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# Ecologies of addiction in nineteenth-century American literature and culture

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Dissertation

**ECOLOGIES OF ADDICTION IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY  
AMERICAN LITERATURE AND CULTURE**

by

**ERIC BJORNSON**

B.A., Southern Connecticut State University, 2014  
M.A., Boston University, 2016

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Approved by

First Reader

---

Maurice Lee, Ph.D.  
Professor of English

Second Reader

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William H. Howell, Ph.D.  
Associate Professor of English

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Major Professor: Maurice Lee, Professor of English

**ABSTRACT**

While moral and medical perspectives have dominated addiction discourse for the past two centuries, addiction specialists and theorists have recently developed ecological alternatives that cross disciplinary boundaries and treat the addicted person holistically. My dissertation excavates a deep history of ecological thinking on addiction in nineteenth-century literature and culture. Writers such as Charles Brockden Brown, Rebecca Harding Davis, Charles Dickens, Frank J. Webb, and Lydia Sigourney countered traditional moral conceptions of intemperance by materially linking mental and physical states to environmental conditions, social structures, and economic systems. In doing so, they combined multiple discourses—ranging from psychology, political and domestic economy, proto-thermodynamics, and physiology—to envision a new ecological model of selfhood that challenged Enlightenment notions of self-mastery and liberal subjectivity. This process included not only the pathologization of addiction but the emergence of a networked self.

My dissertation moves chronologically from the Early Republican period to the eve of the Civil War; it focuses on novels (particularly sentimental genres), but also includes poetry, sermons, journalism, and visual artifacts. Chapter 1 explores the

intersections of mind, republican politics, and intemperance in the writings of Brown and Benjamin Rush. Chapter 2 contends that lady drunkard narratives by Sigourney and others troubled domestic ideology by embedding addiction in the spousal dynamics, traumas, and medical practices of the home. Focusing on Davis and Dickens, Chapter 3 investigates how agency and addiction pathology were reimagined in the toxic urban-industrial environments of the nineteenth century. Chapter 4 argues that Frank J. Webb and the African American press resisted early racialized formations of addiction by depicting drunkenness and white supremacy as conjoined pathologies. The ongoing opioid crisis in the U.S. underscores the importance of not just engaging these early histories to better understand the construction of addiction, but the necessity of balancing networked complexity with the lived experience of those who suffer. I believe that literature is well suited for this task, as it affords psychological, somatic, and social approaches that neuroscience and medicine cannot handle alone.

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## Introduction

Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Rill from the Town Pump" (1837) stands out among the first wave of temperance writings following Lyman Beecher's landmark *Six sermons on the nature, occasions, signs, evils, and remedy of intemperance* (1828). The titular pump, giving a speech on temperance to a group of townspeople gathering for a drink on a hot day, champions the purifying power of water, "the unadulterated ale of father Adam," which, it claims, can remedy most, if not all, of the many ills besetting humankind.<sup>1</sup> Like proponents of the then growing teetotalism wing of the temperance movement, Hawthorne's voluble pump portrays alcohol as a root of poverty, sin, and disease. To "cool earth's fever," the pump declares, people had to wage "moral warfare," following and promoting the virtues of cold water, letting its "deep, calm well of purity," untainted by the "turbulence and manifold disquietudes of the world," cleanse and guide them.<sup>2</sup>

While Hawthorne's later writings, such as *Blithedale Romance* (1852), are much more critical of reform, this short and entertaining variation on the temperance speech highlights a cornerstone of both temperance ideology and later American drug policy—the view that drugs and drug use are the *source* and not the *symptom* of problems at the individual and societal level. This view blends easily with longstanding moral or choice-based perspectives on addiction. Like Nancy Reagan's "Just Say No" campaign against illicit drugs from the 1980s, nineteenth-century temperance pledges often presented alcohol as inherently bad and reduced drug use to a matter of choice between right and

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<sup>1</sup> Nathaniel Hawthorne, "Rill from the Town Pump," *Twice Told Tales* (Boston: American Stationers Co., 1837), 202.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, 209-210.

wrong, health and sickness, and life and death. The 1845 membership pledge for the Cleveland Marine Total Abstinence Society, for example, offers only two options for signees. There are the “FRUITS OF TEMPERANCE,” including “Domestic comfort” and “Favor of God,” or the “FRUITS OF INTEMPERANCE,” which promise the “Ruin of families” and “Eternal Misery.” The choice seems glaringly obvious from a Christian or cost-based analysis perspective, yet the nineteenth century slowly and unevenly came to recognize and even theorize that there are forces at play in life other than faith, reason, or moral calculation, and not everyone is equally positioned to make the “right” choice.

The longtime drunkard’s capacity to choose, for one, was called into question by new pathological perspectives on addiction in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century. While Benjamin Rush and other reformers saw intemperate people as initially free to choose spirits, their wills were increasingly weakened by repeated acts of intoxication, which dramatically, even permanently, debilitated their bodies and minds.<sup>3</sup> By the end of the nineteenth century, the American Association for the Study and Cure of Inebriety would attempt to systematize addiction medicine with a clear description of the disease, its etiology, and possible treatment measures.

While moral and medical perspectives would dominate addiction discourse for two centuries, some nineteenth-century writers and thinkers—not unlike some addiction specialists and theorists today—developed ecological alternatives that crossed disciplinary boundaries and treated the addicted person more holistically. My dissertation

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<sup>3</sup> In *The Mighty Destroyer Displayed* (1774), Antony Benezet describes this breakdown of will as “slavery,” a metaphor that would gain popularity in the early nineteenth century (8).

excavates a deep history of such ecological thinking on addiction in nineteenth-century literature and culture. Writers like Charles Brockden Brown, Rebecca Harding Davis, Charles Dickens, Lydia Sigourney, and Frank J. Webb countered traditional moral conceptions of intemperance by materially linking mental and physical states to environmental conditions, social structures, and economic systems. In doing so, they combined multiple discourses—ranging from psychology, political and domestic economy, proto-thermodynamics, and physiology—to envision a new ecological model of selfhood that challenged Enlightenment notions of self-mastery and liberal subjectivity. This process included not only the pathologization of addiction but the emergence of a networked self, a self whose agency is modulated by larger fields of connection in a changing world.

While early medical histories of addiction, including E. Morton Jellinek's highly influential book *The Disease Concept of Alcoholism* (1960), portray American temperance as opposed to medical models emerging in the nineteenth century, critics like Harry G. Levine and Michael Warner have argued that temperance played a significant role in defining addiction as a disease characterized by an irresistible compulsion to drink.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, writers, reformers, and doctors of the antebellum period discussed in

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<sup>4</sup> Jellinek's views were reflected in other histories of addiction. In "The Medicalization of Alcoholism: discontinuities in Ideologies of Deviance" (1985), Robert E. Tournier points to the major figures often considered as the originators of the pathological model: American doctor Benjamin Rush, Scottish Physician Thomas Trotter, Swedish physician Magnus Huss, and French physician M. Gabriel. These men, according to Tournier, were a minority of modern voices that presented an alternative to temperance ideology and moral conceptions of alcoholism. Harry G. Levine's "The Discovery of Addiction" (1979) was one of the first pieces of scholarship that challenged the anti-medical thesis and linked the development of the disease concept to temperance. More recently, scholars like Michael Warner and Susan Zeiger have drawn attention to the role mass cultural movements like temperance played in constructing addiction as an

detail the complex physiological mechanisms of what was then termed “intemperance,” ranging from alcohol-induced faculty derangement to heritable predispositions to drink. Rather than viewing the issue solely as a medical phenomenon, however, nineteenth-century writers addressed the physical pull of social and economic forces on the minds and bodies of drinkers, whose actions, desires, and thoughts were driven by the environments they inhabited. My dissertation argues that early nineteenth-century addiction narratives often presented the self as a material, reconfigurable, and networked mind-body system, one necessarily moored to and acting on feedback from social environments. In other words, the self is not a stable, hierarchically organized entity in which an immaterial mind mediates and controls all physical actions and behaviors. Mind and body are rather chiastically linked, mutually shaping, as are self and environment.<sup>5</sup>

“Ecologies of Addiction” stresses the importance of a developing *oikos* (body-family-world relationship) in early nineteenth-century conceptions of addiction. This kind of ecology opposes a Cartesian or dualistic model of selfhood in which the mind operates independently of the material world—an idea undergirding naive accounts of addiction that fault the drunkard for failing to use reason-backed volition in accordance with moral

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irresistible physical compulsion to drink. See Zeiger, “‘Mankind Has Been Drunk’: Race and Addiction in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*,” in *Inventing the Addict: Drugs, Race, and Sexuality in Nineteenth-Century British and American Literature* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008), 61-97 and Warner, “Whitman Drunk,” in *Publics and Counterpublics* (Cambridge: Zone Books, 2002), 269-290. For one of the most recent reappraisals of the role of Protestant reform culture in histories of medicalization, see Katherine A. Chavigny, “‘An Army of Reformed Drunkards and Clergymen’: The Medicalization of Habitual Drunkenness, 1857–1910,” *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 69, no. 3 (2014): 383-425.

<sup>5</sup> Here I am drawing from Merleau Ponty’s conception of the chiasm as described in “The Intertwining—The Chiasm,” *The Visible and the Invisible* (Northwestern University Press, 1968), 130-155.

principles. To think ecologically is to interrogate the complexities of embodiment and the ways that humans are enmeshed in social institutions, economic systems, industrialized urban spaces, and domestic spheres. Those intersections help us to see the “disease” of addiction not just as a localized abnormality in the individual body or mind but as the product of relational dynamics that cut across multiple levels of human experience. Ultimately, my purpose is not to annihilate moral agency from addiction studies, but to chart how it was reimagined, negotiated, and resisted in literary texts centered on intoxication. I also want to explore how such texts, in rethinking addiction, reconceptualized the status of the self.

### State of the Field

Like its definition, the historical origins of addiction are highly contested. Most scholars agree that addiction is a modern condition, a product of changing social, political, economic, and technological conditions over the past two or more centuries. While some addiction historians go deep into the origins of modernity—David T. Courtwright, for one, reads transoceanic commerce and empire building during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as drivers of a “psychoactive revolution” that would make potent drugs available to all classes of people across the modern world—much of the debate centers on the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>6</sup> Levine’s Foucauldian reframing

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<sup>6</sup> David T. Courtwright, *Forces of Habit: Drugs and the Making of the Modern World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001). See also Kristen D. Burton, *Intoxication and Empire: Distilled Spirits and the Creation of Addiction in the Early Modern British Atlantic*, (PhD Diss., University of Texas at Arlington, 2015).

of the topic, “The Discovery of Addiction” (1978), argues that the modern concept of addiction as a progressive disease originates in late eighteenth-century medicine.

Timothy Hickman complicates Levine’s account by arguing for a distinction between the disease concept and “addiction,” as the latter contains both “volitional” and “juridical” senses that would serve as different classifications for substance users following a newly emergent threat of *narcotic* addiction during a turn-of-the-century “cultural crisis of modernity.”<sup>7</sup> For Marc Redfield and Janet Farrell Brodie, the “modern recasting of addiction as pathology” emerged not only from the rise of a disciplinary society dedicated to the control of “deviant” bodies, but also a “society of consumption in which identities and desires become attuned to the seriality of commodity production.”<sup>8</sup> Susan Zeiger’s excellent literary genealogy of addiction in the nineteenth century interrogates the ideological and cultural work that a concept like addiction performs over time, especially how addiction metaphors crystallize around discourses of race and gender in the contexts of slavery, eugenics, and medicine. These studies demonstrate that addiction, though partly bio-chemical in nature, is not an objective disease entity that can be plucked from the shifting tides of culture and history. Medicine does not give us a transparent, value-free concept of addiction following what Matthew Warner Osborn calls a Whiggish history of medical progress—one marked by increasing objectivity and

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<sup>7</sup> Timothy Hickman, *The Secret Leprosy of Modern Days: Narcotic Addiction and Cultural Crisis in the United States, 1870-1920* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007), 9; 4.

<sup>8</sup> Janet Farrell Brodie and Marc Redfield, *High Anxieties: Cultural Studies in Addiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 4. For an account of the legal and subcultural dimensions of modern addiction discourse, see Jill Jonnes, “The Rise of the Modern Addict,” *American Journal of Public Health* 85, no. 8 (1995): 1157-162.

methodological sophistication in the identification of disorders—but is itself part of a larger landscape of meaning-making in American culture, including literature.<sup>9</sup>

Like Levine and others, I regard the nineteenth century as a pivotal transition point in a history of addiction, yet my dissertation is not so much focused on customary shifts from moral to medical models, behaviors to identity categories. Instead, I excavate an early history of ecological perspectives on addiction that resist the narrow moral and medical conceptions that have dominated debates about addiction for more than two hundred years. These perspectives do not reject what many consider hallmarks of addiction—e.g., compulsion, persistence in use or behavior despite harm, craving and/or dysphoria following abstinence, etc.—but rather rethink or extend common etiologies by addressing social and environmental contexts as mediators and drivers of addiction.

This view on addiction parallels the insights of many contemporary psychologists and doctors. With the highly influential “Rat Park” experiments of the late 1970s, psychologist Bruce Alexander challenged the common notion of pharmacological determinism—the idea that drugs alone caused addiction—and underscored the role of environment and social interaction as shapers of addictive behavior.<sup>10</sup> He would eventually claim in *The Globalization of Addiction* (2010) that addiction, whether chemical or behavioral, is an attempt to adapt to social dislocation caused by the

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<sup>9</sup> Mathew Warner Osborn, *Rum Maniacs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 3.

<sup>10</sup> To be clear, it is important to recognize that some drugs can be very addictive, such as methamphetamine and synthetic opioids. Yet, in many cases, the properties of drugs are not enough to explain why someone uses and continues to use these substances despite harm. Not only that, the notion of inherently addicting and dangerous drugs has fueled moral panics and played no small role in motivating the war on drugs. Take crack, for example, which was often portrayed as turning people into addicts with just one hit.

unchecked expansion of free-market economics.<sup>11</sup> Six years after the start of “Rat Park,” Norman Zinberg would offer his drug, set, and setting model, which ventured beyond pharmacology and personality traits to analyze “the power of the social setting, of cultural and social attitudes, to influence drug use and its effects.”<sup>12</sup> Social theories like Zinberg’s would influence scholars in the decades to come, but would not significantly impact popular addiction discourse and public policy during America’s escalating war on drugs.<sup>13</sup> Neurobiological theories, meanwhile, would gain traction in the 1990s and help shape a new definition of addiction as a chronic relapsing brain disease with the aid of advanced neuroimaging techniques, well-funded research studies, and the support of agencies like the National Institute on Drug Abuse and the American Society of Addiction Medicine.<sup>14</sup>

Doctor Gabor Maté recognizes the value of current neurobiological models of addiction, which can teach us much about the circuitry and brain structures underlying craving and compulsion, but he argues that “we cannot reduce human beings to their neurochemistry.”<sup>15</sup> Maté thus outlines a more holistic, and humanizing, “ecological

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<sup>11</sup> Bruce K. Alexander, *The Globalization of Addiction: A Study in Poverty of Spirit* (Oxford UP, 2010), 3.

<sup>12</sup> Norman E. Zinberg, *Drug, Set, and Setting: The Basis for Controlled Intoxicant Use* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), x. In the introduction to *Crack in America: Demon Drugs and Social Justice* (1997), Craig Reinerman and Harry G. Levine emphasize the importance of Zinberg’s theoretical perspective in understanding criminalization as a “harm-maximizing context for drug use” in America (8).

<sup>13</sup> In “The Discovery of Addiction,” Levine also describes a “postaddiction model,” which “does not look primarily at the interaction between individual and drug, but at the relationship between individual and social environment” (53).

<sup>14</sup> For a brief account of the rise of neuroscientific conceptions of addiction in the 1990s, see Julie Netherland and Helena Hansen, “White Opioids: Pharmaceutical Race and the War on Drugs That Wasn’t,” *BioSocieties* 12, no. 2 (2017): 217-38.

<sup>15</sup> Gabor Maté, *In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts: Close Encounters with Addiction* (Berkeley:

perspective,” according to which:

the addiction process doesn’t happen accidentally; nor is it preprogrammed by heredity. It is a product of development in a certain context, and it continues to be maintained by factors in the environment. The ecological view sees addiction as a changeable and evolving dynamic that expresses a lifelong interaction with a person’s social and emotional surroundings and with [their] own internal psychological space.<sup>16</sup>

By framing addiction as a “process” and “lifelong interaction,” Maté resists any essentializing notions of addiction as a discrete identity or pathology. This ecological turn has significant implications. For one, it suggests the erroneousness of punitive legal approaches to drug policy. Secondly, it encourages an interdisciplinary approach that addresses a complex phenomenon that cannot be isolated to genes or other objects bound within carefully delineated fields of study. Thirdly, it challenges an enduring model of liberal subjectivity that has supported moral views of addiction for centuries. Yet ecology, I claim, is not an entirely new way of understanding addiction. My project shows that the social and ecological thinking of Maté, Alexander, Zinberg, and others has a deeper history in nineteenth-century American literature and culture, and I believe that we can profit from the early insights of writers into both selfhood and addiction.

Literary studies is well positioned to discover and map the links being made between different epistemic domains in the nineteenth century. For one thing, literature

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North Atlantic Books, 2010), 30. Maté is not alone in making this claim. Thomas Fuchs also challenges neurobiological reductionism in *Ecology of the Brain: The Phenomenology and Biology of the Embodied Mind* (2018). Other critics complicate the disease model of addiction by reevaluating the role of choice. See Hanna Pickard, "Addiction and the Self," *Noûs* 55, no. 4 (2021): 737-61; Berridge, Kent C. "Is Addiction a Brain Disease?" *Neuroethics* 10, no. 1 (2017): 29-33; Sally Satel and Scott O. Lilienfeld, "Addiction and the Brain-disease Fallacy," *Frontiers in Psychiatry* 4 (2013); Gene M. Hayman, "Addiction and Choice: Theory and New Data," *Frontiers in Psychiatry* 4 (2013).

<sup>16</sup> Maté, 360.

serves as a nexus point for multiple discursive fields that co-construct concepts like addiction. A novel like T.S. Arthur's *Ten Nights in a Bar-room* (1854), for example, draws from physiognomy, psychology, political economy, revolutionary rhetoric, the cult of domesticity, and agrarianism to sketch an epidemiological model of intemperance, one that necessitates political intervention and prohibition. By studying a narrative like Arthur's, we can see how concept-formation—like addiction—is itself a dynamic process with multiple, interlocking points of mediation. Secondly, literature is an imaginative arena in which concepts are more fully and impactfully realized through the psychologically rich and detailed experiences of characters in their lived social environments. To put it another way, if a strict moral account of addiction centralizes individual decision-making in a supersensible domain of mind, then literature can situate that mind in the body and that body in complex networks that shape and delimit human agency. The same goes for individually based medical accounts. Like the cinematographic technique of deep focus, literature, at its best, can give us a clear view of the foreground, middleground, and background of addiction over the course of a narrative. It can push us from a shallow moral aesthetics—e.g., the easy, automatic judgments imposed on addicted homeless people in notorious neighborhoods like Boston's Mass and Cass—to textured narratives of struggle and adaptation in response to changing environments and traumas within the home and larger society.

To trace these linkages in antebellum literature and elaborate their significance for current views on addiction, I draw from network theories, new materialism, family systems theory, and current recovery discourse. Bruno Latour's actor-network theory, for

one, presents actors and networks as co-constitutive, which means that actions like substance use arise through entanglements between humans, technology, social practices, and other types of mediators, rather than through human intentionality alone.<sup>17</sup> New materialist Jane Bennet’s notion of “distributive agency” also challenges strong theories of moral responsibility and encourages us to look across shifting assemblages between human and nonhuman actors to identify the sources of harmful outcomes.<sup>18</sup> With more attention to narrative and aesthetics, Victorian literary critic Caroline Levine lays out some important theoretical groundwork for literary understandings of networked systems, particularly as they bear on form, which can be helpfully applied to sentimental and social realist narratives of addiction. Family systems theory, meanwhile, offers an excellent lens for analyzing substance use in the nineteenth-century home. I use the work of influential psychologist Murray Bowen and concepts like homeostasis and circular causality to understand the intergenerational and spousal dynamics that underly addiction and complicate nineteenth-century gender ideology. While Alcoholics Anonymous largely focuses on the psychology and behavior of the individual alcoholic, rather than social or physiological etiologies, it also offers a powerful networked vision of recovery and has strong ties to nineteenth-century temperance.<sup>19</sup> For that reason, A.A. serves as a point of comparison and reference for early views of recovery. All these sources and

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<sup>17</sup> Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-network-theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>18</sup> Jean Bennet, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), 37.

<sup>19</sup> In *Not God: A History of Alcoholics Anonymous*, Ernest Kurtz argues, for instance, that A.A.’s “threefold disease” model—mental, physical, and spiritual—emphasizes the interconnectedness of different domains of human life (202).

movements help me to demonstrate the vital importance of connection during every phase of the addiction process.

In presenting its own history of addiction, this dissertation participates in conversations with scholars from numerous disciplines both inside and outside of literary studies, including cultural studies of addiction, social and political histories of temperance, and the medical humanities. “Ecologies of Addiction” is primarily geared toward eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literary scholars and seeks to enrich and redirect critical conversations about addiction and subjectivity during a significant period in American history. Nevertheless, my findings have relevance for historians of medicine, intellectual historians, cultural studies scholars, and even clinicians working in the field of addiction. My first chapter, for instance, offers a thick intellectual history of addiction in the late eighteenth century, tracing the philosophical and medical coordinates of a relational theory of human behavior based on Enlightenment-era associative psychology and physiology. My second chapter gives deep background for contemporary addiction studies and clinical practices, as I unearth early antecedents of family systems theory and trauma-informed approaches in female temperance literature. With its focus on mid-nineteenth-century theories of air and pollution, my third chapter offers insights for environmental historians, while chapter 4 analyzes an archive of textual artifacts that contribute to cultural histories of black temperance and the fraught relationships of race and addiction. There are many opportunities for interdisciplinary work in the field of addiction studies, and I hope that my project makes some generative connections between different approaches to and perspectives on the topic.

At this moment in American history, doctors and policy makers are rethinking treatment procedures and preventative measures for addiction in response to what has been termed the “opioid epidemic.” Unlike the crack epidemic from the 1980s, which was met with militarized force and punitive measures that disproportionately impacted communities of color, the opioid epidemic has encouraged conversations about safe-injection facilities and expanded use and access to medications such as buprenorphine for the treatment of opioid use disorder. From a medical humanities perspective, this reframing is not the result of an inevitable advancement of the sciences in treating disorders, nor is it only about an alarming rise in deaths from overdose. Racial demographics, digital media (e.g., footage of people overdosing on the street, on buses, or in their homes), reckless prescription practices, and failed national policies like the war on drugs are but some of the driving forces behind the current model of addiction. My project highlights a similar epistemic shift in the nineteenth century—a process that can reveal how complex conditions like addiction are not static and objective entities (despite their empirically verifiable bio-chemical bases), but rather phenomena that constellate and are reconfigured by, among other discourses, literary genres.

The ongoing opioid epidemic underscores the importance of not just engaging early histories of addiction to better understand the construction of addiction, but the necessity of balancing networked complexity with the lived experience of those who suffer. I believe that literature is well suited for this task, as it affords psychological, somatic, and social approaches that neuroscience and medicine cannot handle alone. Such complexity is vital since, as Daniel Z. Buchman and other researchers have claimed,

medical framing can “inadvertently [identify] addicted persons as neurobiological *others*,” given the abnormality of their brain functions.<sup>20</sup> The shift to person-first terminology in current medical discourses may help preempt such othering, but names alone cannot change deeply rooted attitudes toward addiction.<sup>21</sup> And even when new terminology and practices destigmatize the condition, the question remains of who really benefits from the shift.<sup>22</sup> This dissertation shows that narrative, more so than a change in terminology, has the potential to radically reshape how we think about and treat people with addiction, and nineteenth-century narratives can offer some much-needed guidance for compassionate and critical inquiry into this phenomenon.

### Chapter Descriptions

My dissertation moves chronologically from the Early Republican period to the eve of the Civil War; it focuses on fiction (particularly sentimental genres), but also includes poetry, essays, sermons, journalism, and visual artifacts. My first chapter explores early network models of addiction in Benjamin Rush’s medico-political theories and Brown’s novel *Ormond* (1799). Rush situates intemperance within a Republican-influenced medical theory of sympathy that takes behavior to be determined by social, political, and

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<sup>20</sup> Daniel Z. Buchman, Judy Illes, and Peter B Reiner, “The Paradox of Addiction Neuroscience,” *Neuroethics* 4, no. 2 (2010): 71.

<sup>21</sup> For a guide to terminological shifts for medical care providers, see “Words Matter – Terms to Use and Avoid when Talking about Addiction,” *National Institute on Drug Abuse*, November 29, 2021.

<sup>22</sup> For more on the intersection between race and newer medical conceptions of addiction, see Netherland and Hansen, “White Opioids: Pharmaceutical Race and the War on Drugs That Wasn’t”; Stephen Knadler, “Opioid Storytelling: Rehabilitating a White Disability Nationalism,” *Journal of American Studies* 55, no. 5 (2021): 1098–1124.

psychological processes exceeding the intentionality of a subject. Yet for all the radical potential of Rush's sympathetic view on addiction, his reform strategy of coercive medicine and habit-building remains detached from the real external pressures that can motivate one's desire for alcohol. By looking to Brown's *Ormond* (1799), I show how literature narrativizes the networked processes of addiction, adding social and psychological complexity to Rush's theories. Through characters like Mr. Dudley and Sophia's mother, Brown resists the rational, mechanical control that Rush prescribed for the stability of a republican body politic following the Revolution. Brown thus offers a fuller understanding of addiction, though whether he provides the foundations for a more perfect union is unclear.

Chapter two investigates three rarely discussed temperance stories that distinguish themselves for their detailed representation of middle- and upper-class female drinkers—the anonymously penned *Confessions of a Female Inebriate* (1842), Sigourney's "Louisa Wilson" (1848), and Maria Lamas' *The Glass* (1849). Unlike male-centered narratives that viewed drunkenness as a product of public influence, these stories see addiction emerging through spousal dynamics, family traumas, and medical practices of the home. Though these texts undermine the fantasy of a fully enclosed, morally insulated private sphere, they spotlight the very real psychosocial effects of domestic ideology for female substance users who bore (and still bear) a disproportionate stigma for their excess. Read in conjunction with representations of female drunkards in the popular press, and informed by the disparate gender dynamics of the liberal subject, the figure of the drunk gentlewoman shows how gendered responsibility supervenes upon the more laterally-

oriented networked self that I am tracing in nineteenth-century America.

My third chapter investigates the urban-industrial ecologies of addiction described in Davis's *Life in the Iron Mills* (1861) and Dickens's *Bleak House* (1852). By mapping the linkages between industrial labor, air pollution, class oppression, liquor, and bodies, Davis's story helps to reframe intemperance as an over-determined process with multiple, interlocking parts that are intimately related to industrial capitalism and its transformation of the American landscape. For Davis, intemperance is not an intentional act or even a lack of will, but a mental and physical adaptation to an industrialized labor system powered by ethnic workers. Davis's picture thus provides a stark refutation of politically naïve teetotalers who viewed liquor as the primary cause of social and class-based problems in the early nineteenth century. Similarly, Dickens traces the imbricated institutional, social, and physical networks that subtend addictive behavior and its effects, as in the case of Crook, whose body combusts and circulates through London neighborhoods like an industrial waste product. At the center of those networks is the court of Chancery, a bureaucratic monster that drives the obsessions and drains the energy of its claimants and their families. Just as Davis sees intemperance as a byproduct of industrialism, *Bleak House* represents addiction in a thermodynamic register, complicating earlier temperance views that saw alcoholism as a waste of energy. Together Davis and Dickens provide a deeply theoretical account of being wasted.

My fourth chapter maps the emergence of a turbulent, contested racial discourse of addiction in the antebellum period. In temperance culture, intoxication and addiction often assumed the form of a racialized white male subjectivity—drunkenness as descent

into blackness and addiction as slavery—a rhetorical strategy that reinforced notions of white supremacy and black inferiority. Frank J. Webb’s *The Garies and their Friends* (1857) and African American periodicals like *Freedom’s Journal* offer counternarratives of addiction that focus on the precarities faced by the free black community and that link drunkenness with white supremacy. Webb’s novel challenges biological accounts of racism, presenting white supremacy as an epidemical disease characterized by and causing intemperance in white communities. In doing so, Webb draws from discourses of colorphobia and temperance to limn an unwieldy national pathology that threatens free Blacks and permeates almost every corner of white society.

## Chapter 1: The Matter of Minds and Morals: Networked Addiction in the Work of Benjamin Rush and Charles Brockden Brown

### Intro

In the treatise *Inquiry into the Effects of Ardent Spirits* (1784), medical doctor and revolutionary Benjamin Rush gives a particularly vivid example of applied associative science. He describes how he “tempted a negro man, who was habitually fond of ardent spirits, to drink some rum (which I had placed in his way) and in which I had put a few grains of tartar emetic. The tartar sickened and puked him to such a degree, that he supposed himself to be poisoned. I was much gratified by observing that he could not bear the sight nor smell of spirits, for two years afterwards.”<sup>1</sup> Similar to chemically-based negative reinforcement strategies still used today, including the drug Antabuse, Rush desired to overwrite the pleasurable associations of drink with the nausea and vomiting produced by tartar, which would annihilate “the influence of all those circumstances with which the recollection and desire of spirits are combined.”<sup>2</sup> The unnamed black man became a test case for a materialist and associative science that viewed behavior as an entanglement of mental states, physical impressions, and environmental influences. While this science proposed a more radical, networked understanding of human behavior—one which challenged both the essentializing features of racial discourses of the Enlightenment and the rationalism of moral philosophy—Rush’s reform enacts the same dualisms and hierarchies used to justify the slave economy: white minds controlling

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<sup>1</sup> Benjamin Rush, *Inquiry into the Effects of Ardent Spirits upon the Human Body and Mind* (Exeter, N.H.: Printed for Josiah Richardson, 1819), 34.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* Antabuse sensitizes the body to ethanol—producing headaches, nausea, sweating, among other symptoms—for those who consume alcohol while taking the drug.

black bodies. This example demonstrates the vexed character and theoretical complexity of Rush's contributions to early medical theories of intemperance, which represent the emergence of new ways of thinking about the relationship between bodies, minds, social forces, and the agency of liberal subjects.

Historians of addiction have often credited Rush as one of the first doctors to reframe habitual alcohol consumption as a "disease." While Rush was not the first to speak in medical terms about the physical mechanisms of what was then termed "intemperance," Harry G. Levine claims that "Rush organized the developing medical and common-sense wisdom into a distinctly new paradigm," one which broke with more traditional, moral-based evaluations of drunkenness.<sup>3</sup> Rush was indeed a pioneer in the medicalization of alcoholism, but rather than looking at his work only as a nascent disease model, this chapter sees his theories as a different methodology for understanding addiction, one that resides in the interspaces between what some scholars have taken to be discrete, autonomous domains of knowledge, such as medicine and literature, science and religion, philosophy and social practice. Rush, in other words, may have helped to pathologize habitual alcohol consumption, but he also practices a network methodology at odds with the increasing specialization of the sciences and medicine that occurred in the nineteenth-century. A syncretic thinker, like David Hartley before him, Rush's body of work spotlights the intersections between bodies, minds, environments, politics, and culture to the point that diseases are not just localized abnormalities in the individual

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<sup>3</sup> Harry G. Levine, "The Discovery of Addiction: Changing Conceptions of Habitual Drunkenness in America," *Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment* 39, no. 1 (1978): 151.

body or mind but stem from relational dynamics that cut across multiple levels of human experience and require manifold disciplinary approaches.

In defining intemperance in relational or, more specifically, “sympathetic” terms, Rush drew from Enlightenment discourses of sensibility, moral psychology, and associationism, which he infused with his own Republican and Christian commitments. Through these interlocking frameworks, Rush provides a view of the addicted subject that complicates the liberal ideal of the autonomous, rational self.<sup>4</sup> While the Lockean self, backed by dualistic models of mind-body relations, overlooked the power of environmental influence, sympathy brought into focus the constitutive enmeshment of subjectivity within conditions that expressed themselves in the operations of the human mind. Not just an emotional connection or capacity to feel and respond with intention to the world, Rush’s sympathy stressed how thought and action causally relate to an extended field of physical actors within a subject’s lifeworld. From this standpoint, will was not, as philosopher George Ainslie puts it, “the Self’s organ of selection”; neither was morality a set of rational precepts that could be freely imposed upon the body.<sup>5</sup> Both morality and will, for Rush, were material faculties that could be socially and environmentally shaped, for better or for worse. In the case of intemperate persons, morality and will were often corrupted through the linked processes of contagion, association, and habituation, which represented the dark side of Enlightenment discourses

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<sup>4</sup> As I will also show, Rush’s strongly physiological model of sympathy offered an alternative to the mental philosophies of David Hume and Adam Smith.

<sup>5</sup> George Ainslie, “Free Will as Recursive Self-Prediction,” in *Addiction and Responsibility*, edited by Jeffrey Poland and George Graham (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2011), 62.

of sympathy.

While Rush did see frequent and heavy consumption of spirits as creating a physical disposition toward drunkenness—a stricter “medical view”—he also recognized that habits were spurred by social and environmental contexts that influenced individuals and could be passed from person to person. As a revolutionary, he believed that this networked condition of the drinker, like that of the nation itself, was particularly dangerous—drunkenness, like political disorder, could spread throughout a system—but it could also be reformed through countervailing systems of rationally directed mechanical influence. In Rush’s reformist application, networked life was reduced to politically motivated, often coercive strategies meant to reform the associations of individual bodies, as in the example of the black man Rush doses with emetic. This is what makes Rush an emergent and complicated figure in the history of addiction: he acknowledges, and even provides a theoretical basis for, the networked complexity of addiction, but his system of reform remains reductive.

If Rush’s complicated view of addiction in some ways exceeded the scientific discourses of his time, which sought to isolate causes, the fullest implications of his networked liberal subject can be found in the work of Charles Brockden Brown. By looking to Brown’s novel *Ormond* (1799), I show how literature narrativizes the networked process of addiction, adding social and psychological complexity to Rush’s theories, while also resisting the rational, mechanical control that the doctor prescribed for the stability of a republican body politic. In the case of *Ormond’s* Mr. Dudley, Brown uses the physiological language of sympathy to counter rationalist constructions of

drunkards as moral failures. He also presents addictive habits as much more resistant to reform than the early Rush. Though still linked to environment and circumstance, habit could become an intrinsic feature of self that persisted across time and space, as we see with Sophia's intemperate mother and her failed Methodist-inspired reform. Ultimately, Brown's intransigent picture of intemperance underscores the precariousness of the post-revolutionary rational American subject and called into question the utopianism that featured so heavily in Rush's late eighteenth-century writings.

#### Liberal Drunks and the Science of Sympathy

Rush's approach to intemperance serves as a corrective to naïve understandings of intemperance. By naïve, I mean an account that over-stresses the role of individual responsibility by presuming the subject's transcendent capacity for conscious or rational self-control and ultimately privatizes the condition. The naïve view has two linked political and philosophical coordinates: the Lockean concept of the liberal subject—a rational, autonomous individual who assumes ownership over their body and behavior—and an ideal of rational self-governance, which presumes a dualistic and hierarchical relationship between mind and body. As many historians have argued, Locke's *Second Treatise of Government* (1681) helped inaugurate a new liberal vision of selfhood, one defined by the individual's natural right to liberty. Conceiving of freedom as a form of self-proprietorship, Locke says, "every man has *a property* in his own person: this no body has any right to but himself. The labour of his body, and the work of his hands, we

may say, are properly his.”<sup>6</sup> In the context of political rights, the notion of self-ownership entails harnessing one’s labor capacities for their own desired ends. One, therefore, has the right to make of themselves what they will, without the intervention of government or religious authorities if one’s actions do not impinge upon the freedoms of others. Such self-proprietorship has distinct moral implications. As Benjamin Franklin’s *Autobiography* (1791) shows, virtues like temperance were indissociably linked to personal freedom and economic prosperity in the late eighteenth-century. By managing one’s own body, disciplining its desires, and resisting temptations, the individual could forge their own path to wealth and success. As one American writer put it as early as 1744, “To preserve the Mind free from Passion, to be present to one’s Self on all Events, to hold the Rudder with steady Hand, is the great Art of Life.”<sup>7</sup> Cast as ontologically separate from and superior to passion and appetite, reason is the gatekeeper, determining what we should and should not consume in our everyday lives, as well as the “Pilot” who steers the self through the challenges or “Storms of Life.”

Liberalism did not instantiate an entirely new way of viewing drunkenness, but rather emboldened and inflected an already existing moral model. Strong moral arguments, shot through with biblical references and graphic depictions of men reduced to beasts, featured prominently in 17<sup>th</sup>- and 18<sup>th</sup>-century tracts against intemperance. Choice, in the traditional Christian framework, meant serving God and denying the

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<sup>6</sup> John Locke and C.B. Macpherson, *Second Treatise of Government*, 1st ed. (Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett Pub., 1980), 15.

<sup>7</sup> "On the GOVERNMENT of the PASSIONS," *The American Magazine and Historical Chronicle* (1743-1746) 10 1744: 592.

passions (piety) or embracing drunkenness (sinfulness) and depriving oneself of “the kingdom of God.”<sup>8</sup> In a 1710 sermon, given after two native persons had been executed for killing another man while intoxicated, Pastor Samuel Danforth describes drunkenness as “*voluntary* madness,” and drinkers as “addicting themselves.”<sup>9</sup> The oxymoron “voluntary madness” is worth parsing, for it demonstrates how a notion of self-propriety—i.e. control over what one does with or puts into one’s body—underwrites strong moral views of drunkenness. Native persons Josiah and Joseph may have killed another man in a state near “madness,” but their madness was a direct consequence of drinking.<sup>10</sup> While Danforth recognizes the complicity of English traders in providing the alcohol to native persons—gesturing to a more dispersed, system-based understanding of the condition—the act of drinking remains a voluntary act, as rational human agents have the personal freedom to resist the sinful influences of the external world. Similar notions of hedonic motives and personal responsibility freight all the major tropes for intemperance in 18<sup>th</sup>-century Anglo-American culture. As “votaries of intemperance,” for instance, drinkers willingly chose to worship alcohol (aka “the jolly god” Bacchus) instead of God; as self-enslavers, they squandered their capacities to labor, secure property, and provide for their families by chaining themselves to the bottle; as “bestial” creatures, they decided, with every gulp of ale or rum, to stagger about and

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<sup>8</sup> Corinthians 6:10 KJV.

<sup>9</sup> Samuel Danforth, *The woful effects of drunkenness. A sermon preached at Bristol, Octob. 12. 1709* (Boston, 1710), 9; 19.

<sup>10</sup> As the writer of “*Reflections on Sobriety*” (1778) puts it, “by this dangerous pleasure man puts his reason to pawn, and makes himself answerable for all the faults which that loss may cause him to commit” (108-109).

crawl on their hands and knees in fits of drunkenness, unfit for labor, unfit to even be called human.<sup>11</sup>

Rush's alternative to this purely voluntarist conception of intemperance assumed the form of a "science of sympathy," a phrase coined by Rob Boddice for his study of 19<sup>th</sup>-century Darwinist revaluations of sympathy, but which can be helpfully applied to late eighteenth-century Rush.<sup>12</sup> Different from the mental philosophies of influential thinkers like Adam Smith and David Hume, Rush's sympathy entailed a more embodied, pre-reflective and expansive understanding of connection. Smith, for instance, looked to imaginative identification, a distinctly mental process, as the only means of bridging the gap between differently situated persons. Observers may feel another person's injuries in corresponding parts of their own bodies or "shrink from" another's injuries as if they were their own, yet these mirroring relationships are always "predicated on the separation and differentiation" of the subjects involved.<sup>13</sup> Hume, in contrast to Smith and closer to Rush, recognizes how "contagious" passions can pass freely between human subjects, thus temporarily blurring lines of social and corporeal demarcation.<sup>14</sup> Both Smith and Hume have featured prominently in literary studies of sentiment for decades, offering philosophical frameworks for literary modes of social subjectivity and the formation and

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<sup>11</sup> "The FOLLY of INTEMPERANCE. A Genuine History," *The weekly magazine, or, Edinburgh amusement, 1768-1779* 18 (November 12, 1772): 201.

<sup>12</sup> See Rob Boddice, *The Science of Sympathy: Morality, Evolution, and Victorian Civilization*, History of Emotions, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2016).

<sup>13</sup> Ann Wierda Rowland, "Sentimental Fiction," in *The Cambridge Companion to Fiction in the Romantic Period*, edited by Richard Maxwell and Katie Trumpener (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008), 195.

<sup>14</sup> David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1789), 605.

regulation of complex social bodies.<sup>15</sup> Shifting the critical conversation to Rush's materialist science involves a more radical reevaluation of human agency. As a physiological process, sympathy offered a mechanical basis not just for inter-subjectivity (i.e., body-to-body, affective relations) but a more comprehensive system of physical communication between minds and bodies, selves and environments, social groups and cultures, all of which directly impacted the health and behavior of individual Americans. As Rush would argue in the late 1780s, morality, based in the physical structure of a "moral faculty," was itself subject to this field of sympathetic influence, a claim that implicitly challenged the tenets of Lockean liberalism and rationalist philosophy in a way that mental constructions of sentiment did not.

Rush, like his mentor William Cullen, followed Locke's empirical model of mind, as when he speaks of mental faculties "depending wholly upon bodily impressions to produce their specific operations."<sup>16</sup> Yet he would not accept the *tabula rasa* theory, as he believed that moral knowledge was innate to all human subjects. In his correspondence with Anglican minister and abolitionist Granville Sharp in 1773, Rush explicitly challenges Locke's moral epistemology in *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689). For Locke, all ideas, including moral ones, were derived from two

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<sup>15</sup> Marianne Noble's *Rethinking Sympathy and Human Contact in Nineteenth-Century American Literature: Hawthorne, Douglass, Stowe, Dickinson* (2019) uses Smith to theorize the sentimental turn of major American writers. See also Dana C. McClain, "Regulating Feeling in the First American Novel: Sympathy, Sensibility, and Sentiment in William Hill Brown's *The Power of Sympathy*," *Studies in American Fiction* 45.2 (2018): 143-64; Stephanie DeGooyer, "'The Eyes of Other People': Adam Smith's Triangular Sympathy and the Sentimental Novel," *ELH* 85.3 (2018): 669-90; John Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990).

<sup>16</sup> Benjamin Rush, *Medical Inquiries and Observations, upon the Diseases of the Mind* (Philadelphia: Kimber & Richardson, 1812), 10.

sources: sensation and reflection. While physical impressions (sensations) served as the basis for mental activity (i.e., the use and development of the faculties and the formation of ideas), knowledge of “moral law” required the application of reason, not the kind of in-built moral sense Rush would later describe. While Locke’s *Essay* proposed examples that showed “the apparent want of this [moral] faculty not only in individuals but in whole nations,” Rush argued that, like “principles of taste,” the moral sense is “born with us, and not formed by education or country.” Just as an “Indian savage,” a white European devotee of Burkean aesthetics, and a “newly imported African” can be “equally struck” by the “sublime and the beautiful in nature and art,” so too do all human beings, no matter their ethnicity or country of origin, possess an instinctive appreciation and understanding of virtue.<sup>17</sup>

Rush would later expound upon his theory of a universal moral sense in a 1786 oration delivered to the American Philosophical Society entitled *Enquiry into the Influence of Physical Causes upon the Moral Faculty*. In his talk he defines the moral faculty as “a power in the human mind of distinguishing and choosing good and evil; or, in other words, virtue and vice.”<sup>18</sup> Rush presents the moral faculty as encoded with a God-given, “instinctive” understanding of right and wrong, which affords humans the a priori capacity of discernment. Rush goes on to say, “though [the faculty] is capable of

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<sup>17</sup> John A. Woods, et al., “The Correspondence of Benjamin Rush and Granville Sharp 1773—1800,” *Journal of American Studies* 1, no. 1 (1967): 7. Rush’s letter precedes Thomas Jefferson’s 14<sup>th</sup> query in *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1781-82), in which the latter claims a natural division between the aesthetic faculties of whites and blacks. Jefferson, like Enlightenment philosophers Kant and Hume, upholds the notion of race as a difference in kind, rather than condition.

<sup>18</sup> Benjamin Rush, *Enquiry into the Influence of Physical Causes on the Moral Faculty* (Philadelphia: Haswell, Barrington and Haswell, 1839), 2.

improvement by *experience* and *reflection*, it is not derived from either of them.”<sup>19</sup> Such plasticity extends in the inverse direction as well, as the moral faculty may be “suspended, or directed improperly” by *experience*. In other words, the moral faculty, like the brain itself, is intimately and causally linked to the body and, as such, can be modulated directly by external forces. Bypassing the metaphysical confusion of Descartes’ dualistically structured self, Rush connects body and mind by sympathy—the mechanical means by which organ systems, faculties, and even human beings communicate with one another. The fully interconnected sympathetic network leaves little room for any fully independent gatekeeper, a little homunculus that unilaterally controls input into the mind or the effects of that input. One could, following the example of the two sisters from Christina Rossetti’s “Goblin Market,” squeeze their eyes shut and cram fingers into their ears to cut off or at least muffle impressions from the external world, but that is not really a practical model for navigating life, nor does it entirely work for the sisters.

So, if we all have an inner moral sense, why do people behave badly? Morality and the capacity to act according to moral principle maybe innate to the subject, but the operations of the moral faculty, and, by extension, volitional acts informed or directed by moral knowledge, were themselves subject to physical influences that could inhibit moral behavior and produce its opposite. As Rush says in his enquiry, the will is the “seat of the moral faculty,” which entwines a subject’s moral sense with the capacity for directed

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 1.

action.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, if the moral faculty is compromised, so is the individual's capacity to act or even to think according to moral principle, a view that complicates the voluntarist views of Danforth and Locke.

By placing Rush's theory of the moral faculty in a history of addiction, we can see that it serves as a basis for complicating a naïve moral account of intemperate behavior that had a foothold in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and which persists today. Intemperance, from the naïve standpoint, constitutes a willful violation of moral principle. Rush's materialist psychology, in contrast, helps to reframe the issue as a physico-moral "disease." Not a disease that inheres within a discrete body, intemperance is a condition modulated and structured by the individual's intimate, often pre-conscious relationship with their world. Rush may not have entirely abandoned the rhetoric of blame—his equation of intemperance with "suicide" in *Inquiry into the Effects of Ardent Spirits*, for example, lays a heavy moral burden on the drinkers to whom he directly appeals—yet, as we will see, his medical theories challenge the philosophical basis for *unqualified* moral judgments.<sup>21</sup> Those theories, furthermore, were formed in and had serious implications for a period of political upheaval in America. As revolutionary, republican, and doctor, Rush saw sympathy as both foundation for and cause of disorder with the new nation.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 58.

<sup>21</sup> Rush, *Effects of Ardent Spirits*, 13.

### The Mechanics of Sympathy

Rush's materialist view of the moral faculty opened a pathway for medical men to minister to the moral health of Americans. Establishing the connection between medicine and morality in his treatise on the moral faculty, Rush lists and briefly elucidates no fewer than 17 mechanical forces that directly affect the moral faculty of individuals, which include odors, music, sermons, extreme hunger, general diet, and, of course, mind-altering beverages like ardent spirits. As early as 1772, Rush addressed the mechanical (i.e., sympathetic) effects of music on the body and brain. Such sympathy does not require the directed attention and imagination of Adam Smith's interpersonal sympathy, but instead is more like 21<sup>st</sup> century theorizations of affect as physical rhythms and intensities that precede and exceed human intentionality. Affect theories of "intensities that pass body to body (human, nonhuman, part-body, and otherwise)," for instance, share some important similarities with Rush's sensible and interdependent self, which he describes early on in his reform writings through the example of music.<sup>22</sup> As Rush says, music

hath a pleasing and salutary effect upon the body as well as the mind. It is addressed through the avenue of the ears to the brain, the common centre of life and motion, from whence its *oscillations* are *communicated* to every part of the system, imparting to each, that equable and uniform *vigour and action*, upon which the healthy state of all the functions depends.<sup>23</sup>

Rush illustrates a physiological network through which stimuli (acoustic vibrations)

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<sup>22</sup> Gregg, Melissa and Gregory J. Seigworth, "An Inventory of Shimmers," in *The Affect Theory Reader*, edited by Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), 1.

<sup>23</sup> Benjamin Rush, *Sermons to Gentlemen upon Temperance and Exercise* (Philadelphia: Printed by John Dunlap, 1772), 31. My emphasis.

circulate, inducing an “equable and uniform” effect of “vigour and action” in the multiple faculties of the mind. In the case of music, acoustic vibrations radiate through space, enter the human ear, and communicate with the mind’s faculties by way of distinctive oscillations. The specific acoustic signature of music, Rush shows, corresponds to a certain level of intensity in the faculties. In other words, brain function, or, more specifically, the quality and vigor of brain function, is modulated by forces beyond the corporeal and cranial boundaries of the subject.<sup>24</sup> Even the faculties most closely tied to personal identity, such as memory and understanding, are intimately linked to external motions. Though they have independent functions, these faculties are not autonomous, but rather dynamically linked by sympathy with each other and the world. Reason, the vaunted faculty which underwrites notions of human uniqueness and autonomy, in other words, is itself subject to the vibrations of the material manifold.

