

Cultural History of Reading

Volume 2
American Literature

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GREENWOOD PRESS
Westport, Connecticut • London

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Cultural history of reading.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-313-33744-4 (set : alk. paper) — ISBN 978-0-313-33745-1 (v.1 : alk. paper) — ISBN 978-0-313-33746-8 (v. 2 : alk. paper)

1. Books and reading—Social aspects—History. 2. Books and reading—Social aspects—United States—History. I. Watling, Gabrielle. II. Quay, Sara E.

Z1003.C89 2009

028'.9—dc22 2008019927

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data is available.

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Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 2008019927

ISBN: 978-0-313-33744-4 (set)

978-0-313-33745-1 (vol. 1)

978-0-313-33746-8 (vol. 2)

First published in 2009

Greenwood Press, 88 Post Road West, Westport, CT 06881

An imprint of Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc.

www.greenwood.com

Printed in the United States of America



The paper used in this book complies with the Permanent Paper Standard issued by the National Information Standards Organization (Z39.48-1984).

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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CHAPTER 6

Reading and the Growth of a Nation: 1865–1913

David Bordelon

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

- 1865 First *Freedman Readers* are published
- 1866 Transatlantic cable laid
- 1867 United States Department of Education established; publication of Augusta Jane Evans Wilson's *St. Elmo*
- 1869 Completion of Transcontinental Railroad
- 1871 October 8, Chicago Fire
- 1872 *Popular Science* begins publication
- 1873 Congress passes the Act for the Suppression of Trade in, and Circulation of, Obscene Literature and Articles of Immoral Use; William "Boss" Tweed convicted of forgery and larceny
- 1874 Beginning of the Chautauqua Movement, devoted to adult education
- 1876 U.S. Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; American Library Association established; Melville Dewey publishes a pamphlet outlining the Dewey Decimal system for organizing library collections
- 1878 Chicago Public Library established
- 1880 Publication of Lew Wallace's *Ben-Hur*
- 1884 Publication of Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*
- 1886 May 4, Haymarket bombing in Chicago, IL
- 1890 Massacre of Sioux tribes people at Wounded Knee, South Dakota
- 1892 International copyright established; Homestead strike
- 1893 World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago
- 1894 Pullman strike by railway workers
- 1899 Publication of Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*
- 1901 September 6, President McKinley assassinated
- 1906 Passage of the Meat Inspection Act and Pure Food and Drug Act
- 1909 First volumes of Harvard Classics published

INTRODUCTION TO THE TIME PERIOD

"The Gilded Age." "Go West, Young Man." "Survival of the Fittest." "The Other Half." "What Would Jesus Do?" "The Haymarket Riot." "The Yellow Menace." "Remember the Maine."

When scholars consider the years 1865 through 1913, these slogans and catchphrases immediately come to mind, acting as linguistic shorthand for the economic, social, and political events that shaped the period. Unpacking these phrases reveals an America experiencing both the rapid progress (rising prosperity, territorial expansion, and industrialism) and the growing pains (economic divisions, imperialism, and scientific controversy) of a country in transition.

This transition is best illustrated in the shift from an antebellum, agrarian culture to a post-war, industrial culture. Census data show that agricultural work, the archetypal occupation of Americans, declined throughout this period, from 50.1 percent of the workforce in 1880 to 31.6 percent by 1910 (Shifflett 54). This decline, and a concomitant rise in industrial employment, brought about a new, more urban middle class and their values of piety and provincialism, diligence and optimism. Yet this shift in the cultural dynamic from rural to urban was challenged. Throughout the period, questions about American identity lingered. Although most recognized and embraced the prevailing middle-class ethos, some, confronted with the reality of an ascendant urban bourgeoisie, waxed nostalgic about a mythic America of rugged individualists plowing their own homesteads. Others, chafing under the prescriptive social rules and boundaries, objected to the conventionalism of middle-class values. Ultimately, however, the middle class, as the historian Thomas Schlereth argues, "controlled the country's political, social, and cultural agendas" (xiii).

Debates over these agendas continued, spilling over from polling places, factories, wide-open prairies, and slums onto the printed page. It was there, in books, magazines, and newspapers, that middle-class beliefs were confirmed or contested, and where prevailing social codes were ratified or rejected. Given the variety and volume of printed material and the lack of any competing information sources, the printed word and, increasingly, the printed image were the primary shapers of public perceptions and thus public opinion.

This reliance on reading as a means of cultural identity became a cornerstone of middle-class values. With their emphasis on "culture"—a word encompassing good manners and works, appreciation of the arts, and an embrace of Christian values—Victorian Americans believed that the road to self-improvement was

paved with books. The writer Mary Austin, recalling her life during the 1870s, wrote that "Everybody wanted culture in the same way that a few years earlier everybody wanted sewing machines." She added that this "culture" was best achieved through "the studious reading of books" (qtd. in Sichertman 137).

Austin's fellow citizens were able to share in this culture because of increasing literacy. Between 1876 and 1915, the

THE MATERIAL CULTURE OF READING

What do a chair and a sculpture have to do with reading? According to some Victorians, everything. Furniture makers found a ready market for a variety of chairs and stands designed especially for reading and study. Sculptors and printers offered busts of Shakespeare and lithographs of popular writers such as Mark Twain to round out the décor of a typical parlor. This kind of material evidence illustrates the primacy of reading in the Victorian household: a custom that generates a wide range of consumer goods is a custom firmly embedded in the culture.

growth in compulsory schooling and the growing importance of education in an industrial economy led to a rise in literacy rates from eighty percent to ninety four percent of Americans (Schlereth 253). A similar gain in higher education, from fifty-two thousand undergraduates in 1870 to just under two hundred and fifty thousand in 1900 (Perry 283), meant that publishers were assured their wares would find a ready market.

Taking advantage of this literacy and advances such as the development of ground-wood pulp paper, a proliferation of retail vendors, and improved communication and transportation, publishers offered increasing numbers of reading materials in a range of prices and formats. For instance, in 1866, seventeen years after its initial publication, T. B. Peterson & Brothers issued four different editions of Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield*, from a "Cheap Edition" costing thirty-five cents to an "Illustrated Duodecimo Edition" for four dollars. In 1874 Harper & Brothers published a cloth edition of the same novel for one dollar and fifty cents and a paper edition for one dollar. By 1889 *David Copperfield* was included by Lupton publishers as part of their weekly subscription "Leisure Hour Library" for little more than a dime.

This reduction in price meant that reading materials were not limited to the burgeoning middle class. Because reading was considered the main avenue of social mobility, many working-class families made books and periodicals a regular part of their household expenses (Denning 33). And increasingly, people did not have to pay directly for books: by 1900 close to five thousand libraries held forty million books (Tebbel 6).

Yet books provide only a partial account of reading in Victorian America. Newspapers and magazines, offering an inexpensive and convenient access to news and literature, were eagerly consumed by all classes. The rise in the number of both newspapers—from approximately thirty-five hundred in 1870 to twelve thousand by 1890—and magazines "from 700 in 1865 to some 3,300 in 1885" (Mott *American* 411, Roberts 281) fed this hunger for cheap and accessible reading. Readers could be assured that much of the material in mainstream publications was vetted to ensure it was in keeping with middle-class values. The editors of one of the most popular monthly journals, *Scribner's*, professed that their goal was to "make a magazine that is intelligent on all living questions of morals and society, and to present something in every number that will interest and instruct every member of every family into which it shall have the good fortune to find its way" (qtd. in Stevenson 156).

The emphasis on morality and instruction reveals the anxieties of a culture confronted with change. Reading made intelligible the disparate forces and ideas at play during the five decades of transition into the modern age. Darwinism, imperialistic aspirations, the rise of industry, and a host of other social, political, and economic developments threatened to reshape cultural ideals. Filtered through the prism of probity and didacticism, what historian Daniel Walker Howe conflates into the Victorian penchant for "seriousness" (325), these ideas surfaced in readings that sometimes questioned, but more often embraced, the dominant, middle-class values.

READING TRENDS AND PRACTICES

One of the hallmarks of reading in Victorian America was the rise of fiction. Indeed, the term Gilded Age, used to describe the era's hypocrisies, is the title of an 1873 novel by Charles Dudley Warner and Mark Twain exposing the moral

corruption of the wealthy and powerful. Novels made up the majority of best-sellers from 1860 through 1880 (Stevenson 35), and from 1890 to World War I, the literary historian John Tebbel reports that "the reading of fiction in America became something of a mania" (170). His assertion is borne out by yearly reports of book production in America from *Publishers' Weekly*. From 1880, when the reports began, through 1913, fiction constituted the bulk of available texts, usually followed by Juveniles, a category that included much fiction (Tebbel 675-704).

But the rise of fiction is not only a story of the availability of the books; it is also a story of desire. For many, reading fiction offered a vicarious means of escape, a way of lifting burdens and shifting identities. A Midwestern reader, Alice Hamilton, recorded in an 1890 diary entry the pull of fiction in her life:

I live in the world of novels all the time[.] Half the time I am in Europe, half in different parts of America; I am sober and sensible, gay and frivolous, happy or sorrowful just as my present heroine happens to be . . . Sunday I read [the novel] *Stepping Heavenward*. I had not read it for years and for two weeks I could not keep it out of my mind. (Qtd. in Sicherman 207-208)

Similarly, Charles Roosa, a New York printer, noted in 1880 that after studying history and politics, "Dickens sandwiches in between delightfully" ("A Symposium" 93). But fiction did not serve a solely escapist function; it also fostered learning. Howe argues that the all-pervasive influence of "Victorian didacticism" meant an "age of prescriptive writings of all kinds" (527). Infusing into their narratives the topics of the day, novels such as Lew Wallace's *Ben-Hur*, Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*, and Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* put a human (albeit fictional) face on abstract ideas such as faith, socialism, and women's rights.

Many cultural avatars who viewed reading, in general, as an entrée into the prevailing moral realm of the period regarded fiction as a bastard step-child: tolerated, but kept at arm's length. In some cases, critics regarded fiction as a drug and publishers as a kind of word-based cartel. In 1880, *The Hours* magazine cautioned that

Millions of young girls and hundreds of thousands of young men are *novelized* into absolute idiocy. Novel-readers are like opium-smokers: the more they have of it the more they want of it, and the publishers, delighted at this state of affairs, go on corrupting public taste and understanding and making fortunes out of this corruption. (qtd. in Tebbel 171)

A more nuanced, though still cautionary, note is found in Noah Porter's popular guide *Books and Reading or What Books Shall I Read and How Shall I Read Them*, first published in 1870:

Few things are more properly offensive to the traveler than to see a second or third rate novel in the hands of a well-dressed and well-mannered lady, or an intelligent and otherwise well-cultured youth. Few indications are more depressing than to enter a house in which wealth and comfort abound, in which taste and refinement are everywhere manifest, and perhaps a high tone of moral and religious feeling is maintained, and yet to find that the library of the family is made up of a score or two of third-rate novels, with perhaps a few books of devotion. (223)

Here the matrix between reading, fiction, and class is revealed. Although books in the abstract are valued, to attain the manners and culture of a "house in which wealth and comfort abound," it is important to read the right books, and Dr. Porter, later president of Yale, was happy to offer a prescription.

The possible dangers of fiction promulgated by such critics arise from the clash between the classic American values of individualism and the Victorian interest in propriety and control. On the one hand, the democratic ideal of choice seemed an inviolable contract, representing the instinct toward freedom of thought that lay at the core of the American mythos: in other words, let the people read what they want. On the other hand, there was the Victorian ideal of self-restraint (Stevenson xxii) that negated this drive toward freedom: in other words, people should read what society deemed "correct." Though all commentators did not agree with this idea of control, there was enough concern about morality and a lack of restraint, especially among the youth, to take action.

