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THE FACTORY GIRL  
AND THE SEAMSTRESS

IMAGINING GENDER AND CLASS  
IN NINETEENTH CENTURY

AMERICAN FICTION

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# Introduction

This project began as a search for fictional representations of factories in antebellum American literature and ended as a study of two women, the factory worker and the seamstress, as they appear in American literature and culture between 1820 and 1870. In the following chapters I show how through these two working-class figures, middle-class American men and women articulated their anxieties about their class and gender identities at a crucial period of economic and social change. In them, the languages of gender and class intersected and contended with each other.

Social historians have shown that during the second quarter of the nineteenth century an intermediate social group began to form as a result of the growth of mercantile and industrial capitalism, a group which defined itself against a smaller but wealthier upper class (an informal or ascriptive aristocracy)<sup>1</sup> and a lower working class, consisting of wage workers who had once been artisans and mechanics (part of the “middling sorts” or the “middling interests” of the eighteenth century).<sup>2</sup> Composed of professionals, small businessmen, agents, clerks, and independent farmers, this middle class emerged as a coherent group with shared experiences, values, aspirations, and ways of life that differentiated it from the two classes marking the top and bottom parts of the economic and social hierarchy.<sup>3</sup>

Although definable, the American middle class was neither static nor insulated from change. In fact, as Halttunen notes, by the 1830s, “to be middle-class was to be, in theory, without fixed social status” (29). Its members struggled to achieve order and stability in their lives, to define the boundaries between themselves and other groups, and to adjust these boundaries in response to economic and social pressures that shaped the American landscape from the 1820s to the 1870s.<sup>4</sup> Most threatening to

their identity was downward mobility. While the great financial panics of the 1830s hardly affected the wealthy in Jacksonian America, they wiped out modest property owners (Pessen 303). The high failure rate in the antebellum period was borne mainly by artisans and small businessmen (Blumin 112-116). In *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865*, Ryan argues that “midcentury was a sober time for middle-class families, a time of special anxiety about the economic prospects of the rising generation...” (153). At this time members of the middle-class were working to consolidate their position, not to advance: “Their story is not a dramatic case of upward mobility but rather a sustained battle to maintain middle-range occupations for themselves and their children” (184). According to her,

Small-business men who were struggling to keep their own firms solvent were particularly hard pressed to put their progeny on a sound economic footing within the middling sort. Of all the wills processed in Utica after 1850 a mere five witnessed the transfer of a store or workshop to a second generation...Most of the sons of the old middle class who would come of age in Utica at midcentury could expect to be unceremoniously catapulted into the status of a self-made man. (152)

The fluidity of American society that the rags-to-riches story represented had its darker side, captured in the plot of sudden decline; Jacksonian America may have been the land of opportunity where self-made men acquired their fortunes, but it was also thought of as a land of speculation, where these fortunes could be lost overnight. Fear of falling made it particularly necessary that members of the middle class distinguish themselves from those below them. Work was a key area of differentiation. For the men and women of the middle class, the values they attached to different kinds of work determined to a large extent their sense of self. One of the objectives of this book is to draw attention to the centrality of representations of work, wage-work in particular, to the construction of gender and class identities at mid-century.

By the 1850s the “Great Transformation” of America from a mainly agricultural yeoman and artisan economy to an economy of wage labor was well underway. Industrialization, with its factories, markets, and transportation networks, changed labor not only by introducing machines and other technologies, but also by transforming social relations: individual autonomy and social duty were replaced by imposed discipline and control; the egalitarian arrangement of the workshop was superseded by a hierarchical relation of wage workers and managers (Rodgers, Gutman). But the

ideology of the pre-industrial work ethic persisted in the rhetoric celebrating the working man—the honest mechanic and the skilled artisan. This rhetoric was at odds with the actual attitudes towards manual labor of a middle class threatened by downward social mobility (Blumin 109). Mediating between rhetoric and experience is the figure of the working-class woman. Through her, insecure middle-class men and women investigated their anxious relationship to wage-work and to industrialization generally.

That anxieties about work and industrialization should be articulated through women is not at all surprising. Women were America's most visible industrial wage workers. They were employed in the new-found factories and were essential to the outwork system, working for wages in sweatshops and at home; later in the century, many women became white collar workers. By studying working-class women as historical subjects, social and labor historians have highlighted the pivotal role women played in the American industrial revolution.<sup>5</sup> Little attention, however, has been paid to the working-class woman as representation, or to use Theresa de Lauretis's words, as "a fictional construct, a distillate from diverse but congruent discourses" (*Alice Doesn't* 5). In focusing on the factory worker and the seamstress as constructs, I do not mean to negate their existence as historical beings. On the contrary, my discussion of their representations is informed throughout by the work of the social and labor historians mentioned above. But working-class women as historical subjects are available to us through representations. Fredric Jameson reminds us that while "history is not a text...it is inaccessible to us except in textual form and our approach to it and to the Real itself necessarily passes through its prior textualization" (*The Political Unconscious* 35).

The factory worker and the seamstress studied here have been largely invisible in nineteenth-century American literary and cultural studies. One explanation for this invisibility is the general view that American writers, particularly before the Civil War, did not engage with the social and economic reality of their society. Michael Spindler, who demands criticism that "relate[s] literary developments in America to economic and social change" (2), believes that "[c]omplex social experience is characteristically absent from the main novels of the antebellum period" (34). This pronouncement shows traces of the influential view, developed partly in reaction to the sociological criticism of the 1930s, which posited that social and historical questions were ancillary to American literature. Lionel Trilling expressed this view when he pointed out the "lack of social texture" (112) in the works of the great American authors, as did Richard

Chase when he argued in *The American Novel and Its Tradition* that Americans wrote romances, not novels.<sup>6</sup>

Works like Amy Kaplan's *The Social Construction of American Realism* and Spindler's *American Literature and Social Change* do consider social and economic themes, arguing that realist writers represent social changes and class difference. Their focus, not surprisingly, is on the latter part of the nineteenth century. While before them Flory in *Economic Criticism in American Fiction, 1792-1900* briefly searches the literature of the first half of the century, he does so chiefly to discover the "roots of later realism" (198). Other studies of the "economic" or "radical" novel (like Taylor's and Rideout's), or ones that are directly concerned with the literary representation of class conflicts (e.g. Blake's *The Strike in the American Novel*, and Giamo's *On the Bowery*) all tend to privilege realism and naturalism as more socially-engaged genres.

Moreover, discussion of gender is absent from all these works. The few studies that do consider working women characters in American literature are interested in realistic works as well and therefore have nothing to say about the pre-Civil War period.<sup>7</sup> Even Denning, who begins his study of dime novels from the 1840s, devotes his chapter on working-class womanhood to Laura Jeane Libby's novels of the 1880s. According to him, "the first full-fledged working girl heroine appeared in the wake of the public outcry about the plight of the needlewomen in outwork and sweatshops in the 1860s" (186). Similarly, in their chapter on working-class women in *Declarations of Independence*, Bardes and Gossett maintain that "[i]n the antebellum period, class distinctions rarely figure into fictional discussions of woman's place. Although novelists duly noted that many women had entered the factory labor force, they accepted the notion that such employment was temporary and rarely evidenced any idea of class consciousness" (10). It is only after the Civil War, they conclude, that "[c]lass issues...enter directly into a number of novels about the situation of women who work outside the home" (11).

Against this view, the following chapters will show that working-class women were visible in the literature and culture from the early decades of the nineteenth century. Through my discussion of the representations of the factory worker and the seamstress in works published between 1820 and 1870, I argue that issues of class were central to representations of women and work and that well before realism American writers did engage the great social and economic issues of their day. We might not find many factories in fiction, but the issues factories gave rise to were dealt with in both canonical and popular texts. If we are to heed Jameson's call for an his-

toricist and sociological criticism that will restore literature to its concrete context (*Marxism* 377-8), we need also to expand our understanding of the relationship between literature and society by ceasing to look in literature for 'reflections' of the real world.<sup>8</sup>

Although my discussion of the figure of the factory worker and the seamstress focuses on "imaging" women, it will depart from the "images of women" criticism, which has been particularly influential in American feminist criticism. Privileging mimesis, this kind of criticism tends to judge literary texts according to whether they have positive or negative images of "real" women. Hapke in *Tales of the Working-Girl*, for example, evaluates novels about the working-class woman according to their "authenticity" to "real life." Similarly, in "Portrayal of Women in American Literature, 1790-1870," Baym justifies her interest in women's domestic novels by arguing that only in these novels do we find "realistic" portrayals of nineteenth-century women. According to her, most major American writers were not interested in women and thus did not portray them mimetically but used them as intellectual and sexual symbols. But as I will show, women writers' representations of female characters were no less ideological and symbolic than other writers. As de Lauretis reminds us,

The relation between women as historical subjects and the notion of woman as it is produced by hegemonic discourses is neither a direct relation of identity, a one-to-one correspondence, nor a relation of simple implication. Like all other relations expressed in language, it is an arbitrary and symbolic one, that is to say, culturally set up. (*Alice Doesn't* 5-6)

In emphasizing "representation" over "reflection," my discussion recognizes the fictive in the author's understanding of reality. Representation is understood here as an interpretive process that modulates, conditions, mediates, and interferes with the writer's experience of the world. Even though the images of seamstresses and factory workers we encounter in texts may not correspond to "reality," they are nevertheless "real" in the sense that they formed an integral part of the way writers and readers experienced their material reality.

This interpretive process of representation is complicated by many factors, among which are gender and class. Nead observes that the "representations of women can never be contained within an investigation of gender; to examine gender is to embark on an historical analysis of power which includes the formation of class" (8). To understand the intersection of gender and class we need to go beyond an understanding of gender as sexual difference, as difference between women and men. De Lauretis rightly

notes that “a subject is constituted by gender but not by sexual difference alone, but rather across languages and cultural representations” (*Technologies* 2). This understanding of gender allows us to articulate the differences not only between women and men, but also among women themselves. With this understanding of gender in mind, Cora Kaplan, for instance, concludes in her discussion of British nineteenth-century women writers that “the difference between women was at least as important an element as the difference between the sexes as a way of representing both class and gender” (“Pandora’s” 166). Studies of gender in nineteenth-century American literature tend to privilege it as sexual difference and to erase class as a category of analysis relevant to both men’s and women’s writings. Consequently, the middle-class woman is often discussed as a representative of all women (Banta, Earnest, Fryer, Pratt, A. Smith). Even critics who make clear they are speaking of middle-class women in particular focus chiefly on gender, not class.<sup>9</sup> In this project, I argue that considering gender alongside class allows for a fuller historical understanding of women, as both historical agents and representations. By seeing that women are constituted not just by their difference from men, but by class differences that separate them from each other, we become more alert to the complex ways women relate to each other and to men. This understanding of gender as it intersects with class is relevant to this book as a whole, but is particularly important in discussing the representations of working-class women by women writers.

Even when class is acknowledged as a category of analysis, Gilmore rightly notes, it “usually recedes to the background, if it does not vanish altogether” (“Hawthorne,” 215).<sup>10</sup> Ironically, calls to expand the canon to include working-class literature sometimes ignore the class identity of the writers; Lauter, for example, classifies writings by Rebecca Harding Davis and Elizabeth Stuart Phelps as working-class literature, although he admits that they were not of the working-class (844). In this way, he downplays the relevance of their class identity to their work. Unlike him, I will foreground the middle-class status of these writers and others to show how it affected their literary representations of labor and laboring women. The starting point for this project is Leo Marx’s seminal study *The Machine in the Garden*, in which he demonstrated the profound impact industrialization had on the American literary imagination. I will also be drawing on recent studies that have focused attention on the intersection of gender and class. Among these is Leverenz’s *Manhood and the American Renaissance*, which seeks to expose the “implicit class basis for gender codes” (74),<sup>11</sup> Bromell’s *By the Sweat of the Brow*, which convincingly demonstrates the

centrality of labor to nineteenth-century literature, and Dimock and Gilmore's *Rethinking Class: Literary Studies and Social Formations*, which problematizes, yet affirms, "class" as a category for literary analysis.<sup>12</sup>

This project underscores the intersection of gender and class in the articulation of middle-class experience by focusing attention on the working-class woman as an ideological sign. To understand her as such, we need to place her in the discursive context that gave her meaning. For as Eagleton notes, ideology is

a matter of 'discourse' rather than 'language.' It concerns the actual uses of language between particular human subjects for the production of specific effects. You could not decide whether a statement was ideological or not by inspecting it in isolation from its discursive context...Ideology is less a matter of the inherent linguistic properties of a pronouncement than a question of who is saying what to whom for what purposes...ideology is a function of the relation of an utterance to its social context. (9)

In the following chapters, the factory worker and the seamstress are read in a discursive context that consists of canonical literature, popular literature, and non-literary discourses, such as political economy, investigative journalism, political polemics, and advice literature. This contextualization is essential for an historical understanding of the meaning of working women as signs. It will show that these two figures originated in non-literary discourses and came to literature already invested with political meanings. Recognizing the origin of these signs is a first and necessary step if we are to understand the way literature used, or to borrow Voloshinov's word, "accented" them.<sup>13</sup> Viewing works by Melville, Hawthorne, Fern, and Phelps as discourses and juxtaposing them to other non-literary discourses is, then, part of an attempt to historicize literature. At the simplest level, it shows how literature, both popular and canonical, was not insulated from contemporary political debates. On another level, it affords an opportunity to examine the complex relationship between literature and politics, art and history.

This discursive contextualization, however, does not deny the "literariness" of the works I discuss here, for literature has a "dynamic of its own" (Humm, Stigant, and Widdowson 3). Literary discourses have their own rules and conventions, which play a significant role in determining meaning. This role is not always predictable. Thus in my discussion of the fiction, the question of genre will be taken into consideration. Penny Boumelha observes that "[t]he expectations engendered by the genre can enter into a relation of tension and opposition with the author's sense of an

intention and with the project of the text" (6). We will see this tension between generic expectations and political intentions in fictions about both the factory girl and the seamstress, where the use of certain formal conventions (sentimental, sensational, realistic) end up subverting the ideological intentions of the writer.

Reading canonical works in the context of popular ones is an important part of historicizing literature. I include in my discussion popular fiction that has received significant critical attention in recent years, like the domestic novel, but also works that are less well-known.<sup>14</sup> This literature sheds light on major works like those by Hawthorne and Melville. At the same time, it is important to point out that it is not considered simply as a background for the canonical texts. Popular literature is important in itself, for it helps "to articulate the tensions and contradictions within society and...to heighten their significance as part of contemporary consciousness" (Humm, Stigant, and Widdowson 5). My close readings of popular fiction will illustrate how issues of gender and class as they related to wage labor were very much part of the "contemporary consciousness" of nineteenth-century America.

The literary works discussed in the following pages are primarily fiction. As Ingham notes in her study of Victorian British fiction, novels in particular have an advantage over other kinds of writings because

they place signs within a narrative which, like the syntactic frame of a sentence, attempts to determine and control meaning. Plots, like signs, make statements. They do not simply answer the question 'What happened next?' Their main function is to show 'what it all means', how these events add up, even if they add up to meaninglessness. They are part of the method of re-accenting signs. (27)

Viewed in narrative, the factory girl and the seamstress acquire more complex meanings than the ones they have in non-literary discourses. Even the formulaic plots of sensational and sentimental fiction allow for a more ambivalent understanding of issues of labor, gender, and class than the non-literary writing of political polemic, business manuals, and journalism.

The goals of this study, then, are the following: first, to emphasize the visibility of working-class women in key political debates in nineteenth-century America; second, to study in some detail two working-class women figures, the seamstress and the factory girl, by focusing on them as ideological signs through which the culture mediated issues of gender, class and labor; third, to investigate the relationship between canonical literature and popular literature; and finally, to examine the relationship of literary representations to non-literary representations, and by extension literature's relationship to politics, ideology, and history.

The four chapters that follow tell a narrative that unfolds as a dialogue. So although they move chronologically from 1820s to the 1870s, there is still a considerable overlap. The 1850s in particular, which are central in the formation of the middle class (Blumin 12), are revisited in the four chapters.

The first chapter begins with a discussion of “the factory controversy,” which catapulted the “mill girl” of Lowell to the center of national debate. The woman factory worker emerges as a contested sign constructed by a variety of discourses which represented different political and economic interests. A conservative gender ideology figured prominently, though differently, in the political arguments of manufacturers and their supporters on the one hand, and of reformers and factory workers, on the other. As journalists, workers, and writers, women participated in this debate on both sides. I will discuss these non-literary writings at some length because they were the starting point for the debate about industrialization and were relevant to the representations of working-class women which will be discussed in later chapters. Moreover, the image of the Lowell “mill girl” was so politically and culturally influential that for decades to come it was conjured up in writings about American factories. Works by former Lowell factory workers and about them were published as late as 1898. Therefore, a close reading that foregrounds these debates is indispensable for a proper historical understanding of the response to the factory system in nineteenth-century America.

The second part of the chapter studies the literary representations of the “factory girl.” The discussion will show that the polemic continued in fiction, but that fictional representations, even the most polemical ones, allowed for a more ambivalent articulation of the issues involved in the debate. Borrowing the figure of the factory worker as a country maiden from the pro-manufacture polemics, the fiction drew out the paradigm’s latent contradictions. The use of certain literary formulas sometimes hindered the political intention of the writers, as when the seduction narrative favored by reformers ended up drawing attention away from the class exploitation they wanted to expose. This chapter concludes with a discussion of Herman Melville’s short story “The Tartarus of Maids.” My reading emphasizes Melville’s familiarity with the contemporary debates about industrialization and his subversion of the “factory girl” as a representative of the new industrial order.

The second chapter focuses on the seamstress, tracing its origin as an ideological sign to Mathew Carey’s intersecting discourses on political

economy and philanthropy from the 1820s and 1830s and analyzing its ideological uses in later decades by pro-manufacture propaganda, investigative journalism, and the seamstress literature of the 1840s. Her duality, especially as a literary figure, simultaneously expresses and mitigates cultural anxieties about industrialization. By emphasizing the seamstress's labor, my analysis recuperates an important aspect of her identity that has largely been ignored. This emphasis is part of my attempt to historicize the seamstress as a literary paradigm by analyzing the circumstances that made her popular at this particular historical moment.

The popularity of the seamstress is further discussed in the third chapter, which is devoted to Hawthorne's uses of the seamstress in his short fiction, in *The Scarlet Letter*, and in *The Blithedale Romance*. Why did Hawthorne use seamstresses as heroines in two of his romances? Hawthorne, I argue, found the seamstress a useful literary paradigm that mediated his class and gender anxieties as a struggling writer. Viewed in the context of Hawthorne's family and class background, Hester Prynne's and Priscilla's labor is connected to Hawthorne's work as a writer. This chapter allows us to see literature as a process of mediation involving class, gender, psychology, and history, both personal and public. It makes clear that major literary texts were not isolated from politics or from popular literature. At the same time, it shows that while Hawthorne began by employing the seamstress as she appeared in the popular literature of the period, he used her in more complex ways to give literary shape to personal and cultural anxieties.

Similarly, a consideration of the class position of Hawthorne's female counterparts and competitors, the popular women writers of the nineteenth century, can shed important light on their work. My fourth chapter focuses on these writers as representatives of the first generation of successful working middle-class women. I will demonstrate that although middle-class women's work brought them closer to working-class women like seamstresses and factory workers, this closeness did not result in unconditional sympathy and identification. Rather it was a source of danger and anxiety. To distinguish their work from the labor of working-class women, women writers adopt various strategies of representation. They rewrite the seamstress and the factory worker to express and contain their gender and class anxieties as working middle-class women. Domesticity figures prominently as a gender and class ideology that helped women writers negotiate a new identity for themselves.

Beginning with the domestic fiction of the 1850s, I show how this fiction negated economics as a factor in defining female selfhood. Unlike

other critics who tend to emphasize the subversive elements in this fiction, I argue that seen in the context of the debate about women's work, women's fiction generally upheld domesticity. I then discuss Virginia Penny's "business manual," which was a conduct book regulating middle-class women behavior in the marketplace. The last part will discuss the rewriting of the factory girl in light of the changed attitude to manufacture and the short-lived alliance between feminism and labor. This context will be shown to be central to our understanding of the working-class woman that appears in such works as Davis's *Margaret Howth* (1862) and Phelps's *The Silent Partner* (1871) and to the development of realism and naturalism out of sentimental and sensational representations. Emphasizing the intersection of gender and class in the works of nineteenth-century women writers helps us see them in complex ways that go beyond simplistic conclusions informed by gender alone.

While the main aim of this project is not to evaluate the merit of canonical writers like Hawthorne as opposed to non-canonical writers discussed in this book, there is an implicit evaluative scheme in the way I organize the material. My first chapter concludes with Melville, and a whole chapter is devoted to Hawthorne's seamstresses, placed after a discussion of the seamstress in polemical and popular writings. This arrangement does make an argument about literary value by showing how Melville, Hawthorne, and to a lesser extent Davis and Phelps, appropriated popular formulas to produce more ideologically and formally complex texts. While this arrangement confirms the split between "elite" and "mass" culture which, according to Douglas, begins in this period, it also shows the continuities between the two.

Finally, this book does not intend to be a comprehensive study of all working-class women. I do not talk about the labor of African-American women, nor about that of servants, the two largest groups of women workers in nineteenth-century America. My focus is only on the working-class women who were central to the debate about industrialization. These industrial women were the factory worker and the seamstress.

## NOTES

1. See Jaher; Pessen; and Story.
2. See Gutman; Stansell; and Wilentz.
3. See Aron; Blumin; Halttunen; and Ryan.
4. The struggle of the middle-class to define its identity continued until the end of the nineteenth century; see Blumin 13 and Boyer 179.

5. Among those historians are Aron; A. Cameron; Dublin; Foner; Kessler-Harris; and Stansell.

6. For a discussion of the wide-reaching influence of this view, and for a detailed critical study of the various strands in American literary theory, see Reising.

7. See Hapke; Pam; Peterson, and Schofield.

8. There have been several works that complicate the relationship between American literature and politics/history. Among them are ones by Bercovitch; Gilmore; Mizruchi; C. Porter; and Michaels.

9. See Ardis; Baym, *Woman's Fiction*; Brown; Kelley; Shapiro; and Tompkins.

10. As Gilmore says, "The elision of class, usually in favor of gender or race, is so pervasive in criticism on antebellum literature that to illustrate the practice, one could simply call the role of leading Americanists: Jane Tompkins, Philip Fisher, Lawrence Buell, etc. Some 'second generation' New Historicists have argued for greater attention to class, although their own writing tends to marginalize it" ("Hawthorne" 236). He gives Gillian Brown as an example of this last group. I might add that in her comments on *The Blithedale Romance*, Brown does not seem to see Priscilla's labor at all and therefore has nothing to say about her as a working-class woman.

11. Leverenz, however, focuses exclusively on male codes, which, he argues, are based on male rivalry expressive of the most important class conflict in antebellum America, that between the two upper classes. Neither women nor working-class characters are discussed by him.

12. Herreschoff draws attention to the centrality of work as a theme in nineteenth-century American literature but does not deal with gender and class issues.

13. According to Voloshinov, "Existence reflected in sign is not merely reflected but refracted. How is this refraction of existence in the ideological sign determined? By an intersecting of differently oriented social interests between one and the same sign community" (Matejka and Titunik 23).

14. The most important study to draw attention to this body of work is D. Reynolds's *Beneath the American Renaissance* and, on a smaller scope, his earlier *Faith in Fiction: The Emergence of Religious Literature in America*.

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THE FACTORY GIRL AND THE SEAMSTRESS  
IMAGINING GENDER AND CLASS  
IN NINETEENTH CENTURY AMERICAN FICTION

## CHAPTER 1

# Inventing the “Mill Girl”

In 1833 after his election Andrew Jackson toured New England and made a special stop in Lowell. Standing at the balcony of the Merrimack House, he viewed the procession the town had prepared in his honor. The historian Hannah Josephson describes what the President saw and what must have been at the time one of America’s most awesome public displays of women:

{T}he chief attraction of the procession consisted of the girls who worked in the cotton mills, 2,500 of them, each in a white muslin dress with a blue sash carrying a parasol over her bare head...Marching two abreast, with the line stretching out for two miles, the 2,500 girls took half an hour to pass the President’s balcony. “Very pretty women, by the Eternal!” said the gallant old soldier when their fresh young faces swung past in review, and he bowed to each couple as they came abreast of him until fatigue forced him to stop. (60)

Later that afternoon the President visited one of the mills and watched the women, still in the same leisure outfits, working at their machines (Josephson 61).

By thus parading thousands of mill workers in public, the New England manufacturers were using women to deliver an important political message to the President of the United States. Their message was elegantly inscribed on the silk banners carried by the women marchers, which read “Protection to American Industry.” In addition to conveying this explicit statement, the theatrical performance at Lowell, in which the President took part, was put on for the benefit of the nation as a whole: here the industrialists presented their image of the new republic, of the direc-

tion America should take. They were continuing a debate that was started in 1782 when Thomas Jefferson published his *Notes on the State of Virginia*. In this influential work, Jefferson declared that “[t]hose who labour in the earth are the chosen people of God” (164-65), possessing virtues and principles that are lacking in industrial populations. He made it clear that America is to be an agricultural and not a manufacturing republic: “While we have land to labour then, let us never wish to see our citizens occupied at a workbench, or twirling a distaff...for the general operations of manufacture, let our work-shops remain in Europe” (165). In rejecting industry, Jefferson believed he was protecting the new nation from the dependent, demoralized, and dangerous “mobs” of the “great cities” of the Old World. Jefferson’s opponents, Alexander Hamilton chief amongst them, believed they could reconcile agriculture and manufacture by promoting a new division of labor between men and women. Men, they insisted, will continue to be the farmers and artisans while women will enter the new factories and help supplement their husbands’ and fathers’ income (A. Hamilton 193). Tenche Coxe even argued that employing women in factories “prevents the diversion of men and boys from agriculture”<sup>1</sup> and is therefore necessary for preserving the agrarian identity of the country. Although Jefferson eventually became an advocate of American manufacture, industrialization continued to be the focus of a national debate well into the nineteenth century. While reformers, some workers, and anti-manufacture groups resisted the move to mechanized production in the first half of the century, New England industrialists and their supporters argued that they could introduce manufacture to the country without the ills of the European system. The 1833 Lowell parade demonstrated to the president and the nation what Francis Cabot Lowell and his colleagues proudly believed was the most ideal work-force in the world.

As this work-force filed in front of Andrew Jackson, he did not see the much feared industrial mobs whom Jefferson once likened to sores on the human body, but rather row upon row of young, cheerful, well-dressed and orderly women. The sea of green parasols that greeted his eyes as he looked down from his balcony drowned any visions of the smoke-filled skies of England’s Manchester and its starving and unruly populations. Instead, the scene evoked the pastures of New England and their cherubic country maidens. He saw what the poet of rural New England, John G. Whittier, once described under the heading “The Factory Girls of Lowell” as “[a] cres of girlhood, beauty reckoned by the square rod,—or miles by long measure! the young, the graceful, the gay,—the flowers gathered from a thou

sand hillsides and green valleys of New England, fair unveiled Nuns of Industry.”<sup>2</sup>

Paradoxically, the unprecedented public spectacle of thousands of American wage-earning women presented to antebellum America the least threatening work-force imaginable. The baton-wielding overseers, who each marched in front of his group of “girls,” assured the spectators that these female workers were orderly, controlled, and paternally supervised, that the patriarchal order remained intact despite the women’s marching in the streets and their tending of machines in factories. More importantly, the overwhelmingly female work-force was a comforting sight for a country which believed that its true spirit was embodied by its independent yeomen and artisans. The pre-industrial republican work ethic, primarily expressing a masculine ideal,<sup>3</sup> maintained that all work, including manual labor, was virtuous, creative, and obligatory and that it was the individual’s means for independence, self-fulfillment, and success (Rodgers 1-15). As Daniel Rodgers has shown, wage-labor, embodied in the factory system in particular, “challenged each of the certainties upon which the work ethic had rested and unsettled the easy equation of work and morality in the minds of many perceptive Americans” (22). By distancing men from wage labor and factories, New England manufacturers attempted to reconcile their countrymen to industrialization. They were arguing that far from threatening the masculine republican work ideal, wage labor can peacefully coexist with it because America can both manufacture and continue to be an agrarian republic. By feminizing industry corporations, then, were seducing not only the president of the United States but also the men of the young nation as a whole.

But female wage earners did not always look as they did on that cheerful morning in 1833. Only five years earlier, a Philadelphia newspaper complained of “the Yankee sex in a new and unexpected light.” The writer was referring to another group of marching women—to several hundred mill workers who in 1828 in Dover, New Hampshire decided to leave their factory and take to the streets. They too were making a political statement: carrying banners and flags and shooting off gunpowder, they protested the new rules their corporation was trying to impose on them. Their list of grievances included blacklisting, dishonorable discharges, fines, compulsory church attendance and other control measures attempting to regulate their behavior on and off the job. The Philadelphia writer was not the only one alarmed by this public display. The strike was covered in newspapers across the country, and the Dover women, unlike their Lowell sisters, were chastised and ridiculed. The mill owners advertised for several hundred “better behaved women” to replace the ill-behaved ones (Wertheimer 68).

So if the Lowell parade announced that the industrial city was a “republic of women,” the Dover parade showed that there was a revolution in the republic.<sup>4</sup> Both parades, however, are reminders of the visibility of mill women in antebellum America. Indeed, women working in factories were from the beginning central to the public discourse about industrialization and the future identity of the republic<sup>5</sup>. This prominence is not surprising in light of the fact that, in contrast to European women, American women actually formed the majority of the new group of workers called “mill-hands,” since men were reluctant to leave the farms or the frontier to work in the newly-founded factories. Women played a key and visible role in bringing about America’s “Great Transformation” from mainly an agricultural yeoman and artisan economy to an industrial economy with wage labor as its back bone.<sup>6</sup> The factory system, of course, was at the heart of this transition to manufacture, and the discourse about industrialization was from the start inevitably intertwined with the issue of gender.

As a figure in whom class and gender intersected at a crucial historical moment of transition, the woman factory worker of antebellum New England stood at the center of a heated political debate about industrialization, gender, and national identity. The various parties in the debate fought over how to represent her, both aesthetically by “imaging” her and politically by speaking for her. As a result, there is no one coherent image of the factory woman worker: the “mill girls” the corporations promoted differed from those who appeared in the labor press, in the reformers’ pamphlets, or in the popular fiction of the period. In what follows I will discuss in some detail the various images of factory women as these images were constructed by different discourses. This discussion allows us to see how the fears and anxieties of antebellum America not only about women’s proper gender role but also about industrial labor, class, and change were articulated through the polemical figure of the woman factory worker.<sup>7</sup>

The image of the well-dressed young woman at her loom that was stamped on the labels for Lowell cotton goods not only suggested “the quality and refinement” of the product (Eisler 22) but more importantly signified the American manufacturing system as a whole. The New England corporations manufactured the “mill girl” as an ideal representative of the system they espoused. And to guarantee that the nation consumed this new product, they put it on permanent exhibition in front of the nation and the world. Lowell in particular was “a showcase” for the American miracle. As a model manufacturing city, it became a major tourist attraction, competing with other national monuments, and proud-

ly displaying its working women as an essential part of the “American scene.”

There were no more enthusiastic consumers and disseminators of corporate images than the emissaries of the Old World. They arrived in Lowell between 1827 and 1862 with two kinds of pictures imprinted on their mind: one was of the industrial slums of Europe, of which they had first-hand knowledge, and the other of America as an agrarian republic and a future paradise.<sup>8</sup> These European visitors toured the city and later published their impressions of the “Manchester of America.” These impressions usually came from three sources: first, the owners or, more often, their representatives, who planned the visitors’ itinerary, accompanied them on their tours, and supplied them with information. Second, written accounts of Lowell, which suspiciously sound like official guide books. Trollope, for one, quotes extensively from such a book (251), and the striking similarity of the various accounts suggests that this “tourist brochure” must have been accessible to others as well. The above two sources provided the details which made up the visitors’ narrative of progress. This narrative recounted the history of Lowell: its transformation in a short time from a wilderness inhabited by “painted savages” (Hall 135) into a thriving manufacturing town, with large mills, boardinghouses, canals, streets, banks, churches, and a library. An essential part of this narrative focused on the workers themselves: that they are the moral and industrious daughters of New England farmers who converge on Lowell from different states to work cheerfully for a few years before they go back to their homes, carrying little fortunes (thanks to good wages and the savings bank) which will help them improve their lot; some even buy shares in the mills where they work and eventually become proprietors (Chambers 223-24; Finch 44). Those who depart are effortlessly replaced by a fresh supply of ambitious girls eager to follow in their sisters’ footsteps. The third source of information about Lowell and its inhabitants was direct observation. Both the European guests and their hosts were aware that what gave these accounts credibility and authenticity was that they faithfully reported not what the visitors were told but what they actually saw. This awareness perhaps explains some of the writers’ tendency to blur the line between first and second hand knowledge, often leaving the reader with the impression that their narratives, down to the smallest detail, were unmediated eye-witness accounts of the city.

So what did they see? Upon encountering Lowell for the first time they were all struck by its difference from the industrial cities familiar to them. They expressed their surprise by emphasizing the unreal qualities of

the place: it looked like an “opera scene,” “a magic castle,” or a “palace of labor” (Chevalier 133; F. Bremer 209). The city’s unreality was an effect of its “newness,” “freshness,” and “youthfulness.” These qualities captured the essence of Lowell as the model American manufacturing town—it was industrial and wholesome, urban yet rural. The Reverend William Scorsby testified to his English audience that “large as [Lowell] has grown, it is yet rural in its appearance, and, notwithstanding its being a city of factories, is yet fresh and cleanly” (12). What the visitors admired most were not the symbols of industrialization around them, but rather the harmonious presence of these symbols in a rural setting. Marianne Finch described factories surrounded by trees, “handsome buildings of brick, with green venetian shutters to all the windows, looking so bright and clean, that instead of calling up painful associations, they form a very agreeable feature in the landscape” (45). The scene, Finch reflected, was “at once animated and picturesque” (44). Not surprisingly, then, the visitors’ accounts of the “city of spindles” consisted of as many descriptions of rivers, falls, and trees as of canals, bridges, and mills. But more than anything else it was the women workers who enamored these observers with Lowell. The female operatives stood in the center of the picture, symbols of America’s success in harmonizing the machine and the garden.

The women factory workers were the main tourist attraction in Lowell and other manufacturing towns. Every visitor found it necessary to discourse about them, sometimes to the neglect of other scenes and details. The women were never talked to or considered individually, but were always observed from a distance, outside the factories, as crowds walking back and forth between the mills and the boarding houses. But this long view did not prevent the observers from focusing their gaze on particular details pertaining to the women’s appearance. The following passage, written by Captain Basil Hall, one of the earliest visitors to the city, is typical:

The whole discipline, ventilation, and other arrangements appeared to be excellent, of which the best proof was the healthy and cheerful look of the girls, all of whom, by the way, were trigged out with much neatness and simplicity, and wore high tortoise-shell combs at the back of their heads...On the 13th of October, at 6 o’clock in the morning, I was awakened by the bells which tolled the people to their work, and on looking from the window, saw the whole space between the factories and the village speckled over with girls, nicely dressed, and glittering with bright shawls and showy-colored gowns and gay bonnets, all streaming along to their business, with an air of lightness, and an elasticity of step, implying an obvious desire to get to their work. (137)

Hall's "merry damzels," as he called them, were observed and interpreted by others as well, who all noticed and admired the clean attire and the healthy and cheerful faces of the "young ladies." The political journalist Alex Mackay searched for but did not find the look of "settled melancholy which so often beclouds the faces of our own operatives" and concluded that the American workers are cheerful because they know they have good prospects (288). Lowell's women were "infinitely superior" to other workers, Anthony Trollope declared, and proceeded to show how their superiority was the result of their lacking certain qualities: "They are not sallow, nor dirty, nor ragged, nor rough. They have about them no signs of want, or of low culture..." (249). To impress the superiority of the Lowell workers upon her English audience, Finch mentioned that the ladies of Lowell refuse to work or live with "dirty" Irish women (45). The French traveler Michael Chevalier concluded that Lowell was not Manchester only after glimpsing the workers' "scarves, and shawls, and green silk hoods which they wear as a shelter from the sun and dust...hanging up in the factories amidst the flowers and shrubs, which they cultivate" (137).

Significantly, the feminine articles of clothing—hair combs, veils, silk scarves etc.—that Chavalier, Hall, and others mention are emblems of both gender and class. They are cited to confirm the workers' identity as "ladies" and to deny their new class status. The affirmation of the operatives' gender identity, then, becomes a way to negate their class identity. Lowell's most celebrated visitor, Charles Dickens, seemed to do just that when he assured his readers that the American operatives "had the manners and deportment of young women, not of degraded brutes of burden" (60). Dickens, of course, had a class-specific understanding of what a "young woman" was. This understanding becomes clear when he recounts with much admiration that Lowell's operatives have pianos, subscribe to circulating libraries, and contribute to the Lowell Offering—all activities his readers expect from young women of leisure, not from factory workers (61-63). Scorsby used the word "genteel" to articulate the class identity of the women in terms of gender. He informed his audience that they were country maidens, "daughters of able and independent yeomen," longing for nature, attached to home, but still content with their labor. The details of his description, however, emphasize their feminine qualities—their "ladi-ness." They are well-dressed, wearing bonnets and veils and carrying parasols; they are clean, "pallid," and slight; most importantly, they are well-behaved, neither bold nor vulgar (49). At the end of his sermon Scorsby urges the female workers of England to emulate their American sisters. The English impresario Alfred Bunn went even further. He believed that the

feminine virtues of the American operative made her not only “a pattern to her sex,” but also a model worker to be emulated by both women and men. After describing the extraordinary women of Lowell, he concludes, “read all this, digest its matter, and then, ye sons and daughters of the loom in some parts of Old England, either blush yourselves, or get somebody to blush for you” (104-5).

Although Dickens, Scorsby, Bunn and their fellow travelers also toured the inside of the factories, there are noticeably few passages describing the Lowell operatives at work. In these rare descriptions the writers emphasize the gender identity of the workers and show how their womanly presence transforms both machine and workplace. The following passage by the English visitor John R. Dix is one example:

[T]here were carding machines of strange and mysterious structure which often performed their duties in so astonishingly easy a manner, that the girls who stood looking at them seemed almost to be works of supererogation. And they would have been useless too, only for a careless and sly way these machines had of snapping a thread or so now and then just as if they wanted an excuse for stopping to peer into the pretty faces around, and dally with the fair fingers which just touched them, as if chidingly, and set them going on again as though nothing had happened. (76-77)

Here the women's labor is depicted as a leisurely activity and their presence is seen almost as superfluous. The relationship between machine and worker is flirtatious and almost erotic, with the machine described as a mischievous lover pining for a glimpse of his beloved and a touch from her hand. For Marianne Finch the women's presence in the factory seems to feminize and tame the machines. The mechanical operation of a machine curling the fringe of a shawl, for instance, becomes in her eyes the “prettiest process” and is described as if it were a scene in a sentimental novel:

A little machine, like two fingers, jumps up, and seizes two fibers of the wool, and retires, after placing them in a little pair of arms, that open to receive them. These, after twice enfolding the isolated particles in close embrace, leave them indissolubly united. (47)

Fredrika Bremer's novelistic imagination transforms the factory into a nursery, where the operative tending her machine becomes a mother attending to her child. She writes:

I was most struck by the relationship between the human being and the machinery. Thus, for example, I saw the young girls standing—each one between four busily-working spinning jennies: they walked among them, looked at them, watched over and guarded them much

as a mother would watch over and tend her children. The machinery was like an obedient child under the eye of an intelligent mother. (210)

Whether they likened the women workers to mothers nursing children, or to young ladies taking a leisurely stroll, or to lady-artisans (Chambers) and garden flowers (Dix), the foreign visitors were depicting workers who were more than an ocean apart from their European counterparts, both male and female. As emblems of American manufacture, the New England factory women were what most distinguished the American manufacturing scene from that of Europe.

However, the darkness of the European model, which made the American industrial landscape shine so brightly, inevitably cast some shadows on it. When Harriet Martineau, for instance, appealed to the American operatives to help save their English sisters from “a life of shame, blindness, and death” by accepting a reduction in tariff and a cut in their “very handsome earnings,” she not only asserted the differences between the women on opposite sides of the Atlantic but also their similarities as wage-workers. And Chevalier, an enthusiastic admirer of Lowell and of industrialization in general, was still compelled to ask about Lowell, “Will this become like Lancashire? Does this brilliant glare hide the misery and suffering of the working girls?” (133). Suddenly, the jovial young ladies become in his eyes “the nuns of Lowell,” who, “instead of working sacred hearts, spin and weave cotton.” He concludes his observations by expressing his doubts that Lowell and its operatives will remain long “neat, decent, peaceable, and sage” (144). Dickens expressed his scruples differently, by abstaining from drawing any comparisons between American industrialization and that of England because he realizes that American manufacture is too young (63). Chambers reminded his readers that the prosperity of Lowell and its operatives rests on “precarious foundation,” that is, on a protective tariff whose removal, he implies, will lift the magic spell from the city and its women (224). Trollope, who called the mills “philanthropic manufacturing colleges,” declared Lowell a utopia that illustrates what philanthropy can and cannot do. He refused to accept Lowell as a prototype of future industrial towns. As if to justify his reservations, Trollope also mentioned that during his 1861 visit some cotton mills were completely closed and the rest were working with only two thirds of their usual work-force (249-256).

The doubts of the European visitors went largely unnoticed by their contemporaries. But the glowing picture they painted of Lowell and its “ladies” became part of what was known in America as “the factory controversy.” While manufacturers and their advocates used the tourists’

accounts in the public relations campaign they waged to reconcile America to the factory system, opponents of factories were quick to attack and ridicule the same accounts as “misrepresentations.” In fact, the battle between opponents and advocates of corporations was a contest over the “representation” of working women. Each side debated the shortcomings and merits of industrialization by defining the working women on whose behalf they claimed to speak. Orestes Brownson’s “The Labouring Classes,” published in the *Boston Quarterly Review* in 1840, is one telling example. In this controversial essay, the writer claims that his aim is to penetrate beyond “the fair side of the picture; the side exhibited to distinguished visitors” in order to expose “the dark side,” which is “moral as well as physical.” The “mill girls” Brownson depicts do not bear any resemblance to the cheerful young ladies who so charmed the European visitors. In Brownson’s account, the factories of New England were peopled with “poor girls” who “wear out their health, spirits and morals, without becoming one whit better off than when they commenced labor,” and who “when they can toil no longer, go home to die.” Even more shocking, “[f]ew of them ever marry; fewer still ever return to their native places with reputations unimpaired” (3). Brownson presented himself as a defender of a group of women who were broken physically and morally by their industrial labor. But his “defense” was easily construed by manufacture proponents as a slanderous attack on the reputation of virtuous and industrious women. Brownson’s rhetoric led him into difficulties that illustrate the problem reformers encountered in their attempt to criticize the factory system. Because the women workers were set up as representatives of the system as a whole, attacks on the corporations ended up being attacks on the workers themselves. Reformers were lured into this trap by the gender ideology of the time, which saw women as vulnerable and in need of male protection. This ideology offered Brownson and his colleagues their paternal roles and made available to them the rhetoric to match.

The same role and rhetoric, however, were available to their opponents. So when Elisha Bartlett, a physician and Lowell’s first mayor, responded to Brownson’s essay, he entitled his response *A Vindication of the Character and Condition of the Females Employed in the Lowell Mills Against the Charges Contained in The Boston Quarterly Review* (1841). He too defended the working women but this time by asserting that they enjoyed the best of health, physically and morally. Bartlett argues that, contrary to Brownson’s slanderous claims, living and working in the mills improve the women’s constitutions (13), cultivate their manners, enlarge their minds, and develop their moral and religious principles (21). He points to their

bank savings as proof that they are liberally paid and brandishes statistics to show beyond a doubt that marriages among factory girls did not diminish. He dismisses the then thorny issue of the long hours of labor by predicting that time-saving machinery would eventually reduce them and concludes by reminding his readers that factory girls are superior "in relation to bodily health, intelligence, independence, and the moral character" to other working women, particularly domestic servants and seamstresses in large cities (20).