The correspondence between music and mental faculties parallels Rush’s view on the effects of alcohol. Like a distinct acoustic signature, a cup of grog or toddy has its own properties, which are determined by the potency, quantity and/or quality of the beverage and the composition of the system to which it is being introduced. Ardent spirits, for example, excessively stimulate the stomach, the vascular system, and the mental faculties, resulting in a nearly global state of debility. “Fermented liquors, of a

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<sup>24</sup> The corporeal forces described differ, to some degree, from Locke’s understanding of perceptions in *An essay concerning human understanding*. Perception, for Locke, entails the activity or directedness of mind. If one does not consciously attend to a given sensation, then “there follows no perception” (106). Rush’s picture of the sympathetic mind does not seem to require the same directedness or observation for sensations to have a real effect upon the mental faculties.

good quality,” on the other hand, “are favourable to the virtues of candour, benevolence, and generosity.”<sup>25</sup> Rush here follows a line of early religious thinkers, including New England minister Cotton Mather, who acknowledged the usefulness of alcohol while scorning those who abused it. Upholding Increase Mather’s “good creature of God,” Rush sees nothing innately evil or pernicious about alcohol—something he would be criticized for by the teetotaler movement of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>26</sup> Rather, alcohol’s function or dysfunction is determined relationally, or, we might say, sympathetically, i.e., by how the substance communicates with and affects the given constitution of a human mind and body.

Rush used this physiological model to explain the immediate effects of drunkenness and the functional changes in the mind and body across a continuum of drinking behavior. With his curious moral and physical thermometer, Rush outlined an alcoholic progression that begins with “punch,” then proceeds to “grog,” “flip,” “slings,” “bitters,” “morning drams,” and, finally, terminates with “pepper in rum.”<sup>27</sup> As the body and mind become increasingly debilitated by strong beverages, the drinker, Rush later explains, is disposed to up the potency and intake of the stimulants they consume. Such debility constitutes a “disease” over time. Unlike a structural disease like cancer, which assumes the form of tumors in one or more organs or organ systems of the body,

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<sup>25</sup> Rush, *Influence of Physical Causes*, 12.

<sup>26</sup> Increase Mather, *Wo to Drunkards. Two Sermons Testifying against the Sin of Drunkenness: Wherein the Wofulness of That Evil, and the Misery of All That Are Addicted to It, Is Discovered from the Word of God* (Boston: Timothy Green, 1712), 7.

<sup>27</sup> Rush, *Effects of Ardent Spirits*. Progression, for Rush, was not simply confined to increased intake of a specific substance. One could progress from one form of intemperance to another, initially as a means of compensating for the physical debility caused by a pre-established form of excess, typically overeating.

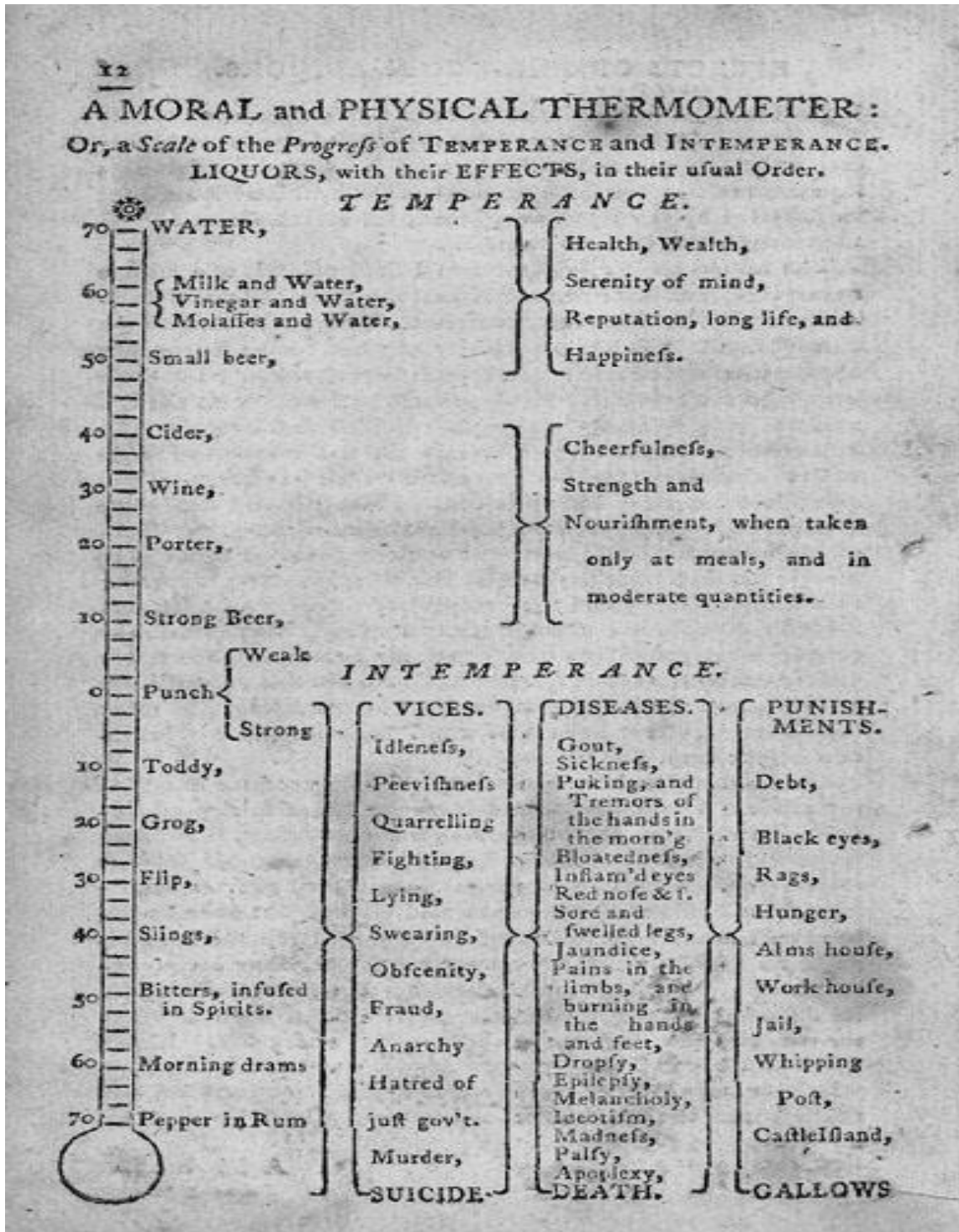


Figure 1. "A Moral and Physical Thermometer" from Benjamin Rush's *An Inquiry into the Effects of Spirituous Liquors on the Human Body and Mind*. Boston: Thomas and Andrews, 1790.

intemperance is more akin to what we would now call a functional disorder. Like William Cullen, Rush believed that disease was caused either by excessive stimulation or a lack of stimulation. This theory served as the rationale for many of his favored methods of medical treatment, particularly bleeding. It also provided a naturalistic basis for morality, insofar as immorality entailed a transgression of natural limits that would be punished by Nature herself.<sup>28</sup>

As a medical explanation for different forms of intemperance, Rush's physiology demonstrates that excessive consumption is not *merely* the misuse or neglect of an individual's reason and moral volition in their pursuit of pleasure. The debility occasioned by stimulant substances engenders a physical disposition to drink, to remedy fatigue and discomfort in an immediate, familiar, and much to Rush's chagrin, a socially acceptable way. While capable of altering the moral faculty on its own, the progressive and sympathetic entwinement of drinkers and alcohol fits into a wider field of causal forces within the world. Rush calls these "causes...of a compound nature."<sup>29</sup> They are "compound" in the sense that they entail multiple, often interlinking forces and forms of mediation. Though they lack the one-to-one directness of mechanistic influences like music and alcohol, they are very "nearly related to those which are purely mechanical."<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> As he warns in *Sermons to Gentlemen upon Temperance and Exercise*, Nature takes "ample vengeance of such as treat her in this manner, by afflicting them with blotches, and other disorders, which are the legitimate offspring of this species of intemperance" (11). Rush here fuses the moral and the physical in an image of a personified and punitive Nature who enforces God's laws by dishing out disease to those who violate the natural constitution of the human body. The metaphor of "legitimate offspring" clearly establishes the glutton's responsibility for their disorder, which unfolds with the same causal efficiency as human reproduction.

<sup>29</sup> Rush, *Influence of Physical Causes*, 366.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, 20.

Rush lists three: imitation, habit, and association.

Imitation, a social form of behavioral transmission, fits into a larger networked structure of association and habit, similarly “compound” influencers of the moral faculty. Imitated behaviors can solidify into habits overtime, while habits (and the imitations that precede them) are contoured and reinforced by associative networks. Whether social, spatio-temporal, or affective in character, such associations serve as the relational scaffolding for a behavior. From this standpoint, habit is not the direct, unmediated effect of human intentionality, an exercise of will unmoored from the socio-physical milieu of one’s lifeworld, following a strong model of liberal subjectivity. If objects, ideas, social others, and places modulate emotions, transmit affects, and activate (or enable us to retrieve) memory, then mind is not an independent, self-existent thing. Like the more recent extended mind thesis, which actively and causally relates human mental processes to external objects, Rush’s associationism suggests a mind that goes beyond “the boundaries of skin and skull.”<sup>31</sup> More so than extended mind thesis, new materialists like Jane Bennet have elaborated the moral and political implications of a more networked model of mind and human/nonhuman life. With her notion of “distributive agency,” Bennet calls for a “cultivated discernment of the web of agentic capacities” that delimit and modulate human action rather than unqualified “moral condemnation” of individuals.<sup>32</sup> The writers of “Drugs, Brains and Other Subalterns” employ this kind of new materialist framework specifically to the dualisms that structure so much debate

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<sup>31</sup> Andy Clark and David J. Chalmers, "The Extended Mind," *Cuadernos De Información Y Comunicación* 16 (2011): 15.

<sup>32</sup> Jane Bennet, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Duke UP, 2010), 38.

about addiction, proposing instead “more process-oriented ways of framing materiality, in which the brain is conceptualized as *distributed* rather than as a singular bounded object.”<sup>33</sup> As a transitional figure in the history of addiction, Rush does not push network as far as the new materialists, yet his view of sympathy rests upon similar propositions: mind ports into body, body ports into world, and world conditions what is possible for both body and mind. On a more epistemological level, Rush’s associative thinking represents an alternative to the strict taxonomic systems of the Enlightenment, which reduced complex and interconnected phenomena into discrete, manageable objects and concepts. The picture Rush provides of intemperance presents the mind as a node, not a discrete object whose operations can be fully understood independent of its specific material circumstances. Here epistemology crosses with ethics, as a relational framework of mind supports a more nuanced understanding of human moral behavior and agency.

Rush’s network-based conception of mind resonates with the work of other late-18<sup>th</sup> century associationist thinkers, most notably Joseph Priestley, whose writings on aesthetics limn a non-dualistic view of influence. In his “Lectures on Oratory and Criticism,” Priestley claims that “all strong passions and emotions are liable to be transferred to indifferent objects, either related to the proper object, or those whose ideas are accidentally present to the mind, at the time that it is under the influence of such emotion or passion.”<sup>34</sup> The picture Priestley gives is of an emotion, one with a “proper

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<sup>33</sup> My emphasis. Suzanne Fraser, Kylie Valentine, and Mats Ekendahl, "Drugs, Brains and Other Subalterns: Public Debate and the New Materialist Politics of Addiction," *Body & Society* 24, no. 4 (2018): 58-86.

<sup>34</sup> Joseph Priestley, *A course of lectures on oratory and criticism* (Printed for J. Johnson, No. 72, St. Paul's Church-Yard, 1777) 94.

object,” such as a lover, that flows outward and imbues the surrounding landscape with its variety of objects. Priestley calls such objects “indifferent,” in that they are not themselves concerned with or directly related to the lover’s amorous mood. Nevertheless, when a mind is “under the influence”—a phrase strongly connoting a state of intoxication—the indifferent objects within a subject’s environment unconsciously become linked to the proper object and the mood it evokes in the subject. The influence produces relational webs through affective and sensory experience with the world around us, and those objects within the web can, in turn, evoke the influence of that emotion and the memory of its object. Emotional influence, therefore, is bi-directional; one’s feelings extend to the world, and the world extends into the subject, evoking mental states or moods. Priestley’s “indifferent objects,” from this standpoint, are anything but indifferent when it comes to their and our affectivity.

The shift from Priestley to Rush, from aesthetics to alcoholic desire, is already facilitated by Priestley’s equation of emotions with intoxicants as an “influence.” Rush also preserves the basic triadic structure (self-object-environment) of Priestley’s associationist aesthetics. For Rush, alcoholic desire is a strong passion that imbues, and can subsequently be triggered by, certain spatio-temporal structures and the inter-subjective relations contained therein. As he puts it, the “influence” of “circumstances” combines “the recollection and desire of spirits,” which drives the repetition of drunkenness.<sup>35</sup> Thinking phenomenologically, one might say that alcoholic desire emerges somewhere between a subject, a drink (object), and an environment, since the

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<sup>35</sup> Rush, *Effects of Ardent Spirits*, 34.

environment can activate the subject's memory and spark their desire for an object. Instead of a dualistic, subject-object structure of desire, Rush's associationist logic calls for a network of mutually influencing characters and objects. Thus, the milieu of a tavern, including the drinking of other patrons, evokes the subject's memory of and desire for liquor. Expanding the associative frame further, Rush offers a few examples of drinkers with more specific orientations: "Some men drink only in the morning, some at noon, and some at night. Some men drink only on market day, some at one tavern only, and some only in one kind of company."<sup>36</sup> We can see the same kind of regular schedule in Melville's "Bartleby the Scrivener" with Turkey, who always starts drinking around noon after the more naturally tempestuous Nippers calms down. Here again, habit has the relational scaffolding of spatio-temporal and social milieus, which do not just guide action but also the desires behind the actions. The morning drinker, for instance, orients themselves in the time of morning with a drink; morning, in other words, exerts an affective pull on the drinker's desire, making a drink part of the felt rhythms of the day (drink as what one does, as a kind of default setting). These kinds of orientations demonstrate that alcoholic desire, at least initially, is not anarchic, but rather that it has a complex structure that forms according to the associative nature of human psychology. For chronic drinkers, those associative structures will later be subtended by a growing physiological disposition.

If the drinker is both physiologically disposed to drink, and their desire is itself reinforced by a relational scaffolding, then a new understanding of intemperance comes

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 35.

into play, one that understands the fundamental interconnectedness of bodies, minds, environments, and others—what we can call networked addiction. The drinker’s desire is webbed to their environment. The desire to drink can come from within (physiological disposition) and from without (associative activation of memory and desire), and both can, and indeed do, overlap in patterns of constructive interference.

These more philosophical and physiological views of intemperance become more complicated and politicized in larger discussions about imitation in Anglo-American culture. As a form of sympathy, imitation entails doing-what-others-do, not because it is reasonable but because it is fashionable, or one has a natural predisposition to follow the example of social others. When imitation involves vice, it is described as “contagion,” a corrupting influence that passes body-to-body in a social milieu. In a 1788 article titled “Thoughts on Drunkenness,” a writer considers drunkenness uniquely apt “to draw in others by the example.” He describes how even one drunkard can infect a whole population, similar to the patient zero figure in epidemiological studies: “The free drinker collects his circle; the circle naturally spreads; of those who are drawn within it, many become the corrupters, and centres of parties and circles of their own; every one countenancing, and perhaps emulating, the rest, till a whole neighborhood be infected, from the contagion of a single example.”<sup>37</sup> The writer begins with the concept of a “free drinker,” one removed from any social influence or predisposition to drink. This drinker accumulates a circle. In doing so, they assume moral responsibility not just for their own

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<sup>37</sup> “Thoughts on Drunkenness,” *Walker’s Hibernian magazine, or Compendium of entertaining knowledge*, May 1785-Dec. 1811 (1788): 230-2.

drunkenness, but that of all the drinkers in their orbit, and all the new circles of drinkers that form around members of their original party. An act of drunkenness, therefore, is not just a violation of one's own nature. It is a sin against others, who, by dint of their imitative natures, are pulled into the vortex of another person's intemperance. In *The Whole Duty of Man* (1784), Richard Allestree takes this cumulative moral responsibility even further, claiming that even the man who does not get drunk himself, but who drinks with those more susceptible to alcohol's effects, "is yet guilty of all the drunkenness that any of his company fall under; for he gives them encouragement to drink on by his example, *especially* if he be one of any authority."<sup>38</sup>

While late eighteenth-century formulations of sensibility held the possibility of a lateral influence that crosses socially constructed boundaries and resists notions of centered, autonomous selfhood, the above examples of moral contagion preserve an idea of unqualified individual responsibility through the idea of the "example." The "free drinker," as example, is the uncaused cause of their own drinking, an Adamic figure whose willful transgression extends, by force of sympathy, outward through the social field. The model upholds a binary of corruptor/victim, while also blurring any clear boundary for secondary drinkers (the original victims) as they become corruptors themselves, whether intentionally or not. According to this model, someone must be blamed and treated as a complete moral agent, even though no living drinker completely stands outside of longstanding traditions of alcoholic excess in Europe and America. The

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<sup>38</sup> Richard Allestree, *The whole duty of man, laid down in a plain and familiar way* (Printed for John, Francis, and Charles Rivington, booksellers to the Society for promoting Christian Knowledge, 1784), 175.

individual qua “example,” however, fit much more readily in moral frameworks that upheld the voluntarist principles of liberalism. We can find this logic at work even in cases of notorious drinkers of the antebellum period, such as Poe, whose drinking binges were regarded by some as socially, rather than psychologically, precipitated, as when Poe was encouraged to drink by poet William Ross Wallace over dinner.<sup>39</sup>

Nineteenth-century figurations of moral contagion, especially concerning the growing narcotic menace of the late Victorian period, would increasingly place the blame on racial minorities and lower-class persons, as we see in Dickens’s *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870). Rush, however, views those in power as the most troublesome examples of intemperate behavior. As a revolutionary, he, like many of his contemporaries, regarded the example of the British Empire as pernicious to the customs and culture of pre-Revolutionary Americans. As an anti-slavery proponent, he similarly targeted masters as the source of the degraded habits of slaves. Thus, power dynamics play an important role as a mediator and modulator of body-to-body influence.

Rush would express his concerns about the bad examples of military leaders in a letter to John Adams from 1777. He tells Adams that “The disorders of our army do not proceed from any *natural* faults in our men,” as “our country affords the finest materials for making good soldiers of any upon the face of the globe.” Rather, it was the “ignorance, the cowardice, the idleness, and the drunkenness of our major generals.”<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> For more on the social and mass cultural mediators of Poe’s drinking, see Stephen Rachman, “Poe’s Drinking, Poe’s Delirium: The Privacy of Imps,” *The Edgar Allan Poe Review* 12, no. 2 (2011): 15.

<sup>40</sup> Benjamin Rush and L.H. Butterfield, *Letters of Benjamin Rush*, Memoirs of the American Philosophical Society, v. 30, pt. 1 (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1951), 163.

For Rush, generals who frequently get drunk posed both a strategic disadvantage for the colonies' military campaign, but also threatened to ruin "the morals and principles of our young men...through their examples."<sup>41</sup> For Rush, the soldiers had no "natural faults." They were the sturdy products of a new and robust American landscape. By being exposed to the corrupting influence of a general, a man with power and influence over his subordinates, these soldiers found themselves adopting his drinking habits. Instead of blaming soldiers for their imitation—a process Rush sees as natural, pre-reflective, and structurally mediated—or critiquing hierarchical structures that concentrate so much power in military and political leaders, Rush blames the general, who *must* be held to a higher standard. As in the contagion model above, Rush looks for a center of influence, a person who may not, in fact, be entirely "free" following Rush's own theories on habit and disposition, but whose office requires that he be treated as if he were. As suggested by Rush's letter to Adams, the philosophical question of the drinker's free will had much to do with the political question of creating a free republic.

### Sympathy and Republican Politics

Rush's philosophy of networked addiction had important, if not entirely coherent, political implications during a transitional period in American history. His proposal for reforms targeting the moral health of a newly established republican citizenry fit within the context of growing anxieties concerning social, economic, and political unrest following the Revolution. Rush's 1786 *Enquiry into the Influence of Physical Causes*

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 164.

*upon the Moral Faculty* preceded a surge of articles and letters addressing the threat of anarchy in America following Daniel Shays's armed rebellion against the Massachusetts state government in 1786 and 1787. For men like Adams and Washington, the political and economic instability in America warranted a revision of the Articles of Confederation, and by 1788, states had begun to ratify a new Federal Constitution. In a letter printed in *The American Museum*, Washington warned that, if all states did not immediately ratify the Federal Constitution, anarchy would ensue.<sup>42</sup> Rush, in agreement with Washington and the Federalists, says "nothing but a vigorous and efficient government can prevent [the people's] degenerating into savages or devouring each other like beasts of prey."<sup>43</sup> In South Carolina, Judge George Pendleton pronounced his own fears of a "present dangerous crisis" to his fellow Carolinians. Faced with the prospect of Americans unwilling to pay their taxes and debts, most dramatically demonstrated by Shays, Pendleton anticipates a collapse of independence and the rise of a Cromwellian dictator or the enforcement of American laws "by force of arms." His solution: "let us all exert ourselves, and support each other as free citizens, acknowledging no master but the laws which we ourselves have made for our common good."<sup>44</sup> In contrast to Pendleton's unifying republican rhetoric, pseudonymous writers like Eboracus focused their fears on social anarchy, specifically the threat of the "rabble" attempting to seize new offices of

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<sup>42</sup> "Article 3 -- no Title," *The American Museum; or, Repository of Ancient and Modern Fugitive Pieces &c. Prose and Poetical* (1787-1788) 01 1788: 76.

<sup>43</sup> Rush, *Letters*, 453.

<sup>44</sup> "Part of Judge PENDLETON'S CHARGE to the Grand-Jurors of Gagetown, Cheraws, and Cambden Districts.: Gentlemen of the Grand Furr," *Worcester Magazine ...Containing Politicks, Miscellanies, Poetry, and News* (1786-1788) 3, no. 4 (1787): 42.

political power to which they were educationally and temperamentally unsuited.<sup>45</sup>

Prior to the growing concern with anarchy, and in a seemingly unrelated treatise, Rush had already laid the groundwork for his political thinking in *An Inquiry into the Effects of Ardent Spirits* (1784). Along with describing liquor's effects on the mind and body, Rush's essay presented ardent spirits as a major threat to American liberty and an efficient government. Just after the title page of the original pamphlet, Rush offers his moral and physical thermometer with its scaled graph of the downward progression from temperance to intemperance, correlating specific moral and physical effects with the potency of liquor consumed.<sup>46</sup> According to the graph, "Morning drams," that is, straight shots of liquor taken shortly upon awakening, bred "anarchy" and a "hatred of just government," a claim that strongly politicized the drinking of spirits and opened a pathway for curtailing or limiting the rights of American drunkards to protect the nation.

Liquor and political disorder had, of course, long been linked, if only as a trope. From drunken riots in ancient Greece to the London gin riots during the first half of the eighteenth century, alcohol served as a precipitant, accelerant, or motivator for civic disorder. Rush, however, situates the relationship in a distinctly republican framework that fuses his medical and political commitments. For Rush, the government and the citizenry were chiastically related, like the body and the mind. Ideally, a government of

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<sup>45</sup> EBORACUS, "For the NEW HAVEN GAZETTE.: When the Political Pot Boils, the Rises to the Top. OTIS," *The New - Haven Gazette, and the Connecticut Magazine* (1786-1789), March 27, 1788: 3.

<sup>46</sup> English physician and abolitionist John Coakley Lettsom would publish his own version of the thermometer in *Hints Designed to Promote Beneficence, Temperance, and Medical Science* (1797). It's noteworthy that Lettsom removed the specifically political effects of intemperance in his thermometer, sticking instead to crimes of "burglary," "murder," and "suicide."

virtuous elected officials would craft policies that would support the formation of virtuous, i.e., disinterested, republican citizens. Those rational citizens, in turn, would exercise their conscience and reason in voting for men suited to their offices, thus resulting in a dynamic equilibrium between the socius and government. The intemperate person, however, threatened to introduce anarchy into the system. On an individual level, ardent spirits disordered perceptions, impaired motor functions, and inverted the hierarchical structure of the human mind (reason over passion). The intemperate person could spread such disorder by way of sympathy (the body-to-body communication represented by imitation), and, in the case of franchised male citizens, through voting.

To correct and preempt such unruly behaviors in individuals and republican society at large, Rush offered a vision of reform based upon the same principles of association and sensibility that serve as the theoretical foundation for his networked model of addiction. Both Sarah Knott and William Howell spotlight Rush's sensiblist strategies for regulating the moral wellbeing of Americans, whose mental operations, including moral reasoning and judgment, were themselves capable of refinement through material practice, yet they do not discuss the importance of intemperance in Rush's network-based reform philosophy.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, Rush's *Inquiry into the Effects of Ardent Spirits* would illustrate key principles of what Knott calls his "sensiblist moral science" two years before his 1786 lecture on the moral faculty. Most importantly, Rush presents

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<sup>47</sup> According to Knott, Rush's writings on the moral faculty provided "the blueprints of a sensiblist moral science, the basis of a unified theory of man's physical and moral nature that might be turned to use in the young American Republic" (204). Howell similarly explores Rush's project of creating "republican machines" through the mechanical operations of imitation and habit, which became material pedagogical tools for forming a distinctly republican nation (92).

the idea that changes in geography, employment, and climate had a corresponding effect on the disposition and behavior of human beings, an idea that would be further developed in later works like *An Account of the Influence of the Military and Political Events of the American Revolution upon the Human Body* and *An Enquiry into the Influence of Physical Causes upon the Moral Faculty*. The locus of change was not human mental faculties that exerted themselves in opposition to or above the physical and social conditions of one's environment. The mental faculties were always grooved and flexed by the impressions the body received from the external world, meaning that behavioral change required new somatic, social, and environmental coordinates for the self. Following these principles, Rush lays out one strategy for reform in *Inquiry into the Effects of Ardent Spirits*: "Now by finding a new and interesting employment, or subject of conversation for drunkards at the usual times in which they have been accustomed to drink, and by restraining them by the same means from those places and companions, which suggested to them the idea of ardent spirits, their habits of intemperance may be completely destroyed."<sup>48</sup> As a mechanical and associative process, habits could be reconfigured by countervailing mechanical/affective forces, which could restore the drinker to a natural, virtuous state of being. The passage's lack of direct address to drinkers shows that Rush does not see intemperate people making these changes themselves. Some other impersonal actor intervenes—presumably a figure who, like Rush, understands the sympathetic mechanisms of association and can wield physico-moral science to serve the new republic by stamping out the excesses and anarchic

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<sup>48</sup> Rush, *Effects of Ardent Spirits*, 35.

impulses that would imperil its formation.

At the scale of nation, and in its more theoretical formulations, Rush's political philosophy is clear (temperance, rationality, order over inebriation, passion, anarchy), but such dualisms become less stable when Rush shifts to narrative descriptions of reform at the individual level. These descriptions not only lack the systematicity of medico-moral science, but they similarly complicate liberal subjectivity in their dialectical depiction of reform. Unlike late eighteenth-century moral commentators, who spoke of individual drinkers judging their situation rationally and making "firm and faithful resolution[s]" to stop—i.e., the voluntarist position—Rush sees habitual drinkers as mentally and emotionally dependent upon others for their reform.<sup>49</sup> To represent the complexity of such post-Lockean relationships between self, object, and other(s), Rush shifts to more literary modes of discourse.

As Sari Altschuler says, Rush frequently deployed literary genres, such as sentimentality and the gothic, to sympathetically stimulate all parts of the reader's body through imagination.<sup>50</sup> Looking through his tract, one finds Rush waxing grotesque (e.g., graphic depictions of the intoxicated body) and sentimental (e.g., second person appeals to drinkers who hurt their friends and family) to forcefully convey the dangers of ardent spirits for current and potential consumers. He also uses short, often amusing anecdotes

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<sup>49</sup> Allestree, *The whole duty of man*, 196. Another example of rational reform is the 1779 article "A Call to Drunkards," in which the writer says, "If, in a sober hour, you would take the trouble to reflect upon your conduct, and your appearance in the view of sober men, you would blush at the thought of being seen again by any rational being." The writer gives us an inversion of Smith's imaginative and spectatorial process of sympathy.

<sup>50</sup> Sari Altschuler, *The Medical Imagination: Literature and Health in the Early United States* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2018), 32.

to dramatize the complex entanglement of human subjects and environments. These quirky slice-of-life stories are meant to help readers grasp the psychological process of association, but they also demonstrate how network—an affective, social, and embodied experience—unfolds through human activity that must be *narrated*. One of the first examples of associative reform that Rush gives is a colorful anecdote about a master and his goat:

A noted drunkard was once followed by a favourite goat, to a tavern, into which he was invited by his master, and drenched with some of his liquor. The poor animal staggered home with his master, a good deal intoxicated. The next day he followed him to his accustomed tavern. When the goat came to the door, he paused: his master made signs to him to follow him into the house. The goat stood still. An attempt was made to thrust him into the tavern. He resisted as if struck with the recollection of what he suffered from being intoxicated the night before. His master was so much affected by a sense of shame, in observing the conduct of his goat to be so much more rational than his own, that he ceased from that time to drink spirituous liquors.<sup>51</sup>

What is immediately striking about this anecdote is its overturning of human-animal hierarchy, not just through a human master's drunkenness but an animal's "rational" resistance to the corrupt power of a master. Having experienced the disabling effects of drunkenness the night previous, the goat develops a natural aversion toward the tavern and its wares. As a "simple" animal, the goat's God-given instincts have not been malformed by artificial customs or associations unsuited to their natural constitution, as in the case of humans, and so it acts according to the dictates of nature rather than the master's arbitrary will. Rush's point is not that animals are superior or even equal to human beings in terms of rationality or goodness, but that humans are unique in their

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<sup>51</sup> Rush, *Effects of Ardent Spirits*, 33.

extreme deviations from natural order due to the cultures and social forms they themselves create, as demonstrated by the human master who, despite the derangement of intoxication, returns to his “accustomed” tavern again and again. Because of habituation, he cannot see the irrationality of his own behavior. It is only through the counter-mediation of the goat—his resistance to intoxication and his challenge to the master’s authority—that the master discovers his error. The little homunculus supposed to clearly see and judge human behavior and thought from within an independent mind gets outsourced to a goat, whose resistance enables the master to identify his own irrationality, which, up to that point, had been enfolded within a system of mutually reinforcing modulators of alcoholic desire, including the tavern, the night, homosocial conviviality, and spirits.

While the goat story is not an allegory of American revolutionary activity (rational revolutionaries like Rush, of course, would not want to be associated with a domestic animal like a goat), it does uphold the idea of a natural right to resist abusive powers that seek to violate one’s moral nature, an idea found in Locke’s political philosophy and later in Paine’s “common sense” argument for political resistance. The goat, of course, does not overthrow the master or achieve independence from a domestic labor system. Instead, he expresses his “rationality” (i.e., his virtue as defined within a physico-moral framework) against the master’s intemperance in a single confrontation. The goat’s challenge to hierarchical power dynamics, naturalized by a Judeo-Christian view of the human’s given superiority and dominion over the animal world, delivers a sudden shock of painful self-consciousness to the master. The master’s shame then

overwrites the pleasurable associations of spirits and liberates the master from the grip of the accustomed tavern and its wares—or so Rush believes.

Immediately following the goat/master anecdote, Rush gives another example of outside-inside reform that has a similar hierarchical structure and outcome. In this case, a black “servant” unwittingly participates in the reform of a “southern gentleman” through the subversive imitation of the latter’s drunken behavior. Hearing a commotion coming from the other side of a closed kitchen door, the master “peeped through the key-hole, from whence he saw one of his negroes diverting his fellow-servants by mimicking his master’s gestures and conversation when he was drunk.—The sight overwhelmed him with shame and distress, and instantly became the means of his reformation.”<sup>52</sup> Rather than a mindless engine of replication, a helpless victim of a master’s downward-seeping moral contagion, the servant performs the master’s drunkenness for the purpose of entertaining his fellow servants, which subverts the master’s authority by turning his behavior into an object of ridicule. Like a person shown a video of themselves in an intoxicated state after they have sobered up, the master’s drunken insensibility is made sensible post facto through another person’s imitation. The “shame and distress” he feels arises, we are led to believe, from the implications of the subversive act, as the master’s failure to regulate his mind and body according to the dictates of nature become reflected in the breakdown of hierarchy in the next room. In other words, differential power relations modulate shame, making affect a “compound” or socio-mechanical form of moral recalibration. Though the passage affords the servant enough autonomy to ridicule

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<sup>52</sup> Rush, *Effects of Ardent Spirits*, 36.

the master's behavior, such resistance is enfolded teleologically within a reform narrative that centers on the master, on his newly acquired self-consciousness and reconfigured relationship with spirits. The master, not the servant, gets his freedom, and by obtaining his freedom, the master would be better able to fulfill his duties and maintain order through the regulation of his own mind and body and, by extension, the entire household over which he presides.

Unlike Hegel's master/slave dialectic, which conceives of self-consciousness as an intersubjective process that hinges upon the successful, albeit unstable, imposition of one's will upon another, Rush presents a mode of sympathy achieved through the failure of self-mastery as reflected in the behavior of social others. On the one hand, Rush's dialectic reaffirms the idea of rational hierarchy. On the other hand, it democratizes the reform process, allowing subordinates and even animals to participate in the moral restoration of propertied white men. To use the titular phrase of William Hill Brown's 1789 novel, the power of sympathy—the mechanical means by which minds and bodies receive and are recalibrated by impressions from the external world—enables these subordinates to check the irrational and immoral behavior of their superiors. Like Rush's vision of a republican government equipped with checks and balances, his examples of reform stress the necessity of external mediation, often in the form of resistance within given systems of power, in maintaining an orderly body-mind system. Habitual intemperance thereby demonstrates not only a failure of liberal subjectivity, i.e., one's inability to control and be responsible for their own behavior and mental processes but brings into relief the precariousness and dependency of subjectivity in general.

The need for external intervention assumes its most disturbing and coercive form with this chapter's opening illustration of the "negro man." In surreptitiously dosing the man with tartar emetic, Rush acts as both *tempter and physician*, denying him the option of giving consent and maintaining some degree of autonomy in matters concerning his physical health. As both a disenfranchised black man in early America and an intemperate person, the unwitting subject is doubly vulnerable. His physico-moral disease, from Rush's perspective, warrants coercive treatment for the benefit of the public good, while his racial status protects Rush from the kind of public backlash or censure that might have followed the tempting and dosing of a white man (especially an elite or middling white man). Though Rush was an active anti-slavery advocate, writing a series of publications supporting the formation of free black Christian communities and decrying the abuses of an inhuman slave institution, his medical work is enabled by and participates in the systems of oppression he criticizes.<sup>53</sup> Though capable of providing a more rounded understanding of a person's addictive behavior, Rush's sympathetic framework for intemperance collapses down to a brutal act of poisoning, the point of which is to reconfigure the drinker's associative networks through the nodal point of *a body*. In other words, Rush exchanges the expansive view of a subject's interconnectedness—their constitutive enmeshment in environments, social structures, and cultures—for a highly reductive mechanistic reform, which occludes the real

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<sup>53</sup> Historians have recently drawn attention to Rush's vexed relationship with the issue of slavery, citing his purchase of the child slave William Grubber and his theorization of blackness as a kind of "leprosy." For a deeper analysis of Rush's views on race, see Eric Herschthal, "Antislavery Science in the Early Republic: The Case of Dr. Benjamin Rush," *Early American Studies* 15, no. 2 (2017): 274-307.

socioeconomic, political, and psychological pressures that might be motivating one's desire for alcohol. This example of coercive reform demonstrates, in a new context, a long-held notion among early American scholars: founders like Rush might have considered themselves Enlightenment rationalists, but their ideals too often foundered around issues of race.

For a modern reader, Rush's vision of socially or chemically mediated reform might appear naïve and overly simplistic in its mechanical conception of the human mind. The idea that brief moments of social or physical feedback can "instantly" and fully "destroy" sympathetic networks of alcoholic desire ignores the fact that such desire may have deeper roots than a temporary debility of the organs or the immediate spatio-temporal scaffolding of one's habits. While one might address these issues in Whiggish terms, using the now hegemonic disease model to poke holes in Rush's incomplete or inadequate disease model, one might think of Rush's views as emergent and more profitably look to popular early American literature for significant reevaluations of Rush's reform that share the urge to narrate the complex networks of addiction. Charles Brockden Brown's *Ormond* (1799), for one, interrogates the viability of republicanism in 1790s America using cases of intemperance and ineffective reform measures.

#### Unstable Republics, Disordered Minds

Over the past twenty years, many critics have attended to the politics of *Ormond; or, the Secret Witness*, a novel concerned with revolution and the redefinition of social structures in early America. For some, Brown's novel is progressive and feminist in its critique of gender norms and its presentation of strong, independent, and rational female characters

like Constantia and Martinette.<sup>54</sup> Other scholars see the novel as part of conservative reactions to radical ideologies and the violence of revolutionaries. Many of these conversations converge on Brown's treatment of republicanism and political subjectivity more broadly. These themes can also be addressed through the lens of intemperance, a topic that rarely receives attention in criticism of *Ormond*. While drunkenness figured prominently in anti-Jacobin rhetoric of the late eighteenth century, as in Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), intemperance in Brown's novel serves as a test case for the utopian and rational systematizing of republican theorists like Rush.

My own contribution joins recent discussions of *Ormond* as a gothic critique of the Post-Revolutionary Republican society vaunted by Rush and contemporary founding fathers. As Howell argues, the prevalence of deceit, impersonation, and swindling speak to the instability of republican ideals of abstract, disinterested personhood.<sup>55</sup> Indeed there is no shortage of anxiety and instability in *Ormond*, particularly with the characters of Mr. Dudley and his daughter Constantia. The villain Craig, by meticulously crafting an alternative identity over the course of a few years, swindles Mr. Dudley out of his money, resulting in the latter's bankruptcy. Forced to work a dehumanizing job, one unsuited to his cultured upbringing and aesthetic sensibility, Dudley becomes disconsolate. Shortly

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<sup>54</sup> See Paul Lewis, "Attaining Masculinity: Charles Brockden Brown and Woman Warriors of the 1790s," *Early American Literature* 40, no. 1 (2005): 37–55; Kristin M. Comment, "Charles Brockden Brown's 'Ormond' and Lesbian Possibility in the Early Republic," *Early American Literature* 40, no. 1 (2005): 57–78. For a discussion of Brown's feminist tendencies in the context of feminist revisions of the American literary canon, see Paul Lewis, "Charles Brockden Brown and the Gendered Canon of Early American Fiction," *Early American Literature* 31, no. 2 (1996): 167–188.

<sup>55</sup> Howell presents *Ormond* as "a novel-length critique of the emulative disciplinary regimes outlined by [Brown's] early national contemporaries," including Rush (160).

thereafter his languishing wife dies from discontent, itself a malady that suggests the entanglement of affect and disease. Despite his daughter Constantia's interventions, Dudley takes to drink to mitigate his suffering, which for Brown is not simply one point in his downward trajectory but a locus for thinking about sympathy as an oppressive networked condition, the obverse of Rush's sympathetically constituted republican body politic.

Just working with the summary above, we can begin to see that Dudley is not only a drunkard whose outward behavior indexes an internal defect, something separable from their lifeworld. In eighteenth-century culture, drunkards often stood (or staggered about) as spectacles of mental and physical disorder, with little or no depth within or beyond their dirty, uncoordinated exteriors. Even in William Hogarth's widely reprinted *Gin Lane* (1751), an image that implicates economic systems and British policy in the proliferation of drunkenness, the characters are no more than brutal, insensible, and deathly creatures. They are mere spectacles meant to shock the reader into a more sober-minded evaluation of the pernicious custom of rum drinking. And as the term "drunkard" suggests, such characters were defined wholly by their state of drunkenness. In narrating Dudley's history, in contrast, Brown lays out a chain of events that dispose Dudley to drink. From this narrative perspective, intemperance is not just a condition that follows from an individual's decision to drink, or the repeated action of drinking over time, but a process with multiple parts and actors that impinge upon the drinker's capacity to choose in the first place. More so than a philosophical treatise or a grotesque piece of artwork, the novel supports a more networked and temporally complex understanding of



Figure 2. *Gin Lane*. William Hogarth, 1751. Prints and Drawings Room, Tate Collection, T01799.

drunkenness as it affects individual subjects, even for minor characters like Dudley.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>56</sup> In "'The Vanity of Physiognomy": Dissimulation and Discernment in Charles Brockden Brown's *Ormond*,' Christopher Lukasic argues that Brown privileges narrative over portraiture given the former's more complete representation of character. I am making a similar point about

While Rush used narrative to show the reformist effects of association, his anecdotes lack the depth and complexity of a more fully developed and historically specific picture of human life, as we get with Brown's novel. Not only that, Dudley's fall into drunkenness itself dramatizes the failings of a republican theory that undergirded Rush's reformist vision.

As Marilyn Michaud claims, republics are "Fragile polities, vulnerable to corruption and decay," due to the requirement of "moral sacrifice," i.e., the embodiment of the public virtue of disinterestedness.<sup>57</sup> Craig, like other characters in the book, bucks the republican initiative, chooses self-interest and mercenary tactics over the public good. By swindling Dudley, he deprives the man of his socio-economic position and upends his psychological and familial life. From a Rushian framework, that event, including its immediate and remote consequences, are enfolded within and modulating Dudley's "paroxysms" of drunkenness.<sup>58</sup> He is not drinking alone, but in company. That company, furthermore, nests within a capricious American urban environment that itself lacks any unifying rational or moral order.

Today many addiction specialists recognize a range of circumstances as drivers of drug dependency, including the positionality of the user and the resource deficits and additional pressures and influences certain individuals might face in their daily lives.

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how narrative affords a networked view of intemperance, which contrasts with the more static and surface-level impressions of eighteenth-century visual representations of intemperance.

<sup>57</sup> Marilyn Michaud, *Republicanism and the American Gothic* (Cardiff: University of Wales, 2009), 43.

<sup>58</sup> Charles Brockden Brown, *Ormond*, *The Novels and Related Works of Charles Brockden Brown*, vol. 2 (Kent State University Press, 1982), 27.

From an intellectual-historical standpoint, Rush's philosophical writings on the moral faculty provide an important pre-history for this now common account of addiction, yet early debates about the causes of intemperance also played out in popular discourse. Surveying contemporary periodicals, it is clear that, for some commentators, acknowledging escapist drinking and the role of circumstance did not necessarily translate to sympathetic understanding. Writing five years before the publication of *Ormond*, one commentator on drunkenness scorns the excuses of the "lower ranks," such as using alcohol "to bury their troubles" and "destroy the remembrance of worldly disappointments," calling such excuses "stupid and vile." He goes on to say, "There appears to me in this, such a shameful deficiency of reason and reflection, that I am unable to express my contempt of it, for rather than trust to Providence for succor and relief, they choose to scorn and reject it."<sup>59</sup> Like most proponents of rational self-governance, the writer views "reason and reflection" as tools that allow the individual to fully process the short- and long-term consequences of any action on the spot, so that they can avoid the pitfalls of drunkenness or other vices. While physical and psychological suffering would seem to impose limitations upon human agency, reason, from the rationalist standpoint, can transcend the pressures and pains of existence. The same goes for Christian piety, which, like rational self-possession, treats will as something that can be removed from the earthly fray and subsumed within God's will.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> "On DRUNKENNESS," *The Massachusetts Magazine; or, Monthly Museum. Containing the Literature, History, Politics, Arts, Manners & Amusements of the Age (1790-1796)* 6, no. 6 (1794): 340.

<sup>60</sup> In *Inquiry into the Effects of Ardent Spirits*, Rush admits that there are predisposing conditions to intemperance that cannot be so easily remedied, such as "the pressure of debt, disappointments

Brown makes a strong counter to this naïve understanding of intemperate behavior. Like Rush, he addresses the background as a dynamic field of influence intimately and causally linked to the behavior and mental processes of subjects. While Rush sought to use associative theories as a means of mechanically producing a virtuous republican citizenry, Brown drew upon the materialism of Enlightenment psychology to create a *more sympathetic* framework for understanding the *experience* of intemperance. As Brown's narrator Sophia says,

The strongest mind is swayed by circumstances. There is no firmness of integrity, perhaps able to repel every species of temptation, which is produced by the present constitution of human affairs, and yet temptation is successful, chiefly by virtue of its gradual and invisible approaches. We rush into danger, because we are not aware of its existence, and have not therefore provided the means of safety, and the dæmon that seizes us is hourly reinforced by habit.<sup>61</sup>

According to Sophia, there can be no totally impenetrable, fixed mind. Using language that evokes Rush's idea of oscillations transferred sympathetically from external objects to the mental faculties, she speaks of minds being "*swayed* by circumstances." Not some supersensible entity, mind is enmeshed in and jostled by the forces and rhythms of one's lifeworld, which, to some extent, have causal effects on behavior and mental processes. Through a materialist framework, Sophia reads intemperance not as a mark of personal weakness, a want or willful neglect of reason and piety, but as the product of temptations

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in worldly pursuits, and guilt." For him, "The only radical cure for those evils is to be found in Religion" (24). Curiously enough, Rush does not wholly reject the use of stimulant substances to remedy pain, but he advises that "wine and opium should always be preferred to ardent spirits. They are far less injurious to the body and mind, than spirits; and the habits of attachment to them are easily broken, after time and repentance have removed the evils they were taken to relieve." Taken ahistorically, Rush's preference for opium over spirits seems ridiculous, even laughable, but he was, of course, writing many decades before narcotics became a public menace in America and Britain.

<sup>61</sup> Brown, *Ormond*, 26.

that exceed one's volitional and epistemic limits. The shift from intentionality to subjective bandwidth serves as an important corrective to Universalist constructions of a rational and autonomous human subject, which, as a key feature of Enlightenment discourse, played a significant role in the othering, stigmatization, and oppression of specific kinds of people and behaviors. Brown discloses the naïveté of moral rationalists who make universal judgments from privileged vantage points, ignorant of or indifferent to the lived experience of substance users. The detached and temperate voyeur, for one thing, does not understand the continuum of the drinker's behavior with its gradual and "invisible" upticks in tolerance and desire, which culminate in addiction, nor can they see the circumstances that might have "swayed" the drinker's mind in the first place. While the religious rationalist's judgments remove figures from grounds, subjects from lifeworlds, Brown situates Dudley firmly within his unstable republican milieu with all its economic upheaval, mercenary self-seekers, and yellow fever outbreaks, all of which illustrate the networked conditions of life in post-Revolutionary America.

Brown further distinguishes his narrator from moral rationalists as well as putatively objective medical authorities like Rush by having her speak in the second person plural ("we") when describing the drinker's fall into temptation, a rhetorical move meant to steer the reader towards sympathy. Sophia's we-statements register as an important alternative to an inherently prescriptive and historically impoverished conception of the liberal subject, which undergirds naïve moral evaluations of intemperance. Her "we" opens the possibility of recognizing the contingency, positionality, and finitude of the subject, which are brought into relief within a yellow

fever stricken, unstable republican polity. As Hawthorne would later write in *House of the Seven Gables* (1851), “In this republican country, amid the fluctuating waves of our social life, somebody is always at the drowning-point.”<sup>62</sup> Of course, Sophia’s “we,” and Hawthorne’s reflections on the contingent nature of republican personhood, still suffer from the representational limitations of any universal statement, including those of the humanizing variety. For while white persons may have had the freedom/misfortune to fall from middling positions in the American economy, native Americans and persons of color were already firmly positioned at the bottom of republican society.

Brown’s novel does not attend to such figures, yet he, like many commentators before him, rhetorically aligns a person’s powerlessness before vice with the compulsory existences of slaves. Brown joins this notion of “enslavement” with other common descriptions of vice, such as being seized by a “daemon” and infatuation.<sup>63</sup> These metaphors converge around power, the power of alcohol and habit over the character and actions of a human being. The point is that, by “grasp[ing] at the happiness that intoxication had to bestow,” Dudley himself becomes vulnerable to yet another form of oppression, which radically alters his disposition (demonism), grips his mind and body (infatuation), and resists Dudley’s own intentions to free himself from drink (slavery).<sup>64</sup> While the metaphors can, and indeed were, used for promoting more liberal understandings of the drinker’s responsibility, here they emphasize Dudley’s lack of

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<sup>62</sup> Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The House of the Seven Gables* (Minneapolis: First Avenue Editions, 2014), 35.

<sup>63</sup> Brown, *Ormond*, 26-27.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, 27.

power over his condition.

What is clear from Sophia's description of Dudley's drunkenness is that the condition resists social intervention and rational argument. Constantia, for instance, uses rhetoric to reform her father, appealing "to his understanding, to his sense of honour and dread of infamy, to the gratitude to which she was entitled, and to the injunctions of parental duty."<sup>65</sup> Dudley is not insensible to her arguments or the distress he causes her. He has "fits of remorse," "fruitless penitence and continual relapses."<sup>66</sup> Unlike Rush's drunkards, who are instantly recalibrated through socially structured experiences of shame, Dudley shows remorse but cannot stop relapsing.

Brown's description of Dudley's "fruitless penitence and continual relapses" adds a greater degree of complexity to Rush's theoretical and anecdotal descriptions of intemperance. Instead of a subject capable of being mechanically shocked out of a habit, Brown gives us a man who comprehends and agonizes over the wrongness of his drinking, makes gestures of penitence, but whose efforts are ultimately "fruitless." Constantia's rhetoric, her appeals to her father's understanding and sense of obligation, cannot override Dudley's disposition to drink, and neither can his own resultant sense of "remorse" and intention to change. Fit within Rush's moral psychological framework, Dudley's conscience and understanding (internal modes) are at odds with his moral faculty and volition (exterior modes).<sup>67</sup> In other words, Dudley's understanding of his behavior, as both rational fact and felt "remorse," does not cash out as a decisive act of

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

will, the kind of “firm and faithful resolution” prescribed by 18th-century rationalist commentators. In a way, Brown’s description of the disjunction between conscience and will suggests a depth model of habit that Rush’s reform anecdotes and utopian rhetoric, though perhaps not his physiological theories, seem to lack. As with causal networks that initially precipitate or modulate drinking behavior, Brown’s narrative affords a more compelling picture of habit as a *deepening* disposition, which can be measured by failed interventions, feckless self-realizations, frequent relapses, and, on a more affective level, despair.