Publishers determined to print the sensational or thrilling fiction, which was so feared by cultural czars, risked running afoul of the Comstock Act (1873). Named after its instigator, Anthony Comstock, founder of the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice, the bill prohibited, under threat of "hard labor in the penitentiary for not less than six months," the distribution of any literature or representation deemed "obscene." Although few writers or publishers actually went to jail, a tone of intolerance and censorship was pervasive throughout the period, stretching as far as to exclude, in 1905, Twain's *Huck Finn* and *Tom Sawyer* from the Brooklyn Public Library (Tebbel 617).

RELIGIOUS TEXTS

Throughout American history, religion has dominated the cultural and intellectual mindscape. In the Victorian era, many were swept up by the fervor of the Third Great Awakening (1860s through 1900s), a time of revivalism and expanding church membership. Yet for others, particularly toward the end of the century, science, and especially Darwinism, weakened the hold of religion on their lives. This seeming dichotomy of embracing and eschewing religion is aptly illustrated by the recollections of two Maryland residents whose age, gender, and class set out the markers of this split in spiritual attitudes. The author Lizette Reese, recalling her middle-class youth in the late 1860s and 1870s, wrote that it "was the age of faith. We were as sure of God as we were of the sun" (5). In contrast, recalling his upper-class youth in the 1890s, the literary



This illustration, from John W. Gibson's *Social Purity* (1903), graphically illustrates the direct cause-and-effect relationship many believed books had on people's lives. [Courtesy Library of Congress]

critic Henry Seidel Canby wrote that the "inner significance" of religion "was lost" (130-131).

Although Canby's views were in the minority, the concern over a slide into ecumenism—or worse, atheism—meant a regime of proper reading was recognized as a corrective, a kind of tonic for the soul. Of course the most prescribed text was the Bible. The most widely read version of the Bible, in both English and a variety of indigenous languages, was the King James version; however, in the 1880s a revised version of the New Testament appeared, written by a committee that included American as well as English scholars. The purpose of the revision was "to adapt King James' version to the present state of the English language without changing the idiom and vocabulary," and to bring it up to "the present standard of Biblical scholarship" (Hall). The cultural significance of this new translation is demonstrated by its popularity: at least two newspapers published the entire text, and in New York, two hundred thousand copies were sold in one week (Hart 162). Such demand for a book that most readers were already familiar with—and owned—attests to the Bible's continuing impact in the culture.

This interest stems from what readers judged as its educative and emotional efficacy. One educator wrote in 1876 that Bible-reading promoted "honesty, general benevolence, public and private charity, industry, economy, honesty, punctuality, sincerity, sobriety, and all social and generous sentiments" (qtd. in Moore 59). A catalog of the middle-class virtues so esteemed by the populace, the list illustrates why the Bible continued to be a core text for this period: in one book, it embodied all of the cultural ideals the majority of society desired. But it also served its traditional role as solace for the faithful. Elida V. Works, writing to her husband in 1868 during a time of depression, wrote that, "I took up my bible to read. I felt as if I wanted to find something to rest upon" After reading two verses from the first Epistle of Peter, she added, "it seemed every time I read them I was lifted a good many degrees" (qtd. in Heininger 10). This more conventional use of the Bible as comfort was, along with reading for spiritual knowledge, one of the traditional approaches to the text.

While the Bible remained the touchstone text, offering a ready source of inspiration for its readers and a wellspring of allusions and symbolism for writers, other books shaped the spiritual makeup of the Victorian age. These include works that endorsed and challenged existing religious doctrines, revealing a variety and complexity rippling the seemingly placid surface of Protestant America.

Henry Ward Beecher's *Sermons* (1868) and Hanna Whitall Smith's *The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life* (1875) are examples of popular nonfiction devotional texts that both supported and subtly shifted the established religious beliefs. The best-known preacher in America (a Billy Graham of the nineteenth century), Beecher's writings were consumed with an enthusiasm usually reserved for popular fiction (Stevenson 140). Part of the attraction was his promotion of a kinder Christianity. At the forefront of a religious movement shifting mainstream American Protestantism from its rigid Calvinist origins to a more emotional and direct response to God, Beecher's sermons espoused a message of "The Gentleness of God" (89). Instead of the stark Puritan imagery of a spider dangling over a fiery pit, Beecher offers a more hopeful view of the Christian mission, imagining a journey up a mountain where "hope, and love, and patience, and meekness, and long-suffering, and kindness, and wonderful mercies, and gentleness, as so many banded helping angels, wait to take you by the Hand and lead you up to God" (107). Beecher's message is clear: "fear him no longer" (107).

Like Beecher's text, Hannah Whitall Smith's *Christian's Secret* is based on a more accessible and benevolent religious view. First published by the Williard

Tract Repository (one of the many organizations issuing a variety of religious texts from children's books to Bibles), the book has remained continuously in print since its initial publication. Structured like a guide book for leading a Christian life, the book achieved a popularity easy to surmise in an age looking for a forgiving Christ. Its core message was to "throw over all the mantle of Christian love" (iv). After delineating the many obstacles to attaining and keeping Christian faith, Smith offers what her pragmatic audience desired: the "Practical Results" of Christianity (172). Further, she reinforces the obedience central to middle-class values by asserting that through "A submissive acceptance of the will of God"—and by following her precepts—"Meekness and quietness of spirit [will] become in time the characteristics of . . . daily life" (176). Part of the book's appeal lay in this result: meekness. This quality was revered; as one late-nineteenth-century author wrote, "The first requisite to the realisation of the object of life is obedience" (Wagner 43). The book's popularity at a time of increasing material consumption and celebration of the individual speaks to the culture's longing for emotional comfort. It also illustrates the gulf between American desires and American realities—the gulf between the aspirations of a Christian nation and the actions of a nation with industrial capitalism at its core.

A different kind of religious comfort was proposed by William James in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902). After a period of personal despondency and skepticism of established religions, James invested his religious inquiry with a psychological approach to address an audience experiencing the pangs of spiritual questioning. He notes at the outset that his interest lies not in religious doctrine but in "religious feelings and religious impulses" (4). He ultimately finds that "The completest religions . . . are essentially religions of deliverance: the man must die to an unreal life before he can be born into the real life" (162). This idea of a "second birth" (157), an echo of "Great Awakening" revivalism, fell upon friendly ears. Fitting the prevailing cultural view of religion as a bulwark against the materialism and otherworldly values that contested Christian ethics, *Varieties* provided an intellectual basis for spiritual growth and renewal.

Like James, Mary Baker Eddy experienced a physical and spiritual crisis, and like him she wrote about her experiences; unlike James, instead of merely ignoring contemporary dogma, she created her own. Baker Eddy's *Science and Health*, first published in 1875, became the central text for Christian Science, a religion based on the ideal that, "all discord, such as sickness, sin or death, is distinct from Spirit, and not produced by God; also, that God is the Soul, or Principle of man, the Truth, unerring and eternal" (12). This idea of a purely benevolent God mirrors the shift to the more compassionate Christianity espoused by Beecher and Smith. Eddy's promotion of spiritual healing meshes with the nineteenth-century interest in mysticism and faith healing. Although many deemed Eddy's focus on the mind's healing powers somewhat eccentric, the faithful accepted her ideas as sciences in an age when phrenology was still an accepted scientific practice and social eugenics was an uncontested field.

Although religious nonfiction titles supported or reworked prevailing convictions, fiction remained the most popular means other than the Bible of spreading the Gospel. Because parables conveying spiritual messages are a central part of the Christian experience, it was a small step for writers to take the parable form and use it to create what can be called a Christian ministry of fiction (Gunther Brown 95). The prevalence of such books led Mark Twain to claim in 1871 that "nine-tenths of all the kindness and forbearance and Christian charity and generosity in the hearts of the American people to-day" was derived "through the despised novel . . . and NOT from the drowsy pulpit!" ("Memoranda" 320).

One such "despised" novel, Augusta Jane Evans Wilson's *St. Elmo*, published in 1867, tells the story of Edna Earl, a poor orphan adopted by Mrs. Montgomery, a rich Tennessean widow. Mrs. Montgomery's son, St. Elmo, gives the novel its name and narrative drive, tracing his conversion from a worldly, debauched sinner to a minister and, inevitably, husband of Edna. A model Christian, Edna is a paragon of virtue, beauty, and humility; of especial interest is her daunting intellect. The novel is filled with offhand references of abstruse and arcane origin such as a comparison of St. Elmo's reading voice to "Jean Paul Richter's description of Goethe's reading" (218). Part of the interest in the novel derives from this allusive richness, which while baffling to most readers, lent a veneer of respectability to the text.

Most importantly for a Christian audience, Edna uses this prodigious learning not to promote worldly ends, but to write a book showing that all the world's mythologies and "every system of religion . . . could be traced to Moses and Jesus" (110). Coupled with the ecstasy over her conversion of the prodigal son, the novel's message is clear: all work conducted under the banner of Christ—intellectual or emotional—is deserving. This message, coming at a time when women were seeking a more independent role in society, may seem revolutionary, but as in most fiction of the period, its fervor was undercut by the novel's conclusion. After their marriage, St. Elmo tells Edna she can no longer pursue her literary ambitions, and she docilely submits. Though the patriarchal culture resumed its reign, the central idea of women as intellectuals, though always ready to demur to men, remained. As one female reader noted in 1881 the novel "did me good for it kept me running to the Dictionary or to an encyclopedia" (qtd. in Trubey 132).

But an encyclopedia is not a book for consolation. For that, readers could turn to Elizabeth Stuart Phelps's *The Gates Ajar*, published in 1868. A response to the carnage of the Civil War, the book offered religious succor to a nation confronting a physical and emotional reconstruction. Faced with such a surfeit of grief, Phelps wrote that she sought to console "the bereaved wife, mother, sister, and widowed girl . . . whom the war trampled down" (qtd. in Long 783). Accordingly the novel presents the story of Mary Cabot, inconsolable with grief after her brother's death in the Civil War, and her slow conversion from the dour vision of the afterlife offered in her Calvinistic church, to a heaven replete with mountains, flowers, and, most comforting of all to female readers, a "home" (140). Accepting this new religious view, taught by her Aunt Winnifred Forceythe, the novel ends with Mary awaiting the moment when "the gates shall open" (248) and she can be reunited with her loved ones.

Like Mary Baker Eddy, Aunt Winnifred is steeped in the spiritualism and mysticism of the period. Unlike her living counterpart, Winnifred does not offer up a new creed as much as a new vision of the prevailing Protestant doctrine. And although much of this vision seems far-fetched, and indeed, was denounced by some in the pulpit and satirized in the press, the writer Bret Harte, reviewing the novel, explains its allure: "Reason grates horribly on the suffering sense; logic can not 'make Death other than Death'" (293). The novel's attraction, as Harte grasps, lay not in its logic, but in its emotional appeal; far from challenging orthodox religion, it provided a therapeutic balm for the many readers touched by the loss of a loved one. While interpreting the Bible metaphorically, its constant reference to scripture ensured its favor among nineteenth-century readers, reinforcing the idea of a benevolent God with its depiction of heaven as a celestial homestead.