Bartlett's *Vindication* was in turn challenged by *Corporations and Operatives: Being an Exposition of the Condition of Factory Operatives, and a Review of the "Vindication," by Elisha Bartlett, M. D. by a Citizen of Lowell* (1843).<sup>9</sup> This work clearly illustrates the problematic rhetoric of the reformers. For in addition to responding to Bartlett's essay, the anonymous writer of this polemic declares that his aim is "to awaken the minds of the community, and especially the operatives themselves, to an inquiry into the real nature and tendency of the factory system, as it now exists." But despite his identification of the workers among his audience, he devotes most of his essay to a detailed description of their condition, a description that can only be directed at the general public. In this discourse, the gender identity of the workers is used to garner sympathy for them. As women they fit easily into the seduction narrative he constructs. They are "poor victims," "lured to the factories" to be crushed by the corporations' "machinery of oppression" (28). Thus seduced, they "patiently endure untold sufferings, till they have worked themselves to the very verge of the grave" (41). The writer's defense turns out to be a sentimental tale of helpless women "in the prime of life, worn out in factory slavery, who have gone home to receive the last farewell of their weeping kindred and friends, and to die among the scenes of their childhood" (66).

But the writer's sentimentalism soon begins to fade when he delineates the moral, physical, and intellectual deterioration of mill workers. Although he passingly mentions that this deterioration is the result of working conditions that do not leave the women much time for self-improvement, the details he gives do not present a flattering picture of the women themselves. For instance, he argues that "large numbers of inexperienced and young females thrown together in boarding houses" mean that "some of them will lead astray the innocent ones" (8-9), and that the lack of time for reflection "must have a tendency to induce levity and a thoughtless state of mind, unfavorable to moral and intellectual improvement" (10). He acknowledges that the greatest evil is the long hours of labor, but he cannot resist blaming those "unthinking females" who over-exert them-

selves (13). He dismisses their religious feelings as a form of fanaticism encouraged by “the natural excitability of the female mind...”(50). This same female mind compels most to spend their hard-won wages as fast as they have earned them on “furnishing themselves with gewgaws and finery, in imitation of the fashionable of the wealthy classes” (54-55). Clearly, the women’s femaleness is their greatest liability.

Still, the author presents himself as a protector of their “true womanhood” when he asks, “[A]re they in the proper female sphere? Do they hold, or are they preparing to attain to that station in society, for which God designed woman?” Although his answer is meant to refute the argument that America does not have a permanent factory population, one is hard-pressed not to see it as an indictment of those he is defending:

Far from it—they have become totally unfitted for the peculiar responsibilities and duties of that station in life, that is and should be the object of the aspirations of every virtuous female. And for them, there is but a faint ray of hope, that breaks in upon the long vista of coming years. They are factory girls—and factory girls they must live—and factory girls they must die. (47)

In the case of those “factory girls” who do become mothers, he warns that “through them somewhat of deterioration is diffused among the community at large, and much moral and physical evil must inevitably be entailed upon posterity” (63). This is particularly true of those who injure “irreparably, their physical constitutions by over-working in the mills” and thus “transmit constitutional disabilities to their offspring, who will in time come forward and take the places of the present generation” (70-71). After presenting his readers with this bleak picture of the future of the republic, the writer enjoins them to enact legislative reform in order to protect themselves and the nation. By casting women as the link between present and future, this reformer makes their protection from the new system of labor a patriotic duty for all Americans.

Proponents of manufacture countered by presenting the factory women as a link between present and past. Henry Miles in his *Lowell As It Was and As It Is* (1845) celebrates Lowell’s modernity by showing it as an extension of a rural past. Thus the Manchester of America is referred to as “a manufacturing village” (35) with boarding houses that “more nearly resemble the abodes of respectable mechanics in rural villages” (67). Far from displacing artisans and mechanics, the machines in the factories are their “ingenious inventions.” He describes one operation as “a combination of taste, art, mechanical and chemical science, and in all its part affords a beautiful example of the mutual dependence of art and science on each

other" (94). Appropriately, these machines are tended by young women who only oversee and adjust their movements (102). After a few years of this "light labor," these women return to their country homes, where they become "the wives of the farmers and mechanics of the country towns and villages" (130). Their future, like that of the republic, is continuous with the past.

Throughout his book, Miles assumes a confident and measured tone that accords with his presentation of himself as a disinterested, objective researcher who only reports "findings." His findings attest to the health, intelligence, and morality of the workers. But this confidence admits an anxious note about the future when in the final pages of his book Miles wonders "whether we can preserve here a pure and virtuous population" and thus avoid the "corrupting and debasing influences which have almost universally marked manufacturing cities abroad" (215). By figuring undesirable change as a loss of purity and virtue, Miles was admitting that the factory girl, the emblem of the American system of manufacture, was also the system's greatest liability.

The vulnerability of the women is more pronounced in Rev. James Porter's pamphlet *The Operative's Friend, and Defense; or Hints to Young Ladies, who Are Dependent on Their own Exertions* (1850). As the title indicates, Porter both defends and advises the factory girls. He musters the usual arguments to show the operatives to be educated and independent country maidens, who are not degraded by laboring in a factory. Most of his essay, however, offers the women advice on how to improve their character. This advice is wide ranging and includes hints about domestic duties, work habits, and the cultivation of virtue, intellect and manners. Resembling more a conduct book than a polemic, this schizophrenic pamphlet reveals that the image of the virtuous and steady factory worker was becoming harder to uphold, or at least was no longer taken for granted. Porter apparently believed that his "ladies" needed some lecturing about acquiring and maintaining good character. His advice sometimes shows him still straining to address two different audiences, as when he argues that the factory is an ideal place for meditation and reflection because "the clatter of the machinery which is so great and steady, as almost to close up the organ of hearing" allows for "uninterrupted thought" (115). He assures his readers that he himself "has often longed for the retirement of the factory, where he might bury himself in meditation, which the sights and sounds of other places render difficult...He used to regard it a sacred retreat from the fascinations of the world, and preferred it to any other place on earth" (115). Porter here seeks to convince an audience ignorant of the nature of factory

work, not operatives only too familiar with the sights and sounds of their workplace.

Porter, Miles, Bartlett and other proponents of manufacture delineated the “true” image of factory girls using details from corporations’ records and from overseers’ and agents’ reports. But the source that authenticated their picture most effectively was the testimonies of the women themselves as they appeared on the pages of the *Lowell Offering*.<sup>10</sup> From its inception in the church-sponsored “improvement circles” of Lowell, the *Offering* played an active role in the debate about industrialization. The stated objective of the periodical was to dispel prejudice against the name of factory girl by showing the world “that labor which had been thought most degrading, was not inconsistent with mental and moral cultivation” (3: 284). As a result, its staunch “defense” of the women workers was inevitably also a laudatory celebration of the factory system that employed them. The *Offering’s* audience was not the factory operatives themselves, but rather a general public who is prejudiced against them and their labor. Many of the pieces about life at the mill are therefore letters written by “mill girls” to fictional correspondents “elsewhere” telling them about their lives as factory operatives, or accounts of tours of the factories and boarding houses conducted for the benefit of imaginary visitors.<sup>11</sup> What made these fictitious letters and tours persuasive is that they were supposedly written and conducted by the factory girls themselves. In fact, the *Lowell Offering* in its entirety was written by factory girls, and this is what made it “representative.” So when William Scorsby was unable to show his audience samples of the Lowell operatives he had been describing (none unfortunately were present in person), he dramatically brandished copies of their magazine, or what he called the ninth wonder of the world, and quoted whole sections from it. Clearly, the *Lowell Offering* was so “representative” that it became a symbol of the women workers themselves.

Harriet Farley, as editor and one of the contributors, played a significant role in using the *Offering* for the construction and public dissemination of the image of the “genteel” factory worker. In detailing her editorial policies, she simultaneously drew the features of the ideal American worker. This worker, she wrote, was above “sectarianism” and politics altogether because “[w]ith regard to politics we, as females should do, remain entirely neutral” (4: 24). Moreover, “[w]ith wages, board, &c., we have nothing to do—these depend upon circumstances over which we can have no control” (3: 48). Her *New England Offering* was inhospitable to such demonstrations of unfeminine emotion and conduct as “bitterness,” “grumbling,” or “whining,” which are all “in shocking bad taste” (95). In

one editorial she thanks her contributors for presenting themselves to their readers “with cheerfulness and self-respect,” and for showing “that their first and absorbing thought was not for an advance of wages or a reduction of labor hours. They have given the impression that they were contented even with their humble lot” (5: 263). She distinguished her cheerful, contented, and obedient workers from those who engage “in low abuse, inflame low prejudice, pander to the base feelings of envy, jealousy, hatred, and suspicion” (5: 264). The only expression of dissatisfaction that was acceptable to the *Offering* was that of sadness for loss of childhood or the past and nostalgia for family and home (5: 263).<sup>12</sup> Not only was this expression proper in that it did not compromise the women’s feminine nature, but it also showed that the workers’ allegiance was still for their homes as their proper sphere.

The home these women yearned for was both a domestic and a rural space. They were country maidens, who

generally come from quiet country homes, where their minds and manners have been formed under the eyes of the worthy sons of the Pilgrims, and their virtuous partners, and who return again to become the wives of the free intelligent yeomanry of New England, and the mothers of quite a proportion of our future republicans.<sup>13</sup>

The expressions of sadness and nostalgia notwithstanding, factory labor was neither a displacement nor a rupture. Rather, the factory becomes an extension of “home.” One editorial encourages this view of the factory by suggesting that when the workers return to visit their country homes they should bring back with them roots and cuttings to be planted in pots and boxes to decorate the inside of the mills (1: 32). These pots of flowers along with “the beautiful flower gardens connected with the factories” transform the industrial landscape into a rural and domestic one. The operative becomes a shepherdess, receiving bouquets of fresh flowers from a friendly shepherd/overseer. The “row of green looms” inside the factory, “handsomely made and painted” completes the picture of a beautiful, harmonious and domestic industrial landscape continuous with the rural one the operatives call “home” (4: 237). Farley’s country maidens are symbols of stability and continuity. The women, for instance, who worked at Amesbury mill, itself located in a charming rural setting, are not changed by their industrial labor thanks to “the conservative influences of *home*,” which assist “in the preservation of purity of heart and life” (Farley 10).

Farley, however, offered this reassuring picture of industrialization, of change-as-continuity, in the same work in which she explodes the myth of a golden rural past by demystifying the image of “home manufacture.” She

begins her polemic *Operatives Reply to the Hon. Jere Clemens* by arguing that the idealized image of the “spinner, with her distaff in hand” one finds in “old ballads and romantic tales” is a product of “the imagination of the writer.” She strips this image of its fiction by critically reading a painting that depicts a home spinner. Instead of a woman peacefully working at home, her labor an extension of her other domestic duties, Farley sees

a woman in a rickety chair, with her feet resting upon a cold, stone floor; she is watching the boiling pot with one eye, while the other follows her thread drawn, by a painfully slow process, from the tuft upon the stick, then to be wound upon the quill: at her right hand is a crock, but not “of gold;” and also a pan, covered with a bit of plank, probably containing her porridge or meal. Through the casement she can look upon the hills and vales; but necessity, by its iron law, chains her to her seat. Pegwrapping, done by a lad is tedious to look upon. Hand-carding, roving, and spinning by hand-wheel, are equally unattractive to look upon. An old hat upon the floor, filled with the spinner’s quills, is significant of the beauties and accommodations of home-manufacture. And, outwardly, the scene may have been as repulsive. (4)

Farley conjured this unsentimental picture of pre-industrial labor to argue that factories are a progressive step forward, ushering in a new epoch of prosperity and reform. Farley was so confident that she did not even try to do what other advocates of manufacture did, that is, distance the American system from its European counterpart. On the contrary, she unapologetically declares that “[w]e too, are of the British...Let us do justice to the parent from which we sprang” (5). Absent from her narrative of the history of industrialization are the specters of misery and degradation associated with the industrial landscape of the Old World which vividly haunted the imagination of her contemporaries.

To the repulsive scene of “home manufacture,” Farley juxtaposes factory work. She argues that the wages paid factory operatives are regular, free of obligation, and, most importantly, higher than those paid to females in other occupations (1: 17-18). Thanks to the new machinery, which is “rapidly and faithfully assuming the laborer’s office,” the work is “easy to do, and does not require very violent exertion, as much of our farm work does” (4: 172). Although workers might need a bigger shoe size for their swollen feet and their right-hand might get larger because of the repeated motion of stopping and starting the loom (4: 170), the regularity of their occupation propagates good health of both body and mind (3: 91). Otherwise, why, Farley ironically asks, would country girls hurry “from their country homes to get rid of milking cows, washing floors, and other

such healthy employments” if they believed the “smoke of a cooking stove is less impure than the dust of a cotton mill?” (3: 191). Moreover, factory women “consider it a blessing that they may labor long, and diligently,” and choose to work long hours because they are ambitious and competitive and like to be commended on their “powers of execution” (5: 96; 4: 237). In other words, their work is not only a way to make a living but also a source of satisfaction and a means for self-fulfillment. On the rare occasions the *Offering* admitted that some operatives were discontented about wages, confinement, and long hours of labor, it used the occasion to dispel these objections by arguing that factory work was temporary and offered leisure hours which enabled the operatives to benefit from the cultural life available for them in the city. The best cure for discontent, however, was of course a reminder of the drudgery of farm work.

What added to the advantages associated with the new workplace was its being governed by the old set of paternal social relations. Here male superintendents and overseers look after the best interests of their workers, who sometimes even “resort to them for advice and assistance about other affairs than their work” (4: 238). The policy of these superintendents “is to harmonize the interests of the capitalists and operatives...and it is owing only to their good management, not to any arbitrary regulations that the capitalists do not become mere operatives” (Farley 18). As to punishment, Farley has “never heard of punishment, or scoldings, or anything of that sort.”<sup>14</sup> When a fight occurs between an overseer and a worker, the woman is usually at fault because “[girls] with unregulated feelings are more common here than men who would be unjust and unkind to females under their care” (5: 281). She has Whittier testify that relationship between employers and their factory “help” is characterized by “harmony,” “esteem” and “paternal care” (Farley 10). “A community of interest” was nourished and promoted by the new rules and regulations implemented by the new system. She assured her readers that the mill owners themselves “love intelligent operatives, and are willing to assist us in improving ourselves. They will supply libraries, reading-rooms, and other advantages, to this end” (Farley 18). Thus “constant abuse of those from whom one is voluntarily receiving the means of subsistence” seems to be something more than bad taste—it amounts to a betrayal of one’s extended family (*New England Offering* July 1848, 95).

Contrary to the impression the above discussion might give, Farley devoted most of her energy to talking not about the factory girls’ work but about their leisure activity. After all, the *Offering* was the fruit of the operatives’ leisure hours and hard evidence that the factory girls were not

defined by their work. Farley herself admitted that the factory girl she sought to represent was a paradox. In an editorial discussing the engraving she chose for the cover of volume 4, she explains that the idea she wanted the engraving to embody is “[n]ot a ‘factory girl’—for, in truth, there is no such person as this to be the representative of a distinct class of beings, and this we wished to imply. It may seem a paradox that we should be so particular to represent a factory girl as not a factory girl, but our friends here will understand us” (5: 72).

Not everybody understood. Reformers and factory workers questioned both the image of the factory girl the *Offering* presented to the world and the periodical’s claims of political representation. The editors’ independence was questioned; they “are flattered and seduced to lend their aid” to the propaganda of the corporations, one reformer charged (*Corporations and Operatives* 23). He likened them to “poor caged birds, while singing of the beauty and fragrance of the roses, that bloom around them, they forget the bars of their prison, around which they are twined so forcefully, to cover and conceal” (25). One operative asserted her right to speak for herself instead of being “compelled to listen in silence to those who speak for gain, and are the mere echo of the will of the corporations” (*Factory Tracts* 1). Sarah Bagley charged Farley with censorship and of being the “mouthpiece of the corporation.”<sup>15</sup> The support the *Offering* received from the manufacturers further alienated it from the operatives. Farley and her co-editor were helped financially by the mill owners, who also subsidized the periodical by having their agents buy thousands of copies of back issues and their overseers deliver and collect subscriptions.<sup>16</sup> More importantly, the owner of the *Offering* was William Schouler, a staunch supporter of manufacture, who as a representative in the Massachusetts legislature wrote the report against the ten hour work day and was defeated in his re-election bid with the help of factory operatives.<sup>17</sup>

Farley fought back against these attacks. She defended her sunny picture of factory life and challenged “any one to prove that we have made false assertions” (1: 376). But her tone is less defiant when she discusses the suicide of two operatives. While admitting that the life of the factory girl has its hardships, she sees no point in talking about the obvious. Her advice to those who suffer from hardships is either to labor patiently and wait or to leave the factory altogether (4: 213-214). But the issue that caused the most bitterness for Farley was the lack of support for the *Offering* among the operatives it supposedly represented. She addressed them in one of her early editorials: “We commend our work to the favor of the factory operatives of New England. We should prefer to receive our principal support from

them; and are particularly anxious to find favor in their sight" (3: 24). But her appeal was unheeded, and she could not hide her disappointment. "Our fellow-operatives have been wayward in withholding their support," she wrote, reminding them that the *Offering* was instrumental in defending their name. Farley's defensiveness is evident when she says: "The *Offering* has been regarded with much distrust, but we believe it has always been as free from any thing dishonorable in its management as a periodical could be" (3: 282-284). If she rejected some essays, she maintained, it was because of their obvious "sectarian bias," and if she showed much regard to the employers, it was out of her sense of justice. In the editorial of the last issue, she again expressed regret for the lack of support among operatives, and took this last opportunity to reach them:

And what shall we say to those of our operatives who withhold from us their patronage, and exert all their influence in opposition to us, and to their own best interest? We feel that they have strangely mistaken us. They appear to think that we are false to them, and to our own professions of interest in their behalf and desire to do them good. (4: 281)

Sometimes she aggressively lashed out at these same operatives as selfish and ignorant women who could have benefited from the *Offering* most if they only would patronize it (5: 282).<sup>18</sup>

The workers who rejected the *Offering's* representations sought other forums to fight back. On the pages of the labor press and in polemical pamphlets, they challenged, questioned, and undermined the narrative of industrialization as progress and the image of the "mill girl" as a cheerful, independent wage-earner. Motivated by a desire to improve their working and living conditions, these women launched a radical critique of the factory system, exposing its structural abuses and challenging the ideology of "a community of interest" promoted by the corporations and their advocates. Along with debating their opponents, they also signed petitions, organized conferences, and went on strikes protesting reduction of wages, speed-ups, punishments, invasive regulations, and deteriorating work-conditions. They viewed their writing as another act of resistance.

The images of factory workers that emerge from this writing are varied. As polemical writers, they adjust their rhetoric to accommodate particular audiences and to contest particular discourses. For instance, to counter the image of "Factory Queens" and "Industry's Angel daughters" prominent in "romances of Factory Life," which foreign visitors told about America, they presented the women workers as "loving, self-sacrificing martyr-spirits," an "army of sufferers," who "will die unhonored and

unsung.”<sup>19</sup> They labor long hours not in the flower-filled rooms painted on the pages of the *Offering*, but in rooms full of lamp smoke and cotton dust, with wet walls and bad ventilation. A letter to the labor newspaper *Voice of Industry* in November 13, 1846 tells the sad story of a young girl who entered the mills a cheerful being, with her cheeks “red as roses, and her eyes bright and beautiful.” But after a stint in the factory she leaves with a pale face and a dreadful cough and soon dies at home. The writer maintains that “[t]here are a great many who die just as she died,” and concludes by demanding a reduction of the hours of labor (qtd. in Foner, *Factory Girls* 154). In April 23, 1847 the *Voice of Industry* quoted one operative who at a labor-reform conference challenged a physician’s apology for the factory system:

[The women] entered [the factories] with healthy, hopeful countenances; they left them with visages whose toil-worn, care-worn expression showed too plainly that they had no hope but to be invalids forever. How many such have I known, who left their employment but to go home to die. They had worked months after their gradually decreasing strength had admonished them of failing health...they must toil on as long as they could, knowing that they were hastening their death, which was already fast approaching. (qtd. in Zonderman 83)

The workers insisted that there was no joy or self-fulfillment in factory labor (Zonderman 283-284). In order to gain sympathy for the women workers, these writers appealed to the paternalism of their society and to its view of what women ought to be. The long hours of labor, they argued, change women drastically, “destroy[ing] all love of order and practice in domestic affairs...that by the time a young lady has worked in a factory one year, she will lose all relish for the quiet, fireside comforts of life, and the neatness attendant upon order and precision.” Consequently, factory workers as wives and mothers are “deficient in everything pertaining to those holy, sacred names!” Those who marry “become a curse instead of a helpmeet to their husbands, because of having broken the laws of God and their own physical natures, in these modern prisons (alias palaces,) in the gardens of Eden!” Future generations will be “What but a race weak, sickly, imbecile, both mental and physical? A race fit only for corporation tools and time serving slaves?” (*Factory Tracts* 3-4). Unlike reformers who used similar rhetoric, the operatives did not raise the issue of the women’s morality; instead, they focused their attention on the long hours of labor which they wanted reduced and on the unsatisfactory work conditions which they desired to change. Moreover, despite the content of their message, their

tone remained defiant. The woman who warned against operatives becoming unfit wives and mothers, for instance, still concluded her "appeal" with the radical slogan, "Equal rights, or death to the corporations" (*Factory Tracts* 4).

One variation on the image of the workers as victims is of them as slaves. Frequently, writers drew the analogy between the factory system and southern slavery. In addition to pointing to the long hours of labor, they emphasized the restrictive regulations that tied operatives for extended periods of time to one corporation before they were allowed to leave (*Factory Tracts* 5). Nothing caused more bitterness, though, than the blacklisting system, so much admired by visitors and advocates of manufacture. Against this system of "character assassination" one worker raised her voice in defense of

the thousands of unprotected white females of Lowell slaves to the overseers of a dozen or two of cotton mills, who hold not only the bread, but the characters of those girls, in the palms of their hands, and can do with them as any passion may dictate or any caprice suggest.

Writers foregrounded the gendered nature of their oppression, casting themselves as women in distress pleading with their chivalric countrymen to come to their succor. The following passage is an example:

When chartered and specially protected monopolies obtain such power and exercise such outrageous tyranny over the women of the United States, making their laws of *custom* and "*privilege*" paramount to the common law of the land, placing thousands of virtuous and noble females under worse than Turkish subjection to the male tyrants of the cotton mills, whose associated millions pension United States Senators and buy up legislators "like cattle in the market," it is indeed high time for the men of the United States, if there are any left this side of the Rio Grande, to seriously inquire whether these things are tending, and whether there is no remedy for such a slavish condition of *American white women?*<sup>20</sup>

In this passage the operatives' use of defiant and militant language clashes with their self-presentation as helpless women. Sometimes the operatives rejected the above self-presentation entirely and unequivocally assumed the voice of the independent Yankee woman to justify breaking out of the gendered roles society prescribed for them and to rally their fellow workers to action. Sarah Bagley was one labor activist who adopted such republican rhetoric to address crowds of male and female operatives:

For the last half a century, it has been deemed a violation of woman's sphere to appear before the public as a speaker; but when our rights are trampled upon and we appeal in vain to legislators, what shall we do but appeal to the people? shall not our voice be heard, and our rights acknowledged here; shall it be said again to the daughters of New England, that they have no political rights and are not subject to legislative action?

As spirited women, she continued, they "would not sit idly down and fold [their] hands."<sup>21</sup> Indeed, these Yankee women were a world apart from the "genteel mill girls" of the *Offering*; they were defiant, angry, and discontented, demanding justice and equality as rights. Their rhetoric was strongly colored with a class antagonism that openly challenged the ideology of a community of interests. For instance, they condemned a system which "enables the few to wield the wealth and power of *hundreds*" and protested against "the difference in caste which the employers create between their sons and daughters and the sons and daughters whom they employ to increase their wealth." They compared their wages to the profits of their employers and concluded that the "the employer receives too much, the operative too little."<sup>22</sup> Employers and overseers were called "drivers," "tyrants," "oppressors," "foes," and "jailers." The women's defiance was expressed in the sarcastic and ironic tones they adopted, especially in exploding the myth of the "genteel" factory worker. Olivia wrote to the *Voice of Industry* of the hypocrisy of those who praise the Lowell working girls but do not treat them as equals, and Juliana asked,

Can it be that any of us are so stupefied as not to realize the exalted station and truly delightful influences which we enjoy? If so, let them take a glance at pages 195 and 196 of Rev. H. Miles' book, and they will surely awake to gratitude and be content. Pianos, teachers of music, evening schools, lectures, libraries and all these sorts of advantages are, say he, enjoyed by the operatives. (Query—when do they find time for all or any of these? When exhausted nature demands repose?)

She then dismisses his book: "After all, it is easier to write a book than...it is to probe to the very bottom of this death-spreading monster."<sup>23</sup>

The public debate about women factory workers was conducted mainly on the pages of newspapers and magazines and through controversial pamphlets. There are few fictional works that have factory labor as their subject. By discussing these works in the context of this larger controversy, I aim to show how the inflammatory issues of gender, labor, and social change were mediated through literary representations, and how the vari-

ous images of factory workers produced in the polemical discourses of the time were incorporated and transformed by the factory fiction of antebellum America.<sup>24</sup>

Most of the fictional representations of the “mill girl” appeared in the *Lowell Offering*. For the most part, they continued the editorial line of the journal, which embraced factory labor unconditionally. A typical story is “Ada, the Factory Maid.” The heroine, daughter of a mechanic, becomes a factory worker in order to support herself and her widowed mother, whose health is undermined by her work as a seamstress. The young woman wins the trust of her employers, resists the temptations of her associates, and contentedly spends her leisure hours in study before she is rewarded with a suitor. Other stories in the *Offering* do what the journal’s non-fictional pieces attempted to do, that is, figure change as continuity by claiming factory girls as country maidens. However, the *Offering*’s fiction did not present the countryside as an ideal alternative to the mills. The countryside was associated with an unstable rural landscape, consisting of broken families, mortgaged farms, and unpaid debts. Far from being a seat of continuity and stability, the countryside is seen as changing and unpredictable. Not surprisingly, several of the stories are based on a reversal of fortune plot. One such story is “The Widow’s Son,” which recounts the trials of Mrs. Jones, an “inestimable lady” who “was reared in the midst of affluence,” but after the death of her husband has to work as a seamstress to support the schooling of her son. Eventually, she decides to work in a factory to help educate him as a clergyman. There she becomes Lucy Cambridge when she assumes her maiden name, thus transforming herself into a “girl” again. Her regression seems to enable her to toil away cheerfully and hopefully until she finally realizes her goal. The heroine of “Disasters Overcome,” Sophia Marsh, is the daughter of a wealthy farmer, who suddenly loses everything he owns. In order to relieve her father from his debts, she becomes a factory worker. Toil improves her mind, causing its “energies [to be] quickened and increased.” As we learn, “[t]he rust that had gathered about it, in the days of their family prosperity, had been worn away by constant activity.” She benefits from lectures, intelligent associates, and good books and is happy and content with her new life.

The factory as a fit place for a lady (or at least a former one) appears in other stories as well. In “The Prejudice against Labor” Caroline Lindsay condescends to Martha Croly because the latter works in a factory. Martha defends herself and the mills by mentioning the great educational and religious opportunities available in a mill town. But Caroline is not convinced until she herself is forced to work in a factory when her father loses his for-

tune in speculation. There she is befriended by the factory girl she has once snubbed. Both women eventually marry gentlemen, proving without a doubt that their factory experience did not disqualify them as "ladies." In a similar story Mary Emmons, daughter of a rich merchant, becomes a factory girl when her father loses his fortune. A year later she marries a gentleman whose sister once snubbed her because of her labor. In these stories, the mill is a stable place for these women to go to when their secure world is turned upside down by unexpected events. The contrast between the precariousness of the countryside and the stability of the mill is clearly drawn in "The Redeemed Farm." After twenty years absence, the characters in this story return to the scene of their youth to find that the mill where they once worked around the year 1815 is still there, a place of refuge for those deserted by fortune, while the farm they knew is unrecognizably run down and about to be lost to a mortgage.<sup>25</sup>

The plot of a woman working in the mill in order to redeem a mortgaged farm is commonplace. While these plots show rural life to be precarious, completely dependent on the factory for survival, they affirm the value of that life, depicting the redemption of the farm as a positive goal. Other stories, however, refuse to idealize rural life in this way. In "The White Mountain Sisters" Mary and Amanda are daughters of a well-to-do New England farmer, who engages in speculation and is suddenly ruined. During their years of work at Lowell, the two sisters save enough money to buy their family a farm. Most importantly, they escape their mother's fate. She, we are told, was once a rustic belle, "and for a country girl, very ladyfied,—but after marriage...immediately began to metamorphose into a common-place, industrious, frugal, managing country-woman." The daughters' experience in Lowell frees them from the stagnation of rural New England. Similarly, In "Abby's Year in Lowell" the frivolous heroine returns home after a brief stint in a factory a changed woman, proudly displaying not only her bankbook but also her cultivated manners and improved mind. "Harriet Greenough" is more satirical in its exposition of the limitations of country life. The country maiden in this story is the daughter of one "of the almost obsolete class of farmers, whose gods are their farms, and whose creed—'Farmers are the most independent folks in the world.'" Her father is conservative, vain, and provincial. She is raised without any kind of discipline, pleased "to rake hay, ride in the cart, husk corn, hunt hens' eggs, jump on the hay, play ball, prisoner, pitch quoits, throw dice, cut and saw wood, and, indeed to run into every amusement which her active temperament demanded." At sixteen she lacks all feminine graces and is more a tomboy than a young woman. Her transforma-

tion takes place during the year she spends at the factory, which her father allows her to attend reluctantly. She arrives home “a very beautiful girl, easy and graceful in her manners, soft and gentle in her conversation, and evidently conscious of her superiority, only to feel more humble.” She brings home “a few minerals and shells” and “fifty well-selected volumes.” Apparently, “[s]he has been studying painting and drawing” and she redecorates the house with items of elegance and convenience. So the mill here is more like a “finishing school,” transforming an uncouth and undisciplined country girl into a charming young lady. She is not the only beneficiary. Her father’s contact with the mill through her broadens his limited horizons and improves his mind as well. “Life Among Farmers” is another satirical portrait of a farmer’s household. No ideal picture of farm life can be found here. Farmers are disorganized, parsimonious, gluttonous, closed-minded, uneducated, and undisciplined. They work all the time with no opportunities for leisure or study.<sup>26</sup>

But some stories that appeared in the *Offering* allowed for a more nuanced attitude towards factories. In several stories the female factory experience is figured primarily as an experience of loss. Susan Miller, for instance, joins a Lowell factory after the disgraceful death of her alcoholic father, hoping to earn enough money to free his mortgaged farm. She succeeds in doing so, but upon her return she discovers that her fiancé has left her and married another woman. Deeply saddened, Susan reconciles herself to living alone as an old maid. Serena Lowe, the heroine of “The Betrothed,” has a similar experience. She works in Lowell while waiting for her fiancé, who is studying to become a minister. Time passes, leaving its marks on her face and turning her into “a sad sallow shrunken old maid.” Feeling some coldness on his side, and realizing that she is no longer suitable to be his wife, she breaks off their engagement. Serena even tries to feel happy for him when he marries another woman who is not a factory worker. Upon returning to her village, Serena lives alone and dies alone, her life sad and unfulfilled. In “The Sisters” two young, intelligent, industrious, and religious workers come to the “goodly city” of Lowell to partake of its “pleasures and privileges.” Soon, however, they become consumptive and are carried home to die with their mother. Some workers do not even make the return trip home and their lives end in the factory. Flora Herbert, a country girl left completely alone in the world, works in a mill for three years, feeding on her memories of a happier and irrecoverable past, before she dies in a boardinghouse among strangers. A grimmer ending is offered in “The Mother and Daughter.” It begins as a typical factory story about young Anna who goes to the mill to help educate her brother after the

death of their father. Her departure and the painful separation from her family are described in much detail, while her happy and productive year in the factory is referred to in passing. On her last day of work the mill catches on fire, and she and the other women are trapped. Some hurl themselves out of the window, but Anna never makes it out and dies in the mill.<sup>27</sup> Through the sentimentality and nostalgia of these stories, the darker side of factory work emerges, thus contradicting the explicit editorial line of the journal.

In fact, outside the *Offering* novels expressed anxiety about industrialization as they celebrated factories. The factory worker was presented as a country maiden embodying stability and continuity, as in Sarah Savage's *The Factory Girl* (1814), probably the earliest novel about factories. It tells the story of eighteen-year old Mary, a farmer's daughter, who, following the death of her father, has to work in a recently established cotton factory in a nearby town in order to support herself and her grandmother. Despite the title, the factory is absent from the novel and most of the scenes are at home. Some drawbacks of the factory system are mentioned but only to be explained away. For instance, the workers look haggard, not because they work fourteen hours a day, but rather because they go to late-night dances and generally lead an undisciplined life. Similarly, when she discusses child labor, Savage chooses one of the factory owners (who is also a physician and a philanthropist) to express her disapproval. He blames the employment of children on ignorant and greedy parents who do not realize the value of education. The novel ignores the fact that at the time manufacturers themselves actively recruited children for their factories and were praised by prominent advocates of manufacture for employing those who otherwise would be idle.<sup>28</sup>

Anxiety about the emergent factory system is expressed in the novel mainly through William Reymond, Mary's fiancé and the only male factory worker in the novel. William is described as an agreeable young man with a good disposition. However, because he did not receive proper childhood instruction, he lacks "steady principles." As a result, his passions are not well controlled, and he is easily distracted by novelty (43). His fickleness and unsteadiness lead him to break up his engagement with Mary and to marry instead the frivolous and selfish factory worker Lucy Newcome. Both William and Lucy (as her surname indicates) are representatives of the new and unreliable as it is embodied in the factory. William is also associated with the vagaries of speculation, for he wins a lottery ticket and is instantly transformed into a gentleman. Like her contemporaries, Savage is suspicious of this quick prosperity and condemns it to failure. William's

lack of discipline inevitably gets him into debt and leads him to desert his wife and child. Through William and Lucy, two factory workers, Savage then expresses her fear and mistrust of two emergent economic modes, manufacture and speculation.

In contrast to William and Lucy stands Mary, the virtuous heroine. The novel in fact is a didactic tale, made up of loose episodes that are occasions to showcase the heroine's unambiguous virtue. Mary is idealized as a moral exemplar. Her gentleness, self-sacrifice, piety, dutifulness and diligence set her apart from those who work with her. At the same time these same feminine attributes make her a better worker, one who performs her tasks with unmatched cheerfulness and dedication. She not only retains her virtue despite factory life, but also inspires others to follow her example. Paradoxically, Mary is an ideal worker because she remains a country maiden, unchanged by her labor and by her new identity—announced in the title—as a “factory girl.” Her constancy and steadiness make the factory appear less destabilizing of the status quo. By insisting on Mary as an exceptional figure rather than a representative one, the novel still reveals its uncertainty regarding the new factory system. Through Mary the reader is reconciled to the new system but is allowed to question it at the same time. In other words, factories are made less threatening but are kept at arm's length.

As an unchanged country maiden, Mary affirms the agrarian ideal as an embodiment of stability. Despite the dramatic changes in her life, Mary remains unwavering in her virtue even when she stands at the brink of total destitution. She is rescued when two men magically emerge from her past and restore her former class identity. Captain Holden, a relative who has been lost at sea for many years and presumed dead, gives her a secure home until Danforth, a former neighbor, marries her. Both farmer Danforth and captain Holden appear to re-establish the world as Mary knew it before she had to earn a living. The novel ends with a comforting picture of this resurrected world in which Mary, now free from the necessity to labor, is an ideal wife and mother, her transition from factory to farm so smooth as to be hardly noticeable.

The paradigm of the factory girl as country maiden was still deemed useful three decades later as is evident in A. I. Cummings' novel *The Factory Girl or Gardez La Coer* (1847). The heroine is fifteen-year old Calliste Barton, who leaves the “rural seclusion” of her humble but happy home to work in a Lowell factory in order to help her brother Edwin obtain an education. As a factory girl she is shunned by fashionable society, but she labors cheerfully for many years, improving her mind and resisting the

temptations of the city along the way. She leaves only when her brother becomes a minister and her fiancé a doctor. The latter also inherits a sizable estate. This “sudden evolution of fortune” raises the young man “from almost penniless poverty to comparative independence” (101) and enables him to restore Calliste to her native hills, where she lives happily ever after as his wife.

Like her predecessor, Calliste is a virtuous and pious country maiden, who, despite her long sojourn in the city and her years of labor, remains “the same beautiful, innocent and lovely being” as before she left her home to work. But unlike Mary, Calliste, although idealized, is portrayed as a representative of a class not as an “isolated case.” Over and over again the author reminds us of the virtuous and admirable class of factory girls. In fact, he dedicates the novel “[t]o the intelligent and highly respectable class of female operatives, in New England” and declares his purpose is “to praise and give merit to the humble operative who works for others” (390). The operatives’ self-sacrifice and self-denial, he proclaims, are what he admires most (36). At one point he rhetorically asks,

What class in society are more worthy of respect, than those who, by the daily labor of their hands, gain an honorable livelihood, and secure to themselves the means of cultivating their minds—thus preparing themselves for future usefulness and a happy life, whether “among the spindles,” in the farm-house, or in the parlor? (48)

Although he insists that what he presents is real and not tinted by any flights of the imagination, the picture he draws is highly idealized. For one thing, as in the previous novel, both factory and labor are absent. We are told that Calliste took pleasure in her work, and we see that she lives in what looks more like a middle-class parlor than a room in a mill’s boardinghouse. Unlike the outspoken Mary, this heroine has no voice, completely silenced by a highly enthusiastic and intrusive male author obsessed with defending factory laborers against the snobbery of the “aristocracy.”

The heavy-handed and hyperbolic rhetoric praising the class of operatives and denouncing the aristocrats who look down on them dominates the novel. Assuming the voice of the republican American, the author vehemently argues that character and virtue, not rank or wealth, are the true signs of merit:

We despise that low, groveling son of wealth, who, in the pride of self-consequence, looks only to rank and riches as tests of worth/who can curl the lip of scorn at the operative, when in fact the real merit of one humble member of this class, if placed in the balance of virtue, would weigh down millions of souls tinctured with this vanity. (95)

But despite his unqualified support for factory girls, Cummings is even more uncomfortable with factories than Savage. In addition to his erasure of labor and his banishment of any male workers, his novel idealizes the countryside and the home of the farmer as seats of “most sublime joys” (66) although it makes clear the insufficiency of farmer Barton’s household and its dependency on Calliste’s labor in the city. The gap between the city and the country is wider than in the earlier novel as is evident in the emphasis put on homesickness and leave-taking. The city here is seen as an unknowable community, full of strangers and seducers who are potentially threatening to the young and innocent. Moreover, the world of the city is the world of novelty, always threatening to distract the young from persevering in any enterprise. At the end of the novel we are left with a familiar world. Calliste, married to a young physician, lives far away from the city. Her years in the factory, so vehemently praised by the author, are far behind her. The discrepancy between the novel’s self-conscious rhetoric and its conventional ending betrays an anxiety about the new order. This anxiety can also be heard in the shrill tone of its “defense,” which distinguishes this novel from the more confident tone of the earlier one.

Mary Gordon, the heroine of Mrs. Joseph Neal’s “The New England Factory Girl” (1848) is another country maiden turned factory girl. She is the daughter of Deacon Gordon, a virtuous farmer whose farm is getting smaller and smaller because of his inefficiency. Mary decides to work in a Lowell factory in order to support the education of her brother, thus sacrificing her happiness for the sake of others. As usual her life in Lowell is sketchily drawn. At the beginning her health suffers from the noise and the confinement, but the knowledge that her labor is helping her brother achieve his dream calms her mind and restores her body. While in the city, she meets “refined and agreeable society, from which she insensibly took a tone of mind and manner, that was far superior to that of her companions.” She also uses the evenings for study and reflection. Eventually, her brother becomes a lawyer with great prospects, and she herself graduates from a girl’s seminary and marries a respectable lawyer, who is not troubled by her past as a “factory girl.”

Although the title of this story, as that of the previous two novels, gives the impression that factory labor is a permanent condition, or at least one that defines the heroines’ identity in significant ways, the novels all in fact figure this labor as a transient experience. By the end of the three narratives, factory work is presented as the “past”—part of the heroine’s history but not part of her present or future. Distancing factories at the very moment they embrace them, these works try to mitigate anxieties about

the emergent factory system by representing the new as the old. The virtuous country maiden who works in the factory is an emblem of the dignity of labor precisely because she remains unchanged by that labor. She is simultaneously an ideal worker, a moral exemplar, and a model of femininity not only to her fellow factory workers, but also to the lady of leisure. Neal explains to the latter what her “factory girl” can teach:

[B]ut remember, as you enjoy the elegancies of a luxurious home, that change comes to all when least expected. And if misfortune should not spare even one so young and so beautiful; if poverty or desolation overshadow the household, it may be your part to sustain and to strengthen, not only by words, but by deeds...God shield you, dear lady; but if the storm come, remember that honest labor elevates rather than degrades; and those whose opinions are of value will not hesitate to confirm the truth of the moral. (349)

A few writers, mostly anonymous, chose to bring anxieties about industrialization to the surface by depicting a more sinister and threatening picture of the changing American landscape. The propaganda for Lowell made the city and its women a tempting target for the shocking sensationalism one finds in a work like *Mysteries of Lowell* (1844). The novel opens with what was a staple scene in foreign tourists’ accounts of Lowell, a scene describing “thousand after thousand of female operatives, beautifully dressed, and with smiling faces...thronging the sidewalks on their way to their respective boarding houses, having partaken of the rich, intellectual banquets which our New England Sabbaths so abundantly furnished” (3). But this charming scene begins to fade as soon as the main characters are introduced. One of them is Owen Glendower, the owner of one of the factories and a professor of Christianity. But the face he presents to the world belies his true identity. At heart he is a hypocrite, a liar, and a libertine, determined to seduce the beautiful factory girl Augusta Walton. More prominent in this novel than in any of the previous ones, the factory becomes a place where girls like Augusta are put on public display to be consumed by the male gaze. Glendower often frequents the workroom to feast his eyes on Augusta. These “gazing visitations” are noticed by everybody including Augusta herself, who seems to enjoy them. When his nephew, Henry Seyton, comes to the factory for the same purpose after hearing of Augusta’s beauty, she does her best to impress him. Suddenly, the picture of the young woman working diligently at her loom amid the din of the machinery becomes a scene of courtship and seduction. Henry is enchanted by Augusta’s “perfect symmetry “ and by her “poetry of motion”(16) and is enthralled by her beautiful hand resting on her machine. He soon propos-

es. While attracted to his riches, Augusta does not marry him, for she discovers that her suitor and Edwin, the poor working man she is in love with, are both her brothers from different mothers.

The Lowell of this novel is a city peopled with country maidens and factory girls who are sexually exploited by factory owners. It is a place of scandal and crime—of incest, illegitimate births, desertions, murder, and suicide. The pillars of society turn out to be licentious hypocrites, the women easy prey to male desire. In this world seduction is not a potential danger, as it is for instance in Cummings' novel, but rather the inevitable outcome of factory work. This is certainly the theme of *A Tale of Lowell* (1849). Again it begins with a conventional celebration of Lowell's great achievements, which transformed the "swampy wilderness of a small village into a thriving manufacturing city" (3). The women workers are the protagonists in this uplifting tale: "Farmers' daughters no longer consented to milk the cows, or turn the spinning wheel, but hied away to Lowell; there, with nimble fingers, to turn the flying minutes into coin, wherewith to purchase, some, an independence of an aged mother, perhaps from want and care—some a wedding dowry" (3). Norton, the novel's hero, returns to Lowell after a twelve-year absence and is favorably impressed. He particularly notices the factory women as they take their leisurely walk along a beautiful promenade, "some laughing, some chatting busily and merrily, their pleasant, happy countenances lighted up with animation; some leaning on the arm of a happy youth, and listening with fondness to some tender tale he was pouring into her willing ear" (4). The view inside the factory is as attractive as outside: "The inner arrangement of the mills were also neat—the operatives well dressed and tidy, and seemingly intelligent and contented" (6). But as the novel progresses, the surface appearance gives way to a different reality. Soon the narrator realizes that the woman leaning on the arm of the happy youth is in the process of being seduced by the sweet lies of a libertine, and that the respectable-looking workers he saw in the factory are infiltrated by "decoys" or stool pigeons there to recruit them for the brothels of the city. He also discovers that in addition to its bridges, canals, and promenades, Lowell has a seedy side that boasts of oyster houses, hotels, taverns, and gambling dens.

