

ABSTRACT

Title of Document: THE AESTHETICS OF INTOXICATION IN ANTEBELLUM AMERICAN ART AND CULTURE.

Guy Duane Jordan, Ph.D., 2007

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My dissertation, *The Aesthetics of Intoxication in Antebellum American Art and Culture*, proposes an ambitious re-evaluation of aesthetics in the United States between 1830 and 1860 that locates the consumption of images in relation to discourses of excess, addiction, and dependency. I uncover the antebellum period's physiological construction of looking as a somatic process akin to eating and drinking and offer a new definition of aesthetic absorption not merely as the disembodied projection of the viewer into a pictorial space, but as the corporeal ingestion of the image into the mind of the viewing subject. I demonstrate how this heretofore unstudied and historically-grounded alignment of aesthesis and alimentation played a crucial role in the production and reception of antebellum literature and visual culture. To this end, my dissertation stands as a broad-ranging cultural history that features fundamental reinterpretations of major works of art by Charles Deas, Thomas Cole, Hiram Powers, and Frederic Church.

THE AESTHETICS OF INTOXICATION IN AMERICAN ART AND CULTURE

By

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For Pop

(1911—1995)

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Introduction: Consuming Images

“When someone gazes intently at an object, we say that he ‘devours it with his eyes,’ and there are many similar phrases.

– Otto Fenichel¹

This project began with a simple question: If it is possible to eat and drink too much, is it possible to *see* too much? If so, what might a gluttony and intemperance of the eyes look like? An 1854 engraving for *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*, entitled “The Five Senses—No 1: Seeing,” appears to offer an answer (Fig. 1). In the foreground, a man in charge of administering a peep show stands by as two young bowery boys crouch and strain to peer into the box. Behind them, a showman in a top hat enthusiastically interprets a large painting of a lion attacking a snake for a group of three younger children, who, like the two peeping young boys, appear completely absorbed in what they see. At the far left of the composition, isolated from the rest of the activity, a frail old beggar, accompanied by his dog, holds out an empty dish. Around his neck, a sign reads: “blind.” The formal arrangement of the print cleverly juxtaposes young people engaged in immersive, obsessive seeing, with an elder man who cannot see at all. This dichotomy, I argue, foregrounds the long-term effects of looking at stimulating, but frivolous images. It seems to warn would-be patrons of these sorts of spectacles against indulging in too much eye-candy. Such fare, while enthralling, has little nutritional value, and only serves to whet the appetite for more of the same.

¹ Otto Fenichel, “The Scopophilic Instinct and Identification,” in *Visual Culture: the reader*, Jessica Evans and Stuart Hall, eds. (London: Sage Publications, 2003): 327.

My purpose in the following four chapters is to examine vision in the United States during the antebellum period as a somatic process akin to eating and drinking, and to answer the call of one major scholar, who recently opined that “The relation of images and thirst is a promising entry into the question of images and value, particularly with reference to the way that images themselves are consumed or ‘drunk,’ and the way in which they are said to consume their beholders.”² As such, I offer a theory of aesthetic absorption that operates not merely as the disembodied projection of the viewer into a pictorial space, but as the corporeal ingestion of the image into the mind of the viewing subject.³ Within the historical context of United States between 1830 and 1860, I contend that the same anxieties and prescriptions that governed the consumption of food and drink also implicitly (and on occasion, explicitly) governed the consumption of images.

² W. J. T Mitchell, *What Do Images Want? The Lives and Loves of Images* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005): 80. Mitchell continues his train of thought, claiming that: “From the kiss of the Byzantine Icon to the alluring mouth of *Videodrome*’s Nikki Brand, the surprising discovery is that images operate even more powerfully in the oral than the optical channel: that is to say, we do not merely ‘see’ pictures, we ‘drink’ in their images with our eyes (Shakespeare aptly called them ‘blind mouths’); and pictures in turn have a tendency to swallow us up, or (as the expression goes) ‘take us in.’” More generally, Angela Rosenthal has recently argued that “Attending to ‘visceral culture’ can help to bridge the gap associated with the divisive polarity pitting mind against body—the one elevated and disembodied, the other disavowed.” Rosenthal, “Visceral Culture: Blushing and the Legibility of Whiteness in Eighteenth-Century British Culture,” *Art History* 27:4 (September 2004): 565. Much scholarship in this regard takes as its premise the phenomenological theories of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who posited a sensuous intertwining, or *chiasmus*, that obliterated distinctions between self and other through an “openness through flesh” that connects the self into the carnal network of the world. See Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “The Intertwining—The Chiasm,” in *The Visible and the Invisible*, ed. Claude Lefort, trans. Alfonso Lingis (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 130-55, esp. 131. My understanding of Merleau-Ponty’s work—and its limitations—owes much to Amelia Jones, “Meaning, Identity, Embodiment,” in *Art and Thought*, Dana Arnold and Margaret Iversen, eds. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003): 71-90.

³ I refer here to the primacy of absorption described by Michael Fried. In his examination of salon reviews published by Denis Diderot, Fried remarks that many contain gastronomical metaphors, yet he does not expand upon the fact that among the Frenchman’s “... vocabulary of key terms, perhaps the most important of which, placed climactically in each, is *délicieuse*.” Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1980): 122.

The incorporation of the sense of sight into the discursive domain of diet structured the way that antebellum Americans thought about art, and fed period suspicions that art was a luxury that would compromise the moral and physiological well-being of the nation. Neil Harris, the first cultural historian to engage this issue, explains that “Like other luxuries, works of art were superfluous; for they served no real need.” Art, argues Harris, “would reduce national activity and movement as it captured the senses and blinded men to their real interests,” and, “like other luxuries, was normally the product of mature societies; it easily suggested age and decay. The very appearance of large numbers of artists seemed to signal the beginnings of national declension.”⁴ In other words, Harris seems to insinuate, although he does not make explicit mention of it, that art in America during this time was couched as a health problem; one that was, like gout, caused by overindulgence.

Yet, the conflation of ocular and gastronomical consumption posed particularly vexing problems for a society steeped in a republican simplicity that privileged utility as one of its cardinal virtues. While food—the proper kinds, taken moderately—was endowed with an essential use value, artworks were not. Yet, they were understood to operate upon the human body in much the same way as did food and drink. It was only, as I shall demonstrate in Chapters Two and Three, when aesthetics was dissociated from appetite, that anything resembling “art for art’s sake” was possible in America. This discursive disconnection, which took place during the 1830s and 1840s, rendered

⁴ Neil Harris, *The Artist in American Society: the Formative Years, 1790-1860* (1966; new ed., Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1982): 34-35. I have adapted the title of the chapter in which this appears, “The Perils of Vision,” for the title of Chapter Three of my dissertation. The most thorough examination to date of ways that tensions between moderation and over-indulgence structured the relationship between physiological social bodies in the nineteenth-century United States is Joan Burbick, *Healing the Republic: The Language of Health and the Culture of Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), esp. Part II, ch.4, “The Recording Eye.”

utilitarianism a dirty word, and redefined the role of the artwork as a haven from the relentless, market-driven rush toward perpetual and seamless efficiency.⁵ The dissertation that follows investigates ocular intoxication as both a theme and a process that articulates the meaning of images and the conceptualization of vision during the three decades that precede the Civil War.

I begin in Chapter One by examining a set of pictures by Charles Deas, with particular attention paid to a recently rediscovered genre painting entitled *Walking the Chalk* (1838) that depicts a man in the midst of a sobriety test. This and other of Deas's pictures depict their subjects on the cusp of ill-boding transformations set in motion by the overstimulation of the nervous system. These metamorphoses not only propel subjects from sobriety into drunkenness, but imply a concomitant shift in race and gender. In Chapter Two, I analyze narratives such as Thomas Cole's *The Course of Empire* and Currier and Ives's *The Drunkard's Progress* that chart terminal cases of unregulated consumption from the point of infection through the death of their subjects. The two scenes at the apex of these narratives, *The Consummation of Empire* and "A Confirmed Drunkard," represent official diagnoses and mark precise moments when self-agency is irrevocably surrendered to objects. They mark points of no return, and initiate self-destruct sequences that cause the body and the body politic to fall to pieces. Chapter three shifts the focus of the dissertation from thematics to aesthetics, and re-conceptualizes Hiram Powers's *Greek Slave* as a sobriety test administered through the eyes that offered the promise of moral improvement, but also threatened to furnish the

⁵ On the role of the artwork during the postbellum period as therapeutic insulation from the ruthless Social Darwinism of commercial life, see Kathleen Pyne, *Art and the Higher Life: Painting and Evolutionary Thought in Late Nineteenth-Century America* (Austin, Tex.: University of Texas Press, 1996).

first step—or literally the first “look”—down the road to ruin. Finally, in Chapter Four, I interpret *The Heart of the Andes* (1859), a *tour de force* of expansive space and painstakingly rendered details, as a painting that offered an illusion of mimetic transparency so intense that it revealed the fissures and disjunctions at the heart of its own representational project. Like *The Consummation of Empire* and “A Confirmed Drunkard,” *The Heart of the Andes* deconstructed itself. It literally generated pain in the minds of viewers who repeatedly visited the painting to look in vain for unity and completion. The painting rendered its viewers (including Mark Twain) as split subjects with splitting headaches. The potency of *The Heart of the Andes* produced its own malady—an ocular hangover—the uncontrollable reverberation of an image too intense to forget.

The subjects of all four chapters are united by the threat—either articulated within the thematic scope of the artworks, and/or enacted by the very techniques of engagement practiced by their beholders—of an implosion of the gap that separates viewing subjects from the objects of their gaze. As such, practices of eating and drinking, acts that *literally* incorporate objects into the bodies of their subjects through processes of ingestion and digestion, are central to my arguments. Nineteenth-Century American scientists such as John William Draper considered the act of seeing as a photographic process, one that depends upon the intromission of external visual stimuli through the retina to be fixed upon the surface of the brain. According to Draper, the reception of images, like consumption of food, entailed a calorific absorption of heat. The strength of visual impressions, and their subsequent effect upon the subject, depended upon the

intensity of the stimulus and the duration of the gaze. After describing in detail the chemical processes of photography, Draper explains that:

It may be demonstrated that the same thing takes place in vision, and in this respect it might almost be said that vision is a photographic effect, the receiving surface being a mathematical superficies, acting under the preceding condition. ... For photographic effects, as well as calorific, the essential condition is absorption.⁶

This absorption left a physical trace and entailed a physiological change and thus dramatically raised the stakes of vision and exacerbated concerns about the long-lasting after-effects of images. The invention of the Daguerreotype and subsequent photographic techniques and their influence on ophthalmology soon percolated into American culture.

Walt Whitman, for instance, surmised that:

As is every show & every concrete object & every experience of life the serious question is, What does it stamp—what will it leave daguerreotyped for the future weal or woe—upon the mind? These physical realities we call the world are doubtless only essentially real in the impressions they leave & perpetuate upon the rational mind—the immortal soul.⁷

Thus, according to many scientists and moral reformers of the time, the mental and physical habits of antebellum American subjects were conditioned by dietary laws that affected the eyes as well as the stomach. Images, like food, were absorbed—materially, chemically, and calorifically—into the body. William Kitchiner, a British physician whose works were widely published and circulated in both Europe and

⁶ John William Draper, *Human Physiology, Statistical and Dynamical: or, The Conditions and Course of the Life of Man* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1856): 393-94. Oliver Wendell Holmes was among those who admired Draper's "ingenious theory of photographic vision." See Holmes, "Border Lines of Knowledge in Some Provinces of Medical Science," 1861; collected in *The Writings of Oliver Wendell Holmes* v. 9, new ed. (Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1891): 249. For a study of Draper's importance to the development of early American photography, see Sarah Kate Gillespie, "Samuel F. B. Morse and the Daguerreotype: Art and Science in American Culture, 1839-55," Ph.D. Diss., The Graduate Center, City University of New York, 2006.

⁷ Walt Whitman, *Notebooks and Unpublished Manuscripts*, Edward F. Grier, ed., 6 Vols. (New York: New York University Press, 1984): 6:2214; quoted in Ed Folsom, "Nineteenth-century Visual Culture," in *A Companion to Walt Whitman*, Donald D. Kummings, ed. (Malden, Mass. and Oxford: Blackwell, 2006): 275.

America, best known as the author of epicurean works such as *Apicius Redevivus, or The Cook's Oracle; Actual Experiments Instituted in the Kitchen of a Physician* (1817), and *Peptic Precepts, Pointing Out Agreeable and Effectual Methods to Prevent and Relieve Indigestion, and the Regulate and Strengthen the Action of the Stomach and the Bowels* (1821), transferred his advocacy of the moderate intake of well-cooked and properly masticated food to his ideas about the proper maintenance and preservation of sight in his subsequent volume, *The Economy of the Eyes* (1824).⁸ Here, Kitchiner employs a gastronomical metaphor to warn his readers that, while reading, or exerting to eyes upon a similarly demanding task, one:

...should be careful not to offend it [the eye] by *too much Light*, which, is quite as prejudicial as *too little Light*. Light enough to illuminate the object and to make it easily and perfectly visible, is all the is wanted:—on this occasion, the Old Proverb, “Enough is as good as a Feast,” is quite true:—more is not only unnecessary, but injurious, and will not only over-stimulate the Eye—and force the Pupil to shut itself up, but if so continually irritated, the Eye will soon become as much impaired by such over-stimulation, as the Stomach is by Dram-drinking.⁹

This period anxiety over the perceived threat of ocular over-stimulation—warnings against too much light (Kitchiner), which produced, in turn, too much heat (Draper)—was largely dependent upon a discourse of nutrition, one that turned upon the virtue of a moderate diet.

The compulsion to see, the addictive nature of looking, gazing, and peeping, and the blindness that “The Five Senses—No 1: Seeing” suggests afflicts the over-indulgent, immoderate viewer, recalls Ralph Waldo Emerson’s oft quoted passage in his essay

⁸ For a fascinating recent examination of the impact of this, and other works of early nineteenth century ophthalmology upon antebellum American visual culture, see Peter John Brownlee, “*The Economy of the Eyes: Vision and the Cultural Production of Market Revolution, 1800-1860*,” Ph.D. Diss., The George Washington University, 2004.

⁹ William Kitchiner, *The Economy of the Eyes* (Boston, Wells and Lilly, 1824): 79-80.

“Nature,” that “I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see all...”¹⁰ Emerson’s ability to “see all” is acquired only after he has become “nothing;” that is to say, only when his stable subject position has been annihilated. The author also posits a concomitant transformation of the subject (in this case, himself) into the very medium through which he sees. In 1836, Christopher Pearse Cranch made this new modern man-morphed-into-media manifest in a startling drawing entitled *Emerson’s “Transparent Eye-Ball,”* (Fig. 2) which depicts a squat torso surmounted by a single, immense eye, all set atop a pair of mantis legs that we can only assume accelerate (what was once) Ralph Waldo Emerson around the countryside with superhuman velocity in order to feed his never-ending lust to see. This amusingly monstrous creature is put together in such a way that highlights how Emerson’s incessant, omnivorous scopophilia has brought him under the yoke of his unremittingly ravenous visual appetite. His entire head has become nothing more than one gargantuan, swollen eye. Emerson’s all-seeing eye, his desire to view everything, to see interminably, may be considered a disease—an addiction—one that is, in fact, quite literally *terminal*. One well-known critique of this sort of boundless, immersive, all-encompassing gaze occurs in Herman Melville’s chapter “The Mast-Head” in his novel *Moby Dick*. Here, a lookout perched in the crow’s nest high above the deck of the Pequod risks staring himself into a stupefying and dangerous trance, where:

...lulled into a such an opium-like listlessness of vacant, unconscious reverie is this absent-minded youth by the blending cadence of waves and thoughts, that he loses his identity, takes the mystic ocean at his feet for the visible image of that deep, blue, bottomless soul, pervading mankind and nature; and every strange, half-seen, gliding, beautiful thing that eludes him; every dimly discovered,

¹⁰ Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Nature,” in *Selected Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. William H. Gilman (New York: Signet, 1965): 189.

uprising fin of some undiscernible form, sends to him the embodiment of those elusive thoughts that only people the soul by continually flitting through it.¹¹

This hypnotic state, brought on by an indulgent lust to discern, fix, and make visible that which is by nature elusive, dim, and flitting, causes the subject to drift into unconsciousness and lose his bearings. Deeply mired in this precarious situation,

...while this sleep, this dream is on ye, move your foot or hand an inch; slip your hold at all; and your identity comes back in horror. Over Cartesian vortices you hover. And perhaps, at mid-day, in the fairest weather, with one half-throttled shriek you drop through the transparent air into the summer sea, no more to rise for ever.¹²

Once one is irretrievably lost in looking, the illustration in *Harper's Weekly*, Cranch's drawing, and Melville's prose all seem to suggest, an irreversible transformation takes place, one that permanently erodes—or violently obliterates—the very boundaries of selfhood. To put it another way, immersive seeing that grows uncontrollably intense threatens, per Melville's passage, an actual (and fatal) immersion of the viewer into the object of desire. This dire situation arises from the mistaken assumption that intangible truths and abstract formulations of unity and completeness might be made visibly manifest, fixed, or embodied in some stable, comprehensible, and consumable form. That is to say: What is the relationship between the glass of brandy that dangles the promise of fulfillment before the eyes and palette of the drunkard, and the perfect, unassailable image that makes its own utopian claim through a seemingly lossless replication of its subject, replete with all the luscious tangibility of the original? What I discern to be taking place in American art during the antebellum period, and what I hope

¹¹ Herman Melville, *Moby Dick* 1851; Charles Child Walcutt, ed. (New York: Bantam, 2003): 174. My positioning of this passage in *Moby Dick* as a warning against the unfettered visionary escapades that Melville believed to infect American romanticism draws from the work of Bryan J. Wolf, who makes a similar claim in his writing about the conditions of the sublime in the nineteenth-century United States. Bryan Wolf, "When is a Painting Most Like a Whale?: Ishmael, *Moby Dick*, and the Sublime," in *New Essays on Moby Dick*, Richard Brodhead, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986): 85.

¹² *Ibid.*

to shed light upon in the pages that follow, is an evolving cultural awareness of the limitations of mimetic realism, one that was skeptical of enthralling, object-oriented clarity and alluring perspicuity, and that, concomitantly, produced a significant amount of anxiety over the habits of perception that such artworks demanded of their viewers. During this time, immersive looking indeed came to be understood as something like a *habit*, a compulsion, an act that produced an unhealthy excess of mental and metabolic stimulation that threw the physiological systems of the body off balance, a danger that was itself replicated on a macroscopic scale in the American social body, with its own delicate Constitution that struggled to maintain a state of equilibrium and national cohesion through a system of checks and balances.

Chapter 2:

Walking the Chalk: Charles Deas's Vision Problems

Some “walk the crack” to make a show,
Some roll upon the floor;
Some pay the bill they know not how,
And straight they see no more.¹³

Walking the Chalk (1838) (Fig. 3), a recently rediscovered painting by Charles Deas, depicts a man in the midst of a sobriety test.¹⁴ The title of the picture alludes to a drinking game where the object is to consume as many drinks as possible while retaining the ability to walk along a straight line of chalk drawn on the floor. Like current-day roadside sobriety tests, where suspected drunk-drivers are made to “walk the line,” such methods were employed in the nineteenth century to determine fitness for duty on board navy and merchant vessels. But the object, it seems, in *Walking the Chalk*, is not to pass, but to fail; or, more correctly, to succeed as long as possible before what will no doubt be a catastrophic—and amusing—collapse. The contest at the core of Deas's painting involves its tipsy participant in a carefully calibrated experiment to determine (the hard way) how much, exactly, is *too much*. In this and other of his paintings, Deas articulates boundaries that mark inexorable transformations from moderation to excess—changes that frequently entail a concomitant muddling of racial and sexual identities.

¹³ “A Parody,” *The Every Body's Album; A Humorous Collection of Tales, Quips, Quirks...* (December 1, 1836): 89.

¹⁴ I thank Eleanor Jones Harvey, Franklin Kelly, and William Truettner for bringing this painting to my attention. The staff of Debra Force Fine Art kindly provided me the opportunity to view the painting, and shared a file full of useful information.

Walking the Chalk relates the plight of the inveterate drunkard as one who is no longer able to discern—much less follow—the straight and narrow path. A short story published in 1846 considers the practice of “walking the chalk” in a similar way:

Larry was a hard working, and, occasionally hard drinking, Dutch-built little man, with a fiddle head and a round stern; a steady-going straight-forward fellow, barring when he carried too much whiskey, which, it must be confessed, might occasionally prevent his walking the chalk with perfect philomathical accuracy.¹⁵

Accurate eyesight, in other words, is a function of sobriety. Otherwise “steady-going” and “straight-forward,” Larry’s drinking sometimes impairs his ability to see correctly. In this way, “walking the chalk” tests one’s sobriety by testing one’s ability to see straight. When the man falls off the line, his failure will be registered as a loss of balance. One period reference to the practice of “walking the chalk” mockingly suggests that:

The genius of a wag, Fitzgerald, of the “City Item,” has made a most important discovery, whereby the nation will be able to save a great deal of money. The discovery is nothing less than a new plan for *moderate* and *immoderate* dram drinkers to get tipsy-turvy, without smelling either London Porter or Ferintosh. The plan is a very simple one, only to spin round rapidly on the heel of one foot as many times as may conduce to give the performer, according to his moderate or immoderate desires, that beautiful street attitude, denominated “walking the chalk with a bric’ in your hat.”¹⁶

In order to appear as a drunkard who unsuccessfully and humorously attempts to walk a straight line, one need not drink, but only spin one’s self dizzy. The inability to maintain one’s balance serves well enough as a surrogate for intoxication. Imbalance registers here, as I argue it does in Deas’s *Walking the Chalk*, as a coordination disorder—an inability to spatially and socially relate one’s self to the world.

¹⁵ “The Good Woman,” *The New York Illustrated Magazine of Literature and Art* (Jan. 1, 1846): 15.

¹⁶ “Great Discovery,” *Scientific American* 5:25 (March 9, 1850): 194.

The composition of *Walking the Chalk* is organized around a tall, thin, enervated man, positioned at the center of the canvas, who strides toward the picture plane along a chalk line, carefully placing his right foot in front of his left. He wears a bright, white muslin shirt, worn through at the right elbow and highlighted by a poorly-fastened cloth tie that dangles precipitously from the collar. A single suspender strap runs over his right shoulder and strains to support a pair of heavy canvas trousers. Wobbling along in calf-high leather boots with his left arm extended to keep his balance and his right hand curled above his head to steady his straw hat, the young farmer's posture assumes the shape of an off-kilter tea kettle. Captured, it would seem, on the verge of discombobulation, the man appears only a step or two away from his boiling point, as viewers within and in front of the painting anticipate the critical stumble, or perhaps the snap or tear of fabric that will cause the man to lose his pants, along with his sobriety. Whether it be light-hearted laughter, pity, scorn, or a combination thereof, this much is certain: the chalk-walker is about to become the object of it. Upon his inevitable forfeiture of self-control and self-governance, he will be transformed into a vulgar object of caricature, and take his place amidst the gallery of stereotyped visages that inhabit the "Tjerck Brink Inn."¹⁷

He will tumble into (and likely onto) the sorry cast of characters that observe his shenanigans. It may be that the inebriated man sitting on the bench and steadied by a young boy at the lower right, was the first to play the game, and it is now up to the current contestant to best his mark. On the left, the bartender records their "scores" on

¹⁷ The name of the inn is carved into the gray wooden planks of the bar in the center left of the scene. I have been unable to locate a literary source for the name, nor any period narratives that approximate the goings on in Deas's picture. It seems more likely that *Walking the Chalk* depicts an invented scene from an actual drinking establishment in or around Kingston and Ulster County, New York, where Deas spent much of his childhood. There were many inhabitants of the area during the time with the last name "Brink." See Theodore B. Meyers, "Lineage of the Christian Meyer Family", *Olde Ulster Magazine*, Vol. X., No. 8 (August, 1914): 243-247. [A trip to the Ulster County Historical Society to scan business registers for the names of tavern and inn owners during the early nineteenth century may reveal the answer.]

the wall, drink by drink. It may be that the seated drunkard's impressive total is on top, and that of his challenger, the current contestant, is being tallied just below. (If read as a single score, the total is an impressive and unlucky "13.") Behind the bar, a man in a top hat gazes out at the viewer and thumbs his nose in a period gesture that expresses either his disapproval of the scene, or perhaps the presence of some sort of con game, one in which we are evidently invited to take part.¹⁸ Next to him, in front of a portly pipe-smoker, sits an elderly man stricken with a swollen foot, a tell-tale symptom of gout. His gaze, like that of the bartender's, is fixed upon the central figure's increasingly wobbly steps. In the back of the room, an elderly black man sits aloof from the rest of the group, and sports a wry, knowing smile as he looks on at the proceedings from a distance. At back right, a man has sustained an eye injury, perhaps the result of a recent brawl.

Set against this motley crew of ragged, spent, and worn-down characters, most of whom exhibit evidence of a long history of unhealthy living and improper conduct, the tipsy anti-hero of *Walking the Chalk* conveys an overwhelming sense of latent, impending transgression, of sobriety doomed to be—but not quite yet—lost. This sense of anxiety—that something momentarily sinister is about to happen—is embodied in the tense attitude of the dog that nervously recoils next to an axe against the wall in front of the bar. Including those belonging to the dog, seven pairs of eyes in the painting converge upon the line of chalk, intent on witnessing the precise moment when the central character loses his balance. Against the backdrop of this laser-like focus on diagnosis, the image takes on the air of a medical experiment in the way it seeks to capture and record the critical point when moderation unquestionably crosses the

¹⁸ The unidentified researcher who compiled the file for *Walking the Chalk* at Debra Force Fine Art identifies this gesture as "cocking a snook."

boundary into excess. Once the scale has been tipped, and the condition of drunkenness is confirmed, a cursory glance around the room at the central character's companions reveals a veritable catalogue of symptoms, and a dire prognosis. One more step, it seems, and the chalk-walker will be doomed, having crossed the point of no return.

By obscuring the eyes of the chalk-walker, Deas renders him an "everyman," one whose identity, while stereotyped, is not as securely fixed as those of the other individuals in the room. The figure can no doubt be read as a yeoman farmer, the kind of character who made frequent appearances in the genre paintings of William Sidney Mount. His age situates him somewhere between the older, more prosperous farmer featured in Mount's *Husking Corn* (1833-34) (Fig. 4), and the innocent youth who plays the fiddle in *Dancing on the Barn Floor* (1831) (Fig. 5). Deas's *Walking the Chalk* was almost certainly painted in response to Mount's similarly themed work, *The Breakdown (Bar-room Scene)* (1835) (Fig. 6). This painting, which Mount scholar Deborah J. Johnson describes as "the cause célèbre at the [1835 National] Academy Exhibition," was sometimes referred to by the artist as "Walking the Crack."¹⁹ The respective compositions of *Walking the Chalk* and *The Breakdown* are organized around central figures whose faces are partially or totally obscured, and whose alcohol-driven actions are the focus of attention for everyone else in the room. The supporting casts of both pictures are exclusively male, but cut across a broad spectrum of age groups, ethnic, racial, and economic backgrounds.

With disheveled hair, tattered clothing, and his back to the picture plane, the man in Mount's picture dances to a beat kept by the clapping hands of a rustic, but well-to-do

¹⁹ Deborah J. Johnson, *William Sidney Mount: Painter of Everyday Life* (New York: American Federation of the Arts, 1998): 33.

gentleman on the left.²⁰ If the dancer had been trying to keep his balance as he “walked the crack,” he has clearly long since lost it. While Johnson is correct to observe that “the onlookers who form a circle around the dancer do not hold mugs or other containers that would be evidence of drinking,” the man in the top-hat seated on the right, with his flushed complexion, bleary eyes, and hands-on-knees that support the weight of his upper body like a pair of crutches, is unmistakably drunk.²¹ While this does not detract from Johnson’s point that there is a clear distinction to be made between the dancing inebriate and the (relatively, at least) sober supporting cast, there can be no doubt that the entire group is complicit in the indecorous goings on. With its warm tones and brightly-lit interior, however, *The Breakdown* presents a scene of levity, conviviality, and ironic humor (the merrymaking takes place next to an advertisement for “Temperance Meetings”) that stands in subtle contrast to the cooler, more somber atmosphere of *Walking the Chalk*.²² Unlike Mount’s picture, where the title is the sole concession to the potential seriousness of the proceedings, *Walking the Chalk*—with its dearth of anyone who could be mistaken as an innocent observer with which the viewer might identify—drew its audience into a veritable den of iniquity.

²⁰ The man is described in a period review as a “rustic, beating time.” See “The Fine Arts,” *The Knickerbocker; or New York Monthly Magazine* (June, 1835): 555.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 33,36.

²² I contend that Mount’s *The Breakdown* roughly corresponds to the “ironic” type of temperance narrative that made light of the hypocrisy that plagued many would-be reformers. According to the literary scholar David S. Reynolds, there are “four main types of temperance-related discourse developed during this period: what may be called conventional, dark temperance, ironic, and transcendental.” See David S. Reynolds, “Black Cats and Delirium Tremens: Temperance and the American Renaissance,” *The Serpent and the Cup: Temperance in American Literature*, David S. Reynolds and Debra J. Rosenthal, eds. (Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997): 22-59. *Walking the Chalk*, however, has more in common with “dark temperance,” which used its ostensible moralizing function as an excuse to peddle lurid scenes of lasciviousness and misbehavior to an eager public.

Taverns, Alcohol, and Ambiguity

While they no doubt mean to show how the excessive consumption of alcohol brings about the “breakdown” of a healthy constitution, these paintings also reveal the synthetic potential of taverns in early America to generate a sense of community by providing a space that brings together a diverse set of individuals under one roof. During the American Revolution, as one scholar recently summarized, “taverns and coffeehouses provided one of the central spaces where political opinion and nation building originated.”²³ Taverns, inns, alehouses, and oyster houses provided a convivial setting where sometimes fractious factions could work through their differences. Although many taverns catered to an exclusively upper or lower-class clientele, an increasing number of establishments at the dawn of the nineteenth century came to be frequented by a mixed array of bourgeois, middle-income, and working-class customers.²⁴ Taverns and inns frequently doubled as post offices, sold newspapers, and provided a setting where travelers mingled and conversed with local citizens. Mediating between individual and communal identities as well as local and national concerns, taverns appealed to genre painters such as John Lewis Krimmel, who sought to capture in his 1814 painting, *Interior of an American Inn* (Fig 7), something of the social and cultural dynamism of the new nation.

Following in the tradition of European painters such as David Teniers and David Wilkie, Krimmel’s work ably integrates the productive and destructive aspects of tavern

²³ Bruce Dorsey, *Reforming Men and Women: Gender in the Antebellum City* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002): 98. Dorsey and other scholars have also noted the role that taverns played in reifying male hegemony. Women of character were infrequent visitors to such “smoke-filled rooms” where political opinions and alliances were formed. See, for instance, Sharon V. Salinger, *Taverns and Drinking in Early America* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002): esp. 220-226. Women, as Salinger writes, even when present in taverns, “did not, like their male counterparts, participate in the sociability of the house. They were there to serve and not to be seen or heard.” (226).

²⁴ Salinger, 243.

life into a single composition.²⁵ *Interior of an American Inn* is a whirl of activity, with 12 characters (plus one dog) densely packed into small space. Just inside the doorway on the left, a young man rushes in and waves his hat to alert the barkeep to the arrival of a stagecoach. Entering along with him is a man selling yarn and other varieties of fabric. In the bottom left corner, a traveler warms his feet by a stove as he gazes over towards the table in front of the bar where a wife and her daughter plead with a farmer to put down his glass of wine and come home. His attention has been diverted from a debate—perhaps a nascent dispute—that is underway between a corpulent Quaker whose girth visibly strains the buttons on his vest and a man standing to the right who sports a derby hat and a thick, coarse coat. The Quaker appears to dismiss the animated, aggressive, and likely alcohol-emboldened gesture of his adversary, who speaks while he points to a newspaper read by an elderly man seated nearby. A refined youth, perhaps a student, listens to the gesturing man's tirade with his hands on his chin, and sits across from an older man in an apron (a butcher or blacksmith?) who takes a drink while watching the wife and daughter vainly beseech the farmer to leave his glass behind. All the while, a large dog, who has apparently witnessed this sort of raucous commotion many times before, lay nestled under the table, relaxed and serene as if nothing were out of the ordinary. The year that Krimmel completed the painting—1814—is recorded on the cover of an almanac that hangs from nail affixed to one of the bar's wooden door posts. Just above and to the left of the almanac, capital letters referring to the days of the week span the doorway.

²⁵ My reading of this painting follows closely that of Annelise Harding, *John Lewis Krimmel: Genre Painter of the Early Republic* (Winterthur, Del.: Winterthur Publications, 1994): 59, 65. See also Kym Rice, *Early American Taverns: For the Entertainment of Friends and Strangers* (Chicago: Regnery Gateway, 1983): 83. Rice includes Krimmel's picture in her useful analysis of the visual and material culture of taverns.

One on hand, Krimmel's *Interior of an American Inn* celebrates the tavern as a nexus of exchange, where old and young, rich and poor, and men from a variety of trades and occupations sit down and relate to one another.²⁶ The conviviality and honest debate that takes place in the picture is dependent upon the social lubricant of alcohol. Divisions between generations and classes are bridged by alcohol's ability to encourage individuals to speak freely. Through a process of productive indirection and obfuscation, alcoholic beverages blurred the sharp divisions that frequently kept people apart. In a long and wide-ranging essay entitled "Something About Wine," H.T. Tuckerman notes that the titular beverage is able to:

Soften us; to make us kinder than our reason, and more admissive than our candor, and to enable us to begin larger sympathies and associations from a state in which the feelings are warm and plastic.²⁷

Beer, Tuckerman argues, "by its properties, destroys fine distinctions," and it, along with pipe-smoking has "obfuscated the modern German brain; yet the parsons meet in the public gardens, and without conscious wrong, empty their frugal glasses and send aboard lusty whiffs, with a quiet zest that disarms theological strife."²⁸ In frugal and moderate amounts, alcohol reduces friction by softening hard facts and amplifying soft sympathies. For example, the two men in Richard Caton Woodville's *Politics in an Oyster House* (1848) (Fig. 8), neither literally nor figuratively see eye to eye, yet they are able to sit down with one another in open and honest discourse thanks in large part to the carafe and half-empty glass of beer that sits between them on the table-top. Drink mediates and

²⁶ As alcoholic beverages became cheaper to produce, tavern culture became accessible to a broader cross-section of Americans. For an argument that emphasizes the fundamental importance of taverns as a force for democratization and the encouragement of free speech, see David W. Conroy, *In Public Houses: Drink and the Revolution of Authority in Colonial Massachusetts* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).

²⁷ H.T. Tuckerman, "Something about Wine," *The Knickerbocker; or New York Monthly Magazine* (August, 1858): 154

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 149, 153.

diffuses the tense and potentially eruptive debate between the brash young man who, like the derby-wearing disputant in Krimmel's *American Inn*, gestures aggressively across the table, and the elderly veteran whose bright red nose and flushed cheeks indicate his inebriation.²⁹ The composition highlights a dichotomy between the mellow indirectness of the older man, who has clearly been sipping his glass, and the grating churlishness of his youthful—and ostensibly sober—companion. Even though this young man is visibly aggravated, and the old man less than receptive to his companion's ideas, beer operates here as a liquid ombudsman, and smoothes the tenor of the conversation.³⁰

Alongside all of its excitement and vitality, however, *Interior of an American Inn* also speaks to the disruptive capacity of taverns to foster intemperance and idleness.³¹

Unlike Woodville's *Politics in an Oyster House*, in Krimmel's painting the younger, more aggressive man—with his blank stare and slouch-lipped countenance that convey cantankerousness and slurred speech—is the one who has clearly been drinking. His gesturing right hand curls up just in front of an ale tankard that sits on a shelf a few feet behind the bar. As such, hand and tankard are aligned in a way that makes it appear that this ruffian is offering a drink to the Quaker, who politely but sternly raises his left hand to indicate his refusal. Bright sunshine falls at a sharp angle through the doorway and onto the floor, an indication that it is the middle of the day. Many of the tavern's patrons

²⁹ For a reading of this painting that takes into account the widespread cultural uproar over immoderate alcohol consumption, see Justin Wolff, *Richard Caton Woodville: American Painter, Artful Dodger* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002): 69-83. Wolff also reads the ruddy complexion and bemused smile of the older man in *Politics in an Oyster House* as signs of intoxication. (75).

³⁰ That the substance is beer, rather than a stronger beverage, is important to my reading. See, for instance, William Hogarth's differentiation of the unifying qualities of beer and the divisive effects of ardent spirits in "Beer Street" and "Gin Lane," respectively.

³¹ For an analysis of anti-tavern crusades in the Colonial period, see David S. Shields, "The Demonization of the Tavern," in Reynolds and Rosenthal, *The Serpent and the Cup*, 10-21. Shields concludes that "The tavern was a gaping maw that consumed men's savings and gnawed at their credit in the eyes of the public" (18). The historian William Rorabaugh notes that Benjamin Franklin called taverns "a Pest to society" in the March 29, 1764 issue of the *Pennsylvania Gazette*. William J. Rorabaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic: An American Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979): 34.

are dressed for work, yet none of them are working. The wife of the farmer, who appears to have been crying, lifts a section of her simple and unembellished dress up toward her face to wipe away tears as she grasps her husband's right arm, imploring him to relinquish his grip on the glass. Her daughter, who plaintively and wistfully gazes up at her tipping father, is dressed in nothing but a meager robe. These two women appear as strangers in an all-male world, one that excludes the moralizing effect of virtuous women, and thus threatens the social, emotional, and economic integrity of the family, and, by extension, the viability of the young nation that Krimmel's generic *American Inn* serves to symbolize. The lazy and morose attitude of the dog portends the debilitating aftermath of money and energy unproductively spent. The seven days of the week inscribed over the doorway—and worse, the flimsy almanac of 1814—stand as testaments to the dilatory passing of time. While acknowledging the productive potential of taverns to enhance sociability, free speech, and democratic sympathy, Krimmel's picture ultimately captures the *American Inn* at the cusp of antagonism, at the moment when tempers begin to flare, productivity begins to suffer, and families begin to break apart. The level of intensity is here about to cross a threshold where the consumption of alcohol exacerbates rather than smoothes over society's lines and cracks—divisions that Krimmel's tavern-goers, as well as the walkers in *Mount and Deas*, unsteadily attempt to negotiate.

Vision Problems

As each passing drink erodes his sense of balance and blurs his vision, the central figure in *Walking the Chalk* must intensify his concentration to compensate for the loss.

He thus plunges deeper and deeper into his task, tuning out everything except the thin white line. Soon, even that will veer out of focus, leaving him isolated and disengaged, cast adrift amidst the collection of disconnected individuals that occupy the Tjerck Brink Inn. Unlike the characters in Krimmel's *American Inn*, the inhabitants of Deas's picture are cold and uncommunicative. Seemingly lost in the throes of their vices, no two individuals in the scene make eye contact. The oblique indirectness that works to foster productive discussion between the two men in Woodville's *Politics at an Oyster House* has here gone too far and become its own object. There are no newspapers or almanacs, no mail or other observable connections to the outside world. Withdrawn from all external cares as well as from one another, they focus instead on an imbibitory act that emblemizes self-imposed exile from all practical and conscious concerns. Even the boy, who props up the seated drunkard, does so without any discernable tenderness, and looks not at his "friend," who totters on the verge of collapse, but at the chalk walker, towards whom he directs a gleeful (and unnoticed) smirk. Graced with none of the celebrative warmth of Mount's *The Breakdown*, a dark storm-cloud looms outside the window, casting a cold, gloomy light over the scene. Once the central figure veers off the straight line on which he remains only tenuously adhered, his drunkenness will isolate him from, rather than connect him to his fellow men. He goes about his task in a trance-like focus, oblivious to all else, as if he were sleepwalking or under the influence of a hypnotic spell. Neither here nor there, the chalk-walker's inebriation is registered as a form of isolation, a self-absorbed, transitional state that is an end in itself, one that cuts him off from the world. With unwavering attention, Deas's subject focuses on the line at his feet; as a consequence, he is, for now, able to ignore the dangers—the unwholesome,

unhealthy, and ill-boding band of provocateurs—that appear in his peripheral vision. But because his visual acuity and sense of balance have been critically impaired, he is no longer self-reliant, and depends entirely on the line to guide his steps.

In his widely-read *Discourse on Intemperance*, the Cincinnati physician Daniel Drake argued that habitual drunkards were unfit to serve as witnesses in court. He claimed that while judgment—the ability to reason—is unaffected by alcohol, “habitual intoxication so disorders our external senses,” to the extent that the observations of an inebriate could “at no time be received without distrust of their accuracy.”³² Moreover, Drake continues:

When from this cause he falls into manifest derangement (*delirium tremens*), he is no longer competent as a witness; but this is only the consummation of an intellectual perversion which commenced long before, and, insidiously, deteriorated his powers of perception.³³

I read the imminent disengagement of the figure from the line of chalk as a metaphor for derangement; or more specifically, the removal of the self from a bounded, Cartesian grid or “range” of straight lines.³⁴ That is to say, *Walking the Chalk* aligns drinking problems with vision problems—the inability to see straight. Within the painting’s narrative trajectory, the self-absorbed chalk-walker is completely beholden to the line’s disciplinary power.³⁵ Yet, by fixing their sights on the line to the exclusion of all else, he

³² Daniel Drake, *A Discourse on Intemperance* (Cincinnati: Looker & Reynolds, 1828): 58. Drake summarizes that “As a witness he might still remain *competent*, and as respects his *disposition* to know and state the truth, even credible; but his *capacity* should be questioned, for it is impaired” (italics in original).

³³ *Ibid.*, 59.

³⁴ I take my cue here from Allen S. Weiss, who writes that: “Drunkenness, in this respect, follows its own laws, even if such laws now reveal the lineaments of inexactitude, indeterminacy, and the aleatory. The calculable, quantitative, isotropic coordinates of Cartesian mathematics no longer suffice to describe perception; space and time are now understood in strictly phenomenal, qualitative, heterotropic terms.” Weiss, *Feast and Folly: Cuisine, Intoxication, and the Poetics of the Sublime* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002): 34.

³⁵ The grid’s role in the alignment of order, vision, and power in Enlightenment projects of social control is well documented. See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Alan Sheridan,

and his drinking (and staring) companions have lost the ability to discern the big picture. Unable or unwilling to expand their horizons, their obsessive boozing erodes their capacity to rectify intensive and compulsive actions, with extensive and comprehensive social and economic concerns.³⁶ Entirely dependent upon the line as a visual aide, the chalk-walker ambles aimlessly about in a lonely, myopic world.³⁷

In the 1830s and 1840s, attempts to reform alcoholics began to take into account the way that the addiction eroded self-control, divested its victims of free will, and rendered them helpless to resist the temptation to drink.³⁸ On April 2, 1840, six drunkards who frequented Chase's Tavern in Baltimore, Maryland, signed a document in which they pledged to abstain from alcohol. By February of 1841, the six had recruited some twelve-hundred additional men to do the same, and their temperance society—The Washingtonians—began to expand at a remarkable pace, claiming some three-hundred thousand members by the end of the decade.³⁹ They owed their success to two factors—

trans. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977): 195-228. For a consideration of these ideas within the purview of early American urbanism, see Dell Upton, "The City as Material Culture," in *The Art and Mystery of Historical Archaeology: Essays in Honor of James Deetz*, Ann Elizabeth Yentsch and Mary C. Beaudry, eds. (Boca Raton, Fla.: CRC Press, 1992): 51-74, esp. 53-55. See also David C. Ward, *Charles Willson Peale: Art and Selfhood in the Early Republic* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004): 178-179; and William H. Truettner, "Plains Geometry," *Winterthur Portfolio* 38 (2003): 199-220.

³⁶ I borrow the terms "intensive" and "extensive" here from Alan Wallach, "Making a Picture from the View of Mount Holyoke," in *American Iconology*, David Miller, ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993): 83.

³⁷ My thinking here has benefited from a range of scholarship that investigates notions of diversity and unity, particularity and abstraction, point and field, and microscopic and macroscopic regimes across a variety of social, political, and aesthetic projects. See Jay Fliegelman, *Declaring Independence: Jefferson, Natural Language, and the Culture of Performance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993): esp. 74, 102, 161-63; Alan Wallach, "Wadsworth's Tower: An Episode in the History of Landscape Vision," *American Art* 10 (Fall 1996): 8-27; Christopher Looby, "The Constitution of Nature: Taxonomy as Politics in Jefferson, Peale, and Bartram" *Early American Literature* 22:3 (1987), 252-73; Alexander Nemerov, *The Body of Raphaelle Peale: Still-Life and Selfhood* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001): esp. 43-58, 176-84; and Wendy Bellion, "'Extend the Sphere': Charles Willson Peale's Panorama of Annapolis," *Art Bulletin* 86:3 (September 2004): 529-49.

³⁸ Although I use the terms interchangeably here, Antebellum Americans used the word "drunkard" or "inebriate" rather than "alcoholic," which was not coined until the 20th century.

³⁹ John W. Crowley, "Introduction," in Crowley, ed., *Drunkard's Progress: Narratives of Addiction, Despair, and Recovery* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999): 7; the most

the signing of a pledge of abstinence, and frequent meetings where recovering drunkards could lend one another mutual support. The meetings allowed individuals to sympathize with others who shared similar problems, and to re-engage in a social network that did not revolve around the indulgence of insatiable appetites. Temperance pledges took into account the inability of hardened alcoholics to exercise their own self-agency and self-governance in regard to the consumption of alcohol, and enacted a transfer of that agency from the bottle to the contract.⁴⁰

The art historian Sarah Burns has written of “the strictest economy of means” that David Gilmour Blythe imparts to his painting, *Temperance Pledge* (ca. 1856-60) (Fig. 9).⁴¹ Blythe, a painter from Pittsburgh who battled his own addiction to alcohol throughout his life, concentrates his focus on a middle-aged inebriate who ponders a choice between a bottle and a temperance pledge. With its dark, foreboding tones, and a reductive, almost claustrophobic composition, Blythe’s picture conveys something of the narrow purview, or the narrow field of vision that structures the drunkard’s existence. Indebted to the bottle, his choice boils down to whether or not he will transfer that debt to the written contract of the temperance pledge. His allegiance to the bottle or the pledge—whatever the outcome may be—will be binding, and will oblige him to adhere to

comprehensive history of the movement is Leonard U. Blumberg, with William L. Pittman, *Beware the First Drink! The Washingtonian Temperance Movement and Alcoholics Anonymous* (Seattle: Glen Abbey Books, 1991).

⁴⁰ By the 1830s, “temperance” had become synonymous with “abstinence,” as many physiologists had come to believe that any substance that needlessly stimulates the system to no practical end was liable to lead to addiction. In 1826, the First National Temperance Convention recommended abstinence from alcohol; ten years later, the Second National Temperance Convention required it of their members. See Stuart Berg Flexner’s entry for the word “temperance,” in his *I Hear America Talking: an Illustrated Treasury of American Words and Phrases* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1976): 335; cited in *ibid.*, 21, n.7.

⁴¹ Sarah Burns, *Painting the Dark Side: Art and the Gothic Imagination in Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004): 50; For a comprehensive examination of Blythe’s career, see Bruce Chambers, *The World of David Gilmour Blythe* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1980).

a certain set of demands. With no ability to regulate himself, the drunkard is beholden to choose one of two masters. In the tight space of Blythe's near-sighted composition, there are no other options to be seen.

A similar calculus informs Blythe's *Conscience Stricken* (ca.1860) (Fig. 10). In this painting, a man standing before a cross is suddenly made cognizant of the ramifications of his debauched lifestyle. He stands, hat removed, with his right hand held over his heart, and appears on the verge of pledging to change his behavior. Behind the man are a set of implements—a pick-axe and a shovel—that Sarah Burns identifies as “tools for grave digging,” an allusion to the fate he will soon suffer if he continues his unabated drinking.⁴² Behind these tools is a jug filled, no doubt, with some variety of ardent spirit. Blythe, it seems, concocts a visual pun where the man is forced to “pick” between the cross and the jug. *Conscience Stricken* was likely intended as a pendant to *Boy at the Pump* (1858-59) (Fig. 11), a picture of the same size that shows a boy thumbing his nose at a source of cold water (the healthy beverage *par excellence* of antebellum America). If so, *Conscience Stricken* illustrates the “correct response” to a redemptive symbol, and further indicates that Blythe intended his narrative to end well, with his contrite subject aligning himself with the cross, rather than the jug. One temperance pledge distributed by the New York Catholic Temperance Association during the early 1840s printed the text of the oath within the perimeter of a cross (Fig. 12). This aligned the process by which the drunkard transferred his “burden” to the pledge, with the Christian symbol for the consignment and remission of sins.

If the man in *Conscience Stricken* makes such a pledge, he will, like the chin-scratching drunkard in Blythe's *Temperance Pledge*, transfer his agency to an external

⁴² Ibid., 55.

source—one that, unlike the bottle or the jug, has his best interests in mind. These redemptive strategies, promoted by hundreds of temperance societies throughout the United States, including the Washingtonians, gave drunkards an opportunity to reform their behavior by literally inscribing their names inside a set of guidelines.⁴³ The pledge thus provided them with the framework to once again become productive and engaged members of their communities. Such pledges re-established a set of boundaries, and re-oriented inveterate drunkards into a straight and narrow mode of living. The act of signing one’s name along a straight line was not only indicative of the subject’s commitment to adhere to a new code of discipline, but also symbolized his literal and figurative “re-alignment” with societal norms. To this end, the formal structure of temperance pledges emphasized clarity, straight lines, and containment.

One such pledge certifies that William T. Cogshall “has taken the total pledge of abstinence on this day of 4 January, 1845.” (Fig. 13) This pledge, printed and circulated by the Cleveland Marine Total Abstinence Society, features an illustration of a ship, which floats near the top of the page. Below it, a quotation from Romans 14:21 reads: “It is good neither to eat flesh, nor drink wine, nor anything whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak.” Below that, another quote printed prominently in fat-faced type references the Roman Emperor Constantine at the Battle of Milvian Bridge: “In this sign, shall thou conquer.” The pledge itself is lodged at the center of the composition, flanked by additional quotations from Christian scripture. The bottom half

⁴³ Sylvester Graham emphasized that the over-stimulation brought on by over-eating, excessive drinking, or even lascivious daydreams, entailed a problem of perception. “When incited by passion, man cannot easily *perceive the lines of truth* which should govern his conduct, and therefore, if he does not adopt some general rules of action, which are consistent with the constitutional laws of his nature, he is sure to run into excesses, and draw evil upon himself and others.” Sylvester Graham, *A Lecture to Young Men* (Providence, Weedon and Cory, 1834): 32. Emphasis added.

of the tableau features an elaboration of the “fruits of temperance,” and the “fruits of intemperance,” and finally, the certification itself, where Cogshall, as well as two officials from the abstinence society, sign their names to the contract. All of the elements of the pledge are composed inside a thick, ornately-patterned picture frame motif that emphasizes the reformed inebriate’s desire to keep his behavior within certain bounds. Pledges such as this one were frequently tacked up on the wall above the fireplace, or in another prominent position in the home, so that they were constantly before their owners’ eyes. Such pledges provided a visual aide to near-sighted drunkards who struggled to see anything beyond the next alluring sip. In other words, the dependency of the drunkard upon the bottle and, concomitantly, upon the pledge, is perfectly correlated. The more deeply and habitually he immerses himself in the first, the more intently he will have to focus upon the second if he is to have any hope of once again expanding his horizons.

Indigestion, Insanity, and the Drunkard’s Shadow

In *The Body of Raphaelle Peale: Still-Life and Selfhood*, art historian Alexander Nemerov describes how the viscerally proximate objects in Raphaelle Peale’s still-life paintings resist “the long view, the all-encompassing scan, in which no particular object is a sustained focus. This shifting expansive view decorporealized the world, turning specific things into ephemeral points in a larger visual field, and socialized the viewer by discouraging focused, fascinated vision.” “Raphaelle’s paintings,” Nemerov writes, “resist a vision that does not bite into things.”⁴⁴ The aesthetic discourse that Nemerov illuminates corresponds to well-known facts about Raphaelle Peale’s personal struggles

⁴⁴ Nemerov, *The Body of Raphaelle Peale*, 43.

with gluttony and intemperance.⁴⁵ While taken ill with a fit of gout—a disease brought on by the excessive consumption of food and drink—Raphaelle received a letter from his father, the artist Charles Willson Peale. In it, the elder Peale pleaded with his son to curb his appetites, and to eat:

...in only such proportion as shall be in exact proportion as to quantity as will nourish the body, for a single particle more becomes a clog and a burden to the digestive powers, [and] therefore, produces a disease more or less in due proportion to the excess. When we set down at table...resolve that taste shall not be superior to reason.⁴⁶

Peale argues that the health of Raphaelle depends upon the co-efficiency of “taste” and “reason.” Every morsel must correspond to a symmetrical nutritional requirement. Even a “single particle” of inutile food threatens to throw the body off balance and “clog” the system. For Charles Willson Peale, the healthy function of the body, and by extension, the body politic (the letter to Raphaelle quoted above was written, appropriately enough, on the Fourth of July), depends upon the seamless and waste-free integration of production and consumption.⁴⁷ Everything taken into the body, as well as everything taken into the republic, must be digestible and able to be put to good use. Even the knowledge that Peale intended his museum to impart to the public was explicitly couched as “useful.” The ill-regulation of diet, drink, sexual practices, or even thoughts, threatened to throw bodies, families, and polities out of balance.

In 1813, English physician Thomas Sutton identified a medical condition that, like Charles Deas’s *Walking the Chalk* and Raphaelle Peale’s still-lives, articulated a

⁴⁵ A thorough analysis of Raphaelle Peale’s art within the context of period attitudes toward gustatory excess and over-indulgence can be found in Brandon Brame Fortune, “A Delicate Balance: Raphaelle Peale’s Still-Life Paintings and the Ideal of Temperance,” in *The Peale Family: Creation of a Legacy, 1770-1870*, Lillian B. Miller, ed. (New York: Abbeville Press, 1996): 135-149.

⁴⁶ Charles Willson Peale to Raphaelle Peale, July 4, 1820; quoted in Fortune, 136.

⁴⁷ David C. Ward traces Peale’s application of his self-disciplined utilitarianism across a wide swath of dietary, economic, sexual, and aesthetic practices. See Ward, *Charles Willson Peale*: esp.111-130.

correspondence between ill-regulated appetites and unregulated eyesight. “Delirium tremens,” also known as *mania-a-potu* in the United States, Saunders-Sutton Syndrome in England, and Morel’s Disease in France, was a type of insanity thought to be caused by excessive drunkenness.⁴⁸ This malady afflicted its sufferers with intense and uncontrollable visions that frequently led to suicide. One extensive account, written by an anonymous author for the *Christian Advocate and Journal* in 1835, relates that:

The peculiar and characteristic symptoms of delirium tremens are a hurried agitation of manner, general tremulousness of the whole frame, a wild and haggard expression of countenance induced by the frightful visions that seem to flit across the excited imagination, rapid and incoherent utterance, and insensibility or indifference to real objects, and the greatest alarm at the fancied presence of loathsome or hideous specters. When the attention can be aroused, however, the answers which are returned to any question proposed are generally coherent; and this circumstance, with the previous habit of the individual, forms a sufficient distinction between this delirium and settled insanity.⁴⁹

Interpersonal communication interrupts the patient’s symptoms, and temporarily mends his psychic break. It allows the delirious man to re-orient himself, to find his place within a broader network of social relations. But “When the mind is left to itself again, it reverts to its fearful imaginings. The vision sees vermin of every description, and all the most loathsome reptiles and other amphibious animals crawling over the bed, and twining themselves down the bedposts...” The account then proceeds to relate in graphic detail the patient’s violent confrontation with imaginary snakes and serpents as he sinks into paranoia, imagining that his food and drink are poisoned and that “his friends are

⁴⁸ Thomas Sutton, *Tracts on Delirium Tremens, on Peritonitis and on Some Other Internal Inflammatory Affections, and on the Gout* (London: Thomas Underwood, 1813). Sutton’s book was available in the United States by 1815. The first reference to the disease by name that I have located appears in an 1819 edition of the *New England Journal of Medicine and Surgery*: “It is well known that persons who indulge excessively in the use of ardent spirits, are occasionally attacked with delirium, and that this sometimes terminates in death. This delirium with its accompanying symptoms is treated of by Dr. Armstrong as ‘a peculiar disorder of drunkards,’ while Dr. Sutton, from a very constantly attending symptom, has termed it *Delirium Tremens*.” Walter Channing, M.D., “*Delirium Tremens*: or of ‘a peculiar disease of drunkards,’” *New England Journal of Medicine and Surgery* (Jan. 1819): 15.

⁴⁹ “Delirium Tremens,” *Christian Advocate and Journal* (September 11, 1835): 9.

alienated from him, and are maliciously plotting his death.”⁵⁰ “Delirium Tremens,” (Fig. 14)⁵¹ the subject of a mid-nineteenth century engraving by an anonymous artist, shows in detail a man leaping from his bed to escape from two snakes and a small, black imp who hovers just above his head. Alone and terrified, his right hand tears at his hair while his left grabs at his clothes as he stares into a preternaturally bright candle on the other side of the small room.

In 1849, ten years after he had exhibited *Walking the Chalk* at the same venue, Charles Deas submitted a painting called *A Vision* to the National Academy of Design’s Annual Exhibition in New York. The painting, since lost, is known only through a description published in the May, 1849 issue of *The Knickerbocker*, and reads as follows:

What have we here? How disentangle the human sufferers from those winding serpents, and release them from those fangs, so wild and horrible, of shapeless and unknown monsters? Until we *do* disentangle, we can make nothing of this extraordinary effort of paint. You must separate the beings that struggle and die in the blue waves of the mystic sea, and when you have done so, you will be astonished at the beauty and delicacy of the handling, and the correctness of the drawing. A ‘vision’ it is? Yes, and a horrid one! Despair and death are together, and Frenzy glares from the blood-red sockets of the victims, and haunting weird thoughts arise, as we reflect over this singular effort of talent.⁵²

One year before *A Vision* was shown at the National Academy, Charles Deas was committed to the Bloomingdale Insane Asylum. At the age of 30, his career as a professional artist was over, and he lived the rest of his life under professional care until

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ [This image is published with no identifying information in William J. Rorabaugh’s *The Alcoholic Republic*—I’ve sent Professor Rorabaugh an email asking him where he got the illustration from and will incorporate the information into my prose when I receive a reply.]

⁵² *The Knickerbocker; or New York Monthly Magazine* (May, 1849): 470; Henry Tuckerman described the work as “...one of his wild pictures, representing a black sea, over which a figure hung, suspended by a ring, while from the waves a monster was springing, was so horrible, that a sensitive artist fainted at the sight.” Henry T. Tuckerman, *Book of the Artists: American Artist Life* (1867; New York: James F. Carr, 1966): 429; for an interpretation of the painting within the context of millennialism and apocalyptic punishment, see Gail Husch, *Something Coming: Apocalyptic Expectation and Mid-Nineteenth-Century American Painting* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2000): 79.

his death from apoplexy in 1867.⁵³ It is unclear whether Deas conceived of and painted *A Vision* before or after he was committed, but the nightmare-like scene described in *The Knickerbocker*, with its writhing serpents and tangled web of “shapeless and unknown monsters,” shares much in common with contemporary descriptions of alcohol-induced delirium tremens and mania-a-potu. Deas, like the chalk-walker he painted a decade earlier, had become unbalanced and lost his way.

Recent path-breaking research by art historian Carol Clark has unearthed notes written by Pliny Earle, Deas’s supervising physician at Bloomingdale. These records reveal specific details of the diagnosis and treatment of the artist.⁵⁴ Clark relates that the records of the Bloomingdale Asylum identify Deas’s condition as “mania, supervising upon monomania,” a diagnosis that was specified in Earle’s own notes as “a religious anxiety” where the artist “imagined himself a chosen instrument of the deity. Said the Saviour was personally in the City, and communicated intelligence to him by means of mesmerism.”⁵⁵ There is no indication—based upon the excerpts from Earle’s notes quoted by Clark—that Deas’s hallucinations were brought on by a drinking problem. Earle takes care to record that Deas was a frequent user of tobacco and snuff, but makes no reference to his use of alcohol.⁵⁶ It is also unclear whether the frightful scene Deas

⁵³ The art historian Carol Clark notes contemporary reports of Deas’s mental illness, as well as his cause of death. Carol Clark, “Charles Deas,” in Ron Tyler, et. al., *American Frontier Life: Early Western Paintings and Prints* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1987): 74. This publication remains the most comprehensive account of Deas’s life and work.

⁵⁴ I am indebted to Carol Clark for sharing with me the unpublished text of her talk, “Monomania on the Subject of Mesmerism”: Charles Deas’s paintings of the mid 1840s,” delivered at *The Annual Meeting the College Art Association*, Atlanta, Georgia (February, 2005), and hereforth referenced as “Monomania.”

⁵⁵ Records of the Bloomingdale Asylum and handwritten notes by Pliny Earle; quoted in Clark, “Monomania.” Contemporary newspaper accounts about Deas’s breakdown also mentioned the artist’s obsession with animal magnetism. See also Clark, “Charles Deas,” 74.

⁵⁶ Clark, “Monomania”; Nevertheless, Deas could not have painted *Walking the Chalk* in 1838 without some familiarity with ways that period discourses of moderation and excess informed the use of alcohol. Alcoholism also affected Deas’s brother Edward, who wrote and signed a temperance pledge in February of 1848. Written in Camp Buena Vista in Mexico, it reads: “I hereby pledge myself upon the honor of an

depicted in *A Vision* was in any way a reflection of the artist's own symptoms. Pliny Earle did not diagnose Deas with delirium tremens or *mania-a-potu*; and Earle, more than anyone, was able to tell the difference between it and other varieties of mania. In January of 1848, Earle wrote an eight page article for *The American Journal of the Medical Sciences* where he outlines the causes, symptoms, and treatments for delirium tremens.⁵⁷ The hallucinations suffered by those stricken with the disease, "are the visions which are continually conjured up by a wayward, excited, and ungovernable imagination, more vivid in their forms and characters than are the wayward designs of the artist, more diverse and unstable than the ever-changing pictures of a phantasmagoria."⁵⁸ The graphic language used by Earle to describe such visions is similar to that employed in *The Knickerbocker* to describe Charles Deas's *A Vision*:

The walls of his apartment, mere mortar and whitewash to the view of other people, present to the patient pictures of every possible variety in character and composition. Animals of various kinds throng into his room, crouch before him, with threatening gestures and grimaces the most frightful, creep beneath his bed or crawl upon it with torturing menaces. Enemies in human form spring up to bind, to drag to poison, to the tribunal of justice, to the rack, or to the place of execution, or perchance to shoot or slay with the sword; and, finally, the phantoms of the ideal world, specters with gorgon heads, and bodies more hideous than those of the satyr or the fabled tenants of the lower regions, glower upon him with their eyes of fire, gnash their teeth in fiendish defiance, at length

officer, and a gentlemen—that I will not hereafter during my service in the army of the United States—drink, or taste, of ardent spirits—or any other species of intoxicating drinks.” Hand-written pledge of Edward Deas, February 20, 1848, National Archives; photocopy in the files of Colonel Merl M. Moore, Smithsonian American Art Museum/National Portrait Gallery Library, Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC. In April of 1848, Captain Edward Deas was dismissed from duty for an unspecified reason. Three months later, he was reinstated with his former rank. The next spring, on May 16th, 1849, he drowned under mysterious circumstances in the Rio Grande River. The Corpus Christi Public Library provides a timeline of Edward Deas's life. See <http://www.library.ci.corpus-christi.tx.us/MexicanWar/dease.htm> (last accessed on July 25th, 2006). I thank Carol Clark for brining Edward Deas's drinking problem to my attention.

⁵⁷ Pliny Earle, "An Analysis of the Cases of Delirium Tremens, Admitted into the Bloomingdale Asylum for the Insane, from June 16th, 1821, to December 31st, 1844," *The American Journal of the Medical Sciences* (Jan. 1848): 76-82. Earle also provides a statistical breakdown of the 594 cases of delirium tremens treated at Bloomingdale during this time period by age, gender, and profession. Although Deas was not admitted to Bloomingdale until 1848, Earle lists one (unidentified) artist among his patients.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 81.

seize upon him, and he struggles with them in the full faith that he has encountered the devil incarnate.⁵⁹

While Deas was no doubt afflicted with an “ungovernable imagination,” similarities between the printed description of *A Vision* in *The Knickerbocker* and contemporary descriptions of delirium tremens are not enough to contradict the diagnosis of the artist’s personal physician. Deas suffered from mania, but it was not *mania-a-potu*.⁶⁰

Yet, a number of Deas paintings seem to dwell upon highly-charged moments of dramatic tension where characters—humans as well as horses—take flight from fires and devils, engage in pitched battles, and rush head-long over the edge of high cliffs. The crises depicted in such paintings as *The Devil and Tom Walker* (1838) (Fig. 15), *The Death Struggle* (1845) (Fig. 16), and *Prairie on Fire* (1847) (Fig. 17) have been interpreted by Carol Clark as instances where Deas may have been “painting out” his inner struggles with mental illness.⁶¹ Even though it appears that alcohol was not to blame for Deas’s own problems, I contend that temperance discourse nevertheless played an important role in his art. Fort Snelling, a United States military outpost on the upper Mississippi River that Deas visited in the summer of 1841, was well-known for its hard-drinking soldiers, and was home to an active temperance society.⁶² Josiah Snelling, the U.S. Army Colonel who founded the fort that bears his name, was himself an alcoholic, a

⁵⁹ Ibid; William Sweester’s description is also suggestive: “The eyes look wild, glaring, unmeaning, and the countenance is pale, unnatural and agitated. Oppression and other signs of disorder commonly exist around the digestive organs. The mind is variously affected in different instances. For the most part it is haunted by frightful and gloomy fancies. The individual also imagines himself from home, about his ordinary avocations, at which he seems to be working most industriously, while the sweat is running from every pore. He is all the while extremely suspicious, and impatient of contradiction.” Sweester, *A Dissertation on Intemperance* (Boston: Hilliard, Gray, and Company, 1829): 39.

⁶⁰ Two other artists are known to have died from *mania a-potu*: David Gilmour Blythe and the little-known J.S. Bridges, “a scene painter from New York,” who in a fit of madness cut his own throat in Louisville, Kentucky in 1853. See “Editorial Melange,” *Gleason’s Pictorial Drawing-Room Companion* (October 22, 1853): 271; on Blythe’s death, see Chambers, *The World of David Gilmour Blythe*, 221; and Burns, *Painting the Dark Side*, 50.

⁶¹ Clark, “Monomania”; and also *idem.*, “Charles Deas,” 72.