An even more literal interpretation came toward the end of the century in Lew Wallace's *Ben-Hur*. First published in 1880, by 1886 the book was selling forty-five hundred copies a month (Hart 164). Opening in the Middle East on the eve

of Christ's birth, the novel realistically presents the virgin birth, with the supernatural elements treated as marvelous, though not unnatural, events. It proceeds to tell the story of Judah Ben-Hur, a member of the Jewish aristocracy in Jerusalem, betrayed by an aristocratic childhood Roman friend and sent into slavery. The novel follows Ben-Hur's epic life in a fast-paced narrative including naval battles, assassination attempts, chariot races, family reunions, and lost and found love. Despite the traditional elements of romance literature, the story's cultural power lay in its spiritual message.

This message becomes clear as Ben-Hur prepares an army to be ruled by Christ, the Jewish king. The novel suggests that Ben-Hur has yet to learn the difference between temporal and spiritual power; between the example of the Roman Empire and the Christian lesson that "Love is better and mightier than Force" (284). After an affecting retelling of the crucifixion at Gethsemane, Wallace leaves Ben-Hur at the end of the novel returning to Rome and establishing the catacombs as a haven for Christian worship. Like *St. Elmo*, the underlying conversion narrative, in this case of Ben-Hur, the Jewish Prince, underscored the period's belief in the essential truth of the Christian way. In addition, its portrayal of a muscular Christianity transformed a passivist message into a creed more suited for an emerging imperial power.

These novels and other religious works illustrate the spiritual dimension of reading in Victorian America. Instead of mere entertainment or attainment of secular knowledge, they became bricks in the American house of faith. To many Victorians, books proceed from *logos*—biblically "the Word," and symbolically all language—and thus were manifestations of the divine, and part of God's works. As Edna says in *St. Elmo*, "Books seem such holy things to me" (468).

EDUCATIONAL TEXTS

Even books commonly considered secular, such as school textbooks, were influenced by the period's desire to impart Christian values. Accordingly, much of the instruction in Victorian American took on a religious hue. In most areas, it was deemed an integral part of instruction. As an Oregonian committee on education concluded in 1884,

there *must* be a *religious* basis to our educational system; and acknowledgement of our religious obligations, and the natural and common presentation of incentives to piety, must have their place in the common school, or it utterly fails of its mission. (Qtd. in Handy 102)

An emphasis on religion, however, did not mean a strictly sacred curriculum. Given the period's embrace of self-help and practicality, much of the teaching and textbooks focused on preparing a generation for work in a new industrial age. Connected to the rise of industry was a rise in urban population, resulting in a concentration of school-aged children and a more heterogeneous school population (Gutek 87). For instance, in part due to the lifting of Southern prohibitions against obtaining an education, African American enrollment went from 1.9 percent in 1860 to 9.9 percent in 1870 and then 44.8 percent by 1910 (*120 Years* 14).

The influx of immigrant children, combined with newly freed slaves entering the education system, heightened the socialization aspect of education (Gutek 179-180). Faced with the challenge of imparting the traditions, values, and mores of middle-class America, textbooks became repositories not only of discrete subjects, but of the very ideals that made up culture. Often chosen by school boards,

the books offered a window into the values a politically and socially connected group desired to impart to its young.

Reading textbooks were a mainstay in the transmission of values. A familiar name from the antebellum period, *McGuffey's Readers* remained one of the most commonly distributed textbooks in the Victorian era, with sixty-one million copies sold between 1870 and 1890 (Tebbel 600). Compiled first by William Holmes McGuffey, the books covered primary through upper-grade reading levels, espousing the benefits of propriety and diligence across the school years. In a story from a fifth-level reader, "Do Not Meddle," appearing in editions from 1879 to 1907, a rich old man tests several boys to see if they can be trusted to, as the title suggests, "not meddle" in his personal belongings. He eventually finds one who resists temptation and rewards him with employment and, upon the death of his master, a "large legacy" ("Do Not" 58). And in case the reader did not understand the message of this story, it was followed by a poem that opens with "Work, work, my boy, be not afraid" (Cook 59). The lesson is clear: self-control and diligence are the road to success.

Readers found that this work was always tempered with an awareness of a greater reward: heaven. Another short tale in the same volume recounts the story of a prosperous barber who decides to give up his Sunday work and instead devote the day to worship. After a rapid slide into poverty, "Providence" arrives in the guise of a lawyer who discovers that the barber is the beneficiary of a fortune from his recently deceased and long-lost uncle. He gained this because "he trusted God, who never said, 'Seek ye my face,' in vain" ("Respect" 70).

Like *McGuffey's*, the *Freedman Readers*, published by various tract house publishers beginning in 1865 and used in Reconstruction-era Freedman schools, attempted to acclimate an entire culture—recently emancipated slaves—into what the publishers believed was mainstream American life. While short biographies of prominent blacks addressed issues of cultural identity and pride, the books also supplied practical information on political and civil rights. Significantly, the books depicted an idealized Victorian home life for people who, the editors believed, had never experienced a proper domestic atmosphere (Stevenson 82).

Although texts like *McGuffey's* were used across the nation, regional variations existed. For instance, *The Southern Series* (1866), ironically published in New York, sought to "assume a distinctly Southern character and scope" (Holmes n.p.). Just as in the North, part of this character included piety (in titles such as "Mary's Prayer") and the moral dangers of lying (in "Acting a Lie"). But the peculiarly Southern character is revealed in "Holidays at the Plantation," where a family of whites are greeted at the plantation by Negro children who "came leaping and skipping about the bush-lights like so many monkeys" ("Holidays" 49–50). Thirteenth amendment notwithstanding, the ideal of American democracy did not apply equally. This acceptance of the most blatant racial stereotyping, inculcated at an early age, reinforced the prevailing Southern views of white supremacy, providing a harbinger of a more violent racism that was to rise in the unreconstructed South.

Regardless of locale, one common feature of these readers was the inclusion of American writers. *The Fifth Reader*, published in 1885 as part of the Appleton's Series, included, along with the usual assortment from the Bible, Shakespeare, Dickens, and Tennyson selections, extracts from Henry David Thoreau, Mark Twain, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Edgar Allen Poe. Authors such as these provided a distinctively American voice to the field, legitimizing the vernacular and lending the authors and their works—and, by extension, their birthplaces—an air of respectability and authority.

Many history texts avoided the overt politicizing and moralizing of the readers, yet their role in shaping the minds and attitudes of young Americans was readily acknowledged. Emma Willard, in the preface to an 1868 history reader for schoolchildren, wrote that “We have, indeed, been desirous to cultivate the memory, the intellect and the taste. But much more anxious have we been to sow the seeds of virtue by showing the good in such amicable lights that the youthful heart shall kindle into desires of imitation” (qtd. in Elson 226). Their content typically moved from first contact with the “aboriginals”—at times treating them with a surprising dignity—to a concentration on wars, pausing for capsule biographies of the important men in a particular period. Although discussions of modern historiography such as social or cultural history were absent, toward the end of the century writers such as George Holmes, in *New School History of the United States* (1885), succeeded in presenting narratives that, as he noted, avoided “consciously partisan or sectional” views (4).

Though the books, like the school boards that purchased them, were essentially conservative, concessions to popular tastes did appear in the form of illustrations and layout. Graphic embellishments became a regular part of the page layout, often including illustrations of people in addition to maps—for example, a page discussing the Civil War might include a full-length portrait of General Grant. This shift in illustration from strict utility (maps) to aesthetics (portraits) demonstrates a culture bowing to the popular desire for visual modes of communication and the technological ability of the publishing world to meet it.

With their mix of sacred and secular literary extracts, and historical writing sanctifying the values of work, piety, and obedience, Victorian-era textbooks reveal the educational anxieties of the period. The repetition and continual emphasis on control, morality, and propriety speak to a generation concerned about the corrupting influences of a world in flux, a world of changing racial, social, and class boundaries. Focusing on the changing character of America, Ellwood Cubberley, professor of education, wrote in 1909 that a school’s task was

to implant in [immigrant] children, so far as can be done, the Anglo-Saxon conception of righteousness, law and order, and popular government, and to awaken in them a reverence for our democratic institutions and for those things in our national life which we as a people hold to be of abiding worth. (15–16)

Of course, implanting these conceptions in immigrants meant that the same values were being implanted in the native-born: all shared in the indoctrination of middle-class values.

This indoctrination extended beyond the confines of the classroom. Given the pressures for social conformity in public and private lives, a proliferation of conduct and etiquette guides offered direct instruction to both the young and the old on “proper” attitudes and behaviors. The idealized manners, much like the idealized stories in the readers, represented the imagined world of probity, diligence, and reverence the authors worried was slipping away. This anxiety led writers to aim their texts at specific audiences in a desire either to shape the manners of the young or to exhort older readers to follow culturally proscribed conduct. One historian of the genre, Sarah Newton, argues that conduct books for younger audiences were often gendered, addressed to either boys or young men, or girls or young women, and often written in a folksy, accessible voice designed both to engage and to convince readers of the rightness of their counsel (1–10). Women were advised that proper behavior included piety, submission, humility, restraint, and domesticity; for men it included piety, ambition, and industry. This amounted

to an extension of the values inculcated by textbooks, albeit with a more practical, prescriptive bent and at times delivered in a warning voice.

Published in the midst of the suffragette movement, Charles H. Parkhurst's *Talks to Young Women* (1895) sets up a casual, conversational tone, suggesting a friendly, paternalistic air. However, the imperative tone of the actual advice admits no quarrel: "The greatest thing a woman can do is to do the thing that she was specifically endowed and ordained to do, and that is to bear children and train them for the uses and service of the world they are born into" (qtd. in Newton 93). Embedded in this advice are the key terms "endowed and ordained . . . service . . . they are born into" that ground it firmly in the religious and duty-bound world the author valorizes and attempts to sustain. For women, this valorization is connected to the domestic. As one 1896 manual noted, "The silent, resistless influence of home and the affections,—this is woman's true glory" (Tuthill 99).

The title of Orison Swett Marden's *The Secret of Achievement* (1898) suggests a more masculine text, emphasizing "achievement" over the restraint in books written for women. The text illustrates the often nationalistic tenor of the genre with exhortative prose: "AMERICA and the TWENTIETH CENTURY! These words, only other names for OPPORTUNITY, are enough to stir every ambitious youth to noble endeavor, and to arouse the sleeping aspirations of the dullest minds" (qtd. in Newton 49). Here the social norms of an aspirational culture unite with the national character, transforming the pursuit of "opportunity" into a patriotic endeavor. Tempering this goal-oriented impulse and providing "the highest endowment of youth," writes John Geikie in *Entering on Life: A Book for Young Men* (1887), is "RELIGIOUSNESS" (8). Thus the two contradictory poles of American thought—market capitalism and Christian virtue—find support in books aimed at forming the character of American men.

Though gendered texts such as these were popular, many books avoided such distinctions and offered direction and advice to both sexes. For instance, Samuel Smiles, an English writer whose titles were extensively reprinted in America, urged his readers in *Duty with illustrations of Courage, Patience, and Endurance* (1880) to submit themselves "to the influence of the Supreme Will, and [act] in conformity with it—not by restraint but cheerfully" (17). Connecting religiosity with submission, Smiles marries two strands of American belief. In addition to this injunction to conform, his exhortations of the importance of work—"Noble work is the true educator. Idleness is a thorough demoralizer of body, soul, and conscience" (37)—fit with the prevailing ethos of abstinence and diligence. Additionally, his long career as a public moralist supplied a seal of approval, legitimizing middle-class beliefs.