The exemplary woman worker who was central in earlier accounts becomes in this novel a marginal character. As a moral exemplar, Caroline Elliston labors contentedly and spends her leisure time on her literary pursuits, thus acquiring great "depth of thought and refinement" that set her apart from those around her. At the end of the novel she is rewarded by marrying the rich hero, who carries her to the south, far away from Lowell.

But Caroline is both exceptional and ineffectual. More typical is Julia Child, Norton's sister. She is not contented with her work and entertains dreams beyond her reach. These qualities make her an easy target for Caldwell, a libertine lawyer, who soon succeeds in seducing and raping her. Pregnant, deserted, and remorseful for not heeding her brother's warnings, Julia soon dies. But in case we think of her as an anomaly, the novel presents the story of Agnes Morland, another factory worker. She was not only raped by her overseer at the factory, but also turned by him into a common prostitute. When Norton meets her again, he cannot recognize the pure and beautiful country maiden he once loved. Instead, he sees an old and haggard woman, broken by alcohol and shame. Unable to endure any longer a life of guilt and degradation, Agnes throws herself in the river—a grotesque victim of male deception and lust.

Except for Caroline Elliston, who eventually leaves Lowell, the factory girls in this novel are no moral exemplars, their virtue as precarious as their social status. Defined primarily as sexual beings, they are cut off from their familial ties as daughters or sisters. For most of the novel, for example, Julia does not know that Norton is her brother, and when she does learn the truth, she still refuses his advice. Even the unambiguously virtuous Caroline is completely on her own, with no mention ever made of her family. The relationship between virtue and familial identity is central to the plot of the short story "Anna Archdale." The heroine is transformed overnight from "a rich merchant's daughter to an humble factory girl" (8) when her father loses all his fortune in speculation. Once in Lowell Anna's reputation is smeared by a jealous rival, who loves her fiancé. At the end of the story Anna's name is cleared and she is reunited with her lover when it is proved that the man she was seen embracing is her long-absent wealthy brother. Significantly, her virtue is vindicated the moment she is claimed as someone's sister and restored to her previous social status as a "lady."

The precariousness and uncertainty of the virtue of factory girls and working women in general is best captured in another novel about the squalid side of Lowell. In *Ellen Merton, the Belle of Lowell* (1844) the anonymous author announces in his introduction that his aim in writing this novel is to warn and save future victims. The Lowell he portrays is a highly sexualized place. The country maidens who come to it from all over New England succumb to temptations and fall victims to seduction because "the pride of maidenly virtue alone when opposed to the tornado of passion" will "in many cases be swept away like chaff before the wind" (3). Although he dismisses as exaggeration the reports which state "that nine-tenths of those fallen and degraded females, who are dependent on crime and charity for

support, in the metropolis of New England, have been operatives in the Mills of Lowell," he goes on to say that "[i]t is not to be denied, however, that many, alas, too many of the unfortunate frail ones, in all our large cities, have gone forth from those haunts of Industry to the haunts of Infamy—turning their backs forever upon respectability, honor, family, friends, and, worst of all, their own self-esteem and peace of mind" (4). The novel consists of "confessions" of some Lowell men who describe in salacious, almost pornographic, details the scenes of seduction they have experienced. The women in these stories—maids, milliners, factory girls, and even some "ladies"—appear virtuous and respectable but turn out to be too passionate and sensual. Often they are more the seducers than the seduced. Ellen Merton, the heroine of the novel, is described as a young and beautiful country maiden, trusting, simple, pure, but also too ardent and passionate in her attachments. These qualities make her an easy target for a libertine's advances, from which she escapes only because of the intervention of a young clerk who wants to marry her. Despite the happy ending, the reader is left with the impression that Ellen's luck, not her virtue, saved her from a life of disgrace, the inevitable lot of most of the women in this novel.

These anonymously authored, sensational books, with their sexuality, violence, and titillating titles, figure the social crisis as a moral one. Men's presence in these novels is prominent, and both city and mill are sexualized spaces. Power relations between employer and employed are expressed in terms of gender, with factory workers as objects of male desire, victims of libertines and rapists who engineer plots for their seduction and ruin. The vulnerability of these women is underscored by their uncertain familial identities and by their severed ties to their rural past, a past that remains invisible. Their virtue is ambiguous, and this ambiguity exposes the weakness of the "factory girl" paradigm. Feminizing factory labor may have succeeded in upholding the myth of the agrarian republic by distancing the industrialization process from the men of America and therefore making it seem less threatening. At the same time, women as symbols of industrialization were seen as the weakest link of the new order because of the dominant gender ideology of the time, which viewed women as vulnerable, sexually and morally, outside their domestic sphere. Because of these contradictory implications of the "factory girl," this paradigm failed to alleviate the anxieties of America about manufacture and was instead a source of unease and discomfort.

Nobody exploited the contradictions of the paradigm and exposed its inadequacies better than Herman Melville in the second part of his diptych

“The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids.” The considerable attention that this story has received from modern critics certainly makes it the most well-known antebellum work about factories.<sup>29</sup> The subversiveness of the story can be fully appreciated only by reading it in the context of other fictional and non-fictional representations of factory workers. That Melville’s contemporary audience read it in that context could partly explain their lack of shock at the sexual explicitness of the story, the familiarity of the “factory girl” paradigm helping mitigate any unfamiliar twists Melville employed.

As some critics have indicated, in “The Tartarus of Maids” Melville explodes the myth of the agrarian republic.<sup>30</sup> He does so by presenting a picture of the uneasy relationship between rural and industrial America. The paper mill the narrator visits is located in the countryside—not the typical countryside of “bright farms and sunny meadows” (210), but a demonized one, with landmarks such as Bleak Hill, Blood River, and Devil’s Dungeon. As soon as this landscape begins to look more and more allegorical, another landmark is introduced: a deserted saw mill, which was built “in those primitive times when vast pines and hemlocks superabounded throughout the neighboring region,” but which is now strewn with logs “in long abandonment and decay” (211). This mill stands as an historical marker, a symbol of change linking present and past. As an icon of a decayed past, the old saw mill is juxtaposed to “a large whitewashed building”—the paper mill. This juxtaposition does not produce the conventional narrative of progress so familiar in contemporary accounts of manufacture. Rather, it connects the paper mill to a past of destruction and violation of the natural environment.

As the narrator approaches the paper mill, the usual dramatic visual encounter with the factories is absent. In fact, the narrator cannot see the building at first and is guided to it by its “whirring and humming” (213). However, he immediately recognizes the boarding houses of the operatives from their “cheap, blank air...and comfortless expression” (213). The scene of the happy, well-dressed crowds of factory workers moving energetically from boarding house to factory is replaced with that of a solitary girl, seeking shelter from a storm that caught her with only a thin apron to shelter her bare head. She turns on him “a face pale with work, and blue with cold; an eye supernatural with unrelated misery” (214). The narrator is shocked at seeing this face, and his shock will only mount as he enters the factory and takes a closer look at the women who work there.

The picture Melville draws here of factory women strands many details from the fictional and non-fictional representations of his contemporaries

to produce the most compelling and poignant indictment of the oppressiveness of industrialization. The dreary boardinghouses, the long hours of labor, the unhealthy and dangerous working conditions, and most importantly, the loss of the workers' autonomy and selfhood—all central issues in reformers' and workers' discourse about manufacture—are strongly present in Melville's story as in no other contemporary fictional work about factory labor. Like his contemporaries, Melville views women as symbols of the manufacturing system, icons of industrialization.<sup>31</sup> The work-force in the paper mill the narrator visits is totally composed of women.<sup>32</sup> But Melville's feminized work-force is a dystopia, a nightmarish vision of sterility and barrenness. The women the narrator encounters are victims of a manufacturing system that defines their identities, controls their lives, and turns them into subservient slaves to the machine. His portrayal indicates his familiarity with the paradigm of the "factory girl" as country maiden and his intent to subvert it. As the owner informs the narrator, the women who work in this paper mill all come from villages, but instead of being symbols of continuity and stability, they are symbols of rigidity and sterility. Their "girliness" and their "pale virginity" are no longer signs of youthfulness, purity, and optimism, but rather of barrenness and decay. Like the landscape outside, they too are frozen in time, their identities forever fixed as "girls" and as factory workers. The word "blank," which the narrator repeatedly uses to describe them, emphasizes their lack of any individuating characteristics. Even the difference in age among them is pointed out only to be dismissed as irrelevant: for when a young woman and an old one, who both attend different positions in regard to the "ruling machine," exchange their places to break the monotony, they do so without any disruption of the work. The homogenizing power of the machine is overwhelming. The women do not seem to have a past or a future and are not defined by familial ties as sisters, daughters, mothers, or wives. Their loyalty is exclusively to the machines they tend. As we saw earlier, the reformers and some of the women workers themselves were the ones who made the argument that factory work prevented women from fulfilling their roles as wives and mothers. They used this conservative rhetoric not to argue for a "true womanhood" ideology but to specifically demand a reduction in the hours of labor. A historicizing reading of Melville's story would see its emblematic use of depraved female sexuality in this context.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, the feminine qualities of submissiveness, tameness, and silence make them ideal workers, this time in an oppressive world where machine dominates woman, and woman becomes a representative of oppressed humanity in general: "Machinery—that vaunted slave

of humanity—here stood menially served by human beings, who served mutely and cringingly as the slave serves the Sultan. The girls did not so much seem accessory wheels to the general machinery as mere cogs to the wheels” (215-216). This domination is at the center of Melville’s critique of the new mechanical age.

As the narrator tours the factory, he is horrified by the fact that these machines are more alive than the women who work them. The scene of a girl “feeding” her machine is no longer a domestic scene of a mother feeding her child as Fredrika Bremer once described it, but that of a subservient girl dominated by an “iron animal.” This particular machine stamps a wreath of roses on the pink sheets, thus producing what seems to be a feminine article, what might one day become a love letter. In this case, however, the woman’s feminizing of the machine and its products is a sinister process of victimization. The presence of color on the sheets only reminds the narrator of its absence on the girls’ cheeks, thus turning the machine into a vampire-like creature that sucks the blood of its victim and injects it into the product she manufactures. That the woman is not likely to have any use for the feminized object she produces—after all she will always be a “factory girl”—only serves to highlight the starkness of her exploitation.

Like the sensational factory novels of his contemporaries, Melville’s story figures the class oppression of workers in gender terms but without using the conventional seduction narrative. Melville’s factory girls can no longer be the objects of masculine desire because the machine claims this position now. The highlight of the tour and the climax of the story is when the narrator faces the machine that makes the paper. This is a moment of crisis for him. The new machine—intricate, punctual, and predictable—fascinates the narrator to such a degree that he is almost seduced by its wheels and cylinders. The workings of the machine are described in great detail, and as many critics have pointed out, the imagery of gestation and delivery likens the production of paper to reproduction (Young; Wiegman). The most shocking aspect of the scene is the juxtaposition of this “living” machine to “the sad looking woman” nearby who once was a nurse but can only “deliver” foolscap now. Mesmerized, the narrator seems unable to shake off the profound effect the scene has on him. He has to remind himself that he is spellbound by just a punctual and precise machine. His will to resist the power of seduction the machine exerts on him triumphs only when he reminds himself of the price being paid for this machine’s “metallic necessity”:

I seemed to see, glued to the pallid incipience of the pulp, the yet more pallid faces of all the pallid girls I had eyed that heavy day.

Slowly, mournfully, beseechingly, yet unresistingly, they gleamed along, their agony dimly outlined on the imperfect paper, like the print of the tormented face on the handkerchief of Saint Veronica.

By the time Melville published this story, in 1855, factories were no longer new, but evidently they were still suspect. His story illustrates how by that time the figure of the woman worker as an emblem of industrialization was becoming more of a liability than a boon. The incoherence of this figure and its paradoxical nature ended up exposing more than resolving the contradictions that marked the American experience with manufacture. Antebellum Americans needed an emblem that would both express and alleviate their anxieties about industrialization and its effects on their class and gender identities. They found such an emblem in the figure of the seamstress.

## NOTES

1. Qtd in Sumner 39. Mathew Carey defended manufacture along similar lines. See Carey, *Essays on Political Economy* 348, 440.

2. Qtd. in Robinson, *Loom and Spindle* 45.

3. Proponents of manufacture attempted to extend the work ethic to include women as part of their defense of factories. They argued that factories made useful those who otherwise would be idle, namely women and children. See A. Hamilton, "On the Subject of Manufactures" 193 and Kessler-Harris 24. For a discussion of the way nineteenth-century feminists attempted to use the republican work ethic to argue for more opportunities for women, see chapter seven "Idle Womanhood: Feminist Versions of the Work Ethic" in Rodgers 182-209.

4. C. D. Arfwedson, one of Lowell's visitors, referred to the city as a republic of women, whose citizens will revolt if a snubbed girl is not dismissed from their midst. Qtd. in Fisher, *Workshops* 105.

5. For a discussion of the visibility of women in nineteenth century political discourse, see Scott.

6. See Kessler-Harris; Foner; Josephson; and Zonderman.

7. Unlike Stansell, who tends to see the "factory girl" as a coherent and changeless trope between the 1830s and the 1850s, I emphasize that from the beginning there was no one consensual image of factory women workers.

8. For a detailed discussion of the European visitors' preconceptions about America and the way these preconceptions influenced their responses to what they saw, see Fisher, *Workshops* 45. Fisher, however, does not focus on their encounters with the women workers. One historian who does focus on that encounter but whose study does not have the same scope as Fisher's is Foner, *Factory Girls* xx-xxi.

9. While the text does not indicate the gender of the author, I will be using "he" throughout my discussion to avoid stylistic awkwardness.

10. There were other magazines similar to the *Lowell Offering*, but I will restrict my discussion to the latter and to the *New England Offering*, which Farley also co-edited, because they were the most famous and influential.

11. See for example Farley's "Letters From Susan" (4: 145-148, 257-259); "A Letter to Cousin Lucy" (5: 109-111); "A Week in the Mill" (5: 217-218); "A Second Peep at Factory Life" (5: 97-100).

12. For examples of this kind of writing see "Home" (2: 320), "Home Affections" (2: 95), "Thoughts of Home" (3: 280); Factory Girl's Reverie" (5: 140); "The Patchwork Quilt" (5: 200-203); "Home" (5: 154); "A Visit in the Country" (5: 146-149); "Wanderings with the Past" (5: 219-220); "My Grandmother's Fireside" (1: 43).

13. Farley wrote this as part of her response to Orestes Brownson's "attack" on factory girls. See *Lowell Offering* 1: 43.

14. Farley qualified her statement by admitting that the only punishment existing is dismissal from the job, see *Lowell Offering* 4: 240. For a discussion of the kinds of punishment that were implemented in New England mills, see Gersung.

15. Qtd. in Foner, *Factory Girls* 58. For details about the public controversy between Bagley and Farley see Foner, *Factory Girls* 57-73.

16. Farley wrote that, during her travels to Manchester and Nashua while an editor of the *New England Offering*, the managers of many mills were more than willing "to give every girl an opportunity to subscribe, without taxing my own time too heavily" (*New England Offering* May 1849, 276). For details about the unwelcoming treatment other labor press received from agents and owners, see Zonderman 225-227. For details about the mill owners' support of Farley, see Foner, *Factory Girls* 26-29.

17. Although the women workers could not vote, they campaigned vigorously against Schouler's re-election and succeeded in defeating him. See Josephson 261 and Foner, *Factory Girls* 246.

18. On the rare occasions Farley acknowledges the negative aspects of factory labor she consistently blames the women themselves. For example, she faults the workers for their bad health by arguing that some operatives were "too ambitious, some too covetous, some too thoughtless, [and] some too ignorant" to buy proper clothing (3: 191-192). She cites excessive recreation as another cause of ill health:

"But," they will ask, "are we to give up meetings, and concerts, and Sabbath schools." "Yes," we reply, "if your health is failing, and you wish to preserve it." "But we had rather die than live but to work, and work but to live." "Well, then, go on, and lose your health, but do not say that you could not have preserved it." We well know that sacrifice and self-denial are demanded, when we ask that in the prime of life they should debar themselves of so much which gives to life its zest and gladness. But there can be, with moderate labor in the factory, moderate amusements and pleasures out of it." (5: 281)

19. *Voice of Industry*, December 3, 1847, qtd. in Foner, *Factory Girls* 92-94.

20. Appeared in *Nashua (N.H.) Gazette*, October 1, 1846, qtd. in Foner, *Factory Girls* 83-84.

21. This is part of Bagley's speech at the New England Workingmen's Association, May 27, 1845. *Voice of Industry*, June 5, 1845, qtd. in Foner, *Factory Girls* 109-110.

22. *Factory Girls' Album*, Exeter, N. H., June 20, 1846, qtd. in Foner, *Factory Girls* 80; *Factory Girls' Album*, Exeter, N. H., February 14, 1846, qtd. in Foner, *Factory Girls* 78.

23. *Voice of Industry*, Sep. 18, 1845, qtd. in Foner, *Factory Girls* 84; *Voice of Industry*, June 12, 1846, qtd. in Foner, *Factory Girls* 85.

24. According to Esenstein: "The factory girl never attained the popularity of other wage-earning women as a heroine in fiction...of all working women [she was] the most remote from the experience of both authors and reading public...the life of the mill girl lacked almost all the romantic elements beloved by novelists...The factory girl lacked all the qualifications for the ideal Victorian heroine" (68-69).

25. "The Widow's Son." *Lowell Offering* 2: 246-250; "Disasters Overcome." *Lowell Offering* 2: 289-297; "Prejudice Against Labor." *Lowell Offering* 1: 136-145; "The Factory Girl." *Lowell Offering* 4: 103-105; "The Redeemed Farm." *Operatives' Magazine* 3: 33-36.

26. "The White Mountain Sisters." *Lowell Offering* 2: 145-155; "Abby's Year in Lowell." *Lowell Offering* 1: 1-8; "Harriet Greenough." *Lowell Offering* 1: 295-302; "Life Among Farmers." *Lowell Offering* 2: 129-137.

27. "Susan Miller." *Lowell Offering*, 1: 161-171; "The Betrothed." *Lowell Offering*, 4: 109-114; "The Sisters." *Operatives Magazine* 1: 15-16; "The Factory Girl." *Lowell Offering* 5: 274-277; "The Mother and Daughter." *Lowell Offering* 4: 126-128.

28. Children were sought especially in the Waltham system, which was family-based. Eisler mentions that some of the manufacturers issued handbills that aimed at recruiting children. One such bill read, "Men with growing families wanted" (15). About the benefits of employing children in factories, see A. Hamilton, "Report on Manufacture" 193 and Carey, *Essays on Political Economy* 430.

29. Not all critics believe that this story is about factories. Generally critical opinion is sharply divided into two camps. There are those who focus on the story's sexual imagery and symbolism and underplay the social protest theme. Among the representatives of this school of thought are Eby, Young, Dillingham, Weigman, Franklin, and Sandberg. The second group of critics read it as protest against industrialization. Most of these critics do not deny the importance of the sexual theme in the story. See Thorp, Rogin, Browne, S. Bremer, Thompson, and Fisher, *Going Under*. Humphreys is one critic who denies the sexual symbolism altogether.

30. See Fisher, *Going Under*; Rogin; S. Bremer.

31. Dimock writes in "Class, Gender, and Metonymy" that in Melville's story "the woman worker...is made to stand metonymically for the entire working class" and that her sexuality in particular becomes "the representative sign of the generalized injuries of class" (85-86). While agreeing with Dimock's analysis, I

stress the fact that Melville was not alone in his uses of gender and that he was employing and subverting what at the time was a cultural paradigm.

32. This does not correspond with the actual paper mill Melville visited and on which he based his story. In that mill there were male workers as well as female workers. See McGaw 335.

33. Dimock, who calls for a historicizing reading of the story, fails to fully recognize its specific historical context when she explains Melville's fictional representation of the women workers in terms of his anxieties about his career in an age of "scribbling women."

## Woman of Industry:

### The Seamstress in Antebellum America

“What next!” exclaimed the editorial of one New York newspaper in April, 1825 after reporting the meetings held by the seamstresses of the city in their attempt to organize for higher wages (Andrews and Bliss 21). The words expressed the writer’s surprise at the novelty of the event, a surprise understandable in light of the fact that those meetings were the earliest attempts by American working women to organize in unions and associations to protect their rights. During the first half of the nineteenth century, seamstresses struggled, with varying degrees of success, to form unions, cooperatives, and associations. Among others there was the United Tailoresses’ Society in New York in 1831, a similar one in Baltimore in 1833, the Female Improvement Society for the City and County of Philadelphia in 1835, and the Shirt Sewers’ Cooperative Union in New York in 1851, an organization that joined together 6000 of the city’s stitchers (Wertheimer 100). The organizational meetings of the seamstresses were usually well attended by sewing women and sometimes by other working people. On several occasions the seamstresses’ activities to raise their wages culminated in strikes. Between 1825 and 1855 newspapers reported several strikes by seamstresses in Boston, New York, Baltimore, Philadelphia and other cities. One of these strikes in 1831 in New York involved 1600 women and lasted at least five weeks (Andrews and Bliss 37).

The seamstresses’ efforts at collective action paralleled the efforts of other laboring groups to have more control over their labor. The cause of the seamstresses was seen by the labor press as part of the cause of all working women and men. The *Boston Times* expressed this view when in 1844 a meeting by the city’s seamstresses was described in these terms:

It was the most animated and glorious gathering and the greatest demonstration in behalf of the rights of the laboring men and women who are oppressed and ground down to the dust by their cruel oppressors among us that has yet been made. (Andrews and Bliss 58)

Labor newspapers in New York led efforts to support the striking seamstresses of the city in 1831 (Foner, *Women* 43). The seamstresses' struggle was seen in class terms. The *Voice of Industry* described the strike of Newburgh seamstresses in 1845 as a "rebellion," which it hoped "will sweep over the whole country." And after reporting on a meeting in New York in which seamstresses made their low wages public, *The Boston Chronotype* angrily declared: "This is what makes us so radical. This is what makes us want to see rich men hoeing corn and rich ladies at the washtub" (Andrews and Bliss 59).

The non-labor press, on the other hand, treated the striking seamstresses in much the same way they did factory workers, that is, with hostility and ridicule (Foner, *Women* 43). It did not help matters that seamstresses sometimes used a militant language to plead their case. As early as 1831, for instance, the secretary of the Tailoresses of New York, Lavinia Waight, gave a speech protesting the oppression of seamstresses and women in general. She was roundly criticized for her unbecoming rhetoric. *The Boston Transcript* judged her protest "clamorous and unfeminine declarations of personal rights, which it is obvious a wise Providence never destined her to exercise." While the paper granted that seamstresses needed to combine their efforts in order to effect change in their working conditions, it took exception to women's public expressions of anger and resentment: "But when they came together they should have left the bitterness of their spirit at home, to quarrel, if it would so be, with their scissors and pin-cushions, their tape and foot stoves" (Andrews and Bliss 36). The women of the United Tailoresses' Society were not daunted by such criticism. Sarah Monroe, another leader, urged her sisters on and defended their right to speak for themselves: "Let us trust no longer to the generosity of our employers; seeing that they are men in whose heads or hearts the thought of doing justice to a fellow being never seems to enter." She concluded:

It needs no small share of courage for us, who have been used to impositions and oppression from our youth up to the present day, to come before the public in defense of our rights; but, my friends, if it is unfashionable for the men to bear oppression in silence, why should it not also become unfashionable with the women. Or do they deem us more able to endure hardship than they themselves?<sup>1</sup>

The seamstresses persisted in their efforts to organize in antebellum America. Like factory workers, they were products of the American industrial revolution. The same forces that impacted the economic life of the United States in the first half of the nineteenth century and which transformed country girls into factory workers also transformed home sewers into wage laborers. What the introduction of machinery did for textile workers, the burgeoning of a wholesale trade did for sewing women (Sumner 120). The textile that was produced by the women of Lowell and Lawrence had to enter homes and “slop shops” to be readied for an expanding market demanding cheap, ready-made clothing. The imposition of tariffs against imported clothing in 1816 and 1828 required that women work as both factory “hands” and as outworkers to satisfy the demands of an expanding home market. As Christine Stansell argues, while outwork was “a precursor to the factory system in some settings, it was crucial to the industrializing process in many great cities” (107).<sup>2</sup> Relying on the New York state census for 1855, she also shows how the profiles of factory workers and seamstresses are very much alike (Stansell 114-15).

Despite these connections between seamstresses and factory women, the discourse about the seamstress was markedly different from that which evolved during the same period around the “mill girl.” As I show in the previous chapter, the battle over the political representation of factory workers produced more than one image of factory women. These polemical representations signaled the failure of the “mill girl” discourse to produce one consensual picture of factory women and eventually ended up exposing the nature of the “mill girl” as an ideological construct. The seamstress, on the other hand, emerges on the national conscience during the first half of the nineteenth century as a relatively coherent paradigm. Political economists, manufacture advocates, reformers, feminists, philanthropists, and novelists—all seemed to find the figure of the seamstress a useful one. In what follows, I will look closely at their discourse as it both constituted and used the seamstress. I will show that through her different ideological uses, she becomes for antebellum middle-class America what the “mill girl” could not be, an emblem of industrialization that expressed the anxieties and fears the new set of economic and social arrangements engendered but also one that helped allay these same fears, especially as they related to class and gender identities.

The earliest writer to draw attention to the seamstress was Mathew Carey (1760-1839). An Irish immigrant who made a large fortune in the publishing business in Philadelphia, Carey was a prominent philanthropist, and the first to publicize the plight of seamstresses in his city’s press.

He was also the most eloquent and distinguished speaker on behalf of manufacture in the United States, perhaps second only to Alexander Hamilton, whom he greatly admired. It is in light of Carey's views and rhetoric on industrialization and political economy that we need to understand his philanthropic discourse about the poor, particularly the seamstress.

In his many addresses before the Philadelphia Society for the Promotion of National Industry,<sup>3</sup> Carey argued cogently and fervently for the protection of home industry against foreign competition. He asserted that government protection of American manufacture was in the interest of the nation as a whole and that its failure to do so would result in great suffering and hardship for large segments of the population. He focused on the failure, ruin, and suffering of the manufacturers of the United States as a result of the antagonistic policy towards them, a policy that leads to bankruptcy and much waste of fortune and talent. Appealing to the citizens of the republic to pressure their government to change its policy, he attacked the principle of free trade proposed by Adam Smith and ridiculed the idea that "trade will regulate itself." The government of the United States, he tirelessly argued, must do what all the governments of Europe have done, that is, interfere on behalf of its national industry by instituting a protective system of tariffs and other regulations.

In addition to brandishing statistics and hard facts to argue his case, Carey often uses an emotive language that one does not expect in a treatise on political economy. He appeals to the "justice," "humanity," "generosity," and "public spirit" of the congress (306), and pleads for "the fostering care of the government" (307). If the current policy is not reversed, he apocalyptically declares, the whole nation will collapse. He particularly gives voice to the suffering and disappointment of the American manufacturer who "implores relief from his unfeeling countrymen. But he implores in vain. Their hearts are steeled against his sufferings" (308). The story Carey tells is one of woe and ruin, a story that a decade later will become a stock plot in the popular fiction of America. It is about the unprotected American industrialist, who "becomes bankrupt, and dies of a broken heart. His family, born to high expectations, are reduced to a state of dependence. His workmen are driven to idleness and want, and exposed to the lure of guilt" (308). The sad fate of the capitalist jeopardizes the nation the same way an ailing part weakens the rest of the human body (87). Using familial metaphors, Carey asks the government to treat its manufacturers the way other countries treat theirs, like "a fond mother towards her only and darling child," not like "a rigorous step-mother, towards a step-child which interferes with her views in favour of her own offspring" (309).

In arguing for government protection of national industry, Carey draws a grim picture of the American landscape. "We are an impoverished nation," he writes, "so many of our manufacturers are beggared and bankrupted—that our workmen are wasting their time in idleness" (163). Unemployment is a central concern of his. In one of his addresses he laments, "Our cities swarm with men, women and children, who, able and willing to work, but, unable to procure employment, immoderately swell our lists of paupers" (431). Elsewhere, he promises his readers that factories will employ these women and children. Not only will they be effectively used as a source of cheap labor (430), but they will be protected from idleness and its attendant vices (966, 459). American factories can transform those who so far have been a "gangrene" in the body of the republic, mainly females (458-459), into productive and healthy citizens (431).

Carey's argument on behalf of the factory system informs his discourse on poverty. In "Letters on the Condition of the Poor," he distinguishes between two categories of the impoverished. The first is the "undeserving poor," which consists of criminals beyond any hope of redemption; the second is the "deserving poor," which consists of widows, seamstresses, and underemployed and unhealthy men (7). Carey makes this distinction part of his response to his compatriots who advance a different view of poverty in the context of what was the American version of the English poor law debate. Not only do his opponents reject traditional charity—which, according to the then influential Malthusian doctrine, encourages the poor to be idle and therefore contributes to the perpetuation of their poverty—but they also condemn all poor people, seeing their misery as the result of their moral failure (6).<sup>4</sup> These same people believe that employment is readily available for anyone seeking it. To illustrate the point that "the industry, morals, and virtue of the poor, are underrated" (*Miscellaneous Essays* 159), Carey shows how some men are willing to work at anything, "however loathsome, however deleterious to health, however degrading," and however badly paid, in order to earn a living (*Letters* 9). He tells stories of poor men, such as the two immigrant cotton weavers M'Giffie and O'Neal, who are unable to support their families not because they are lazy but because they cannot find employment. Carey here is acknowledging and championing the cause of a new category of the poor, that is, those who are able bodied and willing to work but are insufficiently employed. Although his definition of the "deserving poor" includes two of the traditional groups of the needy, the widow and the sick, it is extended to include seamstresses and underemployed men as proper subjects of charity. Carey's definition and defense of the poor is directly linked to his pro-industrial-

ization stance, which he states in his essays on political economy. Only by protecting and encouraging national industry, he argued, can America provide jobs for those who need them. Otherwise, it will not be the land of opportunity but the land of frustrated hopes:

our citizens on the banks of the Missouri are clothed with fabrics manufactured in England and Hindostan, while thousands of useful men, women, and children, capable of furnishing superior goods, at equal prices, are literally pining in wretchedness, in our towns and cities, for want of employment, and many of them driven to mendicinity, to support a miserable existence! (*Essays* 48-49)

Carey's defense of the poor, then, intersected with his appeals for a protective system. His efforts were finally rewarded when in 1828 a tariff was successfully imposed on the importation of clothing and American textile factories were protected from foreign competition.

Incidentally, 1828 is also the year in which Carey launched his philanthropic project, at the center of which stood the seamstress. The language Carey used to describe the seamstress curiously resembled the language he used to describe the wronged American manufacturer. Both belong to a "valuable and industrious class" of beings with much to contribute. Both are "miserable sufferers," deserted by those who are meant to be their guardians—the woman by her husband and community and the capitalist by a heartless congress impervious to his suffering and pain. Thus forsaken, they are left to fend for themselves in a hostile world more powerful than they are. They are ground to earth and driven to ruin because they could not compete with those who are stronger and better protected. Finally, the seamstress and the manufacturer are both deserving of sympathy because they are victims of changed circumstances: like the American manufacturers, many women "have been gradually reduced from a state of comfort and affluence to penury, and thrown upon the world, with no other dependence than their needles to support themselves and their offspring" (*Letters* 9). To be sure, in Carey's America both men and women are vulnerable to the vicissitudes of economic life (*Miscellaneous Essays* 198). But Carey's impoverished men soon die, too proud to survive the humiliation of their new dependent status. He tells, for instance, of one man who ended up in the almshouse "where he was so horrified at the abominations and corruption of the motley herd, by whom he was surrounded, that he refused sustenance, and actually starved himself to death" (*Miscellaneous Essays* 163). So while Carey tells his readers of suffering men, he never shows them any. Instead, he draws a vivid picture of the seamstress.

Carey is aware that the gender identity of the seamstress is what qualifies her to play the central role in his philanthropic project. As a woman, she is more likely to receive sympathy than a man in the same position, for

There are those, who from principle, they say, refuse assistance to the man who can obtain the means of supplying all his wants by his daily labour. But can they withhold relief from her who comes in her desolation and weakness—a woman, who, by the law of her being, is excluded from paths in which coarser men may make a livelihood. (*Miscellaneous Essays* 280)

The gender ideology of the time that sees woman as weak, her opportunities naturally limited by “the law of her being,” has also made her a legitimate object of charity. In order to mobilize people to the seamstress’s support, Carey appeals to this ideology and to the culture’s feminization of poverty by casting the seamstress in the traditional role of the helpless widow, or the wife with an ill husband, who, without a male guardian, is in urgent need of relief.

But in the profile he draws of her, Carey’s seamstress is more than the traditionally vulnerable, poor widow. She is also a woman who, forced to earn her living, eagerly searches for work and accepts whatever is offered her with gratitude, no matter how low the wage and how long the hours. She faces starvation, beggary, and loss of virtue, but despite her trials, she does not complain because she does not have any other choice, being “wholly at the mercy of [her] employers.” Carey uses one of the basic principles of political economy to show that the seamstress’s plight is the result of her expenses being more than her wages, which, he reminds his readers, is as harmful to individuals as it is to nations. He meticulously calculates her daily expenditures to prove beyond a doubt that a seamstress, unencumbered with children, working sixteen hours a day, would not be able to survive on her slender earnings. In focusing on her wages and her relations to her employers, Carey emphasizes the seamstress’s identity as a wage worker. In drawing attention to the inadequacy of her wages, he makes a direct link between poverty and work.

The linking of poverty and work points out an important aspect of the new economic and social reality of industrial capitalism at the time Carey was writing. It is highly significant that the seamstress’s poverty is a result not of her inability to work, but of the kind of work she does. Although she is not part of any industrial establishment, in passage after passage her work is shown to be wage work. She is said to be the American version of the operatives of Europe “who are ground down to the earth by their employers” (*Miscellaneous Essays* 285). Through the seamstress, Carey raises

the problem of unrewarded labor and unsatisfying work but without implicating the factory system. Moreover, by presenting her as an example—or rather as the only example—of the exploited wage worker who is totally controlled by those who pay her Carey distances male workers from industrialism's new relations of production and effectively feminizes wage labor.

In Carey's philanthropic discourse the feminization of wage labor and the feminization of poverty eventually converge and produce the seamstress not only as problem but also as solution. In appealing for her relief, Carey invokes a paternalist society in which men protect women, the old guide the young, and the strong help the weak. He often appeals to the "public," which he sees as a community of people organized around familial relations, united in their interests, and governed by concepts like "justice," "humanity," and "honor." As members of this community, employers, Carey assures his readers, would "cheerfully change their system" once they know that what they pay is not sufficient for the seamstress's survival ("To the Editor" 5). Thus his solution to the plight of the seamstresses is to call on "the fathers, brothers, husbands, sons and friends of those ladies" to "appeal to the employers' justice and humanity...in favour of this hapless and oppressed class" ("To the Editor" 4). According to Carey's paternalist view of society, the seamstress's plight is not hers alone; it brings disgrace and dishonor to the community as a whole.

Paternalism proves particularly useful in countering the necessity of the market. Although Carey argues the wages paid to seamstresses are inadequate and sometimes calls for raising them, he also asserts that wages are governed by the rules of the market and are subject to an economic necessity independent of human desires. He concedes, for instance, that raising wages is impracticable in some cases, "cases in which competition may have reduced the price of the manufactured article, as to render a rise in the price of the labour employed on it, incompatible with that due degree of profit on capital to which it has a fair claim" ("To the Editor" 5). On other occasions he shows that he does not believe a raise in wages is possible at all, especially "while the supply of female labour in the market, so far exceeds the demand as it does at present, and is likely to continue" (*Letters* 12). Soon after Carey and other prominent Philadelphia citizens signed a petition appealing to the secretary of war to raise the wages paid seamstresses working for the army, Carey realizes the impracticality of such an appeal, for "[t]he subject, however, is found to be one of so much delicacy, and is so intimately connected with the manufacturing interests, and the general prices of this kind of labor in the city of Philadelphia, that the Department has not felt itself at liberty to interfere farther" (*Essays* 168). Eventually,

Carey arrives at the conclusion that “[t]he mitigation must wholly depend on the humanity and the sense of justice of those by whom [seamstresses] are employed” (*Essays* 2). So when making the case for protectionist measures on behalf of the American manufacturer, Carey fervently argues in favor of interference and regulation because “trade cannot regulate itself.” But regarding wage work, he defers to the inviolate rules of a free market with which no one should formally interfere. Voluntary mitigation of wage-earners’ suffering is the only form of interference imagined. By casting the seamstress as the representative wage worker, Carey employs a paternal ideology to reconcile the conflicting demands of a free market with those of a “community of interest.”

Through the seamstress Carey removes wage labor from the discourse of political economy and inscribes it instead in a philanthropic discourse about poverty. This shift locates the problem in the private not the public sphere. Individual reform comes to replace social reform, for Carey eventually suggests that since raising wages is not feasible, one way to ameliorate the conditions of the poor is to help them change their habits and behavior. Significantly, the reforms he suggests are “domestic” reforms, ones that fall within the sphere of the “home” not the world outside it. He, for instance, recommends establishing a society to encourage “habits of order, regularity and cleanliness in their persons and apartments; by instructing them in the most economical modes of cooking their food; by inducing them to send their children to school...” (*Essays* 4). He assigns the role of teacher and guardian to well-to-do women, to whom he appeals directly by writing, “a reformation of the horrible oppression under which the seamstresses, spinners, spoolers, &c. groan, cannot be hoped for, unless ladies will come forward with decision, and use their influence to rescue their sex from the prostrate situation in which those unfortunate women are placed” (*Miscellaneous Essays* 203). Thus what was a social problem that should concern the community as a whole has become a special problem for the “sex” to deal with. The ladies can play the role assigned them by visiting the poor in their homes (*Miscellaneous Essays* 286). This way political economy is finally replaced with “domestic economy,” and the market disappears and is replaced with the home, where the seamstress traditionally belonged. In other words, the feminization and privatization of wage work have been completed.

Not surprisingly, Carey was criticized by the labor press for asking for charity instead of justice (Sumner 133). Moreover, he himself admitted the failure of his philanthropic endeavors. In 1833 he wrote with obvious frustration, “after laboring on the subject since November, 1828, the convic-

tion is reluctantly forced on me that the attempt is utterly in vain and that it is impossible to excite public attention to the subject." The ladies and gentlemen to whom he appealed failed to respond and did not make "the slightest effort to remedy the evils that press so heavily on this deserving and numerous class of society."<sup>5</sup> Carey even announced his failure to the seamstresses themselves in a letter he wrote in 1835, in which he accepts their invitation to preside at a meeting they organized to demand higher wages:

I did hope that all that was necessary to produce a decided effort to meliorate your situation was to bring the subject in bold relief before the public. I was miserably mistaken, and finally abandoned the undertaking as impracticable. (qtd. in Sumner 133)

Although Carey's philanthropy failed to improve the situation of sewing women, it certainly succeeded in introducing the seamstress to the public discourse of his fellow Americans.<sup>6</sup> In the decades following his death and during the height of labor agitation in the factories of New England, Carey's picture of her as a worker "ground down by her employers" is deployed by the advocates of manufacture who wrote in the 1840s in defense of factories. In their writings the seamstress stood at the opposite end from the "mill girl," an example of what the latter was not, that is, an exploited and helpless worker. In singing the praises of the "mill girl," they would often conjure the miserable seamstress to prove how superior factories were to other forms of employment. Harriet Farley, for instance, argued that the hours of factory labor are short in comparison with the hours a seamstress spends at her needle and that the work conditions are not much worse "unless it is contended that the smoke of a cooking stove is less impure than the dust of a cotton mill" (*Lowell Offering* 3:191). H. Miles asserted that the health of "mill girls" was better than that of seamstresses (126), while Bartlett did not hesitate to declare the superiority of "mill girls" in "bodily health, intelligence, independence, and the moral character" (Bartlett 20). It is worth noting that none of these writers felt the need to elaborate on the conditions of the seamstress, an indication that by the 1840s, the seamstress was firmly established as a familiar type. Whenever they sought to clinch their argument that factory work was good for America and its women, they only had to invoke the word "seamstress" in order to call up a detailed picture of exploited labor at its worst.

The cause of the seamstress continued to be a popular one long after Carey's death. One newspaper that kept it alive was Horace Greeley's the *New York Daily Tribune*. Like Carey, Greeley was a proponent of tariffs against foreign goods and a supporter of national industry. For him "Every

manufacturing village...is a cheering spectacle, not so much for what it actually is, as for what it suggests and foreshadows" (*Hints Toward Reforms* 41). On the pages of his newspaper, however, Greeley exposed the less cheering spectacle of the seamstresses of the city, thus continuing the project that Carey had started two decades earlier. But although Greeley continues to discuss the low wages and unhealthy working conditions of the seamstress, the focus of his writing shifts to the question of her morality. What was with Carey a peripheral issue, a possibility deferred, becomes with Greeley *fate accompli*. The needy and worthy widow still appears as an example of the exploited seamstress, but it is the seamstress as a young woman with precarious virtue who begins to assume center stage. In other words, the economic problems of the seamstress are rewritten as moral problems.

This is evident, for example, in an investigation the newspaper conducted in 1853 and published under the title "The Needlewomen of New-York." The report confirms "the existence of an amount of wretchedness, immorality, and crime—the consequences of [the women's] low earnings—truly appalling." The article describes young seamstresses living in the "garret of a dilapidated house surrounded by drinking stores, filled with men whose appearance alone speaks powerfully to their character." The women substitute their income through prostitution. The writer visits another house where many families live in

such a picture of filthiness as is disgusting to look upon. Our business lies again at the top of the tenement, and as we went the creaking and battered stairs we cannot fail to observe in those places where the plaster has not been knocked off, sentences of the vilest obscenity and blasphemy defacing the walls. On entering the room we again find a woman, and four girls apparently not more than fifteen years of age, all engaged in vest making. The room itself is unendurably hot and stifling.

The home visit that Carey once recommended so that skeptics can ascertain for themselves the need and virtue of the seamstresses, and more importantly, teach them better domestic skills becomes here part of a journalistic exposé that aims at investigating the poor, especially their state of morality. The seamstress this discourse constitutes is young and sexually vulnerable if not already corrupt. Greeley's poor lack the moral sensibility and the will to change; they belong to what he calls the "Laboring Classes who are not concerned about improving their lot" (*Hints Toward Reforms* 48). The examples he gives of such workers are exclusively of sewing women. In addition to the poor widow who has to earn her living by her

needle, there is, worse still, “the young maiden doomed to poverty and deficient training in one of our great cities,” who is cursed with the need for

constantly exposing herself, in the pursuit of her humble calling, to contact with all that is corrupt and licentious, and at length thrown out of employment by the paralyzing touch of Winter, with black Necessity drifting her to swift Despair, while Infamy eagerly proffers a life of dazzling Luxury and Ease in exchange for, at best, one of Poverty and Toil. (*Hints Toward Reforms* 186)

The sexual vulnerability of the young seamstress and the view of her as a representative of all working women is taken up by Walt Whitman in one *Brooklyne Daily Eagle* piece entitled “The Sewing Women of Brooklyn and New York,” (Jan. 29, 1847). He tries to open the eyes of his male readers to “the *fact* of the intimate connection between *poor pay* for women, and *crime among women*.” He concludes, “It is easy to be pure, where you can do so and get along well; but where you have to battle with destitution, an ordinary soul will faint in the contest, and yield up its goodness” (Whitman 150-151).

Like Whitman, Greeley connected the women’s endangered morality to their low wages. These wages, he maintained, were determined by the rule of supply and demand: because there are too many seamstresses competing with one another, their wages are low. Singled out for censure are those women who “underbid” the poor seamstresses and only work for “pin money” (qtd. in Sumner 140).<sup>7</sup> “Under these circumstances,” *The Tribune* concluded, “nothing can prevent low wages and a constant tendency to lower.” Employers are not to blame, for they are subject to the laws of the market as well: “Necessity rests as heavily upon them as upon the occupant of the most contracted garret.”<sup>8</sup> Charity, especially that conducted by women, is seen as the only solution to the problems of the seamstress. As in Carey’s days, the solution is feminized and is consequently removed from the public domain of political economy into the private domain of individual charity and moral reformation.