⁶² See “Temperance Society at Fort Snelling,” *Army and Navy Chronicle* (May 12, 1836): 298.

problem that likely contributed to his bitter departure from the garrison in 1827⁶³ Native Americans also drank heavily in the vicinity of the fort. In the spring of 1841, not long before Deas's arrival, a member of the Sioux tribe, "it seems being drunk and disorderly within the limits of the garrison and resisting an attempt to remove him, was shot down; hence, the hostile aspect of the tribe." Two companies from nearby outposts had to be sent to Fort Snelling to help control the tense situation that followed the shooting.⁶⁴ Anything but a social lubricant, the excessive consumption of alcohol at Fort Snelling exacerbated the stresses and strains of interpersonal and interracial relationships, and led to communication breakdowns, violence, and discord.

The image of the drunk and disorderly Native American was a widely-recognized cultural trope in antebellum America.⁶⁵ Native peoples were thought to have a congenital weakness for alcohol, or "fire water," a habit that drove them into poverty and destitution, and fueled frequent outbreaks of violence and crime.⁶⁶ Writing about the Chippewas (a tribe that—along with the Sioux—occupied the territory around Fort Snelling), one author related how:

A whiskey vendor, standing upon a raised platform behind his groggery, lures them on, one by one, to a taste of his "vinegar," knowing full well that the unfortunate savage, when he has once tasted of it, can no longer control his thus excited insatiable appetite for more.⁶⁷

⁶³ The website of the Minnesota Historical society provides an account of Snelling's departure. See <http://events.mnhs.org/Timepieces/EventDetail.cfm?EventID=460> (accessed on June 3rd, 2006).

⁶⁴ "More Indian Troubles," *Niles' National Register* (May 1, 1841): 131. Nevertheless, Deas's small landscape painting, *Fort Snelling* (1841), now in the collection of the Peabody Museum at Harvard University, depicts the fort in an ideal and peaceful mood. On Deas's *Fort Snelling*, see Clark, "Charles Deas," 54.

⁶⁵ For an excellent discussion of these stereotypes, see Peter C. Mancall, *Deadly Medicine: Indians and Alcohol in Early America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995: esp. 11-28).

⁶⁶ For an analysis of these attitudes, see Randy Mills, "'It is the cause of all mischief which the Indians suffer': Native Americans and Alcohol Abuse in the Old Northwest," *Ohio Valley History* 3:3 (2003): 3-16.

⁶⁷ James Ducatel, "A Fortnight Among the Chippewas of Lake Superior," *United States Catholic Magazine and Monthly Review* (Feb. 1846): 94.

Within this context, the Native American in Deas's *The Death Struggle* may embody an uncontrollable addiction to alcohol.⁶⁸

A similar argument can be made for the horses ridden by the two combatants in the painting. John Warner Barber, a Connecticut engraver, designed a temperance print called "The Drunkard's Progress" in 1826. In 1870, he revised and republished his illustrations for the print with a number of additions in a small booklet entitled *Barber's Temperance Tracts*.⁶⁹ On the back cover, Barber depicts "The Horseman & the Ungovernable Steed," an image of a man on a wild-eyed horse that gallops off a cliff (Fig. 18). Barber displays the title of the image in the largest of four text boxes, where he playfully turns off-kilter the letters that spell the word "ungovernable." The box closest to the bottom contains the phrase "When wine is in, wit is out," a quote from an 1864 article written by Mark Twain. In the article, "A Confederacy Caged," Twain relates the story of a man named J.F. Dolan, a northerner who secretly harbors southern sympathies. Dolan is able to hide his true allegiance until he becomes sufficiently drunk, whereby he reveals his love for the Confederacy. Alcohol effectively dissolves Dolan's prudential restraint, and exposes his true feelings to the public. Like other "copperheads," he is "a little loyal when sober, and intensely disloyal when the tongue strings are loosened by liquor."⁷⁰ Immoderate drinking intensifies normally hidden internal dispositions, and

⁶⁸ From a native perspective, the very same thing could be said for the white man, who—after all—was responsible for introducing ardent spirits to Native Americans in the first place. As one author opined, "Fire water, introduced to them by white men, has been effectual in their destruction as if arsenic had been administered. Our cupidity and avarice have been melting away this unfortunate people..." "Temperance Among the Cherokees," *New York Evangelist* (January 8, 1846): 7.

⁶⁹ John Warner Barber, *Barber's Temperance Tracts* (New Haven: Published by John Warner Barber, 1870).

⁷⁰ Mark Twain, "A Confederacy Caged," *The San Francisco Daily Morning Call*, August 26, 1864. Twain describes Dolan's trial as such: "The Judge further observed that when a man is under the influence of liquor, being too bold and independent for caution, he is very likely to let out his real sentiments, and that although this Dolan pretends to be a loyal man when sober, he had no confidence in the profession of

unleashes them like demons into society. Dolan's tongue, like Barber's "steed," is rendered ungovernable by alcohol.

Above the roundel that contains Barber's illustration, a quotation from the Reverend John Collinson reads "Strong drink is like an ungovernable horse, carrying its rider to destruction." This text—as well as Barber's image—likely relates to a story from Collinson's book *The Crack Club: Being a Series of Papers Illustrative of the Temperance Question*, published in at least three editions in England between 1837 and 1845, and circulated widely in the United States.⁷¹ Unlike Barber's "ungovernable steed," the two mounted combatants in *The Death Struggle* head straight toward the picture plane, the legs of their horses tethered together by a cord of vine. Just as he had done in *Walking the Chalk*, Deas arrests the motion of his main subjects at the peak moment of crisis, just before they cross the point of no return. This critical moment is again aligned with the imaginative imminent transgression of the picture's pictorial space, a technique that Deas replicates in other works such as *The Devil and Tom Walker* and *The Trooper* (1840) where his characters likewise rush headlong into the "real space" of viewer. We might read this compositional technique as a coping device through which Deas struggled with his inability to separate fantasy from reality. There is little doubt that by the second half of the 1840s, Deas could no longer *see* the difference.

In *The Death Struggle*, Horse and Indian alike register a fatal loss of control. As such, the Indian stands in as the white trapper's savage double, an alter-ego

loyalty in a man who, when intoxicated, would heap curses on every thing pertaining to the Union cause, declare himself a strong Jeff. Davis man, wish for the destruction of the Union army, and that he was in the Southern army with a musket on his shoulder, as did Dolan."

⁷¹ [I have yet to get a hold of this book. Copies are extant in libraries in New York, Massachusetts, Missouri, and Wisconsin. I plan to travel to consult this text sometime during the winter recess of 2006-2007. It can only assume at this point that the title *The Crack Club* refers to the act of walking the crack.]

that he is unable to repress. Irrevocably entangled with one another, they both careen over the edge and suffer the same fate. African-Americans, like Native Americans, were thought by most whites to be powerless to control or govern their passions.⁷² White Americans sought to reify their own hegemony by ascribing to these two groups a racially predetermined vulnerability to intemperance. This racist logic dictated that Indians and blacks, unable to manage their own affairs, were best left under the charge of whites, who provided them with the discipline that they could not muster on their own. As a result, there was nothing more threatening to those who promulgated such viewpoints in the antebellum period than an intelligent, temperate black man. On August 1, 1842, a parade was organized in Philadelphia on the day that many African Americans commemorated Britain's abolition the slave trade. Blacks, joined by a large number of Irishmen, marched under a banner that depicted a freed slave against the backdrop of a rising sun and a sinking slave ship.⁷³ Whites who viewed the proceedings quickly realized that temperance was here couched as the foundation for self-government. In their eyes, this message raised the spectre of racial equality and social leveling. Responding to the perceived threat, a crowd of white laborers instigated a full-scale race riot, an affair that saw the wanton destruction of two black churches, as well as the homes of many black residents of Philadelphia and southern New Jersey.⁷⁴

Black leaders such as Frederick Douglass were well aware of the flimsy tautology upon which the cultural alignment of intemperance and slavery turned. In an address

⁷² Elizabeth Johns notes that when white Americans employed “such stock assessments of blacks as childlike, lazy, and natural (sensual), they thereby distinguished them from the vast hordes of otherwise undistinguished white citizens who—putatively, at least—had the innate capacities for equality: mental acumen, economic drive, and self-control.” Elizabeth Johns, *American Genre Painting: The Politics of Everyday Life* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1991): 100.

⁷³ My description of the parade is based upon the account in Dorsey, 124. [So far as I know, the banner does not survive.]

⁷⁴ Ibid.

delivered in Glasgow, Scotland, entitled “Intemperance Viewed with a Relation to Slavery,” Frederick Douglass argued that racist whites attempted to prop up the institution of slavery by encouraging slaves to drink:

At the time when they would be apt to think—at a time when they would be apt to devise means for their freedom—their masters give them of the stupefying draught which paralyzes their intellect, and in this way prevents their seeking emancipation.⁷⁵

Black servitude was thus dependent upon black intemperance, and especially, Douglass and others argued, the public *perception* of black intemperance. More broadly, Douglass realized that intemperance is itself a form of slavery, the subtle conversion of a human being into something like an animal through a process that erodes self-reliance and free will. For Douglass, a free nation:

... no matter how much it boasts of its freedom, no matter how free it may be from monarchical, aristocratical, or autocratical government, while its people drink deep of the inebriating bowl, they are slaves, they cannot be otherwise, for what is it that is free, that is desired to be free about man? Why it's the mind, the soul, it's the powers that distinguish him from the brute creation, that makes it desirable for him to be free. (Hear.) This intemperance enslaves—this intemperance paralyses—this intemperance binds with bonds stronger than iron, and makes man the willing subject of its brutal control. (Cheers.)⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Frederick Douglass, "Intemperance Viewed in Connection With Slavery: An Address Delivered in Glasgow, Scotland, on February 18, 1846." *Glasgow Saturday Post*, February 21, 1846. Blassingame, John (et al, eds.). *The Frederick Douglass Papers: Series One--Speeches, Debates, and Interviews*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979. Vol. I, p. 165; available online at The Gilder Lehrman Center for the Study of Slavery, Resistance, and Abolition: <http://www.yale.edu/glc/archive/1068.htm> (last accessed on July 8th, 2006).

⁷⁶ Ibid. The rhetorical alignment of intemperance and slavery, and the interpretation of intemperance as a form of self-imposed slavery was commonplace in the antebellum period. See, for example, Eliphalet Gillet, *Evils of Intemperance: A Sermon Preached at Hollowell, on the Day of the Annual Fast in Maine, April 12, 1821* (Hallowell, Maine: Goodale, Glazier, 1821); and Heman Humphrey, *Parallel Between Intemperance and the Slave Trade: An Address Delivered at Amherst College, July 4, 1828* (Amherst, Mass.: Adams, 1828). The frontispiece to Humphrey's volume juxtaposes an intoxicated white man who lazily leans, bottle-in-hand, against the side of an unidentified building, with a profile of Josiah Wedgewood's iconic emblem, *Am I Not a Man and a Brother?*. Douglass, Gillet, and Humphrey are examined in John W. Crowley, "Slaves to the Bottle: Gough's *Autobiography* and Douglass's *Narrative*," in *The Serpent in the Cup*, 115-35; see also Cynthia S. Hamilton, "Dred: Intemperate Slavery," *Journal of American Studies* 34:2 (2000): 257-77; and Marianne Valverde, "Slavery from Within: The Birth of Alcoholism and the Dilemmas of Freedom in Late Victorian Britain," *Social History* 22:3 (1997): 251-268.

The efforts of Douglass and the example of the 1842 Philadelphia Race Riot reveal that dichotomies such as “slave” and “free,” and “black” and “white,” were becoming increasingly destabilized. No longer racially pre-determined congenital conditions, slavery and freedom were instead recast as questions of self-reliance and self-control. This does not mean that racism evaporated into a haze of egalitarian ideals—far from it, as the violence in Philadelphia makes clear—but these new ways of thinking undermined racial determinism to the point where the morality of slavery as an *institution* was increasingly called into question.

In an 1860 drawing, the artist David Claypoole Johnston represents intemperance in the guise of a drunkard who lay passed out upon a set of railroad tracks. The man—who is, by all indications, white—rests his head across one of the rails as a train approaches in the distance. The title of Johnston’s drawing, *Slavery (Voluntary)* (Fig. 19), equates the drunkard’s tragic fate with his willful surrender of self-control to an ungovernable appetite for liquor.⁷⁷ Inveterate alcohol consumption implied a racial transformation, one that, in the words of literary historian Robert S. Levine, “suggests with an uncomfortable literalism that to drink intemperately is to become a ‘slave’ to the bottle.”⁷⁸ In other words, by voluntarily subjecting themselves to the tyranny of their own desires, white drunkards willfully assumed the inferior social and racial position of

⁷⁷ Jennifer A. Greenhill, “Playing the Fool: David Claypoole Johnston and the Menial Labor of Caricature,” *American Art* 17:3 (Fall 2003): 38. There are a number of period accounts of drunkards that were, in fact, killed in this manner. See, for instance, the grisly description in “Railroads vs. Drunkards,” *Robert Merry’s Museum* (July 1, 1851): 37.

⁷⁸ Robert S. Levine, “‘Whiskey, Blacking, and All’: Temperance and Race in William Wells Brown’s *Clotel*,” in *The Serpent in the Cup*, 93-114. See also Jennifer A. Greenhill’s analysis of the ape-like features of Irishmen in David Claypoole Johnston’s art. Greenhill notes that “Middle-class northeasterners often equated the Irish with freed blacks, who lived in the same slums and vied for the same low-status, low-paying jobs.” Greenhill, “Playing the Fool,” 34, 38; and L. Perry Curtis, Jr. *Apes and Angels: The Irishman in Victorian Caricature*, rev. ed. (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997), for an extensive analysis of this phenomenon. Intemperance and Catholicism were seen as subjugating Irish immigrants to external powers that they were unable to control, and as such, rendered them “black” in the eyes of Anglo-American Protestants.

black slaves; or at the very least, the position of free blacks or culturally “Africanized” Irishmen who remained immured in “wage slavery,” effectively “owned” by those for whom they worked.

In Charles Deas’s *Walking the Chalk*, the main character’s fate is in a similar way aligned with that of the elderly African American man who sits on a bench in the background. Deas literally draws them together, positioning them on the same diagonal line of chalk, which appears to extend nearly, but not quite all the way back to the inside edge of the black man’s right foot. We might imagine that the yeoman farmer walks back and forth along the line, in between the position of the (presumably white) viewer and that of the African American. In this way, the tipping figure poised on the brink of an inexorable transformation mediates between black and white worlds. Moreover, his position reifies the culturally constructed double-concordance of whiteness with sobriety, and blackness with drunkenness. The whiteness of the farmer is amplified by his blazing white shirt that overwhelms the otherwise cool tonalities of the painting’s color scheme. To verify his continued sobriety, the farmer’s feet must remain adhered to a thin, *white* line. In almost every way, the young, erect, white farmer is the polar opposite of the old, seated black man, yet Deas places them on the same visual trajectory. Why?

As it turns out, the chalk-walking farmer is not as white as he appears. As we have seen, Deas likely turned to William Sidney Mount’s *The Breakdown* as a thematic model for *Walking the Chalk*; but Deas appears to have drawn from another of Mount’s paintings the source for *Walking the Chalk*’s central character. In his 1836 canvas *Farmers Nooning* (Fig. 20), Mount depicts a black laborer who has fallen asleep on a pile of hay. Like Deas’s chalk-walker, he wears a bright white shirt and a pair of canvas

trousers that are held up by the strap of a single suspender. The hand of his extended right arm just barely maintains its grip on his hat, while his left arm curls gracefully above his head. The farmer in *Walking the Chalk* is an inversion—a mirror-image—of Mount’s sleeping black man (Figs. 21). Deas has switched the positions of the left and right arms, effectively placing the hat on his figure’s head, and has moved the single suspender strap from the left to the right shoulder. When seen from behind—from the black man’s perspective—the chalk-walker’s posture is nearly identical to that of Mount’s black sleeper. Now white and wide-awake, the figure nevertheless seems determined to “attain” a supine position—drunk, and perhaps passed out under the yoke of his (voluntary) slavery.⁷⁹ Precariously balanced on the outermost edge of sobriety, Deas’s farmer is idiosyncratic, dislodged from any secure racial category. He is depicted in transit, walking a fine line between black and white.

Stumbling out towards the viewer, the chalk-walker’s alarming trajectory transforms the picture plane into a zone of collision between the unseemly, indecorous underbelly of society inside the Tjerck Brink Inn, and the gazing eyes of white middle and upper-class gallery-goers. The line of chalk in fact extends all the way down to the bottom edge of the painting, and imaginatively leads the chalk-walker right off the canvas, through the picture plane, and into the viewer’s own space. Because of this, the chalk-walker’s monomaniacal focus, the very thing that has served him so well and kept him on track, threatens to lead him out of the picture’s own frame of reference. Let loose from this bounded quadrant of pictorial space, no longer able to discern the straight and

⁷⁹ Jennifer Greenhill has analyzed a similar dichotomy between waking and sleeping, informed by temperance-inflected racial stereotypes, at work in David Claypoole Johnston’s watercolor *Sound Asleep and Wide Awake* (ca. 1855), an image that shows a young boy who humorously paints a grinning face on the back of a sleeping drunkard’s head. Greenhill, “Playing the Fool,” *passim*.

narrow path, the confirmed drunkard operates off the grid. Deas cleverly concocts his composition to convey an imminent triple-transgression of racial, imbibitional, and pictorial boundaries. Reviews written by those who saw *Walking the Chalk* at the 1839 Annual Exhibition at the National Academy of Design reveal a period cognizance of the painting's potential threat. One writer for the *New-York Spectator* noted that the painting was a "Very good picture of its kind; but not, in our estimation, a fit subject for the pencil. It is enough to know that such scenes are passing around us, without having them placed before us upon canvas."⁸⁰ Another author yoked *Walking the Chalk* together with Deas's *The Devil and Tom Walker* and claimed that:

They incline too much to caricature, and we would remind this promising young painter, that the degradation of human nature is not a pleasing subject for contemplation, and consequently not a fit subject for art; unless it be so represented as to convey a moral lesson, or excite moral sympathies, as in the tales, not more humorous than pathetic, of Dickens, or in those great pictures of Hogarth, where the ludicrous and the affecting are perceived as one.⁸¹

Both authors reveal a reluctance to confront the imagery in Deas's painting. In the opinion of these two reviewers, it is more than enough to know that these sorts of activities happen, but inappropriate to place them on display in front of an audience with nothing but a thin veneer of humor to filter the harsh realities of the subject matter. There is indeed no overt moral message in *Walking the Chalk*⁸²—the whole point of the titular activity is to transgress the limits of propriety, to transform a functional act into a recursive, self-perpetuating excess. Unrefined, unadulterated, and unable to be integrated into societal mores, the denizens of Deas's picture are expressly inutile. Their inordinate

⁸⁰ "National Academy of Design: No. IV.," *New-York Spectator* (June 17, 1839).

⁸¹ "Exhibition of the National Academy—No. II.," *New York Literary Gazette* (May 11, 1839): 118. In contradiction to the *Gazette*, *The New-York Mirror* claimed that "Mr. Deas displays, in his pictures, much of the humor of Hogarth, without any of his grossness." *The New-York Mirror: A Weekly Gazette of Literature and the Fine Arts* (November 9, 1839).

⁸² See my earlier reading of *Walking the Chalk* as an example of "dark reform," n. 9.

consumption of alcohol leaves them physically *and socialy* uncoordinated. That is to say, they are unable to be located or mapped within the coordinates of antebellum society. Incapable of incorporating themselves into the American body politic, the ruffians, drunkards, and idlers depicted in *Walking the Chalk* are altogether indigestible.⁸³

When the writer for the *New York Literary Gazette* criticizes the painting for having “too much caricature,” he touches upon the analogous visual work that caricature performs, the way that it also exaggerates and inflates a particular feature beyond the limit of functionality and renders it a self-perpetuating derogatory excess that subjugates its victims under the devastating weight of its cultural currency. With this writer’s criticism in mind, we recognize that among the other demeaning transformations Deas visually arrests at the threshold of execution in *Walking the Chalk* is the moment when the farmer’s hat falls down over his eyes. This detail in Deas’s picture draws attention to the point where an individual, about to surrender his power of self-determination, loses his sobriety, as well as his face. After the chalk-walker loses face, he will gain a place among the veritable gallery of stereotypes that inhabit the inn. His new identity will no longer be his own, but that of an “other.”

Many of the same compositional devices that Charles Deas employed in *Walking the Chalk* also appear in *The Devil and Tom Walker*.⁸⁴ In this painting, exhibited along

⁸³ They call to mind Charles Willson Peale’s phrase, “a clog and a burden to the digestive powers.” See my earlier discussion, above. My reading of *Walking the Chalk* here aligns with Bryan Wolf’s magnificent interpretation of John Quidor’s *Anthony van Corlear Brought into the Presence of Peter Stuyvesant* (1839). Bryan Jay Wolf, *Romantic Re-Vision: Culture and Consciousness in Nineteenth-Century American Painting and Literature* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1982): 131-38. Of Quidor’s art, Wolf writes that “By releasing forces inimical to the public good, energies unassimilable into the larger culture, they reveal behind that culture the deeper strains and wounds that its own rhetoric denies. . . . Quidor’s characters are not only nature’s fools: they are its truth tellers” (132).

⁸⁴ The racial discourse of two paintings by John Quidor that the artist based on Irving’s tale has been recently elaborated in Sarah Burns, *Painting the Dark Side*, 120-123; Burns also makes mention of Deas’s picture (123).

with *Walking the Chalk* at the 1839 Annual Exhibition of the National Academy of Design⁸⁵, Deas depicts a white protagonist who hurtles toward the picture plane, impelled forward by an axe-and-stick-wielding horned black figure that looms over his left shoulder. The old man rides a galloping black horse with a frothing mouth that appears spooked beyond the control of his reigns. As if aided by some unnatural force, the black figure appears to stand or hover on or just above the horse's back, and, like a shadow, refuses to part company with his fleeing victim. Art historian Guy McElroy has noted that Deas's "...use of a black male to represent the devil...plays on associations of blacks with sinister or sinful characters."⁸⁶ But in Irving's text, and also, as I will soon argue, in Deas's painting, there takes place a not-so-subtle racial transformation, one that erodes iterations of "black" and "white" as clear-cut, congenitally derivative categories, and posits blackness itself as a transferable condition, one that white people, such as Tom Walker, might "fall into" if they do not look where they are going.

Charles Deas's *The Devil and Tom Walker* illustrates a scene from Washington Irving's short story of the same name, which first appeared in his 1824 collection *Tales of a Traveller*. Irving's narrative follows the misfortunes of Tom Walker, a greedy miser who sells his soul to the devil in exchange for the lost treasure of Captain Kidd. Irving describes the devil as "a great black man" who was "neither negro nor Indian," with a "great pair of red eyes" who wore:

...a rude, half Indian garb, and had a red belt or sash swathed around his body, but his face was neither black nor copper color, but swarthy and dingy and begrimed with soot, as if he had been accustomed to toil among fires and forges.

⁸⁵ See n. 56, above.

⁸⁶ Guy C. McElroy, *Facing History: The Black Image in American Art: 1710-1940* (San Francisco: Bedford Arts, 1990): 26. In McElroy's otherwise incisive reading of Deas's painting, he incorrectly claims that "...Irving's description does not specifically describe the devil..."

He had a shock of coarse black hair, that stood out from his head in all directions; and bore an axe on his shoulder.⁸⁷

Although Irving refers to the devil throughout the story as “the black man,” and “the black fellow,” he takes the trouble to explicitly disabuse his readers of the idea that the devil ought to be construed as an actual Negro or Indian.⁸⁸ There is no question that Deas depicts the devil in his painting as a callous stereotype, a caricature of a black man of the kind that was common in racist images of banjo-playing minstrels. Yet, as many scholars have pointed out, most minstrel shows during the antebellum period were performed by whites in blackface.⁸⁹ In his text, Irving seeks to shift readers’ attention away from an unproductive focus upon the actual, essential color of the devil’s face, which the author defines only in evasive language: “*neither black, nor copper.*” Irving instead emphasizes the applied materiality of the color—whatever shade of “dark” it may be—and describes it as soot, or some similar substance that may have adhered to the devil’s face as he toiled “among fires and forges.” In fact, a close look at the face of the devil in Deas’s painting reveals tiny areas of pale skin around each eye, and suggests that the figure is not a black man at all, but a white man playing a “black” role (Fig. 22).

There are other clues in Irving’s text that point to ways in which blackness is couched as a transitive property, as an infection that can be caught suddenly, or a disease that develops over time. Either way, once one is afflicted with the condition, Irving and Deas seem to suggest, its effects are irreversible. At the beginning of Irving’s story, Tom

⁸⁷ Washington Irving, “The Devil and Tom Walker,” Project Gutenberg: <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/13514/13514-8.txt> (last accessed on June 27, 2006). All subsequent quotations from “The Devil and Tom Walker” refer to this unpaginated text.

⁸⁸ The devil remarks that “...the red men have been exterminated by you white savages,” and also mentions that he is “the great patron and prompter of slave dealers.” It would seem counterintuitive for a Native American to speak of his own people in the second person, or for a black man to have anything to do with the slave trade. Irving likely included both phrases to reinforce the devil’s racial indeterminacy.

⁸⁹ See, for instance, Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993): esp. 111-135.

Walker takes a short-cut home through a miasma-laden swamp where he must step carefully to avoid falling into “pits,” “quagmires,” “dark and stagnant pools,” and, most suggestively of all, “a gulf of black smothering mud.” It is here, in this gloomy place, where the high trees “made it dark at noonday,” that Tom first meets the devil. Initially, Tom does not quite believe that the devil is, in fact, who he says he is, and that this so-called devil really knows where the secret treasure of Captain Kidd lies buried. When Tom asks for proof, the devil responds in the following manner:

“This is my signature,” said the black man, pressing his finger on Tom’s forehead. So saying, he turned off among the thickets of the swamp, and seemed, as Tom said, to go down, down, down, into the earth, until nothing but his head and shoulders could be seen, and so on until he totally disappeared. When Tom reached home he found the black print of a finger burnt, as it were, into his forehead, which nothing could obliterate.

Although couched as a transferable condition, blackness here leaves an indelible mark.⁹⁰

Tom Walker not only carries a visible symptom of his turn to the dark side, but also begins to act the part. As a further condition of Tom’s receipt of Kidd’s treasure, (as if his soul were not enough), the devil requires that Tom use his new-found fortune to enter into an unethical business. He first suggests that Tom “fit out a slave ship,” but Tom refuses the offer. The devil then suggests the occupation of “usurer,” whereupon the offer is accepted, and the deal finalized. Just as Tom incurs a debt he cannot repay when he enters into commerce with the devil, he likewise, according to the devil’s own wishes, uses the money from Kidd’s treasure to go into business as a corrupt money-lender, where “every one driven to raise money by desperate means and desperate sacrifices, hurried” to his office. By the end of the story, Tom talks of “the expediency of reviving the persecutions of Quakers and Anabaptists,” which mirrors the devil’s earlier

⁹⁰ The “black mark” on Tom’s forehead may also be a coded reference to the celebration of Ash Wednesday, and thus, a derogatory statement about Catholicism.

revelation that he amuses himself by presiding over (Irving repeats the phrase verbatim) “persecutions of Quakers and Anabaptists.” When he surrenders his ability to choose his own fate, and to choose his own occupation, Tom becomes, in effect, the black devil’s white double.

Irving’s story concludes when the devil arrives to collect his debt. During a thunderstorm, the devil appears at Tom Walker’s counting house and throws him upon a black horse, which whisks Tom away down the street and into the wilderness. Later, an unidentified man reported seeing Tom astride the mad, galloping horse, heading “down into the black hemlock swamp,” after which a “thunderbolt fell in that direction which seemed to set the whole forest in a blaze.” This last image of Tom, carried off by the devil’s own ungovernable steed, is the scene that Deas depicts in *The Devil and Tom Walker*. The fire sparked by the lightning bolt is visible in the background, as is an owl that ominously swoops in toward the action at the center of the composition.⁹¹ In Irving’s text, the devil does not hover over Tom’s shoulder, but disappears immediately after he throws Tom upon the horse. Deas thus reintroduces the devil’s presence on his own accord. As such, *The Devil and Tom Walker* depicts a white man helplessly carried away into a “black hemlock swamp” on the back of a black horse driven by a black man against the backdrop of a black storm cloud. Deas’s painting makes frighteningly clear that Tom Walker’s inexorable loss of free agency is symptomatic of an inability to control his inner blackness. His decision to relinquish his soul to the devil was nothing

⁹¹ Irving twice notes the presence of owls in the swamp, but does not mention their appearance during Tom Walker’s ride. It is tempting to associate the presence of the owl with nightmarish visions, as is the case with Francisco Goya’s “*El Sueño de la Razon Produce Monstruos*,” (The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters), but there is no evidence I have yet discovered that ascribes any such meaning to the owl within the context of antebellum America.

more than an afterthought for a man who had already become a slave to his own unbridled appetites.

Spontaneous Combustion

In one of the last pictures that he completed before he entered the asylum at Bloomingdale, Deas again paints a scene where two unruly horses and their desperate riders stampede into the foreground. Unlike *The Death Struggle, Prairie on Fire* (1847) depicts a family working together to escape a fiery inferno, one that has been ignited, as was the case in *The Devil and Tom Walker*, by a lightning bolt.⁹² As the flames spread uncontrollably across the plain, three figures that a contemporary described as an old hunter, his unconscious daughter, and the man she is to marry, flee on horseback along a small creek.⁹³ Adding further tinder to this already overwrought melodrama is the fierce wind that whips through the hair of horses and humans alike, as they make their mad, death-defying dash for safety. Charles Deas presents the viewer with a scene of concentrated intensity, where a faceless young man rears up atop a white stallion as he takes a final, backward glance over a hellish landscape. The tense sinews in his right forearm strengthen his grip around both the rifle and the reigns of the horse, as his left arm clasps the limp body of his fiancée. Her face, left arm, and a daringly expansive region of her upper chest and shoulder are exposed to the viewer, while her legs dangle unseen behind the body of her rescuer's rearing white horse. Atop a second, charcoal-colored horse, the woman's father rides behind them, maneuvering through a stretch of

⁹² For a recent and well-researched examination of *Prairie Fire*, see Teresa Carbone, et. al., *American Paintings in the Brooklyn Museum: Artists Born by 1876* (New York : Brooklyn Museum, in association with D. Giles, 2006): 449-50.

⁹³ "Mr. Deas," *The Literary World* (April 24, 1847).

tall grass. Largely obscured by the first horse, the old man's head can be seen just below its muzzle, as he points to a potential escape route to the left. This tangle of horses and humans, grass and water, and fire and lightning is one of Deas's most confusing, yet compelling compositions.

Deas's theme was a popular one among audiences of the time, and also furnished the subject of William Ranney's *The Stampede* (1848; now known as *Prairie Fire*).⁹⁴ As Teresa Carbone has noted, one such fire was described in the journals of Lewis and Clark, and made its way into James Fennimore Cooper's *The Prairie* (1827); this, in turn, inspired a painting by Alvan Fisher, which was published in an 1829 issue of *The Token*.⁹⁵ Cooper's account was familiar to Deas, who had based another, earlier painting, *Turkey Shoot* (1837), on *The Prairie*.⁹⁶ George Catlin, whose Indian Gallery had inspired Deas to travel west in 1840, also painted two scenes of prairie fires and published, in 1844, an article entitled "Burning Prairies," a text he excerpted from his earlier book, *Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Condition of the North American Indians* (1841).⁹⁷ Here, Catlin explains that a rider caught in such a fire is frequently slowed by "high grass...filled with wild pea-vines and other impediments," and is forced, with often tragic results, "to guide his horse in the zig-zag paths of the deers and buffaloes, retarding his progress, until he is overtaken by the dense column of smoke that is swept before the fire." This, in turn, alarms:

...the horse, which stops and stands terrified and immutable, till the burning grass which is wafted in the wind, falls about him, kindling up in a moment a thousand

⁹⁴ Johns, *American Genre Painting*, 225, n.35; Another painting by an unknown artist, *The Prairie Fire* (ca. 1850), formerly attributed to John Mix Stanley, is in the collection of the Blanton Museum of Art at the University of Texas at Austin.

⁹⁵ Carbone, 449.

⁹⁶ Clark, "Charles Deas," 52.

⁹⁷ Carbone, 449.

new fires, which are instantly wrapped in the swelling flood of smoke that is moving on like a black thunder-cloud, rolling on the earth, with its lightning's glare, and its thunder rumbling as it goes.⁹⁸

Catlin makes it clear that most fatalities suffered during such fires were caused not by an inability to outrun the flames, but by the burdensome inefficiency of circuitous, “zig-zag paths.” In *Prairie on Fire*, Deas captures this frantic moment of disorientation, when the young man, with his horse rearing up on its hind legs, has lost his sense of direction. It may be that the older, wiser hunter has discerned a more direct route out of the conflagration; but Deas’s leaves their fate unresolved, as they pause to consider what amounts to a life-and-death decision. Surely their lives, like that of Deas’s chalk-walker, depend upon finding and following a straight—or, in this case—the straightest possible route.

Later in his description of prairie fires, George Catlin, in a burst of dramatic flair, rhetorically asks of his audience: “Who has dashed, on his wild horse, through an ocean of grass, with the raging tempest at his back, rolling over the land its waves of liquid fire?”⁹⁹ The terms “liquid fire” and “fire water” were commonly employed to describe ardent spirits such as whiskey and rum. Furthermore, the term relates the way that

⁹⁸ George Catlin, Letter #33, Fort Leavenworth, Lower Missouri, reprinted in *idem*, “Burning Prairies,” *The Anglo-American* 2:12 (January 13, 1844): 279-80. Also available online at: <http://americanart.si.edu/collections/exhibits/catlinclassroom/searchdocs/catlinletter33.html> [I do not yet know whether the plants in the foreground of *Prairie on Fire* are, in fact, “wild pea-vines.”]; see also Daniel Drake’s comment that a drunkard is “unfitted for employment that requires steadiness of nerve; and when he signs his name to promissory notes, given, perhaps, for debts contracted in consequence of his intemperance, the *zig-zag lines* betray to all attentive observers, that they will, probably, never be discharged.” Drake, “A Discourse on Intemperance,” 43. Italics added.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*; quoted in Carbone, 449. Carol Clark suggests another possible source for Deas’s painting: Lewis F. Thomas’s *The Valley of the Mississippi Illustrated in a Series of Views* (1841). Clark notes that Deas’s paintings had provided sources for illustrations in Thomas’s book, who also sat for a portrait by the artist. Thomas describes prairie fires as “lending to the imagination, a semblance of convict-spirits tossing in a lake of fire.” Thomas, quoted in Clark, “Charles Deas,” 72.

addictions to potent potables, once they are “sparked,” grow uncontrollably intense.¹⁰⁰ As early as 1823, an article in *The Boston Recorder* posits intemperance as an evil that “spreads,” as liquor is “poured down the throats of 10,000,000 people, 75,000,000 gallons of liquid fire, mingling and flowing with their life’s blood.”¹⁰¹ Liquor acted as a fiery antagonist, aggravating the bloodstream, and over-stimulating the system into a state of unrelenting hypertension and trauma. George W. Burnap, the author of a popular advice manual, declared that:

All intoxicating drinks are poisons, whence they derive their name. When taken into the stomach they remain there undigested, and irritate and inflame its coats, till they are absorbed unchanged into the vascular system, to derange and set on fire the whole course of nature.¹⁰²

The final stages of alcoholism were thought by some to raise the risk of spontaneous combustion, where the amount of alcohol in the system was so high that one risked catching on fire, or exploding outright. Even respectable medical journals frequently printed accounts of unfortunate inebriates bursting into flames. In an article entitled “Spontaneous Combustion of a Drunkard,” the *Journal of Health* relates the case of a twenty-five year-old man who “burned like the wick of a candle in the midst of his own flame.”¹⁰³ All of this tied into a period obsession with restraint and control, qualities thought to be lacking in impetuous young men. Such men were, according to

¹⁰⁰ By the antebellum period, the consumption of excessive amounts of alcohol had indeed spread like wildfire. Over the course of the year 1830, according to the calculations of temperance historian William Rorabaugh, the average American drank five gallons of distilled spirits.¹⁰⁰ If we assume that most women and children imbibed much less than this amount, the totals for most tavern-going working men must have been truly astounding; and, moreover, this number does not take into account the consumption of beer, cider, and wine. See Rorabaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic*, 8. Michael Kimmel estimates that by 1830, the average American over 14 years of age consumed 9.5 gallons of hard liquor. Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York: The Free Press, 1996): 49.

¹⁰¹ “Intemperance,” *The Boston Recorder* (October 4, 1823): 158.

¹⁰² George W. Burnap, *Lectures to Young Men on the Cultivation of the Mind, the Formation of Character, and the Conduct of Life* (Baltimore: John Murphy, 1840): 127.

¹⁰³ *Journal on Health* (May 26, 1830): 288; for other examples of spontaneous combustion, see Eric Burns, *The Spirits of America: A Social History of Alcohol* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004): 58-59.

Presbyterian pastor William Morrison Engles, “a mass of combustible material, which one spark of unholy fire may inflame.”¹⁰⁴ Even Benjamin Rush, the pre-eminent physician working in America during the first quarter of the nineteenth century, reprinted the following case to illustrate one of intoxication’s more serious consequences:

Frequent and disgusting belchings. Dr. Haller relates the case of a notorious drunkard having been suddenly destroyed in consequence of the vapour discharged from his stomach by belching, accidentally taking fire by coming in contact with the flame of a candle.¹⁰⁵

In 1835, Methodist circuit-rider Charles Barnett gave a lecture in Bethel, Alabama, where he touched upon three themes that ran through much of the temperance literature of the era: alcoholism spreads uncontrollably; it saps strength and sexual potency; and it consumes the body like a flame (metaphorically, and otherwise). *The Christian Advocate and Journal* published the bulk of Barnett’s lecture as “An Address on Temperance.” So familiar that it is nearly invisible, excessive drinking, Barnett argues, “is by no means confined to the unhappy victim that sips the unhallowed cup, for as the poison infused into the body by the fang of the serpent flows through the whole system, so this moral and physical venom...spreads through every member of the political body.” Moreover, he asks his audience: “Who can read of the Herculean strength and the almost incredible feats of manhood of the ancients, and view our present puny state of feebleness and inertness, without being alarmed at this degeneracy?” Next, he launches into a vivid description of spontaneous combustion, and relates how a man,

¹⁰⁴ William M. Engles, *A Plea for Religion* (Philadelphia: 1833): 22; quoted in Dorsey, 106. My understanding of this issue owes much to Bruce Dorsey’s excellent discussion of the perceived incendiary potential of intemperate “young men.” *Idem.*, 102-112.

¹⁰⁵ Benjamin Rush, *An Inquiry into the Effect of Ardent Spirits Upon the Human Body and Mind, with an Account of the Means for Preventing, and of the Remedies of Curing Them*, 8th ed., with revisions (Brookfield, Mass.: E. Merriam & Co.: 1814): 10. All subsequent citations from Rush’s *Inquiry* are taken from this edition.

within the course of one night, was “completely reduced to a smoking cinder.”¹⁰⁶ For Barnett and other social, religious, and hygienic activists of the day, intemperance was a moral and physiological epidemic that threatened to turn virile, hale, and healthy Americans into effete, exhausted, burnt-out wrecks.

In Deas’s *Prairie on Fire*, the faceless young man must somehow maintain control of the reins and rifle in his right hand, while he clutches his insensate fiancée in his left. That is to say, his task is to balance masculine and feminine compositional elements: the restless energy of the unforgiving horse and the phallic firearm on one side, with the soft skin and curvy lines of the woman’s body on the other. But this is more than an artful juxtaposition of male and female attributes. It is altogether unclear at first glance, and even after multiple glances, where the man stops and the woman begins. In fact, it initially appears that the woman wears denim jeans and riding boots; that somehow, her feet bear down on the horse’s stirrups as she gallops along in an unbelievably deep episode of somnambulism.¹⁰⁷ Their bodies are so oddly intermingled, that the man without a face seems barely present at all. Even his tense, muscular right arm appears grafted onto the torso of the woman. Forced to look twice or thrice to disambiguate the intermingled sexes, the confused eye alternates between the two and, like the young man, barely notices the old hunter who points out an avenue of escape. In the panic of confusion and misrecognition, the rider runs himself ragged, and does not

¹⁰⁶ “An Address on Temperance,” *Christian Advocate and Journal* (September 25, 1835): 17.

¹⁰⁷ Given Deas’s obsession with mesmerism and magnetic sleep, this is not altogether out of the question. Carol Clark, even before she discovered Pliny Earle’s diagnosis, related the unconscious girl in *Prairie on Fire* to the sleeping woman in Henry Fuseli’s *The Nightmare* (1782). It may be, as Clark more recently argues, that the entire scene is a product of Deas’s own “psychic trauma.” See Clark, “Charles Deas,” 72; and “Monomania,” *passim*.

look where he is going. His unproductive over-excitement entails a debilitating sex-change.

In nineteenth-century America, manhood, like whiteness, was synonymous with the careful regulation of passions, impulses, and appetites. When Charles Willson Peale chastised his son Raphaelle's intemperance, he implored him to "act the Man," and aligned utility with masculinity.¹⁰⁸ Luxury, utility's opposite, threatened to debilitate, and effectively emasculate, the new nation. "Will you tell me how to prevent riches from producing luxury?" John Adams wrote Thomas Jefferson in 1819. "Will you tell me how to prevent luxury from producing effeminacy, intoxication, extravagance, vice, and folly?"¹⁰⁹ Within this culture of incessant (and increasingly compulsory) self-regulation, every bite, drink, thought, and sexual act ought to connect into a larger network of socio-economic concerns. Objects, practices, or people that could not or would not be integrated into the overarching structure of market-driven use value were denigrated as luxurious, diseased, or something less than human. Raphaelle Peale's still-life paintings, indulgently sensual and hermetic, serve no useful moral or didactic purpose. Instead, they derive their potency from the very uselessness (couched as *impotency*) that so infuriated Charles Willson Peale, who could not tolerate eating, drinking, or even *looking* for its own sake.

Peale's friend Benjamin Rush believed that ardent spirits, when first imbibed, "are stimulating upon the system," but they soon initiate an equally strong reciprocal

¹⁰⁸ Charles Willson Peale to Raphaelle Peale, February 2, 1818; quoted in Fortune, 143.

¹⁰⁹ John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, December 21, 1819; quote in Neil Harris, *The Artist in American Society: The Formative Years, 1790-1860* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1982): 32. Harris argues that suspicions held by many Americans toward the visual arts in the first few decades of the nineteenth century derive from the way that luxury was couched as a disease. "Like patients absorbed in their own fever charts, Americans met any extravagance, any novelty, even any minor superfluity with outbursts of intense anxiety." (32)

response from the body. This diminishes “the action of the vital powers,” and thereby produces “languor and weakness.”¹¹⁰ Incessant drinking prevents the body from maintaining a natural, moderate level of stimulation. Tumultuously fluctuating between hyperactivity and turpitude, the system requires more and more intense sources of artificial stimulation to compensate for the loss. Because the body has been wrested of its ability to govern itself, the only solution to the problem, according to Rush, is external coercion. Among the remedies for inveterate drunkenness, Rush lists: “thrusting a feather down the throat” to discharge the contents of the stomach; “terror;” “a severe whipping;” “profuse sweats;” and “bleeding.” For Peale, Rush, and other reform-minded hygienists, intemperance went beyond the problem of alcohol, and included a host of dietary and sexual practices. Too much excitement of any kind—chemical, sensory, or even mental—threatened to throw bodies and polities into unregulated, violent convulsions, and ultimately, debility and death. Rush’s notion of health, one that dominated American physiology for decades after his death, was based upon the notion of harmony, where each of the body’s systems operate in concert with one another. Based in large part on the medieval theory of bodily humors, Rush’s system held that the over-stimulation of any one system sapped energy from the rest, thus throwing the body off balance.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ Benjamin Rush, *Medical Inquiries and Observations*, 5 vols. (Philadelphia: 1794-98), 4: 59-61; quoted in Stephen Nissenbaum, *Sex, Diet, and Debility in Jacksonian America: Sylvester Graham and Health Reform* (Westport, Conn. and London: Greenwood Press, 1980): 69.

¹¹¹ Rush’s system derived in large part from his teacher, William Cullen, the leading physician in Edinburgh, Scotland, with whom Rush studied medicine. On Rush and Cullen, see Lester S. King, *Transformations in American Medicine: from Benjamin Rush to William Osler* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991): 49-58; For a useful summary of Rush’s crusade against intemperance, see Brian S. Katcher, “Benjamin Rush’s Educational Campaign Against Hard Drinking,” *American Journal of Public Health* 83:2 (February 1993): 273-81.

With Rush's cycle of over-stimulation, debility, and dependency in mind, George Catlin's use of the term "liquid fire" to describe flame-engulfed prairies calls forth not only alcohol, but the "burned-over district" of upstate New York where fire and brimstone sermons were preached at camp meeting revivals.¹¹² Here, dynamic preachers frequently invoked the lake of fire into which sinners would be cast at the end of time. Charles Grandison Finney, a religious leader who led many such revivals, employed the phrase in his *Memoirs* to convey his emotions during his conversion to Christianity: "My heart seemed to be liquid fire within me. All my feelings seemed to rise and flow out ... it seemed as if I met the Lord Jesus Christ face to face."¹¹³ Deas, we will recall, also claimed while at Bloomingdale to have opened a direct line of communication between himself and the deity, one that hinged on a mesmeric process.¹¹⁴ A number of scientists and theologians criticized excessive religious enthusiasm on the same grounds as they did alcohol abuse. Grant Powers, in his *Essay Upon the Influence of the Imagination on the Nervous System, Contributing to a False Hope in Religion*, argued that camp meeting revivals over-stimulated the imagination, thereby skewing accurate empirical perception. Magnetized and entranced, attendees were thus vulnerable to be manipulated and controlled, as if under the power of a mesmerist. Worked up beyond their capacity to regulate their enthusiasm, audiences ascribed their state of spiritual and emotional

¹¹² A recent study that provides a useful summary of these revivals is Kenneth O. Brown, *Holy Ground: A Study of the American Camp Meeting* (New York: Garland, 1992).

¹¹³ Charles Grandison Finney, *Memoirs* [get original citation]; quoted in William Gerald McLoughlin, *Modern revivalism: Charles Grandison Finney to Billy Graham* (New York: Ronald Press, 1959): 17; and Ian Frederick Finseth "Liquid Fire Within Me: Language, Self, and Society in Transcendentalism and Early Evangelicalism, 1820-1860," M.A. Thesis, University of Virginia, 1995; last accessed online on June 3rd, 2006 at: <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~ma95/finseth/thesis.html>

¹¹⁴ Clark, "Monomania," *passim*.

intoxication “to the spirit of God, a deception that,” according to Powers, “might be fatal.”¹¹⁵

The dire consequences of another kind of over-excitement are made visible in an illustration of “The Tranquilizer,” a device designed by Benjamin Rush to cure men addicted to the “solitary vice” of masturbation (Fig. 23).¹¹⁶ In his insightful interpretation of this image, the scholar Jay Fliegelman notes that “the lower torso of the patient is so narrowed, so anatomically distorted, as to efface the area of the genitals.”¹¹⁷ This unfortunate man’s vice has left him effectively feminized, unable to curtail his own base impulses. As a consequence, the only appropriate course of treatment is, according to Rush, to completely restrain and regulate his activities, which includes a series of straps and stocks that prevent him from moving his arms and legs. A rudimentary chamber-pot underneath the chair suggests that the patient will be lodged in “The Tranquilizer” for some time. Critical to Rush’s apparatus is large wooden brace that blocks out peripheral vision.¹¹⁸ Intended to restore to the patient some semblance of self-control, the brace forces Rush’s patient to look straight ahead. Only after he has been retrained to see correctly—to see straight—can the habitual masturbator be trusted to properly relate what is directly before his eyes to a wider visual and social domain. In his anti-masturbation tract, *A Lecture to Young Men*, Sylvester Graham employs similar rhetorical device when he warns that:

¹¹⁵ Grant Powers, *Essay Upon the Influence of the Imagination on the Nervous System, Contributing to a False Hope in Religion* (Andover, Mass.: 1828)” 23-24; quoted in Ann Taves, *Fits, Trances, & Visions: Experiencing Religion and Explaining Experience from Wesley to James* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999): 134; see also James D. Bratt, “Religious Anti-Revivalism in Antebellum America,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 24 (Spring 2004): 65-106.

¹¹⁶ For more on masturbation, see my treatment in Chapter 3, below.

¹¹⁷ Jay Fliegelman, *Declaring Independence: Jefferson, Natural Language, and the Culture of Performance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993): 140.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 138.

When incited by passion, man cannot easily perceive the lines of truth which should govern his conduct, and therefore, if he does not adopt some general rules of action, which are consistent with the constitutional laws of his nature, he is sure to run into excesses, and draw evil upon himself and others.¹¹⁹

“The Tranquilizer,” the temperance pledge, and Deas’s line of chalk all operate through a sadistic domination of attention, one that punishes any deviation of the subject’s line of sight. Physically or contractually obliging their dependents to look straight ahead, keep within bounds, and walk the line, they re-coordinate the relationship between microscopic and macroscopic visual fields. The over-stimulated, uncoordinated, and otherwise out-of-control humans and horses that fill so many of Deas’s canvases constantly threaten to cross lines and boundaries, transgress picture planes, and careen over the edges of cliffs.¹²⁰ They call attention to critical points where over-stimulated psychological, physiological, and social systems fall out of balance and disintegrate into a contentious cacophony of antagonistic parts.

All Used Up

In 1844, Charles Deas exhibited his painting *Long Jakes* (a.k.a. *Long Jaques*, *The Rocky Mountain Man*) (1844) (Fig. 24) at the American Art Union in New York City. Although not in the strictest sense a self-portrait, *Long Jakes* alludes to its creator in a number of ways. Lieutenant J. Henry Carleton described Deas’s appearance during an

¹¹⁹ Sylvester Graham, *A Lecture to Young Men, on Chastity, intended for the serious consideration of parents and guardians* (Providence: Weeden and Cory, 1834): 32

¹²⁰ This includes two other paintings not discussed here, *Indian Warrior on the Edge of a Precipice* (1847) and *Winona* (ca. 1845; lost), that depict Native Americans sitting or standing on the edge of cliffs. Of *Winona*, *The Anglo-American* wrote in 1845 that “the figure has, perhaps, in expression, too much of the maniac.” See “Pictures of Mr. Deas at the Art Union,” *The Anglo-American* (Sep. 6, 1845): 474. Emphasis original. Another mysterious painting entitled *The Oregon Pioneers* (ca. 1846; lost) was described as a “night-mare” that would haunt whomever had the misfortune to buy it, and “destroy his peace of mind forever.” *United States Magazine and Democratic Review* (January, 1847): 64-65; quoted in Clark, “Charles Deas,” 71.

1844 expedition along the Platte River as something like a “fur-hunter,” and noted that the artist spoke French while he painted his pictures. Also, Deas’s nickname at the time, given to him by the troops with whom he traveled, was “Rocky Mountains.”¹²¹ At first glance, *Long Jakes* could hardly be more different than *The Death Struggle, Prairie on Fire*, or other of the artist’s anxiety-laden canvases. The picture shows a genteel, bearded man in a red shirt astride an elegant black stallion. It was “designed,” according to Henry Tuckerman, “to embody the character of the mountain hunter.”¹²² Deas’s rugged, yet chivalrous trapper enacts something like a final scene from a western epic—the last, backward glance o’er traveled terrain before the slow ride off into the sunset. Drawing its power from a period nostalgia for a way of life that had all but passed away, *Long Jakes* was, according to *The Broadway Journal*, “a picture not to be forgotten.” Its subject “...sits upon his horse as through he were fully aware of his picturesque appearance.”¹²³ Deas’s “Rocky Mountain Man” resists classification. The bending, curling body of the hunter’s horse is barely containable within the frame of the picture. Neither wild nor civilized, the subject of *Long Jakes* is a man torn between two worlds.

Deas no doubt carefully calculated the painting to deliver a touching coda on the lives of the hardy, tough-skinned, western mountain-men who were, by the mid-1840s, largely vanished. But the idealized persona of the confident, sagacious, and sober trapper overlooked the fact that a great number of them were men down on their luck, who sought a new life in the west in order to distance themselves from past misfortunes or

¹²¹ J. Henry Carleton, *The Prairie Longbooks: Dragoon Campaigns to the Pawnee Villages in 1844, and to the Rocky Mountains in 1845*, Louis Pelzer, ed. (Chicago: The Claxton Club, 1943): 7; quoted in *ibid.*, 59-60.

¹²² Tuckerman, *Book of the Artists*, 429.

¹²³ *The Broadway Journal* (January 4, 1845): 12; On the passing of the mountain-men, see Clark, “Charles Deas,” 62, 76 n.31.

transgressions. At annual rendezvous where hunters and trappers gathered to sell their furs, companies frequently paid the men in whiskey, which they would then commence immediately to drink.¹²⁴ Purchasing supplies on credit, indebting themselves to fur companies, and barely able to make a living, most mountain-men were anything but self-sufficient. Instead, their romanticized public image belied lonely lives lived in debt and desperation.

While possessed with abundant composure and poise, the countenance and posture of Deas's subject reveals an invisible but palpable weight on his shoulders, a heavy burden of world-weariness and exhaustion. Appearing as a man who is all used up, the hunter accepts his fate—whatever it may be. His eyes, set deep into his long, drawn face, convey a sense of overwhelming resignation. His is a young face, but one that has seen more than its share of hardship and toil.¹²⁵ And, like so many of Deas's characters, he does not look where he is going. Instead, horse and rider glance back in unison, distracted by some unseen or unheard stimulus that the artist leaves to the viewer's imagination. Judging by Deas's treatment of the distant treetops in the middle-ground, the terrain descends precipitously over the edge of a butte. The horse's left leg has already taken the first step down. To the right of the horse's raised right front hoof, a small tree or woody shrub grows laterally out from the rocky ledge, the arc of its curling trunk mirroring that of the horse's black foreleg. Neither Deas, nor his contemporaries, commented upon this steep and imminent decline. Deas certainly did not intend to paint his "rocky mountain man" on the verge of a fatal fall, and I do not argue that this is about

¹²⁴ On mountain men and drinking, see Rorabaugh, 159.

¹²⁵ Elizabeth Johns makes the point that the lithographer Leopold Grozellier, who published a version of Deas's painting in 1855 called *Western Life—The Trapper*, cleaned up the "wizened physicality" of the original. Johns, *American Genre Painting*, 70.

to happen within the scope the painting's narrative. Yet within the context of the rest of Deas's oeuvre, and given what we know about the artist's own decline, there is something revealing about the figure's precarious position and trajectory, something that renders *Long Jakes* even more touching, and more poignant than it otherwise already and undeniably is. The owl that ominously approaches the galloping Tom Walker is here replaced by a buzzard that soars high above the mane of Long Jakes's horse. Yet there is nothing threatening here. Neither hunter nor horse appears in the least bit worried about their welfare. Free from all anxiety, the two take everything—literally—in stride; the cliff, the scavenging raptor, and the distraction, are at best, negligible concerns. Nevertheless, the mountain man's time has passed. As such, *Long Jakes* fits into Deas's penchant for painting people on the edge of oblivion, and provides yet another example of his compulsive examination of subjects on the verge of inexorable, ill-boding transformations. Deas's own signature in *Long Jakes* is shown carved into a rock, just inches short of the steep descent. But unlike the trapper that Deas depicts in *The Death Struggle*, *Long Jakes* appears content to exit gracefully, savoring his final moments of self-possession, before he disappears.

Chapter 2:

The Drunkard's Progress and *The Course of Empire*:

Temperance, Temperature, and Time

“Aesthetics is born as a discourse of the body.”
--Terry Eagleton¹

Prometheus animated his statues of earth with heavenly fire, says fable. As long as this flame continues to burn, life is maintained, and with its extinction, it must cease. Now *pile on the fuel*—increase the flame, and the more rapidly this earthly substance must be wasted down to its primitive state.²

This chapter offers a new reading of Thomas Cole's five-canvas allegory *The Course of Empire* (1836) as a medical document—a practical, diagnostic tool that charts the pathology of terminal desire and articulates antebellum American anxieties about the promises and perils and unmediated vision. To this end, I trace a set of remarkable and consistent formal, structural, and programmatic affinities between Cole's series and Currier and Ives's lithograph, *The Drunkard's Progress* (1846). Both projects mark precise moments when utopian fantasies of political and corporeal unity grow unmanageably intense and thus initiate self-destruct sequences that cause the body (and the body politic) to discombobulate into an unruly mass of disparate parts. More specifically, the two scenes at the apex of each narrative, *The Consummation of Empire* and “A Confirmed Drunkard,” quite literally consummate and confirm a morbid state of

¹ Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990): 13.

² “Be Temperate,” *Norwich Courier*, January 27, 1830.

affairs. They diagnose the point of no return, where self-agency is irrevocably lost in a frenzy of unmediated conjugation between subjects and objects.

In both *The Course of Empire* and *The Drunkard's Progress*, crests of unfettered jubilation followed by collapse and languor signify a sexual subtext, one of orgasm and the aftermath of post-coital exhaustion. Over-stimulated into a state of uncontrollable indulgence, the drunkard and the empire live too fast, and peak too quickly. The drunkard's suicide registers a failure of male agency, as his widow and young daughter are abandoned to fend for themselves in the narrative's closing vignette. In Cole's *Desolation*, a single ruined column likewise stands as a monument to phallic impotency, disengaged from any useful function, and thrust into the air for no good reason.

Yet each of these scenes of aftermath offers an aesthetic corrective to unrestrained materialism, consumerism, and consumption: a particular iteration of feminine influence that mediates the social construction of time. In *The Drunkard's Progress*, the placement of the widow and daughter in a separate semi-sphere underneath the arch exempts them from the relentless temporal acceleration of the print's narrative. *Desolation* presents a scene where time itself has been extinguished—a landscape mediated by a tangible atmosphere that resists and impedes the viewer's rush to visually traverse, appropriate, penetrate, and consume pictorial space. *The Drunkard's Progress* and *The Course of Empire* thus offered a grim diagnosis of what ailed antebellum Americans in the wake of alarmingly rapid social, economic, and territorial expansion. Proactively engaged in the discourse of "reform physiology," these two projects promote an aesthetic that delays and postpones its object, one that privileges a temperate, feminine space that ameliorates and

mollifies the involuntary paroxysms and violent vicissitudes of market revolution. In other words, they implore their viewers to take their time.

A Moral and Physical Thermometer

As we have seen, the central character in Charles Deas's *Walking the Chalk* engages in a diagnostic test to determine the precise amount of alcohol required to render him "officially" drunk. The other characters in the bar may thus be read as an index, a working typology of symptoms that await the drunkard, once his condition is confirmed. Initially, he will take up the identity of the intoxicated man to the right, who requires the assistance of a young "bowery b'hoy" to avoid falling face-first on to the floor. He may then find himself behind bars, having assumed the alter ego of the scorekeeping bartender, who wears the striped costume of a jailbird. The need for funds to purchase liquor may lead him to pursue a career as a confidence man, or—worse yet—his constant inebriation may render him the sharp's perfect victim. As he grows old, he will be at greater risk for developing gout, a disease brought on by overindulgence. He will likely develop other bad habits, such as smoking tobacco. Worst of all, his addiction will render him nothing more than a slave to the bottle, no longer in possession of his own free will and free agency. Violence and brawling, turning finally to the man with the injured eye, was a popular pastime among inveterate drunkards. By aligning quantitative measurement with a delineation of symptoms, *Walking the Chalk* can be considered alongside other projects that sought to chart the etiology and pathology of intoxication.

Foremost among these was Benjamin Rush's "A Moral and Physical Thermometer," an illustration that traces the respective healthy and unhealthy effects of

moderate and excessive alcohol consumption (Fig. 29).³ Rush first published the chart as a broadside in 1789; but his friend, the Boston minister Jeremy Belknap, convinced him to include it in the next edition of Rush's popular pamphlet, *Inquiry into the Effects of Spirituous Liquors on the Human Body and Mind* (1789). Revised and expanded by Rush in subsequent editions, the *Inquiry* sold more than 170,000 copies by 1850.⁴ The most widely circulated temperance-themed image of its time, "A Moral and Physical Thermometer" also appeared in dozens of newspapers and other periodicals from the 1790s through the 1830s. The full title of Rush's original broadside, printed at the top of the sheet, reads: "A MORAL and PHYSICAL Thermometer: Or, a Scale of the Progress of TEMPERANCE and INTEMPERANCE. Liquors, with their EFFECTS in their usual order." Ranging from seventy degrees above to seventy degrees below zero, the namesake thermometer is graduated into ten-degree increments, and runs the length of the left side of the page. Although lines drawn through the thermometer's cylinder subdivide these increments into smaller units, their irregular spacing counteracts the thermometer's otherwise convincing aura of objective precision. Two lines, for instance, separate twenty and thirty degrees above zero, but three lines separate thirty and forty-

³ This chart is based on a number of British prototypes. They include "The Female Thermometer," *Connoisseur* 85 (September 11, 1754); Henry Fielding, "A Weather-Glass of Wit," *True Patriot* 22 (March 25—April 1, 1746); and the spiritual barometer in William Hogarth's *Enthusiasm Delineated* (ca. 1760). The physician John Coakley Lettsom, a close friend of Rush, published his own, nearly identical version of "A Moral and Spiritual Thermometer" in Britain. For a discussion of these prototypes, see Terry Castle, *The Female Thermometer: Eighteenth-Century Culture and the Invention of the Uncanny* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995): 21-43; and Bernd Krysmanski, "We See A Ghost: Hogarth's Satire on Methodists and Connoisseurs," *Art Bulletin* 80:2 (June 1998): 295. On Jeremy Bentham's use of the term "moral thermometer," see Bruce Curtis, "From the Moral Thermometer to Money: Meteorological Reform in Pre-Confederation Canada," *Social Studies of Science* 28:4 (August, 1998): 550. Bentham wanted to use his conjectural device to measure, make visible, and thus effectively regulate public sentiment. We might therefore consider his "moral thermometer" as a corollary to the panopticon, one that extended its surveillance project to the inner-workings of the heart and mind.

⁴ John W. Frick, *Theatre, Culture and Temperance Reform in Nineteenth-Century America* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003): 27. In later editions, Rush changed the term "spirituous liquors" to "ardent spirits." On Belknap and Rush, see Rorabaugh, 43, 45.

degrees above zero. Even when these and other inconsistencies are taken into account, the overall effect—that the thermometer drawn by Rush, the nation’s most eminent physician, conveys a general sense of objective measurement, and scientific authority—remains persuasive.

Yet the range of temperatures measured by the thermometer is absurdly impractical. In fact, Rush’s device appears to be a confabulation of elements drawn from both thermometers and barometers. The arrangement of the print mirrors that of certain period weather instruments where thermometers and barometers were mounted side-by-side in a single case. In all of the double-mounted examples I have seen, the thermometer is mounted on the left-hand side, just as it is in Rush’s print. Whereas the temperature measured by the thermometer merely related current conditions, the air pressure measured by the barometer proved more reliable at forecasting future events. It offered not merely an indication, but a general *prediction* of future meteorological phenomena. A reading taken from a barometer, in other words, reveals the general disposition of the weather.⁵ High Pressure portends fair and dry conditions, while low pressure augurs heavy precipitation. On an English model made by George Cooper (ca. 1810), the median pressure, twenty-nine and a half millibars, is described as “changeable.” This meant that the user should return and take additional measurements to determine whether (and how quickly) the pressure was rising or falling. On Rush’s chart, this indicated that the fate of a man who enjoyed drinking medium-strength punch was yet to be determined.

⁵ While isolated readings of barometric pressure reveal more about the coming forecast than isolated readings of temperature, barometers were intended to be read over a period of time in order to gain a sense of the speed at which pressure was rising or falling. At their most accurate, instrument-based weather predictions considered the correspondence between pressure and temperature over time.

To the immediate right of the thermometer, Rush assigns each temperature a corresponding beverage. The warmest reading—seventy degrees—is aligned with water, while the coldest—seventy below zero—is paired with “Pepper in Rum.” Lodged at zero degrees—the mid-point of the scale—is “punch,” sub-divided by Rush into strong punch, which falls just above, and weak punch, which dips just below the line. “Zero” effectively divides the scale into two halves, “TEMPERANCE,” and “INTEMPERANCE,” which classifies, respectively, the warm and cold regions of the chart. Each beverage or grouping of beverages is further aligned with a set of distinguishing characteristics. Virtues alone populate the region above zero. The optimal drinks on Rush’s list—milk and water—bring about “health, wealth,” and “serenity of mind.” Water mixed with vinegar or molasses, or a simple glass of “small beer,” impart “reputation, long life, and happiness.” While Rush gives his unqualified endorsement to these liquids, he adds a caveat to the consumption of “cider,” “wine,” “porter,” and “strong beer,” which register, in turn, temperatures of forty, thirty, twenty, and ten degrees. These drinks provide “cheerfulness, strength, and nourishment,” but only “when taken in moderate quantities.” Punch represents for Rush a zone of ambiguity that hovers around a critical point (degree zero) where temperance ends, and intemperance begins. “Weak punch,” technically, but just *barely* healthy, is untethered to any benefits.

The word “INTEMPERANCE,” printed in capitalized, boldface type, proceeds across the middle of the page, dividing the composition of Rush’s chart into upper and lower halves. “Strong punch” hangs down, just below this imaginary line, and forms the

upper-most region of Rush's hierarchical, Dantean inferno of dangerous drinks.⁶ Listed in order of increasing strength and debilitating effects, they are: "toddy," "grog," "flip," "slings," "bitters, infused in spirits," "morning drams," and "pepper in rum." Terms that Rush employs to describe the benefits of healthy drinks are not separated into moral and physiological categories, but the dangerous consequences printed below the freezing point are divided into three columns: "Vices," "Diseases," and "Punishments." Rush partitions intemperance into seven levels of increasing severity and analyzes the problem as he would medical condition, which warrants a discovery of cause, a delineation of symptoms, and a prescriptive treatment. But the myriad of horrific maladies he lists under the category "Diseases," including "gout," "dropsy," and "jaundice," are here treated not as diseases or disorders as such, but as symptoms of the "Vices" listed in the left-most (and, if one reads from left to right, presumably the first) of Rush's columns—the one nearest the thermometer. These vices, such as "idleness," "peevishness," and "obscenity," are moral and ethical shortcomings that operate here as diseases. In other words, the excessive and intemperate consumption of alcohol predisposes the subject to immorality, of which physical afflictions are but a symptom, and which nothing but invasive and coercive measures can cure. These, Rush lists on the right side of the page under his final category, "Punishments." The five remedies nearest the bottom of the page, "almshouse," "workhouse," "jail," "whipping post," and "Castle Island," all involve some degree of physical assault, restraint, and incarceration.⁷ At the bottom of

⁶ If we extend the topological analogy of *The Divine Comedy* to the top half of the print, "TEMPERANCE," with its various beverages moving incrementally up the scale, is paradise. There is no space in between Rush's dichotomized moral categories for "purgatory."