Taken together, the textbooks and self-help books articulate, reify, and support the period's middle-class desires and aspirations. Whether these desires and aspirations represent reality is difficult to judge. Historian Ruth Miller Elson believes that the textbooks create "a fantasy made up by adults as a guide for their children" (337). Under the guise of instruction, the books illustrate both the anxieties of a society experiencing a flood of people and ideas, and the wall of instruction they built to uphold the norms and values of the dominant culture. Though the world they created was "a fantasy," it was a fantasy that many readers accepted as real.

SCIENTIFIC AND BUSINESS TEXTS

The gap between the "fantasy" and reality of textbooks is perhaps best illustrated by the conspicuous absence of the work of the most celebrated scientists of the period: Charles Darwin (Elson 24). For the adults writing the books, the publica-

tion of *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life* (1859) and *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (1871) meant that evolution in general and Darwin in particular dominated much of the theological, social, and scientific debates (Boller 239). Indeed, Darwin's shadow loomed over Victorian America, coloring the science and business thought of the period.

Though published and reviewed in antebellum America, the impact of Darwin's *Origin of the Species* on scientific thought was delayed because of the rising tensions that led to the Civil War. *Origin* undercut centuries of religious thought about the creation, and *Descent*, showing the connection between man and primates, struck at the core of human identity. For readers these two books called into question centuries of Biblical study and the thought processes that produced it. The reverberations of the texts continued into the twentieth century with the 1925 Scopes Monkey Trial in Tennessee and continued with attacks on Darwinian evolutionary theory by late-twentieth-century religious fundamentalists.

Origin represented a synthesis of existing ideas of evolution. Darwin's emphasis on natural selection with inheritable variations placed the environment, instead of a god, at the center of species development. Though the author was a self-professed theist, Darwin's theories caused some American readers to question their religious beliefs; partly in response to this, many in the clergy attacked Darwin's views. This attack is perhaps best summed up by the conservative Princeton Seminarian Charles Hodge's terse summation of Darwinism: "It is atheism" (qtd. in Daniels 224).

But the popular understanding of Darwin, and more generally evolution, became wedded to the larger idea of American exceptionalism and progress. The guiding principle in all of these endeavors was progress, and this progress was animated by the spirit of a Christianized Darwinism. As John Fiske wrote in his popular *The Destiny of Man* (1884),

it is Darwinism which has placed Humanity upon a higher pinnacle than ever. The future is lighted for us with the radiant colours of hope. Strife and sorrow shall disappear. Peace and love shall reign supreme. . . . [W]e may look forward to the time when in the truest sense the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdom of Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever, king of kings and lord of lords. (118-119)

Instead of atheism, Fiske believed Darwin's theories supported the "Great Chain of Being" with Jesus as an *über* natural selector. This adaptation of American piety to a seemingly atheistic worldview is a testament to the hold religion had on the mindset of Americans. Faced with a theory that struck at the core of their belief system, instead of changing their belief, they just adjusted the theory. As the titles of Fiske's earlier *The Outlines of Cosmic Philosophy* (1874) and Henry Ward Beecher's *Evolution and Religion* (1885) suggest, American theologians accommodated Darwin's views into their own cosmologies.

Although Darwin's examples and books were grounded in the natural world, other sciences were quick to adopt the paradigm of evolution and apply it to other disciplines. Darwin's theories attained cultural dimensions through "social Darwinism," and through the views of the British economist Herbert Spencer, who in 1864 coined the phrase "survival of the fittest" (a term often associated with Darwin) and championed a *laissez-faire* view of society in *Principles of Biology*. This worldview had a profound effect upon art, society, and politics in America.

Aside from learning about Darwinism, readers of this period encountered a plethora of scientific views and disciplines. The rise of industry was grounded in

advances in physical sciences, especially chemistry and engineering, but the era also saw the growth of entirely new fields of study. In particular, two works of psychology and sociology appeared that set out new fields in American thought. The first, William James's *Principles of Psychology* (1890), established psychology as a medical field in America. Originally conceived as a textbook, *Principles* grew into a major statement of work in the field, combining a survey of existing scholarship with new theories and bringing new terms, such as "stream of consciousness" (180), into the lexicon. One of the book's main contributions was its insight into the biological basis of psychology. Building on the Darwinian idea of instinctual behavior, James suggested that the mind, like the body, acted on instinct and thus only responded to stimuli. With the publication of *Principles*, psychology in America shifted from philosophy to science, joining the ranks of medicine as a practice; it also influenced much of the later work in mental health in America (Evans 27).

Readers also found a more sociological bent in another work that drew inspiration from Darwin, Thorstein Veblen's *Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study in the Evolution of Institutions* (1899). Veblen, a professor of economics at the University of Chicago, skewered upper- and middle-class materialism in *Theory*, coining the terms "conspicuous consumption" (*passim*) and "conspicuous leisure" (*passim*) to describe the purchase of goods or the pursuit of leisure with the aim of impressing others. His critique goes to the core of the progressivism of science and business in this period, suggesting that society's much-vaunted "progress" was really an empty shell filled with the bric-a-brac of a decorous middle-class parlor. Veblen believed that older forms of illustrating power and social advancement—war, accumulation of trophies—had been transmuted into the "conspicuous consumption" of consumer goods. Thus, instead of a display of martial prowess, the upper class—and importantly for Veblen, the middle and lower classes who emulate or aspire to upper-class status—rely on purchasing power to establish their dominance. And these purchases must be "conspicuous" because "The wealth or power must be put in evidence, for esteem is awarded only on evidence" (36). This evidence can take the tangible form of grand estates and sumptuous foods, or the intangible form of leisure time.

Behind the idea of conspicuous consumption lay the Darwinian concept of adaptation (Russett 149). Though Veblen embraced Darwinian theory and discourse, he also warned readers of the dangers of what today would be called social Darwinism, warning that the pursuit of this lifestyle led to a predatory outlook, promoting a "ferocity, self-seeking, clannishness, and disingenuousness" (225). Instead of worshipping the titans of industry so venerated by mainstream America, Veblen believed the Gilded Age was just that: a shiny veneer covering a hollow interior, and that the supposed titans were really emperors without clothes. To readers fed a steady diet of boosterism and panegyrics on the glories of capitalism, *Theory* read like a repudiation of their economic and psychological values. The book was part of a larger critique of American society by writers and thinkers such as William Dean Howells, Kate Chopin, Mark Twain, and Henry Adams, all of whom, like Veblen, looked askance at the worship of consumerism and the unbridled capitalism fueling it.

Yet while Veblen criticized consumerism, the middle class glorified it. Indeed, for some it borrowed the trappings of American self-government. One shopper, in 1892, based the success of department stores on "the fact that their founders have understood the necessity of offering a new democracy" by offering "a taste for elegance and comfort unknown to previous generations" (qtd. in Schlereth 149). Perhaps the best evidence of this embrace of consumerism was the growth of mail-order sales. This direct appeal to the acquisitive nature of Americans led to a

particular kind of reading: browsing a catalog. With the cost of illustration driven down by technological advances, the proliferation of illustrated catalogs cemented the connections between reading and image.

The best-known catalog, Sears, Roebuck & Company, was first issued as a pamphlet listing watches in 1888. By 1897 it had grown to a 786-page compendium of the needs and desires of middle-class America. The work entailed in putting the catalog together, from copy to illustrations, is a testament to the power of the market in Victorian America. Companies investing in the production of such a catalog, including stores such as Montgomery Ward and Bloomingdales, had to be assured of turning a profit. The ubiquity of these book-length advertisements illustrates the link between business and reading in Victorian America. Populists might recognize the dangers of rampant capitalism and its oppression of workers, but the dominant middle-class optimism, combined with a generalized belief in social Darwinism, ensured that most believed in letting "nature" (or a Christianized evolution) determine the course of business. As the Sears catalog confidently stated, "It is safe to say that we are doing more for the farmer and the laborer than all the political demagogues in the country" (xiii). This view transforms consumer goods from a mere engine of commerce to an engine of the republic itself.

Readers also found these pro-business sentiments reflected in the essays of Andrew Carnegie and Russell Conwell. As one of the wealthiest men in America, Carnegie would seem a perfect candidate for Veblen's leisure class, yet while he epitomized the accumulation of capital, Carnegie repudiated the idea of amassing great personal wealth. Today Carnegie is seen as a Janus-faced figure, capable of funding the construction of hundreds of libraries across the United States and establishing philanthropic trusts, and capable of brutally crushing labor strikes and treating his workers with an iron fist. However, for most Victorian Americans Carnegie, who was born a poor Scotsman and died a multimillionaire, exemplified the American dream. His essay "Wealth," first published in 1889 and often reprinted under the title "Gospel of Wealth," illustrates both sides of his ideals, deftly combining a paean to the capitalist with a warning on the concentration of capital.

Carnegie argues that differences "between the employer and the employed, between capital and labor, between rich and poor" (654-655) are necessary "because [they ensure] the survival of the fittest" (655). This recourse to the

MAKING SCIENCE POPULAR

The Popular Science Monthly is known today (under the shortened name of *Popular Science*) as a magazine catering to the "do it yourself" crowd, but when first published in 1872, and on through 1915, it played a central role in the dissemination of emerging scientific theory. An early champion of Darwinism—founding editor Edward Livingston Youmans described evolution as "a great and established fact" (qtd. in Mott *A History* 497)—the magazine, in its first issue, began serializing Herbert Spencer's *The Study of Sociology*. Later years saw the publication of other seminal works such as sections from William James' *Principles of Psychology*.

Yet the magazine did not avoid applied science: in the September 1873 issue, readers could find an article on "Ocean Cables" along with one on "The Doctrine of Natural Selection." For Youmans, these two seemingly disparate subjects were both part of the true study of science, which "is not a mere acquaintance with physical things . . . [but] the investigator of Truth" (639). The magazine's rapid growth and continued popularity (up to twelve thousand in circulation after less than two years of publication [Heyn 13]) suggests that for many Americans, this "truth" lay in the pages of scientific journals instead of the pages of the Bible.

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language of social Darwinism lent scientific credence to his observations, reinforcing the inevitability of the current social order. For Carnegie, the corporation and its attendant division of spoils created the “foundations upon which society is based” (656). After establishing the necessity of market capitalism, Carnegie turns to the actions of those who hold the reins of power: the industrialists. He argued that accumulated wealth should not be passed down through inheritance; appealing to the religious ethos of the period, Carnegie believed that the wealthy, “animated by Christ’s spirit” (661) can ameliorate poverty not through increased wages, but via philanthropic initiatives (such as his libraries and institutes) leading to self-improvement. Concluding the essay with a homiletic tone—“Such, in my opinion, is the true Gospel concerning Wealth” (664)—Carnegie delivers what amounts to a lay sermon, a genre well suited to engage the attentions and opinions of Victorian readers.

Like Carnegie’s essay on wealth, Conwell’s “Acres of Diamonds” provides a spiritual basis for business and capitalism. Widely reprinted, it was also delivered as a speech thousands of times from 1890 until Conwell’s death in 1925. His central message is framed as a direct appeal: “it is your Christian and godly duty” to “honestly attain riches” (20). In prefatory remarks to a print edition he adds another culture marker that explains his appeal: patriotism. “[I]n this country of ours,” he wrote, “every man has the opportunity to make more of himself” (2). This appeal, couched in the language of social Darwinism and combined with the religious imagery and symbolism of the text, made “Acres” a more explicit “Gospel” of wealth than Carnegie’s. Conwell, a Baptist minister who went on to found Temple University, is a representative man of his age, combining the religiosity of a man of the cloth with the financial appetite of a man of business. Combining two respected rhetorics—self-help and sermon—Conwell’s message was styled to ensure a receptive audience. Its popularity reflects the aspirations of a populace of readers that was comfortable with both God and Mammon and was eager to have its economic ambitions reconciled with its religious fervor.