Whether as a virtuous widow or as a sexually vulnerable young woman, the seamstress emerges in Carey’s and Greeley’s writings as a wage worker, a victim of economic relations determined by an impersonal market. At the same time, as a woman who sews, she is also a victim of poverty defined in gender terms, and thus someone who confirms the relevance of a paternal ideology outside the market. This duality of the seamstress is particularly evident in the literary representations of her that one finds in the popular literature of antebellum America. Unlike the “mill girl,” who

appeared in few literary works, the seamstress developed into a literary type. She is the central female figure in what David Reynolds has called in *Beneath the American Renaissance* the “seamstress literature” (355). Although Reynolds is the first to draw attention to this body of literature and show its relevance to the study of canonical nineteenth-century American literature, he regards it in isolation from the non-literary contemporary discourse about the seamstress which I discuss in this chapter. Reynolds shows how this literature “often became gender-specific in its language,” and how it “provided a new means of illustrating the special toughness and nobility of the moral exemplar when faced with seemingly insuperable misfortune” (355). But he does not offer any analysis of why the figure of the seamstress proved attractive as a literary trope during this period in particular.

Such analysis could begin by considering the seamstress literature, which was mostly published during the late 1830s and the 1840s, in the context of the antebellum response to industrialization. Even a cursory glance at this fiction will reveal the centrality of issues of class and gender and their intersection with the contested issue of labor. As Jane Tompkins has argued, popular fictions “offer powerful examples of the way a culture thinks about itself, articulating and proposing solutions for the problems that shape a particular historical moment” (xi). The seamstress allowed writers of popular fiction to express through her their anxieties about degrading labor and class instability and to project solutions to overcome these anxieties and fears and reaffirm a more comforting view of their world.

While polemicists labored to cast the “mill girl” as a country maiden, as someone who despite her new labor and identity still embodies older values and meanings, they often did not succeed. The “mill girl” emerged as a contested figure who, instead of reconciling the old and the new, highlighted the difference between them. The polemical discourse that contested and constituted her prevented her from becoming a consensus figure. The seamstress, on the other hand, although visible in the public discourse of the period, was not at the center of controversy the way the factory worker was. This is not to say that the seamstress who appears in the different fictional and non-fictional writings was less of a political and ideological construct than the “mill girl.” As we saw with Carey and Greeley, the discourse about the seamstress was thoroughly implicated in the public debate about industrialization, work, and relations between classes. The difference is that the seamstress was flexible enough to serve different ideological uses without seeming incoherent or contradictory. Essential to this

flexibility is her identity as a residual figure, as that, according to Raymond Williams, which “has been effectively formed in the past, but is still active in the cultural process” (*Marxism and Literature* 122). The residual connotations of the seamstress explain why writers of the popular literature of antebellum America found the figure so attractive as a way to address ideological problems concerning class instability and industrialization.

One of the earliest novels with a seamstress as a heroine is Catharine Maria Sedgwick’s *The Poor Rich Man and Rich Poor Man* (1836).<sup>9</sup> This novel is one of the didactic works that Sedgwick wrote in the 1830s, and in which she attempted to deal with what she saw as the problem of the growing gap between rich and poor. The seamstress appears in Sedgwick’s fictional world as part of a self-conscious discourse about poverty, classes, labor, and social mobility. Like Carey, Sedgwick distinguishes in *The Poor Rich Man* between two kinds of poor: the vicious and ignorant “very poor,” usually Irish immigrants; and the industrious and honest poor, like Susan and Harry Aikin. The novel, in fact, contrasts the Aikins to the undeserving poor, on the one hand, and to the idle rich, on the other.

But Susan Aikin differs significantly from Carey’s seamstress. She is a skilled and efficient worker, who performs her duties with contentment and cheerfulness. Sedgwick confidently states that “Susan Aikin could at all times command work from the most respectable houses, was sure of the highest wages, and incidental favors that she knew how to turn to account” (84). She stands apart from the other seamstresses who, at the time of the novel’s publication, were the subjects of Carey’s philanthropic appeals. According to Sedgwick, all is much ado about nothing:

Many complaints are made of the low rates of women’s wages—some just, no doubt; but, for the most part, they are paid according to their capacity. A well-qualified seamstress, tailoress, or milliner, can, except in very rare cases, obtain certain employment and good pay: a half-taught and careless worker must take her chance for slop-work, at low wages. (83-4)

Sedgwick’s rejection of Carey’s seamstress cannot simply be attributed to her ignorance of social realities due to her upper-middle class background, as some critics have maintained (Foster).<sup>10</sup> This position implies that Carey’s seamstress, unlike Sedgwick’s, was a true “reflection” of “real” seamstresses and ignores the fact that it was an ideological construct as well. Sedgwick’s seamstress needs to be seen in the context of the author’s larger ideological project. In that context, Susan Aikin registers not her creator’s ignorance of social reality, but rather her sensitivity to, and her attempt to influence, that reality.

Susan is an idealized heroine in an idealized world. She embodies two ideals: a class ideal of “a different kind of poor,” and a gender ideal of “true womanhood.” Both are central to the project of national self-definition as Sedgwick understood it. The picture of Susan singing cheerfully while hard at work may have seemed “untrue” to Carey, Greeley and many others, but it was truthful to the America Sedgwick imagines in her novel. Hers is the land of unlimited opportunity, of meritocracy and upward mobility, where all labor is dignified and rewarded (116) and all men are guaranteed employment (72, 90). There are hardly any “half taught or careless worker[s]” and absolutely no factories or factory workers, and unlike in Europe, “there is very little necessary poverty” (22). Those who are poor have only themselves to blame; their poverty is not caused by the kind of labor they engage in, but rather by their lack of certain virtues and manners, such as industry, ingenuity, contentment, frugality, and temperance. These all-necessary virtues are ones that can be taught, and the aim of the novel is to teach them by presenting the Aikins, who have them in abundance. And it is these virtues rather than the Aikinses’ possessions or the kind of labor they perform that determine their status. As Harry Aikin, Sedgwick’s spokesman, explains, “Ours...is the only country where those who compose the lower classes have the power and the means of good manners; for here there is no sense of degradation from the necessity of labor” (116). Sedgwick insists that class is a state of mind. The Aikins may not be wealthy and may need to labor to survive. Yet in their contentment and in their possessions of certain manners and virtues they are an example of a poor family with middle-class values. Therefore, as the title of the novel clearly implies, they are not actually poor.

At a time of transformation and uncertainty (the panic of 1837 was only a few months away from the time of the novel’s publication), the novel drew a picture of a stable world based on traditional values and relations. Sedgwick idealizes country life at a time when the country was becoming more dependent on the city. As a writer, she knew this fact first-hand for although she resided in the Berkshires part of the year, she was aware of the centrality to her career of New York City with its publishing houses and connections (D. Phelps). She idealized farmers and mechanics at a time when they were struggling and losing ground, as when she made the idealized hero of *Home*, William Barclay, a printer at the very moment printing was threatened as a craft. She idealized “home” at a time the traditional household economy was being disrupted (Cott) and home was more and more directly implicated in the market. She tirelessly asserted American exceptionalism, maintaining that in America no one needs to work twelve

hours a day, when in the 1830s thousands of women, men, and children were working fourteen hours a day in neighboring New England factories.

The novel's optimism offered antebellum Americans a comforting view of their contemporary reality. As a didactic tale, *The Rich Poor Man* delineated what America should be. But by packaging this didacticism in the new form of regional realism, which Sedgwick is usually praised for, the novel succeeds in producing the impression that what America should be is what America is. The seamstress proves to be an ideal figure for this nostalgic realism. Through her the past is recast as present. This is possible because she belongs to two worlds. On the one hand, she is an urban figure who lives and works for a wage in the city. In fact, *The Rich Poor Man* is the first novel by Sedgwick to have the city, not the country, as a permanent setting. On the other hand, the seamstress is a familiar figure from the past, for women always sewed in colonial days for themselves and their families. As a traditional feminine activity, sewing took place at home and cut across class lines. It was seen as a craft, performed by artisans and craftsmen/women. It is because the seamstress belonged to both past and present that she could function as a residual figure. As a representative of a past which has persisted in the present, the seamstress, an urban wage worker implicated in the new social and economic relations, is also an ideal wife and mother, whose labor is an extension of her domestic duties and of a republican work ethic which celebrates labor as both rewarded and rewarding.

Sedgwick offered the past-as-present with authority and confidence. Not everyone was convinced. Herman Melville, for one, rejected Sedgwick's discourse on the poor and ridiculed it in "Poor Man's Pudding and Rich Man's Crumbs" (1854), his parody of *The Poor Rich Man* (Douglas 300). Melville's satirical sketch, like Sedgwick's novel, is a recreation of the past that comments on the present. He counters Sedgwick's picture of the hard-working and happy seamstress with a picture of the hard-working but deprived and unhappy wife of a poor man. He makes clear at the end of his "first picture" that what he is satirizing is the discourse of poverty that called for self-improvement and reformation of the poor. "Of all the preposterous assumptions of humanity over humanity," he wrote, "nothing exceeds most of the criticisms made of the habits of the poor by the well-housed, well-warmed, and well-fed" (173). Sedgwick was one of those privileged that Melville satirized. As the daughter of one of the most elite federalist families in the country,<sup>11</sup> she defined her vocation as that of a moral guide to those whom she called "the majority."<sup>12</sup> She saw herself as a laborer in the domain of culture. "There is an immense moral field opening

demanding laborers," she wrote a friend in 1837, "neither pride nor humility should withhold us from the work to which we are clearly 'sent'."<sup>13</sup> "The majority" seemed to have accepted Sedgwick's cultural leadership, if one is to judge by the enormous popularity of *The Rich Poor Man* with readers from both the middle and lower classes. It went through sixteen editions in less than three years (Foster 117).

Sedgwick's seamstress as a figure from an idealized past opposed to an industrialized present appears in a nostalgic *Lowell Offering* piece entitled "The Patchwork Quilt" (1845). Here the writer, a factory worker, remembers and yearns for the time when she first learned sewing, which is shown to be a feminine skill that mother passes on to daughter, and a right of passage from girlhood to womanhood. She tells of her aspirations of once becoming a "noted seampstress," earning her living by her needle. Fondly she recalls the first dress she ever made and the emotions she experienced: "What a feeling of exultation, of self, of self-dependence, of self-reliance, was created by this effort. What expansion of mind!—what awakening of dormant powers!" But the writer's aspirations go unfulfilled, for she becomes a factory worker instead and her enthusiasm is dampened; work "is now a task quite deprived of its novelty, and Time has robbed it of some of its pleasure" (5: 201-203). This essay stands out in the *Lowell Offering* because it presents the seamstress in a favorable light, as a skilled, proud, and independent artisan. But this artisan, according to the writer, belongs to a different time and place and stands for a more hopeful and innocent past, when work was a source of pride and satisfaction. This past is irrevocably lost and the seamstress as artisan is only a nostalgic phantom summoned by a disappointed factory worker.

But not to "Alfredus," the anonymous author of *The Needle Woman* (1871). Although this novel was published long after the other works studied in this chapter, I would like to discuss it here because it is the only work I came across that still insisted on employing the idealized seamstress long after the paradigm was discarded. Despite the distance separating this novel from Sedgwick's, both works are responding to, and mediating, an unstable social and economic reality. While in the earlier novel this change is kept outside the borders of the fictional world, the later draws a picture of a society that is very much in flux. The novel opens with a celebration of change as progress. The setting is a New England village along the Merrimack, a river, the narrator admiringly states on the first page, which "turns more wheels, does more work, gives employment to more hands, and supports more people, and adds more to the material interest of New England, than any other water-power..." (9). Technology is the backbone of

this forward movement: "But who can count the changes in New England in forty years? Commerce to-day/manufactures to-morrow; a ship, a brig to-day, steamboat to-morrow. A stage-coach to-day, a railcar to-morrow; a post to-day, a telegraph to-morrow" (9). Despite this optimistic view, some people, like Mr. and Mrs. Park, do not seem to benefit from this progress. Mr. Park loses his job as an agent because his "employers found that changes had rendered their business unprofitable" (12). He finds a new job with the government "[b]ut a change comes," and he is replaced (13). Mr. Park's unemployment soon leads to a premature death.

This is when his wife has to support herself and her three daughters. Despite the celebratory opening of the novel, she never considers working in any of those nearby factories. Instead, she becomes a seamstress. Mrs. Park here is offered as an exemplar to other poor people, who are encouraged to "adopt her motto, "God helps those who help themselves" (vii). She is contrasted to "those irresolute complaining persons, who rather others would work for them, than to work themselves" (27). So Carey's seamstress is transformed from a representative of the deserving poor to an example of the exceptional poor, those who do not live on charity. Like Susan Aikin, Mrs. Park obtains all the work she needs and labors cheerfully and diligently showing admirable endurance and perseverance: "the needle was plied hour after hour, and day after day with such diligence as would astonish most women, and with such endurance as most people believe nature could not sustain" (37). In passages like this, the novel celebrates the seamstress's work, showing it to be materially rewarding and spiritually fulfilling. There is no exploitation, or want, or disease. This is a world where work, the narrator insists, "never hurts any body" (38).

What harms women's bodies and souls, we are repeatedly told, are "unnatural practices" like abortion and contraception. Whole chapters are devoted to an anti-abortion polemic which loudly celebrates motherhood. Abortion is called "abominable," and "outright murder"; doctors who help women with abortions or contraception are criminals who must be severely punished. Women who undergo abortion die either at the operation table or after "a long and lingering illness." Young and beautiful women look "pale and cadaverous" not because of any work they are doing, but because they have engaged in a "rank rebellion against Nature and Heaven" (83). Motherhood is declared woman's only natural state of being. Childless women in the novel are miserable, leading empty and unfulfilling lives no matter how rich or busy they are. One character declares, "I never saw a married woman...without children, who enjoyed life. To be married to a man and live with him for years without a sunbeam, or the natural links

which bind husband and wife together, is not natural, and hardly enduring" (29).

This anti-abortion discourse and its idealization of motherhood are part of a more general conservative gender ideology the novel advocates. According to this ideology, men rule over women and women let themselves be guided by their husbands. Women's position "was fixed by the Almighty"; attempts to change it are blasphemous, and alternative arrangements are unnatural and doomed to failure. Women fighting for equal rights are singled out for censure. They are berated for "degrading" and "disgracing" themselves:

This talk about women's rights, women's position, women's voting is only another exhibition of rebellion to the authority of Jehovah; envy, ambition and folly are the foundation of it, and as some persons only seem to live to render vice disgusting, so these women seem to be left to expose their own weakness and imbecility. They can't govern themselves, much less the men of the nation...Let them blow their blast, spin their thread and effervesce a little—their "desire is to their husband and he shall rule over them." (85)

The novel counters what it views as threats to traditional gender relations by offering a heroine who survives and succeeds without a male guardian but who still upholds a traditional gender ideology. The seamstress's identity as an ideal worker is inseparable here from her identity as an ideal mother. Mrs. Park's motherly instinct is what motivates her to become a needle woman. She decides to sew for money because she insists on keeping her children with her and refuses to give them up. Her love for her daughters is what gives her extraordinary powers of endurance and perseverance and what brightens her days. In other words, what the novel gives with one hand, by creating a successfully independent heroine, it takes with the other, by insisting on this heroine as essentially a mother. The residual connotations of the seamstress facilitate this process of recuperation which is central to the novel's reproduction of a traditional gender ideology.<sup>14</sup>

Other works appearing between *The Rich Poor Man* and *The Needle Woman* find the residual connotations of the seamstress, as an artisan in the domestic sphere, useful in allaying fears about downward mobility, especially for middle-class women. A typical example of such works is "Ups and Downs," a short story by the prolific writer Timothy Shay Arthur. In it Grace Williams becomes a seamstress and works to support herself and her mother following the bankruptcy of her father, a rich merchant. Grace's loss of status is not viewed as an extraordinary occurrence. On the contrary,

one character declares when she hears of it, "Ah me! we none of us know what will be the fate of our children. This is indeed a world of change." Her friend concurs, "It is. People go up one side of the wheel to-day, and down the other side to-morrow" (188). In this world of uncertainty and instability, the question that the story is most concerned about is "What...constitutes a lady?" (188).

Grace Williams is the comforting answer. She becomes a seamstress but remains "as she was, a lady internally and externally." As in Sedgwick's novel, her work does not change her "essential" identity, which is defined by her possession of class-defined manners and virtues. It is significant that Grace becomes a seamstress in particular and not any other laboring woman. In fact, the story insists that she is very different from the chamber maid and the nurse. By becoming a seamstress she relies on skills she learned as a lady and works for other ladies who appreciate these skills. Her labor is shown to be both domestic and artistic and therefore not degrading. Grace's downward mobility is figured not as an irreversible rupture but rather as a temporary setback. And of course the litmus test of her true identity is her eventual marriage to the wealthy son of one of her female employers, a man who loves her for "herself alone." The residual connotations of the seamstress are relied on in this case in order to negate the change in Grace's class identity and to restore her to her former status. Grace is offered as a bright example to women of her class, who one day might join the ranks of laborers themselves.

Even when stories about middle-class women turned seamstresses do not have the happy ending of "Ups and Downs," they still play a role in reproducing the dominant gender ideology. These stories constitute the poor seamstress as "one of us," and therefore as someone worthy of help. In Mrs. S. J. Hale's "Sketch from the History of the Poor," another story in *Arthur's Magazine*, Mrs. Conant used to be wealthy before misfortune took away from her all her belongings. Now at seventy years of age, she is left on her own to support two grandchildren. Working as a seamstress, she can't obtain enough employment and finally dies of starvation, her grandchildren crying around her. The sentimental power of the sketch depends on the identification established between reader and character. This identification is also important for the second half of the story. This part consists of the author's plea to her female readers, the "ladies," to get involved in helping women like Mrs. Conant. She defines charity as a female occupation because "Woman is the helper—a ministering angel," who is best suited to aid her own sex. Thus while the first half dramatizes the vulnerability of middle-class women to economic vicissitudes, the second half empha-

sizes the power of femininity. In other words, the economic disempowerment of women becomes an occasion to celebrate their moral empowerment. This process of compensation is another way the domestic ideology, which emphasizes the special sphere of woman, is reaffirmed (Barrett 80-81). Middle-class women who fail to exercise the moral powers of their femininity by intervening to help their impoverished "sisters" are harshly satirized as "not true to their sex," as in Arthur's short story "Plain Sewing; or, How to Encourage the Poor" (in *Woman's Trials* 123-124).

The seamstress as both the victim of class instability and as the one who best negates such instability appears in T. S. Arthur's novel *The Seamstress: A Tale of The Times* (1843). It is not clear to which seamstress the title refers, for there are two in the novel, Mrs. Gaston and Lizzy Glenn. Mrs. Gaston is the Mathew Carey seamstress turned sentimental heroine. As such she is shaped by two of the most important literary conventions of the period, sentimentalism and domestic realism. She is a widow who, after the business failure of her husband and his subsequent death, has to support her little children on her own. For most of the novel they are on the verge of starvation. In great detail the novel describes Mrs. Gaston's struggle to find work and her humiliation and exploitation at the hands of the greedy tailors she has to deal with. Protracted sentimental scenes describe the illness and death of one child and the departure to an apprentice shop of another. Common household activities like shopping, cooking, and feeding the children are detailed and shown to be occasions for much anguish and misery. As a sentimental heroine, Mrs. Gaston is a representative of the weak laborer exploited by her employers. In sympathy with her, the narrator condemns the new social relations that victimize her and her children, relations which are motivated by profit, and determined by competition:

This cutting down of women's wages, until they are reduced to an incompetent pittance, is a system of oppression too extensive, alas! in this, as well as many other countries. It is one of the quiet and safe means by which the strong oppress the weak—by which the selfish build themselves up, cruelly indifferent to the sufferings of those who are robbed of a just compensation for their labor. (26).

These relations infiltrate into the workshop as well. At his master's shop, Mrs. Gaston's son is more a slave than an apprentice: he is not taught anything, is made to work for free, and is physically and mentally abused. The traditionally paternal work relation between master and apprentice no longer exists and is replaced with one of cruelty and exploitation.

While Mrs. Gaston is the center of this sentimentally realistic tale of economic exploitation, Lizzy Glenn is the heroine of a parallel plot that also

tells the story of a woman's downward mobility. But Lizzy Glenn is unlike most of the women who work with her; she is a refined and "genteel" seamstress. Her "fine work" is the most telling sign that "she saw better days." Not surprisingly, it turns out that Lizzy Glenn is actually Eugenia Ballantine, daughter of a once-wealthy man. After a series of catastrophes at sea, her father is changed so much that he is declared an impostor by his business partners. His loss of identity—significantly figured as a loss of class status—results in her transformation into a seamstress, struggling to support herself and her now insane father. While the change in him is profound, the change in Eugenia is only apparent, for her labor does not alter her real identity. Eugenia is finally "recognized" for who she is by old acquaintances, who are not deceived by her humble appearance as a poor seamstress. At the end, the story of Eugenia Ballantine converges with the story of Mrs. Gaston. The romance plot of adventure and mistaken identity offers a happy ending to the sentimental story of the exploited seamstress. At the end, the latter lives with the wealthy Eugenia happily ever after without needing to work again. Thus while the novel uses one seamstress to expose the economic exploitation of women who had to work to survive, it uses another seamstress to show that economic changes do not really affect women's class identity.

Other novelists achieved a similar effect by using one seamstress and by focusing their narrative on her suffering and struggle. This sentimental heroine is repeatedly offered as a representative of a new kind of labor and a new kind of social and economic relationship. Her pre-industrial origins notwithstanding, she is mainly an urban figure, moving in a highly unstable world. Such a precarious world is portrayed in William B. English's *Gertrude Howard* (1843). Downward mobility is the mechanism that shapes the plot. The novel opens with a scene describing the hero between two places and states. We first meet young Charles in his way from the country to the city, where he hopes to re-invent himself and make his fortune in some mercantile occupation. What prompted this migration is his father's loss of his inherited estate as a result of speculation. The once prosperous farmer has been reduced to "bare subsistence" and has nothing to leave his son. Charles is not alone. The novel is crowded with people who once saw better days. There is, for example, Esquire Jones who declares bankruptcy and Alfred Highflyer, "a gentleman reduced very low" (27). At one occasion we witness the ruin of George Beauford at the gambling table: instantly, he is transformed from a gentleman into a man with not a cent to his name.

Beauford's ruin is immediately reversed when he learns that the man who has just beaten him at cards is actually his wife. She disguises herself in order to administer a moral lesson to her husband. But one feels that his ruin has only been deferred. Other success stories in the novel tend to be temporary. Take the case of Samuel Percival, who "[w]ith hard work, economy, and good fortune...transformed himself from a small grocer into one of the wealthiest and most respected merchants in Boston" (8). As a result of speculation and other wild schemes, he eventually loses his fortune and is reduced from his former position to a more modest one. The novel ends on an optimistic note, showing Charles, who starts as a lowly clerk in Percival's establishment, rising up to become a prosperous merchant himself. But even Charles's success is precarious. The imminent instability of his future is suggested at the end of the novel when Charles, in order to test the love of his fiancée, pretends that he has lost his fortune. Interestingly, his fiancée believes the hoax, thus indicating the plausibility of such a sudden and utter reversal of fortune.

English's fictional world is peopled with merchants, some rising and some falling, impoverished farmers, reduced gentlemen, and clerks on their way up the social and economic ladder. Laborers and craftsmen are admired but only make cameo appearances. The only factory mentioned in the novel is situated in India and is the source of the wealth of the novel's villain. There are no American factories or American factory workers anywhere near English's Boston. In this topsy-turvy, pre-industrial world, the only work that is referred to as "daily labor and drudgery" (7) is that of Gerturde Howard, the seamstress. Significantly, her work is the only example of manual labor present in the novel. She has a similar history to that of the hero. For twenty years her father was a prosperous farmer in Concord. But farmer Howard sank into poverty as a result of a series of misfortunes that stripped him of his fortune and forced him to come with his family to the city where he lives off the earnings of his daughter. But while Charles and the other young men of the novel lift themselves upward, Gertrude's work does not promise any such advancement. Instead, it is potentially demeaning and threatens to reduce her to an even lower status. For instance, it is on one of her work-related errands that she is seen by Clarence, a profligate aristocrat, who attempts to seduce her. She tirelessly resists him and as a result is falsely accused of theft and tried in public as a criminal.

Through Gertrude, the novel tells a story that opposes the official narrative about rewarded merit, upward mobility, and more importantly the dignity of all labor. But this oppositional story is contained. By using a woman as a representative of drudgery, whose manual wage-work does not

promise an advancement and who is always vulnerable, the novel distances men from new alienated labor. By using a seduction narrative, English casts her vulnerability in terms of gender, thus further distancing men from the instabilities of class. A seduction narrative conveniently turns into a rescue narrative when a wealthy merchant, who not too long ago was a lowly clerk, proves Gertrude's innocence and marries her.

English's novel, then, expresses the unease his contemporaries had about the new kind of labor and the new work relations that industrialization brought about. But by having a seamstress as a representative of the exploited worker, the novel distances the labor it is criticizing from the industrial order. In fact, Gertrude, though a city worker, is still associated with the country. She is said to be a "country maid," "a little country flower," whose cheek is "like one of the full blown roses of her garden" (6). Angelic and sexless, she trips "along like a fairy...as shy as a fawn, and as cold as ice" (6). Her virginal virtue is associated with the country, with a rural past which is present in the novel only through her. As both a representative of new alienated labor and of traditional feminine virtue, Gertrude fits in with the optimistic ending of the novel, which asserts that upward mobility is still a possibility for men through honest hard work and luck and for women through the guarding of their traditional sexual identities as virtuous virgins.

Mary Andrews Denison's *Edna Etheril, or the Boston Seamstress*, published four years later, strains for a similar ending. It also has a seamstress as the virtuous heroine. But Edna is no country maiden; she lives and works in the city with no indication that she has ever been anywhere else. She is not someone who once saw better days, for her mother worked as a seamstress before her. With her father presumed dead at sea, Edna now works to support her sick mother and her young siblings. As in the previous novel, a young woman substitutes for a metaphorically or literally absent father by becoming the breadwinner of a household.

Edna's labor and that of other seamstresses is dwelt on in more detail than in previous works. We learn of the long working hours, the very low pay, and the damaging effects of the work on body and soul: Edna's labor leaves its traces—"her eye bright, her cheek flushed, her form thin and bent, her hard, dry, hollow cough" (14). Years of working for "slop shops" ruins the health of Edna's mother and eventually kills her, blinds her consumptive aunt, and promises the same for Edna herself. Moreover, she has to contend with the unfair practices of merchants and tailors who try their best to cheat her of her earnings, and to endure the harassment and humiliation of vulgar men and women, usually Irish. Edna faces all these diffi-

culties with unwavering submissiveness, helplessness, and passivity. She is rewarded at the end of the novel with the timely return of her absent father, accompanied by a wealthy young man who marries Edna and makes her a lady. Despite this romance ending, the novel's optimism is qualified, for Edna continues to suffer from labor's debilitating effects on her body and does not fully recover from her past.

This pessimism is even more pronounced in Charles Burdett's *The Elliot Family, or the Trials of New-York Seamstresses* (1847). The novel details the struggle of two sisters to survive as seamstresses. Despite their hard work and virtue, one dies of overwork and disease and the other becomes a beggar in the streets. Although they preserve their virtue, unlike the majority of seamstresses, they are not moral exemplars. That role is given to Eva Bellamy, a middle-class philanthropist who helps Clara and Laura and tries to relieve the misery of the poor. The reader is asked to identify with her, not with the seamstresses. In fact, Burdett makes it clear from the beginning that he is addressing his novel to philanthropists, who, he optimistically asserts, will be moved to alleviate the suffering of "the female operatives" once they learn of their harsh living and working conditions (v-vi). He is confident that if he can excite enough sympathy, especially among the New York ladies, then things will change (viii). As in other seamstress novels, Burdett casts both the problem and the solution in gender terms. One digression in the novel makes this clear. It introduces a Mr. Robertson, the son of a wealthy man who was ruined by speculation. But Robertson is not vulnerable the way the Elliot women are: he is studying law to become a professional and is determined "to carve out a fortune for himself" (19). Although no other mention is made of this man, the confident and admiring tone by which he is introduced leaves no doubt that he will succeed. Again, poverty is feminized and is concentrated in the figure of the seamstress.

But the feminization of poverty does not totally succeed in erasing the subversively grim picture which this novel presents of "reality" and which stands in opposition to the one promoted in the dominant ideology of the time. *The Elliot Family* opens with a scene describing the father on his deathbed. Mr. Elliot was the quintessential American mechanic, "industrious, economic, and temperate" (13). He believed in the rural ideal, for his life-long dream was to buy a farm in the countryside. But despite his hard work and his discipline, he failed to realize his modest dream and dies leaving his family to fend for themselves. Their story further shows that industrious and honest workers are not rewarded for their labor. Instead, they end up in the streets or the almshouse competing with impoverished Irish

immigrants for charity. Passage after passage describes how seamstresses are cheated and lied to by merchants who are described as “confidence-men.” The Elliot Family’s story demonstrates that rural life is an unfulfilled dream beyond the reach of humble citizens, that virtue and hard work do not lead to social and economic advancement, and that business relations between employer and employees are based on exploitation and deceit. More devastating is the fact that the novel itself exposes the inefficacy of philanthropy. Eva Bellamy’s good works fail to relieve the immense suffering of the sisters and to change the course of their downward spiral, which is presented as inevitable. The only comfort she has for them is that “brighter hours will come” and with them salvation through death.

What the seamstresses of this novel and others do as representative of unrewarded honest labor is expose the conflict between what Williams calls ethic and experience (*Long Revolution* 65). But the exposition of the conflict does not lead to any radical questioning of the ethic. For seamstresses themselves embody a resolution to this conflict by casting the industrial experience as a primarily female one. This feminization of experience is pushed one more step in novels that primarily focus on the morality of the seamstress. Although the previous three novels insist on the virtue of their heroines, they still raise the question of the women’s sexual vulnerability. This vulnerability takes center stage in novels that are interested more in the seamstress’s potential as a sensational rather than as a sentimental heroine. Mary Eustis, the heroine of *The Orphan Seamstress: A Narrative of Innocence, Guilt, Mystery and Crime* (1850), is “a helpless, friendless stranger” in the city of New York. Throughout the novel she is on the verge of being turned into a prostitute through an elaborate seduction plot. She moves between brothels and underground drinking dens before she is finally rescued by an honest fireman. But not all seamstresses are as lucky as Mary Eustis, Gertrude Howard, or even the ailing Edna Etheril. Another of English’s seamstress novels dramatizes the fate these heroines escaped. *Rosina Meadows, the Village Maid; or, Temptations Unveiled. A Story of City Scenes and Every Day Life* (1843) is a story of a seduction plot that actually succeeds. The seduction narrative, which critics like Helen Papashively (31-32) and Cathy Davidson (135) declare had disappeared from nineteenth-century American domestic/sentimental fiction, remained alive in the erotic popular literature of antebellum America as D. Reynolds has shown (*Beneath American Renaissance* 212-224), and in the dime novels of the 1870s and 1880s, as Denning has demonstrated (186-213). The fallen woman becomes irrelevant as a metaphor for all American women as she used to be in the eighteenth century (Davidson), especially in light of a

hegemonic domestic ideology touting “true womanhood” as a middle-class female paradigm. However, the seduction plot remains useful for doing what it always did, that is, articulating class and gender at times of economic instability.<sup>15</sup> But in antebellum America the seduced woman is a metaphor for the working-class woman in particular and not for women in general, as in the early republic.

*Rosina Meadows* opens with an idyllic New England rural scene at the center of which is the farmer’s cottage. This is “home,” seat of contentment, happiness, and harmony, “the very beau ideal of rural life and beauty” (4). And the jewel of this rural, domestic haven is Rosina, the farmer’s daughter, whose great physical charms are complemented by an “inherent purity of mind and thought” (3-4). At seventeen years of age, she is the pride of the village and the bride-to-be of one of its promising youths, George Milton. But the moment we are introduced to Rosina’s ideal world she loses it. Rosina leaves home and heads to the city where she hopes to earn her living. Despite the contrast the opening scene sets up between the country and the city, Rosina’s departure shows a country that is becoming more and more dependent on the city for its prosperity and even survival.

Once Rosina departs, she can no longer return, and the setting shifts permanently to the city. The first establishment we encounter is an employment office. This is where innocent women like Rosina are seduced or recruited to work for the city’s brothels. The place is teeming with seducers “hovering like vultures” wherever women work (5). The precariousness of Rosina’s virtue is immediately obvious. She almost falls to a seducer but is rescued by a passing old man. Her rescue turns out to be only a reprieve. Eventually Rosina falls.

Before the story of Rosina’s fall is told, the author launches into a discussion of female employment. He begins by criticizing the gender ideology of his day, which he faults for its constriction of women’s sphere:

It is certainly a matter of deep regret, that there are so few sources of pecuniary emolument open to females. I do not agree with the ultra notions in relation to the rights of woman which have been often expressed by lecturers upon this subject; but it must be allowed that custom has narrowed their sphere of action to a very small compass. Independent of certain domestic duties, a poor girl has but few resources to enable her to obtain an honest living. (6)

He goes on to discuss the shortcomings of the various employment opportunities allowed women. Although he mentions the hardships of factory work, it is sewing which he focuses on as the least satisfactory of women’s employment. He discusses the inadequacy of slop shop prices the same way

Carey once did and, like him, appeals to charity to relieve seamstresses “living in garrets, half starved, half clothed, cold and cheerless, and enduring every privation, and still striving to gain an honest living” (6). He concludes by suggesting some occupations, like shop keeping, which can provide better wages for women but without them “o’erstepping the modesty of nature” (6).

English links the low wages to seduction from the path of virtue. This link establishes seduction as a metaphor for the vulnerability of nineteenth-century women who need to work but are not properly prepared for the market. This link also allows him to shift his focus from political economy to sexual economy. When the narrative resumes, it tells the story of Rosina not as exploited wage worker, but as seduced maiden. Her seducer is a rich libertine who promises to marry her and transform her from “the poor secluded seampstress [sic]” she is into “a fine lady” (11). Restless and discontented, Rosina develops “a slight aversion to her employment” (10) and begins to entertain dreams of a leisurely life as Mendon’s wife. She becomes his mistress and is eventually deserted. From there on, Rosina sinks lower and lower, moving from one brothel to the next, and from court to prison, before she finally takes her own life in an underground den of vice. There is no possibility of redemption for her because, according to the moral ethos of the novel, when a woman “loses that priceless gem, her reputation, she falls never to rise again” (9).

Despite Rosina’s grim fate, the novel ends on an optimistic note. It tells the story of George Milton’s rise. Milton, who, like Rosina, leaves his village and comes to the city to seek his fortune, prospers and thrives. The last paragraph in the novel describes his success:

George Milton, through his own industry, and strict integrity of character, accumulated a handsome fortune, and he now ranks among the first young merchants of Boston...In private life he is a most exemplary member of society—as a man of business, he is known as honorable and just—as a friend, confiding and considerate, and as a philanthropist, generous and noble. (32)

Clearly, the city is still a place of opportunity for young men. As to women, their femaleness leaves them totally vulnerable to the dangers of this urban landscape. The seduction narrative, then, shows that sexual difference, not economic or social difference, is what distinguishes Rosina’s fate from Milton’s. The sexualization of what is economic and social makes men like Milton immune to the instabilities and vagaries of life.

It is significant that the novel combines sympathy for the plight of women workers with a sensational story of their degradation and fall. In

fact, it seems that the greater the writer's expression of sympathy for seamstresses, the more sensational is the picture he draws of their sexual degradation. George Lippard's "The Sisterhood of the Green Veil" (1848) illustrates the point. In the first half of the story, he laments the conditions of, and expresses sympathy for, working women, the "thousands who go sadly along the deserted streets in the dimness of the winter daybreak, who eat their hard crust in silence, who sit patiently down to the loom or the work bench, and when twelve long and weary hours of toil are over, creep home..." (746). Lippard's working women are urban, exposed to the cold and dangerous streets of New York (747). But the second half of the story is a sensational narrative about one working woman, Alice. She is shown dying of brandy and opium after being deceived into a fake marriage by her seducer. This is the description Lippard gives of her:

The poor wretch, whose form swollen with disease, was clad in tatters, while her face, bloated with alcohol, was encircled by masses of tangled hair, soiled with the dust of the floor, was either too weak to stand, or her senses were yet confused by her drunken slumber, for she fell backward, and lay with her whole length on the table. (749)

Alice's degradation is written on her body. This picture of the physically degraded working woman at the center of these sensational narratives is a powerful way of expressing the demeaning effects of the kind of labor she performs. The degradation of the body through manual labor, as Bromell has shown, was a major concern for antebellum Americans. While novels like *Edna Etheril* and *The Elliot Family* also tell of the effect of the seamstress's work on her body, they do not sexualize this effect. Lippard and English, on the other hand, do not show their heroines at work, nor do they expound on the nature of their labor. Instead, they concentrate on telling the story of their physical degradation. By using a seduction narrative to tell this story, these sensational writers figure the worker's degradation in sexual terms. The sensationalization of the seamstress helps draw attention to her exploitation and vulnerability. According to some critics, this sensationalism is part of these writers' conscious opposition to the dominant ideology of the middle class (D. Reynolds, *Beneath American Renaissance* 200-210) and "an attempt to adapt a tale of class conflict...to the emerging conflict between capital and labor" (Denning 96). However, notwithstanding their authorial intentions, the sensational depiction of the seduced woman has the effect of constituting the seamstress as different from the "true woman" of nineteenth-century America. In other words, the seduction narrative helps differentiate not only between men and women, but also between women of different classes.

Sexually degraded and damaged women like Lippard's Alice and English's Rosina can no longer be moral exemplars. Instead they are presented as objects of pity. This shift further distances them from the middle class female reader. The relationship of identification that the moral exemplar establishes between heroine and female reader is replaced with a subject-object relationship in which the reader pities the ill-fated heroine. The distance between the seamstress and the middle-class woman reader eventually leads to an outright rejection of the seamstress as a female paradigm. Mid-nineteenth-century feminists were among the first to do so. Between September 1853 and March 1854, *The Una*, edited by the suffragist Paulina Wright Davis, serialized a novel called *Stray Leaves from a Seamstress Journal*. The narrator, Lucy Vernon, tells of her struggles as a seamstress over the past fifteen years. Her life-story weaves in the usual stories of exploited seamstresses typical in the writing of the period. For instance, there is Mrs. Martyn who does "slop work." She has "a wrinkled withered visage, hair blanched to almost snowy whiteness; limbs contracted and fearfully drawn out of shape by rheumatism; the fruit of cold, of over labor, and meagre diet." She lives in destitution until disease and the death of her children puts her in the almshouse. There are the sisters Maria and Laura Lent, who were not long ago part of wealthy and fashionable society. When their father loses his fortune and dies destitute in the almshouse, Laura is seduced by a man who refuses to marry her. She gives birth to a dead child and dies soon after, heartbroken and disgraced. Her sister, Maria, becomes a hunchback, deformed by her labor. Lucy explains: "This terrible curvature of the spine is the result of close confinement to the needle, to which she says she has an utter dislike, but must work on, and on, to keep body and soul together. Shirt bodies at six cents apiece" (134). Finally, there is Abby Vail, a lady turned seamstress upon widowhood. She is exploited and imposed upon until she can no longer endure her life and commits suicide.

Lucy tells these stories to illustrate how limited women's opportunities are. The condition of the seamstresses here typifies the condition of American women in general. At one point she angrily asks,

Can there be no remedy for this state of society? Are women to be born for this, to toil, shrivel, die and rot? Is there never to be an avenue opened for their powers? Is our country to grow old as Europe has with the same monotony, the same oppression for woman? My very soul is roused with indignation. (134)

According to *The Una*, it is the seamstress rather than Woman as represented by Margaret Fuller in her *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* who best embodies American womanhood at that particular moment in history. In

her critique of Fuller's treatise, Lucy declares that it is "useful only to one class" and challenges Fuller herself as a spokeswoman for all women: "She may write, and teach, and call herself a laborer, but this brings her only into distant relationships with us" (150). Fuller's intellectual work sets her apart from those who earn their living by the labor of their hands. Lucy devotes most of her criticism to Fuller's ideal of self-improvement, which is "impossible" for many women who are struggling to survive. She concludes:

Ah! would that in her picture gallery there were a niche filled with the sewing girl, pale and thin, her throbbing head and trembling heart, with its seed of death fast germinating, sitting alone, grief stricken and sorrowing, her weary fingers plying the needle faster, and yet faster, then, then methinks, she would bend her genius to open to us some new avenue of industry, some mode in which we might have our bread made sure, without such incessant, wearying toil. (150)

This critical review of Fuller's book is consistent with *The Una's* concern for expanding employment opportunities for women. The journal's editors saw the lack of opportunity and the sedentary nature of those occupations deemed suitable for women, needle-work chief among them, as responsible for "the evils of woman's life, and the mischief to her health especially in America" (*The Una* 2: 296).

What makes the need for expanding female occupations more urgent, according to *The Una*, is the fact that seamstress's work is made obsolete by the advancement of machinery. Needle-work is declared an "anachronism" that is soon to be completely replaced by machines. Thus, the sympathy of *The Una's* feminists for the seamstress's plight did not lead them to any idealization of the seamstress as a representative of "true womanhood" as other seamstress novels did. Instead, they transformed the seamstress from a residual figure into an archaic one who is made irrelevant by technological progress. At one point, they state that

it seems to us rather a waste of time for a real, living, human being to sit down when the sun is shining, the flowers gleaming out, and the birds singing, and spend hour after hour over an article which could be so much better done by machinery. The whining call for the needle sounds very much to us like the affectation there has been about the music of the hand-wheel and the loom. (*The Una* 2: 296)

Another piece dramatically announces that "needle-work is now at its last gasp...the needle is sure soon to be consigned to the lumberroom wherein our grand mothers' 'great wheel,' 'little wheel,' loom and 'swifts' are now silently mouldering" (*The Una* 2: 78).

Despite this rhetoric, even *The Una* found the residual meaning of the seamstress useful. But in *Stray Leaves from a Seamstress Journal* the residual is retained as oppositional. Lucy Vernon, although a seamstress, is represented as a new kind of woman. She is not the typical seamstress as helpless victim who appears in the rest of the narrative and in the charity and literary accounts of the period. Instead, she embodies a feminist fantasy of woman as skilled worker and independent individual. Her work differs from that of other seamstresses in that in being artistic. She is talented and produces beautiful objects that are admired by others. She even designs her own patterns, and has total control over them, thus showing that her work combines manual and mental labor and allows a certain degree of autonomy and creativity. Lucy's work, then, is residual, harkening back to a time when labor was not merely a way to earn a living but also a fulfilling personal expression, when workers were not exploited automatons but creative and autonomous artisans. Moreover, Lucy herself views the necessity to support herself and her sisters less as a burden and more as an opportunity to prove her capabilities as a woman: "Many a time in the past I have longed for responsibilities, now I shall understand all its meaning. I must not make my own theories a failure, for I have said that woman was equal to any emergency, that she had worlds of latent strength to be developed at the right time" (69).

Although she never lacks for work, Lucy encounters several difficulties in her dealings with her lady-customers, especially those intent on exploiting her. But unlike a typical seamstress, who is usually shown to be too helpless to do anything but submit to oppression, Lucy fights back. When Mrs. Evelyne, for instance, refuses to pay her all her money at once, Lucy insists on taking the work back and refuses to wait. Mrs. Evelyne is taken aback, because she, like the mid-nineteenth century reader, is not used to such boldness. Lucy's description of the encounter transforms the pathetic seamstress into a superwoman:

She is a weak woman and trembled at the sternness which gathered about my mouth. We confronted each other, our eyes met, she quailed before me, and handed me the ten dollars; and her look said as plainly as possible, "oh, go away as quickly as you can, you great, strong, ferocious woman." (69)

In another confrontation, Lucy gives voice to her violent feelings of indignation and resentment towards those who persecute her—feelings that were never expressed by the seamstresses as they were represented in the period. Certainly, it is unimaginable that any of those seamstresses would

describe themselves the way Lucy does, when she writes of her anger at one woman's mistreatment of her: "I felt as though I could annihilate her with one breath" (69). Lucy's most violent reaction is saved for the sanctimoniously self-righteous customer who suspects her virtue. This time she does not keep her thoughts to herself:

"You, madam, are a sensualist, you have a nature low enough to prostitute yourself for gold, or you could never suspect one of your own sex of unworthy acts. It is you, and such as you, with your untempted virtue, and puritanic self righteousness, who drive helpless, defenseless girls to destruction." (100)

Surely, this *Una's* heroine is a far cry not only from the pathetic seamstress of the times but also from the ideal woman as imagined by the gender ideology of mid-nineteenth-century America.

