

PROFESSIONAL SENTIMENTS:
Professionalism, Affect, and American Literature,
1830-1910

by

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**A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the Department of English at Brown University**

Providence, Rhode Island

May 2010

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This dissertation by Brian Dennis Sweeney is accepted in its present form
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VITA

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

So much gratitude; so little space. Let me begin by thanking the faculty at Brown University who demanded the best from me as a writer and a scholar. My phenomenal dissertation committee—Philip Gould, Kevin McLaughlin, Stuart Burrows and Deak Nabers—challenged my thinking, offered needed encouragement, wrote letters, read drafts, and have been inspiring models of intellectual integrity and vitality. I have learned more from them than they can know. Courses with Nancy Armstrong, Jim Egan, Bill Keach, Arlene Keizer, Jon Klancher, Augusta Rohrbach and Leonard Tennenhouse helped me think through aspects of my project at an early stage. For vital financial support, thanks to the English Department of Brown University, the Graduate School of Brown University, and the Russell C. and Selina H. Wonderlic Fund. Many thanks, too, to Lorraine Mazza and Ellen Viola.

I have been gifted with inspiring and supportive teachers throughout my life as a student. Enormous thanks to Jo Alyson Parker and Lauren Shohet, generous mentors without whose guidance and example I would never have had the audacity to pursue an academic career. Thanks also to Scott Black, Sterling Delano, Hugh Ormsby-Lennon, Vincent Sherry, the late Frank Olley, Mary Schmeltzer, Maria Marsilio, Jim Roche, Claire Brown, Joseph D'Angelo, Ed McCabe, Michael O'Toole, the late Marianne Nolan, and others who instilled in me the love of learning and the thrill of intellectual discovery.

Graduate school is a rigorous test of endurance, but fortunately one does not have to take it alone. I want to thank my friends and colleagues at Brown who offered moral support and intellectual sustenance. I especially wish to thank John Funchion, Keri Holt, Jeannette Lee, Siân Silyn Roberts and Sarah Wald, who generously read and commented on portions of this dissertation, as well as offered encouragement and job-search therapy. They,

as well as David Babcock, Daniel Block, Tad Davies, Jonna Iacono, John Melson, Laurel Rayburn and Rebecca Summerhays sustain me with their brilliant conversation, kindness and friendship. My debts to colleagues beyond Brown are too numerous to list here, but special thanks are due to Kate Cavanaugh, Eurie Dahn, David Morrow and Christina McMahon. Thanks also to my students, whose fresh perspectives perform the essential office of unsettling my ideas and continually renewing my enthusiasm for my research.

Members of my family uphold me in so many ways. My grandmother, Mary Agnes McCarry DeLuca, shaped my life through her support of my education, her love, and her irrepressible spirit and vitality. My mother Lauren Kelly has been a source of love, insight and healing laughter. Over the years, Dennis Sweeney and Larry Kelly moved me in and out of more dormitories than I can now enumerate. Roger and Denise Montalto-Rook have been kind, generous and unfailingly supportive parents-in-law. Charles McCarry and Theresa Exner have been models of generosity, creativity and intellectual curiosity. My brother and sisters—Bridget Sweeney, Sean Sweeney and Tara Sweeney—continue to inspire me. My lovely niece, Maria Craiter, lived with me during the writing of part of this dissertation, and crucially appealed to me—with the words “Stop serving your master!”—to set aside my work for sixty-second dance parties and snowman-building.

To Lea Montalto-Rook, my partner in discovery and in all things, nourisher of my better self, I dedicate my work. Your brilliance as an editor, your sparkling conversation, your love and friendship, your patience and laughter, and your unflagging belief in me made this dissertation possible. I dedicate this dissertation to you and to our newborn daughter, Amelia. The vivid transference that you bring is peace.

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PROFES'SION, n. [L. professio.]

1. Open declaration; public avowal or acknowledgment of one's sentiments...
2. The business which one professes to understand and to follow for subsistence; calling; vocation; employment; as the learned professions...
3. The collective body of persons engaged in a calling. We speak of practices honorable or disgraceful to a profession.

--Noah Webster, *American Dictionary of the English Language* (1828)

Introduction

Feeling Professional

You find people using these terms like “enhanced interrogation techniques.” In one speech [President George W.] Bush used the word “professional” 26 times—the idea being not only that these people knew what they were doing but also that they weren’t taking any pleasure in it.

—Geoffrey Nunberg, Interview in *Mother Jones*, June 5, 2009 (Butler)

Poor Pluto

The contrast that linguist Geoffrey Nunberg invokes between professionalism and “pleasure” symptomatizes a tendency to oppose professionalism to the contingencies and vagaries of private feeling and personal interest. This tendency was on full display in U.S. media coverage of the Pluto affair in 2006, which framed the banishment of Pluto from the category of “planet” as a clash between warring cultures of professionalism and sentimental feeling. The International Astronomical Union (IAU), meeting in Prague in August 2006, resolved to redefine *planet* as a nearly spherical object orbiting the sun which had “cleared the neighborhood around its orbit,” a redefinition that effectively stripped tiny, ice-bound Pluto of its status as the ninth planet in our solar system. Reduced to ignominious “dwarf planet” status, Pluto became the object of numerous affectionate tributes in the U.S. media. In such accounts, Pluto became “Poor Pluto, subzero, subnormal...and so far away from the

warmth and the shine,” as it had been described in Martin Amis’ *Time’s Arrow* (9). A *New York Times* column entitled “I ♥ Pluto,” for example, described its author’s “love for [the] picked-on ninth planet,” a love that was “deeply, perhaps embarrassingly personal” (Kreider). U.S. media thus opposed the sentimental populace—with its fondness for the tiny, underdog planet, its name, bestowed upon it at the urging of an eleven-year-old girl in 1930, conjuring in 2006 not the god of the Roman underworld but a lovable Disney canine—to the IAU, which it predictably cast as an insular coterie of unsentimental experts, beating back waves of popular sentiment with dour affirmations of professional autonomy. One article quoted an astronomer who voiced concern that “a continuing preoccupation with what the public and schoolchildren would think...was...a troubling precedent. ‘I don’t know any other science that says about its frontier, ‘I wonder what the public thinks,’” he said. “The frontier should move in whatever way it needs to move” (Overbye). Conceding little ground to public sentiment, the IAU explained in a press release that Pluto merited special recognition only as an “important proto-type of a new class of trans-Neptunian objects” and reiterated its professional autonomy from public sentiment by adding that the “IAU will set up a process to name these objects” (International Astronomical Union).

In casting the IAU as rigidly prioritizing academic rigor while remaining resolutely unmoved by public opinion, media accounts of the Pluto affair obliquely served the IAU’s professional interests. What might have been a story about the instability and contested nature of scientific paradigms was narrated, instead, as a reaffirmation of scientific authority against the vagaries of unenlightened popular opinion. This way of narrating the controversy buttressed IAU’s declared mission “to promote and safeguard the science of astronomy” by unquestioningly affirming the IAU’s role in preserving the autonomy of the discipline from outside interference (International Astronomical Union). Professional

associations have long justified their claims to special privilege precisely by representing popular prejudice as threatening the integrity of certain socially vital occupations. Since their emergence and consolidation in the nineteenth century, professional organizations have sought to expand their authority—through practices of licensing and certification—to enforce uniform standards and control their membership, thereby “safeguarding” professional practices and standards against popular beliefs and an irrational marketplace’s qualitative race to the bottom. The stated goal of professionalization was to confer on certain kinds of labor—initially medicine, law and the ministry—a measure of autonomy from the market logic of supply-and-demand and from other “external” pressures—to establish what Paul Starr has called (in the subtitle to his study of the professionalization of American medicine) professional sovereignty. The professions, it was argued, served such a vital and remedial function in society that their integrity and self-determination must be protected from external pressures and controls, whether of entrenched power, popular “lay” opinion or market forces. In an address to medical students at Western Reserve College in 1849, at a time in which the professionalization of medicine was in its infancy, Henry Day speaks of the “deep interest” and “peculiar relations” which society at large has to “professional life” and of the “distinctive claims” that professional labor, and no other kind of work, has on society (3). Such autonomy is spoken of in the language of political sovereignty: “Relatively to members of the several professions,” every other person, “be he King or Lord or Bishop, is a layman” (4). Day anticipates that the professions, by policing their membership and controlling their numbers, would invite charges of anti-competitive practices; but, he insists, the professions must “subsist by an organic law” of their own (16), and it is in the general interest for the state to defend professional self-determination against “the popular outcry against...exclusive privileges” and “monopoly” (17, 18). As Eliot Freidson remarks, “Given

laissez-faire philosophy, only quite special excuses could justify the state-sanctioned creation of a market shelter,” and thus appeals to “disinterested dedication and learning provided political legitimization for the effort to gain protection from competition in the labor market (33). Only by conferring on professional associations the exclusive privilege to set standards and license practitioners, it was argued, could the public be safeguarded against pandering, quackery and incompetence in vocations of vital importance to the social welfare.

As Day’s defensive posture suggests, the concept of professionalism and the status of the professional were marked by social ambivalence in the nineteenth century. Indeed, the very words *profession* and *professional* exhibit semantic indeterminacy expressive of this ambivalence.¹ According to the *OED*, the word *profession* dates back to about the fifteenth century. In early modern usage, *profession* often distinguished certain kinds of work—in law, in (non-surgical) medicine, in the Church, and sometimes in the military—on the basis of their perceived importance and prestige. Yet at the same time the term could also be used to refer to “the whole range of occupations by which people were identified and made their living...Thus...the word...could be used to mean either a very exclusive set of occupations or the exact opposite—any occupation at all” (Freidson 22). This ambivalence extends to the term *professional*, which begins to flourish in the late 1700s. In a positive sense, *professional* could denominate the skilled and accomplished practitioner, as opposed to the *amateur* or dilettante who dabbles in a practice and lacks the commitment to develop his skills beyond a basic level of ability. Yet at the same time, in opposition to the amateur who engages in an activity for the love (*amat-*) of it, *professional* might signify one who has degraded some noble pursuit to the status of a mere career, undertaken without proper feeling. The word *professional* could thus celebrate the complete devotion of one’s life to a

¹ My discussion of the etymology of “profession” draws on Freidson (21ff).

particular calling, or denigrate the “person who makes a trade or profession of something usually associated with higher motives: cf. *professional politician*” (OED).

In a great deal of scholarship before the 1970s, this ambivalence surrounding the professional was downplayed in favor of a triumphalist view of the emergence and consolidation of professionalism. The title of John Duffy’s study *From Humors to Medical Science* exemplifies the tendency to depict professionalization as the triumph of systematic rationality and meritocratic structures over the anarchy of unregulated practices in a lawless market incapable of distinguishing the mere appearance of competence from true skill. In the field of literary studies, the discussion of professionalism centered on the professionalization of authorship; scholars like William Charvat concerned themselves with how the establishment of economic protections—such as international copyright—laid the foundation for writing as a career. For Charvat, professionalization, often working hand-in-hand with literary nationalism, increased opportunities for American writers, effecting a transition from an era dominated by independently wealthy “gentleman” writers and hand-to-mouth indigent artists, to one in which writing could be a remunerative full-time career embraced by serious and committed literary artists.² A scholarly consensus emerged that characterized the professionalization of writing, medicine, law and so forth as rationalizing and meritocratizing whole fields of skilled labor, thereby improving the quality of work within those fields. Professionalization, by placing checks on the power of the market, would produce individuals whose careers would be less defined by haphazard commercial concerns and more oriented toward professional excellence and the public good.

² See Charvat (1968). Christopher P. Wilson’s *The Labor of Words* (1985) likewise takes up the professionalization of literature, but concludes that the field of writing was less fully professionalized than other kinds of intellectual labor in the nineteenth century: “of all the professional choices available...a career in professional writing was perhaps the riskiest and the most ill-defined. [It]...received no real public accreditation, had few support networks, and offered real security only to a few. Like today, even the unpublished could still call themselves writers” (15).

Over the past twenty-five years, however, studies of professionalism have been dedicated to unmasking what this triumphalist historiography conceals. Drawing on Foucauldian, Marxist and feminist critical traditions, critics like Lawrence Rothfield and Dana Nelson have interpreted professionalism in a more sinister light, as the basis for newly configured structures of domination and oppression.³ Noting with suspicion that the professional—as neither an owner of capital nor a worker in a Marxian sense—conveniently eludes the conventional categories of classical economics, these critics accuse the professional of aspiring to an illusory autonomy from economic struggle that masks their complicity with—if not centrality to—existing structures of power. The professional’s assertion of his positivistic commitment to disinterested objectivity in the pursuit of “truth” masked, according to such critics, his indirect pursuit of economic privilege and social prestige as well as his political quietism fostered by his parasitic dependence upon the ruling class. In the fields of American literary and cultural studies, perhaps no recent account of professionalism has been more influential than Dana Nelson’s *National Manhood*. Nelson’s study, written at a moment when the public was embracing the tentative revival of racial pseudoscience in Richard J. Herrnstein and Charles Murray’s *The Bell Curve*, looks back at the nineteenth century to implicate professionalization itself in the establishment of invidious social hierarchies. Dismissing the claim that professionalism democratized and expanded

³ Exemplary studies include Poovey; Rothfield; and Nelson, *National Manhood*. A detailed critique of this critical approach can be found in Chapter Three. Growing suspicion of the professional among literary critics developed in parallel with increasingly sophisticated analyses of professionalism by historians and sociologists beginning in the 1970s; see *inter alia* Eliot Freidson, *Profession of Medicine* (1970), Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism* (1979) and Barbara Ehrenreich and John Ehrenreich, “The Professional-Managerial Class” (1977). The Ehrenreichs influentially argued that Marxist theory must evolve to take account of the professional or “professional-managerial” class or PMC, “consisting of salaried mental workers who do not own the means of production and whose major function in the social division of labor may be described broadly as the reproduction of capitalist culture and capitalist class relations” (12); they argued that radicals within the PMC would draw on their modicum of professional autonomy to form the vanguard of the New Left. By contrast, Lasch argues that professional culture nourishes not autonomy and individual merit but mediocrity and conformism, remarking “how easily ‘intellectual merit’ can be confused with the mere acquisition of professional credentials or, worse, with loyalty to an unspoken ideological consensus” (386n.).

vocational opportunities, Nelson argues that the rise of sciences such as racial anthropology and gynecology worked hand-in-hand with male homosocial professional institutions to foster a national white male consciousness that invited light-skinned males to “overlook[] their own differences as they trained their focus on *other* ‘bodies’” (11). The putative disinterestedness of such intellectual pursuits masked the way professional ideology served to further the interests of white males.

Nelson’s major contribution to how we understand the way the category of whiteness “virtualizes” democratic equality lamentably rests, however, on what I believe to be a reductively Manichean equation of professional culture with the narrow interests of a dominant white male elite—a view challenged and complicated by the literary texts that I analyze in the chapters that follow. As Barbara and John Ehrenreich note in their discussion of the professional-managerial class that emerged in the Progressive Era, these professionals sought “to *mediate* the basic class conflict of capitalist society” and although such a goal was obviously useful to a capitalist order threatened by working-class unrest, they were “not merely a class of lackeys” and their goals often pitted them against the ruling elite (19, 22). In exploring an archive of literary depictions of professional labor by a diverse array of authors, I have found it impossible to collapse professionalism and either white supremacy or monopoly capitalism in the way that Nelson and others have done. Declining to confer on professionalism the heroic character attributed to it by triumphalist narratives, my dissertation also declines to regard professionalism as the mustache-twirling villain of Foucauldian melodrama. In this respect, it answers the call of scholars like Victorianist Jennifer Ruth to move our understanding of the relationship between professionalism and literature in the nineteenth century beyond a knee-jerk “hermeneutics of suspicion” (16). Ruth’s absorbing study of professionalism in Victorian fiction, *Novel Professions*, moves the

critical conversation beyond reductive, dogmatic and reflexive condemnations of professional bad faith, a move in part animated by Ruth's belief that the doctrinaire critique of professionalism has left literary scholars at a loss to rhetorically or philosophically oppose the deprofessionalization and corporatization of the academy: "Victorian studies uncannily...reproduces the tendency of today's economy to evacuate professional identity [by converting] professionals into knowledge workers" (27).

While I share Ruth's concern about how certain prevailing modes of critique seem too readily to accommodate the widespread deprofessionalization of skilled labor that arguably exacerbates economic polarization in the U.S., my dissertation calls into question an assumption Ruth shares with those critics she challenges. In agreement with previous critical assessments depicting professionalism as grounded in positivistic claims to rationality and objectivity, Ruth argues that nineteenth-century fiction characterizes professionalism in terms of freedom from "emotional obligation" and "affective influence" (49). My readings of an archive of American texts have led me to a different conclusion, one which would allow literary scholars to rethink the way we understand both the rise of professional culture and its relation to the decline of sentimentalism. I argue that the decline of sentimental culture, art and ideology during the second half of the nineteenth century left middle-class American culture in need of a new structure of feeling to mediate conflicts between economic self-interest and the social good under liberalism, and that professionalism took up that task by predicating moral judgment and social agency *not* on fellow-feeling between individuals *but* on the affective tie between the individual and her work. Eschewing narrow economic self-interest while also rejecting sentimental fellow-feeling as too fragile a basis for ethical conduct, the professional subject is imagined in nineteenth-century texts as modeling an alternative conception of the human subject to both the sentimental subject and the *homo*

economicus of classical liberalism. Like the sentimental subject, the professional is depicted as capable of certain kinds of ennobling feeling, but that feeling is grounded not in the space of the heteronormative bourgeois household but rather in the love of—what Sarah Orne Jewett describes as “sympathy with”—one’s work. In other words, nineteenth-century fiction imagined the professional as defined less by what she knows than by how she *feels* about what she knows. In this respect, professionalism can be seen as the proper heir to sentimentalism, “making good” on its unfulfilled promise while making the profession, rather than the family and the nation, the privileged context for the formation of bourgeois subjectivity.

My dissertation bridges the gulf that conventional periodization inserts between antebellum and postbellum literature to uncover connections obscured by that convention. It challenges the still dominant view that sentimental literature simply disappears after the Civil War, or lives on as children’s literature. By excavating professionalism’s roots in antebellum fiction, I show how professionalist texts revise the terms of sentimentalism for an era of anti-sentimental reaction, and therefore explore professionalism’s roots in sentimental conceptions of human psychology and emotion. Rather than depict professionalism as a hegemonic ideology of impersonal social control that sought to subjugate the private, the affective and the contingent to (white, male) forces of “rationality,” the writers I am concerned with represent professionalism as a structure of feeling—one that (much like sentimentalism) promises to insulate individuals, communities and professions from the corrosive forces of an impersonal marketplace, while at the same time promoting greater social equality and mobility across lines of race, class, gender and region. These writers thus allow us to see what our current scholarly assessments of professionalism obscure, namely the link or bridge between *profession* as denoting a kind of work and *profession*

as denoting an act of “laying open claim to a particular...feeling” (OED, “Profession”) or sentiment. In arguing that nineteenth-century novelists saw professionalism as a “structure of feeling,” I deploy a term coined by Raymond Williams. For Williams, “structures of feelings” are social practices that resist reduction to “fixed forms” (129), and thus embody what cannot be contained by comparatively stable ideological superstructures. While in the work of some cultural critics, structures of feeling are more or less identified with counterhegemonic practices or resistance, that is a claim I hardly wish to make for professionalism in the nineteenth-century U.S.⁴ Moreover, as Tim Cresswell points out, Williams himself does not suggest that structures of feeling are characterized by resistance to fixed, dominant ideological formations: “The term ‘structure of feeling’ simultaneously brings the fixity of structure and the flow of feeling into account. In this formulation structure is not fixed and eternal but part of a process. Feeling is not just ‘personal’ but moulded (not determined!) by the social. Structure and feeling do not inhabit two ends of a spectrum but are interconnected and productive of each other” (270). In short, a structure of feeling is neither wholly complicit with a fixed ideological superstructure—it is not “false consciousness”, but neither does it constitute a radical negation or subversion of dominant ideologies.

The changing critical attitude toward nineteenth-century sentimentalism is an instructive parallel. When sentimental texts first became an object of academic critical attention in the 1970s and 1980s, they were embraced by scholars committed to opening the literary canon to voices and topics who had been unjustly excluded from it on specious aesthetic grounds. While Ann Douglas (in *The Feminization of American Culture*) began the

⁴ See for example Paul Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic*, in which the structures of feeling produced and articulated through black Atlantic cultures constitute as a (proto-)modernist critique of hegemonic Western Enlightenment ideology.

conversation by castigating sentimental fiction as the decline of American culture into bathos and commercialism, most other critics sought to reclaim sentimental literature and culture by arguing that sentimentalism performed the vital democratic role of representing as fully human those (e.g. slaves) from whom full humanity had been withheld by official discourses of power.⁵ For these critics, sentimentalism represented the triumph of a structure of feeling over the hegemonic structure of law. By about 1990, sentimentalism's subversive power was being challenged, as critics began to explore how sentimental literary texts cooperated with hegemonic racist and imperialist values; suddenly it became possible to think of a sentimental hegemony.⁶ Only over the last decade have studies of sentimentalism moved firmly beyond this dominance/subversion model. Thanks to work that has excavated sentimentalism's origins in Scottish Enlightenment philosophy, has it begun to be possible to think of sentimental culture and discourse in more neutral terms, as a contested and flexible structure of feeling capable of being mobilized to diverse and even contradictory ends.⁷

My study of professionalism in the chapters that follow likewise seeks to avoid the dominance-subversion trap that still flourishes in American literary studies. While claiming a genre, literary mode, or cultural phenomenon as dominant or subversive might be an arresting critical move, it has a regrettable tendency to ignore nuance or flatten out complexities. My study looks at nineteenth-century professionalism as constituting neither a wholly emancipatory form of resistance nor bad faith ideological support for the status quo. Within American fiction of the late nineteenth century, professionalism is best understood as a structure of feeling invoked to articulate and negotiate some of the central conceptual

⁵ See Tompkins; Fisher.

⁶ See Hartman; Wexler.

⁷ A more detailed overview of the critical literature concerning sentimental literature can be found in Chapter One.

problems or dissonances of the nineteenth-century U.S.: between liberal individualism and civic virtue, between nationalization and regional character, between market value and other forms of value, between formal civic equality and the realities of social inequality, and so forth. Thus it should be understood that when I do resort to the term “ideology” to describe professionalism, I intend the term in the relatively neutral sense of “a system of beliefs characteristic of a particular class or group,” rather than in the more value-laden sense of false consciousness foisted on the dominated by cultural institutions controlled by their oppressors (Williams 55). Whether I refer to professionalism as an “ideology” or as a “structure of feeling”—terms that in certain formulations would seem to be roughly antonymic—I do so with the intention of presenting professionalism as neither deviously hegemonic nor heroically counterhegemonic. The chapters that follow explore how American writers explored, or even promoted, professionalism as a structure of feeling whose task was to manage the vicissitudes of—not justify or overthrow—the social and economic order in which it has emerged.

Chapter One, “Ever Your Servant: Sentimentalism, the Servant Problem and *Our Nig*” explores antebellum American fiction’s failure to imagine harmonious social relations consistent with social mobility across lines of class, a failure that paves the way for professionalism’s later efforts to attempt to negotiate these values. Drawing on Gillian Brown’s and Lori Merish’s conceptualization of sentimental possession, I argue that in American domestic fiction and domestic manuals of the 1830s through the 1850s, harmonious relations across class and color lines are characterized less by sentimentally-generated equality than by decidedly asymmetrical relations of proprietary benevolence. Writings on the servant problem by the likes of Fanny Trollope and Harriet Beecher Stowe idealize the loyal servant as the sentimental possession of her benevolent employer and

promote a sentimental logic of proprietary benevolence to manage the servant's desire for economic self-determination. Turning to *Our Nig*, I argue that while critics of Wilson's novel see Frado as victimized by the women in the Bellmont household, and emotionally supported by its men, the opposite is indeed the case: it is the psychological and physical violence visited upon Frado by the Bellmont women that has the surprising effect of inoculating her against the more subtle efforts of the sentimental Bellmont men to make her, lastingly, "theirs." Thus *Our Nig* constitutes a powerful working-class critique of bourgeois sentimental strategies for the management of workers.

Chapter Two, "The Butler Didn't: Servants and Professionals in the Gilded Age Detective Novel" reads Anna Katharine Green's *The Leavenworth Case: A Lanyer's Story* (1878) in order to argue that American detective fiction originated in a project of evolving an ideology of professionalism in response to the breakdown of sentimental culture and ideology that the "servant problem" indexed. First I argue that Poe's trope of the clue revises the sentimental trope of the keepsake: an object becomes a clue when the competing individual or social interests that the keepsake is supposed to integrate return to disrupt both the keepsake form and the collectivity it authorizes. I then pursue these insights through a reading of Green's novel, in which the murder of a wealthy merchant by one of his household employees marks the failure of sentimental conceptions of class relations, one which turns the objects within his household into clues. *The Leavenworth Case: A Lanyer's Story* proposes a new kind of subject—the professional—whose ability to read clues is related to his ability to develop a non-acquisitive relation to the object-world, and thus to suspend self-interest and defer gratification—virtues for which he is paradoxically rewarded with a measure of upward mobility and social distinction denied the novel's other socially-ambitious characters.

Chapter Three, “Sarah Orne Jewett and the AMA: Sarah Orne Jewett and the AMA: Professionalism, Regionalism and *A Country Doctor*” reads the relationship between regionalism and professionalism in two regionalist texts: Jewett’s *A Country Doctor* (1884) and Alice Cary’s “The Great Doctor” (1866). Regionalism is conventionally thought to oppose “feminine” virtues of tradition and domesticity to the “masculine” forces of rationalization, industrialization and standardization that the professionalization of medicine might be thought to represent. Yet these two texts, I argue, greet the professionalization of medicine as an *affective* medium through which the conflict between local and translocal forms of authority, meaning and value might be negotiated, while raising standards of care for the rural poor and increasing vocational opportunities for talented women. *A Country Doctor* in particular depicts professional feeling as a love for one’s work that leads one to practice where one is needed, rather than where the money is. I conclude the chapter by observing that faith in the progressive possibilities of professionalism for women and rural poor was betrayed when the AMA decertified many women’s medical colleges in the name of reform in the first decade of the twentieth century. This reduced the number of female physicians, led to the concentration of doctors in wealthy cities, and inspired widespread lamentations over the “vanishing country doctor.”

My final chapter, “Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Jim Crow: Professionalism, Whiteness and *The Marrow of Tradition*,” reads Charles Chesnutt’s classic 1901 depiction of a racially motivated *coup d’etat* in turn-of-the-century North Carolina as exploring the possibilities and limitations of professionalism’s meritocratic promise for African American uplift. The novel invokes both the “servant problem” and debates over African American uplift in tentatively promoting professionalism (embodied in the black physician Dr. William Miller) as a model of black subjectivity against both the posture of loyal servitude cultivated on Southern

plantations and the militarism of the novel's radical workers. While the loyal servant is depicted as tragically sacrificing himself for love of those who exploit him, and the radical worker sees labor as instrumental to economic rewards, the professional, in Chesnutt's novel, embodies the promise of unalienated labor performed for the love of one's work. While some critics have seen in the novel a neoliberal embrace of laissez-faire economics, the novel clearly pathologizes the free market and celebrates the protections extended by professional culture and institutions that foster and support professional identity. Thus *Marrow* reworks the protectionism of antebellum paternalism as the institutional economic protections achieved through professionalization. Yet the novel also registers misgivings about professionalism's utopian social possibilities. Invoking at a key moment Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), Chesnutt associates racial violence and anarchy with the layman and dissociates them from the degreed professional, only to hint at a disturbing continuity between them. Thus, while Chesnutt promotes an optimistic view of professionalism as capable of grounding social relations even in the aftermath of racial apocalypse, his optimism is tentative. Chesnutt's tentativeness can be seen as prophetic of the betrayal of black medical professionals by the epochal Flexner Report, whose reforms resulted in a dramatic decrease in the number of black physicians in the United States, thus signaling the end of professionalism's period of progressive promise.

1

Ever Your Servant:
Sentimentalism, the Servant Problem and *Our Nig*

...a man must keep an eye on his servants, if he would not have them rule him.

--Ralph Waldo Emerson, *English Traits*

But love was loving servants
or bosses.

--John Ashbery, "Meaningful Love"

The sufferings of Frado Smith--the biracial child whose dreadful experiences as a free servant in New Hampshire are related in Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig; or, Sketches from the Life of a Free Black* (1859)--begin with immigrant workers. Frado's mother Mag, a white woman reduced to "drudgery" by social disapproval of her relationships with black men, is compelled from necessity to compete for work with "foreigners who cheapened toil and clamored for a livelihood" (6). Unable to provide for her family due to a flooded labor pool,

Mag abandons one of her daughters, Frado, at the home of the Bellmont family, one day after the departure of Bridget, the latest in a long line of constantly changing servants in the Bellmont home. While the Bellmonts were unable to hang on to servants like Bridget, the capable and hard-working Frado has the potential to become a well-nigh inalienable part of the household. “I have so much trouble with girls I hire,” says Mrs. Bellmont, “I am almost persuaded if I have one to train up in my way from a child, I shall be able to keep [her] awhile. I am tired of changing every few months” (16).

That Frado’s sufferings in *Our Nig* are linked to middle-class American beliefs about the inconstancy of foreign-born servants—and therefore to cultural concerns about immigration, labor and domesticity in the antebellum U.S.—is something in which critics of the novel have shown surprisingly little interest. This lack of interest may be attributable to the critical conversation that framed *Our Nig*’s entry into the literary canon. When it was rediscovered by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and Viking Press in the 1980s, Harriet Wilson’s novel found itself the latest front in the culture wars. For those working to expand the boundaries of the American literary canon, the novel served as fresh proof of a rich tradition of nineteenth-century African American writing, a tradition that had been silenced by conventional literary history; for cultural conservatives, the novel’s self-described “crude narrations” offered *prima facie* evidence that forgotten writers like Harriet Wilson merited their long obscurity (Wilson 3). Because *Our Nig* was ushered into critical view in the midst of this struggle to define an African American literary tradition, it is perhaps unsurprising in retrospect that considerations of race (and to a lesser extent, gender) have dominated critical assessments of the novel’s engagements with questions of labor and class. Indeed, noting that the novel undeniably “echoes...the slave narrative” (Steele 105), much criticism has been content to read Wilson’s novel as a slave narrative in drag, a novel which performs the

slave narrative's task of inventing a voice for the black subject. For instance, Henry Louis Gates argues that the novel's importance lies in its innovative, if not entirely successful, efforts to adapt the conventions of slave autobiography to the demands of fictional narrative, thus providing a "missing link" between the rich history of black autobiography and the "slow development of a black voice in fiction" (lii).