A more direct and practical business text read during the time was Frederick Taylor’s *The Principles of Scientific Management* (1911). The book sets out Taylor’s scientific approach to management based on a simple reward system. He recommends to readers that, once the average productivity for a shift’s work has been established (using time and motion studies), bonuses could be given to those who met it, and training given to those who do not. Taylor’s methods butted against the American strain of individualism, which held that people should have a voice in the way their lives—even their work lives—are conducted. Yet his certainty—the idea that there was one best way to perform a specific task—both reflected and fed into a business culture that looked for specific answers. Coming at a time when science, labor, religion, and politics—the whole host of cultural determinants—were in flux, Taylor provided an oasis of rationality. For businesses looking to scale up, Taylor’s theories provided a clear method of development. Through *The Principles of Scientific Management*, business acquired the mantle of science, professionalizing the field of management just when industry was creating a corps of managers.

DOMESTIC TEXTS

Just as industry looked to Taylor and other writers for guidance, home managers, usually women, turned to books for domestic advice. Such advice was crucial because, as the historian Daniel Walker Howe notes, “the most important

locus for cultural transmission in Victorian society was the home" (529). In nineteenth-century America, the simple word "home" assumed grand proportions, incorporating a wealth of social, gender, and religious values. Historian Maxine van de Wetering ascribes this valorization of the home to a variety of factors including urbanization and the growing materialism of a burgeoning capitalist economy (10–17). Additionally, the rapid swings between boom years and depressions led to dramatic reversals that often threw men back on the resources of the family. These contributed to an undercurrent of anxiety that fed into the concept of home. Families looked to their domestic life to supply a sense of stability, a moment of stasis in a rapidly changing world. Home became an ideal, a goal to be attained quite apart from the actual real estate or dwelling it occupied. Writers offered a variety of works—targeted primarily at women—that produced guidance on what constituted a middle-class home and how to run it effectively.

For Catherine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe, the animating spirit necessary in any home was religion. In their *American Women's Home* (1869), one of the period's best-known and most widely read domestic texts, they mix practical advice on hygiene, education, cooking, care of servants and children, and various other home concerns with a zealous Protestant moral and religious philosophy. They open the book affirming that mastering "Domestic Economy" is "the true mission of woman" (14–15). This mission included fostering "self-denial" in women, "training . . . [them for] self-sacrificing labors" (19). The final chapter, "The Christian Neighborhood," exposes their real ambitions. Gazing into the future, they note that "the 'Christian family' and the 'Christian neighborhood' will be the grand ministry of salvation" (455). With a missionary enthusiasm, they predict that this "Christian neighborhood" will "become the grand ministry, as they were designed to be, in training our whole race for heaven" (459). The Beecher sisters, in part due to the notoriety of the Beecher family name, acted as cultural arbiters, codifying the values and domestic practices and setting the standards by which women judged themselves and others.

One of the main domestic duties involved child care, and Dr. Luther Emmett Holt, in *The Care and Feeding of Children: a Catechism For The Use Of Mothers And Children's Nurses* (1894), offered readers advice on development, feeding, toilet-training, play, and the inevitable "Causes of disturbed sleep" to the "Young Mothers of America" (n.p.). Given the strictures of Victorian prudery, the book's remarkably frank treatment of bodily functions, including the cleansing of "genital organs," as well as discussion of circumcision and of bowel movements, represented a marked departure from the religious circumspection of *American Women's Home*, though the linguistic nod in the sub-title suggests that the sacred was not far removed from the scientific.

Written in a question-and-answer format, *Care and Feeding* carries the authority of science rather than the warmth of domesticity; its popularity attests to a culture increasingly interested in professional opinions, one that looked to expert advice in a complex world. As fitting an age where self-control was esteemed, the text includes warnings against appeasing a child who cries from "indulgence" (124); instead, mothers are advised to let the infant "cry it out" (125). Likewise, the advice to avoid playing with infants for fear of making them "nervous and irritable" (128) speaks to a culture interested in fostering independence at a very young age. The injunctions against kissing children, although medically sound in an age of communicable disease, helps establish, early on, a habit of avoiding displays of affection. This decidedly pre-Spock approach to child rearing is geared to a culture more interested in motivation than in consolation.

Mary Virginia Terhune's *Common Sense in the Household: a Manual of Practical Housewifery* (1871) offered readers information on care of the entire family. A popular novelist and travel writer who wrote under the name Marion Harland, Terhune combines a variety of recipes along with suggestions on other domestic duties. Aiming her comments at middle-class readers, she casually notes that "orders for breakfast [are often] committed to the keeping of Bridget, or Gretchen or Chloe" and refers to a "holiday set" of dishware (1, 143). These comments, complemented by recipes for such dishes as terrapins and imitation *pates de foie gras*, and chapters on dealing with "Servants" and "Entertaining," speak to the aspirations of a society interested in upward mobility. They show that the middle-class audience for this book, as Veblen noted several years later, desired to imitate the conventions and decorum of the wealthier class.

For those more content with their station in life, Fannie Farmer's *The Boston Cooking-School Cook Book*, first published in 1896, offered more practical menus, achieving an archetypal status that kept it on the best seller list until 1965. Its emphasis on "correct measurements" (25) and "condensed scientific knowledge" (n.p.) mirrors Holt's *Child Care* in its embrace of precision and expert opinion.

The proliferation of domestic texts reveals a middle-class culture comfortable with materialism, turning away from the informality of a frontier nation toward the domestic mannerisms of a more urban—and urbane—society. No longer isolated on homesteads, Americans yearned for the sophistication and professionalism of expert opinion. It was not sufficient just to cook and care for children: custom now dictated that it be done in a socially and scientifically proscribed manner, a manner detailed in these texts.

POLITICAL, SOCIAL, AND HISTORICAL TEXTS

Although consensus reigned in household matters, American political, social, and historical views were divided largely along two competing traditions: conservative laissez-faire or liberal populism. Most conservatives viewed the government as benevolent and paternalistic, a friend of business and the world; most liberals viewed it as hypocritical and controlling, an enemy of labor at war with its democratic ideals at home and abroad. These differences surfaced on flashpoint issues for readers—including questions about foreign policy, immigration, judiciary, class, social reform, labor, and individual rights—who found them explored in the nonfiction and fiction of this period.

In law, Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr.'s *The Common Law* (1881) established the basic framework that he and later jurists employed to create a more activist Supreme Court. Contrary to established conventions, Holmes believed that law was not based solely in precedent but was an organic, living process: as he wrote, "the law is always approaching, and never reaching consistency" (36). Socially conservative, his belief in legal decisions rooted in experience instead of precedent set the groundwork for supporting legislation explicitly designed for social engineering, including labor, speech, and regulatory injunctions.

Operating beyond the scope of American law, foreign policy entered an expansionist phase during the Victorian period. For writers such as Albert Beveridge and Josiah Strong, such an expansion was a natural outgrowth of our country's moral and religious duties and destiny. In a speech titled "The March of the Flag," first delivered in 1898 and widely circulated in print, Beveridge articulates the main arguments supporting American imperialism, including religion, race, xenophobia, appeals to democracy, and the economy. Hinting at Darwinian notions of the sur-

vival of the fittest, Beveridge argues for an aggressive foreign policy because it is our "duty to our fellowman" (48).

In a similar fashion, Strong, in *Our Country* (1891) invokes a litany of self approval, but with a more missionary-like fervor, linking the goal of American expansion with evangelicalism. For him, America is "Like the star in the East which guided the three kings" (40). After duly noting the problems with the "typical immigrant . . . whose moral and religious training has been meager or false" (53), he elevates the "Anglo-Saxon [as] the exponent . . . of a pure spiritual Christianity" (201). At a time when Chinese immigrants were referred to as the "the Yellow Menace," Strong's work seems a more refined form of racial demagoguery. Although Strong espoused many views readers today may find repellent, he also warned that the increasing gap between the rich and the poor was building a "republican feudalism" (150). This more practical view of Christianity fit well with those who believed in a more egalitarian America, neatly combining the passion for self-improvement, pragmatism, and religion. Yet his views, like Beveridge's, with their optimistic portrayal and embrace of America's imperialistic designs, make him a precursor to the twenty-first-century, neoconservative worldview. Providing a social and political background for the cries of "Remember the Maine" later used to justify an attack on Spanish colonies, they represent an emboldened nation ready to slough off the hesitations of earlier isolationist policies and replace them with a more muscular, interventionist strategy.

The contradictions between Beveridge's embrace of economic opportunism and Strong's warnings on the dangers of "Mammon" explain the rise of the Social Gospel movement, which reacted to the materialism of American society and the rapaciousness of business by uniting the humanizing doctrines of Christianity with a social agenda. Followers of this movement shared a belief that Christianity entailed a social responsibility, especially a mandate to alleviate the conditions of the poor.

Charles Monroe Sheldon's *In His Steps: What Would Jesus Do?* addressed this mandate in fictional form. One of the most popular texts in nineteenth-century America, selling at least two million copies (Mott *Golden* 197), the novel *In His Steps*, first published serially in 1896, indicts the prevailing capitalist ethos. The plot sets up the essential Social Gospel conflict: God versus Mammon. A young minister, Henry Maxwell, finds himself first turning away from, and then shamed by the death of, a beggar. The incident encourages Maxwell to shed his worldly cares and ask for volunteers from his congregation

who will pledge themselves, earnestly and honestly for an entire year, not to do anything without first asking the question, "What would Jesus do?" And after asking that question, each one will follow Jesus as exactly as he knows how, no matter what the result may be. (15)

THE POWER OF THE PRESS

On February 15, 1898, the U.S.S. *Maine* exploded while at anchor in Cuba's Havana harbor. News coverage was extensive, with editors quickly adopting a sensationalistic tone and agitating for military action. Indeed, many historians credit the press with forcing the McKinley administration to declare war on Spain.

The incident whetted the public's appetite for information, and newspapers such as William Randolph Hearst's *New York Journal* kept it fed, printing over a million copies a day replete with banner headlines and unsubstantiated charges of Spanish involvement in the explosion. Labeled "yellow journalism," this coverage appealed to American xenophobia and racism; it also reduced complex geo-political issues to simple slogans such as "Remember the Maine" and fostered blindness to the human costs of American imperialism.

Those taking up his pledge, all successful members of the middle class, gradually learn the moral efficacy of pursuing the Almighty instead of the almighty dollar. The novel ends with the main characters sacrificing the security of their middle-class lives to achieve what the book—and much of the culture—identified as Christian virtues: a “future joy of suffering, loss, self-denial, martyrdom” (243). This celebration of self-effacement, seemingly at odds with the dominant myth of American individualism, is reconciled when this myth is set against a growing awareness of the social damage that individualism created, a perception that the Gospel of Christ and the Gospel of wealth were separate and unequal. Classified by Gregory S. Jackson as a “homiletic novel” that “aimed to facilitate private devotion, strengthen moral autonomy, and foster social engagement through acts of reading” (641–642), the book’s enduring significance, resurfacing in the acronym WWJD (taken from the book’s title) bracelets and stickers in the late-twentieth century, is a testament to the continuing religiosity of the nation and of Sheldon’s role in sustaining it.