Lucy succeeds in raising and educating her younger sisters and at the end of the novel, she buys a house and retires to the countryside, still a proud and independent seamstress although unmarried.<sup>16</sup> So in arguing for more opportunities for women and in adopting the belief in technological progress, *The Una* dismisses the seamstress as archaic. Yet it also embraces the seamstress as a residual oppositional figure, embodying a work ethic and social relations that diverge from the dominant ones.

Although the author of *Stray Leaves from a Seamstress Journal*, like the other writers discussed in this chapter, finds the traditional figure of the seamstress a useful literary paradigm, she questions the relevance of this paradigm and to a certain degree rejects it. This attitude registers a shift in the understanding of the seamstress due to a series of social and economic changes in the 1850s and 1860s. One of these changes is the introduction of the sewing machine, which implicated the seamstress more directly in the industrial revolution. The mechanization of sewing made it more difficult to see the seamstress as an artisan, part of a pre-industrial world. Moreover, in the years just before the Civil War and after, the question of labor becomes a major concern for middle-class women, who assume a more active role in shaping the debate. These women seem to reject the seamstress as a representative of "true womanhood" and to see her instead as an embodiment of female helplessness and inefficiency. This same period witnesses a change in attitude towards factory labor. Negative literary representations of the factory system begin to appear in American literature, and women novelists make a major contribution in this regard. This literary change needs to be seen in the context of the changing ethnic composition of the factory population in the 1850s and 1860s and the opening up of more employment opportunities for middle-class women. The fourth chap-

ter of this book will discuss in more detail the rejection of the seamstress as a female paradigm and the emergence of the “factory girl,” who hardly bears any resemblance to the “mill girl” of the previous decades. But before turning to that, I want to devote the third chapter to the uses of the seamstress in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s work.

## NOTES

1. *New York Daily Sentinel*, Mar. 5, 1831, qtd. in Foner, *Women* 43.
2. Economists and historians have emphasized the interconnections between the factory system and outwork, or “domestic industry,” seeing both as essential to the development of capitalism. According to Karl Marx, “Besides the factory operatives, the manufacturing workmen and the handicraftsmen, whom it concentrates in large masses at one spot, and directly commands, capital also sets in motion, by means, of invisible threads, another army; that of the workers in the domestic industries, who dwell in the large towns and are also scattered over the face of the country” (434).
3. All references to Mathew Carey’s political economy addresses are to his *Essays on Political Economy*.
4. For a discussion of the changed attitude to charity and the poor during the first half of the nineteenth century, see Stansell 30-37. Although her study focuses on New York, her observations and conclusions could easily apply to other cities during the same period.
5. Qtd. in Sumner 132-133.
6. As I mentioned earlier, Denning maintains that the “first full-fledged working girl heroine appeared in the wake of the public outcry about the plight of the needlewomen in outwork and sweatshops in the 1860s” (186). This chapter will show that the seamstress was an important female paradigm well before that.
7. *New York Daily Tribune*, June 8, 1853.
8. *New York Daily Tribune*, March 7, 1845.
9. David Reynolds mistakenly mentions this seamstress as the heroine of *Home*, Sedgwick’s first didactic novel (*Beneath American Renaissance* 354).
10. D. Reynolds writes, “Such complacency can be attributed to Sedgwick’s attempt...to underscore the sturdiness of her moral exemplar. But such idealization belied a reality that was darker than the upper-middle-class, rural-based Sedgwick could perceive” (*Beneath American Renaissance* 354-55).
11. Sedgwick came from an aristocratic family. Her parents were descendants of the colonial elites. Her father was a congressman, senator, speaker of the house, and justice of the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts.
12. Catharine Maria Sedgwick to Louisa Minot, 26 Nov. 1836, Sedgwick IV, Mass. Historical Society. Qtd. in M. Kelley, *Power of Sympathy* 31.
13. Catharine Maria Sedgwick to William Ellery Channing, 24 Aug. 1837. Catharine Maria Sedgwick’s Papers, Mass Historical Society. Qtd. in M. Kelley,

*Power of Sympathy* 31.

14. Michele Barrett discusses “recuperation” as one of “the processes by which the work of reproducing gender ideology is done” (80-83).

15. Gilmore has argued that the eighteenth-century seduction novel was linked to economic instability (*Literature* 629).

16. In *Beneath the American Renaissance*, Reynolds states that the novel was “unfinished” (356). But, in fact, it appeared in its entirety in *The Una*, concluding the way I state above.



## Nathaniel Hawthorne's Uses of the Seamstress

"labor is the curse of this world, and nobody can meddle with it, without becoming proportionally brutified"  
Nathaniel Hawthorne (15: 558)

While working at the Boston Custom-House in 1839, Hawthorne watched the English ship *Tiberius* unloading its cargo, which, on this particular day, consisted of "seventy or thereabouts factory girls, imported to work in our factories." In his journal entry, Hawthorne describes the scene from the point of view of a detached observer:

Some pale and delicate-looking; others rugged and coarse. The scene of landing them in boats, at the wharf-stairs, to the considerable display of their legs;—whence they are carried off to the Worcester railroad in hacks and omnibuses. Their farewells to the men...with wavings of handkerchiefs as long as they were in sight. (16: 194)

By describing them as "imported" women, Hawthorne distances himself from them as both an American and a man. The details of the description emphasize his point of view as a "spectator" looking at the women from a distance. Hawthorne knew where these women were heading not only because he lived about fifteen miles south of factory towns like Lowell and Lawrence, but also because, a year earlier, he traveled in western Massachusetts and passed by the new factories that were dotting the landscape of the Berkshires. He described what he saw on that occasion in his journal, "Along our road, we passed villages, and often factories, the machinery whizzing, and girls looking out of the windows at the stage, with heads averted from their tasks, but still busy" (8: 87). Although these factory women, both imported and local, caught Hawthorne's eye, they do

not seem to have caught his fancy. He neither followed them to their factories, nor did he invite them into his fiction, his observations about them remaining relatively obscure within the confines of his notebook.

While Hawthorne did not turn those particular journal entries into fiction, he did mention factory women in one of his short stories published four years later. In "The Procession of Life" (1843),<sup>1</sup> Lowell factory girls are among the marchers, just as they were two years earlier, when they paraded in front of the President of the United States. Now, as then, they march not as laborers but as intellectuals and poets who "shall mate themselves with the pride of drawing-rooms and literary circles—the bluebells in fashion's nose-gay, the Sapphos, and Montagues, and Nortons, of the age" (798). They exemplify the fact that "the hall, the farmer's fireside, the hut, perhaps the palace, the counting-room, the workshop, the village, the city, life's high places and low ones, may all produce their poets, whom common temperament pervades like an electric sympathy" (798). It is clear from this characterization that Hawthorne was aware of the propaganda of the manufacturers, for this is exactly the image that was promoted by them.

In the same story, however, and immediately after presenting this idealized image of factory women, Hawthorne mentions "the manufactory where the demon of machinery annihilates the human soul" (802). This remark comes after he rejects intellect as a principle of classification and substitutes it with love (798). Factories are grouped here with "The prison, the insane asylum, the squalid chambers of the alms-house...and the cotton-field where God's image becomes a beast of burthen" (802). This characterization of the factories echoes the rhetoric of contemporary reformers who often demonized the machinery and compared the factory workers of the North to the slaves of the South. Thus Hawthorne presents in this story two contradictory pictures: on the one hand, factory workers appear as intellectuals whose labor (which remains absent) does not demean them. On the other hand, factories themselves are called places of "woe and misery" (802), where only missionaries and reformers dare to tread. These two pictures succinctly present the arguments for and against industrialization clashing in antebellum America.

The presentation of the two arguments side by side in "The Procession of Life" shows Hawthorne's familiarity with them, but not where he himself stands regarding industrialization. Similarly, when he describes in his journal the "most sensible" man he met during his vacation in the Berkshires, a man who is "humorous, intelligent, with much thought about matters and things," and who "occasion calling...holds an argument about the benefit or otherwise of manufactories," he does not tell whose

side the man is on (8: 104-105). Furthermore, the passages in his notebooks in which he describes what seems to be his first encounter with American factories are not of much help either, for they give contradictory messages. Upon glimpsing North Adams factories and the adjacent boarding houses, for instance, Hawthorne immediately notices their “domestic look” (8: 87-88). Like other contemporary travelers, he emphasizes the suddenness by which factories appear in the rural landscape and declares that “there is a sort of picturesqueness in finding these factories, supremely artificial establishments, in the midst of such wild scenery” (8: 88). But these factories are well integrated with the natural landscape; they do not disrupt it. The stream which runs these factories is “a wild highland rivulet, which, however, does vast work of a civilized nature.” Hawthorne continues his observations: “It is strange to see such a rough and untamed stream as it looks to be, so tamed down to the purposes of man, and making cotton’s, woollens &c—sawing boards, marbles, and giving employment to so many men and girls” (8: 88). In another entry he describes his visit to “Hudson’s Cave” and notices that “After passing through this romantic and most picturesque spot, the stream goes onward to turn factories” (8: 100). In this landscape, nature and civilization coexist peaceably and productively.

But just as the factories appear suddenly in the rural landscape, so the following passage jumps out of Hawthorne’s notebook. After describing the beautiful natural scenery of a village he is visiting—its valleys, mountains, and cloud formations, Hawthorne writes:

A steam engine in a factory to be supposed to possess a malignant spirit; it catches one man’s arm, and pulls it off; seizes another by the coat-tails, and almost grapples him bodily;—catches a girl by the hair, and scalps her; —and finally draws a man, and crushes him to death. (8: 101)

The horrific images are then displaced by more descriptions of natural scenes of village beauty.

It is not clear what inspired the above passage: whether Hawthorne was simply recording something he heard from the villagers, perhaps from that wise man discoursing on manufacturies, or whether he was expressing a fanciful thought that came upon him. What is beyond doubt is that he did not use the passage in any of his fiction. However, his dis-ease towards what Leo Marx has called “the machine in the garden”—a dis-ease that takes the form of horror in the above-passage—can still be detected in several of his works. In the “Celestial Railroad,” (1843) for instance, the narrator remarks with terror that the engine looks “like a sort of mechanical demon, that would hurry us to the infernal regions, than a laudable con-

trivance for smoothing our way to the Celestial City." The sound of this engine is as demonic as its appearance: it is an "infernal uproar," a "horrid clamor" and a "horrible scream, in which there seemed to be distinguishable every kind of wailing and woe, and bitter fierceness of wrath, all mixed up with the wild laughter of a devil or a madman" (823). Similarly, "a steam ferry-boat, the last improvement on this important route, lay at the river-side, puffing, snorting, and emitting all those other disagreeable utterances" (824). A year later, the "startling shriek" of the train shatters the quiet solitude of Hawthorne in Concord, as he records in his journal (8: 249).<sup>2</sup>

What horrifies the narrator more than anything is the effect these machines have on those who come in contact with them. The train engine in "The Celestial Railroad," for instance, becomes indistinguishable from the unfortunate human being who runs it. The narrator reports that "On its top sat a personage almost enveloped in smoke and flame, which—not to startle the reader—appeared to gush from his own mouth and stomach, as well as from the engine's brazen abdomen." The chief engineer, according to him, becomes "own brother to the engine that he rides upon!" (811). Working with machines distorts and dehumanizes as evidenced by those who work in the forges "for the manufacture of rail-road iron." They are described as "unlovely personages, dark, smoke-begrimed, generally deformed, with mis-shapen feet, and a glow of dusky redness in their eyes." The narrator goes on to note that "the laborers at the forge, and those who brought fuel to the engine, when they began to draw short breath, positively emitted smoke from their mouth and nostrils" (815). Hawthorne calls this new species of deformed beings the "human machine." The representative of the species in "The Birthmark" is Amenadab, the "man of clay," who is "grimed by the vapor of the furnace" (277). His work-place, Aylmer's laboratory, looks very much like a factory, with its big furnace, soot, tubes, and electrical machine.

The "human machines" in Hawthorne's work are central to his nightmarish vision of progress and industrialization. This vision was part of what Leo Marx has called the American romantics' "complex pastoralism" (363), which marked their response to the technocratic revolution of industrialization. Hawthorne connects these "human machines" to emblems of this revolution, such as trains, fires, forges, steam-engines, and factory-like places, but not directly to factories. The distancing of factories from the ills of industrialization is noticeable in "The Procession of Life." For although earlier in the story Hawthorne does see factories from the perspective of reformers as places of "misery and woe," he chooses not to include them

when he lists occupations that are damaging to the body. Factory workers are not among the “tribes of people, whose physical lives are but a deteriorated variety of life, and themselves a meaner species of mankind” (796). Factories are not among the causes responsible for this “deteriorated” life, which are listed as “the tainted breath of cities, scanty and unwholesome food, destructive modes of labor, and the lack of those moral supports that might partially have counteracted such bad influences” (796). The representatives of this “meaner species of mankind,” who are damaged by “destructive modes of labor,” are house painters with colic, cutlery workers with dust of steel in their lungs, tailors, and shoemakers. But the group he dwells on most and who occupy center stage in this category of marchers are the seamstresses:

But what is this crowd of pale-cheeked, slender girls, who disturb the ear with the multiplicity of their short, dry coughs? They are seamstresses, who have plied the daily and nightly needle in the service of master-tailors and close-fisted contractors, until now it is almost time for each to hem the borders of her own shroud. Consumption points their place in the procession. (797)

What distinguishes his description of the seamstresses from his description of other diseased groups is that he not only mentions the kind of labor they do, but also describes the exploitation they suffer at the hand of “master-tailors and close-fisted contractors.” The seamstress here is an example of someone whose labor is completely “at the service” of others. Like his contemporaries, Hawthorne saw the seamstress as a symbol of exploited labor at its worst, a representative victim of new socio-economic relations.

Hawthorne does not feel the need to present a counter-image to this picture of the seamstress, as he did earlier with factories. The seamstress he uses is a consensus figure of female exploitation and helpless suffering. At the time Hawthorne wrote this story, the seamstress had also developed into a literary type, as David Reynolds has pointed out in *Beneath the American Renaissance* and as I have illustrated in the previous chapter. In “The Christmas Banquet” (1844) there is a seamstress present in the last group of guests to the annual Christmas dinner. She is described as “a half-starved, consumptive seamstress, the representative of thousands just as wretched” (299). Unlike the other guests with her and those who attended in earlier years, this seamstress is not described, her misery not explained. This is all that the narrator says about her, which indicates that by this time the seamstress was known as a type. Furthermore, she is present as a “representative” of thousands like her.

In showing how popular culture fed the literary production of classic American writers, Reynolds draws attention to the fact that by using the seamstress in his fiction, Hawthorne was employing a literary type popular at his time. But Hawthorne was doing more than “register[ing] the sufferings of seamstresses” out of sympathy for them, as Reynolds maintains (376). As I argued in the previous chapter, the seamstress came to literature, including Hawthorne’s work, through a non-literary public discourse about industrialization. In using the seamstress, Hawthorne was, like his contemporaries, commenting on the larger issue of labor in his time.

This issue was of particular interest to Hawthorne as a professional writer in antebellum America. As some recent critics have shown, Hawthorne’s representation of labor in his fiction is directly linked to his anxieties about his position as an author (Newbury; Bromell). These anxieties made the seamstress in particular an attractive figure for Hawthorne, who uses her in some short stories and as the heroine of two of his romances. While Hawthorne’s representation of women has received considerable critical attention, the seamstresses in his fiction have largely been ignored, even by those who are interested in his attitude to labor.<sup>3</sup> The rest of this chapter details the literary uses Hawthorne made of this popular type, and the way these uses articulate crucial issues relating to class, gender, and labor—issues that concerned Hawthorne as a struggling professional writer.

In “The Christmas Banquet” the seamstress appears as a wretched being, representing exploited and helpless laborers. This is the seamstress that was familiar in the public discourse of the period and who figured prominently and consistently in the argument of those who defended factories. This same seamstress also appears in “The Procession of Life” and is contrasted with the Lowell factory girls, who march in a separate group among the intellectuals. Here the seamstress marches with those whose labor diseases their bodies, like housepainters and cutlery workers. But among those manual laborers whose labor is destructive to their bodies, Hawthorne also includes writers. In fact, he mentions them right before he introduces seamstresses in the procession; they are “men of genius...who have written sheet after sheet, with pens dipped in their heart’s blood” (797). Their resemblance to the consumptive seamstresses with whom they march is emphasized: “These are a wretched, quaking, short-breathed set” (797). This connection between seamstresses and “men of genius” is important because it points out the parallel Hawthorne saw between the seamstress’s labor and the writer’s work. It is in this parallel, I believe, that we can locate the conjunction in Hawthorne’s fiction of history and biography.

In order to understand fully Hawthorne's relationship to his seamstresses, it is paramount to frame this relation within a discussion of Hawthorne's concerns about his own work and the relationship of these concerns to his family history and class position. His anxieties are particularly interesting, I believe, as a personal expression of the concerns of the antebellum American middle class at an important moment in its history.<sup>4</sup> For as unique as Hawthorne's family and professional histories were, they remain anchored in the particular historical moment in which he was writing. This moment was one of transition and formation for the American middle class, as social historians have shown (Blumin; Ryan; Halttunen). Blumin in particular has argued that although the formation of the middle class was taking place during the 1840s and the 1850s, it was completed only after the Civil War (13). Work is crucial to the identity of this forming middle class; in explaining its developing identity, Blumin, in fact, accords "primacy to changes in work, and to the economic and social relations of the workplace, and to the social identities that arose from and were most generally framed in terms of, economic activity" (Blumin 11). Because work was an essential factor in determining both class and gender identities, Hawthorne's anxieties about his position as a professional author were at the same time anxieties about class and gender.

Hawthorne's attitude to his profession is inextricably linked with his family's history. He belonged to two families, the Hathornes and the Mannings, who represented two different classes, and whose histories shed light on the changes taking place in antebellum America. The early Hathornes were among the pre-revolutionary elite. The earliest representative of the family in America, William Hathorne (1607-1681), sailed with Winthrop and was one of the Bay Colony's most distinguished men. He became speaker of the house, a magistrate, and a judge (Miller 20-21). His son, John Hathorne (1641-1717), also became a judge and was a prominent figure in his time. Both played public roles in the two most sensational events of their days, the Quaker persecution and the witchcraft trials.

But during the eighteenth century the family's fortunes declined. This decline coincides with the Hathornes' shift from farming and public service to mercantile seafaring as a way of earning a living. Hawthorne's grandfather, uncle, and father were all sea captains. Although the sea captain-merchants of Salem were among the wealthiest in the country, Hawthorne's father died at sea before he could distinguish himself in his trade. Hawthorne was aware that his father had not succeeded as others had and had died before he could accumulate a fortune. The father's lack of achievement stood in contrast with the successes of his fellow captain-mer-

chants and of his ancestors, whose history Hawthorne eagerly pursued. Thus, the conclusion of one of Hawthorne's recent biographers that "Captain Hawthorne may have appeared to his son a failure" is quite reasonable (Turner 10). By the nineteenth century, the Hathorne name still had some prestige, which helped the Hathorne women marry into some of the patrician Salem families of their day (Turner 14). These marriages, more than the name itself, allowed the Hathornes to "move[d]in the fringes of prominence and touch[ed] elbows, at least, with the merchant princes" of Salem. But the Hathorne name was more helpful for the women of the family than for the men, who, more than at any time before, were expected to succeed on their own.

In contrast to the Hathornes, the Mannings were not part of the elite gentry of the pre-revolution, and they did not make it into history books. As tradesmen and businessmen, their story is one of upward mobility. Nathaniel Hawthorne's grandfather, Richard Manning, Jr. began as a blacksmith in 1774, but soon prospered and established a livery-stable business and later a stagecoach line between Salem and Boston. Eventually, he became a land trader and developer. By the time of his death, his estate was estimated at \$54,000, which put the family solidly in the ranks of the middle class (Turner 14-15).

Following his father's death at sea, Hawthorne, at four years of age, joined the Mannings' household. Along with his mother and two sisters, he became dependent on his mother's family since his father did not leave them anything, a fact that was well-known to him (Turner 10). How Hawthorne was treated by his mother's and father's families seems to correspond to the class interest of each side. The Mannings supported young Hawthorne's education and even subsidized him during the ten years after his graduation, which enabled him to write. In doing so, they were following what other middle-class families did during this period of transition, that is, pooling resources behind the young men of the family in order to ensure middle-class stability (Ryan). The Hathorne side, on the other hand, did not play any part in supporting Hawthorne's education. In distancing themselves from their kin, they were rejecting the old form of solidarity—based on bloodline—and asserting instead a solidarity that "centered on the possession and conservation of wealth as opposed to the maintenance of kin connections cutting across lines of economic difference" (Herbert, *Dearest Beloved* 41). Both families were responding to the turbulent economy of nineteenth-century America brought about by mercantile and industrial capitalism.

There is evidence that Hawthorne resented this side of the family and that he did so out of pride. When the twenty year-old Hawthorne was told by a Salem acquaintance that he did not resemble any members of the Hathorne family, he purportedly replied, "I am glad to hear you say that, for I don't wish to look like any Hawthorne" (Herbert, *Dearest Beloved* 63). One favorite story of his sister Elizabeth was that when Simon Forrester, Captain Hathorne's wealthy brother-in-law, and the one who gave him a job, offered the young Hawthorne a ten-dollar bill, the latter rejected it on the grounds that Forrester was not "nearly enough related to have a right to bestow it" (Stewart 320). According to biographers, Hawthorne, throughout his life, hardly mentioned his father and his grandfather (Turner 14). He distanced himself from them by becoming a democrat (unlike his sister Elizabeth, who remained a Whig). But perhaps the most dramatic gesture on his part of repudiating the Hathornes was his changing the spelling of his name to "Hawthorne."

Although in changing the spelling of his name Hawthorne distanced himself from his paternal line, he did not break with it. In fact, in his most autobiographical text, "The Custom-House" sketch, he chooses to identify himself with his father's side of the family. Here he aligns himself publicly with his two prominent ancestors when he introduces himself as their "representative." This identification is ambivalent, for he seems to reject the Hathornes at the very moment he is embracing them. After all, he mentions them to "take shame upon [himself] "for their sakes and pray that any curse incurred by them...may be now and henceforth removed." He is only too conscious of the latter Hathornes' downward mobility, of what he calls "the dreary and unprosperous condition of the race." Ever since the first two generations, members of the Hathorne family "have sunk almost out of sight," without any claim to public distinction (10). His ancestry is, then, both a liability and a boon, a reminder of a shameful and glorious past that is no more.

Hawthorne's uneasy relationship with his father's family points to his uncertainty about his own identity. This uneasiness becomes clear when at some point in the sketch, the forefathers seem to be the ones who distance themselves from the son, just as the contemporary Hathornes had chosen to distance themselves from the orphans and their mother. Hawthorne gives his choice of profession as the reason for the forefathers' rejection of him. His becoming an author will ensure him a place among the undistinguished Hathornes and will be dismissed as improper by his more prominent ancestors :

No aim, that I have ever cherished, would they recognize as laudable; no success of mine—if my life, beyond its domestic scope, had ever been brightened by success—would they deem otherwise than worthless, if not positively disgraceful. “What is he?” Murmurs one gray shadow of my forefathers to the other. “A writer of story-books! What kind of a business in life,—what mode of glorifying God, or being serviceable to mankind in his day and generation,—may that be? Why, the degenerate fellow might as well have been a fiddler!” (10)

The judgment that authorship is “worthless” and “disgraceful” and that the author himself is “degenerate,” a mere writer of “story-books,” who is no better than a “fiddler,” is rooted as much in British cultural history as in New England Puritanism. What is most objectionable is not that Hawthorne writes, but rather that he only writes. In other words, he is becoming a professional writer instead of being a gentleman writer. As William Charvat explains, in the British aristocratic tradition the gentleman writer does not write for money since imaginative literature was “a by-product of learning or study, which presupposes leisure.” He “might take pride in his by-product, but he considered it as only one of many accomplishments in an active life” (6). In opposition to this aristocratic ideal, a professional writer puts his name on his work, prints it, and sells it in the open market, hoping to earn a living this way (Charvat 6). Hawthorne’s ancestors would not have judged him as harshly if he combined writing with one of the professions he once listed to his mother as possible careers—law, ministry, and medicine. At Hawthorne’s time, these were for the patrician class viable alternatives to business. His writing then would have been more acceptable because it would still be in the tradition of the gentleman writer (Charvat 10).

Hawthorne rejected these professions in a letter he wrote to his mother while preparing to go to college. In this letter he expresses his desire to become an author but also his discomfort with such a choice. He regrets that he was not “rich enough to live without a profession.” Unable to be a gentleman writer, he proposes to be a professional writer when he asks his mother: “What do you think of my becoming an Author, and relying for support upon my pen.” And as if to anticipate her objections, he concludes, “But Authors are always poor Devils” (15: 139). This statement shows Hawthorne’s awareness of another British cultural symbol, that of the “beggarly poet”; he even probably had several stories in mind of gentlemen-turned-impooverished writers as a warning against such a hazardous professional course. Less familiar were stories of literary success, for in 1821, the year Hawthorne made the above statements, professional authorship,

though a possibility, was still a precarious one. In choosing authorship as a career, Hawthorne was risking losing his already tenuous connections to the patrician class.

Hawthorne addressed his letter to his mother, but he was also addressing in it the concerns of the other Mannings. While his relatives believed it was important for him to pursue his education, it is safe to assume that being industrious and thrifty business people, they would have preferred it if their charge prepared for one of the self-supporting professions he rejects. On his part, Hawthorne was eager to prove to his immediate family and to the Mannings that he could succeed in the manly world of commerce (Miller 171). There is even evidence that at some point, he was learning book-keeping and contemplating joining his uncle's stage coach business (Turner 46). Although he complained that his uncle Robert Manning did not have a good opinion of his abilities, he was still aware of his family's high expectations of him, expectations he feared he could not realize (Turner 43). According to Turner, "At the end of his college years, Hawthorne's thoughts about a profession were inseparable from his awareness of how much his relatives expected of him" (46). When he lamented to his mother in 1820, "Why was I not a girl that I might have been pinned all my life to my Mother's apron" (15: 117), he was protesting against these family expectations, rooted in the gender ideology of the time, and was expressing his fear of not being able to meet them.

After his graduation, Hawthorne returned to Salem but did not go to work "as other people did," to use the words of an old Salem woman who chastised him publicly for his "idleness" (Stewart 322). For twelve years, he was economically dependent on his Manning relatives, just as his sisters were. Not surprisingly, he was known to the Salem community as an "idler" (Herbert, *Dearest Beloved* 71). Perhaps his sister Elizabeth had this judgment in mind when years later, after Hawthorne had already become famous, she still felt the need to justify her brother's choice of profession, by saying that his boyhood illnesses "conspired to unfit him for a life of business" (Stewart 320).

Elizabeth Hawthorne was well-aware that "a life of business" was deemed the preferred life for middle-class American men. As social historians have shown, by Hawthorne's time the "man of business" had emerged as an ideal representative of the new middle class. This class was seen as a threat by the patrician and old middle class and its representatives were ridiculed for lack of tradition and culture by writers as different as Emerson and Poe (Charvat 61). Hawthorne had ambivalent feelings about this class's male representative. He knew that as an author he could not measure up to

this ideal of manhood, which he both admired and rejected. In "The Custom-House" sketch, for instance, he draws a favorable picture of the "man of business," praising him for his clarity of mind, practicality, and efficiency (24). But this "man of business" is one of those people Hawthorne met while working as surveyor who were different from him in their occupation, interests, and pursuits (24). By characterizing himself in the same sketch as an "idler," Hawthorne makes the contrast between him and this manly ideal more explicit.

This ambivalence towards the businessman is more evident in "Peter Goldthwaite's Treasure." In this story, two kinds of businessmen are presented. There is the successful businessman, John Brown, in whom Hawthorne shows little interest. And there is Peter Goldthwaite, a failed businessman, whose impractical speculations left him "as needy a gentleman as ever" (523). In calling him "a wild projector, seeking to heap up gold by the bushel and the cart-load, instead of scraping it together, coin by coin" (526), Hawthorne is expressing the sentiments of an old middle class that disdained the speculators of the new middle class. Goldthwaite is connected to the new industrial order when his efficient and destructive activity is likened to that of a "steam engine" (537). He is "usefully employed," Hawthorne writes, destroying his own house (532).

But Hawthorne's disdain for Peter Goldthwaite is tempered with sympathy, even identification. Unlike the custom-house businessman who is that rare being, a man "thoroughly adapted to the situation which he held" (I: 25), Goldthwaite is thoroughly unsuited for business, and is more suited for authorship:

But withal, this Peter Goldthwaite, crack-brained simpleton as, perhaps, he was, might have cut a very brilliant figure in the world, had he employed his imagination in the airy business of poetry, instead of making it a demon of mischief in mercantile pursuits (524).

Goldthwaite's imagination seems to have found a better expression for its genius in his paintings than in his business schemes (532). In other words, he fails because he has more of the artist in him than the businessman. Hawthorne believed that Peter Goldthwaite was not alone in this predicament. Not knowing one's "proper sphere" is a common complaint, as one visitor to the intelligence office learns upon inquiring there for his right place in life ("Intelligence Office" 875). In fact, a whole class of people marched together in "The Procession of Life" because they "have lost, or never found, their proper places in the world" (804). Among them are "members of the learned professions, whom Providence endowed with special gifts for the plough, the gorge, and the wheel-barrow, or for the rou-

tine of unintellectual business." They are joined by "those lowly laborers and handicraftsmen, who have pined, as with a dying thirst, after the unattainable fountains of knowledge." Among these two groups of "unfortunates" are authors whom nature "has imbued with the confidence of genius, and strong desire of fame, but has favored with no corresponding power." They are "melancholy laughing-stocks" (805).

Like Peter Goldthwaite the poet-businessman, Hawthorne the writer-surveyor is not suited to his position in the custom-house. On the one hand, his associates at the wharf, his fellow-officers, the merchants and seamen, recognize him only as a surveyor, for they have not read his writings and they would not "have cared a fig the more for me, if they had read them at all" (26). On the other hand, he sees himself as a writer, and discovers that his working at the custom-house means that he cannot write anymore and that he has "bartered" his creative powers "for a pittance of the public gold" (34). Hawthorne, however, is unsuited for his post as surveyor not because his work requires business-like skills he lacks, but rather because it does not have the qualities one would expect of dignified labor, as evident in the following passage, describing the custom-house officials:

Oftentimes they were asleep, but occasionally might be heard talking together, in voices between speech and a snore, and with that lack of energy that distinguishes the occupants of alms-houses, and all other human beings who depend for subsistence on charity, on monopolized labor, or any thing else but their own independent exertions. (7)

In comparing the officials to alms-house dwellers, who, if able-bodied, were expected to work for their upkeep, Hawthorne is drawing a picture of labor at its most degrading. Alms-house laborers worked just to keep body and soul together at closely supervised jobs that were given to them as charity. Not much different is "monopolized labor" outside charitable institutions, the kind of labor appropriated by someone other than the workers themselves.

These modes of dependent labor were undignified because they were deemed unmanly, according to what David Leverenz calls "the artisan paradigm of manhood." Here manhood is defined "in Jeffersonian terms, as autonomous self-sufficiency" in which a man works "his land or his craft with integrity and freedom" (78). That Hawthorne is embracing this paradigm as his model of manhood is apparent when he warns his readers against "Uncle Sam's gold," which may rob a person's character of "many of its better attributes" like "sturdy force," "courage and constancy," "truth," "self-reliance, and all that gives the emphasis to manly character" (39). He concludes: "I endeavoured to calculate how much longer I could

stay in the Custom-House, and yet go forth a man" (39-40). The opposition becomes, then, not one between business and creativity, or manual and intellectual work, but one between two kinds of labor: independent labor, which is manly, versus monopolized labor, which is unmanly. Hawthorne chooses the former by rejecting his position as a surveyor and embracing his identity as a writer.

Hawthorne's insistence on his identity as a writer by publicly embracing the artisan paradigm of manhood at this point in his life is significant. He wrote "The Custom-House" sketch partly in self-defense at a moment of great professional and personal affliction. He had just lost his position in the Salem custom-house and was in the middle of a political controversy which plastered his name across the newspapers of the nation. Hawthorne was defending himself not only against his Whig detractors, but also against his nagging self-doubts, aggravated by his loss of his mother, whose final "injunction" to him was that he "take care" of his sisters (Turner 189). In other words, she was asking him to behave as a "man" was meant to behave towards the women dependent on him according to the culture's gendered expectations. In addition to his sister, Hawthorne was at this time also responsible for a wife and two children. But instead of being able to support them, he became dependent on the labor of his wife, Sophia, who during this period decorated lamp shades and screens for five dollars a piece and sold them with the help of her sister Elizabeth to earn some household money (Miller 274).

This gender-role reversal could only have intensified Hawthorne's urgent appeals to his friends to find him work. In a letter he wrote to G. S. Hillard asking him to procure for him some literary employment, he concludes, "Do not think anything is too humble to be mentioned to me" (16: 273). But Hillard could not come up with a job and instead presented him with a collection of money from friends, who contributed because they knew Hawthorne was "really in want" and "very poor" (16: 310). This friendly gesture touched Hawthorne greatly and drew tears to his eyes (16: 309). These were tears of gratitude and of shame, for this was perhaps the most humiliating experience Hawthorne ever had. He described his feelings in his letter of thanks to Hillard:

It is sweet to be remembered and cared for by one's friends...sweet to think that they deem me worth upholding in my poor walk through life. And it is bitter, nevertheless, to need their support. It is something else besides pride that teaches me that ill-success in life is really and justly a matter of shame. I am ashamed of it, and I ought to be. The fault of failure is attributable—in a great degree, at least—to the man who fails. I should apply this truth in judging of other

men; and it behooves me not to shun its point or edge in taking it home to my own heart. Nobody has a right to live in this world, unless he be strong and able, and applies his ability to good purpose...The only way in which a man can retain his self-respect, while availing himself of the generosity of his friends, is, by making it an incitement to his utmost exertions, so that he may not need their help again. I shall look upon it so—nor will shun any drudgery that my hand shall find to do, if thereby I may win bread. (16: 309-310)

As this letter shows, Hawthorne was ashamed of his dependency on others because this dependency called his manhood in question. Like his contemporaries, he believed in the gendered ideology of individualism, according to which a “true man” succeeds and fails on his own. And it was imperative for him to declare his allegiance to this ideology particularly at the very moment that it was not easy for him to do so. But while privately he asserts his manhood by promising his friends that he will not “shun any drudgery” to achieve independence, publicly he declares his independence by shunning the drudgery that is his work in the custom-house and by embracing instead an artisan ideal of manhood which values dignified, not degraded, labor.

In the text that follows “The Custom-House,” Hawthorne chooses a seamstress to represent this artisan ideal. The product of the seamstress’s work, the scarlet letter A, becomes the bridge between the custom-house and *The Scarlet Letter*, between autobiography and fiction, and between work and art. But the parallel Hawthorne draws now between the seamstress and the writer follows a different trajectory from the one he sketched earlier in his 1840s short stories. Hester Prynne does not bear much resemblance to the consumptive seamstresses marching in “The Procession of Life” or attending “The Christmas Banquet.” In many ways, she is the opposite of those helpless, unhealthy, exploited women. Hester was not so much a break with this earlier view of the seamstress as an elaboration on an even earlier one. Her prototype appears in “Endicott and the Red Cross” (1837). In this short story, the seamstress is a beautiful young woman standing at the whipping post, forced to wear the letter A as punishment for her adultery. In a gesture of defiance, and “[s]porting with infamy, the lost and desperate creature had embroidered the fatal token in scarlet cloth, with golden thread and the nicest art of needle-work; so that the capital A might have been thought to mean Admirable, or any thing rather than Adulteress” (9: 435). Although she is as miserable as her consumptive sisters and, like them, on display, this seamstress is an “artist” who is skilled in “the nicest art of needle-work” (9: 435). Through this art, and by trans-

forming the “Adulteress” to “Admirable,” she attempts to rehabilitate herself in front of her children and to integrate herself back into the community that shuns her. At the same time, her artwork is a signifier of her continued non-conformity and excess.

The seamstress as an artist figure is developed further in *The Scarlet Letter*. Through the seamstress-artist, Hawthorne underscores the parallel between the alienated laborer and the artist. Michael T. Gilmore states that Hester “is the first full-length representation in American literature of the alienated modern artist, a figure Hawthorne finds both admirable and misguided” (*American Romanticism* 85). I would only add that Hester is more specifically a representative of independent artisanal labor—the kind of labor that Hawthorne viewed as an ideal for the artist. Hester’s identity as an artist is emphasized when she is first introduced to the reader:

On the breast of her gown, in fine red cloth, surrounded with an elaborate embroidery and fantastic flourishes of gold thread, appeared the letter A. It was so artistically done, and with so much fertility and gorgeous luxuriance of fancy, that it had all the effect of a last and fitting decoration to the apparel which she wore. (I: 53)

As if to emphasize Hester’s skill, Hawthorne has one of the female spectators remark: “She hath good skill at her needle, that’s certain” (I: 54). The identity of Hester as an artist is underscored in the chapter entitled “Hester at her Needle”; one key passage reads:

Lonely as was Hester’s situation, and without a friend on earth who dared to show himself, she, however, incurred no risk of want. She possessed an art that sufficed, even in a land that afforded comparatively little scope for its exercise, to supply food for her thriving infant and herself. It was the art—then, as now—almost the only one within a woman’s grasp—of needle-work. She bore on her breast, in the curiously embroidered letter, a specimen of her delicate and imaginative skill, of which the dames of a court might gladly have availed themselves, to add a richer and more spiritual adornment of human ingenuity to their fabrics of silk and gold. (I: 81-82)

While Hester resembles the popular prototype of the seamstress as a lonely woman, left to rely on her limited resources to support herself and her children, she diverges from this prototype in significant ways. The passage above highlights the artistic nature of Hester’s work: it is an “art,” which requires a “delicate and imaginative skill.” “The finer productions of her handiwork” (I: 82) and the “exquisite productions of her needle” (I: 83) are “spiritual” products of “human ingenuity.” None of what she produces is functional, but her art becomes necessary to those in power: “Deep painful-

ly wrought bands, and gorgeously embroidered gloves, were all deemed necessary to the official state of men assuming the reins of power; and were readily allowed to individuals dignified by rank or wealth" (I: 82). Acquiring Hester's artistic work becomes a sign of high status and wealth.

Critics have recognized the parallels between Hester and the artist but have underplayed an important aspect of her identity as artist, that is, her entanglement in the market. This entanglement is double-sided. On the one hand, by being displayed in the marketplace Hester and her artistic work are degraded and shunned by the community. On the other hand, through her skill, Hester re-enters the marketplace on different terms, by successfully using her artistic talents to earn a living for herself and her daughter. Thus the language that emphasizes the artistic nature of her skill intermingles with the language of political economy. According to the latter, Hester "supplies" a "labor" that is highly in "demand" (I: 82) and thus secures her economic and social independence. She is an artist who has to earn her living through her art, but unlike Hawthorne, or even Thoreau to whom she is sometimes compared (Gilmore, *American Romanticism* 85), she is able to rely on her own efforts. Moreover, her labor does more than supply her physical wants; Hester's "delicate toil of the needle" is a source of "pleasure," and "a mode of expressing, and therefore soothing, the passion of her life" (I: 83-84).

Hester is very much the independent artist that Hawthorne yearned to become. Hester's labor is artisanal, combining manual and mental labor productively. Her artwork earns her a living but also gives her a measure of independence and self-fulfillment. Moreover, through her labor, she is able to become part of the community again, and on her own terms. As a representative of independent artisanal labor, Hester, in fact, stands in opposition to alienated labor, which is embodied in *The Scarlet Letter* in the bond servant who opens the door for her when she visits the governor's house. Like her, his clothes indicate his relationship to his society. His blue livery announces him a bond-servant: "a free-born Englishman, but now a seven years' slave. During that term he was to be the property of his master, and as much a commodity of bargain and sale as an ox, or a joint-stool" (I: 104). He is a representative of alienated labor at its most degrading, the labor that alienates a man from himself, robbing him of his humanity and turning him into a thing. This paradigm of labor, with slavery as its contemporary incarnation, is opposed to the one which Hester represents—the artisanal ideal.

Because Hawthorne's faith that such an ideal could be realized in nineteenth-century America was tested, even shaken, by his own struggles to

become an independent writer, he casts Hester's art as residual even for her own time. Her skill with the needle is a sign of "antique gentility" (I: 58), for like Hawthorne himself, she belongs to a family that saw a better past. It is a return to that antiquity, through Pearl's marriage into some obscure European aristocracy, which releases Hester from her involvement in the market. At the end of the novel, Hester is still busy with her needle, embroidering a baby-garment. Her sewing now, however, is a sign of domesticity, not of economic necessity. It is work done by woman, not by woman in need. This feminization of Hester's work further distances her from Hawthorne.

In some of his other works, artist figures are represented by men. In "The Artist of the Beautiful" (1844), for instance, Owen Warland, the watchmaker, makes beautiful, nonfunctional objects by uniting manual labor with mental labor. He is no ordinary inventor; in fact, he stands in contrast to those inventors revered as "the intellectual heroes of the age" (L. Marx 199). His creations are contrasted with "ordinary machinery," whose coarseness he despises. One such machinery is the steam-engine, a prominent emblem of industrialization, whose mere sight repulses Owen:

Being once carried to see a steam-engine, in the expectation that his intuitive comprehension of mechanical principles would be gratified, he turned pale and grew sick, as if something monstrous and unnatural had been presented to him. This horror was partly owing to the size and terrible energy of the iron laborer. (305)

Owen's disdain extends to other inventions of industrialization, as is clear from his declaration that if a discovery of perpetual motion were possible, "it would not be worth my while to make it only to have the secret turned to such purposes as are now effected by steam and water power. I am not ambitious to be honored with the paternity of a new kind of cotton machine" (307-308). Owen's anti-machine rhetoric is part of his opposition to un-imaginative labor. His antithesis is Robert Danforth, the human equivalent of the steam engine. As a blacksmith he too is an "iron laborer," representing the brute strength and mechanical deadness of manual labor devoid of imagination and spirituality. But the blacksmith is more at home in his society, for he is the one who wins Annie, the woman Owen idealizes. Owen, on the other hand, is an alienated artist, dismissed by practical people as someone who "trifles" with time—an idler.

Another Hawthornian artist figure is Drowne in "Drowne's Wooden Image" (1844). Not unlike Owen, Drowne represents the creative possibilities inherent in a labor that unites the physical and the mental. He differs from Owen in being more of a craftsman or artisan, who produces objects

that other people use. His uniformly carved wood figures, sold as ornaments for apothecaries and other businesses to attract customers or as figure heads for merchant vessels, earn him a modest living. For one such vessel he carves the figure of a woman. This creation, however, is qualitatively different from Drowne's other "worthless abortions." It is a real work of art that Drowne for the first and last time is inspired to make. He imaginatively captures the woman who is the source of his inspiration only once before she departs with her benefactor, the captain of a merchant ship.

The opposition between the artist/artisan and the man of business is carried on in another of Hawthorne's short stories. In "The Snow-Image" (1850) the common-sensical father, owner of a hardware store and dealer in such mundane objects as pots and pans, is incapable of seeing the wonderful snow-image that his children created. To his way of seeing, it is only a figment of the children's imagination. To the children, who bring the figure to life with the work of both their hands and their imagination, it is undoubtedly real—as real as their parents are. These two contrasting ways of seeing lead to conflict in the household: the children turn against their father and feel betrayed by their mother. Although the latter sees the snow-image, she complies with her husband's orders, which lead to its destruction.

It is significant that creative labor in this story is associated with children, a boy and a girl who have not yet been molded by gender expectations into man and woman. They practice their art in an almost genderless location, the garden, which stands as an in-between space between the mother's domain and the father's, that is, between home and market. Of course, the garden and the children's work, are closer to the former than to the latter. The children make their snow-image under their mother's watchful eye, looking out at them through a window. Like Hester Prynne at the end of *The Scarlet Letter*, the mother herself is busy embroidering a frock for her son. And before the appearance of the merchant-father, she seems even able to share in the children's vision. The association of creative labor with an indeterminate gender identity is also evident in "The Artist of the Beautiful" and "Drowne's Wooden Image." Owen, who is described as "faint-hearted" and who is made sick by the mere sight of a steam-engine, is no model of manhood in the eyes of nineteenth-century America. Not surprisingly, he refuses the "paternity" of machines. Similarly, Drowne's creations are called "worthless abortions," a description which likens his work to women's natural labor. These unfixed gender identities, and the spaces they occupy, are precarious, to say the least. Both Owen and Drowne lose the women, their source of inspiration, to men who embody

the culture's ideals of manhood, a blacksmith and a merchant captain, respectively; and the snow-image is "killed" by the fire of the domestic hearth, its traces obliterated by the menial labor of Dora, the maid.