By reading this novel about servitude as though it were a slave narrative, critics have admittedly been following Wilson's own hint. Wilson's subtitle announces that her novel will show "that slavery's shadows fall even" in the North (1). But slavery's *shadows* are not slavery, and the critical tendency to find a slave narrative in Wilson's novel distorts or oversimplifies the novel's insights into discourses of class in the antebellum North. By emphasizing the novel's affinity with the slave narrative, criticism has emphasized the crude forms of domination practiced by Mrs. Bellmont and paid insufficient attention to what most seems to fascinate Wilson: namely, the more understated and insidious forms of control exercised by those characters in the novel who do not share, and indeed abhor, Mrs. Bellmont's "southern principles" (3). As Harriet Wilson's subtle and cautious preface suggests, the novel's target is less the practice of slavery than the ideologies of anti-slavery. Wilson's novel takes on the risky task of exploring how the views of avowedly anti-slavery Northerners are complicit with deeper structures of racial and class inequality.

Rather, therefore, than follow in the footsteps of critics who have explored how Frado's racial affinity with southern slaves makes her thinkable as a possession—and thus read *Our Nig* as critiquing the way in which American racial attitudes "relegated black people, free or slave, to white ownership" (Tate 113-14)—I'd like to trace a different path through the text. I'd like to consider how Frado's status as a *servant* involves her in sentimental

discourses of domestic labor that idealize the servant—white or black—as his or her employer’s inalienable property. I argue that *Our Nig* is framed by and explicitly engages bourgeois discourses concerning domestic management, discourses which always involved larger questions concerning relations between the bourgeoisie and the working classes. Reading the novel within this frame clarifies the relationship of *Our Nig* to the sentimental conventions and discourses it evokes. For *Our Nig* strategically strikes at the most vulnerable spot in sentimental edifice: if slavery was sentimentalism’s perfect, fated subject, then free labor was its most crippling problem. By dramatizing the experiences of a native-born, mixed-race child who becomes an almost permanent replacement for a series of inconstant “Bridgets,” *Our Nig* anatomizes the conflict between republican ideals and the desire for a relatively permanent servant class, between egalitarianism and the desire for caste, among the American bourgeoisie. Wilson’s novel anatomizes what it sees as the contradictions of a culture of liberal reform in the North that, in attacking the evils of slavery, supports existing class structures. As such, the novel was in some ways an unlikely candidate for resurrection by those party to the culture wars of the 1980s, because the novel offers a challenge to the politics of identity blind to, or providing a convenient distraction from, an engagement with questions of economic injustice.

Domestic Revolutions

By giving the name “Bridget” to Frado’s predecessor in the Bellmont household, Harriet Wilson inserts her novel into a national discussion concerning domestic service, one to which demeaning representations of the Irish servant—or “Bridget,” as she was usually typified—were central. Beginning around the late 1820s, American writers began to note—

with a mixture of nationalistic pride and bourgeois regret—the absence of a permanent servant class in the United States. “Rich as we are in money,” declared *Harper’s* in 1864, “and profuse in spending it in order to heighten the enjoyment of life, the good servant—the essential of comfort and luxury—seems beyond our reach” (Tomes 53). An abundance of writing took up the “servant problem,” a perceived decline in the quantity, quality and dependability of domestic workers in the free Northern states. Essays and fiction abounded with depictions of the sufferings of bourgeois Americans at the hands of the foreign-born maids, cooks and nurses on whom they had to rely. An 1864 *Harper’s* article describes the “Irish female peasant” as “the necessity and the plague of our homes. As we can not dispense with her strong arms, we have to endure her ignorance, her uncouth manners, her varying caprices, and her rude tongue.” It continues:

Housekeepers complain bitterly of Bridget’s ignorance and awkwardness, and will tell you, with tears in her eyes, how she cut off the tender and eatable parts of the asparagus and served up the tough stalks; how she washed her feet in the soup-tureen; how, in her zeal for a shine, she rubbed off the coat of bronze from the tea-urn; how she scrubbed the family portraits with soap and water, and wore off a nose and knocked out an eye; how she left open the front-door and let in the prowling thief, who made a clean sweep of the hats and coats in the hall; how she choked baby, who hasn’t cut a tooth, with a chicken bone; how she cut wood with the best ivory-handled carver, and stirred the fire with the silver gravy spoon; and how, in fine, “these Irish servants are the plague of our lives.”...The ignorance of Bridget is, no doubt, tormenting to the careful housekeeper; but what else can we expect? Where has she had an opportunity to learn?...Born and bred in a mud-hovel, in the companionship of boorish peasants like herself...and the family pig, she can know

nothing of the simplest elements of civilized life. Her knowledge of cookery is confined to the mixing of buttermilk and potatoes for the daily meal of the whole domestic circle, including the hog. (Tomes 53-54)

This *Harper's* article offers insight into midnineteenth-century anti-immigrant sentiment. The image of the immigrant servant effacing a family portrait suggests anxieties that immigrants would change the cultural and ethnic makeup of the American populace; the metaphor of the plague associates the immigrant with the spread of infectious disease; and the anecdote about the servant who let in the prowler associates the immigrant not only with criminal activity but with the introduction of class strife into the hallowed space of the bourgeois home.

How did middle-class Americans, despite their phobia of foreign-born laborers, come to invite them into their homes to work as nurses, maids and cooks? The dependence on non-native domestic workers was blamed on the refusal of native-born Americans to go into domestic service. American workers, it was believed, inspired by republican ideals, looked upon domestic service as degrading work, and were always on the lookout for new work offering better pay or at least improved social standing. As one contemporary observer put it, "In America...too often men and women look upon service as degrading to them, and will prefer any hardship or privation to engaging in it as a business" (Ellet 26). As a consequence, loyal servants were rarely competent and competent servants were rarely loyal: "Those who [work as servants] for a time are usually tormented with jealous fears that their dignity will be infringed on, or are found neither qualified nor trustworthy" (26). This was a tendency anatomized in 1828 by Fanny Trollope, whose ethnographic *Domestic Manners of the Americans* was the oft-cited *locus classicus* for nineteenth-century discussions of the

servant problem. “The greatest difficulty in organising a family establishment...is getting servants,” she writes; “or, as it is there called, ‘getting help,’ for it is more than petty treason to the Republic, to call a free citizen a *servant*.” Working women in particular, “taught to believe that the most abject poverty is preferable to domestic service,” prefer to “work in paper-mills, or in any other manufactory, for less than half the wages they receive in service” for “they think their equality is compromised by the latter” (45). Those who do go into domestic service, says Trollope, exhibit “sore, angry, ever wakeful pride”: “One...pretty girl,” she writes, “whose natural disposition must have been gentle and kind,” had her “good feelings...soured, and her gentleness turned to morbid sensitiveness, by having heard a thousand and a thousand times that she was as good as any other lady, that all men were equal, and women too, and that it was a sin and a shame for a free-born American to be treated like a servant” (46).

Trollope’s dismissive view of the arrival of American democracy permits her to look with a mixture of Olympian detachment and wry bemusement at the American servant problem. But for writers deeply invested in republican and democratic principles, such as Harriet Beecher Stowe, the servant problem troubled the foundations of their belief system. The American servant’s elevation of economic self-interest over loyalty to his employer was at once admirably consistent with the young republic’s image of itself as a land of individual liberty and a threat to the American home. Writing in the *Atlantic* as “Christopher Crowfield,” Stowe describes the servant problem as “the great problem of life...in America” (437). In a society in which “all are to be as free to rise and fall as the waves of the sea,” domestic workers, have come to view their occupation as at best a “stepping-stone” to more attractive and socially respectable employment (438, 439). Whereas, in colonial British America, domestic service had been regarded as a noble calling, the decisive triumph of

liberal capitalism over an earlier agrarian republicanism during the Jackson era had resulted in an America where domestic service was shunned as akin to “slavery” and “retain[ing] about it something of the influences from feudal times”: “No wages could induce a son and daughter of New England to take the condition of a servant on terms which they thought applicable to that of a slave. The slightest hint of a separate table was resented as an insult; not to enter the front-door, and not to sit in the front-parlor on state-occasions, was bitterly commented upon as a personal indignity ” (438). For these reasons, “the girls of New England, with one consent” have chosen the “mechanical toils of the factory” over the “more healthy, more cheerful, more interesting” labor of domestic service (438-39).⁸

It was to this problem that “Bridget” served as an imperfect solution. According to *Harper’s*, “Three-quarters of the globe have become tributary to the lucky fourth we inhabit,” and have “poured their overflowing populations into the heaving ocean of American labor” (Tomes 53). But these servants, according to these same writers, were far inferior to their native-born predecessors. These “Irish and German emigrants,” writes E. F. Ellet, “as a rule are utterly ignorant of household service, and have to be taught everything; often receiving wages for months before they begin to make themselves useful” (26). But worse than their incompetence was their purported insolence and inconstancy. Because antebellum nativists frequently charged the Irish with an un-American “deep respect for class distinctions,” possibly it was expected that Irish servants would prove more docile and manageable than their native-born counterparts (Foner, *Free* 231). Yet to the contrary, Irish servants proved

⁸ Not all antebellum depictions of household unrest blamed the problem of servant retention on the greed avarice of servants, but condemnations of the masters are more often to be found in comic literature than in domestic advice manuals. In Robert Montgomery Bird’s *Sheppard Lee* (1836), one of the body-swapping hero’s borrowed identities is that of the rich Philadelphia brewer John H. Higginson, whose wife is so verbally abusive of her domestic staff that “I never knew a servant, male or female, old or young, black or white, to remain in the house two weeks at a time, except a poor little negress that had been bound to me...under indentures; and she, after running away a dozen times, began to mope, and pine, and look so sorrowful, that, out of pity, I sent her home to her mother” (85).

(or were depicted as) socially ambitious and disloyal. Often, “the servant you have taken such pains to teach” will depart abruptly after “an outbreak of insolence” (Ellet 27).

Indeed, despite the colorful charges of Irish ineptitude and grossness of manner, clearly the chief complaint about Irish servants concerns not their ignorance and poor hygiene but the readiness with which they absorbed American republican ideals. What is resented most is not Irish servants’ incompetence—they *can* be taught—but rather their indomitable social and economic aspirations, aspirations which make them all but impossible to retain after they have been properly trained: “It is not only of the incapacity of the servant,” “that complaint is made, but of her pretentiousness or her ‘uppishness’” (Tomes 54). Thus the problem with foreign-born servants is their *readiness* to adopt the republican attitudes of native-born laborers. Here servant problem discourse accords with 19th-century arguments in favor of relaxed immigration laws. Pro-immigration arguments trumpeted the assimilability of the European immigrant; an 1876 pamphlet, for instance, cited the example of a bank at which “nine hundred depositors, out of the total of four thousand, were persons who had not been more than ten months in the country. It had not taken long for these people to become not only producers and consumers, but tax-payers, and, in their degree, capitalists also” (Hill 13-14). Yet in the context of discussions of the servant problem, it was precisely immigrant servants’ eagerness to adapt to the capitalist ethos that was so objectionable. According to Stowe (1864), the “spirit of democracy,” when it has “infected” foreign-born servants, proves more inflexible than it ever did with native-born servants:

“They came to this country with vague notions of freedom and equality, and in ignorant and uncultivated people such ideas are often more unreasonable for being vague” (439).⁹

Due to this “uppishness” of Irish servants, “domestic establishment[s]” are “never complete, never settled. The household is the scene of continual revolution. To-day there is a change of dynasty in the kitchen, to-morrow in the chamber or nursery. Domestic anarchy and confusion are the inevitable consequences” (Tomes 54, 55). Such charged political rhetoric suggests that the servant problem concerned not only a practical problem of domestic management but also an ideological one. When Stowe writes that the “domestic wrangle and struggle” between beleaguered master and unruly servant that amounts to a “domestic revolution” (439, 434), her lamentation that goes beyond practical domestic concerns to register anxiety about how relations across lines of class were imagined in antebellum America.

The servant problem is then a symptomatic expression of a basic contradiction within early national bourgeois values—a conflict between the republican ideal of self-government by an educated citizenry and the middle-class desire for comforts and privileges made possible only by a relatively permanent class of undereducated, low-skilled laborers. An article in the *Galaxy* magazine underscores this point by explicitly linking the servant shortage to the republican institution of the free school:

Undoubtedly education is of vital importance to the republic, where each and all are called on for a vote and voice in public affairs....yet we cannot dispense with a class willing to do some menial offices which no amount of mechanical invention will

⁹ Indeed, some claimed that it had become less expensive to stay at a hotel than to stay in a friend’s home, because in many households servants will “tax” visitors by demanding exorbitant tips in exchange for good service. A guest who refused to have this tax extorted from him would find himself “ridiculed” by “saucy servants” (Ellet 29).

perform. There must always be people willing, able, and suited to be hewers of wood and drawers of water, or to do what is equivalent to those duties in a modern household. Unfortunately there still exists the demand for such a class; but the tendency of civilization, culture, and education, though good and beautiful, is to advance and elevate so much that we are left without any class of persons whose intellect and capacity render them efficient in the humbler duties of life. (354)

Discussions of the servant problem, then, exposed a threatening fissure in the edifice of American bourgeois ideology, a disconnect between republican ideals and the dream (for those fortunate enough not to be born into it) of a relatively permanent servant class ready to do the work “nobody” wanted to do. “The cringing servility of bygone times,” writes one author, may “in this modern day... be disgusting, and in our republican country impossible”; nevertheless, “there is great need of honest and skilled labor” and “we are not producing or educating any class who in the future will be willing to serve” (Ellis 350, 353). Instead, members of the American servant class were being encouraged to entertain unrealizable social and vocational aspirations, thus unfitting them for the “humbler” callings to which they were naturally suited. Cringing servility or no, Americans must not permit republican ideals to interfere with the formation of a “distinct class” of servants such as exists in Europe, where a “family of servants will serve a long line of masters, being almost, as it were, inherited from generation to generation” (351).

The daughters of many respectable parents, who have been servants themselves, are brought up to despise work. Lately the wife of a gentleman’s gardener, and had been a servant in early life, said ...she [intended that her daughter] should never “live out, but be a governess and a lady.” The fond but foolish mother said she did not want

her to work as she had done, but to learn to play on the piano. And my thought was how she was unfitting her for any useful work, as the girl was puffed up by her superficial education, which had not expanded a mind naturally small. (354)

The author goes on to conclude, “We would not for an instant decry or depreciate the education and elevation of mankind, but it is evident that nothing which unsettles and disturbs the material for a good servant, and makes of him or her an inferior craftsman or poor domestic, can truly improve the happiness or welfare of the community or household” (354).

It would be too easy to dismiss such complaints about the social and economic aspirations of the servant as mere selfish hypocrisy on the part of an American bourgeoisie that felt entitled to comfortable domesticity. As her yoking together of the community and the household suggests, Ellis sees the smooth functioning of the bourgeois household and the “welfare of the community” as inextricably linked. The republican ideal of self-governing citizenry depended in part upon the kind of moral education that could only be provided (it was believed) within the bourgeois home. By placing individual economic self-interest ahead of loyalty to their employers, ambitious servants were corroding the very foundations not only of bourgeois domesticity but, by extension, of American society. No wonder, then, that discussions of the servant problem tended to deploy political metaphors to describe the disruptions the unruly servant caused within the home. Writers on the servant problem feared that the home, that supposedly neutral ground which antebellum America imagined as a space where subjects are prepared for entry into the public sphere, itself has become the site of class conflict.

The state of affairs Ellis wishes for—one in which one class of people could virtually claim perpetual proprietorship of another—did of course, exist in the United States, on its Southern plantations. Writings on the servant problem go out of their way to deprecate the plantation system: the *Harper's* article which called the Irish female servant “the plague of our homes” also condemns slavery as “stolen labor” (53). Yet one of the earliest writings of Harriet Beecher Stowe half-seriously advances slavery as a solution to the servant problem. In “Trials of a Housekeeper,” (first published in *Godey's* in 1839), a young wife describes four weeks spent managing a staff of incompetent and saucy servants. The incidents she recounts include the abrupt departure of a capable but temperamental maid in a “fit of spite,” and the comic adventures of a “merry lass” who “one night...took the stopper from a barrel of molasses, and came singing off upstairs, while the molasses ran soberly out into the cellar-bottom all night, till be morning it was in a state of *universal emancipation*” (97, 98, Stowe’s emphasis). Complaining that during “the four mortal weeks I spent with these *‘helps,’* during which time I did almost as much work, with twice as much anxiety, as when there was nobody there” (97, Stowe’s emphasis), the exasperated housekeeper concludes: “What shall we do? Shall we go for slavery, or shall we give up houses, have no furniture to take care of, keep merely a bag of meal, a porridge-pot, and a pudding-stick, and sit in our tent door in real patriarchal independence?” (100). It might come as something of a surprise that the author of the most celebrated of antislavery novels should write a sketch that, however puckishly, advocates the enslavement of cooks and housemaids while lampooning the abolitionist goal of “universal emancipation” with the comic image of molasses mindlessly oozing from an unstoppered barrel. Stowe’s young housewife, in dreaming of a permanent and popular servant class to stand between American civilization and tent-dwelling anarchy, challenges the republican and democratic beliefs that informed the mainstream of antislavery

thought. As Eric Foner points out, most forms of antislavery were grounded in a shared ideology of free labor that found the idea of a permanent lower class abhorrent (*Free Soil* 232). Yet “Trials of a Housekeeper” suggests that sentimental antislavery might incorporate the quasi-feudal dream of a permanent servant class without losing its coherence as either an aesthetic practice or a discursive system.

All of this is consistent with scholarship that has explored the relationship between sentimental humanitarianism and sentimental discourses of ownership and consumption. Over the course of the long-nineteenth century, Anglo-American sentimentalism engaged in the task of “restructuring of the Great Chain of Being through the inscription of objects previously considered subhuman with human feelings and sentiments” (Merish 153). In a liberal democracy defining itself against English models of ownership, subjectivity and social relations, sentimentalism took up the task of imagining how subjects might relate to one another on other grounds than ties of blood without devolving into the anarchy of mutual predation that conservative political theory regarded as democracy’s inevitable endpoint. Seeking to reconceive the terms of social relations for a “horizontal” era of liberal capitalism, sentimentalism, in the oft-cited words of Philip Fisher, sought to democratically extend “full and complete humanity to classes of figures from whom it ha[d] been socially withheld,” typically “the prisoner, the madman, the child, the very old, the animal and the slave” (99). That Fisher can imagine animals as the object of sentimentalism’s “humanizing” operations raises obvious questions about the precise nature of the “humanity” sentimentalism extends to its objects. While Fisher celebrated sentimentalism as a radically democratic experiment that extended full subjectivity to the oppressed or the socially invisible, most critics have found in sentimentalism a greater concern with defining the subjectivity of the observer *over and against* the fixed point of some sentimental object. No longer praising novels like *Uncle*

Tom's Cabin for their radically democratic and humanitarian “sentimental power” in behalf of the oppressed or socially invisible, critics have argued instead that sentimentalism further the objectification of the oppressed, imaginatively placing the objects of sentimental interest beyond the conceptual borders of the human--turning them into “precious objects” rather than acknowledging them as subjects in their own right.¹⁰ According to this view, sentimental depictions of suffering build up rather than tear down the epistemological wall separating the socially disempowered from the socially privileged, for whom sentimental art is said to render the oppressed as reified objects for their consumption.¹¹ Such “tender violence” does little to bring about recognition of common humanity on the part of the sympathetic observer; on the contrary, it drives an ontological wedge between the liberal benefactor and (in the words of Alain Badiou) the “haggard animal exposed” to his or her sympathetic gaze.¹²

Gillian Brown has powerfully reconciled these two views of sentimentalism by arguing that sentimental representation works precisely by reimagining the dispossessed as the *fully* and *completely* possessed. Registering anxiety about modernity's perceived ability to dissolve every bond of feeling in the corroding element of impersonal economic exchange, sentimentalism imaginatively reconfigures human relations between bourgeois individuals

¹⁰ The phrase “sentimental power” is, of course, Jane Tompkins's; see *Sensational Designs* (1985), 122-146.

¹¹ Saidiya Hartman argues that representations of suffering slaves in texts such as Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* encourage readers' “identification with the slave” while at the same time “fixing and naturalizing” the black subject's “condition of pained embodiment”; sentimental depictions of suffering slaves thus “confirms the spectral character of suffering” thus “effaces and restricts black sentience” (20). If, then, from a sentimental point of view, the abstractions of legal discourse corrupt moral judgment, sentimental strategies of opposing representations of suffering bodies to the abstractions of law involves the risk of reifying the dispossessed, thus (in the words of Marianne Noble) “undermin[ing]” their “own efforts to humanize” the oppressed by positioning them as “objects of sympathy rather than subjects in their own right” (296). See also James Baldwin, “Everybody's Protest Novel” (1949) and Laura Wexler, *Tender Violence* (2000).

¹² “Who can fail to see,” writes Badiou, “that in our humanitarian expeditions, interventions, embarkations or charitable *legionnaires*, the Subject presumed to be universal is split? On the side of the victims, the haggard animal exposed on television screens. On the side of the benefactors, conscience and the imperative to intervene” (*Ethics* 12-13). “Tender violence” is Laura Wexler's coinage.

and their dependents as one of proprietary benevolence on the one side and voluntary dependency on the other. For Brown, a novel like Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* objects to slavery less for the limits it placed on individual freedom than for the *instability*, the *lack* of belonging, the market in slaves introduced into the lives of slaves and slaveowners. By this logic, slavery was less a feudal anachronism than a symptom of the modern social upheavals wrought by Jacksonian democracy and market capitalism. For Stowe the remedy for the horrors of an institution that treated human beings like property was not for slaves' property status to be revoked but for slaves to be treated as a special, inalienable kind of property. The true nightmare of slavery, for Stowe, was its treatment of the slave as a relatively *liquid* asset that could at any moment be exchanged in the marketplace, treatment that denied the slave the rarefied security of feeling fully, securely possessed. By way of remedy, Stowe advocates a strategy of "sentimental possession": as Gillian Brown writes, "The love and care of household things...are what differentiate motherhood from slaveholding, maternal possessions from market articles, and it is this domestic reformulation, rather than eradication, of ownership and property that ideally protects the individual rights of blacks....Stowe's feminization of property relations...continues to define blacks as possessions, albeit protected and properly valued ones" (Brown 41). The rights of blacks are best protected, then, by their being tied to a white property-owner by unbreakable ties of affection. The security of perpetual dependency, not political equality, constitutes the essence of Stowe's antislavery vision. Stowe's half-serious recommendation of slavery as a solution to the servant problem, then, is fundamentally consistent with Stowe's particular brand of anti-slavery thought, which was "basically more horrified by the bourgeois elements of slavery than by the feudal ones" and saw the "evil of slavery" lay "not in its reversion to a barbaric paternalism but in its uncanny way of epitomizing...market society" (Michaels 104).

This logic of “sentimental possession” inscribes the slave within what Lori Merish has called the culture of “sentimental consumption,” in which sentimentally-inflected practices of buying and of ownership seek to ameliorate the depersonalizing effects of market relations through the alchemy of cathexis. Sentimental consumption reacts against universal commodification by making the commodity uniquely and auratically expressive of its owner, thereby removing it from an economy of exchange and securing it within an economy of feeling. According to Merish, sentimental forms of liberal humanitarianism draw on this logic to traffic in “depictions of sympathetic ownership” that “constitute a *reductio ad absurdum* of liberalism’s ideal of consensual authority, articulating a fantasy of noncoercive ownership in which relations of power and force are imaginatively reconstituted, and masked” (Merish 152). When towards the middle of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, a malingering Marie St. Clare complains of the “absurd value” slave-owners attach to their slaves, the derisive picture she paints of sentimentalism is not far from what we are describing. “I’m very particular,” she says, “in letting [my slaves] have everything that comes convenient--anything that doesn’t put one at all out of the wayBut this treating servants as if they were exotic flowers, or china vases, is really ridiculous” (179). As every reader of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* knows, Marie’s complaint is not that people treat their slaves as *objects*, but that they treat them as *precious* objects, and our first instinct is to dismiss Marie’s depiction of sentimentalism as deceptive, recasting its humanitarian operations as a kind of fetishism. Yet the work of Brown and Merish suggests that Marie St. Clare is exactly right: that a novel like *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* sets out *not* to humanize slaves and acknowledge them as subjects in their own right, but rather to reconfigure them as precious objects, deserving of special protection. Sentimental fiction and poetry critique economic and political structures that make “men” into “things” not exactly by making “things” into “men,” but by obscuring the

distinction between people and things. Sentimentalism seeks not to humanize but to *deinstrumentalize* the object.

Ever Your Servant

How, then, short of introducing slavery into the North, might strategies of sentimental possession “solve” the servant problem and, by implication, the problem of social integration in a society tolerant of extreme economic inequality? This was a question that domestic advice manuals addressed from the perspective of the bourgeois housekeeper. Unlike the slave, the servant enjoys a measure of social and class mobility in comparison with other objects of sentimental speculation—the slave, the child—characterized by their fixed position within a given space. For this reason, the servant resisted sentimentalism’s establishment of the socially disfranchised in a fixed position of dependency upon the sentimental benevolence of the bourgeoisie. The servant came to stand for the problem of how to reconcile individual economic mobility with stable and harmonious social relations across lines of social difference that ultimately doomed sentimentalism as a viable social logic. Harriet Wilson’s *Our Nig* is the outstanding instance of an antebellum text explicitly concerned with examining such bourgeois strategies from a servant’s perspective. It explores how sentimentalism negotiates relations and tensions across lines of social and economic class in ways ultimately favorable to the bourgeoisie.

Wilson’s critique of sentimental discourses of class begins with her novel’s provocative and much-discussed title. In what Henry Louis Gates refers to as “the most brilliant rhetorical strategy in black fiction” before Charles Chesnutt, Wilson reclaims the abusive term—“our Nig”—by which her employers refer to her as her *nom de plume*, but only

within distancing and ironic quotation marks (Gates li). However when Claudia Tate writes that by strategically redeploying the epithet “our Nig” Wilson “ironically refer[s] to her re-created self as chattel,” Tate’s use of the term “chattel” too readily inserts Wilson’s novel into the discursive framework of racial slavery (114). The discussion surrounding the problem of the servant offers us a different discursive frame within which to understand Wilson’s ironic use of the term “our Nig,” a frame within which property is understood in affective rather than legal terms. It is important to recall that it is not the melodramatically wicked Mrs. Belmont who first describes Frado as “our Nig,” but her likeable son, Jack; when the horrid Mary Belmont objects to taking Frado into the household, complaining that she does not want “a nigger” getting in the way and being of “no use,” Jack cries out: “Poh! Miss Mary; if she should stay, it wouldn’t be two days before you would be telling the girls about *our nig, our nig!*”

Not only does Mrs. Belmont not trouble to make Frado “our Nig,” she unabashedly endeavors to instrumentalize the child, holding her emotionally at arm’s length while using intimidation and physical violence to compel her to do thorough and efficient work. Mrs. Belmont therefore grows exasperated by what she perceives as her husband’s and James’s desire to puff Frado up beyond her station in life. “Why, according to you...we should very soon have her in the parlor, as smart as our own girls....If you should go on as you like, it would not be six months before she would be leaving me” (49-50). Yet Mrs. Belmont’s efforts at domestic management, were they not so cruel, would seem comically inept. “Self-willed, haughty, undisciplined, arbitrary and severe,” Mrs. Belmont’s “favorite exercise [is] to enter the apartment noisily, vociferate orders, give a few sudden blows to quicken Nig’s pace, then return to the sitting room with *such* a satisfied expression, congratulating herself upon her thorough house-keeping qualities” (14, 37). These methods for managing Frado

actually run counter to the advice dispensed by such writers on domestic management.

While Mrs. Bellmont fears that kindness will lead to Frado's premature departure, domestic advice manuals argued the opposite. In the *Treatise on Domestic Economy* (1841), Catherine Beecher admonishes her readers that there is nothing wrong with servants being inspired by the "noble and generous spirit of freedom, which every American draws from his mother's breast" (200). However, acknowledging that the ambitions of American servants had led to "instability," "discontent" and "perpetual change" in the home (200, 198), Beecher advises homeowners to bind servants to the family through the force of affection, in order to persuade them to act contrary to their economic interests: "this instability and love of change would be remedied, if employers would take more pains...to attach domestics to the family, by feelings of gratitude and affection" (199). The employer should "endeavor[]...to supply the place of a parent" (199) in order to reconcile the servant to his or her inferior position in the household: "it is no more degrading for a domestic to regard the heads of a family as superiors in station, and treat them with becoming respect, than it is for children to do the same, or for men to treat their rulers with respect and deference." (201) Then, although there "would probably be some cases of ungrateful returns," in most cases "even higher wages would not tempt them away" (200); the operations of sentiment would ideally compel the servant to remain loyal to a master who would be regarded as possessing an *inalienable* title to her or him.ⁱ

Beecher therefore advises housekeepers to grapple their servants to their hearts with hoops of steel, and to allow domestic affection between master and servant, or housekeeper and help, to compensate for low wages. Indeed, in contrast to Mrs. Bellmont, who frets about Frado's being made to feel too much at home "in the parlor," Beecher goes so far as to recommend seating servants at the table with the family to decisively incorporate them

into the household. If a servant insists on being on an equal footing with her employers, she should, according to Beecher, be invited to dine with the family, but on condition that she conform at table in matters of dress, conduct, speech and so forth, to the expectations of the family. According to Beecher, the servant will soon grow tired of such conformity and prefer to dine with her own sort. Beecher's disciplinary strategy relies upon the logic of sentimentalism limned by Lori Merish, which articulates "a fantasy of noncoercive ownership in which relations of power and force are imaginatively reconstituted, and masked" (152). Within this discursive matrix, "*property*" is represented as not about 'property,' but about 'love'" and, in this way, property could be "decontextualized...from politically and economically contested relations of labor and ownership" (16, 11). Beecher's solution to the servant problem banishes class conflict from the home by imagining the bond between employer and servant to be grounded not in free economic exchange but in benevolent and loving proprietorship.