⁷ "Castle Island" refers to a state penitentiary that was built on Castle Island in Boston Harbor in 1785. For an excellent consideration of the development of prisons and asylums in the federal and antebellum periods, see David J. Rothman *The Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic* (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown, and Company, 1971).

each column, three words, all written in capital letters, “SUICIDE,” “DEATH,” and “GALLOWS,” stand at the nadir of “Vices,” “Diseases,” and “Punishments,” respectively. They are printed well underneath the lowest temperature listed on the thermometer, and thus signify the condition of *absolute zero*, the terminal point at which everything ceases to move. Preceding “SUICIDE,” Rush lists examples of moral, political, and social disorder, such as “anarchy,” and “hatred of just government,” while “DEATH” is attended by physiological complications such as “epilepsy,” “palsy,” and “madness.”

I call attention here to Rush’s alignment of moral, physiological, social, and political forms of insurrection. The well-run body, like the well-run polity, must quash any uprising that threatens to disrupt physiological or social harmony. The best solution for Rush was to identify and assuage potential problems before they erupted into moral and physiological distemper, or even worse, social unrest. Well-regulated dietary and hygienic practices helped ensure that the body ran smoothly. Ill-regulated consumption, however, once excited to an uncontrollable intensity, necessitates a reversion to authoritarian measures. It is no coincidence that Rush conceived his “Moral and Physical Thermometer” in 1789, the same year that delegates from the thirteen former colonies met in the physician’s home city of Philadelphia to draft a new Constitution. Rush was likewise concerned with the maintenance of an effective system of self-regulating checks and balances. It would have been the bitterest of tragedies for Rush and other leaders if America broke free from the tyranny of King George only to willfully submit itself to the self-imposed despotism of King Alcohol.

Why is it, then, that Benjamin Rush charts the intensity of alcoholic beverages as *inversely* proportional to temperature? According to well-worn political metaphors, those conditions listed by Rush among the worst vices caused by intemperance—“anarchy,” and “hatred of just government”—were encouraged by fervid firebrands who practiced their incendiary tactics in revolutionary “hot-beds.” Yet, according to his thermometer, such activities are liable to take place at sixty or seventy-degrees below freezing. A later version of a “moral thermometer,” clearly based on Rush’s model, simplifies its rationale and posits a blank, neutral space in the middle of a scale that runs from a scorching 220 degrees (labeled “ungovernable”) to an unrecorded, but no doubt chilly temperature that renders human beings “Quite...stupid” (Fig. 30).⁸ Positioned in between “temperate” and “warm,” the blank, unlabelled space in the middle of this revised thermometer represents a neutral state—neither hot, nor cold. Taking his lead from Scottish physicians William Cullen and John Brown, Rush believed that stimulants such as food, alcohol, and mental and physical exercise excite the nervous and digestive systems. Over-stimulation leads to “morbid excitement,” and produces excess heat; that, in turn, causes inflammation and fevers.⁹ In his *Discourse on Intemperance*, Daniel Drake refers to ardent spirits as a “hot and stimulating drink,” and again as a “warm and irritating poison; in moderate doses imparting an unnatural excitement; in excessive draughts suddenly extinguishing life.”¹⁰ Such drinks, according to Drake, abnormally heat the system when taken in small quantities, and burn it up entirely when taken in large amounts; but “liquid fire” does more than merely heat the system:

⁸ “Moral Thermometer,” *Journal of Health* (Sept. 1832): 5.

⁹ The relationship between excitement and fevers as understood by Cullen, Brown, and Rush is explored in King, *Transformations in American Medicine*, 50-51.

¹⁰ Drake, *A Discourse on Intemperance*, 11, 13.

That agent, it is true, can increase for a time the generation of heat in the body; but the law of the animal system is, that if actions are raised above their natural degree by artificial means, they afterwards fall below it—so that he who can brave the cold, in the hour of intemperate indulgence, sinks below it in the period of weakness that follows. He is alternately less and more vulnerable than the man, who, mounting to no delusive elevation, suffers no dangerous depression; but moves forward on a uniform and safer level.¹¹

Rush also addresses the issue when he debunks the myth that ardent spirits:

...are said to be necessary in very cold weather. This is far from being true; for the temporary warmth they produce, is always succeeded by a greater disposition in the body to be affected by cold.¹²

Drake and Rush both argue that hard liquor initiates in the body an abnormally severe thermal fluctuation that, over time, erodes the body's natural ability to regulate its own temperature. Moderation is here equated to modulation—the flattening of the wavelength between extreme polarities of hot and cold. For Rush, the connection between intemperance and temperature is a function of the relationship between temperature and time.

To clarify this point we might consider the formal and functional similarities between the thermometer illustrated in Rush's print, and candles employed in religious emblem books that illustrate the ages of man. Foremost among these was Francis Quarles's *The Hieroglyphics of the Life of Man* (1638) (Fig. 31). Widely read in England and America, Quarles's poems were originally accompanied by prints engraved by William Marshall, who created an eight-stage series delineating a human lifespan in the guise of a gradually truncating candlestick (Fig. 32). Each print marks the passage of ten years time, as the candle grows shorter and shorter until, at the final stage, the empty

¹¹ Ibid., 16-17.

¹² Rush, *Inquiry*, 13.

lamp in which the candle once stood rests upon a coffin.¹³ A healthy lifespan, Marshall's engravings suggest, is like a good candle; it burns slowly and steadily, and lasts a long time. If the flame is too hot, however, the energy locked in the candle will dissipate more rapidly, shortening its longevity. So it is with Rush and Drake in their conceptions of human physiology, where excess heat wears down the fibers of the nervous system and accelerates the aging process. I make this analogy not to suggest that Rush had emblem books in mind when he designed his thermometer, but to demonstrate that formal similarities between "A Moral and Physical Thermometer" and Marshall's engravings entail, in this case, a common set of thematics. It may be coincidental that both temperature and time in Rush and Quarles are marked off in 10-degree and 10-year increments, or that the round mercury basin under the thermometer uncannily resembles the large bulbous lamp at the base of the candle; but the evidence of this formal similarity grows more compelling in light of corroborating cognate metaphors that cement the relevance of the resemblance. That is to say, the thermometer and the candle share a functional, as well as a formal reciprocity. Put simply, what this means within the context of our current discussion is this: to grow old in antebellum America is to grow *cold*.

The physician Charles Caldwell, in the midst of a long and vitriolic condemnation of intemperance as the primary cause of insanity, makes an exception for the moderate use of wine, which he deems "salutary to those who are advanced in years." "Like artificial fire," Caldwell continues, "toward the going down of the sun, it tends to

¹³ Quarles's book and its illustrations are discussed in Samuel C. Chew, *The Pilgrimage of Life* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1962): 167. For the development of these ideas in the United States, see Thomas R. Cole, *The Journey of Life: A Cultural History of Aging in America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); and, more recently, Michael G. Kammen, *A Time to Every Purpose: The Four Seasons in American Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

preserve in the system that warmth, vivacity, and vigor, which time is gradually wearing away.”¹⁴ As people age, Caldwell suggests, their internal “warmth” slowly wanes.

When taken in small amounts, wine helps to stoke the internal fires of elderly persons. If it is to achieve its maximum duration, the flame of life must be maintained at a moderate level. When young, the body requires no outside help; but after the sixtieth or seventieth year, a bit of sweet-tasting exothermal assistance is admissible. This heat need not, according to Caldwell, be chemical:

The aged Romans often protracted the evening of their lives, and rendered it more comfortable, by removing to the milder climate of Sicily, where they were secure from the frosty breath of the Alps and the Apennines; and many Spaniards have done the same, by transporting themselves, at an advanced age, to the sunny climates of Mexico and Peru.¹⁵

Whether it derives from a glass of wine or a removal to a milder climate, the provision of additional fuel for an old, flickering flame is beneficial within the conventions of the body/candle metaphor. These two sources are correlated by Henry Tuckerman in his article “Something About Wine,” where he relates that Englishmen, accustomed to a cool, marine climate, “who daily imbibe their brown stout with impunity at home, find it productive of vertigo and plethora in the United States, where sunshine and alternations of temperature develop such a degree of nervous excitability, as to make solid stimulants unwholesome.”¹⁶ Tuckerman suggests here that while a hot (*neé* stimulating) beverage may produce no ill-effects when the weather is cool, the same beverage, imbibed by the same people, in a warmer and more volatile climate, proves overly exhilarating, and leads

¹⁴ Charles Caldwell, “Thoughts on the Pathology, Prevention, and Treatment of Intemperance, as a form of Mental Derangement,” *Pennsylvania Journal of Medicine and the Associate Sciences* 5:3 (July-September 1832): 322.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 323. Daniel Drake also asks: “When too much heat is retained in the system, because the hot atmosphere conducts off too little, why should we increase its production by a stimulating drink?” Drake, “A Discourse on Intemperance,” 17.

¹⁶ Tuckerman, “Something About Wine,” 151. This article, quoted here as well as in chapter one (above), is by the same author who later wrote *The Book of the Artists* (1867).

to a number of troublesome conditions. Notions of healthy living during the mid nineteenth century thus depended upon the proper management of a moderate level of excitement couched as heat, which in turn affected another metaphorical construct: speed.

The Fast Man

Farther along in the same article where he aligns the consumption of alcohol with the production of heat, Charles Caldwell devotes a long passage to the way that ardent spirits produce “...*premature old age*, and an increased liability to premature attacks of epidemical diseases.” They do this:

...by wasting and weakening the preservative power of the system—that form I mean of vital action, which holds old age at bay, wards off the influence of deleterious causes, struggles with disease, when it has made its attack, and vanquishes it, if it is to be vanquished.¹⁷

Caldwell proceeds to claim that few drunkards live to an advanced age, and that the abolition of hard liquor would “add *twenty-five per cent* to the average longevity throughout the civilized world.”¹⁸ Most physicians of the time believed that within every human body resides a finite amount of what Caldwell the “preservative power of the system,” something like candle-wax. Unable to generate additional stores of this energy, individuals must instead judiciously regulate its expenditure. Ardent spirits are, according to Orson Fowler, “one of the most prolific sources of positive misery that

¹⁷ Caldwell, “Thoughts,” 341.

¹⁸ Ibid. In an address co-authored by Mark Hofkins, Samuel B. Woodward, and Samuel Hoar, the most pressing danger posed by alcoholism is that: “More persons are prevented by this from attaining that period of life which they would naturally reach, than by any other cause.” Hofkins, Woodward, and Hoar, *Address to the People of Massachusetts on the Present Condition and Claims of the Temperance Reformation* (Boston: Temperance Standard Press, 1846): 4.

exist,” because “alcohol *lights the taper of life AT BOTH ENDS.*”¹⁹ In a tone bordering on sarcasm, Henry David Thoreau summarizes that:

According to Liebig, man's body is a stove, and food the fuel which keeps up the internal combustion in the lungs. In cold weather we eat more, in warm less. The animal heat is the result of a slow combustion, and disease and death take place when this is too rapid; or for want of fuel, or from some defect in the draught, the fire goes out. Of course the vital heat is not to be confounded with fire; but so much for analogy. It appears, therefore, from the above list, that the expression, *animal life*, is nearly synonymous with the expression, *animal heat*; for while Food may be regarded as the Fuel which keeps up the fire within us²⁰

We may thus read “A Moral and Physical Thermometer” as a kind of entropic journey whereby everyone eventually succumbs to disorder and disintegration.

Temperance, near the top of the chart, registers self-control and the careful regulation of the body's natural resources. Living intemperately is thus equivalent to overspending, and engages a discourse of debt.²¹ The drunkard wastes money on liquor, but also wastes vital energy, leaving him weakened, wearied, and worn. In 1852, *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* published “Two Paths in Life,” an article that outlines the divergent fortunes of

¹⁹ O.S. Fowler, *Temperance Founded on Phrenology and Physiology* (New York: Fowler's and Wells's Phrenological Cabinet, 1846): 27. Emphasis in original. See also my earlier discussion in chapter one regarding purported episodes of spontaneous combustion. Such occurrences may also operate as metaphors for the intemperate subject's instantaneous—and injudicious—conversion of potential to kinetic energy. I see a similar, though less explosive strain of this discourse operating in Washington Irving's short story *Rip Van Winkle* (1819), where indulgence in a preternaturally strong draught of ale aged the title character twenty years in what was, from his perspective, the blink of an eye.

²⁰ Henry David Thoreau, *Walden, or, Life in the Woods* (1854), available on-line at Project Gutenberg: <http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext95/waldn10.txt> (electronic text last accessed on August 14, 2006). On the relationship of Justus Liebig's ideas about combustion and human body heat, see Joan Burbick, *Healing the Republic: The Language of Health and the Culture of Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994): 63.

²¹ I owe this phrase to Peter de Bolla's chapter “The Discourse of Debt,” in which he investigates the relationship between public and private debt in Great Britain during the Seven-Years War. De Bolla, *The Discourse of the Sublime* (Oxford and New York: Basil Blackwell, 1989): 103-140. Debt caused by unpaid tavern bills threatened to bankrupt many families in the early republic. On this, Benjamin Rush writes: “Behold their houses stripped gradually of their furniture and pawned, or sold by a constable, to pay tavern debts. See their names upon record in the dockets of every court, and whole pages of newspapers filled with advertisements of their estates for public sale. . . . The farms and property, thus neglected, and depreciated, are seized and sold for the benefit of a group of creditors.” Rush, *Inquiry*, 12. On the cultural construction of debt during this time, see Bruce H. Mann, *Republic of Debtors: Bankruptcy in the Age of American Independence* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002).

two men: one who lives a healthy lifestyle, and another that wallows in “idleness and dissipation” (Fig. 33).²² Situated in the center of the page, a column of text is flanked by illustrations of their respective fates. At the top, an image of a young boy, labeled “Childhood,” relates the common origin of the two subjects. But “a few years of training in our schools upon the one hand, or in the streets upon the other, will make the difference, in the YOUTH, between the characters that stand opposed to each other in these opposite pictures.” A series of four paired illustrations—“Youth,” “Manhood,” “Middle Life,” and “Age”—proceed down either side of the column and contrast the physical side-effects of healthy and unhealthy living. While the well-schooled man on the left “slowly descends the slope toward age,” the profligate on the right grows wizened and worn out well before his time.²³ Writing on the effects of intemperance, Dr. William Sweester reasons that:

At any rate, other things being equal, it does seem rational to suppose that the more the functions are urged above their natural standard of action, the sooner will their power become wasted, and consequently the earlier will be their extinction. It has even become a vulgar saying in relation to individuals who live freely and under the influence of strong excitements that they *live fast*.²⁴

A “fast man” was a common period euphemism for a pleasure-seeking spendthrift that lives beyond his means. Such characters frequented boarding-houses, bars, and brothels,

²² “Two Paths of Life,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* 9:54 (November 1854):862.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Sweester continues: “And the saying is founded on sound inductive philosophy, for the signs of age are marked much earlier upon them, than on individuals subjected to less sensual excitement. View the voluptuary, even in the morning of his years; at the period when others are just beginning their career of usefulness, and it will be found that strong and un-natural excitements have borne him rapidly on in his course of existence. The pale and withered brow—the dim sunken eye—the feeble and nerveless arm—the infirm step, and the wreck of all his nobler powers, show us too plainly how prodigally life has been consumed. We behold youth manifesting all the marks of an infirm old age.” William Sweester, *A Dissertation on Intemperance* (Boston: Hilliard, Gray, and Company, 1829): 4.

and comprised part of the emerging “sporting class” of young, single men that flocked to urban areas from rural farms and villages in the mid nineteenth century.²⁵

Intemperance and debauchery, however, were not the only accelerants that turned men “fast.” Joshua Haven’s satirical broadside “Slavery as it Exists in America; Slavery as it Exists in England” (1850) (Fig. 34), contends that low-wages paid to English factory workers is, somehow, a more serious problem than African-American slavery.²⁶ The contentment of slaves in the United States, depicted above, is contrasted to the destitution of English factory workers below. In the left foreground of the latter/bottom vignette, a conversation ensues between two childhood friends who renew their acquaintance. A well-dressed gentleman asks what appears to be a hobbled old-man, “Why, my Dear

²⁵ An amusing compendium of alcohol-related aphorisms supposedly spoken by ‘fast men’ is “Another Forum of *Punch*: The Fast Man’s Phrase Book,” *Spirit of the Times* (January 1, 1848): 529. Period novels by George Thompson describe this lifestyle in lurid detail and have been recently collected and republished with an excellent introduction in David S. Reynolds and Kimberly R. Gladman, *Venus in Boston and Other Tales of Nineteenth-Century Life* (Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press, 2002). Reynolds has also edited and re-published George Lippard’s *The Quaker City* (1845), a book that examines similar goings-on in Philadelphia. Lippard, *The Quaker City*, David S. Reynolds, ed. (1845; Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995). See also George Foster, *New York by Gaslight*, Stuart Blumin, ed. (1850; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); and H.D. Eastman, *Fast Man’s Directory and Lovers’ Guide to the Ladies of Fashion and Pleasure in New-York and Other Large Cities, by the Ladies Man, New-York, 1853* (New York, 1853), a short pamphlet in the collection of the American Antiquarian Society. Sometime during the 1830s, the artist Charles Bird King executed a series of four paintings he called “temperance lectures.” They are: *Temperance Lecture No. 1: First Step to Ruin*; *Temperance Lecture No. 2: Second Step to Ruin, The Loafer*; *Temperance Lecture No. 3: Third Step to Ruin, The Fast Man*; and *Temperance Lecture No. 4: The Last Step, Meditating on Departed Spirits*. The decade of the 1830s as the most likely date for this series is suggested by Andrew Cosentino, who argues that this period coincided with “the heyday of the temperance movement, when every means was employed to encourage abstinence.” Cosentino, *The Paintings of Charles Bird King (1785-1862)* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1977): 96, 196. Unfortunately, these four works were among a cache of 175 of King’s paintings de-accessioned by the Redwood Library sometime after 1885, and are currently unlocated.

²⁶ Johns, *American Genre Painting*, 128. The image lampoons the speeches of British social reformer George Thompson, pictured at the bottom of the page. Thompson was instrumental in the passage of the 1833 Slavery Abolition Act, which soon led to the elimination of slavery in Great Britain and all her colonies on August 1, 1834. In the mid 1830s, and again in the 1850s and 1860s, Thompson toured the United States, giving lectures in support of abolition. Haven’s print accuses Thompson of hypocrisy, and draws upon racist and nationalist sentiments within the American public, many of whom took offence at the nerve of a man who would deign tell citizens of a foreign country how to manage their affairs. On Thompson, see C. Duncan Rice, “The Anti-Slavery Mission of George Thompson to the United States, 1834-35,” *Journal of American Studies* [Great Britain] 2:1 (1968): 13-31. A recent, comprehensive analysis of Thompson’s visits is Ronald M. Gifford II, “George Thompson and Trans-Atlantic Antislavery, 1831-1865,” Ph.D. Diss., Indiana University, 1999.

Friend, how is it that you look so old? You know we were playmates when boys.” His infirm and gaunt-faced companion replies: “Ah! Farmer, we operatives are fast men, and generally die of old age at Forty.” Long hours of unrelenting hard work in a British factory have imparted a forty-year old “wage-slave” with the physical appearance of a man nearly twice his age. His pre-mature enfeeblement results from an unnaturally excessive expenditure of energy. Fast living thus referred not only to the over-indulgence of certain depraved appetites, but to the general over-exertion and over-extension of mental and physical resources.

***Fast Food:
Thomas Cole’s Indigestion***

When Daniel Drake highlights hard liquor’s tendency to produce wild fluctuations between “delusive elevations” and “dangerous depressions,” he does much more than merely explicate the main cause of moral and physiological enervation as it was understood during the antebellum period. Wild swings of temperament between hot and cold, excitement and languor, and alacrity and torpidity, and attempts to control and regulate these convulsions, inextricably entangle morality and physiology in the aesthetic discourse of the sublime. This discourse is notable, according to Peter de Bolla, for its “propensity to produce to excess.” “The experience was itself defined,” he continues, “as one which broke through a boundary, which was, in some sense at least, excessive.”²⁷ Like a deranged appetite for intoxicating beverages, the sublime, according to Edmund Burke, dominates its subject:

In this case the mind is so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other, nor by consequence reason on that object which employs it. Hence

²⁷ De Bolla, *The Discourse of the Sublime*, 12.

arises the great power of the sublime, that far from being produced by them, it anticipates our reasonings, and hurries us on by an irresistible force.²⁸

Subverting the power of the will, the sublime experience operates, as it were, on its own accord. The discourse it produces generates its own momentum and wrenches control from its human subjects, much like the self-replicating symbioses of supply and demand, and capital and debt. These two systems assume for themselves an unassailable mantle of self-evidence, naturalized under the biologically-inflected category, “market forces.” Intemperance is thus the desire for an excess that transmogrifies itself into a burdensome necessity, one that, in order to survive, must continually *accelerate*. Hence, the drunkard speeds forward into a tailspin of violent oscillations between excitement and languor that occur with increasing frequency and intensity until his system burns out or suffers a catastrophic breakdown. As Charles Caldwell explains:

It is that excitement which creates the craving for stimulation, as pimples on the skin cause it to itch; and stimulation, when permitted, sustains the excitement. Thus do the two act reciprocally, maintaining toward each other the relation of cause and effect.²⁹

This sublime distemper grounded aesthetic and political practice in a discourse of physiology, where both were mapped onto a common scale that measured all acts of consumption according to their position in relation to polar extremes of over-stimulation and debility.³⁰ This in turn inflected political speech, where, for instance, Alexander Hamilton warned that:

It is impossible to read the history of the petty republics of Greece and Italy without feeling sensations of horror and disgust at the distractions with which

²⁸ Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, 2nd ed. (1759; London and New York: Penguin Books, 1998): 101.

²⁹ Caldwell, *Thoughts*, 337-38

³⁰ My thinking here follows the thesis of Joan Burbick, *Healing the Republic: The Language of Health and the Culture of Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). On the power of the sublime paintings of John Martin to “overwhelm” disinterest, see Wallach, “Thomas Cole and the Course of American Empire,” 79-80.

they were continually agitated, and at the rapid succession of revolutions by which they were kept in a state of perpetual vibration between the extremes of tyranny and anarchy. If they exhibit occasional calms, these only serve as short-lived contrast to the furious storms that are to succeed.³¹

Temperance, as articulated within aesthetic, political, and gustatory contexts, resisted violent, unhealthy, and unnatural “vibrations” between extreme polarities that sent imaginations, polities, and bodies into cyclical, spiraling, and discombobulating fits.

Physicians began to suspect during the 1820s and 1830s that the consumption of even a small amount of alcohol is habit-forming. Daniel Drake provides an example where a man consumes just one drink that leaves him “animated beyond his usual state;” that, of course, is quickly followed by another, whereby:

His pulse beats boisterously, his feelings and actions become intemperate, his courage is transformed into rashness, and his trains of thought move onward in a gay and giddy disorder.³²

Predictably, the subject’s unbridled “trains of thought” soon accelerate out of control, until:

At last, a total inability to stand, or even sit, a feeble and irregular pulse, vomiting, stupor and deep sleep, terminate the paroxysm; and passing off, leave the individual in a state of exhaustion, from which he does not fully recover under two or three days.³³

In 1863, Emil Ackermann designed “Black Valley Railroad,” an elaborately composed colored lithograph printed above an expansive explanatory text that utilizes the

³¹ Alexander Hamilton, “The Federalist, Number IX,” in John C. Hamilton, ed. *The Federalist: A Commentary on the Constitution of the United States* (Washington: Regnery Publishing, 1998): 97. See also Richard Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition* (New York, Knopf, 1973): 15, who quotes Hamilton, and is subsequently quoted in Wallach, “Thomas Cole: Landscape and the Course of American Empire,” 92. Compare Hamilton to the anti-alcohol rhetoric of William Alger, who explains that liquor “...rapt you to heaven, only to plunge you deeper into despair. The stimulus is unnatural, the excitement destructive, the retributive reaction fearful, and the hollow craving intolerable. It heightens the sensibilities for an instant: it blunts them permanently.” Alger, *The Facts of Intemperance and their Claims on the Public Action of the People* (Boston: Crosby, Nichols & Co., 1852): 6.

³² Drake, *A Dissertation on Intemperance*, 11.

³³ *Ibid.*

trope of a runaway train to warn viewers of the addictive potential of alcohol. (Fig. 35)³⁴

In the foreground, a devilish engineer drives a locomotive labeled “distillery,” that pulls a train across the scene from left to right. In place of coal, the engine is a distillery fueled by bags of grain. This device converts nutritious, non-stimulating, natural food into a concentrated substance that produces excess heat, and thus powers the engine.³⁵ The train is shown departing from the “Drunkard’s Curve” station as it steams away toward a cave guarded by an unnaturally large snake. In front of the station, a flurry of activity surrounds a cadre of “cold stream” carriages arrive to assist and re-orient the dizzy, yet fortunate passengers that have managed to disembark from their ill-fated journey. To their right, an ambulance waits to cart away those shown jumping from the moving cars. A series of peaceful villages and small towns situated under a cloudless blue sky recede into the left background, all earlier stops along the train’s route. Following the tracks into the cave, and back and forth through the middle of the composition, the eye alights upon another train that passes in front of a large penitentiary, and then a third that proceeds into a black, fiery furnace guarded by a large demon. The entire upper-right quadrant of the image is dominated by a stormy, lightning-streaked sky that surrounds an erupting volcano.

³⁴ There are many versions of “Black Valley Railroad,” but all adhere closely to Ackermann’s template. The version to which I refer is published in Sally Pierce and Catharina Slautterback, *Boston Lithography, 1830-1880: the Boston Atheneum Collection* (Boston: Boston Atheneum, 1991): pl. 104. [recall book to get page number] This lithograph, and a smaller broadside of the same title, was printed by Charles H. Crosby, and funded by the Massachusetts State Temperance Alliance. A larger, more ornate version is referenced in Janet Flint, *The Way of Good and Evil*, ex. cat. (Washington: Smithsonian Institution/National Collection of Fine Arts: 1972): n.p., cat. 44. The print apparently influenced later African American narratives of deliverance and salvation that appeared in the sermons of the Reverend A. Nix at the beginning of the twentieth century under the name “Black Diamond Railroad.” See John M. Giggie, “Jesus Handed Me a Ticket: Images of Railroad Travel and Spiritual Transformations among African Americans, 1865—1917,” in David Morgan and Sally M. Promey, eds., *The Visual Culture of American Religions* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001): 249-266.

³⁵ The acceleration of the distillery-locomotive recalls Orson Fowler’s section heading, “Distilleries Consume Time, and the Means of Life.” See Fowler, *Temperance*, 26-27.

A list of the train's forty-one regularly-scheduled stops flanks the sides of the central tableau. The initial four—Sippington, Medicineville, Tiptleton, and Topersville—seem innocuous enough; but the fifth, Drunkard's Curve, requires passengers to make a critical decision. Underneath the scene, a series of pointing fingers make riders aware of three important rules:

- From Drunkard's Curve, the train is an express—all taking in being done above that station, and principally of respectable people. Passengers for all places beyond are thrown out without stopping the train.
- Passengers [are] not allowed to stand on the platform, or put their heads out of the windows below Rowdyville—the Corporation not wishing to alarm persons who are not patrons of the road.
- Persons wishing to leave the train will find stages of the Temperance Alliance at Drunkard's Curve and all stations above, ready to convey them to any of the villages upon Cold Stream River. Below Drunkard's Curve, ambulances will be used.

For passengers aboard the Black Valley Railroad, the Drunkard's Curve is, for all intents and purposes, the last stop on the line. The station splits the composition into two irreconcilable halves. On the left, riders retain the ability to leave the train on their own terms; but on the right, they are at the mercy of the train's unstoppable momentum. Anyone who ventures beyond Drunkard's Curve crosses the point of no return, and is officially confirmed—as the station's name suggests—a drunkard.³⁶ Once en route to Rowdyville, the next “stop” on the schedule, passengers are allowed “to put their heads out of the windows.” No longer containable within the confines of the train's structure, the boisterous drunkards transgress the limits of propriety and sobriety at precisely the same time. “Black Valley Railroad” inverts classic moralizing narratives such as John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, where the object is to tenaciously adhere to the *correct*

³⁶ This metaphor survives in a modified form in late twentieth-century notions of “Dead Man's Curve,” a place of reckoning that likewise punishes those that live and drive “too fast.” [cite Jan and Dean here?]

path.³⁷ Instead, Ackermann's lithograph presents an express line to destruction with no possibility of a return trip. The text makes clear that "accidents by collisions are entirely avoided, as no Up trains are run along the road."³⁸ According to the logic of the lithograph, consumption, once it exceeds a certain point, takes on the character of an ungovernable appetite, a chronic addiction, a runaway locomotive.

Endowed with uncompromising power and speed, railroads signaled the dawn of a new, technologically-inflected definition of the sublime that emphasized the euphoria (and terror) of ruthless efficiency and seamless exchange.³⁹ They also initiated what many in antebellum America, including the landscape painter Thomas Cole, saw as an undesirable acceleration of time, one that would lead to a nation of fast men.⁴⁰ In a journal entry dated September 4, 1847, Cole describes a recent train-ride in the following manner:

The hurry, noise & restlessness of Rail Road traveling with the consequent violence done to all the natural requirements of the body are anything but conducive to health of body or serenity of mind. The body is made to be merely a sort of Tender to a Locomotive Car; its appetites and functions wait on a machine which is merciless & tyrannical.⁴¹

In a recent article, art historian Alan Wallach corrects a long-held assumption that Cole's 1843 canvas, *River in the Catskills* (Fig. 36), celebrates what Leo Marx calls "the essential compatibility between the expansion of industry and the beauty of the

³⁷ Charles Deas's *Walking the Chalk*, for example, retains a Bunyanesque focus upon staying the course.

³⁸ "Destruction" is, in fact, the forty-first and final stop on the Black Valley Railroad. In a black-and-white version of the Black Valley Railroad produced in 1863 by one "Sc. Rudd" [Find out who this is.], each stop is printed on a banner that curls around a pair of metal poles in a way that visually equates the journey with a downward spiral.

³⁹ On the technological sublime in America, see Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden*, 35th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); and John F. Kasson, *Civilizing the Machine* (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1976).

⁴⁰ On the impact that railroads and canals had on American conceptions of time, see George Rogers Taylor, *The Transformation Revolution, 1815-1860* (New York, Rinehart, 1951).

⁴¹ Thomas Cole, *The Collected Essays and Prose Sketches*, Marshall Tymn, ed. (St. Paul: John Colet Press, 1982): 184; the first two sentences of this entry are quoted in Alan Wallach, "Thomas Cole's *River in the Catskills* as Antipastoral," *Art Bulletin* 84:2 (June 2002): 334, 338-39.

landscape.”⁴² Instead, Wallach reveals the painting to be, in his own words: “. . . a deliberate attack on the conventions of pastoral landscape painting and consequently on a pervasive, if often contested, ideology that lauded improvement and material progress.”⁴³ He argues that *River in the Catskills* represents an attempt by Cole to render his pessimism palatable; and furthermore, that the very conventions of pastoral landscape painting in the Claudian mode prevented anything more than a thoroughly diluted and barely discernable attack upon the notion of “progress” that the artist so deeply abhorred (but his *nouveau riche*, capitalist patrons at the time so enthusiastically advocated). The painting, while flush with pastoral elements, is not pastoral at all, but, according to Wallach, a “prospect view” that positions the ever-ominous “man with an ax” in a prominent foreground position to survey and appraise the landscape with an eye toward appropriation and exploitation.⁴⁴

Yet why does *River in the Catskills* impugn the notion of pastoralism *itself*? Why would Thomas Cole, of all artists, abandon, and moreover, subvert the very pastoral conventions of moderation and balance that he considered the ideal aesthetic model for a virtuous republic? According to art historian Angela Miller:

Poised between the extremities of wilderness and overcivilization, the pastoral moment promised an escape from history into a mythic republic where such moral polarities were resolved. Cole’s Eden [here, Miller references Cole’s *The Garden*

⁴² Leo Marx, “Does Pastoralism Have a Future?” in *The Pastoral Landscape*, John Dixon Hunt, ed. *Studies in the History of Art* 26, Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts Symposium Papers, vol. 20 (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1992): 215; quoted in Wallach, *ibid.*, 342. Barbara Novak likewise notes that the train, safely miniaturized and set off into the distance as it is in Cole’s composition, was nothing more than a “fuliginous emblem of power” that “grazes mildly through the landscape.” See Novak, *Nature and Culture*, rev. ed. (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1995): 169-70. Kenneth Maddox, while acknowledging that the railroad was “regarded suspiciously” by Cole, nevertheless concludes that it—for Cole and later painters such as Durand, Church, and Cropsey—extols “the pastoral vision of America.” Maddox, “Thomas Cole and the Railroad: *Gentle Maledictions*,” *Archives of American Art Journal* 26:1 (1986): 9.

⁴³ Wallach, *ibid.*, 339.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, *passim*.

of Eden (1828)] is the first in a series of imagined Arcadias unsullied by ambition and sectarianism which appeared in his art and his writing over the next two decades.⁴⁵

The history that the idealizing conventions of pastoralism sought to escape were the tumultuous forces unleashed during the market revolution of the 1830s.⁴⁶ Unchecked expansion of territory, industry, and capital undercut the ideal of a perfectible, agrarian “middle ground” built upon Jeffersonian principles. The notion of a pastoral Arcadia was thus nothing more than a nostalgic projection, “existing,” according to Wallach, “only in a golden haze of memory.”⁴⁷ In an excellent summary of the situation, one that will serve as a jumping-off point for my own arguments, Wallach writes that, as with Thomas Jefferson, an:

...opposition between agrarian-republican values and material progress structured Cole’s thinking. Yet because he was untouched by the Enlightenment faith in perfectibility that had influenced Jefferson, he saw the opposition more in terms of a contest between a dominant utilitarian ideology and the traditional values of an ideal republic. Thus it was “utilitarianism” that menaced the ideal world of *View on the Catskill, Early Autumn* and similar rural scenes.⁴⁸

I contend that the discourse of temperance, as iterated by Benjamin Rush and his followers during the first third of the nineteenth century, posited a set of ideal somatic practices that constituted a mode of pastoral physiology. The waning of this ideal in the 1830s, as evidenced by the swift transformation of the definition of temperance from

⁴⁵ Angela Miller *The Empire of the Eye: Landscape Representation and American Cultural Politics, 1825-1875* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993): 50-51.

⁴⁶ The key text on this period remains Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991). See also the excellent summary of the cultural and historical milieu in which Cole’s paintings operated in Christine Stansell and Sean Wilentz, “Cole’s America: An Introduction,” in *Thomas Cole: Landscape Into History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994): 3-21.

⁴⁷ Wallach, “*River in the Catskills*,” 343.

⁴⁸ Alan Wallach, “Thomas Cole: Landscape and the Course of American Empire,” in *Thomas Cole: Landscape Into History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994): 72-73. Earlier in the same essay, Wallach writes that “Cole at times paid strategic lip service to the gospel of progress, but like a number of his contemporaries, believed that democracy and “utilitarianism” would lead the nation to disaster” (67).

“moderation” to “abstinence,” corresponds exactly with the cultural moment when pastoralism as an aesthetic and socioeconomic ideal was abandoned as a lost cause. That is to say, the social and economic health of the nation during the market revolution, as it spiraled into convulsions between “booms” and “busts,” is but a discourse of physiological oscillations between overstimulation and debility writ large. While the participation of Cole’s oeuvre in the formation of this macroscopic historical context has been comprehensively analyzed by scholars such as Miller and Wallach, the engagement of the artist’s work in period constructions of the physiologically contingent body remain unrecognized. The fate of antebellum bodies, like that of the antebellum body politic, was determined by the careful regulation (or careless irregularity) of appetites—ocular, sexual, gastrointestinal, and otherwise.

When Thomas Cole wrote about his travails on the rails in 1847, he voiced his displeasure in alimentary terms. The locomotive plays the role of an iron despot, one that forces Cole’s “appetites and functions [to] wait on a machine which is merciless & tyrannical.” Yet the next two sentences in Cole’s journal, heretofore overlooked in the scholarship, expand upon this theme: “The brief moments it allows for eating are employed with a wolfish ravenousness. Food is swallowed without mastication, and a meal is dispatched with disgusting haste.”⁴⁹ The train transforms what would have otherwise been an enjoyable meal into an exercise in shoveling food down the esophagus in the manner that one might throw coal into an engine’s boiler. For Cole, the locomotive is an infernal machine that subjects the systems of its human passengers to an analogous

⁴⁹ Cole, *Journal*, 184.

mechanical transformation.⁵⁰ That is to say, it privileges actions that get to the point in the most efficient and direct manner, ends that dictate and justify means. Rapid eating bypasses the faculty of taste, and implies a regression into “wolfish ravenousness” and savagery. Near the end of his *Essay on American Scenery*, Cole puts the argument a different way. After bemoaning the “ravages of the axe,” and its accompanying “wantonness and barbarism,” Cole writes that:

The way-side is becoming shadeless, and in another generation will behold spots, now rife with beauty, desecrated by what is called improvement; which, as yet, generally destroys Nature’s beauty without substituting that of Art. This is a regret rather than a complaint; such is the road society must travel; it may lead to refinement in the end, but the traveler who sees the place of rest close at hand, dislikes the road that has so many unnecessary windings.⁵¹

The road of improvement that “society must travel” is, for Cole, a dangerous and direct route, one that terminates at “the place of rest,” a bitterly sardonic reference to premature death.⁵² According to Cole, a nation governed by a mobocracy of “copper hearted” barbarians rushes toward this destination with unyielding haste. Near the beginning of

⁵⁰ In an oft-quoted letter to his patron Luman Reed, Cole condemns “dollar-godded utilitarians” as “copper-hearted.” Thomas Cole to Luman Reed, March 6, 1836, Cole Papers, New York State Library; quoted in Wallach, “*River in the Catskills*,” 340. See also Ralph Waldo Emerson, who wrote in 1839 that the “...invasion of Nature by Trade with its Money, its Credit, its Steam, its Railroad, threatens to upset the balance of man, & establish a new and Universal Monarchy more tyrannical than Babylon or Rome.” Emerson, *Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks* vol. 8, William H. Gilman, et. al., eds. (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1960-82): 268; quoted in Maddox, 8.

⁵¹ Thomas Cole, *Essay on American Scenery* (1836), reprinted in Tymn, *Collected Essays and Prose Sketches*, 17. Subsequent parenthetical references to this source are designated *AE*, and refer to Tymn’s pagination.

⁵² In 1843, the same year that Cole painted *River in the Catskills*, Nathaniel Hawthorne published his short story “The Celestial Railroad,” that describes an ill-begotten journey into the infernal regions on board a train driven by Apollyon from Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*. Of this story, John Kasson writes that: “...Hawthorne offered a burlesque of the progressive vision of both nineteenth-century religion and technology and the prosperous but complacent moral climate in which the two flourished. The apostles of religious and technological perfectionism, as viewed in Hawthorne’s story, attempted to provide shortcuts to salvation, to assure their prosperous followers that moral and social progress could be achieved through external contrivances instead of individual virtue and effort. Here, as throughout his work, Hawthorne remained profoundly skeptical of the pretensions of nineteenth-century American “improvements” or any attempts to apply panaceas to the problems of society and the human heart.” John Kasson, *Civilizing the Machine: Technology and Republican Values in America, 1776-1900* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1999): 49-50.

his *Essay*, Cole describes “rural nature” as a soothing sedative, an “exhaustless mine,” a “fountain of intellectual enjoyment, where all may drink, and be awakened to a deeper feeling of the works of genius, and a keener perception of the beauty of our existence” (AS 4). The notion of nature as a beverage drawn from a clear, cold spring that endows its drinkers with heightened faculties of perception reappears again in the *Essay*’s concluding point:

May we at times turn from the ordinary pursuits of life to the pure enjoyment of rural nature; which is in the soul like a fountain of cool waters to the way-worn traveler; and let us

“Learn

The laws by which the Eternal both sublime

And sanctify his works, that we may see

The hidden glory veiled from vulgar eyes” (AS 17).

In *River in the Catskills*, Cole replicates the same pastoral formula he had employed in earlier paintings such as *View on Catskill Creek* (1833), *View on the Catskill—Early Autumn* (1837), and *North Mountain and Catskill Creek* (1838).⁵³ In each of these earlier compositions, the unadulterated flow of the creek structures the ease and harmony with which the humans and animals depicted in these paintings interact with the natural world. Boats glide gracefully along the creek’s placid surface, while sheep and horses stoop to drink, and a mother and child enjoy a leisurely picnic.⁵⁴ But in

⁵³ Ellwood Parry notes that James A. Smillie, the same artist who later engraved Cole’s *Voyage of Life* series, produced a lithograph of *View on the Catskill—Early Autumn* in 1838. For a consideration of this painting and its relationship to other canvases by Cole that depict the same view, see Wallach, “Thomas Cole: Landscape and the Course of American Empire,” 66-77. On *North Mountain and Catskill Creek*, see David Steinberg, “Thomas Cole’s *North Mountain and Catskill Creek*,” *Yale University Art Gallery Bulletin* 39:3 (Winter 1986): 24-29.

⁵⁴ My sentence conflates elements from all three of these pictures. The recreating mother and child, who appear in the foreground of *View on the Catskill—Early Autumn*, may be juxtaposed with a white horse that bolts from his owner in a field across the river to the left. This unbridled horse, along with the stump of a recently hewn tree in the foreground, are the only elements in the painting that portend anything that might be interpreted as a threat to the painting’s aesthetic (and social) harmony. Cole could very well have had *View on the Catskill—Early Autumn* and other of his similarly composed pictures in mind when he wrote in his *Essay on American Scenery* that “You see no ruined tower to tell of outrage, no gorgeous temple to speak of ostentation; but freedom’s offspring—peace, security, and happiness dwell there, the spirits of the

River in the Catskills, Cole injects a locomotive into this pastoral formula in a way that leads the eye to juxtapose the winding course of Catskill Creek with the straight and unyielding trajectory of the railroad. In a long poem entitled “Catskill,” published in an 1837 edition of Cole’s hometown newspaper, the *Catskill Messenger*, an unidentified author refers to the: “...railroad train thundering down the gorge, All level, straight, and stiff, and stereotyped...”⁵⁵ As such, in *River in the Catskills*, Cole plays the river and the railroad off against one another knowing full well that the rail line he painted—the Catskill and Canajoharie—went out of business only a few years earlier.⁵⁶ The locomotive churns toward a bridge that spans the creek, setting up a visual collision that likely called to Cole’s mind an 1840 tragedy where a flood undermined the bridge’s supports, causing a train to tumble into the water, killing one of its passengers.⁵⁷ As such, the painting celebrates a notable, but pyrrhic victory of the river’s line of beauty over the railroad’s rigid constraints.

The railroad in Cole’s *River in the Catskills* is a cipher for direct, object-oriented, acquisitive vision. It represents an incorrect, “utilitarian” way of seeing that privileges speed, and denigrates—much to Cole’s alarm—winding roads and digressive fancies. The painting offers a thinly disguised polemic in support of aesthetic disinterestedness where the artist mingles pastoral and prospective modes of vision together in the same

scene. On the margins of that gentle river the village girls may ramble unmolested—and the glad school-boy, with hook-and-line, pass his bright holiday—those neat dwellings, unpretending to magnificence, are the abodes of plenty, virtue, and refinement” (16). Kenneth Maddox argues that this picture and *River in the Catskills*, while perhaps not intended as pendants, might be considered as such in terms of the way they reveal the transformation of the same scene “before” and “after” the arrival of the railroad. Maddox, “Thomas Cole and the Railroad,” 6-7. On the cultural significance of picnic scenes, see Angela Miller, “Nature’s Transformations: The Meaning of the Picnic Theme in Nineteenth-Century Art,” *Winterthur Portfolio* 24:2/3 (Summer—Autumn 1989): 113-138.

⁵⁵ “Catskill,” *Catskill Messenger*, April 13, 1837; quoted in Maddox, 4; and Wallach, “*River in the Catskills*,” 340.

⁵⁶ Maddox, 6; see also Wallach, “*River in the Catskills*,” 339-40.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

picture to bring into sharp relief their fundamental incompatibility.⁵⁸ In paint and prose, here and elsewhere, Cole advocates for a new kind of aesthetic pleasure that operates independently of possession.⁵⁹ Cole's thinking is suffused with an awareness of a Miltonic distinction between looking and eating, between disinterested enjoyment and sensuous, corporeal appropriation. He makes this distinction clear in a remarkable paragraph in his *Essay on American Scenery*:

In this age, when a meager utilitarianism seems ready to absorb every feeling and sentiment, and what is sometimes called improvement in its march makes us fear that the bright and tender flowers of the imagination shall all be crushed underneath its iron tramp, it would be well to cultivate the oasis that yet remains to us, and thus preserve the germs of a future and purer system. And now, when the sway of fashion is extending widely over society—poisoning the healthful streams of true refinement, and turning men from the love of simplicity and beauty, to a senseless idolatry of their own follies—to lead them gently into the pleasant paths of taste would be an object worthy of the highest acts of genius and benevolence. The spirit of our society is to contrive but not to enjoy, toiling to produce more toil—accumulating in order to aggrandize. The pleasures of the imagination, among which the love of scenery holds a conspicuous place, will alone temper the harshness of such a state; and, like the atmosphere that softens the most rugged forms of the landscape, cast a veil over the asperities of life. (*AS* 6)

Cole sets up a dichotomy between “the flowers of the imagination” and the “iron tramp” of utilitarianism and improvement. Nature is again couched as a liquid tonic for societal ills, an “oasis,” a “healthful” stream “of true refinement.”⁶⁰ Only “the pleasures of the

⁵⁸ My usage of “pastoral” and “prospective” in this sentence derive from Wallach, “*River in the Catskills*,” *passim*. Wallach suggests that *River in the Catskills* may also be considered alongside the *The Oxbow* as an example of the artist's practice of juxtaposing incompatible polarities: “In *The Oxbow* the artist jammed together two almost unrelated vistas—wilderness on one side, pastoral on the other—thus juxtaposing in one painting almost antithetical categories (the sublime versus the beautiful-picturesque), so that a viewer scanning the landscape experienced both a feeling of panoramic breadth, and a sense of imminent split or breakdown. Here, the framing elements barely contain Cole's unconventional composition” (345).

⁵⁹ My phrasing here draws from Paul Guyer's excellent summary of Joseph Addison's ideas about disinterestedness. Guyer writes that “Addison's claim that a view of a landscape can give a properly sensitive person a pleasure independent of and greater than any to be derived from the possession of it can be counted as another early appeal to the idea of disinterestedness...” Paul Guyer, *Values of Beauty: Essays in Modern Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005): 22.

⁶⁰ The healthful intoxication of nature is here compared with the unhealthy intoxication of object-oriented avariciousness. Rufus Porter, writing on the productive physiological and psychological effects of “fancy,”

imagination” can temper the harshness of a state that privileges ruthless efficiency and material gain. This paragraph follows an earlier passage where Cole posits his ideal viewer, one who looks upon nature with a “loving eye,” and “drinks from nature’s purest cup” (AS 5). Nature provides a protective balm against the unforgiving viciousness of the marketplace, and steps down society’s self-perpetuating acquisitiveness. The delight such a man experiences is not merely “sensual, or selfish,” but serves as a reinvigorating, community-building exercise. Afterwards, “when he has turned to mingle with his fellow men, the chords which have been struck in that sweet communion cease not to vibrate” (AS 5). Cole again echoed this notion two years later, when he wrote to Samuel Ward of “the genial influence of the Fine Arts to soften hard & utilitarian features.”⁶¹

Cole was keenly interested in the ways in which desire begat material consumption, and in turn, how consumption itself grew into an uncontrollable, self-sustaining force imbued with its own terminal velocity. After writing his *Essay on American Scenery*, Cole would go on to read Jean-Baptiste Say’s *Treatise on Political Economy* (1803), in which the French economist first postulated what has since become known as Say’s Law. That is, in paraphrase: “supply creates its own demand.”⁶² Say’s book appears in Cole’s handwritten catalogue of literature that he read in 1839, just below an unspecified issue of Joseph Addison’s *Spectator*, a source to which he likely

claims that: “The effects...are in general, highly pleasurable, and resemble those attendant on the agreeable period of intoxication. Exquisite sensations of pleasure; an irresistible propensity to laughter; a rapid flow of vivid ideas;...are the ordinary feelings produced by it. And what is exceedingly remarkable, is, that the intoxication thus produced, instead of being succeeded by the debility subsequent to intoxication by ardent spirits, does, on the contrary, render the person who takes it, cheerful and high spirited form the remainder of the day.” Rufus Porter, *A Select Collection of Valuable and Curious Arts*, 2nd. ed. (Concord, N.H.: J.B. Moore, 1826): 100; quoted in Sumpter Priddy *American Fancy: Exuberance in the Arts, 1790-1840* (Milwaukee: Chipstone Foundation, 2004): xxxiii.

⁶¹ Thomas Cole to Samuel Ward, Catskill, New York, September 23, 1840. Cole Papers, Archives of American Art.

⁶² Jean-Baptiste Say, *Catechism of Political Economy, or, Familiar Conversations on the Manner in which Wealth is Produced, Distributed, and Consumed in Society*, John Richter, trans. (1803; Philadelphia: M. Carey & Son: 1817).

owed the phrase, “the pleasures of the imagination.”⁶³ Addison published his widely-read essay “On the Pleasures of the Imagination” in serial form, spread across eleven consecutive issues of the *Spectator* in 1712.⁶⁴ “A man of polite imagination,” writes Addison, “...often feels a greater satisfaction in the prospect of fields and meadows, than another does in the possession.”⁶⁵ Yet the pleasures of the imagination were constantly under threat by the pleasures of consumption, appropriation, and ownership. The antipathy between interested and disinterested observation aligned with a parallel antipathy between the sublime and the beautiful.⁶⁶ These, in turn, were articulated by a third binary pair: intoxication and sobriety.

Whereas for Cole the landscape productively activated the imagination through the slow-working, sober metaphor of cold, pure water, Richard Payne Knight, in his *An Analytical Inquiry into the Principles of Taste*, traces a connection between intoxication and insanity that is grounded in a disorder of perception, one that acts reciprocally and deleteriously upon the imagination. “Intoxication,” writes Knight, “is a temporary lunacy arising from a similar derangement in the trains of ideas, caused by the irritation produced in the stomach by wine or other intoxicating liquors or drugs, extending itself to the brain; as it does almost instantaneously, when large quantities are taken at a time.”⁶⁷

⁶³ This impressive list, dated December, 1839, represents only one year of reading as recalled by the artist. As a representative sample, it more than justifies assumptions made here and in prior scholarship that Cole was well aware of, if not well versed in, most major works of fiction, poetry, history, and aesthetics that would have been available to him. Cole Papers, Box 5, Folder 3, New York State Library.

⁶⁴ “The Pleasures of the Imagination” was also the title of a 1744 poem by the British author and physician Mark Akenside. I owe my knowledge of both of these works to John Brewer’s *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1997).

⁶⁵ Joseph Addison, “On the Pleasures of the Imagination,” *Spectator* 411 (June 11, 1712): 123-24; quoted in Guyer, *Values of Beauty*, 22.

⁶⁶ On the alignment between sublimity and interestedness in Cole’s art, see Wallach, “Thomas Cole: Landscape and the Course of American Empire,” 79-80.

⁶⁷ Richard Payne Knight, *An Analytical Inquiry into the Principles of Taste* 4th ed. (London: Luke Hansard & Sons, 1808): 137. For an investigation of connections between sublimity and insanity in Goya’s “dark paintings,” see Peter K. Klein, “Insanity and the Sublime: Aesthetics and Theories of Mental Illness in

In language that would be right at home in the antebellum American teetotaling treatises of Edward C. Delavan and Samuel Woodward, Knight then proceeds to suggest that even weak stimulants pose a danger to their consumers:

If taken gradually, it at first only stimulates and quickens the action of the mind, so as to produce sudden gleams or coruscations, either of wit or folly, either of imagery or conceit, accordingly as the natural vigor or acquired furniture of the understanding may be calculated to supply either the one or the other. But as the irritation is increased, the action is increased too; so that, at length it becomes so rapid and violent that it can no longer be limited or regulated by any principles of logical connection or coherence; and the most wild and extravagant combinations, both of thought and imagery, ensue.⁶⁸

According to Knight, stimulation, with its attendant accelerating and deranging effects on the imagination, grows on its own accord, almost as a matter of *course*.

Cole's pessimism drew from his understanding of history as an inevitable cyclical process based upon biological models of birth, growth, decay, and death that he had absorbed from a range of authors from Edward Gibbon to Lord Byron.⁶⁹ Adding to his anxiety, however, was his belief that the enervating effects of luxury and greed shortened the natural lifespan of otherwise healthy republics. Just as the "cold stream" carriages

Goya's *Yard with Lunatics and Related Works*," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 61 (1998): 198-252.

⁶⁸ Ibid. 137-38. Consider the similar calculus of the automatically-accelerating appetite for stimulation ingested through the eyes at work in the following passage from an article warning readers of the danger of intense, sublime, visually arresting scenes (in this case, a re-telling of a story from Saint Augustine about the lure of the arena): "For having heard a great cry he suffered himself to be conquered by his curiosity, and opened his eyes to see what it was, imagining that he still had the power of shutting them. Once of the combatants was wounded. No sooner did he behold the purple stream issuing from the body of the unhappy wretch, than, instead of turning away his eyes, they were arrested on the object; and he became intoxicated with those brutal combats. He was no longer the same man: he, by degrees, imbibed the sentiments of the multitude around him, joined their shouts and exclamations, and carried away from the amphitheatre, a violent passion for returning." "Danger of Public Amusements," *Religious Remembrancer* (Aug. 28, 1819): 2.

⁶⁹ See Alan Wallach, "Cole, Byron, and the Course of Empire," *The Art Bulletin* 50:4 (Dec. 1968): 375-79, and *idem*. "Thomas Cole: Landscape and the Course of American Empire," 90-98. See also Ellwood C. Parry, *The Art of Thomas Cole: Ambition and Imagination* (Newark, Del.: University of Delaware Press, 1988): 140-45. On the pervasive influence of biological models of history in nineteenth-century America, see Michael Kammen, "Changing Perceptions of the Life Cycle in American Thought and Culture," *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 41 (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1980): 35-65; and Thomas R. Cole, *The Journey of Life: A Cultural History of Aging in America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992): esp. 73-158.

offer safe refuge to the weary travelers who have managed to escape the Black Valley Railroad, Cole posits the “cool waters” of rural nature as a corrective to the unhealthy acceleration of desire, ambition, and material gain that posed a mortal threat to the survival of the young nation. The beneficial effects of pure, cold, spring water were widely touted as an antidote to drunkenness, and gave rise to a number of temperate “cold water armies” that employed fountains, streams, and waterfalls as emblems of health and purity. In a generic temperance society membership certificate designed by Thomas Sinclair of Philadelphia in 1841, a group of genteel citizens gather together by a clear stream, from which a man has drawn a glass of water (Fig. 37). The calm and reserved demeanor of this group is contrasted with two drunken brawlers to their right, who duke it out in front of a tavern just behind a sickly-looking inebriate who wistfully gazes at the temperance meeting, dreaming, perhaps, of an escape from his daily misery.⁷⁰ Views of natural scenery, like a drink of cold water, tempered the metabolism of the American social body, slowed it down, and extended its lifespan.

Aesthetics and Appetite

The internal contradiction that Alan Wallach discerns in Cole’s *River in the Catskills* between antithetical pictorial conventions is therefore attended by parallel and equally antithetical notions of time that structure interested and disinterested vision. Utilitarianism, for Cole, allied itself with an unhealthy and reckless haste, which in turn imposed a state of barbarism on its subjects, made manifest in the artist’s rich description of a meal “dispatched” in a rapacious and tasteless fashion. Cole’s pastoral ideal was

⁷⁰ Spurred by the writings of health reformers such as Joel Shew and Russell Trall, cold water cures were a popular fad during the mid nineteenth century. See Ruth Clifford Engs, *Clean Living Movements: American Cycles of Health Reform* (Westport, Conn. and London: Praeger, 2000): 95-98.

threatened by the velocity of modern time, which, like the railroad, yoked its passengers into a ruthless system of speed and efficiency. This acceleration wrested agency from the independent-minded citizenry that formed the backbone of Jefferson's virtuous, agrarian republic, and threatened to envelop the populace into a new authoritarian structure.⁷¹

Aesthetic experience offered persons an opportunity to take time out, to reevaluate the pace and trajectory of themselves and their society from a disinterested, and, by extension, a de-temporalized position outside of the normative and naturalizing strictures of everyday life. In other words, aesthetic experience, conceived as a fundamental component of American society, decelerates the train; it acts, as it were, as an appetite suppressant. Cole's denigration of rapid eating might be related to Asher Durand's later account of the plight of an urban worker, who:

...on his return home, after the completion of his daily task of drudgery—his dinner partaken, and himself disposed of in his favorite arm-chair, with one or more faithful landscapes before him, and making no greater effort than to look into the picture instead of on it, so as to perceive what it represents; in proportion as it is true and faithful, many a fair vision of forgotten days will animate the canvas, and lead him through the scene: pleasant reminiscences and grateful emotions will spring at every step, and care and anxiety will retire far behind him...He becomes absorbed in the picture—a gentle breeze fans his forehead, and

⁷¹ Charles Caldwell, the same physician who wrote invectives against the enslaving effects of excessive alcohol consumption, also intoned a long apology for the moral and social benefits of railroads: "But, when constructed on the scale, and carried to the extent, which I am confident await them, Rail-roads will contribute eminently to the improvement of society. They will make consolidated societies of whole nations." An expansive and well-maintained rail system will guard against outside military incursions, as the armed forces of the United States "might be brought to bear on any single point, to discomfit and destroy an approaching enemy." Most importantly, Caldwell stresses the power of railroads to foster internal social and political cohesion, to produce a nation whose: "...knowledge, and feeling, and power, will be ONE. She will be ONE in all her attributes, without the least disposition to divide herself, while no earthly force can compel a division. The distance from Maine to Louisiana, or perhaps to Texas, and from the Atlantic Ocean to Missouri and Arkansas, or even to the Rocky Mountains, will no longer be measured in miles or perches. The distance will be computed by the time consumed in the journey from one extreme to the other. And that will be short; ... By the arrangement contemplated, our sectional feelings and interests will be extinguished, and even our sectional names will be little else than history. When, as respects our Union, east, and west, and north, and south shall be spoken of, they will mean nothing more than adjacent points or groups, in the same great and harmonious society. For all, I repeat, will be merged in national ONENESS." Charles Caldwell, "Thoughts on the Moral and Other Indirect Influences of Rail-Roads," *New-England Magazine* (April, 1832): 291-292. (Emphasis original)

he hears a distance rumbling; they come not from the canvas, but through the open window casement. No matter, they fall purified on his sensorium, and *that* is far away in the haunts of his boyhood.⁷²

Durand posits the home filled with “faithful landscapes” as a welcome refuge from the “daily task of drudgery,” a phrase that emphasizes the onerous, methodical, and mind-numbingly repetitive requirements of the workplace. A long dash connects (literally aligns—draws together) “daily task of drudgery” with the phrase, “his dinner partaken,” as if the meal is yet another burden to be born, an equally monotonous extension of his everyday routine. Durand thus separates the consumption of material and spiritual food, privileging the latter by insinuating that the former is just barely bearable. Once his worker is finally at ease, stilled and relaxed in his easy chair, he looks *into* the picture and leaves his mundane existence behind.⁷³ When the viewer imaginatively introjects himself into the landscape, he undergoes a temporal regression, and turns back the clock to the happy days “of his boyhood.” Aesthetic experience disrupts the subject’s sense of space and time, as the picture plane gives way to an “open window casement” through which “a breeze fans his forehead.” As if wary of his readers’ suspicions about the potential

⁷² Asher B. Durand, “Letters on Landscape Painting, No. 4” *The Crayon* 1 (February 14, 1855): 98. The tranquilizing effects of nature were likewise noted by Ralph Waldo Emerson, who wrote in a similar vein that: “To the body and mind which have been cramped by noxious work or company, nature is medicinal and restores their tone. The tradesman, the attorney comes out of the din and craft of the street and sees the sky and the woods, and is man again. In their eternal calm, he finds himself. The health of the eye seems to demand a horizon. We are never tired, so long as we can see far enough.” Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature*, in *Selected Essays*, Laurer Ziff, ed. (New York: Penguin Books, 1982): 43. In *Walden*, Thoreau expresses his wish that a rustic lifestyle might allow him to “live deliberately,” a phrase that calls to mind both purposiveness and slowness. Thoreau, *Walden*, available on-line at Project Gutenberg: <http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext95/waldn10.txt> (electronic text last accessed on August 18, 2006). In a paragraph that anticipates Durand’s application of landscape painting as moral therapy, Cole wrote in his “Lecture on Art,” of his own “...earnest desire to see art presented in such a form that none shall be deprived of its pleasure and benefits. That art shall be exposed – free as air – to every citizen, high or low, rich or poor. Will it not readily be perceived that Public art could not be made the means of lifting the mind of this plain laborer & mechanic above its dull common course?...Thousands would be drawn in from their leisure hours away from low pleasures and pursuits that are too often mingled with vice and degradation.” Cole, “Lecture on Art,” reprinted in Tynn, 113.

⁷³ See Rachael DeLue’s thorough examination of pictorial immersion which includes an analysis of the same text by Asher B. Durand that I quote here. Rachael DeLue, *George Inness and the Science of Landscape* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004): 128.

deleterious effects of such an indulgent interaction, Durand issues a reassurance, “No matter, they fall upon a purified sensorium,” and makes clear that there is indeed “no matter” exchanged in this productive and therapeutic aesthetic act. The man’s “purified sensorium” suggests that not everyone is possessed of the necessary refinement to take advantage of what these “faithful landscapes” have to offer. The way that aesthetic experience subverts the materiality of the picture is crucial to the benefits of the operation, as Cole lamented in 1838 that “...the multitude; those who purchase pictures, alas! [,] are like those who purchase merchandise [,] they want quantity, material; they want something to show, something palpable, things, not thoughts.”⁷⁴

According to the Reverend E. L. Magoon, viewers motivated by avaricious and abject desires threaten to debase otherwise nutritious imagery. In his essay “Scenery and Mind,” Magoon writes:

Sir Joshua Reynolds has said that "Nature denies her instructions to none who desire to become her pupils;" but a great deal depends upon the motives with which we enter her school. It will be to a low purpose, surely, if our investigations are conducted in a predominantly utilitarian spirit, recognizing in the laws according to which the Divinity works merely the handmaids to sensual indulgence, rather than the instruments of the noblest use. It is thus that nature is made to present herself to gross minds, not as a quiet and awful temple, but as a plenteous kitchen, or voluptuous banqueting-hall.⁷⁵

The mid-nineteenth century is rife with ocular metaphors that describe the alimentary ingestion of the landscape.⁷⁶ In prose that echoes Thomas Cole’s uneasy experience eating onboard a train in 1847, Thomas Starr King writes of a trip through the White Mountains that passengers “bolt the scenery, as a man, driven to work, bolts his dinner at

⁷⁴ Thomas Cole, *Thoughts and Occurrences*, May 22, 1838; reprinted in Tynn, 157.

⁷⁵ E.L. Magoon, “Scenery and Mind,” in *The Home Book of the Picturesque* (New York: George P. Putnam, 1852): 6.

⁷⁶ I am indebted throughout this paragraph to Angela Miller, who has published numerous examples of alimentary metaphors as a testament to “the somewhat predatory character of visual experience.” See Miller, *Empire of the Eye*, 150-51, 259.

a restaurant,” and that “they will *gobble* some of the superb views between two trains, with as little consciousness, as a turkey has in swallowing corn.”⁷⁷ Henry Ward Beecher likewise described the sensation of standing alone atop a mountain in the Berkshires at the height of the fall foliage in terms of luxury and wanton desire: “...the southern hills buckle the zone of the horizon together with emeralds and rubies, such as were never set in the fabled girdle of the gods! On gazing there can not be enough. The hunger of the eye grows by feeding.”⁷⁸ This is precisely the sort of misapprehension that Cole abhorred when he lashed out at instances when:

The conception, the invention, that which affects the soul, is sacrificed to that which merely pleases the eye. Take away from painting that which affects the imagination, and speaks to the feelings, and the remainder is merely for sensual gratification, mere food for the gross eye, which is as well satisfied with the splash and splendor of jewelry.⁷⁹

Beecher, lost in the throes of ocular indulgence, reads the hot and cool colors of the autumnal landscape as a dialogue between inebriation and sobriety. In the very next line after he broaches the subject of the hungry eye, Beecher writes that:

Only the brotherhood of evergreens—the pine, the cedar, the spruce, and the hemlock—refuse to join this universal *revel*. They wear their *sober* green straight through autumn and winter, as if they were set to keep open the path of summer through the whole year, and girdle all the seasons together with a clasp of endless green. But in vain do they give solemn examples to the merry leaves which *frollic* with every breeze that runs sweet riot in the glowing shades. Gay leaves will not be counseled, but will die bright and laughing. But both together—the transfigured leaves of deciduous trees and the calm unchangeableness of evergreens—how more beautiful they are than either alone!⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Thomas Starr King, *The White Hills: Their Legends, Landscape, and Poetry* (Boston: Crosby, Nichols, Lee, 1860): 17; quoted in Miller, *Empire of the Eye*, 150, n. 38.

⁷⁸ Henry Ward Beecher, *Star Papers: Experiences of Art and Nature* (New York: J. C. Derby, 1855): 327; the last two sentences of this passage are quoted in *ibid*.

⁷⁹ Thomas Cole “Notes on Art,” December 12, 1829, reprinted in Louis LeGrand Noble, *The Life and Works of Thomas Cole*, ed. Elliot S. Vesell (1852; Hensonville, New York: Black Dome Press, 1997): 82.

⁸⁰ Henry Ward Beecher, *Star Papers*, 327. Emphases added

For Cole, the free play of the aesthetic imagination, disengaged from any allegiance to crass materialism or banal practical concerns, could revivify American life. As he wrote near the beginning of his *Essay*, “It is generally admitted that the liberal arts tend to soften our manners; but they do more—they carry with them the power to mend our hearts” (AS 3). Cole advocates a role for art in the United States that is not only non-utilitarian, but deliberately anti-utilitarian, one that privileges the “winding roads” of the Hogarthian line of beauty over the tyrannical efficiency of the grid.⁸¹ Viewing an artwork must somehow escape and temper the obsession with necessity, nutritive use-value, and waste-free expenditure that structured the physiological discourse of diet and health. The literary historian Paul Gilmore has recently explored a similar strain of thinking in Elizabeth Peabody’s *Aesthetic Papers* (1849).⁸² Peabody writes that: “The ‘aesthetic element,’ then, is in our view neither a theory of the beautiful, nor a philosophy of art, but a component and visible part in all human creations which were not mere works of necessity; in other words, which are based on idea, *as distinguished from*

⁸¹ Cole’s aesthetic crusade against utility parallels that of the German Romantic philosopher and playwright Friedrich Schiller, who voiced his suspicions about utility in a remarkable passage from his *Letters Upon The Aesthetic Education of Man* (1794): “For art has to leave reality, it has to raise itself bodily above necessity and neediness; for art is the daughter of freedom, and it requires its prescriptions and rules to be furnished by the necessity of spirits and not by that of matter. But in our day it is necessity, neediness, that prevails, and bends a degraded humanity under its iron yoke. Utility is the great idol of the time, to which all powers do homage and all subjects are subservient.” Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1794), Letter II, Modern History Sourcebook Online, at Fordham University: <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/schiller-education.html> (last accessed on April 28th, 2006). For Schiller, as Elizabeth Maddock Dillon has recently argued, aesthetic harmony begets physiological harmony, and consequently fosters social stability “that will make republican revolution sustainable.” See Elizabeth Maddock Dillon, “Sentimental Aesthetics,” *American Literature* 76:3 (September, 2004): 502-503. Dillon also notes that while Schiller’s *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* was not published in English until 1844, and the first American edition did not appear until 1861, many in the United States would have been familiar with Scottish philosophy from which his ideas emerged. See Dillon, 506-507. A summary of Schiller’s ideas did, in fact, appear in America earlier than 1861. See “Schiller’s Aesthetic Ideas,” *Brownson’s Quarterly Review* 3 (1846): 253-73.