Hawthorne yearned for an intermediary space, which would enable him to write and to earn a living, to be an author and a man, simultaneously. Therefore, it is not surprising that he sought to cast his writing as artisanal labor (Newbury; Brommel). In figuring authorship in terms of artisanal labor, however, Hawthorne was not separating his kind of work from the market, as Newbury and Brommell maintain. Rather, he was attempting to be part of a residual marketplace eroded by the new socio-economic relations of nineteenth century mercantile and industrial capitalism. Working autonomously at a fulfilling task that unites manual and mental labor and allows for a measure of financial independence was not an easy ideal to achieve. Hawthorne discovered that in order to support himself and his family, he needed to do "drudgery" work. This kind of work was not only the type he did while employed as surveyor in the custom-houses of Boston and Salem. "Drudgery" is also a kind of writing. Just as he distinguishes between two kinds of manual labor, that of the artisan and the blacksmith, Hawthorne differentiates between two kinds of writing: there is the creative writing which he does at his own pace, and which produces short stories, novels, and sketches. Then there is what he calls "literary drudgery," which he had to do to earn his bread. In an 1844 letter to his friend Hillard, Hawthorne spells out the difference between the two:

I could not spend more than a third of my time in this sort of composition. It requires a continual freshness of mind; else a deterioration in the article will quickly be perceptible. If I am to support myself by literature, it must be by what is called drudgery, but which is incomparably less irksome, as a business, than imaginative writing—by translation, concocting of school-books, newspaper-scribbling &c. (16: 23)

He reaches the conclusion that it will never do for him "to continue merely a writer of stories for the magazines—the most unprofitable business in the world" (16: 23). However, he began the letter by saying: "God keep me from ever being really a writer for bread! If I alone were concerned, I had rather starve; but in that case, poor little Una would have to take refuge in the alms-house" (16: 23). Being "a writer for bread" is certainly far from the ideal Hawthorne yearned for. The fear of becoming such a writer always cast a shadow over Hawthorne, compelling him towards the end of his life to express his relief that his "labor with the abominable little tool is drawing to a close" (18: 619).

Hawthorne struggled as a writer not only to earn his bread, but also to find a narrative that would best describe his experience. The narrative of the gentleman writer turned “beggarly poet” (Charvat 10) told of an essentially aristocratic experience unsuitable for American democracy. The culture of antebellum America, however, offered no model narratives about the struggling male author. The most popular story lines were the rags-to-riches success story of the industrious young man, and its opposite, which tells of the sudden impoverishment of speculators and other improvident men. The story that found the most resonance with Hawthorne and his experience as a writer is that of the seamstress. Like the seamstresses of popular literature, Hawthorne struggled to support himself and those dependent on him. Like them, he complained about not being paid enough and about not being paid on time. He resented the drudgery of the work he had to endure to “earn his bread” and was reduced to asking for his friends’ financial help. However, what makes the seamstress particularly useful for Hawthorne is her double signification. She could simultaneously stand for both independent artisanal labor and for drudgery. While in *The Scarlet Letter* Hawthorne emphasizes her identity as an artist/artisan, he is well-aware that his readers also know her as an exploited worker. He himself has used her in that capacity in earlier stories.

Moreover, Hester is the heroine of a novel about the past. She was created at a moment of defiance. But Hawthorne knew from personal experience that no Hester is possible in the present. This pessimistic view, along with his feelings of vulnerability, would continue even after his financial difficulties came to an end. With the election of his friend Franklin Pierce in 1852, Hawthorne secured the lucrative position of American consul in Liverpool, which enabled him to assume the role of provider. So before he left to take charge of his new post, he paid back all his debts and arranged that his sister Elizabeth receive \$200 a year during his absence (Turner 263). His fears of poverty, however, would never leave him.

These fears found their grimmest expression in his obsession with the alms-house. The dread he felt at the possibility of ending in the alms-house, in fact, intensified after his return to America and towards the end of his life. According to his wife “Hawthorne dwelt...almost obsessively on the possibility of ending his days in the Concord almshouse” (Miller 19). To Ticknor he predicted in 1863: “I expect to outlive my means and die in the alms-house. Julian’s college-expenses will count up tremendously. I must try to get my poor blunted pen at work again pretty soon...” (18: 597). A few months later, in a letter to James Field, and after listing his taxes and other expenses, he wrote: “I want a great deal of money...I won-

der how people manage to live economically” (18: 606). Sophia Hawthorne complained to Ticknor in 1863 that her husband “feels so poor now, and is so accustomed to go without everything he wants himself, that it is the most difficult thing in the world for me to persuade him to indulge in the smallest luxury...I cannot prevail upon Mr. Hawthorne to take this nice wine, of which he has a little, because, he says, it is so expensive, and he wants it for a guest” (18: 576-577).<sup>5</sup> Sophia was so disturbed by her husband’s irrational fears of poverty that she even wrote Franklin Pierce, behind Hawthorne’s back, asking him to “persuade her husband that ‘there is no fear of his entering the Alms’ House, to which he philosophically looks forward—considering himself entirely useless in the world henceforth’” (Miller 515).

Hawthorne’s fear of the poor-house is a fear of dependency and shame, which he clearly could not shake off even after he became a celebrated author. This fear, I believe, found its clearest fictional expression in Hawthorne’s most autobiographical work, *The Blithedale Romance*, where, again, the seamstress is a central figure. If Hester Prynne was a representative of an ideal of labor the writer was yearning for, Priscilla, the last of Hawthorne seamstresses, represented his worst anxieties about labor, class and gender. In the rest of this chapter, I will discuss these issues as they are dealt with in Hawthorne’s third romance.

Hawthorne met the real-life Priscilla when he lived at Brook Farm. The seventeen-year old “little seampstress from Boston” clearly made a strong impression on him, if one is to judge from the long entry he wrote about her in his journal. In this entry, dated October 9, 1841, he describes her as a bundle of energy, “very vivacious and smart, laughing, singing, and talking, all the time.” Although a city girl, she is as “healthy as a wild flower,” and is at home in the country, “like a bird, hopping from twig to twig, and chirping merrily all the time.” “[T]he very image of lightsome morn itself,” her cheerfulness is infectious, for “to look at her face is like being shone upon by a ray of the sun.” This seamstress’s labor is given scant attention, only mentioned passingly to emphasize her familial identity as “an excellent daughter, who supports her mother by the labor of her hands.” Hawthorne concludes this character sketch musing about the domestic influences of this Brook Farm seamstress:

It would be difficult to conceive, beforehand, how much can be added to the enjoyment of a household by mere sunniness of temper and smartness of dispositions; for her intellect is very ordinary, and she never says anything worth hearing, or even laughing at, in itself. But she herself is an expression, well worth studying. (16: 210)

Whatever ambivalence the above passage hints at is dispelled later when Hawthorne creates Phoebe Pyncheon. By brightening up *The House of the Seven Gables*, Phoebe, as a domestic ideal, demonstrates that much, indeed, can be added to “the enjoyment of a household by mere sunniness of temper and smartness of dispositions.”

When more than a decade later Hawthorne revisits Brook Farm in his third romance, he does not meet there any sunny seamstresses to cheer him up. Although the Priscilla of *The Blithedale Romance* (1852) resembles the seamstress of Brook Farm in being a “little woman...on the outer limits of girlhood” (3: 50), she is almost the reverse image of her real-life counterpart. She also differs from the seamstress of “The Christmas Banquet,” the short story which is the prototype of *The Blithedale Romance*. Priscilla is more ambiguous than any of her predecessors. Her ambiguity has been noted by several critics, who account for it by offering different interpretations. Stanton and Birdsall, for example, attribute Priscilla’s ambiguous qualities to Hawthorne’s growing doubt about the possibility of spiritual goodness in an increasingly materialist world. B. and A. Lefcowitz relate this ambiguity to Hawthorne’s need “to re-present the clear-cut dichotomy between pure heroines and guilty and dark heroines as an artistic burden” (265). While these two critics discuss Priscilla as a seamstress (by focusing on the immoral sexual connotations seamstresses had), neither they nor the others consider the issue of labor that the seamstress represented. Moreover, they collapse Coverdale’s attitude to Priscilla with Hawthorne’s. Priscilla’s ambiguity can also be seen in the wide range of critical opinion regarding her, which characterizes her as both angel and prostitute and everything in between. In what follows, I will show that her ambiguity results from her being a contested figure whose very identity is open to interpretation. Questions about who she really is are at the center of *The Blithedale Romance*, which can be read as a mystery narrative structured around Priscilla’s unknown origins.

Priscilla is first introduced in the novel as the mysterious Veiled Lady, whose “wonderful exhibition” Coverdale has just attended (3: 5). The “enigma” of the Veiled Lady’s identity is brought up a few paragraphs later and is given a class dimension, when Coverdale mentions the “absurd rumor...that a beautiful young lady, of family and fortune, was enshrouded within the misty drapery of the veil” (3: 6). A connection is established between the Veiled Lady and the Blithedale project the instant Coverdale reveals that the reason he has been to see the Veiled Lady is to put to her “a query as to the success of our Blithedale enterprise.” Her answer offers, he says, “a variety of interpretations” (3: 6).

*The Blithedale Romance* too offers a “variety of interpretations” of Priscilla herself. She makes her first appearance in the novel as a “figure enveloped in a cloak,” “a slim and unsubstantial girl” (3: 26) who shows up at Blithedale unexpectedly under Hollingsworth’s protection. By not telling Zenobia that they are sisters, Priscilla opens up her identity for interpretation. Not surprisingly, the first thing anybody says about her comes from Coverdale in the form of a question when he asks: “Who is this?” (3: 26). The participants in Blithedale all define the seamstress differently, and in the process define themselves and Blithedale. This variety of interpretations makes the seamstress the focus of conflicting representations and the product of conflicted discourses. By using an unreliable narrator, Hawthorne does not privilege any of these interpretations, distancing himself from them all. In Priscilla’s character we have an example of how Hawthorne both exploited and transformed a literary paradigm. Moreover, in his ambivalence towards his last seamstress we find his strongest expression of anxiety and dis-ease about issues of class and gender and their interlocking with the all-important issue of labor.

Hawthorne’s feelings and views are mediated through Miles Coverdale, the poet who joins Blithedale in order to establish an alternative society, one “governed by other than the false and cruel principles, on which human society has all along been based” (3: 19). Rejecting “the greedy, struggling, self-seeking world” of the city, a place he associates with convention and falsehood, he arrives at Blithedale as one of the reformers. At the core of this new society is a different social arrangement that envisions a radical view of labor. Coverdale explains:

We meant to lessen the laboring man’s great burthen of toil, by performing our due share of it as the cost of our own thews and snews. We sought our profit by mutual aid, instead of wresting it by the strong hand from an enemy, or filching it craftily from those less shrewd than ourselves...or winning it by selfish competition with a neighbor;...And, as the basis of our institution, we purposed to offer up the earnest toil of our bodies, as a prayer, no less than an effort, for the advancement of our race. (3: 19)

In his commentary on *Brook Farm*, Emerson underscored the new ideal of labor the project espoused. According to him, the participants believed in “the honesty of a life of labor” and had “visions of the spiritualization of labor” (Gross 265). The reformers, he wrote, were rejecting a society not allowing “each to do what he had a talent for, and not permitting men to combine cultivation of mind and heart with a reasonable amount of daily labor” (Gross 263).

This new vision of labor is attractive to Coverdale particularly because he is an artist. Unlike his creator, however, he is not a professional writer, but a gentleman poet. He leads what he calls a "luxurious life" (3: 40) in Boston and does not have to write to earn a living. Still, his identity as a writer is a source of anxiety for him. After all, he is a minor poet, and he knows that like all authors he will never be done in wax in appreciation for his talents (3: 196). Even more troubling, his comfortable life in the city is experienced as an "effeminacy" (3: 145). In fact, his anxiety about his identity as a gentleman poet is mainly articulated as an anxiety about manhood. The "effeminacy" of what he does is pointed out to him by other men. Hollingsworth, the representative of "true manhood," who appreciates neither poets nor poetry, calls Coverdale an "indolent or half-occupied man" (3: 133). Silas Foster, the yeoman farmer who has "Yankee intolerance of any intermission of labor" (3: 138), predicts that Coverdale will "Die in a ditch!" if he had "no steadier means than [his] own labor to keep [him] out of it!" (3: 138). The only one who seems to appreciate Coverdale's poetry and who does not speak disparagingly of it is Zenobia, herself a writer. This alliance with Zenobia adds to Coverdale's (and to Hawthorne's) anxiety. As one critic has noted, Hawthorne was uncomfortable with female authors because "women expose the (female) sexuality of writing, his own [and Coverdale's] chosen profession" (Carton 210).

Coverdale hopes that by joining Blithedale, he can combine manual and mental labor to the advantage of both his poetry and his body. He aspires to write poetry that is "true, strong, natural, and sweet...something that shall have the notes of wild-birds twittering through it, or a strain like the wind-anthems in the woods" (3: 14). He also hopes to become more "masculine." Thus after living as "an amateur working-man" for a while (3: 145), Coverdale proudly records the transformation manual labor has worked on his body:

the yeoman-life throve well with us. Our faces took the sunburn kindly; our chests gained in compass, and our shoulders in breadth and squareness; our great brown fists looked as if they had never been capable of kid gloves. The plough, the hoe, the scythe, and the hay-fork, grew familiar to our grasp. The oxen responded to our voices. We could do almost as fair a day's work as Silas Foster himself. (3: 64)

His new mode of labor associates him not only with Silas Foster, but more importantly with Hollingsworth, the blacksmith. While working side by side with the latter, Coverdale fantasizes about how future generations will venerate them for their experiment. He, for instance, will be admired for his masculine body: "I will be painted in my shirt-sleeves, and with the

sleeves rolled up, to show my muscular development. What stories will be rife among them about our mighty strength" (3: 129).

This alliance with Hollingsworth is important for Coverdale. As the representative of a masculine ideal, Hollingsworth is the model Coverdale would like to identify with most. At the same time, it is also the model that he finds most threatening. At one point Coverdale confesses: "I hate to be ruled by my own sex; it excites my jealousy and wounds my pride. It is the iron sway of bodily force, which abases us, in our compelled submissions" (3: 121). That Coverdale has Hollingsworth in mind is evident in his choice of words. Hollingsworth, after all, is the one character in the novel associated with iron and bodily force (which he threatens to use to subjugate women). The description of his first appearance in the novel emphasizes the "rude strength with which his features seemed to have been hammered out of iron, rather than chiselled or moulded from any finer or softer material." Hollingsworth's physical features, Coverdale maintains, correspond to his occupation as a blacksmith (3: 28). It is what men do, then, that determines how they look. The class differences between the gentleman poet and the blacksmith are recast as gender differences—as manliness versus effeminacy.<sup>6</sup>

The fraternity between Coverdale and Hollingsworth fails, however, and the relationship between the artist and the blacksmith continues to be one of opposition as in "The Artist of the Beautiful." Hollingsworth belittles Coverdale as both poet and laborer, pronouncing him unfit for either occupation: "Just think of him penning a sonnet, with a fist like that! There is at least this good in a life of toil, that it takes the nonsense and fancy-work out of a man, and leaves nothing but what truly belongs to him." At the center of their competition stands Priscilla, who becomes the test of their manhood. Each casts himself as her rescuer: Hollingsworth brings her to Blithedale as his protégée and later saves her from Westervelt's clutches, and Coverdale day-dreams about saving Priscilla the maiden from Hollingsworth the dragon (3: 71). Class opposition continues to be expressed in gender terms as competition over one woman between two different representatives of manhood.

Coverdale's link to Priscilla is further complicated by his being a writer and her being a seamstress. Through them Hawthorne subjects the relationship between art and labor to extensive scrutiny, questioning in the process the seamstress as a metaphor for either ideal labor or ideal womanhood. But this is exactly how his unreliable narrator insists on seeing her. Defining Priscilla is the main aim of Coverdale's story. He takes immediate interest in the seamstress and works hard throughout the novel to ide-

alize her. On their first encounter he casts her as a snow-image that has just stepped out of a fairy tale: "The fantasy occurred to me, that she was some desolate kind of a creature, doomed to wander about in snow-storms, and that, though the ruddiness of our window-panes had tempted her into a human dwelling, she would not remain enough to melt the icicles out of her hair" (3: 27). Soon the miserable looks of Priscilla force on him another possible explanation. So he wonders whether Hollingsworth "might have brought one of his guilty patients, to be wrought upon, and restored to spiritual health, by the pure influences our mode of life would create" (3: 27). Unlike the seamstress of Brook Farm, Priscilla is not one of the reformers; she is one to be rescued by Blithedale and its men. These two aspects of Priscilla's identity, as an idealized being and as a woman in need of protection, will be developed further throughout the narrative.

Both aspects erase Priscilla's identity as a seamstress. Zenobia is the one to underscore this identity, countering Coverdale's definition of Priscilla with one of her own. She declares Priscilla "neither more nor less...than a seamstress from the city," who is eager to do her "miscellaneous sewing." Zenobia reaches this conclusion by reading Priscilla's body, particularly "the needle marks on the tip of her forefinger." The portrait Zenobia draws of a city seamstress is the typical one popular at the time. She says:

my suppositions perfectly accounts for her paleness, her nervousness, and her wretched fragility. Poor thing! She has been stifled with the heat of a salamander-stove, in a small, close room, and has drunk coffee, and fed upon dough-nuts, raisins, candy, and all such trash, till she is scarcely half-alive; and so, as she has hardly any physique, a poet, like Mr. Miles Coverdale, may be allowed to think her spiritual! (3: 34)

Coverdale's insistence on Priscilla's spirituality is part of his insistence on the spirituality of labor, which, as Emerson emphasized, is also one of the aims of the Blithedale experiment. While Zenobia is confident that Priscilla will continue to do her "miscellaneous sewing" in Blithedale as she would outside, Coverdale is eager to believe that no drudgery can exist in the new community. Therefore, he attempts to idealize Priscilla's work by erasing the lines between art and labor, between creativity and drudgery. Priscilla resists this idealization by insisting on her identity as a working seamstress. Thus as soon as Coverdale declares that she blended into Blithedale, "no longer a foreign element" (3: 35), Priscilla produces "out of a work-bag that she had with her, some little wooden instruments, and proceeded to knit, or net, an article which ultimately took the shape of a

silk purse." He emphasizes Priscilla's purses as works of art by talking of their "peculiar excellence," and of "the great delicacy and beauty of the manufacture." Their intricate design, he maintains, makes them "a symbol of Priscilla's own mystery" (3: 35).<sup>7</sup> He, however, confesses that the purses she makes are familiar objects and that he himself owns one of them. This confession reveals that Priscilla's purses are not simply objects of beauty as Coverdale wants to see them, but commercial articles which Priscilla produces and sells to earn her and her father's bread. They connect Priscilla and Coverdale by defining their relationship as a commercial one, between a worker and a consumer.

Coverdale continues to idealize Priscilla's labor throughout the novel. When she presents him with a night-cap she made for him while sick, he declares that he "never can think of wearing such an exquisitely wrought night-cap as this, unless it be in the day-time, when I sit up to receive company!" But Priscilla insists on the utilitarian aspect of her present by assuring him that "It is for use, not beauty," and that she "could have embroidered it and made it much prettier" if she pleased (3: 51). Describing Priscilla's work later when he encounters her in Boston, he calls what she makes "pretty and unprofitable handiwork" (3: 155). Priscilla, however, emphasizes her reality by insisting: "Oh, there is substance in these fingers of mine!" (3: 169).

To Coverdale's chagrin, Priscilla continues to sew at Blithedale (3: 49). As he puts it, "There was no other sort of efficiency about her," for it turns out that sewing and knitting is the only kind of work she can perform:

She met with terrible mishaps in her efforts to milk a cow; she let the poultry into the garden; she generally spoilt whatever part of the dinner she took in charge; she broke crockery; she dropt our biggest pitcher into the well; and—except with her needle, and those little wooden instruments for purse-making—was as unserviceable a member of society as any young lady in the land. (3: 74)

Priscilla, then, continues to be at Blithedale what she was outside it. The effects of her labor on her body also continue to be visible in her nervousness, paleness, and physical awkwardness. Although Coverdale realizes that Priscilla is unable to run like other girls because she grew up "without exercise, except to her poor little fingers," and "had never yet acquired the perfect use of her legs," he concludes that this physical weakness is a sign of "Priscilla's peculiar charm" (3: 74). By thus idealizing her weakness, Coverdale attempts to transform the sickly seamstress into an ideal of womanhood, into the "unserviceable young lady," who is not dependent on her sewing to earn a living.

Coverdale's feminization of Priscilla's physical weakness and submissiveness go hand in hand with his desire to see himself as more "masculine." As a man he is more comfortable with the type of woman that Priscilla represents than with the other "model of womanhood," Zenobia, "with her uncomfortable surplus of vitality" (3: 96). In spiritualizing Priscilla's vulnerability Coverdale is appropriating an essential tenet of Victorian gender ideology which asserts, in Coverdale's words, that "the ministry of souls may be left in charge of women!" (3: 121). Coverdale voices this principle to counter Hollingsworth's belief that women are subordinate to men. Both views, however, complement rather than oppose each other. Westervelt shows the connection between Coverdale's idealization of women and Hollingsworth's subordination of them when he points out that Priscilla is a type of woman, "one of those delicate, nervous young creatures, not uncommon in New England." But what is thought of as her "spirituality" is, he points out, "rather the effect of unwholesome food, bad air, lack of out-door exercise, and neglect of bathing" (3: 95). However, he is the one who, by packaging Priscilla as the Veiled Lady, markets her "spirituality" to a gullible public the way Coverdale is trying to convince himself and his readers that Priscilla is "spiritual."<sup>8</sup>

At some point, Coverdale admits that he is idealizing Priscilla, that he cares not "for her realities—poor little seamstress...but for the fancy work with which [he has] idly decked her out!" (3: 100). This is the only time at which Coverdale refers to Priscilla as a seamstress. This is also when he draws the strongest comparison between his work and Priscilla's: in using "fancy work"—a term from "stitching/ seamstressing"—he is making a connection between his art as a poet and her work as a seamstress. Hollingsworth, let us remember, uses the same term to contemptuously describe Coverdale's poetry as unmanly. It is this connection that accounts for Coverdale's persistence in idealizing Priscilla. In doing so, he is insisting on his identity as an artist. By erasing the drudgery from Priscilla's work, he is erasing the drudgery from the writer's work and affirming the identity of the writer as a gentleman rather than a professional.

This erasure is necessary to calm Coverdale's class anxieties. Although he leads a privileged life in the city, a life he gives up voluntarily for a short time but eventually resumes, Coverdale's class fears do come to the surface. They are articulated as fears of the future as when he declares that he "would rather look backward ten times, than forward once" (3: 75). Change, for him, might bring with it downward mobility. Not surprisingly, he describes himself wearing work clothes in Blithedale as "gentility in tatters" (3: 64) and takes much interest in the actual gentleman in tatters

in the novel, Priscilla's father. Coverdale even calls Moodie a "decayed gentleman" (3: 181), and admits that he always wondered "what he was before he came to be what he is" (3: 82). Moodie's life history is a story of downward mobility—of a prince turned pauper—which Coverdale reconstructs allowing his pen "a trifle of romantic and legendary license, worthier of a small poet than of a grave biographer" (3: 181). According to this narrative, Moodie used to be Fauntleroy, "a man of wealth, and magnificent tastes, and prodigal expenditure" (3: 183). In an attempt to delay his loss of status, Fauntleroy commits a crime, as a result of which he flees, and his estate is divided "among his creditors" (3: 183).

There are some gaps in this narrative. What was Fauntleroy's crime? What was threatening his high status that he felt compelled to commit this crime? The gaps in the plot attest to its familiarity, as if Coverdale trusts the audience to supply the missing elements. Indeed, the plot of the gentleman turned beggar was a popular one in nineteenth-century America. The transformation is sudden and is the result of some imprudent act committed by the individual, usually speculation. But such change of status was so taken for granted that often no explanation was given for the change. Coverdale's narrative differs from the other versions in that it dwells in some detail on Fauntleroy's changed circumstances. Under an assumed name, Fauntleroy moves to "the older portion" of Boston, Coverdale's city, where he leads the life of a pauper (3: 185):

There he dwelt among poverty-stricken wretches, sinners, and forlorn, good people, Irish, and whomsoever else were neediest. Many families were clustered in each house together, above stairs and below, in the little peaked garrets, and even in the dusky cellars. The house, where Fauntleroy paid weekly rent for a chamber and a closet, had been a stately habitation, in its day. An old colonial Governor had built it, and lived there, long ago, and held his levees in a great room where now slept twenty Irish bedfellows, and died in Fauntleroy's chamber. (3: 184)

As the above passage indicates, Fauntleroy's story of downward mobility is not an exceptional one, for the house he now occupies used to be the governor's palace (185). The one thing that stands between Fauntleroy and the poor-house, Hawthorne's most dreaded institution, is Priscilla's purses.

This story of downward mobility and all its troubling connotations concerning class insecurity is eventually reversed in Coverdale's narrative. For it turns out that Fauntleroy chooses to be a pauper; he is impoverished out of choice not necessity, as he explains: "I am unchanged—the same man of yore!...my brother's wealth, he dying intestate, is legally my own. I know

it; yet, of my own choice, I live a beggar, and go meanly clad, and hide myself behind a forgotten ignominy" (3: 192). Moodie asserts his power, not only by choosing his fate, but also by influencing the fate of others. Although a shadowy figure throughout the narrative, he ends up playing the most critical role in shaping the lives of the main characters. He sends Priscilla to Blithedale by entrusting her to Hollingsworth; he allows Zenobia to enjoy his wealth, so his former self "shines through her" (3: 192); and finally he disinherits Zenobia to punish her for her unsisterly conduct towards Priscilla. As a result, Zenobia commits suicide after losing her wealth and the man she loves, and Priscilla, now an heiress, secures Hollingsworth as her husband. Moodie, it turns out, is one of the most powerful paupers in American literature.

In redeeming Moodie in this way, Coverdale restores a fellow "decayed gentleman" to his rightful place by bestowing on him the power he had before his fortune and status were lost. By doing so, he transforms Priscilla into a Cinderella figure, for she is no longer the offspring of a poor seamstress and a pauper (3: 185), but Fauntleroy's daughter and his heiress. Coverdale tells Moodie's story to counter with it Zenobia's legend. In that legend, Zenobia demystifies the Veiled Lady by presenting her as a victim of bondage, slavery, and exploitation. There is nothing spiritual about Zenobia's Veiled Lady. Even more importantly, Zenobia shows that the Veiled Lady is actually Priscilla, when, in a dramatic gesture, she drapes the latter with the veil. This is really the answer to Coverdale's question at the beginning of the novel as to who Priscilla is (3: 108-16). But just as Zenobia is blinded by her class prejudices from seeing her connection to Priscilla, that they are actually sisters, Coverdale refuses to see the connection between Priscilla and the Veiled Lady. Even after she is unveiled in front of him in the village hall, he only acknowledges her as "Poor maiden!" not as "Priscilla" and insists that "she had kept...her virgin reserve and sanctity of soul, throughout it all" (3: 201). To see the connection between the seamstress and the Veiled Lady is to acknowledge the reality of exploitation, alienation, and total loss of selfhood. All are embodied in the Veiled Lady, a figure in whom Hawthorne joins alienated labor and subjugated womanhood. Such an acknowledgment would shatter the idealized picture Coverdale has of Priscilla, himself, and Blithedale.

The transformation of Priscilla comes with a heavy price. Zenobia dies, Hollingsworth is broken, and Coverdale, who assures us that he lives in ease and "fare[s] sumptuously every day," leads a "colorless life," with no ideals or hopes (3: 245). More significantly, he is no longer a poet and Blithedale is no longer a model for a new society. The last image of

Blithedale we are left with reflects the grim picture Hawthorne had concerning his future as a writer: the “modern Arcadia” becomes an almshouse, where “the town-paupers, aged, nerveless, and disconsolate, creep sluggishly afield” (3: 246).

Just as the seamstress disappears from Coverdale’s story, she will disappear from Hawthorne’s later work. With Priscilla, Hawthorne seems to have exhausted this paradigm, as a representative of both artisanal labor and alienated labor. But his anxieties about labor will continue to occupy a new generation of writers—women writers. For them, as for Hawthorne, labor and authorship remained entangled with issues of class and gender, but this entanglement took different forms and yielded different literary results, as I hope to show in the last chapter.

## NOTES

1. Unless otherwise specified, all references to Hawthorne’s short stories are to *Nathaniel Hawthorne: Tales and Sketches*. New York: The Library of America, 1982.

2. For an extended discussion of this episode, see L. Marx 11-33.

3. Hawthorne’s women have always interested the critics. The prefeminist phase viewed them mostly in mythical terms; they were divided into one-dimensional fair maidens and dark ladies, allegories or symbols—of good and evil, innocence and experience, spirit and body—in Hawthorne’s moral and psycho-sexual landscape (Lawrence, Fiedler, Pratt, Carpenter). Feminist critics generally divide into two groups: some see Hawthorne as a misogynist who is afraid of women’s sexuality and power and therefore consistently silences them (DeSalvo is a good example of the limitations of this school; see also Fetterley, *Resisting Reader*; Schriber; and Bardes and Gossett). The other group of feminists argues that Hawthorne is, in fact, a feminist who was ahead of his contemporaries in recognizing the confines of women’s lives and used strong sexual women as foils for his weak male protagonists. (Baym is the most prominent among these, see especially “Thwarted Nature,” but see also Waite; Bauer; R. Miles).

Inevitably there is a larger group of both feminists and nonfeminist scholars who stand between these two poles. These critics emphasize the ambivalence in Hawthorne’s representation of women. Fiedler was a forerunner of this view; he emphasized Hawthorne’s ambivalence to his fair ladies. Other critics agree and attribute this ambivalence to Hawthorne’s “divided sexuality” and “inconsistent nature” (Carton), and to his “anxiety about gender and sexuality” (Fleischner, Pearson, Steinback). All these critics see his heroines not as mere types or stereotypes but as complex characters that resist facile categorization. Others historicize Hawthorne’s women by placing them in their cultural context and seeing them in relation to the popular paradigms of their age (“Subversive literature” for D.

Reynolds; sentimental tradition for Egan; sensational fiction for Dalke; and domestic novels for Gallegher).

4. For critics who see Hawthorne within the context of middle class culture, see, for example, Herbert 1993 and Gilmore 1994.

5. Sophia also complained to Annie Fields that "Mr. Hawthorne has been presented with some tickets to go to the White Mountains but declares he will not go, because board will be so high there" (18: 582, note 3).

6. DeSalvo in her chapter on *The Blithedale Romance* rightly points out that Coverdale "dislikes the womanly" in himself (109). But the only explanation she gives for his attitude is his, and his creator's, hatred for women. She does not relate this attitude to the other issues in the novel.

7. Some critics have drawn attention to the sexual connotations of the above description of the purses. See Lefcowits 267-268. The purses as products of Priscilla's labor are, however, ignored by these critics and others.

8. The similarity between Coverdale's spiritualization of Priscilla and Westervelt's is evident in the text. Coverdale himself recognizes it and is uncomfortable with his recognition of the affinity between him and Westervelt, whom he despises.



## Domesticating Women:

The Seamstress, the Factory Girl, and the Nineteenth-Century Woman Author

“America is now wholly given over to a d—d mob of scribbling women, and I should have no chance of success while the public taste is occupied with their trash—and should be ashamed of myself if I did succeed,” Hawthorne complained to his publisher in 1855 (17: 304). Among other things, his complaint shows that he recognized women writers as his main competitors in the literary marketplace. This assessment, of course, was correct. During the mid-nineteenth century, women emerged as the most popular writers in America. Their books sold in unprecedented numbers, went through multiple editions, and earned them good incomes. Women like Susan Warner, Maria Cummins, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Fanny Fern managed to become what Hawthorne was struggling to be, successful professional writers.<sup>1</sup>

Hawthorne’s resentment towards the “ink-stained” women who wrote “trash” and who “prostitute[d]” themselves to the public was entangled with his own unease about authorship as a profession (17: 457). At one point, he explicitly faults the profession, not the women who practiced it: “Women are too good for authorship, and that is the reason it spoils them so,” he wrote (17: 457). But in describing authorship as a practice that “stains,” “spoils,” and “prostitutes,” Hawthorne was invoking a middle-class domestic ideology that posited the ideal female as primarily a woman who did not work for money. The rigid distinction this ideology made between domesticity and moneyed labor was so entrenched that, in Nancy Armstrong’s words, “the figure of the prostitute could be freely invoked to describe any woman who dared to labor for money” (118). Nineteenth-century women authors contended with the gender ideology of their class as they participated in reproducing it. Beginning with the domestic fiction of

writers like Cummins and Fern and concluding with the sentimental naturalism of Rebecca Harding Davis and Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, this chapter investigates how women used domestic ideology to mediate the gender and class anxieties they felt as professional writers. By placing their work in the context of the debates about women and labor as it evolved in the 1850s and 1860s, I show that essential to their project of re-defining themselves as working middle-class women was a rewriting of the working-class woman as she was embodied by both the seamstress and the factory girl.

Critics are divided as to how nineteenth-century popular women novelists viewed authorship. Judith Fetterley maintains that they “seemed to manifest a considerable degree of comfort with the act of writing and with the presentation of themselves as writers and relatively little sense of disjunctiveness between ‘woman’ and ‘pen’” (*Provisions* 5). Coultrap-McQuin concurs, adding that “[by] concentrating on certain aspects of authorship, such as genteel amateurism or its moral goals and noncommercial aims, women could feel they did not compromise their womanhood by being writers, even if their critics said they did” (19). In contrast, Mary Kelley in *Private Woman, Public Stage* highlights in much detail the ambivalence nineteenth-century women writers felt towards professional careers that conflicted with their private lives as domestic women and made them appear as anomalies in their society.

What is indisputable, however, is the fact that women wrote for money and that they were often compelled to do so by economic necessity. In her discussion of the social background of twelve of these writers, Kelley shows that they belonged to “the functional elite” (347), as daughters and wives “of those exercising leadership as merchants, clergymen, lawyers, educators, or journalists” (x, 28-36). In many cases, financial catastrophes impoverished their families and forced them to seek some way of supporting themselves and those dependent on them, whether children, parents, or husbands.<sup>2</sup> Thus for most of them downward mobility was either already a fact of life or an immediate threat. E.D.E.N. Southworth, impoverished after her husband had deserted her and their two children, describes to her publisher how writing delivered her from destitution: “I, who six months before had been poor, ill, forsaken, slandered, killed by sorrow, privation, toil, and friendlessness, found myself born, as it were, into a new life; found independence, sympathy, friendship and honor, and an occupation in which I could delight” (qtd. in Coultrap-McQuin 56). In other instances, the earnings of women authors were what kept them and their families within the bounds of middle-class respectability. Stowe, who wrote to supply the

meager income of her husband, was one such case. This is the way she describes how her career began:

When a new carpet or mattress was going to be needed, or when at the close of the year it began to be evident that my family accounts, like poor Dora's 'wouldn't add up'—then I used to say to my faithful friend and factotum Anne,...'Now if you will keep the babies & attend to the things in the house for one day, I'll write a piece & then we shall be out of the scrape,'—and so I became an authoress. (qtd. in Coultrap-McQuin 83)

Most writers did not feel comfortable acknowledging publicly the economic imperatives that compelled their careers. This was a time when “the lady’s leisure, whether hypothetical or actual, was increasingly treated as the most interesting and significant thing about her” (Douglas 55). Writing may have been “arduous drudgery” as Susan Warner called it (Baym 150), but the majority of women writers preferred to cast themselves as courtly writers or leisured amateurs who wrote as the spirit moved, not for money (Coultrap-McQuin 13-14). Catharine Maria Sedgwick declared that with her “[l]iterary occupation is rather a pastime than a profession”(qtd. in Kelley, *Private Woman* 203). Caroline Zentz downplayed her professionalism by saying she was not writing “a book,” but “only a record of my heart’s life, written at random and carelessly thrown aside” (qtd. in Clinton 47). Others denied their agency, as when Stowe declared that God Himself wrote *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and Mary Abigail Dodge insisted that authorship was a calling, “not a thing to be quietly chosen, as circumstances may determine. It chooses you; you do not choose it”(qtd. in Coultrap-McQuin 110).

Although many of these authors wrote for the same reasons women became factory workers and seamstresses, that is, to support themselves, they neither identified with these workers nor employed them as tropes in their narratives. Instead, they “represented themselves to self and society as nothing more or less than private domestic women, as women of the home (Kelley, *Private Woman* 184) and wrote fiction that posited domesticity as the only state of “true womanhood.”<sup>3</sup> Even when they acknowledged writing for money, they insisted that this work made them better domestic women. Stowe explains to a friend why her career does not undermine her domestic identity, but rather boosts it:

I mean to have money enough to have my house kept in the best manner and yet to have time for reflection and that preparation for the education of my children which every mother needs...[As a result of my income from writing] I am not only more comfortable but my

house affairs and my children are in better keeping than when I was pressed and worried and teased in trying to do more than I could. I have now leisure to think—to plan—contrive—see my friends, make visits, etc. besides superintending all that is done in my house even more minutely than when I was shut up in my nursery.” (qtd. in Coultrap-McQuin 93)

Stowe makes clear that money allows her to be a middle-class woman. It rescues her from a life of drudgery in which she is “pressed, and worried and teased”<sup>4</sup> and gives her the leisure that sets her apart from other working women. She seems to be aware that her gender identity as a good wife and mother depends on her middle-class identity, as a woman of money and leisure. Yet, publicly and in her fiction, Stowe purged economics out of women’s experience by tirelessly celebrating “the surpassing dignity of domestic labor” (qtd. in Rodgers 186).

The fact that Stowe felt the need to assure her friend in a private letter that she is a truly domestic woman reveals the uncomfortable position from which she was writing. Indeed, by prescribing the very domestic ideology they were violating, women writers were being defensive in more than one way. To hide the gap between experience and rhetoric, the latter had to be loud and uncompromising. As Gerda Lerner points out, the discourse of domesticity became particularly aggressive and shrill at the very moment many women left the home to work as mill operatives, seamstresses, and, one might add, authors (26).<sup>5</sup> Their support of domesticity, which puzzles historians like Rodgers (189) and Clinton (47) for its inconsistency with their own experience, was ideological in the sense of being a “performative contradiction” in which what is said is at odds with the situation or act of utterance itself” (Eagleton 24). Domesticity as an ideology allowed women authors to counter the instabilities of class, which their own experience confirmed, by insisting on a fixed meaning of gender as the only category by which to define the self. Over and over again, they assured their readers and themselves that “true womanhood” was not affected by economic vicissitudes. In her study of domestic fiction, Nina Baym describes the overplot of women’s novels as one that tells “the story of a young girl who is deprived of the supports she had rightly or wrongly depended on to sustain her throughout life and is faced with the necessity of winning her own way in the world” (*Woman’s Fiction* 11). But while women authors imagined heroines who were emotionally and economically vulnerable, they insisted that the only way these women could make it in the world was by acquiring or maintaining a set of feminine virtues. Their self-reliance was defined in terms of their gender.

Maria Cummins' best-selling novel *The Lamplighter* (1854) is a typical example of the way domesticity was presented as the only reliable marker of female identity. In this female version of the rags-to-riches story, the heroine, Gertrude, is an orphan whose parentage is unknown. At the beginning of the narrative, she is part of the urban working class, first as a member of Nan Grant's household and then as the protégée of Trueman Flint, the kind lamplighter of the title. But Gertrude eventually joins the household of the wealthy merchant Mr. Graham as a companion to his daughter, Emily. By the end of the novel her real father is discovered to be Philip Amory, Emily's missing lover. Gertrude's discovery of this father, who is now a wealthy man himself, places her solidly in the middle-class and puts her on equal footing with Emily, the mentor-turned-mother.

At one level, the story is not as much about Gertrude's "rise" as about her restoration to her rightful class through the wealthy men she is connected to: Mr. Graham, then her father, and finally her husband. Both father and husband are self-made men, whose rags-to-riches story celebrates the individualism and self-reliance of the American male. Gertrude is allowed to enjoy the fruits of these men's success only after proving her worthiness. The novel is about what Gertrude needs to do to deserve the reward of being Amory's daughter and Willie's wife. In other words, how can she as a woman "make" herself middle class?

Domesticity is the answer. When we first meet Gertrude, she is poor and belligerent, sitting outside "a dark, and unwholesome looking house" (1), almost in the street. She is also idle, for Nan Grant, the bad mother figure, has not taught her anything. Her idleness is contrasted to the labor of two male children: a street-vendor, the son of poor immigrants (31), and the apprenticed Willie, working to support himself and his mother. Gertrude becomes "useful" like them by learning to be domestic. Under the tutelage of Mrs. Sullivan and Emily she tames her unfeminine emotions, mainly her anger and resentment, and acquires the necessary domestic skills like cleaning house and toasting bread. By the end of the novel, the "scantly clad" child, with the "uncombed and unbecoming" hair, with the "sallow complexion" and "unhealthy appearance" described on the first page is transformed into "a lovely and graceful woman, her sweet attractions crowned by so much beauty as almost to place her beyond recognition" (410). The signs of poverty are erased by those of "true womanhood," or, to use Amy Lang's words, "the language of class yields to the language of gender" (130).<sup>6</sup>

Cummins permits her heroine to work for money, when for one brief chapter, Gertrude becomes a teacher. Gertrude's work itself is irrelevant, as

the narrator makes clear: "Of Gertrude's school-duties we shall say nothing, save that she was found...competent to the performance of them, and that she met with those trials and discouragements only to which all teachers are more or less subjected, from the idleness, obstinacy, or stupidity of their pupils" (152-53). The work episode is presented as a test of Gertrude's domesticity, a test she eventually passes. She becomes a teacher only after Mr. Graham refuses to allow her to take care of her sick friend and insists on her accompanying him and Emily to Europe. While her rebellion against her benefactor's wishes is motivated by her sense of duty towards those who need her, for an instant, Gertrude appropriates the language of self-reliance and individualism to justify her actions:

He hinted I should never be able to support myself, and should be driven to a life of dependence; and, since the salary which I receive from Mr. W. is sufficient for all my wants, I am anxious to be so situated,...that he will perceive that my assurance, or boast...that I could earn my own living, was not without foundation. (175)

This is the only time in the novel that the issue of women's economic independence is brought up. And it is clearly presented as a moment of temptation, with Gertrude threatening by her anger to undo all the domestic education she has received.<sup>7</sup> But the dangerous moment passes, and Gertrude shows that her training was effective. After diligently nursing Mrs. Sullivan and Nan Grant, she returns, against the advice of her friends, to Mr. Graham's house to keep Emily's company. This work episode, then, underscores her domestic identity in two ways: she renounces economic autonomy for duty, and she proves that her work experience is irrelevant to her true self. She returns for the same reason she left: her desire to serve others.

*The Lamplighter* is representative of many novels written during this period by middle-class women. These novels may tolerate their heroines working for a living for a short period of time. The impoverished heroine may give piano lessons, teach, color, and illustrate, but only until she is rescued by marriage.<sup>8</sup> While these heroines are not condemned for working outside the home, their work, seen in the context of the plot as a whole, is part of an argument about the insignificance of economics to true female selfhood. In other words, rather than being inconsistent with, and therefore subversive of domestic ideology (as, for instance, Susan Harris maintains), these work episodes uphold domesticity. Women's work is subsumed under their domestic duties as in Warner's novel *Queechy* (1852), in which the impoverished Fleda Ringgan runs the family farm before she is whisked off to England to be married. Domestic necessity (always temporary), not self-

fulfillment, is the accepted motivation. When a woman works for other than domestic reasons, her very being is threatened. In Augusta Evans's *St. Elmo* (1866), young Edna Earl, angry at her family, leaves home to work in a factory in another part of the country, but her train is wrecked, and she is badly injured. When later in life she becomes an ambitious author, she gets a serious heart ailment that threatens her life. Fortunately, she is saved by St. Elmo, who announces after their marriage:

To-day I snap the fetters of your literary bondage. There shall be no more books written! No more study, no more toil, no more anxiety, no more heartaches!...You belong to me now, and I shall take care of the life you have nearly destroyed in your inordinate ambition. (480)

Edna heeds the advice of Sara Josepha Hale's that "true independence in a woman, is to fill the place which her God assigns her; to make her husband's happiness her own" (qtd. in Baym, *Woman's Fiction* 76). Hale delivers this advice via her heroine Marian Gayland in *The Lecturess, or Woman's Sphere* (1839), who after lecturing on women's rights in defiance of her husband's wishes, dies lonely and regretful.