The broad currency of sentimental strategies of domestic management lends a different aspect to the "friendship" that the novel's male characters offer Frado. Henry Louis Gates claims that in general "the men in *Our Nig* befriend the heroine" while most of the "women...victimize" her (xlv). While it is true that, in contrast to Mrs. Bellmont, who endeavors to beat Frado into a state of cringing efficiency, the men in the novel treat her with kindness and affection--what Gates calls "friendship." Yet as Frado's "friendship" with the dog Fido--introduced in a chapter titled "A Friend for Nig" (23)--reminds us, "friendship" in *Our Nig* does not necessarily imply a recognition of equality or symmetry. The "friendship" the Bellmont men offer Frado is repeatedly ironically undermined, revealed as asymmetrical and narcissistically self-regarding. Mr. Bellmont is "a kind, humane man, who would not grudge hospitality to the poorest wanderer, nor fail to sympathize with any

sufferer, however humble” (in contrast to Mrs. Bellmont is “not as susceptible of fine emotions”) (15). Yet Mr. Bellmont demonstrates how ineffectual his fine feelings are when called upon to convert them into action. When Mary falsely accuses Frado of attacking her and Frado stands at risk of being punished for no fault, Mr. Bellmont having “witnessed too many” such scenes, sits “quietly reading his paper,” the print instrument of civic engagement paradoxically facilitating his retreat from social responsibility (16). Shortly thereafter, the kindly Mr. Bellmont goes for a walk, leaving Frado at the mercy of Mrs. Bellmont and Mary, who “commenced beating her inhumanly” (16). The narcissistic character Wilson ascribes to the sympathy offered to Frado by these Bellmont men is superbly crystallized in John’s stated wish, after Mrs. Bellmont inflicts a horrible beating on the girl, that Frado might “never wake again” (21).

Not only is the sentimentality of the Bellmont men revealed as self-serving, it is revealed as deeply misogynistic in its attempt to violently divorce sentimentality and domesticity from their conventional association with femininity. Early in the novel in which the kindly John sweepingly indicts all women for the suffering endured by the likes of Frado:

“...I hope[] the child never [will] come into the house again.”

“What would become of her? You cannot mean *that*,” continued his sister.

“I do mean it. The child does as much work as a woman ought to; and just see how she is kicked about!”

“Why do you have it so, John?” asked his sister.

“How am I to help it? Women rule the earth and all in it.” (25)

In reversing predictable patterns of gendered thought—women are now the oppressors and men the angelic representatives of domestic resistance—John rhetorically entraps women in a misogynistic double-bind: by way of a token recognition of women’s moral leadership he is able to exalt male virtue while indicting women for the moral failings of the society they “lead.”¹³

Even as the men in *Our Nig* seek to disarticulate the home from its conventional associations with virtuous femininity, the novel reveals the home’s capacity to sentimentally harmonize individual interests as grounding a bourgeois ideology of social organization. Nowhere is this ultimately self-serving character of bourgeois sentimentalism more pointedly examined than in the relationship between Frado and James Bellmont. While the hypocrisy of James’ father and his brother John is lightly but unmistakably underscored, James himself seems to be presented to the reader with a strong measure of authorial approval. Yet we must not overlook the fact that while James is one of the novel’s greatest spokespersons for antiracism, he appears incapable of imagining a life for Frado outside of the servant class. His desire is to “take her under his protection” (40), an ambition that practically works out to his taking her on as his servant. Even more trenchantly, lying on his deathbed, the expiring James expresses his sorrow that he will be unable to bring her to his home to be his servant, but takes the opportunity to draw on the language of domesticity and servitude to impose upon the grieving Frado the onerous burden of perpetual, metaphysical servitude. “My Heavenly Father is calling me home,” he says to her. “Had it been his will to let me live I should take you to live with me; but, as it is, I shall go and leave you. But, Frado, if you

¹³ John’s disingenuous depiction of women as the rulers of the earth and thus responsible for the failings of society is similar to a maneuver Nina Baym identifies as common to the American texts deemed canonical by Cold War critics. See Baym, “Melodramas of Beset Manhood.”

will be a good girl, and love and *serve* God, it will be but a short time before we are in a *heavenly* home together” (53, first emphasis added).

Quite clearly, the “heavenly home” John imagines for Frado is one she must earn by continuing to be a servant; his injunction to “serve God” is scarcely different from an injunction to embrace her social role as a servant, given the deified character John possesses in the child’s eyes. Richard Brodhead has coined the phrase “disciplinary intimacy” to describe American sentimentalism’s compromise between those modalities of social control familiar to us from the work of Foucault—early modern corporeal punishment and modern discipline. According to Brodhead, antebellum sentimental culture, as exemplified by child-rearing manuals and antislavery fiction, can be seen as constituting a compromise between these Foucauldian polarities, that advocates “an extreme personalization of disciplinary authority,” a “strategic relocation of authority relations in the realm of emotion, and a conscious intensification of the emotional bond between the authority-figure and its charge” (Brodhead 18, 19). It is just such a “purposeful sentimentalization of the disciplinary relation” that James, more than any other character in the novel, manages to effect. Frado comes to identify her affection for James with moral principle: “She did not love God; she did not serve him or know how to....*He* [James] was the attraction” (55). Frado admits to having no desire to go to Heaven if she were not as “high up” as James (55). Indeed, Frado’s minister has to take pains to “make Christ, instead of James, the attraction of Heaven” for Frado, and there is no sign that he is successful (57). Frado’s conflation of James with heavenly authority helps to explain how Frado, even after James death, is powerfully “restrained” from acting upon her desire to run away by what she experiences as “an *overruling* Providence” (60, emphasis added).

Our Nig therefore is concerned with representing two different strategies for the social control of the servant class, and it is this double focus of the novel that explains the wary and cautious tone adopted in Wilson's subtle premise. Expressing a hope that her book will earn her "a faithful band of supporters and defenders," she assures her readers that her novel does not seek to undermine antislavery efforts, "palliat[ing] slavery at the South, by disclosures of its appurtenances North" (3). Indeed, she promises that she has gone so far as to "purposely omit" details of her experience that "would most provoke shame in our good anti-slavery friends at home" (3). She further underlines her assurance by rhetorically exonerating Northern whites of the sufferings she does relate by writing that her cruel mistress (and her fictional alter ego, Mrs. Bellmont) "was wholly imbued with *southern* principles" (3, emphasis in original).

By regionalizing racism and racial violence as "southern," Wilson seems to let Northern white readers off the hook—a pragmatic decision when we recall that *Our Nig* was (or claims to have been) produced as a money-making commodity. Yet the crude, physical practices of domination represented by Mrs. Bellmont—her "southern principles"—are represented as less insidious and more resistible than the implicitly "northern principles" of sentimental discipline practiced by the saintly James. It may be precisely these liberal forms of benevolent domination that Wilson refers to by the sly phrase "slavery's shadows": subtle, less dramatic techniques of coercion and control that permit racial equality at the price of reinforced economic inequality – the sentimentalization of class difference. Thus while Xiomara Santamarina writes that the ineffectual sympathy of the Bellmont men inspires in Frado "loyalty" to them that "only intensifies her vulnerability to Mrs. Bellmont's abuse" (91), it is more accurate to say that Frado's torments at the hands of the Bellmont women

inoculate her against the efforts by the sentimental Belmont men to fully and irreversibly incorporate her as a permanent fixture of the household.

The bourgeois household proves in *Our Nig* to be a site wherein the working classes, when they are not being physically and psychologically abused, are subtly induced to accept and embrace their immutably subordinate class position. This is of course a bold challenge to antislavery fiction opposing idealized Northern domesticity to the Southern plantation, which helps explain Wilson's anxiety about giving offense to the abolitionist leadership. And that Wilson sees the sentimental incorporation of the servant into the household as parallel to efforts to harmoniously integrate the working class into a stratified antebellum U.S. is clear from her depiction of free schools. We might expect the novel to represent the free school as offering the kind of emancipatory space which the Northern home only counterfeits. Writings on the servant problem, as we have seen, complained that free schools were puffing up servants beyond their social position, leading them to entertain unsuitable social ambitions. Surely, then, educational institutions might offer what the bourgeois home does not—a site of real opportunity to redress the inequalities of the American class system. Yet *Our Nig* deflates the republican pretensions of the free schools, with an irony so understated that critics have missed it altogether.

In one of the most famous scenes in the novel, Frado is defended against the prejudices of her fellow students by the kindly schoolteacher, Miss Marsh. Overhearing the taunts hurled at Frado by her fellow students, Miss Marsh “referred them to one who looks not on outward appearances but on the heart. ‘She looks like a good girl; I think *I* shall love her, so lay aside all prejudice, and vie with each other in shewing kindness and good-will to one who seems different from you’” (19). Eve Raimon points to this scene in arguing that

the schoolhouse “represents the only location in the novel where ‘Nig’ gains true respite from abuse and where she gains the respect of her peers and of her teachers” (172). Yet while the words of the kindly Miss Marsh are “agreeable” to the “sorrowing, grieving” Frado, the whole incident is problematized by troubling inconsistencies in Miss March’s “lesson.” Instructing her students not to judge one another by “outward appearances,” Miss Marsh contradicts her own teaching by opining that Frado “looks like a good girl” to *her*. Miss Marsh’s message therefore is not that one ought not to judge from outward appearances; her message is that judging from appearances will be *her* privilege in her capacity as educator, while her students will (through the operations of disciplinary intimacy) accept her judgment and adopt it as their own.

Miss Marsh’s tender-hearted hypocrisy encapsulates the novel’s critique of Northern antiracism. By teaching her students *not* that they should overcome their own prejudices but rather that they ought to *rely* upon the rightness of *hers*, Marsh encourages a heteronomous relationship to figures of authority that mimics that which housekeepers were encouraged to cultivate in their servants. Thus her sentimental antiracism mirrors the sentimental management of workers advocated in domestic advice manuals and embodied in the sentimental Belmont men. It is of course precisely this heteronomous relation that Frado/Wilson seeks to escape; the narrative is preoccupied with the question of whether Frado Smith will permit herself to be sentimentally incorporated into the household of one or another of the Bellmonts, or whether she will follow the example of the “Bridgets” who preceded her toward economic self-determination. The efforts of the Belmont men to sentimentally possess Frado more or less terminate with the death of John, and although his demise is treated as a tragedy in the context of the plot, it is only that death that makes Frado’s self-determination possible. In Frado’s case, the path toward a measure of

economic autonomy consists of her slow unmasking of the economic ties that connect her to the rest of her community—not a triumphant embrace of capitalism as such but a demystification of the economic relations in which she is involved. The relative anonymity of the series of employers for whom Frado works after her departure from the Bellmont home underscores Frado's growing sense of emotional distance from those who employ her and, with it, an increasing clarity of vision concerning the economic motivations of even the most charitable actions. For example, at one point she is taken under the care of “two maidens (old), who had principle enough to be willing to earn the money a charitable public disperses” (67).

In rejecting the logic of sentimental possession that acts as liberalism's supplement in domestic advice manuals and bourgeois anti-slavery fiction, *Our Nig* neither rejects nor espouses impersonal market relations as offering a space for personal emancipation. The novel concludes that relationships are only intelligible and meaningful when understood within an economic framework, but sees these relations as affectively charged, albeit in a way significantly distinct from the quasi-feudal formulations of sentimental possession. One must credit Mrs. Bellmont with liberating Frado from sentimental dependency, for the turning point in Frado's development is her discovery in the latter half of the novel that Mrs. Bellmont feels no affective debt or obligation to her. Despite being charged with “ingratitude” for wanting to leave the Bellmont home earlier in the novel (65), Frado discovers that the affective tie is not reciprocated. Sick and run-down at the end of the novel, Frado turns to the Bellmont family for support, feeling “sure they owed her a shelter and attention,” and believing that the “place where her declining health began, should be the place of relief” (67). Yet Mrs. Bellmont withholds her assistance. “[S]he shall never come

under this roof again; never! Never!’ she repeated, as if each repetition were a bolt to prevent admission” (67).

This rejection liberates Frado from sentimental ties, generating within her a desire to “take care of herself, to cast off the unpleasant charities of the public” (68) and to embrace what might be called literary entrepreneurship. Perhaps no other canonical work of the antebellum period seems less anxious or apologetic about its status as a commodity within a system of capitalist exchange than *Our Nig*, copies of which Harriet Wilson hawked along with her bottled hair dye. At “the present time,” begins the novel’s penultimate paragraph, “you may see her busily employed in preparing her merchandise; then sallying forth to encounter many frowns, but some kind friends and purchasers” (72). That “and” between “friends” and “purchasers” links affective relations (friend) with economic ones (purchasers) in a way directly contrary to the logic of sentimental possession. Ties of friendship and affection here become one with, not antithetical to, the servant’s pursuit of economic self-interest. This connection between custom and friendship is underscored in the first of the appendices, in which “Allida” writes, “I trust [Wilson] will find a ready sale for her interesting work; and let *all the friends who purchase a volume*, remember they are doing good to one of the most worthy...of the human family” (76). Harriet Wilson appreciates your sympathy, and kindly requests that you allow it to express itself through the medium of dollars. In this way, she turns inside out the logic of sentimental possession, which seeks to make bonds of affection a supplement (or justification) for low wages and heteronomy.

Neoliberalism and the Return of the Servant Problem

Let me turn briefly to the present moment. The last three decades, which have seen the gradual erosion of New Deal and Great Society programs and with it intensified economic polarization, witnessed too a concomitant rise in the demand for domestic workers and, with it, fresh talk of a “servant problem.”¹⁴ In particular, the dot-com nineties, with its palatial McMansions moated by sprawling lawns, witnessed a flourishing of writing about the trouble with servants. In the *Time* article “Yuppies and the Servant Problem” (July 1993), Michael Kinsley writes of the “squeamishness” domestic workers induce in affluent American professionals such as himself. “We don’t even have names we feel comfortable with for people who do this kind of work,” he writes, seeming to hold even his own words at arms length. This “squeamishness,” in his view, is the “tribute prosperity pays to democracy”: “In America we are committed to political equality and resigned...to financial inequality. What we want, or should want, is for financial inequality to pollute social equality as little as possible.” Kinsley’s solution to the “servant problem”—that is, to the problem of the coexistence of extreme economic polarization (he calls this “1990s bourgeois affluence”) with republican-democratic ideals of political and social equality (he calls this “1960s values”) epitomizes the neoliberal belief in a global free market as a cure for social injustice.¹⁵ Kinsley’s suggestion is that relations between domestic worker and employer become more impersonal, “more like capitalism and less like feudalism”: if “domestic service were generally provided by business firms,” he writes, “...with all the trappings of a business relationship...the arrangement would be more dignified for both parties” and would

¹⁴ During the midtwentieth century, according to at least one observer writing in *Harper’s*, a combination of factors—the increased mechanization of the home, the purported increased willingness of husbands to help around the home, and a decrease in extreme economic disparity—reduced both the need for servants and the supply of them and thus had “solved” the servant problem (Lynes 46).

¹⁵ As Walter Benn Michaels puts it, by the logic of neoliberal ideology, “it’s OK for a few people to be rich and a lot of people to be poor but...it’s definitely not OK to make anyone feel bad about being poor” (*Trouble* 75, 101).

“provide household workers with some of the benefits...enjoyed by those of us who work in the grownup economy.”¹⁶

It is a long way from the servant problem of Wilson’s moment to that of the eras of Clinton, Bush and Obama, and as the title of Kinsey’s article intimates, one difference lies in the appearance of a new figure on the scene: the professional. By the time the servant problem resurfaces at the end of the twentieth century, it has become inextricable from debates over professional identity that endeavored to manage the problems of liberalism that sentimental domesticity “failed” to solve. *Our Nig*’s skepticism about sentimental solutions to the servant problem anticipated larger skepticism about sentimentalism as a recipe for social integration in a liberal society tolerant of extreme economic inequality. While Wilson’s novel gives voice to a working class frustration with bourgeois paternalism, bourgeois writings about servants increasingly complained of servant’s imperviousness to sentimental strategies of class management of workers. As sentiment came to be seen as “wasted on the modern servant,” housekeepers came to be advised to “realize that while she properly treats and promptly pays her domestics that is not a subject for gratitude in them, but simply a matter of right and business. They sell their time and labor for her wages” (Ellis 353). This unsentimental notion of the relationship between master and servant as one of economic exchange undermines the sentimental view that the home as a site of unbreakable ties of

¹⁶ With the economic downturn, the servant problem has taken a recessionary twist. In December 2008, the *New York Times* article “Trickledown Downsizing” profiled unemployed or financially-strapped professionals tormented by guilt over having to fire their domestic workers. Throughout the article, the domestic workers themselves remain nameless, shadowy figures who “decline to be interviewed,” and the general impression is of vulnerable workers shielding their precarious social and legal position behind anonymity. Their professional employers, on the other hand, perfectly at home in the media limelight, ostentatiously parade their feelings of guilt. One of the interviewees confesses that she is “considering dismissing the housekeeper, to whom she pays \$150 a week. ‘She doesn’t do that great a job, but she has four kids and I know she relies on the money.’” Accompanying the article is an illustration of a domestic worker, her hand lifted to her brow in a posture of stylized despair reminiscent of a Lichtenstein painting. Image and text collude to depict the employer’s responsibility to the servant as one going beyond a relationship between employer and employee. Yet reading this narrative of self-congratulatory liberal remorse, one concludes that domestic workers require a more secure occupational foundation that the guilty feelings of their employers.

affectionate proprietorship could serve as a model for peaceful social relations across lines of class in society at large, and revealed the need for a new way of imagining American class relations. In the next chapter I turn to the literary history of professionalism to explore how professional ideology grappled with, and found new ways to resolve, the problems of class stratification at issue in the servant problem. Taking as my exemplary text Anna Katherine Green's *The Leavenworth Case: A Lawyer's Story* (1878), regarded as the first modern American detective novel, I argue for a link between detective fiction's well-documented popularity among members of the professional class that emerged along with it as a genre, and the genre's persistent phobia of the servant, encapsulated in the phrase "The butler did it."

2



The Butler Didn't: Servants and Professionals
in the Gilded Age Detective Novel

...the gorgeous house, its elaborate furnishing, the little glimpses of yesterday's life,
as seen in the open piano, with its sheet of music held in place by a lady's fan....

—Anna Katharine Green, *The Leavenworth Case*

On this sofa the aunt cannot but be murdered.

—Walter Benjamin, *One-Way Street*

Writing in *Harper's* in 2000, Barbara Ehrenreich claimed that the newly thriving servant industry was offering up the domestic worker as a magical solution—in her words, “*dea ex machina*”—to the exploitative relation feminist theory had exposed at the heart of the domestic division of labor. Professional couples’ reliance on the labor of the cleaning lady not only trivialized the lessons of feminism, she argued, but moreover was fundamentally altering the character of the home, rendering the home unhomelike—the very manifestation

of the Freudian uncanny: “As the home becomes a workplace for someone else,” she writes “is it still a place where you would want to live?” (62). Ehrenreich’s critique of economic polarization under late capitalism problematically depicts the domestic space transfigured by the presence of servants, signifiers of economic inequality that ought not to pervade the home. Moreover, like Michael Kinsley in “Yuppies and the Servant Problem,” Ehrenreich makes the figure of the servant rather central to what it means to be a professional in the United States, a participant in what Kinsley smugly calls the “grownup economy.” Because domestic workers, according to Kinsley, can at best enjoy only “some of the benefits” that accrue to full members of this so-called “grownup” economy, the implication is that to achieve what we might call “capitalist adulthood” one must emphatically be something other than a servant. A professionally-cleaned home, then, is a contradiction in terms: in America, a domestic worker, it seems, can never be a professional.

In defining upright and adult capitalist personhood against the negative instance of the ghoulish and infantilized domestic worker, both Ehrenreich and Kinsley carry forward a nineteenth-century discourse about class that, as we have seen, regarded the social aspirations of servants as a serious problem. Scholarship has elaborated the ways in which nineteenth-century sentimentalism worked hand-in-hand with liberal economics to manage the social instability associated with market capitalism.¹⁷ Against the *homo economicus* of classical economics, sentimental moral philosophy raised the possibility of an innately benevolent and sympathizing individual capable of entering into “purely human” relations with other, similarly constituted subjects. Under the rubric of sentimentalism, interpersonal relations might be established on what Jürgen Habermas has called “purely human” basis,

¹⁷ See Gillian Brown (1990); Jane Tompkins (1985); Philip Fisher (1985); Walter Benn Michaels (1987); Elizabeth Barnes (1997); Lori Merish (2001); and Lauren Berlant (2002).

and even commodities might be understood as expressive of the self rather than of their market value.¹⁸ The servant was a problem because her social and economic aspirations troubled this ideological separation of the social world into two distinct spheres, troubling the fine line between the private domains of interpersonal feeling and of economic activity upon which sentimentalism's edifice was poised. On the one hand, the servant was encouraged and indeed expected to yoke herself to her employer by unbreakable ties of dutiful affection, yet prohibited from identifying as a member of the family that employed her. On the other, the servant was regarded as an item of furniture, indispensable to the well-appointed nineteenth-century American household, yet one phantasmatically endowed with a mind and will of her own and who might at any moment refuse to stay—might instead, like Marx's enchanted commodity, turn a somersault right out the front door. The problem of the servant, then, is that she troubles the ontological distinction between subject and object, and the conceptual boundary between interpersonal feeling and market relations, that were—and still remain—the central axes of liberal conceptualizations of the social and of the self.

It is no accident that the phrase “The butler did it” has become inextricably linked with the detective genre, for although murderous butlers are as *recherché* in such fiction as they are in the real world, the domestic detective novel evinces a built-in wariness of the domestic worker, whose social ambitions signify the breakdown of sentimental conceptions of relations across lines of class. For the detective novel emerged in the United States simultaneously with the cultural backlash against sentimentalism, not as part of that backlash

¹⁸ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 48. For important critiques of Habermas, see the essays in Craig Calhoun, ed., *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (MIT Press, 1992), in particular Nancy Fraser's “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” and the collection *No More Separate Spheres*, edited by Cathy N. Davidson and Jessamyn Hatcher (Duke UP, 2002).

but as an effort to reinvent the terms of literary sentimentalism for a post-sentimental age. Challenging a literary critical practice that makes Charles Dickens's *Bleak House* (1852-53) and Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone* (1868) paradigmatic instances of detective fiction, I argue that this quintessentially English genre is only truly intelligible when understood as arising from specifically American concerns about social mobility and civic virtue in an era of increasing economic polarization. This emphasis on American contributions to the genre is justified by Walter Benjamin's remark that detective fiction's habit of depicting the bourgeois household as the horrific site of "deadly traps" whose "soulless luxury becomes true comfort only in the presence of a dead body" was pioneered by the American detective novelist Anna Katherine Green (446, 447). Recontextualizing Green's *The Leavenworth Case: A Lawyer's Story* (1878) within the discursive nexus of nineteenth-century debates over the place of the servant in America and discourse about the professional, I argue that Green changed the course of literary history by writing novels whose narratives centered upon fictional detectives who modeled an ethos and affect of virtuous professionalism. The fictional detective embodies a set of qualities antithetical to those attributed to the servant, whom nineteenth-century discourse tends to depict rather paradoxically as both cringingly servile and graspingly opportunistic, and thus stands at the center of an ideology of professionalism that proposes other than sentimental ways of imagining harmonious relations across lines of class in the United States.

Uncanny Domesticity and the Trope of the Clue

Although widely recognized as a genre favored by professionals, the detective novel has not been regarded as playing a significant role in shaping how the professional class came to imagine itself. To argue that detective fiction is concerned with valorizing professional

activity and normalizing professional subjectivity is to cut against the critical grain, given the genre's established reputation as an indulgent retreat from productive activity into passivity and escapism. Franco Moretti, for instance, writes that detective fiction constructs its ideal reader by devaluing productive labor in favor of the passive consumption of mass cultural commodities. Thus, he explains, the Sherlock Holmes stories cannot begin until Dr. Watson has been lured away from one or another "professional case" in order to serve in the passive role of "spectator" to Holmes' adventures; the elevation of Watson-as-passive-reader over Watson-as-practicing-physician "heralds the devaluation of work that will characterize the new bourgeois ethic, and on which mass culture will thrive" (Moretti 147).

The view that detective fiction devalues rather than promotes professional work dates back to detractors of the American detective novelist Anna Katharine Green. In the short story "Fin-de-siècle," published in *Harper's* in 1892, a young typist traveling by herself on a train searches frantically for reading matter "of the worst kind"—"something real spicy." When a fellow passenger offers her *The Rise of Silas Lapham* she inquires, "Is that by Anna Katharine Green?" When informed that the author is in fact William Dean Howells, she is disappointed: "Don't know him. Guess I won't tackle that. You haven't got any detective stories, have you?" (Meyers 437-38). As this passage suggests, during a period when literary production in the United States was undergoing a process of internal differentiation and stratification spearheaded by Howells and other partisans of highbrow realist fiction, Green emerged as one of the chief avatars of popular and intellectually demanding fiction.¹⁹ Green had not, to be sure, set out to become Howells's mass cultural Other. As a young woman, she wrote to Ralph Waldo Emerson soliciting his opinion of her poetry, and his response--polite but not encouraging--heralded a literary career repeatedly

¹⁹ For accounts of this transformation, see Brodhead (1990) and Glazener (1997).

punctuated by frustrated aspirations to literary respectability. Although she published a volume of poetry and a verse drama, Green never enjoyed critical esteem or popular success as a poet or serious dramatist. Her only commercially successful play was an adaptation (1892) of *The Leavenworth Case*, with her husband, the actor and furniture designer Charles Rohlf, in the role of the murderer. It was as a popular novelist that Green found an adoring audience, and specifically as a master of a literary formula which *The Leavenworth Case* did more than perhaps any novel to establish.

In titling her first novel “A Lawyer’s Story” and centering it upon the rise of a young and ambitious professional, Green suggests a quite different way of reading detective fiction’s relation to professional labor than that which Moretti describes. The detective novel, as Green helped to define it, far from devaluing the labor of the professional, is perhaps the first literary genre to confer on the professional a heroic character. In detective fiction, the professional, idealized as the fictional detective, is elevated to the status of an iconic figure, and professionalism is promoted as an ideological support of liberalism at a moment when the collapse of sentimental ideology has made such a support especially needful. The almost unprecedented commercial success of *The Leavenworth Case*—it sold nearly a million copies in ten years and twenty-five years later was being advertised as “the standard of comparison for all later detective stories” (Fig. 1)—suggests that Green’s decision to build a mystery plot around the figure of a heroic professional struck a chord with American readers.

A New Illustrated Issue of
THE BEST AMERICAN DETECTIVE STORY

The Leavenworth Case

By

ANNA KATHARINE GREEN



"GO BACK," HE WHISPERED, "GO BACK!"
 (Reduced Illustration.)

IT is now more than twenty-five years since **The Leavenworth Case** was first published, and it still remains the standard of comparison for all later detective stories, the most successful of which have been announced as "equal to **The Leavenworth Case**."

The aggregate sales of this engrossing and brilliant book have been far in advance of those of any detective story published before or since.

After wearing out two sets of plates, the publishers have decided to bring out an entirely new edition in full 12mo size, with frontispiece in colors and other striking illustrations by the well-known artist, G. W. Peters.

12mo, Ornamental Cover, \$1.50

READY MAY 22nd

New York **G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS** London

Fig. 1. Advertisement for a new illustrated edition of *The Leavenworth Case*. *Publisher's Weekly*, 6 May 1905. In the illustration, the private secretary Trueman Harwell is forcing the narrator and lawyer Everett Raymond up the steps of a staircase in the Leavenworth home.

The Leavenworth Case begins, like all good detective novels, with a body in a library. Horatio Leavenworth—retired tea merchant, philanthropist, and gentleman-scholar—has been found murdered at a writing desk in his posh Fifth Avenue home. He is survived by his two adopted nieces, the willful Mary and the dutiful Eleanore, a house full of domestic workers, and an unfinished ethnographic study of China. As the novel begins, the narrator Everett Raymond is summoned to the Leavenworth home in his capacity as a partner in the law firm that represents the Leavenworth family, and when he arrives an inquest is taking place. Everett's first impression of the Leavenworth home is of a space in which seeming incongruities are in conflict. Stepping inside, Raymond is "dazed" by the "strongly contrasting features of the scene" before him and begins to experience a "sensation of double personality....I appeared to be living two lives at once: in two distinct places, with two separate sets of incident going on; so now I seemed to be divided between two irreconcilable trains of thought; the gorgeous house" with its "glow of satin, glitter of bronze, and glimmer of marble" "occupying my attention fully as much as the aspect of the throng of incongruous and impatient people huddled about me" (9).

Raymond is unnerved by the intrusion into sumptuous haute bourgeois domesticity of a crowd of unruly strangers and representatives of state power. "Raymond's sense of reality," writes Catherine Ross Nickerson, "splits along the divisions that his genteel worldview makes between the public and private spheres, the world of crime and the world of comfort, the world of official inquiry and the sacrosanct privilege of the elite" (73). By beginning her novel by confronting her professional hero with a disorienting vision that challenges his bourgeois conception of separate spheres, Green links the figure of the professional with the breakdown of sentimental ideology. The novel's preoccupation with ruptures within the home signals its kinship with sentimental fiction, in which, as Joanne

Dobson reminds us, “Violation...of the affectional bond generates the primary tension” (267). If Raymond Chandler later boasted, ignoring the contributions of American writers other than Poe to classic detective fiction, that he had Americanized an anemic English genre when he took murder “out of the Venetian vase and dropped it in the alley,” Green’s novel challenges the very opposition between domestic security and public danger upon which Chandler’s boast is predicated.²⁰ In the world of Green’s fiction, the home is not an emancipatory space but, quite to the contrary, is in Walter Benjamin’s words the site of “deadly traps,” whose “soulless luxury becomes true comfort only in the presence of a dead body” (446, 447). In all, it is a space that can be, has been, translated into the deathly, skeletal form of a floorplan (Fig. 2).