⁸² Paul Gilmore, “Romantic Electricity,” *American Literature* 76 (September, 2004): 467-493.

appetite.”⁸³ Aesthetics, for Peabody as for Cole, must be free from physiological compulsion in order to incite a self-awareness that allows the subject to detect, and subsequently, to resist the enslaving operations of compulsive behavior. As opposed to addiction, or desire after an object of gratification that, as per Say’s Law, produces its own surplus value, aesthetics refocuses the attention of the viewer upon the processes that structure and accelerate these vicious cycles. That is to say, aesthetics affords the opportunity for deconstruction, a chance for the subject to extract himself from compulsive action and reorient himself by providing, in the words of Peabody, “a reference to the central fact of the constant relation of the individual to the universal, and of their equally constant separation.”⁸⁴ What Cole seeks most of all through his artistic practice is to provide the public a chance to arrest the progress of sensual incorporation, to sustain a deliberate pace and a moderate temperature in order to assure a healthy and well-balanced republic; but Cole’s paintings of the 1830s reveal a society that was already accelerating out of control.

⁸³ Elizabeth Peabody, *Aesthetic Papers* (1849; rep. Gainesville, Fla: Scholars’ Facsimiles & Reprints: 1957): 1; quoted in Gilmore, 468. Emphasis added. Peabody’s charge echoes an earlier passage in Andrew Combe’s *The Physiology of Digestion*, where Combe likewise argues that: “The most common source, however, of the errors into which we are apt to fall in taking appetite as our only guide, is unquestionably *the confounding of appetite with taste*, and continuing the eat for the gratification of the latter long after the former is satisfied. In fact, the whole science of a skillful cook is expending in producing this *willing* mistake on our part; and he is considered decidedly the best *artiste* whose dishes shall recommend most irresistibly to the callous palate of the gourmand, and excite on it such a sensation as shall at least remind him of the enviable excellence of a natural appetite. If we were willing to limit the office of taste to its proper sphere, and to cease eating when appetite expressed content, indigestion would be a much rarer occurrence in civilized communities than it is observed to be.” Andrew Combe, *The Physiology of Digestion Considered in Relation to the Principles of Dietetics* (Boston: Marsh, Capen & Lyon: 1836): 30.

⁸⁴ Peabody, 2; quoted in *ibid.*

***From Moderation to Abstinence:
The Vicious Cycle of “Prometheus Bound”***

During the 1830s, of a new generation of reformers such as Samuel Woodward argued that *all* alcoholic beverages—even wine, cider, and other substances deemed healthful by Benjamin Rush—incited the appetite down a slippery slope of consumption:

Man is a creature of *imitation* and *habit*; his physical system is easily molded by any factious influence; and while spirituous liquors, wine, or even ale and cider are in use, he will be liable to intemperance, and the evil will be perpetuated: the use of the weaker liquor will perpetuate the desire for the stronger...⁸⁵

Disregarding the empirical evidence of millions of Americans who drank an occasional glass of wine with their meals and lived to tell the tale, Woodward nevertheless posits a drink of alcohol as something akin to a match placed near a tinderbox. This new interpretation of what it means to be temperate departs significantly from Benjamin Rush, who argued that only excessively potent beverages initiated a terminal pathology that led to increasingly dire moral and physical symptoms. Moderate drinking in Rush’s system maintained the heat of the body at a healthy and productive level. Rush even draped his classification of healthy and unhealthy drinks in political language. Beer and Cider were “invaluable FEDERAL liquors,” vital “companions of those virtues that can alone render our country free and respectable,” while hard liquor was “*Anti-federal*... the companions of all those vices, that are calculated to dishonor and enslave our country.”⁸⁶ According to Woodward’s schema, however, even beer, wine, or cider sent their users down an inevitable slippery slope to harder and more destructive drinks.

⁸⁵ Samuel B. Woodward, *Essays on Asylums for Inebriates* (Worcester, Mass: 1838): 3.

⁸⁶ Benjamin Rush, “An Oration on the Effects of Spirituous Liquors on the Human Body,” *American Museum* 4 (1788): 325-327.

Thomas Cole was not a teetotaler. He condoned the moderate consumption of weak alcoholic beverages in his home.⁸⁷ His advocacy of the softening power of the liberal arts parallels that of Rush's notion of "Federal liquors," and also Henry Tuckerman's writings on the "softening" effects of wine⁸⁸ Nevertheless, I mean to align Cole's pessimism, his subscription to teleological determinism, that the harmony and balance of his ideal, pastoral republic would be inevitably eroded and destroyed by a sublime indulgence in sensuous and rapacious appetites, with the concurrent transformation of temperance discourse during the 1830s from the promotion of moderation to a crusade for total abstinence. Even though alcohol may not have been the bugbear for Cole that it was for many who wanted to see the production and consumption of all liquors abolished, Cole held that the growth of a more generally defined material extravagance—luxury—portended a fate for the young republic that was similar to the doomsday scenario plotted out by those that claimed America was fast becoming a nation of drunkards. Cole's solution, as we have seen, was to sublimate corporeal appetites into the realm of aesthetics, to drown unhealthy urges in a refreshing deluge of pure, disengaged, inherently tempering opticality.⁸⁹

Nevertheless, Cole was acquainted with a number of individuals who advocated total abstinence, including Edward C. Delavan, one of the most prominent anti-liquor

⁸⁷ Cole owned a chest of wineglasses and decanters that are in the collection of Cedar Grove, the artist's home in Catskill, New York. (Notes of the author taken during a tour of Cedar Grove on 08/26/04).

⁸⁸ On the mollifying effects of wine, see Tuckerman, "Something About Wine," quoted above in Ch. 1: p. 9, n. 15.

⁸⁹ This practice is evident in a, 1838 letter that Cole wrote to his friend, the artist Asher Durand. Cole, who lived near the site of Rip van Winkle's fabled draught of soporific ale, wrote of Durand's painting of the subject: "So Rip has toiled up the mountain with the liquor. I should like to see old Morpheus: and though I may not be blessed with a taste of the somnific cordial, I hope to enjoy the sight of the flagon; and perhaps I may exclaim like the old woman, (I believe in one of Aesop's Fables,) who, putting her nose to the bung-hole of an empty wine-cask, cried 'if thou art so delightful now, what must thou have been when full?' But your flagon shall not be enjoyed by nose, but by eyes." Thomas Cole to Asher Durand, January 4, 1838; quoted in Noble, *Life and Works*, 184. Taste and scent are here distilled by Cole into sensations that are ingestible through the ocular faculties.

campaigners in the United States during the three decades leading up to the Civil War. Writing Cole to congratulate the artist on his safe return from Europe in 1832, Delavan remarks that: “our brief meeting has very often been the subject of conversation, and it has been remembered as one of the pleasant incidents of life.”⁹⁰ We do not know the subject of conversation between the two men, but Delavan proceeds to offer up his New York home to Thomas Cole anytime he or his family needed a place to stay when they found themselves in the city.

The most noteworthy of Cole’s teetotaling acquaintances, however, was Samuel Ward, the wealthy New York banker who commissioned the first version of the artist’s *The Voyage of Life* (1839). Ward was a generous financial supporter of many reformist causes, and was also a founding a member and President of the American Temperance Society.⁹¹ In her autobiographical *Reminiscences*, the author Julia Ward Howe describes growing up in her father’s house:

The early years of my youth were passed in the seclusion not only of home life, but in a home most carefully and jealously guarded from all that might be represented in the orthodox trinity of evil – the world, the flesh, and the devil. My father had become deeply imbued with the religious ideas of his time. He dreaded for his children the dissipations of fashionable society, and even the risks of general intercourse with the unsanctified many. He early embraced the cause of temperance, and became President of the first [such] society formed in this country. As a result, wine was excluded from his table.⁹²

⁹⁰ Edward C. Delavan to Thomas Cole, December 3, 1832, Archives of American Art. [Delavan’s letter responds to one written to the reformer by Cole that I have yet to locate.] Delavan gave many lectures on the dangers of alcoholism by utilizing four lithographed plates made by Dr. Thomas Sewell of the successive stages of drunkenness and its effects on the lining of the human stomach. These can be seen in Sewell, *The Pathology of Drunkenness, or the Physical Effects of Alcoholic Drinks with Drawings of the Drunkard’s Stomach* (Albany: C. VanBenthuysen, 1841).

⁹¹ On Ward’s abstinence, evangelism, and reformist stance, see Alan Wallach, “Thomas Cole and the Aristocracy,” in *Reading American Art*, Marianne Doezema and Elizabeth Milroy, eds. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998): 100-101.

⁹² Julia Ward Howe, *Reminiscences* (1899); quoted without any reference to pagination by Ellwood C. Parry, in the Introduction to Paul D. Schweitzer, et. al., *The Voyage of Life by Thomas Cole: Paintings, Drawings, and Prints* (Utica, Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute, 1985): 2.

Cole perhaps references Ward's support of the temperance cause when he includes in *Manhood* (Fig. 38), the third of four canvases that comprise *The Voyage of Life*, a trio of demons—Murder, Intemperance, and Suicide—that tempt the mariner during his perilous journey through a chasm (Fig. 39). Cole's subject, buoyed on by his inordinate ambition to reach for and pursue a castle in the clouds in *Youth* (Fig. 40) the preceding picture in the series, hastily travails the rapids in *Manhood*. The rocks that threaten to wreck the boat of the mariner, and thus prematurely end his life, are made even more dangerous by the high rate of speed at which he makes his "rapid" descent. The successful navigation of these obstacles, and thus, the successful completion of a full lifespan, is registered by the calm sea of *Old Age*, where no wave or current disturbs the water. The dearth of motion in this final scene alludes to a safe haven evacuated of the flow of time. In *The Voyage of Life*, Cole equates danger with speed, and safety, health, and success with slow, methodical, and temperate procession. It is precisely when the voyager takes the helm in *Youth* and *accelerates* into the center of the stream that his fortunes—and the river—take a turn for the worse.

In 1852, four years after Cole's death, a book appeared that provided the most comprehensive contemporary expression of *The Voyage of Life* as a moral agent. It was written by an evangelical congregational minister from Boston named Jared Bell Waterbury, and illustrated with John Halpin's engravings of Cole's series. Entitled *The Voyage of Life: Suggested by Cole's Celebrated Allegorical Paintings*, this 180 page book employs the four paintings in Cole's series as sounding boards to discuss social ills that, according to Waterbury, threatened society.⁹³ Waterbury, while describing the

⁹³ Jared Bell Waterbury, *The Voyage of Life : Suggested by Cole's Celebrated Allegorical Paintings* (Boston: Massachusetts Sabbath School Society, 1852). On the similarities and differences of Cole's

scene in Cole's *Youth* where the voyager ambitiously embarks in pursuit of his own fanciful pleasures, comments that:

...some young men are just of this character, pleasers and idlers. They are sons of ordinarily rich men. Some defect, far back in their education, has occurred. Something went wrong at the beginning of the voyage, and has gone wrong ever since. Every thought of theirs seems concentrated upon themselves. The care that presses heaviest is, how should they get rid of time, or what new variety of pleasure they shall pursue.⁹⁴

Waterbury equates immorality here with "get[ting] rid of time," a pathological desire to live fast. In addition to pleasure-seeking and idleness, Waterbury also uses *Youth* as a point of departure to decry avarice, pride, and what he terms 'animal passions.'⁹⁵ In later chapters entitled 'Manhood' and 'Trials—How They are Met,' Waterbury uses the third painting in Cole's *Voyage of Life* as a model to discuss the vices of murder, intemperance, and suicide, among other moral and ethical shortcomings. In relation to intemperance, Waterbury keeps his sermonizing directly related to Cole's narrative:

But some, who would shudder at the thought of self-destruction, adopt, nevertheless, means of relief in trouble as certainly suicidal as if they thrust a poniard into their vitals. See ye the hand emerging from the cloud over the stream? And that fiend-like face that accompanies it, looming toward the voyager, and seeming to invite him to partake? That is the personification of intemperance, and that cup in his hand is the inebriating cup. How many, when the storm gathers, and the stream roughs, and things looks dark around them, are tempted by this vision, and seize the fatal cup, in the hope of, at least, temporary oblivion of their cares! It is told of an Indian navigating his canoe near the rapids of Niagara, that, finding his efforts unavailing to reach the shore, and supposing his fate inevitable, he took his liquor-flask and drank it off, and then, lying down in his canoe at the bottom of the boat, was carried over the falls, and seen no more.⁹⁶

Voyage of Life to Christian allegories such as John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, as well as the series' appearance in Waterbury's tract, see Joy Kasson, "Thomas Cole and Romantic Disillusionment," *American Quarterly* 27:1 (March 1975): 42-56.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 99-100. Waterbury's rhetoric of drunkenness as an unstoppable torrent draws on earlier examples, including that of O.S. Fowler. Fowler writes in 1845 that drunkards, "once in the current," will "surely be carried over the falls." Fowler, *Temperance*, 26.

In essence, Waterbury uses Cole's series much as one might utilize a popular religious print. Waterbury himself says as much, when in his preface he writes that his book, and by extension Cole's series, help "furnish the Christian voyager with the requisite outfit."⁹⁷ The word 'outfit' here refers to a kind of chart, a navigational aide that helps the user find his way.⁹⁸ Yet Waterbury, like Cole, was pessimistic about the majority of his fellow countrymen. Something went wrong "at the beginning of the voyage, and has gone wrong ever since."

1836 marks a watershed in the history the American temperance movement. In the summer of that year, thousands gathered in Saratoga, New York, to participate in the National Temperance Convention. Led by a group of reformers headed by Lyman Beecher, Justin Edwards, and Cole's acquaintance Edward C. Delavan, the convention voted to abandon the old tactic of separating alcoholic beverages into safe and unsafe categories based on strength.⁹⁹ Instead, the 1836 convention adopted a resolution to declare *all* alcoholic beverages—their production and consumption—anathema to the moral and social health of the nation. The internal heat produced by even the smallest quantities of alcohol, were deemed unsustainable and uncontrollable. This move formally sanctioned the pessimism held by many that individuals were unable to control their own corporeal urges in the face of what was believed to be an uncontrollable brand of chemical stimulation. The only hope for preserving public health was to regulate and control all forms of excitement and stimulation. Reformers like Delavan were certain that Americans, if their appetites were left unchecked and unfettered, would fall victim to the enslaving cycles of excess and debility, and ultimately consume themselves to death.

⁹⁷ Ibid. 'Preface,' pg. IV.

⁹⁸ Ibid., pg. 175

⁹⁹ My account is based on that in Tyrrell, 144,148.

Near the end of his life, Cole painted a version of *Prometheus Bound* (1847) (Fig. 41), a subject whose narrative hinged upon just this sort of dire, uncontrollable cycle of consumption.¹⁰⁰ The canvas, one the largest of Cole's career, is dominated by a stark, gray-blue morning sky endowed with an effervescent haze that mingles about a cluster of desolate mountaintops. Together, mountains and sky almost entirely overwhelm the figure of Prometheus, bound to the highest peak in the middle right of the scene. The indeterminate scale of the composition does not allow the viewer to properly access the size of the bearded male titan, who turns his head to the right in dreadful anticipation of yet another painful encounter with the vulture, who each day soars up to eat his liver. This tiny scavenger, almost undetectable in the vast landscape, slowly ascends from the lower left foreground to partake its meal. The vast distance between Prometheus and the vulture adds to the ominous and dreadful suspense of the picture.¹⁰¹ The viewer is presented with an eerie calm juxtaposed with the undepicted, but tragically inevitable sharp, wrenching pain that Prometheus is soon to endure. The titan is condemned to suffer, over and over again, the same unavoidable agony.

Prometheus's endowment of fire to the world was punished by the Gods, who believed that the human race was not yet ready for such a gift.¹⁰² While beneficial, fire—a cipher here for the ignition of civilization itself—may prove too powerful for humans to

¹⁰⁰ The most comprehensive treatment of the painting is Patricia Junker, "Thomas Cole's *Prometheus Bound*: An Allegory for the 1840s," *American Art Journal* XXXI: No. 1 & 2 (2000): 33-55. Junker locates the painting alongside contemporary debates about slavery in the United States. Cole painted *Prometheus Bound* without a commission, and sent the picture to England in hopes of securing it a place of honor on the walls of the newly constructed British Parliament Building. Although the picture received a few favorable mentions in the British press, the painting was not selected for installation. See also Parry, *Ambition and Imagination*, 327-332.

¹⁰¹ The position of the vulture in the final version marks a change from an earlier study in which Cole melodramatically depicts the bird adjacent to Prometheus's body, poised to inflict the initial wound. This earlier attempt currently hangs in the collection of the Catskill Public Library in Catskill, New York.

¹⁰² Although he was likely familiar with versions of the Prometheus story in Hesiod and Pausanias, Cole based his picture on the narrative of Aeschylus's *Prometheus Bound*, which had recently been translated by Henry David Thoreau. See Junker, *ibid.*, 53, n. 4.

control. In this way, Cole's *Prometheus Bound* likely offered, as Angela Miller has argued, a critique of the paradoxical nature of free will, a visual essay on the conflicted complexities of self-determination, and by extension, the wave of self-interested ambition released by the growth of unrestrained capital during the period.¹⁰³

There was, however, a more specific set of concerns associated with the Prometheus myth during this period with which Cole or his audience may have engaged. Listed second among eleven physiological effects of alcohol abuse by Benjamin Rush in his *Inquiry* is:

Obstructions of the liver: The fable of Prometheus, on whose liver a vulture was said to prey constantly, as a punishment for his stealing fire from heaven, was intended to illustrate the painful effects of ardent spirits upon that organ of the body.¹⁰⁴

In 1839, Robert B. Todd, an English physician, assigned the term 'cirrhosis' to the gradual calcification of the livers of known alcoholics with connective tissue, and published it in the first volume of his widely-read *Cyclopædia of Anatomy and Physiology*. Two years earlier, however, the designation occurs in an article entitled "Morbid Anatomy of the Liver," written by the American doctor S. D. Gross.¹⁰⁵ A description of the malady subsequently appears in dozens of articles published in United States journals over the ensuing decade. Later temperance publications intended for a popular audience also picked up on the theme. William Alger presents the shamed

¹⁰³ Angela Miller, "The Imperial Republic: Narratives of National Expansion in American Art, 1820-1860," Ph.D. Diss., Yale University, 1985, 179-191.

¹⁰⁴ Rush, *Inquiry*, 9.

¹⁰⁵ See Robert Bentley Todd, *Cyclopædia of Anatomy and Physiology*, v.1. (London: Sherwood, Gilbert, and Piper: 1839); and S.D. Gross, "Morbid Anatomy of the Liver," *The Western Journal of the Medical and Physical Sciences* 5:1 (April-June 1837): 60. S.D. Gross is none other than the young Dr. Samuel Gross, who would later serve as the subject for Thomas Eakins's *The Gross Clinic*. Prior to this time, the malady was also known as Laennec's Disease after the French physician René Laennec (1781-1826), who studied the livers of deceased alcoholics, and was the first to use the term 'cirrhosis' to describe its effects.

alcoholic as an individual whose gross imperfections are, like the figure of Prometheus in Cole's picture, made visible, and placed on display for all to see:

Of all the unfortunate creatures in the world, if there be one who deserves special commiseration on account of his sufferings, it is the slave of intemperance. His self-respect is utterly gone; and he hangs his head in shame and agony before the bar of his own conscience, and before the clear gaze of men, and before the haunting glance of God. . . . A worm gnaws at his breast—with an appetite more pitiless far than that of the vulture which devoured the vitals of the old Titan.¹⁰⁶

If we associate the figure of Prometheus with one whose appetite has grown so intense as to effect a reversal of subjective and objective roles, then it is the vulture—the bird that ominously approaches Cole's title figure, and a device also seen in Deas's *Long Jakes*—that is likewise condemned to consume over and over again, a representation of dark, uncontrollably ravenous, Id-aligned appetites.¹⁰⁷ It calls forth the threat of a potentially enslaving thirst, and the terror of an unbridled imagination. Cole's *Prometheus Bound* thus provides more than a comment on the nature of free will (Miller) or slavery (Junker); it does these things, no doubt, but through recourse to contemporary somatic metaphors that explained addictive and self-destructive behavior—an excess of freedom that overwhelms the will—as an ever accelerating cycle of violent oscillations between overindulgence and debility. Later in the same journal entry in which he decried the stomach-churning oppression of his recent railway journey, Cole relates that: “In deep repose is the highest element of the sublime and not in action. The human mind must always associate action with waste and ultimate exhaustion.”¹⁰⁸ Cole's linkage of sublimity and repose echoes the aesthetic program of Johann Joachim Winckelmann, whose adherence to the milk and vegetable diet endorsed by the English dietary reformer

¹⁰⁶ Alger, *The Facts of Intemperance*, 17.

¹⁰⁷ Gout, the disease of excess *par excellence* was also known as “Prometheus's Vulture.” See Roy Porter and G. S. Rousseau, *Gout: The Patrician Malady* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000): 22-35.

¹⁰⁸ Cole, unpublished journal entry, September 4, 1847, reprinted in Tymn, *Collected Prose Sketches*, 185.

George Cheyne is well documented.¹⁰⁹ Cheyne's system, like that of the American Sylvester Graham a century later, held that meat as well as most cooked foods generated in the human body an unnecessary and dangerous level of heat and nervous stimulation. But the most comprehensive elaboration of the Prometheus myth as a somatic allegory occurs in the extensive footnotes of Percy Bysshe Shelly's *Queen Mab* (1813):

Prometheus (who represents the human race) effected some great change in the condition of his nature, and applied fire to culinary purposes; thus inventing an expedient for screening from his disgust the horrors of the shambles. From this moment his vitals were devoured by the vulture of disease. It consumed his being in every shape of its loathsome and infinite variety, inducing the soul-quelling sinkings of premature and violent death. All vice rose from the ruin of healthful innocence. Tyranny, superstition, commerce, and inequality were then first known, when reason vainly attempted to guide the wanderings of exacerbated passion.¹¹⁰

A few paragraphs later, Shelley composes a quatrain that sums up his position:

But just disease to luxury succeeds,
And every death its own avenger breeds;
The fury passions from that blood began,
And turned on man a fiercer savage--man.¹¹¹

While Cole was in all likelihood no vegetarian, his aesthetic sympathies derive from a figuration of the sublime that draws its inspiration—whether or not Cole himself knew it—from a physiological context. Cole's consistent privileging of slow, natural courses in both his life and his art can be considered alongside his promotion of an ambient,

¹⁰⁹ Writing on affinities between Winckelmann and Cheyne, Aris Sarafianos suggests that "Health was unthinkable without the 'unity' and 'truth' of a 'calm soul,' and Winckelmann's ideal art sought to imitate this state, both for the benefit of artists and for the moral quality of the figures represented. Indeed, his aesthetic quietism, which repeatedly emphasized the ideal of minimal physical tension in representation, provides the equivalent of the belief of medical pietism in the existence of a 'bio-soul' that actually supervises the operation of the body and intervenes to maintain an unperturbed balance of the fluids and a strict economy of spirits as a matter of the utmost moral necessity." Aris Sarafianos, "Pain, Labor, and the Sublime: Medical Gymnastics and Burke's Aesthetics," *Representations* 91 (Summer 2005): 72. Cheyne's volumes circulated widely in the United States, as evidenced by a volume entitled *Cheyne on Vegetable Diet* that appears among the articles on the shelf in Charles Bird King's *Poor Artist's Cupboard* (1815).

¹¹⁰ Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Queen Mab* (1813), in *The Complete Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, v.3, Thomas Hutchinson, ed. (Oxford: Oxford Edition, 1914): consulted online on October 30, 2006, at Project Gutenberg: <http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext03/shlyc10.txt>.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

stable, and sustainable version of the sublime, free from the violent and convulsive characteristics ascribed to it by Burke—in essence, a therapeutic instrument to ward off “waste and ultimate exhaustion.” Cole promoted a role for art that sought to mollify and extinguish carnal appetites and worldly desires. Any undue or misdirected visual stimulation threatened to introduce an unquenchable fire into the world.

Consummations

For physicians, as well as for dietary and temperance reformers in the 1830s and 1840s, healthy consumption, broadly defined, was a means to an end, not an end in itself. When one’s eating, drinking, spending, and viewing habits were held in check, one could expect to do well in the world. In an 1848 lithograph, Nathaniel Currier’s vision of ideal family life, where everything seems to be in balance, is explicitly couched as *The Fruits of Temperance* (Fig. 42). Currier’s scene is a carefully calibrated balance of masculine and feminine elements. In the background, a river divides a landscape into two halves. On the left bank, a smokestack rises from a complex of four factory buildings, while the right remains a wild and uncultivated expanse of high, narrow-peaked mountains that mask the rays of the setting sun. Near the top of the composition, a distant sailboat navigates the space between, tacking back and forth betwixt industry on the one side, and untapped natural scenery on the other. This harmony is mirrored in the foreground, where a husband arrives home from work, greeted by his family. Consisting of two males, two females, and one baby of indeterminate sex, the family is reunited in the front yard of their home, within the confines of a white picket-fence. Under this image, Currier prints the message: “Behold the son of Temperance, with buoyant heart and step,

returning to his home, the partner of his bosom looks up and smiles his welcome; his children fly to meet him, their little arms embrace him, and with lip and heart they bless him.” This text, and the image it attends, aligns the sober body of the print’s male protagonist with the attainment of a healthy and happy family life, set against the backdrop of a well-regulated national system that balances stimulating commercial and industrial activity, with the tranquilizing effects of the natural world.

Currier and Ives published a companion lithograph to *The Fruits of Temperance* entitled *The Bad Husband: The Fruits of Intemperance and Idleness* (1870) (Fig. 43). The print’s title equates intemperance with a failure of male agency, and the scene, like *The Fruits of Temperance*, depicts a family of five; but the similarities end there. Sharing none of the warmth and harmony of its predecessor, *The Bad Husband* was printed in grayscale, and depicts a raggedly dressed husband, his wife, and his three children, all indigent and homeless, set off along a wind-swept road. The man’s oldest daughter draws her left hand across her face to wipe away tears as she staggers forward to her father’s side. The man’s wife carries in her arms their unconscious son, and upon her shoulders, their baby girl. The wife glances skyward as she walks, as if to ask God for mercy. All the while, the intemperate husband just stands there, altogether unmoved and unaffected by the suffering of his family, and callously stares off to the left as if nothing were the matter. Although they are all members of the same family, they appear nothing more than a burden to one another. Alcohol has here severed all lines of communication between husband and wife, father and daughter, and parents and children. No two individuals relate to one another in any discernable, productive way in *The Bad Husband*. The only indication of any tenderness is the cheek-to-cheek contact between the mother

and her baby, who peers over her right shoulder, too innocent yet to comprehend the meaning of shame. As the title of the print makes clear, the onus of intemperance and its consequences are squarely on the shoulders of the husband. It is he who bears responsibility for the breakdown of personal and familial health.

Intemperance in the antebellum period was couched as a disease, with its own etiology, pathology, symptoms, and termination. Eating or imbibing too much, too quickly, or too often, or partaking of food or drink that was too spicy or too strong over-stimulated the nervous system. If such habits persisted, the body was at risk of developing a chronic condition that Sylvester Graham alternately termed “diseased excitability,” and “morbid irritability.”¹¹² Physiological systems ceased to work in concert with one another, marking the commencement of an irreversible pathology, a self-destruct sequence where one’s body turned against itself, alternating with increasing frequency between violent paroxysms and paralytic languor and debility. For many reform physiologists, any form of stimulation not directed toward a productive end was dangerous. William Alcott thus preached abstinence from alcohol, opium, tobacco, coffee, and tea, claiming that “the strength they give is not by adding nutriment to the system, but by exciting the nerves and brain. They give strength, I admit, but only by tickling the nerves, as it were, and hence the strength is temporary, and leaves the system more debilitated than it found it. It also increases the temptation to repeat the dose.”¹¹³

In Currier and Ives’s 1846 print *The Drunkard’s Progress*, we see how just one dose of a stimulant—a glass with a friend—might develop into a situation that quickly flies out of control. Here, nine stages of drunkenness are isolated and analyzed, as we follow

¹¹² Sylvester Graham, *A Lecture to Young Men* (Providence, Weedon and Cory, 1834): *passim*.

¹¹³ William A. Alcott, *Familiar Letters to Young Men* (Buffalo: George H. Derby & Co., 1849): 166.

the misfortunes of a man, step by step, from his first glass of liquor to his miserable demise. The vice of habitual drunkenness is treated like a disease whose symptoms follow a distinctive pathology. The first and second steps seem ostensibly innocuous (Fig. 44). In these early stages drinking is a means to conviviality and warmth and not yet an end in itself. As the man consumes greater amounts of alcohol, however, the severity of his symptoms grows incrementally worse. He feels ill, dizzy, and predisposed to fits and anger and physical violence. The critical point in the narrative is “Step 5: The Summit attained, Jolly Companions, A Confirmed Drunkard.” This scene, larger than the other eight, is given prominence at the top of the arch (Fig. 45). “Confirming” the man as a “drunkard” in effect renders an official diagnosis. This scene, the summit of his dissipation, marks the irreversible surrender of the man’s free agency to the bottle, his very subjectivity and self-reliance swept away in a triumphal frolic. Descending from “Step 5,” the disease runs its course and the drunkard’s fortunes along with his mental and physical health literally plunge as he is consumed by his addiction, taking his own life in “Step 9: Death by Suicide” (Fig 46). While not explicitly stated in the print, a tenth step in the narrative, a *denouement*, is depicted underneath the arch, where the home of the now-deceased drunkard stands a desolate, smoldering ruin as his widow and child are left to fend for themselves (Fig. 47).¹¹⁴

On a fundamental level, *The Drunkard’s Progress* critiques a man’s inability to preserve a state of sustained moderation. The metabolic stimulation garnered from

¹¹⁴ Brief, but uncritical investigations of “The Drunkard’s Progress” can be found in Christa Piesche, “The European Origins of the Four Pennsylvania German Broadsheet Themes,” *Der Reggebogen* 23: 1 (1989-1991): 6-31; Thomas H. Cole, *The Journey of Life*, 118; and, most recently, in Crowley, *Drunkard’s Progress*, 1-2. Crowley notes how: “Beneath the arch of *The Drunkard’s Progress*, the print shows how the wages of sin are visited upon his [the drunkard’s] innocent family. As their homely cottage burns in the background, a grieving woman, with child in hand, averts her gaze from the ruination of her once happy house-hold. (2)”

alcohol proves too intense, causing the man to peak too quickly, cutting short his lifecycle and sending him to an early grave. The formal composition of *The Drunkard's Progress* was based on earlier Dutch and English models that charted the healthy lifecycles of men and women. These prints influenced American versions, such as one example published in 1848, where a full 90 to 100 years of time elapse between birth and death (Fig. 48). In *The Drunkard's Progress*, however, the temporal duration of the narrative might be measured in months rather than years.¹¹⁵ As opposed to the well-regulated, normal, temperate template on which healthy individuals pattern their lives, the over-stimulated drunkard lives too fast. His consumption of alcohol seems to generate its own momentum, growing in intensity as it moves up the left side of the arch. Then it crests like a wave in a euphoric burst of energy before tumbling down the other side, sweeping its victim away. An alternative version of the print by E.B. and E.C. Kellogg, also published in 1846, compresses the narrative into a vertical register, dramatically increasing the height the organizing structure by means of a tall, pointed arch (Fig. 49).¹¹⁶ This compression emphasizes the amplitude of the wave, and makes visible the violent convulsions and vibrations, ups and downs, and highs and lows traversed by its over-stimulated subject.

A decade earlier, in 1836, the same year in which the attendees of the National Temperance Convention in Saratoga, New York voted to push for the prescription and abolishment of *all* alcoholic beverages, Thomas Cole completed his five-canvas allegory *The Course of Empire*. This series depicts the rise and fall of a generic civilization, from

¹¹⁵ One version of the print drawn and published by J. Baillie, includes the age of the subject at each stage of the narrative. Baillie's "Drunkard's Progress" spans 12 years, from age 18, when the man has his first taste of alcohol, until the ninth, and final state, when he slits his own throat at age 30.

¹¹⁶ Crowley argues that Kellogg's version plagiarizes Currier's original. It is likely that Baillie's print is also an attempt to capitalize on the popularity of the subject. See Crowley, 20, n. 2.

The Savage State (Fig. 50), to *The Pastoral State* (Fig. 51), *The Consummation of Empire, Destruction* (Fig. 52), and finally, *Desolation*. The lifecycle of the empire takes place over a single day. Each of the five canvasses depicts incremental progressions in time from dawn to dusk. Augmenting this sense of brevity were three small auxiliary panels that represented the sun moving through the sky. A drawing in one of Cole's sketchbooks makes clear the artists' intended installation of *The Course of Empire* (Fig. 53). Painted for Luman Reed, a wealthy New York grocer, the narrative trajectory of the series moves along an arc, installed over a fireplace. Cole, however, made one change to this schema. He decided to flip the order of *The Savage State* and *The Pastoral State*. This allowed him to pair his two sublime canvasses, *The Savage State* and *Destruction*, as well as his two canvases in the Claudian mode, *The Pastoral State* and *Desolation*, across from one another.¹¹⁷ At the apex of the series, Cole's *Consummation of Empire* depicts both the end of the beginning and the beginning of the end, a summit from which the only direction is down. Here, the viewer is treated to a triumphal procession painted in bright, garish tones. The swollen physical dimensions of the painting, a full fifty-six percent larger than those of the other four scenes in Cole's cycle, are nevertheless unable to contain the whirl of excitement and activity that seems to spill right off the left edge of the canvas. The figures in the painting, too small and numerous to count, seem to fill every available space. This density of detail in *The Consummation of Empire*, where people are pressed into every available nook and cranny of the scene's wedding-cake

¹¹⁷ In a recent article, literary scholar Martha Banta traces some of the same patterns I explore here in the cultural history of the United States from 1850 to 1900. Weaving together articles published in the *Atlantic Monthly* and *The Crayon* in the 1850s, Banta notes that artistic styles were thought to progress from "the raw primitivism of the pre-Giotto generations" peaking with Fra Angelico's classicism, and then devolving into Baroque extravagance, typified by the sculpture of Gian Lorenzo Bernini. See Banta, "Raw, Ripe, Rot: Nineteenth-Century Pathologies of the American Aesthetic," *American Literary History* 17:4 (Winter 2005): 675. Within this rubric, moving from bottom to top, Cole's *Course of Empire* traced the threat posed upon the classical/pastoral/healthy repose by sublime/baroque/incendiary action.

architecture, presents a veritable orgy for the eyes, and suggests another sort of consummation—a sexual one. To consummate a marriage is to mark a boundary, to confirm a union in an act more binding than any spoken vow. Unhappy marriages that had yet to be consummated (such as the well-known example of John Ruskin and Effie Gray) could be annulled. Before the act of consummation, then, it was still possible to arrest the situation, to revert to a prior state of affairs and turn back. In this way, both *The Consummation of Empire* and “Step 5” in *the Drunkard’s Progress* provide proof of a permanent change of state. The empire and the drunkard are thus wed, respectively, to luxury and alcohol, till death do they part. The diagnoses offered by these two paintings recall the similar calculus that structures Charles Deas’s *Walking the Chalk*, with its emphasis on determining with as much precision as possible the point of no return.

The two scenes not only consummate two visibly manifest cases of “diseased excitability,” but also mark the moment where corporeal and political constitutions begin to break down. In these narratives, then, the blame for each catastrophe is placed firmly upon irrational and unproductive exuberance, unbalanced and unchecked. The considerable energy, excitement, and heat generated at the climax of each narrative are put to no good use outside of self-reflexive material and chemical hedonism. In both cases, a crest of frenzied emotion followed by collapse and languor suggests a sexual subtext, one of orgasm and post-coital exhaustion. In Kellogg’s version of *The Drunkard’s Progress*, the central reveler in the fifth stage of the narrative sits behind a round table held up by a single centered post. The vertical alignment of the post with the lone bottle that sits atop the table imparts a distinctly phallic appearance. In both *The Drunkard’s Progress* and *The Course of Empire*, the celebratory ejaculations are

premature—both the drunkard and the empire come too quickly. Neither of these two expenditures serves any healthy or fruitful purpose. In Cole's *Desolation*, we are presented with a final, cautionary tale, a parting shot that encapsulates the moral of the story. Here, a single, ruined column stands as a monument to failure—a spent phallus—disengaged from any useful function, and thrust into the air for no good reason. It references the extinction of time in the guise of an extinguished candle, much like the example illustrated in Francis Quarles's *Hieroglyphics of the Life of Man*; but unlike the example in Quarles, which burns all the way down to its base, this tall column, capped by an unlit wick-like tuft of vines, has burned itself out much too soon.¹¹⁸ The image calls to mind the dire warnings of an article published some six years earlier, that reminds its readers that:

Prometheus animated his statues of earth with heavenly fire, says fable. As long as this flame continues to burn, life is maintained, and with its extinction, it must cease. Now *pile on the fuel*—increase the flame, and the more rapidly this earthly substance must be wasted down to its primitive state.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ Jennifer Roberts has aligned the palpable timelessness in Cole's *Desolation* with John Lloyd Stephens's treatment of the historical fate of the civilizations of the Yucatan Peninsula of Mexico, where "...the Indians, their course of empire exhausted, their history, indeed, their very awareness of history, extinguished." Roberts, *Mirror-Travels: Robert Smithson and History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004): 94. Many period texts reference the ancient empires of Greece and Rome as spent organisms, and associate the ruins of past civilizations with a particular type of collapse brought about by the wasteful overextension of masculine energy. Edward Hitchcock, for example, employs the discourse of gender to couch history in the language of health. He writes that intemperance is "...undermining the physical and intellectual character of our country. As a general fact, the two stand or fall together: at least, we cannot expect that the intellect should long maintain itself erect, vigorous, and well proportioned when the body is half in ruins. The great minds of other days, whose names and works make the deepest impression on future times, were lodged in vigorous bodies; and if some of these have been found in periods of effeminacy, it shows only, that they withstood its deteriorating influence. Intellect is not necessarily cultivated and strong, where there is vigorous muscular strength; but where bodily debility and effeminacy pervade a nation, we never look for great intellectual achievements. Knowing what were the habits and physical energy of the ancient Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans, we are not disappointed to find the display of a correspondent mental power, such as their history exhibits. But modern Egypt and Italy are the last places to which we look for intellectual prowess. Poetry may, indeed, kindle up her fitful lamp at the funeral pile of the body; but it is not the poetry of Homer or of Milton." Edward Hitchcock, *An Essay on Temperance Addressed Particularly to Students and the Young Men of America* (Boston: J.S. & C. Adams, 1830): 28-29.

¹¹⁹ "Be Temperate," *Norwich Courier*, January 27, 1830, as in n. 1. The article concludes by asking: "Does not...the desolation of all nobler powers of the man, bespeak too plainly the curses of intoxication?"

The Course of Empire thus operates as a historical chronometer, charting the terminal acceleration and hyperbolic over-stimulation of a doomed civilization. It cannot be fully understood without reference to the potent somatic and physiological associations that operate alongside its historical and political narratives. That is to say, the series binds together history and physiology through a complex and textured engagement with vectors of temperature and time. I now turn to conclude this chapter by bringing temperature back into the equation, to demonstrate that Cole's series functioned as its own sort of moral and physical thermometer. In his landmark study of Cole's art, Ellwood Parry mentions in passing that Cole painted his *Consummation of Empire* "perhaps even with an awareness of the population theories of Thomas Robert Malthus."¹²⁰ I postulate that far from being beside the point, this picture, and the entire series, draws upon a Malthusian understanding of population growth. Malthus argued in his *Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798) that while food production grew at a relatively slow, linear, mathematical rate, population grew exponentially, and would soon outstrip the ability of agriculture to produce enough food.¹²¹ He argued that:

The power of population is so superior to the power of the earth to produce subsistence for man, that premature death must in some shape or other visit the human race. The vices of mankind are active and able ministers of depopulation. They are the precursors in the great army of destruction, and often finish the dreadful work themselves.¹²²

In *The Consummation of Empire*, Cole devotes an uncanny amount of attention to depicting a population that has grown innumerable large. Civilization has paved over

¹²⁰ Parry, *The Art of Thomas Cole*, 170.

¹²¹ Malthus did not account in his calculations for the power of technology and genetic hybridization to make up the difference.

¹²² Thomas Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, 1st ed. (1798), drawn from the e-text available at <http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext03/prppl10.txt> (last accessed on September 3, 2006).

nearly the entire landscape with marble, leaving no visible area set aside for agriculture. It would seem that Cole's empire initiates its own self-destruction through a devolutionary process of uncontrollable reproductive expansion.

As cultural historian Pat Malooney has recently demonstrated, a number of Scottish Enlightenment philosophers considered Malthus's *Essay* in thermometric terms, where:

Savages—sects of hunters and fishers—are of great use to political economists, as well as to political philosophers, their condition serves as a sort of zero in the thermometer of civilization,—the point from which there is a gradual rise toward perfection. They are thus very valuable in hypothetical reasoning.¹²³

William Godwin likewise noted that man in his savage state existed in “original lethargy,” which eventually led to an awakening of the “appetite of the mind...perpetually craving after new intellectual food.”¹²⁴ The ignition of the passions, a set of carnal desires thought to be lacking in native peoples, brought about the beginning of civilization, which in turn registered an increase in temperature, one that, like Malthus's uncontrollable population, rose exponentially. That is to say, Cole's civilization not only lives too fast, but runs at too high a temperature, and as a consequence, prematurely expends its vital energy. Malooney's own description of the ways in which the Scottish Enlightenment theorized the passions could just as easily—and indeed does, almost uncannily—describe Cole's *Course of Empire*:

If desire hovered around degree zero in the savage state and rose to a comfortable temperature in European societies in the early stages of the age of commerce, it reached dangerous heights in opulent societies. With the fate of Rome ever-

¹²³ Herman Merivale, “Senior on Political Economy,” *Edinburgh Review* 66 (October, 1837): 87; quoted in Pat Malooney, “Savages in the Scottish Enlightenment's History of Desire,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 14:3 (2005): 246. Malooney's captivating arguments inspire my current strain of thinking in respect to *The Course of Empire*'s own thermometric qualities.

¹²⁴ William Godwin, *Thoughts on Man* (n.p.); quoted in *ibid.*, 247. My wording here paraphrases Malooney.

present in their minds, Millar, Kames, and others sought to alert their contemporaries to the decline into luxury and moral decay to which wealthy societies were prone. Their histories of manners traced the mechanisms whereby a controlled, moderate, and socially beneficial desire had been produced ‘in a state of society equally removed from the extremes of barbarism and of luxury.’ There two opposing appetitive poles—rude versus decadent, natural versus unnatural, weak versus strong, unawakened versus unquenchable—were mirror images of each other. The ideal point of refined passion was defined between and by these two alternatives.¹²⁵

This passage calls to mind the extremes of “Ungovernable” and “Quite...Stupid” that bounded the moral thermometer printed in the September, 1832 issue of the *Journal of Health*¹²⁶, and also bears a striking resemblance to Orson Fowler’s characterization of alcohol’s propensity to cause “the energies of the system, including the health, spirits, &c., [to] sink as far *below* zero as ardent spirit raises them above.”¹²⁷ To these structuring polarities of hot and cold, and slow and fast, I add one more pair: raw and cooked. As it happens, Cole comments in a letter to Luman Reed that he intended his *Consummation* to show an image of New York, “*a la mode*.”¹²⁸ Here, his culinary language echoed that of Henry David Thoreau, who likewise suggested in *Walden* that: “The luxuriously rich are not simply kept comfortably warm, but unnaturally hot; as I implied before, they are cooked, of course *a la mode*.”¹²⁹

Narrative structures like those made visible in *The Course of Empire* and *The Drunkard’s Progress* were deeply embedded in nineteenth-century American culture where economic booms swelled, crested, and then broke or burst into destructive panics with alarming frequency. In the volatile market economy of the 1830s and 1840s,

¹²⁵ Malooney, 257.

¹²⁶ See n. 8, above.

¹²⁷ Fowler, *Temperance*, 25.

¹²⁸ Cole to Luman Reed, September 7, 1835, Archives of American Art. Italics original.

¹²⁹ Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*, e-text available at Project Gutenberg, <http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext95/waldn10.txt> (last accessed on September 5, 2006). The intended installation of Cole’s series over a fireplace, a site of the constant ignition, growth, decay, and extinguishment of fires, must have reinforced the narrative points that I trace here.

consumption, while dangerous, was also necessary and productive. Ideals of moderation, self-possession and self-control came to dominate advice books on finance, fashion, etiquette, diet, and drink. Americans were thus charged to strike a balance between expansion and cohesion, to somehow simultaneously stimulate and curb their enthusiasm. As noted by Elizabeth Peabody in 1849, the ability of public to properly administer their viewing habits was incumbent upon the disambiguation of aesthetics from appetite. This process, a necessary pre-requisite to the removal of high art in America into its own separate (and feminine) sphere, depended upon the ability to look without recourse to touching or tasting. A key event in this history, one that trained Americans to do just that, was Hiram Powers's *Greek Slave*, a subject to which we now turn our attention.¹³⁰

¹³⁰ Peabody, *Aesthetic Papers* (1849; rep. Gainesville, Fla: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints: 1957): 1; quoted in Gilmore, 468, as in n. 81, above.

Chapter 3:

Hiram Powers and the Perils of Unmediated Vision

Hence, sentimentalism, strictly, is as selfish as the love of ice-cream, or the love of oysters, or the appetite for brandy. It rests and riots in the luxury of its own feelings. It seeks their gratification as selfishly, as intensely, as ever the epicure longs for his luscious dish, or the still lower sensualist for the grossest animal pleasures.¹

Perhaps no other statue in the history of American art aroused as much controversy as Hiram Powers's *The Greek Slave* (1843) (Fig. 54). Many who saw it—and many who did not—warned that the sculpture degraded public virtue. Others held that it did just the opposite, and argued that *The Greek Slave* had a salutary effect on the moral and spiritual health of its visitors. Either way, *The Greek Slave* was powerful medicine; but like any drug, one best used as directed. Side effects of looking at *The Greek Slave*, if we take seriously the testimony found in dozens of published accounts, include headaches, dizziness, anxiety, euphoria, and in rare cases, memory loss. While some community leaders recommended *The Greek Slave* to their constituents, others feared the statue to be habit forming. Indeed, in a way uncannily resonant with our twenty-first-century culture of fashion-plate pharmaceuticals and beneficial—but addictive—prescription drugs, antebellum Americans flocked to their ministers, doctors, friends, and neighbors to ask if *The Greek Slave* was right for *them*.

¹ T.[aylor] L.[ewis], "The Anatomy of Sentimentalism," *The Mercersburg Review* (January 1857): 30.

The statue's narrative told the story of Christian faith in the face of torment, as a young woman stands on the auction block to be sold to the highest bidding Turk into what will be, presumably, sexual slavery. The soft, burnished, wax-like surface of the marble reflected the crimson drapery that surrounded the podium, imparting a trompe l'oeil "blush" upon *The Greek Slave*'s "skin."² The statue's palpable verisimilitude worked in tandem with its subject's tragic, heart-wrenching story to resist disinterested aesthetic contemplation. *The Greek Slave* demanded to be *felt*, not read, to be *experienced* rather than studied. Indeed, it seemed that to get all *The Greek Slave* had to offer required viewers to go all in, to lay down their free-will at the very base of the pedestal, and allow the statue to take control. This transfer of agency reversed the hierarchy of subject and object, leaving audiences under the dominion of their unregulated impulses, imaginations, and appetites. Like a puff of opium or a warm cup of spiced rum ingested through the eyes, *The Greek Slave* intoxicated its audience. Many spoke of being "spell-bound," within *The Greek Slave*'s "magic circle," or of being enveloped in the statue's humid, rose-colored "atmosphere."³ The sculpture generated

² In August of 1847, during *The Greek Slave*'s inaugural tour of the United States, Miner Kellogg, who managed the exhibition while Powers remained in Florence, wrote to the sculptor describing the elaborate *mise-en-scène* of the statue, which included "A single burner of 2 feet long with 50 punctures which sheds a powerful & concentrated light just where I need it, and the statue has a marvelous effect against the deep crimson background which is 21 feet high." Miner Kellogg to Hiram Powers, Boston, August 13, 1847, Cincinnati Historical Society; reprinted in Richard Wunder, *Hiram Powers: Vermont Sculptor, 1805-1873*, vol. I, (Newark, Del.: University of Delaware Press, 1991): 219. In Cincinnati, a critic noted that "The Hall is admirably adapted to the exhibition, and the experience of her masters enables them to arrange to drapery for reflection, to give the pure white a delicate, warm, living color, which adds much to the effect. The statue stands upon a pedestal with a revolving top-plate, placed upon a slightly elevated platform, and is almost entirely enveloped with crimson hangings at a proper distance." "Powers's *Greek Slave*," *Cincinnati Daily Chronicle* (October 26, 1848).

³ One passage from a period review that incorporates all of these oft-repeated sentiments reads: "It is extremely interesting to watch the effect which the slave has upon all who come before it. Its presence is a magic circle within whose precincts all are held spell-bound and almost speechless. The gray-headed man, the youth, the matron and the maid, alike yield themselves to the magic of its power, and for many minutes gaze upon it in silent and reverential admiration, and so pure an atmosphere breathes round it that the eye of man beams only with reverent delight and the cheek of woman glows but with the fullness of emotion."

within the bosoms of its visitors a warm, moist micro-climate of sentimentality, from which lengthy encomiums in prose and verse seemed to germinate and sprout like tropical plants and spread uncontrollably through the popular press. Anna Lewis, who visited the statue in 1855, wrote of how she and her companions gazed upon the work until “voices from a group near roused us from our stupor, when we found we *had been in this spell for five hours.*”⁴ After viewing *The Greek Slave* in 1847, the author Clara Cushman related that:

There was a rose tinge flushing the pure marble, the reflection of the crimson drapery around—the sorrowful gaze of the downcast eyes, the grace of the assumed position, affected me most singularly. I could have wept with a perfect agony of tears. Enthusiasm with me always ends in a merry laugh or bitter weeping. The scene around was unheeded, the calm majesty of that perfect loveliness had brought a train of delicious reverie, in which hours might have passed unnoticed.⁵

Indeed, the most consistent theme in the voluminous accounts published in newspapers about *The Greek Slave* is the statue’s remarkable ability to dominate its audience—male and female alike—and render them subject to her mysterious, disarming, and invasive power. This role reversal amounted to an inversion of the master/slave relationship that informed the work’s narrative, one not lost on its viewers. W.H. Coyle, in a long and effusive poem, noted that, “Amid a wandering group of worshippers, in mute idolatry,

“The Greek Slave,” *The Courier and Enquirer (New York)* (August 31, 1847); available online at <http://www.iath.virginia.edu/utc/sentimnt/snar52at.html>; last accessed by the author on October 27, 2006.

⁴ Anna G. Lewis, “Art and Artists of America: Hiram Powers,” *Graham’s Magazine* 10:8 (November 1855); quoted in Linda Hyman, “The Greek Slave by Hiram Powers: High Art as Popular Culture,” *Art Journal* 35 (Spring 1976), 221. Hyman argues that the trance-like state in which many women found themselves before *The Greek Slave* is related to narcissism that Freud claimed manifested itself in post-pubescent girls. This explanation, however, does not take into account the similar patterns of reception reported by men who viewed the statue. Of the spell-binding power of the statue, one newspaper related that the exhibition cast “...a HUSH on the most tumultuous spirits—the spell of genius is upon them, and they are constrained to sympathize in the majestic sorrow that almost speaks from the marble. It is a triumph of art thus to subjugate even the thoughtless, and hold them spellbound. It is a triumph which pre-eminently belongs to the work.” “The Greek Slave,” *Cincinnati Daily Enquirer* (November 22, 1848).

⁵ Clara Cushman, “First Impressions of Powers’ Greek Slave,” Written for Neal’s Saturday Gazette, and reprinted in an undated article found in the Powers Scrapbook, Archives of American Art, reel 1135:60. [All further quotations from this resource are referred to as “Powers Scrapbook.”]

spell-bound I stood—MYSELF THE SLAVE,” while the author of a review in the *New York Courier and Enquirer* began his account by marveling at how the statue takes “a clinging hold upon the heart, and subdues the whole man.”⁶ “The eye,” the *New York Commercial Advertiser* wrote of the *Greek Slave*, “is enamored of it, and you spend hours gazing upon it, spell-bound by its enchanting witchery.”⁷

In this chapter, I take as my point of departure the work of historians Linda Hyman and Joy Kasson, who have both interrogated the permeability of *The Greek Slave*’s veneer-like narrative, one that frequently evaporated under the spectacular intensity of the statue’s appearance.⁸ This narrative, communicated to the public through exhibition pamphlets and local newspapers, operated as a metaphorical framing device, keeping the statue safely contained within a moralizing tale of faith and courage. As Joy Kasson writes, such pamphlets “served both as art criticism and as instruction in the process of spectatorship in the fine arts. In this sense they may be considered part of the prescriptive literature of the nineteenth century, like etiquette books, sex manuals, and health guides.”⁹ Crucial to the literature of moral reform, however, was the maintenance of temperate self-possession as a guard against the loss of self-agency—be it to alcohol, food, narcotics, gambling, or even sentimental novel-reading. There exists, in other words, a remarkable discrepancy between the calm, cool, self-possessed demeanor of *The*

⁶ W.H. Coyle, “Powers’ Greek Slave,” October 28, 1850, Powers Scrapbook, Archives of American Art; and “The Greek Slave,” *Courier and Enquirer*, as in n. 1, above. For many, *The Greek Slave* indeed inverted the master/slave relationship implied in the narrative, rendering its spectators helpless to resist its powerful effects. For a study of the statue as a work of art that engages the issue of abolition, see Vivien M. Green, “Hiram Powers’s *Greek Slave*: Emblem of Freedom,” *The American Art Journal* 14 (autumn 1982): 31-39.

⁷ *New York Commercial Advertiser* (September 2, 1847), Powers Scrapbook, Archives of American Art.

⁸ See Hyman, “The Greek Slave by Hiram Powers: High Art as Popular Culture,” 216-223; Joy S. Kasson, *Marble Queens and Captives: Women in Nineteenth-Century American Sculpture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), especially 1-72; and, more recently, Joy S. Kasson, “Mind in Matter in History: Viewing The Greek Slave” *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 11:1 (Spring 1998): 79-83.

⁹ Joy S. Kasson, *Marble Queens*, 31.

Greek Slave, and the wild, enthusiastic, and sometimes irrationally ecstatic reactions that the statue produced in her audience. The noble intentions of Powers's work was both aided and hindered by its potent mimetic qualities, as the project sought to unify dispassionate and immersive modes of reception into a single, consummate aesthetic experience; but no analogously unified visual strategy was available to its audience, whose apprehension remained bifurcated, oscillating between embodied rational analysis and disembodied emotional absorption. By appealing to the visceral as well as the visual, the heart as well as the mind, *The Greek Slave* demanded a degree of indulgence from its audience that many found too risky to recommend—no matter how beneficial the outcome *might* be.

The Apple and the Awful Pause: Powers's *Eve Tempted*

Many of the formal and thematic concerns that animated the controversy over *The Greek Slave* were first made manifest in Hiram Powers's initial foray into the genre of full-length, ideal sculpture: *Eve Tempted* (1839-42) (Fig. 55).¹⁰ Powers's earliest conception of the statue was inspired by the *Idyllen*, a cycle of poems written by the Swiss author and painter Solomon Gessner; but the sculptor dramatically altered his plans after an early description was leaked to a Cincinnati newspaper.¹¹ It is unclear why the publication of his ideas—excepting the possible professional embarrassment of having

¹⁰ My ensuing summary of the history of the production of the two versions of the statue is indebted to Richard Wunder, *Hiram Powers*, vol. I, 181-193. See also April Kingsley, "Hiram Powers' *Paradise Lost*," in *Hiram Powers' Paradise Lost*, ex. cat., (Yonkers, N.Y.: The Hudson River Museum of Westchester, 1985).

¹¹ Wunder, *Hiram Powers*, vol. II, 184. No material evidence of this aborted version survives, but modeling did not progress beyond a small bozetto, subsequently destroyed by the artist. In my ensuing text and notes, versions one (*Eve Tempted I*) and two (*Eve Tempted II*) refer to the two full-length versions brought to completion by the sculptor. When I do not use a roman numerical designation, I refer to general themes shared by both versions.

the early stages of his work exposed to public scrutiny—caused him to radically alter his conception. The original title, *Eve Reflecting on Death*, referenced Powers’s intention to illustrate a particular scene in Gessner’s work where Eve, soon after eating the forbidden fruit, beholds the body of a dead dove, and thus comes to realize her own mortality.¹² By 1840, Powers had called his new composition by a variety of titles: *The Temptation of Eve*, *Eve Before the Fall*, and most often, *Eve Tempted*.¹³ The first version of the statue was exhibited in Powers’s studio as a finished life-size clay model in 1840, and the next year in a pointed plaster version that remained in Florence for the rest of the sculptor’s life.¹⁴ Shortly after the Powers’s death in 1873, a marble version based on this plaster was carved by Powers’s studio assistants. Because the right hand of *Eve Tempted (I)* is extended away from the body, Powers’s feared that a full-sized marble version of the statue would be subject to damage during transport. To reduce this risk, he executed a second plaster version sometime between 1842 and 1845 that brought the arm (holding an apple) into contact with the right breast, a change that provided extra support, and made the statue more resistant to breakage during shipping (Fig. 56). A marble version of *Eve Tempted (II)* was carved in 1848-49, and subsequently sold by its first owner, John Preston of Charleston, South Carolina, to A.T. Stewart’s Department Store in 1861. In 1897, the statue was bought by James Fish for his Hoffman House restaurant, where it

¹² Ibid. 182. See also Charles Thomas Walters, *Hiram Powers and William Rimmer: A Study in the Concept of Expression* (New York: Garland Press, 1977): 71-74. Walters claims that Powers drew part of this narrative from a section of Gessner’s *Idyllen* entitled “The Dead Abel,” where the death of the first animal portends the death of the first human being. It is tempting to speculate whether this popular work may have also influenced Thomas Cole’s painting *The Dead Abel* (1831-32), which was, like Powers’s *Eve*, executed in Florence. Perhaps Gessner’s parallel careers as a painter and a poet had something to do with his influence on Powers, and also, perhaps, on Cole. I have discovered at least one English edition of Gessner’s work published in America to which Cole may have had access: an 1802 edition printed by William Duane of Philadelphia. There were also a number of editions published in England that may have made their way to the United States.

¹³ Ibid. 183.

¹⁴ Kingsley, 15; Richard P. Wunder, *Hiram Powers: Vermont Sculptor, 1805-1873*, vol. II, (Newark, Del.: University of Delaware Press, 1991): 139-144.

remained until sold to an unrecorded buyer in 1904. Its current whereabouts are unknown.¹⁵

Eve Tempted established the themes that would come to dominate Powers's future work.¹⁶ The subject is depicted at the critical moment when she contemplates a decision that will either grant her eternal life, or ensure her doom.¹⁷ This test hinges on a question of consumption—whether or not to eat the apple. Eve's gustatory dilemma produced a symmetrical conundrum for her viewers, who likewise had to decide whether to adhere to noble intentions, or give in to base desires, all the while knowing full well that if they chose the latter, they could undetectably indulge themselves in the privacy of their own imaginations. Living in a time fraught on so many levels—social, political, and economic—with tensions between ambition and restraint, desire and forbearance, and expansion and cohesion, the viewers of *Eve Tempted* were challenged to rectify the noble ideality and fleshy voluptuousness held in delicate equipoise in Powers's composition. Donald Reynolds has persuasively demonstrated that this fusion of material and spiritual elements Powers's sculptures was one the artist's key objectives.¹⁸ Reynolds writes that:

In his ideal statues, then, Powers fused [Emmanuel] Swedenborg's notion of the "material covering" and the "spiritual body" with his own, probably imperfect, understanding of those terms, and his erotic conception of the earthly body

¹⁵ Wunder, *Ibid.*, 142-43; For an insightful revelation of the competing cultures of visual consumption at Hoffman House, see David Scobey, "Nymphs and Satyrs: Sex and the Bourgeois Public Sphere in Victorian New York," *Winterthur Portfolio* 37:1 (spring 2002): 43-64. While Scobey does not mention *Eve Tempted (II)* in his discussion of the Hoffman House collection, he does employ *The Greek Slave*, a version of which was exhibited at A. T. Stewart's Department Store, as a foil in his analysis of the reception of William Bouguereau's painting *Nymphs and Satyr*. Both the plaster and marble versions of *Eve Tempted (I)* are in the collection of the Smithsonian American Art Museum.

¹⁶ The key work of scholarship on the social and cultural context of *Eve Tempted* remains Joy Kasson, *Marble Queens*, esp. 166-202. Kasson explores the pointed liminality of Eve in American culture, and traces Eve's art historical pedigree as a figure who is both tempted and temptress. See also Judith Freyer, *The Faces of Eve: Women in the Nineteenth-Century American Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976) for an investigation of similar themes in literature.

¹⁷ My reading here follows that of Joy Kasson, *Marble Queens*, 173-176.

¹⁸ Donald Martin Reynolds, *Hiram Powers and His Ideal Sculpture*, passim; and Reynolds, "The Unveiled Soul: Hiram Powers's Embodiment of the Ideal," *The Art Bulletin* 59 (September, 1977): 394-414.

(Swedenborg's "material covering") in a unique combination of the erotic and the spiritual, the real and the ideal, which he called the "unveiled soul."¹⁹

That the erotic and spiritual dimensions of *Eve* held together so well is a testament to the sculptor's unique vision; but the powerfully alluring amalgam of sensuality and spirituality in *Eve Tempted* and subsequent statues by Powers was dissociated under the gaze of many who were ill-equipped to comprehend, or worse yet, chose to ignore this spiritual program. Eve's dilemma was by and large a visual one, as a bite from the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil would grant her the ability to know and *see* everything. It would free her from the naïve innocence of the straight and narrow path that she had until that moment tenuously followed. A bite, for better, and of course, for worse, would open her eyes.²⁰

For the statue's audience, the wrong choice might initiate a tragic pathology that ran its course according to its own logic, an express train to destruction like that depicted in the *Black Valley Railroad*.²¹ Viewing *Eve Tempted* called the dark side of Archibald Alison's theory of associations into play.²² The series of autonomous associations in the mind that sprang from the contemplation of objects and images could lead one to depravity as well as beauty. The determination of which one of these courses is initiated—moral pathway or immoral pathology—is bound up in the act of looking. It is the result of a calculus that takes into consideration both the viewing subject—his or her

¹⁹ Donald S. Reynolds, "The Unveiled Soul," 401-402.

²⁰ For a recent survey of the ramifications of unbounded knowledge in western culture, see Roger Shattuck, *Forbidden Knowledge: A Landmark Exploration of the Dark Side of Human Ingenuity Imagination* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996).

²¹ See my earlier discussion of this print in Chapter 2.

²² Archibald Alison, *Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste* (Edinburgh: Bell and Bradfute, 1790), especially 1-67. Although Alison held that beauty was inherent in objects themselves, the aesthetic process he outlines posited that viewers perceive objects only as a means to approach the understanding of what were, for the author, essentially nominal, Platonic ideals. Because this process takes place in the mind's eye, it relegates the role of objects in the construction of meaning to that of catalysts that initiate pre-conditioned responses in the imagination.

state of mind, education, experience, religious proclivities, and so forth—and the exigencies—material, compositional, narrative, and otherwise—of the object to be viewed. The results, in other words, were unpredictable, and potentially uncontrollable. *Eve Tempted* presented its American audience with a subject that dealt explicitly with the problematic relationship between vision and desire. This audience was steeped in a culture where virtue and vice were highly polarized categories, and was singularly unprepared for a statue whose meaning turned upon a fulcrum of pointed ambiguity.²³ That is to say, antebellum audiences were used to clearly delineated “paths” to good and evil, and saw Powers’s *Eve Tempted*—formally and thematically—as a crossroads where they were, like Eve, required to make critical choice that had the power to both enlighten and debase.

During the antebellum period, a severe disambiguation of virtue and vice informed the collective horizon of associations available to Powers’s audience, and thus precluded many viewers from rectifying the erotic with the spiritual, the real with the ideal, the ample display of flesh with the pure, sacrosanct marble. Education in the United States during this time had come under the influence of a revival of the ideas of seventeenth-century Huguenot philosopher Petrus Ramus.²⁴ Ramus advocated a method of teaching derived from his neo-Manichaeic assumptions about dualism that juxtaposed things, ideas, and concepts with their opposites. This method allowed students to discern truth and falsehood in relief from one another, and call to mind Thomas Cole’s frequent

²³ Joy Kasson notes the erotic charge of the temptation in John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, writing that “As Raphael had warned, the Fall plunged Adam and Eve into the turbulent world of the passions, ‘both in subjection now / To sensual Appetite.’” Kasson, *Marble Queens*, 173.

²⁴ My knowledge of Ramus and his profound, but largely unrecognized influence on American thought is indebted to Laurel Warren Trufant, “Metaphors in the Construction of Theory : Ramus, Pierce, and the American Mind,” Ph.D. diss., University of New Hampshire, 1990.

use of paired paintings that operate according the same logic, as well as a large number of moralizing prints that depict divergent paths to virtue and vice. One such print, *The Way of Good and Evil* (1862) (Fig. 57) drawn and published by John Hailer, traces the lives of its subjects from childhood to old age.²⁵ In the lower left foreground, children emerge from a schoolhouse and walk along a path that almost immediately splits into a left and right forks. Some choose to walk to the right, and pass over a heading that reads “Obedience to Parents and Teachers: Truth, Wisdom,” while others turn to the left, and progress over another heading that denotes “Disobedience to Parents and Teachers” (Fig. 58). Those on the “right” path proceed past a church, “The House of God,” a college, and a third building identified only as the “The House of Peace,” as they work their way past a list of virtues—“industry,” “health,” “righteousness,” “humility,” etc.—until they arrive at old age, where they are met by a trio of angels that escort them into “Eternal Life.” On the left, the disobedient children quickly file into a brothel and a tavern, and contend along the way with a host of dire moral and physical afflictions such as “shame,” “disease,” and “intemperance,” until they arrive at the gallows where they are cast into the flames of “Everlasting Punishment.” In Hailer’s composition, these two paths never meet—the fate of every individual is determined by a decision made early in youth to obey or disobey their parents. This unforgiving situation recalls both Jared Bell Waterbury’s comment that for many on the road to ruin, “some defect, far back in their education, has occurred. Something went wrong at the beginning of the voyage, and has gone wrong ever since,” and the similarly divergent composition in the “Two Paths of

²⁵ *The Way of Good and Evil* is illustrated, but not analyzed or interpreted, in Janet A. Flint, *The Way of Good and Evil: Popular Religious Lithographs of Nineteenth century America*, ex. cat. (Washington: National Collection of Fine Arts, 1972): n.p.

