of the late nineteenth-century novel, contradictions constituted by the novel's position within a middle-class ethos that romantically celebrates an environment it must inevitably destroy to maintain desired levels of growth. The work reproduces at the formal level the conflicted relationship between the reigning ideology and the material world that sustains it. The contradictions of *The Jungle* also reveal how ecological ideas are always susceptible to competing political ideologies. Though Sinclair spent a lifetime railing against fascism, his own back-to-the-land ideas are not inconsistent with an authoritarian outlook. His work thus exemplifies why an ecological politics, in order to be just, must also be a social politics (Biehl and Staudenmaier).

The political promise of *The Jungle* perhaps resides in its compelling image of the slaughterhouse. While the novel ends in pastoral abstraction, the material slaughterhouse haunts the center. This is not to fetishize or romanticize a violent and oppressive capitalist space, a space cruel to both the animal and the laborer, but simply to acknowledge how as metaphor the slaughterhouse calls attention to its own "meatiness" (Little, 14). It is a place where we face our situation squarely and honestly. "In our time," writes Bataille, "the slaughterhouse is cursed and quarantined like a plague-ridden ship," and yet it "bares traces of a remainder resistant to elimination no matter how thorough the inspection" (Little, 15). Although Sinclair attempts to construct a "clean" progressivist text, the slaughterhouse operates as a kind of parasite that infests the novel in the same way the rats of the novel infest the slaughterhouse (Little 49). If Sinclair

naturalizes the slaughterhouse as an elemental force of nature, our analytical technique might rather be to push the image to its ultimate conclusion, to its breaking point: the slaughterhouse as a gargantuan wild animal that eats away the unity of *The Jungle* from the inside out. However, this materialist haunting points not solely to animals, but to the mutual implications of organized labor and biophysical systems: to second nature itself, to those who work in it, and to the stunning problems that these combined agents cause for the capitalist system. These struggles, contradictions, and crises, point to an aesthetic response in the form of ecological utopianism – a desire to re-imagine and remake physical space in a more sustainable manner. It is this response that we will turn to in our analysis of the built environment in the fiction of Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Mike Gold.

CHAPTER VI

RETHINKING THE GARDEN:

CHARLOTTE PERKINS GILMAN'S URBAN POLTICAL ECOLOGY

To what extent was Charlotte Perkins Gilman an environmentalist? At a time when National Parks were being established, the science of ecology was developing, and John Muir was calling for the defense of nature based on its intrinsic worth, Gilman herself, in a voluminous body of fictional and nonfictional writing produced between the 1880s and the 1930s, seems to have had little-to-nothing to say about wilderness preservation. Where she did treat such issues, her position was marred by a shortsightedness regarding ecological processes and an anthropocentric and techno-scientific utilitarianism.

Such is the dominant interpretation of Gilman in the field of environmental literary criticism. According to most of these assessments Gilman illustrates a noble early attempt at an environmental ethic that ultimately fails because it does not fit certain models of social and ecological diversity. These readings consistently isolate images of "gardens" and "parks" in Gilman's work, finding these representations to negatively connote the domestication and control of both women and wilderness by a patriarchal, technocratic civilization. Lee Schweninger's reading of "The Yellow Wallpaper," for example, proposes that "wilderness represents freedom" and "gardens imply confinement," and thus the narrator's desire to escape from a house into a garden merely

reveals her "internal colonization" by patriarchy, insofar as she cannot conceptualize a true escape into the freedom of wild nature (25, 36). Similarly, Janna Knittel argues that the feminist utopian novel *Herland* actually depicts an "ecological dystopia" because the imagined society "is founded on human control over the environment" (55). "An environment made entirely into a garden," Knittel exclaims, "is an ecological travesty."

While more sympathetic critics have identified *Herland* as a precursor to modern ecofeminism, they ultimately emphasize the serious flaws of its sculpted, garden-like world. Susan Stratton's survey of exemplary twentieth-century feminist utopian novels situates *Herland* at the beginning of a teleological progression from an admirable but failed first-wave effort to a more nuanced and successful third-wave position. For Stratton, Gilman's writing falls short because, among other things, it retains too firm a commitment to scientific management. In what is probably the most positive reading, Mary Jo Deegan and Christopher Podeschi claim that Gilman was "a forerunner and perhaps a foundation for contemporary ecofeminism" (19). They conclude cautiously, however, with a section on the "incongruencies" and "flaws" of Gilman's utopian vision, asserting that her "strict control over nature" is ultimately incompatible with such an ecofeminist politics (31).

Each of these critics subtly constructs a narrative of linear progress by which Gilman is assessed retrospectively. The effect of this "Whig" history is to view the author through a very particularly position that itself is taken for granted rather than critically examined. Problematic though Gilman's representations of nature may be, contemporary interpretations of her work say as much about reigning conceptions of "environmentalism" as they do about her work itself. While most of the aforementioned

readings take an ecofeminist perspective, which is understandable given Gilman's prominence in the canon of women's literature, their negative fixation on the "control" represented by the garden belies *a specific strand* of deep-ecological ecofeminism, one which embraces the "intrinsic worth" of nature and rejects anthropocentrism as the root cause of environmental crisis (Merchant, *Radical Ecology*, 91, 109-111). Under this paradigm the human scrutinizing and regulation of the earth's natural processes is equated directly with its exploitation, and the arch villains become the "mechanistic" and "materialistic" thinkers of the scientific revolution (Merchant, *Death* 164-235).

Judged according to an ecocentric framework that posits untouched wilderness as the ultimate goal, Gilman cannot help but disappoint. However, to view Gilman this way is to construct something of an unfair standard, as she was not particularly informed about nor involved with late-nineteenth century wilderness conservation and preservation debates. On the other hand, she was deeply involved in an alternative environmentalism, in the form of factory regulation, sanitation, housing design, park and playground construction, and other progressive public health reforms. If, following the suggest of Robert Gottlieb, we redefine the trajectory of American environmentalism to focus on movements related to industrialization, urban pollution, and human well being, then suddenly Gilman is no longer on the periphery of environmental debate.

Most criticisms of "the garden" in Gilman's writing seem to interpret it as a figure for a hidden, insidious ideology – namely the domination of nature – rather than as a direct comment on *actual* gardens and the material situation of human habitats. Of course, any representation is always something more than its mimetic correspondent. However, an anti-realist critique of gardens as merely the stand-in for a larger "bad idea"

erases an important political aspect of the text, not only because it fetishizes pristine wilderness at the expense of human social justice, but also because it ultimately falls into the trap of philosophical idealism by attributing the power of ecological destruction to "ideas" rather than to material socio-economic structures (Newman 2). As a corrective, I seek to re-historicize Gilman from a cultural materialist and ecosocial perspective, arguing that sometimes a garden is just a garden; which is to say, it is valid to recognize Gilman as a sociologist, activist, and writer of critical realist fiction who intervened directly into debates on human health and urban spatial restructuring.

After providing historical background on Gilman's biographical and literary relationship to urban environmental reform movements, I will analyze representations of the built environment in "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892) and *Herland* (1915). I will conclude by explaining how a *historical* re-orientation of Gilman's literary output suggests a *theoretical* intervention into current environmentalism, shifting the grounds of debate from a mystical deep-ecology to a social and political ecology. I contend that Gilman's depictions of nature are inseparable from her commitment to socialism and labor activism, her critiques of bourgeois possessive individualism, and her involvement in the politics of urban space. While this reading seeks to open up new possibilities for assessing Gilman's work, Gilman herself allows for a critique of the dominant "green" ideologies of our own late capitalist era and the structural unsustainability of our current mode of production.

Gilman's Environmental Politics

As both an activist and an artist Charlotte Perkins Gilman had direct connections to the restructuring of late-nineteenth century urban environments. Part of this no doubt had to do with her commitment to the cause of socialism. Although Gilman is today remembered as a leading first-wave feminist, Mark Van Wienen points out that her early activism was primarily directed to issues of labor, and that her innovative theories of gender arose out of a more general socio-economic investigation of inequality (Van Wienen 603). Many critics have pointed out that Gilman's socialism was of a distinctly "American" reformist mold. She was influenced most directly by Bellamy's Nationalism as well as by the Agrarian Populists, British Fabians, Reform Lamarckians, Debsian electoral socialists, and others arguing for a "gradual" or "evolutionary" shift away from free-market capitalism. There is no evidence that she had ever read Marx, and in several places she openly distances herself from the revolutionary, class-based aspects of his thought. However, Gilman's socialism was certainly to the Left of others in the Progressive movement, and on some issues (for example human reproduction) she was arguably more radical than Marx (Zauderer 152).

Gilman was a philosophical materialist who discovered the roots of oppressive ideologies in the structures of everyday life. In *Building Domestic Liberty: Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Architectural Feminism*, Polly Allen locates her in a "material feminist" tradition that linked the exploitation of women to the built environment (20-25). As a collectivist, Gilman mounted an unrelenting critique of the modern single family home and its relationship to the ideology of possessive-individualism. Taking a cue from utopian socialists like Owen and Fourier, she saw the physical restructuring of

domestic space as concomitant with social change. Thus, Gilman was an "environmentalist" in the broadest sense of the term: her fictional and nonfictional political writing centered on the organization of human habitats.

Gilman's most direct biographical connection to urban reform came in 1895 when she moved to Chicago and spent a year at Hull House, at a time when many environmental justice progressives were in residence. There is evidence that Gilman and Hamilton had read each other's work and conversed on multiple occasions. In a letter from 1898, Gilman wrote, "I sat and talked, pleasantly and profitably, with a fair frail little woman – Dr. Hamilton by name" (Gilman, *Letters* 25). Hamilton, in a letter from the same year, indicates that she had received a copy of Gilman's *Women and Economics* and remarks, "It is very cleverly written and I agree with it" (Sicherman 127). It is likely that through her close contact with Hamilton and other reformers Gilman gained firsthand knowledge of the field of occupational medicine and an insight into the health problems related to urban and industrial environments. Gilman's personal library included maps and papers on urban sociology, as well as a study of tuberculosis in tenement houses (Scharnhorst and Knight 187, 209). Her growing sensitivities to pollution during this formative period of her life are illustrated in her autobiography, in a series of vivid descriptions of Chicago ghettos: "the loathly river flowed sluggishly near by, thick and ill-smelling…everywhere a heavy dinginess; low dark brick factories and gloomy wooden dwellings often below the level of the street" (Gilman, *Living* 184-85). In contrast, she was impressed with the cleanliness and social organization at Hull House, which, according to Carol Kessler, provided the bourgeoning writer-activist with a "model woman-centered utopia" and an inspiration for her later fiction (29, 90).