The intensive interest in social economics illustrated by the Social Gospel is best exemplified by the remarkable popularity of Henry George’s *Progress and Poverty*, first published in 1879. Its wide circulation, estimated at two million by 1905 (Hart 175–176), for a book with chapter titles such as “Wages and Capital,” “Population and Subsistence,” and “The Laws of Distribution,” demonstrates the reading public’s abiding interest in economic issues. Read against a backdrop of strikes and worker discord, the book, like *What Would Jesus Do?*, criticizes the prevailing capitalist doctrine, which “condemn[s] the producer of wealth to poverty and pamper[s] the non-producer in luxury” (338–339). For George, the solution was simple: “We must make land common property” (326). These sentiments, soon to be echoed in the Populist Party’s campaign for working-class and farmers’ rights, provided a factual and theoretical basis to contest capitalist ideas of ownership and taxation. The popularity of George’s vision of a more equitable distribution of the fruits of labor suggests that many did indeed see the late-nineteenth century as a Gilded Age, a triumph of the powerful over the powerless.

In contrast with the more analytic economic analysis of George, Jacob August Riis’s *How the Other Half Lives*

(1890) appealed more directly to reader’s emotions. Using text and images to raise the public’s consciousness concerning the plight of tenement dwellers, primarily immigrants, in New York City, Riis’s depiction of the dangers of alcohol and the poor treatment of children played into the sentiments of the temperance movement and the sentiments of a culture that idealized the young as repositories of a lost innocence. Focusing on the squalid living quarters and sordid environment of the slums, the book revels in sensationalistic descriptions, but for a specific purpose: to reap a “harvest of

READING PICTURES

While Riis used graphic illustration to stir public indignation, newspaper publishers used it to increase their circulation. Full-color comic strips, such as Richard Outcault’s *The Yellow Kid* began regularly appearing in the 1890s, much to the public’s delight. Though writing in different genres, Riis and Outcault employed similar settings (the New York slums), subjects (immigrants and the poor), and attitudes (sympathy).

Strips such as *Kid*, and other early-twentieth-century comics such as George Herriman’s *Krazy Kat*, broadened the definition of popular reading to include images and words, delivering pointed social commentary—along with laughs—to the masses. Indeed, the roots of *Pogo*, *Doonisbury*, and similar modern strips can be traced back to the Victorian antics of a buck-toothed immigrant urchin wearing an oversized yellow shirt.

justice" (296) and improve the conditions of the poor. In keeping with the business mentality of the period, Riis looks to "Private enterprise" (283) to remedy the tenement problem, and offers the examples of several profitable model tenement settlements. Beyond such solutions, the book literally provided faces of the anonymous poor, making it more difficult for society to dismiss their plight. Aesthetically, its hybrid form, an assemblage of photos, drawings, and text, is an early and influential example of photojournalism.

How the Other Half Lives falls into a genre labeled "Muckraker" by President Theodore Roosevelt, in which writers such as Riis, Ida Tarbell in *The History of the Standard Oil Company* (1904), and Lincoln Steffens in *The Shame of the Cities* (1906) wrote exposés uncovering abuses of public trust in business and government. Like George's *Progress*, these nonfiction texts provided readers with the factual basis critics used to foment change and institute reform.

Muckraking found its most recognized fictive voice in Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*. Published in 1906, the book is best known for its descriptions of tainted meat and unhygienic workplaces and for ensuring the passage of the Meat Inspection Act and Pure Food and Drug Act in the same year. Set in Chicago, the novel traces the slow decline of Jurgis Rudkus, a Lithuanian immigrant in search of the American dream. Though he and his wife are exemplary immigrants, possessing the work ethic and optimism that characterize mainstream values, a combination of bad luck, venal supervisors, and grinding poverty makes their lives miserable. They learn the hard economic lesson that "there was no place in [America] where a man counted for anything against a dollar" (70). Imprisoned after beating his wife's boss for sexual provocations, Jurgis is released to find his wife dying in childbirth and himself blacklisted. Undaunted, he resolves, evoking the language of Marxism, to "tear off his shackles, to rise up and fight" (253). His fighting turns political and he becomes a "convert" (379)—with all of the religious implications therein—to socialism.

President Roosevelt acknowledged the novel's role in alerting him to unsanitary practices in the food industry, but Sinclair's real aim was to place socialism at the center of workers' rights. *The Jungle* appealed to readers interested in sensational descriptions of corporate misdeeds, and to those moved by its portrait of Jurgis. While oppressed by his environment and the "survival of the fittest" ethos that ruled the business world, Jurgis remains a sympathetic Darwinian character who, in typical American fashion, looks forward to a brighter future—in his case, a future of socialism.

An earlier novel, Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward: 2000–1887*, published in 1887, also explored socialism, but used middle-class characters to tout its benefits for all. A utopian work depicting a socially progressive future, the novel follows the upper-class Bostonian Julian West, who wakes one morning to discover himself in the year 2000. The novel's interest lies in the lengthy disquisitions between West and the inhabitants of twenty-first-century Boston, giving Bellamy a chance to spin out his vision of a peaceful, prosperous, and progressive society. Picking up on the language of Darwinism, Bellamy learns that labor problems have been solved through "a process of industrial evolution which could not have terminated otherwise. All that society had to do was to recognize and cooperate with that evolution, when its tendency had become unmistakable" (35). Offering remedies for the social and political ills that beset late-nineteenth-century America, including employment, corruption, and class differences, the book depicts a society of full and equal employment controlled by the government and a state-run compensation system. Labor tensions have vanished because wealth disparity no longer exists: as a result, crime has virtually disappeared. Taking the Marxist argument

that society's problems are, at base, economic, the novel suggests that with a more equitable distribution of income—in this case by making the nation the “sole capitalist” (46)—social ills cease.

Tapping into the concerns of a country undergoing radical social changes, the novel offers a picture of a brighter future, a typically triumphalist view of American progress. According to the novel, America is inherently a benevolent culture. All that it needs is time to evolve and adopt higher moral and ethical standards. Though antithetical to the prevailing capitalist culture, the novel touched a chord of dissatisfaction, prompting the establishment of “Bellamy Clubs” to foster his egalitarian social vision (Mott *Golden* 169). Diaries and other documents reveal the impact of both *The Jungle* and *Looking Backward* on readers. In the early-twentieth century, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, born into a Bronx working-class family, noted in her diary that she was radicalized through the works of Bellamy and Lewis (Tinsley and Kaestle 233), and in 1890, at a Chautauqua meeting in Texas, an attendee quoted from *Looking* in a debate on socializing railway service (Rieser 142). These readers illustrate fiction's role as social critic, casting the philosophies and ideas of a variety of political and social reforms into narratives that appealed to working- and middle-class audiences.

Whereas writers such as Lewis and Bellamy looked broadly at society to uncover abuse, two important works were directed more narrowly toward a particular social group. Booker T. Washington's *Up From Slavery* (1901), and W. E. B. Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folks* (1903) offer readers competing views on the position of blacks in America. An autobiography tracing his movement from childhood slavery to president of the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, Washington's *Up From Slavery* moves beyond the individual through its agenda for black survival and improvement. Born out of the racism and segregation in the Reconstruction-era South, Washington supported compromise, patience, and accommodation of the strictures imposed by white America. Emphasizing the practical over the ideal, the vocational over the intellectual, the book charted a course for African Americans firmly grounded in the agricultural and tradesman worlds with an eye toward placating white America's concerns about blacks assimilating into their professional lives.

Writing in response to Washington's work, Du Bois argued that instead of placating, blacks should strive for parity with white Americans. Where Washington focused on vocational training and the individual (the economic), Du Bois focused on a liberal education and a public life (the political). The reason for this was simple: as he wrote, “the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color line” (vii). The brutality of this line was made clear by politicians such as Senator Benjamin R. Tillman of South Carolina, who in 1900 condoned the disenfranchisement and murder of an African American, arguing that it helped others understand the futility of engaging in “politics, for he [an African American] found that the more he meddled with them the worse off he got” (“Speech”). Instead of accommodating such racist rhetoric, Du Bois met it head on in his collection of thematically grouped essays. *The Souls of Black Folks* looks under the “Veil” of color that hides or distorts an entire people, and accepts African Americans as individuals instead of filtering them through white perception. Rejecting Washington's emphasis on vocational training as a reinforcement of “triumphant commercialism, and the ideals of material prosperity” (43), Du Bois instead argues “that voting is necessary to modern manhood, that color discrimination is barbarism, and that black boys need education as well as white boys” (55). For Du Bois, black identity should be embraced, and black expression and intellect nurtured because, as he concludes, “Would America have been America without her Negro people?” (263). The last

chapter, on Negro songs, illustrates one way this could be achieved. In these songs, Du Bois believes, lies the message that eventually "men will judge men by their souls and not by their skins" (261).

Washington's book, with its embrace of work, material comforts, and subordination, played into the period's cultural strictures on race, becoming one of the most widely read books written by an African American at that time. Its optimistic tone provided comfort for a nation of readers still grappling with the stain of slavery. Yet the strain of self-improvement and racial pride in Du Bois's book, while limiting its popular acceptance, ultimately made it the more influential text in American culture and society (Hubbard 12-13).

Two other works set the direction of historical study on the West and on history in general. Frederick Jackson Turner's "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" (presented in 1893) and Charles Beard's *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution of the United States* (1913) each established the dominant historical perspectives in the field for decades after their publication. Turner developed a view of the West (later labeled the "Turner Thesis") as one of the driving forces in American development and imagination. He argued that a gradually shifting frontier line had been the catalyst for America's "social development" (200). Turner believed that this tension between settlement and wilderness—the civilized and the primitive—led to a "perennial rebirth," which became the dominant force in "American character" (200). Although later challenged as simplistic and limiting (Limerick 20-26), the Turner Thesis worked its way into American consciousness and historiography.

Beard's book, as the title suggests, gave readers the chance to examine the Constitution not as a strictly political document, but as a text that reinforced the economic wellbeing of its framers. He argued that its emphasis on property rights revealed the capitalism at the very core of America; the document that enshrined political freedom also reinforced the privileges of wealth and power. He writes that most of those who drafted the Constitution "derived economic advantages from . . . the new system" (324). Although not directly critical of the founding fathers—Beard does not state that they were wrong to employ economic motives—his interpretation questioned the ethical basis of the country: were we a nation based on democracy for all, or a nation based on economic prosperity for some? Such a challenge was quickly met by critics interested in reinforcing the established view of the Constitution as a document grounded in political equality and silent on economic concerns (Nore 63-66). The intensity of the criticism hints at the larger political issues at stake: written at a time when the Populist movement was agitating for a stronger, working-class voice in government, and at a time when muckrakers had laid open the spectacle of a government enmeshed in business interests and graft, the book suggests that the problems these critics raised were not transient and situational, but pervasive and structural. For historians, the book amounted to a broadening of ideas, an opening of the borders of historical interpretation, influencing a generation of scholars who cast more skeptical eyes on the mechanisms of wealth and prestige.

CREATIVE TEXTS

This broadening of ideas is also seen in the density and variety of fiction available to readers during the period. Although short stories remained popular, as in the antebellum period, technological advances, and especially the rise of paperbacks and other low-cost books, put the novel at the center of interest. As the writer and editor Charles Dudley Warner noted in 1897, "This is pre-eminently the age of the novel" (158), but these novels weren't necessarily by American writers. Indeed,

before the International Copyright Law of 1892 that required royalties to be paid to foreign writers, the low cost—and, of course, the writing abilities—of English authors made them more popular than American writers. In 1876 *Publishers' Weekly* prefaced an early best-seller list with the following qualifier: "It should be noted that from these lists, works of Bulwer, Dickens, George Eliot, Scott and Thackeray were excluded since they, of course, stood at the head of standard novelists" (qtd. in Sheehan 99).