²⁰ Raymond Chandler, “The Simple Art of Murder” 14. Scholarly neglect of Anna Katharine Green’s fiction may be attributable to the rigidly nationalist canons into which Chandler did so much to divide detective fiction, canons which continue to structure thinking about the genre. Criticism sees American contributions to the development of detective fiction as at once premature and belated: it regards Poe’s tales of ratiocination as having anticipated by two decades the full-fledged emergence of the *roman policier* in the works of such European writers as Dickens, Collins and Emile Gaboriau, but also believes that, after Poe, American contributions to this genre are supposed to constitute a marginal tradition for almost century, until the advent of the *Black Mask* school of crime writing. Only after 1920, the story goes, did American writers like Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler inject grit and realism into a refined, domestic and feminine—in a word, un-American—genre. The theory that detective fiction consists of two distinct, national traditions—the cozy, genteel, domestic, “feminine” English tradition, and the tough, streetwise, “masculine” American tradition—mirrors a larger distinction it used to be fashionable to draw between the English novel of society and the American romance of socially alienated men, a critical commonplace that justified the exclusion of numerous significant women writers from scholarly consideration. But while the romance thesis has been subjected to thoroughgoing critique, the thesis that there are two distinct (and distinctly gendered) national traditions of detective fiction remains more or less the critical orthodoxy.

* For those who are interested in the details of this affair, the following diagram is given:—

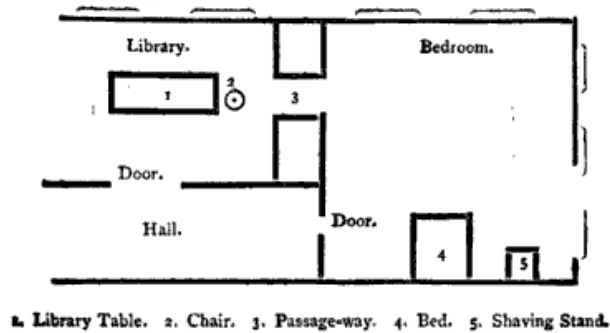


Fig. 2. Floorplan of the second floor of the Leavenworth home. Anna Katharine Green, *The Leavenworth Case*. New York: Putnam, 1878 (6).

Green's representation of uncanny domesticity reaches something of an apotheosis late in the first chapter, in the remarkable scene in which we are introduced to the official detective Ebenezer Gryce not far from Leavenworth's corpse. Gryce is introduced to us in terms meant to contrast him sharply with his illustrious literary antecedent, Wilkie Collins's Sergeant Cuff. Raymond tells us that Gryce, in contrast to Cuff,

was not the thin, wiry individual with the piercing eye you are doubtless expecting to see. On the contrary, Mr. Gryce was a portly, comfortable personage with an eye that never pierces, that did not even rest on *you*. If it rested anywhere, it was always on some insignificant object in the vicinity, some vase, inkstand, book, or button. These things he would seem to take into his confidence, make the repositories of his conclusions; but as for you—you might as well be the steeple on Trinity Church, for all connection you ever appeared to have with him or his thoughts. At present, then, Mr. Gryce was, as I have already suggested, on intimate terms with the door-knob.

(5)

Gryce's way of seeing inverts the relation between humans and objects, treating objects as though they were sentient beings capable of being treated on "intimate terms" and taken into one's "confidence," and treating human beings as objects, like the Trinity Church steeple. This habit of perception suits Gryce, of course, to what he calls "my profession" (5) which brings him in constant contact with human beings who have been converted, by an assassin's weapon, into an object; as Raymond writes of first entering Leavenworth's private apartment, "It was here then that *it* ought to be, the horrible, blood-curdling *it* that yesterday was a living, breathing man" (7)

Green's visual and textual representations of alienated, hollowed out, *unheimlich* domesticity have their origin in Edgar Allan Poe's development of the trope of the clue. In his tales of ratiocination of the 1840s, Poe took dead aim at the sentimental construction of domestic space as a haven of authenticity and stability in which "purely human" relations might be entered into. The harbinger of these tales of crime and detection was the essay "The Philosophy of Furniture" (1840), in which Poe pokes malicious fun at Americans' interior design. Poe mocks with quasi-patrician disdain the efforts of the American "aristocracy of dollars" to ape the manners of the European aristocracy of blood, compensating for their lack of noble ancestry and heraldic display with the symbolic display of costly goods (368). This aping of aristocratic values through the conspicuous "display of wealth," in Poe's view, in fact subverts those values by elevating mere cost above aesthetic value or utility (364). In "imitat[ing] the nobles," the people achieve only "*parvenu* rivalry" (365). For Poe, then, in a democratic society whose elite members clumsily ape the refinement of European aristocracy, the result can only be a "thorough diffusion of feeling" (365). The home, imagined by Poe's sentimental contemporaries as the space of authentic human relations uncorrupted by the moral compromises of the worlds of politics and

commerce, becomes just another arena for competition, in this instance in the realm of conspicuous consumption.

For all its satirical thrust, the dominant note of “The Philosophy of Furniture” is the macabre. Poe’s grisly diction suggests that as taste in domestic furnishing elevates mere costliness over aesthetic value, the result is less a laughing matter than it is a matter for gothic horror. Look into the dwelling of an American bourgeois and one finds a house of horrors: the Turkish carpet, “taste in its dying agonies” (366); a cut-glass shade, an “abomination” whose light is “unequal, broken, and painful” (367); mirrors, “monstrous and odious” (367). These gothic flourishes anticipate how Poe’s first detective story, “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” (1841), will grotesquely elaborate and literalize the thesis of “The Philosophy of Furniture.” In “The Murders in the Rue Morgue,” the figurative “dying agonies” endured by “taste” in “The Philosophy of Furniture” are literalized as the dying agonies of Madame L’Espanaye and her daughter at the hands of a rampaging orangutan. In Poe’s tale, a domestic space is quite literally converted into the scene of a crime when a creature *apes* his betters.

For Poe’s quasi-aristocratic critique of sentimental middle-class culture, Green substitutes a fundamentally bourgeois critique. The opening of *The Leavenworth Case* presents us not with a home transfigured but with a home that, in becoming a crime scene, has had its latent character disclosed. This unsettling of separate spheres ideology undermines the efforts on the part of Leavenworth’s nieces to paint an idyllic portrait of their home before the crime. At first, the genial Everett Raymond approves of the Leavenworth nieces’ genteel reserve, of their receiving the coroner as a “politely endured intruder into this home of elegance” (47). In the most dramatic moment of the inquest, when Mary Leavenworth is

asked by a juror to name the person most likely to benefit from her uncle's death, she replies imperiously:

I know who would be greatest losers by it. The children he took to his bosom in their helplessness and sorrow; the young girls he enshrined with the halo of his love and protection, when love and protection were what their immaturity most demanded; the women who looked to him for guidance when childhood and youth were passed—these, sir, these are the ones to whom his death is a loss, in comparison to which all others which may hereafter befall them must ever seem trivial and unimportant. (52)

To Raymond, this dramatic speech, conjuring up a portrait of the Leavenworth home as one whose members were tied to one another by bonds of unadulterated affection, is a “noble reply to the basest of insinuations” (52). Yet the unfolding of the plot quickly and mercilessly undermines Mary's narrative of prelapsarian innocence. Mary proves to be hardly the most credible spokesperson for the sentimental elevation of affection over self-interest: after secretly eloping with a man of whom her uncle disapproved, she estranged herself from her husband and kept her marriage a secret to avoid disinheritance. Mary defends this decision by suggesting that economic self-interest is, in her case, none other than an expression of filial devotion:

Is it not my manifest duty to be governed by my uncle's wishes? Has he not brought me up from childhood? Lavished every luxury upon me? Made me all that I am, even to the love of riches which he has instilled into my soul with every gift he has thrown into my lap, every word he has dropped into my ear, since I was old enough to know what riches meant? Is it for me now to turn my back upon fostering care so wise, so

beneficent, and free, just because a man whom I have known some two weeks chances to offer me in exchange what he pleases to call love? (247)

Mary's self-defense contradicts the separation of spheres constitutive of and constituted by sentimental ideology by suggesting that money is, or can be, the medium of domestic affection.

Thus the novel anticipates now-orthodox critiques of the ideology of "separate spheres" by suggesting that the "unnatural" mixture of domestic and market values in the Leavenworth home is not an effect of Leavenworth's murder but rather the precondition for that event. *The Leavenworth Case* stages not the violation of a "purely human" sphere of deinstrumentalized affection by homicide, but the disclosure that inviolable domesticity was always a bourgeois fantasy. The murder in Green's novel does not so much violate the Leavenworth household as bring its latent character to the surface; the corpse of the bourgeois patriarch, mute witness to the crime of his reification, proves to be a long-deferred manifestation of the underlying hollowness of sentimental ideology, manifesting itself like the return of the repressed in the scene of the uncanny.

This brings us back to the servant. As we have seen, beginning around 1830, complaints about the lack of dutiful and contented servants began to appear in American periodicals. The presence of discontented, inconstant and unapologetically self-interested servants in middle-class household challenged the ideological belief in the autonomous and idealized separateness of the domestic sphere. Antebellum domestic management manuals proposed sentimental "solutions" to the servant problem that reasserted the autonomy of the domestic sphere from the laws of the market, by imagining the bond between master and servant to be grounded not in an economic arrangement but in mutual affection. In the

Treatise on Domestic Economy, Catherine Beecher advises homeowners to bind servants to the family through the force of affection, in order to persuade them the act precisely contrary to their economic interests: “this instability and love of change would be remedied, if employers would take more pains...to attach domestics to the family, by feelings of gratitude and affection” (199). The employer should “endeavor[] . . .to supply the place of a parent” (199) in order to reconcile the servant to his or her inferior position in the household: “it is no more degrading for a domestic to regard the heads of a family as superiors in station, and treat them with becoming respect, than it is for children to do the same, or for men to treat their rulers with respect and deference.” (201) Then, although there “would probably be some cases of ungrateful returns,” in most cases “even higher wages would not tempt them away” (200); the operations of sentiment would ideally compel the servant to remain loyal to a master who would be regarded as possessing an *inalienable* title to her or him.

But along with immigration and an increasingly ethnically diverse labor pool arose a sense that sentimental solutions were no longer effectual. Foreign-born servants seemed surprisingly resistant to their employers’ efforts to “sentimentally possess” them. By the 1870s, when Green was writing *The Leavenworth Case*, writers for *Harper’s*, the *Atlantic*, and the *New York Times* were discussing with chagrin the intensification of the servant problem. An 1872 magazine article complains “we are in danger of being left without any class of persons whose intellect and capacity render them efficient in the humbler duties of life” (Ellis 354). By endeavoring fruitlessly to expand the “naturally small” minds of the least capable workers, Americans had become the “authors of [their] own misfortunes” (353), having prevented the formation of a “distinct class” of servants such as still existed in Europe, where a “family of servants will serve a long line of masters, being almost, as it were, inherited from generation to generation” (351). Although “we do not ask for the cringing

servility of bygone times,” which “in this modern day...would be disgusting, and in our republican country impossible,” nevertheless, “there is great need of honest and skilled labor”; however, “we are not producing or educating any class who in the future will be willing to serve” (350, 353).²¹

The widespread belief that American institutions were failing to produce a distinct and relatively stable servant class lies behind Green’s characterization of Hannah Chester, an Irish maid in the Leavenworth household and an accessory after the fact to the murder. Despite never actually appearing in *The Leavenworth Case*, Hannah is the focus of almost the entire investigation, and indeed it is on account of Hannah’s social aspirations that there is a mystery to solve at all. Hannah exemplifies the stereotypical Irish servant not in her incompetence but in her social ambition. Hannah observes Leavenworth’s private secretary Trueman Harwell in all but in the act of murdering their employer, but is persuaded to keep silent about what she knows and to flee the household by Harwell’s promise of marriage. Harwell, aware of the young woman’s “unreasonable susceptibility” to him, proposes marriage in an effort to make that susceptibility “serve my purpose” (319), and in agreeing to Harwell’s design, Hannah effectively confirms stereotypes about the foreign-born servant’s disloyalty and inclination to betray her employers from self-interest.

²¹ It is not surprising that the peak of such complaints about the uppishness of foreign-born servants coincided with the backlash against Reconstruction and the emergence of fresh doubts about just how bad the peculiar institution really was. In 1882, a writer for the *Atlantic Monthly* opined that to be taken mentally hostage by sentimental fantasies of social reform amounted to a worse slavery than slavery ever was: “It would be far better for a man to be the slave of an intelligent master, who would hold him to some useful work, and flog him for his idleness, than to be the dupe of sentimental schemes for the reconstruction of society.” In the *Uncle Remus* tales of Joel Chandler Harris, readers were offered idylls of life in the Old South idealizing the unbreakable bond of master and slave. But if sentimental representations of master-servant relations make a comeback in nostalgic plantation fiction, it is a curiously ghostly revival: even as it deploys the language and conventions of sentimental fiction, plantation fiction marks sentimentalism’s decisive repudiation as a working cultural logic, its irrevocable consignment to a more “innocent” and altogether irrecoverable past. See Chapter Four for a further discussion of plantation nostalgia’s relation to the rise of professionalism.

During her absence from the Leavenworth home, until her murder at Trueman's hands, Hannah lodges in the home of Amy Belden, a lonely and sentimental widow whose diligence in concealing Hannah from the police only delivers her into the hands of her killer. Intriguingly, as Hannah hides out at Belden's home she poignantly embarks on a course of self-improvement, seeking Mrs. Belden's help to learn to play the piano and to read. As Nickerson has pointed out, Belden's home is the novel's only site of female authority, a space to which the female characters flee to escape the control of male authority, and Belden is portrayed as exhibiting all the conventional attributes of sentimental female virtue. The failure of Belden's home—the novel's one conventional domestic space—to provide an emancipatory space for Hannah resonates with the general view that sentimentalism no longer provided a viable model for social relations across class lines. Notably, Mrs. Belden teaches Hannah by having her copy out such sentimental platitudes as "Be good and you will be happy" and "Evil communications corrupt good manners" (276-77). The fact that Hannah copies these sentimental epigrams without learning from their content underscores the novel's critique of sentimentalism as form without content.

Professional Feeling; or, Why Everybody Loves Raymond

When Raymond visits Belden's home, he finds its atmosphere "stifling" and feels an "anxiety to escape" from it (266), and the narrative confirms Raymond's view: far from an emancipatory space or maternal power, Belden's home is depicted as the materialization of a sentimental ethos as ludicrous as it is ineffectual, merely preserving Hannah for death at Trueman's hands. If the social ambitions of workers are a troubling force in Green's bourgeois universe, the sad case of Hannah Chester serves both as a cautionary tale against

“overweening” working-class ambition and a revelation of the limitations of bourgeois sentimentalism to temper working-class ambitiousness. Yet the rise of Everett Raymond makes it impossible to read Green’s novel as utterly opposed to social mobility. Catherine Ross Nickerson has argued that the death of Hannah and the unmasking of Trueman pave the way for a “reassertion of class solidarity” at the end of the novel:

The dissent and suspicions...are all caused by the mischief of a liminal class figure, the secretary who hovers between the ranks of servant and business professional....The ending reestablishes the novel as one of solidly middle-class values and literary genre; while the middle of the story is full of gothic obstructions and energies, in the end domestic realism is triumphant. (95)

But *what* class, exactly, can be said to have been consolidated in a conclusion that also finds Eleanore Leavenworth married to her social inferior Everett Raymond? Nickerson’s phrase “middle-class values” questionably yokes the Leavenworths and Raymond under the rubric “middle class,” whereas the novel takes great pains to emphasize the social gulf separating the young professional Raymond from the elite world the Leavenworths inhabit. One of the interpretive challenges of this novel is to determine the narrative logic that condemns Trueman for his social aspirations while rewarding Raymond with marriage into an elite New York family. If the goal of the novel is to reassert a preexisting caste system, why does Green punish one middle-class social climber and reward another?

Critics since W. H. Auden have viewed the criminal in detective fiction as a scapegoat: that the identification of the criminal at the end of a detective novel, by localizing guilt, serves the ideological function of conferring innocence on the social order. By this logic, Trueman’s crimes, his confession, and his imminent punishment can be seen to serve

the function of what Jean Baudrillard has called the “scandal-effect.” “The denunciation of scandal,” writes Baudrillard, makes a show of paying “homage to the law” while “concealing that there is no difference between the [scandalous] facts and their denunciation” (172-173). In *The Leavenworth Case*, the “denunciation” of Harwell serves to conceal his fundamental affinity with the novel’s “innocent” characters. Harwell’s (and Hannah’s) “uppishness,” in this view, is declared monstrous in order that another form of social mobility might be declared innocent, even worthy of emulation.

A striking scene early in the novel helps to clarify what in Raymond suits him for social advancement. When Raymond first steps inside the Leavenworth home, he finds himself mesmerized by the portrait of an “entrancing blonde” (10). The portrait in fact depicts Leavenworth’s late wife, but Raymond, unaware of this, is possessed by “the idea that one, if not both, of Mr. Leavenworth’s nieces looked down upon” him (10). Raymond, then, senses that the portrait he is looking at is not a representation of any actually existing member of the Leavenworth family but rather a depiction of an archetype of genteel femininity in the elite world of inherited wealth and privilege, and his complex response to the portrait suggests the recognition of his own socially ambiguous position with respect to that world. There is at least a double signification to that adjective “entrancing,” then, since the portrait confronts Raymond on the threshold of the Leavenworth home, where it seems to him to both invite and forbid him entrance. Her “glance” “beckon[s]” and her “smile” “invite[s]” but her “hand” “forbid[s]” (10): the portrait both draws and repels Raymond, leaving him suspended between two contradictory impulses of attraction and repulsion.

This ambivalence, one traditionally associated with the male viewer of visual representations of women, in this case more specifically gestures Raymond’s sense of socially

indeterminacy of the professional class just coming into its own in late-nineteenth-century America, to which, as a lawyer, Raymond belonged. As Burton Bledstein has argued, the late 19th century saw a gradual redefinition of the “middle class” in the United States. To belong to the middle class during this period no longer meant that one occupied “an equilibrium between the extreme social orders of the aristocracy and the peasantry”; it signified more specifically one’s membership in the new professional class, a social group marked not by stable middleness but by its fluid character. In social terms, the professional was one who continually moved “vertically between the floors of the poor and the rich” (20). When Green, herself a lawyer’s daughter, was writing *The Leavenworth Case*, the practice of law was in the midst of a decades-long process of professionalization. Only forty years earlier, in the 1830s, “the lawyer class...tended to be closely restricted and built on a system of personal alliances including marriage, paternal occupations, an extended apprenticeship, a college education, and economic means” (185). The explosion in the number of law schools after 1850 and the establishment of the first national professional law association in 1878 helped “to break the historical trend toward the monopoly of knowledge and services by an exclusive and privileged class and to...universaliz[e] the standards for achievement in order to measure men in terms of merit” (84, 181). Unlike gentleman lawyers of an earlier period, the professional lawyer saw his calling as a “full-time occupation” for which one was fitted by, “during a fairly difficult and time-consuming process...master[ing] an esoteric but useful body of systematic knowledge” (86-87). Thus as a professional, one embraced a meritocratic ethos which measured individual achievement according to universal, “objective” standards while implicitly rejecting the arbitrary and residually aristocratic world of inherited privilege.

If professionalism’s meritocratic ethos set it apart from the world of inherited privilege, it also distinguished it from the market world of fluctuating value. By developing

their own codes of ethics and standards for certification, professional organizations insisted upon their autonomy from the logic of the market. New institutions of professionalization sought “to eliminate wasteful competition and to establish universal standards for moral and civil behavior” and “restrict competitive practices within the select group” (Bledstein 27, 108). The adoption by professional associations of “more stringent preparations and higher standards” for certification aimed to “protect the public from incompetence and quackery” that flourished when the only law governing professional practice was the law of supply-and-demand. Indeed, many professional organizations even prohibited members from mentioning their certification in advertisements. Writes Bledstein: “a professional embraced an ethic of service which taught that dedication to a client’s interest took precedence over personal profit, when the two happened to come into conflict” (87). It was from the fact that he neither “exclusively pursue[d] a self-interest” nor followed “popular whim” that the professional derived the greater portion of his social prestige. The idea was to set up the professional as an individual who stood outside the crudely competitive world of the market, where the dominance of the profit motive, it was believed, would lead to an ethical race to the bottom. The construction of the professional as iconic figure of resistance to unbridled capitalism is perhaps traceable to the writings of John Ruskin. In his influential manifesto *Unto This Last* (1862), Ruskin took issue with the depiction of the human being in classical liberal economics as “merely...a covetous machine” (167). Classical liberalism, Ruskin says, disregards the fact that unlike a machine, the human being “is an engine whose motor power is Soul” and whose “own proper fuel” is “the affections” (170).

Interestingly, Ruskin sets out to demonstrate his point by discussing the relation between a servant and master. While classical liberal economic theory argues that the wages the master of a household pays to the servant are and ought to be subject to the law of

supply-and-demand, thus placing master and servant on a continual footing of mutual antagonism, Ruskin argues that “the greatest material advantage” will accrue to both master and servant “not through antagonism to each other, but by affection for each other”: treat a servant “kindly,” he writes, “without any economical purpose, and all economical purposes will be answered” (170-171). Ruskin thus critiques classical liberalism in language that echoes sentimental solutions to the servant problem proposed by the likes of Catherine Beecher. But Ruskin quickly proceeds from this sentimental model of interclass relations to an alternative model: professionalism. “The respect we pay to the lawyer and physician,” he writes, is, no less than that due to the soldier or the pastor, “founded ultimately on their self-sacrifice. Whatever the learning or acuteness of a great lawyer, our chief respect for him depends on our belief that, set in a judge’s seat, he will strive to judge justly, come of it what may” (176). The professional deserves honor and respect, not merely because he or she serves the nation, but because “on due occasion” one must “die for it”—“the Lawyer, rather than countenance Injustice,” “the Physician, rather than leave his post in plague,” and so on (177). In order to earn a measure of social prestige, the capitalist, he maintains, must emulate the civic-mindedness of the professional.²²

Ruskin lionizes the professional by representing him as valiantly resisting what he perceives as the market’s tendency to reduce all human practices to their exchange value. Yet as Bledstein observes, the professional’s adherence to institutionally established ethical and occupational standards masked an unacknowledged “monopolistic self-interest.” Rigorous standards in licensing and certification not only protected the public from quackery in medicine and shysterism in law, but also “worked to restrict the number of practitioners, thereby raising their incomes” (96). In this way, its superficially collectivist and civic-minded

²² The “market,” writes Ruskin, “may have its martyrdoms as well as the pulpit” (177).

veneer masks the fact that professional culture “embodied a more radical idea of democracy than even the Jacksonian had dared to dream”: “In the service of mankind—the highest ideal—the professional resisted all corporate encroachments and regulations upon his independence, whether from government bureaucrats, university trustees, business administrators, public laymen, or even his own professional associations. The culture of professionalism released the energies of the free person who was usually accountable only to himself and to his personal interpretation of the ethical standards of his profession” (87, 92). Thus professionalism’s avowed commitment to high standards of conduct and performance, even when adherence to such high standards was unprofitable, masked the profitability to the individual professional of such rigorous institutional standards. The professional’s self-representation as one who places the good of the client and the general public above the pursuit of profit was therefore, paradoxically, most profitable. Professional ideology’s power of masking economic self-interest as an anti-market ethos of civic-mindedness worked to elevate their social status. This paradox implies another: the new professional class, whose meritocratic ethos sets it apart from the closed world of inherited privilege, to be successful must find favor with the families that make up that world.

The professional thus occupied a precarious zone of social instability, and this instability of social status lies at the root of Raymond’s sense of repulsion and attraction by the portrait in the Leavenworth home. Ebenezer Gryce, the official detective in *The Leavenworth Case*, for his part trades on the social fluidity of the young professional’s social position when he ropes Raymond into acting as his assistant. A gifted criminal investigator, Gryce is nevertheless hampered in this case of murder among New York’s elite by his lack of social fluidity, his inability to pass as a gentleman:

Tailors and barbers are no good; I am always found out...I have even employed a French valet, who understood dancing and whiskers; but it was all of no avail...I can enter a house, bow to the mistress of it, let her be as elegant as she will, so long as I have a writ of arrest in my hand, or some such professional matter upon my mind, but when it comes to visiting in kid gloves, raising a glass of champagne in response to a toast—and such like, I am absolutely good for nothing. (106-07)

Recognizing the investigative value of Raymond's gentlemanly manner, Gryce dispatches the young lawyer to insinuate himself into the society of various suspects, ferreting out in polite or professional contexts information Gryce, in his official capacity, could never discover. For his part, Raymond, as a young professional, is too insecure in his social status not to express misgivings about his function as unofficial assistant detective. The uneasiness he felt when on arriving at the Leavenworth household he sensed that domestic privacy had been improperly violated by the prying eyes of the public extends to his own conduct as Gryce's assistant: "the part of a spy was the very last one I desired to play," he says; "A spy in a fair woman's house! How could I reconcile it with my natural instincts as a gentleman?" (108, 120). Raymond fears that by trading on his gentlemanly manner for undisclosed purposes he will reveal his gentlemanly manner as a performance rather than rooted in "natural instincts." For this reason Raymond plays the role of assistant detective only under strong qualifications: "I will," he says

give Mr. Clavering an opportunity to form my acquaintance; and I will listen, if Miss Leavenworth chooses to make me her confidant in any way. But any hearkening at doors, surprises, unworthy feints or ungentlemanly subterfuges I herewith disclaim

as outside of my province; my task being to find out what I can in an open way, and yours to search into the nooks and corners of this wretched business. (121)

“In other words,” Mr. Gryce wryly replies, “you are to play the hound, and I the mole; just so, I know what belongs to a gentleman” (121).

Raymond’s anxieties about his role as investigator come into focus in a crucial scene early in the novel, when he endeavors unavailingly to extract information from Eleanore. Sensing at length that he “had pushed [his] inquiries too far,” Raymond assures Eleanore of the disinterestedness of his motives: “I intend,” he tells her, “to discover the true author of this crime. That is a sacred duty which I feel myself called upon to perform; but I will ask you no more questions, nor distress you with further appeals. What is done shall be done without your assistance, and with no other hope than that in the event of my success you will acknowledge my motives to have been pure and my action disinterested” (99). But Raymond’s protestations of disinterestedness coincide with his (and our) gradual awareness of his blossoming romantic interest in Eleanore. Refusing, despite overwhelming evidence, to believe that Eleanore is complicit in the crime, Raymond examines his reasons for believing in her innocence: “‘She must be innocent; she cannot be otherwise,’ I reiterated to myself, and then pausing, asked what warranty I had of this? Only her beautiful face; only, only her beautiful face” (81). He goes on to reject the possibility that his attraction to Eleanore is clouding his professional judgment: “Was it possible that I, Everett Raymond, hesitated to know the truth...? No, that should never be said” (82).

In scenes such as these, in which Raymond seeks to understand his own motivations, the otherwise perceptive and competent Raymond becomes, in Nickerson’s words, “charmingly obtuse” (74). Raymond’s dilemma is that of the young professional, whose

reputation depended on his ability to faithfully serve, without nurturing unseemly aspirations to join, the world of inherited privilege. In this context, the portrait of the “entrancing blonde” with her inviting glance and forbidding gesture refers to the lure of the world of inherited privilege for the professional meritocrat. This ambivalence recalls professionalism’s radical dissociation of self-interest and action, its insistence on that it is the professional’s self-interest not to act self-interestedly—that is to see, to be unconscious that one is acting self-interestedly. In his desire to feel and act professionally, to cultivate and maintain a studious unconsciousness of where his own interests lie, Raymond stands in striking contrast with Trueman Harwell, who is depicted not only as harboring powerful ambitions but also as chillingly aware of his own desires and frequently impulsive in acting to satisfy them. A seemingly trivial anecdote he tells during the inquest reveals how Trueman’s unprofessional feelings manifest themselves in clumsy dealings with his social betters.

One of the last words [Leavenworth] said to me was, “In a month we will have this book in press, eh, Trueman?” I remember this particularly, as he was filling his wine-glass at the time. He always drank one glass of wine before retiring, it being my duty to bring the decanter of sherry from the closet the last thing before leaving him. I was standing with my hand on the knob of the hall-door, but advanced as he said this and replied, “I hope so, indeed, Mr. Leavenworth.” “Then join me in drinking a glass of sherry,” said he, motioning me to procure another glass from the closet. I did so, and he poured me out the wine with his own hand. I am not especially fond of sherry, but the occasion was a pleasant one and I drained my glass. I remember being slightly ashamed of doing so, for Mr. Leavenworth set his down half full. It was half full when we found him this morning. (23)

In the shame Trueman confesses to feeling after he drains his glass we find the key line of demarcation dividing Trueman's ambitions from Raymond's. In greedily drinking the sherry, Trueman reveals an inclination to self-gratification, a correspondence of will and action, not present in the "charmingly obtuse" Raymond, who remains imperfectly aware of his own desires and thus unable to pursue them directly.

Professionalism's dissociation of self-interest and agency, between head or heart and hand, proves to be the structuring motif of *The Leavenworth Case*. When Raymond first encounters the Leavenworth nieces, Eleanore has just accused her cousin Mary of desiring, if not in fact bringing about, the death of their uncle: "I do not accuse your hand, though I know of none other which would or could have done this deed; but your heart, your head, you will, these I do and must accuse" (42). Eleanore's condemnation proves especially prescient when we learn that Trueman has murdered Leavenworth for Mary's sake—that is, his hand has performed what her head and heart desired. One of the novel's richest ironies is that the secretary Trueman, Leavenworth's "amanuensis" or hand whose pale complexion and general appearance suggest to Raymond a "negative sort of person," (27) should turn out to be the character most inclined to act boldly in his own interest, while the energetic and capable Raymond should epitomize the split between will and action. But in the world of Green's novel it is precisely the ability to act out of accordance with one's will that marks you as suited for social advancement.

Holmes and House

The influence of Green's first novel on the development of detective fiction cannot be overestimated; as we have seen, it was being claimed as the greatest of detective novels

twenty-five years after its publication, and the young Agatha Christie wrote her derivative first novel, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, under its heady influence (Christie, *Autobiography* 147). I'd like to conclude, then, by briefly considering the extent to which Green's valorization of the professional may have found its way into the DNA of this popular genre. The second chapter of Arthur Conan Doyle's first Sherlock Holmes novel, *A Study in Scarlet* (1888) bears the same title as the first chapter of the second novel, *The Sign of the Four* (1890): both are titled "The Science of Deduction," and both contain an articulation of Holmes' method. However, the later chapter revises the earlier one in a way that suggests that Doyle was quick to grasp Anna Katharine Green's valorization of the detective-as-professional. In the earlier chapter from *A Study in Scarlet*, Holmes confesses to an delighted Dr. Watson that he has little room in his mind for such trivial information as heliocentrism: "I consider that a man's brain originally is like a little empty attic, and you have to stock it with such furniture as you choose. A fool takes in all the lumber of every sort that he comes across, so that the knowledge which might be useful to him gets crowded out [but] the skilful workman is very careful indeed as to what he takes into his brain-attic" (15). Drawing on Lockean spatial metaphors for describing the process of cognition, Holmes also invokes Poe's condemnation of the bourgeois accumulation of bric-a-brac in "The Philosophy of Furniture." But for our purposes what matters here is Holmes's self-identification with a "skilful workman," which Holmes further underscores by referring to his calling as a "consulting detective" as his "trade" (19). Given that Holmes has just boasted of his ability to discern the "trade or profession" of any given individual by observing such minute details as his "finger-nails," his "coat-sleeve" and "the callosities of his forefinger," Holmes would seem to be conscious of the distinction between tradesman and professionalism as he identifies with the former.