Explicit discussions of urban environmental conditions abound in Gilman's short nonfictional writing. In "The Smoke Evil" Gilman comments on the pollution resulting from coal burning and proposes that electricity and steam technologies be used to improve cleanliness and health (27). In "Interstate Sanitation" she points to the "public danger" resulting from unclean railways (237), while in "An Unsavory Subject" she addresses the issue of domestic food waste as a way of tackling the larger problem of urban/rural relations under capital (272-73). The class inflections of environmental degradation are made explicit in "Best for the Poorest," an essay on ghettoization in which she exclaims, "If human beings are forced [...] into dark, dirty, crowded tenements, they are inevitably injured by their environment" (260). The essay ends by calling for the construction of playgrounds and urban green spaces. Further alternatives are illustrated in articles such as "The Beauty of a Block," which seek to counteract the "suffer[ing] in body and mind [...] for lack of room, air, sunshine, peace and beauty" that comes with urban overcrowding (69). Here Gilman argues that the main problem is not overpopulation, but rather poorly designed living arrangements – a fixation on isolated, single-family living units has lead to inefficient housing design. Space would be saved and healthful "social contact" would be encouraged by limiting the size of individual dwellings and by communalizing other aspects of life, including kitchens, laundries, libraries, gymnasiums, and parks. In these renderings of mixed-use facilities Gilman anticipates what we today call the "New Urbanism."

In Gilman's book-length sociological studies, such as the influential *Women and Economics*, her environmental orientation shades into a language of biological determinism that was popular among intellectual circles at the time, as when she notes

the "inexorable effect of conditions upon humanity" despite "the power of the individual will to struggle against" them (1). This rhetoric would seem to cast suspicion on her social justice claims, given the historical tendency of the determinist thesis to "naturalize" unequal social relations and justify oppressive policies. Rather than being a strict biological determinist, however, Gilman seems to view organism and environment as involved in a co-constitutive and co-evolutionary dialectic. She is really more akin to what we would today call a "social constructivist" insofar as she sees the environment as malleable. For example, although Gilman enumerates the ways in which the single-family house structures patriarchal relations and forces women into isolation and dependency, she goes on to assert that this space can be *remade* as a way of liberating women. In particular she argues that the elimination of individual kitchens would lead to greater transparency in the regulation of women's labor, as well as better hygiene, dietary health, and sociability. To better improve the quality of life for women, Gilman calls for "an environment" that would "allow of free association among us, on lines of common interest" (*Women and Economics* 314). Ultimately then, her nonfictional writing, when viewed from an urban, social ecology perspective, places her squarely in an environmentalist tradition. Gilman, the philosophical materialist, recognizes that the physical world always partially shapes and conditions human ideas, and thus that the remaking of social space must occur concurrently with ethical and political consciousness-raising.

"The Yellow Wallpaper" and the Garden as Environmental Complaint

As the narrator of "The Yellow Wallpaper" sits confined in her summerhouse, she gazes out a window at a garden with "mysterious deep-shaded arbors…riotous old-fashioned flowers, and bushes and gnarly trees" (134). Throughout the story she walks in the garden to calm herself, and near the conclusion, locked in her attic bedroom, she has visions of her other self, the mysterious woman of the wallpaper, creeping in the garden. While Lee Schweninger concedes that the narrator "does indeed initially see the garden as a place for succor," that "holds the promise of self-fulfillment or liberation," he ultimately finds this to be an illusory freedom and a poor alternative when compared to the mountains and "open country" beyond (33, 35-36). Schweninger claims that the garden represents the "demystification of nature" by the "medical logic" of the narrator's husband John and the doctor S. Weir Mitchell – a romantic formulation that implies that demystification is inherently negative and mystification is inherently positive (31). This set of assumptions overlooks the fact that representations of wilderness have *themselves* long been implicated in capitalist ideology, and it fails to examine the deeper nuances of "control" in the story, including the question of "who" controls "what." While it may be valid to argue that scientific demystification is exploitative in certain situations (for example in the quantification of resources for capitalist profit), it is also true that mystification itself, in the form of obfuscation, has long served to mask hierarchies and oppressive power relations.

To argue that the garden in "The Yellow Wallpaper" is an ideological extension of the patriarchal house is to neglect how forcefully the garden stands in opposition to the oppression that occurs within the house. In contradistinction to the opaque, unruly

mixture of industrial capitalism and arbitrary patriarchal rule that we find in the imprisoning household, the garden presents a positive vision of rational, democratic, feminist control. Thus, to adequately read the text on its own terms, the garden must be compared to its opposite, the built environment of the house, and in particular to the imprisoning bedroom with its gothic wallpaper. If the green garden is an image of community and health, the wallpaper is an image of isolation and disease. Scholars have used biographical evidence to interpret the color "yellow" as symbolic of the narrator's sexual repression, fear of motherhood, and postpartum depression (Knight, 13). Alongside these symbolic interpretations, would it be out of place to note, as Tom Lutz does, that domestic and industrial pollutants are often yellow? In *American Nervousness* Lutz makes the startling historical connection between yellow wallpaper and chemical-induced disease:

> John Harvey Kellogg...warned readers of his *Household Manual of Domestic Hygiene, Food, and Diet* (1882) to stay away from certain kinds of wallpaper because of the use of poisonous dyes, many containing arsenic. The two worst culprits, Kellogg wrote, were red and yellow wallpapers. Children had died scratching at pieces of wallpaper and ingesting fatal amounts of arsenic. (110)

Lutz goes on to suggest that the narrator is "poisoning herself" in her attempt to tear the wallpaper (110). So we could say that in a very literal, non-metaphorical sense, the wallpaper itself is driving the narrator insane. The toxic qualities outlined by Lutz seem to fit with Gilman's description of the wallpaper as "smouldering," "unclean," "old foul, bad" and "dull yet lurid orange," with a "sickly sulphur tint" (133). She also spends a good deal of time describing the smell of the wallpaper:

> Such a peculiar odor, too! I have spent hours in trying to analyze it, to find what it smelled like. It is not bad – at first, and very gentle, but quite the subtlest, most enduring odor I ever met. In this damp weather it is awful, I wake up in the night

> and find it hanging over me. It used to disturb me at first. I thought seriously of burning the house – to reach the smell. But now I am used to it (141).

From epidemiological studies we know that the effects of air pollution are made worse by shifts in the weather (D. Davis). Such phenomena would explain the narrator's comment that the smell is "awful" during "damp" periods. We also know that people who inhabit industrial "sacrifice communities" often grow accustomed to toxic stench, resulting in an inability to see the connection between disease and the surrounding environmental causes. This would account both for the narrator's inability to describe the smell of the wallpaper, and her impression that it doesn't exactly smell "bad."

In addition to being a motif of manmade toxic pollution, Gilman's wallpaper suggests the health problems associated with the growth of mold. Gilman writes:

> The outside pattern is a florid arabesque, reminding one of a fungus. If you can imagine a toadstool in joints, an interminable string of toadstools, budding and sprouting in endless convulsions – why, that is something like it…[T]here are always new shoots on the fungus, and new shades of yellow all over it (139, 140).

Mold was a serious problem in nineteenth-century urban spaces, given the warm, moist conditions and lack of ventilation in tenement houses and sweatshops. Jacob Riis reports that the death of a child in the tenements was "plainly due to suffocation in the foul air of an unventilated apartment" (Riis 11). Given that the underside of wallpaper is an ideal place for mold to grow, what are we to make of Gilman's recurring use of the word "fungus"? While Schweninger sees in the image of the fungus the narrator's fears of uncontrolled wilderness, it could equally connote the toxicity of uncontrolled development. Gilman's coupling of "fungus" with the image of strangulation (the pattern "strangles" the women's heads, "making their eyes white") could be explained by the fact

that airborne toxic mold was known to cause allergic reactions and irritate mucous membranes, causing throat and respiratory problems (141). The narrator's repeated comment that she feels better when the sun shines is consistent with the understanding that dampness and darkness caused mold to flourish. We now know that household mold can even damage the nervous system, and so, again, the wallpaper could literally be contributing to the narrator's mental breakdown, not only through its infuriatingly haunted pattern, but also because of its actual chemical state. This reading adds a missing material dimension to the usual metaphorical interpretation of the story's "crucial point [...] that had the narrator controlled her own physical environment, neither the wallpaper nor forced inactivity would have overcome her" (Sutton-Ramspeck 125). Gilman's description of domestic pollution, combined with themes of confinement and lack of control, make this scene a powerful environmental justice statement.

In opposition to the toxic chaos of the bedroom, an environment filled with pollution run amuck, the garden appears as the redemptive image of a healthy natural space. The narrator's desire to have access to this green space is revealed in her preference for a room "downstairs that opened on the piazza" (132). Instead, her husband John places her in a "nursery at the top of the house." Although it is an "airy room...with windows that look all ways, and air and sunshine galore" there are bars on the windows and the narrator's access to the garden is restricted. Occasionally she is allowed to "walk a little in the garden" and take brief moments of respite from a polluted environment, before being forced to return to her room (135). Viewed in this way, the important question raised by Gilman's representation of the garden is not whether it is "controlled" nature or "wild" nature, but the political question of who has *access* to green space in the

first place. With a bird's-eye-view from her barred window and regulated walking periods, the narrator is granted mere symbolic access to the garden, without physical access to the space itself. She is provided with a nature aesthetic in lieu of actual contact with a healthy physical environment. Thus at the same time that Gilman uses a pastoral rhetoric to extol the virtues of the garden, she also self-consciously critiques the nature-writer's impulse to provide the reader with a vicarious wilderness experience devoid of a socio-economic analysis and a political program.

A major counterargument against any interpretation connecting "The Yellow Wallpaper" to urban, working-class spatial reform would be that the story is set in what is described as both a "colonial mansion" and a "hereditary estate" that makes the narrator "think of English places that you read about" (131). In this context it could be claimed that the garden is nothing but the most stereotypical and nostalgic aristocratic pastoral. This is immediately complicated by the fact that the narrator and John are not aristocrats, but an "ordinary" middle-class couple who "secure" the estate "for the summer" (131). A symbol of landed gentry has been converted into a bourgeois vacation destination. Furthermore, though the narrator describes the house as "beautiful," the grounds are somewhat dilapidated: "the place had been empty for years" due to "legal trouble" and the greenhouses "are all broken" (132). Here Gilman presents an outmoded way of life – an aristocratic order in shambles. In the reference to "English places that you read about," the text self-consciously invokes a mock pastoral. Whereas the neoclassical pastoral typically erases the presence of labor and depicts the country house as a self-sustaining entity, Gilman's story does something a bit different: through the "broken"

greenhouses and empty gardener's huts the very absence of labor becomes a palpable presence. This is a landscape in which the historical traces of labor haunt the space.

Ultimately it is around the issue of labor and collectivity that "The Yellow Wallpaper" makes its most subversive environmental and social justice statements. After all, along with being confined to a toxic space, the narrator is prohibited above all else from two things: labor and social intercourse. She longs for "more society and stimulus," believes that "congenial work...would do [her] some good," and finds it "discouraging not to have any...companionship about [her] work" (131-2, 134). The narrator's impulse is to see the garden not only as a healthy space, but also as a space of sociability and work, in opposition to the private leisure space of the manor. Looking out the window, the narrator conjures a thoroughly peopled landscape, remaking, "I always fancy I see people walking in these numerous paths" (134). It is not just a cleanliness she needs, but also an active social relationship with her environment. By imagining her double, the "madwoman," creeping in the garden, she begins to envision such a relationship, however briefly.