It is worth noting that no matter how needy the heroines of domestic fiction become, they do not work as seamstresses. In Anna Warner's *Dollars and Cents* two sisters in genteel poverty sit up all night sewing shirts, but for their father's use, not for the market; in Caroline Chesebro's novel *Getting Along: A Book of Illustrations* (1855) a female character embroiders to get extra money, but she is a teacher not a seamstress; and in Susan Warner's *The Wide, Wide World* (1851) sewing is a domestic activity the heroine shares with her mother. Sewing, then, is present as a feminine domestic skill, but is absent as work. By barring the seamstress from their novels, women writers were keeping the economic imperatives the figure represented out of their domestic havens.<sup>9</sup>

Thus it is not surprising that when a woman writer decides to break the silence of domestic fiction about these economic imperatives central to middle-class women's lives, she uses a seamstress. Ruth, the heroine of Fanny Fern's *Ruth Hall* (1854), is an impoverished middle-class widow who after the death of her husband and the desertion of her family works as a seamstress to earn money for herself and her children. Scenes in which she looks for work in the city and is humiliated by fashionable ladies and employers owe much to the seamstress literature discussed earlier.<sup>10</sup> Working women are part of the world of this "domestic tale," as it is called in the subtitle. The boarding house where Ruth stays is run by Mrs. Skiddy, who refuses to support the husband who deserted her, and looking out of her window at a row of tenement houses, Ruth sees a washerwoman

and a seamstress. Her sympathies with the latter are evident: "And there...sat a young girl, from dawn till dark, scarcely lifting that pallid face and weary eyes—stitching and thinking, thinking and stitching. God help her!" (90). Foreshadowing the bleak future that awaits this seamstress, a brothel stands not far from where she lives and works.

Although Ruth comes very close to these tenements, and although she sews for awhile, she does not become a seamstress. She is rejected as a "hand" at a sweatshop because the owner does not allow her to bring her child with her (80), and she cannot do "nice needlework" for ladies because women do not like to employ those who "had seen better days" (81). The little "fine work" she manages to secure does not pay her enough: "Only fifty-cents for all this ruffling and hemming...only fifty cents! and I have labored diligently too, every spare moment, for a fortnight; this will never do" (96).<sup>11</sup> It is Ruth's declaration that "this will never do" that distinguishes her from the young seamstress she pities and from the army of resigned seamstresses in antebellum popular literature.

Instead, Ruth becomes an author. She now stays up all night, to plow not her needle but her pen: "Scratch—scratch—scratch, went Ruth's pen; the dim lamp flickering in the night breeze, while the deep breathing of the little sleepers was the watchword, On! to her throbbing brow and weary fingers" (125-26). Writing is hard work that leaves her "faint" and "exhausted" (126). But while this image of her writing recalls the seamstress sewing in her garret, Ruth compares herself to the male typesetters, who are working late at night to support their families:—they worked hard too—they had their sorrows, thinking, long into the still night, as they scattered the types, more of their dependent wives and children, than of the orthography of a word, or the rhetoric of a sentence" (125). This identification with working men and not with the seamstress is necessary if Fern is to break free from the conventional associations of women with economic helplessness and dependency and if she is to re-invent her heroine as a new kind of working woman. At the same time, by describing the typesetters as sorrowful husbands and fathers working hard to support their families, Fern casts men's labor in domestic terms. The second half of the book shows how Ruth triumphs in a way that no seamstress ever did; she becomes a professional writer, earning enough money to restore herself and her daughters to their middle-class status. In the process, Fern celebrates self-reliance, individualism, economic independence, and artistic genius, all of which Hawthorne in *The Scarlet Letter* associated with the seamstress as an artist figure. Here these qualities are associated with the woman writer, a successful working middle-class woman. Fern herself was such a

woman. Like her heroine, she successfully transformed herself from being a dependent seamstress earning 75 cents a week into the highest paid newspaper writer of her day, receiving \$100 per weekly column (Warren, Introduction xviii). By rewriting the heroine of domestic fiction, Fern was literally rewriting herself.

As several critics have noted, Fern was unconventional in using a woman to celebrate such undomestic virtues.<sup>12</sup> Certainly, the ending of the novel, in which Ruth prefers the security of bank stocks to that of marriage sets it apart from most of the domestic fiction of the period. But Fern does not reject domesticity. In fact, although the first half of the book exposes the weaknesses of middle-class domestic ideology, and the second seems to offer an alternative to it, the novel still makes an argument for authorship as a profession consistent with domesticity. Writing is shown to be a suitable profession for a middle-class woman because it is one that reconciles the private sphere with the public. As a writer, Ruth works at home, surrounded by her children. Even when she ventures into the outside world, she shields herself from public exposure by assuming a pseudonym, "Floy." And there is no ambiguity about the conventionality of her motivation: she becomes a writer because she is a good mother, not because she desires self-fulfillment. Her pursuing a career, then, is an extension of her domestic identity. The domesticity of authorship is further emphasized by contrasting it with other occupations like preaching, lecturing, and acting, all of which Ruth dismisses as unsuitable.

The unprecedented advertising campaign and the scandalous controversy that accompanied the publication of *Ruth Hall* surely undermined Fern's argument for authorship as a domestic occupation. Contemporaries ignored Ruth's economic motivation for work and focused instead on her anger. The book was seen as an attack on "true womanhood." Grace Greenwood called the heroine "Ruthless Hall," and the *New York Times* reviewer declared that he "cannot understand how a delicate, suffering woman can hunt down even her persecutors so remorselessly," concluding that he "cannot think so highly of [such] an author's womanly gentleness." This was a book, others exclaimed, "overflowing with an unfemininely bitter wrath and spite," one not "creditable to the female head and heart." Once Fern's real identity was leaked to the public, thus revealing that the writer was actually satirizing members of her own family, all critical restraint was abandoned and reviewers no longer distinguished between heroine and author: Fern was censured for not being "decorous" and "womanly," for her "self-love" and "unfilial" feelings, and for writing an "abominable" and a "monstrous" book. Fern's character assassination reached a

particularly low point when William Moulton, the same man who blew her cover, anonymously published *Life and Beauties of Fanny Fern*, in which he questioned Fern's morals, character, and integrity. And as if to clinch the case against Fern, one woman reviewer revealed to her readers that Fern, whom she knew as a married woman, was a "poor housekeeper."<sup>13</sup>

The critical response to *Ruth Hall* reveals in a dramatic way the vulnerability of women authors. Not only the book, but Fern herself was put on trial, her very womanhood in question. She was expected to display in both her writing and her private life the same domestic virtues expected of the heroines of domestic fiction itself. She, too, must be patient, pious, forgiving, feminine, submissive, and self-abnegating. She wrote as a woman and was judged as one. Years later, Fern admitted that she often cried because critics "reviewed" her instead of her book (128). In insisting on seeing her as primarily a woman, critics were doing what writers of domestic fiction did: making a fixed meaning of gender the only criterion by which a woman is defined. This is why Ruth and Fern's anger was more threatening than their work.

Fern understood the meaning of the attacks on her. In a mock review of her book, she satirizes the gender expectations of her opponents:

We have never seen Fanny Fern, nor do we desire to do so. We imagine her, from her writings, to be a muscular, black-browed, grenadier-looking female, who would be more at home in a boxing gallery than in a parlor—a vociferous, demonstrative, strong-minded horror,—a woman only by virtue of her dress...Thank heaven! there are still women who are women—who know the place Heaven assigned them, and keep it...Thank heaven! there are women writers who do not disturb our complacence or serenity; whose books lull one to sleep like a strain of gentle music; who excite no antagonism, or angry feeling. (qtd. in Warren, *Fanny Fern* 126)

Fern begins by ridiculing her critics for their claim that what a woman writes can undo her very identity. At the same time, by implicitly defining herself as a different kind of woman, as someone who does not keep the place Heaven assigned her, she questions the very notion of a fixed gender identity. The last part of the passage illustrates that Fern's consciousness that being a different kind of woman was connected to being a different kind of author; her challenge to the limitations of the prevalent gender ideology was also a challenge to genre. She saw herself writing against the grain of the prevalent women's fiction of her time, which glossed over the realities of women's lives. Interestingly, Hawthorne was one of the few contemporaries who was not distracted by the scandalous publicity surround-

ing Fern; he admired her book particularly because it was different from other women's fiction: "Here is not merely silk and suavity and surface," he wrote (qtd. in Warren, *Fanny Fern* 122).<sup>14</sup>

One hostile reviewer hoped the author would follow a "more womanly and modest course in her future works" (qtd. in Warren, *Fanny Fern* 125). Fern tried to follow this advice, but found it hard to do so and at the same time to write books that were not "merely silk and suavity and surface." Her difficulties are apparent in the two novels she wrote after *Ruth Hall*. In "Fanny Ford: A Story of Everyday Life," which was serialized in the *Ledger* in 1855, there are no independent women but only vulnerable ones, mainly seamstresses. To support her daughter and granddaughter, Lucy Ford returns to sewing after the death of her husband, who made his money exploiting the seamstresses in his sweatshop. The novel draws the usual picture of suffering seamstresses, dying alone in their garrets because of the greediness of their employers who refuse to pay them living wages. But despite her sympathies, Fern could not do much with the seamstress, whose life is a dead-end street. Therefore, the happy ending of the novel relies instead on the marriage of the granddaughter. In *Rose Clark* (1856), her last novel, the independent Gertrude Dean, who works as a painter after her marriage fails, is a secondary character. The heroine is the long-suffering Rose Clark. Gentle, patient, and dutiful, she believes in her absent husband and devotedly awaits his return. Critics loved the pious Rose, praising her as "real," "attractive," and "beautiful." (qtd. in Warren, *Fanny Fern* 208). Perhaps tired of the constant struggle to reconcile women's work and independence with domesticity, after *Rose Clark* Fern turned away from writing novels and devoted herself to her weekly column in the *Ledger*. In these journalistic pieces, she advocated women's rights, pleaded for seamstresses, defended authorship, and gloried in her financial independence.<sup>15</sup> She also wrote about "unwomanly topics," like crime, prostitution, venereal disease, and prison reform (Warren, Introduction xxxiii). Journalism, a medium that thrives on debate and controversy, was more accommodating of her unpopular views than domestic fiction. Apparently, to re-define womanhood and to celebrate her new identity as a working woman Fern found it necessary to move away from domestic fiction and its rigid ideological and aesthetic demands.

If Fern seemed less threatening in her articles than in her fiction, it was more because of context than content. Domestic fiction may have succeeded to a large extent in bracketing off the debate about women and work, but it did not stop it from taking place elsewhere. Outside domestic fiction, there were voices arguing for expanding women's sphere, and Fern's

was one of them. During the 1860s in particular, female employment became an urgent issue for middle-class women. The expansion of white color labor provided women with more work opportunities. In a magazine article entitled "What Shall They Do?" Phelps encourages her female readers to work, assuring them that "[t]he choice is wide. The perplexity is what not to do" (522). The Civil War ushered in a more positive attitude towards women's work outside the home; with the blessings of the United States government, new occupations, like nursing, opened up and women replaced men at shops, in the fields, and in munitions factories (Clinton 81). An illustration in *Harper's Weekly* July 20, 1861, showing a row of beautiful young women filling cartridges at the United States Arsenal in Watertown, with a soldier standing in the background, captures this approving attitude (O'Sullivan 12). Moreover, during the 1860s American feminists paid more attention than ever before to the issue of female labor. Caroline H. Dall, who wrote *Women's Right to Labor; or, Low Wages and Hard Work* (1860), presented in 1866 a report to the Woman's Rights Convention about the "the broader need for female employment, job training, better working conditions, and equal pay for equal work" (Balser 57). This was the same woman who a few years earlier criticized Fern for her "manly wit and the sarcasm of a soured soul" (qtd. in Warren, *Fanny Fern* 126-7).

The debate about female employment focused on two related issues: the necessity for middle-class women to work for a living and the need to define which occupations were suitable for them. The latter part of the debate, which was in response to the availability of more opportunities for women, revealed an anxiety that the work a woman does can actually change her. This anxiety belied the faith in fixed and stable class and gender identities. Distinguishing middle-class women's work from that of others, like seamstresses and factory workers, became at this point more important than any other time before.

One woman who contributed significantly to the two aspects of the debate was Virginia Penny. She made a career writing about what was kept out of domestic fiction, that is, women's work. Her *Employment of Women* (1863) was an encyclopedic compendium consisting of more than five hundred essays about what American women did, or may do, for a living. Dedicated to "worthy and industrious women in the United States, striving to earn a livelihood," the book was intended as "a business manual" (*How* vi). This intention was made clearer when the second edition appeared seven years later under the enticing title *How Women Make Money, Married or Single*.<sup>16</sup> Penny believed that in the clatter about their social,

moral, mental, and religious needs, women's "working, every-day reality" was ignored (*How* v). Her work was meant to rectify this imbalance.

Penny explained why she felt American women needed her kind of book in a series of essays entitled *Think and Act: A Series of Articles Pertaining to Men and Women, Work and Wages* (1869). Here she draws a picture of a world in crisis. According to her, the "financial revulsion of 1857" (83) and recent inventions such as the sewing machine have thrown many women out of employment (19). The Civil War made things worse by creating a new army of women who needed to work to support themselves and their families: "At no time in our country's history," Penny wrote, "have so many women been thrown upon their own exertions" (*How* v).

What alarmed Penny most was the identity of this new work-force. These were genteel young women "who were tenderly reared, and possessed all the comforts, and even luxuries of life" (*Think* 20). In an essay ominously titled "Changes of Fortune," she explained why American women in particular needed to be better prepared for the future:

Those that have been tenderly and delicately cherished, are more frequently thrown upon their own resources for a livelihood, in new, than in some of the older countries, where property is entailed. So it is desirable that the people of the United States be prepared for emergencies. It is not an unusual sight to witness the daughter of affluence to-day, penniless to-morrow. And between the extremes of fortune we see almost every day some fluctuation. A lady should, therefore, be educated to adorn the highest ranks of society, or, if necessary, earn a livelihood by her acquirements. (*Think* 352)

By not being prepared for the reversal of fortunes awaiting them, and by growing up believing labor is a disgrace, middle-class women were likened to "children groping in the dark, bewildered and helpless" (*Think* 80, 163). Penny was speaking to and about educated and economically insecure women like herself. While she was self-supporting for a while as a teacher, she had at some point to sell her library, the family jeweled heirlooms, and the printing plates of her first book to make ends meet.

The unstable world Penny experienced and delineated for her readers is a far cry from the domestic haven that was always ready to shelter the heroines of domestic fiction. Penny, who remained single, did not believe that such a haven existed for all women. Domesticity, which designates men as the providers, is a "pretty system," she tells one interlocutor, but one not realized in reality (*Think* 65). To the claim that "Woman's sphere is at home," she responds:

We know home is the sphere for some women. Is it for all? Have all homes?...The sphere of married women is mostly confined to home; but for the many thousands of females that have no home ties and home duties, their sphere of action necessarily lies outside the home. We cannot believe that Providence intended them for drones in society; that they are to exist as mummies. (*Think* 298)

She had harsh words particularly for women who could not sympathize with those who needed to work for a living and treated them as if “they were transgressing the limit of ‘woman’s sphere’” (*Think* 190). Sometimes she sounded compromising, attempting to reconcile domesticity with working outside the home. Business life, she claimed, can make a woman a better wife and mother for it will strengthen her mind and make her more independent (*Think* 120).<sup>17</sup> But more often she rejected domesticity in no uncertain terms: to think a woman’s place is in the kitchen, “to sweep, dust, scour, iron, and all the thousand and one menial employments connected with housekeeping,” is to make her “a slave for her husband and children” (*Think* 296). Instead of domestic virtues like subservience and dependence, she promoted economic self-reliance as the one virtue American women needed for survival (*Think* 80, 222, 265, 318).

Unlike Stowe, who celebrated the dignity of “domestic” labor, Penny wrote of the “dignity of labor.” She assured her readers that “[a]ll occupations are of value” (*Think* 3) and that “[n]o reproach should be cast upon any honest employment. The dignity and value of labor in the most menial occupation is superior to idleness or dependence upon others for the requirements of life” (*How* ix). With such rhetoric, she was countering not only the prejudice against labor of the well-to-do, but also the “false pride” of needy middle-class women, who believe “that not to work makes a lady” (*Think* 190, 101).

Yet, when Penny describes specific occupations, it is clear that the domestic ideology she rejects elsewhere is still dictating her advice. Penny leaves no doubt that her main aim in *How Women Make Money* is to offer her readers advice about respectable occupations, that is, occupations suited to middle-class women who need to work (20, 24; *Think* 28, 27). This aim makes the book prescriptive rather than simply descriptive, a conduct book for the working woman. Broadly speaking, “respectable” occupations, in Penny’s view, are meant to be fulfilling materially and spiritually and are not degrading to woman’s taste and talents. More specifically, Penny insists on drawing rigid gender and class distinctions to differentiate “ladies” work from men’s occupations and from the labor of working-class women and immigrants—two groups that often overlap.

According to Penny's work taxonomy, women's "mildness," "amiability," "modesty," "delicacy," "refinement," "patience," "taste," and "attention to detail" qualify them to be authors, doctors, agriculturists, librarians, copperplate engravers, and florists (24-5). Their education and refinement make them suitable as readers for the working classes (33), and as matrons in charitable institutions (400), where they can exert their influence. They can work as shopgirls because ladies need ladies to serve them (140). The professions deemed unsuitable for women include ink-making, because it is too dirty (373); lawyering, because "the noisy scenes...in a court room are scarcely compatible with the reserve, quietude, and gentleness that characterize a woman of refinement" (17); and acting because of the "want of home influences" (47). Dentistry, painting, and restaurant work are too demanding to be suitable for women's delicate constitution (79, 14, 167). Menial labor is excluded altogether; as she explains elsewhere, it should be left to the "hardy and ignorant" (*Think* 54), to foreigners with "more bodily strength" (*Think* 23).<sup>18</sup>

Penny's classification does not challenge the traditional gender categories of feminine and masculine but rather reaffirms sexual difference. Men, she advises, should find work as traders, speculators, mechanics, and manufacturers and should avoid "feminine occupations" (*How* 105). She was dismayed that men are engaged in occupations

beneath their dignity as men, and unworthy their strength. They are pursuits that should be in the hands of women. A strong, healthy man behind the counter of a fancy store, in a millinery establishment, on his knees ditting ladies'shoes, at hotels laying the plates and napkins of a dinner table, is as much out of place, as a woman chopping wood, carrying in coal, or sweeping the streets. (*Think* 25)

Not only were men taking over women's occupations, but they were in doing so "becoming effeminate" (*Think* 80). Clearly, Penny believes that the kind of labor one performs affects his, and by extension her, gender identity in fundamental ways. The insistence, then, on naturalizing gender hints at a belief in its fluidity as a category of difference.

Sexual difference alone is not the only principle of classification Penny uses. She is just as anxious to distinguish work suitable for American women from that suitable for immigrants, against whom she directs both her nativist and class prejudices. "Foreigners" are described as "coarse," "ignorant," "insolent," and "rude" (133). They make the army of paupers in the cities, for whom Penny recommends the "vagrant act" (114). The Irish are "shiftless," and bring with them poverty and disease; the Germans underwork Americans in their prices (*Think* 34, 140), and the Jews are

“extortionists” and “lazy,” preferring “to live off the profits of their seamstresses, and other work-people, to laboring with their own hands” (*How* 87). Penny goes so far as to blame immigrants for the Civil War: “The vast influx of those who neither know nor care anything about our institutions, but have the privileges of freemen and native born, have done much to bring about the lamentable war lately ended” (*How* 136).

In light of this characterization of immigrant populations, Penny’s observations as to which jobs have American women and which have immigrants are by no means innocent. The most appealing occupations are those that employ only American women. Penny, for instance, is happy that “all the young ladies in the Independent office were American, and were certainly very pretty and lady-like” (372).<sup>19</sup> Sometimes she expresses regret that jobs suited to women, such as the cultivation of flowers and fruits, are taken over by “ignorant foreigners” (142). But more often the fact that certain work is done by immigrants disqualifies it as an option for American women.<sup>20</sup> Domestic labor, for example, is not for American girls but for “uneducated female emigrants” (*Think* 136), such as those naive Irish girls who come to this country thinking all people are equal and as a result do not behave in a way suited to their grade in society (403).

Penny, to be sure, eschews the republican rhetoric of democracy and equality. The fact that “Irish girls” presume they are equal at a time when “educated ladies” are becoming destitute make it very important for someone like Penny to draw distinctions and to insist on differences. The instabilities of class that middle-class women experienced necessitated that class lines be clearly drawn, especially at a time when the meaning of gender is being revised. So in Penny’s world, all women are not equal: Americans differ from “foreigners,” and middle-class women from working-class women. Not that Penny did not recognize similarities among women that cut across class lines. Her demand for “properly remunerated labor” responds to the conditions not only of educated women, but also of “women in humbler walks of life,” in whose case “[c]harity has been substituted for justice, alms for employment” (*Think* 136-137).

This inclusive gesture, however, is rare. In talking about working-class women Penny does not sustain the economic discourse for long and shifts instead to a moral one. According to the latter, working-class women lack guidance and proper influences. In “Children of the Working Classes,” Penny regrets that “[o]ne of the saddest features in the history of the majority of working girls is, that they have no one to improve their morals and manners, to form good habits, and cultivate a pure taste and conversation—in short, no one to set them a good example, and exert a good influ-

ence" (*Think* 144). Such good influence would save them from many evils and vices that plague their class (128), such as too much fondness for dress, which is "the bane of many working girls" (140). The issue of the morality of working-class women, which plagued the reformer's defense of factory girls, re-emerges anew as part of a class discourse that seeks to consolidate a hierarchical relation between two groups of women, positing one as the moral guides of their unfortunate sisters. As I will show later in this chapter, middle-class women novelists found this discourse particularly useful for fashioning a new subject matter and a new identity.

Penny's attitude to working-class women colors the way she deals with the most visible of their representatives: the seamstress and the factory girl. She devotes several entries to talking about sewing in various forms, but she has a contradictory attitude towards it as a profession for women. On the one hand, she chastises men who encroach on such a traditional female occupation: "Shame, I say, on the man seen at a sewing machine, or with a needle in hand! Surely the muscles and bones and sinews of men were never given for such a purpose" (408). On the other hand, she shows at great length what a poor profession it is on account of its long hours, low wages, and damaging effects on a woman's body: "The habits of the sempstress are indicated by the neck suddenly bending forward, and the arms being, even in walking, considerably bent forward, or folded more or less upward from the elbows" (310).

While in other contexts such details were meant to excite sympathy for seamstresses, here they function to warn off women from an unsuitable occupation. As I showed at the end of my second chapter, for many middle-class women the seamstress became a cautionary tale. Those fighting for women's rights pointed to her as an embodiment of what is wrong with womanhood in general; others emphasized their difference from her, showing that the seamstress was, in her helplessness and inefficiency, a woman unlike them. Penny's entries on sewing emphasize the seamstress's difference by defining her as a working-class woman, inefficient and unskilled (and therefore underpaid) (*Think* 96). Because sewing is a profession that does not require any special training—only good eyesight and average strength (taste is a bonus)—it attracts German, Irish, and Jewish women (*How* 112). If some "refined" and "cultivated" women still work as seamstresses, they do so next to "the most ignorant and stupid specimens of humanity," in the words of one employer (*Think* 53). Penny takes the opportunity to inform her readers that many seamstresses in Europe are known to be criminals and prostitutes (*How* 125). She leaves no doubt as to the seamstresses' class affiliations when she refers to them as "hands," the word employers used to describe the industrial working class.

Penny's attitude to the seamstress is reflected in the fiction of the 1860s, where the seamstress figures in an argument about the necessity of training women for other occupations. While feminists were the first to reject the seamstress as a female paradigm, they were not the only ones to do so. Writers antagonistic to women's rights took a similar stand. Marie Louise Hankins is one such writer. She was a prolific author and journalist who was staunchly against all the liberal causes of her day, particularly abolition and suffrage.<sup>21</sup> She was also the owner and editor of the monthly "New York Literary Gazette," and the editor of "The Family Newspaper," which she advertises as the "FIRST and only SUCCESSFUL Paper EVER published by a LADY. It always aims to help the deserving, when they try to help themselves, and it has no sympathy with 'strong-minded' women. It never meddles with Politics nor the Sectarian views of any one, but constantly strives to give good Moral Entertainment for both rich and poor" (Hankins 89-92).

One of her novels that attempts to give such "moral entertainment" is *Reality: or, A History of Human Life* (1858). Despite the ambiguous, all-inclusive title, the picture on the title page promises a traditional story about the suffering of a lonely and overworked seamstress.<sup>22</sup> It shows an emaciated woman sewing in her bedroom late into the night. The broom lying on the floor is a reminder of the woman's domesticity, and the sketch's caption, which reads "In this wild world, the fondest and the best/Are the most tried, most troubled, and distressed," establishes the novel's stance as that of sympathy and respect for the downtrodden. Indeed, the novel begins with a discourse on the hard life of the poor in the city. The examples the narrator gives of victims of urban poverty are all of women, seamstresses in particular, who stand for all "female operatives." The picture drawn is one of unmitigated misery and relentless suffering that destroy body and soul and lead to an early grave (6-7).

The stock lamentation that opens the novel is followed by the life-story of one particular seamstress. Lying on her deathbed, she tells the narrator of her downward mobility. After the financial failure of her wealthy father and the moral failure of her alcoholic and gambling husband, she becomes a seamstress in some clothing establishment. The story of her exploitation is cast as a story of seduction. Her resistance to her employer's sexual advances leads her into a series of trials, in which she is continuously swindled by owners of manufacturing establishments, by Jews, and by insolent clerks. Her narrative ends with her death from starvation and disease.

The seduction narrative is prominent. Male sexual desire, not economic desire, is offered as the motivating force which leads to the seamstress's victimization. This sexualization of economic relationships does not dismiss the economic exploitation of women but emphasizes its gendered nature. This is apparent when the seamstress laments the helplessness of her situation, how as a woman she has but few opportunities and how she is always paid less than a man for the same kind of work. She concludes by asking: "Is there nothing but a needle for me to earn my own support with?" (61).

The narrator has the answer. In response to the seamstress's question, she writes:

There are many ways for a woman to provide for her wants with which the needle has no connection. But she [the seamstress] did not understand all the arts of living. She could not entertain notions beyond the fixed custom of her personal experience. In her opinion, it was proper only for a woman to engage in such occupations as pertain to domestic seclusion. (61-2)

She assures her readers that there are "genteel and remunerative" positions that a respectable woman can get, but she must know how to get them. The narrator herself is proof that there are other opportunities for women besides seamstressing. As a writer and editor of a successful paper, she is a living example of what a woman can do and thus stands in contrast to the helpless woman whose story she relates. As in the case of Fanny Fern, rewriting the seamstress was a rewriting of the self. The narrator emphasizes that her kind of work helps create opportunities for other women, as her announcements at the end of her novel show. She advertises for female agents to sell her magazine, newspaper, and books, assuring them that the job is perfect for those respectable and industrious women who would like to earn more than the other occupations pay: "Working people, whose necessities compel them to earn their own living, cannot find any genteel and respectable employment that will honestly yield so much profit as canvassing for our own publications" (352). Far from being offered as a representative of all working women, the seamstress is an example of the inefficient woman worker limited as much by others' perception of her as by her own perception of herself. By the end of the novel, it becomes clear that the sketch on the title page is more a critique of the seamstress, and the gender ideology she represents, than a sympathetic embrace of the poor and the helpless. This critique, despite the sympathy (or rather because of it) is expressed as an assertion of difference and opposition, not identification,

between the middle-class woman and the seamstress, who significantly remains nameless in this narrative.

Another example of the fictional rewriting of the seamstress is “Needle and Garden,” a novel which was serialized anonymously in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1865.<sup>23</sup> Here the working-class narrator tells the story of her struggles to be something other than a seamstress. Lizzie learned needle work from her mother, who always believed in the “supremacy of the needle,” that

the needle was a woman's only sure dependence against all the vicissitudes of life. She believed, in a general way, that a good needle-woman would never come to want. The ideal of diversifying employment for the sex had never crossed her mind; the vocation of woman was to sew. (93)

Through her mother, and from her own experience, Lizzie learns of the seamstress's low wages, long hours, hard labor, and humiliation (91). The novel doles out the usual stories of suffering seamstresses. When the sewing machine is invented, Lizzie first greets it with an optimism similar to that expressed by the Una's story, *Stray Leaves from a Seamstress Journal*. But the sewing machine only worsens things for her, by reducing wages, making employers more exacting, and moving work from home to factory. Even the mother's faith in the needle flounders, and she begins to think that it is necessary for women to train for other occupations (176).

This is the novel's main argument, and it is expressed principally through Effie Logan, daughter of a wealthy merchant. Effie puts her ideas into practice by working in a sewing factory, so she can support herself in case of a future reversal of fortune (322). She is contrasted with the Hawley sisters who, following the impoverishment of their father, struggle to keep up a facade that nothing has changed: “they were brought up to consider work, for a lady, disgraceful. Women might work, but not ladies; or when the latter undertook it, they ceased to be such, and certainly so, if working for a living” (327).

While the novel argues in favor of expanding women's occupations and draws attention to the discrimination against women in terms of wages, it does not espouse a feminist agenda. Lizzie distances herself from the suffragists by assuring the reader that she has no interest in voting or in running for office. In fact, she is worried that women's involvement in politics would “unsex” them (619). Neither had she “ambition to parade in Bloomer costume,” nor to “figure[d] as the chairman or secretary of a woman's convention” (620). She also makes clear that her desire to be something other than a seamstress is not motivated by “discontentment,” “ambition,” or desire for self-fulfillment. She has no class aspirations

because her mother taught her “not only contentment, but thankfulness for my condition” (325) and “conformity to our position in life” (38). Lizzie’s disclaimers assure the reader that her desire to expand women’s occupations does not challenge gender and class hierarchies.

Eventually, Lizzie the seamstress succeeds in transforming herself into Lizzie the “strawberry girl.” In great detail more suitable to a “how to” manual than to a story, she describes her planting strawberries in the patch of land around the house and selling them in the market. This, she insists, is independent, fulfilling work, even an art. With much self-admiration, she declares:

Here was I—a sewing girl—breaking through the ordinary routine of female occupations, and standing on the threshold of an enterprise considered by the world unsuited to my sex, unfeminine because uniformly undertaken by men, hazardous because untried by women, but practically within the power of all having taste and courage to venture upon it. (187)

Her success proves that “it was possible for a woman, when favorably situated, to become a successful fruit-grower, and that a new door could be opened through which she might be emancipated from perpetual bondage to the needle, without violating the conventional properties of the sex” (191). At the end Lizzie is rewarded by marrying the owner of the sewing factory where she once worked, who admires her industriousness and initiative. Although this ending recalls the domestic fiction of the 1850s, there are important differences. The heroine’s work is now one of her attractions. It is also central to her identity. Up to the last page of the novel, Lizzie is identified by what she did for a living.<sup>24</sup>

While the novel identifies its heroine as either “seamstress” or “strawberry girl,” it is worth noting that Lizzie spends most of the first half of the novel in a factory. Her desire to buy a sewing machine that would enable her to work at home remains unfulfilled. By moving from home to factory and by working on machines instead of with needles, seamstresses become industrial workers, “hands,” as Penny described them. This was another reason to distance middle-class women from the seamstress. The 1860s in particular were not a good time for respectable American women to enter factories, which have been gradually darkening in the collective consciousness of nineteenth-century America. Thus although Lizzie praises the factory as a “refuge” and a “blessing” for women, providing them constant employment at living wages (615), she is clearly on the defensive. Her defensiveness is apparent when she reminds the reader of the “thrift,...intelligence,...neatness, even...personal loveliness,” of the Lowell factory girls of

earlier decades, and asks that today's factory workers be seen in a similar light:

Both in the sewing-school and in the factory, there were girls who were patterns of all that is modest, beautiful, and womanly...No Lowell factory could turn out a larger or more interesting army of young and virtuous girls than some to the establishments here, in which the sewing-machine is driven by steam. (616)

But Lizzie never identifies herself as a factory worker, and her re-invention of herself involves her leaving the sewing factory for the strawberry garden.

Penny too invokes the Lowell factory girls in her discussion of factory labor. "No class of New England workpeople," she declared, "surpassed, or, perhaps, equaled them, in intelligence, morality, and education" (*Think* 131). In her entry on "Factory Operatives" in *How Women Make Money* she sounds as if she was writing one of pro-manufacture promotional brochures. Factory operatives are described as temporary workers, skillful and active, well supplied with wholesome food and comfortable homes. They are healthy and young (180). In cotton manufacture most of them are American, living in regulated boarding houses and attending churches, lectures, and evening schools (173). One manufacturer assures her that "the girls are generally happy and contented" (176).<sup>25</sup>

But the glowing employers' accounts which Penny quotes are punctuated by a sense of regret that things are not the same as they used to be. So while "[i]n Lowell, a few years back, nearly all the operatives were young American girls from the country" with "noble motives," now "Irish women, by working for less wages, have pushed American women out of factories" (*How* 181). Historians confirm that by 1852, half of all New England factory workers were foreign-born (Ware 234-35), the majority of them Irish (Kessler-Harris 64; Foner, *Women* 83-84). These workers became the focus of anti-immigrant sentiment—sentiment evident in the negative descriptions of "foreign" factory workers which pepper Penny's work: they are "below mediocrity" (183); "low on the scale of intelligence" (173); and "dirty and sad enough" (190). As factory labor becomes less and less an "American" occupation, the healthy and independent "mill girls" of yesterday gradually shrivel into the "hands" of today (120, 172, 174).

During the 1860s the "mill girls" of Lowell recede into the background as part of a past golden age that exists no more. A different image of the factory girl replaces them in the public imagination, one that reflected the shifting attitude towards factories. If one is to locate a specific moment that symbolically represents this shift, it has to be January 11, 1860, the day the Pemberton Mill collapsed in Lawrence, Massachusetts.

The five-story edifice, built in 1853 by the Essex company, was considered the pride of Lawrence and the finest mill in New England (Cole 48). The collapse trapped seven hundred and fifty workers, the majority of whom were Irish immigrant women and girls (A. Cameron 19). While rescuers were trying to extricate those caught under beams, crumbled walls, and shattered machinery, a fire broke out. Horrified eyewitnesses watched helplessly as the trapped workers waited for the fire to engulf them. Eighty-eight died and hundreds were injured (Cole 53).

This incident shocked the nation and occupied the popular press for many months. Reporters, relief workers, worried relatives, and thrill seekers flocked to Lawrence. People everywhere talked about the “fall” (Cole 53). It was called “the most terrible catastrophe on record” (“Horrible Calamity”), a disaster “unparalleled in our history” (“The Disaster”). Newspaper headlines in the days after screamed about the “horrible calamity,” in which two hundred were killed, and a hundred burned to death. Their pages were filled with eyewitness accounts of dramatic rescues and miraculous escapes. In graphic detail reporters described the workers’ agony before death: “Many of the victims died in excruciating torture, their bodies being shockingly mangled, and some were literally roasted alive,” one reporter wrote (“The Lawrence Calamity”). Harper’s described a girl who had her left arm torn from its socket, one whose ankle was burnt to a crisp, and another whose head was “jammed between two heavy beams, and pressed so that it was not thicker than the thickness of a hand” (“The Disaster”). The nation read about what two thousand eye-witnesses saw: women hurling themselves out of windows, men slitting their own throats, and cart loads of “baked and blackened forms” (“The Lawrence Tragedy”). They heard the cries of the victims, as when the *New York Times* told them how a woman “shrieked out piteously that the fire was burning her hair, but the flames soon after silenced her” (“The Lawrence Tragedy”).

Along with these stories of suffering and anguish, there were also headlines of “female heroism”: of victims helping extricate each other, of one trapped woman, soon to die, urging rescuers to attend to a man suffering more than her, of another whose courageous initiative spurred on a reluctant crowd of men and helped free three women from under a collapsed beam (“The Disaster”). An illustration with the caption “Women’s Heroism” appeared in *Frank Leslie Illustrated Newspaper* in Jan. 20, 1860, showing at the center a defiant young woman holding a rope on the steps of the collapsed mill about to go into the fire to rescue others, while a fire-fighter and a group of men are trying to hold her back (A. Cameron 24). According to one report, “Some were heroic even in death, exhibiting the

most unflinching courage while surgical operations of the most painful nature were performed...Others...were resigned, and displayed a repose and valor almost sublime" ("Additional").

The sympathy for the victims, the majority of whom were immigrants, was unconditional. An eyewitness told a newspaper reporter that "he never saw such an extraordinary exhibition of humanity as was elicited from many hardened characters who were present. Known rowdies and scoundrels, at other times, were here working with all their might; with tears of sympathy rolling down their cheeks" ("Additional"). Men who a few years ago may have thrown stones at defenseless Irish immigrants during the Know-Nothing riot were now putting their own lives in danger to rescue others (Cole 47). Although one report mentions that a woman visiting the hospital exclaimed upon seeing a suffering man "what a pity he is an American" ("The Coroner"), such incidents of "selfishness" were rare. The city came together: thousands participated in the rescue, shops were open all night to provide needed supplies, and citizens made their homes into make-shift hospitals.

Sympathy for the workers fueled anger towards those responsible: "Society is unanimous in its verdict on the terrible disaster at Lawrence," said a *Harper's Weekly* editorial, "and every one denounces the builder and proprietors of the Pemberton Mills." If the evidence is confirmed, it continued, "a responsibility at which all good men will shudder weighs on the proprietors of those mills; they are, in fact, before God and man, guilty of the deaths of some two hundred innocent creatures" ("The Slaughter"). A *New York Times* editorial declared the disaster, not an act of Providence but "a reckless sacrifice of life upon the altar of a mean and criminal cupidity" ("The Lawrence Tragedy"). It called for laws that ensure the safety of public buildings and an investigation of the cause of the fall. Such an investigation did take place, and it put on trial not only the proprietors and architects of the Pemberton, but also the factory system itself. According to one historian of the incident, "Like a national pageant, the 'Fall of the Pemberton'dramatized the oppression of factory operatives, forcefully and graphically undermining the industrial bon mots of mill masters in general and of Lawrence's lords in particular" (A. Cameron 19). A poem in *Vanity Fair* entitled "Pemberton Mills" draws a sympathetic picture of the workers just before the building collapsed:

Father and son, and daughter and wife,  
A microcosm of labor and life,  
All day long, from the rise of sun,  
Honestly work till the day is done;

Nimble fingers and busy hands,  
Weaving and working for all the land.

The poem ends with the angry curse of mothers and daughters who lost loved ones:

A curse on ye, ye Millionaires  
Who sit at home in your easy chairs,  
And crack your nuts and sip your wine  
While I wail over this son of mine!

Lawrence emerged from its ruins as a dark model of the industrial city, a testimony to the destructiveness and violence of industrialization. The dramatic cover of *Harper's Weekly* eleven days after the mill collapsed captured the new image of factories: at the center lay the charred ruins, still on fire, while huge clouds of smoke coiled up in the sky; in the foreground, bodies of women were being carried out by rescuers. There is no record of other American mills falling in later years, yet this image of destruction will capture the imagination for many years to come. The fall of the Pemberton became symptomatic of what was wrong with manufacture as a system. This "corrupt system" was attacked three years later in a pamphlet entitled *Some of the Usages and Abuses in the Management of Our Manufacturing Corporations* (1863). According to the author, J. C. Ayer, the current "vicious system" of manufacture bears no resemblance to the golden past, when factories benefited both owners and workers. Now, greedy managers enrich themselves at the expense of the workers (9). He singles out for censure one manager who "was a party to the construction of the Pemberton Mills, which fell and crushed many of our citizens" (11).

In addition to connecting factories with greed, destruction, and death, the fall of the Pemberton mill showed immigrant working women in a new light, as victims of violence and objects of pity and compassion. Not all working-class women were fit for receiving such sentiments. Those who demanded higher wages, participated in strikes, and staged public parades still evoked the same hostile feelings they did in earlier decades. When the women shoebinders of Lynn, Massachusetts went on strike three months after the Pemberton incident, some editorials attacked them for being corrupted by the women's rights movement. A reporter for the *New York Herald* wrote: "They assail the bosses in a style which reminds one of the amiable females who participated in the first French Revolution"(qtd. in Foner, *Women* 93). And a group of manufacturers demanded from one of the pastors that he deliver a sermon criticizing the women strikers for defying

St. Paul's injunction that women should be passive and silent (Foner, *Women* 96).

Passive and silent women, embodiments of the Christian ideal that dominated domestic fiction, appear now in fiction by women as factory workers who are mutilated by machines. Factories are depicted as violent places, physically and morally dangerous, and women are shown to be their main victims. The picture on the cover of Mary (Andrews) Denison's *The Mill Agent* (1863) shows a four-story edifice standing alone in an arid area, with only one crooked tree in sight. Thick black smoke curls out of two tall chimneys and darkens the sky and half of the mill itself. The mill is the most prominent institution in Clifton Lock, a New England town described as a godless "dark place" (41) that, along with the mill, boasts a tavern and a poorhouse. The novel is a conversion narrative that tells the story of how, at the hands of the saint-like new mill agent Guilford Coit, Clifton Locks becomes a model Christian city.

The central event that brings about the conversion of the most skeptical citizens is that in which Hagar, a sixteen year old mill worker, is "drawn under the shaft" and is cut down by the machine on which she works. The accident is not described in much detail, but is nevertheless anticipated as the only thing expected of the "cruel machinery" (336). Hagar's injuries and protracted physical pain take up the rest of the novel, turning her into a Christ figure whose suffering redeems the whole community. At the end of the narrative the mill is still standing, but it is now enclosed by five churches.

There were those who still defended the factories as places particularly suited for women. But even such defenses show the shifting attitude to factories and to women who work in them. In Charlotte S. Hilbourne's *Effie and I: or, Seven Years in a Cotton Mill. A Story of the Spindle City* (1863), Lowell is called by detractors the "doomed city of Sodom" (3); its factories are "living tombs" and "slave-palaces," where "the pale, shrinking, over-tasked thousands, toiling on, year after year, for the mere pittance to prolong a miserable existence...to fill the coffers of the wealthy capitalists, and rear marble palaces for their aristocratic sons and daughters" (5). The narrator acknowledges that "Lowell is not a paradise," but goes on to vindicate it as "an asylum for the oppressed, a home for the homeless, and broad highway leading to wealth and honor." The "oppressed" and the "homeless" are all women like her, for whom cotton mills become "home factories" that shelter and rehabilitate (8-9). Indeed, the factories are presented as the only stable institutions women can rely on. The narrator's own experience and that of other workers prove over and over again that family, marriage,

friendship, and class are all unreliable, while the factory is always there. Moreover, the factories are shown to be safe despite the dangerous machinery. When the heroine first enters the mill, she feels her life is in danger:

a fearful whiz and stunning blow from its neglected and threadless mate, would send me reeling and fainting to my seat, with a fearful contusion upon my brow or temples, bursting with pain and indignation at the neglect which had wrought upon me so much trouble and toil. In every way, I seemed in momentary peril of my limbs or life. If I sought refuge from the flying shuttles on the other side, then the swift revolving of the whizzing clogs and heavy belts would draw, like the treacherous whirlpool, my garments into their fearful embrace. Or the belts would break loose from the heavy drums, and, like the fiery fangs of the flying dragon, clutch me fearfully in their angry grasp. (48-49)

But she survives because she learns “the art not only of keeping my threads and spirits up, but of dodging a flying shuttle, and the treacherous fangs of the sweeping dragon” (49). While deaths from all conceivable causes are described on almost every page, none is related to factory work. In fact, it seems that the heroine outlives the rest of her family because she is the only one among them working in a factory.

The surviving heroine of *Effie and I* is the exception. The working-class woman as the sentimental victim of violence became a literary paradigm long after the Pemberton mill collapse disappeared from newspaper headlines. A young generation of women writers discovered in this working-class woman a new heroine for a different kind of novel. One of these writers was Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, who was fourteen years old when the terrible news from Lawrence reached her in Andover. They left a deep impression, as she makes clear in her autobiography: “One January evening, we were forced to think about the mills with the attending horror that no one living in that time when the tragedy happened will forget” (*Chapters from a Life* 89). Unlike her brother, the young Elizabeth was not allowed to visit Lawrence and see the accident first hand. But years later she would conduct her own investigation and publish it in *The Atlantic Monthly* in 1868 as a story entitled “The Tenth of January.”