Mr. Dudley’s reform is not brought about through shame or expostulation, remorse or Constantia’s acts of filial devotion, or any of the “compound” and “mechanical” means Rush lists in his treatises on the moral faculty and ardent spirits. Neither is Dudley transplanted from one geographic area, social situation, or occupation to another as a way of mechanically reconfiguring his behavior. Rather, as Sophia tells us, Mr. Dudley’s sudden blindness “dissolved the spell by which he was bound.”<sup>68</sup> While Brown’s narrator sees blindness as “evil” in its own right, she also recognizes that it “restored [Mr. Dudley] to himself” and “showed him, with a distinctness which made him shudder, the gulf to which he was hastening.”<sup>69</sup> Blindness, paradoxically, affords Dudley clarity. Though strange, this idea is itself underscored by the speciousness of visual appearances in Brown’s post-revolutionary America, to which Dudley himself falls victim. We can also find a parallel with 20<sup>th</sup> century conceptions of “rock bottom” (i.e., a

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 28.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

severe low point and moment of clarity for an addicted person). As a prefiguration of the endpoint of intemperate consumption, which was itself often pictured as a vortex in religious allegory, blindness shows Dudley in the starkest, most forceful way possible the death to which he hastens. That knowledge is not imposed from without, by way of a minister's admonitions or even a daughter's tearful warnings, but rather irrupts from within Dudley's perceptual field, making it an immediate, seemingly inescapable fact.

More than just an admonition, blindness serves as a means of reconfiguring Dudley's relationship with himself and the world. From the perspective of late eighteenth-century physiologists like Rush, the senses were communicative pathways between the external world and a dynamically interconnected mind-body system. While the idea of open channels of communication between human and world, self and other, supported optimistic views of a harmonious body politic, Rush's theories of intemperance spotlight the dangers of the open mind-body system through examples of moral contagion and the associative scaffolding for immoral behavior. Perceptions, therefore, were causally joined to the memory, desire, and behavior of the drinker. Blindness, as presented in early American cultural discourses, represented a breakdown of perception, a cleavage between self and other. The poem "Blindness: An Extract" (1792), for example, pictures a mother plunged into the "dreary void" of sightlessness, struggling against a partial but highly affecting, even torturous disjuncture between self and other. Though the poem references the mother's other senses, those senses are inadequate for a deep, complete relationship with her children, specifically the kind of face-to-face identification that is so often the fulcrum of eighteenth-century literary and cultural

productions of sympathy.<sup>70</sup> Brown reconceives this disjunctive nature of blindness as a partial collapse of associative networks that, according to Rush, undergird and propel unhealthy and immoral behaviors.

While Rush envisioned reform through geographic, occupational, and social shifts—a reworking of associative networks—Brown conceives sensory foreclosure as itself a solution to Dudley’s intemperance. The event follows the mechanical logic of sympathy but does not necessarily align with the republican ideals embedded in Rush’s reform plan. For one thing, blindness privatizes Dudley’s reform experience, visually removing him from the unstable environment of the city. Far from being a return to an independent liberal subjectivity, Dudley’s blindness requires a new system of dependence that overturns the patriarchal structure of the early American household. Unlike Rush’s dialectics of drunk masters and sober subordinates, which culminate with the full restoration of masters and hierarchical order, Brown pictures the master’s intemperance as an occasion for the redefinition of power relations within the family unit, allowing daughters to become centers of rational and benevolent influence.

Dudley’s detachment from the social fits into a larger pattern of withdrawal in Brown’s novels. Colin Jeffrey Morris reads such withdrawal as a “response to the crisis in moral authority and identity that accompanied wrenching post-revolutionary

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<sup>70</sup> "BLINDNESS: An EXTRACT," *The Massachusetts Magazine; or, Monthly Museum. Containing the Literature, History, Politics, Arts, Manners & Amusements of the Age* (1790-1796) 4, no. 8 (1792): 522. In the 1797 poem "On a Blind Woman," the condition is treated as a "black disease" that renders all the "charms" of creation entirely vain for the afflicted person. Not only barred from the aesthetic splendor of creation, the blind woman is also denied "the paths that lead to wisdom's throne," following the optical metaphors of Enlightenment discourse.

transformations.”<sup>71</sup> Looking at *Ormond* and *Wieland* (1798), we see this crisis unfold at the level of sense perception. In *Wieland*, hearing is liable to deceit and social disorder, as the ventriloquist Carwin reproduces the voices of other characters with disastrous effect; *Ormond* looks to gaps in vision, represented by counterfeit documents and specious human appearances, as indices and drivers of socio-political and economic disorder. If, as Wendy Bellion says, the “senses [were] politicized as agents of knowledge and discernment” in post-revolutionary America, then Brown’s novels showcase the precariousness of American political subjectivity through the failure or unreliability of sense perception itself.<sup>72</sup> In *Ormond*, such unreliability becomes painfully clear with the rise of yellow fever (a sometimes-invisible invader of bodies and homes), but the text lays special stress on agents whose specious appearances mislead men like Dudley. Speaking of the forger and swindler Craig, Brown says: “His character was a standing proof of the vanity of physiognomy. There were few men who could refuse their confidence to his open and ingenuous aspect.”<sup>73</sup> Later, Dudley’s landlord bemoans the ubiquity of deception: “There is nothing but knavery in the world one would think.”<sup>74</sup> Read against the theme of deceit, the paradoxical notion of clarity-through-blindness makes sense, as it disconnects Dudley from the conditions that spurred his later intemperance, including his initial susceptibility to the “open and ingenious aspect” of the

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<sup>71</sup> Colin Jeffrey Morris, "To "Shut out the World": Political Alienation and the Privatized Self in the Early Life and Works of Charles Brockden Brown, 1776-1794," *Journal of the Early Republic* 24, no. 4 (2004): 611.

<sup>72</sup> Wendy Bellion, *Citizen Spectator: Art, Illusion, and Visual Perception in Early National America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2012), 5.

<sup>73</sup> Brown, *Ormond*, 99.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid*, 102.

forger Craig.<sup>75</sup> Disconnection, however, does not return Dudley to some kind of foundational self; nor does it instill a true ascetic attitude, as he shuns human company out of shame, not conviction (Dudley, one should note, creates his own alias to disguise his poverty from former connections in New York). It turns out that sympathy—the web of social relations that structures and impinges upon subjectivity—runs quite deep.

#### Sophia's Mother and the Interiority of Habit

While Brown begins to complicate the elasticity of Rush's republican subject through Dudley's narrative, his treatment of Sophia's mother offers an even more troubling framework for thinking about the relationship between mind, behavior, and external/somatic conditions. Her shift from dissipated woman to reformed Methodist to religious maniac (i.e., an intemperately religious person) prompts some important questions: how deep does intemperance go? Is it eradicable through a change in habits and associations, as Rush would have it, or is it adaptable to different environments and contexts, even reformist ones? Finally, what are the political implications for such an interiorized view of intemperance?

While Dudley gets a full backstory illustrating the networked conditions of his drinking, Sophia's mother hits the page as a fully formed prostitute and drinker. The only thing Sophia shares about the origins of her mother's habits was her "early indulgence," which could refer to a lack of restraint in her household and/or an early experience with

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid, 99.

gratifying unhealthy desires.<sup>76</sup> Ultimately, the lack of narrative detail makes for a less sympathetic picture than that of Dudley, as does Sophia's mother's more extensive list of transgressions and crimes. Apostrophizing the now dead woman who tormented her, Sophia refers to "thy freaks of intoxication, thy defiance of public shame, the enormity of thy pollutions, the infatuation that made thee glory in the pursuit of a loathsome and detestable trade."<sup>77</sup> Sophia's mother does not just drink to excess or prostitute herself. She publicly defies social mores, including patriarchal prescriptions for female behavior in Anglo-American culture, and revels in her transgressions, making her a "tigress," a beast beneath the dignity of human beings.

The life of Sophia's mother seems to follow a steady progression in immorality, yet she is able to extricate herself from New York, "the theatre of her vices," and "carry a new name, and mask of virtue, into scenes hitherto unvisited."<sup>78</sup> As Howell argues, characters like Sophia's mother assume identities, practices, and new social situations as "mask[s]" or costumes to conceal true motives and personal histories.<sup>79</sup> Resituating the self physically, in other words, does not necessarily translate into a reconfiguration of one's internal states, as Rush would have it (or, to put it in A.A. terms, faking it does not always mean making it). Intentions matter. Sophia's mother is not performing good manners with a desire to be a virtuous woman, to overcome the damage of the past. Neither is she undertaking a more prudential self-making in the Franklinian sense. As

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 226.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 225.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, 226.

<sup>79</sup> Howell, *Against Self-Reliance: The Arts of Dependence in the Early United States*, 180.

with Ormond's racial and class-based cross-dressing, Sophia's mother uses appearance for more nefarious purposes, as when she seduces a wealthy young Englishman into marriage. Artifice, however, cannot be maintained indefinitely; Sophia's mother's "vices had been too conspicuous for her long to escape recognition," nor could she stop her "true character" from bleeding through the costume.<sup>80</sup>

Like Dudley, Sophia's mother is eventually struck sober. Following the death of her English husband: "[A]n unexpected and total revolution was effected, by the exhortations of a Methodist divine. Her heart seemed, on a sudden, to be remoulded, her vices and the abettors of them were abjured, she shut out the intrusions of society, and prepared to expiate, by the rigours of abstinence and the bitterness of tears, the offences of her past life."<sup>81</sup> What the reader gets is a white light come-to-Jesus type moment. Part of a longer history of conversion narratives in the Augustinian tradition, this concept of revelation would become a central motif and structuring principle in recovery narratives of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>82</sup> In Brown's novel, Methodism becomes the mediator for, and the catalyst of, a dissipated character's "total revolution."

Given its suddenness, the experience is one of passion, not rational deliberation. While there were not many late 18<sup>th</sup>-century theologians willing to reduce revelation to motions in the material brain, Rush saw the eloquence of ministers as paralleling the

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<sup>80</sup> Brown, *Ormond*, 226.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 227.

<sup>82</sup> In *Influence of Physical Causes*, Rush speaks of instances where God himself touches the heart and mind of a human: in "extraordinary cases, where bad men are suddenly reformed, without the instrumentality of physical, moral or rational causes, I believe that the organization of those parts of the body, in which the faculties of the mind are seated, undergoes a physical change" (18). In other words, transformation occurs within the physical structures of the mind, not within an immaterial consciousness.

mechanical operations of music on the moral faculty. Passion, in such cases, serves as an “avenue” for not just affecting the moral faculty, but the interlinked faculties of “the understanding and the will.”<sup>83</sup> Like Hume, who affirmed that passion rather than reason motivated action, Rush read moments of rapture as capable of transforming the self, of creating new pathways for thought and action that correspond to changes in the physical structure of the mind. Moved by the minister’s exhortations, Sophia’s mother is similarly motivated to remake her lifeworld. Her reform begins with separation from the social, particularly the triggering effects of familiar milieus, persons, and objects. She also adopts habits of piety, including penitence for her past sins. All good so far. Yet, “In this, as in her former career, she was unacquainted with restraint and moderation.”<sup>84</sup> Rather than being completely reformed by new intentions and practices, following the Rushian model of habituation, Sophia’s mother instead exhibits a similar pattern of intemperance within a different context of practices and behaviors. For her, Christian penitence and introspection lead to obsession, endless self-recrimination, and violent mood swings.

With the example of Sophie’s mother, Brown inverts Rush’s reform strategy of reconfiguring minds through somatic states and habits. For Rush, a shift in context triggers, with mechanical efficiency, a change in the disposition and mental operations of the subject. Rather than stressing deep psychological content and internal qualities that persist overtime, Rush looks to somatic form, occupation, sociality, and geographical location as material determinants of one’s disposition and behavior. Similar associationist

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<sup>83</sup> Rush, *Influence of Physical Causes*, 17.

<sup>84</sup> Brown, *Ormond*, 227.

principles are at work throughout Brown's novel, though the outcomes are different, sometimes ironically so. In an attempt to "snatch [Constantia] from the odious pursuit of Ormond," Dudley plans to take his daughter to Italy and, "by a variety of objects and adventures, efface from her mind any impression [Ormond's] dangerous artifices might have made upon it."<sup>85</sup> When Sophia reflects upon Helena's ignominious situation as Ormond's mistress, she speaks of similar means of liberating Helen from her passion: "Is it not in every bosom a perishable sentiment? Whatever be her warmth, absence will congeal it. Place her in new scenes, and supply her with new associates. Her accomplishments will not fail to attract votaries."<sup>86</sup> In the former case, Ormond intervenes by spurring on Craig to murder Dudley. In the latter, Sophia's desperate love and financial dependency upon Ormond precludes her from "voluntarily adopt[ing]" Sophia's imagined plan.<sup>87</sup> Re-association, as both examples show, is not always executable due to material circumstances, a fact that liberal theories of agency often overlook.

Unlike Constantia and Helen, Sophia's mother resituates herself socially, spatially, and ideologically, but without experiencing the kind of complete "revolution" in character that one might expect under Rush's ideas. As a psychological correlate of the two notable political revolutions of the late eighteenth century, Sophia's mother's "revolution" is supposed to be an overthrow of a corrupt system (significantly described as slavery in Dudley's case), which would then be replaced by a new system, that of

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid, 210-211.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, 141.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

Methodist-inspired penitence. As Rush and other founders conceived of it, the American Revolution promised liberty for Americans, enabling them to live the rational and virtuous lives of republican citizens. Yet, by the 1780s, Rush would bemoan the savagery and self-interestedness of his fellow Americans. Not only that, he would conceive of the American Revolution as itself a source of pathology, which he called “anarchia,” a form of insanity produced by an “excess of the passion for liberty, inflamed by the successful issue of the war.”<sup>88</sup> In *Ormond*, Brown illustrates a revolution in sentiment (remorse, devotion), practice (penitence), and association (social isolation), yet, as with the continuity of vice and excessive passion in post-Revolutionary America, something of the mother’s intemperance persists. Flipping Rush’s script of outside-inside reform, Brown gives us internal conditions that determine the character and outcome of reformist associations and practices. In other words, intemperance itself becomes the mediator and modulator of external forms. In Sophia’s mother’s case, it cranks up her penitence and introspection into overdrive, resulting in “mania,” a condition that suggests Brown’s own anti-utopian sensibilities.

From this picture, intemperance assumes the form of specific habits, such as excessive drinking or smoking, which, overtime, sediment themselves into an individual’s body and mental faculties, forming dispositions or deeper structures of desire that can accommodate more than one kind of excessive behavior. We see something similar in recovery discourse today, specifically the concept of “substitutions.” As Steve

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<sup>88</sup> Benjamin Rush, *Medical inquiries and observations* (Philadelphia: Printed and sold by Prichard & Hall, 1789), 196.

Sussman and David S. Black claim, there is a wide breadth of addictive behaviors, including what have been labeled “substance addictions” and “process addictions,” and many individuals with addiction issues have reported substituting one form of addiction for another.<sup>89</sup> Addiction or, more specifically, the overactive reward systems of those with substance use disorders, becomes a kind of place holder in which different substances or behaviors can fit, providing similar but often sublimated forms of pleasure-seeking (e.g., a heroin addict who takes to excessive coffee consumption). Conceptual differences and historical gaps notwithstanding, the “substitute” concept and Brown’s portrayal of intemperate reform demonstrate that addiction does not have to be a narrowly defined condition but can be a supple and somewhat elastic tendency towards excess that can manifest in, or slide between, multiple forms and contexts. Brown, therefore, complicates Rush’s insistence on habit annihilation, the way in which the mind-body can be completely purged of “disease” through the external reconfiguration of the subject’s habits and lifeworld. A specific habit may be annihilated, yes, but a more enduring disposition can manifest in new, similarly destructive patterns of behavior.

Brown’s inversion of outside-inside reform sets limits to the almost infinitely plastic subject that Rush imagined, a subject whose possibilities reflected the untouched abundance of the American landscape as well as the freedom offered by its republican system of government. For Brown, intemperance demonstrated that reform could not proceed with scientific precision or complete rational control, for either doctors or

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<sup>89</sup> Steve Sussman and David S. Black, "Substitute Addiction: A Concern for Researchers and Practitioners," *Journal of Drug Education* 38, no. 2 (2008): 168.

individuals. Like political revolution, reform was messy, uneven, and, on an emotional and physical level, costly. It might also lead to other kinds of substituted manias—Whiskey Rebellions and other forms of anarchia that threatened the stability of the new nation—as if addiction itself was addicting.

### Conclusion

This chapter has investigated an alternative methodology to strict medicalizing and moralizing perspectives on addiction. Benjamin Rush's science of sympathy, on the one hand, complicates the moral voluntarism of liberal subjectivity by addressing the material networks that undergird drinking behavior. Through the sympathetic framework, what appears to be an individual drinker who has ruined their lives by bad choices becomes a person subject to extra-personal influences that delimit agency both before and during use. As a transitional figure in the history of addiction, Rush does not entirely give up on moral judgment, yet he importantly establishes the physical, shapeable nature of human behavior, which redefines intemperance as a complex process rather than a fixed state, a multi-pronged system of influence rather than an individual's willful command to do wrong. This view of addiction was powerfully shaped by Rush's vision of a Republican government that could effectively reform its citizens into rational, disinterested subjects following the turbulence of the Revolution.

Brown's *Ormond* pushes intemperance deeper into the mind and body in ways that seem to anticipate later chronic disease models of addiction. While this chapter resists a simple linear history of addiction, it should be noted that Brown's depiction of

Dudley and Sophia's mother's persistent intemperance suggests a view not dissimilar from the "disease" concept in 12-step discourse. Dudley, for one, relapses continually, despite feelings of shame and remorse. His "fruitless penitence" demonstrates the ineffectiveness of self-willed reform, a central theme in A.A. narratives produced in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Sophia's mother shows that though behavior and associations may change, and alcohol be avoided, the tendency for excess can persist in alternative forms and in varying degrees.<sup>90</sup>

By 1808, Rush himself would undergo a significant shift in his thinking on intemperance. By rebranding it as a "disease of the will" in *Medical Inquiries and Observations, upon the Diseases of the Mind* (1812), he more firmly localized the problem of chronic drinking in the human mind.<sup>91</sup> Rush preserved his earlier physiological understanding of alcohol's debilitating effects, but he discarded his earlier optimism about mechanical reform. The new "disease" was far more intractable than he initially conceived, prompting Rush to call for the construction of "sober houses" where chronic drinkers would be sequestered against their will to protect them from bad influences and preserve the moral health of the American populace.<sup>92</sup> As Michael Osborn Warner tells us, psychologists and medical doctors following Rush would increasingly focus on biology and psychic interiority in lieu of a more Lockean sensiblist model of

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<sup>90</sup> Sophia's mother's example recalls the idea of the "geographic cure" in 12-step recovery discourse, which denotes an often-flawed attempt to stop using drugs by making changes to one's environment and social relations. The failure of the geographic cure suggests that addiction is more than the aggregate of external influences around an individual at any given point in time.

<sup>91</sup> Rush, *Medical Inquiries and Observations, upon the Diseases of the Mind*, 263.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid*, 268.

disease.<sup>93</sup> However, Rush's philosophy would continue to shape the emerging field of addiction discourse in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Addiction, conceived as a networked phenomenon, would be expanded, modified, and challenged in new contexts and discursive constellations by writers like Rebecca Harding Davis, Lydia Sigourney, Charles Dickens, and Frank J. Webb.

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<sup>93</sup> Mathew Warner Osborn, *Rum Maniacs: Alcoholic Insanity in the Early American Republic* (University of Chicago Press, 2014), 43-44.

## Chapter 2: “Driven to comfort myself”: Lady Drunkards and Family-Systems in 1840s Women’s Temperance Narratives

### Intro

In an 1842 address delivered before the Martha Washingtonian Society of Saco, Maine, a woman described the pivotal moment when she first learned to thoroughly detest intemperance. Returning to her native village after almost ten years away, the speaker muses upon the innocent gambols and formative life experiences of her early years while passing familiar landmarks on the way to her childhood home. However, her fond recollections are violently interrupted by the “sickening, filthy, loathsome stench of Rum, oozing even from the cracks and crevices of the house in which I was born!” Following the fumes into the house’s interior, the narrator makes a shocking discovery: “a woman I had known and respected in former years, now wretchedly intoxicated!”<sup>1</sup>

The oozing home and its drunk inhabitant tarnish the sacred memories of the speaker’s early domestic life and rework the corporeal imagery of antebellum temperance literature. While the leaky, combustible bodies of drunkards appear in novels like Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *House of the Seven Gables* (1851) and Charles Dickens’ *Bleak House* (1853), the temperance speaker extends these qualities to domestic space itself. Just as alcohol fumes emanate from the mouth and pores of the intoxicated woman inside, so does it pass through the “cracks and crevices” of the house, revealing both woman and home as bound and undone in their abjection. The imagery naturalizes the relationship between domestic space and the woman’s body even as it illustrates the

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<sup>1</sup> “A Female Inebriate,” *Washingtonian & Banner* 2, no. 2 (10/20/1842).

collapse of domesticity through the “polluting drug” that turns the “image of an angel” into a “loathsome creature.” Though the speaker admits “that the number of female inebriates is comparatively small,” the singular unnaturalness, the monstrosity, of what she saw that day proves more shocking than more typical stories of male intemperance.

The idea that women drinkers were far outnumbered by men was common in the antebellum period. The American Temperance Society reported that women drank only “one-sixth of the alcohol imbibed by the nation as a whole.”<sup>2</sup> The Bloomingdale Asylum for the Insane recorded a similar 6-to-1 ratio in their statistical analysis of male vs. female patients admitted for delirium tremens and intemperance from 1821 to 1844.<sup>3</sup> Historian Catherine Gilbert Murdock claims, “At the very most, 20 percent of the alcoholic population was female. Historically, it is not America that has a drinking problem, it is American men.”<sup>4</sup> One obvious reason for the variation is that women had more narrowly defined social roles, particularly as mothers and wives, that did not allow for frequent or heavy drinking. Domestic ideology—integral to definitions of an emerging middle-class—also enshrined an image of a morally pure and self-sacrificing womanhood that was vehemently at odds with tippling ladies, whose excess made them unsuitable for the duties of marriage and motherhood. The unique horror of the illustration above hinges upon this jarring contrast between an angelic womanhood and the polluted, uncontrolled

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<sup>2</sup> Holly Berkley Fletcher, *Gender and the American Temperance Movement of the 19th Century* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 16.

<sup>3</sup> Pliny Earle, "ART. VI.--an Analysis of the Cases of Delirium Tremens, Admitted into the Bloomingdale Asylum for the Insane, from June 16th, 1821, to December 31st, 1844.: Table Showing the Ages of 254 Patients. RE-ADMISSIONS," *The American Journal of the Medical Sciences (1827-1924)* 15, no. 29 (1848): 76.

<sup>4</sup> Catherine Gilbert Murdock, *Domesticating Drink: Women, Men, and Alcohol in America, 1870-1940* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1998), 4.

female body—reminiscent of recent anti-drug campaigns featuring before and after images of woman meth addicts—demonstrating what scholars have argued for decades: gender roles and skewed power dynamics have reinforced double standards for addicts across cultures and time periods.<sup>5</sup>

In *Devil of the Domestic Sphere* (2008), Scott C. Martin calls for a deeper analysis of gendered double standards for intemperance and the often-accepted view that women of the nineteenth century did not drink much.<sup>6</sup> Scott amasses an impressive archive of stories and periodicals that compellingly demonstrate a stronger presence of female inebriates in temperance discourse than was originally thought. By digging into the ideological underpinnings of what Mark Lender terms women’s “special stigma” in these texts, he articulates the fundamental threat female drunkenness posed, not only to domestic order but the naturalness of the gender binary so essential to middle-class

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<sup>5</sup> For analysis of double standards for female addicts and alcoholics, see Valery Yandow, “Alcoholism in Women,” *Psychiatric Annals* 19, no. 5 (May 1, 1989): 243-247; Stephen R. Kandall, *Substance and Shadow: Women and Addiction in the United States* (Harvard University Press, 1999); Joanne Sanders, “The Sick Role: A Contemporary Analysis of Women, Alcoholism, and Gender Ideology,” *Alcoholism Treatment Quarterly* 36, no. 1 (2018): 127-49. For scholarship that covers gender double standards outside of the U.S., see Kaye Middleton Fillmore, “Women’s Drinking across the Adult Life Course as Compared to Men’s,” *British Journal of Addiction* 82.7 (1987): 801-11 and Louise Nadeau and Kathryn Harvey, “Women’s Alcoholic Intoxication: The Origins of the Double Standard in Canada,” *Addiction Research and Theory* 2, no. 3 (1995): 279-290. For a study of how women have been redefining gender roles through consumption of alcohol in western countries, see Antonia C. Lyons and Sara A Willott, “Alcohol Consumption, Gender Identities and Women’s Changing Social Positions,” *Sex Roles* 59, no. 9-10 (2008): 694-712.

<sup>6</sup> For more on 19<sup>th</sup>-century perceptions of female drinkers, see Harry G. Levine, “Temperance and Women in 19th-Century United States,” *Alcohol and Drug Problems in Women*, edited by Oriana Josseau Kalant (New York: Plenum Press, 1980), 25–67 and Mark Edward Lender, “A Special Stigma: Women and Alcoholism in the Late 19th and Early 20th Centuries,” *Alcohol Interventions: Historical and Sociocultural Approaches*, edited by David L. Strug, S. Priyadarsini, and Merton M. Hyman (Haworth Press, 1986), 57.

identity.<sup>7</sup> In this chapter, I take a more intersectional approach to the topic of female intemperance by analyzing a selection of under-discussed temperance stories about upper-class women drinkers from the 1840s, including the anonymously penned *Confessions of a Female Inebriate* (1842), Lydia Sigourney’s “Louisa Wilson” (1847), and Maria Lamas’s *The Glass* (1849). These stories offer insight into how social categories of gender and class supervene upon the more laterally oriented network models of addiction I am tracing in antebellum literature.<sup>8</sup> They not only depict the disproportionate stigma that Martin describes but resist naïve moral theories of addiction by looking to the familial and medical origins of excessive drinking for upper-class women.<sup>9</sup> In doing so, these narratives trouble 19<sup>th</sup>-century constructions of the domestic sphere—and its psychic correlate, female interiority—as contained, unassailable spaces. In describing these networks of influence, I will be drawing from recent psychosocial theories of addiction, particularly family systems theory, not so much to prove the usefulness or validity of any theory, but to show how key insights about the relational underpinnings of addiction in contemporary theory took shape in mid-19<sup>th</sup>-century

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<sup>7</sup> Scott C. Martin, *Devil of the Domestic Sphere: Temperance, Gender, and Middle-Class Ideology, 1800-1860* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2008), 16.

<sup>8</sup> By “more laterally oriented network models,” I refer to models that envision addiction unfolding within social, physical, and cultural networks that powerfully mediate or overdetermine drinking patterns, thus complicating volitional, subject-oriented theories of addiction.

<sup>9</sup> My focus on class, gender, and medicine aligns my work with Susan Zieger’s excellent chapter on female hypodermic morphine addicts from the late Victorian period. While Zieger recognizes how both alcoholism and hypodermic morphine use threatened social order and women’s ability to inhabit prescribed gender roles, she focuses on the complex and paradoxical entanglements of morality and medicine in doctors’ constructions of the female morphinomaniac. In attempting to outline a network approach that both complicates and expands these frameworks, I push my focus beyond the doctor-patient relationship to a larger web of mediators that trouble the myth of private spheres and women’s insular moral nature.

temperance narratives about lady drunkards. Such narratives offer an alternative to simplistic models of alcoholism that blamed individuals for chronic consumption and undermine the cultural logic behind monstrous representations of lady drinkers.

Most representations of intemperance in the early nineteenth century focused on drinking among men and poor women. The alcoholic prostitute, for instance, was a frequent trope in popular sentimental and later realist fiction, with Nancy from *Oliver Twist* (1839) being one of the more memorable, sympathetic instances. Because womanhood often assumed the contours of middle-class domesticity in antebellum temperance culture, drinking among bourgeois and more well-to-do women was much more disruptive, threatening, and unintelligible than for the lower classes. In *Society in America* (1837), Harriet Martineau speaks to the unthinkability of intemperate “women of station and education” and gestures to a sociological explanation for their behavior:

If women, in a region professing religion more strenuously than any other, living in the deepest external peace, surrounded by prosperity, and outwardly honoured more conspicuously than in any other country, can ever so far cast off self-restraint, shame, domestic affection, and the deep prejudices of education, as to plunge into the living hell of intemperance, there must be something fearfully wrong in their position.<sup>10</sup>

Martineau gets to the heart of the representational problem. How could intemperance—a condition that so often took on racial and classed valences in American art and literature—affect affluent women, whose material conditions and aura of purity seemed to protect them from the Bacchic influence of booze? Unlike lower-class women, whose lives were marked by toil and economic instability, upper-class women were supposed to

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<sup>10</sup> Harriet Martineau, *Society in America* (New York: AMS, 1966), 2.267.

be insulated from the struggles, temptations, and rough contingencies of the marketplace. So, what made them drink? Seeing something “fearfully wrong in their position,” Martineau points to the stultifying effects of leisure and lack of political and civic engagement for American ladies, what she calls “vacuity of mind.”<sup>11</sup> Along with hereditary influence and the use of cordials during girlhood, such vacuity left gentlewomen vulnerable to the lure of intoxicants.

In many ways, Martineau’s sociological take on tipping ladies did not noticeably impact temperance discourse in the decade to follow. As many scholars have argued, temperance was itself highly conservative in its normalization of separate spheres as an essential condition for sober, industrious white middle-class subjectivity.<sup>12</sup> And while suffragists like Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Amelia Bloomer would seek educational reform and an expansion of woman’s rights to further the temperance cause in the early 1850s, they elided any detailed discussion of women drinkers that would have distracted from their urgent message about legal and political remedies for the hopeless situations of drunkard’s wives.<sup>13</sup> Yet Martineau does put her finger on a major concern of female

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid

<sup>12</sup> See Fletcher, *Gender and the American Temperance Movement of the Nineteenth Century* (2008) and Martin, *Devil of the Domestic Sphere* (2008). Glenn Hendler shifts the focus from the middle-class to the working-class with his reading of Washingtonian sentimentality, arguing that temperance rhetoric “articulates racialized, classed, and gendered forms of identity together into an affective whole” (43). In the intro for *Water Drops from Women Writers: A Temperance Reader* (2001), Carol Mattingly argues that temperance fiction by women tended to address social and cultural issues that male temperance fiction did not. Eric Norton reads the overlooked novel *The Reveille; or, Our Music at Dawn* as a powerful counterpoint to the critical consensus about the normative functions of temperance discourse in his article “Temperance Friction.”

<sup>13</sup> Stanton leveraged woman’s superior moral sense—a hallmark of domestic ideology—to push for voting rights under the argument that only women would dependably vote politicians into office who would stop the liquor traffic.

temperance narratives from the 1840s: the unique suffering of lady drunkards based upon the private character of their intemperance. Martineau elaborates, “An intemperate man has strong temptation to plead: he began with conviviality, and only arrives at solitary intemperance as the ultimate degradation. A woman indulges in the vice in solitude and secrecy, as long as secrecy is possible. She knows that there is no excuse, no solace, no hope.”<sup>14</sup> The two etiological poles of conviviality and secret indulgence that Martineau describes correspond to gender differences that grounded separate spheres ideology in the nineteenth century.

As the 1827 serial novel “Confessions of a Drunkard” shows, the doctrine of separate spheres supported a distinctly masculine understanding of intemperance and its causes. The author writes, “Woman from her pursuits is *naturally confined* almost wholly to the precincts of her dwelling...She is not *exposed* to the daily, aye hourly, temptations to indulge in potations which man is, from the very nature of his pursuits and the customary civility of those with whom he is *constantly obliged* to mingle.”<sup>15</sup> Stressing the inherent and unavoidable dangers of public life for men who must carefully navigate the market economy and the temptations of tavern homosociality, Lamb presents intemperance as an outside threat of influence. Later novels like T.S. Arthur’s *Ten Nights in a Bar-room* (1854) would elaborate upon this view by picturing the tavern as a site of moral contagion. Unchecked by feminine influence, the homosocial space of the Sickle and Sheaf progressively deteriorates under the influence of alcohol, gambling, and hyper-

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<sup>14</sup> Martineau, 2.267.

<sup>15</sup> My italics. “Confessions of a Drunkard: Chapter III,” *The New - England Galaxy and United States Literary Advertiser* (1830-1836), Aug 10, 1827: 2.

masculine violence. In Walt Whitman's *Franklin Evans* (1842), an innocent young man from the country goes to the city in pursuit of opportunity, where he faces a "thousand vicious temptations besetting [him] on every side."<sup>16</sup> Drinking in such narratives is never only an issue of intentionality or personal responsibility. It gets enfolded into social and economic assemblages—drinking customs, cheap liquor peddlers, industrial-scale whiskey producers, spaces like boarding houses and hotel taverns where shelter and alcohol are entangled—whose temptations and excesses confound the untrained minds of innocent youths, who eventually become socially contagious drunkards themselves.

Women's domestic nature, according to this understanding of drunkenness as a product of a life lived in public, ostensibly immunized them from social vices like drunkenness. Temperance fiction promoted this ideal of femininity in its depiction of dutiful wives who strive to save their husbands from temptation through a countervailing, domestic influence, following the moral suasion approach of early temperance reformers. But just as domesticity was thought to protect women from the evils of the public world, so too did gendered notions of privacy structure discussions and narratives of lady drunkards. Secrecy is the most salient example of what Elaine Franz Parsons calls the "different language and tropes" of female drunkard narratives.<sup>17</sup> The author of "Confessions of a Drunkard," for one, conjectures that "secret griefs" might lead women to drink.<sup>18</sup> In the introduction to *Confessions of a Female Inebriate*, secrecy takes on

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<sup>16</sup> Walter Whitman, *Franklin Evans; or The Inebriate: A Tale of the Times* (New York: Random House, 1929), 40.

<sup>17</sup> Elaine Frantz Parsons, *Manhood Lost: Fallen Drunkards and Redeeming Women in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 11.

<sup>18</sup> Lamb, 3.

classed dimensions as wealth temporarily throws a “broad mantle” over personal and domestic disorder.<sup>19</sup> The author of “The Intemperate Wife,” a companion piece to an article on drunk husbands in the Kentucky-based *Western Luminary*, pictures women drinking in “the innermost sanctuary of the domestic temple.”<sup>20</sup> As these examples suggest, secrecy indicates a nested structure of psychological interiority and physical enclosure that supports the consumption patterns of upper-class women. Though secrecy can feed into misogynistic characterizations of women as deceptive and manipulative, a view that Susan Zieger sees in late nineteenth-century narratives of female morphinomaniacs, private drinking or drug use need not presuppose a private or purely moral origin of intemperance.<sup>21</sup> Nor can domestic ideology, with its insistence on women’s separation from the public world, hide the networked dynamics that underlie addiction, dynamics that can help us chart the cracks and holes in nineteenth-century separate spheres logic.

The narratives at the center of this chapter all focus on lady drunkards whose experiences show how addiction breaches and undermines the domestic sphere through networked discourses like family histories, spousal dynamics, and medical practices. In my analysis, I examine the following questions: Did women’s private drinking practices make them uniquely responsible for their drinking in the minds of reformers, or were their addictions attributed to the same feminine nature that was supposed to insulate them

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<sup>19</sup> *Confessions of a Female Inebriate; or, Intemperance in High Life* (Boston: William Henshaw, 1842).

<sup>20</sup> “THE INTEMPERATE WIFE,” *Western Luminary* (1824-1834), July 25, 1827: 30.

<sup>21</sup> Susan Zieger, *Inventing the Addict: Drugs, Race, and Sexuality in Nineteenth-Century British and American Literature* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008), 129.

from the immorality of the public world? How do family dynamics, guided by gender ideology, shape or enable drinking within the home, and contribute to more lateral ways of conceiving addiction? What new pathways for networked thinking about addiction are opened by considering the historically specific situation of lady drinkers? How does gender constrain, support, or make unavoidable these new networked models? The answers to these questions will help us understand how female temperance literature—an often-conservative brand of social reform writing—opened new pathways for reconceiving not just addiction, but selfhood, the marital bond, and intergenerational inheritance.

*A Lady's Medicine: Confessions of a Female Inebriate*

The title of this short story, billed as a true account of female inebriety written by “a lady,” echoes a surfeit of similar titles found in American periodicals and autobiographies produced during the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Influenced by the subjectivist turn of Romanticism, including Rousseau’s *Confessions* (1782), as well as religious traditions, the confessional mode took hold of public discourse at a time when the liberal subject of free market capitalism was emerging in American culture and political discourse. The 1800s were, as one periodical writer put it, an “age of confessions.”<sup>22</sup> By the late 1820s, everyone seemed to be confessing—novel readers, spies, drinkers, husbands, smokers, even inanimate objects. Relevant to the topic of drugs, and indicative of how ubiquitous

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<sup>22</sup> W. B.E, "Letter 2 -- no Title: CONFESSIONS OF A HUSBAND," *Ladies' Magazine* (1828-1829), November 1828: 513.

the confessing spirit was, one object narrative features a talking medicine cabinet that bewails the dangerous tinctures it stores, which an untrained “doctoress” prescribes to hapless clients.<sup>23</sup> More importantly for a cultural history of addiction, Thomas De Quincey published *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* (1821), which Barry Milligan reads as inaugurating a new genre of addict autobiography, while first-person (in)temperance narratives set up a formula and confessional style that would greatly influence speaking and writing practices in Alcoholics Anonymous and other 12-step groups throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.<sup>24</sup>

Confessions by nineteenth-century ladies stand out, however, as public disclosure of “bad” behavior violated gendered notions of propriety in early American culture. For the narrator of “Confessions of an Inebriate,” the normative demand for privacy is outweighed by the potential benefits of sharing one’s experience with others. “I have written it for a warning,” she says, “that none of my sex may be innocently lost upon the rock where my bark was wrecked; yes, wrecked, under a calm sky and on a summer sea.”<sup>25</sup> “Innocently” suggests that the speaker fell under the power of liquor, despite all the material comforts of her upper-class existence, at least partly because of ignorance. By sharing her story, she can help other women navigate the otherwise unrecognized temptations and perils that ladies face. Ever since the early temperance writings of Rush and Beecher, reformers had addressed the epistemic problems of intemperance, focusing

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<sup>23</sup> “Confessions of a Medicine-Chest.: CHAPTER I,” *Robert Merry’s Museum (1841-1851)* November 1845: 338.

<sup>24</sup> Barry Milligan, intro to *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater and Other Writings* (London: Penguin, 2003), xiii-xxxviii.

<sup>25</sup> *Confessions of a Female Inebriate*, 35.

particularly on the subtleness of dependency (a physiological process that can exceed conscious awareness) and alcohol's longstanding entrenchment in social and professional life, which can blind users to its dangers. The writer of "Confessions" takes on similar problems but also gives literary treatment to an issue addressed by Martineau a decade earlier: the unintelligibility of intemperance among ladies.

Of the three narratives I am analyzing, "Confessions" is the most explicit in its moral. Published by William Henshaw in Boston in 1842 and advertised alongside T.S. Arthur's *Six Nights with the Washingtonians* and another Henshaw publication called "Violated Sanctuary" in *Christian World*, the story describes a wealthy woman's plunge into drunkenness after becoming dependent on wine prescribed for a medical complaint. Mary admits,

I loved and prized the bounties of God's providence; but few and short were the moments of gratitude to the Giver. My character peculiarly needed the discipline of adversity; I never knew but one human being who had so much pride as myself, and that was my husband. My pride needed to be humbled, but "O Lucifer, son of the morning," how was it humbled!<sup>26</sup>

For the narrator, pride offers an overarching providential framework for the events of the story: Mary's overuse of wine (self-medication vs. reliance upon God the healer), her unwillingness to give up drinking after recognizing the problem (denial of the truth of her alcoholic/human condition), and her husband's abandonment after Mary makes a spectacle of herself after getting drunk at a social gathering (the fall and its consequences). Yet the story's moral does not entirely eclipse the more subtle cultural, physical, and gendered dynamics at play.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

While Scott proposes that female drunkenness threatened the biological basis of middle-class gender ideology, stories like *Confessions of a Female Inebriate* hew to gendered etiologies and descriptions of alcoholism that still uphold the divisions of the sexes.<sup>27</sup> The pathway for intemperance in *Confessions* thus begins with a serious illness—an internal complaint, rather than an external temptation—after which the narrator experiences a prolonged debility and depression. Her husband contacts a renowned physician, who prescribes exercise and a “fine old wine.” Mary describes her experience:

I commenced its use sparingly, intending to increase it, if it proved beneficial. It was decidedly so. The sensations of weariness, languor, and faintness at the stomach, from which I had suffered so much, were immediately relieved by it. My health began to improve gradually, and at the end of three months, I was nearly well. Yet I did not dream of discontinuing my medicine; on the contrary, I was gradually increasing the quantity, from week to week, as its effects became less perceptible.<sup>28</sup>

The prescription works immediately, and the narrator becomes strongly attached to what she calls “my medicine,” so much so that she increases the dose to maintain the desired effect. Whether that effect is simply pleasure resulting from the immediate relief of debilitating symptoms or a surplus pleasure that exceeds the restorative functions of the medicine, Mary does not say—another marker of gendered, upper-class propriety. And while a theory of drug tolerance had yet to be formalized, this idea of increasing dosage in response to diminishing returns was very much part of a mid-century physiological

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<sup>27</sup> Martin, *Devil of the Domestic Sphere*, 33.

<sup>28</sup> *Confessions of a Female Inebriate*, 11.

understanding of alcoholic progression, as was the idea of dependence.<sup>29</sup> Thus, when Mary attempts to stop all restoratives after six months, she experiences disruptive symptoms, and then resumes the wine. “Once and again I made the same attempt and failed,” she says, “and then I told Mr. L. that my health was not as firm as I had supposed, for I found it impossible to relinquish my wine; he replied that I ought not to attempt it.”<sup>30</sup> At this point, Mary opens up to her husband, who simply tells her to keep on using the medicine. Mary’s circumscribed domestic life offers no help or mediation beyond her doctor and husband, allowing for her dependence on wine to progress unchecked.

For the first thirty years, temperance had focused most of its energies on ardent spirits as distinguished from fermented beverages. Teetotalers of the 1830s, however, took reform to the extreme, calling for abstinence from all kinds of alcohol, which became branded as inherently evil and pernicious to the human constitution. This meant that no matter the context of consumption, or the type of alcohol consumed, ingesting alcohol was bad. Teetotalism would spur debate over wine in the Bible and, more importantly for our purposes, the longstanding tradition of prescribing alcohol for numerous medical problems. In a series of allegorical stories printed in the Boston-based *Zion’s Herald*, Dr. Richard Alcohol—representing the unsafe practices of physicians,

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<sup>29</sup> Going back to Rush, doctors perceived the organs of drinkers, like the stomach, as increasingly debilitated by stimulants like whiskey overtime. Such debility necessitated greater amounts of stimulants to overcome the torpor caused by the drug. The same theories can be found in later periodicals, including the 1814 article “On the Gradual and Insidious Progress of Intemperance: No. V” in *The Utica Christian Magazine*, which details how self-medication can precipitate dependence on alcohol.

<sup>30</sup> *Confessions of a Female Inebriate*, 12.

surgeons, and dentists—celebrates alcohol as a “matchless sanative,” an agent that supports physical and spiritual health, and promises to promote its use when elected to the medical board for the “city of dissipation.”<sup>31</sup> Another teetotaler article would leverage anti-immigrant sentiment in its portrayal of an Irish peddler who tries to pass himself as a doctor. The “doctor” prescribes brandy as a universal cure-all; to circumvent the criticism of temperance people, he presents it “as a medicine,” not a beverage.<sup>32</sup> The distinction, readers are led to believe, is as dubious as the doctor’s credentials. The medical label is merely a justification for drunkenness. Temperance advocates also garnered the support of doctors to cast doubt on the efficacy of alcohol as medicine. In an article in *Liberator*, a Dr. Gilman is quoted as saying that there is no “absolute necessity” for the medical or surgical use of alcohol, instead offering a variety of substitutes that do not have the same potential for addiction. The writer argues that “the foundation of much, very much of the intemperance of the land is laid in the nursery by the little, but constant, and ultimately ruinous dosing of alcohol.”<sup>33</sup> While the teetotaler’s task was formidable, given the long history of doctor-prescribed and self-medicating uses of alcohol in western societies, they rallied many doctors, chemists, and religious leaders to their cause of purging alcohol from the *materia medica*.

“Confessions,” following rules of feminine decorum, does not engage directly in polemics about the medical use of alcohol or whether doctors could be held responsible

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<sup>31</sup> P., “FROM THE SAYINGS AND DOINGS OF RICHARD ALCOHOL, M. D.: CHAP. VII. ‘NATURE’S INFALLIBLE COMPOUND MATCHLESS SANATIVE.’ ‘CERTIFICATES,’” *Zion’s Herald (1823-1841)*, June 20, 1838: 100.

<sup>32</sup> “AS A MEDICINE,” *Christian Reflector (1838-1848)*, Jan 4, 1839: 1.

<sup>33</sup> “MEDICAL USE OF ALCOHOL,” *Liberator (1831-1865)*, February 18, 1853: 28.

for turning patients into drunkards, a topic that is very relevant today given increased scrutiny of the pharmaceutical industry and prescription practices as drivers of the opioid epidemic. “Confessions” only offers a spare description of a subtle physiological progression of alcoholism that begins with debility and the common prescription of wine as a restorative. Even the moral framework of pride, which encourages the reader to view Mary’s tinkering with dosage as an attempt to preserve the comforts of earthly life, does not negate the insidiously subtle nature of physical dependence that takes Mary, and to some extent her husband, unawares. Then there is the fact that Mary tries again and again to stop but finds herself physically unable to do so, which demonstrates the limits of human intentionality before a phenomenon that does not answer to moral appeals against pride or calls for Christian humility.

Following Mary’s physical dependence, the narrative shifts to a more conventional drunkalogue that underlines the transgressiveness of a lady’s intemperance. Mary describes the automatism of her alcoholic body, a case of the spins due to overconsumption, extreme shifts in mood, and even the physical abuse of her eldest child. All these experiences of intoxication violate the aesthetic and behavioral norms of upper-class womanhood. These violations register even more strongly with Mary’s overly familiar banter with an Irish servant and, at the end of the story, being too loud, emotional, and wobbly during a social party. Most disturbingly, Mary’s increasing uncontrol leads to the accidental poisoning of her eldest daughter by giving her laudanum instead of paregoric for a serious illness. When the husband first finds out about his wife’s consumption following the accident, he gives her a firm ultimatum: “There is but

one alternative before you, Mary; this disgraceful, fatal habit must be abandoned, or we *part*.”<sup>34</sup> Mary, in this moment, is treated as a full liberal subject, as she is promised no external aid to help with her intemperance. The husband neither recognizes the physiological dimension of intemperance—what Mary describes as overexcitement of the nervous system in response to her mind being “jarred out of tune by constant stimulants”—nor how he might have enabled his wife’s behavior, at least through ignorance.<sup>35</sup> A habit, for the husband, is something taken up willingly, and something discarded willingly, at least with sufficient motivation. Yet Mary’s later relapse demonstrates the faultiness of a will-based approach to recovery and the magical thinking of a prideful upper-class man who wants his problems to simply disappear.

Mary, however, does not just accept her husband’s ultimatum uncomplainingly. In a rare moment of what might qualify as social criticism, Mary declares: “O how wide the difference with the heart of woman! She may be forsaken, abused, trampled on, but amid all, the thought of separation does not enter her heart...let the wife be scorned and forsaken of the world, and the husband will not bide the disgrace.”<sup>36</sup> On a surface level, Mary criticizes bourgeois husbands for their inconstancy and extreme sensitivity to public disgrace, their inability to parallel the devotion and perseverance of drunkards’ wives. Going deeper, she can be read as calling out double standards of judgment that present male drunkenness, including the violence visited upon women, as more common and acceptable than a wife being scandalized publicly. Mary may be valorizing a self-

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<sup>34</sup> *Confessions of a Female Inebriate*, 25.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 30.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, 25.

sacrificing womanhood, but she still jabs at the fact that women, though wronged time and time again in American society, are stigmatized and abandoned so quickly and for lesser transgressions than their male counterparts.

Despite the implicit gender critique, the genre of confession converges with classed and gendered status to ultimately privatize Mary's experience. The narrator, in the end, can only blame herself. Yet we, the audience, are still confronted with a string of mediators—the doctor, prescription practices, the distant husband, physiological and psychological dependence, shame inflected by social expectations of mothers, guilt over Mary's possible role in her terminally ill daughter's death. "Confessions," I thus contend, cannot recognize its own potential moral—that intemperance is a networked phenomenon and should be addressed as such—given the entrenchment of liberal subjecthood in antebellum culture and the confessional genre in particular. This tension between overt moral judgment and an emerging view of networked addiction persists in Sigourney's "Louisa Wilson," yet the latter goes much further in articulating how spousal and intergenerational family dynamics engender the lady drunkard's alcoholic desire.