This is not to claim that Gilman deliberately shaped "The Yellow Wallpaper" as an endorsement of urban reform. However, given her direct ties to the settlement house movement in the years leading up to the story's composition, we can detect throughout the text a latent concern with human health and the spatial dynamics of industrialization. The terror of the wallpaper is not the terror of an uncontrolled wilderness that must be tamed with a garden. It is rather the terror of an uncontrolled mode of production – the "wild" system of capitalism that restricts and contains certain bodies even as it flexibly melts longstanding traditions into air. We are told that Gilman's wallpaper, like capital

itself, contains "unheard of contradictions" (133). One of these is the *ecological contradiction* elaborated by James O'Connor, in which the system represented by the wallpaper exploits and destroys the very land and people on which it relies for existence. Gilman seizes upon this contradiction and asserts an alternative image in the haunting female collective and its spatial configuration in the garden – a marker of the faintest utopian glimmerings of an eco-social community. For a fuller exposition of this collectively owned environmental space we must look ahead fifteen years.

Herland and the Garden as Environmental Response

The environmental reform of industrial cities was at the forefront of Gilman's concern in her first attempts to write utopian fiction, when, in 1907 she published four chapters from the unfinished novel, "A Woman's Utopia." The story imagines a Manhattan island of the future, transformed by a civically minded matriarchy into a garden city, with clear skies and pristine harbor waters, thanks in part to the development of electric transportation and the banishment of coal plants. In naming the "great body of women" involved with "municipal suffrage" and "civic management" as the primary agents of such a change, Gilman may have recalled organizations like Hull House and female sanitation and labor activists like Hamilton, McDowell and Kelley (157).

If "A Woman's Utopia" sketches the beginnings of a program for environmental reform, the most developed fictional statement on the issue can be found in the garden cities of *Herland*. In this novel, three explorers – Vandyck Jennings and his friends Terry and Jeff – join a scientific expedition to a remote corner of the globe, where they become separated from their group and stumble upon an all-female civilization in which the

women live communally and give birth without reproduction through "parthogenesis." Gilman uses this mechanical plot as a vehicle to describe an ideal female society through the eyes of the bewildered males, thereby satirizing modern patriarchal attitudes. Terry is a wealthy adventurer and playboy who continually makes threatening sexual advances to the women, while Jeff is a chivalrous poet and botanist who idolizes women "in the best Southern style" with the "gentle romantic old-fashioned notion" that they are "clinging vines" (9, 21). The pair thus embodies twin modes of female objectification. The narrator, Vandyck, presents himself in the "middle" of these two, as a neutral and objective mediator (9). While the reader is clearly meant to identify with Vandyck, his very objectivity soon becomes an object of critique, as we realize that, as a sociologist and taxonomist, he is a stock figure of the masculine, positivist scientist (10).

The characterization of these men is informed by Gilman's background in science and environmental reform. Terry's self-interested desire calls to mind the outright pillaging of natural resources, while Jeff's naïve celebration illustrates the inadequacy of certain romantic responses to development. Although Gilman pokes fun at the sociologist Vandyck, it becomes clear that he represents an alternative to this dichotomy. Knowing that Gilman herself was a sociologist and a staunch defender of scientific method, we should not interpret Vandyck's characterization not as a rejection of science and technology per se, but simply as a comment on the limits of knowledge under a non-democratic system (Deegan). Against the violent exploitation of Terry and the romanticism of Jeff – both perspectives based on a kind of excess – the "control" implied in *Herland's* garden imagery begins to appear in a different light. Through the re-

education of Vandyck, Gilman sublates and transcends this binary, providing in its wake the image of a planned, sustainable society.

The country of Herland is surrounded on all sides by an impenetrable mountain range that keeps settlement from expanding. Because of its geographic confinement the society is forced to develop a zero-growth economy and a sustainable mode of production. As Vandyck surveys the area he observes that, "Here was this little shut-in piece of land where one would have thought an ordinary people would have been starved out long ago" (80). The inhabitants comfortably feed themselves on a limited amount of land without depleting the soil through a system of organic agriculture:

> These careful culturalists had worked out a perfect scheme of refeeding the soil with all that came out of it. All the scraps and leavings of their food, plant waste from lumber work or textile industry, all the solid matter from the sewage, properly treated and combined – everything which came from the earth went back to it....[T]he practical result was like that in any healthy forest; an increasingly valuable soil was being built, instead of the progressive impoverishment so often seen in the rest of the world.

This formulation shows Gilman's familiarity with the emerging science of soil conservation and with what Marx, following soil chemist Liebig, referred to as the "metabolism" (*Stoffwechsel*) between humans and the land-base (Foster 155-163). Nonetheless, critics have taken issue with the fact that there is no "wilderness" within the borders of Herland. Given space constraints, the Herlanders farm wherever possible. Through a "system of intensive agriculture" they completely "reset" the forests "with fruit- or nut-bearing trees" (68, 79). As a result of such engineering, there is no untouched space within the borders of Herland. As Jeff comments, "I never saw a forest so petted, even in Germany" (13) which is perhaps a reference to that country's preeminence in the science of forestry (Harrison, 122-123). Similarly Vandyck describes

"a land in a state of perfect cultivation, where even the forests looked as if they were cared for; a land that looked like an enormous park, only it was even more evidently an enormous garden" (11).

There is a slippage in Gilman's descriptions between a food producing "garden" and a genteel "park" – an aesthetic that extends into her descriptions of the Herland towns and villages, the designs of which are reminiscent of both Bellamy's *Looking Backward* and the urban parks of the City Beautiful movement. Terry points out that the Herlanders have "architects and landscape gardeners in plenty" and the buildings are situated "among the green groves and gardens like a broken rosary of pink coral" (18). Near the center of town the houses lie "grouped among parks and open squares," just as "college buildings stand in their quiet greens," an image that calls to mind the work of designers such as Olmsted, who oversaw the construction of hundreds of neo-Gothic university buildings in the nineteenth century (19). The defining features of Herland's park-cities are their order, efficiency, and cleanliness. The roads, for example, are described as a feat of ingenuity, "sloped slightly to shed rain, with every curve and grade and gutter…perfect" and "dustless as a swept floor" (18, 43). We are told that there is "no dirt," "no smoke," "no noise," in short, "everything was beauty, order, perfect cleanness, and the pleasantest sense of home over it all" (19).

The domestic cleanliness of Herland's park-like nature is clearly problematic from a social justice perspective. Gilman's utopia is devoid not only of pollution but also of minority populations, as the novel depicts an apparently all-white society that is concerned with "breeding out" the "lowest types" (82). It is no secret that Gilman, like others in the progressive movement, held racist and nativist anti-immigration sentiments

and supported eugenics (C. Davis 81-84). Melanie Dawson concludes that the novel's combined emphases on forest management and bodily fitness reflect early twentieth-century "fears of immigration, resistance to ethnic populations, and an interest in preserving what was broadly termed an Anglo-Saxon heritage" (100). In this sense Gilman's healthy gardens could be read as a defense of gentrification and as a pastoral, nativist reaction to an increasingly multicultural city, a claim that is bolstered by the fact that Gilman eventually left New York City for Connecticut because of her displeasure with the city's growing ethnic diversity (C. Davis 82).

While it is certainly important to read the garden as metaphorical of oppressive ideologies, this does not invalidate a reading of the garden *as* garden. That is to say, while Gilman's reference to cleanliness may bespeak notions of racial purity, they may also be read as a direct intervention into debates about urban sanitation. When Jeff exclaims that there is "no smoke" in Herland, this is a direct comment the polluting industries that lowered the quality of life in Gilman's day. At the novel's conclusion one of the women remarks to the men: "in this widespread Other World of yours, there is still much disease, often contagious" (145). This concluding thought emphasizes the text's political intervention into problems of human health. It is curious then, that in her damning environmentalist critique of *Herland*, Jana Knittel focuses so much on the ecologically and politically problematic aspects of the novel (the intensive forestry practices, the extermination of animal species), and so little on Gilman's relationship to worker health movements. To focus only on the flaws of *Herland's* utopian blueprint is to miss a large part of its political engagement. Given that utopias have long been understood not as direct plans for egalitarian societies but as "diagnostic interventions"

that serve the "negative" or "critical" function of exposing current social problems and agitating for change (Jameson, *Archaeologies* 12), it is possible to view *Herland's* gardens as a fictional intervention into the problem of urban public health.

The subversive core of *Herland* is also the key redeeming aspect of the more radical progressive-era reform movements: the fact that in their vision the environment is collectively owned. There is no hierarchy or poverty in Herland, and the aestheticized urban structures – quaintly genteel and Victorian though they may be – benefit all of the community equally (62). As Dawson writes, "Herlanders take great pleasure in public beauty, which they deem more satisfying and more egalitarian than private sumptuousness, and invest their labors in forestry, landscape beautification, and civic architecture rather than individual decors" (Dawson 101). Because the work of the foresters "requires them to move frequently" their labor guards them against "ideas of domestic pride as well as private ownership itself" (Dawson 100). As in much of Gilman's fictional and nonfictional writings, the bourgeois single-family home is seen as a structure that impedes social progress by isolating women and fostering a selfish individualism. In Herland the "domestic" has not so much been abolished, as revised and expanded, so that the entire community is seen as a "home." For example, in describing the Herlander's sustainable agricultural practices, Vandyck muses:

> To them the country was a unit – it was theirs. They themselves were a unit, a conscious group, they thought in terms of the community. As such, their time-sense was not limited to the hopes and ambitions of an individual life. Therefore, they habitually considered and carried out plans for improvement which might cover centuries (79)

It is precisely the Herlander's emphasis on collectivity that gives their society the extended "time-sense" necessary for long-term sustainable planning. Gilman intuitively

understands that under the capitalist mode of production there is a structural necessity for short-term profit increase, and thus that ecological exploitation is not necessarily the result of personal feelings of greed, but is rather built into the organization of such a society. Thus, in the structure of *Herland*, Gilman's environmental reform presupposes her socialism: the positive health effects of her garden world are built upon a critique of capitalist profit and call for collective ownership.