This is the story of Asenath Martyn, who works in the Pemberton as a weaver to support herself and her father. She is engaged to one of her fellow workers, Richard Cross, who treats her with much kindness. In many ways, she embodies the virtues of traditional domestic heroines: she keeps the house clean and her father decently clothed, makes neck ties for Dick, and dreams of becoming a good wife. Asenath, however, is not the usual

kind of sentimental heroine, and she bears the marks of her difference on her body: she is a hunchback and has a scar across her face. While the cause of her first deformity is not known, an abusive and drunkard mother has inflicted the second. Asenath also differs from the traditional sentimental heroine in that she refuses to sacrifice herself for others. When she accidentally finds out that her fiancé has fallen in love with another worker, the pretty Del Ivory, she does not give up the man she loves. Her reluctance to sacrifice herself sets her apart, as Phelps explains:

I am quite aware that, according to all romantic precedents, this conduct was preposterous in Asenath. Floracita, in the novel, never so far forgets the whole duty of a heroine as to struggle, waver, doubt, delay. It is proud and proper to free the young fellow; proudly and properly she frees him; "suffers in silence"—till she marries another man...[and] overwhelms the reflective reader with a sense of poetic justice and the eternal fitness of things. (328-29)

"Asenath was no heroine," Phelps declares, and she herself was "not writing a novel," but was rather the "biographer of this simple factory girl" (329). For Phelps a new subject matter demands a new heroine and a new aesthetic.

Then the mill collapses. Phelps describes the incident from Asenath's point of view, and gives much detail of the suffering and agony of those trapped under the rubble. These details, some of which reproduce the journalistic accounts, excite the reader's sympathy and compassion: dying girls call for their lovers, a mother prays for her baby, a man kills himself, and Asenath loses the finger "which held Dick's little engagement ring" (343). Asenath not only suffers in silence, but also sacrifices her love and life for others. Unlike the hardly injured but hysterical Del, she resigns herself to her fate: "Sene shut her lips and folded her bleeding hands together and uttered no cry" (345). She proves her courage when she urges her rival to save herself and go with the rescuers who had time only for one of them: "The latent heroism in her awoke. All her thoughts grew clear and bright...This, then, was the way. It was better so. God had provided himself a lamb for the burnt-offering" (348).

Asenath sacrifices herself so Del can be saved to become Cross's wife. In thus rejecting her earlier selfishness, she proves herself a true heroine, that is, a Christian one, motivated not by pride, but by goodness. In this respect, she is not different from the submissive and subdued domestic heroines of *The Wide, Wide World* and *The Lamplighter*. Moreover, her extended death scene and her excruciating physical suffering make her a Little Eva, the "Child Angel" so popular in sentimental and evangelical

discourse (Tompkins 128). But Asenath differs from these middle-class heroines and from the conventional pure, blonde, blue-eyed objects of sentiment in two crucial ways. First, she is until the very last a scarred-faced, hunchbacked mill worker. The sympathy and compassion associated with traditional sentimental discourse are now extended to include a new object, the working-class woman, presented here as a grotesque figure.

Second, Asenath's suffering and self-sacrifice are not redemptive. She does not make those around her better people; rather she exposes their shallowness and selfishness: Del jumps at the chance of rescuing herself first and Cross forgets all about his trapped fiancée the moment he sees the insignificant gash on Del's face. Asenath's power as a sentimental figure is meant to transform the relationship between her and the reader, and to a certain extent it does. When the novel opens, the narrator presents herself as a mediator, taking the reader on a guided tour of the unfamiliar territory of a mill town. She herself is not one of the workers, but a mere observer. She describes a "dull-colored, inexpectant crowd" going in and out of the mill. When she attempts a closer look at them, she emphasizes their difference: "Factory faces have a look of their own,—not only their common dinginess, and a general air of being in a hurry to find the wash-bowl, but an appearance of restlessness...not habitual in most departments of 'healthy labor.'" She invites her reader to "[w]atch them closely: you can read their histories at a venture" (306). But knowing that her audience are not used to analyzing crowds, she does the work for them (307). Her tone is condescending about those she observes: "One never knows exactly whether to laugh or cry over them" (308). By the end of the novel, this condescension is washed away by tears of sympathy and compassion. The distance between the reader and the working woman has been narrowed significantly: our gaze moves from the panoramic, "long view" of the opening pages of indistinct crowds of workers to a close-up of Asenath's amputated finger, of her face peering from under the rubble, while she waits for the raging fire to reach her. Anonymity gives way to sentimental recognition.

Why did a writer like Phelps choose to become a "biographer" for this "simple factory girl"—something her real mother, and her metaphoric mothers, the sentimentalists of earlier years, never thought of doing even when the factory girls were very much in the public eye? Phelps belonged to the second generation of professional women writers, which made it easier for her to accept her identity as a self-supporting woman with less ambivalence than her predecessors. "I am proud to say," she wrote in *Chapters from a Life*, "that I have always been a working woman, and always had to be...When the first little story appeared in 'Harper's Magazine,' it

occurred to me, with a throb of pleasure greater than I supposed then that life could hold, that I could take care of myself, and from that day to this I have done so" (79). Unlike her foremothers, she did not attempt to hide or mystify her connection to the marketplace. She was well-aware of the economic forces governing her profession and acknowledged that writing was "a question of demand and supply like any other trade." She even spoke of her "market value" (qtd. in Coultrap-McQuin 184). After her marriage, her writing was the main source of income for the family.

In writing about the life of working-class women, Phelps was implicitly acknowledging an aspect of her own identity as someone who "always had to be" a working woman. At the same time, she was claiming a new territory for herself as a writer, one that extends beyond the domestic sphere. To tell this story, Phelps does what she could not do a few years earlier, that is, leave home to look at the collapsed Pemberton mill. Now, as a writer she visits Lawrence, interviews witnesses, and retells the story of what happened from her perspective. In defining herself as a "biographer," not a novelist, she was underscoring her identity as a new kind of writer.

Moreover, Phelps, who believed that the woman question was "the most tremendous question God has ever asked the world since he asked, 'What think ye of Christ on Calvary?'" ("The Higher Claim"), came of age as a writer at the very historical moment when the women's rights question converged with the labor issue. This convergence led to a political alliance between middle-class women, on the one hand, and working-class men and women, on the other. The most important feminist newspaper of the time, the *Revolution*, established in 1868 by the suffragists Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, developed a radical economic critique that linked the oppression of women with that of the working class and published articles connecting the exploitation of wage labor and the discrimination against women. In its first issue the *Revolution* announced its commitment "to suffrage, irrespective of color or sex; to equal pay for equal work; [and] to the eight-hour day." It declared that "The Principles of the National Labor Union are our principles" (qtd. in Balser 59). Feminists blamed capitalism, not men, for the fact that women were crowded in few low-paying professions. In speeches and editorials, Stanton described a society polarized across class lines, with one class living "mid ease and luxury, dying out with ennui and excess, yet imagining itself made to mold the masses to its will" and another "sullen with hardship and injustice," hopeless except for "occasional outbursts" of protest (qtd. in Balser 60). The political alliance between women and labor reached its peak with the establishment in 1868 of The Working Women's Association, which sent

Anthony as a delegate representing working women to that year's National Labor Union convention.

Phelps too participated in this alliance as a representative of working women. In 1869 she addressed a meeting in Boston between working-class women and middle-class women about a petition the former submitted to the Massachusetts legislator demanding that the state provide affordable homes for them. The meeting was reported in the labor newspaper *Workingman's Advocate*. The most striking feature of Phelps's address is the way she vacillates between identifying with the working women and distancing herself from them. At several points during the speech, she leaves no doubt that she is speaking as one of the workers: "Some of us who signed the petition have had to work for less than twenty-five cents a day" (Baxandall 105); "Often when we go to the shop we have to wait one, two, three hours for work to be given us" (Baxandall 107); "Only help us to earn a home that we can attach ourselves to, that will make us feel that we have a country" (Baxandall 108). But in the same speech Phelps repeatedly speaks of the workers as "them," as when she says: "How much better to have these girls independent, earning their own living, enjoying their own homes than, that they should be compelled to go to station-houses for soup" (Baxandall 106). These working women, she informs her audience, are too weak bodily and mentally to be able to do housework. Decent wages and affordable homes, Phelps insisted, are necessary for the domestication of "those poor working women." She even agrees that the "poor girls" are "improvident and shiftless" but goes on to say:

Who would not be in their condition? Make their conditions better and they will not resort to the streets after dark. Make their conditions better and you will see them educate themselves for skilled labor and become what our grandmothers were, good wives and good mothers. (Baxandall 107)

By linking acquiring "skilled labor" to becoming "good wives and mothers," Phelps is casting the labor issue in terms middle-class women could sympathize with. As a result, the activist demand for affordable homes becomes a plea to "domesticate" working-class women, to remove them from the "street" into the "home." This step is necessary if working-class women are to become like "our grandmothers." Phelps, however, concludes her speech with an emphasis on her identity as "one of them": "I am no speechmaker—only a worker" (Baxandall 108).

Phelps's double identity as a worker and as a middle-class woman leads her to speak in a dual voice. She expresses her sympathies with the working-class woman but at the same time underscores her difference from her;

she advocates her cause, and yet points out her shortcomings. This two-fold relation carries over to the fiction and determines to a large extent the representational strategies middle-class women authors use to inscribe the working-class woman. The fiction that spoke in sympathy with working women also gave much detail of their degradation, deformity, and difference. Thus the working-class woman enters the fiction of writers like Phelps as an Other, as a grotesque sentimental figure who carries the marks of her class difference on her body permanently. Her otherness is articulated through an emergent naturalist discourse that co-exists, sometimes uneasily, with the humanizing sentimental discourse of domestic fiction. This new "sentimental naturalism" is embryonic in Phelps's "The Tenth of January." It is more fully-developed in her later novel *The Silent Partner* and in the earlier fiction of Rebecca Harding Davis.

Deborah in Davis's "Life in the Iron Mill"(1861) is one working-class character represented by sentimental naturalism.<sup>26</sup> She is one of the "hands" in the cotton mills, where she works as a "picker," a word that denotes the person and the machine. While we never see her at work, her labor is marked on her body. She is a hunchback, whose deformity attests to the brutality of her life. At several points in the narrative, the narrator, taking the reader on a tour of the industrial underworld, attempts to see Deborah through sentimental eyes, thus extending to her a humanity that erases her physical and class difference. Deborah, we are told, has a heart; her unrequited love for her cousin Hugh Wolfe and the pain and jealousy she feels are meant to bring her closer to us: "Are pain and jealousy less savage realities down here in this place I am taking you to than in your own house or your own heart,—your heart, which they clutch at sometimes? The note is the same" (23). The look of apathy and vacancy in her face, the narrator maintains, can also be glimpsed on the faces of well-to-do women (22).

Overlapping with this sentimental discourse is a naturalist one. It insists on a deterministic version of experience that affirms Deborah's difference from the narrator and the reader. Deborah's love, after all, can be expressed only as a criminal act: she steals Mitchell's wallet and gives it to Hugh. In seducing him, she sets in motion the plot of decline that drives him to suicide and sends her to jail. Through her transgression, Deborah represents the danger, the excess, that Mitchell and the narrator glimpsed in the Korl woman (32). Likened to "murderers" (61), Deborah is a woman with an "impure body and soul" who eventually will be converted and subdued by another woman, a Quaker. At the end, Deborah is still deformed, but she is now humble, loving, and silent (63-4). The working-class

woman as represented by Davis's Deborah is more than a passive sufferer and an object of sentimental sympathy; she is also a criminal who must be rehabilitated.<sup>27</sup> Not surprisingly, then, the narrator does not identify with her, but with the feminized iron puddler Hugh Wolfe, the artist figure in the narrative.<sup>28</sup> He is the ultimate victim, trapped by his environment but not a product of it. His story, not Deborah's, is meant to counter the limited discourse of political and personal reformers, who, according to the narrator, speak of the mill workers' "incessant labor," "miserable living conditions," and "drunkenness" (15) but do not go beyond the surface of what they see.

Davis's self-consciousness that she was writing a different kind of book is even more evident in her first novel *Margaret Howth*, written shortly after "Life in the Iron Mills." Here she portrays another Deborah-like character. Lois Yare is the Little Eva of industrialism: she is close to nature, loving, and Christ-like. She is also a deformed, crippled, and mentally-retarded mulatto. As the daughter of a criminal black man and a Virginian woman who drank herself to death, Lois embodies the evil of miscegenation. What heredity started, the years Lois spent working in the factory finished. She is thus a product of "all the slow years of ruin that had eaten into her brain" and "all the tainted blood in her veins of centuries of slavery and heathenism" (69). This is how Lois describes what the factory, that "black place" (62), did to her:

It was th' mill...I kind o'grew into that place in them years: seemed to me like as I was part o' th' engines, somehow. Th' air used to be thick in my mouth, black wi' smoke 'n' wool 'n' smells. In them years I got dazed in my head, I think. 'T was th' air 'n' th' work. I was weak allus. 'T got so that the'noise o' th'looms went on in my head night 'n' day,—allus thud, thud. 'N' hot days, when th' hands was chaffin' n' singing', th' black wheels 'n' rollers was alive, starin' down at me, 'n' th' shadders o' th' looms was like snakes creepin',—creepin' anear all th' time (69).

The factory that ruined Lois is a synecdoche for a sordid America, an America that, according to the narrator, has become nothing but a marketplace: "Trade [is] everywhere,—on the earth and under it" (18). Boys play marbles "for keeps," the horses "[have] speculative eyes," and churches register "their yearly alms in the morning journals" (17-18). The factory is prominently positioned at the heart of this urban decay. It is a dark, overwhelming presence, whose "floors shook constantly with the incessant thud of the great looms that filled each story, like heavy, monotonous thunder" (15). The women workers are "bold, tawdry girls of fifteen or six-

teen, or lean-jawed women from the hills, wives of the coal-diggers" (116), and the men are "red-faced and pale, whiskey-bloated and heavy-brained, Irish, Dutch, black, with souls half asleep somewhere, and the destiny of a nation in their grasp" (16). Even the owner of the mill, Stephen Holmes, cannot escape the corrupting influences of the place: he trades love for money, giving up the poor Margaret, and planning instead to marry the wealthy daughter of his mill-partner.

Before Holmes can free himself from the corrupting influence of the mill, the latter has to be destroyed. Lois, however, cannot escape her fate. She succeeds in rescuing Holmes from the burning mill, but she later dies from breathing copperas. Imprisoned by both heredity and environment, she carries the factory in her. Her death, as Sharon Harris notes, has no redemptive power (67), that is, except to free her from her body: "The cripple was dead; but Lois, free, loving, and beloved, trembled from her prison to her Master's side in the 'To-Morrow'" (262). Her suffering and death excite the reader's pity and compassion, but they do not promise a different future. As the narrator insists, this "is a story of 'To-Day'" with no prophetic visions to offer (264). The optimism of the conventional sentimental narrative is contained here by the pessimistic determinism of the naturalist discourse.

While Davis uses sentimental naturalism to portray working-class women, she does not find it suitable to represent all women, certainly not Margaret Howth. The author, in fact, is at a loss as to how to represent her heroine. On the one hand, Margaret's story is a familiar one. According to the narrator, "Her history was simple enough: she was going into the mill to support a helpless father and mother; it was a common story; she had given up much for them;—other women did the same" (19-20). On the other hand, although Margaret describes herself as one of the "hands" (16), she is not like Lois and the other workers; as the mill's book-keeper, she labors in an office, with pen and paper. Her work identifies her with Davis the author. After all, Margaret's ledger is what inspires the narrator to write this story, just as the Korl Woman and the scarlet letter A inspire the narrators of "Life in the Iron Mills" and "The Custom-House," respectively.

Davis wants Margaret to be a new kind of heroine who corresponds better to real life where things are not black or white. She rejects the traditional sentimental heroine who "glides into life full-charged with rank, virtues, a name three-syllabled, and a white dress that never needs washing, ready to sail through dangers dire into a triumphant haven of matrimony" (102). Margaret is not the traditional self-sacrificing daughter, "the impetuous, whole-souled woman, glad to throw her life down for her

father, without one bitter thought of the wife and mother she might have been" (104-5). On the contrary, she resents having to sacrifice her life for her parents and the narrator sympathizes with, rather than censures, her resentment: "She thrust out of sight all possible life that might have called her true self into being, and clung to this present shallow duty and shallow reward. Pitiful and vain so to cling! It is the way of women" (44). The narrator even turns to the reader, whom she assumes shares her heroine's experience: "After you have made a sacrifice of yourself for others, did you ever notice how apt you were to doubt, as soon as the deed was irrevocable, whether, after all, it were worth while gained! How new and unimagined the agony of empty hand and stifled wish!" (61)

While Davis knows what she does not want her heroine to be, she does not know what to do with Margaret. The two choices she gives demand self-sacrifice. Knowels, the idealistic but dogmatic reformer (like Hawthorne's Hollingsworth), wants to recruit her to work in the slums of the city, to use her as "a machine." Holmes, after a change of mind, wants her to be his wife, devoted to his needs alone. Margaret accepts him, and he delivers a speech in which he defines what Margaret is to be: "I need warmth and freshness and light: my wife shall bring them to me. She shall be no strong-willed reformer, standing alone: a sovereign lady with kind words for the world, who gives her hand only to that man whom she trusts, and keeps her heart and its secrets for me alone" (242). Withdrawal into matrimony and domesticity is the solution, and Margaret turns out to be after all a typical domestic heroine. And as if to underscore the contrived happy ending, oil is found underneath her parents' house. Not only is she going to be a wife and mother, but she is no longer poor.

Davis was not happy with how Margaret turned out. When her publisher James T. Fields suggested altering the original title "The Deaf and the Dumb" to "Margaret Howth," Davis was reluctant: "I don't like 'Margaret Howth' at all, because she is the completest failure in the story, besides not being the nucleus of it" (qtd. in Yellin 213). Yellin attributes the unconvincing happy ending to the demands of the editor, who thought the original story too gloomy. According to her, Davis wanted her heroine to work among the poor and to find in that work some measure of self-fulfillment. This explanation is not convincing in light of the fact that the Knowels's attempts to recruit Margaret for such work are disapproved of throughout the narrative. Clearly, Davis did not want a traditional domestic heroine, but could find no alternative.

Davis wanted to rewrite the ending of her novel, but Fields discouraged her from doing so. However, other women writers of Davis's genera-

tion will get a chance to revise, so to speak, the ending of *Margaret Houth*, by writing novels with middle-class heroines who venture among the poor, not to sacrifice themselves for others, but in search of independence and self-fulfillment. One such woman is Perley Kelso, the heroine of Phelps's *The Silent Partner*.

Phelps's 1871 novel is sometimes appreciated for being one of the first American novels to depict realistically the ills of nineteenth-century industrial life. Most often, however, it has been praised for portraying a strong-willed woman, who rejects the constraints imposed on her by the domestic ideology of her class. Mari Jo Buhle and Florence Howe, for instance, pronounce the book "extraordinary, since its focus is not domestic life and romance but rather industry and women's vocation" (382-383). Carol Farley Kessler admires Phelps's "unqualified belief in women's right to achievement and fulfillment" (32). Lori Duin Kelly speaks for most critics when she writes:

*The Silent Partner* celebrates the refusal of...women to become locked into traditional roles. It records their rebellion against the status quo and also their growth into sisterhood and selfhood. Here...the antagonist to a woman's development is clearly identified as male society which, functioning in the traditional roles of father, business partners, coworkers and companions, forcibly endeavors to debar women from entering any fields outside their supposedly natural ones. (2)

Eager to express their appreciation for Phelps's feminism, these critics offer a partial reading of *The Silent Partner* which erases the central issue of class.<sup>29</sup> As a result, they tend to focus on the middle-class heroine and often ignore the working-class women in the novel. Unlike other critics, I believe that through her depiction of the three women characters in this novel, Perley, Sip, and Catty, Phelps foregrounds the differences rather than the similarities among women. A reading that recognizes the novel's class discourse and the ways it intersects with Phelps's feminist discourse shows how redefining the middle-class woman involves inventing the working-class woman as an "Other." In the process, the embattled Victorian domestic ideology is rehabilitated and becomes part of a new antagonistic class discourse.

Phelps chooses to see life in the mills of the 1870s through the consciousness of her middle-class heroine, Perley Kelso. As a daughter of a Boston manufacturer, Perley's life is sheltered and comfortable but stagnant. The opening scene of the novel shows her sitting idly in her father's library, listening to the raging storm outside and waiting for something to happen. Perley is not satisfied with her inert state of being. According to

Phelps, "She had indeed a weakness for an occupation, suffered passions of superfluous life" (13).

Change intrudes on Perley's placid life when her father is accidentally crushed to death at his mills. Ghastly as this accident is, it brings the daughter to a deeper realization of the marginality of her existence. She soon comes to understand that there is a whole world out there that she does not know much about. The death of her father provides her with an opportunity to become part of the mysterious and exclusive world of business. When with the confidence of an heiress she suggests to her father's partners that she take his place, Perley learns a hard lesson, that she cannot participate in running her own business because she is a woman; this is an unpleasant moment of revelation: "For the first time in her life, she was inclined to feel ashamed of being a woman...A faint sense of degradation as being so ignorant that she could not command the respect of two men...possessed her" (59). Perley is allowed to be only a silent partner. When she asks, "Has a silent partner a voice and vote in—questions that come up?" Maverick Hale, her fiancé and one of the partners explains, "No,...none at all. An ordinary, unprivileged dummy, I mean. If you have your husband's, that's another matter. A woman's influence, you know; you've heard of it. What could be more suitable?" (60-1).

Perley has no choice but to accept her role as a silent partner and to try in the meantime to prove herself fit to be an active one. She begins to take interest in the workers of her mill. She befriends the working-class woman Sip Garth, through whom she learns many new things about the living and working conditions of the mill people. Perley witnesses death, disease, and mutilation. She sees women weavers who walk around looking like "beautiful moving corpses," before they die of consumption soon after. Those who survive lose their voices from breathing cotton-filled air. She meets young women who walk to their work in the mill twenty and thirty miles a day and who faint in their hot and humid work rooms. She learns that children are spared neither the hard and long labor nor death and dismemberment and that workers who complain or attempt to organize are fired and blacklisted in all of New England factories. Phelps depicts a permanent working class, exploited and brutalized by the factory system.

Perley finds her vocation in trying to improve the lives of her workers. Significantly, her intervention takes the form of domestication. Coming home from work one day, Sip finds that her cramped and damp room is transformed:

Something has happened to the forlorn little room to-night...A fire has happened, and the kerosene lamp has happened, and drawn cur-

tains have happened; and Miss Kelso has happened,—down on her knees on the bare floor, with her kid gloves off, and a poker in her hands. (79)

As Christine Stansell argues in *City of Women*, the middle-class evangelical reformers of nineteenth-century America instituted the “home visit” as an essential component of their activities among the urban poor. Stansell shows how “The conception of the home visit grew out of the great moral importance attributed to the home” by the Victorian domestic ideology. “The ideology of domesticity,” Stansell continues, “thus provided the initial impetus for what would become a class intervention, the movement of reformers into the working-class neighborhoods and the households of the poor” (65). The very ideology Perley rejects in moving outside her own home justifies her movement into the homes of the poor. In other words, the slogan “A woman’s place is in the home” becomes “A woman’s place is in poor people’s homes.”

The influence of Perley’s “home visits” on Sip is profound. Earlier we are told that Sip had “the unmistakable, incorrigible, suppressed laugh of “discontented labor” (51). She belonged to “the dangerous hands” who “alone are stirring in the dark” (72). Perley’s first encounter with Sip, which takes place outside the home in the street, arouses both her pity and fear. Sip then was an angry woman, who resented “carriage folks” like Perley and rejected their pity. Angered by Perley’s condescending advice, Sip even had the impudence to intrude on Perley’s privileged world when she follows her to the opera. There she stood “black and warning as a hidden reef, a sunken danger in the shining place” (29).

But under Perley’s influence, Sip becomes less dangerous and gentler in her judgment of Perley’s “kind of folks.” Perley lectures her on superior music, fiction, and art and gives her a painting which again transforms her little room; Sip describes the change:

Sometimes now...there’s music comes out of that picture all about the room. Sometimes in the night I hear’em play...Sometimes when the floor’s all sloppy and I have to wash up after work, I hear’em playing over all the dirt. It sounds so clean! (196)

Perley also uses the “home visit” in the other direction, when she opens her parlor’s doors to Sip and her friends. Here they drink tea, play waltzes on the piano, read literature, and learn good manners generally. Even Bijah Mudge’s incendiary political speeches to the younger workers become, in Perley’s gatherings, part of a benign comic act. Perley is the perfect hostess, believing she is bridging the gap between her class and that of the workers.

Perley's influence on Sip and her class is most evident in the central scene in the novel—when the workers strike, protesting the mill owner's decision to reduce their starvation wages. This crisis proves to be Perley's golden opportunity to show the men of her class that she is worthy of being their active partner. After angrily admonishing them for shutting her out of the firm, she steps in front of an angry crowd of workers, who make room for her. Sip describes the scene:

If we'd all been in her fine parlors, we wouldn't have been stiller..We were all worked up and angered; and she stood so white and still. There was a minute that she looked at us, and she looked—why, she looked as if she'd be poor folks herself, if only she could say how sorry she was for us. Then she blazed out at us. (251)

Perley tells her workers that they must accept the wage cuts and call off their strike. Although not convinced, the workers do what she asks. Thus the sisterhood established between her and Sip and the sympathy and compassion she shows to the workers prove useful as strategies for social control and means for establishing her credentials as a trusted partner in her father's mill.<sup>30</sup>

Perley does not deal with the issue of wage cuts again, but she continues her public philanthropic work. Her work transforms her. It gives her the confidence to break her engagement with Hale and to turn down a marriage proposal from Stephen Garrick, a partner in the firm who supports her activities. She justifies her rejection of him thus: "I believe that I have been a silent partner long enough. If I married you, sir, I should invest in life, and you would conduct it. I suspect that I have a preference for a business of my own" (262).

Sip Garth also assumes a new role. She refuses to marry the man she loves, not as an act of self-assertion as in Perley's case, but as an act of self-sacrifice: she does not want to bring more factory workers into the world. Sip becomes an evangelist, preaching to the men and women of the working class submission, self-denial, and renunciation. She castigates her fellow workers for their selfish and wicked ways and calls on them to turn their efforts inward. It is "none of their business," she declares, and against "Christ's way" to blame those above them (297-299). All signs of the disturbing conflicts of class which were so evident in Sip's earlier words evaporate. Now, we have a reformist discourse that draws on the ideas and practices of the domestic ideology of the middle class. Indeed, the taming of the coarse and angry woman Perley met at the beginning has been finally completed. The novel offers Perley's and Sip's activities as alternatives to

workers' collective actions, whether strikes or petitions, and as the only hope for change.

But not all workers can be domesticated. One who resists Perley's and Sip's efforts is the latter's sister, Catty. Catty is a fifteen year old

with a low forehead, with wandering eyes, with a dull stoop to the head...with a thick, dropping under lip,—a girl walled up and walled in from that labyrinth of sympathies, that difficult evolution of brain from beast...An ugly girl. (86)

She has also been born deaf and mute. Catty's birth defects are attributed to the mother's long-working hours as a cotton weaver and to her abuse by a drunken husband. In other words, Catty is not only the monstrous daughter of a woman who worked outside the home, but also of a degenerate and brutalizing domestic sphere.

Catty's deafness and muteness make her a sentimental victim but also put her outside Perley's and Sip's range of influence. She is "sullen, ill-tempered, ill-controlled, uncontrollable" (85); she drinks, runs away from home, and often wanders about the streets as a prostitute. Although Sip teaches Catty some kind of sign language, which keeps her in check, this mode of communication breaks down when Catty loses her eyesight after rubbing her eyes with hands contaminated with wool picking. As a result, she is more uncontrollable than ever. Predictably, the more rebellious she is, the harder it is for Sip to keep her at home. As in the case of Lois Yare, factory work finishes what heredity began.

Catty's class identity is fixed by a sentimental naturalist discourse that puts her beyond the reach of Perley's domesticating middle-class culture. If Perley anticipates the New Woman of the 1880s and 1890s, Catty is the "other" new woman of the nineteenth century—the woman of the working class. As a street wanderer, she is a repository of "bad womanhood" or negative femininity, embodying all that is not beautiful, pure, disciplined, and, above all, domestic—all values of Perley's class. Thus impossible to reach and contain, Catty must be exorcised from the world of the novel. This happens during a flood when Catty, feeling some water seeping into the kitchen, panics and leaves the house where ironically had she stayed, she would have been safe. Her drowning is staged as a public event, witnessed by crowds who helplessly watch as she falls off a collapsing bridge into the raging river.

So while Phelps's *The Silent Partner* exposes the limitations of the domestic ideology and anticipates the emergence of the New Woman of the next two decades, it also insists on domesticity as an essential component of a new class discourse that sought to invent the working-class woman as

an “other.” The novel has what Cora Kaplan identifies in works by British women authors as a “double discourse” (“Like a Housemaid’s” 61): on the one hand, it envisions a new role for the middle-class woman, which frees her from the confinement of the home and brings her closer to working-class women with whom she sympathizes. On the other hand, the novel inscribes the poor working woman as undomestic and therefore inferior and degraded and imposes on her the same domestic values it has challenged.

At the end of *The Silent Partner*, Perley and Sip part ways. Perley explains: “I undertook to help her at the first...but I was only among them at best; Sip is of them; she understands them and they understand her; so I left her to her work, and I keep to my own” (293). This recognition of difference between women is at the heart of the novel. The parting of ways between Perley and Sip is rooted in a particular historical moment when the political alliance between middle-class women and working-class women came to an end. Two years before Phelps’s novel appeared, Susan B. Anthony was rejected by working-class women as their representative. They voted against admitting her as a delegate to the 1869 National Labor Union convention. In the debate before the vote, John Walsh, a unionist, claimed Anthony was “not a friend of labor” but “a determined enemy of labor” (qtd. in Balser 74). He denounced her for encouraging women earlier that year to work as scabs during a strike by the typographical union, for not paying the women working on her newspaper the *Revolution* equal wages to those of men, and for firing a union organizer, Augusta Lewis (Balser 74). Anthony defended herself by emphasizing that her priority was to defend “a class of women that had no husbands, and who were on the street penniless, homeless and without shelter” (Baxandall 112). Her duty, she maintained, is “to stand here and speak for women today, who are as dumb as the four millions of slaves were a few years ago on the plantations.” For her, women’s wrongs took precedent over labor’s wrongs:

Now, I think men have great wrongs in the world between the existence of labor and capital, but these wrongs as compared to the wrongs of women, in whose faces the doors of the trades and avocations are slammed shut, are not as a grain of sand on the sea shore, and if some of us who advocate the wrongs of down-trodden women do take a position which you do not like you must remember that our clients are in a very suffering condition, and we must act and speak for them. (Baxandall 113)

Ironically, the helpless, suffering, and dumb women Anthony “spoke for” voted against her. They spoke for themselves, choosing to stand with working-class men rather than with middle-class women. As historians point

out, this split between the feminist movement and the labor movement will persist for the rest of the nineteenth century (Balser 77). Middle class women continued to speak for working-class women, by representing them politically and aesthetically. In fact, one of Anthony's favorite speeches which she gave through the 1890s was entitled "Suffrage and the Working Woman." She began it by announcing herself "a representative of the working women" (Anthony 139).

Anthony's claim will be contested by others, and the working-class woman will continue to figure in the last third of the nineteenth century at the center of the new debates about labor, class, gender, and national identity. Middle-class women will continue to shape this debate in important ways that correspond to their increased involvement in the marketplace as white-collar workers. In this chapter, I have sought to describe their first major intervention in the public discourse about women and labor as both activists and writers. Whether in the domestic fiction of the 1850s, the business manuals of Virginia Penny, or the sentimental naturalism of Davis and Phelps, women writers grappled with a domestic ideology that denied their identities as working women. Some of them solved this conflict by projecting on the "other" working women, particularly seamstresses and factory workers, their fears and anxieties by adopting representational strategies that emphasized their difference from them.

## NOTES

1. In antebellum America, 40 percent of the novels reviewed in journals were by women. Best seller lists show that by the 1850s women were authors of half of the popular literary works. By 1872 women wrote three-quarters of all the novels published (Dexter 97; Baym, *Novels* 100; Hart 306-307; Q. Reynolds 38).

2. This fact is agreed on and illustrated by Coultrap-McQuin, Kelley, *Private Woman*, and Baym's *Woman's Fiction*, especially 30 and 34.

3. Although there is a critical consensus that these authors espoused domesticity in their fiction, critics differ as to the political implications of "domesticity" itself. Ann Douglas's *The Feminization of American Culture* and Jane Tompkins's *Sensational Designs* frame the debate, with the first holding writers of domestic fiction (and their allies the ministers) responsible for weakening Calvinist culture and for bringing about a mass consumer society, and the second maintaining they offered a complex and subversive critique of American culture from a woman's point of view. In between falls Papashvily's *All the Happy Endings*, along with Baym's *Woman Fiction*, and Susan Harris's *Nineteenth-Century American Women's Novels: Interpretative Strategies*.

4. Rodgers note that "[w]hile insisting on the dignity of household labor,

Stowe was herself a chaotic and unwilling housekeeper, who found domestic labors, even with servants, oppressive" (188).

5. In her study of Oneida County, New York, Mary Ryan concludes that despite the rhetoric of woman's sphere, many middle-class women worked for money outside the home. She writes: "women workers brought income into about 1 in 7 households of the native-born. From the standpoint of the local economy, women's work was even more significant. In both 1855 and 1865 women constituted more than one-fifth of the local labor force. The especially high proportion of women in the native-born population meant that they contributed an even larger share to the wage-earning population of their ethnic group. In the peak year for female employment, 1855, an impressive 30% of the native-born labor force was female...the middle-class native-born females also secured 3 in 10 of the positions in the paid labor force" (204).

6. Lang is one critic who is studying the interrelation of class and gender in the writing of nineteenth-century women. I find her readings of the novels insightful, but my focus differs from hers in significant ways. While she discusses class and gender in isolation from the issue of work and the nineteenth-century debate about it, I argue throughout this book for their interdependence.

7. My interpretation of this episode differs from that of Baym, who sees in it a critique of "the emergent American moneyed aristocracy from the standpoint of liberal Protestant domesticity" (Introduction xxiv); and from that of Erica Bauermeister, who sees in it a shift in the theme of the novel from "self-conquest to self-assertion" (23). Neither of them considers how the episode actually ends.

8. As in *A New England Tale* by Catharine Maria Sedgwick, *Elinor Fulton* by Hannah Farnham Sawyer Lee, *Constance Latimer, or the Blind Girl* by Emma Catherine Embury, Maria McIntosh's *Two Lives: or, To Seem and To Be*, and *Getting Along: A Book of Illustrations* by Caroline Chesebro. For a discussion of these novels, see Baym's *Woman's Fiction* 72-73, 93, and 219.

9. In fact, in Hale's *The Lectress*, the seamstress discourse is part of the feminist discourse that the novel attacks. The heroine becomes interested in women's rights in response to the suffering and exploitation of her widowed mother who works as a seamstress. See Baym, *Woman's Fiction* 76.

10. Here I disagree with Hamilton, who argues that in *Ruth Hall* Fern uses the rhetoric of women labor activists from the 1840s. I believe it is the rhetoric of the seamstress literature that Fern utilizes and discards. This literature goes unrecognized in Hamilton's essay.

11. According to Hamilton, this is an exceptional moment in *Ruth Hall*: "To describe the manual labor of what would have been recognized by antebellum audiences as a 'lady' and then to name the wage for which that work was done [constitute] a sharp departure from the bourgeois literary conventions of the sentimental novel in 1854" (101). But as I illustrate in chapter two, Ruth's rhetoric is typical of the literary and non-literary discourse about the seamstress, the poorly paid wage worker.

12. Among those who emphasize the novel's exceptionalism is Baym, *Woman's Fiction* 252-53; Susan Harris 111-127; and Wood. Warren calls Ruth Hall

a “revolutionary book” (130-142) because it insisted on women’s financial independence. Kelley, on the other hand, emphasizes Fern’s domesticity (*Private Woman* 153-157).

13. This critical reception is discussed by Warren, *Fanny Fern* 120-130.

14. As Warren notes, feminist critics tend to ignore Hawthorne’s admiration for Fanny Fern and focus instead on his “Scribbling women” remark. Certainly, his admiration for Fern shows a more complex attitude towards women authors. I also believe that the theme of the economic struggle of a woman writer appealed to him on a personal level in a way that other heroines of domestic fiction failed to do.

15. See, for instance, “Sewing Machines,” “My Old Ink-Stand and I,” “Women’s Salaries,” and “Lady Lecturers.” All in Fern, *Ruth Hall and Other Writings*.

16. All page references are to the reprint of this second edition issued by Arno press.

17. But the result of attempts at compromising rhetoric were often confused and contradictory statements, as in the following passage from an essay entitled the “Province of Women”:

Many are the virtues and graces that should adorn the home sphere of woman...A woman will find full play for all her powers and talents in the sanctities of home...The spheres of men and women are not so separate and distinct as is generally thought. Yet there is no need that one should trespass on the other. We would not limit woman to any particular sphere more than man, except as her physical strength and modesty should determine that limit. What she now is, is the result of custom founded on arbitrary laws. (292-293)

18. Penny was adamant that educated American women should not engage in menial labor. “Educated women doomed to menial labor,” she warned, “feel that society has driven them to a position they were not made to occupy. And so the moral nature suffers. A constant sense of injustice preys upon the mind” (*Think* 23). She was furious with one of the domestic fiction writers, Gail Hamilton, who flip-pantly advised women who cannot continue as teachers to find work as “trained housewives, or skillful seamstresses, or accomplished laundresses, or sweetmeat makers, or strawberry fanciers, or counting-room clerks.” Penny responds: “I am sorry that Gail Hamilton offers nothing better to women teachers—nothing more in consonance with their education...Gail Hamilton would push educated, intelligent American women into menial service. She would call into play their material, at the expense of their spiritual, nature” (*Think* 27). Phelps recommended domestic labor for women in her article “What Shall They Do?” (521).

19. Other American-only jobs she mentions are telegraph operating, herb-packing, folding and directing newspapers (*How* 102,146).

20. Shops for second hand furniture are exclusively owned by “Jews” (134-35); bakeries, which are unhealthy, are dominated by Germans, who do not respect the Sabbath (150); and market sellers are Irish (160). Thankfully, no American women work as rag pickers (486).

21. One of Hankins books is called *The Apostate Quaker: or, Abolitionism Exposed*. The advertisement for it claims that the author is going to expose the abolitionists in their private lives, by showing how they oppress white children and women and force them into servitude. She calls abolitionists fanatics, moral lunatics, and mock philanthropists. She is not pro slavery, but she does not warn against it either.

22. This novel appears in some advertisements under the title of *The Needle Woman: A True Story of Real Life*.

23. According to Sharon Harris, "Needle and Garden" was written by a man, 127.

24. This important shift is noticeable in Alice B. Haven's novel *Loss and Gain; or, Margaret's Home*. The heroine, who works in a store to support her family before she too marries her boss, is defined by her work—as is clear from the way the narrator introduces her: "There was nothing of the elegantly distressed heroine of romance about her. She looked exactly, what she was, a store girl on the way to her daily morning tasks" (16)

25. This nostalgia for the past will prove useful in later years, especially with the increase in labor agitation in the 1870s and 1880s. Among the books that were published at the height of this labor agitation were Lucy Lacrom's *An Idyll of Work* (1875) and *A New England Girlhood* (1889) and Harriet Robinson's *Early Factory Labor in New England* (1889) and *Loom and Spindle, or, Life Among the Early Mill Girls* (1889). All of these books recall factory labor's golden past.

26. Critics usually emphasize either one aspect of the story or the other. Often, it is its realism that is singled out for praise. Pfaelzer calls the story "unique," "one of the first detailed pictures of a factory in American fiction" ("Rebecca" 236). It is pronounced an important literary document in the transition from romanticism to realism (Sharon Harris 1989; Conron ; Pattee 328) and "the first major American work to represent in explicit detail the painful conditions of the American mill system" (Molyneaux 158). Davis is spoken of as a pioneer of naturalism, brilliantly dramatizing "the socioeconomic implications of environmental determinism" (Gilbert and Gubar 903). Few critics point out the story's sentimentalism, and those who do see it as a defect (see Kahn 117 and Conron 488). Rose argues that the sentimentalism was necessary to reconcile women writers to realism, a male genre.

27. This double identity of Deborah is often ignored by those who insist on seeing her as the sympathetic figure in the story with whom Davis identifies. See, for example, Pfaelzer and Scheiber.

28. Hugh Wolfe's femininity has been discussed by several critics. See Pfaelzer, *Parlor Radical* 39-40; Seltzer 129-136; Scheiber 107-108.

29. Lang's essay "The Syntax of Class in Elizabeth Stuart Phelps's *The Silent Partner*" is an exception. But even Lang focuses her discussion on Perley and Sip and ignores Catty's character altogether.

30. My reading of Perley's role in containing class anger is diametrically opposed to Lauter's reading. According to him, "*The Silent Partner* is of great historical interest because it antedates most theoreticians in suggesting the importance

of cross-class organizing of women; indeed, it implied that working women are organized less by the labor movement as such than by other women” (844).

# Conclusion

A study of the imaginative response to industrialization, this book offered readings of selected canonical and popular texts that emphasized these text's engagement with some of the most important political and social issues in nineteenth-century America. I have argued that the response to the socio-economic changes brought about by the industrialization process—the factory system in particular—was articulated in the period between the 1820s and 1870s through the languages of gender and class as they intersected in two working-class women figures, the factory girl and the seamstress. As the most visible wage workers of their time, these women stood for a system that threatened the gender and class identities of a middle class still in the process of defining itself. The representations that the members of this class produced of female wage labor both expressed and contained their class fears and their gender insecurities.

The focus on the intersection of gender and class is necessary for an historically grounded understanding of the literary representations of women. In my chapter on Hawthorne, I have shown how introducing class as a category of analysis alongside gender complicates our interpretations of his female characters. A truly historical reading of *The Scarlet Letter's* Hester Prynne and *The Blithedale Romance's* Priscilla must take into consideration their identities as seamstresses. My discussion of these two characters emphasized the various ways Hawthorne's insecurities as a struggling writer inflected his representations of women's labor. Similarly, by stressing the class identity of nineteenth-century women novelists, I drew attention to some of the major contradictions in their work—contradictions that remain largely invisible to analyses focused on gender alone.

To historicize the literary representations of women, I have placed the fictional figures of the factory girl and the seamstress in non-literary contexts. This contextualization demonstrated the interconnectedness of the literary and the non-literary. Literature, both canonical and popular, is not insulated from politics and ideology. The factory girls and the seamstresses who appear in works by Herman Melville, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Timothy Shay Arthur and Fanny Fern originated in debates about politics and economics. They came to literature already packed with political meanings. At the same time, the juxtaposition of the literary and the non-literary also illustrates literature's autonomous nature. The political significations of the working woman were complicated by genre, personal history, and creativity. Melville's subversion of the factory girl of the 1840s, Hawthorne's elaborations on the seamstress of the same period, and Phelps's reinvention of the factory girl a decade later—all show the lively, complex, and unpredictable relationship between literature, politics, and ideology.

The debate concerning labor, class, and gender did not stop where this book ends. It continued through the last third of the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth. The factory girl, and to a lesser extent the seamstress, survive in canonical and popular literature. But they are no longer the only representatives of industrialization and its discontents. New paradigms of the working woman come into being as a result of changing economic and political conditions. The expansion of white collar work, suffrage, new waves of immigration, the explosions of class conflict in the form of strikes and riots in Lawrence, New York, Boston, and Chicago—all changed the gender and class landscape and the imaginative response to it. But Henry James's nameless telegraph operator of "In the Cage," William Dean Howells' Hannah Morrison, Statira Dudley, and Lyra Wilmington, and Theodore Dreiser's Carrie Meeber, Gennie Gerhardt, and Roberta Alden have a history behind them. So do the working-girls whom Helen Campbell created and Dorothy Richardson impersonated. All were conceived decades earlier—when their foremothers spun their wheels and plied their needles in the first factories and sweatshops of America, and in the imagination of its writers.

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