(Con)testing the Limits of the Marital Bond: Lydia H. Sigourney's "Louisa Wilson"

Lydia Sigourney is best known as a prolific New England poet and educator who produced hundreds of texts during her lifetime ranging from poems on Native American displacement to conduct manuals like *Letters to Young Ladies* (1833). Early critics tended to view Sigourney as thoroughly conventional in her literary creations and

conservative in her politics.<sup>37</sup> Seen as a proponent of separate spheres, Sigourney stood opposite bold suffrage crusaders like Stanton and Bloomer, despite having carved out a very prominent space for herself in a predominantly male literary marketplace. Such support of separate spheres is on full display in the preface to *Water-Drops* (1848), where Sigourney, going under the name Mrs. L.H. Sigourney, describes how women can best serve the temperance cause: “Not the assumption of masculine energies, not the applause of popular assemblies; but the still, small voice singing at the cradle-side,—the prayerful sigh, that cries where seraphs veil their faces.”<sup>38</sup> Just as women’s conduct book writer George Washington Burnap trumpets that “Woman is mistress of the fortunes of the world, by holding in her plastic hand the minds and hearts of those who are to mould the coming age,” so does Sigourney uphold a view of republican womanhood that stresses the importance of domestic influence on the formation of sober selves and societies.<sup>39</sup> While this model seems to relegate women’s direct influence to the home, more recent critics have argued that Sigourney strategically deployed and repurposed domestic and

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<sup>37</sup> In the biography *Mrs. Sigourney, the Sweet Singer of Hartford* (1930), Gordon Sherman Haight would set the tone for much future criticism by portraying Sigourney as lacking literary merit. In “Early American Writers for Children: Lydia H. Sigourney,” Bert Roller contrasts the popular Sigourney, who “did not write even one line of real poetry” (233), with Margaret Fuller, whose efforts to emancipate women wrecked her career. Ann Douglas Wood reads Sigourney as “sociologically significant as an index to the psychology and culture of nineteenth-century American women,” but without “intellectual or literary merit” (163-164). Mary G. De Jong would be one of the first scholars to call for a critical reevaluation of Sigourney’s work and life in “Lydia Howard Huntley Sigourney (1791-1865),” *Legacy* 5, no. 1 (1988): 35-43.

<sup>38</sup> Mrs. L. H. Sigourney, *Water-Drops* (New York: Robert Carter: 1848), V.

<sup>39</sup> George Washington Burnap, *The Sphere and Duties of Women: A Series of Lectures* (Baltimore: Printed by John Murphy, 1848): 110-111. For more on Sigourney’s contributions to models of republican womanhood, see Sarah Robbins’ “The Future Good and Great of Our Land’: Republican Mothers, Female Authors, and Domesticated Literacy in Antebellum New England,” *The New England Quarterly* 75, no. 4 (2002): 562.

sentimental modes to push for greater agency among women in public affairs.<sup>40</sup> Like these scholars, I see Sigourney's treatment of the lady drunkard as reworking the genre of domestic fiction in ways that complicate separate spheres ideology. Unlike those scholars, I read addiction as vitally important to Sigourney's project of testing the limits of dominant ideologies and their concomitant literary modes. I use family systems theory to understand Sigourney's more networked conceptualization of addiction and its challenge to domesticity.

Published in 1847 in the *Columbian Lady's and Gentleman's Magazine* and later included in the temperance collection *Water Drops*, Sigourney's story "Louisa Wilson" differs from *Confessions of a Female Inebriate* in several ways. Perhaps most significantly, Sigourney writes in the third person, shifting between the thoughts and perspectives of two gossiping spinsters, Louisa, her husband Frederick, and Mrs. Carlton, a surrogate mother figure to the Wilsons. As the title of the work suggests, Louisa and her drinking are at the center of the narrative, even when they are hidden within the spacious apartments of the Wilson mansion. Yet Sigourney's multi-perspectival structure supports a more ecological view of intemperance. Despite moralistic temperance tropes in the story (such as references to drinking as an "evil habit"), polemics take a backseat to what

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<sup>40</sup> See Sean Epstein-Corbin, "From 'American Hemans' to Global Servant: The Structure of Sentimental Cosmopolitanism in Sigourney's *Pleasant Memories of Pleasant Lands*," in *Lydia Sigourney: Critical Essays and Cultural Views*, edited by Mary Louise Kete and Elizabeth Petrino (University of Massachusetts Press, 2018), 87-104; Janet Dean, "She Wept Alone," in *Unconventional Politics* (University of Massachusetts Press, 2016), 67-112; Lynnette Grace Leonard's 2006 dissertation, *A Rebel in Conservative Clothes: The Rhetorical Theory and Practice of Lydia Sigourney*; Allison Giffen, "Dutiful Daughters and Needy Fathers: Lydia Sigourney and Nineteenth-Century Popular Literature," *Women's Studies* 32, no. 3 (2003): 255-80.

is otherwise a sympathetic study of how relationships and social structures mediate the secret alcohol consumption and thwarted recovery of an upper-class woman.<sup>41</sup>

Of particular importance to this study is Louisa's husband's perception of and response to his wife's intemperance. By shifting the focus to the husband, Sigourney sheds light on how intemperance reconfigures the spousal dynamics within the bourgeois home beyond the privation and violence typically seen in narratives of male drunkards. Sigourney's dramatization of role shifts and what we might call "enabling" behaviors anticipates more recent psychosocial approaches to addiction, including family-systems theory and the family disease model.<sup>42</sup> Her early recognition of these dynamics represents a rethinking of the public model of intemperance, which upheld domesticity and motherhood as counters and correctives to the noxious influences of the outside world. Intemperance, Sigourney suggests, does not just develop because of a failure to police boundaries between internal and external spaces, familial and extra-familial relationships. It could thrive under the insular conditions of domesticity and the restrictive values of middle-class ideology.

For both family-systems theory and the family disease model, addiction entails more than just the chemical dependency and dysfunctional behavior of an individual

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<sup>41</sup> Sigourney, *Water Drops*, 96.

<sup>42</sup> The "enabling" designation features significantly in popular recovery discourses, namely that of Al-Anon, Codependents Anonymous, and Adult Children of Alcoholics. It also applies to family therapeutic models. Therapist Kyle S. King says that all enablers "love someone who is out of control, and they find themselves taking more responsibility for the actions of that person than the person is taking for themselves." For a history of the concept and a reevaluation of its usefulness, see also Rob J. Rotunda and Kathy Doman, "Partner Enabling of Substance Use Disorders: Critical Review and Future Directions," *The American Journal of Family Therapy* 29, no. 4 (2001): 257-70.

substance user. A condition shared by families, addiction instead “manifest[s] in how members interact with one another—how their roles, responsibilities, and communication styles develop and adjust when at least one family member has an addictive disorder.”<sup>43</sup> In an important 1958 article “Alcoholism and the Family,” Joan K. Jackson argues that there is a “two-way” relationship between the alcoholic and the family, with families perpetuating, but also playing an important role in remedying, the condition.<sup>44</sup> Just seven years before Jackson’s article, Al-Anon, a 12-step based recovery program for the spouses and relatives of alcoholics, formed with the help of Lois Wilson, wife of Alcoholics Anonymous co-founder Bill Wilson. Along with the new family-based paradigm in psychological literature at the time, Al-Anon pushed for a more relational understanding of the issue, spotlighting the importance of healing and boundary maintenance for family members whose mental and emotional lives had been thoroughly entangled with a loved one’s alcoholism.

While Al-Anon and early family disease models demonstrated principles of general systems theory, most notably circular causality, psychiatrist Murray Bowen would use systems theory as a basis for his own model of human behavior, which favored the observable and more objective dynamics of systems to the internal mechanisms of psychodynamic theories.<sup>45</sup> In a 1974 article, Bowen also sidesteps the inward focus of

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<sup>43</sup> Dennis L. Thombs and Cynthia J. Osborn, *Introduction to Addictive Behaviors* 4th ed (New York: Guilford Publications, 2013), 192.

<sup>44</sup> J. K. Jackson, “Alcoholism and the Family,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 315, no. 1 (1958), 91.

<sup>45</sup> Bowen was one of several prominent psychologists/psychiatrists who shaped system-based models of psychological disorders between the 50s and 70s, including Gregory Bateson, who would become one of the leading figures in cybernetic theory, eventually publishing “The Cybernetics of ‘Self’: A Theory of Alcoholism” in 1971.

chronic disease theories of addiction by presenting alcoholism as itself a “symptom of the larger family or social unit.”<sup>46</sup> Bowen explains his theory with the narrative of a wife who drinks in response to her husband’s overfunctioning as businessman and head of the household. Having given up her own career to support her husband’s ambitions, the wife gradually loses her decision-making powers and sense of self, then resorts to liquor to get through her chores and other household obligations. The story illustrates Bowen’s definition of the family system, in which “a change in the functioning of one family member is automatically followed by a compensatory change in another family member.”<sup>47</sup> These “compensatory changes” create feedback loops that reinforce dysfunctional familial dynamics, as when the husband’s overfunctioning precipitates, and is then perpetuated by, the mounting dysfunction of the wife. Like circular causality, the systems concept of homeostasis has frequently been used to explain how addictions emerge and persist overtime within families. In its early uses, family homeostasis referred to the norms and rules, both spoken and unspoken, that were meant to preserve order in the family and regulate its contact with the outside world.<sup>48</sup> According to Paula Marantz Cohen, however, clinical studies have demonstrated that sick families seem to suffer from “over-developed homeostatic behavior.”<sup>49</sup> That is, the very efforts considered integral in maintaining order within a closed family system can breed or exacerbate dysfunction.

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<sup>46</sup> M. Bowen, “Alcoholism as Viewed through Family Systems Theory and Family Psychotherapy,” *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 233, no. 1 (1974): 115.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Paula Marantz Cohen, *The Daughter's Dilemma: Family Process and the Nineteenth-century Domestic Novel* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991), 17.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

With addiction, such dysfunctional homeostatic behavior can manifest as social isolation of the family, secrecy, and attempts at managing the presence and consumption of alcohol or drugs in the household—all of which occur in “Louisa Wilson.”

The family systems approach is not new to literary study. During the 1990s and early 2000s, critics looked to the relational dynamics underpinning and characterizing addiction and obsessive behavior in 19<sup>th</sup>-century novels like *Wuthering Heights* (1847) and *Madame Bovary* (1856).<sup>50</sup> *Wuthering Heights* is particularly illustrative in its picture of intergenerational conflicts, codependencies, and addictions, which was likely inspired by the Bronte sisters’ experiences with their own addicted brother. “Louisa Wilson” is not as fully realized a work of fiction as those by Bronte and Flaubert, but it does offer us something different—the lady drunkard and her enabling husband. More so than drunk husbands and sober wives, this new dynamic emphasized the dangers of private life in terms of intra-familial influences, sometimes extending across generations, and a lack of necessary social support beyond the home. In traditional temperance stories, dutiful wives and daughters, who often act as surrogate mothers out of necessity, strive to keep male drunkards within the home and away from barrooms and liquor sellers.<sup>51</sup> The wife in Sigourney’s story “The Harwoods,” for example, redoubles her efforts to make the home more “agreeable” to hold her intemperate husband within the domestic orbit, but

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<sup>50</sup> The publication *Dionysos: The Literature and Intoxication Triquarterly* (1989-2001) served as an important venue for family systems readings of literature during the early 1990s, publishing articles on D.H. Lawrence, Fyodor Dostoevsky, as well as Flaubert.

<sup>51</sup> The “social glass” often refers to the first step of alcoholic progression, the consumption of alcohol in a social setting with reveling companions, yet the term also refers to the context of consumption.

the pull of drink is too strong.<sup>52</sup> The more spatially confined narratives of lady drunkards, in contrast, look to conditions and dynamics within domestic space that fuel, if not partly cause, addiction, thus challenging prevailing views among middle-class temperance reformers that the home was a sanctuary. In this section, I look to “Louisa Wilson” as an early description of family systems thinking in which the homeostatic and circular dynamics of the Wilsons’ relationship complicates notions of patriarchal authority and domestic insularity that were central to middle-class identity in antebellum America.

Unlike traditional temperance stories that target male drinking as a breakdown in the patriarchal structure of the family, “Louisa Wilson” looks to the limits and even misguidance of patriarchal authority when faced with a wife’s intemperance. In antebellum America, patriarchy was upheld legally under coverture. Husbands and wives were viewed as “one person in law,” with wives pressed under the “wing, protection, and *cover*” of their husbands,” meaning that any legal rights they had prior to marriage were subsumed by him.<sup>53</sup> With coverage came responsibility. Fathers were charged with providing for their families financially as well as sheltering and keeping them from harm. Bound by his “duty to protect the reputation of his wife,” Louisa’s husband Frederick exhibits what might be called an “intemperate coverture,” as his attempts to cover and conceal Louisa’s drinking inadvertently perpetuates her addiction and his own

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<sup>52</sup> Sigourney, *Water Drops*, 172-73.

<sup>53</sup> Broom et al., *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, American ed. (Albany, N.Y.: John B. Parsons, Jr., 1875), 362.

suffering.<sup>54</sup> His role requires him to lie to friends and eventually isolate himself and Louisa from the larger social world. Even Frederick and Louisa's "principal social delight," small and intimate gatherings of close friends, must be forsaken.<sup>55</sup> Just as Cohen reads "over-developed homeostatic behavior" as a driver of dysfunction within a closed family system, so does Frederick contribute to family dysfunction in his attempts to preserve a veneer of normalcy. Drained by his efforts to maintain his wife's pristine image in the eyes of upper-class society, Frederick also demonstrates what Bowen reads as the compensatory nature of spousal relations with substance users. Louisa's drinking episodes—marked by stupor, instability, emotional capriciousness—demand from Frederick a concerted effort to correct and conceal her behavior, if he is to honor his promise to protect and care for his wife. Thus begins a causal circle in which Frederick's efforts at containing his wife's intemperance within their spacious mansion create conditions that allow for continued drinking.

To be clear, Sigourney's narrative does not entirely resist moral conceptions of addiction. As in *Confessions of a Female Inebriate*, pride—the upper-class woman's stubborn unwillingness to rely wholly upon God—is an overarching theme and determinant of intemperance and relapse. Further buttressing the moral perspective, Louisa herself at one point bewails her lack of "sufficient moral courage to acknowledge [her intemperance]," and earlier Frederick describes Louisa's instability as "in some measure dependent on volition."<sup>56</sup> Sigourney's narrative instead complicates, or at the

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<sup>54</sup> Sigourney, *Water Drops*, 97.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 95

very least supplements, the volitional perspective by looking at how male possessiveness enables and perpetuates addiction within the domestic sphere. If Louisa lacks sufficient humility to seek the help of God with her whole heart, so must Frederick admit his own inability to effectively manage his own wife's drinking and social standing, not to mention the traffic of liquor and medicines that furtively enter and thus compromise the purity of the home. "Louisa Wilson" shares much in common with the view offered by Al-Anon in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, that the spouse of an alcoholic is, like the alcoholic themselves, "powerless" over alcohol.<sup>57</sup> A spouse, in other words, cannot cure a loved one of their alcoholism, no matter how tireless they are in their pleadings or personal interventions, nor can they remove them entirely from outside influences such as liquor advertisements or late night phone calls from drinking acquaintances. Further, these attempts to restore order against the forces of networked addiction can themselves become a compensatory form of dysfunction, as concerned loved ones lose any sense of boundaries between themselves and those they are trying to help. In "Louisa Wilson," this unhealthy breakdown of boundaries takes the form of an intemperate coverture that problematizes the linked ideals of marital unity and insular domesticity while offering a relational and affective understanding of addiction.

In her descriptions of Frederick's thought processes and reactions to Louisa's drinking, Sigourney strongly links cultural ideals of womanhood with Frederick's need to cover up the problem. The first half of the story is marked by vagueness regarding the

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<sup>57</sup> The first step of both Alcoholics Anonymous and Al-Anon are the same: "We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable."

alcohol issue, which is unsurprising given how many women writers of the time avoided or significantly limited descriptions of drinking.<sup>58</sup> Such vagueness further suggests Frederick's own unwillingness to directly face the true nature of his wife's condition. Even before Frederick discerns that alcoholism is the cause of his wife's "physical indisposition," he demonstrates an acute, inordinate sensitivity to the judgments of others. Speaking of Louisa's episodes, Sigourney says: "Exceedingly did he dread their recurrence, especially when the glance of any other observer was added to his own, for such was the sensitive nature of his love, that he shrank at the thought that the slightest reproach should fall upon its object, and hoarded her praises as the miser his gold."<sup>59</sup> Frederick wants to hold on to a phantasmatic view of his wife, which, like the feminine ideal enshrined in antebellum temperance culture, opposes all corruption in its beauty and isolation from the public realm. At one point, he even calls her the "purest pearl from ocean's deepest cell," a metaphor that indicates Frederick's own possessiveness—with Louisa figured as valuable treasure plucked from inviolate and abyssal depths—while gesturing to the suffocating, even pathological privacy surrounding aesthetic constructions of womanhood.<sup>60</sup> Interestingly, Sigourney describes the husband as himself a hoarding miser, which suggests his own addictive tendencies, as Louisa herself is later described as having a "secret hoard" of alcohol.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> In their statistical analysis of themes in 19<sup>th</sup>-century literature, Matthew L. Jockers and David Mimno found that women authors referenced "drinks as in liquor and beer and tobacco" far less than their male counterparts, which suggests how gender mediated choice and expression of certain themes.

<sup>59</sup> Sigourney, *Water Drops*, 94.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*, 93.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*, 95.

To hoard is to remove something, or in this case somebody, from the currents of social and economic life to preserve its value for oneself. In Frederick's case, this removal allows addiction to flourish, as the protective shield of domesticity and patriarchy becomes a weakness, a vulnerability. Alcohol may enter the home from without, but once inside it can wreak havoc because of the insular conditions of domestic life. As I show in chapter 3, intemperance and hoarding converged early on in medical diagnoses of monomania, and while Frederick's obsessive tendencies do not quite meet the level of Krook's boozy rubbish collecting in *Bleak House* (1853), they still cause and exacerbate suffering within the Wilson household. Intemperate coverture, Frederick's psychosocially mediated drive to contain his wife's drunkenness both from others and himself, only leads to further isolation for the couple. It also increasingly taxes Frederick, who "spread out, as it were, his whole being to guard her from suspicion, until the effort was agony."<sup>62</sup> While Frederick puts his whole self into his efforts, he cannot help but feel painfully divided by his actions, as when he makes excuses for his wife's absence during social gatherings. Thus, the marital ideal of one flesh proves to be entirely untenable and unhealthy for the Wilsons.

The Wilson's homeostatic and circular dynamics, organized around structures of patriarchy and domestic womanhood, require a family systems solution that challenges and reimagines those very same structures. The Wilsons get their intervention in the form of Mrs. Carlton, a distant relative of Frederick's mother who confronts Frederick after Louisa shows up to her own tea party drunk. As family systems theorists from Bowen

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

onward stress, the triangle, not the dyad, is the fundamental structure for relationships. Capable of stabilizing as well as destabilizing relationships, triangulation allows for the remediation and redistribution of affects and behaviors within family dyads like the parental unit.<sup>63</sup> Unlike triangulation between a child and parents, Mrs. Carlton's relationship with the Wilsons directly challenges the patriarchal structure of the household. As Mrs. Carlton tells Frederick, "You are not the person to manage this matter." Frederick agrees, albeit reluctantly, saying: "I put myself under your control."<sup>64</sup> For Shelley R. Block, the intervention of Mrs. Carlton represents the vital importance of female support networks in promoting the wellbeing of women and shows how Sigourney would afford rhetorical support for the political efforts of later organizations like the Women's Christian Temperance Union.<sup>65</sup> I would argue that the event is more radical than that, as Frederick relinquishes control over his estate, servants, and wife to Mrs. Carlton, who begins her intervention after Frederick departs. Of course, Sigourney does not venture beyond traditional family structures in conceiving of Mrs. Carlton's role in the Wilson's household. In some sense, Frederick outsources domestic control to an outside party, a surrogate mother figure who complicates notions of coverture and privacy while simultaneously affirming the importance of a traditional domestic influence.

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<sup>63</sup> Rudi Dallos and Arlene Vetere, "Systems Theory, Family Attachments and Processes of Triangulation: Does the Concept of Triangulation Offer a Useful Bridge?" *Journal of Family Therapy* 34, no. 2 (2012): 119-120. For more on triangulation within the 19<sup>th</sup>-century family, see Cohen, 18-19; 20-23.

<sup>64</sup> Sigourney, *Water Drops*, 102.

<sup>65</sup> Shelley R. Block, *Nineteenth-Century Literary Women and the Temperance Tradition: Temperance Rhetoric in the Fiction of Lydia Sigourney, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, Rebecca Harding Davis and Elizabeth Stuart Phelps*, PhD. Dissertation, 2007, 31-32.

In helping to enact a barrier between the enmeshed couple, Mrs. Carlton does not depart too dramatically from the guiding insights of Al-Anon members or family systems therapists, at least not until she unveils her customized magic lantern treatment. Having understood Louisa's condition—including her inability to hear “appeals to her understanding and affections”—Mrs. Carlton, now a crafty psychologist, leverages Louisa's disordered mind and overactive imagination in creating a magic lantern spectacle meant to shock the young wife into sobriety.<sup>66</sup> Mrs. Carlton projects the images of two ghostly figures suggestively between the portraits of Louisa's deceased mother and father. With all the theatricality of a séance led by the Fox sisters or Davenport brothers, Carlton then makes the figures admonish Louisa about the cup's dangers and the need for repentance, even working in a “gush of perfume” and a “strain of dulcet music, strange and wild” to imbue Louisa more thoroughly with awe. The spectral return of Louisa's long dead mother—made explicit when one image cries, “Daughter, repent! and do the first works, or else”—shocks Louisa into tractability and allows Mrs. Carlton to cement her status as surrogate mother figure.<sup>67</sup> Carlton will later apologize to Frederick for her deception, but her technological re-presentation of Louisa's mother expedites a necessary transference of love and trust from the unknown dead woman to the living woman, as suggested by Louisa's “childlike, enthusiastic attachment” afterward.<sup>68</sup>

Frederick's enabling behavior may only perpetuate Louisa's intemperance, yet her

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<sup>66</sup> Sigourney, *Water Drops*, 105.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, 106. The passage, referencing Revelation 2:5, suggests another possible point of triangulation in Christ.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, 107.

motherless status and early family and social dynamics play an integral role in forging Louisa's disposition to drink. After the magic lantern intervention, we hear Louisa confess her long-term relationship with alcohol:

My loneliness as an orphan, without brother or sister, and the secluded habits of the aunt with whom I resided, made me exceedingly delight in those few social and festive seasons that varied the monotony of our life. In those entertainments wine was always prominent. I heard no odium attached to it, and tasted and admired. Thus, even in childhood, was laid the foundation of my shame.<sup>69</sup>

Louisa's family history demonstrates that attachment to alcohol itself emerges from the conjunction of circumstances—Louisa's being an orphan who lives in relative isolation with a shut-in aunt—and social norms among the upper-class. It is not that alcohol unilaterally hijacks the mind and body of a "normal" person, a common view in temperance stories, but that psychosocial and cultural factors predispose one to desire alcohol. Alcohol, through association, becomes a vehicle for the social feelings and connections that Louisa lacked as a child, bonds considered essential to the healthy development of children. While the passage makes a conventional critique of social custom as driving alcohol consumption, it stands out for its recognition that domestic isolation and relational dynamics (or, in this case, the lack thereof) can make a person "exceedingly" sensitive to the effects of what was often termed the "social glass." We also see this notion of alcohol as substitute for social affections when Louisa describes how she turned to wine as her "comforter" when Frederick was gone for three years. At this point, "Louisa Wilson" goes further than "Confessions" in articulating the role of desire in drinking, as Louisa admits to discovering alcohol's "power of excitement,"

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 107.

which led her to even “tamper with the fire of ardent spirits.”<sup>70</sup> Drinking ardent spirits, in contrast to a more genteel and feminine wine, represents both a progression in drinking and a transgression of gender norms. The takeaway: thrill seeking need not be entirely incompatible with drink as coping mechanism or substitute for social affections. Louisa’s later behavior may more closely align with naïve views of addiction as willful pleasure seeking, but, as we have seen, she is already psychosocially predisposed to drink for reasons well beyond her control. An alcoholic may cycle through different motivations for drinking—pleasure, escape from adversity, relief from withdrawal, and social lubrication are but some—yet those synchronic instances of desire often root back to original familial conditions that shaped the sensibility of the drinker in a way that made alcohol particularly gripping for them.

By beginning to fill the gap left by the death of her parents and her lonely upbringing, Louisa’s relationship with Mrs. Carlton enables her to stay sober, thereby demonstrating how networks facilitate healing from a condition that itself develops relationally and affectively, rather than from moral transgression. As a sentimental device, Mrs. Carlton’s surrogate motherhood toward both Louisa and Frederick offers the hope of restoration for the family and cues the reader to expect a happy ending—not the wedding found in many Victorian novels, but a family reconstituted under a long absent maternal influence. Mrs. Carlton eventually dies, and Louisa gives birth to a baby girl almost immediately afterward. However, this is not a poignant circle of life moment by any means, because the birth of Louisa’s daughter causes a postpartum “infirmity of

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

constitution,” for which Louisa seeks the aid of medicine.<sup>71</sup> As with “Confessions” and anti-medical temperance discourse, Sigourney pinpoints the dangers of opiate and alcoholic medicines, but this time as precipitants of relapse. Unaware of or unconcerned by Louisa’s history of substance use, her physicians and nurse “recommended the free use of tonics to restore her decaying appetite and strength.”<sup>72</sup> Frederick tries to forbid their use completely, believing stimulants of any kind, taken under any circumstance, would only rekindle Louisa’s intemperance. Louisa pushes back, even expostulates against Frederick to their baby: “Poor innocent!! She murmured, ‘hard that thou must pine for thy natural food, and thy sick mother suffer, because cruel father denies the medicine that would restore us.’”<sup>73</sup> Ironically, Frederick once thought that “Were [Louisa] but a mother! Those cares and joys would be her salvation.”<sup>74</sup> Frederick’s belief in the salvific effects of motherhood is supported by domestic ideology, which upheld the magical and transformative power of female nature—as one periodical declares, “A mother’s love is the most powerful thing on earth!”—yet Frederick’s wishful thinking, and its cultural underpinnings, are shown to be a false or at least dubious hope with his wife’s postpartum turn to opium.<sup>75</sup>

Louisa’s relapse represents the final challenge to a traditional patriarchal, insular domestic sphere. The substances cannot be kept out, and Louisa’s desires cannot be kept

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 115.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, 116.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, 115.

<sup>75</sup> "PARENTAL.: A MOTHER'S AFFECTION," *The Youth's Companion* (1827-1929) Sep 02, 1842: 67.

in. After getting her medicine smuggled in by a nurse, Louisa, under an “opium-trance,” and in a truly horrific scene, drops her child into the fire. “One fair cheek was scorched,” Sigourney writes, and a little arm was “burned to a crisp.” Frederick’s later reaction has a biblical cast: “Woman! see your own work! The fruit of your accursed, willful wickedness!”<sup>76</sup> Up until this point, Frederick has not castigated or condemned his wife. In the moment of his daughter’s injury though, he cannot withhold judgment. The “willful” act becomes Louisa’s “own.” The harsh moral judgment is not the final say of the narrative on Louisa’s case, but an understandable response to a traumatic scenario. The narrative leaves the reader open to a similar shock. Hooked into the Wilson’s family system through Sigourney’s sentimental design, the reader must confront a condition that bucks narrative expectations and a family’s hopes for the restoration and recovery of a loved one—a jarring process that happens repeatedly for family members who invest in a loved one’s recovery but time and again face disappointment and despair because of relapse. Today, medical professionals define addiction—more technically, substance use disorder—as a chronic relapsing disorder, but expanding the definition does not always make it easier to accept, especially when relapse has tragic, irreversible consequences, as it does for Frederick, Louisa, and their daughter. Sigourney, of course, is not proposing a brain disease model as a corrective to moral condemnation. Through Frederick, she demonstrates how families respond to addiction and trauma with moral outrage, which is easier than sitting with the networked complexity and contingency of actual life.

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<sup>76</sup> Sigourney, *Water Drops*, 117.

“Confession” ends with the death of the main character’s estranged husband, which, within the Christian frame of the confessional narrative, takes on the character of providential justice. The narrator, as far as we know, recovers, and shares her story to keep other ladies from following her path. If that is the case, then her recovery comes at a terrible cost. Louisa, on the other hand, does not recover after the injury of her daughter. Sensing her husband’s lack of respect for her and imagining that he actively despised her, she withdraws from life, drinks with abandon. Her opioid and alcohol use now largely functions as an escape from trauma, from the nameless daughter’s body, its amputated limb and blasted innocence. Sigourney’s vision of trauma to some extent militates against emerging concepts of ecological addiction because of its excessive moral burden, its figuration as psychological haunting correlated with the broken body of a child. For Louisa, her daughter’s lost limb—a disfigurement that compromises the girl’s value in a society that equates beauty with moral purity—is “a perpetual reproof, bringing anew the sound of those terrible words, ‘Woman, see your own work!’”<sup>77</sup> Trauma traps Louisa within her own mind, an echo chamber of endless recriminations that recapitulates the lonely domestic interiors she haunted as a child. Yet trauma also reproves naïve, regenerative understandings of domesticity that neglect the networked dynamics driving human behavior. That lesson comes through most resoundingly with Louisa’s eventual death, her “bloated, discolored face” staring vacantly into the wounded interiors of the Wilson mansion.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Sigourney, *Water Drops*, 118.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*, 119.

Helen Wants More: *The Glass*

Maria Lamas's 1849 temperance novel *The Glass; or, the Trials of Helen More* is one of the most extreme takes on the lady drunkard from the 1840s. "Confession of a Female Inebriate" gave us the death of a husband overseas and the mother's accidental but not fatal poisoning of a child with laudanum (though the child would die eventually). "Louisa Wilson" ramps up the tragic with a nameless daughter's disfigurement and the titular character's miserable, lonely death. *The Glass*, however, pushes the lady drunkard narrative to its most gothic form yet, packing in delirium tremens terrors, trance-states, a misdeclaration of death, and the gruesome ends of three characters, including a small child. The escalation suggests that, despite the decorum expected from antebellum women, female temperance authors also took to what David S. Reynolds calls "dark temperance," a brand of sensation literature that revels in the psychosis, fatal progression, and extreme violence of drunkards. Reynolds himself considers *The Glass* as possibly the "nadir" of dark temperance, given its description of a starving child locked in a closet who resorts to eating himself following his mother's four-day bout of delirium.<sup>79</sup>

And yet for all the extreme content of the story, Lamas still resists naïve moral theories of intemperance by attending to the familial origins and intergenerational dynamics that fuel addiction, going even further than Sigourney in its network tracing as well as its sensationalism. *The Glass* may be convoluted in its plot—with its many tonal shifts and role reversals suggesting intoxication at the level of fictive organization (a

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<sup>79</sup> David S. Reynolds, "Black Cats and Delirium Tremens: Temperance and the American Renaissance," *Serpent in the Cup: Temperance in American Literature*, edited by David S. Reynolds and Debra J. Rosenthal (Amherst: University of Mass. Press, 1997), 23; 28.

reading that may be too generous for what is otherwise a sensation story)—but its very inchoateness reflects the moral ambiguity and causal slipperiness of what I am reading as an early picture of networked alcoholism. At the level of genre, Lamas’ novella stages a conflict between the moral absolutism of melodramatic and gothic modes and the networked logic of class-mediated family systems, which account for Helen’s tempting behavior and later plunge into alcoholism. Consequently, Lamas troubles the usual processes of judgment and identification encouraged by the aesthetic architecture of much nineteenth-century domestic and sensation literature.

Like the other stories in this chapter, Lamas’ story flips the gender dynamics of antebellum temperance narratives. Instead of a public threat of male homosocial drinking that bleeds into and disorders the domestic sphere, Lamas gives us an intemperance that stems from the unconstrained, self-seeking desires of an upper-class woman of fashion. *The Glass* is a purportedly “true” first person confession told by the once fashionable and rich Helen More. Unrestrained by her fashionable mother, Helen becomes a willful child who demands constant gratification. At one point, young Helen even gets her lower-class nurse to give her some brandy, despite the nurse’s warning that strong drink did not suit “young ladies.”<sup>80</sup> As a vain, beautiful teenage heiress with a lust for power, Helen successfully tempts three temperate men, known as “the water drinkers,” into drunkenness at an evening party. Shortly after, one of the men, Reid, predicts Helen’s ruin as a drunkard’s wife. Reid’s promise of providential retribution comes true after

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<sup>80</sup> Maria Lamas, *The Glass; or, The Trials of Helen More* (Philadelphia: Martin E. Harmstead, 1849), 4.

Helen marries another one of her temptees, Merwyn, whose intemperance progresses as the two settle into married life and have a child. Later disgraced by her husband's public drunkenness, Helen herself takes to the "glass"; compulsive drinking and DTs ensue, culminating with the gruesome death of her son.

In presenting Helen as temptress, Lamas re-genders a common character in temperance fiction. A vector of moral contamination, the typical tempter operates in public spaces like taverns wherein men of different stations mix; sometimes as a gambler cajoling the unwary to tipple (*Ten Nights in a Bar-room*), sometimes as a veteran drinker teaching a child how to glug liquor like a man ("Little Charlie and the Glass of Rum"), or, in the case of rum sellers, providing the intoxicating beverage itself (George B. Cheever's "Deacon Jiles' Distillery"). In stressing the role of social influence on chronic drunkenness, mid-century reformers often subsumed the individual responsibility of drunkards within a larger public system of tempters. Reformers created a hierarchy of blame that often ascribed the greatest responsibility to peddlers of "demon rum," who exploited the addictions of drinkers for their own selfish gains. In contrast, Helen, as domestic female tempter, does not seek financial gain. For her, temptation represents a means to self-gratification through a proof of power over possible male suitors, which darkly inverts key tenets of domestic ideology, including the salutary influence women were supposed to exert over men. Dubbing herself "empress and autocratice" of her own realm, Helen feeds on the adoring gaze and slavish devotion of men and seeks to demonstrate absolute sway over her suitors by testing the convictions of Reid, Merwyn,

and Barron, the water drinkers.<sup>81</sup> Within the temperance frame of the narrative, Helen's self-love and reckless pursuit of power are coded as forms of intoxication that violate the norms of bourgeois womanhood, but they are also presented as symptoms of unstable family dynamics within the childhood home.

For the most part, *The Glass* follows a linear trajectory, beginning with Helen's justification for her confession before a nameless interlocutor and then moving on to one of her earliest memories, the death of her father. The chronological sequencing puts what Helen refers to as "moral culture" in the foreground.<sup>82</sup> Discussed in phrenological journals, criminal reform publications, and even a husbandry magazine from the 1830s, moral culture referred to a parent or educator's efforts to properly develop the moral faculty of young children.<sup>83</sup> Just as important as, if not more so than, intellectual culture, a good moral culture instilled children with strong habits of virtue that would protect them from the trials of this world, making it the greatest "legacy" a parent could offer their progeny.<sup>84</sup> Like many antebellum illustrations of fashionable mothers whose selfishness distracted them from home and hearth, Mrs. More fails to provide Helen with the moral education that plainer, more domestically focused middle-class wives dutifully gave their children.<sup>85</sup> She only devotes her energies toward catching a fashionable

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>83</sup> Moral culture was often metaphorized as seed-planting and tilling the soils of a child's heart, which explains why *The Genesee Farmer and Gardener's Journal (1831-1839)* published the 1833 article "GERMINATION OF SEEDS: AGRICULTURAL IMPROVEMENT--NO. 4 MORAL CULTURE."

<sup>84</sup> P. L. Buell, "Educational Department.: ADVANTAGES OF MORAL CULTURE," *American Phrenological Journal (1838-1869)* 13, no. 6 (June 1851): 126.

<sup>85</sup> One 1835 story called "The Ball, Or, A Hint to Fashionable Mothers," details how one lady of fashion leaves her ailing child for the night to attend a ball and, upon her return, discovers the

husband after Helen's father dies, leaving Helen in the care of the stimulant-loving Mrs. Randall. Upper-class vanity and detachment from domestic concerns thus allow for the spirits and self-medicating practices of a lower-class nurse to creep into the home, which Helen soon tries for herself, thus seeding her later slide into intemperance. With this early picture of maternal absence and alcoholic influence in young Helen's home life, Lamas undercuts the naïve belief that morality is an inherent and instinctive attribute of women, a view that makes women drinkers monstrous in the eyes of antebellum Americans. Lamas instead highlights the developmental effects of class-mediated family dynamics, thereby directing the reader's sympathy, at least initially, towards Helen.

While Helen avoids becoming a "premature toper" by being sent to boarding school at 11, alcohol still plays a role in reconfiguring the dynamics in her family through her stepfather, Frank Neville. This dandyish man, known for his conviviality and fondness for alcohol, does not get sloppy or violent like stereotypical drunkards. Still, during the "depression which follows undue stimulus, he was petulant, irritable, and complaining," which he would take out on his wife.<sup>86</sup> As Helen confesses, "the want of sympathy between my [step]father and herself, made my mother cling to me; and, child as I was, from the necessity of the case I became the confidant of her troubles and sorrows, the recipient of her griefs, her wrongs and her fears...I thus obtained a premature womanly feeling, and felt my position to be much higher than became my age."<sup>87</sup> Lamas shows us how spousal dynamics, such as the abusive and pestering

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child dead.

<sup>86</sup> Lamas, *The Glass*, 5.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid*, 5-6.

relationship between Helen's mother and stepfather, precipitate larger shifts in the family's affective ecology. Helen's mother compensates for the lack of love in her marriage by sharing her troubles with her daughter, becoming more of an "elder sister" than parent, while Helen, acting as a buffer between her parents, fiercely ridicules and browbeats her aging dandy of a stepfather to protect her mother. Helen's experience parallels what sociologists and psychologists now term "parentification," the process by which children take on parental or adult responsibilities because of a parent's addiction or illness. Like an adult child of an alcoholic, Helen adopts the role of emotional caregiver and protector, but not the domestic duties that we see more disadvantaged daughters assume in other temperance narratives.<sup>88</sup> Helen further distinguishes herself in that parentification, inflected by her heiress status (dead father's legacy) and burgeoning vanity (mother's legacy), leads to domineering and unladylike behavior, including her temptation of the water drinkers. In plotting these stages of psychosocial development, Lamas traces a skein of familial and social mediators that shape Helen's disposition as a "self-willed" woman, allowing the reader, Helen's implicit confessor, to judge her as a product of forces beyond her or any single person's control.<sup>89</sup>

While Helen's account of her psychosocial development challenges a liberal picture of moral subjectivity, the narrative still shifts to a more gothic, moralistic register

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<sup>88</sup> For an analysis of the shifting roles and uneven power dynamics between intemperate fathers and their daughters, see Allison Giffen, "Dutiful Daughters and Needy Fathers: Lydia Sigourney and Nineteenth-Century Popular Literature," *Women's Studies* 32, no. 3 (2003): 255-80.

<sup>89</sup> Lamas, *The Glass*, 6. She also complicates moral readings of Helen's early behavior, and its later consequences, by presenting her as a protector to a lonely mother who, like Louisa Wilson, lacks deep connections with women outside the domestic sphere.

following Helen's successful temptation of the water drinkers, which creates tension with the networked logic of her early history. Like Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) and Matthew Lewis' *The Monk* (1796), Lamas uses gothic prophecy to create a sense of divinely decreed punishment for one's sins. Forecasting the decline of Helen and her other two temptees, Barron and Merwyn, Reid declares: "Helen More, you have sowed the wind to reap the whirlwind. You will yet endure the misery and suffer the fate of a drunkard's wife. Silly woman! On your head lies the blood of two men—on your soul will their ruin be reflected."<sup>90</sup> Given the fatalistic and progressive nature of intemperance, Helen's temptation of Barron and Merwyn makes her responsible not only for their drunkenness (an immediate effect), but also their inevitable descent into full-blown inebriety (a remote effect of the initial cause). Lamas repeatedly describes this power to entrance and transform men in supernatural terms that link Helen with bewitching figures from Judeo-Christian tradition and classical myth. Reid, for instance, speaks of Helen as "metamorphosing three men into brutes," like the sorceress Circe's transfiguration of Odysseus's men into swine in *The Odyssey*.<sup>91</sup> Helen, seeming to internalize Reid's rhetoric, later speaks of herself as a "Circe [that] handed the wine-cup to the water drinkers."<sup>92</sup> Such figurations of Helen's witchery will also structure Barron's DTs-induced train of hallucinatory terrors prior to his death at a poor house. Beholding Helen as both "Sea Serpent" and "Satan in woman's shape," Barron regards Helen less as a tempted tempter, an Eve manipulated by Satan, and more as a direct embodiment of the

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid, 13.

serpent whose reptile minions swarm Barron's body and eat away at his brain.<sup>93</sup> Like Reid's prophecy, Barron's DTs serve the moral machinery of a gothic text: they brand Helen as monstrous for her violation of gender norms—her lust for power and perversion of men's moral character—and place blame squarely upon her for all the suffering that unfolds after the temptation.

Reid and Barron's misogynistic rhetoric directs the reader to condemn Helen's excesses, following the moral imperative of sensation fiction, but Lamas complicates readerly judgment and feeling yet again by repositioning Helen as distressed drunkard's wife shortly after the birth of her son. As the helpless victim in much temperance fiction, the character of the drunkard's wife serves to mobilize the reader's sympathy for the protection of those victimized by "demon Rum." With the rhetorical question "What was to become of me and my babe...?" Helen draws the same concern from readers, but she is not the ideal, self-sacrificing mother of domestic ideology.<sup>94</sup> Unable to receive succor or guidance from her fashionable mother and decaying stepfather, Helen drinks, privately stashing bottles of brandy within her wardrobe. As she puts it, "I was...*driven* to comfort myself in the best way I could, and resorted to stimulants for the purpose of overcoming my depression of spirits."<sup>95</sup> By her own admission, Helen's drinking assumes the form of a determined behavior: psychological and physical distress that forces her to seek the only relief she knows—a product of social learning through Mrs. Randall—and that is readily available to her. Instead of willful excess, a clear moral violation, Helen finds in

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid, 27

<sup>94</sup> Ibid, 14

<sup>95</sup> Ibid, 15

alcohol a means of coping with conditions outside of her control. As with the narrator of “Confessions,” Helen follows a gendered drinking pattern: secretive and self-medicating, with the same progression and physiological compulsion as masculine consumption. These stories differ, however, in that male-dominated medicine enables and provides an initial justification for the narrator’s drinking in “Confessions,” whereas Helen’s drive to drink fits within a causal pathway that, from Reid’s prophetic perspective, she herself first created. Merwyn’s drinking may be encouraged by social acquaintances, including Barron and the hanger-on Breen, but those relationships are facilitated by the original temptation. The mechanistic plot of *The Glass* thus relies upon a domino effect, a causal chain of intemperance that doubles back to the tempter that initiated the sequence, making Helen the remote cause of her escapist drinking.

The convolutions in the story’s plot do not just stop there, as Helen and Merwyn take marital discord and circular causality to a whole other level, demonstrating how husbands and wives continually switch roles and set off one another within a closed marriage system continually under the influence of alcohol. As the 1842 temperance tale “Female Drunkards” shows, spouses can pull each other back into drunkenness, as when a once intemperate but now sober working-class wife returns to a life of dissipation after her husband returns from a voyage to sea, a process of recovery and relapse that will happen once more before they both join a temperance society.<sup>96</sup> In “Female Drunkards,” a wife’s prescribed duty to her husband is itself a structural determinant of consumption and relapse, just as the bonds of matrimony act as pathways for circulating disorder in

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<sup>96</sup> “Female Drunkards,” *Samaritan & Total Abstinence Advocate* 1, no. 30 (6/8/1842): 4.

Lamas' story. In *The Glass*, Helen goes from tempter to drunkard's wife, self-medicator to paralyzed and presumably dead woman (a variant on the trope of the drunkard as living corpse) following her husband's public drunken escapade and Helen's subsequent discovery of her mother's dead body. The pendulum swings yet again when Merwyn, completely overtaken by remorse, promises to stop drinking after Helen wakes from her deathlike trance. Merwyn stays sober, but Helen does not, her habit progressing to the point that she "could not do without drinking before breakfast."<sup>97</sup> Then, as in our other two lady drunkard narratives, Helen makes a spectacle of herself at a public party—a reversal of Merwyn's own earlier spectacle of drunkenness at one of Helen's clothing shops—and must be carried home, which precipitates Merwyn's relapse and, ultimately, his departure from the family home. These constantly shifting spousal dynamics (tempter to victim, influencer to influenced), coupled with the novella's competing perspectives, give Lamas' text an incoherent, dizzied, and intoxicated feel that differs significantly from "Confessions" and "Louisa Wilson." Intemperance, as we have seen in these earlier works, often manifests as sudden and violent shifts in affect and mental states, like when the narrator of "Confessions" slaps her daughter and then smothers her in kindness immediately afterward. *The Glass*, a self-professedly "thrilling" tale, features the same kinds of whiplashing maneuvers at the level of plot and the system dynamics that serve as its engine, which are meant to horrify and thrill its audience. These maneuvers foreclose easy sympathetic identifications with the main characters or any stable or essentialized notions of their moral subjectivity. While Lamas' story can be read as an inchoate mix of

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid, 21.

older moralistic temperance modes with mid-century cravings for sensationalism à la Reynolds, *The Glass* also offers a messy, networked picture of addiction that, despite its extremes, communicates important truths about family life and how we, and the personal histories that shape us, impinge upon each other.

Lamas' vision of causal networks extending across time get most fully and sensationally realized with the death of young Frederick. Just as Barron's alcoholic progression terminates in madness, so does Helen experience delirium tremens after punishing her child for petulance by locking him in a clothes closet in a distant wing of the house. Upon awakening from a four-day bout of delirium, Helen

unlocked the clothes room door, and there--oh! If you are mothers, you, and you only can feel with me--there bathed in his blood, lay the mangled corpse of my child--murdered by his mother. There he lay, poor slaughtered innocent! Starved! Starved! His left arm gnawed to the bone--gnawed till the artery had been severed, and he had bled to death.<sup>98</sup>

In her retelling of the event, Helen occupies two positions: self-proclaimed murderer and bereaved mother. To get through the shock and horror she feels, Helen appeals to the sympathy of fellow mothers, those that birthed and feel uniquely bonded to their children. However, this same ideal of maternity condemns her, as it supports an implicit double standard for male and female drinkers: unlike public-dwelling fathers, mothers devote themselves entirely to their children, which makes acts of maternal neglect more unthinkable and monstrous. The alliterative linking of her child's "mangled," "murdered" body with the term "mother" only emboldens the unnaturalness of Helen's transgression, which she seems to briefly displace by referencing herself in the third person. When

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<sup>98</sup> Lamas, *The Glass*, 22

Reynolds calls this scene the “nadir” of dark temperance fiction, he’s focusing on the over-the-top gruesomeness of the child’s fate—his slow and agonized gnawing on himself unto death within a dark closet. But Helen’s status as drunk and delirious mother, already a taboo subject in bourgeois society, amplifies the enormity of what might be one of the most extreme child deaths in antebellum literature.

Of course, Helen does not directly kill her child, as mad axe-wielding husbands do in other works of “dark temperance,” most notably Poe’s “The Black Cat,” or in newspaper reports of actual murders like the James Birdwell case. Nor did Helen have full possession of her faculties. For four days, she had been prostrated with DTs, her body swarmed by hallucinated toads and serpents, her head pierced by phantom screams (which, it turns out, were those of her child). Still, Helen names herself “murderer”—due to both her monstrous perversion of maternity, and the original gender violations that seeded her later neglect of young Frederick. Looking closer at the scene, one can see that the child’s auto-cannibalism gothically mirrors Helen’s own original fixation on herself, which again stresses the narrative’s overarching deterministic logic: Helen once thrived on self-love to the detriment of others, and here that self-love transforms into her child’s literal consumption of himself in a private space reserved for fashionable clothing. The end—Helen’s self-enclosing delirium and her child’s self-cannibalism—reflects the beginning, in the same way that Lamas’ title causally weds vanity and drunkenness in the image of the “glass,” both a container for alcohol and a mirror. Linked by homology and causal sequencing, vanity, alcoholic madness, and self-cannibalization constitute an intergenerational progression that begins with Helen’s mother, who neglects her

daughter's moral education in her pursuit of male attention, and ends with young Frederick, who fittingly bears the name of his now deceased father, being fatally neglected by Helen.

Lamas' commentary in the "Remarks by the Author" section at the end of the novella addresses none of these dynamics. Instead, Lamas boils down the pseudonymous Helen More's narrative to a simple moral: belles or ladies that influence men to drink at evening parties constitute "one of the most prominent causes of drunkenness and its consequent evils." As for Helen herself, she is "the specimen woman of a class...one of a numerous order who thoughtlessly upheave a huge rock from the summit of a hill, and then sit down and moan on the ruin that follows its downward path."<sup>99</sup> The analogy distinguishes Helen from typical male tempters of the public sphere in her thoughtlessness. Such thoughtlessness—a quality with a gendered valence—suggests both a lack of malevolence and an incomplete understanding of possible outcomes, which mitigates Helen's culpability in the eyes of the reader. Lamas also criticizes Helen's emotional excesses, including her "highly nervous and forcible language," and casts doubt on the veracity of her observations and judgments, saying, "A prey to continual self-reproach, [Helen] was made unduly sensitive, and felt insult and persecution, where perhaps neither was intended. Without any intention to deceive she may have exaggerated; may have felt all that she so graphically describes, and yet had no cause to feel quite so much."<sup>100</sup> What do we make of these clearly gendered assessments of

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid, 31.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, 30; 31.

Helen's character and narration? And how do they mediate readerly judgment? I would argue that Lamas' commentary attenuates Helen's guilt through a gendered reading of her emotional distress and her "thoughtlessness" as a "specimen of her class," not a boldly defined individual acting intentionally. Lamas reserves moral judgments instead for Merwyn, describing him as "a cold-blooded, weak and wavering wretch, who deserved his fate."<sup>101</sup> While Lamas does not monstrify Helen, she somewhat problematically undercuts her rational autonomy as confessing subject and glosses over the networked dynamics of her life for a simple class-based and gendered critique of alcoholic temptation in "high life." Helen's not a monster, but she is also a little less than a subject. That is not because of networked complexity, but because of her sensitivities as an upper-class woman.

### Conclusion

There are numerous blogs, articles, and fact sheets attesting to how women experience addiction differently than men. Such differences range from women being more susceptible to drug cravings in response to stress and interpersonal problems to women moving more rapidly from initial use to dependence than men because of their biology.<sup>102</sup> Consequently, a slew of therapeutic methodologies and recovery frameworks have been developed to address the issues women substance users go through. As Jill B. Becker,

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid, 31.