Charles Dickens, in particular, remained popular throughout the Victorian period, and one of his most popular novels, *David Copperfield*, though published in 1850, retained its popularity well into the 1890s (Holland 458, Roberts 276). This extended publication points to what critics label a "steady seller" (Gunther Brown 7): a book that remains popular over a period of time. *David Copperfield* is the autobiographical story of the title character, orphaned at an early age, who, after a series of setbacks, eventually becomes a successful novelist. Filled with eccentric characters and plot twists—Dickens's trademarks—the novel's celebration of hardy self-reliance, resilience in the face of adversity, and strong work ethic reads like a primer on American values. These traits, along with the over-arching image of the self-made man, transform the novel into an anglicized version of the American dream. In particular, *Copperfield's* emphasis on diligence mirrored the American cultural ethos. When David describes his own success, recalling how he would come home and begin writing after a long day of transcribing parliamentary debates, he notes that "my success had steadily increased with my steady application" (561). Here Dickens makes clear that David's success is based not on talent but on industry. Essentially Dickens, like the American propagators of the success myth, argues that anyone, regardless of their class or financial situation, can share the riches of capitalism through the sweat of their brow.

Yet while English writers such as Dickens remained popular, American authors earned a steadily greater share of the reading public's interest. Some of them, taking a cue from English writers such as Dickens and other European writers, began investing their characters and plots with more realistic emotions and situations. Instead of the metaphysical story of a whaling boat on the South Seas commanded by a monomaniacal captain in pursuit of a white whale, as presented in Herman Melville's antebellum novel *Moby Dick*, readers were offered the drama of drawing rooms and resort towns—in other words, the everyday life of everyday people (Ahnebrink vi), a term that, for many realists, meant members of the middle class.

This realism—and its class-bound focus—found expression in works such as William Dean Howells's *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885). Like most realist authors, Howells avoids overt commentary in the novel, letting the actions, thoughts, and speech of the characters speak for themselves. Much like *Copperfield*, Howells's novel focuses on a self-made man, in this case Silas Lapham. But in a Reformation-era twist on this trope, the "rise" of the title refers not to personal economics but to ethics. The novel opens with Lapham already wealthy as a manufacturer of paints. The tension derives from his conflicting desire to enter the upper ranks of Boston's society and the choice he has to make when faced with a shady business deal: will he save his material or moral life? His decision to follow a moral path and buck the prevailing attitude of the day—as one character remarks, "Money buys position. . . . It is the romance, the poetry of our age" (87)—suggests the anxiety of a society uncomfortable with the culture it has constructed. Its depiction of the material presence of middle-class life, from the detailed descriptions of home construction and decoration to the books the characters read, represents Howells's attempt to capture the realities of life. These descriptions, coupled with social themes such as the importance of work and the

dangers of lassitude, combined to create a novel that fed both the aesthetic and moral tastes of a nation. In the midst of the Gilded Age, Howells's novel left readers with a choice. They could believe that all was well, that morals still reigned in the corporate world, or they could believe Lapham was the exception that proved the rule, and that morals had disappeared from the corporate world.

Like *The Rise of Silas Lapham*, Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885) is grounded in realism, yet it stretches boundaries, reveling in the exaggerations of the American tall tale and couched in Southern dialects. A protean work, the novel charts the cultural landscape of antebellum America, including confidence men, revivalism, alcoholism, reform, senseless violence, and, above all, race relations in the father and son relationship that develops between Jim, the runaway slave, and Huckleberry Finn. Narrated by Huck, the vagrant son of a drunkard father, the novel opens with his adoption by the Widow Douglas and Miss Watson who attempt to "sivilize" (18) him. In rapid picaresque fashion, Huck runs away from them, is kidnapped by his father, manufactures his own "murder," meets up with Jim, and heads down the Mississippi river. Two con men, the Duke and the Dauphin, join them and run through a catalog of scams, from revivalism to impersonation, exposing the underbelly of a seemingly God-fearing nation. The novel concludes with an elaborate ruse involving Huck's friend Tom Sawyer who, lost in a cloud of literary Gothicism and romanticism (metaphorically reflecting Twain's view of the antebellum South), needlessly delays Jim's freedom.

Infused with the humorous local color and satirical social insight that made Twain famous, *The Adventures* presents readers with a powerful moral message. Huck's decision to "go to hell" (272) rather than accept the will of society and turn in Jim portrays an idealistic view of race in the Victorian era. Significantly, it is Huck, living on the outskirts of the established culture, who adopts a color-blind view. This celebration of the individual and freedom—at the end of the novel, Huck "light[s] out for the [Western] Territory" (366) instead of going back to the Widow Douglas—plays into the myth of American freedom described just nine years later in Turner's "The Significance of the Frontier."

Although American culture encouraged such freedom in young boys, it actively discouraged it in women. This made Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899), with its portrayal of a woman shedding the inhibitions of oppressive social conventions, a groundbreaking work. Set in New Orleans and the resort community of Grand Isle, Louisiana, the novel displays the life of Creoles and Acadians, containing much of the local color of Chopin's previous work. It differs from popular fiction in its portrayal of a woman who rejects her proscribed role. The protagonist, Edna Pontellier, begins to shed the social responsibilities of the pampered upper-class housewife satirized by Thorstein Veblen in *Theory of the Leisure Class*. She begins "seeing with different eyes and making the acquaintance of new conditions in herself that colored and changed her environment" (Chopin 102). No longer content to receive guests on Tuesdays, oversee a retinue of servants, and attend to her children, Edna aspires to become an artist, eventually moving out of her comfortable house and taking a lover. Shaken by the realization that she will never be fully free, at the end of the novel she returns to Grand Isle, where she first experienced her awakening, and commits suicide.

The objectivity of the narrator—who neither approves nor disapproves of Edna's increasingly flamboyant and romantic lifestyle—signaled for readers moral decay to some and the height of artistic achievement to others. Although reviewers were shocked by its scandalous subject, the novel's portrayal of Edna's desire for independence suggested that by the end of the century, the feminine ideal set out in Beecher and Stowe's *American Women's Home* did not satisfy all women.

Influenced by the prevailing currents of Darwinism and its deterministic view of life, many authors created characters shaped not by a benevolent higher power, but by their environment and emotions (Pizer 10–12). This aesthetic view of man as brute, labeled Naturalism by critics, is displayed in Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895), where "the fighters resembled animals tossed for a death struggle into a dark pit" (173). The novel debunks the romantic notions of individual valor first held by the protagonist Henry Fleming, and replaces them with the more communal view of the "battle brotherhood" (113) of real soldiers. Mixing the quotidian with the fantastic in the minute descriptions of a corpse decomposing under a tree, Crane makes war ordinary, suggesting that all life is a Darwinian struggle; we are all, in some way, at war. Written in a spare yet richly symbolic style, the novel's irony is underscored by its title: the red badge, or wound, Fleming receives is not from battle but from interfering with the retreat of his own army. Such irony fit with the temper of the period, a time when some readers recognized and rejected imperialism disguised as patriotism.

Although Crane used violence in his fiction to show the innate beast in man, other writers used it to lure readers with sensational tales of adventure and romance. Usually published in cheap, paperback format or in "story papers" (pulp newspapers), these texts, often labeled "Dime Novels," dominated the popular reading of this period. Often run as a series, the books' appeal lay in their topicality, vividness, and appeal to the prurient (Hart 153). Set in tenements, the high seas, exotic foreign locations, and the American West, the books fed the nation's hunger for cheap entertainment.

One of the most popular of the series, *Deadwood Dick*, offered by one of the best known Dime novel publishers, Beadle & Adams, was initially written by Edward Wheeler, and then carried on by a variety of house writers after the author's death in 1885. The first in the series, *Deadwood Dick, the Prince of the Road; or, The Black Rider of the Black Hills* (1877), established many of the conventions of the genre, including the basic plot—a conflict between good and evil climaxing in vengeance—and other formulaic features such as a variety of subplots, comic relief, violence and vigilantism, slang, melodrama, and hidden identities: in short, the basic elements of popular fiction. Set in the gold rush days in South Dakota, the novel presents the title character in the archetypal role of the avenging child. Deadwood Dick, assisted by a variety of characters, including Calamity Jane, becomes a criminal to avenge the swindling and murder of his adopted parents. At the end of the novel, frontier justice is administered, the murderers are hanged, and Deadwood resumes his life as the head of a band of outlaws.

Deadwood, a Victorian variation of the likeable criminal (Reynolds 59), is a stock type in sensational literature and a popular figure of the American imagination. With the cultural stress on individuality and the mythic "code of the West," readers admired characters like Deadwood Dick who might "take the law into their own hands" and issue summary violent justice (Slotkin 102). The setting of the novel, with its depiction of a frontier teeming with outlaws, Indians, and cowboys, spotted with dusty towns where saloons and gunfights are the order of the day, created a mythic view of the West that persisted well into the twentieth century.

Although Dime novels were popular with both children and adults, publishers in this period offered a variety of books aimed specifically at younger readers. The author of one series, Horatio Alger Jr., entered the vernacular as an exponent of a constellation of virtues ranging from patience to perseverance. His most popular book, *Ragged Dick; or, Street Life in New York with the Boot-Blacks*, first published

in 1867, best exemplifies the Alger formula of self-improvement through pluck and luck.

Though he is an orphaned shoe-shine boy, Dick, the title character, retains the attributes—honesty, courageousness, self-reliance—of an idealized middle-class youth. After taking a wealthy businessman's son on a tour of New York, he is rewarded with five dollars and reminded of the American social creed; the father tells him "your future position depends mainly upon yourself, and that it will be high or low as you choose to make it" (114). Dick heeds this advice, and acquires a new view on life. After bartering for an education, he improves his station, moving from a street urchin to an archetypal member of the professional class—a clerk. The novel ends with a stroke of good luck: he rescues a young boy from the East River and is rewarded with a job from his grateful and (coincidentally) wealthy father.

With its stress on individualism and repeated references to Dick's perseverance and resilience, the book and others in the series cemented the myth of America as the land of opportunity. This, coupled with its repeated connections between education and self-improvement, made *Ragged Dick* well-suited to instructing American youth. In parts reading like an exposé on the perils of urbanization, including the condition of the young and poor and the pervasiveness of crime, the novel rises above the dry moralizing tone of other books for boys, retaining an element of sensation that leavened its moral lessons with excitement.

Like *Ragged*, Louisa May Alcott's autobiographical *Little Women: Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy* (1868-1869) is a moral primer, though directed at a different audience of readers. Instead of the stereotypical masculine values portrayed in *Ragged*, Alcott sets out, as the title suggests, stereotypical feminine values. The novel focuses on the domestic drama of the March family, particularly the sisters of the subtitle and their relationships with Marmee, their beloved mother. Divided into two parts and structured around John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, the first section follows the sisters as they learn (like the pilgrim in Bunyan's book) to overcome their "Burdens" (54)—anger, vanity, egotism, timidity—in order to become the "little women" of the title. For readers, these "burdens" were part of the book's charm. Instead of the stock characters common in much of the children's fiction of the period, the March sisters were realistic, sharing the flaws of their readers, yet eventually, through patient work, overcoming them. In the second part of the novel, the sisters, now young adults, have internalized the Victorian feminine rule of self-control and are prepared for

"GO WEST, YOUNG MAN"

In Owen Wister's novel *The Virginian: A Horseman of the Plains* (1902), the myth of the American West reached its apotheosis in the tale of a tough yet virtuous cowboy, the unnamed Virginian of the title. A late permutation of the perennial call, best captured in Horace Greeley's 1865 exhortation to "Go West," the novel represents a culmination of the American frontier myth. In a now-familiar formula, the novel follows the Virginian riding the range managing cattle, laconically delivering homespun wisdom, eventually wining an eastern bride, and, at the climax, reluctantly shooting his nemesis in a gun fight on the streets of a dusty western town.