Conclusion: Utopian Gardens and Second Nature

It has been argued that in the age of global capitalism there is in fact "no more nature" – that the totality of the biosphere has been entirely transformed into a recycled second nature (Jameson, *Postmodernism* ix; Shukin 68). No corner of the earth has escaped the effects of human civilization. To those who decry that this is an "attack" on wilderness, we might suggest that this is not so much a prescription for the way things ought to be, but instead a fairly honest and accurate, albeit bleak, description of the way things are. In this light, the literary image of the earth as garden seems less like an ideologically sinister metaphor and more like an engaged response to our contemporary reality. Given the utter "wildness" of the free-market, and the fact that appeals for "escape" into rugged nature fit perfectly within a culture of corporate greenwash, the literary image of the controlled garden may have subversive implications. Rather than seeing science, technology, and regulation as the enemies of a "free" nature, and unwittingly allowing appeals to mysticism to blend into justifications for neo-liberal ideology, a positive reassessment of the garden trope allows for a consideration of responsible, democratic regulation. After all, in one sense humans must "control" nature

in order to survive – that is, we must take in nutrients and energy, and expend waste. Once this is recognized, the real question becomes: how do we rationally manage our metabolic exchange with nature? Capitalism has polluted the earth precisely to the extent that it is structured irrationally and has failed to achieve such "mastery."

Thus Gilman's gardens provide a reorientation of the very language we use to talk about environmental problems. As Vandyck tours the countryside of Herland, he remarks: "They loved their country because it was their nursery, playground, and workshop....[T]hey had made a pleasant garden of it...but most of all they valued it – and here it is hard for us to understand them – as a cultural environment for their children (94). It may indeed be difficult for us to understand Herland's "cultural environment," conditioned as we have been to see nature and culture as separate and to envision the environment as something "out there" that we occasionally then enter into. Gilman reminds us that the environment is something we produce, and that the production of healthy and just natures is our ultimate task. Gilman's ultimate shortcoming, however, is in imagining this "ecotopia" as an enclosed, and in fact, *exclusionary* space. In this sense her work on environmental health dangerously parallels the nativist back-to-the-land rhetoric that equated ecological "rootedness" with white ethnicity. Gilman's racism compromises the social justice potential of her "garden aesthetic." For a more subversive example of such an aesthetic we thus turn to the work of the Jewish Eastern-European immigrant and revolutionary communist agitator Mike Gold.

CHAPTER VII

PROLETARIAN FICTION AND THE NATURALIST-UTOPIAN *AUFHEBUNG*

When William Empson famously remarked that "good proletarian art is usually Covert Pastoral," this was surely not intended as praise (6). Praise, perhaps, for the pastoral, but certainly not for working-class writing. As Empson says: "My own difficulty about proletarian literature is that when it comes off I find I am taking it as pastoral literature; I read into it, or find that the author has secretly put into it, these *more subtle, more far-reaching, and I think more permanent, ideas*" (21 my emphasis). This witty and iconoclastic blast against the strictures of proletkult is also a paradigmatic example of ahistorical reading. For Empson, proletarian fiction succeeds insofar as it fails to fulfill its intended purpose of responding to specific social crises, and instead unwittingly morphs into a more universal and therefore more "important" lament about Man's fall from grace. 'Notice,' Empson seems to say, 'how this novel about industrialization is more fundamentally concerned about a longing for unity with Nature that transcends our particular moment.' Thus realism is translated into myth, and a historically specific literary genre which deals with local, contingent, political struggles is transformed into a timeless commentary on a "natural" situation.[72] Proletarian struggle is

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[72] For a discussion of the ideology of myth see Roland Barthes, "Myth Today" from *Mythologies*: "The oppressed *makes* the world, he has only an active, transitive (political) language; the oppressor conserves it, his language is plenary, intransitive, gestural, theatrical: it is Myth...Bourgeois ideology continually transforms the products of history into essential types...it cannot rest until it has obscured the ceaseless making of the world, fixated this world into an object which can be for ever possessed, catalogued its

simply the latest manifestation of a discontent with the human condition that has always been with us, and, by implication, always will be.

We might say, then, that in addition to praising the pastoral genre, Empson's essay actually performs a "pastoralization." That is, even as it expresses discontent, it erases the potential for political agency by simplifying complex historical particularity into a general problem. My aim is to reverse this trajectory, and, in the spirit of Raymond Williams, perform a reading that politicizes the pastoral impulse. Against Empson's claim that proletarian fiction is actually pastoral in disguise, I will argue that proletarian fiction, as a distinct genre of literature, strategically and self-consciously utilizes the pastoral tradition in committed and self-conscious ways, thus transforming this inherited genre into something new entirely. In the 1930s the genre of "ghetto pastoral" emerged out of earlier traditions of realism, naturalism, utopianism, and nineteenth-century social problem fiction. The ghetto pastoral genre was made up of thoroughly material and place-based texts that explored the relationship between class and issues of pollution, health, natural resource extraction, housing, and access to space – or "environmentalism" broadly defined.

Proletarian Politics and the Emergence of Ghetto Pastoral

The literature of the 1930s constitute nothing short of a "Second American Renaissance." Like the first U.S. literary renaissance, based in New England, this spurt of cultural production went hand in hand with social and political upheaval. "Just as the radical movements of abolition, utopian socialism, and women's rights sparked the

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riches, embalmed it, and injected into reality some purifying essence which will stop its transformation, its flight toward other forms of existence" (149, 155).

antebellum American Renaissance," writes Michael Denning, "so the communisms of the depression triggered a deep and lasting transformation of American modernism and mass culture" (xvi). Denning points out that the political movement known as the Popular Front, organized around anti-fascist politics and CIO union militancy, also included a "Cultural Front" of writers, musicians, photographers, actors and directors, who collectively reshaped mass culture in the twentieth century. Though certain formalist schools may see this period as a kind of Dark Ages between the psychological realism of Henry James and the high modernism of William Faulkner, the painstaking work of critics such as Barbara Foley and Alan Wald has shown that U.S. socialist fiction was not simply a reductive form of literary propaganda that slavishly narrated Soviet ideology, but was rather an innovative, aesthetically complex, and conflicted body of work.

The most significant genre of the proletarian cultural movement was the ghetto pastoral, "the central literary form of the Popular Front" according to Denning (230). These autobiographical tales of childhood coming-of-age amidst inner-city poverty arose from, but also significantly reformulated, traditions of literary naturalism and muckraking journalism. Whereas nineteenth-century naturalist narratives, for example Davis's *Life in the Iron Mills*, had typically taken an "outsiders" perspective, escorting middle class readers "down into the depths" in order to reveal how "the other half lives," proletarian pastorals were largely written by ethnic, working-class tenement residents themselves (230). Well-known writers of mid-twentieth century ghetto pastorals included Richard Wright, Mike Gold, Tillie Olsen, Henry Roth, Daniel Fuchs, Nelson Algren, and James T. Farrell. The work of these realist writers arguably constitutes a subterranean counter-

narrative to the rise of the high-modernist aesthetic, and provides a link between nineteenth-century social problem fiction and the contemporary political activism of "post-postmodernist" social justice fiction.

One of the central features of ghetto pastoral is an attention to the shaping role of the biophysical environment. Characters in ghetto novels, Harold Strauss remarks, are "creatures of their environment" (Denning 250). Space and place are central to community identity in ghetto pastorals: rather than having a linear plot, these works are typically made up of a series of descriptive sketches, and in the absence of an overarching narrative structure, the unifying principle of the text becomes the physical "neighborhood" itself. As a result, the ghetto pastoral frequently emphasizes how exploitation is manifested geographically. Denning calls these works "regional novels" and remarks on their use of the four seasons as a structuring device (247, 233). As I will presently show in more detail, this seasonal structure is not only a figurative organizational device, but also a literal comment on a physical lived reality. We do these works an injustice if we abstract their pastoral elements away into metaphoricity. For the seasonal shifts of the ghetto pastoral cognitively register material, environmental struggle.

Ironically – and this is further evidence that the Cultural Front was no monolith – many writers and critics on the Left rejected the ghetto pastorals because they were not sufficiently historical or political (236). They were too immediate, too personal, and omitted major historical details. Gold, for example, was chided for not including in his representation of early-twentieth century New York City important events like the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire. In a way, criticisms of the genre parallel more generally

Lukács' critique of naturalism examined in Chapter One, in which the narration of a broad social totality is sacrificed to a narrow description of impoverishment.

But what is lost in the absence of socio-historical referents is gained in the registering of *environmental* history. By focusing on the direct, embodied, empirical sensations of human characters and their interactions with the physical environment, these works map the changing relationships between classes as they are manifested in spatial stratification and geographic underdevelopment. These descriptive, naturalistic works thus provide us with an ecosocial knowledge not readily available in other literary texts. They achieve this in part by mobilizing a generic tension between the literary categories of *naturalism* and *utopianism*. According to Denning this simultaneous "degradation and elevation" constitutes the "fundamental generic antinomy" faced by "plebian writers" (250-1).[73] Whereas naturalism is the genre of ultimate limitation, utopianism is the genre of infinite possibility. In the former we have the "irons laws" of a determined and determining nature, with humanity entirely subjected to environmental forces, while in the latter we have the unfettered freedom of the human spirit, and an environment that is entirely malleable and subject to the will of human planning.

Certainly as early as Upton Sinclair the proletarian pastoral juggles these twin impulses: a pessimistic tale of environmental determinism is shot through with the socialist's utopian demand for a new and better world. It is my contention that, by masterfully integrating both of these generic elements, the ghetto pastoral performs what

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[73] Rather than introduce the concept of *utopia*, Denning casts this as an opposition between naturalism and the pastoral itself: naturalism and pastoralism are the "twin temptations of the ghetto tale," and individual works can be plotted on a sliding scale from the most pastoral to most naturalistic (250). I would argue that it works just as well to see this as a tension between naturalism and utopianism that is contained within the pastoral genre.

in Hegelian Marxist terms we would call an *aufhebung*, or sublation, of this supposed antinomy.[74] The trick here is to imagine this not as a "middle ground" between two extremes of naturalism and utopianism, to repeat the cliché that "the truth lies somewhere in between." For while sublation preserves these two terms and suspends them in tension, it also negates and transcends them, pointing to a literature that is not "half naturalism and half utopianism," both something else entirely, a scandalous hybrid that cannot be thought within the parameters of this binary. The ghetto pastoral begins to grasp at this something, informed as it is both by the naturalist's awareness of the primacy of the biophysical environment and the socialist's desire to remake the world through collective human agency. It is a literature that refuses to choose between the natural and the social, or between determinism and freedom.

In this chapter I explore this hybridity through a reading of two works by Mike Gold, the short story "Love in a Garbage Dump," published in 1928, and the groundbreaking novel *Jews without Money*, from 1930. Though working-class ghetto pastorals had existed before Gold, *Jews without Money* was the first widely-read and most influential example of the genre. This work, a template that subsequent writers would both emulate and critique, is also a stunning example of a proletarian treatment of urban nature.