In *The Sign of the Four*, however, Holmes disaffiliates from the ranks of tradesmen and throws in his lot with the professionals. “I crave for mental exaltation,” he says after having injected himself with a seven-per-cent solution of cocaine. “That is why I have chosen my particular profession, or rather created it, for I am the only one in the world” (4). It is not the word alone that marks Holmes’s professionalization in *The Sign of the Four*; nor even his insistence on his autonomy from coercive state power in describing himself here as an “unofficial” detective (4). What marks Holmes’s professionalization is his description of his relation to his own calling.

When [the official detectives] Gregson or Lestrade or Athelney Jones are out of their depths—which, by the way, is their normal state—the matter is laid before me. I examine the data, as an expert, and pronounce a specialist’s opinion. I claim no credit in such cases. My name figures in no newspaper. The work itself, the pleasure of finding a field for my particular powers, is my highest reward. (4-5)

Holmes here unites in himself the penetrating detective skill of Ebenezer Gryce with what from Green’s perspective are Everett Raymond’s exemplary professional denial of any gratification beyond that of duty discharged superlatively well. Like so many later fictional detectives—including his namesake House on the eponymous television series (2004-), an irascible and antisocial diagnostician who despite himself freely serves the public good by virtue of his love of the puzzle—Holmes models a form of virtue that yields public good neither through narrow economic self-interest (the classical liberal model) nor sympathy with others but for the love of the work. Those names—House, Holmes—with their domestic overtones seem to confirm the argument of this chapter: that it was the breakdown of

sentimentalism, grounded in idealized depictions of domesticity, that made the emergence of professionalism, and its avatar the fictional detective, possible.

My emphasis in this chapter on the professional as a male expert, one who intrudes into domestic space to heroically rectify what sentimental feeling cannot set right, might seem to lend support to the orthodox view of the professional as an avatar for scientific male authority. In the next chapter, I look one of late nineteenth-century American fiction's preeminent female professionals—Nan Prince in Sarah Orne Jewett's *A Country Doctor* (1884)—to consider how a writer more associated with a genre (regionalism) mistrustful of rationalizing institutions embraced professionalism. Like Green, Jewett makes professional feeling the basis for a reimagining of the social, although Jewett's concern is not with immigrant labor and domesticity but with regional difference in an era of homogenizing nationalization. Jewett's novel appeared as the American Medical Association was expanding and consolidating its power to use licensing to police its ranks. Jewett's novel promotes professional feeling, as embodied by Nan Prince, not only as a hedge against social atomization but, paradoxically, as a safeguard against what Jewett regards as professionalization's own destructive potentialities.

3

Sarah Orne Jewett and the AMA:
Professionalism, Regionalism and *A Country Doctor*

F.O. Matthiessen's study (1929) of Sarah Orne Jewett helped establish her critical reputation for decades to come, but its critical rigor has long been questioned. William E. Cain describes Matthiessen's book study as "sentimental, soft, and self-indulgent" and attributes its failings to Matthiessen's ambivalence about his initiation into professional academic criticism (Cain 49). Written after he had completed his Harvard dissertation on Elizabethan culture and before he had begun to revise his dissertation for book publication, *Sarah Orne Jewett* offered Matthiessen, in Cain's view, a pastoral vacation from his more "rigorous" and "scholarly" work, at a moment when the future founder of American Studies was wary of being "ensnared by...professional scholarship" (51). In contrast to his professional work on the Elizabethans, Matthiessen's book on Jewett was (in Cain's words) a "labor of love"—in the strictest sense, *amateur* work. Significantly, Matthiessen dedicated his book to his deceased mother, to whom "he had been devoted" (50), thus inscribing the text within a matrix of filial and domestic affection rather than that of professional scholarly rigor.

Cain's critique of Matthiessen derives from the scholarly recognition that Jewett's achievements, like the achievements of so many women authors, had been underestimated and indeed actively diminished by the founders of American studies, especially by those (like Matthiessen) who championed her work. Matthiessen, in Cain's view, fails to treat Jewett "with real seriousness" by using her work to indulge in a refreshing vacation from the rigors of professional scholarship (50). Yet even now, when Jewett has been reclaimed as an artist worthy of professional scholarship, critical assessments of late-nineteenth century American fiction continue to position her (along with so many women authors of her period) *against* a hegemonic, masculine culture of professionalism. If Matthiessen saw in Jewett's loving depictions of the forgotten cultures of rural New England an occasion to escape the rigors of professional scholarship, much contemporary criticism unwittingly follows his lead by enlisting Jewett's work in the service of a critical enterprise that opposes her writing to a coercive and insidious professionalism slyly complicitous with a host of oppressive institutions. For critics who see regionalism as the remains of the culturally diminished "feminine" genre of sentimental fiction after the Civil War, Jewett's work (like the larger body of late-nineteenth century regionalist writing for which her work, by critical convention, has come to be synecdochally representative²³) can be sentimentalized as bravely but hopelessly resisting the emergence of a national professional manhood that wrested cultural authority away from women, even (indeed, especially) on grounds on which their authority, in the early part of 19th century, had been more or less supreme—their bodies, domestic management, and so forth. As Dana Nelson puts it, contrary to Ann Douglas' "thesis that a 'feminization' of American culture occurred during this period," the late-

²³ Judith Fetterley and Marjorie Pryse note with some disapproval Jewett's reputation as the quintessential regionalist author (10). I do not intend to argue for or against Jewett's preeminence among regionalist writers, but rather to explore how critics of her work, Fetterley and Pryse among them, have approached her work through an anti-professionalist hermeneutic that *A Country Doctor* thoroughly undermines.

nineteenth century witnessed “national manhood brace[] itself in the mantle of professional authority” (133).

In this chapter, I want to reconsider this all-too-familiar critical narrative, by arguing that Jewett’s *A Country Doctor* (1884)—as well as another work of regionalist fiction, Alice Cary’s “The Great Doctor” (1866)—challenges the stark opposition between the sentimental-affective and the professional by which this critical narrative is fundamentally structured. Far from resisting the professionalization of American culture, Jewett and Cary embrace it (with reservations) as an affective basis for social integration across lines of difference. In particular, Jewett depicts the professionalization of medicine as offering women—or, rather, certain women—the ability to carve an affective space for themselves beyond the constraints of heteronormative prescriptions of womanhood. That the author of *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, revolving around the herbal practitioner Mrs. Todd, should have produced a novel depicting the professionalization of medicine in such a positive light poses a striking problem for rigidly gendered accounts of the rise of (medical) professionalism, which oppose professionalism’s masculinist rationalism to the “feminine” ethos of sentimental domesticity. In narrating a young woman’s awakening to the possibilities for personal fulfillment in the sphere of professional activity against the backdrop of a disapproving rural New England community, Jewett draws on discourses of professionalism to disrupt dominant gender discourses, while moreover, I argue, exploring professionalism’s power to serve as an affective framework for binding together diverse interests in the postbellum U.S. My argument is not that the professional discourses, institutions and cultures lacked a hegemonic social “agenda,” but that critics like Nelson have critiqued professionalist ideology on the questionable grounds, failing to attend to how professionalism opened up possibilities for imagining a world in which greater social equality

across lines of group identity might exist, but only by fantasizing such a world as one in which certain forms of *class* difference were naturalized and class identity ontologized. While the critique of Matthiessen I referenced earlier depends upon a distinction between what one does professionally and what one does for the love of it, Jewett's novel suggests that no one can love what she does more than the professional, and that this affective relation of the professional to her work might be powerful enough to serve as a basis for social organization in an era of geographical and economic expansion and intensified economic polarization.

The Good Doctor

Published in 1884 and set in the decades bracketing the Civil War, Sarah Orne Jewett's *A Country Doctor* narrates the story of an orphaned girl's intellectual and personal development and eventual entry into the medical profession in the midst of dramatic and rapid transformation in the practice of medicine in the United States. Over the course of the nineteenth century, hospitals, once religious and/or charitable institutions tending to the terminally ill, developed into for-profit businesses providing recovery to those who could afford to pay. At the same time, the gradually growing power of the American Medical Association (founded 1848) began a decades-long process of nationalizing standards for medical training and practice. Replacing a regionally diverse and heterogeneous apprenticeship system under which "doctors acquired more idiosyncratic views of medicine and formed personal attachments with their preceptors rather than their peers," professionalization gradually streamlined the practice of medicine in America, "increased the homogeneity and cohesiveness of the profession," "instill[ed] common values and beliefs,"

and “discouraged sectarian divisions” (Starr 123). The professionalization of medicine accompanied, and enabled, medicine’s increasing rationalization and industrialization, which protected the public from quackery and spurious patent medicines even as it marginalized respected pre-industrial practices such as botanical healing and natural childbirth. It would be overstating the case to say that medicine became fully professionalized in the period between 1850 and the early 1880s—as late as 1900 professional medicine had not consolidated its authority to standardize medical training and exclude so-called “irregulars” whose training did not meet those standards (Starr 198)—but the period witnessed an epochal social transformation as the medical profession changed from one comprising unlicensed practitioners whose training and methods were highly variable to one consisting of a smaller number of licensed physicians whose training and practice were marked by greater uniformity across regions.²⁴

The engagement of Jewett’s novel with these larger social transformations makes it something of a case study in how literary regionalism confronted a significant late-nineteenth-century challenge to the autonomy of local practices. Moreover, in focusing on the professional and personal development of a young woman, it offers one of the very few “searching or sympathetic accounts” in nineteenth-century American fiction “of a girl’s steady growth into an autonomous, self-sufficient, productive citizen unencumbered by the burdens of conventional domestic life.”²⁵ Yet unlike the magazine tales of life in Dunnet Landing, Maine, that made Jewett’s reputation (and which Henry James coolly praised as her “beautiful little quantum of achievement”), *A Country Doctor* has been almost totally

²⁴ Important accounts of this transformation include Paul Starr, *The Social Transformation of American Medicine: The Rise of a Sovereign Profession and the Making of a Vast Industry* (Basic Books, 1982); John Duffy, *From Humors to Medical Science: A History of American Medicine* (U Illinois P, 1993); Regina Morantz-Sanchez’s *Sympathy and Science: Women Physicians in American Medicine* (U North Carolina P, 1985); and John Haller, *American Medicine in Transition, 1840-1910* (U Illinois P, 1981).

²⁵ Frederick Wegener, “Introduction” to *A Country Doctor*, xxxiv-v.

neglected by scholars of American literature (James, “Mr. and Mrs. James T. Fields” 174). I would like to suggest that *A Country Doctor* has been neglected not for its aesthetic weaknesses but for its “failure” to underwrite certain critical orthodoxies that emerged triumphant out of the culture wars--perspectives that for all their differences concurred in subjecting the ideology of professionalism to a reductive and rather formulaic critique that Jennifer Ruth describes as the “hermeneutics of suspicion” (Ruth 16). As we shall see, Jewett’s novel offers a view of the relationship of professional structures and institutions to women’s authority that complicates the dominant view of professionalism as an ideological support for white patriarchy.

Before turning to Jewett, I want to review how academic critiques of the emergence of new forms of scientific authority have structured scholarly approaches to late-nineteenth-century fiction. The last quarter of the twentieth century saw various trends in academic literary criticism converge in the critique of scientific, humanist and bureaucratic forms of knowledge as complicitous with social repression and pernicious ideological control. Because it marks a crucial site of contact between scientific discourse and intractable materiality, medicine has been a privileged site for such scholarly interventions.²⁶ In particular, numerous literary critics have explored the connections between discourses of medical science, from the early modern period forward, and literary forms and texts. In nineteenth-century studies a dominant view links the novel to the rise of positivism in medical science. Lawrence Rothfield, for instance, argues that the emergence of realism in European fiction was tied to, and worked to legitimate, the epistemic rise of positivism in medicine and in the natural and human sciences more generally. For Rothfield, late-

²⁶ Some representative studies and collections include Rothfield; Nelson, *National Manhood*; Adams; Gallagher and Laqueur, eds.; Smith-Rosenberg; Poovey; Tougaw; and Herndl.

nineteenth-century medical procedure was analogous to literary realism in that both consisted of a turn toward clinical *objectivity* and *detachment* away from the messier entanglements of emotional identification and sympathy that characterized both early-nineteenth-century fiction and lay medicine. Writing specifically about Flaubert, Rothfield argues that

realism aims at demonstrating the epistemological and heuristic authority of the medical paradigm itself, the controlled technical power of the clinical gaze....When the clinical point of view is adopted, a new, absolute gap, an ironic distance, must open up between the knowing subject (doctor or writer) and the object of knowledge (patient or character). To know the truth about a patient no longer means to understand how he or she feels, but to locate where it hurts; the doctor treats the person who is ill, but seeks to isolate the embodied disease from the person, and this requires a certain withdrawal, a reticence, a repression of the impulse toward identification with the patient, a silencing of one's sympathy so as to permit the disease to speak for itself....Similarly, to know the truth about a character no longer means to live through that character, but to record strictly its vicissitudes, and this requires an alert yet hidden omniscience that approaches absolute impersonality. (85)

Thus, as clinical positivism took hold in the natural and human sciences, a concomitant change occurred in fiction, with sentimental novels that fostered a readerly emotional engagement with characters losing critical and popular ground to realist texts that fostered in readers ironic detachment rather than identification. Late-nineteenth-century fiction not

only registered the emergence of new scientific perspectives, then, but helped to legitimate those perspectives.²⁷

A mass of scholarship has argued that the rise of the clinical perspective was deeply entwined with a patriarchal agenda seeking to seize discursive control of women's bodies. Because a great deal of postbellum medical thought depicted "woman as the product and prisoner of her reproductive system," an implicitly masculine discourse of professional medicine sought to bring their bodies under the rationalizing regime of clinical procedure and analysis (Smith-Rosenberg & Rosenberg 335). Rest cures, genital mutilation and forceps births were among the medical interventions, many ranging from the questionable to the outright horrific, prescribed for the disciplining of female patients and their unruly reproductive systems.²⁸ In the study of American literature, critical discussions of the relationship of literature to new medical perspectives and practices have centered upon Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1899), a story which famously depicts a convalescent young mother driven to madness by the ministrations of her overbearing physician husband. Suffering from depression soon after childbirth, the narrator is all but confined to a single room in a rented colonial estate. Forbidden to write--or to indulge in any mentally or physically strenuous activity--she secretly dashes off the short, nervous paragraphs of her narrative, gradually disclosing her growing resolution to liberate a ghostly woman she believes to be imprisoned behind the garish yellow wallpaper of her chamber. For critics dedicated to unmasking professionalism as the bad faith ideological support for patriarchal structures, "The Yellow Wallpaper" seemed the perfect parable. For example,

²⁷ For more on the relationship between the professionalist imagination and realist irony, see Chapter Four.

²⁸ Rosenberg and Rosenberg For discussions of medical science and gender in the late nineteenth century, see among others Morantz-Sanchez; Adams; Nelson, *National Manhood*; Herndl; and Smith-Rosenberg and Rosenberg.

the 1998 Bedford Edition of Gilman's story supplements the twenty-odd pages of Gilman's story with over 300 pages of nineteenth-century documents, many of which testify to the horrific abuses of nineteenth-century medicine. Presented in this context, Gilman's story begins to look like a fairly unambiguous critique of medical professionalism's ruthless subjugation of women to scientific methods of inquiry and control.²⁹

Dana Nelson's *National Manhood* extends the basic insights of these readings into an expansive account of the emergence of "white manhood" in the nineteenth-century U.S. The boldest intervention of Nelson's study is to connect the rise of medical science to the emergence of professional culture generally. Writing in the wake of the Bell Curve affair, in which dubious racist claims took cover under an appeal to disinterested scientific professionalism, Nelson argues that the rise of sciences such as racial anthropology and gynecology worked hand in hand with male homosocial institutions of professional fraternity to foster a national white male consciousness that invited light-skinned males to "overlook[] their own differences as they trained their focus on *other* 'bodies'" (11). Nelson's project thus sweepingly synthesizes Foucauldian critiques of power-knowledge, feminism and critical race studies with an equally powerful tradition, largely confined to Victorianist studies, of unmasking the professional. As Jennifer Ruth writes, Victorian studies since Mary Poovey "has been operating under the assumption that the nineteenth-century professional fostered the illusion that he transcended the market upon which he exchanged his services" and Victorianists have therefore tasked themselves with "exposing this fraudulent claim, laying bare the rhetorical machinations behind the professional's apparent transcendence" (9).

²⁹ Bauer, ed. (1998). Antiprofessionalist readings of Gilman's story have been challenged: see Susan Lanser (1989); Jonathan Crewe (1995); and Jane F. Thrailkill (2002).

Dovetailing Victorianist critiques of the professional with post-Cold War American studies' obsessions with race, sexuality and gender demanded a heroic feat of intellectual synthesis for which Nelson's book remains tremendously important and provocative. Yet in presenting disinterested (scientific) male professionalism as a threat to the sanctity and privacy of the women's (domestic) sphere, Nelson's argument rehearses what James Eli Adams calls the "Foucauldian melodrama," that "familiar story of the many-headed Hydra of 'surveillance' violating the sanctity of domestic privacy" (858-59). Nelson's perpetuation of this critical commonplace is compounded by the fact that her study, by conflating professionalism with (pseudo) scientific discourses of sex, race and gender, depicts professionalism as an intrinsically raced and gendered discourse. To be sure, Nelson is building upon one of the central insights of critical race studies: that the early nineteenth-century production of the category of whiteness in the United States worked to occlude the exploitation of working-class "whites" by the wealthy, fostering an imagined sense of community among white men and dividing the American working-class along racial lines (cf. Roediger). If the category of whiteness ideologically banished class struggle from dominant views of American history and culture, however, Nelson, by treating professionalism as a discourse of race and gender rather than as a discourse of class *intervening* in discourses of race and gender, replicates that very gesture of occlusion, erasing class considerations from our understanding of professionalism's ideological work and reinscribing structures of difference along exclusively racial and gender lines.³⁰

³⁰ Nelson in fact hints strongly that her study will collude in the very occlusion of class difference that her study purports to analyze: "my aim is to analyze white manhood not so much in the range of its local formulations (such as white urban working-class manhood, or white patrician manhood), but in its broader symbolic attachment to national identity and civic organization" (*National Manhood* 6).

A brief analysis of a fictional treatment of medical care by Alice Cary will help us to see how professionalism, a discourse of class, might be critically and fruitfully disarticulated from the discourses of gender in which it unevenly intervenes and with which critics too often have confused it. “The Great Doctor,” serialized in two installments of the *Atlantic* in 1866, offers apparent support for the conventional portrait of nineteenth century professional medicine as a conspiracy of white knowledge workers against women. As Judith Fetterley argues, the story “presents the medical profession as...a cancer with its roots deep in the body of the human community” (Cary xlii), and indeed most of the medical practitioners in the text are depicted as preying on the hopes and fears of the gravely ill and their families. The story consists of two loosely connected, symmetrical narratives. The first deals with the succumbing of a farmer, John Walker, to a disease his doctors are able neither to diagnose nor to cure. “We had all the doctors in the neighborhood,” says John’s bereaved mother, “but none of them understood his case. At first they thought he had the small-pox, and doctored him for that; and then they thought it was a liver-complaint, and doctored him for that; and then they thought it was bilious fever, and then it was typhus fever; and so it went on, and I really can’t believe any of them understood anything about it” (239). Alternately bled, blistered, and dehydrated under doctor’s orders, Johnny is driven “clean crazy” before rapidly succumbing to his still undiagnosed disease.

The second half of the story repeats the basic narrative elements of the first half, only this time within an allegorical framework of almost risible explicitness. Johnny’s son Hobert contracts cancer, and he and his wife expend all of their resources in fruitless pursuit of a cure. In desperation, Hobert and his wife turn to a famous doctor by the name of Killmany. Hobert is repeatedly warned that the famous Dr. Killmany is an notorious charlatan. A slave he encounters warns him that Killmany “mos’ly sends dem ar’ [sic] as ar’

doctored by him to dar homes in a box!” while another person advises him that Killmany “has no more regard for human life than you have for that fly” and that “gain is his first object, his last object, his sole object” (256, 259). For the desperate Hobert, however, the grotesquely exorbitant fees Killmany charges his patients simply confirm his rare excellence as a physician. Hobert submits to Killmany’s expensive operation, which only hastens his demise.

In both parts of the story, professional medicine not only fails to cure disease but causes needless suffering for patients and impoverishes families. The doctors who treat John Walker only succeed in depriving the dying man of comfort in his last days by subjecting him to ineffectual and painful “heroic” medical practices, while Killmany is depicted as morally responsible not only for Hobert’s premature death but for the financial ruin of his widow. By contrast, nonprofessional medicine, such domestic maternal care, stands out for its greater humanity and feeling. In the first part of the story, unfeeling medical dogmatism is dramatically contrasted to maternal affection when John Walker’s mother is prevented from giving her dying son the cold drink he desperately craves by an unfeeling “young doctor” who, stubbornly insisting upon his “heroic” treatment of dehydration, “stepp[ed] between us [and] took the cup out of my hand” (239-40).

Yet to see “The Great Doctor” as an indictment of professional medicine (as avaricious, unfeeling and predatory) combined with a reactionary advocacy of traditional healing would be to oversimplify its double-edged critique. Folk medicine and domestic healing, while depicted as well-meaning and sincere, are also revealed to be ineffectual in healing the sick. It is precisely because the ministrations of Mrs. Walker fail that the help of professional physicians is sought. Moreover, by targeting practices such as bloodletting, the

story in fact sides *with* and not *against* contemporary transformations in American medical practice. By the 1860s, the period during which “The Great Doctor” is set and was written, bloodletting and other “heroic” procedures had been out of fashion among professional physicians for a decade or more (Starr 56). By having John Walker suffer these ineffectual and painful treatments, Cary is not addressing problems in the *professionalization* of medicine but with the *persistence* of irregular medical practices that the AMA, the chief institution dedicated to medicine’s professionalization, was specifically targeting for elimination.

Likewise, professional avarice of the sort exhibited by Dr. Killmany was among the principal targets of professional reform. The AMA, like other professional associations, sought to minimize what it saw as destructive competition among its members by advocating for rigorous and centralized licensing requirements that would keep the pool of doctors few in number and high in quality. Because their quest for shielding from the market forces of supply-and-demand prompted charges of monopolism and protectionism, advocates of licensing had to vociferously profess their adherence to a principle higher than the profit motive. Unlike many irregular practitioners and hawkers of patent medicines, the good doctor was professionally bound by a code of ethics that elevated the well-being of his or her patient above every other consideration, especially profit. Paul Starr notes that patients’ fees were notoriously difficult to collect in the nineteenth-century, a difficulty perhaps exacerbated by the necessity for licensed professionals to performatively demonstrate their transcendence of narrow pecuniary self-interest.

Cary’s story then creates a desire not for a return to the medical practices of the past but a professional medicine guided not by profit or dogmatism but by a genuine concern for the health, well-being, and comfort of the patient. Cary’s story condemns its greedy and

unfeeling doctors not for their extreme professionalism but for their not being professional *enough*. In this respect, the story's paragon is not one of its figures of maternal domestic care but the allegorically named Dr. Shepard. While Killmany derives financial riches from the benighted optimism of his terminal patients, Shepard refuses to dispense false hopes or to charge patients for whom he can do nothing. Shepard tells Hobert that his cancer is in an advanced state, that "he must not hope to be cured" by any operation and that "all his hope was in quiet and care" (258). When the unbelieving Hobert offers to pay him for his diagnosis, Shepard will accept no fee: "I have done nothing for you; and my advice has certainly been disinterested. I don't want pay for that" (258). But Shepard is not simply romanticized as the beau ideal of medical practice; Cary puts him forward to explore how an as yet semi-professionalized medical community is unable to protect patients from the Killmanys of the world. Horrified by Killmany's exploitation of the sick, Shepard is nevertheless restrained by his own professionalism from explicitly accusing Killmany of malpractice. Midcentury medical ethics deemed it unprofessional to be critical of another physician, as such criticism contributed to the competitive spirit professionalism sought to eliminate. "Professional solidarity" was considered essential to guarding the medical profession against unseemly competition for patients: "physicians were to avoid any behavior that might smack of patient stealing....[T]hey were supposed to avoid visiting any sick friends who were under the care of another doctor since that might arouse suspicions; and if they did make such a visit, they were to skirt any discussion of the treatment....When taking over a case, they were to justify, as far as honesty would permit, the previous doctor's conduct of the case" (Starr 94). Thus when someone remarks that Killmany's treatment of Hobert amounts to murder, Shepard declines to agree and couches his own severe judgment of Killmany within an evasive hypothetical: "I must not say that...but if I had performed

[this] operation, under the circumstances, I should think myself his murderer” (264). Cary’s story, then, is not an indictment of medical professionalism but of medicine’s incomplete professionalization; lacking a centralized institution with authority to discipline or expel Killmany from the profession, good physicians like Shepard are prevented by their own professionalism from shielding patients from physicians who exploit their fears and prey upon their hopes.

In the absence of a robust institutional disciplinary framework of certification and exclusion, then, midcentury discourse about professional medical ethics stressed the importance of cultivating proper feeling as equaling if not surpassing in importance the development of skill. Essays in medical journals as well as medical school commencement addresses drew the line between professionalism and unprofessionalism along an axis of *feeling* rather than objective ability. In 1853, Joseph Carson, a professor of medicine at the University of Pennsylvania, in an address to the graduating medical class, explained that “candor” in observation and diagnosis was one of the most important virtues to be espoused by a doctor.

In its influence upon society, there is perhaps nothing so impressive nor so fruitful of good as the correct and faithful representation of things as they actually exist. The necessity of it is more conspicuous from the gloss and the fictitious covering ordinarily investing the affairs of life: for specious misrepresentation is so prevalent, that the attainment of declarative truth is frequently difficult. (Carson 23-24)

The terms with which Carson advocates candor in medical diagnoses—praising the “correct and faithful representation of things as they actually exist”—could easily be mistaken for an essay on realism in fiction. Yet Carson depicts the ability to transcend subjectivism as

entailing not a clinical withdrawal of feeling from the patient but rather a renewed affective relation toward the world. Carson emphasizes the affective dimensions of and bases for such medical descriptive realism: in exercising “candor” to “correctly stat[e] the condition of his patients” the physician must combine “tact,” “firmness” and “feeling” (25). Moreover, the possibility of such empirical accuracy is grounded in fellow-feeling existing among members of a larger professional community: the doctor is buoyed up by “sympathy” with an imagined community of “co-laborers” grounded not in personal acquaintance but in their shared affective investment in a professional pursuit (14). For Carson, professionalism in medicine depends not upon clinical objectivity but upon an affective disposition supported by sympathetic connections within a network of professional fellowship.

Like Carson, Sarah Orne Jewett associated professional excellence in medicine with accuracy of observation grounded in proper feeling. In an autobiographical sketch published in 1892, Jewett suggests that her girlhood travels with her physician father contributed significantly to her development as a writer. Theodore Herman Jewett worked as a physician in rural South Berwick, Maine and he invited his young daughter to accompany him on his medical rounds. As a young girl Sarah Orne Jewett was an avid reader of fiction by Austen, Eliot and Margaret Oliphant, and she viewed her “own world of imagination” as “more real...than any other,” but over time her admiration for her father’s acute eye for the significance of seemingly insignificant details gradually awakened her to the interest inherent in everyday country life (Jewett, “Looking Back” 367). “I was sometimes perplexed at my father’s directing my attention to certain points of interest in the character or surroundings of our acquaintance,” she writes.

[M]y father never lost a chance of trying to teach me to observe. I owe a great deal to his patience with a heedless little girl given far more to dreams than to accuracy, and with perhaps too little natural sympathy for the dreams of others.

The quiet village life, the dull routine of farming or mill life, early became interesting to me. I was taught to find everything that an imaginative child could ask, in the simple scenes close at hand. (367)

“[A]s I write my sketches of country life,” she also remarks, “I remember again and again the wise things he said, and the sights he made me see” (367). Jewett here constructs an origin story for her writerly self that grounds her literary art in her father’s lessons in accurate observation of every day life. But far from confirming Rothfield’s view that late-nineteenth-century medicine and realist fiction overlapped in advocating a clinical and ironic perspective, Jewett’s sketch implies that medical and literary realism both require affective engagement: to observe things accurately, one must *care* about them. As Jewett writes, her childhood indifference to the quotidian details of country life ensued from her absorption in her own “dreams,” fed by popular fiction, and an attendant lack of “sympathy for the dreams of others.” As a young woman, then, Jewett was prevented from finding the significance in the everyday *not* on account of an indulgent and immoderate absorption in the lives of other people, but on the contrary in a solipsistic absorption into her *own* “dreams.”

Jewett’s sketch chimes with contemporary injunctions to medical students in suggesting that accurate observation (in medical diagnoses as in fiction writing) depends not upon an inhuman transcendence of subjective emotion but rather the cultivation of particular kinds of affectivity. Moreover, her sketch (by making her fiction derive from her

father's medicine) suggests that these kinds of feeling are not gendered as male or female. Indeed, for Jewett, professionalism seems to be defined not by gender but by how one affectively negotiates one's relationship to *place*. Jewett identifies her father's preeminent qualities as a deep knowledge of human nature and an indifference to consideration of profit. Growing up in the household of his father, a mercantile capitalist, Jewett's father was "unconscious of tonnage and timber measurements, of the markets of the Windward Islands or the Mediterranean ports" and instead gave over his "devotion" to "the study of medicine," a devotion which "only ended with his life" ("Looking Back" 366). Dr. Jewett's hyperattentiveness to the world around him entails a turn away from his father's participation in translocal networks of global trade oiled by calculations of profit. As Jewett depicts it, professionalism in medicine has nothing to do with grounding white male exceptionalism in fantasies of clinical disinterest and everything to do with developing an affective disposition that, moreover, takes on the weighty task of imagining and managing the tension between the far-away and the near-at-hand, between local and translocal forms of meaning, value and authority.