<sup>102</sup> These views are now a major part of addiction recovery discourse and can be found in fact sheets from The National Institute on Drug Abuse, The Hazeldon Betty Ford Foundation, and numerous rehabilitation and recovery programs advertised on the internet.

Michelle McClellan, and Beth Glover Reed contend, neurobiology can explain some of these differences, yet brain function cannot be separated from sociocultural contexts, including prevailing gender norms, that shape drug use patterns among women.<sup>103</sup>

One major barrier to recovery for women is disproportionate stigma for their drug use. Almost two centuries after the lady drunkard narratives of the 1840s, women users are still being judged more harshly than men for deviating from culturally prescribed roles like the caring mother and self-sacrificing wife. Women who are sexually assaulted while under the influence, for one, get “slut shamed,” treated as if they are responsible for their own rape. And when race intersects with gender in the case of black mothers addicted to crack, a focal point for the moral panics of the 1980s, such stigma is amplified considerably. The stories I have analyzed in this chapter do not completely unravel moral logics on substance use and addiction, nor do they entirely replace personal responsibility for a vision of networked complexity that defies the moral absolutes of melodrama and domestic fiction. At times, moral perspectives, embodied by male judges of lady drinkers, stand unresolvedly embattled with emergent ecological models of addiction, as in *The Glass*. In “Louisa Wilson,” Sigourney applies a framework of Christian piety to the problem of intemperance, but also offers one of the clearest pictures of the relational nature of addiction in temperance fiction, which anticipates not only key insights of family systems thinkers but also current attachment and trauma-based perspectives on substance use. Mixed messages and modes notwithstanding, these texts

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<sup>103</sup> Jill B. Becker, Michelle McClellan, and Beth Glover Reed, "Sociocultural Context for Sex Differences in Addiction," *Addiction Biology* 21, no. 5 (2016): 1052.

trouble the domestic ideologies and gender roles that motivated, and still motivate, the disproportionately harsh treatment of women drug users and addicts. In doing so, they prove that temperance fiction, though often reactionary and propagandistic, could serve as a platform for rethinking social structures and identity in response to the very real problem of addiction in antebellum America.

### Chapter 3 Fog, Smoke, and Whiskey: Addiction Networks in Rebecca Harding Davis and Charles Dickens

#### Intro

In the first chapter of *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* (1952), Bill Wilson, one of the founders of Alcoholics Anonymous, speaks to the near impossibility of an alcoholic staying sober through “singlehanded combat” against the bottle. He says: “It was a statistical fact that alcoholics almost never recovered on their own resources. And this had been true, apparently, ever since man had first crushed grapes.”<sup>1</sup> In this passage, Wilson seems to retroactively infuse the central tenet of A.A., an *alcoholic’s powerlessness* over the drink, into an entire history of alcohol consumption in the western world. This ahistorical understanding of alcoholism ultimately instantiates a continuum of shared lived experience across time and space that can bring comfort to the alcoholic (“I am not alone; this is not a *personal* flaw”) and reinforce the weight of Wilson’s message that an alcoholic must admit powerlessness in relation to the *disease* of alcoholism to recover.

As many scholars in the field of addiction studies would argue, this universalizing and ahistorical account of alcoholism, though helpful for community formation, elides the complex forces that over-determine how we understand, treat, and even experience alcoholism, or addiction more generally. As Harry G. Levine argues in his influential 1978 article “The Discovery of Addiction,” the disease concept itself (vital to A.A.’s

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<sup>1</sup> *Twelve Steps and Traditions* (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc., 1952), 22.

definition of compulsive drinking) emerged under particular social and ideological conditions in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, most notably the rise of the middle class in America. Middle class ideology, for one thing, regarded self-discipline as essential for successfully navigating the market economy, making chronic drunkenness a “negation” of self-control that needed to “be more clearly defined and combatted” by medical authorities and new institutions like the asylum.<sup>2</sup> Cultural historian Timothy Hickman would later challenge Levine’s equation of addiction and the disease concept, arguing that addiction, as both a *volitional* and *juridical* idea, emerged during what he calls a “cultural crisis of modernity,” a “struggle to redefine human agency in the face of rapid technological, economic and political change” occurring in the last third of the nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup> Following Hickman, literary scholar Susan Zieger plotted her own transatlantic genealogy of the addict concept with the 2008 publication of *Inventing the Addict*, analyzing how literature and discourses like temperance, eugenics, and gender ideology shaped and reconfigured “addiction” and “the addict” over the course of the long nineteenth century. All three of these scholars resist Wilson’s anachronistic thinking and pinpoint different historical, political, technological, literary, and discursive conditions that spurred the development of an addiction concept.

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<sup>2</sup> Harry G. Levine, “The Discovery of Addiction. Changing Conceptions of Habitual Drunkenness in America.” *Journal of Studies on Alcohol* 39, no. 1 (1978): 164.

<sup>3</sup> Timothy Hickman, *The Secret Leprosy of Modern Days: Narcotic Addiction and Cultural Crisis in the United States, 1870-1920* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007), 4. In his introduction, Hickman argues that “addiction” (a condition) and the “addict” (an identity category) are specific products of the late nineteenth century (8-9). While Levine proposes that addiction is synonymous with the disease concept, Hickman makes the point that addiction contains two contradictory models, the volitional and the involuntary or juridical, with the former being applied predominantly to ethnic and racial minorities and the lower classes.

While there are ongoing debates over how and when addiction took form, as well as arguments as to the uniqueness of a more recently identified narcotic addiction in relation to the more traditional construction of chronic drunkenness, scholars largely agree that an important paradigm shift occurred at some point in the long nineteenth century, namely the medicalization of chronic substance use as a disease of the will. This initial effort at medicalization, as Levine claims, constituted a “radical break” from traditional understandings of chronic drunkenness as a problem of individual morality.<sup>4</sup> Yet scholars have not always recognized the extent to which volitional and emergent medical models merged in antebellum culture. In the domain of medical jurisprudence in 1830s America, for instance, lawyers and doctors preserved the idea of moral blame (if not criminal culpability) in cases where drinkers had completely lost control of their faculties through a distinction between the *remote* and *immediate* effects of drunkenness.<sup>5</sup> While one might admit that a drinker can at some point experience a physiological compulsion to drink, that development represents a remote effect of initial bouts of drunkenness, over which the drinker originally had control—a point Rush makes in *Medical Inquiries and Observations, upon the Diseases of the Mind* (1812). In other words, one must assume responsibility for early acts of willful indulgence that, over time, become more and more compulsory as the body and mind are warped by repeated

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<sup>4</sup> Levine, “The Discovery of Addiction,” 144.

<sup>5</sup> For an important account on the deployment of remote effects and causes in the criminal trials of drunkards, see “ART. I.--INSANITY PRODUCED BY INTEMPERANCE,” *American Jurist and Law Magazine (1829-1843)* 3.5 (1830): 5. In this article, the author disputes the arguments of one prosecutor who claims that a man who commits murder while experiencing delirium tremens is culpable for their actions by virtue of their having drunk liquor willingly at a remote time, eventually altering their brains to the point of madness.



Figure 3. *The Drunkard's Progress*. N. Currier, 1846. Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, LC-USZC4-1629

intoxication. This understanding of the problem of chronic drunkenness crystallized in widespread lithographs like N. Currier's *The Drunkard's Progress* (1846)—a chronological movement through increasingly more catastrophic effects of excessive drinking ranging from spousal abuse, poverty, insanity, and suicide by pistol.<sup>6</sup> As

<sup>6</sup> Nathaniel Currier's vision of the progressive nature of intemperance is but one lithograph of

presented in visual culture, this entire progression exists virtually within the drink itself, so that if one picks up spirits, they willingly invite both the immediate, sometimes pleasurable effects of intoxication as well as the remote effects of privation and disease into their lives.<sup>7</sup> From this point of view, the volitional and pathological models exist on a temporal continuum: the drinker begins as a knowing subject and ends with their reason and volition immobilized by months or years of chronic drunkenness. By acting on their own desire to drink, the drinker ensnares themselves in a fatalistic progression. But what if the initial desire to drink is not simply a private matter? What if that desire is mediated, amplified, or driven by environmental, technological, social, and economic conditions that shape a subject's mental and bodily reality in potentially radical ways? And what if recognizing such shaping challenges fundamental beliefs in liberal individualism as a political and philosophical concept?

In this chapter, I analyze two works of literature that address these questions and, in doing so, challenge purely volitional and pathological accounts of addiction, as well as the continuum model of progression described above. Charles Dickens's *Bleak House* (1853) and Rebecca Harding Davis's "Life in the Iron Mills" (1861) distinguish themselves from many temperance tracts, novels, and lithographs produced in the mid-

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many produced in the nineteenth century that starkly painted the fatalistic train of effects occasioned by drinking. In the same year, another version of *The Drunkard's Progress* was produced by the E.B. & E.C. Kellogg Company. The same image would be repurposed in 1884 by Caasis & Lubrecht.

<sup>7</sup> To clarify, temperance ideology regarded the inherent properties of hard alcohol (its effectiveness, or capacity to effect bodies and minds in predictable ways) as necessarily determining a precipitous trajectory for the drinker. This chain of events inheres within the substance as a virtual effectivity that becomes actualized when the drinker drinks and continues to drink.

nineteenth century in their close attention to the material connections between mental and physical states and social and physical environments. While temperance advocates sought to correlate intemperance with susceptibility to miasmatic diseases like cholera following major mid-century epidemics in cities like New York, many mid-century writers depicted addiction itself as an atmosphere, a field of diffuse social and physical forces that unnaturally shaped or distorted human behavior.<sup>8</sup> Davis and Dickens wed intemperate behavior with inescapable physical forces and atmospheres. The palpable effects of industrialization and modern urban life envisioned in both of their works reveal how the body—its apertures, sensory “gateways,” material limits, socio-spatial moorings—hooks into a complex and imbricated system of mediators that limit the agency of any given subject. Such physically immersive views of life resist notions of political subjectivity that place mind above the mechanistic forces that govern the material world.

Davis’s and Dickens’s view of the interconnected body participates in the nineteenth century’s construction of what can be called a network model of addiction. While we tend to think of networks in terms of transportation and communication, e.g., the global dimensions and complex infrastructure of social media platforms, addiction networks can more helpfully identify the links and tensions between local, embodied experience and larger social, economic, and technological conditions. In the case of Davis’s narrative, intemperance is not understood as an intentional act (i.e., an exercise of will occurring above and apart from the body and its social and environmental

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<sup>8</sup> During the 1830s and 40s, numerous articles argued for the direct correlation between drunkenness and cholera, referencing demographic and statistical reports submitted by the Executive Committee of the New York Temperance Society.

entwinement), but as a mental and physical adaptation to the industrialized labor system that swallows up the lives of ethnic factory workers. Similarly, Dickens traces the imbricated institutional, social, and physical networks that over-determine or subtend addictive behavior and its effects. Well before sociologists and philosophers of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century began to reframe addiction through relational theories of agency ranging from cybernetics to Actor-Network Theory, Davis and Dickens were using literature to reconceive what it meant to be addicted and what it meant to be a networked self in an increasingly liberal age.

#### A Theory and History of Addiction Networks

“Life in the Iron Mills” is not a temperance narrative. It does not center on a middle-class everyman whose progressive drinking ultimately bankrupts his family, destroys his health and sanity, and blights the social order—the formula deployed in countless temperance lithographs and stories ranging from Harriet Beecher Stowe’s “Let Every Man Mind his Business” (1839) and George Cruikshank’s widely reprinted cartoon *The Bottle* to T.S. Arthur’s *Six Nights with the Washingtonians* (1842). Nor does Davis talk of “demon rum”—a personification that stresses the inherent evil of alcohol, a substance that can unilaterally hijack the mind and body of the drinker no matter their preexisting social, physical, or psychological condition.<sup>9</sup> While not every temperance narrative

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<sup>9</sup> As T.J. Matheson shows in “Poe’s ‘The Black Cat’ as a Critique of Temperance Literature,” many temperance tales, including Arthur’s *Six Nights with the Washingtonians*, depicted intemperance as the demonic possession of an otherwise morally sensitive, responsible man. Alcohol, from this standpoint, was solely to blame for their afflictions, and such afflictions would be removed with the cleansing of the body and mind from alcohol.

reduces intemperance to willful excess of the drunkard or the intrinsic addictiveness of liquor, many tales offer simple etiologies, with varying degrees of moral responsibility didactically assigned. “Iron Mills” offers an important alternative to these approaches by situating addiction in an industrial landscape that undercuts the liberal ideal of autonomous selfhood by materializing mind-body-environment relations. In doing so, Davis presents intemperance as a networked process or, as Frederick Engels puts it in *On the Condition of the Working Class in England* (1845), a “phenomenon,” with multiple, interlocking mediators and actors that drive addictive behavior. Davis’s narrative depicts an addiction network that causally links the mental and physical states of drinkers to a larger field of forces that shape and constrain human agency.

Ranging from the Deleuzo-Guattarian concept of assemblage to the underground mycorrhizal fungal networks that Paul Stamets calls “Earth’s natural internet,” network has proved to be a flexible concept and analytic practice for understanding the workings of complex phenomena such as social media, global trade, energy flows, and industrial pollution.<sup>10</sup> In the case of addiction, network can help to reframe and complicate traditional notions of human agency that buttress moral understandings of drug dependency. Instead of the addict as a centered subject, one whose willful pursuit of excessive and short-lived pleasure forges their addiction, network theory presents addicts as enmeshed in and influenced by a web of interrelated processes. From this standpoint,

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<sup>10</sup> Over the past fifteen years, mycorrhizal fungal networks have factored prominently in the ecological sciences. In a 2008 TED talk, mycologist Paul Stamets refers to fungi as “Earth’s natural internet,” a metaphor that explicitly links far flung symbiotic entanglements with expansive virtual networks.

addiction is not just a private condition, an enclosed and toxic relationship between a single person (their cravings and intentional states) and a mind-altering substance. As Jacques Derrida suggests in “The Rhetoric of Drugs,” the modern addict blurs any such kind of public/private divide because their habitual usage necessarily connects to supply chains, a marketplace, transportation systems, and communication technology.<sup>11</sup>

Extensive, multilateral networks make addiction possible but prompt the question: how, and to what extent, does an enabling network complicate the idea of personal responsibility, which has motivated harsh politico-legal and social responses to drug use for over three centuries? This question is particularly salient now, given the push for more networked and disease-based understandings of addiction during the opioid epidemic, a shift facilitated by high numbers of overdoses among white users as well as a vast expansion of communication systems.<sup>12</sup> While people might consider technologies such as cellphones or syringes as simply tools deployed by addicts, thinkers like Bruno Latour have called for a different metaphysical system that extends agency beyond the intentional human subject. As Latour puts it, “any thing that does modify a state of affairs by making a difference is an actor.”<sup>13</sup> From that point of view, a syringe is an actor because it enables the user to inject a drug directly into their bloodstream, thus enhancing

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<sup>11</sup> Jacques Derrida, “The Rhetoric of Drugs: An Interview,” by Michael Israel, *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 5, no. 1 (Spring 1993): 1. In *Forces of Habit* (2002), historian David T. Courtwright similarly expands our view of substance use by describing the complex, sprawling trade and economic networks that made widespread consumption of alcohol, tobacco, and caffeine possible in eighteenth and nineteenth-century America.

<sup>12</sup> Commentators have rightfully noted the disparity between the American government’s response to the crack epidemic of the 1980s, with police bringing military force to bear on communities of color, and the more recent opioid epidemic.

<sup>13</sup> Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-network-theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 71.

the magnitude of the high and fast tracking the chemical addiction process, while a cellphone collapses boundaries in space and time so that a user can connect instantly with sources, a process that can modulate, even generate craving.<sup>14</sup> Further, when we consider other possible mediators or actants like socio-economic adversity, childhood trauma, and genetic predisposition, we begin to see addiction as much more than the product of a series of intentional acts committed by a single person. But network does not just undermine more traditional or choice-based models of addiction, which are currently held by only a minority of experts.<sup>15</sup> As sociologists Jukka Törrönen and Christoffer Tigerstedt contend, network theory also troubles the more hegemonic concept of addiction as neurological disease. Instead of just seeing altered brain chemistry as materially determining a pathological state called “addiction” or “substance abuse disorder,” they say, researchers should look to the assemblage of “situational dependencies” that mediate and transform the drug-seeking behavior of a user.<sup>16</sup> While the sociological and philosophical reframing of addiction through network theories is a relatively recent event, “Life in the Iron Mills” suggests that this type of thinking is anticipated in American antebellum literature, which in some cases points toward a broader rethinking of liberal subjectivity and agency at a time of significant economic,

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<sup>14</sup> Injecting a substance allows more of the substance to cross what is referred to as the “blood-brain barrier,” which can limit or block the passage of certain chemical substances. Therefore, the syringe transforms the drug-taking experience by maximizing a drug’s potency, which also maximizes its addictive potential.

<sup>15</sup> For a critique and alternative to a disease-based model of addiction, see Jeffrey A. Schaler, *Addiction is a Choice* (Chicago: Open Court, 2000) and Gene Heyman, *Addiction: A Disorder of Choice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).

<sup>16</sup> Jukka Törrönen and Christoffer Tigerstedt, “Following the Moving and Changing Attachments and Assemblages of ‘addiction’: Applying the Actor Network Approach to Autobiographies,” *The International Journal of Drug Policy* 54 (2018): 63.

technological, and environmental change.

Critics like Ulfried Rechartd and Regina Schober claim that the concept of network emerged during the early nineteenth century in parallel with the vast growth of technological and communication networks, including steam-powered boats and printing presses.<sup>17</sup> I would add that the national temperance movement, enabled by the developments Schober describes, also played an important part in shaping and encouraging networked thinking. In the 1840s, for instance, the Washingtonian temperance movement stressed the importance of peer support systems and group meetings for recovering men, who signaled their accountability to their communities by signing public temperance pledges and sharing their personal stories. But network did not just undergird notions of social interconnectedness and mutual behavioral reinforcement. It became a means of understanding the condition of intemperance itself through critiques of the liquor trade, tavern culture, capitalism, and industrialized distillation. Some of these critiques were literary, the most popular being T. S. Arthur's *Ten Nights in a Bar-room* (1854), which records the progressive deterioration of an entire community after one-time miller Simon Slade opens a tavern in pursuit of greater profits, following a new capitalist ethos of self-advancement at the cost of others' happiness. Networked understandings of subjectivity and culture did not entirely negate ideas of personal responsibility, but they did represent a challenge to liberalist principles and the dynamics of free market capitalism.

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<sup>17</sup> Ulfried Reichardt, Heike Schaefer, and Regina Schober, "Introduction: Network Theory and American Studies," *American Studies* 60, no. 1 (2015): 11.

“Life in the Iron Mills” presents one of the more complex network models of addiction in American literature at the time. By mapping out the linkages between industrial exploitation, pollution, and whiskey, the story helps to reframe intemperance as an over-determined network of mind-body-environment relations. Literature, for Davis, also becomes a networking tool that allows for the detailed tracing of forces, flows, and bodies to understand how systems interpenetrate in etiological and ethical domains. This kind of reading connects with Caroline Levine’s claim that “narratives are among the very best forms for identifying and tracking the unfolding of relations among different forms.”<sup>18</sup> Unlike temperance lithographs and magic lantern slides, which typically offered static images of filthy drunkards, Davis creates narratives in which befouling smoke and networks of addiction stretch across time and space. As we will see, Davis’s aesthetic—marked by destabilized boundaries, sprawling connections, and thickly corporeal and adjectival prose—itsself reflects a networked worldview that encroaches upon artistic production and reader responsibility.

#### Industrial Networking in “Life in the Iron Mills”

Since Sharon M. Harris’ groundbreaking *Rebecca Harding Davis and American Realism* (1991), much criticism on “Life in the Iron Mills” has turned to the political, aesthetic, and philosophical implications of Davis’s portrayal of historically and socially specific bodies under industrial capitalism. The “real” material struggles of Davis’s

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<sup>18</sup> Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), 122.

underrepresented laboring classes, Allison Tharp claims, challenges the abstract personhood found in the transcendentalist philosophy of *The Atlantic*'s founders, most notably Ralph Waldo Emerson.<sup>19</sup> Caroline Miles reads Davis's text as a pivotal moment where the white laborer's body, specifically its recalcitrance and material limits, becomes visible, thereby challenging a "myth" of unified, disembodied white male identity.<sup>20</sup> Following Tharp and Miles, a network-based hermeneutic shows that agency is necessarily delimited by the physical and social systems in which one is enmeshed, in contrast with a more abstract understanding of self as grounded in the soul or some supersensible faculty like reason or the will. By mapping the dynamics of an industrial system, Davis presents mind not as independent of the social and physical world, but as part of a mind-body-environment system that is hooked into and reconfigured by industrial technologies, waste products, atmospheric conditions, and, finally, liquor, which is itself a product of large-scale industrialized distillation in the early nineteenth century. Such network-forging realism provides the basis for a different explanatory model of addiction that complicates both a moral model that blamed individuals for their failings and emerging pathological models that reduced addiction to physiology.

To understand the networked dynamics of alcohol consumption in "Iron Mills," we need to begin with unhealthy atmospheric conditions, which curb the agential capacities of laborers and, ultimately, dispose them to drink. Like Dickens's famous

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<sup>19</sup> Allison Tharp, "'There Is a Secret down Here': Physical Containment and Social Instruction in Rebecca Harding Davis's *Life in the Iron Mills*," *Journal of Narrative Theory* 47, no. 1 (2017): 5.

<sup>20</sup> Caroline Miles, "Representing and Self-Mutilating the Laboring Male Body: Re-examining Rebecca Harding Davis's *Life in the Iron Mills*," *American Transcendental Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (2004): 89.

opening scene in *Bleak House* (1853), Davis describes the seemingly inescapable pollutions circulating through an industrial 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 grocer's shop opposite, where a crowd of drunken Irishmen are puffing Lynchburg tobacco in their pipes. I can detect the scent through all the foul smells ranging loosely in the air.<sup>21</sup>

Teeming with tactile and olfactory details, the passage provides a fully embodied experience of the town that collapses spatial and somatic boundaries between individuals. While one's breath is typically something that only becomes palpable through face-to-face interaction, here the narrator feels the moisture, the very materiality of mingled breaths, from a distance, due to the crowding of "human beings." In one small, simple sentence—"It stifles me"—Davis conveys how humans living in urban industrial conditions become objects affected by physical forces that are outside of their direct control. The "thick, clammy" air, assuming the subject position in the sentence, becomes an actor, a character in its own right, as it touches the body and permeates the orifices of not just the narrator, but all who live within the cramped confines of poorly ventilated homes. The same goes for the "Lynchburg tobacco," whose fumes permeate the thick and "foul" air, penetrating the senses, throats and noses of those who do not themselves use tobacco.<sup>22</sup> In these first sentences, Davis creates an atmosphere that crowds and oppresses

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<sup>21</sup> Rebecca Harding Davis, "Life in the Iron-Mills," in *A Rebecca Harding Davis Reader: "Life in the Iron-Mills," Selected Fiction & Essays*, edited by Jean Pfaelzer, 3-34 (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995), 3.

<sup>22</sup> The tobacco pipe in this section links metonymically with smoke-producing pipes in industrial factories, both of which deliver smoke to a human's "pipes," i.e., their throats.

not just the characters of the mill town but the reader addressed at the beginning. The massification of bodies and smells, coupled with the similarly “muddy, flat, immovable sky,” creates a sense of inescapable suffocation, a condition under which the full and uninterrupted agency of any given person—including the reader—is called into question.

Davis uses industrial conditions to show the permeability, interconnectedness and vulnerability of a self living in an unhealthy environment. Smoke, in particular, serves as the central industrial actor that connects and affectively distorts those who work within and live around the iron mills. Described as “the idiosyncrasy of this town,” 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.”<sup>23</sup> Davis’s smoke does not just rise and dissipate in the atmosphere; it is more corporeal and sludgy, its thick movements conveyed by a glut of liquids and sibilants. This smoke falls, flows outward, encrusts and coats an entire landscape, engendering a mood of sullenness.<sup>24</sup> Humans are not exempt from this stain of the industrial process, as Davis positions “the faces of the passers-by” in a catalog of objects that are indiscriminately, equally marked by smoke.<sup>25</sup> While humans may entertain the prospect of escape or insulation from such pollution, the narrator dashes the hope of a private “inside” space completely removed from the influence of factory smoke. Thus, the wings of the “little broken figure of an angel,”

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<sup>23</sup> Davis, “Life in the Iron-Mills,” 3.

<sup>24</sup> The behavior of smoke in Davis’s text fits nicely with Jesse Oak Taylor’s comments on atmosphere in an era of anthropogenic climate change: “‘Air’ is no longer synonymous with ‘outside,’ a space of nothingness or a void into which solidity passes, never to return. It has become instead an expansive interior, a state of suspension, a haunted house” (45).

<sup>25</sup> Davis, “Life in the Iron-Mills,” 3.

situated on the narrator's mantel piece within domestic space, are "covered with smoke, clotted and black."<sup>26</sup> As Maribel Molyneaux claims, this staining of the angel—representing the Victorian ideal of woman as the "angel of the house"—challenges the idea of an insular private space and women's separation from the public sphere.<sup>27</sup> This complication of domesticity, I argue, puts "Iron Mills" at odds with more conservative strains of temperance ideology, which viewed male sobriety and industry as contingent upon a safe, well-regulated domestic space free from the temptations and filth of public life.

Davis's picture of industrialism contrasts markedly with pro-industrial temperance lithographs, such as N. Currier's *The Fruits of Temperance* (1848). Currier foregrounds an affectionate family moment within a verdant, fenced in domestic space, as industrial work happens in the background, across a winding blue river that buffers the private realm from the public. An 1870 edition by Currier and Ives similarly centers on a scene of bourgeois familial bliss. This time an industrial and mercantile landscape can be seen through a glassed-in window at the top left of the image, which, again, causally links but also physically separates a lush private realm from the bustle of steam-engines and commerce. This spatial bifurcation between private and public, so fundamental to bourgeois gender identity, is unrealizable in Davis's town where "Smoke is everywhere!"<sup>28</sup> The traffic of smoke and smells consistently unsettles the boundaries

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Maribel Molyneaux, "Sculpture in the Iron Mills: Rebecca Harding Davis's Korl Woman," *Women's Studies* 17, no. 3-4 (1990): 157.

<sup>28</sup> Davis, "Life in the Iron-Mills," 3.



Figure 4. *The Fruits of Temperance*. Nathaniel Currier, 1848. Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, LC-USZC2-2380

between self, other, and environment. And, for Davis, this smoke is not just a cosmetic problem, a stain that can be wiped off or a noxious smell that only temporarily exasperates one's nostrils and taste buds. It morally and physically debilitates the Welsh laborers Davis depicts.

Addressing smoke in “Life in the Iron Mills,” Jill Gatlin discusses how pro-industrialists often packaged smoke as an anti-miasmatic agent and a symbol of progress, despite its unhealthiness. “Entering a debate that would remain contentious for the next half-century,” Gatlin says, “Davis counters idealized claims linking smoke to economic

equality, progress, and health. She portrays pollution not as a source of awe or a sign of wealth, nor as simply a nuisance or annoyance, but rather as a lethal hazard to laborers.”<sup>29</sup> In the above passage, Gatlin uses “nuisance” to denote a practice or thing that is annoying or obnoxious, but the term had a stronger meaning in nineteenth century Anglo-American culture. In legal discourse, for instance, a “nuisance” referred to “something harmful or offensive to the public,” which constituted “unlawful interference with an individual in the enjoyment of his or her rights.”<sup>30</sup> One of those rights in question is access to clean air. Described by Reverend Charles H. Brigham in the *Herald of Health* as the freely given, universal “breath” of God, that which supports and connects “all organized life,” air was considered a natural right, an essential foundation for all other rights enjoyed in civil societies.<sup>31</sup> Given the ease with which that right could be interfered with in the industrial age, nuisance indicated the vulnerability—even speciousness—of liberal concepts of selfhood.

For American reformers of the mid-nineteenth century, the industrialized urban environment teemed with airborne contaminants, ranging from coal smoke to tobacco. Smoking was considered particularly “noxious,” not to mention dangerous given the common belief that smoking disposed men to drink hard liquor.<sup>32</sup> Smoking also posed a

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<sup>29</sup> Jill Gatlin, “Disturbing Aesthetics. Industrial Pollution, Moral Discourse, and Narrative Form in Rebecca Harding Davis’s “Life in the Iron Mills,” *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 68, no. 2 (2013): 201.

<sup>30</sup> “nuisance, n. and adj.,” *OED Online*, June 2021, Oxford University Press, <https://www-oed-com.ezproxy.bu.edu/view/Entry/129032?redirectedFrom=nuisance> (accessed June 12, 2021).

<sup>31</sup> Charles H. Brigham, “The Air Cure. What Shall We Breathe?” *Herald of Health (1864-1892)* 14, no. 1 (1869).

<sup>32</sup> “The Use of Tobacco is a Dangerous Inducement to Intemperance,” *Massachusetts Cataract & Worcester County Waterfall* 3, no. 48 (1846). The article cites Rush’s theory that smoking debilitates the taste buds, disposing tobacco users to seek stimulating beverages like ardent

unique threat to the moral and physical health of Americans due to its public consumption and the possibility of second-hand exposure. In one editorial on the smoke nuisance from 1868, a writer rails against being “compelled” to breathe tobacco smoke emitted by men who crowd the front of railway cars. Since such smoke causes sickness and prostration in those with “sensitive natures,” the writer reasons, public smoking constitutes a violation of the fundamental right to clean, breathable air.<sup>33</sup>

The elements, if not the legal underpinnings, of this argument are no doubt familiar to Americans who live in a country where smoke-free zones are now a commonplace. Though mid-nineteenth century citizens did not have the same toxico-chemical understanding of the harmful effects of secondhand smoke as we do, the writer concludes from others’ mental and physical experience that smoke constitutes an unhealthy, even debilitating nuisance.<sup>34</sup> This nuisance takes on oppressive networked dynamics, as the mouths, noses, and lungs of non-smokers get entangled with the habits of smokers through circulating clouds of tobacco.

When we scale up from wafting tobacco smoke to the dark plumes perpetually belched out of iron foundries, a nuisance which materially interferes with the health and thus agency of an entire working-class community, the implications get more radical.

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spirits, and Massachusetts Governor James Sullivan’s claim that, by reducing “glandular secretions,” tobacco induced a thirst for hard liquor.

<sup>33</sup> “Smoking on the Street Railway Cars,” *American Phrenological Journal (1838-1869)* 48, no. 6 (December 1868): 226

<sup>34</sup> There were, however, scientific understandings of unhealthy air presented in popular magazines. “Air and Ventilation,” published in *Godley’s Lady’s Book and Magazine*, argues that “Pure air is composed of oxygen, nitrogen, and carbonic acid gas, in certain fixed proportions; that these proportions are such as are fitted for healthy breathing; that unless these proportions are maintained the blood cannot be purified.” Chemistry and physiology are both appealed to in order to compel the reader to ventilate their homes properly so as to avoid disease and fatigue.

Coal smoke does not just challenge the self-possession or autonomy of liberal subjects but the very idea of private property, as factories emit materials that exceed the boundaries of a given parcel of land. This is the central problem that M.E. Curwen addresses in British and American nuisance law cases: “The right...is to the air diffused over *one’s own land*. The creation of offensive smells, extending themselves beyond that limit, is a direct violation of the rights of adjacent owners.”<sup>35</sup> Curwen’s analysis draws attention to the way in which air can complicate legal conceptions of private property. Air, unlike a parcel of land, cannot be gridded, boxed up, or owned. To pollute the air, from Curwen’s point of view, constitutes an unlawful extension of one’s property—one’s labor and the material byproducts of that labor—beyond cartographic boundaries, ultimately causing harm to others who cannot help but breathe and be affected by those pollutants. In Davis’s story, the circulation of smoke similarly troubles the fiction of a private, self-contained space, as land necessarily fits within a larger ecosystem comprising interconnected beings, processes, and phenomena. In a way, industrial smoke

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<sup>35</sup> M.E. Curwen, “THE MORALS OF THE LAW: THE ACTION ON THE CASE. LIGHT AND AIR--EXTENT OF THE RIGHT TO. THE ENJOYMENT OF AIR—NUISANCES,” *The Western Law Journal (1843-1853)*, July 1852: 433. The Prout case of 1819, for example, sought to determine whether the emissions from Roger Prout’s printing ink factory in New York City constituted a “public” nuisance or a “private” annoyance. While prosecution witnesses testified to being sickened by the boiling of oils on Prout’s property—including onetime resident Sarah Sherwood, who said the smell was so terrible that it “seemed to stop my breath”—Prout was defended by medical professionals, held up as an industrious innovator in printing ink and ultimately acquitted.<sup>35</sup> Like other cases from the early and mid-nineteenth century, the Prout case highlights the way in which the rights of entrepreneurial businessmen often trumped the natural rights of citizens living adjacent to their businesses. See “ROGER PROUT’S CASE: NUISANCE,” *The New York City Hall Recorder (1817-1822)*, June 01, 1819: 87. For a critical analysis of nuisance law in the industrial age, see Christine Meisner Rosen, “‘Knowing’ Industrial Pollution: Nuisance Law and the Power of Tradition in a Time of Rapid Economic Change, 1840-1864,” *Environmental History* 8, no. 4 (2003): 568.

makes the air disturbingly palpable, thereby marking the bustling traffic of elements that materially connect and, in the case of pollutants, distort properties, people, and objects. Beyond legal questions of property and responsibility, these visible material connections support a network view of self and environment, one that rejects the idea of a bounded liberal self in favor of a material mind-body system dynamically shaped by its environment.

Along with its theoretical significance, industrial smoke ravages the health and mental wellbeing of Davis's working-class persons. Its effects interlock with the labor forms that similarly mark and debilitate the bodies of factory workers. These marks are plainly exhibited when Davis's narrator describes "the slow stream of human life creeping past, night and morning, to the great mills. Masses of men, with dull, besotted faces bent to the ground."<sup>36</sup> The description of this procession parallels the slow, thick motions of the factory smoke under a "muddy" and "immovable" sky. These men do not walk, but creep. By "stooping all night over boiling caldrons of metal," their bodies have been reshaped. Their "faces bent to the ground," they stoop as if work has sedimented itself within and expressed itself through the very physical structure of the body. The stoop and the creep become the corporeal and kinetic signatures of mechanized human labor: humans, in this system, become "dull" tools whose bodies are permanently remolded to fit the labor they do, even as such remolding constrains the health and agency of its victims and bars them from any fantasy of a private life.

The most dramatic example of this somatic reconfiguration through labor is

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<sup>36</sup> Davis, "Life in the Iron Mills," 3.

Deborah, described as “deformed, almost a hunchback.”<sup>37</sup> Having to stand at the spools for 12 hours at a time, Deborah’s body, like those of young British factory workers recounted in exposés of the 1840s and 50s, begins to lose its shape and vigor.<sup>38</sup> As she brings Hugh his dinner, for example, she must stop and rest at every square, her body unable to support even casual locomotion.<sup>39</sup> This deformity takes on social significance, as the men in Hugh’s factory reduce Deborah synecdochally to her deformity (“hunchback”), and Hugh himself, Deborah’s love interest, cannot help but see her as a degraded creature. Though smoke and labor forms seem to mark all laboring bodies indiscriminately, Deborah’s plight demonstrates that women are even more dramatically affected by the industrial system, something Hugh acknowledges when he speaks of Deb’s “worse share” in human misery.<sup>40</sup> Parsing the implications of Deborah’s disability from the perspective of gender ideology and marriage, Rosemarie Garland-Thompson argues that “she represents the ultimate threat to nineteenth-century female selfhood: a body that prevents her from attachment to a man, women’s conduit to power and status.”<sup>41</sup> In Deborah’s case, the aesthetic standards of womanhood collide with industrially produced deformity, Deb’s “thwarted woman’s form,” to deprive her of

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>38</sup> During the 1840s, exposés were published in magazines such as *Mechanic’s Advocate* and *Religious Monitor and Evangelical Repository* detailing the disabilities and deformities of young female laborers subjected to brutal factory conditions in England. American writers, for the most part, attempted to distinguish American industry from its British counterpart in terms of humaneness and cleanliness, though some, like the author of “One of the Problems of the Age,” recognized the possibility of worsening hardship if Americans did not learn from the British system.

<sup>39</sup> Davis, “Life in the Iron Mills,” 6.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 20.

<sup>41</sup> Rosemarie Garland-Thompson, *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature* (New York: Columbia UP, 1997), 96.

personal fulfillment, a means of offsetting the debilitating effects of the industrial network through the consolidation of a domestic identity.<sup>42</sup> As Davis shows her readers, the imbrication of smoke, machinery, deformity, and gender ideology does not just transform action. It violently delimits possible courses of action, and, for many laborers, compels a path straight to alcohol.

#### Stimulants and (Mal)adaptation to the Industrial Network

In Davis's narrative, drunkenness is treated as a condition inextricably connected to mechanical labor and environmental pollution, both of which taint and reconfigure the minds and bodies of laborers so as to dispose them to drinking. In contrast to conventional temperance narratives, Davis does not provide a temptation narrative in which young men succumb to the pleasure and demonic power of drink and undergo a progressive decline in health and social status. Such narratives often center around a bourgeois male subject, whose decline into drunkenness is itself measured in classed and raced ways.<sup>43</sup> Drinking is, instead, a pre-established fact of existence in the iron mills, its effects smoothly overlapping and converging with the begriming and stooping effects of air pollution, industrial labor, and abject living conditions. Davis makes this clear when describing the "class" of Hugh Wolfe, whose lives are uniformly characterized by

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<sup>42</sup> Davis, "Life in the Iron Mills," 7.

<sup>43</sup> This racialization occurs in metaphorical constructions of (white) intemperance as slavery in temperance discourse. For more on the ideological and political implications of such rhetoric, see Susan Zieger, "'Mankind has been Drunk': Race and Addiction in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*," in *Inventing the Addict: Drugs, Race, and Sexuality in Nineteenth-Century British and American Literature* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008), 61-97.

“incessant labor, sleeping in kennel-like rooms, eating rank pork and molasses, and drinking.”<sup>44</sup> In the case of the lower classes, there’s no reason for a narrative of progressive intemperance because intemperance, as Davis’s text suggests, is a conditioned and socialized response to an industrial system, rather than the choice or act of intentional subjects. Intemperance in Davis’s story constitutes a behavioral adjustment that allows laborers to meet, but also be further ground down by, the demands of a given industrial network. This reading hinges on the often-used classification of hard liquor as a “stimulant,” a substance that speeds up certain autonomic processes and affectively invigorates the user, as distinguished from weaker beverages, like wine and beer, which were traditionally considered sources of nutriment in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

The National Institutes of Health currently classifies alcohol as a Central Nervous Depressant. While the antebellum period viewed alcohol as such, beverages like spirits were also seen as stimulants that could improve worker’s productivity. Early pioneers of temperance, most notably Benjamin Rush and Anthony Benezet, tried to counter this belief by explaining how ardent spirits depleted rather than augmented strength. As Rush says in *An Inquiry into the Effects of Ardent Spirits* (1784), “There is no nourishment in ardent spirits. The strength they produce in labor is of a transient nature, and is always followed by a sense of weakness and fatigue.”<sup>45</sup> Following Rush’s lead, many doctors would propound and elaborate similar theories in later antebellum medical publications.

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<sup>44</sup> Davis, “Life in the Iron Mills,” 5.

<sup>45</sup> Benjamin Rush, *An Inquiry into the Effects of Ardent Spirits upon the Human Body and Mind* (Exeter, N.H.: Printed for Josiah Richardson, 1819), 15.

For them, drinking spirits for physical enhancement was a case of immediate gains shortchanging one's future health and labor capacities. The American agriculturalist John Beale Bordley also took issue with spirit consumption and called upon farmers to grow hops to produce "good beer," "an article conducive to sobriety, health, vigor and contentment."<sup>46</sup> For Bordley, "good beer" differed fundamentally from high proof spirits like whiskey, which quickly induced drunkenness and thereby interfered with one's work. Nevertheless, antebellum farmers and laborers continued to use spirits to energize labor, as evidenced by the many temperance periodicals that criticized the practice during the antebellum period.

This labor-related conception of alcoholic stimulants continued into the mid-nineteenth century and became marked by new concerns regarding the effects of industrial labor and the crowded, unsanitary living conditions in urban zones. The most prominent example of this shift can be found in Friedrich Engels' *On the Condition of the Working Class in England*. Remarking upon the British laborer's need for spirits, Engels says: "he has urgent need of recreation, he *must* have something to make work worth his trouble, to make the prospect of the next day endurable...His enfeebled frame, weakened by bad air and bad food, violently demands some external stimulus"<sup>47</sup> No longer a means of maximizing labor productivity in rural economies, spirits become a way of enduring the enervating physical conditions of slum life in industrial cities. For Engels, the

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<sup>46</sup> J. B. Bordley, *Essays and Notes on Husbandry and Rural Affairs* (Philadelphia: Budd and Betram, 1799), 395.

<sup>46</sup> Tharp, 15.

<sup>47</sup> Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (London: Electric Book, 2001), 176.

intemperance of laboring classes stems from an insurmountable, violent physical need caused by the industrial class system itself, and, as such, it cannot be reduced to a moral failing. While acknowledging the well-intentioned efforts of temperance advocates like Father Mathew, Engels doubts the efficacy of moral reform in remedying what he understands to be a socially and environmentally driven physical compulsion.<sup>48</sup> As the cornerstone of the addiction concept, compulsion entails an irresistible urge to use a mind-altering substance. While British and American doctors and phrenologists were formulating physiological explanations for compulsive substance use in the mid-nineteenth century, Engels provides a different physiological understanding. The need Engels discerns in laborers does not originate in an internalized pathology—one that seats the problem in the adulterated functions of a longtime drinker’s organs and mental faculties—but instead grounds the body and organs of the intemperate person in a toxic environment that itself drives a physical compulsion to use alcohol as stimulant. Engels thus shifts the focus from physiology to socio-physiology, as Davis does in her immersive, embodied account of industrial networks and widespread drinking.

We can expand this networked view of escapist drinking patterns even further by recognizing that distilled liquor was itself a product of industrialization. Though spirits had been consumed for thousands of years, they had never been so potent or widely available as in the first half of the nineteenth century, due to technological innovations

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 208. Temperance champions like Father Mathew, Engels says, may get “thirty to sixty thousand workers” to take a temperance pledge during visits to English cities, “but most of them break it within a month” (208). Such men may continue to take pledges over and over again, but they are constitutionally incapable of maintaining sobriety overtime due to their living conditions.

like the “perpetual still”—a more rapid, energy-efficient form of distillation—and the steam-powered ships and railways that transported whiskey and rum throughout the country.<sup>49</sup> According to Wolfgang Schivelbusch, these spirits, ten times more potent than traditional beer, represented “a process of acceleration of intoxication, intrinsically related to other processes of acceleration in the modern age.”<sup>50</sup> Schivelbusch’s idea of “intrinsically related” modern processes is strikingly visualized in the American temperance lithograph *The Black Valley Railroad*, which conflates alcoholic progression with the astounding speed of locomotive travel. In the image, a distillery replaces the typical steam locomotive. Fueled by bags of grain from the second car, the distillery propels drinkers through increasingly more bleak and disastrous destinations, including “prison town,” “beggar town,” “delirium town,” and, ultimately, “destruction.” While Davis’s story does not focus on the progressive decline of once sober and healthy citizens, as her laborers must breathe “from infancy to death an air saturated with fog and grease and soot,” it does link industrial acceleration—measured by longer hours, more intensive labor—with the use of hard liquor.<sup>51</sup> By describing spirits as a stimulant, i.e., something that excites and accelerates mental and physical activity, Davis connects drinking logically and materially to an industrial system, which accelerates the pace of labor to the point where workers are enervated and in *need* of a compensatory stimulus. Drinking, therefore, constitutes a (mal)adaptation to the demands and effects of that

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<sup>49</sup> W. J. Rorabaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic, an American Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 72.

<sup>50</sup> Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Tastes of Paradise* (New York: Vintage, 1993), 153.

<sup>51</sup> Davis, “Life in the Iron Mills,” 4.

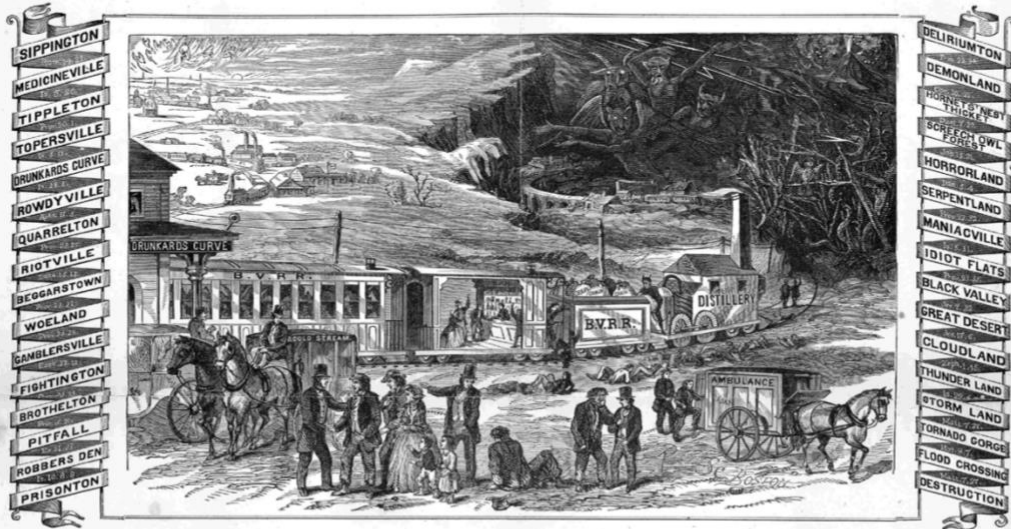
# BLACK VALLEY RAILROAD!

GREAT CENTRAL, BROAD GAUGE, FAST ROUTE,

From Sippington, through Tiptleton and Topersville,

VIA  
**BEGGARSTOWN, DEMONLAND AND BLACK VALLEY,  
TO  
DESTRUCTION!**

ACCIDENTS BY COLLISIONS ENTIRELY AVOIDED AS NO UP TRAINS ARE RUN OVER THE ROAD.  
TICKETS SOLD AT ALL LIQUOR SHOPS.



EP From DRUNKARDS' CURVE the Train is an Express—all WARRIORS to be done above that station, and principally of respectable people. Passengers for all the places beyond are required to stop at the Train.  
EP Passengers not allowed to stand on the platform, or to put their heads out of the windows below level—the Corporation not wishing to admit persons who are not patrons of the Road.  
EP Persons desiring to leave the Train will find the stages of the TEMPERANCE ALLIANCE at Drunkards' Curve, and all the Stations above, ready to convey them free to any of the villages upon Cross Stream River. Below Drunkards' Curve, AMBULANCES will be used.

LOOK OUT FOR  
**PICKPOCKETS!!**  
WHILE PURCHASING TICKETS.

EP Persons living in the vicinity of this Road must "look out for the engine," as an fall is rung or brakemen employed below Drunkards' Curve, and the Company declines all responsibility for baggage.  
EP All baggage at the risk of the owners. Widows and orphans in receipt of baggage lost by friends of this Road are informed that the Corporation will adhere strictly to the usage of the Road, and positively will not restore lost baggage.  
EP Passengers in the sleeping cars, especially Blackbills, will be waked up at Scotch Oat Flour, Thunderland, and at the end of the Road.  
EP Stages from THUNDERLAND connect with all the Trains.

In the background, on the left, a train is seen leaving the region of mountains, churches and ministering angels, for the BLACK VALLEY COURTYARD; further down, faster trains are seen. In the foreground a train is leaving DRUNKARDS' CURVE, the last stopping place. In the middle one is endeavoring to empty the pockets of travelers, while another is emptying them from the train. Forward of the station is the FRODO, who is also largely interested in the Road. On the left some travelers who have been carried further than they intended to go, are leaving the train to return by the Temperance stage; on the right the passengers are being sent down a track to the railroad and dying, where they have thrown out along the track of the Road. Beyond is seen a part of the BLACK VALLEY TOWN, where mad men and mad times are leading and breaking in the coils of hopelessness. Further on is DEMONLAND and THUNDERLAND, beyond which a train is seen disappearing into DEMONLAND and THUNDERLAND and the stormy regions toward the lower terminus of the Road, from which the only telegram that ever comes is

"At the last it biteth like a Serpent and stingeth like an Adder."

**BUSINESS STATEMENT.**  
1. It is constantly carrying over 600,000 persons toward the down that swathe the Common Drunkard. 2. It carries without pity and wickedness directly to more than 2,500,000 persons, a large proportion of whom are women and children. 3. It carries down to poverty and beggary enough to keep over 400,000 persons in the Alms House. 4. It carries down to the condition of criminals enough to keep 75,000 in Prison. 5. It is carrying toward destruction multitudes of the brave and noble young men in our army.

**MASSACHUSETTS TEMPERANCE ALLIANCE,**  
49 Washington Street, Boston.

**STATEMENT CONTINUED.**  
6. It has carried victory to our enemies and slaughter to our friends in several important battles during the war, by disqualifying officers and men for duty. 7. It has carried down to disgrace and destruction many of the most talented men of the country from every profession in life. 8. It carries more than 400,000,000 of dollars to Insurrection annually. 9. It carries annually over 60,000,000 of bushels of grain to the Pauper. 10. It carries more than 80,000 into Eternity annually.

Charles H. Crosby, Printer and Lithographer, 12 and 14 Water Street, Boston.

Figure 5. Black Valley Railroad! Great central, broad gauge, fast route, from Sippington, through Tiptleton and Topersville via Beggars-town, Demonland and Black Valley, to destruction! Accidents by collisions entirely avoided as no trains are run over the road. Massachusetts Temperance Alliance, 1863. Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress, rbpe07002900.

system, with the parenthetically enclosed prefix “mal-” suggesting the concealment of hard liquor’s unhealthiness within an already polluted environment where “Smoke is everywhere!”