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[74] The usefulness of the term *aufhebung* lies in its ambiguous and contradictory meanings: 1) To preserve, keep, save; 2) To cancel, abolish, destroy; and 3) To lift up, to raise to a higher level. The term describes a process through which a set of concepts are both preserved and simultaneously superseded. A partial approximation of Hegel's point is captured in a statement by mathematician Frank Ramsey: "The truth lies not in one of the two disputed views but in some third possibility which has not yet been thought of, which we can discover by rejecting something assumed as obvious by both discussants" (Inwood 536 n.59)

"Weird Gardens": Trash Heap as Metaphor and as Reality

Like much of Gold's writing, the short story "Love on a Garbage Dump" is semi-autobiographical. In a head note that accompanied the story's original publication in *The New Masses* he writes:

> Bourgeois friends to whom I have related this story cannot believe it. What strikes them as incredible is the basic fact that I ever worked on a garbage dump. They can't understand how anyone would choose such a job. Well, I didn't choose it; it merely happened that I was broke, hungry, without Boston friends, and desperate for any old job.

The head note introduces one of the central concerns of the story, which is to critique the bourgeois ideology of "free choice." Like an early environmental justice advocate, Gold is at pains to show that working class people are not "choosing" to live and labor in polluted spaces; their material determination is the result of socio-economic determination. The story begins at the garbage dump itself, the material site of production (if we can call it that, for ironically, this productive space is also the *endpoint* of previously consumed commodities). The gothic, polluted landscape of the Boston dump, which lies "a few miles outside of town, on an estuary of the harbor," is a "land of slime and mud…blasted and nightmarish like a drawing by Doré" (177-178). The "mountains of rusty tomato cans" and "hills of rotten fish" are interspersed with "valleys" filled with "weird gardens" of trash (178). A "Niagara of old newspapers" cascades past the narrator and a "cornucopia" of garbage flows from the conveyor belt as the impoverished trash-pickers grab "like magpies" (178). Like so many naturalist works before it, this text naturalizes the very pollution it implicitly condemns: the piles of refuse become landforms, with individual items of trash becoming vegetation, and the poor who scavenge in the area are cast as animals inhabiting an ecosystem. In this initial

description the trash seems to be spontaneously growing from the space itself. Initially there is no indication of a socially-produced "waste stream" – no narrative link between the dump and the larger processes of production and consumption. On the other hand, Gold's "weird gardens" do show a vital awareness that the dump is a *biological* site: a space of organic decomposition, decay, growth, and disease. The narrator informs us, for example, that the garbage "gives off smoke as it decays," pointing to the chemical reactions occurring through decomposition (178).[75] Furthermore, the dump's very "weirdness" defamiliarizes the space and suggests that things will become more complicated.

This opening description of the toxic environment fills the narrator with grand apocalyptic and utopian emotions. As he says, "The pervading smoke and odor of the dump made me feel at first as if all America had ended, and was rotting into death....I was young and violent then, and must confess this image of America's extinction filled me with Utopian dreams" (178). Here we have a kind of proletarian rewriting of Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind," in which the wind signals both seasonal change and political revolution. For the young, romantic narrator of Gold's story, the decaying garbage metaphorically stands in for a decaying culture: the immediate dump is also metaphorical "garbage dump of America." From out of this rot the narrator envisions an organic fecundity; from out of the fundamental contradictions generated by this social,

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[75] Interestingly, the narrator also adds that the dump gives off "melancholy smells like a zoo" (178). This phrase points to the chemical reactions occurring through decomposition, and also metaphorically connects this to the imprisonment of animal life. Though the phrase may simply be meant to signal that zoos, like dumps, smell bad (it is unclear what Gold's position was on animal rights), there is an uncanny parallel between the mass production of waste and the "melancholy" feeling of the modern industrial structures that confine animals as an object of the human gaze. Perhaps the text achieves more than it intends.

political, and cultural decay, he imagines the utopian possibility of large scale structural change. However, by casting the story as memory, with an older narrator reflecting on his younger, naive self, Gold implicitly suggests that such "utopian dreams" are in and of themselves insufficient for political change. The narrative then turns directly from the image of decaying garbage to the laborers who manage these facilities: "Working on the dump," he says, "were 30 men, women and pale children…peasants of Italy and Portugal" (178). Like the polluted river of Coketown in Dickens' *Hard Times*, which conjures forth the presence of labor agitation, Gold's image of "weird gardens" summons working-class bodies into the text, thereby suggesting that the laborers themselves will be both the agents and beneficiaries of this apocalyptic "rebirth."

With the introduction of working-class human agents into the scene, the narrative further explores how the dump is a space of economic conflict. We are told that "profiteering ghouls" salvage usable materials and resell them "to the poorest poor," generating profit by taking advantage of both a "free" resources and a destitute population (178). Composed immediately before the emergence of scientific waste management in the 1930s, Gold's narrative prefigures the modern "sanitary landfill," which, as Heather Rogers argues in *Gone Tomorrow: The Hidden Life of Garbage*, was a prime site of ideological struggle (79). Rogers points out that the rise of the professionally managed landfill in the early twentieth century, an attempted "technological fix" for growing overproduction, was also a form of enclosure, as items that were previously repaired and reused by the poor were increasingly discarded in an area that was off-limits to scavengers. As the quantity of waste that Americans tossed out continued its industrially fueled upward spiral," Rogers explains, "and as collection and

disposal grew increasingly consistent, scavenging became controversial and more tightly monitored. At the new sanitary landfill, gleaners were problematic because they got in the way and made a mess, driving up costs" (96).

Waste, we learn, is serious business. The acceleration of the treadmill of production requires that the waste stream itself be tightly managed in the interests of capital. Gold's short story provides a darkly comic parody of these attempts at management, as it depicts a macabre vision of a lumpenproletariat struggling for survival, and in the process providing a visual mockery of a newly "efficient" techno-capitalism:

> I will not be picturesque, and describe the fantastic objects that turned up during a day on this conveyor. Nor will I tell how the peasants whimsically decorated themselves with neckties, alarm clocks, ribbons, and enema bags, mantillas and other strange objects, so that by the evening some of them resembled futurist Christmas trees. It was their mode of humor. As I have said, I was too young and violent then to appreciate such humor. (178)

In one sense this description is clearly unrealistic, as it elides the suffering that would accompany life in this toxic space. But this strange passage also challenges the stereotypical expectation that a naturalistic short story will simply involve maudlin descriptions of suffering. Instead, the passage presents a more rounded and complete picture that includes humor, resistance, and survival. The young narrator, a violent and serious-minded communist who frequently barrages characters with quotes from Marx, cannot appreciate this subversive carnivalesque. He is an example of what Foucault calls the "sad, ascetic militant" (xii).[76] Gold's rhetorical strategy of creating an old narrator who tells of his youthful experience allows the text a degree of critical self-reflection. The narrator's very statement that he "will *not* be picturesque," followed ironically by

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[76] See also Hardt and Negri 411.

just such a description, reveals a conflicted double voice. These critical asides imply that the more "mature" narrator has moved beyond seeing the garbage dump simply as a site of apocalyptic violence and despair, to instead view it as a more complex site of struggle. This emotional and intellectual maturation is situated in the formal movement of the story itself, as the narrator moves physically through space. That is, through his peregrinations, the narrator physically experiences a situation that helps him grow politically.

The impetus for this intellectual journey is adolescent romance. Following descriptions of the dump and its inhabitants, the narrator begins a tale of his longing for two very different women – an aristocrat from Beacon Hill, and a "swarthy," impoverished Portuguese girl named Concha whom he kisses "behind the tomato can mountain" (181). This love triangle introduces problematic binaries of race, gender and class: the narrator is torn between his *physical lust* for a poor, dark-skinned woman and his *spiritual love* for a rich, white woman. These binaries are significant for ecocritics insofar as they are also mapped onto a spatial binary. The narrator meets Concha in the "wooden tenement shacks in the North End," and after he becomes disillusioned with their trysts when she asks him for money, he wanders to Beacon Hill and gazes into the window of the aristocratic girl's parlor. After being accosted by a policeman who tells him that "bums have got no business hanging around this part of town," he returns to the tenements (184). His spatial movement across the city allows him to reconsider his feelings about these two women, and the social situation more broadly: while he initially feels ashamed and angry when Concha asks him for money in exchange for sexual advances, he now concludes that, "You [the aristocrats] are parasites, Concha is the one

who pays for you! It's more honorable to work on a garbage dump than to be a parasite on Beacon Hill. If Concha needed a dollar, she had a right to ask for it! It is that lazy, useless, parasite who plays Mozart who forced Concha so low!" (185). When the story began, the narrator had idealized the cultured existence of Beacon Hill, exemplified in the figure of the aristocratic woman. By the end of the story his ideas about the ruling class are no less complex: a pure longing is replaced with a pure hatred. But the narrator's ideas about his *own* class, represented by Concha, have grown more complicated, moving from a condescending romanticization of the "crazy young clown and melodious lark of our garbage dump," to a material understanding of her motives (181). This newfound awareness has been initiated through a confrontation with spatialized power, in the form of the policeman patrolling the wealthy neighborhood. The narrator's realization that he is himself confined to a toxic landscape as a result of his class status, allows him to rethink his own ideas about the people he interacts with. From a series of essentialist stereotypes about his fellow workers, he begins to see their characteristics as socially and environmentally produced. Thus, it is his growing awareness of environmental conditions that allows his politics to "mature." It is his recognition of determinism that allows him to conceptualize freedom, as he concludes by imagining himself marching to the barricades.

This is not to suggest that the story advocates a full-fledged ecosocial project. It has little to say about the negative health effects associated with toxic exposure, and the narrator's newfound militancy contains no hint of social organization, instead ending on a note of individualized anguish. However, the text's fascinating use of setting speaks to the importance of place in proletarian fiction. Its naturalistic descriptions of

environmental degradation and material determinism, blended with moments of apocalyptic utopian and dystopian longing, its recognition of the shaping influence of environment, interspersed with a call to change that environment, points to the beginnings of a new, hybrid literary form.

Jews without Money I: Environmental Injustice on the Lower East Side

The full implications of Gold's environmentally-oriented utopian-naturalism come to fore in his best known work, *Jews without Money*, a fictionalized memoir of his life as a poor immigrant in New York City, narrated from the first person perspective of his childhood persona "Mikey." The novel opens with a striking memory of place:

> I can never forget the East Side street where I lived as a boy. It was a block from the notorious Bowery, a tenement canyon hung with fire-escapes, bed-clothing, and faces. Always these faces at the tenement windows. The street never failed them. It was an immense excitement. It never slept. It roared like the sea. (13)

The image of the "tenement canyon" establishes the well-worn naturalist trope of the urban jungle. Similar images appear throughout the work: when spring arrives, the people "sniff like hibernating bears" and the prostitutes "chirp like a jungle of parrots" (15-16). While the language of canyons, seas and animals risks naturalizing the built environment, Gold's concern with human emancipation – the constant presence of "these faces" – imparts a utopian, humanist element into the text.

Though not a single ecocritical study has been done on Gold's writing, or on proletarian literature as a genre, *Jews without Money* maps the effects of capitalist urbanization on the land, animals, and people of a local neighborhood. In the opening pages Mikey tells us that "Earth's trees, grass, flowers could not grow on my street; but the rose of syphilis bloomed by night and by day" (15). On one level, this is simply a

strikingly poetic metaphor. But read literally, there is a material connection between the vegetation and the disease; both are biological agents that impact, and are impacted by, the economic underdevelopment of the neighborhood. The space prohibits the flows of some forms of life, and promotes (or is at least indifferent to) the spread of others. The same arrangement that prevents the organic agents known as "trees," "grass," and "flowers" from growing, simultaneously encourages the spread of bacteria. Thus we have a novel that begins to explore the interaction between biology and power.