The conflict between the local and the trans-local is, of course, one of the overriding thematic obsessions of regionalist fiction, and Jewett's *A Country Doctor* explores this conflict with the specific cultural context of the professionalization of medicine. *A Country Doctor* begins in the rural village of Oldfields, Maine, which (like Dunnet Landing in *The Country of the Pointed Firs*) is a site of occulted knowledge and secret histories. In the early chapters, the reader is confronted with a "cheerful" domestic scene: two women, Mrs. Martin Dyer and Mrs. Jacob Dyer are enjoying a "social hour or two" as guests in the home of Mrs. John Thacher. The three women knit, converse, and snack on cake and apples (*Doctor* 6). The cake they enjoy "was of a kind particular to [Mrs. Thacher], who prided herself upon never

being without it; and there was some trick of her hand or a secret ingredient which was withheld when she responded with apparent cheerfulness to requests for its recipe” (10).

The apples, too, have their own half-occulted history:

they were grown upon an old tree, one of whose limbs had been grafted with some unknown variety of fruit so long ago that the history was forgotten.... Whether it were some favoring quality in that spot of soil or in the sturdy old native tree itself, the rich golden apples had grown there, year after year, in perfection, but nowhere else. (10)

The cake’s slyly withheld ingredient, the apples’ inability to thrive outside of Thacher soil: these seemingly trivial details instantly characterize Oldfields as a place where knowledge is proprietary, occulted, attached to persons and places, and not easily portable. The limits of such knowledge are exposed when a crisis arrives, quite literally, on Mrs. Thacher’s doorstep: Mrs. Thacher’s daughter, Adeline, looking “forlorn” and “in the last stages of decline” and “carrying her child in her arms” (21). As Mrs. Thacher sends urgently for the doctor, Mrs. Martin Dyer “ascend[s] to her garret in quest of some useful remedies in the shape of herbs” (22). Like the redoubtable Mrs. Todd, the character at the center of Jewett’s *Country of the Pointed Firs*, Mrs. Dyer is a herbal practitioner, and her expert knowledge of the medicinal benefits of local vegetation has made her “the authority on all medical subjects for that neighborhood”--next, that is, “to the doctor himself” (22).

“The doctor himself” is Dr. Leslie, Jewett’s loving fictional depiction of her father and a character whom contemporary reviewers pronounced “delightful.”³¹ If Dr. Leslie is contrasted to Mrs. Dyer on the basis of recognition of his superior “authority,” that

³¹ *Spectator* 57 (October 18, 1884), 1378-79.

authority seems to derive less from manifestly superior skill than from his ability to feel, and make others feel, in particular ways. Echoing Joseph Carson's address at the University of Pennsylvania, the novel grounds Dr. Leslie's virtues as a physician less in his ability to cure his patients than in his ability to inspire in them feelings of confidence and trust: "[T]he benefaction of his presence was felt by every one....There was something singularly self-reliant and composed about him; one felt that he was the wielder of great powers over the enemies, disease and pain....[T]here was that about him which gave certainty, not only of his sagacity and skill, but of his true manhood, his mastery of himself" (25). Indeed, considering that Dr. Leslie is unable to save his first patient from a death the narrative concedes as inevitable, it is quite evident that Dr. Leslie's professionalism will be grounded not in his "sagacity and skill" (which are assumed rather than represented) but in his personal qualities—qualities that are here gendered as masculine ("true manhood") but which the novel as a whole will work to liberate from such gender prescriptions.

This depiction of Dr. Leslie as a figure whose professionalism is a function of affect rather than skill recalls the language with which Jewett memorialized her father, not only in the autobiographical sketch we have already considered but also in a eulogy she wrote for him in 1879. Instead of focusing on his medical achievements, Jewett concentrates almost entirely on her father's sensibility and mental habits. She boasts of his reputation, while a student, for his "singularly close habits of observation and study," but his powers of observation are linked to amiable sociability: Dr. Jewett "won friends for himself everywhere; his genial, beautiful smile, and rare wit and humor, his unselfishness and kind-heartedness, made his presence seem like sunshine everywhere he went...Even on a journey, or elsewhere, among entire strangers, he at once roused people's interest, and everybody seemed to recognize the true-hearted gentleman and charming companion at first sight"

(“Theodore Herman Jewett, M.D.” 266-68). Yet if despite being universally liked Dr. Jewett is also depicted as somewhat lonely, alienated from his professional peers, and misunderstood by his rural neighbors. After graduating from medical school, Dr. Jewett

planned to go abroad for some time, to perfect himself in some speciality in the medical schools of Europe, and, on his return, to locate himself in one of our larger cities. But [his father] begged him so persistently not to leave home, that...he stayed in Berwick just to please him.... And there his life was, for the most part, spent. It could not help being, at times, somewhat a lonely life, for he was shut out from the larger circle of professional friends, with its pleasures and advantages, to which he would have belonged in a city. Not that his ambition ever needed more stimulus than it found, or that he ever felt that his skill had been thrown away, where it was appreciated. The people in the village and on the lonely farms seldom realized what a man he was, though they put their confidence in him so fully as their doctor and their friend....He wrought many most wonderful cures...but his victories over disease were oftener unheralded and unrecorded, and he was content to have it so, since his wish was not so much to be called great as to be useful, and the service done, he was glad, and there was an end of it. (266-67)

The note of sadness and regret in this passage is mingled with a note of pride in the purity of her father's almost saintly professionalism, all but untainted by “ambition” or cupidity.

Jewett dwells lovingly on what his choice to remain a country doctor reveals about his moral character, and even couches her praise of his skill in the context of a praise of his humility, evidenced by his willingness to diligently serve a community that could only dimly appreciate

his surpassing professional excellence. His “unheralded” victories over the diseases afflicting his Berwick neighbors redound all the more strongly to his credit for being unheralded: in the absence of financial reward or professional celebrity, professional excellence must be its own reward. It is this tautological nature of professionalism that permits Dr. Jewett to remain “content” in his loneliness.

Like Jewett’s father, Dr. Leslie is depicted as a man “at home” everywhere, on the friendliest of terms with neighbors by whom he is nevertheless estranged on the basis of his superior understanding and knowledge of the world. The doctor “was a lonely man in spite of his many friends” (32) and he looks upon his neighbors as “Druid worshipers” with “strange ways” (30). Yet his distance from his neighbors’ “strange ways” is combined throughout the novel with a social intimacy and comfort with them rather than clinical or anthropological detachment. Dr. Leslie’s ability to feel at home among neighbors from whose ways he is furthermore matched by countervailing skepticism about new medical practices enthusiastically embraced by some of his professional peers. Dr. Leslie often defends “old-fashioned” practices against the faddishness of these young doctors:

Often Dr. Leslie would be found eagerly praising some useful old-fashioned drugs which had been foolishly neglected by those who liked to experiment with newer remedies and be “up with the times,” as they called their not very intelligent dependence upon the treatment in vogue at the moment among younger men of certain cliques, to some of whom the brilliant operation was more important than its damaging result. There was, even in those days, a haphazard way of doctoring, in which the health of the patient was secondary to the promotion of new theories, and

the young scholar who could write a puzzlingly technical paper too often outranked the old practitioner who conquered some malignant disorder single-handed. (125)

In objecting to the “puzzlingly technical” jargon of young medical specialists, Dr. Leslie surprisingly echoes the complaints launched against formally trained physicians by advocates of popular medicine, such as the “radical movement of botanic medicine” led by Samuel Thomson, a physician with no formal training. A school of medicine practiced mostly in the rural North, Thomsonianism emphasized natural healing and claimed that the best medical practice was grounded in tradition and common sense. To the Thomsonians, professional medicine was a protectionist charade propped up by arcane and antidemocratic medical jargon. But despite the resemblance to Thomsonianism, Dr. Leslie’s objection to hyperspecialized jargon quite evidently does not spring from populist antiprofessionalism and anti-intellectualism. “Dr. Leslie was always trying to get at the truth, and nobody recognized more clearly the service which the reverent and truly progressive younger men were rendering to the profession” (125-26). Benignly skeptical, Dr. Leslie refuses to fully embrace either traditional, folk medicine or the latest medical fads. From Dr. Leslie’s perspective, both are united by their occulted histories—the “puzzlingly technical” language of medical specialists doubling the herbal practitioner’s “secret ingredient” as a means of exclusion and enhanced prestige. For Dr. Leslie, hyperspecialization constitutes its own special form of provincialism—as the common expression “turf war” suggests.

Dr. Leslie’s efforts to distance himself from these occult knowledges of both lay and professional varieties precisely mirrors the efforts of the AMA during its founding and rise to prominence. The AMA was founded with the goal of establishing a space of relative

autonomy for its membership from the external pressures of the market, while centralizing and standardizing medical standards and enhancing the profession's social prestige. The AMA fought this battle for professional sovereignty (to borrow Paul Starr's phrase) on two principal fronts. On one side, it battled to exclude so-called "irregular" practitioners—a broad category to which were consigned midwives, herbal practitioners, outright quacks, hawkers of patent medicine cures, and so forth—most of whom lacked formal medical training and whose activity was seen as lowering the prestige of the medical profession while driving down wages by glutting the market with competition. Over the course of the nineteenth century, the AMA fought for monopolistic powers of licensing and certification in order to officially police membership in the profession. Meanwhile, on another front, it sought broad internal consensus and the elimination of internecine schisms. Throughout the nineteenth century, disputes between rival schools of medical theory divided medical institutions and occasionally erupted into actual, physical violence, as when a clash between different camps of medical theory at the Eclectic Medical Institute of Cincinnati in 1856 concluded when one party to the dispute arrived at the college armed with a cannon (Starr 93-94). One of the principal goals of the development of professional codes of behavior was to foster professional solidarity, by declaring overt hostility between factions unethical.³²

Professionalization, then, constituted an effort to navigate medicine between the Scylla of local folk custom and the Charybdis of professional factionalism. Centralized and formalized codes of ethics and standards of education and practice were seen as essential to this process, and the power of licensing was the chief enforcement mechanism to ensure that those standards were universally honored and applied. The importance of the AMA was its national reach and scope: such authority naturally had to be translocal, or else many doctors

³² See Starr, Chapter Three, especially 93-99.

or medical schools could simply move to states with less rigorous and exacting standards. It took decades however for the AMA to succeed in its effort to establish the centralized control over licensing and certification. For most of the nineteenth century, including the period during which *A Country Doctor* is set and was written, the AMA was a relatively weak institution, limited by scant resources, little enforcement power, and internal squabbles (Starr 91). Dr. Leslie himself seems conscious of the negative consequences to the profession in the absence of a robust institution to control numbers and manage competition. While his old college chum Dr. Ferris expresses the optimistic view that “there’s less quackery in our profession than any other” (77), Dr. Leslie expresses grave worries about the effect increasing competition is having on the quality of all kinds of labor: “There will be more and more sorrow and defeat as the population increases and competition with it. It seems to me that to excel in one’s work becomes more and more a secondary motive; to do a great deal and be well paid for it ranks first” (96).

Supporters of the AMA believed that by controlling the numbers of physicians through strict and energetically enforced licensing standards would lead to greater professional excellence, but this belief was not universal. One of the questions most raised by skeptics was the question of region. How would centralization and nationalization of the medical profession affect the autonomy of local practices and cultures? And how would professionalization affect rural communities’ access to medical care? As the AMA acquired the institutional muscle to decertify or shut down underperforming medical schools, the number of doctors entering the profession each year would decline. To the AMA’s supporters, declining numbers would raise wages for members of the profession and help stave off a profit-driven race to the qualitative bottom. But, some objected, wouldn’t these less numerous, if better prepared doctors gravitate to the wealthiest communities, leaving

poor communities underserved? Moreover, as less rigorous medical programs lost students or certification, those that remained standing would have to adopt the model of Johns Hopkins or the University of Pennsylvania, whose programs were more difficult and intensive, demanded extensive clinical training, and most importantly took longer to complete, thus involving increased financial sacrifices on the part of the aspiring doctor. Wouldn't these changes result in a class of doctors drawn mostly from the wealthy classes who could afford to make such sacrifices, and wouldn't these doctors flock to the wealthy cities where they would be better able to recoup the financial losses sustained through their years of training (Starr 112-18)? As a faculty member at a Chattanooga medical school wrote:

True, our entrance requirements are not the same as those of the University of Pennsylvania or Harvard; nor do we pretend to turn out the same sort of finished product. Yet we prepare worthy, ambitious men who have striven hard with small opportunities and risen above their surroundings to become family doctors to the farmers of the south, and to the smaller towns of the mining districts....Would you say that such people should be denied physicians? Can the wealthy who are in a minority say to the poor majority, you shall not have a doctor? (quoted in Starr 125)

Such fears would prove valid: despite optimistic predictions that "a kind of 'spontaneous dispersion' would spread the graduates of the top medical schools to the four winds," in actuality the "increasing cost of medical education ensured that many small towns and rural areas would lose the services of any physician" (Starr 125-26).

While the harmful effects of professional reform on rural and poor communities did not fully materialize until the early decades of the twentieth century, they were already

discernible when Jewett was writing *A Country Doctor* in the early 1880s. “Between 1870 and 1910, poorer states lost physicians relative to the population [as] wealthier states gained them,” while within states “disparities between cities and rural areas were also growing” (Starr 125). Little wonder, then, that one staunch supporter of medical professionalism, the author-physician Stephen Smith, also warned against the corrupting influences of the city. In *Doctor in Medicine and Other Papers on Professional Subjects* (1872), Smith offers unambiguous support for a strengthened AMA. Because of the proliferation of quacks and other irregulars, he writes, the “honor, dignity, and character of American medicine are approaching a crisis” which only a strengthened AMA can “avert”; “Through the medium of the American Medical Association, [the medical profession] can erect such defences as it chooses, and dictate, authoritatively, who may, and who shall not, be admitted to its highest privileges....[I]t can by suitable organization establish its *own* standard of education, have its *own* examining body, and confer its *own* degrees” (24-25). But Smith also implies his concerns about the migration of the best doctors from the country to the city, which skeptics believed was one of the likeliest effects of a robust and powerful AMA. According to Smith, “a Sabbath spent in rural scenery, away from the excitements of the jostling, city crowd, may be elevating, refining, and hallowing; but very different is the effect upon the *morale* of the individual, when the day is occupied with boisterous and exciting city amusements. These scenes are not conducive to rest, or even recreation, but they stimulate the passions and appetites, and lead to the wanton commission of offences” (78, Smith’s emphasis).

The affective dimensions of medical professionalism could serve a double function, then: professional feeling could supplement a relatively weak AMA while also acting as a check on the more troubling effects of professionalism. The vital question was whether

professional feeling might serve *both* to encourage professional excellence in physicians not yet subject to rigorous centralized licensing mechanism *and* to prevent the flight of the best doctors to wealthy urban centers—to the neglect of rural populations—that a strengthened AMA was expected to precipitate. Through the story of the mental and personal development of Nan Prince, Adeline's daughter and the ward of Dr. Leslie, from orphaned girl to country doctor, *A Country Doctor* sets forth an imaginative solution to the problem at the center of these debates over medical professionalization. Jewett's *bildungsroman* narrates not only the development of an individual professional but the development of an ideology of professionalism that established the professional's autonomy from external authority (the laws of the market, provincial power arrangements) even as it ensured that the professional would submit to a moral law grounded in professional feeling.

Professional Futurism

I have been arguing that professionalization of medicine was committed to constituting and policing the borders of a translocal community through both the centralized disciplinary authority of a more robust AMA and the less formalized mechanism of professional feeling that would both supplement and act as a check against some of the negative consequences of robust institutional professionalization. While the professionalization of medicine sought to move the practice of medicine away from bewildering heterogeneity of local practices and power dynamics toward increasing standardization and rationalization, it also (through the inculcation of professional feeling) sought to protect impoverished regions from professional neglect.

This effort to affectively negotiate between the claims of regional and national authority places professionalization in explicit dialogue with literary regionalism. The clash of local-rural with national forms of community, meaning and value is one of the central concerns of regionalist fiction. As Richard Brodhead writes, regional fiction “requires a setting outside the world of modern development, a zone of backwardness where locally variant folkways still prevail” (Brodhead 115-16). Because writing regionalist fiction depended upon deep knowledge of such settings, “regionalism made the experience of the socially marginalized into a literary asset” and “cultural advantage” for an era of homogenizing nationalization (117). At the same time, however, readers of regionalist fiction were more likely to be concentrated in urban areas far removed from the places depicted in such fiction: Stephanie Foote points out that the readers who consumed regionalist fiction, if they “did not think of themselves as exactly worldly,...probably did not think of themselves as provincial either” (4). According to Foote and many other critics of regionalism, regionalist fiction constituted a literary response to the standardizing tendency of modern western life. Although regional texts offered “portraits of preindustrial rural communities and people,” their “nostalgic tone shows them to have been profoundly shaped by an awareness of the globalizing and standardizing tendencies of urbanization and industrialization” (3). For Foote, Sarah Orne Jewett, especially in *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, “[p]erhaps more than other writers...amplifies the traditionally valued concerns of regionalism [by gesturing] toward an outer world that may be read as the embodiment of nineteenth-century history threatening to destroy the world of Dunnet Landing” (20).

Regionalism (particularly as sentimentalism’s heir presumptive) has been conventionally understood as gendering this conflict between local cultures and modernity, counterposing “feminine” values of domesticity, community and tradition to the

“masculine” forces of modernity and nationalization. Jewett’s *A Country Doctor*, however, by centering on a female protagonist who embraces a career as a professional physician, defies this binaristic logic. In the late nineteenth century, the entry of women into the medical profession was greeted with some ambivalence. For some, women doctors threatened to delay the professionalization of medicine, by further increasing the numbers of doctors and thereby intensifying competition. Indeed, one of the reviews of Jewett’s novel raised precisely this concern: “There are already many more male doctors in the world than the world needs, most of whom work with their highest abilities and intense belief in their dogmas without successfully grappling with the problems which disease presents. To add to the already overcrowded profession vast numbers of a sex not usually considered scientific or endowed with keen, accurate intellectual vision does not seem to promise the instant dawn and full noonday which enthusiasts declare to be shining in the distance.”³³ At the same time, however, the perceived need to establish an affective basis for medical professionalism led some observers to defend the admission of women to medical schools on the basis of their supposed greater capacity for feeling. Wrote one essayist, “It is certain that medicine, which gives such scope to the study of the natural sciences and such development to the higher sentiments and holier feelings in the practical application of its principles, will hereafter invite women to our ranks in yearly increasing numbers” (Smith 58).

While her choice of career is supported unconditionally by her kindly guardian Dr. Leslie, Nan confronts two major obstacles to her professionalization: her relationship to her patrician aunt and her courtship by a young lawyer. By placing these obstacles in the way of her protagonist, Jewett is able to carefully distinguish Nan’s professional feeling from both sentimentalism and failed professionalism, signified respectively by the elder Miss Prince and

³³ *Lippincott’s* 34, September 1884, p. 319

George Gerry. Both Gerry and Miss Prince reside in Dunport, the novel's major setting outside of Oldfields. Once a node in a thriving network of commercial trade, Dunport has been marginalized and antiquated by the rise of the railroad: "It had come to be an uncommon event that a square-rigged vessel should make the harbor of Dunport, and the elder citizens ignored the deserted wharves, and talked proudly of the days of Dunport's prosperity, convicting the railroad of its decline as much as was consistent with their possession of profitable stock" (192). While the elder members of the town profit ambivalently from the forces of industrialism and modernity they disparage, the younger citizens, or at least the "more enterprising" among them, finding no future in this blighted town, "spread their wings of ambition and fled away to the larger cities or to the westward" (192).

Miss Prince, one of the first citizens of Dunport, is "a proud and stately" woman, "more colonial than American" and "provincial in her traditions and prejudices," whose "ancestors had belonged to some of the most distinguished...colonial families" (112, 114). During the first half of the novel, the elder Miss Prince, provoked by her dislike of Nan's mother, holds Nan at arms length from her affections even as she supports her financially, until, upon meeting Nan for the first time in the novel's second half, she is so struck by how much of her father there is in the girl, and how little of her mother:

"I suppose this is Anna," the not very cordial voice began, and faltered; and then Miss Prince led her niece toward the window she had left, and without a thought of the reserve she had decided upon, pushed one of the blinds wide open, and looked again at Nan's appealing face, half eager herself, and half afraid. Then she fumbled for a handkerchief, and betook herself to the end of the sofa and began to cry: "You

are so like my mother and [my brother] Jack,” she said. “I did not think I should be so glad to see you.” (147)

Here, Miss Prince’s “reserve” unexpectedly melts into tears at the sight of an estranged niece so physically like herself; Anna’s outward resemblance to the Prince family and, implicitly, her lack of resemblance to her mother, makes Miss Prince’s attitude of icy reserve impossible to sustain. “This was no copy of that insolent, ill-bred young woman who had so beguiled and ruined poor Jack,” she reflects; “she was a little lady, who did honor to the good name of the Princes” (148). Miss Prince’s feelings here are consistent with a sentimental tradition which predicates the capacity for fellow-feeling on actual or potential resemblance.³⁴ For the elder Miss Prince, the imprint Nan bears of the Prince family makes it impossible for her to continue to withhold her affection for her; consanguinity, manifested in external appearance that indexes a hidden metaphysical essence, trumps all. Completing the full circuit of sentimental feeling, Miss Prince ends by feeling a proprietary interest in her niece—the logic of what Gillian Brown has described as the dynamic of sentimental possession: capitulating to her irrepressible feelings of affection for her niece, “she felt a great consciousness of having been added to and enriched, as the person might who had suddenly fallen heir to an unexpected property” (152).

Miss Prince, then, experiences her reunion with Nan as a scene from a midcentury sentimental novel like *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, in which two characters are brought, through the operations of sympathy, into a newly intimate, but unequal relation. For Nan’s part, however, the reunion has the quite contrary effect of dispelling her childhood fantasies of self-fulfillment through a reunion with her estranged blood relative. The young Nan, while

³⁴ According to Michelle Burnham, “The traditional formulation of sympathy [is] an identification with...suffering figures whom we are or could be like” (4).

in the care of Dr. Leslie, sometimes fantasized about being restored to her aunt and to the life of privilege that she imagines as her birthright. As she becomes “aware of a great outside world beyond the boundaries of Oldfields,” the young girl associates that larger world her unknown relative: “she felt a new, strange interest in her mysterious aunt, for it was this hitherto unknown space outside the borders of Oldfields to which her father and his people belonged” (63, 102). The elder Miss Prince is, to the young Nan, the repository of deferred satisfaction: “She had been told that her aunt—that mysterious and beneficent aunt—had already sent her money which was lying idle in the bank until she should need to spend it, and her imaginary riches increased week by week, while her horizon of future happiness constantly grew wider” (59). Even as a train speeds her to Dunport and to a reunion with her aunt in Chapter Fifteen, a now adult Nan thinks back to these childhood fantasies and acknowledges their continued hold upon her: “Long ago she had laughed at her early romances of her grand Dunport belongings, but the memory of them lingered still” (146). As a carriage transports her from the railway station to her aunt’s home, Nan observes the streets of Dunport with intent interest as the home of her unknown father and almost unknown mother: “So this was Dunport, and in these very streets her father had played, and here her mother had become deeper and deeper involved in the suffering and tragedy which had clouded the end of her short life” (146). Even now, her eyes fill with tears as “with strange irony came...a picture of the home of one of her schoolmates,—where the father and mother and their children lived together and loved each other” (147).

Yet upon meeting the elder Miss Prince at last, Nan finds that reality falls far short of her changeling fantasy, and Miss Prince ceases to be the embodiment of a copious future but instead signifies stagnation and a refusal to acknowledge, much less adapt to, present realities. Largely unconscious of the physical resemblance that her aunt finds so deeply

affecting—she is most impressed by the fact that “Miss Prince was so much like *other* people”—Nan perceives a huge gulf of experience and understanding separating her from her provincial relative (148, emphasis added): “Nan’s taste had been so educated and instructed by her Oldfields’ advantages, not to speak of her later social experiences, that she felt at once that her aunt’s world was smaller than her own” (148). The reunion that shakes the aunt out of her chilly hauteur strikes the niece as “prosaic” (156), and Nan, who throughout the novel expresses the wish that she might be useful, considers her aunt a heartbreaking waste of enormous reserves of character and personality: Miss Prince’s “strength and will of determination”—the same which “made the framework of [Nan]s own character”—“were all the traits of character which are necessary for the groundwork of an enterprising life, but Miss Prince seemed to have neither inherited nor acquired any high aims or any especial and fruitful single-heartedness, so her gifts of persistence and self-confidence had ranked themselves for the defense of a comparatively unimportant and commonplace existence” (158-59).

Nan’s overcoming of her desire for her aunt’s approval allegorizes the process whereby medicine seized professional sovereignty from forms of authority and association grounded in ties of blood and patronage, and in this respect sharply distinguishes her from the dependence of George Gerry, the young lawyer from Dunport whose proposal of marriage Nan climactically rejects. Like many young people of Dunport, George feels trapped there and is unable to imagine a life for himself outside it. Feeling “dissatisfied with his surroundings” and “hardly used by a hindering fate,” he “believed himself most anxious to get away, yet he was like a ship which will not be started out of port by anything less than a hurricane” (192). Although he believes that his professional training ought to free him from dependence on his community of origin—“he might be a great lawyer in Dunport as

well as anywhere else”—he feels organically integrated into Dunport in a way that makes life elsewhere unthinkable.

Discontented though he may be, George has been richly rewarded for his inability to move on from his community of origin: “Dunport was grateful to him because he had stayed at home, and he was altogether the most prominent young man in the town” (193). Despite his resentment of the provincial constraints imposed upon him by Dunport, George has actively built his career by developing local ties of custom, kinship and patronage that are not transportable. These were precisely the sort of social arrangements and power structures against which the practice of law, during the period of its professionalization, struggled to establish its autonomy. As we saw in Chapter Two, the professionalization of law (like that of medicine) struggled for autonomy from the personal and capricious ties of patronage by rationalizing and standardizing legal training. In the early national period, law was a family affair, with firms made up of members tied to one another by blood or marriage: until the Jackson era, “the lawyer class...tended to be closely restricted and built on a system of personal alliances including marriage, paternal occupations, an extended apprenticeship, a college education, and economic means” (Bledstein 185). The professionalization of law (again like that of medicine) sought to open up access to the profession to new talent by undermining local power structures and establishing institutions such as professional associations that operated at the national level to establish translocal standards in education, accreditation and ethical practice. George has failed to embrace professionalism’s emphasis on individual merit within a rational and consistent framework of qualitative standards and values, instead throwing his reliance on the insular and unregulated system of provincial power dynamics governed by kinship and patronage. Because of this, George finds himself,

by his own doing, enmeshed in local power relations and incapable of thriving in the larger world.

George has benefitted in particular from the patronage of the elder Miss Prince. For her part, Miss Prince has been motivated by a sentimental attachment to George's late father, whom George physically resembles. Just as Miss Prince eventually melts toward Nan once she meets her and discovers her physical resemblance to her late brother, Miss Prince has long since taken a special interest in this young copy of a man she once loved, and has given him "the place in her heart which" according to the narrator "should have belonged to her niece" (132). George for his part does his best to make himself "especially agreeable" to her (133). Even before meeting Nan, George "had made up his mind that he would be attentive to her" on account of her aunt. Gerry's desire to marry Nan is, thus, at least initially motivated by a desire to align his interests firmly and permanently with those of his powerful patron.

Paradoxically, when George finally meets the niece of his patron, he imagines her to be the embodiment of all that patronage has excluded him from: she seems to represent "what he had missed since he had ended his college days," "a welcome link with the busier world outside of Dunport;...a gleam of cosmopolitan sunshine, which made the provincial fog less attractive than ever. He was anxious to claim companionship with this fair citizen of a larger world, and to disclaim any idea of belonging to the humdrum little circle which exaggerated its own importance" (195-96). The cosmopolitan quality Gerry discovers in Nan—or projects upon her—leads him to see his own struggle for recognition and reputation in Dunport as a petty enterprise. Yet his very desire to "disclaim" Dunport and to unmoor himself from its small social world by means of an attachment to Nan

paradoxically entails, in his mind, circumscribing the ambit of Nan's activity: George wants to see this embodiment of cosmopolitan worldliness "anchored" in "a home of her own" (198).

If Gerry's courtship of Anna, then, is rendered most intelligible within the frame of George's ambivalent relation to local/provincial and translocal/professional power structures, then Nan's climactic rejection of George's proposal of marriage needs to be understood not only as a refusal of the domestic existence to which any marriage (in Nan's view) would confine her, but also a specific rejection of the antiprofessional or preprofessional values that George has embraced. While explaining at great length the reasons why she must reject of Gerry's proposal of marriage in Chapter 20, Nan says, "I know ...that most women are made for another existence, but by and by I must do my part in my own way to make many homes happy instead of one; to free them from pain, and teach grown people and little children to keep their bodies free from weakness and deformities" (217-18). In this passage, Nan draws on the ideology of domesticity and reworks it as the basis for professional ideology: in disclaiming domesticity, the professional woman does not, paradoxically, abandon the home, but makes the world her home: her home is everywhere. Nan's feeling of universal at-home-ness contrasts not only with the domestic female's confinement to the home but, more thunderingly, casts in deep relief Gerry's sense that, by being anchored in a provincial town for which he has no affection, he is universally homeless.

Interestingly, even as Gerry sees in Nan, or projects upon her, a cosmopolitan aura, Nan hardly shares his desperation to disclaim the ties that bind her to her community of origin. Even as she rejects the confinements of domestic life, Nan feels no corresponding

impulse to flee the confinements of rural existence. On the contrary, Nan feels it “a great pleasure to belong to the dear old town” (227), but that sense of belonging is accompanied by awareness of opportunities for her in the wider world. “More than one appointment had been offered [her] in the city hospitals....But she decided for herself that she would neither do this, nor carry out yet the other plan of going on with her studies at some school across the sea. Zurich held out a great temptation, but there was time enough yet” (227).