Life” illustrated in the November 1854 issue of *Harper’s Weekly* that juxtaposes “moderate” and “fast” living.²⁶

As we have seen in our analysis of Thomas Cole’s aesthetic thought in the previous chapter, few were able to separate observation from acquisitiveness, to isolate optic from haptic practices. Both *Eve* and her audience likewise stood on the threshold between indulgence and restraint, challenged to isolate vision within a safe aesthetic realm of pure opticality, free from the attendant senses of taste and touch. Viewers of Powers’s statue were held in precarious suspension between the ideality of the sculpture’s media and the carnal materiality of its subject. Another work that treats a similar dilemma is Francis William Edmonds’s *Facing the Enemy* (1845) (Fig. 59).²⁷ This small painting depicts an old carpenter who sits in his shop sizing up an elegantly tapered decanter of rum perched on the windowsill.²⁸ The bottle is positioned alongside an advertisement for a temperance meeting tacked on an adjacent wall. The picture’s narrative seems obvious enough: the carpenter must choose between the bottle and the meeting, as he stares warily at the red liquid, “facing the enemy” as the title indicates. Edmonds skillfully freezes the position of the man as he leans back in his chair and balances the weight of his body on its two rear legs. His weight, like his fate, is precariously balanced between the bottle of alcohol, and the inside of his shop, a room

²⁶ Jared Bell Waterbury, *The Voyage of Life : Suggested by Cole's Celebrated Allegorical Paintings* (Boston: Massachusetts Sabbath School Society, 1852): 52, as in Chapter 2, n. 94; and “Two Paths of Life,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* 9:54 (November 1854):862, as in Chapter 2, n. 22.

²⁷ On Edmonds’s picture, see Maybelle Mann, *Francis W. Edmonds: Mammon and Art* (New York: Garland, 1977); and more recently, H. Nichols B. Clark, *Francis W. Edmonds: American Master in the Dutch Tradition* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1988): esp. 80-84. Edmonds was a lifelong supporter of temperance causes, and he had *Facing the Enemy* engraved by T. Doney, and published by R.F. Frazer of the American Art Union as the recto side of a flyer that promoted the Washingtonians. The print initially sold for three dollars, but was soon listed in an 1849 advertisement for a cost of only one dollar by John P. Ridner. See *The Literary World* 1:1 (February 6, 1847): 15; and *idem.* (June 23, 1849): 543.

²⁸ Published accounts differ as to whether the decanter holds rum or brandy.

filled with tools—a straightedge, and a wood plane—that function to ensure that he imparts a level surface to his products.²⁹ In a published description of the picture, a critic for the *Broadway Journal* notes how the bottle of alcohol is “rendered doubly tempting by being placed on the sill of an open window, the light falling through it and rendering it very brilliant and cheerful.”³⁰ Another writer also mentions that the bottle is placed “on the sill of an open window, where the brilliant light can illuminate the Godly liquor.”³¹ The rich, velvet-colored liquid is therefore not merely an object, but a medium, with “light falling through it.” It appears, in fact, that the gaze of the carpenter does not fall upon the bottle at all, but passes directly through it. As he wrestles with his decision to imbibe or forswear the rum, he also toggles between antithetical conceptions of the rum as an object and a medium.³² The rum is both something to look *at* and something to look *through*; and hopefully for Edmonds’s subject, something to look past.

While the fate of the carpenter in *Facing the Enemy* is left unresolved, the prospects for the old toper in William Sidney Mount’s *Loss and Gain* (1847) (Fig. 60)

²⁹ Nicholas Clark notes the significance of the chair, and how the subject’s “decision literally and figuratively hangs in the balance.” Clark, 82.

³⁰ “No. 114—Facing the Enemy,” *The Broadway Journal* (May 10, 1845): 306; quoted in Clark, 80.

³¹ “No. 114—Francis W. Edmonds,” *The Spirit of the Times* (May 17, 1845): 140

³² In Nathaniel Hawthorne’s novel *The Blithedale Romance*, Miles Coverdale muses upon the shortcomings of temperance reform. “The temperance-men,” he exclaims, “may preach till doom’s day; and still this cold and barren world will look warmer, kinder, mellow, through the medium of the toper’s glass; nor can they, with all their efforts, really spill his draught upon the floor, until some hitherto unthought-of discovery shall supply him with a truer element of joy. The general atmosphere of life must first be rendered so inspiring that he will not need his delirious solace.” Hawthorne, *The Blithedale Romance*, William E. Cain, ed. (1852; Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 1996): 165. In her analysis of this passage, Gale Temple remarks that “Drink remystifies everyday life, permitting men and women to conceive of their present existences, and more importantly their future prospects, as (at least temporarily) revitalized...Neither alcohol nor communal reform are solutions; they merely throw a misty veil over life that must be continually renewed to be effective.” Gale Temple, “‘His Delirious Solace’: Consumption, Consumption, and Reform in Hawthorne’s *Blithedale Romance*,” *ESQ: Journal of the American Renaissance* 49:4 (2003): 309. With respect to *Facing the Enemy*, Temple’s reading of Hawthorne suggests the possibility that the cold, hard-edged world of the workplace pales in comparison to the view out the window through the rose-colored lens of the rum bottle.

appear more reassuring.³³ The subject of the picture has dropped his jug of spirits while attempting to climb a fence; but in so losing his drink, he has gained a measure of freedom, a chance to reflect upon its unyielding control over his impulses as he futilely reaches for the container to save its precious contents. The look on the man's face suggests that he is on the verge of entering upon a new understanding of his irrational attachment to alcohol. This revelatory and potentially transformative moment is made possible by the intervention of the fence that effectively separates the drunkard from the object of his affection. That is to say, the fence operates here as a medium, a boundary that reinstates a proper set subject-object positions between the man and the jug. Only when entangled in a medium that disconnects him from his liquor is the subject of Mount's picture able to operate independently of his object. Healthy viewing practices, *Loss and Gain* seems to suggest, depend upon the isolation of the body from the object to be seen, and the concomitant vigilant separation of visual and visceral domains.

The drama that inflected the reception of *Eve Tempted*, like that which informed Edmonds's *Facing the Enemy* and Mount's *Loss and Gain*, did not go unnoticed by its audience. The art critic George Calvert, who viewed the plaster for *Eve Tempted (II)* in Powers's Florence studio, noted that:

³³ For the most recent and comprehensive account of Mount's life and art, see Johnson, *William Sidney Mount*. For an interpretation of *Loss and Gain* within the context of Phrenological publications, see Charles Colbert, *A Measure of Perfection: Phrenology and the Fine Arts in America* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1997): 34-37. Colbert notes that Mount was mindful of the temperance discourse that pervaded American society at the time, and owned a copy of T.S. Mackintosh's *The Electrical Theory of the Universe*. In this volume, Mackintosh, according to Colbert, "seeks to devise a system of morality from natural laws. He takes as his paradigm the precept that every action has an equal and opposite reaction. Extreme positions in politics are bound to invite equally harsh countermeasures; hence Mackintosh proposes the best recourse is to press forward, avoiding violent action, so that the violent reaction that might otherwise follow can be circumvented. No doubt Mount wanted to press forward as well, but not at the pace demanded by radical Jacksonians or Republicans. The world depicted in his paintings is also one of moderation, and there the individual may pursue his own perfection unimpeded by outside forces" (35). See also Sarah Burns, *Painting the Dark Side*, 52.

Both for moral and physical effect, the best moment is chosen, the awful pause between obedience and disobedience. Her fresh feet pressing the flowers of Eden, Eve, still in her innocent nakedness, is fascinated against her purer will—the mother and type of mankind, within whose bosome (*sic*) is ever waging the conflict between good and evil.³⁴

Calvert's interpretation locates the cause of Eve's downfall within the visual trope of fascination.³⁵ Like many who viewed Powers's statues, Eve was unable to look without touching. To more fully explore the ramifications of viewing *Eve Tempted*, we now turn to triangulate the interconnectedness of the three principal players in Powers's composition—the woman, the apple, and the snake.

Ripeness

Bayard Taylor, in *Views A-Foot*, writes of encountering *Eve Tempted* while visiting Powers's studio in Florence:

You would like to hear of his statue of Eve, which men of taste pronounce one of the finest works of modern times. A more perfect figure never filled my eye. I have seen the masterpieces of Thorwaldsen, Dannecker, and Canova, and the Venus de Medici, but I have seen nothing yet that can exceed the beauty of this glorious statue. So completely did the first view excite my surprise and delight, and thrill every feeling that awakes at the sight of the Beautiful, that my mind dwelt on it for days afterwards. This is the Eve of Scripture—the Eve of Milton—mother of mankind and fairest of all her race. With the full and majestic beauty of ripened womanhood, she wears the purity of a world as yet unknown to sin.³⁶

Bayard Taylor's assessment of *Eve Tempted* sublimates the erotic charge of the statue into the subject's metaphorical setting, the innocent state of "a world as yet unknown to

³⁴ George Calvert, quoted in *The New York Evening Post* (August 31, 1847).

³⁵ Joy Kasson writes that "Far from a woman of power or passion, *Eve Tempted* was a figure similar to *The Greek Slave*, embodying ideal womanhood as his generation understood it: pure, passionless, melancholy, endangered. Yet the sculpture acquired its interest, and the tension which infused the narrative with which it was surrounded, from its viewers' perception that this fair lady was trembling on the verge of a tremendous and irreversible transformation and, like *The Greek Slave*, a fall into carnality." Kasson, *Marble Queens*, 178.

³⁶ Bayard Taylor, *Views A-Foot* (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1846): 296.

sin.” That “she wears...purity” is for Taylor a mere afterthought. It occurs to him only after the figure of Eve “fills his eye,” and excites his system, “thrill[ing] every feeling” so much that his “mind dwelt on it for days afterwards.” Eve’s predicament, finding her in the full ripeness of womanhood, is analogous to that of the forbidden fruit. Both have reached their prime, ideal states, and stand ready to be plucked, to be savored by the eye, the taste buds, and (for Eve) the erotic caress.

Powers’s sensual intertwining of vision, taste, and touch was also abundantly present in what would turn out to be, by far, his most financially lucrative commission.³⁷

Powers’s *Proserpine* (1843) (Fig. 61) is a bust-length depiction of a woman from Greek mythology who, like Eve, made a tragic decision to eat a piece of fruit. Powers described his subject as follows:

She was the daughter of Jupiter and Ceres and gathering flowers when exceedingly young and beautiful, was discovered by Pluto who seized her in his arms and bore her down through a neighboring lake to his own infernal dominions. Her mother sought her a long time in vain, but at last found out her fate and besought Jupiter to release her, which request was granted on condition that ‘Proserpine’ had eaten nothing while with Pluto. But unhappily she had eaten a pomegranate in his garden and so a compromise was made, viz., she should come back to earth half the year and remain with her husband the second half. And so she appears in the bust with a wreath in bloom on her head and rising out of an acanthus (emblem of immortality) around her waist.³⁸

The eating of the pomegranate is a metaphor for Proserpine’s lost virginity through her sexual union with Pluto, even though he is referred to as Proserpine’s “husband” near the end of Powers’s narrative. Like Eve’s seduction, Proserpine’s abduction causes her personality to be rent asunder into two distinct natures—one that symbolizes purity,

³⁷ Richard Wunder has accounted for some **156** marble versions of *Proserpine* produced for sale by Powers and his workshop. See Wunder, *Hiram Powers*, vol II., 187-202. For an assessment of tactile qualities of Powers’s sculpture, see Donald Martin Reynolds, *Hiram Powers and his Ideal Sculpture* (New York: Garland Press, 1977): 304-305.

³⁸ Powers (source not given), cited in Wunder, *Hiram Powers*, vol II., 189.

while the other lay mired in a charged, eroticized underworld.³⁹ The first version of *Proserpine*, commissioned by the wealthy Philadelphia publisher Edward L. Carey, sets its subject in an elaborate woven basket filled with flowers and acanthus leaves. A *tour-de-force* of delicately wrought detail, the basket was intended by Powers to reference the flowers gathered by Proserpine at the time of her abduction. But the sculptor places Proserpine inside the basket in such a way that her breasts appear to spill out over the edge, much like fruit depicted in contemporary still-life paintings (Fig. 62).⁴⁰ The woman, with her breasts signaled out for display, is placed in a container typically filled with objects that appealed to the faculties of taste and smell. The upper-torso of the figure, like the other contents of the basket, is presented freshly picked. Powers's *Proserpine* thus engages in a visceral poetics that directly associates the act of looking at a female nude with the act of eating.

Likewise, in *Eve Tempted (II)*, the apple literally touches the subject's right breast, drawing the ripeness of the fruit into alignment with that of the body. "The form of Eve," one critic claimed, "is expanded to the utmost limit of voluptuous development."⁴¹ A writer for the *Bulletin of the American Art-Union* went so far to suggest that "The *Eve* is truly the mother of a race. Riper, richer, and larger than the

³⁹ The trope of the woman with a split-personality appears again in Powers's full-length ideal sculpture *California* (1850), who holds a divining rod in her left hand, but hides a twig of thorns behind her back with the right. See Wunder, *Hiram Powers* vol. II, 124-126. One contemporary review that focuses upon this trope is "Great New Work by Powers, The Sculptor," *The New Bedford Mercury* (November 14, 1851).

⁴⁰ See, for instance, the analysis of the breast-like pairings of fruit in the still-lives of Raphaelle Peale in Alexander Nemerov, *The Body of Raphaelle Peale: Still Life and Selfhood, 1812-1824* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001): 157-169. See also Meyer Shapiro's observation, quoted by Nemerov, that "fruit is a natural analogue of ripe human beauty," and "apples are both an offering of love and a metaphor for the woman's breasts," in Meyer Shapiro, "The Apples of Cezanne: An Essay on the Meaning of Still-Life," in *Modern Art, Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: Selected Papers* (New York: Braziller, 1978), 6; quoted in Nemerov, 157-158. Alex Potts notes that Johann Joachim Winckelmann "characterized the Venus de Medici as no more than a delectable natural object, comparable to a rose opening up before the morning sun, or a firm, and still not quite fully ripe fruit." Alex Potts, *Flesh and the Ideal: Winckelmann and the Origins of Art History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994): 129.

⁴¹ "Sculpture, Tapestry, and Porcelain," *The New York Evening Post* (August 20, 1853).

Slave, it leaves, perhaps, nothing to be desired.”⁴² The quality of ripeness, a consummate state of existence, carries along with it the promise of an ensuing decline. Eve, paused at the threshold of time itself, is indeed arrested at the “ripest” peak of her womanhood, at the very moment when her passion reaches its highest swell, yet remains, for but a moment longer, safely within the bounds of innocence. When Eve bites into the apple, and physically incorporates the fruit into her own body, she initiates her doom. Her mortal condition is confirmed, and the dimension of time comes into play. Eve’s great sin was to indulge her appetite, to allow observation to precipitously slip into ingestion. The apple, the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, was, like the statue of *Eve Tempted*, meant to be contemplated, not consumed.

Viewers’ accounts of *Eve Tempted* prefigure similar encounters that visitors had with Powers’s *Greek Slave*. Of the latter work, a Philadelphia newspaper playfully chided Miner Kellogg, the manager of the exhibition, “to let the Gothamites go hungry for a few weeks and bring the statue to Philadelphia, so that we might get one glimpse of its divine beauties, just to stay our stomach, as if it were a piece of bread and butter before dinner.”⁴³ Yet a number of critics and philosophers during this time also attempted to tease out distinctions between the twin dichotomies of high and low eating, and high and low seeing. One such man was Charles Astor Bristed, the grandson of John Jacob Astor.⁴⁴ Bristed, writing under the pseudonym “Carl Benson,” published in 1848 a long and garrulous article in *The Knickerbocker* entitled “Table Aesthetics.” In it, he relates a fictional conversation:

⁴² Undated issue of the *Bulletin of the American Art-Union*, pg. 22.

⁴³ “The Greek Slave—When is She Coming!” [Illegible Philadelphia Newspaper,] Powers Scrapbook, Archives of American Art.

⁴⁴ See Sarah G. Bowerman, “Charles Astor Bristed,” *Dictionary of American Biography* (New York: American Council of Learned Societies, 1928-1936).

‘The art of eating and drinking!’ cries one. ‘Animal propensities! Sensual! Making a beast of one’s self! Digging his grave with his teeth!’ and much more in the same strain.

Hold hard, my friend, and don’t talk rubbish. Do you mean to insinuate that table-aestheticism and gluttony are convertible terms? If so, you might just as well say that every man who goes to see the *Venus de Medicis* is a profligate.⁴⁵

Bristed proceeds to promote the development in America of a refined gustatory sensibility modeled on the system laid out by the French culinary theorist Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin. Just as the author promoted an elegant and morally acceptable way to eat, he insinuates that there is also an appropriate and tasteful way to see, one that may render even the *Venus de Medici* a fit subject. One year before the publication of “Table Aesthetics,” *The Biblical Repository and Classical Review* printed Henry N. Day’s “Taste and Morals: The Necessity of Aesthetic Culture to the Highest Moral Excellence.” Day implored his readers to cultivate “The aesthetic element of our nature, that element which finds its employment and its gratification in the forms of things, as distinguished from their essences.”⁴⁶ Unlike Bristed, Day sought to disentangle vision and hearing, which he considered “the aesthetic senses,” safely removed from any physical contiguity with their objects, from those lower faculties where: “In the taste, the smell, the touch, on the other hand, there is an organic impression which is distinctly sensible. We unavoidably refer the impression to the organic part on which it is made, and feel it to be there.”⁴⁷

Sight and hearing, Day argues, are faculties of a higher order precisely because they are once removed from the materiality of their objects. There is no direct

⁴⁵ ‘Carl Benson,’ “Table Aesthetics,” *The Knickerbocker* 31:4 (May 1848): 292.

⁴⁶ Henry N. Day, “Taste and Morals: The Necessity of Aesthetic Culture to the Highest Moral Excellence,” *The Biblical Repository and Classical Review* 3:3 (July 1847): 524.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 528.

“impression” or any physical intermingling of self and substance as there must be with smell, taste, and touch. Even so, this additional degree of variance does not insulate the subject from carnality; in fact, it opens the door to what Day defines as a species of carnality that has grown even more insidious and refined. It is “what we may call *imaginative sensualism*—a sensualism which finds its gratification through the images presented through the sight and the hearing.”⁴⁸ Day continues, in an eloquent passage that summarizes his position, that:

There is a sensual world for the eye and the ear, as well as for the lower senses and appetites; and in that, may ailment be found for a corrupt and debased spirit. There may be as truly, as really a sensual indulgence, poisonous to all true morality and virtue, in the gratifications of the sight and hearing, as in the gratification of those other senses in which the object comes in immediate contact with the sense. If we rise above mere animalism, where we substitute the pleasure of the sight and the hearing for those of the taste and the touch, we do not yet, by this alone, attain to the proper spiritual elevation which the Bible commands, and our rational natures demand.⁴⁹

Day’s concept of *imaginative sensualism* suggests that aesthetics in antebellum America remain obdurately subject to the discursive constraints of dietary laws. That is to say, the act of seeing during this time was informed by an implicit set of nutritious and deleterious eating and drinking practices. This gluttony and intemperance of the eyes posed a dire threat to personal and public virtue, even more so, according to Day, than those vices that primarily operate through the senses of taste and touch:

We shall not stop to weigh the question, which of these forms of sensualism is more corrupting and debasing; whether it is worse for man to yield occasionally, as outward temptations may assail the animal sense, with little check or restraint from the moral tone in society, or, with as little check from prevailing manners, to gloat over foul obscenities and animal excesses painted to the eye and ear in language or in art, or spawned from a diseased and filthy imagination; to plunge for the moment, recklessly and without thought of evil to character or reputation, into the worst excesses of brutal vice, or wallow habitually in the rottenness and

⁴⁸ Ibid., 527.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 528.

filth ejected from a thoroughly sensualized mind and fancy;...The sensualism and corruption which we now have to combat, comes in this seeming aesthetic form. It has taken this sphere of the sight and the hearing, the properly aesthetic senses.⁵⁰

Day's warning, that the insidious articulation of base desires within a sophisticated and refined idiom is especially hazardous to moral health, could easily be applied to critique Hiram Powers's artistic attempt to make visible in his statues the "unveiled soul," a technique through which the sculptor sought to rectify the contradictory essences of matter and spirit.⁵¹ For Day, and also for those who offered up of similar criticisms of Powers's sculptures, the mingling of these two antithetical properties produced an unstable and potentially explosive concoction that was much too intense for public consumption. Yet many of those who claimed to attain a moral benefit from viewing Powers's work nevertheless articulated their experiences in gastronomical language. One visitor to *The Greek Slave* was delighted "To be *reminded of this thirst*" that is "the commonest effect of living female beauty upon the imaginative and cultivated man, and, with its intense want aching in the soul, he turns to the unblemished creations of lofty-minded sculpture, and drinks in the pure beauty-life for which his spirit is parched."⁵²

Metaphors of ingestion that structured encounters with *Eve Tempted* contradicted the content of a narrative that required Eve *not* to ingest. Powers's subject in *Eve Tempted*, April Kingsley writes, "seems mesmerized by the apple she holds in her hand, almost as if she were in a trance."⁵³ The complete absorption of Eve in the presence of the apple prefigures a second kind of absorption—the physical incorporation of the fruit

⁵⁰ Ibid., 530.

⁵¹ Donald S. Reynolds, "The Unveiled Soul," *passim*. It may be more than mere coincidence that so many texts and artworks that engaged these issues were produced in the years 1847 and 1848, a period that witnessed *The Greek Slave*'s wildly popular and well-publicized tour the United States.

⁵² "Powers's Greek Slave," uncited and undated article, Powers Scrapbook, Archives of American Art.

⁵³ Kingsley, 17.

into Eve's own body. These twin appetites, of the stomach and of the eyes, are further confounded in the symbol of the rattlesnake, an actor that provides the critical organizing element in Powers's drama.

Fascination

George Calvert's contention that the subject of *Eve Tempted (II)* is "fascinated against her purer will," is puzzling, since only in the first version of the statue is Eve's gaze fixed on the apple, the object of her affections.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, Eve's vacant stare indicates that her mind is preoccupied with what she is about to do, her attention taken up with an internal struggle between indulgence and restraint, the "awful pause" alluded to in Calvert's passage.⁵⁵ Another difference, however, between *Eve Tempted (I)* and *Eve Tempted (II)* is the prominence given to the serpent coiled around the verdant post. Although the snake in the first version is carefully delineated, each scale carved with painstaking accuracy, Powers's further amplifies its importance in the second, where it is just as finely wrought, but larger in relation to the rest of the composition, its head now rendered in three-dimensions, raised up in high relief from the surface of the leaves.

Powers put significant effort into his conception of the snake. In letters exchanged between Powers and Richard Henry Wilde, the sculptor arranged for Rubens Peale to ship a specimen of a North American Rattlesnake to the sculptor's studio in Florence.⁵⁶ The glass container holding the preserved reptile, however, broke during

⁵⁴ See n. 17, *passim*.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*.

⁵⁶ My account is drawn from Wunder, *Hiram Powers*, vol I., 183. The correspondence between Powers and Wilde concerning the snake are reprinted in Nathalia Wright, "The Letters of Richard Henry Wilde to Hiram Powers," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 46 (September-December 1962): 296-316, 417-437. After examining the appearance of the snake on the marble version of *Eve Tempted (I)* in the collection of the

shipment, causing the head of the snake to putrefy. A second example was procured, again in a glass container, but this time more carefully packed in sawdust. This specimen arrived in-tact, and served as the model for the serpent in both versions of *Eve Tempted*.

Calvert's categorization of Eve's temperament as "fascinated" likely derives from the hypnotic abilities thought possessed by all snakes, but especially rattlesnakes, according to early American folklore and natural history.⁵⁷ Rattlesnakes charmed their prey, it was believed, through a magnetic power emanating from their eyes. One observer noted that rattlesnakes "have the Power; and use it, of darting from their Eyes some harmful Effluvioms, subtle as the rays of Light, which thro' our Opticks find quick admission to the Brain."⁵⁸ This power was also bound up in the color and pattern of the snake itself, a pattern which Powers took pains to meticulously and accurately delineate scale by scale. Rattlesnakes used this power to lure their prey in close enough so that they may strike, inject their quarry with poison, and swallow their meal whole. William Bartrum noted how:

It is generally believed that they charm birds, rabbits, squirrels, and other animals, and by steadfastly looking at them possess them with infatuation; be the cause what it may, the miserable creatures undoubtedly strive by every possible means to escape, but alas! Their endeavors are in vain, they at last loose the power of resistance and flitter or move more slowly, but reluctantly towards the yawning jaws of their devourers, and creep into the mouths to lay down and suffer themselves to be swallowed.⁵⁹

Victims of fascination were infatuated by the appearance of the snake, and, like Eve, proceed willingly and against their better judgment into the mouth of their predator to be

Smithsonian American Art Museum, I am not at all certain that Peale shipped a rattlesnake to Powers at all, since the snake on the statue has no rattle.

⁵⁷ My information on this subject is drawn largely from Herbert Leventhal, *In the Shadow of the Enlightenment: Occultism and Renaissance Science in Eighteenth-Century America* (New York: New York University Press, 1976): 137-167. See also Christoph Irmscher, "Rattlesnakes and the Power of Enchantment," *Raritan* 16:4 (Spring 1997): 1-29.

⁵⁸ Joseph Breintall to Peter Collinson, Philadelphia, November 3, 1735, quoted in Leventhal, 150.

⁵⁹ William Bartrum, *Travels*, 1797, quoted in Leventhal, 137.

eaten. Stories abounded about people, as well as animals, who found themselves charmed by the rattlesnake's spell. One naturalist, writing about wildlife in Vermont, relayed an account of a young boy who had been charmed by a snake, but lived to tell the tale. The snake:

...raised his head with a quick motion, and the lad says, that at that instant there appeared something to flash in his eyes, which he could compare to nothing more similar, than the rays of light thrown from a glass or mirror when turned in the sun shine; he said it dazzled his eyes, at the same the colours appeared very beautiful, and were in large rings, circles, or rolls, and it seemed to be dark to him everywhere else, and his head began to be dizzy, much like being over swift water. He then says, he thought he would go from the snake; as it was dark everywhere but in the circle, he was fearful of treading any where else; and as they still grew in less circumference, he could still see where to step; but as the dizziness in his head still increased, and he tried to call his comrade for help, but could not speak, it then appeared to him as though he was in a vortex or whirlpool, and that every turn brought him nearer to the center.⁶⁰

It is tempting to wonder whether Powers was familiar with such stories from his home state of Vermont. His decision to give the rattlesnake more prominence in *Eve Tempted (II)*, in particular, as we have seen, the raising of the head of the snake from the moderate relief of the first version into full three-dimensionality in the second, provides a compelling context to George Calvert's use of the word "fascination." The power of fascination that snakes were thought exert had a corollary in the power of temptation, exerted by the serpent over Eve. Indeed, according to Calvert's account, their powers are one and the same. The alluring attraction of the apple in *Eve Tempted (I)* serves the same purpose in the statue's narrative as does the divining rod in the left hand of Powers's *California* (1850) (Fig. 63). Both attract and titillate the viewer. But the snake, present though unacknowledged by Eve, and the sprig of thorns held in reserve behind

⁶⁰ Samuel Williams, *The Natural and Civil History of Vermont* (2nd. Ed.; Burlington, Vt.: Samuel Mills, 1809), I: 156. Quoted in Leventhal, 144. The "circle" in this account is much like the "magic circle" that viewers would ascribe to Powers's *Greek Slave*.

California's back, portend unseen punishments that lurk and loom just anterior to the subject's (and the viewer's) line of sight. The young, spellbound Vermont boy likewise myopically concentrates his attention on the snake, ignorant of any danger, as "it seemed to be dark everywhere else."⁶¹ Fascination, as the testimony of a second young Vermont boy reveals, gains its power from an appeal to multiple senses.

...the most vivid and lively colours that imagination can paint, and far beyond the powers of the pencil to imitate, among which yellow was the most was the most predominant, and the whole drawn into a bewitching variety of gay and pleasing forms, were presented to my eyes; at the same time, my ears were enchanted with the most rapturous strains of music, wild, lively, complicated and harmonious, in the highest degree melodious, captivating and enchanting, far beyond anything I ever heard before or since, and indeed far exceeding what my imagination in any other situation could have conceived. I felt myself irresistibly drawn towards the hated reptile,⁶²

In addition to sight and sound, Herbert Leventhal quotes a number of individuals who attest to the role that odor plays in the operations of fascination.⁶³ I add to these accounts an example from Nathaniel Hawthorne's *House of the Seven Gables* (1851), where the author explicates the power of daguerreotypes in similar language. Here, the menacing, daguerreotyped visage of Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon, the main villain of Hawthorne's narrative, is encountered by young Phoebe Pyncheon in the following manner:

But, as it happened, scarcely had Phoebe's eyes rested again on the Judge's countenance than all its ugly sternness vanished; and she found herself quite overpowered by the sulfury, dog-day heat, as it were, of benevolence, which this excellent man diffused out of his great heart into the surrounding atmosphere—very much like a serpent, which as a preliminary to fascination, is said to fill the air with its peculiar odor.⁶⁴

⁶¹ n. 35, *passim*.

⁶² Williams, *Natural and Civil History*, 487. Quoted in Leventhal, 145.

⁶³ Leventhal, 151.

⁶⁴ Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851; London: Collier Books, 7th ed., 1970): 117-118. All subsequent quotes from this novel are from this edition. See Leventhal, 151, for the role of odor in fascination.

Oliver Wendell Holmes likewise employs a serpent in his novel, *Elsie Venner: a Romance of Destiny* (1860), to signify the dark side of his Janus-faced title character.⁶⁵ While pregnant with her daughter, Elsie Venner's mother is charmed and bitten by a rattlesnake. As a result, Elsie is born with a peculiar bipolar disorder, her virtuous femininity relentlessly at odds with a "wild," snake-instilled alter-ego that retains for her the power to fascinate others with her gaze. Throughout the novel, Elsie enters trance-like states where she inadvertently charms, and occasionally kills men. While some of her victims were rakes with lecherous intentions, and receive their just desserts, others perish while attempting to cure Elsie of her malady. Holmes writes how "there was a strange fascination in her eyes, too, which at times was quite irresistible," that many a man "would feel himself drawn to her by a power which seemed to take away his will for the moment."⁶⁶ By the end of the novel, Elsie is finally cured by the administration of an herb with antivenin properties, but only at the cost of her life. The antithetical natures of Holmes's protagonist—the virtuous woman and the evil seductress—were thus discovered to be inseparable.

Christoph Irmscher has recently demonstrated how the perceived power of fascination during the antebellum period relied upon the fact that "the dichotomy between good and evil...cannot be equated to the opposition of beauty and ugliness."⁶⁷ Irmscher relates an account written by Jonathan Edwards, who wrote of small mammals fascinated

⁶⁵ On Elsie Venner as an allegory of unpreservable hybridity, see Joan Burbick, *Healing the Republic*, 241-261.

⁶⁶ Oliver Wendell Holmes, *Elsie Venner: A Romance of Destiny* (1860). Full text available at Project Gutenberg: <http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/2/6/9/2696/2696.txt>. Accessed by the author on January 12, 2005.

⁶⁷ Christoph Irmscher, "Rattlesnakes and the Power of Enchantment," *Raritan* 16:4 (Spring 1997): 1-29. For a survey of the social ramifications of these sorts of disjunctions between appearance and reality, see Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Ladies: A Study of Middle Class Culture In America, 1830-1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982).

by rattlesnakes that kept moving back and forth, nearer to and farther away from their predators, until, pushing their luck too far “they come so [near] that the serpent can lay hold of them: and so they become their prey; just thus, oftentimes sinners under the gospel are bewitched by their lusts...”⁶⁸ *Eve Tempted* charts the etiology of this power, bound up with temptation and sexual seduction, from its origins (the rattlesnake), through its first victim (Eve), and finally projected out upon the sculpture’s audience. We may equate curious visitors, walking to and fro, some maintaining a respectable distance while others move in to touch the surface of the marble, as potential victims of the statue’s intoxicating charms. George Calvert, for instance, reported “that standing before the work, the beholder is not only spellbound by beauty, but awed by a solemn, ineffable feeling, and mysteriously drawn closer into the chastening presence of God.”⁶⁹ Even when *Eve Tempted* successfully imparts a moralizing effect upon one of its viewers, as it appears to here, it nevertheless engaged the same “fascinating” techniques as those thought practiced by snakes to seduce and consume their prey.

Just as Eve was warned not to touch the apple, viewers of *Eve Tempted* were warned not to touch the statue.⁷⁰ Powers also published instructions on how best to clean the surface of his works: “Allow no one to touch them, for the oil on the skin will be sure to discolor the marble. In cleaning be sure to use *pure* cold water only; and wash with a painter’s small brush.” The use of warm water and soap was discouraged by Powers, for

⁶⁸ Jonathan Edwards; quoted in Irscher, *ibid*.

⁶⁹ George Calvert, “The Process of Sculpture,” *The Literary World* 2 (September 18, 1847): 159-160; reprinted in *Littell’s Living Age* 15 (1847): 169-170; and quoted in Reynolds, “The Unveiled Soul,” 402.

⁷⁰ See Reynolds, “The Unveiled Soul,” 412. Reynolds writes that “The unique marble surfaces that he carved and finished to textures unparalleled for their sensual appeal drew spectators in unprecedented fervor to examine and touch those tantalizingly flesh-like surfaces. Yet Powers insisted that no one should be able to touch the marble because repeated touching would damage the marble surface.”

it too would “be sure to discolor the marble.”⁷¹ Powers insistence on pure, white surfaces for his statues also appears to project racial polemics onto a thermometric scale, where cold purity is set in opposition to warmth and contamination, registered visually as “discoloration,” an undesirable deviation from pristine whiteness.⁷²

Calvert’s appreciation of *Eve Tempted* did not transcend the corporeality of its female subject. In the following passage, Calvert explains how his imagination transforms the pure white marble of the statue into something quite different. He marvels at the

...flexible expression imparted to the flesh and blood by the vital workings, that the great internal process might be inferred from such an exterior. The organs of animal life are at play within that elastic trunk. There is a smooth pulsation beneath the healthy rotundity of limb. The capacity and wonderful nature of the human form fill the mind as you gaze at this union of force, lightness, and buoyant grace. [Her form] makes you think of Eve as bounding over shrub and rivulet, a dazzling picture of joyous beauty.⁷³

In the eyes of many of her admirers, *Eve*’s stone became flesh. The space of Powers’s studio is left behind, as *Eve* “bounds over rivulets” somewhere in the recesses of the viewer’s imagination. The chastising coldness of the marble is discarded for an image in motion, a warm living being made of flesh and blood, and admired in the privacy of the mind’s eye. Those who viewed other statues by Powers, such as his bust of *Genevra* (1841) (Fig. 64), likewise expressed amazement at the sculptor’s “original creation in marble. I say *creation* because there is nothing of the work which speaks of labor. It is a figure so complete, so living and beautiful, that it is not to be described. ... It ought to be called *Galatea*, because Pygmalion Powers has infused into her a vitality which requires

⁷¹ Hiram Powers, “How to Clean Marble Statues,” *Boston Daily Evening Transcript* (January 15, 1853).

⁷² On whiteness as a racial metaphor in nineteenth-century American statuary, see Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), esp. 3-20.

⁷³ George Calvert, quoted in *The New York Evening Post* (31 August, 1847).

only a divine indication to breathe.”⁷⁴ *The Greek Slave* also exhibited symptoms of this Galatea-syndrome, and was constantly on the verge, viewers imagined, of springing to life. “The reality is surprising,” one columnist mused, “that it is not marble but flesh and blood; that cheek must yield to the touch, and you instinctively watch for the heaving of the bosom.”⁷⁵ As we will discover in the next section, the anticipated respiration of *The Greek Slave* worked in tandem with its apparent perspiration.

Breathing Ideal Sculptures: Mesmerism and Moral Atmospheres

The “spell” under which viewers of Powers’s statues fell resembles states of hypnotic sleep induced by traveling mesmerists during the 1830s and 1840s.⁷⁶ Mesmerism was a popular pseudoscience in antebellum America that was used both to entertain and to heal patients afflicted with various maladies such as indigestion, depression, and hysteria. One of the most influential practitioners of mesmerism in America was Robert H. Collyer. Details about Collyer’s life and career are sketchy, but he appears to have been born on the Isle of Jersey, and learned the practice of mesmerism

⁷⁴ Fredrika Bremer, *The Homes of the New World: Impressions of America* (New York, Harper Brothers, 1853): 169. For a theoretical investigation of this “slip from representation to presentation,” see David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 27-28.

⁷⁵ “City Items: Powers’s *Greek Slave*,” *New York Tribune*, undated clipping from the Powers Scrapbook, Archives of American Art. An inversion of this slippage from marble to flesh informs the sensational description in the *New York Herald* of the murdered body of the prostitute Helen Jewett: “Slowly I began to discover the lineaments of the corpse, as one would the beauties of a statue of marble. It was the most remarkable sight I have ever beheld—I never have, and never expect to see such another. ‘My God,’ exclaimed I, ‘how like a statue! I can scarcely conceive that form to be a corpse.’ Not a vein was to be seen. The body looked as white—as full—as polished as Parian marble. The perfect figure—the exquisite limbs—the fine face—the full arms—the beautiful bust—all—all surpassing in every respect the Venus de Medicis...For a few moments I was lost in admiration at the extraordinary sight—a beautiful female corpse—that surpassed the finest statue in antiquity.” *New York Herald*, April 12, 1836; quoted in Patricia Cline Cohen, *The Murder of Helen Jewett* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998): 16.

⁷⁶ For a history of mesmerism in the United States, see Robert Fuller, *Mesmerism and the American Cure of Souls* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982). On the operations of trance, see Ann Taves, *Fits, Trances, & Visions: Experiencing Religion and Explaining Experience from Wesley to James* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

from Dr. John Elliotson in London during the mid-1830s.⁷⁷ He also claimed to have traveled to Paris for instruction in Phrenology from Johann Gaspar Spurzheim.⁷⁸ In 1836, Collyer traveled to the United States where he exhibited a powerful microscope, in addition to conducting demonstrations of mesmerism and phrenology. Later that year, in New York City, Collyer dined with Rubens Peale. Peale records that Collyer asked him during the meal whether he would interested in an “exhibition on mesmerism, that he thought it might be a profitable thing. I told him that I had no belief in it, to which he replied that if I would get some lady to be operated on, he would show me that it was no humbug.”⁷⁹ Collyer later recalled that Peale had been more interested in his microscope than his mesmerism, but subsequent lectures and demonstrations had convinced Peale of mesmerism’s legitimacy.⁸⁰ By 1841, Collyer and Peale, working together, presented a series of public demonstrations at Peale’s Museum in Manhattan. A newspaper advertised the shows as “Animal Magnetism! Dr. R.H. Collyer will deliver a short explanation, and illustrate, on a living subject, some of the most remarkable features in the above subject, every afternoon of this week, at 4 o’clock.”⁸¹ As Peale learned the finer points of mesmerism from Collyer, his attention turned to the practical applications of the craft, mainly its use as an anesthetic.⁸² Later that year, Peale hypnotized “Mrs.

⁷⁷ Taylor Stoehr, “Robert Collyer’s Technology of the Soul,” in Arthur Wrobel, ed., *Pseudoscience and Society in Nineteenth-Century America* (Lexington, Ky., The University Press of Kentucky, 1987), 23.

⁷⁸ Ibid. For information on his early life and career, see Collyer’s short autobiography, *Lights and Shadows of American Life* (Boston: Redding & Co., 1843).

⁷⁹ Uncited letter of Rubens Peale, quoted in Edward John Nygren, “Rubens Peale’s Experiments with Mesmerism,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 114:2 (1970): 102.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 102-103.

⁸¹ *New York Commercial Advertiser* (17 February, 1841); Quoted in Nygren, 103.

⁸² Ibid. See also Stoehr, 28. Stoehr’s article is largely concerned with Collyer’s later claim that he had been the first to discover and safely administer chloroform as an anesthetic before surgical operations. Others who had claimed to be the rightful discoverer of this process included Samuel Colt, the future firearms manufacturer, who toured the United States in his youth, demonstrating the effects of nitrous oxide.

York,” and allowed a dentist to extract one of her teeth while she lay in a deep sleep. The woman awoke with no memory of the procedure, and no residual pain.⁸³

Without exception, the subjects of Peale and Collyer’s mesmeric experiments were women. Such shows played up male fantasies of domination. LaRoy Sunderland, another mesmerist who performed at the Peale Museum, made his female subjects play the piano, and through the power of suggestion imparted a feeling of hunger to one “patient” who, after awakening, was handed “a cracker which she proceeded to devour with great eagerness.”⁸⁴ The complete control that mesmerists imposed on their female subjects was one danger addressed by a special committee convened in France some 70 years earlier whose members included Benjamin Franklin. Writing in 1838, David Reese noted the committee’s findings that “a woman in a high state of magnetic excitement, was not the mistress of her own actions, and was incapable of resisting any attempts on her own modesty.”⁸⁵ Women’s passions, in other words, could be awakened and excited while under a mesmeric spell, predisposing them to risky, licentious impulses.⁸⁶

Entranced and endangered women play an important role in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The House of the Seven Gables*.⁸⁷ In one key episode of the novel, Holgrave, a Daguerreotypist and trained mesmerist, comes dangerously close to completely dominating the will of young Phoebe Pyncheon. Although he had, in his

⁸³ Ibid., 106.

⁸⁴ Uncited letter of Rubens Peale. Quoted in Nygren, 105.

⁸⁵ David Meredith Reese, *Humbugs of New York: A Remonstrance Against Popular Delusion* (New York: 1838): 53. Quoted in Theresa Strouth Gaul, “Trance-Formations: Mesmerism and “A Woman’s Power” in Louisa May Alcott’s *Behind A Mask*,” *Women’s Studies* 32 (2003), 840.

⁸⁶ Gaul, 841. Gaul notes many Americans in the mid-nineteenth century who voiced such concerns. She writes that “The physical proximity between mesmerist and subject, the use of physical touch by the mesmerist, the passive, receptive state of the subject while mesmerized, and feelings of dependence and sexual arousal sometimes experienced by the patient all were cause for concern to those who saw moral standards being subverted by the practice.”

⁸⁷ On the influence of mesmerism on Hawthorne’s fiction, see Samuel Chase Coale, *Mesmerism and Hawthorne: Mediums of American Romance* (Tuscaloosa, Ala. and London: The University of Alabama Press, 1998).

relationships with other members of the Pyncheon family, his genuine love for Phoebe prevents him from consummating the spell. Hawthorne writes that Holgrave “forbade himself to twine that one link more that might have rendered his spell over Phoebe indissoluble.”⁸⁸ Holgrave resists the temptation of “acquiring empire over the human spirit,” something his ancestor, the carpenter Matthew Maule, was unable to do.⁸⁹ In the chapter directly preceding his account of Holgrave’s forbearance, Hawthorne tells of a similar mesmeric encounter between the ancestors of Holgrave and Phoebe, whose families had been engaged in a long and bitter conflict. In an attempt to make a claim on a large grant of land in Massachusetts owed to the family, Gervayse Pyncheon, an ancestor of the current generation of Pyncheons, entreats Matthew Maule to divulge the location of a lost deed that will secure the transfer. Maule, whose family had been swindled out of the land upon which the Pyncheons built their home, claims that the location of the document is buried deep within the memory of Gervayse’s daughter Alice. Gervayse, in his reckless desire for wealth, allows Maule to mesmerize Alice to help her to remember the information. The attempt fails, but Maule succeeds in dominating Alice’s mind. Over the coming months, Maule cruelly forces Alice to laugh and dance at his command. Alice eventually dies an emotional wreck when she witnesses Maule kiss his new bride. Maule had meant “to humble Alice, not to kill her; but he had taken a woman’s delicate soul into his rude gripe, to play with—and she was dead!”⁹⁰ Holgrave, Maule’s secret grandson, is able to do what Maule could not—exercise self-control over the power of his gaze. Drawn in by Phoebe’s beauty, he nevertheless resists the temptation to possess and control her, and in so (not) doing provides an opportunity for

⁸⁸ Hawthorne, *The House of the Seven Gables*, 196.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 195.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 194.

her affections to develop naturally, which indeed they do: at the end of the novel, Holgrave and Phoebe marry, putting an end once and for all to the feud between the Pyncheons and the Maules. While Holgrave, in his dealings with other members of the Pyncheon family, at first “seemed to be in quest of mental food, not heart-sustenance,” his genuine affection for Phoebe prevents him from engaging her through callous, gastronomically inflected means.⁹¹

There are some striking similarities between Hawthorne’s descriptions of mesmerism, first-hand accounts of fascination in the presence of rattlesnakes, and the experiences of many who viewed *The Greek Slave*. Both the sentimental narrative of the statue and the hypnotic effects of mesmerism were informed by theories of sympathetic identification.⁹² Mesmerists attempted to tune themselves in to the same frequency as their subjects so that they may act as two violins playing the same note. The ‘control’ exerted over those in a hypnotic state is achieved through the power of suggestion acting upon a mind that cannot differentiate its own will from one acting outside of itself. An anonymous writer for the *Cincinnati Daily Commercial* described how *The Greek Slave* “has sent to the contemplative hearts of thousands a thrill, and touched a sympathetic chord, that was instantly answered by a tear.”⁹³ The response described in this passage is involuntary and automatic, unrestrained and unfiltered by any form of conscious, rational self-control. Rubens Peale likewise described how Robert H. Collyer controlled a woman he had placed under a hypnotic spell:

He stood behind her, she having a bandage over her eyes. He then raised one of his hands toward his head; she did the same. He then extended it; she did the

⁹¹ Ibid., 166.

⁹² For a useful theoretical explication of sympathy, see David Morgan, *Visual Piety: A History and Theory of Popular Religious Images* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998): 59-96.

⁹³ Anonymous, “The Greek Slave vs. Modesty,” *Cincinnati Daily Commercial* (October 30, 1848).

same. I then went to the other end of the room with him and pulled one of his hairs; she instantly put to the same part of her own head her own hand as though her hair had been pulled... These experiments were to show the sympathy between them.⁹⁴

Robert H. Collyer was, in fact, an acquaintance of Nathaniel Hawthorne, and appears in his short story "The Hall of Fantasy."⁹⁵ Hawthorne's tale was published in 1843, at the height of Collyer's popularity, and presents a satirical description of a dream-like world where popular reformers, writers, and artists float about in the air while practicing their craft, free from any responsibility to integrate their ideas into the practical activities of everyday life. Collyer appears at the very end of Hawthorne's story, just as the narrator takes leave of the "Hall of Fantasy":

As we passed out of the portal, we met the spirits of several persons, whom Dr. Collyer had sent thither in the magnetic sleep. I looked back among the sculptured pillars, and at the transformations of the gleaming fountain, and almost desired that the whole of life might be spent in that visionary scene, where the actual world, with its hard angles, should never rub against me, and only be viewed through the medium of pictured windows.⁹⁶

The "pictured windows" spoken of by Hawthorne take the edge off the "hard angles" of everyday life. Hawthorne frequently employs a hazy atmosphere as a symbol in his writing, including the "purple atmosphere," of his hall of fantasy that allows "its inmates

⁹⁴ Rubens Peale, quoted in Nygren, 103.

⁹⁵ Coale, *Mesmerism and Hawthorne*, 9-10. It seems likely that much of Hawthorne's knowledge of mesmerism, which he feared as a vehicle of seduction and control, was informed at least in part by Collyer, who also knew and corresponded with Edgar Allan Poe. Many of Poe's stories, such as "The Case of Mr. Valdemar," also employ mesmerism as a major theme. Robert Collyer's interest in optics and mesmerism, and his penchant for hypnotizing and controlling female subjects came into alignment when he produced a troupe of model artists that toured the United States in 1847 and 1848. Chief among his representations was a live version of Hiram Powers's *Greek Slave*. It appears that Collyer's troupe followed the *Greek Slave* from city to city in hopes of taking advantage of the statue's popularity. In Washington, Miner Kellogg complained to Powers that the low attendance figures in that city were due to the fact that the statue and the model artists were "classed somewhat together in the public mind." In Baltimore, too, Charles Eaton reported to Powers that "the model artists have done you a vast deal of injury." Miner Kellogg to Hiram Powers, 28 February, 1848; quoted in Wunder, *Hiram Powers*, vol. I, 227; and Charles J. M. Eaton to Hiram Powers, 14 June, 1848; quoted in *idem.*, 229. On Robert H. Collyer's career as a producer of model artist performances, see Jack McCullough, *Living Pictures on the New York Stage* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Research Press, 1983): 3-36.

⁹⁶ Nathaniel Hawthorne, "The Hall of Fantasy," *The Pioneer and Literary Critical Magazine* (February, 1843), n.p.

to breathe, as it were, a visionary atmosphere, and tread upon the fantasies of poetic minds.”⁹⁷ The olfactory qualities of atmosphere in Hawthorne’s fiction were often associated with the ostensibly moralizing influence of virtuous women. Innocent maidens in Hawthorne’s works bloomed like flowers, releasing intoxicating scents into the air that appear to morally uplift everyone in the area.

As with Hester Prynne in *The Scarlet Letter*, a rosebush stands for Phoebe’s innocence in *The House of the Seven Gables*, where the scent from the flowers “sent a fresh and sweet incense up to their creator; nor would it have been the less pure and acceptable because Phoebe’s young breath mingled with it, as the fragrance floated past the window.”⁹⁸ The evil legacy of the house of the seven gables, however, exerted its own influence in the guise of a miasmatic ventilation problem:

...the sick in mind, and, perhaps, in body, are rendered more darkly and hopelessly so by the manifold reflection of their disease, mirrored back from all quarters in the deportment of those around them; they are impelled to inhale the poison of their own breath, in infinite repetition.⁹⁹

Phoebe, traveling numerous times throughout Hawthorne’s narrative between the city and country, evokes Proserpine, dwelling half the year at her rural farmstead, and the other half with Clifford in their dark, musty house in Salem, Massachusetts. For Clifford, Phoebe is a pure, therapeutic influence, but not without a strong undercurrent of sordid, unrequited sexual desire. Phoebe’s allure, however, is kept in check and rendered healthy by both Holgrave’s and Clifford’s refusal or (given the latter’s advanced age and physical frailty) inability to make a sexual advance. Both men keep their passions in check, and refuse the temptation to “possess” the maiden. Clifford’s appreciation of Phoebe

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Hawthorne, *The House of the Seven Gables*, 77.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 137.

certainly acknowledges her seductive charms, but it never crosses the boundary into rank carnality:

He was a man, it is true, and recognized her as a woman. She was his only representation of womankind. He took unfailing note of every charm that appertained to her sex, and saw the ripeness of her lips, and the virginal development of her bosom. All her little womanly ways, budding out of her like blossoms on a young fruit tree, had their effect on him, and sometimes caused his heart to tingle with the keenest thrills of pleasure. At such moments – the effect was seldom more than momentary – the half-torpid man would be full of harmonious life, just as a long-silent harp is full of sound, when the musician’s fingers sweep across it. But, after all, it seemed rather a perception, or a sympathy, than a sentiment belonging to himself as an individual. He read Phoebe, as he would a sweet and simple story; he listened to her, as if she were a verse of household poetry, which God, in requital of his bleak and dismal lot, had permitted some angel, that most pitied him, to warble through the house. She was not an actual fact for him, but the interpretation of all that he had lacked on earth brought warmly home to his conception; so that this mere symbol, or lifelike picture, had almost the comfort of reality.¹⁰⁰

By perceiving Phoebe as a work of art, something like a “pictured window,” Clifford maintained the frame that divides the symbolic and the real. Viewers of ideal statuary—of *Proserpine*, *Eve Tempted*, and *The Greek Slave*—were likewise called upon to maintain the same boundaries in front of palpably lifelike representations. A transgression of the frame, a touch pressed upon the surface of the marble, annihilated the distinction between representation and presentation. Such an act deleteriously realigns the parameters of observation into something essentially pornographic, where the viewing subject took the image before him as a transparent replication of the real thing.

Stuck within the confines of his dank, musty mansion during his infirmity, Clifford sometimes gazed out from a large, open, arched widow on the second floor that overlooked the main road, so that he “might discover matter to occupy his eye, and

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 136.

titillate, if not engross, his observation.”¹⁰¹ One day, Clifford witnesses a “political procession, with hundreds of flaunting banners, and drums, fifes, clarions, and cymbals” so intense that it appeared made up “into one broad, mass existence—one great life—one collected body of mankind with a vast, homogenous spirit animating it.”¹⁰² “But,”

Hawthorne’s narrator warns:

...on the other hand, if an impressible person, standing alone over the brink of one of these processions, should behold it, not in its atoms but in its aggregate—as a mighty river of life, massive in its tide, and black with mystery, and, out of its depths, calling to the kindred depth within him—then the contiguity would add to the effect. It might also so fascinate him that he would hardly seem restrained from plunging into the surging strains of human sympathies.¹⁰³

“Had Clifford attained the balcony,” the narrator continues, “he would probably have leaped into the street; but whether impelled by the species of terror that sometimes urges its victim over the very precipice which he shrinks from, or by a natural magnetism, tending towards the great center of humanity, it was not easy to decide. Both impulses might have wrought on him at once.”¹⁰⁴

The title of the chapter in which this episode occurs, “The Arched Window,” recalls the “pictured windows” that Hawthorne employed in “The Hall of Fantasy.”¹⁰⁵

The eleventh of twenty-one chapters, “The Arched Window” is located at the precise midpoint of Hawthorne’s novel. It presents the reader with a moment of crisis—a turning point—where Clifford almost, but not quite, goes over the edge, a leap that would have

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 151.

¹⁰² Ibid., 156.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 157.

¹⁰⁵ These examples draw currency from contemporary analogies that identified pictures with windows, such as the effusive description found in Richard Storrs Willis, “Picture Windows,” *Cosmopolitan Art Journal* (July 1856): 18. Willis writes that “It is such an inexpressible relief to person engaged in writing, or even reading, on looking up, not to have his line of vision chopped squarely off by an odious white wall, but to find his soul escaping, as it were, through the frame of an exquisite picture, to other beautiful, and perhaps idyllic scenes, where the fancy for a moment may revel, refreshed and delighted.”

physically (and fatally) integrated him with the chaotic world beyond the window's frame. As such, the chapter operates in much the same way as Thomas Cole's *The Consummation of Empire*, which also features an enrapturing political procession that sweeps its subjects up into "one broad, mass existence." The seductive attraction of the scene observed through the window offers Clifford just such a consummation—one that he is, just barely, able to resist. Both "The Arched Window" and Cole's *Consummation* present crises that initiate, or threaten to initiate, irreversible and ill-boding transformations. Situated exactly in the middle of their respective narratives, they represent what German scholar Gustav Freytag would later characterize as a *climax* in his landmark 1863 work, *The Technique of the Drama*. "Through the two halves of the drama that come together at one point," Freytag writes, "the drama possesses—if one may symbolize its arrangement by lines—a pyramidal structure" (Fig. 65)¹⁰⁶

Hawthorne replicates the formal structure of *The House of the Seven Gables* in his next novel, *The Blithedale Romance*, when he again locates "A Crisis," the fifteenth of twenty-nine chapters, at the median of his narrative, or in Freytagian terms, at the apex of the pyramid.¹⁰⁷ In this chapter, Hollingsworth, a hyper-masculine reformer with utopian designs, makes one final attempt to convince Miles Coverdale, the protagonist and narrator of the story, to join his crusade. After successfully resisting his offer, Coverdale

¹⁰⁶ Gustav Freytag, *Technique of the Drama*, in *Essays on the German Theater*, Margaret Herzfeld-Sander, ed. (1863; New York: Continuum, 1985): 107. Freytag continues on to describe his pyramid in language that calls to mind Cole's five-part series *The Course of Empire*: "It rises from the *introduction* with an entrance of the existing forces to the *climax* and falls to the *catastrophe*. Between these parts lie (the parts of) the *rise* and *fall*. Each of these five parts may consist of a single scene, or a succession of connected scenes, but the *climax* is usually composed of one chief scene." It should be noted that "The Confirmed Drunkard," perched atop the stepped bridge in *The Drunkard's Progress*, fits Freytag's description of a "chief scene."

¹⁰⁷ On the transition that takes place in Chapter 15, and its role in transforming the narrative trajectory of the novel, see Kelly Griffith Jr., "Form in *The Blithedale Romance*," *American Literature* 40 (1968): 17; and more recently, John N. Miller, "Eros and Ideology: At the Heart of Hawthorne's *Blithedale*," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 55:1 (January 2000): 10.

muses that “Had I but touched his extended hand, Hollingsworth’s magnetism would perhaps have penetrated me with his own conception of all these matters. But I stood aloof.”¹⁰⁸ Again, it is touch—integrative physical contact—that threatens to seal the doom of Hawthorne’s protagonist; but the act, as in *The House of the Seven Gables*, is left unconsummated. Unlike the citizens in Cole’s *Course of Empire* or the unfortunate subject of *The Drunkard’s Progress*, both Clifford Pyncheon and Miles Coverdale, at the last possible moment, stand back.

The Greek Slave, like the extended hand of Hollingsworth, or the unified community of revelers outside the arched window of the House of the Seven Gables, symbolized the fulfillment of a dream for many who saw it—not excluding Powers himself. In a letter to his cousin, the sculptor recalled the origin of his idea for the statue:

When a child in Woodstock, and for years afterwards in Ohio, I was haunted in dreams by a white figure of a woman, white as snow from head to foot and standing on some sort of pedestal below Uncle John’s house on the opposite side of the Quechee. I could not get near to it, for the water seemed deep and roaring, but my desire was always intense to come nearer. The figure seemed most lovely, but not of a living person.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Blithedale Romance*, 136. I am indebted here to the examination of the intersections between capitalism, desire, and utopian designs, as well as a useful analysis of the perpetually deferred state of “consummation” in *The Blithedale Romance* by Gale Temple. See Temple, “His Delirious Solace,” *passim*. See also Robert S. Levine, “Sympathy and Reform in *The Blithedale Romance*,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Nathaniel Hawthorne*, Richard Millington, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004): 207-229. Levine examines the novel as a self-critical project that both participates in and indicts strategies of sentimental reform. Coverdale’s insistent, almost addictive spectating throughout the novel is addressed by Gillian Brown in the following manner: “Even away from Blithedale, ‘the train of thoughts’ his ‘three friends’ have generated keeps ‘treading remorselessly to-and-fro’ (153). These figures and thoughts ‘encroach upon’ his dreams, where he is ‘impotent to regulate them.’ (153)” Brown, *Domestic Individualism: Imagining Self in Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990): 125. The inability to control one’s physical or mental processes as a symptom of over-indulgent looking is critical to my forthcoming arguments about the Greek Slave.

¹⁰⁹ Hiram Powers to John P. Richardson, December 14, 1853. Archives of American Art, 1036/1095-1096; quoted in Charles Colbert, “Spiritual Currents and Manifest Destiny in the Art of Hiram Powers,” *Art Bulletin* 82:3 (September, 2000): 535. *The Greek Slave*, an object which Powers did, of course, have to cross a deep and roaring body of water to realize, was put on display for a time in his home town of Woodstock, Vermont. Colbert notes the significance of *The Greek Slave*’s coming full-circle back to the birthplace of its creator, as if in fulfillment of a prophecy revealed in a dream.

According to Powers's narrative, a raging river comes in between him and his "intense desire" to attempt a more intimate inspection of the woman in white. As such, the river acts as a frame that protects Powers (and the woman) from a mutual collision, just as the "railing and iron uprights" purchased by Miner Kellogg kept viewers kept viewers of the *Greek Slave* at arms length.¹¹⁰ Earlier in his career, Powers designed a group of wax automata that performed a show called *The Infernal Regions* in Cincinnati's Western Museum from 1827 to 1837.¹¹¹ Augmented by acoustic shrieks and groans, these figures, drawn from Dante's *Inferno* and Milton's *Paradise Lost*, appeared so lifelike that many visitors could not help but touch them; but because the malleability of the wax made the exhibit especially vulnerable to damage, Powers soon erected a metal screen that separated the figures from the audience. He also wired a battery to the screen so that it imparted an electric shock to anyone who touched it. Therefore, when curious, probing hands drew too close to the wax figures, the guilty visitor would receive a disciplinary "shock" of recognition, reminding him not to touch.¹¹² While such unseemly behavior was hardly offensive when practiced upon wax skeletons and demonic imps, the "appropriating touch" that tends to follow the lead of the "caressing eye" clearly

¹¹⁰ Miner Kellogg to Hiram Powers, Boston, August 13, 1847, as in n. 1, above.

¹¹¹ For a detailed chronology of Powers's work on the *Infernal Regions*, see Wunder, vol. I, 39-65.

¹¹² Sometimes, if the person who touched the screen was holding hands with others in the crowd, the shock would travel through the audience. The resulting shrieks and screams only added to the theatrical effect of the *Infernal Regions*, and many members of the audience delighted in purposefully touching the screen, and especially in bringing unsuspecting friends back to the exhibit to goad *them* to do the same. The single surviving broadside for the *Infernal Regions*, housed in the collection of the Cincinnati Historical Society, in fact playfully cautions visitors against touching the screen, warning them that "the punishment for such temerity would not only be instantaneous, but most shocking!!" This warning, of course, only encouraged more people to join in the act. An editorial in an 1835 issue of *Hall's Western Monthly Magazine* by an unknown author includes a description of the atmosphere inside the exhibition: "...Perhaps some one [sic] who is bolder or more curious than the rest, advances to the iron railing, and carelessly drops his hand upon it, as he endeavors to make a close reconnaissance—the metal is charged with electric fluid, and the horror-stricken wight recoils with a shock and a scream, which electrifies the whole assembly, sets the children to crying, the women to wailing, and the men to wishing themselves *out* of the infernal regions...;" editorial quoted in Ulana Lydia Baluk, "Proprietary Museums in Antebellum Cincinnati: Something to Please You and Something to Learn," E.Ed. diss., University of Toronto, 2000, 192.

traversed the boundaries of propriety when practiced upon a statue of a nude woman—or worse, a real one.¹¹³

In *The House of the Seven Gables*, Clifford, after his ordeal before the arched window, falls back upon an opaque, atmospheric, and non-haptic iteration of sympathetic identification, one that refuses veristic and palpably lifelike forms of display. For Clifford, Phoebe's presence is refreshingly diaphanous, an atomized mist of morally and physically invigorating perfume. She provides:

...her poor patient a supply of purer air. She impregnated it, too, not with a wild-flower scent—for wildness is not trait of hers—but with the perfume of garden roses, pinks, and other blossoms of much sweetness, which nature and man have consented together in making grow from summer to summer, and from century to century. Such a flower was Phoebe, in her relation with Clifford, and such the delight that he inhaled from her.¹¹⁴

In a similar way, Hiram Powers, according to an advertisement for a Daguerreotype reproduction of *The Greek Slave*, “has it always in his power to summon the ‘flowers of feeling’ through the living influence of his works.”¹¹⁵ When Anna Lewis entered the exhibition room in New York to view *The Greek Slave* (where she would, we recall, remain captivated for five hours), she and her companions found themselves in “a new atmosphere such as we had never breathed before.”¹¹⁶ One published poem about the statue called forth:

...the serene and spiritual atmosphere
From thy pure chastity outflowing,
Around thee luminously glowing,
We do forget thy mortal grief and care;¹¹⁷

¹¹³ I borrow these terms from Brigitte Peucker, “Looking and Touching: Spectacle and Collection in Sontag’s *Volcano Lover*,” *Yale Journal of Criticism* 11:1 (1998): 159.

¹¹⁴ Hawthorne, *The House of the Seven Gables*, 137-138.

¹¹⁵ Anonymous, “The Greek Slave—Daguerreotype Views,” *Boston Evening Transcript* (21 July, 1848).

¹¹⁶ Lewis, “Art and Artists of America: Hiram Powers,” as in n. 3, above.

¹¹⁷ William H. Holcombe, M.D., *Poems* (New York: Mason Brothers, 1860): 71.

In a lighter vein, a writer for *The Spirit of the Times* wrote punningly of *The Greek Slave* in 1847 that "the marvelous point then, is that statue is not 'marble-ous,' that the flesh looks as plastic, and the skin as porous, as if it could perspire."¹¹⁸ Scent played an especially critical role when *The Greek Slave* was exhibited at Boston's Horticultural Hall in 1848. Before the exhibition opened, where the work would be set amidst a verdant variety of flowering plants, *The Greek Slave* was concealed under a set of crimson curtains; but eager viewers nevertheless lifted the fabric to peek at Powers's statue. This seemingly irresistible temptation to peep did not go unnoticed in the press:

The scene this morning was enchanting. The flowers—some blossomed, some to bloom—the fruits in the livery of mother Nature, whose luscious shape and size would tempt another Eve to sin;...Speaking, however, of mother Eve, some of her fair daughters in the hall today, showed they were not altogether divested of that curiosity that proved to be the ruin of her posterity. In the midst of the room stood enshrouded, in thick drapery, a figure which none could explain about. It was at length guessed to be Powers's Greek Slave—not, of course, on exhibition to-day. But the way some ladies endeavored to pluck out—as Hamlet would say—the heart of the accomplished sculptor's mystery, by peeping through the veil, caused a mixture of mirth and grave remark for the beholder. Whether if their curiosity had been gratified, the effects, the effects would have been fatal, as seeing a basilisk or the contents of the three-tailed Bashaw's blue chamber, we will not pretend to say.¹¹⁹

The uplifting scent of flowers and the moralizing influence of an ideal statue are here received with a high degree of ambivalence. Scents, like appearances, could be deceiving, a lure emitted to draw unsuspecting victims in for a fatal glimpse of an image that could, like the mythical basilisk, turn its viewers—metaphorically, at least—to stone.

Although Nathaniel Hawthorne frequently employs floral aromas to denote virtuous, feminine influence, he calls the reliability of this equation into question in his short story "Rappaccini's Daughter" (1844). The tale's plot revolves around Beatrice, a

¹¹⁸ *The Spirit of the Times*. September 18, 1847.