Jews without Money offers movingly poetic and fairly accurate descriptions of the mid-twentieth century urban environment and its impacts on working-class inhabitants. Midway through the novel Mikey's father begins to suffer dizziness from "painter's disease," an affliction which he tells us, "eats up the painter's stomach and nerves, and poisons his bones (111). Eventually these toxins cause Mikey's father serious kidney and lung problems (244). The father is well aware that he has an occupational disease resulting from his "accursed trade" (112). He is aware then, and by extension so are we, that his wellbeing is directly related to the state of the environment in which he labors.

Aside from the direct effects of pollutants, the novel also explores how the built environment modifies the effects of weather. The four seasons that structure the novel at first appear as merely a pathetic fallacy, mirroring the mood of our narrator. They also offer a kind of allegorical and emotional rising and falling action, as we move from glorious summer boyhood, through the struggles of autumn, to the despair of winter, to the rebirth and potential of spring. But these seasonal descriptions are also meant to be a comment on material realities. The novel relates how tenement dwelling amplifies the effects of weather: for a working-class person, the heat of the summer is hotter, and the

cold of the winter is colder. The changing seasons are not fuel for passive, philosophical reflection, as they might be in a certain nature-writing aesthetic (imagine the romantic poet strolling through the meadow). For the impoverished, the change in seasons means a drastic change in one's material engagement with the world, both in terms of the labor one performs and in the everyday logistics of survival. This is how Gold's urges us to view the seasons, when, for example, Mikey describes tenement families spending summer nights on the rooftop in order to escape the stifling heat of the unventilated apartment: "mothers, greybeards, lively young girls, exhausted sweatshop fathers, young consumptive coughers and spitters, all of us snored and groaned there side by side" (126). Environmental conditions drive people with diseases into close proximity, further exacerbating health problems. And when it begins to rain people must make the impossible choice between going back into the suffocating building or sleeping in the rain.

Though the novel has been criticized by mid-century theorists of proletarian realism for its lack of historical awareness, perhaps this is based on too narrow a view of what counts as "historical." The text does in fact directly reference a historical event, when it mentions that "Delancey Street" is being torn up and "converted into Schiff Parkway" (45). This real-life instance of modern urban planning turned a bustling Lower East Side street into a wide boulevard, in a process not unlike the reactionary *Haussmannisation* of Paris in the mid-nineteenth century.[77] Although the construction ("destruction" would be a better word) initially creates vacant spaces that the children

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[77] For two contrasting views of Delancey Street/Schiff Parkway before and after "renovation" see Watson and Gillon, 138-39.

seize upon for their enjoyment, their games ultimately lose out to the encroaching highway: "Schiff Parkway was an opponent we could not defeat. It robbed us of our playground at last…a long concrete patch was laid out, with anemic trees and lines of benches" (48). The street's modernization has rendered it more productive for the circuits of capital, but in the process has disrupted the local community. Soon after this construction project, Mikey's pal Joey Cohen is killed by a horse car on the parkway (49). The literal death of this friend gestures towards the structural violence of capitalist urban planning, revealing Gold to be a critic of capitalist modernization in the tradition of Lewis Mumford and Jane Jacobs.

Jews without Money II: Gold among the Animals

Animal references are central to the structural critique of Gold's novel. When Mikey says that "it's impossible to live in a tenement without being mixed up with the tragedies and cockroaches of one's neighbors," the "tragedies" here would be "social relations," while the "cockroaches" would be the equally important biological systems (30). The parallel significance of "cockroaches" and "tragedies" metaphorically illustrates the parallel importance of nature and human labor in Gold's worldview. Like Upton Sinclair, Gold employs the familiar worker-as-animal trope, albeit in a more interesting and subversive way. Take the following passage from early in the novel:

> New York is a devil's dream, the most urbanized city in the world. It is all geometry angles and stone. No grass is found in this petrified city, no big living trees, no flowers…just stone. It is the ruins of Pompeii, except that seven million animals full of earth-love must dwell in the dead lava streets. (40)

The relationship between the people and the built environment is presented through a language of "organic" and "inorganic." Flora may be absent in this "petrified"

city, but the streets are filled with the fleshly presence of human animals. If Upton Sinclair uses the human-as-animal metaphor to denote a "lowering" of workers to the level of beasts, Gold uses this metaphor to emphasize human dependency on organic processes. People struggle to retain a necessary connection to the biosphere even amidst an ossified stone world that constricts and perverts this impulse. The built environment is cast as an all-encompassing prison, an iron cage of ideology, and yet there is a utopian element in the persistence of "earth love." New York is not "Pompeii" precisely because human (and nonhuman) bodies continue to flourish amidst this city's rubble. Gold seems to say: 'Of *course* Nature exists in the city, because *people* exist in the city.' Thus the novel refuses a dichotomy between humans and an external 'Nature,' instead exploring the interaction between the social and the biophysical as part of an internal dynamic.

The continuity between human and animal suffering plays an important role in this critique. Humans and animals are both described as "prisoners" of the East Side (140). Descriptions of human misery are framed by the plight of animals. In a disturbing description of the winter months, Mikey relates how the boys discover "a litter of frozen kittens and their mother" while digging a "snow fort" (242). A few lines later we learn that "men and women, too, were found dead in hallways and on docks," and then we immediately hear that "horses slipped on the icy pavement, and quivered there for hours with broken legs, until a policeman arrived to shoot them" (242). Some might object that by sandwiching a statement on human mortality between descriptions of animal suffering, the novel de-humanizes these people and belittles their plight. Another way to consider this, though, is to say that this is not what the *novel* does, it is what *capital* does, and the novel is an attempt to objectively render these de-humanizing practices. On the

Lower East Side, what happens to men and women also happens to kittens and horses. Exposure to the elements in this crowded built environment is a structural condition with which all warm-blooded mammals must struggle.

For while the text clearly means for the reader to sympathize with the plight of animals, at the same time we are cautioned against projecting a sentimental, middle class idea of the domestic "family pet" onto this situation. A scene describing the boys' abuse of a stray cat may reveal the narrator's ethical concern for animal life, but it is amended with the lines, "There were too many cats…these cats were not the smug purring pets of the rich, but outcasts, criminals and fiends…They were so desperate they would sometimes fight a man…We tortured them, they tortured us. It was poverty" (64). Feelings of sorrow for the individual cat are rerouted toward a critique of a system in which cats and children are pitted against one another. Instead of allowing the scene to become a moralistic value judgment on the behavior of the boys or the situation of the cats, Gold turns the vignette into an opportunity for structural critique: as he says, "*It was poverty*."

For Gold, moments of individual, embodied, human-animal identification are always occasions to work outward toward a broader critique. For example, Mikey tells a poignant story of his relationship with an intelligent but neglected neighborhood work-horse named Ganuf. After the horse collapses from overwork and heat exhaustion, his body is left in the street for days, which Mikey takes as an insult to "my kind old friend… my poor old Ganuf" (70-71). Mikey's despair leads him to ask a series of existential questions: "Had God made Ganuf? Then why had He let Ganuf die? And had God made flies? The millions of East Side flies, that drove us crazy in summer, and sucked at our

eyelids, while we slept…Had God made bedbugs?" (71). Here, Mikey is a young Epicurus.[78] His skeptical musings, with their implication of cosmic injustice, question the existence of benevolent God who would allow Evil (otherwise known as "bedbugs") into the world, thus foreshadow his impending loss of faith and its replacement with socialist politics. But the statement is also a materialist critique of his living situation. "Bedbugs," the narrator interjects, "are what people mean when they say: Poverty…Nothing could help [the bedbugs]; it was Poverty; it was the Tenement" (71). There is an implicit understanding that "God" did not create bedbugs, or at least "He" did not create the situation in which these creatures infest Mikey's bed – this was a social creation, an act performed by other humans. Like the situation in which the boys were pitted against stray cats, we are told that "it was poverty." The suggestion that we read "bedbug" and "poverty" as synonyms (like the earlier slippage between the words "tragedy" and "cockroach") points to a profound biopolitical critique. The novel offers a corrective to social constructivist readings which would overlook the importance of biological processes, as well as to ecocritical readings which would ignore the shaping influence of socio-economic processes. In the world of Mike Gold's novel these categories are part of an internal dialectic – one that is inherently conflicted and contradictory.

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[78] Ancient Greek philosopher Epicurus was a philosophical materialist, a naturalist, and a key figure in the development of scientific method. His school of thought, promoted by Lucretius and embodied in Enlightenment rationalism, stands opposed to metaphysical explanations of existence, including Platonic idealism.

Gold's class-conscious treatment of the lived environment comes into sharp focus when he contrasts the joyful outdoor experiences of the neighborhood boys, with the detached "academic" study of Nature they are forced to undergo in school:

> Each week at public school there was an hour called Nature Study. The old maid teacher fetched from a dark closet a collection of banal objects: birdnests, cornstalks, minerals, autumn leaves and other poor withered corpses. On these she lectured tediously, and bade us admire Nature.
>
> What an insult. We twisted on our benches, and ached for the outdoors. It was as if a starving bum were offered snapshots of food, and expected to feel grateful. It was like lecturing a cage of monkeys on the jungle joys. (40-41)

The educational establishment has constructed Nature as an abstract category, separate from the boys' lived experience. They are commanded to admire an idealized Nature from a detached observational position. This interdiction ignores the boys' ongoing dwelling *in* the built environment of the Lower East Side. With living nature all around them in their daily material negotiations with the city, they are nonetheless presented with a "dead" Nature (with a capital "N") circumscribed by the disciplinary regime of the industrial classroom space. But the boys seem to know better, as the naturalistic metaphor of "monkeys" in the "jungle" implies; they have an innate awareness of the city environment that is not accessible from the "cage" of the schoolroom.

Like the earlier comment on the changing seasons, this passage is essentially a critique of a bourgeois reflective consciousness which passively looks out on the world as a static, reified, and alienated object, rather than as something that is actively produced through experience. We might go so far as to suggest that the scene makes an argument about social class and epistemology. In this hierarchical relationship, the teacher metaphorically represents the dominant ideology into which the students are being inculcated, while the students themselves – children of the slum – stand in for the

potentiality of proletarian subjectivity. These boys are able to "know" the environment in a way that the educational establishment is not, because they are a part of the class that actively *produces* this environment through their labor. In Lukács' terms, their status as producers means that they are able to unite subject and object through praxis. Their perceptual potential to understand the socio-ecological situation goes hand in hand with their political potential to remake the built environment.