Though the life Wister described was fading (and exaggerated) when the book first appeared, its depiction of a rugged, adventurous life was welcomed by a society that had recently elected a "Rough Rider" president, Theodore Roosevelt. Only three years before the novel was published, Roosevelt had written that a "strenuous life," such as the one the Virginian led, represented the American ideal: it was "the only national life . . . really worth leading" (7-8). In *The Virginian*, Americans found just such an ideal—and idealized—national vision.

the betrothals that await them. In particular, Jo March, a character modeled on Alcott, learns the virtues of modesty and a measured docility, providing a realistic role model for young readers.

The novel avoided overt moralizing, yet transmitted through its vivid characters the version of Victorian womanhood embraced by the culture at large. While reinforcing the value of the existing roles of women, the novel also functions as a transitional work, with Jo March's fierce intellectual independence bridging the antebellum "angel in the parlor" and the suffragette of the future.

Poetry

Although fiction of this period ranged over all parts of the country, from a bootblack's New York to the Western territories Huck Finn lights out for, much of the poetry remained rooted in New England. Collections by John Greenleaf Whittier, Emily Dickinson, and Edward Arlington Robinson illustrate the different directions poetry took in the Victorian era. Whittier's *Snow-Bound: A Winter Idyll*, first published in 1866, is a look backward, a nostalgic reverie evoking an idyllic view of home, hearth, and family. The book-length poem tells the story of a family comfortably snowed in and passing time telling stories before a fire. For the father narrating the poem, the stories kindle memories of earlier times, leading him to ponder questions of remembrance and loss, all colored with a patina of longing. A testament to the joys of domesticity, the poem harkened back to an earlier time in America, before the carnage of the Civil War, offering comfort in the shape of a gentle and sentimental narrative filled with vivid descriptions of a New England winter. One of the most popular collections of poetry of the Victorian era, with twenty-eight thousand copies printed in its first year (Hart 135), the poem spoke to a generation looking back fondly on its rural past as it confronted an increasingly urban and mechanized lifestyle.

Much of Emily Dickinson's imagery, like Whittier's, is rooted in a preindustrial past. *Poems*, published in 1890, uses this imagery not as nostalgia, but to explore questions of self, truth, religion, and mortality. Published four years after her death, the volume met with both critical and commercial success, selling nineteen thousand copies by the turn of the century (Buckingham 164). Other collections quickly followed: *Series Two* (1891) and *Third Series* (1896). Though all were edited to normalize capitalization and punctuation, the early books retain the poet's epigrammatic style and idiosyncratic voice. Her veneration of nature as a kind of religion and acceptance of death speaks to her acquaintance with Ralph Waldo Emerson's work and beliefs, grounding her work in the transcendentalist philosophies associated with New England. Her spare and precise diction, metaphoric and symbolic instead of literal and descriptive, is of a kind with later developments in poetry, such as the Imagist movement and the elliptical poetry of the modern period.

Echoing Dickinson on some thematic levels, Edwin Arlington Robinson also anticipates the modernists, particularly in his depiction of the alienation of modern life and in his iconoclastic style (Joyner). His books *The Torrent and the Night Before* (1896), *The Children of the Night* (1897), *Captain Craig* (1902), and *The Town Down by the River* (1910) were given a spectacular boost after a review of *The Children* by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1905. Robinson is best known for his Tillbury Town poems, including "Richard Cory," "Luke Havergal," and "Mr. Flood's Party," which detail the complexity and disappointments of life in a fictional Maine town. Instead of perpetuating the idealized myth of rural New

England existence, the inhabitants of Tillbury Town exhibit the same ennui and malaise associated with urban dwellers, creating a more jaundiced vision of small-town life and foreshadowing later developments in American literature.

Two individual poems, Emma Lazarus's "The New Colossus" (1883) and Rudyard Kipling's "White Man's Burden" (1899), are important works that inject the political into the poetical. Although aesthetically limited, they point to the more didactic purpose of popular poetry in the Victorian era, when the genre retained an air of authority and a more public presence.

Lazarus's sonnet, written to raise money for the purchase of a pedestal for the Statue of Liberty, was largely ignored by the reading public on its initial publication. Its welcoming sentiment, best expressed by the image of a nation welcoming the tired, poor, and huddled masses, captures the myth of America as benevolent caretaker. Though embraced in the later twentieth century as a talismanic phrase praising the nation's immigrant roots, this ideal clashed with the period's often virulent anti-immigrant stance, and fell upon deafened ears.

More suited to the tenor of the age was Kipling's "White Man's Burden." An English writer, like Dickens, Kipling was adored by American readers: at least six American towns adopted his name (Hart 196). Part of his appeal lay in his embrace of the imperialistic impulses of late-nineteenth-century America. Writing during America's takeover of the Philippines, Kipling urges whites to care for what were considered part devil, part child. This racializing of the conflict, patronizing the inhabitants and providing a veneer of Christian duty to an essentially political endeavor, echoes the nativist rhetoric of writers and politicians such as Josiah Strong, Senator Albert Beveridge, and soon to be Vice President Theodore Roosevelt. Parodied after publication by those opposing America's expansionist endeavors, and embraced by those supporting them, today the poem is interpreted as an expression of the period's reflexive and innate racism.

Drama

Like poetry, drama played a central cultural role in Victorian arts. Although most cities boasted at least one active theatre, contemporary drama was usually ephemeral and seldom published (Bordman v). Instead of reading plays, audiences attended performances of them. The exception, of course, was Shakespeare, whose works could be found in excerpted form in school readers and elocution books, and in complete form in over one hundred editions published between 1850 and 1889 (Sturgess 20). Shakespeare's plays, after the Bible, were probably the most commonly read texts during this period (Mott *Golden* 57-58). Venerated as a symbol of Anglo-Saxon superiority (Sturgess 102), his plays were considered a compendium of Western tradition and thus a fit agent of acculturation for a country struggling to retain its identity amid an influx of immigrants. Instead of a vision of Britannia, American readers saw themselves in Shakespeare: as the American poet Bayard Taylor wrote in 1872, he was "The Master of our thought, the land's first Citizen!" (333).

Shakespeare's plays also illustrate the gradual transformation of literary taste into a class marker. In the 1860s, he was read by all, from cattlemen on the Western frontier to society matrons on the eastern seaboard. By the end of the century, after his inclusion in college curricula and a hardening of distinctions between highbrow and lowbrow culture, he became associated with a more elite audience (Levine 168-169). An acquaintance with Shakespeare's works became part of the mental furniture associated with a "cultured" lifestyle: a collected edition and bust of the author were considered *de rigueur* for Victorian parlors

(Stevenson 6). Esteemed as a literary badge of "quality" and hailed as a transmitter of values and language, Shakespeare reigned as America's playwright.

PERSONAL TEXTS

The Victorian emphasis on individuality and "the self-made man" explains, in part, the embrace of Shakespeare and, more generally, the popularity of biographies and memoirs. An 1883 report of New York's Mercantile Library makes this clear, noting that three hundred biographies were purchased, ranking it fourth in acquisitions, behind fiction, literature, and history (*Sixty-Second* 21). Of the many biographies and memoirs published during this period, two stand out, the first because of its subject and publishing history, and the second because of its style and influence. Ulysses Grant's *Personal Memoir* (1885) presented readers with the military career of the popular Civil War general and president. After a chapter on his birth and early upbringing (emphasizing his middle-class origins), the book moves quickly from West Point to his experiences in the Mexican War and then the Civil War. Discussing the different campaigns of the war, Grant writes not only as a primary participant—the commander of the Union army—but also as a historian; instead of self-aggrandizing his own role, he strives for objectivity. The focus on the war was welcomed by a generation of readers who had lived through it, and made even more prominent by the book's scope, which ends at the Civil War, ignoring the scandals of his presidency.

Stylistically, the book's open, simple diction won the praise of writers as disparate as Mark Twain and Gertrude Stein (McFeely 501), although it was not Grant's style that made the book a prepublication success. Shepherded through a private press by Twain and pre-sold through subscription agents prior to actual publication, Grant's autobiography illustrates the rising role of the celebrity author. *Personal Memoirs* also illustrates the idea that a book could serve as a status marker, a commodity that occupied a social role in the Victorian age.

Like Grant's memoir, Henry Adams's *The Education of Henry Adams* also had an atypical publication history. It was first read in manuscript form by his friends, and then published privately in 1906. This initial small circulation, however, was overshadowed by the great influence cast by the book over the intellectual thought of America. Adams, scion of a presidential and founding family, represents a transitional figure: a nineteenth-century man living in the twentieth century, casting a skeptical glance backwards and a foreboding stare ahead. Written in the third person to echo his personal detachment, the book explores the main ideas of the period, exploring Adams's trenchant views on religion, social improvement, education, politics, human relations, science, and even aesthetics. A synthesizing figure, Adams condenses all the competing forces of Victorian America into a metaphor that marries the past with the present in his famous chapter, "the Virgin and the Dynamo."

For Adams the Dynamo, exhibited at the Chicago Exposition of 1893 and Paris Exposition of 1900, is the new master. The religious symbols of earlier ages, exemplified by the figure of the Virgin, have crumbled in the face of mechanistic man. Time itself has sped, and Adams—looking over the wreckage of the Gilded Age with its political corruption, social Darwinism, and above all, entropy—concludes that "order and anarchy were one" and the result was "chaos" (406), a worldview soon echoed by the modernists. Anticipating the alienation of the machine age, Adams saw that, in this new world driven by energy instead of introspection, "The conflict is no longer between men but between the motors that drive the men" (442). These motors would soon be flying over the fields of Flanders and, armored, lurching

across the trenches of the Somme. Articulating the contradictions and tensions of a culture convulsed in change, the book presents a pessimistic view of the Victorian period, a distillation of an era bookended by wars.

CONCLUSION

In *Every-Day Life and Every-Day Morals* (1885), George Chaney explained the role of reading and books in Victorian culture: “Next to the people whose company we keep, we are most influenced by the books we read” (77). Meant both as a warning (stay away from “bad” books) and as a celebration (embrace “good” books), Chaney’s sentiments illustrate the centrality of books, and reading in general, between the years 1864 and 1913. This centrality was fueled by the availability of printed texts and images, including newspapers, pamphlets, and magazines, as well as books, all in a variety of formats and prices—and, with increasing accessibility of libraries, such texts were frequently available at no cost to the reader.

For a culture bent on self-improvement and concerned with maintaining its middle-class values, reading became both a means of economic and social mobility and a means of transmitting the social principles that supported those values. Over time, these values assumed a fictive mantle, as readers turned to novels for entertainment, to gain a more cultured view of the world, and, in some instances, to question or challenge the prevailing social mores. By 1913, challenges to the primacy of text itself arose in the form of movies and other entertainments that would begin to erode the influence of the printed word. But during the Victorian era, print culture reigned supreme.

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