¹¹⁹ "A Scene at Horticultural Hall," undated and unidentified article from the Powers Scrapbook, Archives of American Art.

beautiful maiden who entrances young Giovanni with her fragrant charms. Beatrice's father practices black magic, and has gradually attuned Beatrice's immune system in such a way to render her impervious to the effects of poisonous plants. Giovanni, seduced by the sweet-smelling scents that drift into his apartment from Beatrice's garden, disregards repeated warnings that Beatrice herself is also poisonous, and instead ventures to heal her so that she might leave her father's estate and become his bride. Giovanni enters the forbidden garden and tries to cure Beatrice with an specially prepared antidote, but she, like Elsie Venner, is killed during the process. Worse yet, the botched attempt leaves Giovanni trapped at the end of the story in the same predicament as his former quarry—immune to poison but morbidly sensitive to all things pure and cleansing. Beatrice's pleasing odor, like that released by fascinating rattlesnakes, lures Giovanni into a dire situation. Beauty, in the age of the confidence man, was not necessarily truth.

The warm and rosy-tinged atmospheres that sent viewers into “delicious reverie” and caused hours to pass unnoticed in the presence of both the *Greek Slave* was no guarantee that the statue would uplift the morals of its audience. Viewers sent spinning into soporific trances by the statue reported symptoms similar to those who “were so overcome when the *snake* had fixed his Eyes upon them, that they were presently seized with such feebleness & Languor all over them, that they were ready to drop down.”¹²⁰ Just as the effects of fascination were caused by subtle and harmful effluvia sent out from the snake and into the eyes of its victims, so too did Powers's statues operate by “filling the eye,” as Bayard Taylor had claimed, with their equally enchanting charms.¹²¹ That is to say, the anesthetizing effluvia emitted from the perspiring pores of the *Greek Slave*

¹²⁰ John Bartrum to Peter Collinson (date unclear, either 1727 or 1728), quoted in Leventhal, 142.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 150.

carried with it, the statue's apologists claimed, the productive and moralizing effects of the artwork. To fully partake of the sculpture's content required audiences to breathe deeply and submit themselves to her hypnotic effects.

The opiate-like atmosphere that appeared to surround the *Greek Slave* may be better understood by comparing its effects to those experienced by the figures in Jerome B. Thompson's landscape painting, *The Belated Party on Mansfield Mountain* (1858) (Fig. 66).¹²² The picture depicts a group of six tourists paused at a well-known vantage point to the west of the title summit.¹²³ The two men in the left middle-ground nearest the edge of the escarpment appear transfixed as they stare out into the open air toward the sun that sets behind the left ridge of Mount Mansfield. A woman seated next to them turns her head ninety-degrees to the left, adjusting her line of sight so that it is parallel to the picture plane. Her gaze suggests the presence of another breathtaking vista, hidden

¹²² Franklin Kelly and Kevin Avery have recognized similar qualities in the reception of paintings by Sanford Robinson Gifford, in particular recorded affinities between viewing the artist's landscapes and "lotus-eating" (taking opium). Both note the vividly intense, almost hallucinatory descriptions of Catskill scenery by commentators such as George William Curtis and Bayard Taylor. See Franklin Kelly, "Nature Distilled: Gifford's Vision of Landscape," in *Hudson River School Visions: The Landscapes of Sanford Robinson Gifford*, Kevin J. Avery and Franklin Kelly, eds. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003): 3-24; and Kevin J. Avery, "Gifford and the Catskills," in *idem.*: 25-52. Consider also in "Rappaccini's Daughter" how Giovanni heard Beatrice's voice, "rich as a tropical sunset," initiating thoughts of "deep hues of purple or crimson, and of perfumes heavily delectable." Nathaniel Hawthorne, "Rappaccini's Daughter," in *The Portable Hawthorne*, Malcom Cowley, ed., (New York: Penguin Books, 1976): 181-182; and Ralph Waldo Emerson's passage in his Essay "Woman," where he claims that "They admit from their pores a colored atmosphere, one would say, wave upon wave of rosy light, in which they walk evermore, and see all objects through this warm-tinted mist that envelops them." Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Woman," Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Woman," published on-line at: www.vcu.edu/transcendentalism/authors/emerson/essays/woman.html. Last accessed by the author on August 14, 2004.

On Thompson, see Lee M. Edwards, "The Life and Career of Jerome Thompson," *American Art Journal* 14 (Autumn 1982): 5-30.

¹²³ My description and information about Mansfield Mountain and its use as a subject by Jerome B. Thompson and Sanford Gifford are drawn from Franklin Kelly's catalogue entry, "Mount Mansfield, 1859," in *Hudson River School Visions*, 108-110; and Edwards, 15. Edwards quotes a period description of the picture that relates the narrative as such: "The key to the title is given by a young man holding up his watch to his companions, and pointing to the sun, scarce half an hour above the horizon. In the long descent to the valley you feel the urgency of his summons for departure in conflict to the desire to wait and watch the sun disappear beyond the far distant dim line where earth and sky blend in the blaze of light." "Fine Arts: National Academy of Design," *The Home Journal* (June 4, 1859): 2.

from the viewer. This clever trope amplifies the illusion of the painting's pictorial space and effectively nudges the viewer into the composition, tempting her to peer around the inner left edge of the frame to see at what the woman gazes. The consequences of this desire to enter into the work and lose oneself in the act of looking are addressed by the other three individuals in the foreground of the painting. The two women in this group both turn their backs to the mountain. One reclines against a rock, visibly exhausted, while the other exhibits a combination of fatigue and annoyance as she glares at the man in the foreground with his back to the picture plane who nervously examines his watch. The viewing party have clearly lost track of time as they come to realize that they have already passed the point of no return, that they will be trapped on the mountainside after dark, and that their afternoon picnic has brought them more than they bargained for.

In her examination of the landscapes of Sanford Gifford and John Kensett, Angela Miller ascribes the translucent, atmospheric effects of such pictures to a feminine influence. "Like air and space softening the rugged forms of nature," Miller argues, "women were the medium or transparent screen that vitiated the harsh outlines of social life."¹²⁴ The substance emitted from the surface of Powers's *Greek Slave*, however, was almost interchangeable with the hazy atmospheric effects found in luminist landscapes. In his oft reproduced poem about the statue, W.H. Coyle in fact views the *Greek Slave* according to topographical conventions:

A rosy twilight,
From the crimson folds of drapery around,
In sunset softness, blushes on her limbs.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ Angela Miller, *The Empire of the Eye: Landscape Representation and American Cultural Politics, 1825-1875* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993): 264.

¹²⁵ W.H. Coyle, "Powers' Greek Slave," October 28, 1850, Powers Scrapbook, Archives of American Art.

The very same language, in fact, used to describe the synthetic effect of atmosphere in luminist paintings was also used describe the lubricating effects of alcohol. Wine too, according to Henry Tuckerman, softens the sharp and frequently abrasive aspects of interpersonal relationships.¹²⁶ The mediating effects of alcohol, like that of atmosphere, were gendered feminine. As a consequence, the drinking of beer, wine, or ardent spirits to excess by working men threatened to trigger an unwelcome sex change. As I will argue in the next, and concluding section of this chapter, the same discourse of overstimulation, addiction, and debility that informed the consumption of alcohol, also inflected debates over the moral consequences of viewing *Greek Slave*.

The Sobriety Test

The Greek Slave seemed at once to have the power to stimulate and tranquilize, to produce uncontrollable flashes of rhapsodic emotion and enthusiasm, yet, like medusa, to turn its viewers into statues themselves, frozen for hours in the exhibition hall, entangled in a rapturous trance. The mechanism that subtended fascination operated by cultivating a heightened state of sensitivity under which the subject was acutely susceptible to the power of suggestion. In this trance-like state, individuals were dissociated from their conscious free-will, stripped of their free-agency, and left at the mercy of their dreams. By similar means, subjects might become clay in the hands of a respected revivalist preacher, or prey in the arms of an evil seducer. In either case, to be fascinated was to be made malleable, to be left vulnerable. Viewers of the *Greek Slave* were thus faced with a visual sobriety test—to drink deeply enough to absorb the nutritional, moral value of the

¹²⁶ I treat this theme extensively in Chapter One; see, for instance, H.T. Tuckerman, “Something about Wine,” *The Knickerbocker; or New York Monthly Magazine* (August, 1858): 154; as in Chapter One, n. 16.

statue without succumbing to the intensity of the tonic. Nevertheless, once smitten, once under the spell of an object—be it an image, a sentimental novel, or a bottle of whiskey—it was easy to lose one’s self, to get lost in a vortex of pure sensation, swept away by a “delicious train of reverie,” never to be seen again. By inducing a state of mild hypnosis in so many of its viewers, *The Greek Slave* triggered autonomous reactions—tears, shock, ecstasy, arousal—that were, for better or worse, authentic. In this way, *The Greek Slave* was another kind of test, a truth serum administered through the eyes, where—in *in vino veritas*—visitors confronted the best and worst of their deepest proclivities. The moral and physical end of such states might be productive and transformative, but could also become ends in themselves.

One of many critics that made this connection was Matthew Simpson, a trained physician and Methodist minister. Simpson, writing about *The Greek Slave* in 1848, argues against the claim that the *Greek Slave* brought about constructive feelings of compassion and pity in its audience. Simpson wrote that:

The feeling of compassion will be excited from two causes: the bondage of the female, and her perfect exposure. This feeling, however, will be, like the feeling excited by other fictitious narrations, awakened to no practical end. Our emotions are implanted for the purpose of leading to action; and, hence, as is well noticed by Abercrombie in his treatise on mental powers, excited emotion, not leading to action, tends to impair mental economy. We learn to sympathize, without making exertions to relieve.¹²⁷

The man referred to in Simpson’s critique is John Abercrombie, a Scottish physician and moral philosopher. Simpson refers to a passage in Abercrombie’s *Inquiries Concerning the Intellectual Powers and the Investigation of Truth* where the author addresses “two

¹²⁷ The Reverend Dr. Matthew Simpson, “Power’s Greek Slave,” *Western Christian Advocate*, November 29, 1848, n.p.

evils” likely to arise from an unhealthy “indulgence in the work of fiction.” “The one,” Abercrombie explains:

... is a tendency to give way to the wild play of the imagination; a practice most deleterious, both to the intellectual and moral habits. The other is a disruption of harmony which ought to exist between the moral emotions and the conduct—a principle of extensive and important influence. In the healthy state of moral feelings, for example, the emotion of sympathy excited by a tale of sorrow ought to be followed by some efforts for the relief of the sufferer. When such relations in real life are listened to from time to time without any such efforts, the emotion gradually becomes weakened, and the moral condition is produced which we call selfishness, or hardness of heart.¹²⁸

Simpson associates the act of viewing *Greek Slave* with the practice of reading sentimental fiction of the kind condemned by Abercrombie. Many ministers, doctors, and social reformers in the antebellum period decried the reading of sentimental novels because they stirred the emotions and fed the imagination without providing any outlet to convert pent-up sentiment into productive action or social justice. While it is unclear whether he had the *Greek Slave* in mind, the abolitionist Theodore Parker offers an effective extension of Simpson’s thoughts when he explains in regard to sentimental fiction that:

The effect of getting up the feeling of piety, and stopping with that, is like the effect of reading novels and nothing else. Thereby the feelings of benevolence, of piety, of hope, of joy, are excited, but lead to no acts; the character becomes enervated, the mind feeble, the conscience inert, the will impotent; the heart long wont to weep at the novelists unreal woes, at sorrows in silk and fine linen, is harder than Pharoah’s when a dirty Irish girl asks for a loaf in the name of God, or

¹²⁸ John Abercrombie, M.D., *Inquiries Concerning the Intellectual Powers and the Investigation of Truth* (Boston: Otis, Broaders, and Company, 1845): 132. In language that recalls David S. Reynolds’s diagrammatic investigation of “dark reform,” Abercrombie proceeds to argue that “If fictitious narratives be employed for depicting scenes of vice, another evil of the greatest magnitude is likely to result from them, even though the conduct exhibited be shown to end in remorse and misery; for by the mere familiarity with vice, and injury is done the youthful mind, which is in no degree compensated by the moral at the close.” On dark reform, see David S. Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance: The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988): esp. 54-91.

when a sable mother begs money wherewith to save her daughter from the seraglios of New Orleans.¹²⁹

One man addicted to reading novels penned an anonymous testimony of his experience as a cautionary tale to dissuade others from falling into a similar trap. Identified only as “D,” he relates how his uncontrollably voracious reading separated him from, rather than connected him to, his fellow citizens.¹³⁰ In the first paragraph of his effusive and exhaustive account, he makes the analogy that “the excitement of novel reading is akin to intoxication,” and goes on to equate the overzealous “feeding of the imagination” with “a kind of intellectual dyspepsia, whose diseased appetite relishes only in the exaggerations of fable, while it rejects and loathes the wholesome nourishment supplied by works of practical usefulness.”¹³¹ Even more remarkable is an article entitled “The Anatomy of Sentimentalism” that even more explicitly locates the mechanism that drives such addictions at the nexus of healthy and unhealthy eating and drinking practices. The article’s author, Taylor Lewis, aligns “feeling for the sake of one’s feelings—a *feeling to feel*,” that “rests in itself as an *end*,” with “a false appetite for food and drink,” that is “created and indulged for the sake of the appetite.”¹³² The insatiable and self-perpetuating appetite that sentimental literature generates leads to an “*intemperance* of feeling for feeling’s sake,” that afflicts its sufferers in much the same way that the excessive consumption of ardent spirits afflicted drunkards. Its victims are

¹²⁹ Theodore Parker, *Ten Sermons of Religion*, 2nd. Ed. (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1861): 347.

¹³⁰ It is amusing given the current discussion to imagine readers of D’s story themselves passionately engrossed in its sensational prose, whetting their thirst to read more accounts of people hopelessly addicted to reading.

¹³¹ D, “Confessions of a Novel Reader,” *Southern Literary Messenger* 5:3 (March 1839): 179.

¹³² T.[aylor] L.[ewis], “The Anatomy of Sentimentalism,” *The Mercersburg Review* (January 1857): 29. My understanding of sentimentalism with respect to Lewis and Parker owes much to the analysis in Mark Walhout, “Aesthetic Experience and Social Justice: Historical Reflections on Christian Criticism,” *Christian Scholar’s Review* 16:3 (1987): 249-264. For an analysis of the genre’s sadistic potential, see Glenn Hendler, “The Structure of Sentimental Experience,” *Yale Journal of Criticism* 12 (1999): 145-153.

“ever turning introvertedly on themselves, like Milton’s children of sin ever gnawing into the maternal vitality.” Their demise calls to mind the final stage of *The Drunkard’s Progress*: “They kill themselves, when they thus become, at the same time, both subject and object.”¹³³ Both D. and Lewis demonstrate that the discourse of addiction structures a wide variety of somatic practices. Matthew Simpson, in a long and scathing passage, condemns the *Greek Slave* in a similar fashion:

Licentiousness is increasing in our midst. Our eastern cities are growing in impunity, and so is the great west. Our steamboat landings are marts of impure publications. Our coffee-houses contain licentious paintings; and some of our bookstores are guilty of trafficking in the most corrupt literature. Model artists, or naked women, representing the Greek Slave and other pieces of statuary, are travelling from city to city, and from town to town, exhibiting themselves for money; and strange to say, they draw large audiences even from among the ladies! How shall this be arrested? All other evils are arrested by striking at the root. Fever, in all its raging forms, is imbibed from the fine perceptible poison in the air. Cholera, with its spasms, travels unseen. But purify the air, and you escape evil. The moderate drinker of wine or beer is the parent of the drunkard. Blame not the man who disputes for his bed with the swine; but blame him who genteelly tips his glass in the cheerful parlor. Total abstinence is a sacred duty, because of its healthful influence. And, even at the risk of giving offence, we must add, that the exhibition of the Greek Slave, in our humble judgement, prepares the way for model artists; and they for the house which leads to the chambers of death, and to the gates of hell. Yet thousands of Christian ministers and members are among its visitors! Christian reader, would Christ and his apostles have patronized such an exhibition?¹³⁴

While Lewis provides an analogue to the end of *The Drunkard’s Progress*, where an addiction terminates in an act of violent self-destruction, Simpson offers up the *Greek Slave* as “a glass with a friend,” the first stage of the print, an ostensibly innocuous image that merely whets the appetite for more intense fare—first, model artists, and then, soon after that, houses of prostitution, such as the one that abuts the path to destruction in John

¹³³ Ibid., 40.

¹³⁴ Simpson, “Power’s Greek Slave,” n.p.

Hailer's *The Way of Good and Evil*. Once the seed of vice is planted, Simpson suggests, it inevitably germinates and grows out of control.

The impure publications referenced by Simpson, whether blatantly pornographic or merely sentimental, had the potential to cause much mischief. The intense feelings brought about through novel reading could only lead, ministers and physicians feared, to licentiousness and auto-eroticism. Isaac Cruikshank, in an 1801 print titled *Luxury*, was one of many to illustrate this connection (Fig 67).¹³⁵ Here, a woman stands clothed in a nightgown inside her private chamber where cheap, pulp literature lay strewn about the furniture and floor. With her left hand, she holds open one of these novels as she reaches under her gown with her right hand to pleasure herself. The stretching, yawning cat in front of her, as well as the raging fire behind, visually replicates her state of arousal.

When Matthew Simpson writes of “excitement to no practical end,” and “emotion not leading to action” that “tends to impair the mental economy,” his language is, in fact, almost identical to that used by antebellum reformers such as Sylvester Graham and Seth Pancoast to describe the dangers and ill-effects of masturbation.¹³⁶ Not only did masturbation result in the unproductive loss of semen, Graham argued, but it, through the same mechanism as spicy food or strong drink, causes “a peculiar *excitement* or violent *stimulation*, which causes the muscular tension and convulsion, and increased action of

¹³⁵ The link between novel reading and masturbation is also explored in Mary D. Sheriff, *Moved By Love: Inspired Artists and Deviant Women in Eighteenth-Century France* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2004).

¹³⁶ See Sylvester Graham, *A Lecture to Young Men, on Chastity, intended for the serious consideration of parents and guardians* (Providence: Weedon and Cory, 1834); and Seth Pancoast, *Onanism, Spermatorrhoea, Porneikalognomiopathology: Boyhood's Perils and Manhood's Curse; An Earnest Appeal to the Young of America* (Philadelphia: 1858). I owe my knowledge of Pancoast, as well as my awareness of the diagram I illustrate in Figs. 18 & 19 to Russ Castronovo, *Necro Citizenship: Death, Eroticism, and the Public Sphere in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001): esp. 62-100. The most recent and exhaustive history of masturbation is Thomas W. Laqueur, *Solitary Sex: A Cultural History of Masturbation* (New York: Zone Books, 2003): esp. 215-216, which examines the role of the unbridled imagination in British publications about the practice.

the heart, and occasions visceral congestion, and disturbs all the functions of the system, and thus produces general debility, morbid irritability and sympathy, and all the train of evils which result.”¹³⁷ Graham’s masturbator is haunted by lascivious images that trigger the vice, which in turn, debase the moral faculty of vision so that: “Almost every object that he sees will, by a diseased association, suggest the debasing vice; and his eye can scarcely fall, by accident, on the sexual parts of any female animal without awakening a train of filthy thoughts, and exciting a foul concupiscence.”¹³⁸ It is, in other words, it is the aesthetic process of association itself that is debased and diseased, subsumed under the suzerainty of the appetite. Masturbation was corrupting, according to its detractors, because it turned what was intended as a practical act—procreation—into indulgent pleasure for its own sake. It was tantamount to eating for its own sake (gluttony) or drinking for its own sake (intemperance). Free from any practical purpose, such actions reversed the hierarchy of subject and object. In short, one no longer consumed food or images, but was consumed by them. The masturbator, his imagination stimulated by reading novels or viewing statues, risked being overwhelmed by his own visions and enslaved by his own desire.

In a lithograph attributed to John L. Magee titled *Lola in Boston* (Fig. 68), a crowd stands mesmerized before the famous entertainer and striptease artist Lola Montez. A number of individuals, clearly overwhelmed by the experience, cover or blow their noses. The runny nose, an involuntary loss of self-control over the emission of fluid from the body, was a common euphemism for masturbation and the nocturnal emission of

¹³⁷ Graham, *A Lecture to Young Men*, 24.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 59.

semen.¹³⁹ Another print by Magee in the same series depicts the “enthusiastic reception” of another performance by Montez (Fig. 69). Here, a Quaker sitting in front of the stage puts down his copy of “Sober Thoughts” to fixate upon the pirouetting figure of Lola. This aroused spectator can only manage to peep through the fingers of his left hand with one eye, as if a binocular apprehension of what dances before him would overwhelm his senses.¹⁴⁰ This *Polyphemus Americanus*—an American Cyclops—with his lone visible eye strangely centered upon his face, is no doubt developing a “taste” for the flesh that Lola offers him. Yet, his intensifying lust to see is impeded by an almost instinctive retreat into the bounded, embodied stability of Cartesian monocularity. To the left of Lola, the devilish theater manager holds a contract for “half the house,” and snaps his glove as he eyes the poor Quaker who may be about to lose his soul in a Faustian bargain. Lola, like the fruit that will allow Adam and Eve see things as they really are, tempts the Quaker with another sort of complete revelation. The manager of the theater, like the snake in the garden, stands poised to strike. Another figure to the right of Lola inhabits a side balcony and reads a copy of the *New York Herald*, a well-known tabloid famous for its sordid depictions of violent crime and houses of ill-repute. The reader’s wide-eyed, immersive attention seems suspended between the newspaper and the woman. The compositional pairing in *Lola Has Come* of low reading with low seeing reveals how both acts deleteriously affected the eyes. The three eyeballs shared by these two men are hideously swollen and inflamed. The end result of masturbation, an act facilitated through one’s engagement with prurient texts and images, was depicted by Seth Pancoast as “Spermatorrheal Ophthalmia”—blindness—the over-stimulation of the eyes. The

¹³⁹ See John F. Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility: Manners in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1990), p. 124.

¹⁴⁰ Joy Kasson notes similar behavior by visitors to Horatio Greenough’s *Medora*. *Marble Queens*, 156.

unfortunate gentleman in Pancoast's print has had his eyes literally burned blind by the intensity of his imagination (Fig. 70).

Matthew Simpson was correct to claim that viewers were powerless to help the *Greek Slave* avoid her fate—the narrative required that the blameless, stainless virgin, a female Christ-figure, fulfill her unfortunate destiny. The physical location of the audience viewing the statue, even if holding steadfast to the prescribed narrative, mimics that of the Turks, evaluating the 'merits' of the woman, deciding whether or not to make a bid for her purchase. Whether *The Greek Slave* was viewed through the lens of the official narrative, or within the context of low-brow entertainments performed by nearby theatrical performers made no difference—the hazy veil of virtue clothing the maiden remained see-through, much like the insubstantial gauze that (barely) clothed the bodies of the women who performed in model artist companies such as Madame Wharton's Troupe of Living Females and Dr. Collyer's Model Personifications (Fig. 71).

Any ability Powers and Kellogg had to mediate the experience of the *Greek Slave*'s audience evaporated once viewers left the exhibition. Small parian-ware reproductions of the statue along with inexpensive prints and daguerreotypes were available for purchase in nearby shops.¹⁴¹ Such facsimiles allowed the *Greek Slave* to be seen, touched, and otherwise admired in private in whatever way, and within the context of whatever narrative was deemed appropriate by its new owner. These souvenirs frequently depicted *The Greek Slave* viewed from behind, where the chain binding her

¹⁴¹ An advertisement for a Daguerreotype of the statute by Southworth & Hawes appears in *The Boston Transcript* (July 21, 1848): 1. One parian version of the *Greek Slave* designed by M. Brucciani and sold by Copeland and Co. of London received a favorable reviews in at least two newspapers that I have been able to locate. See "Fine Arts," *The Illustrated London News* (May 1, 1852): 358; and "Cast of the Greek Slave," *The Morning Chronicle* (March 19, 1852), which extolled the exactitude of the copy as "an actual double of the marble. We could not—from memory, at all events—detect a shade of variation. The composition has a rather waxy appearance in some lights, but in others shows very like marble."

hands, as well as the crucifix hanging from the pedestal are obscured. In addition to masking these visual reminders of the proper narrative context of the statue, such voyeuristic viewpoints let the maiden's unchained hands dangle in front of her pubic area. Indeed, *The Greek Slave* appears to be touching herself in such compositions, not unlike the novel-reading woman before the raging fire in Isaac Cruikshank's *Luxury*.¹⁴² Matthew Simpson references the danger of these sorts of unmediated experiences, when he writes that:

Is it fit and becoming to exhibit such statuary, and is it right to take a painting or to produce Daguerreotype drawings of it for general distribution? Yet what would be the feelings of a father, were his daughter to be presented by a young man, with a painting of "The Greek Slave?" ... We appreciate the beautiful, but only when, as God designed it, it leads to the true and the good. The beautiful adorns and captivates, but it has no virtue in itself—it receives its moral hue from the subject to which it is applied. Flowers may bloom upon the pathway either to heaven or to hell.¹⁴³

In signaling out the particular danger to the nation's daughters that an image of the *Greek Slave* potentially posed, Simpson taps into period anxieties about the potential of female masturbation to spread from woman to woman and grow, as it were, into a pandemic of prurience that threatened to undermine the virtue of future republican mothers.¹⁴⁴

In the most popular novel of the 1840s, George Lippard's *The Quaker City* (1845), the author describes the plans of the rakish womanizer Gus Lorrimer to seduce (and thus

¹⁴² I owe this point to Joy Kasson.

¹⁴³ Simpson, "Powers' Greek Slave," n.p.

¹⁴⁴ I owe my understanding of this suspected phenomenon to Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Re-Reading Sex: Battles Over Sexual Knowledge and Suppression in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Vintage Books, 2002): esp. 101-103. The issue is addressed in Mary Sargeant Gove, *Solitary Vice: An Address to Parents and Those Who have the Care of Children* (Portland, Me.: Journal Office, 1839): 9,13; cited by Horowitz, 457 n. 28. See also Andrew Stone, M.D., *A Treatise on the Causes of the Premature Decay of American Youth: Of Masturbation or Self-Abuse* (Troy, N.Y.: Hygienic and Lung Institute, 1863): esp. 10. An examination of images of the *venus pudica* in European art with respect to issues of female sexuality can be found in Kelly Denis, "Playing With Herself: Female Sexuality and Aesthetic Indifference," in *Solitary Pleasures: The Historic, Literary, and Artistic Discourses of Autoeroticism*, Paula Bennett and Vernon A. Rosario II, eds. (New York and London: Routledge, 1995): 49-72.

permanently debase) the virtuous Mary Arlington by awakening and thus irreversibly unleashing her sexual passions:

In that silent gaze, which drank in the beauty of the maiden's face, Lorrimer arranged his plan of action. The book which he had left open on the table, the story which he was about to tell, were the first intimations of his atrocious design. While enchaining the mind of the Maiden, with a full story of Romance, it was his intention to wake her animal nature into full action. And when her veins were all alive with fiery pulsations, when her heart grew animate with sensual life, when her eyes swam in the humid moisture of passion, then she would sink helplessly into his arms, and—like the bird to the snake—flutter to her ruin.¹⁴⁵

The Greek Slave forced its viewers to make a portentous decision akin to the Judgment of Hercules. They had to choose the high road or the low road, to engage virtuous or base visual associations. John Adams's first choice for the national seal of the United States, the Judgment of Hercules was adopted by the American Sons of Temperance in 1842 as their official symbol, seen in a print published for the organization by Currier and Ives (Fig. 72). The Judgment of Hercules is a choice between two women—one chaste and pure, the other dazzling and licentious.¹⁴⁶ One, or both of these women could be projected by a viewer onto the surface of the *Greek Slave*, giving it the power to both save and seduce, the disease and the cure all wrapped in one unwieldy package. To look upon Powers' statue for the sake of moral betterment carried the risk that it might instead furnish the first step, or literally the first look down the road to ruin. A gaze demanded an interpretation, as virtuous and licentious narratives and

¹⁴⁵ George Lippard, *The Quaker City: A Romance of Philadelphia Life, Mystery, and Crime* (1845; Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995): 127. I do not intend, here or elsewhere in this study, to discount sentimentalism and sympathetic identification as a productive force for social change. For an examination of the trope of seduction—and sympathy in general—as a positive force that played a critical role in the development of democratic ideals in the early republic, see Elizabeth Barnes, *States of Sympathy: Seduction and Democracy in the American Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997). On the role of sentimentalist discourse in Harriet Beecher Stowe's profoundly successful novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, see Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985): esp. 122-146.

¹⁴⁶ On the dark lady/fair lady dichotomy in American literature, and its relationship to ideal sculptures of nude women, see Joy Kasson, *Marble Queens*, 168, 201.

atmospheres struggled for pride of place. The ultimate moral hue of the surface lay suspended somewhere in between the pure white marble, and the sumptuous red drapes.

A similar quandary presents itself in the initial canvas of Thomas Cole's 1847 unfinished series *The Cross and the World* (Fig. 73), where an evangelist imparts another redeeming narrative—the Gospel. A choice must be made to either accept or reject this 'correct' narrative, and, as with Powers's *Greek Slave*, the consequences are severe. To be confronted with this portentous choice is to risk everything. The pilgrim that accepts the evangelist's offer proceeds down the way of the cross, and is, eventually, welcomed into heaven (Fig. 74). The other figure, however, proceeds down the path to destruction, where he meets a tragic end (Fig. 75).

Hiram Powers's *Infernal Regions* in Cincinnati's Western Museum also depicted the ultimate consequences of incorrect moral choices.¹⁴⁷ Powers provided the voices for his mechanical characters, including the large central figure that he referred to as "Minos, King of the Underworld." At the end of each performance, which featured pyrotechnics and acoustic shrieks and groans, Powers delivered a short sermon offering advice to the crowd on how to avoid ending up in such a grim place at the ends of their own lives. Local ministers also got in on the act, preaching sermons during the show in an effort to bring about religious conversion and conviction in the audience.

The intense visual and auditory experience of *The Infernal Regions* was largely borrowed from camp meeting revivalism.¹⁴⁸ Camp meetings, outdoor theaters of

¹⁴⁷ For a detailed chronology of Powers' early career, including his work on the *Infernal Regions*, see Wunder, 39-65.

¹⁴⁸ The literature on camp meeting revivals is vast. See, for instance, Ellen Eslinger, *Citizens of Zion: The Social Origins of Camp Meeting Revivalism* (Knoxville, Tenn.: University of Tennessee Press, 1996); and Charles A. Johnson, *The Frontier Camp Meeting: Religion's Harvest Time* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1955). On the criticism of camp meetings revivals as excessively and counterproductively exciting, see James D. Bratt, "Religious Anti-Revivalism in Antebellum America,"

conversion popular during the Second Great Awakening, relied upon intense, spectacular effects, loud fire and brimstone sermons preached at night against the backdrop of bonfires that cast eerie shadows through the trees. Frances Trollope, who visited the American Midwest and lived for a time in Cincinnati, described a camp meeting she attended in rural Ohio in her book *The Domestic Manners of the Americans*. In language that could just as easily be applied to Powers' wax tableau, she writes:

...both fell forward on the straw, as if unable to endure in any other attitude the burning eloquence of a tall grim figure in black, who looked like an ill-constructed machine, set in action by a movement so violent, as to threaten its own destruction, so jerkingly, painfully, yet rapidly, did his words tumble out;...His terrible arms tossed above his head, had forced themselves so far out of his sleeves. It was too dreadful to look upon long, and we turned away shuddering.¹⁴⁹

Trollope, who had befriended the young Hiram Powers in Cincinnati, likely suggested the theme of the *Infernal Regions* to the artist, and worked closely with the sculptor and other museum staff to realize the project.¹⁵⁰

Excitement—the stimulation of the emotions—made one more susceptible to conversion, but it also left one open to other, more pernicious influences if conversion did

Journal of the Early Republic 24 (Spring 2004) 64-106. Bratt's thorough research includes an appendix that provides an exhaustive list of anti-revival publications available during the antebellum period.

¹⁴⁹ Frances Trollope, *Domestic Manners of the Americans* (London: The Folio Society: 1974): 169-170. Trollope's description of the "jerky" motion of the preacher may also represent an indirect allusion to the automata that Powers designed for the *Infernal Regions*. Years later, Powers admitted in a letter to his friend George Perkins Marsh that: "I used to humbug people when I managed the "Infernal Regions" (an Exhibition) at Cincinnati. I had a cart load of old wax figures to convert in to devils, and by warming the wax I was able to modify the features. I made a Beelzebub of Lorenzo Dow, a Cannabal of Napoleon and God forgive me! a hypocrite of John Quincy Adams and a coquette of Charlotte Corday! But I made no horses to stand on their hinder legs alone or upon their tails. I worked upon the superstitions and credulity of country people, and the simple means I took served my purpose." Hiram Powers to George Perkins Marsh, December 31, 1857. Available online at the George Perkins Marsh research center: http://bailey.uvm.edu:6336/dynaweb/woodstock/hpgpm571231/@Generic_BookView. Last accessed by the author on October 8th, 2006.

¹⁵⁰ Wunder, vol I.,50-52.

not take place.¹⁵¹ There was a shared concern among many religious and medical authorities that attendees of camp meeting revivals, *The Infernal Regions*, or *The Greek Slave* would achieve an emotional catharsis without any useful purpose—those “feelings awakened to no practical end” so condemned by Matthew Simpson. Viewers would become addicted to such spectacles—whether beautiful, like the *Greek Slave*, or horrific, like *The Infernal Regions*—seeking out the stimulation of their senses and emotions for their own sake, rather than as a means to moral betterment.¹⁵² This is precisely the same brand of criticism that reformers marshaled to combat gluttony, intemperance, and masturbation. Vision was likewise pharmaceutically constructed—therapeutic when used with prescriptive care but a dangerous narcotic on its own terms.

Audiences who sought out such spectacles merely for thrills, rather than as a means to moral betterment, risked developing nothing less than a “diseased excitability” of the eyes. As they developed a higher tolerance for such fare, these ocular drunkards required ever more frequent and more intense multi-sensory experiences to feel the rush, and, in the end, risked stimulating themselves to death. Within this context, vision was, in essence, pharmaceutically constructed, therapeutic when used with prescriptive care,

¹⁵¹ One of the most widely disseminated of these anti-revival tracts was J. W. Nevin, *The Anxious Bench* (Chambersburg, Penn.: 1843).

¹⁵² The British traveler Frederick Maryatt employs the language of intoxication and sobriety when he recounts such sermons and their electrifying effects at a camp meeting he witnessed seven miles outside of Cincinnati: “As the din increased so did their enthusiasm...It became a scene of Babel; more than twenty men and women were crying out at the highest pitch of their voices and trying apparently to be heard above the others. Every minute the excitement increased; some wrung their hands and called for mercy; some tore their hair; boys laid down crying bitterly, with their heads buried in the straw; there was sobbing almost to suffocation, and hysterics and deep agony. One young man clung to the form, crying: “Satan tears at me, but I would hold fast. Help-help, he drags me down!” It was a scene of horrible agony and despair; and, when it was at its height, one of the preachers came in, and raising his voice high above the tumult, entreated the Lord to receive into his fold those who now repented and would fain return. ...I quitted the spot and hastened away into the forest, for the sight was too painful, too melancholy. Its sincerity could not be doubted; but it was the effect of overexcitement, not of sober reasoning.” Frederick Maryatt, *A Diary In America* (1839; New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962): 242-243.

but a dangerous narcotic on its own terms. Consuming *The Greek Slave* in antebellum America was a risky proposition indeed, one that could make viewers better—or *blind*.

Chapter 4:

Frederic Church and the Overindulgent Eye

“The tropical landscape by Mr. F.E. Church is well named. . .”¹
— James Somerville

“Dissect him how I may, then, I but go skin deep;
I know him not, and never will.”
—Captain Ahab, *Moby Dick*

The title that Frederic Church assigned to his immense canvas, *The Heart of the Andes*, pre-conditioned audiences to expect a consummate visual experience (Fig 76). In the minds of many thousands of people who strolled across Manhattan to the Tenth Street Studio Building in the spring of 1859, the painting’s bold title actively inflected the image that they were soon to see. On a superficial level, my remark calls attention to something patently obvious. Any title cultivates a certain set of expectations. But *The Heart of the Andes* was not just *any* title.² The phrase implied foreclosure and finality, an ultimate expression, an emphatic, terminal “there.” It generated a surplus of desire, dangling the promise of fulfillment in the imaginations of would-be viewers, an ecstatic climax where manifest destiny, at long last, arrives at a manifest destination. The title audaciously implies that once one had seen *this* painting of the Andes, there are no others worth looking at. *The Cincinnati Inquirer* claimed that “No words can do it justice; no enthusiasm can exaggerate its effects or

¹ James Somerville, *F.E. Church’s Painting: The Heart of the Andes* (Philadelphia, 1860): 1. This is the beginning of the first sentence of Somerville’s pamphlet.

² “Cecilia,” writing for *The Southern Literary Messenger*, related that “We had the happiness of seeing at one of the exhibition rooms Church’s last painting—“The Heart of the Andes.” How poetical and suggestive the title—the Heart of the Andes! How much of mystery and power and beauty are revealed to the imagination by the words!” Cecilia, “Memory Pictures,” *The Southern Literary Messenger* 30:1 (January, 1860): 29. Another reviewer notes that the title is “a name significantly bestowed.” See “Church’s Heart of the Andes,” *Russell’s Magazine* 5:5 (August, 1859): 427.

overstate its beauties. All other pictures seem worthless since we have seen *The Heart of the Andes*.”³ To look past the painting for something more, the title seems to suggest, would be as a pointless as searching for the liver, pancreas, or spleen of that great South American mountain range and expecting it to be nearly as revealing or dazzling a *summa* as its heart. Wolf Mahlstock, writing for *Vanity Fair* with tongue firmly planted in cheek, suggested that:

The Heart of the Andes having proved so very attractive, it is proposed to order a series with anatomical titles. Commissions are already in contemplation: *The Pericardium of the Alleghenies*, by Hart; *Lights of Boston Harbor*, by Day; *Stomach of the Maelstrom*, by Swallow; *In’ards of the Kentucky Cavern* by Holloway; and *Lungs of the Windward Islands*, by Bellows.⁴

Mahlstock’s puns, ridiculous as they are, foreground the incisive, revelatory power of the anatomical metonymy at work in Church’s title. When we look upon stomachs, lungs, “in’ards,” or hearts, we bear witness to inner truths not normally exposed to view. The reception of the painting thus turns upon a dynamic interrelationship between the nouns “heart” and the “Andes,” one where the calculated juxtaposition of an internal organ and vast swath of rugged mountains plays a heretofore unrecognized yet critical role in orchestrating meaning.

But when we peel back the surface of Church’s title to examine *its* heart, we uncover a congenital arrhythmia, a paradox embedded in its syntactic structure that both advances and countermands its promise of full disclosure. As a conceptual metaphor, *The Heart of the Andes* depends upon an analogical relationship that entails

³ “The Heart of the Andes,” *The Cincinnati Inquirer*, 1860. Church Scrapbook, New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation, Olana State Historic Site, hereafter referred to as Olana. Few articles in Church’s scrapbook are identified beyond the name of the newspaper and the year of publication.

⁴ Wolf Mahlstock, “Boston and its Pictures,” *Vanity Fair*, December 9, 1860: 288.

a slippage of context between two discrete referents. The fundamental importance and centrality of the heart in relation to the human body is placed alongside the notion of the “Andes” as a living organism where—if such were the case—the particular region depicted on Church’s canvas would function as a simultaneously centripetal and centrifugal space, an origin and a terminus, the place from which and to which everything flows. While the title smoothes over ontological distinctions by tracing connections between a pair of ostensibly dissimilar objects, its effectiveness nevertheless depends upon the persistence of the very gaps and rough edges it seeks to obfuscate. Incomprehensible outside of secure categorical distinctions between bodies and landscapes, *The Heart of the Andes* prompts viewers to perform a synthetic act that is grounded in *différance*.⁵ This cognitive process instinctually plays upon tensions between desire and restraint, the impulse to combine run up against the impossibility of seamless cohesion.⁶ The heart is to the human body what “this place” is to the Andes not because mountain ranges and human beings are

⁵ In this way, *The Heart of the Andes* paradoxically bolstered its pretensions to unity and comprehensiveness by drawing power from the symptomatic deficiencies at the heart of its own metaphorical project. The interstices between a sign and its referent are, of course, crucial to the maintenance of subject/object distinctions that make communicative action possible. While I realize that *all* synthetic acts are by definition predicated upon *différance*, I mean to emphasize here how metaphorical language in particular draws its power directly from these internal contradictions, lifts them into consciousness, and amplifies their magnitude. Jacques Lacan argues that the inherent bipolarity of language, the way it draws subjects and objects together by reinforcing their distinctness from one another, is structured around a “lack,” a realization early in childhood that one is separate from the mother, and thus detached from the world. See Jacques Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1978), and “The Mirror State as Formative Function of the ‘I’ as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience,” in *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977): 1-7.

⁶ The painting and its title animated tensions between what John Locke termed “wit” and “judgment.” Locke writes that “Wit lying most in the assemblage of ideas, and putting those together with quickness and variety wherein can be found any resemblance or congruity, thereby to make pleasant pictures and agreeable visions in the fancy. Judgment, on the contrary, lies quite on the other side, in separating carefully one from other ideas wherein can be found the least difference, thereby to avoid being misled by similitude and by affinity to take one thing for another.” John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Roger Woolhouse, ed., (London: Penguin Classics, 1997): 153, quoted in W.J.T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1986): 122.

coextensive, but because they are not. The force of *The Heart of the Andes* thus derives from its rendering such discreteness *indiscreet*. The title begs its audience to play along and accept the proposition that Church's landscape is—metaphorically, at least—a body. Therefore, before viewers even arrived at the exhibition hall, it seems likely that they actively teased out these sorts of correspondences between the anatomical and geographical components of Church's title. That *The Heart of the Andes* was comprehensible at all as the title of a painting is reliant upon an unconscious acceptance of some degree of permeability between mental conceptions of bodies and landscapes.

The potency of the painting's name is also amplified by a productive reciprocity between two iterations of the word "heart," which is at once a physical, corporeal object and a figurative, metaphorical construct. The title encouraged would-be viewers of the picture to engage an expansive strategy of reception, to account for anatomy and romance, thinking and feeling, "looking at" and "looking in." The heart is a rhetorical figure laden with ambiguity, something simultaneously material and conceptual, inherently difficult to penetrate. A sharp, indivisible core, the heart is possessed with a primal intensity of meaning; but like a mirage, its solidity evaporates into a nebulous abstraction just as it appears within the grasp of comprehension. As a summary conception of larger subject, the power of the heart proceeds from stresses and strains that animate the relationship between representation and reality.⁷ Before they even saw the painting, audiences thus

⁷ For a consideration of the way that Church's art occupies unsettled terrain between "real" and "ideal" modes of representation, see Barbara Novak, *Nature and Culture: American Landscape and Painting, 1825-1875* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1980): 47-77. The totalizing yet reductive aspect of Church's title, the way that it mediates between the all-important privileged part

comprehended *The Heart of the Andes* through a cognitive process that was intrinsically synthetic and generative.⁸ Despite the jocular prodding of Wolf Mahlstock, the unfathomable capacity of the heart to address issues essential to meaning-making far exceeded that of the lungs, stomach, or “in’ards.”

The Heart of the Andes, descriptive and evocative, incisive and broad-ranging, implies (and conflates) two modes of perception: one cold and clinical; the other impressionable, sensitive, and suffused with emotion. Animated by a tension between breadth and precision, the painting’s title posits an observer-to-be who is at once poet and anatomist, one who synthesizes, combines, and analogizes, but also discriminates, deconstructs and dismembers. Working in tandem with the painting it identifies, the title registers and ultimately seeks to resolve the epistemic conflict between rational and emotional modes of cognition that lay at the “heart” of American romanticism. Indeed, the title does not merely denote but actively produces the very dialectics between interiority and exteriority, private emotions and public spaces, and art and science with which the painting itself contends. This delicate, almost poignant sense of subtlety, balance, and restraint, is coupled with an ambitious drive towards resolution and completion, and invests *The Heart of the Andes* with a revelatory power as one of the preeminent representational projects of

and the all-encompassing whole bears a resemblance to what Stephen Bann has articulated as the “poetics of the museum.” See Bann’s *The Clothing of Clio: A Study of the Representation of History in Nineteenth-Century Britain and France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984): 77-92.

⁸ Edmund Burke relates how “The mind of man has naturally a far greater alacrity and satisfaction in tracing resemblances than in searching for differences; because by making resemblances we produce *new images*, we unite, we create, we enlarge our stock; but in making distinctions we offer no food at all to the imagination; the task itself is more severe and irksome, and what pleasure we derive from it is something of a negative and indirect manner.” Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Idea of the Sublime and the Beautiful*, ed. James T. Boulton (South Bend, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1958): 18; quoted in Mitchell, *Iconology*, 124. I call attention to Burke’s phrase “enlarge our stock” as a clear allusion to the generative—one might even say “reproductive”—pleasure of synthetic sight.

the nineteenth century. By any other name, however, *The Heart of the Andes* would not *mean* the same.

Ambition, Infection, and (Re)presentation

The Heart of the Andes appears to support the ambitious claims of its title (Fig 77). The painting is a *tour-de-force* of expansive space and microscopic particulars, all cohering tightly together in a grand unified presentation of historical, religious, and scientific narratives. The myriad of details contained within *The Heart of the Andes*—the flora, fauna, and geologic formations—are based upon actual specimens collected or drawn by Church during two trips to South America, in 1853 and 1857.⁹ But the composition of the painting, the artist's own invention, was not derived from any single, actual viewpoint. It functioned instead as an encyclopedic structure, an armature whose shape allowed for the most information to be arranged in a way that granted maximum visual access. Taking his cue from the great German naturalist and explorer Alexander von Humboldt, Church strove to paint a summary view of the tropics that could stand on its own as a working index.¹⁰ Henry Tuckerman wrote that:

⁹ For a thorough history of Church's South American expeditions and his planning, execution, and exhibition of *The Heart of the Andes*, see Kevin Avery, *Church's Great Picture: The Heart of the Andes* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1993).

¹⁰ On Church's engagement with Alexander von Humboldt's ideas about the potential uses of landscape painting as an aide to natural science, see Edmund V. Bunske, "Humboldt and an Aesthetic Tradition in Geography," *The Geographical Review* 71:2 (April, 1981): 127-46. Both *The Heart of the Andes* and Humboldt's *Cosmos*, through their respective attempts to render nature as a clear, rational, and comprehensible model, operate within the epistemological parameters of the late Enlightenment. Less well understood is the degree to which Church's understanding of Humboldt's ideas might have been influenced by John Ruskin's own reading of the great German naturalist. Humboldt's resonance can be clearly detected in the following passage from Ruskin's *The Stones of Venice*: "The charts of the world which have been drawn up by modern science have thrown into a narrow space the expression of a vast amount of knowledge, but I have never yet seen any one pictorial enough to enable the spectator to imagine the kind of contrast in physical character which exists between Northern and Southern countries. We know the differences in detail, but we have not that broad glance

The proof of the scientific interest in such landscapes as have established Church's popularity may be found in the vivid and authentic illustrations they afford of descriptive physical geography. No one conversant with the features of climate, vegetation, and distribution of land and water that characterize the portions of North and South America, as represented by the artist, can fail to recognize them in all his delineations. It is not that they merely give us a vague impression, but a positive embodiment of these traits. The minute peculiarities of sky, atmosphere, trees, rocks, rivers, and herbage are pictured here with the fidelity of a naturalist.¹¹

To view *The Heart of the Andes* as a scientific document, however, requires some degree of critical distance. The painting in fact countermanded such detached, disinterested appraisals. A broad channel in the center of the picture generated a tendency to look *in* rather than at *The Heart of the Andes*. This artery effectively spreads open the landscape and pulls apart the dense forest in the foreground to the left and right sides of the canvas to allow the eye free range to proceed uninhibited up the valley into the middle ground and background of the scene.¹² By presenting its audience with a virtually unlimited number of painstakingly rendered details, *The Heart of the Andes*—all fifty square feet of it—truly attempted to show all that Church's ambitious title claimed it did (Fig. 78). The painting withheld nothing,

and grasp which would enable us to feel them in their fullness.” [online: get hard reference] It may also be productive to consider *The Heart of the Andes* as a kind of “visual anthology.” In its original usage, the word “anthology” referred to a collection of flowers. *The Heart of the Andes* not only presented its viewers with a veritable explosion of trees, ferns, shrubs, and flowers, but predisposed its audience to engage its content through an anthological process. The painting refuses to answer directly the question, “What *is* the heart of the Andes?” Instead, it floods the sensorium with an exhaustive list of particulars and places an aggregation of exemplary specimens before the viewer whose task it becomes to draw connections and synthesize an answer from this vast accumulation of visual data. See Barbara M. Benedict, “The Paradox of the Anthology: Collecting and *Différence* in Eighteenth-Century Britain,” *New Literary History* 34 (2003): 231-256.

¹¹ Henry Tuckerman, *Book of the Artists* (1867; reprint New York: James F. Carr, ed., 1966): 371-72.

¹² David Miller has noted similar structures in nineteenth-century American nature writing. While discussing the travelogue of one “Porte Crayon” that recounts a journey to Lake Drummond in the Great Dismal Swamp, Miller writes that “...by mobilizing the sexual analogy implicit in the situation (the sense of penetrating a female landscape by way of the narrow channel; the rhythm of mounting tension and orgasmic release in the narrative) and by realistically portraying the landscape (despite the sentimental allusions), Porte brings death at the symbolical level into a dialectical relationship with life.” David Miller, *Dark Eden: The Swamp in Nineteenth-Century American Culture* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989): 35. See also Ronald Paulson, *Literary Landscape: Turner and Constable* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1982): esp. 3-18.

titillating and tantalizing its audience with a complete exposure of nature's innermost core. In his 43-page guide to viewing the painting, Theodore Winthrop, in his own distinctive language, described Church's enterprise this way:

A master artist works his way to the core of nature, because he demands not husks or pith, but kernel. The inmost spirit of beauty is not to be discerned by dodging about and waiting until the doors of her enchanted castle shall stand ajar. The true knight must wind the horn of challenge, chop down the ogre, garrote the griffon, hoist the portcullis with a petard, and pierce to the shrine, deaf to the blandishments of the sirens. Then, when he has won his bride, the queen, he must lead her beauty forth for the world's wonderment, to dazzle and inspire.¹³

Church did not settle for an opaque, suggestive, hazy atmosphere through which objects were only obliquely seen, but endeavored to drag the "inmost spirit of beauty"—chopping, piercing, and garroting along the way—out of *her* shrine, fixing the authentic, undiluted image up on the canvas for all to confront, face to face, in crystal clarity.

A visual unveiling of nature's secrets, *The Heart of the Andes* lured its audience into an eroticized visual quest not unlike that depicted by William Hogarth in the first state of his 1730/31 engraving *Boys Peeping at Nature* (Fig. 79).¹⁴ Designed as a subscription ticket for a number of Hogarth's print series, including *The Four Times of Day* and *The Harlot's Progress*, *Boys Peeping at Nature* playfully juxtaposes proper and improper visual and artistic practices. Nature is personified here by a statue of the multi-breasted Ephesian Diana. Nude from the waist up and clothed only by a long, rudimentary skirt and a veil that descends largely unseen

¹³ Theodore Winthrop, *A Companion to The Heart of the Andes* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1859): 4-5.

¹⁴ See Ronald Paulson, *Hogarth: Volume 1, The "Modern Moral Subject"* (Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 1992): 274-80, and *Hogarth's Graphic Works*, 3rd rev. ed. (London: The Print Room, 1989): 75-76, for further information about *Boys Peeping at Nature*. My interpretation of the engraving in this paragraph closely follows Paulson's meticulous analysis.

down the length of her back, she is surrounded by two putti engaged in copying her. The putto on the left paints a bust-length image of Nature upon a canvas. By omitting entirely the lower-half of her body, and reducing the number of Nature's breasts from eight to two or three, this putto, as Ronald Paulson argues, effectively chastens his subject.¹⁵ Even further removed from a direct engagement with Nature is the putto on the right, who refuses to look directly at his subject, relying instead upon his memory and imagination to depict the statue.¹⁶ These two putti embody the virtues of critical distance and artistic interpretation. Showing no such restraint is a brash satyr who shamelessly lifts Nature's skirt to unveil her hidden secrets.¹⁷ The satyr's hooves recall the myth of Actaeon, whose glimpse of the naked, bathing Diana transformed him into a stag to be devoured by his own hunting hounds. Perhaps to prevent just such a catastrophe, a third putto physically confronts the satyr and attempts to pull his head from beneath Nature's dress.

Hogarth's image of a conflict between compulsive and forbearing vision, sensual and spiritual sight, proves doubly effective when considered in its original context as an illustration for a subscription ticket. This ticket—a kind of voucher—was issued to a subscriber for a half guinea. Once Hogarth had completed the work, the subscriber exchanged the ticket plus the remaining half guinea to obtain the

¹⁵ Paulson, *Hogarth's Graphic Works*, 75.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ An indictment of the lust for forbidden knowledge, the trope of a man who lecherously peeps or reaches up a woman's skirt appears in other Hogarth engravings as well, including *Cunicularii, or the Wise Men of Godliman in Consultation* (1726). This print satirizes Mary Toft, a young woman from Surrey who falsely claimed in 1726 that she had given birth to a brood of rabbits. Here, "The Lady in the Straw" (Toft) lays in a prone position upon a bed as "An Occult Philosopher Searching into the Depth of Things" reaches up her dress. For more about this print, see Paulson, *Hogarth's Graphic Works*, 69-70.

engravings.¹⁸ For a time, then, the subscriber was left to dwell upon a series of images half-paid for yet unseen. The subscription and its constituent illustrated ticket entailed a commitment to accept the final work, a contract that registers a loss of control over the outcome of the project. Whether the engravings proved suggestive, evocative, or explicit, subscribers were bound to accept them and to pay in full lest they be willing to sacrifice their initial investments. Visitors on their way to pay admission to see *The Heart of the Andes* grappled with a similar degree of uncertainty as they ruminated upon its ambiguous title and the wildly enthusiastic descriptions of the painting in the popular press. Like those in England a century earlier who anxiously waited to see Hogarth's ribald engravings, the American public wondered whether or not they were about to behold the secrets of nature unveiled before their eyes. Both Hogarth and Church required that their audiences, with tickets in hand, be invested in the outcome.

Because of its uncanny ability to muddle the boundaries between presentation and representation, *The Heart of the Andes* astonished its viewers. "Its charm is perfect truth," remarked one critic, impressed by Church's mimetic talents, "you gaze over a landscape on canvas as if upon nature itself."¹⁹ To get all that *The Heart of the Andes* had to offer required audiences to go all in. Disinterested aesthetic contemplation proved an inadequate means of engagement. Many who visited the painting, which toured the United States as a phenomenally successful one-picture

¹⁸ Paulson, *Hogarth: Volume 1, "The Modern Moral Subject,"* 274-75.

¹⁹ Unidentified clipping in the Heart of the Andes Scrapbook, marked "Chicago, January 11, 1861," Olana Archives. Viewers of *Niagara* (1857), Church's first large-scale popular success, expressed similar sentiments that they were standing not before a picture but the falls themselves. See David Huntington, "Frederic Church's *Niagara*: Nature and Nation's Type," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 25 (Spring 1983): 126. The most comprehensive analysis of *Niagara* remains Jeremy Adamson, "Frederic Church's 'Niagara': The Sublime as Transcendence," Ph.D. Diss., University of Michigan, 1981.

show from 1859 to 1861, reported feeling dizzy, faint, terrified, and rapturous, overcome by the sublimity of their own disembodied projection into the pictorial space of the canvas.²⁰ As a number of scholars have noted, Church and his agent John McClure carefully calibrated the exhibition of *The Heart of the Andes* to produce this reality effect.²¹ Church and McClure displayed *The Heart of the Andes* in darkened rooms where the only sources of illumination—a window, skylight, or gas lamp—were directed to focus upon the surface of the painting like a spotlight, making it appear to glow and, at times, shimmer. Instead of displaying the picture in a bright, gilded frame as was fashionable during the period, Church ordered one carved from dark walnut according to his own design (Fig. 80). The muted tone of this proscenium-like frame blended into the surrounding darkness, further emphasizing the bright surface of the canvas. The frame augmented the pull that the scene exerted on its viewers' eyes through the use of deeply recessed coffers perfectly aligned with the perspectival system of the picture. Solidly set upon the floor and flanked by a pair of velvet curtains, the frame with the picture inside of it produced the illusion—intended by Church and acknowledged by many visitors—that one was actually looking out the window of a South American hacienda onto an actual scene.

Extending the logic of this fiction further, the view depicted through the window

²⁰ For a short account of these sensations, see Deborah Poole, "Landscape and the Imperial Subject: U.S. Images of the Andes," in *Close Encounters of Empire: Writing the Cultural History of U.S.-Latin American Relations*, Gilbert M. Joseph, Catherine C. LeGrand and Ricardo D. Salvatore, eds. (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998): 107.

²¹ Franklin Kelly, *Frederic Church and the National Landscape* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1988): 96-98. Kelly emphasizes that the painting's composition itself—before the *mise en scène* of the exhibition is taken into account—produces this effect. This characteristic of Church's painting can be traced back to earlier canvases such as *Storm in the Mountains (Blasted Tree)* (1847), where "Church organized everything to thrust the viewer into the pictorial space quickly and forcibly, so that the sensation of looking at a picture is replaced by a feeling of actually being present in the scene." Idem., 17; See Kevin Avery, "The Heart of the Andes Exhibited: Frederic E. Church's Window on the Equatorial World," *American Art Journal* 18:1 (1986) 52-72., for a thorough account of the way that the exhibition amplified these already potent impressions.

would have continued in the mind's eye of its visitors, present though unseen, a full 360 degrees around and behind the other three walls of the house, enveloping the audience and immersing them into the very *Heart of the Andes* at which they gazed. Art historian Kevin Avery has summarized that “to approach the ensemble of picture and frame was to be absorbed by it, to imaginatively cross a threshold into a post-Biblical Eden.”²²

With this in mind, I now consider the stakes of Church's project. What were the implications for his audience as they confronted an image that was so sharply delineated that it seemed to make truth claim? By dissolving the boundary between the inside and outside of the scene and by undercutting the ability of the frame to demarcate what is intrinsic and extrinsic to *The Heart of the Andes*, Church threatened to traverse—and perhaps transgress—the threshold between the representational and the real. Less than one month after the debut of Church's painting in New York in 1859, Oliver Wendell Holmes published his seminal essay “The Stereoscope and the Stereograph” in *The Atlantic Monthly*. When viewing a stereograph, Holmes described how:

The mind feels its way into the very depths of the picture. The scraggy branches of a tree in the foreground run out at us as if they would scratch our eyes out. . . . There is such a frightful amount of detail, that we have the same sense of infinite complexity that nature gives us. A painter shows us masses; the stereoscopic figure spares us nothing—all must be there.²³

The Heart of the Andes, with its audience moving in close to peep into its depths with binocular opera glasses, was thus a kind of hybrid, a painting with pretensions to

²² Avery, “The Heart of the Andes Exhibited,” 58.

²³ Oliver Wendell Holmes, “The Stereoscope and the Stereograph,” 1859. Online version at www.yale.edu/amstud/inforev/stereo.html. Accessed on July 12, 2005.

stereographic sharpness and solidity (Fig. 81).²⁴ There are no visible brushstrokes to signal the artist's presence or to distract the eye from the tactility and sheen of the painting's finely articulated objects. *The Heart of the Andes* seems to exist on its own accord. It offers not simply the semblance of the thing represented, but the thing itself. The painting not only stimulated desire, but claimed to resolve it by showing everything there is to see and leaving nothing to the imagination.²⁵

But the stereoscopic gaze was intrinsically private.²⁶ The stereoscope (including the model invented by Holmes) could only engage one individual at a time. The device sealed the eyes off from everything external to the image and privileged an intimate, personal encounter within the confines of the home. Although I

²⁴ Elizabeth Lindquist-Cock has conclusively demonstrated that Church used stereographs to assist him with some of his most important compositions including *Cotopaxi* (1862) and *The Parthenon* (1871). See Elizabeth Lindquist-Cock, "Frederic Church's Stereographic Vision," *Art in America* (Sept.-Oct., 1973): 70-75. Two stereocards owned by Church that date from around the year 1860 are *View Within the Crater of Pinchincha*, *Looking Down from the Side of the Great Eastern Wall* and *Volcano of Cotopaxi from its Base*, both photographed by Camillus Farrand and published by E. and H.T. Anthony & Co., New York. These two examples are published in *Fire & Ice: Treasures from the Photographic Collection of Frederic Edwin Church at Olana*, ex. cat. (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2002): 21. Deborah Poole remarks that "The out-of-body experiences described by Church's public can be usefully compared to the sensations of vertigo and immersion that contemporary viewers described for the new technology of the stereoscope." Poole, 136, n. 31. While I have yet to discover a stereocard among Church's personal effects that might have served as a model for his composition of *The Heart of the Andes*, I merely intend to show that the painting's realism operated within a cognitive style determined by a contemporaneous surge in the popularity of stereographs in the United States the late 1850s and early 1860s. Barbara Novak has likened the effect of viewing landscape paintings through opera glasses as productive of "a stereoscopic intimacy that remains curiously satisfying." Novak, 26; David Miller also refers to *The Heart of the Andes* as a "stereoscopic space." D. Miller, 111, 113. Neither Poole, Novak, nor D. Miller pursues the issue any further.

²⁵ I adapt this phrase and its connotations from Jill Bennett, "Leaving Nothing to Imagination: Obscenity and Postmodern Subjectivity," in *The Rhetoric of the Frame: Essays on the Boundaries of the Artwork*, Paul Duro, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996): 242-257.

²⁶ For an account of the stereoscope's role in the production of modern vision, see Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1990): 116-136; Recent scholarship has historicized the role of stereoscopes in nineteenth-century American social history, especially Alan Trachtenberg, *Reading American Photographs: Images as History, Matthew Brady to Walker Evans* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1989): 82-89. Nancy West, "Fantasy, Photography, and the Marketplace: Oliver Wendell Holmes and the Stereoscope," *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 19 (1996): 231-258; and Laura Schiavo, "A Collection of Endless Extent and Beauty: Stereographs, Vision, Taste, and the American Middle-Class, 1850-1880," Ph.D. Diss., The George Washington University, 2003. Schiavo emphasizes the way that privacy conditioned the use of stereoscopes.

emphasize here the ways in which *The Heart of the Andes* drew upon the mimetic power of the stereoscope to enhance its pretensions to indexicality, the public exhibition of the picture in crowded, gas-lit venues played a crucial role in the operation and reception of its realism.²⁷ In other words, the painting transformed a representational strategy that was intended to function in a private setting and motivated it instead to unleash its intensity upon the masses who paid 25 cents apiece to witness the disclosure and exposure of the innermost secrets of the Andes' "heart." Church's relentlessly graphic delineation of his objects produced startling, almost embarrassing effects. This is especially apparent in the exposed root systems of the two trees that dominate the center right foreground of the scene (Fig. 82).

Like those in the stereoscopic landscape described by Oliver Wendell Holmes, these gnarled roots indeed "run out at us" as if to mount an intromissionary assault upon the eyes.²⁸ Imbued with quasi-gothic horror, the visually threatening roots, stripped bare of the substrate of surrounding soil under which they are normally concealed, appear poised to strike, scratch, and blind. Botanically, the roots operate to transport and transmute that which is formless and inchoate (water and nutrients in the rich, tropical loam) into something particular and precise (a certain species of tree). In essence, these feelers feed an organic engine that produces formal specificity. But in this case, they seem to have over-reached their normal boundaries and find themselves in a precarious position, dangling there in the thin air, their exposure a threat to the very survival of the trees they nourish and serve. The root

²⁷ Private viewing was privileged, however, in regard to both a watercolor and a related high-quality engraving of *The Heart of the Andes* produced in Great Britain in 1862. See Gerald Carr, "American Art in Great Britain: The National Gallery Watercolor of *The Heart of the Andes*," *Studies in the History of Art* 12 (1982): 84-87.

²⁸ See n.23, above.

problem here is the absence of soil; or more precisely, the soil's failure to effectively mediate its subject.

It appears that these trees with their roots tenuously adhered to the edge of a precipice are only one strong, erosive rain shower away from tumbling down into the water below (Fig. 83). As such, the processes of graphic exposure and structural erosion are perfectly aligned. The soil functions both optically (to conceal the roots) and structurally (to reinforce the physical integrity of the trees). Any further removal of soil will concomitantly increase the odds of a catastrophic collapse. Church's trees, with their mediating matrix gradually washing away, are thus condemned to death by means of excessive revelation. The roots of the trees are in a figurative sense obscene, because they depict that which should be left "off scene" and unseen.²⁹ If any more of them are allowed to be seen, roots and trees together will plunge into the river and *out* of the scene entirely.

The roots register a representational surplus that spills out into the domain of the beholder, metaphorically scratching, wounding, and puncturing the eye.³⁰ A discordant part that overwhelms the unity and harmony of the painting, the roots call attention to themselves as an excess, an irruption that exposes and demystifies the hermetic anatomy of the artwork (and the tree). Their hyper-visibility effects a transmogrification of an internal structure into an external effect, one that is

²⁹ My understanding of the nature of obscenity has benefited from Kelly Dennis, "The Face of God: Representation as the Pornography of Modernity." Ph.D. Diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1994; Lynda Nead, *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality* (London and New York, Routledge, 1992); and Linda Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and "The Frenzy of the Visible"* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

³⁰ My description of the way that these dense, strange, knotted roots interject themselves into the viewer's consciousness draws upon Roland Barthes's notion of the *punctum*. See Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1980).

symptomatic the painting's ambiguous position in between nascent categories of high and low art. The precarious situation of these trees on the edge of oblivion is a microcosm of the nervous tension that animates the painting as a whole—a painting that likewise seeks to shuffle off the constraints of the medium that gave it birth. Church seems determined here to push pictorial representation to its very limits, to wring out and exhaust all its possibilities.

Yet one anonymous British critic for *Littell's Living Age* was unmoved by Church's penchant for exacting detail in *The Heart of the Andes*:

A certain mastery of manipulation Mr. Church undoubtedly has, but whether he is in the highest sense a great artist we are not yet prepared to decide. The "Heart of the Andes" exhibits his versatility rather than increases his reputation. The local color of American scenery is new to us; yet arguing from what we know, the proofs would confirm in us that Mr. Church is not a great colorist. We know the exquisite tints of American shrubs and flowers transplanted from their natural soil, and then we ask why they should lose their brilliant, luminous appearance and delicacy by being painted in the topics. The painting might have been expected to be startling in its vividness, yet on the contrary, it is opaque—the texture reminding us of German painting on copper. It is summer, but there is no warmth—there is sun, but it is simply light, without heat. The mountains are leaden, like the clouds—the sky has no luminousness. There is no tender dying away of tint, without which Mr. Ruskin has said there is no good, no right color.³¹

The reviewer was left cold by the very qualities that produce the painting's remarkable illusionism. *The Heart of the Andes* is too sharp and too bright. It wants for delicacy, tenderness, and subtlety, all of which are lost amidst the veneer of Church's "mastery of manipulation" that the writer likens to the opaque, reflective sheen of "German painting on copper." The picture, according to these criteria, is ridiculous in its meticulousness, devoid of any real substance or atmosphere. Church, in his zeal for precision and technical virtuosity, had apparently forgotten to give his

³¹ "Church's 'Heart of the Andes,'" *Littell's Living Age* (Oct. 29, 1859): 318.