Dwelling at the very end of the novel upon the “old ties of affection and association” that connect her to Oldfields, Nan’s thoughts conclude on a stirring note:

And Nan stood on the shore while the warm wind that gently blew her hair felt almost like a hand, and presently she went closer to the river, and looked far across it and beyond it to the hills. The eagles swung to and fro above the water, but she looked beyond them to the sky. The soft air and sunshine came close to her; the trees stood about and seemed to watch her; and suddenly she reached her hands upward in an ecstasy of life and strength and gladness. “O God,” she said, “I thank thee for my future.” (233)

Novels about vocations, according to Lawrence Rothfield, resemble conversion narratives in that both involve “a single radical discontinuity of the self, at the moment of conversion” when “the old egoistic self renounces its desires” (80). As such, novels of vocation, he argues, are radically *anti*-novelistic, dispensing with the appetitive desiring subject proper to the novel form. Once the protagonist in a novel of vocation experiences her professional epiphany toward the middle of the novel, everything after is anticlimax. Yet the ecstatic words of gratitude with which the novel concludes suggests an alternative way of reading the novel of vocation: not as a novel short-circuited by the premature gratification of the

protagonist's desires, but as a novel enhanced by its protagonist's essential ungratifiability, her embrace of gratification's indefinite or even infinite deferral. Indeed, Nan's gratitude for some undefined and unconsummated future satisfaction links her perhaps more closely to the kind of female protagonist Jennifer Fleissner associates with naturalist fiction. Writing about *Sister Carrie*, Fleissner writes that "Carrie's never-ending dreams that future happiness awaits, through a turn in the road ahead that she cannot yet imagine, work *against* sentimental insinuations made to women like her in the 1890s that the conventional marriage plot could ensure female fulfillment" (33). Yet even as *A Country Doctor* shares with *Sister Carrie* a rejection of the marriage plot and a character who remains ever oriented toward a moment of future satisfaction, there is as wide a gulf between Carrie's neurotic unsatisfiability and Nan's ecstatic gratitude as there is between Carrie's consumeristic material desires and Nan's professional refusal of such material gratification. Carrie's desires make her perpetually restless, while Nan's deferral of complete fulfillment to some future moment harmonizes her to the present.

In this respect the kind of deferral of fulfillment enacted on the final pages of *A Country Doctor* might be less usefully compared to the ungratifiable appetites of naturalism's heroine than to a trope of literary and political discourse that Lee Edelman, in *No Future*, refers to as "reproductive futurism." Focusing in particular on sentimental narratives, from Dickens' *Christmas Carol* to the musical *Annie*, Edelman argues that liberal politics, "however radical the means by which specific constituencies attempt to produce a more desirable social order, remains, at its core, conservative insofar as it works to *affirm* a structure, to *authenticate* social order, which it then intends to transmit to the future in the form of its inner Child. That child remains the perpetual horizon of every acknowledged politics, the fantasmatic beneficiary of every political intervention" (Edelman 2-3). Queerness, he goes

on to argue, “names the side of those *not* ‘fighting for the children’”; “*queerness*...figures...the place of the social order’s death drive” and, moreover, “attains its ethical value precisely insofar as it accedes to that place, accepting its figural status as resistance to the viability of the social while insisting on the inextricability of such resistance from every social structure....Rather than rejecting, with liberal discourse, the ascription of negativity to the queer, we might...do better to consider and even embrace it” (3, 4). For Edelman, it is the unrepentant Scrooge rather than the avuncular benefactor of Tiny Tim—as it is the irascible Miss Hannigan rather than the red-headed orphan singing of a utopian tomorrow that is “only a day away”—who represents a truly radical politics organized around a negation of futurity.³⁵

Like the sentimental texts that Edelman critiques in his study, *A Country Doctor* focuses attention on the figure of a child, but one whose nonconformity to heteronormative prescriptions of female subjectivity has led critics to claim her as a queer figure.³⁶ And if Nan’s rejection of social prescriptions of womanhood can hardly be said to constitute a radically nihilistic politics of “no future,” it is likewise discontinuous with the politics of sentimentalism. If Nan does not embody or articulate a *negation* of futurity—Edelman’s

³⁵ Edelman takes as a central text the 1993 film *Philadelphia* which I discussed in my introduction. For Edelman, the film’s ostensible message of tolerance is thoroughly saturated with an uncompromisingly heteronormative sentimentality. Edelman focuses on the final scene of the film, the wake for Andy Beckett, set in room “crowded with children and pregnant women whose reassuringly bulging bellies displace the bulging basket (unseen) of the HIV-positive gay man (unseen)” while a videotape of Andy Beckett as a child plays on a television in the background (18). “The tears that these moving pictures solicit burn with an indignation directed not only against the intolerant world that sought to crush the honorable man this boy would later become, but also against the homosexual world in which boys like this eventually grow up to have crushes on other men. For the cult of the Child permits no shrines to the queerness of boys and girls, since queerness, for contemporary culture at large as for *Philadelphia* in particular, is understood as bringing children and childhood to an end. Thus, the occasion of a gay man’s death gives the film the excuse to unleash once more the disciplinary image of the “innocent” Child performing its mandatory labor” (19). As I wrote in my introduction, a film like *Philadelphia* thus retains enormous interest for criticism on the basis of its ultimately unsuccessful attempt to get beyond sentimental reproductive politics, ultimately lodging its faith for a brighter future not in the film’s queer (or professional) characters but in its prodigiously reproductive straight (lay) people.

³⁶ See for example Fetterly and Pryce, 326.

radically nihilistic politics of “No Future”—nevertheless she represents the professionalization of the reproductive futurism that animates sentimental art and politics. While sentimentalism offers a vision of the future that ultimately is reducible to a return to, in the form of the biological and cultural reproduction of, the past, professionalism, in Jewett’s novel, imagines the future as an endless and unpredictable unfolding of individual and collective human potential. It is worth noting that Burton Bledstein, in his study of professional culture, notes that from the perspective of the northeastern urban professionals, southerners behaved as though they had “no future” (28). By contrast, writes Burton, northern professionals expressed their “faith in the future” in “teachings about delayed gratification and careful calculation” (29).

If Nan’s ethos of “professional futurism” (as we might call it, to distinguish it from Edelman’s biologically-based “reproductive futurism”) is hardly reducible to the prudential deferral of gratification characteristic of classical liberalism’s *homo economicus*, it yet implies the relinquishment of present satisfactions for some future moment of complete fulfillment, and thus constitutes an internal division, a subjective disjunction. It internalizes within the subject a disjunction that, in sentimental reproductive futurism, divorces political struggle from its (never achieved) utopian realization. Nan seems desperate to repress this disjunction by insisting that it is only by giving herself fully to her profession that she can achieve wholeness. “I could not marry the whole of myself as most women can,” she explains to George, thereby asserting that marriage to him would leave her self-divided, but she also professing that a total embrace of the profession (with the psychic division between present work and deferred future happiness that entails) would grant her personal wholeness (217). The novel thus represents its exemplary professional—Nan—as characterized by same internal, psychic disjunction which some of Jewett’s contemporaries saw as

characterizing women on the marriage market. In *Women and Economics*, Charlotte Perkins Gilman anatomizes the peculiar relation patriarchal courtship practices impose upon the unmarried female: while the “woman’s whole life depends upon one choice,” yet she “must not appear as if she wanted it” (Gilman 160). Professionalism demands a similar kind of self-division, a total devotion to one’s work divorced from any expectation of extrinsic reward. *A Country Doctor* implicitly defines professionalism as the ability to experience this disjunction as psychic wholeness.

By returning in the final chapter to the setting of the first, the novel links Nan’s ecstatic moment of professional resolve to her mother Adeline’s decision in the first chapter not to drown herself and her infant in the river that runs through Oldfields. Nan in fact reflects on this: “There was a strange fascination about these river uplands; no place was so dear to Nan, and yet she often thought with a shudder of the story of those footprints which had sought the river’s brink, and then turned back” (233). The novel has revisited this setting one other time, at almost the exact center of the novel, when Nan, alone on the bank of the river, resolves, in the teeth of social disapproval, to become a doctor. In this climactic moment, feeling deeply her “unfitness for the simply duties which life seemed to be offering her with heartless irony,” Nan reflects that “it was not with her, as with many of her friends, that the natural instinct toward marriage, and the building and keeping of a sweet home life, ruled all other plans and possibilities” (110, 107). Despite all her efforts to “fancy herself in sympathy with the conventional world...of the every-day ideas of society,” Nan’s “inward sympathy with a doctor’s and a surgeon’s work grew stronger and stronger” (109).

Sympathy—which for the philosophers of the Scottish Enlightenment was one person’s experience of fellow-feeling with another through an act of imaginative

projection—gets reconfigured here as an affective tie to one's vocation. Instead of a web of feeling binding together moral adults on the basis of a perception of (at least potential) similitude, sympathy is reimagined as having the potential to bind individuals together through their devotion to their work, and thus capable of producing social harmony across lines of difference. On the surface, the novel might seem to be decisively liberalizing sympathy—that is, expunging its residually republican emphases on socialization and public duty and leaving only the individual fanatically pursuing her own desires regardless of social demands. But the novel hardly promotes that classical liberal moral calculus whereby the private pursuit of enlightened self-interest yields social benefit, because this calculus defines that self-interest in terms of material reward and social approbation. Jewett's novel advocates professionalism as the willingness to make personal sacrifices in the present neither in pursuit of magnified economic reward in the future nor in desire for the approval of a society whose values you reject, but solely the psychological rewards of professional excellence. These sacrifices are dramatized in a small way very early in the novel, when Dr. Leslie foregoes his dinner to rush to the side of Nan's expiring mother, which places him on the spot to be entrusted with the guardianship of Nan in the first place. For Nan's part, what Dr. Leslie calls her "high moral purpose" (130) Nan explicitly declares to have no truck with sentimental values: "I hate...to be sentimental," she says, "but I want to throw my whole love and life into whatever there is waiting for me to do" (). The moral grounding for virtue in the novel is not at all (despite some rather perfunctory talk of God) religious: as Nan remarks to her "confused and dismayed" aunt, "I think one should care more about being a good woman than a good Episcopalian" (156). But neither is the grounding for Nan's secularized virtue the conventional domestic and sentimental definitions of the "good woman" that Nan emphatically, explicitly and repeatedly rejects. For Jewett, it is one's all-

determining “sympathy” with one’s “work”—and not the various forms of fellow-feeling theorized by sentimental moral philosophy—that motivates the individual to make the kinds of personal sacrifices that produce benefits to the public.

This is a point brought home by the fact that Dr. Leslie is able to support Nan’s decision precisely because of how utterly autonomous his judgments are from the “opinion of society” and are predicated almost exclusively on his sense that people are called to perform the work that is “proper” to them: “Separated as he was from the groups of men and women who are responsible for what we call the opinion of society, and independent himself of any fettering conventionalities, he had grown careless of what anybody might say. He only hoped, since his ward had found her proper work, that she would hold to it” (121-22). Professionalism, for Jewett, offers a form of socialization which does not require the individual to submit her conduct to the judgment of society—to which indeed the approval or disapproval of other people is nearly, if not entirely, superfluous. But professionalism’s autonomy from external authority is characterized not as lawlessness but as a Kantian or perhaps (given Jewett’s more immediate cultural context) Emersonian submission to a higher law. Nan, we are told, “was hard to find fault with, except by very short-sighted persons who resented the least departure by others from the code they themselves had been pleased to authorize, and who could not understand that a nature like Nan’s must and could make and keep certain laws of her own” (180). While here there is a hint that the laws Nan keeps are also of her manufacture, later these laws are treated as having divine origin. “To let God make us, instead painfully trying to make ourselves;...this is to keep the laws that give us...freedom” (202). The elevation of professional standard to a kind of religious imperative is underscored later when Nan, echoing the Gospel of Luke, tells her aunt: “Listen, Aunt Nancy! I must be about my business” (205). While in the Gospel story, the

young Jesus declares that he must be about his *father's* business, Nan's words internalize that divine imperative, so that in a very Emersonian fashion the self is construed as the source of all legitimate authority.

A Country Doctor construes professionalism, then, not as a set of acquired skills or values but a law within the self that is activated, not produced, by one's actual entrance into a particular profession. Indeed, from almost the moment the young Nan resolves to enter medical school, she begins to think of herself as "already a member of the profession" (118). Rather than see her decision to enter the profession as a dramatic break with the past, as in spiritual conversion narrative to which the novel so ambivalently gestures, instead "it seemed to her as if she had taken every step of her life straight toward this choice of a profession" (122). By the logic of the narrative, the decision to enter the profession is not so much a prelude to the acquisition of particular skills as the confirmation of a preexisting capacity for professional feeling.

A Country Doctor thus makes professionalism the solution to the problem of professionalization; Jewett's novel construes professionalism as an affective disposition to live up to one's profession, which will mean the pursuit of professional excellence regardless of material economic benefit. If such a construction of professional identity undergirds a fantasy of professional solutions to economic polarization, it also, of course, supports class hierarchy. Class status, in *A Country Doctor*, is ontologized in a manner prophetic of late twentieth-century neoliberal discourses surrounding class. As Walter Benn Michaels has recently argued, neoliberals on the left and on the right have arrived at a consensus that views class a set of cultural signifiers rather than an economic category. Viewing class within the prism of the culture wars rather than a Marxian narrative of economic struggle, this

neoliberal consensus reduces one's class position to the status of a cultural identity that ought to be respected and appreciated rather than a structure of social and economic oppression that ought to be ameliorated or eliminated. The consequence is that anti-elitism supplements (at best) or (at worst) substitutes for a substantive struggle for more equitable access to and distribution of resources. As Michaels puts it, "if, at the heart of the liberal imagination, as [Lionel] Trilling understood it, was the desire not to have to think about class difference, at the heart of the neoliberal imagination is the desire not to have to get rid of class difference" (109). Jewett's novel reveals neoliberalism's roots in nineteenth-century conceptions of professional identity. If professionalism is conceived of as an innate capacity that allows specially-endowed individuals a measure of mobility within a stratified and permanent socio-economic order, then that very class structure becomes naturalized, while one's position within the social class hierarchy becomes less a matter of what you *do* than what you *are*. The true professional will be marked precisely by his or her accommodation to that order of things—by the innate capacity to practice a profession for the pleasure of it and without expectation of financial reward.

Nan's "mental and moral" "progress" thus narrates the evolution of professional ideology in a way that reveals both its progressive promise and its limitations. Rather than depict professionalism's supplanting of sentimentalism as a dominant ideological force as marking the masculinization of American culture (as Nelson would have it), Jewett depicts professionalism as an ideology that levels gender difference by imagining enhanced social mobility for talented individuals across lines of gender. But if professionalism imagines a way out of oppressive gender essentialisms, it does so at the heavy price of essentializing class and thereby naturalizing an increasingly exploitative economic system that both reproduces and is supported by the very hierarchized class structure professionalism

permitted individuals to navigate. If Jewett's utopian hope is that the social good might be protected by a class of persons intrinsically able—to alter a phrase from Hawthorne—to find the perfect present in the Future, it does so in such a way as to ensure that—at least with respect to unequal distribution of resources—the future will resemble her present.³⁷

The Curious Case of the Vanishing Country Doctor

The authority of the AMA, which grew steadily throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, dramatically consolidated itself in the first decade of the twentieth century with the establishment of the AMA Council on Medical Education—which codified minimum educational standards and conducted inspections of medical schools—leading in 1910 to the publication of *Medical Education in the United States and Canada* by Abraham Flexner. Now known as the Flexner Report, *Medical Education in the United States and Canada* concluded that medical schools in the United States were too numerous and that too many of them fell far below an acceptable standard of quality. These were standards of quality that the AMA had established in 1906 and which most medical schools, by complying or pretending to comply with them, had implicitly legitimized. The report particular targeted women's and African American medical schools. Flexner questioned the need for separate women's medical schools now that the best schools, including Johns Hopkins, were admitting women. In the case of African American medical colleges, the report held that what these institutions contributed to society by offering educational opportunities for groups underrepresented in the profession was offset by the low quality of education most of these schools supplied. "The negro needs good schools rather than many schools," argued Flexner, and

³⁷ See Hawthorne, "The Birthmark" in *Tales and Sketches*, 780.

recommended the closure of five of the seven African American medical schools then in existence (Flexner 178-181).

As a result of the Flexner report, and the legitimacy its high-minded and impartial author lent to AMA reform efforts, roughly half of all medical schools disappeared, either by merging with other institutions or by closing their doors. One consequence was greater homogeneity among admitted students: students admitted to the fewer-but-better medical schools that survived the report tended to come from well-to-do families who could make the kinds of financial sacrifices required by the more demanding, first-rank schools; “Whether or not physicians intended to keep members of the lower economic groups out of medicine,” writes one historian, “this was one result of [reform]” (Duffy 212). Moreover, many medical colleges that survived the purge, able now to be more selective, stopped recruiting women and minorities. Reform thus had a homogenizing effect on the medical profession, reducing the numbers of minorities and women. According to John Duffy, “token acceptance of female students by...leading medical schools seemingly eliminated the need for separate women’s colleges” but “biased entrance requirements and a deliberate policy by most faculty members to discourage women students resulted in a steady drop in the number of women’s M.D.’s” (212). In 1894, a few years after Jewett published *A Country Doctor*, 1,419 women were enrolled in medical schools; by 1909, the number had dropped to just 921 (Starr 124). The career path of Nan Prince—from orphan to female doctor—was much less imaginable in 1909—the year of Jewett’s death—than it had been just thirty years earlier. Moreover, as some of the AMA’s critics had predicted, the (increasingly) white, upper-middle-class men who entered medical school, upon graduating, gravitated to wealthy cities. The popular press, noting decreasing availability of medical care in rural communities,

began to feature stories about the “vanishing country doctor.”³⁸ Jewett’s decision to make one of the main characters of *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, the redoubtable Almira Todd, a practitioner of herbal medical suggests her growing recognition in the years after the publication of *A Country Doctor* that the professionalization of medicine had failed to live up to its progressive promise.

³⁸ Starr 126. See also Wilbur H. Watson, *Against the Odds: Blacks in the Profession of Medicine in the United States*, Chapter 9*.

4

Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Jim Crow:
Professionalism, Whiteness and *The Marrow of Tradition*

the hand of Henry Jekyll...was professional in shape and size: it was large, firm, white and comely.

—*The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*

having thus escaped from the Mr. Hyde of the mob, [he] now received the benediction of Dr. Jekyll.

—*The Marrow of Tradition*

In the wake of 2009-2010 debates over health care reform, in which opposition articulated itself by means of racist iconography (the President in whiteface, the President as an African witch doctor) and questioned the Obama administration's very legitimacy on paranoid nativist grounds, Charles Chesnutt's *The Marrow of Tradition* (1901) seems more contemporary than ever. This fictional depiction of the 1898 Wilmington, N.C. *coup d'etat* places a black

medical professional—Dr. William Miller—at the center of portrait of a community devolving into racial violence and anarchy. As white supremacists conspire to incite the violent overthrow of a democratically-elected government whose legitimacy they reject on overtly racist grounds, the novel considers the possibilities of professional feeling as the basis for democratic social cohesion in the aftermath of racial apocalypse.

While the emerging ideology of professionalism has been acknowledged by critics as a significant aspect of the text, too often it has been dismissed as a manifestation of bourgeois false consciousness or bad faith, whether Miller's or Chesnutt's. The novel has been read as a critique of the "self-deceptions" of "black professionalism" (Brodhead 209), as a celebration of the power of (womanly) sympathy over (masculine) professional ethics (Danielson), or a capitulation to white liberal hegemonic structures (Adeeko 63, Michaels 291-93). Critics agree, however, in privileging sentimentalism and sympathy in their readings of the novel: either the novel shows that professional ethics must be supplemented by sentimental feeling, else the novel advances the interests of the middle-class while betraying Miller's (and/or Chesnutt's) want of racial solidarity—what Miller regards as the "mere matter of racial sympathy" (82).

I argue that *The Marrow of Tradition* locates in professional sociality and subjectivity a positive alternative to what it represents as the hopelessly compromised culture of sentiment and sympathy. Like other black writers of late nineteenth century, Chesnutt saw sympathetic models of sociality, and the sentimental values that grounded them, as impoverished, and in *The Marrow of Tradition* he explores the possibilities for a new kind of feeling—professional feeling—to replace sentimentalism as a basis for social agency and cohesion. Chesnutt sees the individualistic commitment to one's own work for its own sake as an alternative to the

paternalism and naïveté of sentimental liberalism while at the same time declining to retreat into the ironic detachment of then-fashionable literary realism. *The Marrow of Tradition* rejects realism's ironic turn away from political engagement by linking the realist sensibility to its Other—sentimentalism—by suggesting that both lead to political paralysis and preclude positive social change. Against the sensational backdrop of a white supremacist uprising, *The Marrow of Tradition* presents both sympathy and realist irony as dead ends for social agency and explores the extent to which professionalism might constitute a viable alternative to these dead-end affects. At the same time, Chesnutt draws on professional culture's demonization of aristocratic notions of hereditary privilege to oppose the emerging ideology of whiteness. Through Miller's crisis of professional identity, the novel explores both the possibilities and the tragic limitations of professionalism for social and political transformation.

Chesnutt's Bitterness

It is well known that the “dean” of late-nineteenth century American literary realism, William Dean Howells, helped to destroy Chesnutt's career—a career he had done much to promote—when in a lukewarm review he declared *The Marrow of Tradition* to be a “bitter” book marred by its implied code of strict, even-handed justice. Echoing Portia's words in *The Merchant of Venice* (and thus casting Chesnutt as Shylock), Howells rhetorically wrings his hands over Chesnutt's failure to leaven strict “justice” with a little “mercy” for the sake of art: the novel would be “better” if less “bitter,” if less inclined to repay “wrong” with the “hate” it deserves (Howells 456). Implicitly invoking a standard of realist taste by whose

logic *tout comprendre, c'est tout pardonner*, Howells condemns Chesnutt for allowing a desire for strict equal justice to diminish his artistic vision.

By faulting *The Marrow of Tradition* for its unfeeling and inartistic endorsement of strict retributive justice, Howells apparently unknowingly extends a line of thought already explored in the novel itself. Early in the novel, Olivia Carteret is discussing the care of her newborn son with Jane Letlow, the black domestic who has served her aristocratic Southern family since before the Civil War. Little “Dodie” Carteret has been placed partially under the supervision of a young black nurse, the graduate of a mission school. Dismissing the nurse’s formal instruction, Jane remarks: “None er dese yer young folks ain’ got de trainin’ my ole mist’ess give me. Dese yer newfangle’ schools don’ l’rn ’em nothin’ ter compare wid it” (69). Olivia concedes that the young nurse’s formal education is no match for Jane’s affective investment in the Carteret family: “She does fairly well, Mammy Jane, but I could hardly expect her to love the baby as you do” (69). For her part, the young nurse is repelled by the sentimental ties of mutual affection that, in her view, enslave Jane to the Carterets: “These old-time negroes...made her sick with their slaving over white folks, who... favored them...because they had once belonged to them” (70). For the nurse, the obsequious “slaving” inspired in the worker by the sentimentalizing of labor sustains in the realm of feeling a property relation that has been abolished by law; such “slaving” makes a slaver of the employer, and makes the free worker a slave, in the domain of affect.

In contrast to Jane Letlow, the nurse espouses an unsentimental free labor ideology that opposes the “freedom” of contract to such enslavement: “they gave her nothing but her wages, and small wages at that, and she owed them nothing more than equivalent service. It was purely a matter of business; she sold her time for their money. There was no question

of love between them” (70). The nurse here seems to adopt the bitter demand for exacting justice that Howells claims is endorsed by the novel as a whole. Therefore it is vital to acknowledge that Chesnutt’s narrator casts ambivalent judgment on her disposition:

Standing, like most young people of her race, on the border between two irreconcilable states of life, [the nurse] had neither the picturesqueness of the slave, nor the unconscious dignity of those of whom freedom has been the immemorial birthright; she was in what might be called the chip-on-the-shoulder stage through which races as well as individuals must pass in climbing the ladder of life,—[neither] an interesting [nor an] agreeable stage, but an inevitable one, and for that reason entitled to a paragraph in a story of Southern life.... (69-70)

By declaring that the nurse’s unsentimental contractualism, neither “interesting” nor “picturesque,” merits little more than “a paragraph” in the novel, the narrator implies that her unsentimental ethos of reciprocity is not only politically or morally questionable but—anticipating the criticisms of Howells—also aesthetically deficient.

By contrasting the nurse’s unlovely disposition to the pretty “picturesqueness of the slave,” Chesnutt’s narrator invokes plantation nostalgia, a largely postbellum literary phenomenon whose roots lie in the picturesque tradition. The picturesque “studiously” diverted the attention of its bourgeois readers away from “squalid scenes” of industrial “urban poverty,” transporting them to the “romanticized poverty of an earlier feudal era” (Silver 95). Such strategies of representation banished any “sign of the utility or the exploitive working conditions [accompanying] working-class labor” that “would interrupt the picturesque text’s willful suspension of the real and so destroy the fantasy of domination at the heart of the picturesque” (95). Postbellum plantation nostalgia celebrating the

paternalistic relation of master and slave mystified the exploitative relations between laborers and those who employ them, and Chesnutt cut his teeth as a writer writing dialect tales that satirized such sentimental depictions of Southern life. While Joel Chandler Harris' Uncle Remus tales depicted whites and free blacks as tied together by bonds of unforced affection forged in the antebellum plantation durably grounded in unforced mutual affection, Chesnutt's Uncle Julius tales depicted the relationship between a white landowning couple and a former slave as an intricate *pas de trois* of role-playing, manipulation and uncertainty. Chesnutt's deft use of classical allusion subtly undermines plantation nostalgia's depiction of the loyal (former) slave as a childlike and childless "uncle" with no legacy beyond his faithful service to whites. By naming his ex-slave "Uncle Julius" (invoking Julius Caesar, "uncle" to Caesar Augustus and founder of an empire he did not live to rule) rather than "Uncle Remus" (founder, unlike Romulus, of nothing), Chesnutt suggests that the black laborer's seeming docility could mask tactics of resistance to white domination, and such resistance could amount to a legacy to future generations.

Yet as Chesnutt's conjure tales were discovering resistance in the seeming compliance of black servants, other black intellectuals were publicly denigrating servant work. From the perspective of postbellum white America, "The true station of a negro" was "that of a servant," as one newspaper put it (qtd. Foner, *Short History* 60), and many black intellectuals argued that to accept such employment was to reinforce such cultural stereotypes and impede racial advancement. Martin Delany declared in 1848 that "he would prefer to hear his family had died" than to discover they were employed as "domestic servants to white people" (qtd. Santamarina 66). Seeking to "uncouple [American] culture's equation of race with menial labor," black intellectuals like Delany "came to conflate the low status attached to these menial occupations with the character of those who occupied them"

(Santamarina 66). Such disdain is echoed by the contempt Chesnutt's nurse feels for Mammy Jane, whom she despises for her sustained posture of picturesque dependency. To the nurse, Jane's affective ties to her employers freeze her in social immobility. The nurse's view is, to be sure, at least partially borne out by the workings of the plot: as Richard Yarborough has noted, "in *The Marrow of Tradition*...the African American servants Mammy Jane, Jerry, and Sandy...all ...attempt to align themselves with whites, and all three have to pay for such naivete," thus dramatizing Chesnutt's view of "the fate awaiting blacks who assume that the interracial accommodations established under the old Southern slave order are still valid" (235). Throughout *The Marrow of Tradition*, the most effectively exploitative master-servant bonds are those in which all parties understand their relationship in the most sentimental terms. Olivia Carteret and Jane Letlow regard each other with reciprocal "sincere affection" (71) that only reinforces the inequality of their social positions, while Major Carteret tells Jane: "If all the colored people were like you...there would never be any trouble...You served your mistress faithfully before the war; you remained by her when the other negroes were running hither and thither...; and you have transferred your allegiance to my wife and child" (71). Carteret's idealized depiction of the unwavering loyalty of the servant across generations aligns Jane with the idealized Uncle Remuses of nostalgic plantation fiction—characters for whom formal political emancipation has entailed no corresponding social or psychological adjustment. As a highly skilled and educated worker whose duties overlap with those of the informally educated "Mammy" Jane, the nurse affects a "chip-on-the-shoulder" attitude to disidentify with the debased subjectivity Jane, to the young nurse, signifies.

As a contributor to mainstream middle-class periodicals like the *Atlantic*, Chesnutt doubtless understood that, to northeastern middle-class readers, the nurse's unsentimental,

contractual vision of employer-worker relations—far from freeing her from symbolic social abjection—would likely serve as confirmation of her essential servanthood. In writings on the servant problem that appeared frequently in women’s magazines and other periodicals “between the Civil War and World War I” (Katzman 223), the “loyal servant” who works for love of her employer was the ideal invoked to highlight by contrast the unseemly economic self-interestedness of the actually existing modern servant. As a magazine article put it in 1872, “sentiment is wasted on the modern servant, and the mistress should realize that while she properly treats and promptly pays her domestics that is not a subject for gratitude in them, but simply a matter of right and business. They sell their time and labor for her wages” (Ellis 353). Within this discursive framework, Chesnutt’s nurse, by insisting in similar language that her employment is “a matter of business” not “love,” and that “she sold her time for...money” (70), abundantly confirms her as belonging to the servant class and proclaims her lack of fitness for middle-class status.

The confrontation between two generations of black working women near the beginning of Chesnutt’s novel thus narrativizes this discursive double-bind enfolding turn-of-the-century blacks. Given that dominant cultural paradigms defined the social ambitions of the lower class as ironically demonstrating their unseemly self-interestedness and thus their lack of middle-class feeling, how could black Americans escape the position of servitude in the U.S. economy and cultural imaginary? How might a new generation of black Americans acquire something of the “unconscious dignity” which the narrator suggests, is the “birthright” of whites (70)?

For black intellectuals of Chesnutt’s generation, the possibility of black workers escaping symbolic confinement to the servant class rested in professionalization. In

professional contexts, individual social mobility was seen as consistent with public virtue rather than narrow economic self-interest. In 1898, W.E.B. Du Bois told the graduating class of Fisk University that the medical profession offered unparalleled opportunities for individual and collective black uplift. While success in the “overcrowded” profession of law might depend on “wealth” and “influence,” medicine was, he maintained, authentically meritocratic and professionalized, offering African Americans opportunities for modest individual socio-economic advancement while making meaningful contributions to the race. Medicine offered the opportunity of “large and important work” to “the well trained physician, as distinguished from the quack, and the man who is too hurried to learn”; while the “remuneration which a poor people can pay will not be large,” “the chance of usefulness and far-reaching influence on the future of our race can scarcely be over-estimated” (836).