For those who labor in Davis’s town, the stimulant effects of alcohol take the form of emotional excitation and heightened social feeling, which counter the dull, mechanical efficiency of the factory system. Davis reveals these related functions of alcohol in an early scene, in which Deborah is accosted by a group of female laborers at night following their shift at the cotton mill. These women attempt to pressure Deb into attending a night of festivities. The scene begins: “‘Good-night, Deb,’ said one, a mulatto, steadying herself against the gas-post. She needed the post to steady her. So did more than one of them.”<sup>52</sup> Throughout the story, Davis focuses the reader’s attention on the bodies of laborers—their loss of gender markers, their deformities and stains—and here she spotlights the mixed-race character’s need for a crutch due to drunkenness and/or the wear and fatigue occasioned by incessant factory labor.<sup>53</sup> The juxtaposition of this detail with the announcement of a “ball” helps us to see drinking festivities as fulfilling a similar function and need, though alcohol, as stimulant, does not just physically prop up a body like a gas-post, but affords the drinker a transient joy, a brief transcendence from the pains of daily life. Davis’s close attention to the hazardous effects of industrial networking preempts a purely moralistic reading of these

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>53</sup> Ambiguity here is important, as it attests to the inextricable connection of labor-induced exhaustion and intoxication. We get the same ambiguity in the phrase “dull, besotted faces bent to the ground.” In this example, “besotted” could refer to either the stupefying effects of smoke and labor or liquor.

characters and their drinking. Instead of stressing the inherently evil effects of alcohol, as conveyed by tropes like “Demon Rum” in temperance discourse, Davis attends to the physical conditions that drive drinking as an individual and social act. The reader can thus better understand how alcohol, for these women, seems a blessing, rather than a curse. Just as Increase Mather once declared alcohol to be a “good creature of God,” so does one of the Welsh women equate drink with a divine gift: “Be the powers, an we’ll have a night of it! there’ll be lashin’s o’ drink,—the Vargent be blessed and praised for’t!”<sup>54</sup> To praise the immaculate mother of Jesus for allowing “lashin’s o’ drink” to flow in the midnight hour may seem an impiety or corruption, particularly to anti-Catholic *Atlantic* readers, but that view disregards the felt, embodied experiences of women whose natural rhythms are hijacked by what Davis calls “the vast machinery by which the bodies of workmen are governed...unceasingly from year to year.”<sup>55</sup> For these women, alcohol rouses disabled, temporally disjointed bodies; it is, in keeping with the etymology of “spirits,” a term used for distilled alcohol, that which gives renewed life, or at least provides the illusion of it, which parallels the understanding of alcohol as stimulant.

The two central characters of the text, Hugh Wolfe and Deb, are not drunkards in the conventional sense, but they still demonstrate the same physical need for stimulus as other laborers. Hugh drinks spirits on occasion, imbibing “desperately” when he does.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Increase Mather, *Wo to Drunkards. Two Sermons Testifying against the Sin of Drunkenness: Wherein the Wofulness of That Evil, and the Misery of All That Are Addicted to It, Is Discovered from the Word of God* (Boston: Timothy Green, 1712), 7.

<sup>55</sup> Davis, “Life in the Iron Mills,” 7.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

As for Deb, “She did not drink, this woman,—her face told that, too,—nothing stronger than ale. Perhaps the weak, flaccid wretch had some stimulant in her pale life to keep her up,—some love, or hope, it might be, or urgent need. When that stimulant was gone, she would take to whiskey.”<sup>57</sup> At least in the case of Deb, laborers are not mindlessly determined to drink spirits. Deb, importantly, resists the “dirty hands” and exhortations of the cotton mill workers who want her to drink with them. But her resistance does not stem from an abstract moral principle of temperance. Instead, as the narrator suggests, Deb has a different kind of affective stimulant, “some love, or hope...or urgent need,” which enables her to endure the dehumanizing conditions in the town without seeking artificial stimulants like spirits. The narrator treats Deb’s stimulant—namely her love for Hugh—as something finite, exhaustible, anomalous and, given Deb’s industrially produced deformity, nonreciprocal. The narrator does not say, “If that stimulant were gone, she would take to whiskey,” but rather “When that stimulant was gone.” Within the industrial network Davis maps out, characters cannot help but be progressively marred, penetrated, and reconfigured by the incessant flow of pollutants and the burden of factory labor. Love or hope, as affective stimulants, cannot persist indefinitely under such conditions, as symbolized by the “dirty canary” whose “dream of green fields and sunshine” is “almost worn out.”<sup>58</sup>

Davis’s networked addiction importantly challenges more conservative appraisals of the laborer in American literature and culture. As Tharp indicates, it was not

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 3.

uncommon for writers in popular publications to treat the suffering of the working-class as “an individual, not social problem” and to link riotous living with a working-class type.<sup>59</sup> Instead of viewing the ethnic drunkard as immoral or naturally vicious, Davis illustrates how external conditions strongly determine drinking behavior among the working-class. This view has important political implications, as one way to resist labor reform is to argue that workers lack the full humanity of liberal subjects because of their “unbridled thirst for pleasure” or “want of Providence.”<sup>60</sup> Davis refutes this argument, not just under Engel’s socio-physiological logic, but by challenging the basis of liberal subjectivity, which neglects the linkages and horizon-shaping powers of network.

### The Limits of Network

As the previous sections have argued, Davis constructs a network model of relations between laborers, technologies, pollutants, and an industrial class system, thereby challenging notions of liberal selfhood in American culture. In presenting human characters as extensively networked, Davis helps to rework the concept of intemperance, showing that the craving for and continued use of spirits is not simply a willful and immoral excess, nor an internalized pathology to be understood independent of social and physical environments. Instead, the nature of the industrial network compels laborers to indulge in a stimulant commensurate in character and effects with the industrial technologies and pollutants that envelop the town of the iron mills. But if “Life in the

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<sup>59</sup> Tharp, “‘There Is a Secret down Here’: Physical Containment and Social Instruction in Rebecca Harding Davis’s *Life in the Iron Mills*,” 15.

<sup>60</sup> Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class*, 209.

Iron Mills” provides an alternative network-based explanation of selfhood and addiction, one might ask: is Davis herself throwing out the very concept of individual agency, a cornerstone of American political identity, in the network model she traces? What about in her depiction of the truly unique Hugh Wolfe? In other words, how radical is the network model here presented, and what are the ethical and aesthetic implications of a networked model of selfhood? What does it mean to think of oneself as a node in shifting, enmeshed networks, and is agency possible within this framework?

To answer such questions, we need to examine the character of Hugh, whose intrinsic drive for self-fulfillment through artistic expression suggests a theory of individual agency consistent with liberal subjectivity, at least superficially. To begin with, Hugh’s artistic traits evince no external determinants or mediators. His genius cannot be sourced to his father, a disabled and intemperate man with “red rabbit eyes,” nor attributed to his partial schooling.<sup>61</sup> Among his fellow laborers, Hugh’s ambition to be an artist is, if not entirely unintelligible, then at least totally impractical, even worthy of scorn. Such social incongruity and resistance throw into relief the private or self-determined nature of Hugh’s passion, which links him with natural aristocrats in Anglo-American romance fiction and real-world romantics such as William Blake and Robert Burns. Then there is Hugh’s purely intuitive grasp of and natural skill in sculpting, which lacks any supportive context of customary tools/mediums, art traditions, or tutelage. Even Deborah “knew by instinct, although she could not comprehend it, the finer nature of the man, which made him among his fellow-workmen something unique, set apart. She

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<sup>61</sup> Davis, “Life in the Iron Mills,” 6.

knew, that, down under all the vileness and coarseness of his life, there was a groping passion for whatever was beautiful and pure.”<sup>62</sup> Hugh, in other words, possesses a God-given “passion” and artistic skill that is irreducible to his environmental and biological conditions, which suggests a transcendent basis for individuality, at least for the “unique” Hugh.

Davis further complicates a deterministic mind-body-environment relationship by claiming that Hugh “was *by habit only* a coarse, vulgar laborer, familiar with sights and words you would blush to name.”<sup>63</sup> In its earliest usage, “habit” referred to one’s clothing or style of apparel, i.e., purely external markers placed upon the body that indexed one’s position within a socio-political order, but that meaning soon extended to one’s demeanor or behavior, which are more intimately related to but not necessarily congruent with one’s internal states.<sup>64</sup> In other words, habit encompassed an individual’s appearance but did not speak to the hidden essence of a person, that which could become crusted over and choked by external circumstances.<sup>65</sup> In the passage above, Davis maintains this original division between essence and habit, innate propensities and external behaviors by presenting readers with a genius whose God-given aesthetic gifts clash with his polluted exterior. “Life in the Iron Mills” thus seems to be structured around an irreconcilable theoretical tension between self-determining individuality and networked over-

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<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, 8.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, 11.

<sup>64</sup> “habit, n.” *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, September 2019.

<sup>65</sup> However, as early as 1405, writers like Chaucer were using “habit” to denote mental constitution or moral character of the mind and soul, creating a dialectical tension within the very concept of habit itself.

determination of the self, but it may be that Hugh's example does not actually support the full independence or self-determining powers of liberal selfhood, even for the most gifted individuals. Rather it illustrates the material limits of spiritual essence and autonomy, and their dependence upon networked life for actualization.

When Davis says, "*by habit only*," she does not undercut the powerful shaping influence of habit, a topic widely discussed in antebellum periodicals. Used often in temperance discourse, habit entailed associative and behavioral patterns that, when repeated over and over, could radically and permanently alter one's mental and bodily organization. The habit of intemperance, as one writer puts it, turns "man" (a sentient, rational being) into a "machine" (a physically determined, mindless entity) in the same way that Davis's laborers become mechanized by industrial processes that alter their bodies and minds.<sup>66</sup> Davis subscribes to this strong model of habituation, but wants her readers to see the primacy and irreducibility of essence, which preserves Hugh's humanity and value in the midst of his dehumanization, making him a person worth saving. In asserting the primacy of essence, however, Davis does not endorse an atomistic liberal subject whose innate mental capacities enable them to overcome external circumstances and forge their own destiny. Hugh is anything but a self-made man who creates his own way out of oppression and in fact may be a pointed rejection of such models.

Despite his gifts, Hugh, like all other laborers in the mill town, is overpowered

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<sup>66</sup> "ART. II.--THE PHILOSOPHY AND INFLUENCE OF HABIT, IN ITS RELATION TO INTEMPERANCE," *Quarterly Christian Spectator (1829-1838)*, September 01, 1834: 370.

and shaped by his environment. As Adam Sonstegard puts it, “The environment and industry impose a working-class, homogenizing identity from without as it obscures a unique personal identity attempting to emerge from within.”<sup>67</sup> Such obscuration of personal identity manifests in numerous descriptions throughout the text, ranging from “thwarted sunshine” to “brains filled with unawakened power” and “thwarted energy.”<sup>68</sup> Within the industrial network, Hugh cannot fully actualize his transcendent genius. Using the materials that are available to him, namely kohl, the refuse from the melting of pig iron, Hugh sculpts figures on his off hours. In doing so, he aesthetically repurposes industrial waste, one of the actors that distorts his mind and body. His innate capacity for artistic invention enables him to give form to what is basically entropic, purposeless matter. While the act seems to be transformative, and holds the promise of an individualist capacity to recreate the given world in meaningful ways, Hugh continually destroys his works, as he cannot achieve a beauty or form that transcends the degrading conditions of his life.<sup>69</sup> Though his works may be “sometimes strangely beautiful,” they are also “hideous, fantastic enough” and do not possess the power of uplifting Hugh’s mind, body, and spirit.<sup>70</sup> Instilled with “a fierce thirst for beauty,—to know it, to create it; to *be*—something, he knows not what,” Hugh, as artist and man, must work with the material resources at his disposal, but his submergence within and dependence upon

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<sup>67</sup> Adam Sonstegard, “Shaping a Body of One’s Own: Rebecca Harding Davis’s Life in the Iron-Mills and Waiting for the Verdict,” *Arizona Quarterly* 60, no. 1 (2004): 105.

<sup>68</sup> Davis, “Life in the Iron Mills,” 4, 5, 23

<sup>69</sup> As Molyneux says, “Each statue makes visible Hugh’s struggle to break free from the stultifying conditions of labor” (165).

<sup>70</sup> Davis, “Life in the Iron Mills,” 9.

industrial byproducts qua artistic medium consistently sabotages his attempts to actualize himself, “to *be*—something.”<sup>71</sup> Even the one work that does outlive its maker, the *korl* woman, only seems to personify Hugh’s ontological hunger and reflect the transformation of laborers into waste products. While the content and form of the statue convey an unyielding tension between lack and possibility, external constraint and intrinsic capacity, for Hugh lack and constraint inevitably seize the day, as art in-itself cannot recalibrate his over-determined life and save him from prison and, ultimately, suicide.

While the concept of transcendent spirit or essence may complicate a material and reconfigurable mind-body system, as well as veer far afield from the relational ontologies suggested by actor-network theory or new materialism, clearly the material effects of industry on Hugh’s body and brain progressively oppress him. Hugh’s spirit cannot fully manifest itself in the operations of a material brain and body as they are already overrun by the machinery, pollution, and labor forms of the iron mills. As in the case of drunkards who become physically and mentally enervated by alcohol, habituation to industrial conditions increasingly forecloses the possibility of self-determination as guided by supersensible faculties or transcendent gifts. Smoke and whiskey both powerfully demonstrate these networked limitations of human subjects. Smoke, a visceral substance that fills out an often-invisible sphere of connectivity, palpably links labor, industrial byproducts, human lungs, and the fatigued brains and bodies of ethnic laborers. Whiskey, in its effects and industrial origins, also connects to labor, while playing an integral but

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

ultimately destructive role in the social lives of ethnic laborers, who lack the means and energy for other kinds of recreation.

While Hugh's struggles powerfully dramatize the material limits of autonomous selfhood in an industrialized landscape, Davis more directly criticizes naïve theories of agency, such as the Franklinian myth of the self-made man, through the upper-class characters in the novella. In the case of May, liberal subjectivity can be used to justify an upper-class person's passivity in relation to an industrial class system. While May encourages Hugh, telling him that "you have it in you to be a great sculptor, a great man," he ultimately falls back to liberalist maxims and imperatives that disregard the networked over-determination of Hugh's life: "A man may make of himself anything he chooses" and "Make yourself what you will. It is your right." Hugh responds with "I know," quietly. "Will you help me?"<sup>72</sup> Hugh, who has already exerted himself strenuously to overcome the industrial class system through his art, grasps the need for external support, but May denies Hugh, ostensibly for monetary reasons. If men like May or Mitchell had been willing to support and educate Hugh, Davis suggests, then Hugh might have found fulfillment in his life as an artist. Such an intervention would not constitute a transcendence of network, but rather a re-networking of the self, a shift in space and identity supported by the money, connections, and knowledge of a privileged patron, which could produce new possibilities of action and being for a man like Hugh. Davis's story, therefore, does not abolish agency altogether in its construction of a network model of mind-body-environment relations. Rather it suggests that an individual's agency is

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<sup>72</sup> Davis, "Life in the Iron Mills," 18.

contingent on the form and character of a given network, a view that anticipates more recent feminist reformulations of autonomy. Linda Barclay, for instance, argues, “the very precondition of our being able to develop and sustain our capacity for autonomy is attributable to our developing and remaining embedded within a network of social relationships.”<sup>73</sup> Hugh’s artistic genius and ability to express it in some form may not be relationally constitutive in the way Barclay means, yet his capacity to “develop” and “sustain” autonomy are still very much dependent on the dynamics of the social system.

The kind of re-networking and relational agency suggested in Davis’s story occurs in even the most naïve celebrations of the self-made man mythology—from Franklin, to Horatio Alger, to Stowe’s “Let Every Man Mind his own Business,” which features a philanthropic gentleman who reinvests a drunkard with socio-economic capital, allowing him to live a happy bourgeois life. While the latter two examples of re-networking have the feel of a romantic *deus ex machina*, temperance history furnishes more realistic and diverse examples of how agency was reconceived in the context of reform work. During the 1840s, Martha Washingtonian societies, counterparts to the predominantly male Washingtonian movement, took drunkards and their children off the streets and fixed them with new clothing (often made or donated by members), jobs, housing, and new social contacts, all in the name of duty. That duty was not just taken on by men of means, but by women of the lower and working classes, whose collective strength and fundraising efforts compensated for the limited resources of individual

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<sup>73</sup> Linda Barclay, “Autonomy and the Social Self,” in *Relational Autonomy Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy, Agency, and the Social Self*, edited by Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar, 52-71 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 57.

members.<sup>74</sup> As Lorenzo Dow Johnson—an early historian of female temperance—put it, these women used their charitable work as “a powerful lever in their hands for raising the individual with whom they communicate to better habits and to an improved state of mind and feelings.”<sup>75</sup> Johnson’s mechanical metaphor is instructive, for it underscores the fact that an elevation in position requires physical, social, and monetary energies, which cannot come from the afflicted individual alone, a view that contrasts markedly with the naïve, self-serving liberalism of May.

Davis gives the reader a similar vision of community-based aid as orchestrated by a Protestant group with strong ties to social reform, the Quakers. While Hugh commits suicide in his prison cell, Deb is rescued by a humble Quaker woman, who brings the former factory hand to a pastoral community after serving her prison sentence. Davis’s ending, Harris points out, does not offer a full restoration of moral and natural order following crisis, in keeping with the conventions of American romance.<sup>76</sup> For one thing, Deb does not miraculously transform after being taken from the influence of the industrial network and her jail cell. As the narrator tells us, there are “long years of sunshine, and fresh air, and slow, patient Christ-love, needed to make healthy and hopeful this impure body and soul.”<sup>77</sup> Re-networking, therefore, is not a sudden return-to-essence of liberal subjectivity but a long, dynamic process with multiple parts, most

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<sup>74</sup> For a discussion of class and the Martha Washingtonians, see Ruth M. Alexander, “‘We Are Engaged as a Band of Sisters’: Class and Domesticity in the Washingtonian Temperance Movement, 1840–1850,” *The Journal of American History* 75, no. 3 (1988): 763–785.

<sup>75</sup> Lorenzo Dow Johnson, *Martha Washingtonianism; or, A History of the Ladies' Temperance Benevolent Societies* (New York: Saxton and Miles, 1843), 29.

<sup>76</sup> Sharon M. Harris, *Rebecca Harding Davis and American Realism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), 55.

<sup>77</sup> Davis, “Life in the Iron Mills,” 33.

importantly compassionate material aid. While Mitchell maintains passivity in his belief that only a Messianic figure among the laborers could elevate them from their oppressed condition and May seeks only self-gratification through what he feels is duty to pray for their liberation, the Quaker woman provides Deb with a humble means of escape, a re-networking of relations between self and world that can lead to recovery (not renewal) and new possibilities of being over time (but not infinite possibilities).

While Deb does not recover explicitly from her particular stimulant use (her love for Hugh), her experience of slow, networked redemption parallels actual histories of addicted persons in the mid-nineteenth century. These people were not instantly redeemed by the hand of Providence or the signing of a temperance pledge. Internationally renowned orator John B. Gough, for one, underwent several public relapses. In recounting the aftermath of his first relapse in Boston, Gough praises the benevolent aid of his friends, who rallied around him, encouraged his honesty and continued participation at temperance meetings, and helped ease his personal shame and remorse—all in keeping with the re-networking process Davis describes. Anticipating the first of A.A.’s twelve steps, Gough learns from relapse that self-reliance can be a hindrance to recovery and that, without God’s “strength,” he “was utterly powerless.”<sup>78</sup> To abstain and sign a temperance pledge, in other words, does not restore the drinker to autonomous liberal subjectivity. For Gough, agency must be networked agency—mediated by faith, shared experience (stories), emotional support, and community

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<sup>78</sup> John B. Gough, *An Autobiography by John B. Gough* (Boston: Published by J.B. Gough, Gough and Lincoln, 1852), 85.

practices. The same goes for A.A. in the twentieth century. Though disavowing some Washingtonian practices, A.A. would institute a similar peer-support model of recovery that envisioned the strength of a Higher Power manifest in networked relations guided by principles of humility, service, and unity.<sup>79</sup>

Deb's recovery, of course, does not resolve the larger networked problems of class oppression and addiction under industrial capitalism in the story. In the end, we are faced once more with the "desperate need" of the kohl woman, who, from behind a curtain in the narrator's home, stretches her arm "imploringly in the darkness."<sup>80</sup> Earlier the factory manager Kirby jokes that the statue, like the ethnic laborers it represents, hungers for whiskey. Hugh does not entirely disagree, though he resists Kirby's class stereotyping by pointing to the existential desire that underlies whiskey consumption: "It mebbe. Summat to make her live, I think,—like you. Whiskey ull do it, in a way."<sup>81</sup> As Hugh suggests, alcoholic spirits cannot be entirely sundered from Spirit, but the stimulant whiskey can partly and temporarily sate the oppressed laborer's desire to transcend the brutalizing conditions that were imposed upon them, to be like those who seem to float above the smoke and wretchedness of their lives. While the escapist narrative of addiction is now well known to the point of being cliché, Davis's story has an ethical

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<sup>79</sup> In *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, Bill Wilson argues that the Washingtonians deviated from their primary purpose of helping alcoholics in allowing "politicians and reformers, both alcoholic and nonalcoholic, to use the society for their own purposes," including the support of abolitionism. The society also doomed itself by determining "to reform America's drinking habits," rather than focusing on alcoholics themselves (178). Thus, in the tenth tradition, A.A. declares that it "has no opinion on outside issues; hence the A.A. name ought never be drawn into public controversy" (176).

<sup>80</sup> Davis, "Life in the Iron Mills," 34.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

punch that differentiates it from more universal, ahistorical narratives that tend to depoliticize suffering as a given element of human existence. Under the logic of network, the korl woman's gesture forces upon us, Davis's narrator and readers, the ethical burden of interconnectivity, which cannot be hidden forever behind curtains, palls of factory smoke, liberal ideals, or lines of stratification between different classes, ethnicities, and regions. Davis may not lay out a political program for the empowerment and healing of early 19<sup>th</sup>-century laborers, but her korl woman, and the suffering of its maker, tell us in no uncertain terms that recovery must be networked recovery, that we are responsible for one another, and that, borrowing a phrase from current addiction discourse, one that bears some irony given the focus of this chapter, "the opposite of addiction is connection."

Dickens's *Bleak House*: From Subjects to Networks

On a surface level, Davis's story seems utterly unlike Dickens's *Bleak House*. One is a novella, a targeted exposé of an oppressive labor system in West Virginia with an overt reformist impulse; the other, a sprawling novel that careens ceaselessly through labyrinthine London streets and the countryside, connecting bodies, institutions, social classes, and literary genres (mystery, romance, tragedy, satire, and more), a novel with some hostility toward social reformers but also pointed criticisms of institutions. Despite these differences in scale, generic scope, and authorial intent, both texts throw readers headlong into the mud-spattered and smoky streets of modern settings to highlight the detrimental effects of industries and institutions on humans and their environments. Each elaborates a darkly ecological vision of self and world that stretches the dimensions of

early addiction discourse. Just as Davis's story challenges individualist accounts of addiction through dense descriptions of life in an industrial town, Dickens's novel troubles the notion of a centered, autonomous subject with its multiple, crisscrossing network systems, what Levine calls the "meta-network" of London society.<sup>82</sup> Though concerned with form more generally, Levine's claim that *Bleak House* "undermine[s] the usual novelistic reliance on individual agency" helps us see how literature can restructure concepts and narratives of addiction, especially narratives that instantiate or reinforce individualist ways of perceiving and judging.<sup>83</sup>

As we have seen, Davis's narrative maintains a tenuous commitment to an essence-based individualism that seems to precede a subject's positioning within the socio-political order. Dickens, in contrast, appears far less concerned with the metaphysical underpinnings of individual identity, offering instead a radical ecological perspective more of a piece with modern variants of network theory. In no case is this more vividly demonstrated than with Krook's spontaneous combustion and the aerial distribution of his oily body through London streets. Krook's life and death as hoarder and drinker, I argue, is key to understanding how addiction emerges within imbricated social, institutional, and thermodynamic networks, making it processual in character, rather than a substance or discrete object all its own.<sup>84</sup> As a process, addiction develops

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<sup>82</sup> Caroline Levine, "Narrative Networks: Bleak House and the Affordances of Form," *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 42, no. 3 (2009): 519. As Levine claims, Dickens's massive novel does not organize itself around important characters, as most novels do, but rather on networks, thereby "casting narrative persons less as powerful or symbolic agents in their own right than as moments in which complex and invisible social forces cross."

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> To understand what it means to conceive of addiction as a substance, one might think of Narcotics Anonymous members who speak of being "born an addict." While there may be a

over time and across socio-physical space through energetic entanglements between human and non-human actors, though, as we see with Krook, it often manifests as a condition of isolation and enclosure. In presenting this view, *Bleak House* provides a networked critique of the addict as disciplinary subject in Victorian era medical and reformist discourses.

#### Combustion and Ecology in the Case of Krook

Krook's death by spontaneous combustion is perhaps one of the most memorable moments from *Bleak House*. Described by neighbors as a man "continual in liquor," the intemperate Krook draws liberally from the rum supply of nearby public house Sol's Arms and gets drunk in the company of his cat within his Rag and Bottle Shop. Dickens forecasts Krook's over-the-top dissolution early on, saying, "He was short, cadaverous, and withered...the breath issuing in visible smoke from his mouth, as if he were on fire within."<sup>85</sup> Consumed inwardly by the potent, flammable spirits he pours regularly down his gullet, Krook presents a "withered" visage and breathes forth "visible smoke," both of which index a progressive physiological transformation that will ultimately culminate in total combustion. In response to G.H. Lewes' charge that he was propagating scientific misinformation with his depiction of spontaneous combustion, Dickens asserted in his

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genetic rationale for the statement (i.e., addiction runs in one's family and children of addicts can be genetically predisposed towards addiction), it is less an epistemic assertion and more of an ontological claim. From this standpoint, one thinks and feels like an addict (isolated, out of place, dis-eased, etc.) before they ever use a drug. Addiction therefore inheres within the individual before any neurochemical alterations occasioned by drug use.

<sup>85</sup> Charles Dickens, *Bleak House* (London: Penguin, 1996), 68.

1853 Preface that “I do not willfully or negligently mislead my readers.” Krook’s death, he says, was based on almost thirty documented cases recorded by medical professionals from across Europe.<sup>86</sup> Though likely over-reporting here, Dickens is still correct in claiming that medical doctors considered spontaneous combustion a real, albeit rare, condition. French physician Pierre-Aimé Lair, for one, argued that such cases were almost exclusively confined to elderly women prone to intemperate consumption of spirituous liquors. He would further rename the condition “accidental combustion,” since the inward fire required an external flame, rather than just happening spontaneously.<sup>87</sup> One of the key architects of the temperance movement, Benjamin Rush provides an illustration of such accidental combustion in the case of a man “suddenly destroyed in consequence of the vapour discharged from his stomach by belching, accidentally taking fire by coming in contact with the flame of a candle.”<sup>88</sup>

In describing Krook’s combustion, Dickens third-person omniscient narrator speaks of it as being “inborn, inbred, engendered in the corrupted humours of the vicious body itself.”<sup>89</sup> The emphasis on the inward origins of spontaneous combustion seems to suggest that it is the problem of a discrete body, a failure to regulate the kind and amount of fluids that enter that body, following common definitions of intemperance.<sup>90</sup> But looking at Krook’s liquor-fueled combustion as a discrete event and cautionary tale about

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<sup>86</sup> *Ibid*, 6.

<sup>87</sup> Pierre-Aimée Lair, "From an Essay on Human Combustion from the Abuse of Spirituous Liquors," *The Medical and Physical Journal* 4, no. 17 (1800): 45-48.

<sup>88</sup> Benjamin Rush, *An Inquiry into the Effects of Ardent Spirits upon the Human Body and Mind* (Exeter, N.H.: Printed for Josiah Richardson, 1819), 84.

<sup>89</sup> Dickens, *Bleak House*, 519.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid*, 505.

the dangers of drinking ignores the book's preoccupation with networked life and the dynamics of physical and social systems, as discussed by scholars like Levine and Allan MacDuffie.<sup>91</sup> With this system-based view in mind, one might ask what to make of the fact that Krook's "inbred" condition culminates with combustion and, consequently, an aerial distribution of his body, now reduced to a "thick, yellow liquor," a "stagnant, sickening oil," and a flavor and scent that characters around the law courts of Lincoln's Inn unwittingly imbibe?<sup>92</sup> As a thick, disagreeable and airborne substance, Krook's body parallels the ubiquitous London fog that envelops Chancery and the surrounding landscape; it stains bodies and objects similar to the "soft black drizzle" of mass-produced smoke.<sup>93</sup> And, as Anna Henchman claims, Krook's transformation into "meaty air" mimics the phase-change of burning tallow candles, which serve as indices of heat and energy loss throughout the book.<sup>94</sup> When reading Krook's transmutation alongside

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<sup>91</sup> Thomas Trotter, the first doctor to pen an entire book on drunkenness, saw the didactic value of spirit-induced combustion. Such a horrible death, he suggests, could more indelibly impress the fatal effects of liquor consumption on the minds of drunkards (92). While Trotter presented combustion as fact, later commentators like G.H. Lewes, who called out Dickens for perpetuating falsehood in his representation of Krook's death, believed spontaneous combustion to be a fanciful idea. One of the authorities on chemistry Lewes quotes, Justus von Liebig, regarded one story about a priest viewing the combustion of a female brandy-drinker as an admonitory tale, one that equated bodily combustion with the hellfire that proceeds the death of the sinner. Temperance discourse makes ample use of this equivalence between the fiery properties of spirits and hellfire, which are combined in personifications like "demon rum." See G. H. Lewes, "SPONTANEOUS COMBUSTION," *Leader and Saturday analyst*, Jan. 7-June 30, 1860 4, no. 150 (1853): 137-8.

<sup>92</sup> Dickens, *Bleak House*, 516.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>94</sup> Anna Henchman, "Tallow Candles and Meaty Air in 'Bleak House,'" *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century* 25 (December 2017): 3. See also Jesse Oak Taylor's *The Sky of Our Manufacture: The London Fog and British Fiction from Dickens to Woolf* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2016). Taylor says that Krook's combustion "provoke[s] the embodied revulsion and affective urgency that the distributed, diffuse, and invisible vectors of ecological crisis often do not" (42).

these numerous descriptions of system-based pollution and material waste, one is compelled to read it not as simple moral allegory of intemperance but as an ecological event, one whose character and effects need to be understood as part of a larger system of interconnected spaces, characters, institutions, and material resources.

The link between human behavior and system dynamics has been a persistent focus in criticism on Dicken's novel for over the past 50 years. Both Pamela K. Gilbert and F.S. Schwarzbach approach this relation in the context of social pathology, addressing the way in which Dickens, similar to doctors and hygienic reformers of the mid-nineteenth century, maps the physical forces of sickness and vice proliferating within an interconnected social body.<sup>95</sup> Focusing on the intersections between literature and Victorian science, scholars like MacDuffie and Barri J. Gold have more recently situated Dickens's work within emergent discourses of energy and thermodynamics. Ann Y. Wilkinson, one of the first critics to address the connections between behavior and physical systems in *Bleak House*, claims that, for Dickens, "the physical world is the moral world for modern man, and the moral world must inescapably be the physical world."<sup>96</sup> As Wilkinson demonstrates, Dickens poetically repurposed Michael Faraday's lectures on combustion and thermodynamics in his depiction of Krook, whose moral behavior aligns with the physical laws of system dynamics. Though Wilkinson does not directly address the question of autonomy, her point about the unity of morality and

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<sup>95</sup> See Pamela K. Gilbert, "Medical Mapping: The Thames, the body, and *Our Mutual Friend*," in *Filth: Dirt, Disgust, and Modern Life*, edited by William A. Cohen and Ryan Johnson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 78-102; and F.S. Schwarzbach, "'Bleak House', The Social Pathology of Urban Life," *Literature and Medicine* 9, no. 1 (1990): 93-104.

<sup>96</sup> Ann Y. Wilkinson, "*Bleak House*: From Faraday to Judgment Day," *ELH* 34, no. 2 (1967): 225.

physical mechanics has the potential of troubling moral agency as something opposed to or independent of material relations. If, for instance, chemical and energetic dynamics underlie and perhaps even *drive* moral and immoral action, as we see with Rush's early theories of intemperance, then the idea of an independent and autonomous self, a self individually responsible for their own behavior, becomes rather shaky, as does a purely volitional model of addiction that hinges upon liberal selfhood. To explore this question of agency in *Bleak House* further, it would be helpful to first repurpose one of the central concepts in MacDuffie and Gold's thermodynamic analyses of the novel: energy.

Energy, loosely construed in economic and biological terms, played a vital role in constructions of intemperance in Anglo-American culture. Physically debilitated by excess and unable to marshal their natural energies, drunkards lost their capacity to labor, meaning that they, and their family, would inevitably sink into poverty or worse. This common narrative conceives of energy loss primarily through the relationship between subject and substance, i.e., the subject's energy loss occasioned by spirit consumption alone. MacDuffie's concept of "energy systems" holds the promise of a much more expansive view of energy as embedded in a Victorian thermodynamic imaginary, one shaped by scientists and literary writers alike. MacDuffie argues that "energy appears...as a complex field of environmental effects and transformations, in which buildings, persons, things, institutions, city streets, industrial by-products, and natural formations are interconnected and mutually defining."<sup>97</sup> As a dynamic field that both

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<sup>97</sup> Allen MacDuffie, *Victorian Literature, Energy, and the Ecological Imagination* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 93.

inter-animates and links human and non-human beings occupying a shared “medium,” the material environment, energy helps us see that no character or object ever exists alone. To exist is to exist within a system, to effect and be affected in turn by the different dynamics of that system. I will use this conception of energy systems to open a new inquiry into how larger energetic dynamics of an urban environment can constrain agency and transform behavior, including intemperate behavior, in a way like Rebecca Harding Davis’s networked view of social and technological over-determination in “Life in the Iron Mills.”

In *Bleak House*, Dickens provides a complex ecology of addiction, one that allows readers to gauge the origins and character of addictive behavior (its system dynamics) as well as its environmental and social consequences (its entropy). To view Krook’s intemperance and combustion ecologically, I will first sketch out the environment in which Dickens situates the Rag and Bottle shop—the site of Krook’s drinking—and then trace the flow of material resources, pollution, and alcohol both in and out of the shop.

In the neighborhood along Chancery Lane, there are three main structures: the law courts of Lincoln’s Inn, the Rag and Bottle Shop, and Sol’s Arms, the neighborhood tavern located across from Krook’s establishment. The Rag and Bottle Shop, as the name suggests, serves as a storehouse for used materials or waste: there are “blacking bottles, medicine bottles, ginger-beer and soda-water bottles, pickle bottles, wine bottles, ink bottles,” with the latter proximate to and materially linked to the “shabby” law books that

Esther sees littering the store.<sup>98</sup> Krook's shop draws an in-flow of old law documents continually produced by the bureaucratic monster of Chancery, such as "bills, cross-bills, answers, rejoinders, injunctions, affidavits, issues" and other "mountains of costly nonsense."<sup>99</sup> These documents are joined by "rusty keys," which Esther sources to "doors of rooms or strong chests in lawyer's offices," as well as a "litter of rags...[that] might have been counselor's bands and gowns torn up."<sup>100</sup> When Richard jocosely suggests that "yonder bones in a corner, piled together and picked very clean, were the bones of clients," he draws attention to the real human waste that Chancery's endless proceedings create, including Tom Jarndyce's suicide at Sol's Arms. The above passages establish Krook's shop as a receptacle for some of the superabundant material waste generated by Chancery, which flows from Lincoln's Inn to the adjacent shop, where Krook hoards all that he accumulates. While heterogeneous things flow into the Rag and Bottle Shop, they do not leave, nor does Krook use them in any practical sense. Putting Krook's hoarding in thermodynamic terms, Barry J. Gold reads the Rag and Bottle shop as a kind of "energy sink" in that it accumulates energy (used material items), and in the accumulation, denies them the capacity of doing work or of being repurposed (e.g. paper being reused, bottles being refilled), resulting in a dangerous buildup.<sup>101</sup> From this point of view, Krook's shop is a closed system in that it absorbs energy and waste but does not recirculate them in the larger urban ecosystem of London. These same energy dynamics

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<sup>98</sup> Dickens, *Bleak House*, 67-68.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid*, 14.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid*, 68.

<sup>101</sup> Gold, *Thermopoetics: Energy in Victorian Literature and Science*, 196.

can be helpfully applied to Krook's constant alcohol consumption.

Along with purchasing and hoarding random items, Krook obtains liquor from another important structure in the Chancery Lane neighborhood, Sol's Arms. This public house serves as a convergence point for multiple characters who go for entertainment, some chops or, in the case of a beadle, a discreet drink or two prior to attending to one's official duties. Krook's drinking, however, differs qualitatively from other characters. He drinks spirits, his "High Chancellor's fourteen penny," not in company over meals and conversation, following a tradition of male homosocial drinking, but alone.<sup>102</sup> Like Nemo, who smokes opium solitarily in his room above the Rag and Bottle shop, Krook withdraws from the world of affective and social exchange and swims in booze, the same way that Nemo, in his confined and unventilated room, lives, works and breathes within a stagnant but ever-growing cloud of "bitter, vapid" opium smoke.<sup>103</sup> Through such excessive consumption, Krook's body becomes an unstable retainer for spirits, rather than a well-regulated physiological system that sustains equilibrium by limited intake and moderate excretion of external substances. Though bodies perspire alcohol (e.g., the fumes that emanate from Krook's body and breath) or vent it through the urine, Krook's constant intake keeps his system dangerously hyper-saturated. Technically speaking, Krook's body is not a closed system, but the liquor he does drink and vent through his body fills the closed system of the Rag and Bottle Shop to the extent that, "even the eyes of the cat upon her shelf...look drunk."<sup>104</sup> The atmosphere, in other words, is itself

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<sup>102</sup> Dickens, *Bleak House*, 329.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid*, 165.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid*, 327.

intoxicating, and any extrusion of liquor fumes from Krook's body becomes reabsorbed as he sits, isolated and enclosed, in stupefaction.

Given the similar system dynamics, Dickens homologizes the relationship between Chancery-produced waste-Krook's shop and spirits-Krook's body. The consonance of Krook's name reinforces this sense of imbricated spatial and somatic confinement of waste and alcohol, both of which manifest the crookedness or unnaturalness of his behavior. But what is the cause of Krook's crookedness? And how do hoarding and chronic drunkenness braid together and gesture to systemic causes? So far, Dickens presents a thermodynamic picture of what seems to be an individual's problem of excessive *domestic* consumption, one differing markedly from Davis's more Marxist view of capitalist energy dynamics, namely the exploitation of labor power and its conversion into mechanically produced commodities, a process that wears down bodies and thereby spurs the need for liquor as compensatory stimulus. In the next section, I fit Krook's consumption into discourses of monomania and partial insanity in Anglo-American culture, which shed light on the pathological nature of Dickens's energy dynamics and their systemic origins.

#### Intemperate Monomaniacs and their Useless Pursuits

While Krook in some ways fits the common stereotype of a drunkard in Anglo-American culture—a dirty, bumbling, and isolated imbibor of booze—characters often bundle up his drinking in a more general description of madness, thereby pathologizing what was often treated as a moral failure. As Miss Flite puts it, Krook is “a little—you know! – M -

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Coined by French psychiatrist Jean-Étienne Dominique Esquirol around 1810, monomania referred to a form of partial insanity characterized by an almost all-consuming fixation on an idea or object, a definition that dovetails nicely with the mental obsession of addiction. As an example of partial insanity, monomania did not affect all the mental faculties, but rather afflicted specific areas of the brain, creating a fracture

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<sup>105</sup> Dickens, *Bleak House*, 69

<sup>106</sup> Krook, for instance, combusts, but his shop (despite being a fire hazard in its own right) does not.

within the unified mind.<sup>107</sup> In his 1845 nosology of mental disorders, *Mental Maladies: A Treatise on Insanity*, Esquirol elaborates five distinct types, among them the “monomania of drunkenness.” While early temperance advocates and doctors often argued that chronic drunkenness caused diseases like insanity, Esquirol regards the “irresistible desire for fermented drinks” as itself the primary symptom of a “mental disease” that has “all the characteristic features of partial insanity and monomania,” thus challenging traditional moral perspectives on intemperance.<sup>108</sup> Describing the multiple relapses of a young man with a good education and a family, he writes: “Notwithstanding his excellent sentiments and fair protestations; notwithstanding his promises, every time that we permit him to go out of the establishment [the asylum], he restrains himself for three or four days only; after which, he drinks, and relapses into a state of complete drunkenness.”<sup>109</sup> Though Esquirol’s young man possesses good moral sentiments and a functioning reason, his higher faculties are split off from and at times overshadowed by a disordered appetite, an “irresistible desire” that first originates with the incapacity of the stomach following acute drunkenness. While Esquirol’s patient can reason, and understand the consequences of his drinking, his reason cannot master or manage what becomes a runaway, autonomous desire that compels the subject, regardless of their morals or intentions, to drink.

Esquirol’s classification of intemperance as “monomania” did not hold up in

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<sup>107</sup> Jean-Etienne Dominique Esquirol, *Mental Maladies: A Treatise on Insanity* (Philadelphia: Lea and Blanchard, 1845), 355.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

subsequent taxonomic systems developed by British psychiatrists. James Cowles Prichard, for one, would restructure Esquirol's nosology, adding another category of partial insanity, that of "moral insanity." As defined by Prichard, the condition entailed "a morbid perversion of the natural feelings, affections, inclinations, temper, habits, moral dispositions, and natural impulses, without any remarkable disorder or defect of the intellect or knowing and reasoning faculties."<sup>110</sup> Moral insanity differed from monomania in that it did not affect the understanding, whereas monomania, characterized by a particular "illusion" or "train of ideas," partially disorders the intellect.<sup>111</sup> Like Esquirol, however, Prichard still linked chronic drunkenness to partial insanity, but of the moral variety. In describing the example of a person afflicted by impetuosity in speech and manner, he says: "Not unfrequently persons affected with this form of disease become drunkards; they have an *incontrollable desire for intoxicating liquors*, and a debauch is followed by a period of raving madness, during which it becomes absolutely necessary to keep them in confinement."<sup>112</sup> Here, Prichard reverses the usual causal sequence of events in reports of madness; drunkenness does not just cause madness—a view that temperance reformers would stress for admonitory purposes in sermons and periodicals—but can itself be a symptom or a manifestation of a preexisting moral insanity that eludes rational control.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> James Cowles Prichard, *A Treatise on Insanity and Other Disorders Affecting the Mind* (London, Sherwood, Gilbert, and Piper: 1835), 6.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 19. My emphasis.

<sup>113</sup> Prichard will later follow medical consensus in declaring that, "among the physical agents which give rise to madness, there is none more influential than intemperance and the habitual use of ardent spirits" (158). Psychiatrist William A.F. Browne reads intoxication itself as analogous to mania—a type of insanity defined by the derangement of *all* mental faculties, rather than one

As suggested by the taxonomical systems of Esquirol and Prichard, the status of chronic drunkenness as a mental disease was contested in the early nineteenth century, but these works provide some context for understanding Krook's continual drunkenness as an example or a symptom of a pathological condition. Krook's hoarding can also be situated in these new taxonomies of partial insanity, like that of Prichard's contemporary, British psychiatrist William A.F. Browne. In a series of lectures delivered to the managers of the Montrose Royal Lunatic Asylum in 1837, Browne proposed fourteen different types of monomania, including "monomania of avarice." While avarice often connotes the selfish accumulation of gold or money, Browne claims that these types of monomaniacs "may be styled omnivorous," as "they will derive pleasure from receiving or taking any article without reference to its nature or value," as in the case of Krook.<sup>114</sup> Whether the articles have value or not, the purpose of accumulation is not to make use of items; rather satisfaction derives from the act of accumulation itself.<sup>115</sup> Browne largely characterizes these individuals in criminal terms, as they will do whatever it takes to possess an object of interest, including steal it and conceal it expertly on their person, using the lining of their coat, their shoe, their mouth, or their stomach. In this respect, Krook differs from Browne's avaricious monomaniacs, given that he does not manipulate or steal from people to amass his hoard but rather buys these items. On the other hand,

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or more as in the case of monomania. Edgar Allan Poe explores the link between madness and intoxication at length in short stories like "The Black Cat" and his novel *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* (1838).

<sup>114</sup> William A.F. Browne, *What Asylums Were, Are, and Ought to Be: Being the Substance of Five Lectures Delivered Before the Managers of the Montrose Royal Lunatic Asylum* (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1837), 40.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid*, 40

Krook's behavior aligns compellingly with Browne's idea of *useless* articles, or articles that are useless by virtue of being hoarded, i.e., taken out of social and economic circulation for the temporary gratification of an individual's passion. This kind of uselessness also describes intoxicated persons, whose prostrated bodies and distorted faculties bar them from useful pursuits within the social realm, as when Guppy and Jobling find Krook basically dead to the world after draining a bottle of gin.<sup>116</sup> Thus Krook's hoarding and excessive drinking, both linked to emergent and changing formulations of partial insanity, also converge in their shared uselessness or entropy, as both behaviors entail solitary and wasteful consumption: the exchange of money for items that have no value beyond the temporary gratification of an individual's desire.

If, as Roger Bastide argues in *The Sociology of Mental Disorder*, madness is not a "natural entity," but a structural relationship between a person and a "given society," one assuming the opposing forms of deviance and normality, then the social and economic uselessness of Krook's behaviors constitutes his "madness," as defined against the norms of Victorian England.<sup>117</sup> Such social uselessness motivates the categorization and treatment of "addicts" or inebriates in the nineteenth century. In "The Rhetoric of Drugs," Derrida claims: "it cannot be said that the pleasure of drug use (*la jouissance toxicomanique*) is in itself forbidden. Rather we forbid a pleasure that is at once solitary,

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<sup>116</sup> Dickens, *Bleak House*, 327-328

<sup>117</sup> Roger Bastide, *The Sociology of Mental Disorder*, translated by Jean McNeu (New York: David McKay, 1972), 195. By tying the disease concept to the rise of the American middle class, Levine makes the point that deviance becomes defined in opposition to a liberal subject who masters their passions and effectively deploys their reason and labor-power to thrive within the American market economy.

desocializing, and yet contagious for the socius.”<sup>118</sup> While Derrida’s main concern here is with narcotics, his analysis speaks directly to social constructions of alcohol addiction in nineteenth century Anglo-American temperance discourse. Temperance stories often center on the downfall of a young man, whose progressive habits dislodge him from social relationships and civic duties (Sargent’s “My Mother’s Gold Ring”), whose intoxication begets anti-social and violent behavior (Poe’s “The Black Cat”), and whose drinking in taverns poses a threat of contagion for young and impressionable men (Arthur’s *Ten Nights*). These anti-social tendencies of the intemperate person constitute a waste of physical, mental, and economic capacities for both the individual and society at large. Instead of working to support one’s family and community, and instead of participating in a market economy based on the productive exchange of goods and labor, the drunkard drinks, bleeding capital to feed a ravenous and insatiable appetite, thus impoverishing their family and, as Lyman Beecher argues in *Six Sermons on the nature, occasions, signs, evils, and remedy of intemperance* (1828), draining public funds to support alms houses populated by the dissolute.<sup>119</sup>

Advocates of teetotalism, a brand of abstinence-based temperance that swept America and Britain in the mid-nineteenth century, ascribed these social effects directly to the substance. In the early American tale “Deacon Giles’ Distillery,” the titular deacon hires a group of demons to take over operations at his industrial distillery; after the demons complete their task, Giles witnesses them marking “barrels and kegs and

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<sup>118</sup> Derrida, “The Rhetoric of Drugs,” 1.

<sup>119</sup> Lyman Beecher, *Six Sermons on the nature, occasions, signs, evils, and remedy of intemperance*, 10<sup>th</sup> Edition (New York: American Tract Society, 1883), 54.

hogsheads” with invisible inscriptions such as “Convulsions and Epilepsy,” “Insanity and Murder.”<sup>120</sup> This hammer-fisted didacticism impresses upon the reader the idea that social and physical evils inhere virtually within the substance itself, that the bottle represents a kind of Pandora’s box containing all the sorrows and suffering that beset humankind. From this point of view, drinking, in any quantity, actualizes the inherently pernicious qualities of alcohol within the person of the drinker. In England, periodicals like *The Edinburgh Review* published criticisms of these more hyperbolic dimensions of teetotalism, including medical testimonies on the safeness of moderate drinking.<sup>121</sup> Dickens himself published an article in *All the Year Round* entitled “The Poor Man and his Beer,” which describes a vision of “temperate temperance,” a community wherein men and their families socially drink beer at a “Club-house,” without drunkenness and any of its attendant disorders.<sup>122</sup> Dickens, as scholars have noted, is decidedly not a teetotaler, but he does portray the dangerous effects of certain kinds of drinking. Thus, the uselessness of alcohol in *Bleak House* is not an intrinsic property of the substance. Rather, the way one drinks it—in Krook’s case, solitarily, excessively, constantly, i.e., pathologically—makes it useless, in the same way that empty bottles—an item that can be easily repurposed—become useless by being taken out of social and economic

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<sup>120</sup> "DEACON GILES' DISTILLERY," *The Religious Intelligencer ... Containing the Principal Transactions of the Various Bible and Missionary Societies, with Particular Accounts of Revivals of Religion* (1816-1837) 19, no. 40 (1835): 632.

<sup>121</sup> See "ART. II.-1. an Act for the Suppression of Drinking Houses and Tippling Shops," *The Edinburgh review, 1802-1929* 100, no. 203 (1854): 43-79.