Heart a soul. Near the end of the review, the writer praises Church for his attempt, but nevertheless concludes that “the first flights of genius are never very original. There is an old way of trying on wings to feel how high they may soar.”

Here, the writer draws a parallel between Frederic Church and Icarus, the figure from Greek mythology who likewise tried on a pair of wings and discovered (the hard way) the limits of his youthful ambition. Church is found guilty of adopting an artistic tradition “founded on European models,” and abusing it through the application of brute force.³² The allusion to Icarus in the guise of reckless and unsophisticated “first flights,” while perhaps a bit harsh, is nevertheless perceptive, and productive in getting at the peculiar character of Church’s art. Just as Icarus sought to fly to an Olympian heaven, Church, in *The Heart of the Andes*, proffered a vision of a tropical Eden, one that instantaneously transported its viewers to the spot. The painter and his mythological counterpart both drove their projects to the breaking point, to the moment when the unity of their respective compositions is rent asunder by a searing intensity, both of them done in by a catastrophic failure of structural integrity. There is indeed what might be described as an Icarian dynamic at work in *The Heart of the Andes*, a picture that—like the overextended roots of its trees—seems possessed of its own *hubris*. Just as the soil works to physically reinforce and optically cover up the junction between the trees and the Earth, so the wax at the base of Icarus’s wings seals *and conceals* through an analogous two-fold process.³³ *The Heart of the Andes* and the winged Icarus both come undone because they venture too

³² Ibid.

³³ I will make a similar argument later in this chapter about the function of atmosphere, which likewise bolsters the structural integrity of landscape paintings by protecting them (and their viewers) from the blinding intensity of direct sunlight.

near to their respective goals. Church and Icarus want to show and see too much, and the resulting proximity between subject and object erodes and melts their respective media. As such, the objects in Church's painting are too close for comfort, shrinking the gap between art and reality. Those who were (or who allowed themselves to be) convinced were dazzled and drawn into the composition, while others dismissed Church's technique as mechanical, deceptive, brazen, and gaudy. In this vein, the anonymous author of the review in *Littell's Living Age* criticized the mountains and sky in Church's painting as heavy, dense, and "leaden," weighed down by over-exposure and indelicate treatment. For him, *The Heart of the Andes* just didn't fly. By showing everything there was to see, and by meticulously delineating every last leaf, twig, rock, and cloud, there was nothing left for the reviewer to do but look and shrug.

Fantasy, Fullness, and Finish: The Incoherence of Completeness

In his landmark study *Techniques of the Observer*, Jonathan Crary describes the plight of the binocular observer set adrift in a stereoscopic image as witnessing "an assemblage of local zones of three-dimensionality, zones imbued with a hallucinatory clarity, but which when taken together never coalesce into a homogeneous field. ... Part of the fascination of these images is due to this immanent disorder, to the fissures that disrupt [their] coherence."³⁴ In a similar vein, the most persistent criticism of *The Heart of the Andes* was that the painting was an un-

³⁴ Crary, 126. Indeed, *The Heart of the Andes* is riven with incongruent spatial relationships, a result of Church's failure to unify the elements of his composition into a single, uniform system of scale. This makes it difficult to accurately measure distances in the painting between one and another object or topographical region.

amalgamated conglomeration of parts, a collection of sections that did not quite cohere together as unified whole. *The Crayon* proclaimed that “the picture lacked...repose and unity,” and that the lack of subordination of objects within the composition led to the mind’s preoccupation with “an infinity of details.”³⁵ Henry Tuckerman called for the painting’s dismemberment, suggesting that “four or five paintings might easily be cut out of this one...”³⁶ Two diagonals that converge at a vanishing point just above the waterfall expose the artifice of the composition. These sutures strain to hold together the expansive scope of the scene and allude to a threat of dissolution that lurks just beneath the surface. Indeed, the body of the painting, like the American body politic in 1859, appeared to be on the verge of splitting apart at the seams.³⁷

The Heart of the Andes attempted to combine a selection of specimens into a unified, tangible organ(ism). The scene, although invented, was intended by Church to function as a veritable living thing. The painting can in this way be contextualized

³⁵ Anonymous, “Sketchings: The Heart of the Andes,” *The Crayon* 6 (June, 1859): 193. *The Crayon*, the most influential promoter of Ruskin’s aesthetics in the United States, here found itself in the uneasy position of having to account for a painting that took Ruskin too far.

³⁶ Tuckerman, *Book of the Artists*, 375. Like the anonymous critic in the *Christian Examiner*, Tuckerman derided the painting’s consanguinities with photography, concluding his sentence and his thought by noting that *The Heart of the Andes* “...is full of the most photographic imitation of natural objects and effects.”

³⁷ Angela Miller, in her groundbreaking study *The Empire of the Eye: Landscape Representation and American Cultural Politics, 1825-1875*, has shown how this tendency in Church’s painting spoke to issues of geographic expansion and national identity. Miller writes that “*The Heart of the Andes*, like *New England Scenery*, was a composite composition; yet by the late 1850s Church was more successful at hiding the seams, and the later painting more suavely orchestrates its parts into a visual unity. As with his earlier painting, Church was attempting to create a geographical summary of an entire region, although his new interest in South America vastly expanded his imaginative field. Yet despite the growth of his artistic skills, Church faced the same dilemma in the late work as in *New England Scenery* eight years before: how to create an aesthetic and visual experience that was greater than the sum of its parts.” See Angela Miller, *The Empire of the Eye: Landscape Representation and American Cultural Politics, 1825-1875* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993): 196-197. While I agree with Miller’s thesis, I argue that the reality effect of *The Heart of the Andes* was so intense and uncompromising that it, much more so than *New England Scenery*, revealed the incongruities that lurked under the surface of its synthetic project.

alongside other cultural attempts to combine the disparate social and ethnic types into a single working model. In *The New York Elephant* (1851) (Fig. 84), the lithographer Adam Weingartner crafts an image of a “National Monument: to be erected at the top of New City-Hall.” This beast, which appears like something out of the imagination of the sixteenth-century painter Giuseppe Arcimboldo, is comprised of a hodge-podge of street vendors, wealthy businessmen, firemen, women of both high and low social stature, and an African American.³⁸ *The New York Elephant* in effect summarizes the social conditions of the antebellum city—a collection of parts that just barely coheres together under the yoke of authority, symbolized by an image of city hall mounted upon the back of the immense pachyderm.³⁹ Neither *The New York Elephant* nor *The Heart of the Andes* seem able to overcome the tyranny of factious, fractious facts that erode their respective superstructures.

In addition to its seams and fissures, *The Heart of the Andes* contains subtle but discomfiting distortions in scale. The rock cliff that leads the eye from the overhanging trees in the right foreground back to the waterfall gives an indefinite and ambiguous sense of distance. The large size of the proximate trees in comparison to the miniscule scale of the distant trees that cling to the rocks above the waterfall

³⁸ Elliot Bostwick Davis, “The Currency of Culture: Prints in New York City,” in *Art in the Empire City: New York, 1825-1861*, ex. cat., Catherine Hoover Voorsanger and John K. Howat, eds. (New York and London: Yale University Press, 2001): 217, 219. It is unclear to me whether the dark-complexioned young man that forms the right foot of the Elephant is an African American, or a Caucasian in blackface. The composition of the elephant generally adheres to the social stratification of the antebellum period, with those best-dressed and most well-heeled individuals massed along the spine and within the main body of the beast. A drunkard, two firemen, two laborers, a newsboy, and others who tended to be marginalized by society are all relegated to the legs, feet, and hindquarters.

³⁹ The same sort of anthological superstructure also animates Walt Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass*. John Wilmerding has noted how Whitman’s work was “not least an encyclopedic inventory of the country’s geography. Its enumeration of place names and natural phenomena calls to mind the luminists’ penchant for recording the minutiae of a landscape: the colorful flowers in the foreground of a canvas by Lane, the meticulously drawn boulders on a Newport beach by Kensett, or the foliage of Church.” John Wilmerding, “Walt Whitman and American Painting,” *Antiques* 78 (November, 1985): 998.

suggests a more expansive interval between the foreground and middle ground than is ably conferred by the cliff. This disjunctive gap that separates the foreground from the middle ground proceeds across the entire width of the painting and frustrates attempts to objectively measure the space. The eye is left stranded in one or the other dense sections of foreground jungle. On the right, there is no way out of the foreboding copse of trees perched upon the moist, unstable soil. On the left, a trail leads to a cross (and the only two human figures in the picture), but then disappears into a ravine that is surrounded by a dark, unfathomable thicket.

Intractable spots of unintelligibility can also be found in the center of the painting. The waterfall operates both optically and geographically as a cataract: a point where vision and movement are impeded and the stream that flows down from higher elevations breaks apart into a rushing blur of drops and splashes (Fig. 85). Here, the eye naturally toggles between these independent bits-in-motion and a larger summary prospect of the waterfall's overarching entirety. Part of the appeal of waterfalls—both in nature and in Church's painting—is the way that they force viewers to confront the limitations of comprehension. While looking at a waterfall, one cannot comprehend the whole and its constituent parts at the same time. The viewer is thrown back again and again upon the flow and flux of motion and time. Too powerful to navigate, the cascade forces the eye to seek portage. In his "Essay on American Scenery," Thomas Cole reflected on the way waterfalls isolate junctions between space and time:

And I now must turn to another of the beautifiers of the Earth—the waterfall; which in the same object at once presents to the mind the beautiful, but

apparently incongruous idea, of fixedness and motion—a single object in which we perceive unceasing change and everlasting duration.⁴⁰

With its concentrated, descriptive intensity, the waterfall in Church's picture marks the spot where strategies of spatial representation run up against the constraints of human eyesight and reveals the precise moment when optical hyper-clarity, overburdened by space and time, dissolves into incoherent mist.⁴¹

Just upriver from the waterfall, at the fulcrum of the two main diagonal seams that divide the picture into four roughly-triangular sections, lurks a dark shadow (See Fig. 85). Here, more than anywhere else in the painting, the viewer is aware of a place where Church is unsure of himself. At this 'point,' the high degree of resolution that is predominant in almost every other part of the canvas disintegrates into something irresolvable—an incoherent crust of thickly-laid impasto. Lodged there at the core of *The Heart of the Andes*, this unknowable, obdurate smear operates both literally and figuratively as the picture's vanishing point. These troublesome zones of mist and dense, painterly spots weave a strain of uncertainty into the painting's otherwise cocksure indexical enterprise.

Such ruptures in Church's composition are amplified by the painting's meticulously rendered and preternaturally bright surface. As a consequence, the sharpness and clarity that generate the painting's convincing illusion of reality also

⁴⁰ Thomas Cole "American Scenery," *Dwight's American Magazine, and Family Newspaper, for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge and Moral and Religious Principles*, Vol. 3, no. 7 (Feb. 13, 1847): 107; originally published as "Essay on American Scenery," in *The American Monthly Magazine*, 1836.

⁴¹ John Davis, commenting on Frederic Church's *Jerusalem* (1870), remarks that "the artist's representational energies intensify in the center of the canvas, for example, where detail becomes almost unbearably insistent." Although the relatively low level of descriptive intensity in the foreground of *Jerusalem* does much to augment the impact of the concentrated detail employed upon and around the Dome of the Rock, I discern in *The Heart of the Andes* a similar "unbearable insistence" in the waterfall, where the eye of the viewer is similarly overloaded with information. See Davis, *The Landscape of Belief: Encountering the Holy Land in Nineteenth-Century American Art and Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996): 192.

undermine it. In *The Heart of the Andes*, Church indulged his ability to mingle the exponential and the infinitesimal on the surface of his canvas; but in so doing he rendered everything in perfect focus, endowing his viewers with the power to see beyond the physiological limitations of the human eye. This sustained intensity of focus generated pain that proceeded from the horror of unlimited self-knowledge, a terminal narcissism where absorption brought about the recognition of one's perceptual and corporeal limitations. *The Heart of the Andes* provided its audience with a vision so clear that it made viewers aware of their own blindness.⁴² This hyper-clarity also produced a mild, uncanny dissonance that bordered on the surreal. The painting's illusionism was so convincing that it appeared not only to replicate reality, but to distort it in a way that allowed the artificial to blend into the actual. It simultaneously extended to its audience a dreamy promise of completion and fulfillment, and a nightmarish threat of dissolution and haunting. Theodore Winthrop, commenting upon this intrinsic and potentially incendiary instability, wrote in his guide that *The Heart of the Andes*:

...demands far more than...we can safely admire without committing ourselves. It is not enough to look a while and look a little and evade discrimination with easy commonplaces. Here is a strange picture evidently believing itself to be good; if not so, it must be elaborately bad, and should be massacred.⁴³

Winthrop's reading of the painting as a sentient being thus positions Frederic Church as a New World Victor Frankenstein who has sutured together a collection of carefully preserved dead parts in an effort to do nothing less than synthesize life, thus consummating a desire for absolute knowledge and perfect replication. Like the

⁴² See Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*, n.25, above.

⁴³ Winthrop, 6.

being created by Mary Shelley's mad scientist, *The Heart of the Andes* was an unframed, unbounded image that allowed its viewers to see and know too much.⁴⁴ In this way, it posed a grave danger to the unity of the viewing subject and rendered its audience vulnerable to the discursive operations that subtend compulsive addiction and social control.⁴⁵ To mistake *The Heart of the Andes* for *the* heart of the Andes unleashed an uncontrollable monster of the mind that Mark Twain, among others, could not banish from his memory.⁴⁶

The Heart of the Andes was roundly criticized for taking its realism too far by writers who considered the proper function of art to empower the imagination and to stimulate a viewer into contemplating those things a painting does not and can not show.⁴⁷ In 1770, Sir Joshua Reynolds wrote of the limitations of mimetic realism in language that could just as easily apply to Church's canvas:

If deceiving the eye were the only business of art, there is no doubt, indeed, but the minute painter would be more apt to succeed: but it is not the eye, but the mind, which the painter of genius desires to address, nor will he waste a moment upon those smaller objects, which only serve to catch the sense, to

⁴⁴ For a fascinating analysis of the aesthetics of overdescription in Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein*, see Christopher Rovee, "Monsters, Marbles, and Miniatures: Mary Shelly's Reform Aesthetic," *Studies in the Novel* 36:2 (Summer 2004): 147-169.

⁴⁵ See Nead, *The Female Nude*, especially her section "Obscenity and the Sublime," 25-33.

⁴⁶ Bryan Wolf has similarly argued that "This is the catastrophe of imaginative vision, the fate of the artist for whom all creation is a mode of psychic or social disruption that returns Frankenstein-like to haunt its creator." Wolf, *Romantic Re-Vision: Culture and Consciousness in Nineteenth-Century American Painting and Literature* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press: 1982): 173. My thinking throughout this investigation owes much to Wolf's pioneering work on American romanticism.

⁴⁷ Michael Leja has investigated similar issues regarding the limits of realism in the art of Thomas Eakins. See Michael Leja, *Looking Askance: Skepticism and American Art from Eakins to Duchamp* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004): 59-92. Two decades before Eakins produced his ambitious pictures of the late 1870s, Church's *The Heart of the Andes* revealed similar disjunctions between knowing and seeing, or more precisely, *feeling* and seeing. My understanding of the nature of such frictions has been shaped by Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, trans. B.H. Bernard (Hafner: New York, 1951). Jacques Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-Portrait and Other Ruins*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1993); and Jean-François Lyotard, *Of the Sublime: Presence in Question*, trans. Jeffrey S. Librett (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993).

divide the attention, and to counteract his great design of speaking to the heart.⁴⁸

In 1860, an anonymous critic for *The Christian Examiner* described *The Heart of the Andes* this way:

There is a lack of the right sort of mystery...the consequence of too much definiteness in the delineation...; and this is a fault, because it fails to give the imagination its proper objects and play. For the correspondence between picture and subject to remain unaffected and alike in all cases, would be to petrify human emotion, and transform the artist into an animated stereoscope.⁴⁹

Many viewers were literally petrified by the intensity of the painting, lingering in a half-trance for hours and hours in the exhibition hall, returning again and again over successive days and nights. The promise of complete satisfaction, the fiction that *in fact* the painting left nothing to be desired, kept them coming back for more. The author Mark Twain, writing to his brother after seeing *The Heart of the Andes* in Saint Louis, related that:

...your *third* visit will find your brain gasping and straining to take all the wonder in, and appreciate it in its fullness. .. You will never get tired of looking at the picture, but your reflections—your efforts to grasp an intelligible *something* – you hardly know what—will grow so painful that you will have to go away from the thing in order to obtain relief. You may find relief, but you cannot banish the picture – it remains with you still. It is in my mind now—and the smallest feature could not be removed without my detecting it. So much for ‘The Heart of the Andes.’⁵⁰

Twain’s engagement with *The Heart of the Andes* did not end when he left the exhibition hall. He “goes away from the thing” to find relief, but the “thing” pursues him, stubbornly resisting his attempts to banish it. It remained lodged in his mind

⁴⁸ Sir Joshua Reynolds, *Discourses on Art*, Robert R. Wark, ed. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1975): 52.

⁴⁹ Anonymous, “Art VII: The Heart of the Andes,” *Christian Examiner* 68:2 (March, 1860): 289-290.

⁵⁰ Samuel Clemens to Orion Clemens, St. Louis, March 18, 1860, repr. in Albert Bigelow Paine, ed., *Mark Twain’s Letters* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1917), vol. 1, pp. 45-46. Twain’s letter is also cited in Avery, *Church’s Great Picture*, 43-44 (emphasis added).

even as he wrote his letter. Twain's experience registered a mode of aesthetic absorption that went beyond the mere disembodied projection of the viewer into a pictorial space. It was not so much the projection of the self outward but an *injection*, the incorporation of the image into the body of the viewing subject. When Twain attempted to consume the painting whole—to appreciate it in all its fullness—he bit off more than he could chew. *The Heart of the Andes* proved too intense to handle, causing the author some degree of lingering pain, reverberating inside of his head and resisting all attempts to forget.

Infected with an image let loose from its frame, Mark Twain's subjectivity, as well as his headache, was splitting. The painting's stereographic sharpness, with its branches and roots that appear scraggy enough to scratch, foregrounds the tactile dimension of vision.⁵¹ While seeing does not necessarily entail that one is seen, touch requires reciprocity, and thus implies contagion. By this I mean to call attention to the etymology of the word "contagion," which derives from Latin *contingere*: "to touch closely."⁵² Mark Twain and many others who viewed *The Heart of the Andes* were indeed touched and moved by what they saw. This unprotected visceral proximity—a reciprocal co-habitation of the viewer in the painting and the painting in the viewer—dissolved the subject's monopoly on agency and initiated a radical

⁵¹ My understanding of tactility draws upon Aloïs Riegl's formulation of the "tactile ideal." See Aloïs Riegl, *Die sprättrömische Kunstindustrie nach den Funden in Österreich-Ungarn (The Late Roman Art Industry)*, 1901, trans. By Rolf Winkes (Rome: G. Bretschneider, 1985). See also Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Nancy, *On Touching*, trans. Christine Irizarry (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).

⁵² Online Etymology Dictionary, <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=contagious>. Accessed on August 18, 2005. The primary definition of "contagious" in the Oxford English Dictionary reads "where the notion of mutual contact is present." Both "contagious" and "contiguous" derive from the same Latin root.

fusion of subject and object.⁵³ Because of this, attempts like those of poor Mark Twain “to grasp an intelligible *something*” inevitably ended in temple-throbbing frustration. Twain could not comprehend his object because he had become coextensive with it.⁵⁴ *The Heart of the Andes* had so completely engorged his mind’s eye that it left no room for Twain’s own critical faculties to operate. His looking thus left him both completely full and entirely empty.

With its overwhelming density of spot-lit visual details, *The Heart of the Andes* overtaxed the capabilities of viewer’s eyes, hearts, and brains. The painting was positioned not as a representation, but a presentation, a direct projection rather than an indirect reflection.⁵⁵ Like Semele, whose desire to see Zeus in his full, unmediated glory brought about her immolation, looking at Church’s great picture was akin to looking at the sun. It is therefore unsurprising that writers who criticized the painting for its lack of unity and synthesis almost always touched upon its lack of atmosphere. An anonymous reviewer in *The Crayon* deemed the painting’s excessive attention to detail problematic because “the faint indications of rays which are meant

⁵³ I borrow this phrase from Rachel DeLue, who discerns in Henry Ward Beecher’s aesthetics a “...radical fusion of the beholding subject and the object or view beheld...” Rachael DeLue, *George Inness and the Science of Landscape* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004): 134. I also draw inspiration here from Alexander Nemerov’s elaboration of a sensuous poetics of reciprocal embodiment at work in the paintings of Raphaele Peale. See Nemerov, *The Body of Raphaele Peale: Still-Life and Selfhood* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001): esp. 31-41, 62.

⁵⁴ As a key example of the tendency of the gaze to objectify the viewing subject, scholars have gravitated to Marcel Duchamp’s *Etant donnés* (1946-68). See Jean-François Lyotard, *Les TRANSformateurs Duchamp* (Paris: Galilee, 1977): 137-38. Rosalind Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious* (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1993): 113; and Kaja Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World* (New York and London: Routledge, 1996): 171-72. While I do not discount the importance of Duchamp in the history of post-modern subjectivity, I find in Church’s *The Heart of the Andes* a striking example of postmodernism’s pre-history.

⁵⁵ My use of the terms “presentation” and “representation” here borrow from that of Hans-Georg Gadamer’s opposition of *Vorstellung* and *Darstellung*. See Gadamer’s *Truth and Method*, trans. William Glen-Doepel (London: Sheed and Ward, 1975); and also *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, trans. N. Walker (London: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

to express atmosphere do not fulfill their mission.”⁵⁶ The mission of atmosphere, then, had there been more of it in *The Heart of the Andes*, was to soften and mellow the harsh reality of the surface, to smooth over the cracks and rough edges that evinced a visible threat to the unity and integrity of the image and its viewer.⁵⁷ In Frederic Church’s *The Andes of Ecuador* (Fig. 86), for instance, atmosphere acts both figuratively and literally as a sunscreen. It filters and refines, mediating the *immediacy* of the image. In 1863, a writer for the *New York Albion* preferred Church’s *Cotopaxi* (Fig. 87) to *The Heart of the Andes*, because “in the former the parts are subordinate to the whole, and in the latter the whole subordinate to the parts.”⁵⁸ *Cotopaxi* owed its cohesion, the author continued, to the smoke issuing forth from the Volcano, a plume that “is here a mitigating agent.”⁵⁹ Here, atmosphere smoothes over the harshness and ameliorates the hyper-intensity of Church’s realism. It acts as a prophylactic veil that withholds the complete exposure of the scene, a “mitigating agent” that refuses the fantasy of unmediated conjugation (and contagion) between subject and object.

⁵⁶ Anonymous, “Sketchings: The Heart of the Andes,” *The Crayon* 6 (June, 1859): 193. Katherine Manthorne has highlighted this aspect of Church’s style by comparing his treatment of atmosphere to that of Louis Mignot, a landscape painter who accompanied Church on his 1853 trip to Central and South America. Compared to Church’s scientific attention to clarity and detail, Louis Mignot, “plays the role of interpreter, not reporter. Creating images that were ‘vague’ and ‘indistinct,’ he encouraged and even demanded participation of the beholder to finish the picture in the imagination.” Katherine Manthorne, *Tropical Renaissance: North American Artists Exploring Latin America, 1839-1879* (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989): 155.

⁵⁷ Angela Miller genders the mellowing effects of atmosphere as feminine. See A. Miller, 243-288. See also Paulson’s treatment of the atmosphere in Giorgione’s *Sleeping Venus*. Paulson, 10.

⁵⁸ “Fine Arts: Mr. Church’s Cotopaxi,” *The New York Albion* 21 (March, 1863): 141.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

Tucked in among the volumes in Frederic Church's library at Olana is Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance* (1852).⁶⁰ In addition to this volume, Church owned twelve other books that employ the word "romance" in their titles.⁶¹ *The Blithedale Romance*, like *The Heart of the Andes*, occupied unsettled terrain between fact and fiction. Hawthorne's book charts the rise and fall of a fictional utopian experiment, based largely upon the author's own experience as a member of Brook Farm, a community founded by George Ripley in West Roxbury, Massachusetts in 1841. It is, like Church's painting, a work that proceeds from its author's direct experience of and *in* its subject. While it is not my purpose here to argue that Church's reading of *The Blithedale Romance* furnished some sort of direct inspiration for *The Heart of the Andes*, there are nevertheless striking similarities between the two projects. The particular way that book and painting alike revolve around a problematic of concealment and exposure is especially relevant to unlocking the processes that mediated so many of the tension-filled encounters between antebellum observers and Church's "strange picture."

The plot of *The Blithedale Romance* follows the development and ultimate demise of the titular utopian community through the eyes of Miles Coverdale, Hawthorne's narrator and autobiographical agent. The other three characters around

⁶⁰ I am indebted to Ida Brier, Archivist and Chief Librarian of the Olana State Historic Site, who kindly shared with me an exhaustive list of the books in Church's library. Subsequent references to titles and statistical data about books owned by the artist are derived from this document.

⁶¹ [One tantalizing example that I have yet to examine is F. Hassaureck's *The Secret of the Andes: A Romance*, (Cincinnati: Robert and Clarke Co., 1879).] There are, of course, additional examples of this genre in Church's library that do not contain the word "romance" in their titles. James Ryan has suggested that the reading of oriental romances by Frederic Church and his wife Isabel, including Washington Irving's *The Alhambra* (1859) had a marked influence on their two-year trip to Europe and the Holy Land from 1867-69, a journey that Ryan claims "united science and romance." See Ryan, 133. Ryan also credits "Gerald Carr and Robin Eckerle for pointing out the large number of romance novels" in Church's library. *op. cit.* 153 n.36.

whom the story turns are Hollingsworth, a larger-than-life magnetic personality who seeks to draw everyone into sympathy with his single-minded passion for reform, and two sisters, Zenobia and Priscilla, who embody, respectively, the opposing polarities of perspicuity and obscurity.

Zenobia, a wealthy feminist and leader of the experiment, is described as “just on the hither verge of her richest maturity,” with “bloom, health, and vigor...possessed in such overflow that a man might well have fallen in love with her for their sake only.”⁶² Throughout the book, Zenobia’s qualities were symbolized by the presence of a flower worn in her hair. Coverdale remembers this talisman as “...an exotic, of rare beauty, and as fresh as if the hot-house gardener had just clipped it from the stem. That flower has struck deep root into my memory.”⁶³ Later, while recovering from a feverish illness, Coverdale again fixes his attention upon the “hot-house flower—an outlandish flower—a flower of the tropics, such as appeared to have sprung passionately out of the soil, the very weeds of which would be fervid and spicy.”⁶⁴ After a rapturous fit of adjectives, the narrator recovers his senses, admitting that “It might be, that my feverish fantasies clustered themselves about this peculiarity, and caused it to look more gorgeous and wonderful than if beheld with temperate eyes. In the height of my illness, as well as I recollect, I went so far as to pronounce it preternatural.”⁶⁵ The character of Zenobia was defined by the nature of her flowers – an exotic beauty poised at the broadest extent of her bloom, with “no

⁶² Hawthorne, *The Blithedale Romance*, 48.

⁶³ *Ibid.* 47.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* 69.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

folded petal, no latent dew-drop, in this perfectly developed rose!”⁶⁶ She is “Eve, when she was just made, and her Creator brought her to Adam, saying—‘Behold!

Here is a woman!”⁶⁷ At great length, Coverdale pronounces Zenobia:

...a truly magnificent woman. The homely simplicity of her dress could not conceal, nor scarcely diminish, the queenliness of her presence. The image of her form and face should have been multiplied all over the earth. It was wronging the rest of mankind, to retain her as the spectacle of only a few. The stage would have been her proper sphere. She should have made it a point of duty, moreover, to sit endlessly to painters and sculptors, and preferably to the latter; because the cold decorum of the marble would consist with the utmost scantiness of drapery, so that they eye might chastely be gladdened with her *material perfection, in its entirety*. I know not well how to express, that the native glow of coloring in her cheeks, and even the flesh-warmth over her round arms, and what was visible of her full bust—in a word, her *womanliness incarnated*—compelled me sometimes to close my eyes, as if it were not quite the privilege of modesty to gaze at her. Illness and exhaustion, no doubt, had made me morbidly sensitive. (emphases added)⁶⁸

I hope by this point my readers will call to mind similar critical responses to *The Heart of the Andes*, an object likewise appreciated as an embodiment of completion and “entireness,” a *vera icon* of a new world Eden.⁶⁹ One writer who beheld *The Heart of the Andes* similarly asked “Could anything be more grand, more beautiful or more true?”⁷⁰ The image of Zenobia as the apex of material perfection was so potent that Coverdale was compelled to close his eyes, a reaction similar to that of Mark Twain who had to “get away” from *The Heart of the Andes* to find relief from its intensity. Awestruck visitors standing before the painting sometimes expressed their appreciation in romantic terms and wrestled with bittersweet emotions brought on by

⁶⁶ Ibid. 71.

⁶⁷ Ibid. 49.

⁶⁸ Ibid. 69.

⁶⁹ For an analysis of representations of the South American landscape as a “paradise,” see Katherine Manthorne, “The Quest for a Tropical Paradise: Palm Tree as Fact and Symbol in Latin American Landscape Imagery, 1850-1875,” *Art Journal* 44:4 (Winter, 1984): 374-382.

⁷⁰ “The Heart of the Andes,” unattributed clipping labeled “Chicago, January 11, 1861,” Olana Archive.

what they sensed was a culminating aesthetic experience, one never again to be equaled, let alone surpassed:

But never any sight of new-found land
Shall equal this, where we entranced stand
With dewy eyes and overflowing heart,
Gazing from the exalted hill of art!⁷¹

Coverdale's constant and relentless observation of Zenobia during the early stages of the novel grows into a voyeuristic obsession. From the back window of a boarding house, Coverdale peeps into the window of Zenobia's hotel room, gazing upon the scene "like a full-length picture."⁷² Coverdale spends hour after hour looking sheepishly into the window and into the private lives of Zenobia and her associates, "dazzled by the brilliancy of the room."⁷³ In rich and evocative language, Hawthorne's narrator indulges in enumerating a long list of sensuous objects to be seen there, "the fulfillment of every fantasy of an imagination," all of it "repeated and doubled by the reflection of a great mirror..."⁷⁴ This doubling calls to mind the paired images of a stereocard, further highlighting Coverdale's visceral immersion into the scene. Hence, when Zenobia confronts Coverdale after discovering his lecherous peeping, she remarks that "You are a poet—at least, as poets go, now-a-days—and must be allowed to make an opera-glass of your imagination, when you look at women." Even the frank exteriority of Zenobia does not reveal enough for

⁷¹ Thomas Buchanan Read, uncited quotation in Albert Ten Eyck Gardner, "Scientific Sources of the Full-Length Landscape: 1850," *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 4 (October, 1945): 62.

⁷² *The Blithedale Romance*, 151. On this episode, Richard Brodhead writes that "Life as Coverdale understands it is not what he has or does but something presumed to be ledged in someone else. Watching that someone, inhabiting it through spectatorial self-projection and consuming it through visual appropriation, becomes accordingly a means to 'live' into *his* life some part of that vitality that always appears as 'other life.'" Richard Brodhead, *Cultures of Letters: Scenes of Reading and Writing in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1993): 61.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 158.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

Coverdale's satisfaction. He still desires ever more intense, private views into her world.

Opposite Zenobia's manifest completeness and perfect exposure, Hawthorne situates her young sister Priscilla, who:

...had grown to be a very pretty young girl, and still kept budding and blossoming, and daily putting on some new charm, which you no sooner became sensible of, than you thought it worth all that she previously possessed. So unformed, vague, and without substance, as she had come to us, it seemed as if we could see nature shaping a woman out of our very eyes, and yet had only a more reverential sense of the mystery of a woman's soul and frame.⁷⁵

Priscilla embodies process. She is perpetually unfolding, never complete, and never fully exteriorized and comprehensible. Unbeknownst to Coverdale, Priscilla is also the "Veiled Lady," a performer in a *tableaux vivant* theatrical who acts as a clairvoyant medium between the living and the dead. As a medium, she embodies her own function. The Veiled Lady reveals only as she withholds, operating simultaneously as a go-between and a come-between. Her pronouncements and her "impalpable grace" are alluring and seductive because they are incomplete and inexact.⁷⁶

Just as a tropical flower comes to symbolize Zenobia's full and perfect development, a silk purse stands in for Priscilla's vagueness. Early in the story, Coverdale observes that Priscilla "now produced, out of a work-bag that she had with her, some little wooden instruments, (what they are called, I never knew,) and

⁷⁵ Ibid., 91. The critic Bayard Taylor appears to understand the relationship between Hiram Powers's *Eve Tempted* and *The Greek Slave* within a similar organizing dichotomy: "The 'Greek Slave' is now in the collection of Mr. Grant, of London, and I only saw the clay model. Like the Eve, it is a form that one's eye tells him is perfect, unsurpassed; but it is the budding loveliness of a girl, instead of the perfected beauty of a woman." Taylor, *Views-a-Foot*, 297.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 112.

proceeded to knit, or net, an article which ultimately took the shape of a silk purse.”⁷⁷

The “peculiar excellence” of Priscilla’s purses:

...besides the great delicacy and beauty of the manufacture, lay in the almost impossibility that any uninitiated person should discover the aperture; although, to a practiced touch, they would open as wide as charity and prodigality might wish. I wonder if it were not a symbol of Priscilla’s own mystery.⁷⁸

As we have seen, *The Heart of the Andes* retained zones of incongruence that resisted objective measurement and countermanded Church’s ambition to paint a perfectly legible picture. Like the thinly-disguised vaginal emblem of Priscilla, the vanishing point of *The Heart of the Andes*—the dark, mysterious area just above the waterfall—refuses to reveal its dimensions even to the “practiced touch” of the master painter or the prying eyes of the viewing public.

In chapter XIII of *The Blithedale Romance*, Zenobia tells the fictional tale of Theodore (a thinly disguised caricature of Coverdale), who seeks to discover the true identity of the Veiled Lady. Conflicting rumors about the identity and appearance of the lady relate her as either the stunningly beautiful daughter of a wealthy family or an unsightly hag in possession of “the face of a corpse...a monstrous visage with snaky locks, like Medusa’s.”⁷⁹ The Veiled Lady, “so impalpable, so ethereal, so without substance,” presents Theodore with a dilemma.⁸⁰ She promises to reveal herself to him only if Theodore pledges his love *before* lifting the veil:

But I entreat thee, in all maiden modesty, to bend forward, and impress a kiss where my breath stirs in the veil; and my virgin lips shall come forward to

⁷⁷ Ibid., 62.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 118.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 119-120.

meet thy lips; and from that instant, Theodore, thou shalt be mine, and I thine, with never more a veil between us!⁸¹

The Veiled Lady forces Theodore to make a leap of faith, to accept the indeterminacy and incompleteness of her medium as such. And so her revelation, her disclosure of full knowledge, is to be instantiated only after Theodore accepts the reality of *not* knowing, only after he comes to terms with blindness as a pre-requisite to sight. Frightened of the prospects of spending the rest of his life with a corpse bride, Theodore, much like his namesake Theodore Winthrop's conception of Frederic Church, refuses to settle for "dodging about and waiting until the doors of her enchanted castle shall stand ajar."⁸² Unable to tolerate a truth that remained only partially revealed, Theodore grasped the veil and:

... flung it upward, and caught a glimpse of a pale, lovely face beneath; just one momentary glimpse; and then the apparition vanished, and the silvery veil fluttered slowly down, and lay upon the floor. Theodore was alone. Our legend leaves him there. His retribution was, to pine, forever and ever, for another sight that that dim, mournful face—which might have been his lifelong, household, fireside joy—to desire, and waste life in a feverish quest, and never meet it more!⁸³

The Veiled Lady embodies the lack, the relentless incongruity and incompleteness that structures language and necessitates communication. Theodore's attempt to cast the veil aside and obtain a true contiguous image of the lady without any intermediation ends in disaster. After this shock of recognition, Theodore is thrown back upon his own fractured subjectivity and is cast into a closed circuit of irresolvable desire to pine for an image he is unable to forget.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Winthrop, 4-5.

⁸³ *The Blithedale Romance*, 121.

In each of the four novels that Hawthorne completed during his lifetime—*The Scarlet Letter* (1850), *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851) *The Blithedale Romance*, and *The Marble Faun* (1860)—the author grappled with the term “romance”⁸⁴ In *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne describes romance as:

...a *neutral territory*, somewhere between the real world and fairy-land, where the Actual and the Imaginary meet, and each imbue itself with the nature of the other.⁸⁵

The medium of romance for Hawthorne was, in other words, a romance of mediation, a genre defined by process rather than subject matter. The romance provided a safe place for the productive interpenetration of the “Actual” and the “Imaginary.” This engagement allowed Hawthorne’s readers to operate within the *neutral territory* of fantasy where issues normally too uncomfortable to address directly were instead engaged obliquely and vicariously. Romance thus operates as a “safe-mode” where readers’ troublesome feelings and emotions can be deployed upon a fictional (yet plausible) set of circumstances without the threat of permanent harm or the terror of self-recognition.

⁸⁴ Hawthorne, it should be noted, sub-titled *The Marble Faun* “The Romance of Monte-Beni.” Although I do not address the controversy here, Nina Baym has analyzed the difficulty of ascribing any degree of fixity to the definitions of “novel” and “romance” in the antebellum period. Baym cautions that Hawthorne’s own “distinction between romance and novel, a distinction which has carried so much weight for subsequent criticism, was idiosyncratic...In fact, the term romance turns out to have been used so broadly and so inconsistently in the era that in any given instance of trying to fix its meaning the critic or writer was evidently indulging in a creative rather than a descriptive activity.” See Nina Baym, “Concepts of the Romance in Hawthorne’s America,” *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 38:4 (March 1984): 429-430. While I do not essay a solution to this problem here, the sheer volume of meaning-seeking regarding these two terms in antebellum newspapers and periodicals is itself significant. Even if, as Baym argues, there was no consensus, there was certainly a desire for one. In contrast, Robert Merrill argues that the definition of the terms “novel” and “romance” were relatively fixed in the minds of Hawthorne and his public. See Robert Merrill, “Another Look at the American Romance,” *Modern Philology* 78 (1981): 379-92.

⁸⁵ Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter* (1850; repr., New York: New American Library, 1981): 45, quoted in Manthorne, *Tropical Paradise*, 136. Directly following this quote, Manthorne writes that “this notion of romance, a hybrid offspring of realism and romanticism, offers a useful construct in which to view Latin American landscape imagery.” While I do not consider here the role played by nineteenth-century American constructions of the tropics in Church’s art, I find Manthorne’s analysis a compelling analogue to my own ideas.

In the prefaces of his next two novels, however, Hawthorne addresses his task in more pictorial terms. The author stresses the importance of using the “atmospheric medium as to bring out or mellow the lights and deepen and enrich the shadows of the picture” in his preface to *The House of the Seven Gables*.⁸⁶ He cautions his readers not to “assign an actual locality to the imaginary events of this narrative,” or risk “exposing the romance to an inflexible and exceedingly dangerous species of criticism, by bringing his fancy pictures almost into positive contact with the realities of the moment.”⁸⁷ Hawthorne is ever wary, here and elsewhere, that his audience might mistake his fiction for a thinly veiled rendering – or worse, an *exposé*—of reality. On its surface, Hawthorne’s fear might be interpreted merely as a reluctance to embarrass those individuals (or families) from whom he cultivates primary material to reincorporate into his fiction. The character of Zenobia in *The Blithedale Romance*, for instance, was modeled on Margaret Fuller, who had drowned in a tragic ocean accident less than two years before the publication of Hawthorne’s book. But there is a stubborn undercurrent of anxiety in both the prefaces and plots of Hawthorne’s novels over the power of representation to lapse into presentation in the minds of his readers. Narratives revolving around the pain of secrets too dangerous to be revealed follow prefaces where Hawthorne makes light of the fact that he (in this case, regarding *The House of the Seven Gables*):

... would be glad, therefore, if—especially in the quarter to which he alludes—the book be read strictly as a Romance, having a great deal more to do with the clouds overhead than with any portion of the actual soil of the County of Essex.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Hawthorne, *The House of the Seven Gables*, 15.

⁸⁷ Ibid. 16

⁸⁸ Ibid. 17

Fiction, for Hawthorne, needed to be kept safely within its own frame. While it depended upon the import of reality, a “place where the Imaginary and the Actual meet,” Hawthorne’s brand of fiction – the romance – needed to be kept separate from the novel. Hawthorne distinguishes between the two forms in the following passage:

When a writer calls his work a Romance, it need hardly be observed that he wishes to claim a certain latitude, both as to its fashion and material, which he would not have felt himself entitled to assume, had he professed to be writing a Novel. The latter form of composition is presumed to aim at a very minute fidelity, not merely the possible, but to the probable and ordinary course of man’s experience.⁸⁹

For Hawthorne, then, a novel describes, while a romance evokes.

Addressing his reasons for setting *The Marble Faun* (1860) in Italy rather than the United States, Hawthorne laments over the difficulties of writing romances “...about a country where there is no shadow, no antiquity, no mystery, no picturesque and gloomy wrong, nor anything but a common-place prosperity in broad and simple daylight...”⁹⁰ America’s lack of historical *gravitas* is consonant with a lack of atmosphere. Earlier, Hawthorne more fully developed this idea in his preface to *The Blithedale Romance*, where:

...atmosphere is what the American romancer needs. In its absence, the beings of the imagination are compelled to show themselves in the same category as actually living mortals; a necessity that generally renders the paint and pasteboard of their composition but too *painfully* discernable.⁹¹

In this passage, Hawthorne considers the potential menace of representation gone too far. Without any atmosphere to obfuscate the transparency of his medium, the

⁸⁹ Hawthorne, *The House of the Seven Gables*, 15.

⁹⁰ Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun* (1860; repr. Vol. 4, *Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1968): 3. Nina Baym notes that Hawthorne never engaged the institution of slavery as a “gloomy wrong,” although the onset of the Civil War did provide an ironic post-script to Hawthorne’s comment. See Baym, 442.

⁹¹ Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Blithedale Romance* (1852), ed. William E. Cain (Boston and New York: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 1996): 38 (emphasis added).

characters in his story would be revealed, “compelled to show themselves” against their own will, as nothing more than “paint and pasteboard.”

Writing about *The Heart of the Andes*, one critic remarked that “It seems impossible for art more perfectly to represent the fullness and finish of nature.”⁹² This statement, at first glance a simple plaudit, tacitly acknowledges that Church’s enterprise plied the very limits of representation itself. In Church’s painting and Hawthorne’s prefaces, there lurked a critical point where the impulse to mimetic precision fell to pieces under the searing heat of its own intensity. By attempting to reveal everything about its subject, *The Heart of the Andes* also revealed much about (we might even say, it “de-mystified”) its own reproductive apparatus.⁹³ The same over-descriptive excess and atmospheric transparency that produced the painting’s powerful illusions also brought into equally sharp focus the “painfully discernable” and disruptive fissures that doggedly divide representation from reality. The violently assertive, specific roots of Church’s trees, too real for romance, reveal the painting as an exhaustive dissertation of *the* heart, rather than a poetic evocation of *a* heart of the Andes. In the end, the viewers of Church’s painting, like the characters in Hawthorne’s story, were resigned to acknowledge the *nowhere* at heart of all utopian

⁹² “Memory Pictures,” 30.

⁹³ Régis Durand, writing about photography as an inherently self-critical process, summarizes that: “It is in this manner that the photographic process leads back to itself rather than to the object it purports to represent. Such a mode of ‘thinking’ is very close to the operations of the scopic drive—hence its power and importance. In all partial drives (and in the scopic drive in particular) the same circular mechanism can be found, as Lacan has demonstrated, as if the drive looped on itself, in a ‘circuitous return’ in which it is ‘the object as absence’ that is aimed at.” Régis Durand, “How to See (Photographically),” in *Fugitive Images: From Photography to Video*, ed. Patrice Petro (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995): 149. More recently, Hans Belting has remarked upon the self-negating qualities of fullness: “*Iconic Presence* still maintains a body’s absence and turns it into what must be called *visible absence*.” Hans Belting, “Image, Medium, Body: A New Approach to Iconology,” *Critical Inquiry* 31, no. 2 (Winter 2005): 312.

experiments; both were finished, we might say, by too much “finish.”⁹⁴ *The Heart of Andes*, by so closely approximating perfect “fullness and finish,” thus initiated its own deconstruction. Like no other American painting executed in the nineteenth-century, Church’s “strange picture” was a victim of its own success.⁹⁵

The Landscape, the Body, and the Self (in Pieces)

In the United States, during the 1850s and 1860s, atmospheric opacity played a key role in re-establishing and re-asserting the integrity of the frame—the limits between the inside and the outside of an artwork.⁹⁶ This bolstering of objective and subjective containment was a necessary precursor to a process articulated by John Kasson, Lawrence Levine, and Alan Wallach—that of the definition and consolidation of categories of “high” and “low” art.⁹⁷ The near-absence of atmosphere in *The Heart of the Andes* worked in concert with other elements

⁹⁴ “The utopian moment,” writes Gale Temple, “must always recede like a glimmering but ungraspable prize, like the selves we imagine we will occupy when we are, at last, fulfilled, when we finally arrive at the stable subject positions promised by the commodity form.” “Romance,” she writes at the conclusion of her article, “abdicates historical memory in favor of undefiled, unconsummated sexual and utopian—and capitalist—longing.” Gale Temple, “A Delirious Solace,” 295, 311. In his recently completed dissertation, Peter J. Brownlee also suggests that: “Myopically speaking, the commodity dangles complete gratification before us, just anterior to our focus. Clearly, signs only complicate this picture. As surrogates for the real thing, signs place partial representations of products just out of our grasp. Taken in this light, just as capitalism produces a myopic society, consumer culture produces myopic subjects—essentially short-sighted individuals who are led from one commodity to the next, from one desire to the next, from one ephemeral moment of partial satisfaction to another.” Peter J. Brownlee, “The Economy of the Eyes: Vision and the Cultural Production of Market Revolution,” Ph.D. Diss., The George Washington University, 2004: 209. Temple’s article and Brownlee’s dissertation elucidate how vision plays a critical role in structuring ways that desire and consumerism act reciprocally upon one another in this seemingly perpetual, self-sustaining cycle.

⁹⁵ I emphasize the double-meaning of “execute” here.

⁹⁶ For a theoretical consideration of picture frames with respect to Kant and Derrida, see Brad Prager, “Kant in Casper David Friedrich’s Frames,” *Art History* 25:1 (February, 2002): 68-86.

⁹⁷ John F. Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility: Manners in Nineteenth-Century Urban America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1990), esp. chapter 7; Lawrence W Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy In America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990); and Alan Wallach, *Exhibiting Contradiction: Essays on the Art Museum in the United States* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998), esp. chapter 1.

employed both within and around the painting that emphasized a transparency, rather than an opacity of medium. “A moment’s absorbed examination,” claimed *The Spirit of the Times*, “and apparently the *real scene* is before you—the medium of its expression disappears.”⁹⁸ This transparency facilitated a visceral, interested gaze, and fed sexually-charged scopic drives that informed a number of surprisingly overt published accounts, most notably that in Theodore Winthrop’s guidebook.⁹⁹

Referring to Church’s handling of atmosphere in *The Heart of the Andes*, Winthrop writes that:

This sky is no brazen canopy, no lustrous burnished screen, no opaque turquoise surface. It is pure, *penetrable*, lucent in every tremulous atom of its substance, and as the eye pierces its depths, it feels [a] vital quiver thrilling through a boundless calm.¹⁰⁰

Winthrop encourages his readers to cast aside the veils of mist and haze that impede the observer’s desire to pierce the quivering depths of the picture. Unlike those artists that merely flirt or tease their audiences with partial revelations of the scenes they depict, Church aims to deliver the goods. He is, in Winthrop’s words, “a bold lover that has gone nearer to nature than we...[so] we will choose him for our guide, and follow him straight in his track to the *penetralia* of beauty.”¹⁰¹

A graphically delineated object arranged in such a way that enables a surfeit of visual access through a transparent medium is the stock and trade of pornography.

⁹⁸ “The Heart of the Andes,” *The Spirit of the Times*, 14 May, 1859, p. 291.

⁹⁹ For a study of Theodore Winthrop’s approach to writing about landscape, see Paul J. Lindholt, “West of Winthrop: Landscape and Language in the Washington Territory,” *ATQ* 18:3 (2004): 155-177. Lindholt does not bring *A Companion to the Heart of the Andes* into his discussion.

¹⁰⁰ Winthrop, 14-15. The last sentence of this passage is quoted in D. Miller, 112. To my knowledge, Miller is the only author to comment upon the “manly energy” of Winthrop’s prose. In a similar vein, John Davis offers a sexually charged reading of Church’s *El Khansé, Petra* (1874). See Davis, *The Landscape of Belief: Encountering the Holy Land in Nineteenth-Century American Art and Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996): 196.

¹⁰¹ Winthrop, 9. I retain here Winthrop’s italic emphasis in the original text of the word “penetralia.”

I contend that *The Heart of the Andes*, while not explicitly porn, was explicitly graphic. The painting's ambition to perfect verisimilitude clearly aroused its audience. The picture purported to present its object as real—the thing itself—rather than a mere semblance. The veristic palpability of the painting, its magnetic pull upon the eyes to traverse the canvas, privileged a masculine gaze, one that invoked the mental processes of sensuous inspection, invasion, appropriation, and sexual domination. Its uncompromising scope and brutal intensity calls to mind a Heideggerian “world picture” where:

Everything has become calculable, and consequently everything is understandable. There are no longer any limits to our domination over beings, if only our will is great enough and constant enough. Everything becomes obvious, without any impenetrable depths, and this transparency derives from a luminosity in which the eye of knowledge is dazzled to the verge of blindness.¹⁰²

An overloaded picture of an exotic paradise, *The Heart of the Andes* withholds no secrets. It exists to be indulged and fertilized by the eye. Period accounts of colonization and appropriation of the land as a hyper-masculine assault make this discourse clear. In an article entitled “The Valley of the Amazon,” a writer for the *The National Magazine* asserts that:

Freely admit the Yankees here, with our steamers, plows, axes, and hammers, and this wilderness, with these solitary places, in the beautiful imagery of scripture, would literally bud and blossom as the rose.¹⁰³

We might locate the position of the beholder before *The Heart of the Andes* in relation to that of Amerigo Vespucci, who stands before a nude female personification of the New World in a sixteenth-century engraving by Theodore

¹⁰² Martin Heidegger, *Basic Questions of Philosophy*; quoted in Ken Egan, Jr., “Edgar Allan Poe and the Horror of Technology,” *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance* 48 (2002): 187.

¹⁰³ “The Valley of the Amazon,” *The National Magazine: Devoted to Literature, Art, and Religion* 13 (Oct. 1858): 297.

Galle, based on an original drawing by Jan Van der Straet (Fig. 88).¹⁰⁴ The Latin title of the engraving reads “*Americen Americus retextit, & Semel vocavit inde simper excitam,*” or “Americus rediscovers America: he called her once and henceforth she was always awake.”¹⁰⁵ Not a discovery, but a *re*-discovery, the title inflects this encounter as one that brings back to Vespucci—and by extension, to the viewer—something long since lost. Ostensibly, the lush, recumbent form of the female nude represents the miraculous preservation of an innocent, pre-industrial way of life, one that affords Vespucci an opportunity to indulge in an erotic, utopian regression. While this image was no doubt intended to allegorize the *initial* moment of contact between Amerigo Vespucci and the new world, any reference to the engraving as “Vespucci Discovers America” not only employs a mistranslation of the Latin title, but implies a rather odd, anachronistic event where an explorer encounters a landmass that already bears his own name. There is a remarkable duality at work in this image: the simultaneous presence of Amerigo and *America*, who look into one another’s eyes and exchange friendly, congenial expressions. Although the misogyny of Vespucci and the discourse of colonialism he represents are unmistakable, there is also no mistaking the fact that these two figures do more than just exchange greetings—they recognize one another. Their interlocking glances speak to an unexpected familiarity, not at all the sort of shock and surprise that might be expected from a napping native American who awakens to behold an armor-clad European

¹⁰⁴ A number of scholars have considered this image an example of the alignment between colonialism and misogyny. See Darby Lewes, *Nudes from Nowhere: Utopian Sexual Landscapes* (Lanham, Md. and Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000): 131-133; and Louis Montrose, “The Work of Gender in the Discourse of Discovery,” in *New World Encounters*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993): 179-180.

¹⁰⁵ This translation is provided by Montrose. *Ibid.*, 180.

stranger for the first time. The reclining woman springs to life and extends her right hand towards Vespucci with a loving glance and parted lips of a wife welcoming her husband home after a long business trip. Vespucci, far from dominating what he sees, is met here on equal terms by a woman who is not only unfazed, but animated by his presence.

Nevertheless, the slumbering *America* awakens to find Amerigo Vespucci standing before her, bearing emblems of religious, military, and navigational authority—a cross, a sword, and an astrolabe. While she lay asleep with legs parted upon the hammock, the view afforded to Vespucci, whose stolid posture implies that he has been standing attentively in the same spot for quite some time, no doubt allowed him full access to scan her exposed genitalia. At first glance, then, America is presented as fully and unconditionally available, languorously splayed before the virile male explorer to be converted by the cross, dominated by the sword, and navigated by the astrolabe.¹⁰⁶

The power relations in this scene recall a similar situation in Albrecht Dürer's "Draftsman Drawing a Reclining Nude," a woodcut illustration from *De Symmetria Partium Humanorum Corporum*, a manual of human proportions originally published in Nuremberg in 1532 (Fig. 89). In this image, the eyes of a male artist are granted a similar range of uninhibited access to the body of an unclothed woman. Here, a grid known as a "draftsman's net" is set up between the artist and his subject. Caught and arrested in/upon this net/grid, the body of the woman is optically divided and conquered. Visually separated into square sections of equal size that correspond to a second grid drawn upon a piece of paper, her body is mechanically disassembled and

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

reassembled by the artist. The draftsman's net, along with the grid-lined paper, compels the artist to work more efficiently by minimizing synthetic acts of interpretation, training the eye and hand to focus on de-contextualized fragments. He sees and consequentially draws the woman as an agglomeration of square sections, something like a map, where a corporeal and vertical subject is transposed into a topographical and horizontal object. That is to say, a living woman is here *exposed* onto a graph where her image is fixed and rendered maximally readable. This mechanical, reprographic process is dependent upon the extraction of time, just as the preservation of a biological specimen is dependent upon desiccation, the extraction of moisture. Fixing, freezing, and drying, techniques to arrest the passage of time, suspend animation and make the subject vulnerable to the equally cold, lurid, and merciless gaze of the draftsman, scientist, and voyeur.

It would be too simple, however, to merely characterize "Americus Rediscovered America" as an illustration of a carnal male desire to "consume" the naked female body, and by extension the landscape and resources of the newly-discovered terrain. It is indeed those things, but the power relations at work in the image are more explicitly multidirectional than those which structure "Draftsman Drawing a Female Nude." As the eye moves from the visually arresting confrontation in the foreground to the billowing smoke of the cooking fire in the distance, it alights upon the shocking detail of a human thigh roasting on a spit. A glance to the lower right reveals a second thigh—it is impossible to say whether it is raw or cooked—positioned on a line between Vespucci and America's extended right hand. This object posits cannibalism as a new mode of interchange between these

two figures.¹⁰⁷ An inversion of the optical dismemberment of the female body in “Draftsman Drawing a Reclining Nude,” it the male bodies of the supposed conquerors in “Americus Rediscovered America” that are here literally served for dinner. While the draftsman in Dürer’s engraving draws the woman in pieces, bodies in van der Straet’s engraving are devoured piecemeal.

I mean here to stress *explicitly*, since both images already implicitly engage the phenomenon examined by Jean-Paul Sartre in *Being and Nothingness*, where the author reflects upon the vulnerability of the voyeur “caught looking” through a keyhole, an issue likewise addressed in Marcel Duchamp’s *Etant donnés* (Fig. 90)¹⁰⁸ In his analysis of Duchamp’s project, the philosopher Jean-Francois Lyotard has emphasized the role played by the implied reciprocity between subject and object. Because the transverse positions of the viewing point and the vanishing point across a given visual field are symmetrical, Lyotard, in his infamous statement about the role of the viewer before the nude in *Etant donnés*, claimed that “he who sees is a cunt.”¹⁰⁹

As the art historian Rosalind Krauss summarizes:

Now this viewer, specified by Duchamp as essentially carnal, caught up in a cat’s-cradle of identification with what he or she sees, is also—like Sartre at his keyhole—a prey to the intervention of the Other. For Duchamp, leaving nothing up to his old buddy Chance, willed that the scene of *Etant donnés* be set within a museum, which is to say, within an unavoidably public space.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Montrose

¹⁰⁸ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, tr. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1966): 348. My understanding of Sartre and Duchamp owes much to Krauss, “The Blink of an Eye,” *passim*.

¹⁰⁹ Lyotard, *Les TRANSformateurs Duchamp*, 137-38; quoted and translated by Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious*, 113. My understanding of this statement is inflected by Kaja Silverman, who astutely observes that “*Con* means ‘cunt’ in French, but is also used as a standard scolding term for men, equivalent to ‘prick.’ The French text is thus not entirely translatable.” Kaja Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World* (New York: Routledge, 1996): 246, n.12.

¹¹⁰ Krauss, *The Blink of an Eye*, 180.

As we have seen, the relationship between *The Heart of the Andes* and its viewers was organized around a similar set of concerns. Church placed before the masses a work of art whose mimetic force drew upon the technology of the stereoscope, an apparatus whose physical configuration had restricted the intensity of its images to the private parlor. Like Duchamp a century later, Church (albeit unwittingly) implored his audience to assent to peeping in public.

In a revealing twist of irony, Frederic Church first looked upon his future wife, Isabelle Carnes, while gazing out at her from behind one of the drawn curtains that framed *The Heart of the Andes* as she stood in the audience, transfixed before his painting.¹¹¹ Armed with a pair of his own opera glasses, Church “was very fond of standing behind some of the rich draperies he had arranged around his picture,” because “it was intimated that he was fond of looking at the pretty girls. It was even charged that this was the reason why he preferred gas light and darkened room...because there was more mystery about the shadows at night than in the daytime.”¹¹² After his eyes happened upon the “ravishing vision” of Isabelle Carnes, Church “dropped *his* opera glasses” and proceeded to exit through a back door in order to reappear outside the gallery to make a formal introduction.¹¹³ Church, clumsily dropping his instrument, is thus caught looking at someone caught looking. While it is difficult to verify the details of the story, Whittredge’s account reveals

¹¹¹ The circumstances surrounding the meeting of Church and Isabelle Carnes are alluded to in Huntington, *The Landscapes of Frederic Edwin Church*, 115; and described in greater detail in Gerald Carr, *Frederic Edwin Church, The Icebergs* (Dallas: Dallas Museum of Fine Arts, 1980): 28. These accounts, in turn, draw from Worthington Whittredge, *The Autobiography of Worthington Whittredge 1820-1910*, John I.H. Baur, ed. (New York: Arno Press, 1969): 28-29. It should be noted that Whittredge’s prose contains a number of errors, including incorrect remembrances of the painting’s date and the appearance of its frame. He is the first to add a “k” onto the end of the artist’s first name, a mistake replicated by a number of subsequent authors.

¹¹² Whittredge, 29.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, Italics mine.

Church as someone inherently aware of the potent power of *The Heart of the Andes* to captivate and mesmerize its audience.

With the complicated network of gazes and intersubjective complexity that structure the reception of *The Heart of the Andes* and *Etant donnés* in mind, it should be noted that the draftsman in Albrecht Dürer's engraving cannot be accused of voyeurism *per se*, because the model is and presumably has always been fully aware of his presence. Van der Straet's nude personification of America, on the other hand, is shown at the moment she awakens to (re)discover Amerigo Vespucci standing before her, where he had likely been feasting his eyes upon her exposed, slumbering figure for a significant duration of time. This scene embodies a moment of prescient contradiction, where both figures are at once subject and object. The mutual recognition of the two figures is bound up in symmetry of their names—Amerigo and America. Or, in other words, to adapt Lyotard's turn-of-phrase: *he who sees America is Amerigo*. The viewing subject is here named and defined by what he sees just as much as what he sees is named and defined by him. The power relations between the man and the woman, subject and object, are suddenly thrust into equilibrium at the very moment she recognizes that she is being looked at. "The object" *literally* "stares back."¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ My phrasing here is adapted from James Elkins, *The Object Stares Back* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996). The scholar Darby Lewes notes this easy slippage of power relations at play in Van der Straet's engraving: "The early explorer's situation was similar to the plight of the fabled traveler offered the choice of two unmarked doors. Behind one was a beautiful, exotic lady willing and eager for a sexual encounter. Behind the other, however, was a savage and hungry tiger. The choice—and the risk—was his: the lady or the tiger? Sexual ecstasy or a beast that is, as the old obscene joke points out, 'a thousand pound pussy that eats *you*'? The anxiety, the mingled desire and apprehension that the fabled traveler must have experienced, parallels the situation of any explorer venturing into the unknown. At any moment, his reality can be inverted: instead of his body invading the wilderness, the wilderness might invade his body—and possibly eat it." Darby Lewes, *Nudes from Nowhere: Utopian Sexual Landscapes* (New York and Oxford: Rowan & Littlefield, 2000): 131. See also Mary Louis

With the oppressive, objectifying power of the perspective grid in mind, that is, its power to render subjects into images “to-be-seen,” it is significant here that the very point at which America recognizes that she is “being-looked-at” coincides with her own uprising. No longer supine, unconscious, and parallel with the horizontal, grid-patterned hammock on which she had been sleeping, the woman sits up and moves forth to actively engage her previously unnoticed spectator. In so doing, she renounces her spectator’s appropriation of her body as a passive, topographic space. No longer “just looking,” Amerigo Vespucci is now a part of the drama, one in which he is co-extensive with the object of his desire, a new coalescence of previously separate categories that now share the same name. Like the shock of recognition that takes place near the end of Alfred Hitchcock’s classic film *Rear Window*, where Lars Thorwald looks up to discover the prying eyes of L.B. Jeffries across the courtyard of their apartment complex, the event depicted in van der Straet’s engraving initiates a new state of affairs, a new configuration of power, one that places the ostensibly omnipotent Vespucci in grave danger.¹¹⁵ In the journal of his second voyage, Vespucci relates the following story about a newly discovered island and a member of his crew who had gone ashore:

The young man advanced and mingled among the women; they all stood around him, and touched and stroked him, wondering greatly at him. At this point a woman came from the hill carrying a big club. When she reached the place where the young man was standing, she struck him with such a heavy blow from behind that he immediately fell to the ground dead. The rest of the women at once seized him and dragged him by his feet up the mountain... There the women, who had killed the youth before our eyes, were

Pratt’s treatment of subject/object reciprocity in the travel narrative of Mungo Park. Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Studies in Travel Writing* (New York: Routledge, 1992): 78-85.

¹¹⁵ At this point in the film, Thorwald breaks free from the objective containment of Jeffries’s gaze. His new-found knowledge subverts the power of Jeffries’s one-way surveillance and he ventures forth to physically confront (and attack) his observer.

now cutting him to pieces, showing us the pieces, roasting them at a large fire.¹¹⁶

The scene of cannibalism in this engraving likely refers to this passage. The body being roasted and eaten in the background is probably that of the young man in Vespucci's account. The man-eating woman, empowered by the large, phallic club that leans against the tree to the right of her hammock, is about to switch gender roles with her soon-to-be-former voyeur. Once asleep in the net of a horizontal grid, she rises to assert herself in the vertical plane. No longer a passive, erotic dish to be ingested into the eyes of Vespucci, she reaches out to touch him. Although this reciprocation of affection might be understood to grant the fulfillment of the explorer's carnal desire for a full and complete understanding of his object, Vespucci's "rediscovery" implies a regression into a primitive state of existence, a club to the head that will result in his extinction, his corporeal sub-summation and integration into the very object he sought to optically devour. Absorptive, immersive gazing, if followed to its end, here results in a state of unified non-differentiation between subject and object, a kind of categorical equilibrium. This transformation is consummated by touch, an act that requires and instantiates perfect sensorial reciprocity.¹¹⁷ Although Vespucci stands entranced before the sight of the maiden, it is only touch that will irrevocably change their worlds. For America will literally become what she eats, just as Vespucci will become what he sees. The historian Mario Klarer has investigated this alignment between cannibalism and utopian imagery. He writes that:

¹¹⁶ Amerigo Vespucci, "Account of the Second Voyage," quoted in Mario Klarer, "Cannibalism and the Carnavalesque: Incorporation as Utopia in the Early Image of America," *New Literary History* 30:2 (1999): 392.

¹¹⁷ See my discussion of touch and contagion in relation to Mark Twain, above.

Already with the fall of Adam and Eve incorporation as the eating of forbidden fruit functions as a central motif later taken up in the Eucharist, although with new valences. Utopia and anthrophagy (cannibalism) coincide as apparently irreconcilable differences constituting an integral part of the Eucharist. Incorporation of the Other thus serves as a prerequisite for the restitution of a prelapsarian unity or utopia... While cannibals devour strangers to reestablish the unity of subject and object, Christians eat the “body” of Jesus as a guarantor for a utopian unity or oneness with their God.¹¹⁸

The visual lure that leads to touch and ultimately to some form of carnal conjunction or ingestion (sexual or otherwise), recalls the transformation that takes place in an image I considered earlier in Chapter 3, *Lola Has Come* (see Fig. 68), where a Quaker, gazing upon a striptease show, takes on the appearance of a Cyclops, a monocular cannibal from Greek mythology. Unable to withstand the intensity of Lola’s close proximity, the Quaker covers his eye(s). This conditioned reflex reveals the Quaker’s unconscious recognition of the abject object—death—that accompanies the fulfillment of his desire. The impulsive shielding of the eyes in *Lola has Come* mirrors that of a model who poses for this anonymous mid-nineteenth-century pornographic stereocard (Fig. 91). Here, subject and object alike register a mutual loss of containment. In these sadistic acts of exposure, viewer and viewed are both transformed into something less than human.

By doing all the work and leaving nothing to the imagination, *The Heart of the Andes* interpolated a passive, non-thinking, purely corporeal subject. There was simply nothing for the viewer to contemplate in a scene where nothing was left unelaborated or withheld from view. And “no thing” is *precisely* the thing that ultimately confronts the viewer of pornography. Audiences seeking to return to

¹¹⁸ Klarer, “Cannibalism and Carnavalesque,” 395.

l'origine du monde (Fig. 92) were thrust instead upon a vanishing point.¹¹⁹ The pain generated by the misrecognition of unity and completeness in *The Heart of the Andes* turned attention back to the seams and disjunctions that fractured not only the painting, but the psyche of the viewing subject.¹²⁰ Viewers were thus thrown back upon their own fractured subjectivity and cast into a closed circuit of irresolvable desire to pine for an image they were unable to forget. Instead of unity and completion, they confronted their own lack, the void around which language is structured that forces individuals to rely on the very representational strategies that *The Heart of the Andes* boldly attempted to implode.