Yet even as race leaders like Du Bois extolled it as a vehicle for black advancement, the medical profession was beginning to move in a direction that would reduce opportunities for black aspirants to the professional middle class. In 1904, the American Medical Association established the Council on Medical Education, mandating it to “elevate and standardize the requirements for medical education” (Starr 117). The council appointed Abraham Flexner to inspect all 160 North American medical schools and to draft a report detailing his findings and recommendations, which appeared in 1910. A respected young educator described by Du Bois as “one of the great leaders of education in the United States” (Du Bois 1010), Flexner was doubtless guided by a sincere desire to improve standards of medical training and practice. Nevertheless, one of the principal effects of his report was an increasingly homogeneous medical profession, dominated by well-to-do white men. Flexner’s report called, in the name of reform, for the closing of all but a few black medical colleges, citing their failure to satisfy minimum standards of educational rigor. The

result was a new organization of the medical profession in which African Americans were imagined as potential contributors to medical science in the role, not of physicians, but of laboratory mice. As a U.S. Public Health Service physician remarked in the year of the report's publication, "The future of the Negro lies more in the research laboratory than in the schools...When diseased, he should be registered and forced to take treatment before he offers his diseased mind and body on the altar of academic and professional education" (qtd. Washington 157).

It is within this context that Chesnutt's decision to center his novel on the figure of a professional physician must be understood. From the first, Chesnutt was resolved to center his fictional depiction of the Wilmington uprising on the figure of a black physician; in his notes toward the novel, Chesnutt wrote that his protagonist "must be of some pursuit or profession, preferably medicine" (*Marrow* 443). Yet the novel hardly endorses unqualified faith in the salvific nature of the medical profession. Written at the beginning of a decade of "reform" that would end with the publication of Flexner's report, *The Marrow of Tradition* is pulled between Du Boisian belief in the medical profession as an institutional vehicle for individual and collective African American advancement and profound uncertainties about the possibilities of professional meritocracy to transcend local prejudice and gradually to redress social, economic and racial inequalities.

The novel's exploration of the possibilities of medical professionalism for social agency and black uplift centers on William Miller. The grandson of slaves and son of a "thrifty" dock-worker whose savings financed his son's education, Miller studied medicine in the U.S., Paris and Vienna before settling in the South, where he used part of an inheritance to found a hospital, harboring future plans to add a school for nurses and a medical college

(74-75). Miller's reason for remaining in the South exemplifies DuBoisian ideals: "He had been strongly tempted to leave the South, and seek a home for his family and a career for himself in the freer North, where race antagonism was less keen, or at least less oppressive, or in Europe, where he had never found his color work to his disadvantage. But his people had needed him, and he had wished to help them, and had sought by means of this institution to contribute to their uplifting" (75).

The novel introduces Miller as a passenger on an interstate train, deftly associating professionalism with dynamic mobility and modernity, over and against the stubbornly hidebound and anachronistic space of the Carteret household. But the train's southward trajectory—it has departed from Philadelphia, conventionally associated with liberty and fraternal affection—permits Chesnutt to invoke *Plessy* and Jim Crow, and thus to explore how racial ideology intersects with professional ideology to set the terms of Miller's social and economic mobility. By Dickensian coincidence, traveling on the same train is Miller's colleague and former professor, Dr. Alvin Burns, who has been anxiously summoned (a further Dickensian twist) to treat the ailing child of Olivia Carteret. When Miller first approaches his mentor, Burns' reaction is ambiguous "surprise" and a "keen, incisive glance," yielding afterward to "an expression of cordial recognition" (74). Burns invites Miller to sit beside him, and the two converse about Miller's career as well as the larger problem of African American advancement, which Burns figures in reflexively novelistic terms: "the future of your race....is a serial story which we are all reading" (75). Once the train passes into the state of Virginia, the conductor tentatively approaches Burns and Miller and inquires whether Miller is Burns' servant. Informed by Burns that "The gentleman is not my servant, nor anybody's servant, but is my friend," the conductor informs him that, although he is "sorry to part *friends*...the law of Virginia does not permit colored passengers

to ride in the white cars” (77). Banished to the Jim Crow car, Miller reflects on the irony that he has been ejected from the white car not because he is black but because he is a black *professional*—or, more precisely, because he is *not* a black *servant*. Watching a “colored nurse” board the train and be seated with her employer in the white car, he considers: “White people...do not object to the negro as a servant. As the traditional negro,—the servant,—he is welcomed; as an equal, he is repudiated” (81).

Thus from early in the novel, Chesnutt registers doubts as to the power of professional institutions and relationships to provide protection against prejudice and segregation—doubts that only intensify even as the novel increasingly depicts professionalism as the only safeguard against the rise of Jim Crow. Chesnutt underscores this point by having Miller’s ejection from the main car be prompted by a complaint by “Captain” McBane, the novel’s most outspoken champion of the ideology of white supremacy. McBane is a former prison warden whose rise through Wellington society has depended upon blackmail, intimidation, and an insistence of white solidarity. McBane is the novel’s major spokesperson for an ideology of whiteness whose emergence historically paralleled the rise of professional culture. While the Civil War had impoverished the plantation class by the “loss of slaves and life savings (Foner, *Short History* 59), the category of racial whiteness underwent a postbellum transmutation from the legal warrant for the ownership of black persons “into a commensurate property of hereditary racial esteem” (Bentley 464). Postbellum American culture reimagined whiteness as a form of transcendent and inalienable property, one that united all white people while (and by) eliding or transcending social differences among whites.³⁹

³⁹ For the definitive study of the rise or “invention” of whiteness, see Roediger.

McBane is viewed with some alarm by the novel's black and well-born white characters alike. To the African American house servant Sandy, McBane represents a postbellum intensification of white solidarity that threatens the survival of antebellum social distinctions: "ain' nothin' but po' w'ite trash nohow," he reflects; "but Lawd!...Look at de money he's got... 'Pears to me de bottom rail is gittin' mighty close ter de top" (66). White elites are equally alarmed by this *arriviste* who, in a chapter titled "The Social Aspirations of Captain McBane," is described as "determined to assault society in its citadel" (139). The well-born but dissolute Tom Delamere is "annoyed" by this "social aspirant": "His aristocratic gorge rose at the presumption of this son of an overseer and ex-driver of convicts. McBane was good enough to win money from, or even to lose money to, but not good enough to be recognized by a social equal" (141).

Yet through a combination of aggressive racism, bullying and good timing, McBane's rise through southern society is well-timed and thus meteoric. In one key moment in the text, his unseemly ambitions are contrasted unfavorably with Dr. Miller's conduct. During a strategy session for the coup, one of the conspirators advises against harming Miller: he's "a very good sort of negro, doesn't meddle with politics, nor tread of any one else's toes. His father was a good citizen, which counts in his favor" (199). Perhaps irked by this seamless connection of Miller's character to his parentage or stock, the low-born McBane reacts vehemently: "That sort of nigger...sets a bad example...They make it all the harder to keep the rest of 'em down....I don't like smart niggers" (199). McBane objects that Miller's reputability is a dangerous spur to racial uplift; but more immediately he has been provoked by the general's valuation of parentage above racial identity. Having referred to Miller only moments before with the polite phrase "the colored doctor," McBane now deploys an epithet—"smart nigger"—whose brutal ugliness is designed to violently reorient group

identity along lines of immutable racial identity. And when General Belmont and Major Carteret continue to insist that there be “no trouble” concerning Dr. Miller, McBane blasts their “hypocrisy” concerning “this nigger doctor”: “This is a white man’s country, and a white man’s city, and no nigger has any business here when a white man wants him gone!” (199).

McBane’s investment in an alchemy of whiteness that magically elides intraracial difference manifestly opposes itself to professionalism, with its concern for conferring membership on the basis of an individual merit and achievement. McBane’s property stake in whiteness exempts him, in his view, from external judgments that would assign him a subordinate position in a social hierarchy. To McBane, the rejection of all authority located outside the self is a justifiable assault on hierarchical structures, including those (such as the AMA) that set the terms of Miller’s own social rise. McBane thus ironically derives from a newly conceived and strengthened racial institutional hierarchy his ideological belief in his own exemption from the judgments of institutional hierarchies. Indeed, his self-conferred title of “Captain” serves as a continual reminder of his rejection of standards of judgment outside of the self.

Critics like Dana Nelson have seen a connection between the rise of whiteness and the rise of professionalism, arguing that professional societies and institutions helped to buttress a white identity premised on the Othering of abjected blackness.⁴⁰ But *The Marrow of Tradition* depicts the ideology of whiteness as essentially antithetical to the meritocratic ideology of professionalism, since it disregards personal merit and achievement in order to unify and elevate whites. Rather than depict professionalism (as Nelson does) as code for

⁴⁰ See Nelson, *National Manhood*.

privilege based on hereditary characteristics, *The Marrow of Tradition* sets up an opposition between professionalism and white supremacy along the lines of a distinction Max Weber, Chesnutt's contemporary, drew between different modes of exclusivism. Objecting to the crude opposition of "aristocracy" and "democracy" in the work of Ernst Troeltsch, Weber writes that "one must...distinguish whether membership [in an exclusive] group is linked to...individual achievements...or qualifying features passed on by inherited social stratification or the social position of one's ancestors" (Weber 218). The novel makes a very Weberian distinction between racial exclusivism and professional exclusivism, and depicts the intensification or consolidation of whiteness in postbellum America as intrinsically opposed to the concurrent rise of professional ideology. While the protectionism afforded by professionalism not only insulated individual professionals from the logic of the market but, even more vitally, preserved professionals' collective autonomy to establish and enforce their own standards of professional rigor and competence, but the borders of its community were permeable. The ideology of whiteness predicates membership in the protected community on a theoretically immutable accident of birth.

Chesnutt's way of representing the relationship between whiteness and the rise of professionalism complicates conventional readings of *The Marrow of Tradition*. Many critics have discovered in Dr. Miller, and some in the novel itself, an elitist desire for a robust social Darwinism that will establish a caste system built on a more logical basis than race. As Miller sits alone in the Jim Crow car, he reflects on how irrationally "expensive" it is to provide separate accommodations for a solitary black passenger (79), and later, when he is joined in the car by what he regards as "noisy, loquacious, happy, dirty, and malodorous" working-class blacks, he reflects on how "personally, and apart from the mere matter of racial sympathy, these people were just as offensive to him as to the whites....Surely, if a

classification of passengers on trains was at all desirable, it might be made upon some more logical and considerate basis than a mere arbitrary, tactless, and...brutal drawing of the color line" (82). According to Walter Benn Michaels, Miller's "response to being sent back to the colored car—in effect, I don't want to ride with these people any more than you do" objects to segregation and white supremacy precisely because they impose arbitrary protectionist restraints on the "natural" operations of the marketplace. According to Michaels, remarks such as these expose Miller's essential sympathy with liberal capitalism; opposing racial segregation on the principle of market rationality, Miller (according to Michaels) declares racism an irrational barrier to capital. "The injustice in Chesnutt," he concludes, "is that racism and the drawing of the color line interfere with the market" (66). Miller thus, for Michaels, identifies *laissez-faire* economics with civil rights, professing a (naïve) faith that local prejudice will be gradually eroded by the progress of color-blind and impersonal capitalism. Treating Miller (with unclear justification) as a spokesperson for Chesnutt himself, Michaels concludes that *The Marrow of Tradition* espouses a liberal antiracism whose condemnation of an unjust *racial* order leaves an unjust *capitalist* order firmly in place.

Yet leaving aside the qualifying terms with which the incensed Miller brackets his unspoken views, to condemn Miller (much less Chesnutt) as a *laissez-faire* apologist is to ignore the importance of professionalism. For nineteenth-century forces of professionalization, as I have observed before, operated from the premise that the market was a *hopelessly inadequate and irrational mechanism* for determining value. The law of competition in an impersonal marketplace granted authority to judge professional excellence to those professionalism deemed least qualified to make such a judgment—the layperson or amateur. For the professional, the law of the market placed quacks and charlatans on an equal footing with the truly competent and skillful. For this reason, professional institutions

were first and foremost committed to *shielding* their members, and the integrity of the profession, from the corrosive effects of aggressive competition; indeed, as we have seen, critics of professional institutions tended to attack such protectionism as monopolism. So what Miller objects to is not the very existence of artificial constraints on human economic behavior. What he objects to is the *nature* of those constraints. What Miller objects to is protectionism based on accidents of birth rather than merit and achievement—and in this he is consummately professionalist.

Miller's antiracism is informed, then, not by free market principles but by a professionalist ideology grounded in an ethos of protectionism. Miller does not object to segregation because it seeks to accrue economic advantages and protections to an exclusive group; he objects only to the basis on which membership in such an exclusive group is determined. Miller objects to racism not because it is anti-capitalist but because it's anti-professional. While professionalism, at least ostensibly, justifies its protectionism on the basis of meritocracy, the ideology of white supremacy grounds group affiliation in racial status that is, by its very nature, unmeritocratic.

But if *The Marrow of Tradition* sees possibilities for challenging the rise of whiteness ideology in professionalism's meritocratic protections, it also evinces a host of anxieties about the protections professionalism affords. Throughout the novel, this distinction between professional meritocracy and racial aristocracy is challenged so as to cast doubt upon professionalism's power to offer protections to African Americans any more meaningful than the illusory protections extended by the antebellum code of aristocratic *noblesse oblige*. When Miller first encounters Burns on the train, Burns remarks, "I'm delighted...to see you looking so well – and so prosperous," to which Miller replies, "I

deserve no credit for either ...for I inherited both health and prosperity” (74). Miller’s effort to separate what is to his “credit” from traits and qualities he has inherited bespeaks his professionalist view. His rather bizarre insistence, in the course of a casual conversation, on emphatically differentiating his inherited qualities from his personal achievements exposes his anxiety about the extent to which he can separate inherited “gifts” from achievement, distinctions critical to professional ideology. Indeed, although Miller wishes to be judged by his accomplishments rather than inherited traits for which he deserves “no credit,” the narrative discloses that these same attributes made those professional achievements possible. Miller’s success was motored by Burns’s special “interest in his only colored pupil, to whom he had been attracted by his earnestness of purpose, his evident talent, his excellent manners, and fine physique” (74-75). Miller’s physical body—his comportment, physique and skin color—thus precipitated his friendship with Burns, and it was “in part due to [this] friendship that Miller had won a scholarship that had enabled him, without drawing too heavily upon his father’s resources, to spend in Europe, studying in the hospitals of Paris and Vienna, the two most delightful years of his life” (75).

Indeed, notwithstanding the fact that racial *difference* inspired Burns to take a special interest in him, the narrative emphasizes Miller’s physical *similarity* to Burns in virtually every respect other than color. Subjecting the racist “American eye” to anthropological critique, the narrator underscores how strikingly similar Miller and Burns are in physical appearance, deportment, and dress:

they were both tall and sturdy, both well dressed, the white man with perhaps a little more distinction; both seemed from their faces and their manners to be men of culture and accustomed to the society of cultivated people. They were both

handsome men, the elder representing a fine type of Anglo-Saxon, as the term is used in speaking of our composite white population; while the mulatto's erect form, broad shoulders, clear eyes, fine teeth, and pleasingly moulded features showed nowhere any sign of that degeneration which the pessimist so sadly maintains is the inevitable heritage of mixed races. (74)

Miller's desire to separate professional meritocracy from a racial pseudo-aristocracy is troubled, then, by this link between physical attributes largely determined by birth and professional success. If, as the narrator suggests, members of a profession have a tendency to look alike, this introduces the troubling suggestion that professional meritocracy is similar to the ideology of whiteness that predicates individual social worth on accidents of birth.⁴¹

Moreover, in the rioting that follow the murder of Polly Ochiltree, the line between professionalism and white supremacy is further troubled, as white professionals like Dr. Price and the lawyer General Belmont invoke professionalism to disingenuously justify actions serving the particular interests of the town's minority white population. When Sandy, wrongly suspected of Polly's murder, stands condemned by white opinion and faces near-certain death by lynching, Dr. Miller appeals to white leaders to intervene. The white physician Dr. Price appeals to his professionalism as an excuse for inaction: "I have too much respect for myself and my profession to interfere" (162). Ironically (given the novel's persistent skepticism about the *status quo antebellum*), Sandy's only safeguard proves to be

⁴¹ Moreover, Chesnutt's skepticism about the autonomy afforded by professionalism echoes the ambivalence critics have noted at the heart of late-nineteenth-century rags-to-riches novels, which often blurred the line between self-reliance and passive dependency on a benevolent patron. The rags-to-riches novels of Horatio Alger, for example, pay "lip service" to the cultural ideal of the self-made man "but fails to narrative or thematize [that ideal] effectively"; rather than present examples of "'rugged' and competitive individualism," such novels "show boys 'rising' through a combination of genteel patronage and good luck" (Moon 89). In such texts, beneath the superficial "celebrations of self-reliance" one discovers sentimental "novel[s] of nurturance" which give voice to "a craving to be taken care of and a yearning to surrender the terrible burden of independence" (Zuckerman 207, 209).

noblesse oblige of his employer and former master, the elderly plantation aristocrat Mr. Delamere. In a further irony, Delamere must effectively destroy the Southern code he honors in order to preserve it: to save Sandy from the mob, he must lie upon his honor to manufacture an alibi. Only after Delamere has lied does Dr. Price come forth with testimony ameliorating the severity of the crime. As the narrator puts it, “Sandy, having thus escaped from the Mr. Hyde of the mob, now received the benediction of Dr. Jekyll” (186). This allusion to Stevenson’s 1886 romance associates mob violence with the layman (Mr. Hyde) and dissociates it from the degreed professional (Dr. Jekyll), only to hint at a disturbing continuity between professional virtue and frenzied mob violence.

With Delamere dies the one sincere adherent to aristocratic *noblesse oblige* in the novel, and the disappearance raises the stakes for professionalism as the one form of social organization potentially capable of holding Wellington back from the brink of anarchy and racial terror. Miller too sees that sentimental ideology has played itself out—that, in Eric Foner’s words, the “paternalist ethos” has been a “casualty” of the Civil War (*Short History* 59). Under the slave system, Miller reflects, some “good white men... treated their slaves kindly...because they recognized the claims of humanity,” but many a slave owner

protected or pampered his negroes...just as a man fondles his dog,—because they were his; they were a part of his estate, and integral part of the entity of property and person which made up the aristocrat....[W]ith all this kindness, there was always present, in the consciousness of the lowest slave, the knowledge that he was in his master’s power, and that he could make no effectual protest against the abuse of that authority. (214)

Miller's recognition that the flawed a patronizing sentimentality of an earlier era has vanished before the onslaught of whiteness ideology; his hope that professionalism might offer a new form of protection from the disturbing forces of violent racist populism; and his anxiety that the protections of professionalism might be merely a new form of paternalism: these frame his professional crisis in the concluding chapters. From the moment he learns of the riot, Miller is caught up in a conflict between "professional instinct" to disinterestedly care for the victims of violence, and more self-interested ties of family feeling. Speeding through the streets of Wellington, Miller places the interests of himself and his family first, and invokes professionalism inconsistently. Preoccupied with the welfare of his wife Janet and their child, Miller at first ignores his "professional instinct" to care for the wounded. It is only when he mistakes one of the victims for his wife, he finds himself stooping over the "prostrate form" of Mammy Jane:

She was not yet quite dead, and as Miller, with a tender touch, placed her head in a more comfortable position, her lips moved with a last lingering flicker of consciousness: --

"Comin', missis, comin'!"

Mammy Jane had gone to join the old mistress upon whose memory her heart was fixed; and yet not all her reverence for her old mistress, nor all her deference to the whites, nor all their friendship for her, had been able to save her from this raging devil of race hatred which momentarily possessed the town. (226)

Significantly, this passage, both moving and savagely ironic, is the first and only time in the novel in which "Mammy" Jane is referred to by her full name. Yet this symbolic recognition of her full personhood coincides with her dying embrace of infantilized servitude: her last

“flicker” of “consciousness” is expended in a spoken wish to be restored to the mistress she has loyally served all her life. Jane’s dream of posthumous reunion with her late mistress exemplifies the affective dependency that was promoted in domestic workers—a feeling of unbreakable sentimental attachment and belonging extending into perpetuity. In her dying moment, Jane Letlow utterly capitulates to the pretty cruelty of this sentimental fantasy of proprietary benevolence. Not long after Jane death, her son Jerry also finds himself at the mercy of the rioters and without recourse to the protection of his “white patron,” Major Carteret. Carteret, present at Jerry’s death, crucially fails to recognize his loyal retainer pleading with him for protection. The fate of both Letlows dramatizes the tragic failure of sentimental paternalism to ground post-emancipation social relations. As the “raging devil of race hatred” is let loose in Wellington, the sentimental promise of genteel white benevolence toward a loyal class of black servants proves false and ineffectual. The Letlows’ having forged social identities based upon affective ties to those they work for and not (as is the case for the professional subject) in the work itself is represented as a tragic error.

To what extent does Miller’s professionalism constitute a positive alternative to the failed model of sentimental servanthood and dependency? While the abject servitude of the Letlows provides a foil for Miller’s greater personal and social autonomy, their relatively stable personal and social identities also highlight by contrast the comparatively confused and conflicted character of Miller’s professional identity. Throughout the final chapters, Miller alternatively invokes and ignores professional duty to rationalize conflicting and inconsistent behavior.

Miller’s invocations of professionalism throughout these final chapters are inconsistent and self-serving. Encountering in the course of his search a a group of black

workers, led by the working-class radical Josh Green, Miller declines their invitation to join their counterinsurgency in terms subtly invoking professional prerogative and authority. Green argues that violent resistance is essential to asserting or confirming their humanity: “Things can’t be any wuss, doctuh ... [W]e’re tired er bein’ shot down like dogs, widout jedge er jury. We’d ruther die fightin’ dan be stuck like pigs in a pen!” (225). Miller attempts to turn Green and the other men from certain destruction using language that slyly emphasizes his professional authority and superior social position. “You are throwing your lives away,” he tells them, diagnosing the social crisis as “a fever; it will wear off to-morrow, or to-night....Resistance only makes the matter worse” (225). Miller’s use of diagnostic language is neither accidental nor isolated: in an earlier conversation with Green, in which Green told Miller (in language echoing the Carterets’ nurse) “I don’ wan’ nothin’ but w’at I wo’k fer, but I wants all er dat,” Miller replied, “you’re feverish, and don’t know what you’re talking about” (115). Miller’s inclination to draw on the discourse of professionalism to justify self-serving behavior serves as disturbing evidence of his own servanthood with respect to white power. His failure to heroically rise up against the rioters belies the free subjectivity his professionalism supposedly confers upon him, and makes him, no less than the Letlows, a servant of white interests and an agent of his own oppression.

Doubtless Miller’s growing sense that his adherence to professional may have made him an unwitting servant of white interests—that he is every bit the “good negro” that “Mammy” Jane was—reinforces his initial sublime refusal to use his professional skills to save the life of Major Carteret’s child, after Miller’s own child has been killed in the riot Carteret helped to incite. Carteret, as a respected member of the white community, feels that he can expect the compliance of the man General Belmont has described as a “good negro” who doesn’t “meddle with politics, nor tread on any one else’s toes” (199). No

matter how the events of the day may have affected him, Miller, Carteret believes, “could hardly refuse a professional call,--professional ethics would require him to respond” (239). But Carteret’s confidence that Miller’s professionalism can be taken for granted—that Miller can be relied upon to be a good servant of the dominant class—proves misguided. Carteret arrives at Miller’s home to find him grieving over the death of his child, collateral damage of the uprising.

The confrontation between Carteret and Miller is notable, first of all, for its sharp critique of sentimental morality. There is, to be sure, no lack of sympathetic identification between the two men. On the contrary, Miller makes clear he is perfectly capable of imagining Carteret’s pain; he emphasizes that their experiences of loss are virtually identical. And when Miller explains that his child “lies dead, his little life snuffed out like a candle, because you and a handful of friends thought you must override the laws and run this town at any cost!,” Carteret experiences sympathy with his position that transcends racial prejudice:

Carteret possessed a narrow, but a logical mind, and except when confused or blinded by his prejudices, had always tried to be a just man. In the agony of his own predicament,--in the horror of the situations at Miller’s house,--for a moment the veil of race prejudice was rent in twain, and he saw things as they were, in their correct proportion and relations,--saw clearly and convincingly that he had no standing here, in the presence of death, in the home of this stricken family. Miller’s refusal to go with him was pure, elemental justice; he could not blame the doctor for his stands.... In Dr. Miller’s place he would have done the same thing. (241)

Finding Miller stubbornly indisposed to perform his professional duty, the grounds of appeal shift to the sympathetic grounds, and yet having imaginatively placed himself in Miller's position, like the good sympathizing subject, Carteret is compelled to acknowledge the appropriateness of Miller's intractability. Far from clouding the judgment, sympathy yields clarity of moral vision, one in which all things are seen "in their correct proportion and relations." Yet Carteret's sympathetic identification with Miller's feelings—his recognition that "in Dr. Miller's place he would have done the same thing"—translates not into action but paralysis. Carteret, in effect, is on the receiving end of the sentimental feeling bestowed by the master on the slave which (setting aside Mr. Delamere's brave but exceptional defense of his servant Sandy) never translates into real action. Although critics have read the end of Chesnutt's novel as displaying the limits of professionalism and the necessity of professional ethics to be supplemented by sentimental fellow-feeling, *precisely the opposite* seems to be the case. Sympathy, the grounding of sentimental morality, while providing the basis for achieving moral clarity across the color line, brings moral agency to a standstill. Sympathy leads only to a recognition of the justice of the other's grievance; it does not or cannot lead to action.

The détente between Miller and Carteret is broken only when Olivia Carteret arrives to plead with Miller's wife Janet for her child's life. While there is good reason to read this scene in terms of sentimental conventions, a more immediate and equally useful point of reference is the fiction of Howells. In my reading the point of this final confrontation between Janet Miller and Olivia Carteret is not only to undermine sentimental morality but also to critique the politics of Howellsian realism. In the novels of William Dean Howells, which helped to establish the formal and ethical dimensions of American literary realism, sentimentalism is usually embodied in a female character who serves as the foil for her

husband's more intellectually elevated stance of ironic and detached realism. As Philip Barrish argues, Howells' major novels reject the belief that the order of things, however arbitrary and contingent, can be radically transformed through individual or collective agency. Howells advocates a complex ironic realism that at once recognizes the contingency of social structures and values and paradoxically acknowledges the paradoxical solidity and reality of the contingent. In *A Hazard of New Fortunes*, for instance, Basil March epitomizes Howellsian "realist" irony: unlike other characters in the novel who "toss off firm but simplistic proposals" for ending the class struggle that have embroiled New York City, March displays his superior intelligence by recognizing "the impossibility of anyone's resolving the strike, let alone dealing with its underlying causes" (Barrish 38). March thus "both exemplifies the failings of...liberalism and, simultaneously, himself accrues the realist intellectual credit of recognizing those failings" (45). Howells uses March "to demonstrate how the very moment of empathizing with someone else's suffering ('I feel your pain') can be combined with a clear-eyed articulation of the structural impediments to taking action against the underlying causes"--an "often paralyzing" but intellectually courageous acknowledgement of "the unfixable brokenness of both self and world" (46, 47).

As Barrish points out, sentimentality and ironic realism tend to be gendered perspectives in Howells, with Howells' male protagonists embodying the latter in contrast to their wives' naively sentimental desire to take action to alleviate the suffering of others that they feel so deeply. At the end of his novel, however, Chesnutt makes Janet Miller the spokesperson for a middle way between ironic detachment and sentimental agency, be recalling her husband to his professional obligation. The choice in Howells is between devotion to a cause at the expense of one's intellectual integrity, and intellectual integrity at

the cost of political paralysis. Chesnutt rejects as false this Howellsian choice, locates a basis for moral action in the enchantments of work.

Elsewhere in the novel, Janet has expressed doubts about professionalism as the grounding for sociality and moral agency, implying the need for professionalism to be supplemented by sympathetic feeling. As William prepares to head to the Carteret home to treat Dodie in an early chapter, Olivia feels “by sympathy, all the sickening suspense with which the child’s parents must await the dangerous result of this dangerous operation,” and exhorts her husband to place himself imaginatively in the position of Dodie’s emotionally distraught parents: “O Will.... Think of the child’s poor mother! Think of our own dear child, and what it would mean to lose him!” (86). But here at the end of the novel, it is sympathy that is insufficient. While Olivia Carteret, pleading for her child’s life, appeals to ties of blood and sentiment that she has stubbornly refused to acknowledge throughout the novel, Janet eschews her former sentimentality and grounds her moral judgment in her economic independence, a status predicated on her husband’s professional accomplishments and reputation. Echoing the professional’s ideological rejection of inherited advantages, Janet rejects Olivia’s belated offer of her “father’s name” and her “father’s wealth.” “Now, when I have married a man who can supply my needs, you offer me back the money which you...have robbed me of” (246), she says. To be sure, Janet invokes in passing conventional sentimental phrases: “you may know that a woman may be foully wronged, and yet may have a heart to feel, even for one who has foully injured her.” But her last words to Olivia-- “you may have your child’s life, if my husband can save it!”—move us away from a discussion of sentimental fellow-feeling into a discussion of professional skill. Emphatically, the life of Dodie Carteret no longer depends on a relationship between the Millers and the Carterets, but depends entirely upon the relationship between Miller and his work. Rejecting Howells’s

example, Chesnutt makes social agency possible, but grounds it not in interpersonal affection but in the enchantments of work.

Read through the lens of professionalism, *The Marrow of Tradition* complicates orthodox perspectives on the relationship of professionalism to the consolidation of white identity as it tentatively promotes the possibilities of professionalization for individual and collective black uplift and ethical sociality in an era of racial conflict and market atomization. Far from confirming Howells' charge of "bitter" unmerciful desire for retributive justice, the novel promotes the affective orientation of professional feeling against both the sentimentality of plantation nostalgia and the pose of bourgeois irony promoted by the novels of Howells. Far from the "bitter" novel Howells accused it of being, *The Marrow of Tradition* expresses a thoroughly un-Howellsian, if again tentative, faith in the possibility of individuals to transform the social, but unlike sentimental writers, Chesnutt predicates social transformation not on fellow-feeling but on the affective investment in work that professional culture conceptualizes, valorizes and rewards.

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