<sup>122</sup> Charles Dickens, “The Poor Man and his Beer,” *All the Year Round* 1 (1859): 13. There is also an anonymously published article of the same name in *All the Year Round*, which might or might not have been written by Dickens. The article does match the tenor of “The Poor Man and his Beer” in its criticism of zealous teetotalers that want to drastically change the behavior of lower-class people.

circulation and chaotically amassed.

### Hooked to Chancery

While Dickens maps the physical flow of materials into Krook's shop and person, showing the effects of wasteful overconsumption in a nested configuration of space and an inhabiting body, he does not provide an origin point for Krook's related pathologies. For one thing, Krook's hyper-embodiment, his fuming and withered exterior, often occludes access to an interior, and neither does an omniscient narrator provide an initiating cause for Krook's behavior from his personal history. This lack of interiority, and the novel's preoccupation with networked relations, compels the reader to instead look at the larger system of which Krook is a part for a cause: Chancery. For Miss Flite, Richard Carstone, and Krook, three monomaniacal persons linked to and through the Lincoln Law courts, Chancery's operations forge what might aptly be called an "addiction." As scholars often note, "addiction" derives from the English word "addict," based on the Latin *addictus*, which denoted being "devoted or attached to a person, party, or cause" or "bound as, or as if, a servant."<sup>123</sup> To be addicted, therefore, entailed being *bound* to someone (a King, a feudal Lord) or something (a legal case, a political movement), giving the term strong juridical and political connotations. With Davis, this early definition takes on a more ecological cast, as ethnic laborers are bound, body and mind, to an industrial class system and toxic environment. Dickens similarly enmeshes

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<sup>123</sup> "addicted, adj. and n." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, December 2019. This early definition serves as the basis for what Hickman calls the "juridical" or non-volitional aspect of the addiction concept.

Flite, Carstone, and Krook with the legal institution of Chancery and its wasteful proceedings. Dickens inflects this binding, or addiction, with the pathological character of chronic drunkenness as described in medical discourse and mass temperance culture of the mid-nineteenth century. Thus, Richard Carstone's obsession and subsequent deterioration, like that of Krook, closely parallels the socioeconomic, physical, and psychological character of intemperance. Said by Mr. Weevle to be undergoing a "smouldering combustion"—a less explosive variety of Krook's spontaneous combustion—Richard is drained of physical and financial resources due to an addiction to the Jarndyce and Jarndyce case.<sup>124</sup> Not an individual pathology, Richard's addiction emerges and progresses within an imbricated system of family, Chancery, and predatory enablers.

As a relative of claimants in the ongoing Jarndyce and Jarndyce case, Richard can be said to be born into his addiction, following an emergent discourse of heredity in medicine and temperance culture. During the first half of the nineteenth century, moral models of intemperance were being complicated, if not challenged outright, by new ideas about the role of physiology and hereditary transmission in habitual drinking, with the latter being a precursor for what we now regard as a "genetic predisposition." Benjamin Rush was one of the first doctors to warn against marriages between healthy and intemperate persons, a proto-eugenic move that sourced intemperance to heritable dispositions and behavior.<sup>125</sup> In an article for the British periodical *The Moral Reformer*,

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<sup>124</sup> Dickens, *Bleak House*, 631

<sup>125</sup> Rush, *Effects of Ardent Spirits*, 8.

the author J.L. regards intemperance as “a hereditary curse; the father imparts it to his offspring, and by it the implements of social destruction are prepared for generations yet unborn.”<sup>126</sup> Arguments from heredity, like those of Rush and J.L., temporally extend the effects of any given case of intemperance through subsequent generations, adding remote effects to an already long list of more immediate social and physical ills, but it is not clear in the above cases whether parents transmit intemperance physically, socially (i.e., through imitated behaviors), or both. Whatever the case, by the 1850s doctors would be proposing physical theories of heredity linking intemperance among parents to drunkenness and idiocy in their children.<sup>127</sup> In his characterization of Richard, Dickens ventures beyond an isolated genealogical model of transmission, i.e., the inherent traits of a father and/or mother directly passed on to a child. He extends heredity to the disposition-shaping legal *position* of parents, a position passed on to a child who exists within and becomes affected by the same entropic field as the parents. Social, institutional currents, including heritable property and legal actions, thus flow from parent to child as well as blood and physical traits.

Ada refers to this transmission of position as Richard’s “*fatal inheritance*.”<sup>128</sup>

Sympathetic to the plight of Richard, a fellow ward of the court, Ada ascribes the cause of his downfall to social and legal conditions that precede his birth and predispose him to

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<sup>126</sup> L. J., “INTEMPERANCE,” *The Moral reformer, and protestor against the vices, abuses, and corruptions of the age*, Jan. 1831–Dec. 1833 2, no. 4 (1832): 116

<sup>127</sup> Such views would play a role in discourses of devolution. In the 1858 article “The Degenerations of our Race,” for instance, a British writer argues that the hereditary character of intemperance will eventually terminate in the extinction of a genealogical line, allowing for the preservation of purer natures.

<sup>128</sup> Dickens, *Bleak House*, 929.

an all-consuming obsession, one that marks almost every claimant in Chancery cases. Thrown into a court case that has already destroyed numerous lives, Richard becomes the victim of a preexisting system that contours his mental and physical character (his disposition, habits, and beliefs) without his consent, making his ruinous fixation on the case not merely an issue of individual morality or a lack of proper self-governance as defined by liberal individualism. While Richard's procrastination and noncommittal nature seem to constitute major character flaws, for which he may be deemed responsible, John Jarndyce cannot help but see Chancery as "responsible for some of it," having "engendered or confirmed in him a habit of putting off—and trusting to this, that, and the other chance, without knowing what chance—and dismissing everything as unsettled, uncertain, and confused."<sup>129</sup> Richard's "fatal inheritance" already makes him a sympathetic character, but Dickens amplifies his victimhood by making him prey to parasitic characters like Vholes, a lawyer who feeds Richard's fantasies of a settlement, and Skimpole, who helps scrape Richard's pockets clean. Chancery's toxic influence on Richard's disposition and expectations makes him easy prey for these predatory human actors, resulting in a "smouldering combustion" that, as in so many temperance narratives, impoverishes him and his wife Ada and ultimately kills Richard. Richard's case thus presents a networked configuration of addiction that links the Chancery system, familial inheritance, and predatory characters with Richard's mental and physical states, thus complicating a purely volitional understanding of his behavior.

Dickens elaborates the compulsive and cyclical dynamics of Chancery addiction

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid, 197.

through Miss Flite, who has her own fatal legacy as a second-generation claimant. As she tells Esther, her entire family was sucked up into Chancery's seemingly bottomless energy sink. First, her father "was drawn—slowly. Home was drawn with him," and, finally, "He was drawn to a debtor's prison," where he would die. Her brother was then "drawn—swiftly—to drunkenness. And rags. And death. Then my sister was drawn. Hush! Never ask to what."<sup>130</sup> The much-repeated verb "draw" speaks to the inescapable hypnotic and attractive force of Chancery, a vampire-like institution that pulls minds, bodies, families, and reputations into its orbit, where it proceeds to drain them of all moral vitality, all usable energy. The effects of Chancery's pull manifest as multiple social ills, such as drunkenness, bankruptcy, and prostitution (the unspeakable fate of Miss Flite's sister), with all such manifestations of hereditary addiction uniformly leading to annihilation, yet Chancery also offers false hopes of resolution, thus driving a vicious cycle of desire and despair. Both Flite and Richard, initially drawn in and intoxicated by the prospect of a settlement, undergo a marked decline in health and wellbeing due to their obsessive involvement in Chancery cases. Unable to dislodge themselves from the Court system, these characters look to the settlement of their respective cases as a solution and a release from Chancery's ill effects. Chancery, the cause of their problems, becomes the means of rescuing them from those problems, the same way that heroin is both cause and solution to the sufferings of chemical dependency. For Flite and Richard, each Chancery proceeding engenders new hopes of resolution, making them mediators of desire and fantasy; each new legal document holds

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid, 567.

the promise of some clue or key that will help to unravel the Gordian knot of Jarndyce and Jarndyce, thereby pulling the energy and attention of the claimants towards the courts and away from healthier structures of feeling and connection.

But what does one make of Krook's conditions? Krook is, first off, much more isolated than Richard. He has no parasitic influencers that manipulate him or encourage his wasteful behavior. Further, he lacks Richard and Miss Flite's "fatal inheritance[s]" of Chancery suits. While there does not seem to be the same overt social and systemic causes that help explain Richard and Flite's monomania, Krook's behavior must be understood in relation to the Court of Chancery, which feeds his hoarding passion, and his brother the Lord Chancellor, whose own opulence and wastefulness disproportionately affects those under the influence of the court. Dickens makes this relation very clear, as most characters refer to Krook as "Chancellor" and dub his shop "Chancery" because it amasses so much rubbish that it is "wasting away and going to rack and ruin."<sup>131</sup> Regarding this popular characterization of his person and shop, Krook says: "*I don't mind. I go to see my noble and learned brother pretty well every day, when he sits in the Inn. He don't notice me, but I notice him. There's no great odds betwixt us.*"<sup>132</sup> From Krook's perspective, he and his brother are similar, two sides of the same coin. They both "grub on in a muddle," meaning that they dig in and toil through a disordered, unmanageable mass of objects. However, they differ starkly on the level of power dynamics. Krook goes to see his brother each day, becomes engrossed in and

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid, 70.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

muddled by his brother's endless and resource-depleting proceedings, which, one may assume, strongly influence Krook's own passion for accreting legal rubbish in the same way that Chancery disorders addicted characters like Miss Flite and Richard. In contrast, the Lord Chancellor does not see or attend to his brother, in the same way that he does not regard those victimized by Chancery proceedings. Krook provides an illustrative example of this neglect when describing the court's response to Tom Jarndyce's suicide: "my noble and learned brother, and all the rest of 'em, grubbed and muddled away as usual, and tried to look as if they hadn't heard a word of the last fact in the case; or as if they had—O dear me! Nothing at all to do with it, if they had heard of it by any chance!"<sup>133</sup> In his own moment of outraged remembrance, one that reveals another significant difference between the brothers, Krook spotlights the Lord Chancellor's assumed air of apartness from the human costs of Chancery, which extend to Krook's own decline and demise.

As MacDuffie maintains, such an air of disembodiment or apartness assumed by socially privileged characters in *Bleak House* has real material effects within the energetic system of Dickens's London. MacDuffie writes, Tulkinghorn's "aura of disembodied mastery over the environment"—the way in which he seems to appear and disappear at will, in contrast to the difficult trudging of characters like Jo—is itself an effect of language that masks the real costs in energy occasioned by Tulkinghorn's movements and activities. Within the energy system there is "always a corresponding

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid, 72.

cost in resources that allows such an effect [of disembodiment] to be produced.”<sup>134</sup> Like Tulkington, the Lord Chancellor seems to float above the entropic systems his endless proceedings create. Described in the first chapter as “softly fenced in with crimson cloth and curtains,” the Chancellor looms above the fray, wrapped in regal fineries and draperies that mask his embodiment and the material links between himself and those crushed in the gears of Chancery’s bureaucratic machinery.<sup>135</sup> Krook, with all his dirtiness and drunkenness, stands as the obverse of this kind of disembodied mastery. The relation here suggests a kind of Dorian Gray dynamic, in which the corruptions of one Chancellor seem to be visited upon the body, health, and passions of the mock Chancellor, his brother and double. While the Lord Chancellor enjoys a kind of disembodied aloofness, Krook exhibits a grotesque hyper-embodiment: withered like a root, smoldering internally, and eventually combusting, becoming undifferentiated, abject material. Krook’s combustion, therefore, is not just an analogy for a yet-to-be-realized apocalyptic conflagration within the closed system of Chancery, as Wilkinson contends, but is itself also a product of Chancery’s wastefulness and assumed apartness from the entropic forces it generates. In other words, one should not just view Krook as a self-contained mind-body unit unaffected by or only representative of the entropic dynamics of the larger Chancery system, but as a mind-body “drawn” or hooked into and affected by the system. Thus, Krook’s somatic transformation into something akin to an industrial by-product, like a fog or rain of ash produced not by an individual but by an

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<sup>134</sup> MacDuffie, *Victorian Literature, Energy, and the Ecological Imagination*, 92.

<sup>135</sup> Dickens, *Bleak House*, 14.

interconnected whole of society, suggests a larger systemic determination of behaviors that were often attributed to either moral irresponsibility or physiological susceptibility.

### Addiction Networks and the Disciplinary Subject

In “Epidemics of the Will,” Eve Sedgwick begins with a brief Foucauldian reading of the origins of the (opium) addict category, through which medico-juridical authorities of the late nineteenth century transformed a series of behaviors (i.e., the use of opium as a means of sensual gratification) into a condition and an identity. As Sedgwick puts it, “From being the *subject* of her own perceptual manipulations or indeed experimentations, she is installed as the proper *object* of compulsory institutional disciplines, legal and medical, that, without actually being able to do anything to ‘help’ her, nonetheless presume to know her better than she can know herself.”<sup>136</sup> Sedgwick here gestures to the darker side of the “disease concept” or pathologization of drug dependence.

Medicalization, in this context, does not destigmatize the condition of addiction in the way that Alcoholics Anonymous medically reframed compulsive alcohol use in the late 1930s to mitigate alcoholics’ feelings of shame and guilt. Medicalization instead institutes new forms of control following a taxonomic reconfiguration of a behavior deemed harmful for the addict and society at large. The addict, by virtue of being out of control, requires the supervision and disciplinary control of juridical and medical authorities.

While *Bleak House* precedes what scholars like Hickman and Sedgwick see as the

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<sup>136</sup> Eve Kosovsky Sedgwick, “Epidemics of the Will,” *Tendencies* (London: Routledge, 1994), 2.

advent of the (narcotic) addict category, the novel still participates in contemporary medical and social strategies of control that treated “deviants,” like drunkards, as “objects” of reform. Pamela K. Gilbert situates novels like *Bleak House* and *Our Mutual Friend* (1865) within the emergence of disciplinary regimes aimed at categorizing and controlling urban populations in mid-century Victorian London. Like medical cartographers and government-hired statisticians, Dickens identified and mapped the moral and physical pollutions circulating through urban spaces, crossing social barriers, and threatening both the integrity of individual bodies and the larger body politic. As Gilbert sees it, Dickens’s cartographic writing demonstrates his “focus on disciplining the bodies and desires of those who deviated from a bourgeois norm.”<sup>137</sup> In her analysis, she looks to abject characters, addicts and obsessives like Krook, whose boundary-breaking excesses violate the liberal norms to which Dickens subscribed. In conjoining liberal norms with abjection as a means of articulating the social threat (but not the cause) of addiction, Gilbert downplays the strong link between cases of addiction and abuses of institutional or juridical power.<sup>138</sup> Like Richard and Miss Flite, Krook is himself a product and a symptom of Chancery’s corruption. Less a discrete object (a drunkard, a madman) in need of individual-based disciplinary control, Krook is an embodied, interconnected human being whose behavior stems from the catastrophic wastefulness of

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<sup>137</sup> Gilbert, “Medical Mapping: The Thames, the body, and *Our Mutual Friend*,” 80.

<sup>138</sup> Gilbert’s analysis neglects to engage the clear social, economic, and institutional determinants of pathological behavior, at least in the case of *Bleak House*. As F. S. Schwarzbach argues in “*Bleak House: The Social Pathology of Urban Life*,” Dickens both institutes panoptical modes of seeing, in keeping with strategies of social and medical control, but he also critiques these very modes in his representation of characters like Mrs. Pardiggle, who imperiously intervenes in the lives of lower-class characters, treating them less as “fully human subjects” and more as “reified objects of inquiry” (21).

an institution spatially, fraternally, and energetically linked to his intemperance and obsessions. To turn Krook into an isolatable object of reform or a failed liberal subject would be to negate or neglect the social and institutional forces that warp human behavior in the first place, one of the central concerns in Dickens's novel.

One might argue that this ecological view exists in tension with Krook being an underdeveloped type-character, a drunkard whose alcohol-induced physical grotesqueness may trigger repugnance in the reader, rather than a feeling of sympathy and/or a need to understand and remedy the underlying causes of his intemperance. Dickens only exacerbates this problem through Krook's combustion and subsequent circulation throughout the neighborhood of Chancery Lane as a source of physical contamination, a disruptive material force needing to be shunned and contained. As Guppy says when stained by what would turn out to be Krook's circulating body-oil, "Give me some water, or I shall cut my hand off."<sup>139</sup> While Davis similarly portrays wasted bodies, she carefully curates her vision of wasted humans so as to keep the reader constantly attuned to the fact that industrial conditions create such waste and forge the qualities typically associated with lower-class ethnic characters, among them chronic drunkenness. Further, her narrator gives access to Hugh's interiority, his human strivings and longings. Excavated from mire and deformity by the narrator of "Life in the Iron Mills," the intrinsic humanity of characters like Hugh makes an ethical claim on readers already complicit in social, political, and economic networks that curb agency and engender escapist behavior in oppressed people. Davis has a reformist agenda, and her

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<sup>139</sup> Dickens, *Bleak House*, 516.

novella provides one possible answer to systemic injustice and oppression: networked recovery, most explicitly represented by Quaker redemption at the end of the story. Dickens's novel, in contrast, demonstrates the limits of alternative networks and the failure of outside interventions. Neither Esther's kindness, Jarndyce's moneyed benevolence, nor Ada's love can stop Richard's combustion, nor can Miss Flite be rescued from her addiction by her new friends. Yet it is Krook's spontaneous combustion that demonstrates most forcibly addiction at its zero-level, a point well beyond the reach of disciplinary regimes and personal appeals alike. Through Krook's oily and inhalable body, the pure material effects of systemic corruption register, shorn of all sentimental trappings and small-scale interpersonal antagonisms. Those effects are shocking enough to pull the otherwise free-floating omniscient narrator into the drama—itsself an ecologically significant development—when they shout “Help! help! help!”<sup>140</sup> There is no help to be had though, no recovery possible, if the system stands. Dickens may close his novel with a baby and a marriage—the traditional reconcilers of conflict in Victorian fiction—yet these events are poor chasers for the bitter tragedies that have come before, and they cannot wash away the flavor of Krook from our mouths.

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid, 519.

**Chapter 4: Racial Ecologies of Addiction in Antebellum Temperance and Frank J. Webb's *The Garies and their Friends***

Black Addicts and Racialized Drugs

Race has played a decisive role in shaping public perceptions and policies regarding the use, distribution, and legality of mind-altering substances in America since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Whether it is the racializing of dangerous drugs (smoked opium as Chinese, crack as black, marijuana as linked with Mexican immigrants), anxieties about racial intermixing that motivated the early prohibition and policing of drugs like heroin in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, or the disproportionate suffering faced by black and brown communities under the more recent war on drugs, race has thoroughly imprinted itself upon addiction discourse and the institutions determined to combat the “menace” of dangerous narcotics.

The trope of the black addict in American political discourse and culture has a long history. In the 1980s, white authorities on the crack epidemic spotlighted crack-addicted black mothers who gave birth to developmentally disabled babies that would drain resources from the state. Before that, Harry J. Anslinger, head of the Federal Narcotics Bureau, warned of black jazz musicians seducing white women with marijuana. W.B. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* (1915) drew upon similar fears of miscegenation in its depiction of mobs of free blacks (played by whites in blackface) getting drunk and attacking white women, cinematically reproducing reconstruction-era representations of black degeneration following emancipation.<sup>1</sup> Whether in the form of

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<sup>1</sup> For discussions of race and degeneracy in the postbellum era, see Denise Herd, “The Paradox of

alcohol or the new gamut of narcotics that would be criminalized in the 20th century, black substance users were troped and used for social and political purposes by white authorities invested in the perpetuation of racial hierarchy and white supremacy. These tropes offered an essentializing picture of the black substance user that mystified the social and political conditions that motivated substance use in communities of color. Instead of systemic thinking, racist politicians and doctors presented black people as innately predisposed to excess and criminality, making them constitutionally unfit for rational subjectivity. In the reconstruction era, the North Carolina physician J. Wellington Byers argued that “the negro” is uniquely vulnerable to intemperance because of the “inherent frailties of his nature.” Following the abolishment of slavery, Byers’ comments cast doubt on whether black people could successfully adapt to white social and political systems.<sup>2</sup> Black drug users of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Timothy Hickman reminds us, were unsurprisingly lumped into a criminal class of drug *addicts*, while middle-class whites were regarded as diseased and in need of aid.<sup>3</sup> Representations of the black substance user also evinced a paranoid racial ecology—a fear of blurred lines, of amalgamated races, of overturned hierarchies—which would play no small role in pushing forward anti-drug legislation.

While continuities run through late nineteenth and twentieth century depictions of

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Temperance: Blacks and the Alcohol Question in Nineteenth-Century America,” in *Drinking: Behavior and Belief in Modern History*, edited by Susanna Barrows and Robin Room (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 365.

<sup>2</sup> J. Wellington Byers, “DISEASES OF THE SOUTHERN NEGRO,” *Medical and Surgical Reporter (1858-1898)* 58, no. 23 (1888), p. 734.

<sup>3</sup> Timothy Hickman, *The Secret Leprosy of Modern Days: Narcotic Addiction and Cultural Crisis in the United States, 1870-1920* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007), 10.

the black substance user, constructions of race and addiction in the antebellum period were much more turbulent and contested. Still, we can find important antecedents to later tropes in temperance discourse and popular culture. Denise Herd, for instance, describes how white Southerners viewed liquor and grogshops as fomenters of insurrectionary violence among the black population, motivating greater prohibitions on consumption for slaves.<sup>4</sup> In minstrelsy and American theatre, blackface characters demonstrated a penchant for alcohol, but not the kind of abject dependency we find in nineteenth-century temperance literature. The two-act opera *The Padlock* (1768) features Mungo, a slave with a fondness for liquor and music, who would influence representations of blackness on the stage for many decades to come.<sup>5</sup> The man that would play Mungo in Isaac Bickerstaffe's 1830 version of *The Padlock*, Thomas Dartmouth Rice, would also start a dance craze that would spread from New York to London.<sup>6</sup> "Jump Jim Crow," Dale Cockrell notes, oddly mixes anti-slavery references with the womanizing and hypermasculine violence of what appears to be a black frontier figure.<sup>7</sup> Though these characteristics are not framed explicitly as intemperance, they represent how blackness was often hyperembodied and sensualized in racist caricatures. In later editions of the song, Jim would drink rum as part of his growing repertoire of roguishness, thus helping to fashion and reinforce an image of black men as naturally disposed to drinking and

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<sup>4</sup> Herd, "The Paradox of Temperance: Blacks and the Alcohol Question in Nineteenth-Century America," 356. This link was also made in *Confessions of Nat Turner* (1831) when all the slaves, except for Nat, drink cider before killing Mr. Travis, Turner's master, and his family (12).

<sup>5</sup> For more on the legacy of Mungo, see Julie A. Carlson, "New Lows in Eighteenth-Century Theater: The Rise of Mungo," *European Romantic Review* 18, no. 2 (2007): 139-47 and Cedric J. Robinson, "The Inventions of the Negro," *Social Identities* 7, no. 3 (2001): 329-361.

<sup>6</sup> Dale Cockrell, "Jim Crow, Demon of Disorder," *American Music* 14, no. 2 (1996): 171.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

other forms of sensuality that opposed the values of an emerging white middle-class.

Despite the links between black men and alcohol in popular entertainment and instances of black drinkers in novels like *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), the black drunk never became a major staple of antebellum temperance fiction. Instead, race and temperance intersected through a more complex metaphorical logic of whites-becoming-blacks through intoxication and addiction, which often played upon fears of amalgamation and notions of black inferiority.<sup>8</sup> Whether through the commonplace metaphor “slaves to the bottle” or racialized physical descriptions of drunkards, blackness became a marker of the white drunkard’s descent into addiction, madness, and death, thus giving shape to an emergent and unwieldy racial discourse of addiction. For periodical writers of the 1830s and 40s, the racist ideologies of blackface and other cultural forms would provide a rhetorical technique for combatting “one of the greatest curses of the human family.”<sup>9</sup> But as white drunkards were getting blacked up metaphorically and sometimes literally in popular periodicals from the North and the South, antislavery proponents were linking intemperance with the institution of slavery and the absolute, corrupting power of slave masters. One of the most memorable examples of this rhetorical strategy, John Greenleaf Whittier’s 1854 anti-slavery poem “The Haschish,” undercuts the vision of an Enlightened white Christian society by connecting the intoxicating properties of an exotic “Eastern plant” with the effects of cotton and the

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<sup>8</sup> In pro-slavery discourses of the day, black people were portrayed as ignorant, bestial, sensual, and incapable of self-government, either because of inherent nature or their status as commodities in the plantation economy.

<sup>9</sup> Joshua H. Cooledge, "DEPARTMENT: EVILS OF INTEMPERANCE," *Western Christian Advocate* (1834-1883), November 15, 1839: 118.

economics of slavery. Just as haschish was thought to distort perception and engender illogical behavior, so too does cotton turn a Judge into “a railing blackguard...[who] reads the ten commandments backward” and the “noisiest Democrat” into “Slavery’s parish beadle.” In one apostrophe, Whittier claims that cotton even outstrips the titular mind-altering plant: “O potent plant! so rare a taste / Has never Turk or Gentoo gotten; / The hempen Haschish of the East / Is powerless to our Western Cotton!”<sup>10</sup> Unlike later novels and political propaganda that would increasingly associate white substance use with contamination from other cultures and races, Whittier demonstrates that intoxication comes already baked into America’s system of slavery, scrambling the heads and hearts of everybody from pacifists to ministers.<sup>11</sup>

Whittier’s poem parallels the efforts of black activists and writers to, as Robert S. Levine says, “develop a trenchant critique of slave owners as ‘intoxicated’ by, or ‘enslaved’ to, the unlimited power vouchsafed them by their culture” and “turn upside down the proslavery stereotype of blacks as brutes in need of restraint.”<sup>12</sup> Following Levine, and drawing on emerging dynamics between addiction and race in antebellum culture, I analyze the works of prominent black author Frank J. Webb, who subverts the racist logic of antebellum temperance and offers a counternarrative of addiction that focuses on the specific exigencies and precarities faced by the free black community. I

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<sup>10</sup> John Greenleaf Whittier, “The Haschish,” *American Poetry: The Nineteenth Century*, vol. 1, edited by John Hollander (New York: The Library of America, 1993), 457-458.

<sup>11</sup> Charles Dickens’ *Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870) offers one example of racial transformation through the smoking of opium.

<sup>12</sup> Robert S. Levine, *Martin Delany, Frederick Douglass, and the Politics of Representative Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 103.

begin by mapping the varied and unruly network of racialized constructions of intemperance and then shift to Webb's rewriting of the racial dynamics found in so many periodicals and narratives of the nineteenth century.

### Racial Transformations: The Blackness of Inebriety

The drunkard's loss of autonomy and social status—defining features of intemperance in white middle-class narratives—often took a corporeal form. Dirty, leaky, slack, disheveled, and stooped, the drunkard's body communicated a loss of labor power and self-possession, an abject counterpoint to the pristinely dressed, erect, and fruitful men found in lithographs like *The Beneficial Effects of Temperance on a Man and his Family* (1840). Temperance pioneer and doctor Benjamin Rush offers a whole catalog of these identifying marks: “The face now becomes flushed, the eyes project...the underlip is protruded,--the head inclines a little to one shoulder;--the jaw falls, belchings and hiccup take place.”<sup>13</sup> As we see with Rush's description, the mien of the drunk man can take on a racialized cast, as with the reddening of the face and the protrusion of the jaw.

Addressing this phenomena, Holly Berkley Fletcher remarks that “the coloring of the drunkard's whiteness was the diminishing of his manhood,” given that black slaves and natives were infantilized in the white racial imaginary.<sup>14</sup> Susan Zieger's analysis of the common metaphor “slave to the bottle” further elaborates on the entwinement of race and

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<sup>13</sup> Benjamin Rush, *Inquiry into the Effects of Ardent Spirits upon the Human Body and Mind* (Exeter, N.H.: Printed for Josiah Richardson, 1819), 6.

<sup>14</sup> Holly Berkley Fletcher, *Gender and the American Temperance Movement of the 19th Century* (New York; London: Routledge, 2008).

the construction of intemperance in the antebellum period. For Zieger, novels like T.S. Arthur's *Ten Nights in a Bar-room* present white drunkards as mere flesh, shorn of subjective particularity like black people under the chattel slave system.<sup>15</sup> Incorporating Toni Morrison's concept of "Africanness," Saleh Alshamrani analyzes how white temperance authors like T.S. Arthur and Walt Whitman associated drunkenness with blackness, "thereby ostracizing African Americans from the temperance movement."<sup>16</sup> In the analysis to follow, I expand these inquiries into the functions of race in temperance discourse, introducing new contexts such as blackface minstrelsy and analyzing black counternarratives of intemperance. These new contexts and narratives reveal how African Americans redeployed popular forms of entertainment to consolidate a temperate black identity and explore the roots of widespread intemperance in white communities.

While racialized physical descriptions of drunkards, like George Lippard's dissipated gentlemen with "red round face[s]" in *Quaker City; or, The Monks of Monk Hall* (1845), offered a simple, visual strategy for articulating the destabilization of white subjectivity, early temperance discourses on moderate drinking relied upon a more refined racial logic.<sup>17</sup> In his *Six Sermons on the nature, occasions, signs, evils, and remedy of intemperance* (1828), Lyman Beecher deploys race to underscore the danger of moderate drinking to dash common misconceptions about what an intemperate person

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<sup>15</sup> Susan Zeiger, *Inventing the Addict: Drugs, Race, and Sexuality in Nineteenth-Century British and American Literature* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008), 66.

<sup>16</sup> Saleh Alshamrani, "Antebellum Temperance Literature and the Racial Divide," (PhD diss., Western Illinois University, 2020).

<sup>17</sup> George Lippard, *The Quaker City; or, The Monks of Monk Hall* (Philadelphia: George Lippard, 1847), 10.

looks like. He says: “The poor Indian, who, once a month, drinks himself *dead* all but simple breathing, will out-live for years the man who drinks little and often, and is not, perhaps, suspected of intemperance.”<sup>18</sup> Beecher deploys a common racial stereotype of the time—the binge-drinking native—as one end of a spectrum of intemperance. “Poor” in an economic as well as pitiful sense, the native imbibes only once a month, but drinks to absolute oblivion. He is a conspicuous consumer because of both race and inebriation, whereas the “man who drinks little and often” eludes the attention of others and himself by not getting drunk, though alcohol still subtly adulterates his mind and body. Beecher’s 1828 typing of the native drinker parallels other instances of racial rhetoric in temperance literature, including an article called “My Wife’s Influence” published in the Kentucky-based *Masonic Mirror: Science, Literature and Miscellany*.<sup>19</sup> The narrator admits: “For a number of years I have been what is called a moderate drinker. I have never been right ‘*negro drunk*,’ though I have been pretty ‘tipsey’—most too high for picking cotton, and just *so as to go by things*.”<sup>20</sup> “Negro drunk” racializes the spectrum of alcohol’s effects, equating extreme intoxication with the limited physical and intellectual capacities of a black man. As the narrator says, he did not get drunk enough to be fit for “picking cotton”; being “tipsey” only, he could keep up with the obligations of a middle-class white man. Beecher’s sermons and “My Wife’s Influence” suggest that the very idea of

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<sup>18</sup> Lyman Beecher, *Six Sermons on the nature, occasions, signs, evils, and remedy of intemperance* (Boson: T.R. Martin, 1828), 9.

<sup>19</sup> For a different version of the article that removes racial language, see A. N., “MY WIFE’S INFLUENCE,” *The Christian Telescope and Universalist Miscellany (1824-1828)*, August 30, 1828: 394.

<sup>20</sup> A. N., “MY WIFE’S INFLUENCE,” *Western Luminary (1824-1834)*, July 22, 1829: 4.

moderate drinking rested upon white middle-class self-possession, which defined itself not just in opposition to slavery, but a racialized form of extreme drunkenness.

Temperance reformers indeed challenged moderate drinking, seeing it as subtly progressive and ultimately destructive, and thereby qualified liberal notions of (white) autonomy, yet in doing so they reinforced the inferiority of racial others.

The racial logic of intemperance also took on stranger, more sensationalistic forms, such as the phantasmagoric imagery of the delirium tremens narratives that began to proliferate in the late 1830s and 1840s. Ranging from John B. Gough's stories of being engulfed in "millions of monstrous spiders" to Dante-esque descents into the bowels of hell as a prefiguration of a drunkard's damnation, DTs narratives offered readers thrilling accounts of hallucinations and paranoid, even murderous behavior.<sup>21</sup> One story, "The Inebriate," reverses the usual racial optics of intemperance by picturing drunkards who hallucinate and are haunted by blackness in their social relations and surroundings. In one scene, two young girls implore a doctor to help their father, saying, "I do not think he knows what he is saying—he looks so wild. He called us all black negroes, and seems afraid of us."<sup>22</sup> Here, it is not the drinker who is himself racialized, but the long-term effects of alcoholism, including delirium tremens, that corrode the perceptual basis for racial stratification. As a result, family—an essential ingredient of middle-class subjectivity—becomes defamiliarized, dangerous, i.e., blackened.<sup>23</sup> Earlier

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<sup>21</sup> John B. Gough, *Autobiography and Personal Recollections of John B. Gough, with Twenty Six Years' Experience as a Public Speaker* (Springfield: Bill, Nichols &, 1870), 46.

<sup>22</sup> Professor Wright, "THE INEBRIATES: ORIGINAL." *Ladies Repository, and Gatherings of the West (1841-1848)* 5 (August 1845): 226.

<sup>23</sup> The white family becoming black can also signify how the man's declining mental and social

in the story, a doctor recounts the hallucinations of another drunkard doctor similarly haunted by blackness: “One moment he saw a monkey dancing on the top of the bed-post, or suspended in the air. Now and then he would strike at this shape of humanity, for having, with the end of a long tail, tickled his nose. In another moment he was laughing at the pranks of an ugly and distorted negro. Then he fancied that his body was covered with worms and insects...” Such phantasmagoria plays out notions of black inferiority and bestiality in its train of terrors. Flanked by “worms and insects” and “a monkey dancing,” the “ugly and distorted negro” (reminiscent of descriptions of blackface characters) occupies a lateral plane with other low, creepy, and abject creatures that haunt the mind of the drunkard. In both cases, seeing black people suggests an encroachment of blackness upon the most intimate aspects of a white man’s social and psychic identity, including family and one’s own perceptual faculties.

Some stories were more targeted in their racism and attention to the long-term, progressive effects of alcoholism. One of the most blatant instances of a pro-slavery depiction of racialized drinking can be found in “Two Scenes from the Life of a Drunkard,” published in the Philadelphia-based *Ladies' Garland and Family Wreath Embracing Tales, Sketches, Incidents, History, Poetry, Music, etc.* In the story, a once well respected, intelligent, and wealthy Southern slave owner drinks his way into abject poverty, finishing his life in a hovel “deserted a year before, as uninhabitable, by a lazy,

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status—metaphorized as blackness—necessarily bleeds over into the family that depends on his labor.

idle, and worthless family of free negroes.”<sup>24</sup> The slave master, once a pinnacle of white respectability, has fallen below even the level of a “worthless family of free negroes” due to intemperance. Doing ideological double-duty as temperance writer and slavery proponent, the writer denigrates free blacks and then juxtaposes their laziness with the devotion of a long-time family slave. Though sold off to pay his former slave owner’s liquor debts, the old slave returns secretly to serve his old master as the latter descends precipitously into delirium tremens and dies. The story reimagines the family tragedy at the heart of many drunkard narratives, seeing the sale of slaves as part of the destruction of once loving homes, while also using the idleness of free blacks—blacks without the guidance and structure of slavery—as a measure for alcoholic disorder and devastation. Even in northern abolitionist publications like *The Liberator*, one can find such racial logic, as in the reprinting of a report of a drunken man catching fire at a blacksmith’s shop. In the aftermath, the dead man’s face “was as black as that of a negro’s,” a fact more dramatically underscored with a later description of how his face changed from “white to black” as he thrashed hopelessly before dying in the road. The racial metaphors of temperance here lack the overt racism of “negro drunk” and “Two Scenes from the Life of a Drunkard,” but they still envision severe intoxication, and its fatal consequences, as a loss of racial identity and a breakdown in the color line.

As we have seen, temperance discourse used blackness to embolden the economic, social, and physical threat of intemperance for white middle- and upper-class

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<sup>24</sup> "TWO SCENES FROM THE LIFE OF A DRUNKARD," *Ladies' Garland and Family Wreath Embracing Tales, Sketches, Incidents, History, Poetry, Music, etc. (1837-1850)* 14, no. 4 (October 1848): 85.

men. In doing so, reformers leveraged white supremacy and fears of racial contamination in the push for a temperate masculine identity. Whether in the disordered perceptions of the DTs sufferer or racialized schemas of intoxication, intemperance constituted a breakdown not just in possessive individualism but the social hierarchies then being “naturalized” by pseudoscientific discourses of racism during the antebellum period, as with Samuel Morton’s *Crania Americana* (1839) and Louis Agassiz’s polygenism. Like the paranoid ecologies of later black user tropes, intemperance contaminated white subjects, not in the form of black contact necessarily but in a kind of black becoming, which equated black subjectivity and abjection with the imbruting effects of intoxication. While many of these racialized representations of intemperance sought to evoke horror and anxiety in antebellum audiences, some writers took a more comedic approach, borrowing from other areas of popular culture. The 1848 “A Temperance Story,” for one, stands apart for its use of blackface minstrelsy as both a symbol of and cure for one man’s habitual drunkenness.

Originally printed in the Philadelphia-based *Saturday Evening Post*, “A Temperance Story” describes a white man, W—, who is unknowingly blacked up by fellow tavern goers and later returns home, only to be beaten by his Irish maid the next morning. The writer sets up W’s blackface transformation by first delineating his shifts in personality under increasing amounts of whiskey toddy: “He was a quiet sort of man when sober; lively and chatty under the effects of a single glass; argumentative and offensively dogmatic after the second toddy, and downright insulting and quarrelsome

after getting beyond that number of drinks.”<sup>25</sup> The end point of this progression is explicitly racialized when an incapacitated W. is painted with lamp-black and oil by “mischievous fellows” who wanted to “make a darkie of him.” On one level, the story illustrates the vulnerability of the drunkard—reduced to an insensate object, and thus easily manipulated, humiliated in homosocial drinking rituals, robbed, killed, etc.<sup>26</sup> On another level, the addition of black face evinces the same logic as “negro drunk.” Drunkenness does not just serve as an occasion for blacking a person’s face; the black mask itself indexes the reduced status and incapacity of W., who shifts from a “quiet sort of man when sober” to an “argumentative” man to an incapacitated man under the influence of alcohol, finishing up like Beecher’s “dead all but simple breathing” native. To put it another way, the mask is not disguise, but an exteriorization of the man’s estrangement from his racial identity during drunkenness, and the dramatic irony of the scene centers on W’s inability to recognize himself as a black(faced) man, even as tavern goers shout for him to perform minstrel standbys such as “Zip Coon,” “Lucy Long,” and “Jim Crow.”

Eric Lott and other scholars of minstrelsy have argued that blackface both affirmed white supremacy and challenged any firm demarcation between the races as performers slid in and out of racial identities and skirted taboo subjects like miscegenation.<sup>27</sup> “A Temperance Story” is similarly boundary-blurring with its

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<sup>25</sup> John Smith, “A TEMPERANCE STORY,” *Maine Farmer (1844-1900)*, March 16, 1848: 4.

<sup>26</sup> This point links to Zeiger’s elaboration of the “slave to the bottle” metaphor, how intemperate men lost their autonomy.

<sup>27</sup> See Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*, 20th-anniversary ed. *Race and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Dale

suggestion of miscegenation in its second half, after the blackfaced W. slides into bed beside his white wife. In the morning, she discovers him, and “what was her surprise and horror, upon rising up, to see, instead of her lawful husband, what she thought a strapping negro, as black as charcoal, lying at her side.” A subtext of ethnic and class-based tensions soon emerges as Mrs. W. seeks the help of her servant, a “stout, two-fisted Irish girl” named Kitty, to deal with the “monstrous negro” in her bed. Marked both by her dialectal speech and an overdeveloped “organ of combativeness,” Kitty promises to hurt “The black, murtherin thafe of a villain.” As Noel Ignatiev says in *How the Irish Became White*, the Irish, sometimes called “negroes turned inside out,” were often caricatured and presented as less-than-white in antebellum America.<sup>28</sup> Inordinate fondness for liquor often fit into these caricatures, accentuating the grotesqueness and animality of the Irish person.<sup>29</sup> Kitty’s dialect and temper certainly mark her as a kind of raced subject, yet by becoming the champion of violated white female identity she nullifies connections with the black man. The trifecta of frightened and violated white woman (a key figure in so much racist propaganda to come), bullish Irish maid, and (putative) black man represents ongoing racial and ethnic tensions in antebellum America and ultimately affirms a hierarchy with blacks firmly positioned at the bottom.

Strangely enough, blackface serves as the instrument of W’s reform. Like the

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Cockrell, “Jim Crow, Demon of Disorder,” *American Music* 14, no. 2 (1996): 161-84. In “White Skins, Black Masks: Minstrelsy and White Working Class Formation,” David R. Roediger argues that attempts to read blackface minstrelsy “as a kind of oppositional, contestatory culture ultimately fail” (123).

<sup>28</sup> Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 1995)

<sup>29</sup> For an argument about how intemperance and Catholicism perpetuated famine in Ireland, see “SUFFERINGS OF THE IRISH,” *Zion's Herald (1823-1841)*, February 07, 1838: 23.

many shock-induced reforms discussed by Rush in *Inquiry into the Effects of Ardent Spirits* (1784), the experience of being misidentified as black and nearly fatally attacked by Kitty shakes W. out of his intemperance and motivates him to join a temperance organization. Though never said explicitly, one takeaway from “A Temperance Story” is that every white man can uphold the color line by putting down the drink.

“A Temperance Story” plays lightheartedly with the conventions of blackface minstrelsy, even as it stages real anxieties about racial intermixing, yet blacking up also functioned as a form of terrorism meant to uphold racial hierarchy. There is an account of New York City police stopping a mob from tarring and feathering Garrison and fellow abolitionist speakers at a meeting at the Tabernacle or the Society Library in May of 1850. The *New York Sunday Era* performed rhetorically what the mob could not do through physical violence by presenting Garrison and his troupe as “nigger minstrels” who brought “harps of discord” to crowds of racially mixed “spirits,” a term that links abolitionist enthusiasm with liquor.<sup>30</sup> Another article printed in *Liberator* describes how an abolitionist from Massachusetts was beset by a mob in Georgia. According to the writer, the mob rode the man on a rail, painted him black, put him through auction, and then “took him to a drinking-saloon, and had niggers hugging and kissing him.”<sup>31</sup> The mob turns blackface into a multi-stage ritual of racialization, one that strips the man of his freedom, objectifies him as an article of commerce, and forces him to mingle affectionately with black people in a tavern, a punitive enforcement of the amalgamation

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<sup>30</sup> "GARRISONS'S NIGGER MINSTRELS," *Liberator* (1831-1865), May 31, 1850: 1.

<sup>31</sup> "AN ABOLITIONIST RODE ON A RAIL, BLACKENED, AND SENT FROM TOWN ON THE CARS," *Liberator* (1831-1865), April 20, 1855: 1.

that northern abolitionists were thought to desire.

The saloon is a fitting endpoint for the procession, as abolitionists and writers ranging from Frederick Douglass to Stowe causally linked intemperance with slave holding. With its dulling of human sensibilities, affections, and rationality, intemperance enabled whites to brutally objectify and violate black persons, not to mention manipulate religious teachings to justify their lives as oppressors. In a speech delivered to an Irish audience on temperance, Douglass goes so far as to say that if the slave holder could be made “sober for a moment,” he “would consider the sinfulness of his position” and “we could get a public opinion sufficiently strong to break the relation of master and slave.”<sup>32</sup> In *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (1845), Douglass takes a different angle, seeing the power dynamics of the slave system as intoxicating in their own right, as shown in his description of a slave holder’s wife: “The fatal poison of irresponsible power was already in her hands, and soon commenced its infernal work. That cheerful eye, under the influence of slavery, soon became red with rage.”<sup>33</sup> Slavery causes the same red eye commonly linked to drunkenness, and Douglass hammers home the connection with temperance phraseology, such as “fatal poison” and “under the influence.” Like Whittier’s poem “The Haschish,” Douglass reframes intemperance as a systemic issue—a symptom and byproduct of white economic and political systems that perpetuate black oppression—rather than one of individual control or responsibility,

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<sup>32</sup> Frederick Douglass, “Intemperance and Slavery: An Address Delivered in Cork, Ireland, on October 20, 1845,” in vol. 1, *The Frederick Douglass Papers: Series One—Speeches, Debates, and Interviews*, edited by John Blassingame (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 55.

<sup>33</sup> Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (Cambridge and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), 44.

values typically linked to white middle-class identity.

The intemperate, mobocratic instance of blacking up in the *Liberator* article similarly gestures to the forces that undergird concepts of black inferiority in temperance discourse and American culture in general. The conjunction of violence, chattel slavery (the auction block), and separation—how blackness is enacted symbolically upon the abolitionist—point to race being a product of social and economic systems, an identity violently imposed upon bodies rather than an innate set of characteristics that destine certain groups of people to different positions within a social hierarchy. This shift from temperance’s racialized drunkards to the intemperance of white mobs and power structures represents an important challenge to dominant constructions of both race and addiction during the antebellum period, one that writers like Frank J. Webb would take up in their push for black empowerment and collective action. Just as these writers would create counternarratives of black uplift to disprove dehumanizing and racist discourses, so would they offer counternarratives of intemperance based upon the specific exigencies, struggles, and goals of a burgeoning black community.

#### Black Temperance and Frank J. Webb’s *The Garies*

White temperance reformers of the antebellum period cast drunkenness as a universal threat against all humankind. As William Wirt put it, great plagues of history like the black death paled in comparison to intemperance, for they were “occasional,” “confined by climates or places,” whereas intemperance “is of all climates and all times and places.” Worse still, it “consumes both body and soul by a lingering and dreadful death,

involving the dearest connexions in the vortex of ruin.”<sup>34</sup> Wirt’s logic, while certainly hyperbolic, had a firm basis in temperance rhetoric of the late 1820s and 30s. Heman Humphrey, for instance, would marshal the same kinds of pandemical arguments in 1828 to prove that intemperance was a far “more ruthless enemy of happiness and life” than the more geographically circumscribed issues of slavery and the slave trade.<sup>35</sup> As with many universalist constructions of humanity following the Enlightenment, black people or other minority populations were not a real concern or major focus of reform efforts. Foregrounding a stupefied white drunkard and relegating a chained slave in prayer pose to the background (the morally superior and thus better off person), Humphrey’s frontispiece demonstrates quite clearly who were the priority targets of reform, the people really in need of saving. And while Humphrey would at least recognize, but ultimately deprioritize, the oppression of black people, there were southern and northern temperance organizations that barred blacks from their ranks with open prejudice or, like the Washingtonians with their singleness of purpose principle, resisted integration because it would engender controversy and effectively gut the temperance effort.<sup>36</sup>

Black reformers also conceived of intemperance pandemically, as part of a more general reform movement underfoot in major American cities during the 1830s, but a

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<sup>34</sup> William Wirt, "TEMPERANCE.: INTEMPERANCE," *American Masonic Register and Literary Companion (1839-1847)*, January 22, 1842: 162.

<sup>35</sup> Heman Humphrey, "Parallel between Intemperance and the Slave-Trade," (New York: John P. Haven, 1828), 4. The notion that intemperance was a worse fate than slavery would persist even into the postbellum period, as evidenced by the 1874 speech of a Reverend T.A. Cuff in Philadelphia, the transcript of which can be found in the November 12, 1874 edition of *The Christian Recorder*.

<sup>36</sup> For an example of the latter argument, see G. Vantort, "'Sons of Temperance': Mobile, [Ala.], July 28, 1850," *Liberator* 20, no. 35 (Sept. 30, 1850): 1-9.

**PARALLEL**  
BETWEEN  
**INTEMPERANCE**  
AND THE  
**SLAVE-TRADE.**

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BY HEMAN HUMPHREY, D. D.  
PRESIDENT OF AMHERST COLLEGE, MASSACHUSETTS.

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"Drag me, bound and bleeding, if you will, from my blazing habitation—but—O bind me not to a rack, where I can neither live nor die under the torture."—P. 10.

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Figure 6. Frontispiece of Heman Humphrey's *Parallel Between Intemperance and the Slave Trade*. John P. Haven, 1828.

growing number would speak to the specific impact of intemperance for already vulnerable black communities. In a series of articles printed in *The Colored American* and other African American publications during the 1820s and 30s, we can see an alternative racial construction of intemperance, one that eschews the abstract, subtly exclusionary universalism of white temperance for a more finely grained picture of the economic, social, and political consequences of drunkenness for the free black communities of the north. In contrast to Douglass, who would claim in his 1846 temperance and anti-slavery speech that “blacks are to a considerable extent intemperate,” New York reformers would downplay the ubiquity of drunkenness in the black community.<sup>37</sup> As one *Freedom’s Journal* writer says, “however advanced many of our brethren may be in degradation and crime, yet in point of temperance they have the advantage of the white population...” while another writer says, “The coloured people, may indeed be ranked among the most temperate classes of community....Can more be said of the most respectable classes of white men?”<sup>38</sup> While not explicitly saying that intemperance was a white problem, these writers protected the reputation of black folks by carefully framing their endorsement of temperance as a measure necessitated not by the widespread immorality of black people—which might suggest the correctness of proslavery views about the degraded, essentially bestial nature of black people—but the specific circumstances and precarity faced by the black community. One writer underscores the contrasting circumstances of whites and blacks to make the point:

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<sup>37</sup> Douglass, “Intemperance and Slavery,” 55.