Jews without Money III: Utopian Socialist Pastoral

Though *Jews without Money* is filled with naturalistic descriptions of pollution and degradation, there is a consistent pastoral and utopian thread that runs throughout the novel, constituted by a series of brief utopian moments that coalesce in the final concluding scene, a scene that asks us to retroactively view these brief moments as a structuring principle of the novel as a whole. Mikey may envision the tenement dwellers sleeping on the roof as a nightmare of "pale stricken flesh tossing against an unreal city," however the older narrative voice, looking back in remembrance, seems to also acknowledge in this scene a utopian moment of solidarity, a vision of a people enduring hardship together (126). He may tell us bitterly that the "East River is a sun-spangled open sewer running with oily scum and garbage" that "stinks with the many deaths of New York" and is filled with "dead swollen dogs and vegetables" (39). And yet, he interposes this description with comments about the great fun he and his friends would have playing in the polluted water, and he ultimately concludes that "the sun was shining, the tugboats passed, puffing like bulldogs…the river flowed and glittered, the sky was blue, it was all good" (39). The language moves back and forth between realistic

descriptions of urban blight and a pastoral nostalgia that casts the landscape in the rosy glow of childhood.

It is this innocent child's voice, filtered through the memory of an older and more critical narrator, which allows Gold to mobilize the pastoral impulse in the service of radical critique. One of the main "traits" Mikey and his gang of boys show is a "hunger for country things," which is not satisfied by the stone and steel of the city (40). "Once," Mikey relates, "Jake Gottlieb and I discovered grass struggling between the sidewalk cracks near the livery stable. We were amazed by this miracle. We guarded this treasure, allowed no one to step on it. Every hour the gang studied 'our' grass, to try to catch it growing" (41). The image is reminiscent of "grass sprouting between the stones" of London in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (20). In both instances the grass reminds us that nature is "alive" beneath the concrete. But whereas in Conrad the sprouting grass is a fearful reminder of the encroaching wilderness, a reminder that this too "has been one of the dark places of the earth," in Gold the grass positively connotes the persistence of organic nature amidst urban blight (18).

The pastoralization of urban decay continues, as the vacant lots and piles of garbage become, in the eyes of the children, play spaces in which to compete at sports and act out their imaginative games of pirate and explorer. At one point the narrator's wistful feelings for the space break all bounds, as he directly addresses a garbage pile, in a romantic and rhapsodic apostrophe:

> Shabby old ground, ripped like a battlefield by workers' picks and shovels, little garbage dumps lying forgotten in the midst of tall tenements, O home of all the twisted junk, rusty baby carriages, lumber, bottles, boxes, moldy pants and dead cats of the neighborhood – everyone spat and held the nostrils when passing you. But in my mind you still blaze in a halo of childish romance. (46)

In this passage the narrator freely admits a romanticization and childhood nostalgia. The "acres of empty lots" near Delancy Street are a "fairy-tale gift to children," since "one sickened for space on the East Side, [for] any kind of marsh or wasteland to testify that the world was still young, and wild and free" (45-46).

The pastoral heart of *Jews without Money* is located, however, in an important central chapter entitled "Mushrooms in Bronx Park," in which Mikey's family spends a Sunday picnicking in the park. Gold sets up a stark contrast between the pastoral park itself, and the severely overcrowded conditions – "crowded with people to the point of nausea" – on the train that takes them north to the Bronx (149). This juxtaposition more forcefully sets up the entrance into the park as a release from the constriction of the overpopulated urban space. Though Mikey's mother is at first reluctant to leave their neighborhood and travel to the park, the journey turns out to be an especially moving experience for her, reminding her of the childhood she spent in the fields and forests of a Hungarian village (148). When they step off of the train the mother remarks, "It's a pleasure to see green things again…I am glad we came" (150).

As we might expect, this turns out not to be a simple and innocent "escape" into nature. For a class-conscious pastoralist like Gold, the movement into urban green space comes with an awareness of property and power. As the family enters the "big lonesome country" of Bronx Park, the narrator tells us, "We looked for signs: KEEP OFF THE GRASS. There were no signs. So we walked into the middle of the field, and found a wonderful tree. This tree we made our own" (151). By "making it their own" the narrator simply means that the family eats lunch under the tree, experiencing its presence.

The family's claiming of the space through use implicitly challenges the notion of privatization suggested by the "Keep off the Grass" signs. While the passage gestures towards a feeling of "freedom" in nature, it also exudes a sense of surveillance. It is only because "there were no signs" that the family is able to enjoy this space, and so their pleasure remains circumscribed by the capitalist state. Mikey's father warns the mother that she could be arrested for taking off her shoes, and so she looks around "to see if no policeman was near" before removing her shoes and stocking to walk in the grass (150, 152). Lurking behind the pastoral enjoyment is a kind of paranoia – an awareness that this healthy, rejuvenating space is built upon accumulated capital and associated with class privilege. By simply taking a stroll in the country these slum dwellers are transgressing class boundaries.

When they do enter the forest, however, the transformation in character is palpable. Mikey observes that his mother's face suddenly "looked younger," as she is inspired to take the children on a mushroom-hunting expedition (153). With her "sharp nose," she leads the children through the forest, and warns her daughter, Esther, that some mushrooms will be poisonous and must not be picked without proper knowledge, a knowledge that these children lack because, as she remarks, they are "American" (153). When Mikey asks if the mushrooms will come "on strings" his mother exclaims, "Those are the grocery store mushrooms…Ach, America, the thief, where children only see dry, dead mushrooms in grocery stores!" (153). In contrast to the common "American mushrooms" that are grown "in cellars" and taste "like paper," a "real mushroom" she says, "should taste of its own earth or tree." The mother reminisces that as a child in Hungary she could identify birds, snakes and edible berries, and could venture twenty

miles into the forest without getting lost (155). She ends by exclaiming that she is "so happy in a forest" and adds "You American children don't know what it means!" (55).

The repeated contrast between Hungary and America reverses the standard polarity of American wilderness and developed Europe. Far from "Nature's Nation," the United States is here equated with urbanization, while the "Old Country" of Eastern Europe is pastoralized. Adam Meyer points out that this is a common motif (nearly a cliché) in the immigrant novel, and with good reason, given that the turn-of-the-century immigrant experience often involved rural peasants traveling to an alienating city – a movement from agrarian to industrial way of life (162). In the mother's forest transformation, and in her harsh words for the "American" children, we have essentially a nostalgic criticism of capital from the standpoint of a pre-capitalist peasant formation. This is not in any way to detract from the force of such a critique: the mother's statements reveal how the division of labor has alienated the children from their land base, rendering them unable to identify edible plants, and thus made them helpless. It is a powerful statement on food politics and consumer culture. However, by locating this back-to-the-land Jeremiad in the midst of an urban park, on the edge of a highly industrialized city, Gold seems to gesture toward the futility of the mother's critique. We know that knowledge of birdsong and a nose for mushrooms will not help Mikey survive on the East Side. The pastoral thus serves merely a negative function. Through contrast, it illustrates the depth of the problem. By conjuring a green memory it reminds us of what has been lost and what is at stake. But ultimately, Gold seems to intend the reader to see it as only a beginning. The Bronx Park scene, placed almost at the center of the

novel, crystallizes a utopian impulse that emerges intermittently throughout the work, but that only fully emerges in what Michael Denning calls the novel's "scandalous final page" (248).

Jews without Money ends with the image of a garden. In the final chapter, Mikey, now a teenager, quits school to search for employment, eventually finding, and then losing, work in a factory that is "suffocating with the stink of chemicals" (306). In desperation he becomes a gang member, contemplates suicide, and adopts various coping mechanisms, from alcohol to what he calls a "crazy religious streak" (309). Gold sets these up as false alternatives to Mikey's conversion to socialist politics, when he encounters "a man on an East Side soap-box" who speaks of "a world movement" to "abolish poverty" (309). The scene is even more abrupt than the conversion of Jurgis Rudkus in Sinclair's *The Jungle*. Mikey's teenage existence is condensed into one chapter, and the introduction of socialism constitutes literally the last dozen lines of the novel, which end:

> O workers' Revolution, you brought hope to me, a lonely, suicidal boy. You are the true Messiah. You will destroy the East Side when you come, and build there a garden for the human spirit.
>
> O Revolution, that forced me to think, to struggle, to live.
>
> O great Beginning! (309)

One could argue that these final lines are not even the "conversion" itself, but simply the catalyst that will *become* the conversion, in a "to be continued" formulation. By ending with the word "beginning," the novel points beyond its own pages to the material world. It seems to enact aesthetically the philosophical critiques leveled by Marx and Engels against the utopian socialists, who would presume to build ideal societies in the imagination, without beginning from real-world situations. 'Revolutions are not made *in*

novels,' Gold seems to say, 'novels only point to the conditions through which revolutions may become a possibility.' Gold's refusal to represent the culmination of his conversion, or even, arguably, the conversion itself, is a kind of fidelity to the Marxist idea that a future communist society would be unrepresentable, indeed unimaginable, until there existed the conditions of possibility for such a thought. This is not to argue against the utopian impulse as such – as Marxist theorists from Ernst Bloch to Fredric Jameson would vigorously instruct – but simply to realize that the utopian moment is a very real, but not-fully-focused glimmering, as Jameson says, "like a diseased eyeball in which disturbing flashes of light are perceived" (*Valences* 612).

For Gold's conclusion does insist on an apocalyptic/utopian prediction that is cast in environmental terms: the Workers' Revolution will "destroy the East Side" slum and build in its place "a garden." As Adam Meyer explains, Gold seems here to "reintroduce the pastoral," and yet "he is actually pointing to a new way of reaching such an idyllic world: the communist movement to which he wholeheartedly, although quixotically, dedicated the rest of his life" (169). In brief moments throughout the novel, as well as in these final lines, Gold imagines the communist alternative to the industrial-capitalist city in pastoral terms. Gold appears to be something of a hippie Marxist: more William Morris than Edward Bellamy. He imagines the ideal future as a greenhouse rather than as a machine. This seems only natural for someone whose main contact with industrial civilization was being forced to grow up in a polluted slum, bathing in the East River. What makes Gold's rhetoric significantly different from the wealth of romantic anti-capitalist and even anti-civilization sentiments in American literature is that this ending does not involve an *escape from* the Lower East Side into an external pastoral, but instead

a *reconstitution* of this space *as* pastoral. Mikey does not want to leave his neighborhood and go "back to the land," he wants to stay put and *green* the Lower East Side, with the collective help of a revolutionary humanity. The novel thus deserves a central place in the emerging canon of environmental justice literature.

Jews without Money ends with a call for the oppressed to see their built environment not as "natural" – in the sense of fixed and inevitable – but rather to see it as a malleable space that is produced by human labor and thus can be remade in more healthful ways. This utopian call is only achieved, however, through recognition of the conditioning of human well-being by the stability of ecosystems. Here is the productive paradox in Gold's formulation: only by accepting the primacy of "nature" (in the biophysical sense) can the people de-naturalize, and progressively re-naturalize, the built environment that surrounds them. The recognition of humanity's dependence on the biosphere is a prerequisite to the freedom of imagining a truly sustainable society. This freedom-in-determinism is encapsulated in the naturocultural image of the East Side garden: a fully humanized nature and a fully naturalized humanity.