<sup>38</sup> “Grog-Shops. -None but the attentive observer knows the injury,” *Freedom’s Journal* July 20, 1827; “For the Freedom’s Journal,” *Freedom’s Journal*, June 1, 1827.

Circumstanced as we, the people of colour, are in this country, intemperance is more hurtful to us than others. Debarred from many of the sources of obtaining a livelihood enjoyed by the white men, we cannot as well afford to expend our money for liquor as they, and labouring under strong prejudices, the least act of intemperance, often throws us entirely out of employment. Our very existence therefore depends upon temperance.<sup>39</sup>

Though black people may drink less than whites, the writer reasons, they are disproportionately impacted by intemperance than whites due to their underprivileged status in antebellum America. A white person could “afford” a habit, given their socioeconomic privileges, just as white middle- and upper-class persons today have access to and can more readily afford various treatments for substance use disorder. White narratives of intemperance may have dramatized the leveling effects of alcoholic progression—we’ve already seen one narrative about a slave master reduced to beggar—yet many narratives also pictured recovery as a reconstitution of white rational subjectivity through the resources and connections available to nineteenth-century white men. The *Freedom’s Journal* writer claims that intemperate black people, because of prejudice, do not have the same fall to look forward to as middle-class white men because they are already poised on the edge of ruin. The “vortex” metaphor so often used in temperance discourse here becomes inflected with the specifics of racial struggle; it is not a vehicle for the effects that follow from rum alone, but the chaotic swirling of prejudice, discrimination, and booze that hasten the irretrievable and fatal descent of black people.

For black reformers, the economic loss due to intemperance figured collectively as a setback in the effort for black uplift, which gave black temperance a more grounded

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<sup>39</sup> “For the Freedom’s Journal.”

and urgent ecological framing than its white counterparts. One annual report by the Pittsburgh Temperance Society for Colored People calculates that almost one hundred thousand dollars was spent on ardent spirits by members of the black community over the course of four years. For rhetorical effect, the auditor of the society breaks down this “immense loss” in terms of missed educational opportunities and unbuilt black institutions. Such money, he says, could’ve gone to the “tuition of two thousand five hundred children” or the building of “four substantial churches, each sufficient to purchase a farm, and erect all the necessary buildings for a Manual Labor College.”<sup>40</sup> This collectivist thrust of black temperance offered an alternative to an atomistic liberal subjectivity—one that set individuals and their behaviors apart from the larger society—yet this same networked understanding of selfhood could accentuate the moral responsibility of black drinkers since the consequences of their drinking did not just impact themselves and their families but the entire black community, a community lacking the same economic opportunities and social capital as white people.

Black reformers did not just compare the different impacts of intemperance for white vs. black people in socioeconomic terms, but also addressed the political implications of black drunkenness, which Webb himself was no doubt aware of when later writing *The Garies* (1857). In a letter written to Reverend Samuel E. Cornish, pastor of the First Colored Presbyterian Church of New York City, a man going by F.A.C. runs through a hypothetical scenario in which he and an “opposer of colored people” stand over a drunk black man and a drunk white man. Regarding the black man, the “opposer”

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<sup>40</sup> “Annual Report of the Temperance Society,” *The Colored American*, April 29, 1837.

says, "I told you they were a drunken set, and do all you can, and you cannot elevate them." As for the white man, "he is only an exception to the class to which he belongs, many of whom have reached the top of refinement and education - have become great in the world." The writer does not rebut the opposer with the now common view that, under structural racism, black and white people do not start on a level playing field. The writer only highlights the flawed but compelling logic of the "opposer," who can refute "the imbecility and degradation of the whites" by referencing innumerable instances of white success in the world.<sup>41</sup> Taken to be a "fair sample" of the white population, the "opposer" follows a logic that upholds the individuality of white people while casting black drunkards as exemplars of an inferior racial type, thus supporting proslavery argument and anti-black racism more generally.

Black reformers would flip these white perspectives on black inferiority by conceiving of whites as themselves sources of intemperate behavior that needed to be avoided. One article urges "the respectable part of our brethren" to "studiously avoid taking ruinous places, and by all the means in their power, reprobate the practice in others. We say it from convention, and without prejudice, that association with dissipated whites, and the allurements of the grogshop, are more ruinous to the lower class of our colour, than any other vice."<sup>42</sup> The frontispiece for *The Western Temperance Almanac for 1835*, produced for western as well as southern states, features an array of drunken and

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<sup>41</sup> "For the Colored American. Brother Cornish, -Permit me to occupy," *The Colored American*, February 23, 1839.

<sup>42</sup> "Grog-Shops. -None but the attentive observer knows the injury," *Freedom's Journal*, July 20, 1827.

disorderly characters, including a vomiting man and a poor man bartering for booze, but the most conspicuous element is a fist fight between a black and a white man.<sup>43</sup> As Fletcher notes, the black man “consorting freely with whites” “represented the loss of manhood, the breakdown of social mores, and the resultant disorder.”<sup>44</sup> The *Freedom’s Journal* article on grog shops offers a very different perspective. The black man becomes infected by the influence of “dissipated whites,” which, in turn, impacts the wellbeing of the black community—an inversion of the paranoid racial ecologies of substance use we see in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The writer is careful to voice his lack of “prejudice,” either towards the whites or the lower-class blacks he speaks of, but his picture of racial intermixing clearly communicates a moral epidemiology that centers on the degraded habits and influence of whites. While intoxicated slave owners and brutal and intemperate overseers like Mr. Plummer from Douglass’s *Narrative* were common in slave narratives and abolitionist writing, northern reformers conceived of alternative vectors of influence within homosocial barroom spaces wherein different races could mix. African Americans, of course, were working to desegregate public spaces and gain access to modern networks of transportation and education, which offered opportunity and uplift to free black communities. Grogshops were an important exception to these efforts because of the vices whites would share with more precariously situated black people.

Black temperance organizations faced yet another distinct challenge that their

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<sup>43</sup> *Western Temperance Almanac for 1835* (Truman and Smith Publishers), American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts.

<sup>44</sup> Fletcher, *Gender and the American Temperance Movement of the 19th Century*, 26.

white counterparts did not. Self-improvement efforts were often met with derision and even violence by defenders of racial hierarchy, especially in cities like Philadelphia where a series of race riots took place between 1834 and 1849. As Stowe points out in her 1857 preface to *The Garies*, Philadelphia, Webb's city of birth, stood on the "frontier between free and slave territory," making it a refuge for "escaping fugitives, or of emancipated slaves."<sup>45</sup> The growing black population found itself increasingly at odds with whites, particularly the Irish, over a lack of jobs during recession times, pro-emancipation efforts, and fears of amalgamation. In 1834, a gang of white youths retaliated against a group of black men that had vandalized and stole equipment from the Fairmount Engine Company by storming a carousel and later attacking the homes and church of a black community. Four years later, Pennsylvania Hall, built by the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society as a meeting place for abolitionists, was burned down after rumors of amalgamation spread through the white community.<sup>46</sup> On Jamaican Emancipation Day in 1842, members of the black community formed a temperance parade. Douglass describes the result in "Intemperance and Slavery": "they had not proceeded up two streets before they were attacked by a reckless mob, their procession broken up, their banners destroyed, their houses and churches burned, and all because

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<sup>45</sup> Frank J. Webb, *The Garies and their Friends* (Ontario; Tonawanda, NY: Broadview Press, 2016), 41.

<sup>46</sup> Julie Winch, *Philadelphia's Black Elite: Activism, Accommodation, and the Struggle for Autonomy, 1787-1848* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), 146-147. Mob activity had apparently been building up for over a week before the event, with one article, "Riot in Philadelphia," reporting on white mobs that had been clamoring outside the hall during a series of anti-slavery lectures by Garrison, Lucretia Mott, and others. Descriptions of the crowd of attendees as "promiscuously composed of white and black people," with half of them being females, hint at the fear of amalgamation and miscegenation motivating the white mob.

they had dared to have a temperance procession on the 1st of August. They had saved enough to build a hall, besides their Churches. These were not saved, they were burned down, and the mob was backed up by the most respectable people in Philadelphia.”<sup>47</sup> Douglass neglects to mention one of the most frustrating parts of the whole affair: it was the city authorities who decided to tear down the black temperance hall in Moyamensing because white members of the surrounding community feared that their property might be attacked by rioters.<sup>48</sup> While Julie Winch rightfully claims that different populations and causes were at play for each of the Philadelphia race riots, there still remains an overarching hostility of whites toward blacks as economic competitors and supporters of abolition.

Before much of the newspaper coverage of the Philadelphia race riots in the late 1830s, blackface minstrelsy offered its own commentary on black Philadelphians and violence in “The Extravaganza of Jim Crow.” The song begins with Jim Crow declaring, “I’m a full-blooded nigger, / Oh de ral’ ol’ stock.” The doubly ironic line—being an assertion of black racial purity uttered by a white man as well as an uneasy conflation of pride with the derogatory term “nigger”—sets up Jim’s motivations for assaulting “a Phillidelphy nigger, / Dress’d up quite nice and clean,” a man who fits the profile of the respectable black people who were sometimes targets for racial hatred and jealousy. Jim strips away the man’s pretense of bourgeois respectability with epithets like “Sambo,” evoking racist caricatures of ignorant and sensual slaves, and even threatens to “skin

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<sup>47</sup> Douglass, “Intemperance and Slavery,” 55.

<sup>48</sup> Winch, *Philadelphia’s Black Elite*, 149-150.

[him] like an eel” when the Philadelphian tries to retaliate after Jim punches him.<sup>49</sup> The threat of flaying inverts the external manipulations of black face in a gothic literalization of race transcendence. To be skinned, in other words, is to become an anonymous self, a self that no longer scans for socio-political identity through the thick medium of the skin, and while Jim himself may hold onto a blood-based racial identity, that racialized blood is itself expressed largely through pigmentation, either that of the individual or their progenitors. There is a meanspirited “I’ll give you what you want” bent to the threat that links the minstrel song to mobocratic instances of forcefully blacked up abolitionists. “Extravaganza,” of course, distinguishes itself from white terror and white supremacy by critiquing black uplift efforts in Philadelphia through the perspective of a proudly “full-blooded” black man. In true carnivalesque spirit, Jim even presents the white man’s “bery wickedness” as “What makes him turn pale,” thus reversing the moral metaphysics of race in American culture, and he muses delightedly upon his white audience’s desire to be black like him. As scholars have noted, blackface has its subversive moments—sometimes anti-slavery sentiments, sometimes critiques of white social types—but “Extravaganza,” like so many other examples of minstrelsy, continually signals its investments in racial hierarchy through both form (white control of black voice and perspective) and content (the reinforcement of an inferior black image through overly sensual stock characters). More specifically, T.D. Rice’s song channels white anger toward blacks that did not know their place in American society, an anger that would

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<sup>49</sup> "THE EXTRAVAGANZA OF JIM CROW: AS SUNG BY MR. T. RICE," *The Every Body's Album; A Humorous Collection of Tales, Quips, Quirks, Anecdotes, and Facetiae* (1836-1837), October 01, 1836: 354.

erupt time and time again as mob violence in Philadelphia. Frank J. Webb's *The Garies* fiercely undermines such white supremacist notions and, in its form and subject matter, directly challenges what bell hooks refers to as white society's "right to control the black gaze," the capacity of black people to see, criticize, and speak the truth about white people.<sup>50</sup> In doing so, Webb would put blackface minstrelsy to very different purposes, highlighting the link between white terror, intoxication, and popular culture.

Once an overlooked African American novel, the *The Garies* has recently garnered critical attention for its engagement with race, ethnicity, and class. Diego Millan, for one, analyzes Webb's complex aural and textual strategies for troubling racial identity. Robert Nowatzki explores similar breakdowns in his reading of passing and Irish ethnicity, while Anna Engle complicates notions of race by arguing that "blackness and whiteness are not separate from but intricately entwined with class categories."<sup>51</sup> Earlier criticism of *The Garies* addressed similar themes but within the context of black uplift. Following Frederick Cooper's 1972 reading of black elevation in the antebellum period, critics had debated the political significance of "self-improvement," as opposed to political or militant black action, including whether it encouraged black assimilation to

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<sup>50</sup> bell hooks, "Representing Whiteness in the Black Imagination," in *Displacing Whiteness: Essays in Social and Cultural Criticism*, edited by Ruth Frankenberg (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997), 168.

<sup>51</sup> Diego Millan, "'Voice Might Discover Him': Representations and Failures of Voice in Frank J. Webb's *The Garies and Their Friends*," *Melus* 45, no. 2, 2020: 46–69. Robert Nowatzki, "Blurring the Color Line: Black Freedom, Passing, Abolitionism, and Irish Ethnicity in Frank J. Webb's *The Garies and Their Friends*," *Studies in American Fiction* 33, no. 1 (2005): 29–58. Anna Engle, "Depictions of the Irish in Frank Webb's *The Garies and Their Friends* and Frances E. W. Harper's *Trial and Triumph*," *Melus* 26, no. 1 (2001): 152. For a reading of race as a mystifier of class aspirations and antagonisms that drive much of the violence in the novel, see Russell Sbriglia, "Specters of Marxism in Frank J. Webb's *The Garies and Their Friends*: Class, Race, and the Critique of Ideology," *ESQ* 64, no. 4 (2018): 564–602.

white middle-class values.<sup>52</sup> Robert S. Levine argues that, despite the clear assimilation of free black communities to dominant white culture in *The Garies*, Webb still “challenges hierarchical and racialist models of exclusion by depicting blacks pragmatically making use of the master’s tools”—including the “self-help” ideology of temperance—to assert their claims to equal rights and opportunities in America.”<sup>53</sup> Samuel Otter would eventually dub assimilation a “red herring” in critical studies of the novel, but Levine’s contextual analysis remains exemplary in its detailed account of intemperance and its links to institutional power structures.<sup>54</sup> I expand that analysis by focusing more closely on Webb’s contributions to emerging racialized models of addiction and his epidemiological framing of both white supremacy and intemperance.

From the very beginning, *The Garies* interrogates how race is sensed and read in antebellum America. Challenging the dominant visual epistemologies of race then gaining traction in American culture through physiognomy and other pseudosciences, Webb offers Mr. Garie’s light skinned friend Mr. Winston who passes as white in the company of gentlemen, including one vehement racist who believes that there is a “natural antipathy of the Anglo-Saxon blood to anything with a drop of negro blood in its

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<sup>52</sup> Frederick Cooper, “Elevating the Race: The Social Thought of Black Leaders, 1827-50,” *American Quarterly*, 24, no. 5, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972, pp. 604–25. See also Donald Yacovone, “The Transformation of the Black Temperance Movement, 1827-1854: An Interpretation,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 8, no. 3, 1988: 281–297. In her reading of Delaney’s *Blake*, Shelley Block argues that temperance was deployed for radical, emancipatory purposes and did not have to signify assimilationism. See “A Revolutionary Aim: The Rhetoric of Temperance in the Anglo-African Magazine,” *American Periodicals* 12 (2002): 9-24.

<sup>53</sup> Robert S. Levine, “Disturbing Boundaries: Temperance, Black Elevation and Violence in Frank J. Webb’s *The Garies and their Friends*,” *Prospects: An Annual Journal of American Cultural Studies* 19 (1994): 350-351.

<sup>54</sup> Samuel Otter, “Frank Webb’s Still Life: Rethinking Literature and Politics through *The Garies and Their Friends*,” *American Literary History* 20, no. 4 (2008): 736.

veins.”<sup>55</sup> Through this and other early scenes, Webb firmly establishes his purpose of showing that black people, however light or dark skinned they might be, are intelligent, cultured, and self-controlled, even more so than whites. It is thus fitting that there are hardly any depictions of intemperate black people, or black drunkards being reformed, as we see with the escaped slave character Cato from William Wells Brown’s *The Escape* (1858).<sup>56</sup> Levine claims, “it is the whites, not the blacks, who are in dire need of temperance reform, as the blacks are generally represented as industrious bourgeois capitalists.”<sup>57</sup> While earlier black reformers in *Freedom’s Journal* and *Colored American* would make comparisons about different rates of intemperance among whites and blacks, arguing for the infrequency of drunkenness in free black communities, Webb goes much further in presenting intemperance as a distinctly white problem.

The contrast between whites and blacks is most evident in back-to-back chapters introducing the black industrialist Walters and the slippery white lawyer George Stevens, the moral and temperamental antipodes of the book. Stevens’s class as both gentleman and intemperate man is first indicated by his “enjoying a fragrant Havannah” from a window overlooking his garden.<sup>58</sup> The provenance of the cigar marks upper-class taste and connects Stevens with slave economies beyond the United States. As the character Major Armsted would tell the northern racist Judge Ballard in Delaney’s *Blake* (1859),

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<sup>55</sup> Webb, *The Garies and their Friends*, 45.

<sup>56</sup> There is only one “drunken negro” referenced in *The Garies*, and he, unsurprisingly, does odd jobs for a racist southern gentleman.

<sup>57</sup> Levine, “Disturbing Boundaries,” 352.

<sup>58</sup> Webb, *The Garies and their Friends*, 146.

“all tobacco preparations [are] worked by negro hands in Cuba.”<sup>59</sup> The addictive habit of smoking also aligns Stevens with slavery-loving Southerners who have an inordinate fondness for tobacco, “cocktails and mint juleps.”<sup>60</sup> While Webb troubles the correlations between black skin and subpar intelligence with the “jet black” Walters, he still follows the physiognomic logic of much melodramatic and temperance fiction in describing his white antagonist, a man whose appearance perfectly befits his bad habits.<sup>61</sup> Stevens’s “cadaverous skin,” “long, thin arms,” and baldness all signify his evilness, his greed.<sup>62</sup> Stevens may not be presented as a drinker early on—he will become a confirmed alcoholic later in the book—but he still demonstrates the vicious self-consumption occasioned by intemperate habits on his body, qualities that are emboldened by their juxtaposition with the clean-cut, “exceedingly well-proportioned” Walters in the previous chapter.<sup>63</sup> Like many temperance lithographs, including the 1855 companion pieces *The Tree of Temperance* and *The Tree of Intemperance*, Webb here offers a pair of contrasting, mutually defining images. Not equating temperance with an immaculate white man—the iconography of so many temperance stories and images—Webb instead personifies temperance as a black man and its opposite as the white Stevens, thus challenging the racial metaphors that feature so prominently in early portraits of addiction.

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<sup>59</sup> Martin R. Delaney, *Blake; or, The Huts of America: A Tale of the Mississippi Valley, the Southern United States, and Cuba*, Corrected Edition (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017), 64.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.

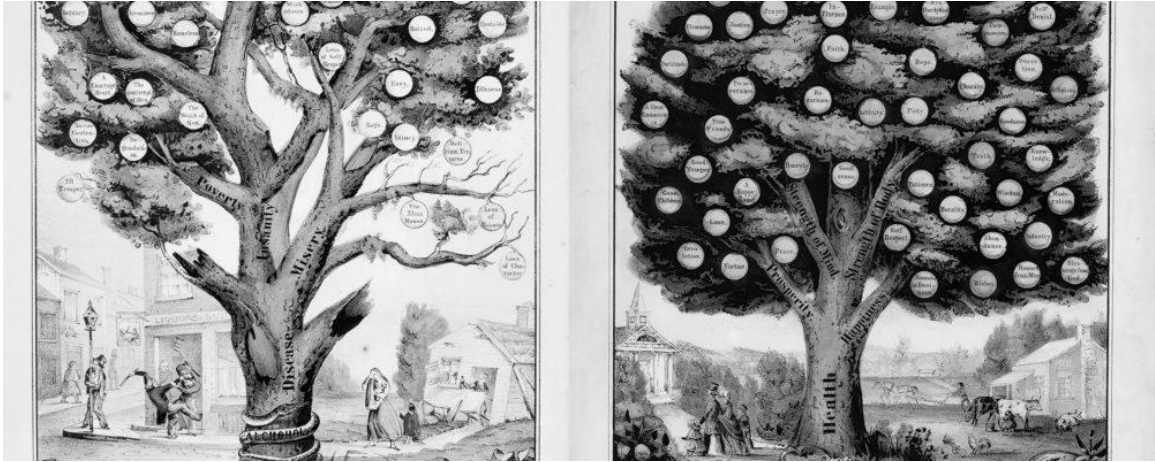


Figure 7. *Tree of Temperance* and *Tree of Intemperance*. N. Currier, 1849. Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, LC-USZC2-3090 and LC-USZC2-3092.

Webb, nevertheless, adheres to one major ethnic stereotype in his representations of intemperance, that of the drunken Irishman. Indeed, *The Garies* teems with drunk, bellicose Irishmen. The drunkard McCloskey, for one, kills a fellow tavern goer with a “slung shot” while intoxicated, which parallels a different murder case referenced by Stevens involving Irishmen.<sup>64</sup> Later, Webb describes a “barroom crowded with half-drunken men, the majority of whom were Irishmen, armed with bludgeons of all sizes and shapes.”<sup>65</sup> Though he is a gentleman (at least financially and socially speaking), Stevens’s “greyish-red hair” links him with the working-class drinkers that he would use to execute his plan of acquiring property owned by well-to-do blacks.<sup>66</sup> His hair also indicates that Stevens’ father, the “handsome, but drunken and vicious” carpenter that Mr. Garie’s sister marries, was himself Irish as well.<sup>67</sup> *The Garies*, Levine argues,

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, 179.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, 196.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*, 146.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, 127.

presents the Irish as “of the baser sort. Webb thus simultaneously taps into nativist anxieties...about the dangers posed to the republic by drunken, antirepublican Irish, while expressing his own hostility toward the ethnic group that, for a variety of complex sociohistorical reasons, was so openly hostile to the black community.”<sup>68</sup> It is also important to note how Webb’s strategy of positive black representation entails a firm separation from an ethnic group with whom blacks were often coupled as similarly degraded and animalistic. We see this coupling in literature, as when Rebecca Harding Davis describes disgustingly polluted cabins “tenanted by drunken free negroes and Irish,” as well as in gritty depictions of urban life in the infamous Five Points neighborhood of New York.<sup>69</sup> *The Garies* actively resists this coupling with its depiction of dignified black gentlemen and working-class Irish drunkards. While Stevens may have the trappings of a “gentleman,” he still proves himself to be just as bad or even worse than these lower-class Irish.

Playing with Stevens’s questionable status halfway through the book, Webb takes a page from minstrelsy in offering back-to-back scenes of Stevens undergoing a class-based and then racial transformation. Wanting to remain incognito while communicating orders to McCloskey about black properties to be targeted by the mob, Stevens purchases the clothes of a lower-class man from a second-hand store. Like the blackface routine in

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<sup>68</sup> Levine, “Disturbing Boundaries,” 360.

<sup>69</sup> Rebecca Harding Davis, *Bits of Gossip* (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin & Co, 1904), 22. For a detailed discussion of Irish and black relations in the Five Points, see Lisa Merrill, “Amalgamation, Moral Geography, and ‘slum Tourism’: Irish and African Americans Sharing Space on the Streets and Stages of Antebellum New York,” *Slavery & Abolition* 37, no. 3 (2016): 638-60.

“A Temperance Story,” Stevens’s initial disguise is meant to reveal as much as it conceals. His adoption of a “dilapidated coat, of drab colour” and a similarly decrepit pair of trousers and hat “completely robbed [him] of all appearance of respectability; the most disagreeable points of his physique seemed to be brought more prominently forward by the habiliments he had assumed, they being quite in harmony with his villainous countenance.”<sup>70</sup> Stevens’s class-based transvestitism does not simply draw attention to the performative dynamics of social identity, which can undermine essentialized notions of selfhood, but shows that one’s true character and motives can be mismatched with or revealed by sartorial expression, which qualifies some critics claims about Webb’s resistance to “essentialist categories of race and class.”<sup>71</sup>

As a direct result of his lower-class disguise, the racist Stephens gets some poetic justice, his power and privilege as a wealthy white man overturned through a violent act of blacking up. Mistaken for another man by drunk ruffians after donning the coat of a notorious fire company—a detail that evokes the race riots of 1834, which started from a feud between black youths and a white fire station—Stephens is beaten, tarred, and later misidentified by wealthy whites as a black man. Millan reads the scene as aligning pseudoscience with minstrelsy “in that both cling to false reproductions of authenticity.”<sup>72</sup> Such reproduction, Webb shows, entails violence. Because of blows, Stevens’ lips “were swelled to a size that would have been regarded as large even on the

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<sup>70</sup> Webb, *The Garies and their Friends*, 195.

<sup>71</sup> Engle, “Depictions of the Irish in Frank Webb’s *The Garies and Their Friends* and Frances E. W. Harper’s *Trial and Triumph*,” 160.

<sup>72</sup> Millan, “‘Voice Might Discover Him’: Representations and Failures of Voice in Frank J. Webb’s *The Garies and Their Friends*,” 57.

face of a Congo negro, and one eye was puffed out to an alarming extent.”<sup>73</sup> Violence here creates the exaggerated physical features of blackness that were then being put on display in minstrel routines and cranial charts. Physical violence, therefore, parallels the representational violence black people faced within white culture, which Webb counters with his temperate, intelligent black characters. While one might question the extent to which Webb is displacing notions of black inferiority upon the Irish-coded Stevens, whose adoption of lower-class garb is less a disguise than a revealer of character, the blackface scene is more focused on the intemperance of lower- and upper-class whites than in remediating cultural notions of blackness.

A critique of racist discourses and practices like blackface minstrelsy, the scene diverts from the usual spectacle of imbruted blackness to the intemperance of the wealthy white oppressors who force Stevens through an improvised minstrel routine. These men, the narrator remarks, were “in an advanced state of intoxication,” which Webb marks phonetically for one character who asks: “Spirit of—hic—hic—night, whence co-co-comest though?”<sup>74</sup> Instead of the caricatured black dialect of minstrel shows, a sonic index of the black man’s inferior mental constitution, we get the broken speech of a drunken rich white man. His query, “art thou a creature of the mag-mag-nation-goblin-damned,” may reference Hamlet’s speech to his father’s ghost, thus bespeaking the man’s culture and education, but such refinement is perverted by drunkenness, and by the propensity for drunkenness that marks the white upper classes.<sup>75</sup> Plus, as we have seen,

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<sup>73</sup> Webb, *The Garies and Their Friends*, 200.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> When first confronted by the apparition of his father in Act 1 Scene 4, Hamlet says, “Be thou a

young Charlie knows his classics too, including Chaucer and Spencer, and proves himself superior in memory to classically educated white men.

The riot of the white drunken men, consisting of forcing Stevens to jump in and out of a tank of water and dancing about miserable and bedraggled, culminates with one man attempting a whiteface routine. Rubbing Stevens's tarred face with lime, he says, "I'm going to make him a glorious fellow-citizen, and have him run for Congress."<sup>76</sup> The attempt evokes popular minstrel character Zip Coon, who differs from the happy slave Sambo in his belief that he is just as good as white men. In the 1834 song written by Thomas Birch, the titular Zip Coon is presented as a "larned skoler" set to take over the Presidency after Jackson.<sup>77</sup> Here it is the house of Congress that the putative black man, the object of the white men's "fun," will occupy once he undergoes his racial cleansing with lime. The performance amplifies the carnivalesque dimensions of the minstrel routine through an additional layering of racial makeup. Drunkenness and minstrelsy—already linked conceptually in their temporary suspension of symbolic order—here converge explicitly as the white man, in his drunken state, offers the black man a path towards citizenship in a scene that recalls a once enslaved Douglass drinking to feel like "a president."<sup>78</sup> The reality of the situation is that, despite the gains made by Walters and

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spirit of health, or goblin damn'd." The unnamed white man is not the only person who references Shakespeare. Walters also identifies with Shylock later in the narrative when he thinks of the "negro-hating white man" that takes loans from him.

<sup>76</sup> Webb, *The Garies and Their Friends*, 201.

<sup>77</sup> Thomas Birch, "Zip Coon" (New York: Atwill's Music Saloon, 1834).

<sup>78</sup> Frederick Douglass, "Temperance and Anti-Slavery: An Address Delivered in Paisley, Scotland on March 30, 1846," in vol. 1, *The Frederick Douglass Papers: Series One—Speeches, Debates, and Interviews*, edited by John W. Blassingame (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 205.

other prominent members of the black community in Philadelphia, black people did not have the franchise and could not be congressional representatives.<sup>79</sup> Even Walters, the proud self-made man himself, declaims that “it is everything to be white,” whereas blackness violently curbs one’s possibilities of becoming in America, not just in the slaveholding south but in the ostensibly free north, as Charlie learns when searching for a job after his father is maimed by the white mob.<sup>80</sup> The attempted white face routine mockingly announces this tragic fact, affirming black exclusion from political subjectivity even as it undercuts the optical and performative bases for white political citizenship. Through this scene, Webb very clearly engages minstrelsy of the antebellum period, using the racial mask to disclose the excesses and abusiveness of white men of privilege. In doing so, he reconceives the racial cast of intemperance and thereby subverts the white supremacist ideology of Stevens and other characters.

While the group of rich young white men demonstrate the riot and abuse typically associated with alcohol in antebellum culture, Webb also highlights the not altogether displeasing properties of alcohol, which contrasts with the more heavy-handed temperance endorsed in African American periodicals. Mr. Morton, tipsy but not as drunk as the young men, attempts to stop the presumed black man’s mistreatment: “‘oh, let the poor darkey go,’ he continued, compassionately, for he had just drunk enough to

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<sup>79</sup> As Roediger claims, “Minstrels claimed the right to turn Black for as long as they desired and to reappear white. They forcefully denied Blacks that right, parodying fancy dress, ‘l’arned’ speech, temperance and religion among Blacks as ridiculous attempts to ‘act white.’ Mockeries of Black political activity and claims to civil rights sometimes literally turned on the impossible vision of activist Blacks wishing to turn literally white” (125).

<sup>80</sup> Webb, *The Garies and Their Friends*, 272

make him feel humane; ‘let the poor fellow go, it’s a shame to treat him in this manner.’<sup>81</sup> Alcohol, typically presented in anti-slavery poetry and narrative as dulling human faculties and sympathy, here enables Morton, a participant in Stevens’ plan to incite riots against the black community, to feel for and act on behalf of the abused black man. This departure from anti-racist rhetoric does not constitute an endorsement of alcohol by any means, but only serves to highlight the unnaturalness of interracial sympathy for Mr. Morton, which can only emerge through the derangement of his senses and sensibilities. The implication: alcohol is not the taproot of abusive or bad behavior in the novel. White men—whether wealthy whites or lower-class Irishmen—are not abusively racist because of alcohol, because of a derangement of their otherwise orderly senses following an Enlightenment model of rational subjectivity. Yes, alcohol facilitates, fuels, and accompanies mob violence—note, for example, the “half-drunken” men at the tavern primed for violence or the rioters who drink Mr. Garie’s wine after killing him—but it is itself not the cause. Webb, like Douglass, seems to reverse the usual causal sequencing of middle-class temperance narratives, which picture good men of promise becoming bad because of alcohol. Instead, base men drink a beverage whose unruly effects harmonize with their prejudices and bad dispositions, which is most clearly the case with Stevens, who takes to booze after orchestrating a riot and the murder of his cousin. While this view may suggest a strong moral or liberalist interpretation of intemperance—one that emphasizes individual responsibility over systemic determination of behavior—Webb’s novel encourages the reader to view drunkenness

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 201.

and racism epidemiologically and to understand the roots of these entwined pathologies.

Both Robert Nowatzki and Levine read Stevens' racism as a disease. Nowatzki calls it a "moral disease," while Levine describes it as "a pathology of envy and status anxieties."<sup>82</sup> Neither scholar parses the notion of pathology, including its relation to emergent medical models of intemperance, but their phrasing evokes representations of racism as akin to alcoholic madness. Just as DTs narratives would picture white minds haunted by blackness, writers before and during the Civil War deployed DTs and other temperance tropes to criticize fears of amalgamation and black equality. One writer, sallying with reactionary voices from *The Journal of Commerce* that warned of racial hierarchies overturned by the recruitment of negroes in northern armies, says: "It is the negro that haunts the *delirium tremens* of patriotism in our neighbor's case. They wake up of nights, shrieking Negroes, negroes!...It is probable that they see negroes in trees and stones and running brooks."<sup>83</sup> For the writer, racist zeal is itself a form of intemperance that culminates with "delirium tremens," a hallucinatory and paranoid vision of negroes constantly threatening to overturn white supremacy.<sup>84</sup> Though meant satirically, the framing of white paranoia as delirium tremens resonates strongly with depictions of whites who inflexibly cling to racial separation in *The Garies* and other works of African American fiction. The brandy-sipping Judge Ballard from Martin

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<sup>82</sup> Robert Nowatzki, "Blurring the Color Line: Black Freedom, Passing, Abolitionism, and Irish Ethnicity in Frank J. Webb's *The Garies and Their Friends*," *Studies in American Fiction* 33, no. 1 (2005): 47; Levine, "Disturbing Boundaries," 353.

<sup>83</sup> "A Dreadful Case," *Independent (New York, NY 1848-1876)* 14, no. 711 (July 1862): 4.

<sup>84</sup> See also "Awful Death of Two Kidnappers," *Zion's Herald & Wesleyan Journal (Boston, MA)* 31, no. 13 (Mar. 1860): 49. This short article describes a northern slave catcher named Jones who dies of "delirium tremens" shortly after his partner gets sick and dies. The article never portrays Jones as a drinker, and instead links his madness with his vocation.

Delaney's *Blake*, for instance, expresses revulsion at the prospect of having his cigar touched by "black fingers."<sup>85</sup> In Webb's novel, Mrs. Stevens feels disgusted by the coupling of Mr. Garie and his wife, while Mr. Stevens chastises his daughter for kissing the Garies' son Clarence, saying, "you nasty little thing; your mother ought to have taken a scrubbing-brush and cleaned your mouth."<sup>86</sup> Just as temperance reformers relied upon a slippery slope argument that one drink would catalyze an unstoppable progression in alcoholism, so does Alfred, Mrs. Bird's servant, tell the more tolerant Eliza: "'Now if you want to eat with the nigger, you can...Perhaps he may marry you when he grows up—don't you think you had better set your cap at him?'"<sup>87</sup> Alfred, like so many anti-integrationists throughout history, sees any form of racial contact as leading to miscegenation. Such aversion to racial mixing extends well beyond the dinner table, permeating domains of transportation, education, and employment, which demonstrates the scope and excessiveness of racism in the North.

Anti-racist discourse had already pathologized such aversion under the name of colorphobia beginning in the 1830s. More so than the delirium tremens metaphor, colorphobia stressed the contagiousness and national scale of a disease characterized by an inordinate dread of racial contact, a disease thought to be particularly severe in Philadelphia and other northern cities.<sup>88</sup> One *Colored American* writer describes it as "first cousin to hydrophobia...a terrible insanity produced by the bite of slavery," thus

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<sup>85</sup> Delaney, *Blake*, 64.

<sup>86</sup> Webb, *The Garies and their Friends*, 184.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 161-162.

<sup>88</sup> One article, "Massachusetts vs. Pennsylvania. Colorphobia in Pennsylvania," stresses how entrenched the condition is in Philadelphia.

picturing the slave system as a rabid dog.<sup>89</sup> The writer of a *Herald of Freedom* article identifies the same cause but reworks the metaphor, seeing colorphobia as “injected into [white people’s] veins and *incided* into their systems, by old doctor Slavery.”<sup>90</sup> For these and other periodical writers of the 1830s and 40s, colorphobia had a clear vector of transmission: a system of oppression and racial hierarchy whose influence, like a “virus,” infected the blood and disordered the brains of northern whites, suggesting that racism was not only an issue of personal beliefs or familial inheritance but an expansively networked pathology.<sup>91</sup> For Don James McLaughlin, colorphobia “staged a rejoinder to the growing discourse of scientific racism.”<sup>92</sup> Indeed, black writers distinguished themselves from white practitioners of scientific racism, who often stressed innate racial differences as determinants for susceptibility or immunity to disease, by looking to white-centered institutions and racist ideologies as spreaders of disease, which offered additional rhetorical ammunition for anti-racist activism before the Civil War.

Colorphobia would be most memorably rendered in Frederick Douglass’ 1849 satirical essay “Colorphobia in New York,” which describes the phobic responses of upper- and lower-class whites to two English ladies walking with Douglass. Otter reads the essay as parodying “the link between black skin and yellow fever,” a connection

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<sup>89</sup> “Colorphobia,” *The Colored American*, July 13, 1839. According to the author, the condition could be identified in men like Alfred, who would repudiate emancipation with the question, “Would you have your daughter marry a nigger?”

<sup>90</sup> “ANTI-SLAVERY: COLOR-PHOBIA,” *Liberator (1831-1865)*, November 23, 1838: 1. The “old doctor Slavery” figure leans on contemporary polemics about dubious medicine, including iatrogenic addiction, and links racists and drunkards with its prescription for the disease: “Anti-slavery must cure it—or it must die out like the incurable drunkards.”

<sup>91</sup> J.D., “Colorphobia. -A Discovery,” *The North Star*, April 27, 1849.

<sup>92</sup> Don James McLaughlin, “Dread: The Phobic Imagination in Antislavery Literature,” *J19* 7, no. 1 (2019): 23.

formed during public debates about race and medicine during the yellow fever outbreaks in late eighteenth-century Philadelphia.<sup>93</sup> Otter, however, overlooks one crucial coordinate in this networked pathology, that of the DTs, which Douglass references early on:

Gough's description of "delirium tremens" would not be much out of place in describing one haunted and afflicted with colorphobia. Monsters, goblins, demons, snakes, lizards and scorpions - all that was foul, strange and loathsome - seized upon their bewildered imaginations. Pointing with outstretched arm towards us, its victims would exclaim, as if startled by some terrible sight - "Look! look!" "Where?" "Ah, what?" "Why?" "Why, don't you see?" "See what?" "Why, that BLACK! BLACK! *black!*" Then, with eyes turned up in horror, they would exclaim in the most unearthly manner, and start off in a furious gallop - running all around us, and gazing at us, as if they would read our very hearts.<sup>94</sup>

Douglass looks to the disordered imaginations of drunkards, most strikingly performed on American and European stages by John B. Gough, to capture the extreme aversion of whites to black contact. Seen through the distorting lens and warped logic of white supremacy, blackness takes the form of a supernatural monster or a nightmarish parade of creepy crawlies that threaten the integrity of white identity. Douglass's account is comedic, the lower-class gawkers buffoonish in their confusion and galloping and the upper-class persons reservedly intemperate with their "red and furious look[s] about the cheek."<sup>95</sup> Yet this entertaining portrait of colorphobia—which Douglass distinguishes from prejudice in that it encompasses the threat of black elevation in the north rather than a generalized aversion to black people—raises some important questions about personal

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<sup>93</sup> Samuel Otter, *Philadelphia Stories: America's Literature of Race and Freedom* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 32.

<sup>94</sup> Frederick Douglass, "Colorphobia in New York! The fifth of May will long be remembered," *The North Star*, May 25, 1849.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

responsibility, as Douglass refers to lower-class colorphobics, jittery with DTs-like symptoms, as “poor creatures” and “unfortunate victims,” following medicalized perspectives on addiction. McLaughlin notes how skeptics criticized the “pity embedded in colorphobia’s medicalization,” seeing it as “supply[ing] an apology on slavery’s behalf.”<sup>96</sup> Despite these criticisms, colorphobia remained a popular way of articulating the extremes of northern racism for over two decades, and as we have seen with Douglass, the concept was particularly amenable to metaphoric and metonymic elaboration, as delirium tremens, yellow fever, and racism all congeal together in an unwieldy epidemiological view on the intemperate passions of white society. Webb would later expand and reimagine this networked pathology in his own critique of white identity’s extremes, most notably through the tragic story of the orphan Clarence Garie

Clarence has what might be called a novel strain of colorphobia. Not a white man who dreads racial contact, Clary is a mixed-race person posing as a white gentleman who fears both the revelation of his own blackness and being contaminated from association with free blacks. Speaking to his Aunt Ada, a maternal figure from the boarding school where he would begin his life as a white man, Clarence confesses his dread and self-division:

I can’t be white and coloured at the same time; the two don’t mingle, and I must consequently be one or the other. My education, habits, and ideas, all unfit me for associating with the latter; and I live in a constant state of fear that something may occur to bring me out with the former. I don’t avoid coloured people, because I esteem them my inferiors in refinement, education, or intelligence; but because they are subjected to degradations that I shall be compelled to share by too freely associating with them.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> McLaughlin, "Dread: The Phobic Imagination in Antislavery Literature," 23.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid*, 311.

Like examples from the free African American press, Clarence's colorphobia is structurally determined by racial hierarchy and the compulsory identification of every individual as either white or colored. While racial taxonomies of the mid-nineteenth century constructed ever more refined systems of classification based upon pigmentation and percentages of black blood, whiteness remained a monolithic entity in the cultural imaginary, a standard of purity that could only be contaminated by contact with non-white races following the ideology and legal practice of hypodescent. Clarence does not wholly buy into this ideology of white supremacy. Black people, he knows, are not inherently inferior, but rather "subjected to degradations" by a white supremacist society and government. Still, Clarence avoids black people, not only because he finds their ways "strange and irksome," but to protect his identity as a white man.<sup>98</sup> He even tries to convince his sister, who has lived as a colored woman since the death of their parents, to forsake all black associations to avoid degrading herself (and him). Like Douglass' colorphobic whites, Clarence sees blackness, or the degradations of blackness, as dangerously communicable, but feels this danger more acutely given his precarious status. His unique strain of colorphobia disproves the recurring theory of a "natural antipathy" between the races in the novel.<sup>99</sup> Education and the psychosocial necessity of racial separation drive Clarence's aversion to black people, not any biological determinism, yet that does not mean that these forces cannot drastically and permanently impact his body and mind.

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid, 246.

Clarence's colorphobia is one symptom of an ultimately fatal pathology rooted in racial hierarchy and deeply colored by tropes of intemperance. Webb marks this sickness during Clarence's first encounter with Aunt Ada after his return to Sudbury as an adult. Ada remarks, "My dear boy, how thin and pale you look....your hands are hot—very hot, you must be feverish."<sup>100</sup> Feverishness and emaciation connect Clarence to intemperate whites like McCloskey and George Stevens and his son.<sup>101</sup> McCloskey, for one, reports to an ailing Stevens that "I've had favers and cholera and the divil alone knows."<sup>102</sup> He ultimately dies from typhus fever after a bout of delirium tremens, following the claims of Philadelphia doctors and temperance advocates regarding the correlation between alcoholism and contagious diseases like cholera and yellow fever. In Birdie's prophetic dream, it would be the intemperate man, George Stevens Jr., that would touch Clarence's face, causing him to break out into "loathsome black spots," racial markers reminiscent of smallpox.<sup>103</sup> George Stevens Jr.'s father, meanwhile, wastes away prematurely from a "weight of guilt and sin" and copious amounts of booze, with his "frightful attacks" suggesting DTs.<sup>104</sup> Webb underscores the link between Clarence and the elder Stevens with their shared descriptions of a "secret gnawing" in their hearts.<sup>105</sup> George, guilty of the murder of Clarence's father, must live in fear of disclosure from McCloskey, a fear he drowns in laudanum and brandy. Clarence, also an agonizingly divided being, dreads the

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid, 310.

<sup>101</sup> Mrs. Garie is also described as "pale" early in the narrative (6), yet the connections between her and Clarence's sicknesses are not nearly as developed as in the case of Stevens and McCloskey.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, 304.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, 317. It is significant that Jr.'s father was himself blackened by tar.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid, 307; 301.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

revelation of his blackness and loathes himself for joining in the racist jests of white society and not speaking the truth to his fiancé. Like a drunkard, Clarence's conscience disproves of his actions, yet he feels compelled to continue:

it has kept me awake night after night; it haunts me at all hours; it is breaking down my health and strength—wearing my very life out of me; no escaped galley slave ever felt more than I do, or lived in more constant fear of detection: *and yet I must* nourish this tormenting secret, and keep it growing in my breast until it has crowded out every honourable and manly feeling.<sup>106</sup>

Though not concerned explicitly with liquor, Clarence's speech mixes temperance tropes like self-consumption, progression, and slavery into a pathology specific to the American system of racial hierarchy—a move that joins Webb with early thinkers of national pathology like Benjamin Rush. Just as Anthony Benezet argued that “Every act of intoxication puts nature to the expense of a fever,” thus draining the drinker's body of usable energy, so does Clarence picture himself consumed by his “tormenting secret,” which he later describes as a “vampire, sucking away, drop by drop, happiness and peace.”<sup>107</sup> Clarence's wasting condition follows the same progressive trajectory as intemperance, spreading throughout his entire being, making him “sick in heart, mind, and everything.”<sup>108</sup> To articulate his internal agony, Clarence compares his situation to that of a slave—a favored rhetorical technique of early temperance reformers—and even recalls Humphrey's “Parallel between Intemperance and the Slave-Trade” with his claim

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid, 313. Italics are mine.

<sup>107</sup> Anthony Benezet, *The Mighty Destroyer Displayed* (Philadelphia, Printed by Joseph Crukshank, 1774), 47. Brown, 317; 328. Vampirism and the sins of a mother's drunken son converge in Cornelia, “MOTHER AND SON,” *Ladies' Magazine and Literary Gazette* (1830-1833) 07 1831: 324.

<sup>108</sup> Webb, *The Garies and their Friends*, 310.

of superior suffering. These tropes and symptoms root back to compulsion. No matter how much pain Clarence goes through, he must keep silent, must keep the parts of himself separate following the dictates of white supremacy and his own need for ontological coherence. Clarence's sister recognizes that her brother may be acting selfishly, but affirms that "What you are, Clarence, your false position and unfortunate education have made you."<sup>109</sup>

When George Stevens Jr. later reports seeing Clarence "drinking at the bar of the hotel" with a white gentleman, the final piece in the pathology puzzle falls into place.<sup>110</sup> Whether Clarence drinks to escape his grief over losing Birdie or has always drunk as part of the rituals of upper-class white society, his consumption links back to the excesses of white power dynamics.

While much antebellum temperance leaned on black inferiority to amplify the threat of drunkenness for white men, Webb undoes the very logic of white supremacy undergirding raced representations of drunkards. White supremacy, he shows, is not a matter of biology or ontology, but a pathology characterized by drunkenness, paranoia, contagiousness, and fever, symptoms that all feature heavily in temperance discourse. Webb goes further than Douglass and writers from the African American press in his networked imagination, repurposing a history of temperance tropes to highlight the abuses and virulent prejudices of white society. He also explores what would become a major motif in late Victorian addiction discourse, that of the double.<sup>111</sup> Robert Louis

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid, 320.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid, 340.

<sup>111</sup> Poe's 1839 tale "William Wilson" also uses the motif of doubling to explore the nature of evil

Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), in particular, would use markers of racial otherness to articulate the dualistic nature of the addicted subject, thus helping to codify the racialization strategies emerging in Anglo-American antebellum temperance culture.<sup>112</sup> Webb counters these strategies through divided characters like George Stevens Jr., who is a well-mannered gentleman while in polite society but a completely unrestrained and brutish sot in the domestic sphere. Webb presents Jr.'s gentlemanly lifestyle as dependent upon his father's blood money, conveying the violence and greed underlying white upper-class identity. *The Garies* more insistently resists racializing logics by looking to structural dynamics that drive the internal division and the intemperate condition of the ill-fated son of Mr. Garie. Webb's take on the double may have not had a pronounced influence on later addict discourse, but it demonstrates how free black writers actively shaped their own understandings of intemperance and theories of racial conflict, often pushing for an interconnected model of self, society, and disease.

### Conclusion

During COVID-19, scholars, journalists, and medical professionals spotlighted the disproportionate impacts of the pandemic on communities of color. The pandemic would itself function as a metaphor for describing the spreading effects of structural racism, which threatened the health and even the lives of black people through police violence,

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and intemperance.

<sup>112</sup> *Strange Case* deploys standard markers of race found in temperance fiction, such as "ape-like fury" (20) and hands of a "dusky pallor" (58) but draws from a newer discourse of degeneration.

disparities in health care, and rising incidences of medical disorders like addiction.<sup>113</sup> Haley Jackson Manley rejects the pandemic label, reading racism instead as a “chronic disease,” which parallels Ibram X. Kendi’s notion of “metastatic racism” and Marie Chisholm-Burns’ call-to-action against America’s “long-prevalent and virulent disease.”<sup>114</sup> Whether describing the impacts of systemic racism on Americans of color or the viral spread of white nationalism through social media, pathology has entrenched itself in anti-racist rhetoric during a period of overlapping public health crises, most notably COVID-19 and the Opioid Epidemic.

*The Garies* critiques much more overt, but no less systematic, forms of racism in antebellum America. As with the pathological constructions of today, Webb compels us to think beyond individual psychology in understanding the networked causes and effects of racism. This approach comes with difficulties. While liberalist notions of self and behavior have the value of simplicity (it is certainly much easier to hold a person accountable for being “racist” than a society, or a national history), networks can be messy, unmanageable, and ever-expanding. As Henry James indicates in his preface to *Roderick Hudson* (1907), “relations stop nowhere,” and networked thinking can sometimes lead to exhaustion or pessimism.<sup>115</sup> Nevertheless, Webb and other writers of

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<sup>113</sup> “‘We Are Living in a Racism Pandemic,’ Says APA President.” *American Psychological Association*, May 29, 2020. See also Briana Starks, “The double pandemic: COVID-19 and white supremacy,” *Qualitative Social Work* 20, no 1-2 (2020): 222-224.

<sup>114</sup> Haley Jackson Manley, “Racism: Not a pandemic. But a chronic disease,” *Baylor College of Medicine*, June 12, 2020; Jennifer Schuessler, “Ibram X. Kendi Has a Cure for America’s ‘Metastatic Racism,’” *New York Times*, August 6, 2019; Marie Chisholm-Burns, “The Disease of Racism,” *American Journal of Health-System Pharmacy* 77, no. 18 (2020): 1537–1538.

<sup>115</sup> Henry James, *Roderick Hudson* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1907).

the nineteenth century demonstrate the importance of reimagining the boundaries and agency of the self to better understand complex phenomena like addiction.

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**Vita**