CHAPTER VIII

AFTERWORD: ECOCRITICISM AND THE NEW CRITICAL REALISM

> The conception of capital is admittedly a totalizing or systemic concept: no one has ever seen or met the thing itself; it is either the result of scientific reduction (and it should be obvious that scientific thinking always reduces the multiplicity of the real to a small-scale model) or the mark of an imaginary and ideological vision. But let us be serious: anyone who believes that the profit motive and the logic of capital accumulation are not the fundamental laws of this world, who believes that these do not set absolute barriers and limits to social changes and transformations undertaken in it – such a person is living in an alternative universe.
>
> Fredric Jameson, "Cognitive Mapping"

This dissertation has sought to trace an alternate history of literary environmental protest, one rooted in realistic fictional representations of working-class labor and urban-industrial pollution. One of the most important contributions of "first wave" ecocriticism, emerging as it did amidst the poststructural orthodoxy of the late 1980s, was to defend mimetic representation against its wholesale dismissal, and to reconsider the positive political contributions of a realist aesthetic. This defense was made most eloquently and influentially by Lawrence Buell in *The Environmental Imagination* (1995). The shortcoming of this intervention in my view, and in the view of Buell himself, was its sole focus on the creative-nonfiction genre of "nature writing" and that genre's representations of "wild" spaces (*Writing*).

Unfortunately, the increasing "theoretical sophistication" of ecocriticism's second wave has, for many, meant a turn to anti-foundationalist theory and anti-referential

aesthetics. Scores of essays seek to correct the naiveté of the first wave by drawing parallels between deep ecology and poststructuralism. Today the "greenness" of a text is measured by its ability to "deconstruct" our humanist hubris, humbling our anthropocentric ambitions before the mystery of a fragmented text and an unknowable, all-encompassing Gaia.

There is, however, another type of "second wave" ecocriticism: an environmental justice criticism that takes a humanist approach to ecological crisis, examining the built environments of cities and suburbs, farms and factories, indeed anywhere people "live, work and play" (Novotny). This criticism often retains the first-wave commitment to mimetic representation, extending this perspective to overlooked physical spaces and literary genres. As an example of such an environmental justice criticism, this dissertation has examined the intermingled depictions of nature and labor in nineteenth and early twentieth century urban and industrial fiction, texts which utilize a realistic aesthetic in an attempt to both chronicle and criticize the emerging industrial regime. I do not suggest that these texts were innocently non-ideological, or that they ever did achieve such a direct and transparent representation. But the *attempt* itself, in all of its failures and contradictions, bespeaks a utopian impulse to remake the social and biophysical world in a more just, healthy and sustainable manner. An analysis of these historical texts provides the foundation for a new kind of ecocritical aesthetic: a critical realist environmental aesthetic that carries implicit theoretical and political commitments.

Fredric Jameson's concept of "cognitive mapping" supports theorizing such an aesthetic. In his influential essay Jameson calls for a "new aesthetic," which "does not exist" and which he is "not even sure how to imagine" (347). What we know from his

outline is that this aesthetic would be didactic – it would have a directly pedagogical function – and it would be representational. It would address, critique, and resist the epistemological crisis of late capitalism; namely, the fact that a global division of labor has rendered the totality of the social system unrepresentable. For Jameson, the fragmented and interiorized aesthetics of modernism and postmodernism are *symptoms* of a crisis of understanding. As he says, the "structural coordinates are no longer accessible to immediate lived experience and are often not even conceptualizable for most people" (349). Or, as a student of Jameson's, Christian Thorne, explains, "Under conditions of political and economic globalization, which entangle individuals in social networks of ever more extended intricacy, established narrative techniques break down or come to seem patently false" ("Green"). Narrative theorists in this tradition, harkening back to Lukács, posit that the decline of the sprawling realist novel was a great aesthetic and *political* loss, as it ceded an objective understanding of the social totality. Implicitly, Jameson demands a new realist tradition: vast, epic tales with interlocking layers of plot that cross divides of race, class, gender, nationality and history, and in so doing, help us narrate, and thus understand the Totality of capitalism. Jameson insists that this does not mean *returning* to a nineteenth-century aesthetic, as if the answer were to once again write novels like Balzac (348). Because the social reality has changed so too must the literary form. And yet, this nineteenth-century aesthetic may well contribute to the development of a future realist aesthetic, precisely because of striking historical similarities between the era of politically-engaged realist literature, an era of imperial expansion and unfettered monopoly capitalism, an era of extravagant wealth and utter poverty, and our own "Second Gilded Age" of neoliberal globalization.

A similar impulse to document and mobilize against oppression through aesthetics informs the anthology *What Democracy Looks Like: A New Critical Realism for a Post-Seattle World.* For editors Cecilia Tichi and Amy Lang, the anti-globalization movement galvanized by the 1999 WTO protests signaled the revitalization of a left social movement focused on social class and economic disparity. The "palpable sense of social urgency" which accompanied this movement necessitated a shift in what literary scholars read and teach, a "critical internal audit of the established canons in light of the new conditions imposed by late twentieth- and early twenty-first century-century neoliberalism" (20). Tichi and Lang urgently but optimistically foresee a revival of "civic melodramas" and "narratives of social disclosure," a "new critical realist canon" of explicitly political, documentary works that directly treat poverty, corruption, and exploitation at the level of content – a disparate and eclectic range of texts that all address structural violence by "summoning us to the overt issues on the page" (11, 20). We might think here of films by Spike Lee and Michael Moore, or investigative narratives by Eric Schlosser, Barbara Ehrenreich, and Michael Pollan. As with second-wave feminist efforts to recover neglected women writers, this critical re-canonization changes not only what we read, but how we read.

This "how" might best be described as a "new materialism," which would in some sense be a revitalized "old" materialism. Tichi and Lang offer the example of *Moby Dick*, which they suggest should be read not simply for its metaphysical symbolism, but also its direct treatment of labor conditions in the whaling industry. My dissertation has been guided by such an approach, which I call "literal reading," recovering for interpretation such spaces as the western Massachusetts forest of Melville's "Tartarus,"

the Virginia factory town of Davis's *Iron Mills*, the Midwestern hinterland of Sinclair's *The Jungle*, and the garden of Gilman's "Yellow Wallpaper." Again, this is not to suggest that ecocritical interpretation ought not be as attentive to signifier as signified. We do not have to innocently imagine that words touch the thing-itself in an unmediated and transparent way. But the urgency of our socio-economic and ecological crisis demands that we take seriously fiction's attempts to render the material world intelligible, seeing its very constructedness as an aid to communication rather than an impediment.[79] Furthermore, if we resist the notion of a self-contained prison house of language, and accept that words themselves are materially connected to the rest of existence, then we must agree that the best "formalist" analysis is a *historicist* analysis that accounts for the conditioning of language by extra-textual socio-economic and biophysical structures.

The significance of these critical realist approaches to ecocriticism should be readily apparent. It is no coincidence that Jameson calls his project a "spatial analysis of culture" or that he uses the word "mapping" to describe this new cognitive aesthetic. It is also not accidental that Tichi and Lang base their literary paradigm shift toward a new critical realism around a protest event that was thoroughly *spatial* in its tactics and *environmental* in its content.[80] Just as there is an affinity between the worldviews of ecology and historical materialism, there is an accompanying affinity between

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[79] See Phillip Fisher's *Hard Facts*, which Tichi and Lang cite approvingly, and which I find makes a similar argument.

[80] The 1999 WTO protests were "spatial" in the sense that many of the tactics involved blocking entranceways and reclaiming street. They were "environmental" in the sense that for the first time, ecological issues were placed alongside issues of socio-economic justice. One is reminded of union workers marching side-by-side with environmentalists dressed as sea turtles.

environmental writing and realist aesthetics. As Carol Wolkowitz argues, "Critical realism can help to prise apart the binary between linguistic leakiness and the 'really dirty'...the binary between naturalistic and social constructionist views of dirt and dirtiness." (15). A critical realism allows us to return, in some measure, to the "earth itself" without proclaiming ourselves "anti-theoretical" and rejecting an important half-century long tradition of hermeneutic suspicion.

If the nineteenth-century concern over class conflict and labor conditions does not provide a precisely articulated socio-ecological alternative to the wilderness environmentalism of Thoreau and Muir, it certainly reveals a subterranean current of concern that emerges in progressive era movements for sanitation and industrial reform, in Marx's theorization of the "metabolic rift," in the eco-socialism of writers from Williams Morris to Raymond Williams, and in present-day class-based anti-toxics and environmental justice struggles. Narratives of reflective nature appreciation to the contrary, the primary relationship between humans and the natural world is a relationship of labor. Labor is the way humans relate to their surroundings, the way they regulate their metabolism.[81] The rise of industrial capitalism, the division of labor, and the wage system profoundly changed how a majority of humans relate to nature. The era in which "Nature" became fetishized as an object of leisure activity and aesthetic appreciation, was

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[81] This line of argument will be criticized by some as "workerist" in orientation, as an uncritical valorization of the laborer as revolutionary subject. However, as a theoretical intervention into an environmental philosophy that has largely abjected the categories of labor and class, this is a necessary corrective. Furthermore, "labor" is not used here as a limiting category (proletariat as white, muscle-bound male), but as an expansive category: labor in the sense used by the young Marx of the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, as a word for the fundamental process by which humans interact with each other and with their land base.

also the era when most people's direct control over their own interactions with nature, through labor, was severed. Humans became "alienated from nature." But this alienation from nature was more fundamentally an alienation from the means of production, and thus from their own selves. Such an alienation cannot be overcome in the pages of literature, and thus the ecocritic's call to "reconnect" us with nature through art is misguided. Alienation can only be overcome in material practice, through a radical reorganization of labor on a communal and cooperative basis. If literature has an ecocritical purpose, it is to map our socio-ecological predicament, providing us with a guide for objectively understanding our current crisis. In doing so, such literature may act as a catalyst for change, keeping alive the utopian belief in the possibility of new productions of nature. All around us we see such utopian glimmerings: in community gardens, in environmental justice struggles to keep toxics out of low-income neighborhoods, in indigenous uprisings against resource extraction, in tree-sits and monkeywrenching operations, in bicycle commuters, in the sustainable design of the "New Urbanism," in grassroots collaborations between laborers and environmentalists. But as Theodor Adorno says, *Es gibt kein richtiges Leben im falschen* [Wrong life cannot be lived rightly].[82] Ultimately, the only hope for decent human and nonhuman coexistence on the planet Earth lies not in this or that reform or micro-political decision, but in the vision of a *truly* sustainable and democratic society, one that exists, by definition, beyond the profit motive and its accompanying treadmill of destruction.

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[82] *Minima Moralia*, 39.

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