Like anatomists pouring over the secrets of a corpse, viewers armed with multiple interpretive guides and opera-glasses were left to confront the painting (and themselves) in pieces, to trace the lineaments of multiple sections and narratives in order to achieve systemic knowledge through an aggregate apprehension of individual facts. Summation, completion, and coherence thus explode apart into a fetish of dismembered close-ups, a somber meditation upon the point where mimetic excess ruptures into a realization—within both the artwork and the viewer—of a state of

¹¹⁹ See Linda Nochlin, “*L’origine du Monde: The Origin Without an Original*,” *October* 37 (Summer, 1986): 76-86. My understanding of the “vanishing point” of *The Heart of the Andes* draws upon Kelly Dennis’s analysis of Courbet’s *L’origine du Monde*. Dennis, 73-89. See also Hal Foster’s reading of Sigmund Freud’s “The Uncanny.” Foster, *Compulsive Beauty* (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1993): 7-8; and Nemerov, 143-147. Rosalind Krauss writes that “Vanishing point, or the goal of vision, is manifested by the dark interior of a bodily orifice, the optically impenetrable cavity of the spread-eagled nude, a physical rather than a geometrical limit to the reach of vision.” Krauss, *The Blink of an Eye*, 180. This picture was, until recently, in the collection of the estate of the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan.

¹²⁰ As a document of American cultural politics on the eve of the Civil War, *The Heart of the Andes* in many ways provided its audience with a painfully literal example of what T.J. Clark has termed “imagery of its own fate.” See T.J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers* (New York: Knopf, 1985): 229.

utter depletion.¹²¹ Dissecting the canvas in this way, as most viewers did, followed the painting's drive for knowledge to its unsatisfactory conclusion. Here, the contemplative project of identity formation fundamental to humanism ruptures into a spectacular, graphic quest to externalize interior truths. This autoptic vision ultimately leaves *The Heart of the Andes* splayed open on the dissecting table bereft of life, something *less* than the sum of its parts.¹²²

The Heart of the Icebergs: Exploration and the Limits of the Male Gaze

I have argued that Frederic Church, in painting (and naming) *The Heart of the Andes*, sought to resolve internal tensions between object and concept, part and whole, essence and entirety. In doing so, he crafted a powerful image that carried viewers away, a fixed point of reference that lodged in their memories and dominated their thoughts. I now turn to integrate *The Heart of the Andes* into the larger pattern of Church's professional career in order to suggest another pair of opposites that the painting sought to collapse: space and time.

¹²¹ As Régis Durand writes, "The figure which operates here is an oscillation, a beat; an excess, but one which points to a lack; a 'signifier in excess,' but one which has to do with 'a permanent state of depletion.'" Durand, "How to See (Photographically)," 150.

¹²² For a consideration of dissection and pornography's analogous drives for knowledge, see Jonathan Sadway, *The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture* (London: Routledge, 1995): 11-12. I borrow the phrase "autoptic vision" from the title of Sadway's first chapter. Both pornography and dissection follow similar scopic trajectories and posit holistic objectives (or at least "whole objects") that ultimately degenerate into a fetish of fragments and parts. My understanding of fragmentation and dismemberment in the visual arts has been aided by Linda Nochlin, *The Body in Pieces: The Fragment as a Metaphor of Modernity* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1996); and Hal Foster, *Prosthetic Gods* (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 2004). See also the analysis of colored mezzotints of Jacques Gautier d'Agoty in Richard Leppert's subchapter "The Erotics of Dissection," in Leppert, *Art and the Committed Eye* (Boulder, Col.: Westview Press, 1996): 143-148.

During his lifetime, Frederic Church journeyed to the ends of the Earth.¹²³ On each of his four main trips outside of the United States—two to the tropics, and one each to the arctic and the holy land—Church sought the origins and the limits of things.¹²⁴ There were times during each of these trips where what he sought threatened to kill him. In the Andes, near Popoyan, Columbia, in 1853, Church, Cyrus Field, and an Englishman known only as “Gregory,” advanced up the side of the volcanic Mount Peresé until their horses gave out and the thin air forced them to turn back. Church’s ambition had been to peer into one of the main craters of the volcano. Hopeful that his objective was close at hand, Church and his company made one final push only to find that what they had assumed would be an impressive, massive crater, was merely a “blowhole.” Standing near the orifice, Church described the “pure sulphur and calcined stone so hot that a specimen which I picked up dropped from my fingers like a hot iron.”¹²⁵ Burned, horse-less, and exhausted by their perilous ascent, Church’s party reluctantly made their way back down the mountain.

In the arctic, while exploring and sketching icebergs off the coast of Labrador, Church sought to get as close as possible to his quarry without losing his life. Although Louis Noble, in *After Icebergs With a Painter* (1861), a published account of the artist’s journey, celebrates Church’s derring-do—the painter’s ambition to

¹²³ A recent exhibition of Church’s paintings takes the artist’s travels as its central theme. The curator, Gerald Carr, states at the outset of his catalogue that “Church’s art was goal-oriented. His lifetime peregrinations, and the paintings that sprang from them, as we shall see, are about going places, *and* getting to them...” (emphasis in original). See Gerald L. Carr, *In Search of the Promised Land: Paintings by Frederic Edwin Church* (New York: Berry-Hill Galleries, 2000): 11. John Davis writes that Church’s expeditions all speak to a “search for continuity and origins that marked his entire career.” See Davis, *The Landscape of Belief*, 169.

¹²⁴ Carr, *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ Frederic Church to Charlotte Church, 8 August 1853; quoted in Manthorne, *Creation and Renewal*, 33. My retelling of Church’s adventure on Mount Peresé draws from Manthorne’s account.

move in close and touch his massive prey—he also related the perils of such proximate encounters. He recalls, for instance, that Church nearly slipped off of one iceberg that he had clambered aboard in order to collect a sample. He mused upon how “...we forget the dangers of intimacy” with the icebergs; and how “There is a strange fascination, particularly at this hour, that draws like the fabulous music of the sirens.”¹²⁶

Church’s objects in the tropics and the arctic were massive and monumental, but deceptively protean and slippery. His volcanoes were usually obscured by clouds, and his icebergs by fog. While the vertical challenge posed by altitude impeded Church’s quest to scale Mount Peresé, the random and unpredictable horizontal drift of the icebergs presented an equally formidable imposition. In both cases, Church came face to face with the productive catastrophe of temporal change, bearing witness to huge structures in the throes of metamorphoses—erupting, expelling, fusing together, and breaking apart. Yet he sought these tumultuous subjects in some of the most static and unchanging climates on earth, where there is little or no seasonal variation, and in the case of the arctic, long periods of diurnal constancy where the sun never (or only briefly) rises and sets. In his search for the historical and natural origins of things, Church sought out a world before time.

Church’s interest in icebergs and his near-habitual penchant to paint waterfalls reveal the artist’s obsession with objects-in-motion that impede physical and optical navigation. He sought out subjects that were hard to get to, hard to get at, and above all, hard to see. Waterfalls figure prominently in most of Church’s large-scale

¹²⁶ Louis Legrand Noble, *After Icebergs with a Painter: A Summer Voyage to Labrador and around Newfoundland* (New York and London: 1861; reprint ed. New York: Olana Galleries, 1979): 213; quoted in Carr, *In Search of the Promised Land*, 54.

paintings of Andean scenery, including, as I have already noted, *The Heart of the Andes*.¹²⁷ *Small Waterfall* (c.1874-76) (Fig. 93) is an oil study based on a subject that Church may have seen in April of 1865 while traveling in Jamaica, and is an example that deserves special consideration within the context of the current discussion.

Undertaken nearly ten years after the artist visited the island, *Small Waterfall* was based on a photograph found in Church's collection at Olana.¹²⁸ The unknown maker of this albumen print, titled *Waterfall, Jamaica* (1865-1870) (Fig. 94) sets the hazy, veil-like effect produced by the speed of the falling water against the static, slick, and meticulously delineated surface of the dark basalt that frames the falls. Church's painting subtly inverts this scenario, arresting the falls in a thick, calcified crust of white paint that stands in contrast to the muted, thinly scumbled ochre that registers the presence of the rocks. The vague blur that characterizes the water and the high degree of precision that animates the rocks in the photograph reverse their roles in the oil study. The artist transforms the flux and flow of the waterfall into a tactile, legible surface. While working with the photograph, Church was drawn to the most transient and optically ambiguous element in the composition and attempted to externalize its interior mechanics, rendering the tumbling plumes and splashes of water as minutely-sculpted ridges and valleys in the manner of a highly-skilled physical cartographer. More than a mere illusionary change of state, this optical freezing of a warm, tropical cascade indicates a further development of Church's ambition towards unqualified

¹²⁷ In addition to *The Heart of the Andes*, waterfalls appear in *The Andes of Ecuador* (1855), *Cotopaxi* (1862), and *Rainy Season in the Tropics* (1866), and a number of other smaller canvases based upon scenery in both South and North America. This interest is especially apparent, of course, in the artist's three major versions of *Niagara Falls* in 1857, 1862, and 1867.

¹²⁸ Both the oil study and the photograph from which it derives are illustrated in Thomas Weston Fels, "Fire & Ice: Observations on the Photographic Collection of Frederic Edwin Church at Olana," in *Fire & Ice: Treasures from the Photographic Collection of Frederic Edwin Church at Olana*, ex. cat. (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2002): 24-25.

lucidity and temporal simultaneity in his work. The flow and flux of water in Church's paintings can be equated to the flow and flux of time, to the onset of geological processes of erosion. By denying the movement of the waterfall, Church formally aligns space and time and renders them symmetrical on the surface of the painting, arresting the scene in a state of cryogenic suspension.¹²⁹

This effect resembles the spatial construction of time traced by John William Draper, a prominent American physician, chemist, and historian, in the second edition of his *Thoughts on the Future Civil Policy of America* (1866). Here, the author draws a parallel between the constant death and replenishment of cells in the human body, and the constant death and replenishment of individuals that constitute a nation state.¹³⁰ To this end, Draper employs the figure of the waterfall:

The aspect of identity he [a given person] presents is therefore altogether illusory. Particles are perpetually abandoning him, and new particles are being perpetually introduced. In a waterfall which retains its appearance for many years unchanged, the supply from above continually flows in, and the precipitated portions below glide finally and forever away. The waste is compensated by the supply. In no other manner can the transitory matter exhibit a permanent form. The waterfall is only a form which the flux of liquid assumes. So in that collection of substance constituting human, or any animal, whatever may be its position, high or low, in the realm of life, there is a perpetual introduction of new material and a perpetual departure of the old.¹³¹

¹²⁹ Church also owned two photographs of Niagara Falls

¹³⁰ Draper writes that "The analogy between the life of an Individual and of a Nation arises from a similarity in their constitution. In the individual there must be unceasing changes in the component parts. The appearance of permanence is altogether an illusion. Physicians sometimes say that the body changes completely in seven years. In truth, it changes far more quickly than that. The particles of which it is composed are continually becoming effete. They must be removed, and new ones introduced in their stead. Such replacements are going on from the moment of birth to that of death; they occur by night as well as by day; during sleep as well as when we are awake. This death of the constituent particles of a living being is called interstitial death. It is the very condition of life. It occurs in every part indifferently-in the soft textures, as in the muscles or nerves; in the hardest, as bone. Energy of life depends altogether on the rapidity of these transmutations." John William Draper, *Thoughts on the Future Civil Policy of America*, 2nd. Ed. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1866): 14.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 15.

Draper, whose prose here merits quoting at length, continues:

Nor does the analogy between an Individual and a Nation end here. A similar, perhaps a more surprising parallelism is perceived when their modes of growth are considered, for not alone in the incidents of birth and death are they alike. As the former pursues his way through the successive stages of infancy, childhood, youth, maturity, old age, so, as history teaches, does the latter too. The Individual helplessly and in a predestined manner runs through these stages, being unable to modify their succession, or to accelerate or retard their occurrence. The Nation, also, in a like helpless and predetermined way, moves through the same inevitable career. An unavoidable destiny rules over the progress of both. That transitory permanence, if such a contradictory expression may be used, which is equally seen in the Nation, the Individual, the Waterfall, depends on the invariability of external conditions.¹³²

As we have seen, it is precisely an “invariability of external conditions” that Church sought out in the tropical and arctic climates that fascinated him during the 1850s and early 1860s. While we may discern in oil studies such as *Small Waterfall* and the preparatory sketch for *The Heart of the Andes* (1858) instances where the current of a cascade is frozen and fixed in a way that might equate the stoppage of motion with the stoppage of time, Church nevertheless in his finished paintings renders and positions waterfalls in a way that foregrounds their diaphanous intangibility, their “transitory permanence.”

It is possible that the formal and tactile characteristics of *Small Waterfall* might proceed from something much more personal. In Jamaica, and afterwards, Church’s experience of time was no doubt shaped by unfortunate events in the artist’s personal life. In March of 1865, both of Frederic Church’s first two children—Herbert Edwin and Emma Francis—succumbed to diphtheria in New York City. The artist and his wife, burdened by the additional shock of President Lincoln’s subsequent assassination, made their journey to Jamaica the next month in no small

¹³² Ibid.

part to recuperate from the mental and emotional anguish brought about by this series of tragedies.

The inversion of state that animates the relationship between *Waterfall*, *Jamaica* and *Small Waterfall* parallels Church's interest in the icebergs of the northern Atlantic. The sea off the coast of Labrador provided Frederic Church with an ideal laboratory to observe the relationship between ice and water, and an opportunity to ruminate more broadly upon the interplay between form and formlessness. Although I do not consider icebergs and the ocean as Jungian "deep structures" that signify existence on the one hand, and death and non-identity on the other, I nevertheless mean to emphasize the important role played by the physical relationship between solid and liquid water in Church's art. I highlight here the relentless crusade against indeterminacy that, in almost every element *but* waterfalls, characterizes his style. Even the misty atmosphere of *Rainy Season in the Topics* (1866) (Fig. 95), based largely upon the artist's imaginary recollection of the scenery he had beheld years earlier, is concerned at least as much with the optics of rainbows as it is with abstract notions of reverie or sublime transcendence. Church's graphic, linear style, even in its most poetic moments, remained incessantly empirical and scientific.¹³³

As such, *The Icebergs* (1861) (Fig. 96) can be read as a remarkably sophisticated and surprisingly abstract meditation upon the relationship between figure and ground. This is not to say that Church's style was "abstract" as such, but

¹³³ Church's style changed significantly, however, in the years following the Civil War. Only at the end of his career can it be argued that Church finally abandoned his penchant for mimetic precision for a more poetic and diaphanous mode. Even then, however, his paintings appear meticulously linear when compared to contemporary landscapes by George Inness, or when placed alongside the works of any one of a number of artists whose style might be called "tonalist" or "impressionist."

that he crafts an attentive and painstakingly meticulous image of a (relatively) barren and abstruse subject. *The Icebergs* demand a more subtle, probing, and delicate mode of aesthetic engagement from the viewer, whose eyes are granted no obvious escape from the blinding, white triangle of snow that dominates the center of the canvas. Like the waterfall that anchors the composition of *The Heart of the Andes*, the iceberg to which this white field belongs impedes navigation; but here the impediment looms larger, confronting viewers with an inscrutable absence. By observing the massive blocks of ice drifting to and fro, slowly melting into the surrounding water and at times catastrophically splitting apart, Church gained insight into the processes by which discreet, measurable things dissolved into formlessness.¹³⁴ In this polar landscape, he discovered a subject that reduced and purified the same set of aesthetic concerns that initially drew him to South America.¹³⁵ Virtually the same size as *The Heart of the Andes* and exhibited in a nearly identical frame¹³⁶, *The Icebergs* was

¹³⁴ For an analysis of the decay of icebergs in Louis LeGrand Noble's account of Church's voyage, *After Icebergs with a Painter*, see Timothy Mitchell, "After Icebergs with a Painter: Erratic Boulders and Time's Slow Changes," *Smithsonian Studies in American Art* 3, no. 4 (Fall, 1989): 10-11. Gerald Carr notes that Church, in his guide to the painting, explains that the icebergs in the composition are in fact the fragments of a single iceberg that broke free from a glacier in Greenland. The contents of the guidebook for *The Icebergs* (no copies have yet been located) are known only through excerpts printed on a broadside housed at Olana. Carr, *The Icebergs*, 82; 97 n.4. Recounting his voyage with Church, Louis LeGrande Noble writes that "I am struck with the rapid rate at which the bergs are perishing. They are dissolving at every point and pre, both in the air and in the sea. One sheet of water, although no thicker than a linen sheet, covers the entire alp...Around the surface line, the ever-busy waves are now polishing the newly-broken corners, and cutting under and mining their way in, with deceitful rapidity. Unceasingly they bore and drill..." Noble, from *After Icebergs With a Painter*, excerpted in "After Icebergs," *The Eclectic Magazine of Foreign Literature* 55:1 (Jan. 1862): 96.

¹³⁵ As one London reviewer put it, "It has been said that he was so weary from the elaboration of all this equatorial vegetation...as to long for scenes where not a tree or leaf was to be met with, and that hence arose the project of pictorially assailing the icebergs." W.P.B., "Mr. Church's Picture of The Icebergs," *The Art Journal* 25 (Jan. 1863): 187; quoted in Mitchell, "Frederic Church's *The Icebergs*," 6. A writer for the New York *Albion* claimed that *The Icebergs* registered "a complete abnegation of extrinsic interest." *Albion* (May 4, 1861): 213; quoted in Carr, 81-82.

¹³⁶ Both Kevin Avery and Gerald Carr speculate on the nature of the period frame that surrounded *The Icebergs* when it was rediscovered in a house in Manchester, England in the late 1979. Writing about the frame crafted for *The Heart of the Andes* in 1859, Avery writes that "it was similar to, if not identical with, the deep warm umber of the plain walnut frame found on Church's next largest picture,

considered by the public as a pendant to Church's earlier tropical masterpiece.¹³⁷ "So we may in time expect the Heart of the Icebergs," one journalist opined, "if these cold and glittering piles can be said to have a heart."¹³⁸ Like *The Heart of the Andes*, *The Icebergs* was exhibited as a one-picture show in New York and London that immersed audiences into its *mise en scène*.¹³⁹ The fictive space of the painting appears palpably responsive to the viewer's presence. Any sudden shift of weight or position or ill-advised step threatens to disrupt the composition's tenuous equilibrium. Unlike the warm, joyful exuberance that accompanied the reception of the earlier painting, the reductive austerity of *The Icebergs* coupled with its exhibition during the initial months of the Civil War drew a reaction that, while no less enthusiastic, was decidedly less sentimental. There is no living thing in the entire composition, no broad range of climatic zones, and no extensive narrative framework to guide the viewer through the scene. All of the energy that elaborated the near-limitless variety of *The Heart of the Andes* is here concentrated into a luminous intensity that is (relatively speaking) purified of subject matter. Icebergs, water, sky, rocks, and the

The Icebergs, when it was rediscovered recently in England." Avery, "The Heart of the Andes Exhibited," 57, 70 n. 40. Also see Carr, *The Icebergs*, 99 n. 44.

¹³⁷ Franklin Kelly has interpreted *The Icebergs* as a pendant to *The Heart of the Andes*. He argues further that the smaller, but equally impressive canvas, *Twilight in the Wilderness*, can be understood in relation to these two works. Franklin Kelly, "A Passion for Landscape: The Paintings of Frederic Edwin Church," in *Frederic Edwin Church*, ex. cat. (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1989): 58-59; and idem., *Frederic Church and the National Landscape* (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1988): 114. A more recent study of pendants and other forms of interrelated narratives among Church's canvases of the late 1850s and early 1860s is Joni L. Kinsey, "History in Natural Sequence: The Civil War Polyptych of Frederic Church," in *Redefining American History Painting*, Patricia M. Burnham and Lucretia Hoover Giese, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995): 158-173.

¹³⁸ The New York *Evening Post* (August 5, 1859); quoted in Carr, *The Icebergs*, 59.

¹³⁹ Gerald Carr summarizes that: "The very size of *The Icebergs* was and remains another of its primary attractions. The scene is virtually large enough to walk into. This, too, was part of Church's purpose: the immensity of the canvas, coupled with the incredible variety of minute details, put the spectator among the icebergs. Art and reality merge. The plain, dark frame surrounding the picture was deliberately contrived to enhance the effect of a window onto another world." Carr, *Frederic Edwin Church, The Icebergs* (Dallas: Dallas Museum of Fine Arts, 1980): 21.

mast of a wrecked ship: that is all there is to see.¹⁴⁰ A timely treatment of the formal thematics of dissolution and fragmentation, *The Icebergs* was uncompromisingly direct and severe.

Augmenting the painting's sublime ferocity was a keen awareness of the real dangers faced by many mariners and explorers who ventured too close. The constant threat of impending disaster posed by icebergs was manifest in a many written and illustrated accounts. In *After Icebergs with a Painter*, an engraving entitled "Ice Falling from a Lofty Berg" illustrates one close call, as do a number of images found in other published narratives, such as that of the voyage of Elisha Kent Kane.¹⁴¹ Unlike the passive and opaque waterfalls that appear in other works, the titular subjects of *The Icebergs* assume an aggressive stance. More than mere impediments, they move according to their own incalculable logic and float along imprecise trajectories. Without warning, they shed massive slabs of ice onto the heads of unsuspecting sailors.

Vicariously projected into a scene of eerie, dissimulating calm, viewers of *The Icebergs* are given no solid ground on which to stand, no shelter, and no way out. The lone ocular escape route, an area of open water that extends into the background on the left, is marginalized. The current is registered by a succession of waves that advance into the small lagoon and flow toward the picture plane, effectively bottling up the viewer in the foreground against a looming blue-green wall of ice that dominates the left edge of the canvas appears primed to collapse. Adding further to

¹⁴⁰ Church added the mast to the composition in 1863, before the painting's London debut. See Eleanor Jones Harvey, *The Voyage of the Icebergs: Frederic Church's Arctic Masterpiece* (Dallas Museum of Art; New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002): 63, 66.

¹⁴¹ See Elisha Kent Kane, *Arctic Explorations in the Years 1853, '54, '55*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: 1856).

the immersive effect of the composition is the large and looming shadow cast across the lower-right corner. With no observable relationship to any of the visible bergs in the painting, this shadow registers the existence of a gargantuan mass of ice that looms unseen over the viewer's right shoulder. In this way, Church wraps and curls the imaginative space of the painting around and behind the viewer's own position. The effect is claustrophobic. Do we dare turn around and look up? Are we being watched? And what became of the denizens of the wrecked vessel that lay smashed near the bottom of the composition? Are we next? I ask these questions not to be needlessly melodramatic, but to get at the remarkable way that *The Icebergs* co-opts the viewer's agency, the way it actively repels all attempts to libidinally appropriate and carnally possess its space. With its superabundant detail and artfully arranged composition that opens up the interior fecundity of the landscape, *The Heart of the Andes* encourages ocular traversal. Viewers who gazed into *The Icebergs*, however, encountered its polar opposite: a foreboding, chaotic field of blank points at point blank range. Unlike its tropical cousin, the painting stubbornly resisted the probing eyes of its audience. Viewers vicariously and precariously positioned within the painting's pictorial space stand exposed to the elements. Overhead, large chunks of melting ice threaten blows to the head that recall the club-induced reversal of power relations in Jan van der Straet's engraving "Americus Rediscovered America." The desire for a seamless and immaculate transcendental fusion of subject and object is thereby quashed amidst the instability of crunching, cracking, and crashing landforms.

Some visitors reported that an arctic chill passed through their bodies as they gazed at the picture, that it “radiated upon its spectator its atmosphere of cold,” and caused “a positive feeling of pain, akin to that which we sometimes feel in the presence of terrible visions of sleep.”¹⁴² Of Church’s “refrigerating” painting, a reviewer for *The Knickerbocker* noted that the “dazzling mountains of ice freeze into the very soul...”¹⁴³ Just as a strong shot of alcohol registers a sharp drop in temperature on the “Moral Thermometer” of Benjamin Rush, “This picture,” writes the *New-York Daily Tribune*:

...is one that would affect the thermometer, and lower the temperature of the exhibition room, say twenty degrees. Tacitus says that in all defeats the eye is conquered first. So, in all Arctic freezings, the eye feels the first shock, and anticipates in a moment the slow agonies that shall wind slowly, enduringly about the tender tissues, and the unsuspecting blood vessels. This first shock, Mr. Church’s picture gives us.¹⁴⁴

Another writer for the *Christian Examiner* who endorsed the moral and aesthetic value of *The Icebergs* nevertheless prepared readers for the sensory onslaught that awaited them in the exhibition hall, where the painting “will burst on their sense like a vision,” and “will follow them home and haunt them for weeks.”¹⁴⁵ We are reminded again of Theodore Winthrop’s consideration of *The Heart of the Andes* as a strange picture with its own motivations and dawning sense of self-awareness, and of the way that Church’s earlier 1859 canvas took hold of the mind of Mark Twain. *The Icebergs*—radiating, bursting, following, haunting—is likewise an object seemingly

¹⁴² *The World* (New York: Apr. 11, 1861); quoted in Carr, *The Icebergs*, 83. [Note: There is also another quote re: the chilly sensations felt by the audience. Where did you see it? Also, consolidate the footnotes in this section. There are too many of them.]

¹⁴³ “American Art,” *The Knickerbocker* (July, 1861): 50; quoted by Carr, “Early Documentation of *The Icebergs*,” in Harvey, *Voyage of the Icebergs*, 93.

¹⁴⁴ “The Bostonian in New York,” *New-York Daily Tribune* (May 12, 1861): 3; quoted in Carr, “Early Documentation of the Icebergs,” 92.

¹⁴⁵ *Christian Register* (Mar. 15, 1862): 42; quoted in Carr, *The Icebergs*, 85.

in the midst of becoming a subject, a picture whose principal actors literally “swallow” ships and freeze their pursuers to death.¹⁴⁶ Immersive, venturesome imaginative projection is countered here by an equally powerful ocular introjection, where the painting takes charge and invades its subjects, causes pain, induces nightmares, and otherwise sends chills up and down the spine.

The history of arctic exploration is rife with such reversals of fortune, subjects who pursue their objects only to become, like Melville’s Ahab, physically embedded into their quarry, *themselves* the subsequent object of an equally dangerous expedition to discover “the truth” about their fate. This self-perpetuating sedimentation of dashed hopes was roundly criticized in 1856 by a correspondent for the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* who associated such quests with botched attempts to discover perpetual motion or the philosopher’s stone. The article claims that:

The last great patent folly, that which will distinguish the present age, is the mania for Arctic exploration. The New Atlantis and Utopia, the fountain of youth and the Eldorado, commend themselves to the imagination as splendid phantoms with brilliant allurements for poetical credulity; but the Arctic regions present no attractions either to science, commerce, or the poetic instinct. Dreary barrenness and blank desolation alone present themselves. It has death and not perpetual youth to offer; instead of golden ingots it has but icebergs and snow. The experience of its devotees is uniform and consistent. Every exploring expedition either perishes totally like Franklin’s party, or such a miserable remnant returns as bear fearful evidence of the horrors though which they have passed. They return like messengers to Job, each to tell a tale more disastrous than his predecessor.¹⁴⁷

As a poignant reminder of such catastrophes, the composition of Church’s *Study for “The Icebergs”* (1860) (Fig. 97) features an entire ruined hull, placed just to

¹⁴⁶ A recent study that champions the utility of studying images as active agents and nascent organisms is W.J.T. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

¹⁴⁷ *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* (Dec. 22, 1856): 2; much of this passage is quoted in Carr, Frederic Edwin Church, *In Search of the Promised Land*, ex. cat. (New York: Berry-Hill Galleries, 2000): 79.

the left of the arch of ice that defines and spans the cavern. At the last minute, however, Church replaced the ship with a large boulder in his final canvas.¹⁴⁸ This decision erased the only sign of human presence—living or otherwise—in the composition. Although the very existence of the painting registers the presence of the artist as the “first” observer of the scene, this decision nevertheless placed viewers at the vanguard of discovery, and magnified the exotic appeal of *The Icebergs* as a revelation of one of nature’s last secret places. In 1863, before the painting’s London exhibition, Church re-introduced the ruined ship that had played an important part in his 1860 study.¹⁴⁹ Now reduced to a single mast disengaged from its hull, Church placed the object in a prominent position in the left foreground. While the mast certainly alludes to the farthest extent of Sir John Franklin’s polar expedition of 1845-47, it also symbolically marks the limits of empirical science, and more broadly, the limits of mimetic realism that Church’s own art so boldly sought to probe.¹⁵⁰ No longer of any practical use, the ruined mast, like the solitary column in Thomas Cole’s *Desolation*, serves only as a marker of its own demise. A diagonal line extends from the tip of the fallen mast and carries the eye across an ice-clogged strait

¹⁴⁸ For Church’s use of sketches in relation to *The Icebergs*, see Eleanor Jones Harvey, *The Painted Sketch: American Impressions from Nature, 1830-1880* ex cat. (Dallas: Dallas Museum of Art, 1999): 51-53, 172-75; and Theodore E. Stebbins, Jr., *Close Observation: Selected Oil Sketches by Frederic E. Church*, ex. cat. (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1978): 31-33. The geological significance of the boulders that occupy this spot in the final canvas is explored in Timothy Mitchell, *Frederic Church’s The Icebergs: Erratic Boulders and Time’s Slow Changes*.

¹⁴⁹ Because they depended on Southern textile imports, English sympathy for the Confederacy ran high. Church, who had changed the title of the painting to *The North* when it was first exhibited in New York during the initial weeks of the Civil War, changed it back to *The Icebergs* when he brought the painting to London in 1863. This, along with the addition of the mast to pay homage to British explorer Sir John Franklin, were the two major changes Church made to the painting that year. See Harvey, *The Voyage of the Icebergs*, *ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ Church was friends with Isaac Hayes, a surgeon who served on board the second expedition mounted by Henry Grinnell to ascertain the fate of Franklin and his crew. For an account of Church’s interest and engagement with these voyages, see Mitchell, “Frederic Church’s *The Icebergs*,” 8-9; and William H. Truettner, “The Genesis of Frederic Edwin Church’s *Aurora Borealis*,” *The Art Quarterly* 31:3 (Fall, 1968): esp. 271, 281-82 n.17.

of water into a luminous, emerald-green cavern that commands attention on the right side of the composition (Fig. 98). The highest point of the ship's architecture, the sturdy mast-head, once used to provide the crew with a commanding, panoptic view, now lays broken and supine upon the ice. A monument to the failure of penetrating sight, the mast is depicted in the throes of a final, plaintive gesture toward the mouth of the cavern.

Very early in his thinking about *The Icebergs*, Church considered what one reviewer would describe as a "bridge and arch of ice" above the cavern as a crucial element of his picture.¹⁵¹ An early, imaginative conception, *Study for "The Icebergs"* (1859), features a wide bridge in the center of the composition that connects two massive bergs (Fig. 99). Here, Gerald Carr has noted how the low vantage point leads the eye through the narrow straits and under the bridge in a way that recalls the narrative propulsion of *Manhood*, the third canvas of Thomas Cole's *Voyage of Life*.¹⁵² Unlike *Manhood*, the viewer is put in the place of the mariner, drifting forward at a much slower pace to pass under a bridge that appears likely to collapse. This early study and the final preliminary oil sketch of 1860 in fact draws more directly from Cole's *Expulsion from the Garden of Eden* (1828) (Fig. 100).

Cole—like Church—devoted much thought to the appearance and meaning of the bridge in his composition. Cole had originally conceived of the bridge as a separate subject in its own right—"The Bridge of Fear"—and executed two drawings

¹⁵¹ M.C.A., "From New York. From Our Own Correspondent. New York, May 2." *Springfield Daily Republican* (May 4, 1861): 1. This and other reviews of *The Icebergs*—many of them reprinted at length—have been gathered together by Gerald Carr in Harvey, *The Voyage of the Icebergs*, 87-96.

¹⁵² Carr, *The Icebergs*, 61. Carr also notes a compositional similarity between this study and Church's *Natural Bridge, Virginia* (1852). Rebecca Bedell has since compared to Cole's *Expulsion From the Garden of Eden* (1829). See Bedell, *The Anatomy of Nature: Geology and American Landscape Painting, 1825-1875* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001): 72.

with that title in 1827/28.¹⁵³ The larger and more finished of the two, in the collection of the National Gallery of Art, Washington, features a boulder precariously wedged in between two projections of rock (Fig. 101). A low vantage point allows the viewer to see that this tenuous bridge spans a body of water rimmed by high, sheer-faced cliffs. Like *Study for "The Icebergs"* (1859), the composition effectively draws the eye under and through the arch-like structure. Another related oil, *The Expulsion—Moon and Firelight* (c.1827/28) (Fig. 102), marks an important preparatory exercise for Cole's subsequent and final 1828 version that now hangs in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Although unfinished, *Expulsion—Fire and Moonlight* measures just over four by three feet in size, and likely represents an initial (and subsequently abandoned) attempt by Cole to paint a pendant picture for *The Garden of Eden* (1828).¹⁵⁴ In *Expulsion—Fire and Moonlight*, Cole brings the bridge even closer to the picture plane, where it serves to anchor the entire composition. The cascade of a distant waterfall passes behind the center of the span, effectively dividing the canvas into four quadrants of equal size. Riven with a large crack just left of center, the bridge stands for and in a world where the acceleration of time is made palpable and terrible. In a single composition, Cole depicts the cheerful mid-morning sun of Eden, and a desolate, cloud-shrouded, post-lapsarian moon. In between the lunar scene on the far left and the central waterfall, an erupting volcano adds to the kinetic energy of

¹⁵³ Both are illustrated and discussed in Franklin Kelly, *Thomas Cole's Paintings of Eden*, ex. cat. (Fort Worth: Amon Carter Museum, 1994): 31-33. Kelly notes that "The Bridge of Fear" appeared on Cole's list of subjects for paintings that he recorded in an 1827 sketchbook. For a transcript of this list, see Howard Merritt, "Thomas Cole's List: Subjects for Pictures," *Studies on Thomas Cole, an American Romanticist* (Baltimore: The Baltimore Museum of Art, 1967): 82-101.

¹⁵⁴ A full examination of the relationships between these paintings can be found in Kelly, *idem*. Had he completed the painting, Cole likely would have added the figures of Adam and Eve to the composition. Their absence in *Expulsion—Fire and Moonlight*, while perhaps unintended, nevertheless impels the bridge to dictate the meaning of the picture.

the picture and further heightens the viewer's expectation that the bridge is on the verge of collapse. In Cole's final version of the scene, *Expulsion from the Garden of Eden* (1828), the bridge, the waterfall, and the volcano are condensed into a single vertical register on the left-hand side of the composition. The waterfall, no longer relegated to the distance, spills over a ledge just behind the bridge and appears to undercut the ground beneath the feet of Adam and Eve. The erosive power of the water is here brought to the fore to emphasize Adam and Eve's expulsion as a decidedly one-way trip.¹⁵⁵ The two figures, driven from the gate of Eden by a gale-force blast of heat and blinding light, stumble beleagueredly onto the left edge of the bridge and into a fallen, time-ravaged world.

The ruined ship embedded in the left-side of the frozen arch in Frederic Church's 1860 *Study for "The Icebergs"* can be read in conversation with Cole's earlier example. With its upwardly-tilted, right-facing prow, the ship appears preserved in the midst of a futile attempt to re-cross a distant but nonetheless discernable recollection of Cole's "bridge of fear." As in Cole's *Expulsion from the Garden of Eden*, water erodes the integrity of the arch. The waves lap up against the ice and combine with the temperature of the air to melt the structure, and ultimately, to sink the remains of the ship. In the final canvas, a large boulder stands in place of the ship, its massive weight pressing down on the ice. The boulder and the ruined ship it replaces evoke, respectively, the expulsion and a hoped-for return of Adam and Eve to the Garden of Eden. As a castaway, the erratic boulder is tinged with the

¹⁵⁵ Bryan Jay Wolf has highlighted the way that *Expulsion from the Garden of Eden* is a bifurcation of real time and paradisiacal timelessness. See Wolf, *Romantic Re-Vision: Culture and Consciousness in Nineteenth-Century American Painting and Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982): 91-96; and idem., "A Grammar of the Sublime, or Intertextuality Triumphant in Church, Turner, and Cole," *New Literary History* 16:2 (Winter, 1985): 329-333.

pathos of separation.¹⁵⁶ Its precarious position at the foot of the bridge registers both geologic and biblical time, the unstoppable entropic forces of erosion, dissolution, and gravity set against a nostalgic yearning for pre-lapsarian wholeness. Church's 1863 pairing of this boulder with the foreground mast adds another testament—this time, a more explicit one—to the futility of attempts to regain paradise.

While it may at first seem far-fetched to associate the cold and desolate seascape of *The Icebergs* with anything resembling a biblical Eden, reviews of the painting as well as the accompanying account of Church's voyage, *After Icebergs with a Painter*, are filled with references to warm, tropical, and altogether otherworldly associations. While exploring the coast of Labrador, Church "skirted along a bleak palisade of desolate rock, as wild as the wilderness of Sinai. Occasionally the iron coast opened and allowed a glimpse of the interior."¹⁵⁷ Noble's prose, which refers to icebergs themselves, rather than Church's painting, was highlighted in a number of publications, and spoke of "that dreamy lotos of Arctic seas, with a loveliness as strange, penetrating, and ethereal as the fragrance of Arctic flowers."¹⁵⁸ Recalling imagery from Tennyson's "Land of the Lotos-Eaters," *The Icebergs* (and I refer equally here to the real things and those in Church's painting) functioned as a sort of psychedelic *tabula rasa*, where the mind was set free to project its own fantasies onto the blank, white surface. Invoking these protean qualities, Noble proceeds to liken icebergs to "Parthenons," "Peter's Domes," and "Byzantine

¹⁵⁶ On the geological context of erratic boulders in *The Icebergs*, see Timothy Mitchell, *idem.*; and Rebecca Bedell, *The Anatomy of Nature: Geology and American Landscape Painting, 1825-1875* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001): 27-33, for a convincing argument about their role as evidence of a post-diluvian world in the paintings of Thomas Cole.

¹⁵⁷ T.L. Cuyler, "Among the Icebergs," *The Independent* (May 2, 1861): 1.

¹⁵⁸ Louis Noble, *After Icebergs with a Painter*, 376-77; excerpted in "After Icebergs with a Painter," *Christian Examiner* 72 (May, 1862): 368-383; quoted by Carr in "Early Documentation of *The Icebergs*," 93.

Columns.”¹⁵⁹ W.P. Bayley, who saw *The Icebergs* in London, claimed that the painting was possessed of “an oriental and fairy-like splendor,” where the “the air seems soft; you might even deem it warm.”¹⁶⁰

Paradoxically, it was warmth that many nineteenth-century polar explorers sought after, including Sir John Franklin, Elisha Kent Kane, and Isaac Hayes. Each of them supposed the existence of an open polar sea, a warm, temperate region that would allow for maritime navigation and realize the mercantile dream of a northwest passage around North America.¹⁶¹ There can be no doubt that the Open Polar Sea Theory played an important role in structuring the public’s understanding of *The Icebergs*; but the painting does more than offer a laudatory affirmation of the heroic sacrifice of arctic explorers. No mere celebration of expeditionary zeal, *The Icebergs* documents a conflicted response to unchecked, ambitious dreams of discovery. Before the 1863 addition of the broken mast, the painting presented the public with a bleak, unwelcoming scene that precluded easy and instantaneous comprehension. The mast, while certainly intended to honor Franklin and others like him who gave their lives to reveal the wonders of an unexplored region of the world, also registers

¹⁵⁹ Ibid. On the influence of Tennyson’s poem on the art of Sanford Gifford, see Kevin Avery, “Gifford in the Catskills,” in *Within the Landscape: Essays on Nineteenth-Century American Art and Culture*, Phillip Earenfight and Nancy Siegel, eds. (University Park, Penn.: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005): 149-182.

¹⁶⁰ W. P. Bayley, “Mr. Church’s Picture of *The Icebergs*,” *London Art-Journal* (September 1, 1863): 187-88; quoted in Carr *The Icebergs*, 93.

¹⁶¹ Hayes and Church were good friends, and the art historian William Truettner has demonstrated that Church’s *Aurora Borealis* (1865) was a homage to the ambition of the explorer’s 1860 expedition to prove the existence of this mild, ice-free body of water. See Truettner, “The Genesis of Frederic Church’s *Aurora Borealis*,” 271, 280. In this painting, Truettner claims that Church may have deliberately moved Hayes’s ship, the schooner *United States*, some 150 miles farther north than it actually traveled in order to portray “the expedition in light of what was believed to be its ultimate accomplishment.” Gerald Carr has likewise written of the strong attraction that the Open Polar Sea Theory exerted upon nineteenth century explorers, and, like Truettner, highlights the importance of Elisha Kent Kane and Isaac Hayes in Church’s artistic imagination. See Carr, *In Search of the Promised Land: Paintings by Frederic Edwin Church*, 76-85.

the folly of such adventures, and thus acknowledges the undercurrent of criticism that contradicted the prevailing optimism and public acclaim.¹⁶² Henry David Thoreau did the same in *Walden*, when he wrote that:

Is it the source of the Nile, or the Niger, or the Mississippi, or a Northwest Passage around this continent, that we would find? Are these the problems which most concern mankind? Is Franklin the only man who is lost, that his wife should be so earnest to find him? Does Mr. Grinnell know where he himself is?¹⁶³

Thoreau continues, shifting his attention from the northern to the southern hemisphere:

What was the meaning of that South-Sea Exploring Expedition, with all its parade and expense, but an indirect recognition of the fact that there are continents and seas in the moral world to which every man is an isthmus or an inlet, yet unexplored by him, but that it is easier to sail many thousand miles through cold and storm and cannibals, in a government ship, with five hundred men and boys to assist one, than it is to explore the private sea, the Atlantic and Pacific Ocean of one's being alone.¹⁶⁴

Near the conclusion of his acerbic attack, Thoreau un.masks the nineteenth-century mania for expeditions to map the globe as substitution-reaction for the fear of candid self-examination. At the end of such voyages, Thoreau sarcastically suggests, “you may perhaps find some *Symmes’ Hole* by which to get at the inside at last.”¹⁶⁵

“Symmes’ Hole” refers to John Cleves Symmes, a U.S. Army Captain who helped to popularize the theory of a hollow Earth in the early nineteenth century.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶² In addition to the article in the *Brooklyn Eagle*, cited and quoted above in [insert op. cit. here], Carr (*In Search of the Promised Land*, 116, n. 12) lists two other sources that question the wisdom of arctic adventures: “Lecture on the Arctic Regions by Captain Whiting,” *New York Herald* (January 26, 1861): 5; and “Arctic Explorations—Misdirected Efforts,” *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper* (November 2, 1861): 370.

¹⁶³ *Walden* online, get a real book. <Ch. 18>

¹⁶⁴ Henry David Thoreau, *Walden, or, Life in the Woods* (1854), available on-line at Project Gutenberg: <http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext95/waldn10.txt> (electronic text last accessed on September 24, 2005).

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ Symmes was not the first to suggest this idea. Plato, Athanasius Kircher, and Edmund Halley, among others, have proffered similar theories. For an excellent summary of the history of such thinking, see Victoria Nelson, “Symmes Hole, Or the South Polar Romance,” *Raritan* 17:2 (Fall 1997):

Through a series of public lectures and published reports, Symmes argued that the Earth was made up of a series of hollow, concentric shells, with vast, round openings at both the north and south poles. Ocean water entered the interior of the planet through these polar apertures and flowed toward the tropics where it percolated back to the surface near the equator (Fig. 103). This circulation generated the currents of the surface oceans, and the polar gaps allowed warmth from the interior of the planet to escape, creating a mild climate where Symmes thought to exist “a warm and rich land, stocked with thrifty vegetables and animals.”¹⁶⁷ These ideas attracted a number of followers, including Jeremiah N. Reynolds and James McBride, who continued to advocate for their veracity after Symmes’s death in 1829. Perhaps the most exhaustive consideration and elaboration of Symmes’s theories is the novel *Symzonia: A Voyage of Discovery* (1820), a first-person account of a fantastic voyage through the center of the Earth written by a person known only as ‘Adam Seaborn.’¹⁶⁸ In the plot of *Symzonia*, Seaborn designs and outfits a special steamship he christens *The Explorer*, in order to find:

...a passage to a new and untried world. I flattered myself that I should open the way to new fields for the enterprise of my fellow-citizens, supply new sources of wealth, fresh food for curiosity, and additional means of enjoyment; objects of vast importance, since the resources of the known world

136-167. The most comprehensive treatment of Symmes’s theories remains John Wells Peck, “Symmes’ Theory,” *Ohio Archaeological and Historical Publications* 18 (1909): 28-42

¹⁶⁷ John Cleves Symmes, “Light Gives Light, to Light Discover—‘Ad Infinitum,’” (mailer, St. Louis, 1818), 1; quoted in Gretchen Murphy, “The Dream of U.S. Global Isolation,” *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance* 49:4 (2003): 254, 280 n. 14. Symmes also argued that solar heat played a crucial role in the maintenance of moderate temperatures at the poles during those months when the Sun does not set.

¹⁶⁸ While J.O. Bailey contends that John Cleve Symmes himself is the real author of the novel, that attribution has been questioned by Hans-Joachim Lang and Benjamin Lease who contend that a mariner named Nathaniel Ames is the real ‘Adam Seaborn.’ See J.O. Bailey, “An Early American Utopian Fiction,” *American Literature* 14:3 (Nov. 1942): 285-293, esp. 286, n.5; and Hans-Joachim Lang and Benjamin Lease, “The Authorship of *Symzonia*: The Case for Nathaniel Ames,” *The New England Quarterly* 48:2 (June 1975): 241-252. At present, Ames appears the most likely candidate.

have been exhausted by research, its wealth monopolized, its wonders of curiosity explored, its every thing investigated and understood!¹⁶⁹

Motivated by commercial greed as much as curiosity, Seaborn believes that he need only “find an opening in the 'icy hoop,' [that surrounds the South Pole] through which I could dash with my vessel, to discover a region where seals could be taken as fast as they could be stripped and cured.”¹⁷⁰ As they approach the object of their quest, however, the needle of the ship’s compass, the unerring instrument which had been their guide, suddenly ceases to function, and is in “no manner of use; the card turned round and round on the slightest agitation of the box, and the needle pointed sometimes one way and sometimes another, changing its position every five minutes.”¹⁷¹ Arrived at the bottom of the world, they enter a zone of singularity where magnetic rules of attraction and repulsion, of positive and negative charges, no longer apply. Unable to navigate, Seaborn and his (all male) crew are rendered impotent, with no way to define their subjective position in the world. But while the crew “were perfectly bewildered,” and “knew not which way was north, south, east, or west,” Seaborn is able to maintain his bearings through the use of three chronometers, from which he is able to triangulate the position of *The Explorer*. Space, at the very moment the ship begins to run “due north, *internally*,” is discernable only as a function of time.¹⁷²

After currents carry the boat up into the interior of the planet, the expedition discovers a utopian civilization populated by a race of pale, white humans, slightly

¹⁶⁹ Adam Seaborn, *Symzonia: A Voyage of Discovery* (1820; repr., Gainesville, Fla.: Scholars’ Facsimiles and Reprints, 1965): 13.

¹⁷⁰ *Symzonia*, 30; quoted in J.O. Bailey, 286-87.

¹⁷¹ *Symzonia*, 78.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 79-82.

smaller and thinner than those who live on the surface. The Symzonians are vegetarians that have built a civilization upon the principles of agrarianism and temperance. Seaborn remarks that there are “no temptations to vice by offers of seducing cordials, wines, agreeable decoctions, or other intoxicating drinks, as in our places of resort for recreation. The enjoyments of this refined people are intellectual and pure, not the debasing gratifications of animal passions and sensual appetites.”¹⁷³ The whiteness of the Symzonian race is a direct result of their strict abstinence. Those who succumb to indulgence are exiled to the surface with the rest of the so-called “externals,” where insatiable desire darkens the color of their skin.

The influence of their gross appetites and of the climate, causes [*sic*] them to lose their fairness of complexion and beauty of form and feature. They become dark-colored, ill-favored, and mis-shapen men, not too much superior to brute creation.¹⁷⁴

Upon meeting a Symzonian for the first time, Seaborn rolls up his sleeve and observes that even those parts of his body that not exposed to the Sun are quite dark compared to the fair-skin of his new acquaintance.¹⁷⁵ Seaborn was “not a white man compared with him,” and learns that cupidity and excess are the main causes of dark skin.¹⁷⁶ The intrepid crew of *The Explorer* is thrust into an interior Eden whose preservation (and whiteness) is dependent upon the extinction of surplus desire, where slavery is both defined and caused by a helpless beholdance to base appetites.

But Seaborn and his men cannot divest themselves of their greed. While the Symzonians must constantly guard against moral and physical “blackening,” neither

¹⁷³ “The Internal World,” *The Western Review and Miscellaneous Magazine* (June 1821): 4-5.

¹⁷⁴ *Symzonia*, 132; The first sentence of this excerpt is quoted in Gretchen Murphy, “The Dream of U.S. Global Isolation,” 264. My understanding of race in *Symzonia* draws from Murphy’s excellent analysis.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 263.

¹⁷⁶ *Symzonia*, 110; quoted in *Ibid.*, 263.

The Explorer and its crew, nor any of those exiled to the outer surface succeed in reversing this process. Dark skin is a permanent handicap, a symptom of chronic and intractable moral failures. Therefore, the Symzonians forbid any further intercourse with those who live on the outer surface of the world and order *The Explorer* and all who sailed with her to return from whence they came. According to the decision of the Symzonian Assembly, the outsiders were:

...of a race who had either wholly fallen from virtue, or were at least very much under the influence of the worst passions of our nature; that a great proportion of the race were governed by an inveterate selfishness, that canker of the soul, which is wholly incompatible with ingenious and affectionate good-will towards our fellow-beings; that we were given to the practice of injustice, violence, and oppression, even to such a degree as to maintain bodies of armed men, trained to destroy their fellow creatures; that we were guilty of enslaving our fellow-men for the purpose of procuring the means to gratify our sensual appetites; that we were inordinately addicted to traffic, and sent our people into the extreme parts of the world to procure, by exchange, or fraud, or force, things pernicious to the health and morals of those who receive them, and that this practice carried so far as to be supported with armed ships...¹⁷⁷

“Petrified with confusion and shame,” upon hearing his race “thus described as pestiferous beings, spreading moral disease and contamination,” Seaborn agrees to leave.¹⁷⁸ Although *The Explorer* had penetrated the deepest recesses of the Earth’s interior and discovered a veritable utopia where individuals live in harmony with nature in a just and equitable society, its crew was unwilling and unable to regain Paradise. Inextricably bound to the colonial discourse of appropriation and exploitation, they are objects of derisive satire, given a second chance at Eden, only to fail to see beyond its commercial appeal.¹⁷⁹ Condemned for their excessive and

¹⁷⁷ *Symzonia*, 196.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 198.

¹⁷⁹ The mercantile objectives of the expedition are made explicit in the first chapter. See *Symzonia*, p. 13, quoted above. Gretchen Murphy comments on the pervasive strain of commerce and conquest that

unquenchable desire, the crew is expelled. Those who live above the surface are here rendered subaltern according to the novel's racial dialectics, their privileged position as active agents—exploring, mapping, discovering, and utilizing—subverted by the very race they came to discover. Ironically, the dark(er) skin and concomitant avariciousness of the outside Anglo-American intruders allows the Symzonians to more fully realize their own place in(side) the world. At the culmination of their failure, the subjects aboard *The Explorer* are objectified, diagnosed with a terminal, viral cupidity, and summarily expunged, their souls irredeemable in the face of perfect whiteness.¹⁸⁰

drove many who advocated for more expeditions to discover the open polar sea and what may lie “beneath” it. In contrast to Thoreau’s cautionary advice in *Walden*, she cites an address by Jeremiah N. Reynolds, who unabashedly claims that “Neither Fauns nor Dryads can protect the grove when it is wanted for the saw or axe... if any there be who mourn over these changes, we are not among them. The great branches of our national industry will constantly go on, destroying and recombining the elements of productiveness, till every atom is made to bear its greatest amount of value, and the wildest speculations of the theorist are more than equaled by the reality.” J.N. Reynolds, *Address on the Subject of a Surveying and Exploring Expedition to the Pacific Ocean and South Seas. Delivered in the Hall of Representatives on the Evening of April 3, 1836* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1836): 14,13; quoted in Murphy, 256. It should be noted that Reynolds had already made one such voyage aboard the *Potomac* from 1831 to 1834. See J.N. Reynolds, *Voyage of the United States Frigate Potomac* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1835). The first sentence of book’s *Dedication* reads: “We have been a commercial people from the very germe [*sic*] of our existence.”

¹⁸⁰ Edgar Allan Poe drew upon the plot of *Symzonia* for his *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* (1838). See J.O. Bailey, “Sources for Poe’s *Arthur Gordon Pym*, ‘Hans Pfaal,’ and Other Pieces,” *PMLA* 57 (June, 1942): 513.535. Like the crew of *The Explorer*, the narrator and title character of *Pym* has a close encounter with an embodiment of perfect purity and whiteness. At the end of a journey to the south pole, Pym encounters an immense waterfall and a being that seems related to (though taller than) the inhabitants of Symzonia. “The range of vapour to the southward had arisen prodigiously on the horizon, and began to assume more distinctness of form. I can liken it to nothing but a limitless cataract, rolling silently into the sea from some immense and far-distant rampart in heaven. The gigantic curtain ranged along the whole extent of the southern horizon. It emitted no sound. ... Yet we were evidently approaching it with a hideous velocity. At intervals were visible in it wide, yawning, but momentary rents, and from out these rents, within which was a chaos of flitting and indistinct images, there came rushing and mighty, but soundless winds, tearing up the enkindled ocean in their course. ... The darkness had materially increased, relieved only by the glare of the water thrown back from the white curtain before us. ... And now we rushed into the embraces of the cataract, where a chasm threw itself open to receive us. But there arose in our pathway a shrouded human figure, very far larger in its proportions than any dweller among men. And the hue of the skin of the figure was the perfect whiteness of snow.” Edgar Allan Poe, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* (1838; New York: Penguin, 1999): 216-217. This encounter suggests that Pym is annihilated into a blank, white void, but the Preface to Poe’s book demonstrates that Pym survives to tell his tale. Poe, writing in his own voice in a note added on to the end of the story, intended that the

The shortcomings satirized in *Symzonia* and the limitations of empirical science that articulate the meaning of *The Icebergs* and other of Church's paintings draw from a common set of conditions that are endemic to the overextension and exhaustion of phallogentric, proprietary vision. Alexander von Humboldt and Aimé Bonpland together penetrate the jungles of South America in much the same way as Church and Theodore Winthrop ventured into the virgin wilderness of northern Maine, "as if no others had ever parted its overhanging bowers."¹⁸¹ Humboldt writes that:

When a traveler newly arrived from Europe penetrates for the first time into the forests of South America, nature presents herself to him under an unexpected aspect...He feels at every step that he is not on the confines, but in the centre of the torrid zone...he can scarcely define the various emotions, which crowd upon his mind; he can scarcely distinguish what most excites his imagination.¹⁸²

When positioned at the very core of the object of his study, Humboldt is overwhelmed by a sense of multiplicity, a confusion of particulars that dilute his concentration and divide his attention over a mélange of sights, sounds, and smells, a

shrouded white figure at the end of his book be considered in contrast to dark-skinned natives that Pym had earlier encountered. Poe, *Pym*, 220. [Add Melville and the Whiteness of the Whale]

¹⁸¹ Theodore Winthrop, *Life in the Open Air and Other Papers* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields: 1863): 113; quoted in David C. Huntington, "Frederic Church: 1826-1900," (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1960): 67. The impact of Theodore Winthrop's homosexuality upon his relationship with Frederic Church and his art is unstudied. After Winthrop's 1861 death in the Civil War battle of Great Bethel, Virginia, a manuscript for a novel, *Cecil Dreame*, was discovered in his New York home. The plot of *Cecil Dreame* details a male protagonist's conflicted affection for two men, including the title character: a landscape painter who lives and works in a top-floor studio located in a building adjacent to Washington Square. Church and Winthrop were best friends, and the author's tragic, untimely death clearly had a lasting impact on the artist. For instance, in February of 1869, the artist's fourth child, Theodore Winthrop Church, was born. This act of remembrance demonstrates that the pain of Winthrop's loss remained acute nearly eight years after the author's passing. On Winthrop's homosexuality, and an excellent analysis of *Cecil Dreame*, see Michael Millner, "The Fear Passing the Love of Women: Sodomy and Male Sentimental Citizenship in the Antebellum City," *Arizona Quarterly*: 58:2 (summer 2002) 19-52.

¹⁸² Alexander von Humboldt, *Personal Narrative of Travels to the Equinoctial Regions of the New World* (7 vols.; London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1818-1829): vol. 3, 35-36; quoted in Bunske, 134.

metaphor for an orgasmic loss of self. Engulfed by a rush of indistinguishable sensations, Humboldt's occupation of the "centre of the torrid zone," is achieved at the cost of his own internal compass. The same can be said for the viewer thrust into the *mise en abyme* of *The Heart of the Andes* or (The Heart of) *The Icebergs*. Where the earlier painting overburdens the mind with an excess of details, the latter, over a canvas of almost identical size, focuses the same level of mimetic precision upon a scene where there is what one writer deemed "a complete abnegation of extrinsic interest." Like many of the explorers he so deeply admired, Church drove his representational project as far as it could possibly go.

Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein* (1818; rev. ed., 1831), like Frederic Church's *The Icebergs*, was engaged in a critical dialogue with polar exploration.¹⁸³ In Shelly's novel, the narrative of Victor Frankenstein is embedded within the context the mariner Robert Walton's expedition to discover the Open Polar Sea. Walton, in a letter home to his sister Margaret, describes how his "day dreams become more fervent and vivid. I try in vain to be persuaded that that pole is the seat of frost and desolation; it ever presents itself to my imagination as the region of beauty and delight." Soon, Walton expects to be "wafted into a land surpassing in wonders and in beauty every region hitherto discovered on the habitable globe," where he may "discover the wondrous power that attracts the needle; and may regulate a thousand

¹⁸³ Many, including Mary Shelley herself, have interpreted *Frankenstein* as a cautionary tale that warns against unbridled scientific ambitions. The alignment of such ambitions with misogyny in Shelly's novel is made clear by Frankenstein's tutor, M. Waldman, who lauds the modern masters of chemistry that "penetrate into the recesses of nature and show how she works in her hiding-places." Mary Shelly, *Frankenstein* (1818; rev. ed., 1831; New York: Barnes and Noble Classics, 2003): 45. See Ann K. Mellor, "Frankenstein: A Feminist Critique of Science," in *One Culture: Essays in Science and Literature*, George Levine, ed., and Alan Rauch, asst. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987): 287-312.

celestial observations, that require only this voyage to render their seeming eccentricities consistent for ever.”¹⁸⁴

The scholar Jessica Richard has argued that the backdrop of polar exploration in Mary Shelly’s *Frankenstein* (1818) was critically engaged with period definitions of the term “romance.”¹⁸⁵ The ring of ice that was thought to encircle the temperate waters of the Open Polar Sea is for Richard a material embodiment of “the threshold which is romance.”¹⁸⁶ Citing the work of scholar Patricia Parker, Richard argues for a definition of romance as that which “simultaneously quests for and postpones a particular end, objective, or object.”¹⁸⁷ Thus, “the perennially postponed Paradise beyond the pack ice,” remains forever at arm’s length, tantalizing and palpable, but never attainable.¹⁸⁸ The ice defers its object just as Priscilla’s veil had done in *The Blithedale Romance*. To crash through the ice (or to die trying, as John Franklin did), or to lift the veil—either that of Priscilla or of nature—enacts an inversion of subjectivity. Sir John Franklin—once the intrepid explorer questing for the open polar sea—thereby becomes the static, frozen object of subsequent quests, swallowed up the very thing he pursued, consigned to the same fate as that of Amerigo Vespucci in Jan Van der Straet’s 1580 engraving. Adam Seaborn and his white subjects, upon gaining entrance to the subterranean utopia they longed to discover, were likewise racially repositioned as black objects, slaves to their own inveterate appetites.

¹⁸⁴ Shelly, *Frankenstein*, 11.

¹⁸⁵ Jessica Richard, “A Paradise of My Own Creation: *Frankenstein* and the Improbable Romance of Polar Exploration,” *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 25:4 (2003): 295-314.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 304.

¹⁸⁷ Patricia Parker, *Inescapable Romance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979): 4; quoted in *Ibid.*, 303.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

By wreaking its viewers among the very things it depicts, *The Icebergs* engages the problematic of desire without an object; or rather, desire run up against and destroyed by its object. That is to say, Church's picture reveals not the truth or "the heart of" the icebergs *per se*, but makes visible the internal, recursive apparatus that drives desire itself. As such, the painting stands as a decidedly modernist moment in Church's oeuvre, an apocalypse of male agency that privileges a mode of aesthetic absorption that is passive and self-reflexive. A pictorial essay on the limits of vision and empirical knowledge, *The Icebergs* records the critical point where ocular penetration and appropriation are exhausted and left desolated just short of their goal.

In the year that followed the initial exhibition of the painting in New York, a number of authors employed the trope of chasing icebergs as a metaphor to condemn the homosocial and monomaniacal pursuit of wealth and fame to the detriment of family life. One writer, identified only as "A New-York City Pastor," penned a warning that could just as easily have described the folly of the mariner in Cole's *Youth* who abandons all other concerns to quest after castles in the sky:

But what is this world with all its brilliancy, all its hopes, and its alluring pleasures, but a glittering iceberg, melting slowly away? Its false splendor, enchanting to the eye, dissolves, and as drop after drop trickles down its sides, or steals unseen through its hidden pores, its very foundations are undermined, and the steady decay prepares for a sudden catastrophe. Such is the world to many who dance over its surface, and in false security forget the treacherous footing on which they stand¹⁸⁹

Another author elaborated upon this allegory and noted the chiasmic transference of qualities from the object to the subject of such pursuits:

¹⁸⁹ "A Day on the Iceberg." *The National Preacher and Village Pulpit* (January 1862): 22.

One great characteristic of an iceberg is intense coldness. So this class of persons appears to cultivate this attribute until it attains a degree of perfection. Is anything interesting repeated in their hearing? They receive it with stolid indifference and coldness. They bear up the same phlegmatic composure under the news of a marriage or of a death. Joy and grief seem to effect no lodgment in their natures. To the beautiful and the hideous they are alike insensible. They are *Icebergs*.¹⁹⁰

Mindlessly focused upon their object, the “iceberg men” in this account lose their ability to respond to human emotions, and thereby cease to care for the welfare of others. In the next paragraph, the author develops this idea further:

Again, those who try to pierce the Ice-mountain find difficulties increasing with every attempt. Its whole front presents a hard, glassy surface, and the explorer, after essaying here and there to penetrate it, goes away unsuccessful. The same holds good with regard to these men. Having succeeded in cultivating coldness and stolidity with regard to the affairs of others, it follows as a natural sequence that the next step will be to shut out others from their own concerns.¹⁹¹

Like the alcoholic who callously brutalizes the wife and children he once loved when they attempt to disrupt his appetite for drink, there is no getting through to these men, caught in a “prison-house of impenetrable adamant” of their own design.¹⁹² They are like Robert Walton and Victor Frankenstein in Mary Shelley’s 1818 novel, isolated from the humanizing influences of society, and respectively self-exiled aboard an arctic-bound sailing ship and into a secret, attic laboratory. Frankenstein’s relentless and “Faustian thirst for knowledge and power,” scholar Anne K. Mellor has noted, transforms him into a “frightening image of the alienated scientist working in feverish isolation, cut off both physically and emotionally from his family, friends, and

¹⁹⁰ *The Nassau Literary Magazine* 22:5 (February 1862): 227.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

society.”¹⁹³ In Shelley’s novel, when the young Captain Walton first takes Victor Frankenstein aboard his ship, he explains to the scientist—who has pursued his monstrous creation onto the arctic icepack—“how gladly I would sacrifice my fortune, my existence, my every hope, to the furtherance of my enterprise. One man’s life or death were but a small price to pay for the acquirement of the knowledge which I sought.” Frankenstein, who had abandoned his parents, friends, and his fiancée in favor of the solitary pursuit of forbidden knowledge and had, as a result, long everything, replies “Unhappy man! Do you share my madness? Have you drank also of the intoxicating draught? Hear me—let me reveal my tale, and you will dash the cup from your lips!”¹⁹⁴ This device likens the overambitious pursuit of scientific knowledge with alcohol addiction, and sets up the telling of Frankenstein’s sad tale.

As we have seen, Robert Walton’s desire in *Frankenstein* to discover “the power that attracts the needle” is aligned with his wish to rectify the “seeming eccentricities” of celestial mechanics. The problem is, of course, that once a navigator arrives at the source of the Earth’s magnetism, the very force that draws him to the area ceases to operate.¹⁹⁵ The irresistible pull of the compass needle leads to a place beyond the scope of objective measurement, a place with no reference

¹⁹³ Anne K. Mellor, “*Frankenstein: A Feminist Critique of Science*,” 298, 292. Mellor later suggests, but then backs off of the claim that the absence of a feminine influence was partly responsible for the tragedies that afflicted Frankenstein’s Monster: “In trying to have a baby without a woman, Frankenstein denies to his child the maternal love and nurturance it requires, the very nurturance that Darwin explicitly equated to the female sex. Frankenstein’s failure to embrace his smiling creature with maternal love, his horrified rejection of his own creation, spells out the narrative consequences of solitary paternal propagation.” *Idem.*, 300; See also Eric Daffron, “Male Bonding in Frankenstein,” *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 21 (1999): 415-435.

¹⁹⁴ Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 23.

¹⁹⁵ Richard lists a number of mariners in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that encountered compass problems as they neared the pole. See *Ibid.*, 298. These problems had to do with variance of the magnetic North Pole from the axial (a.k.a. geographic) North Pole.

point, in essence, no place at all. This purported utopia at the North Pole—or, if John Cleves Symmes is to be believed, the north *hole*—is therefore a lot like a black hole, a point of centripetal concentration where objectivity itself is swallowed up. The dream of an open polar sea is nothing if not a yearning for a non-place, purified of materiality, where massive, threatening things melt away.

Michael Gaudio persuasively argues for the presence of just this sort of (non)meaning in a number of drawings by the American naturalist William Bartrum.¹⁹⁶ In three of Bartrum’s cartographic renderings of Florida swampland, sinkholes anchor the composition. Writing about *The Great Alachua-Savana, in East Florida* (c. 1775), Gaudio calls attention to the ambiguous sense of flow, the way that “Bartrum allows us to read the Great Sink as both the void into which the waters of this landscape drain and the very source of those waters.”¹⁹⁷ In another drawing of the same area, *View of Alatchua Savannah* (1775), the sink hole is a “representation of nothing in particular;” and in *View of the Alegator Hole* (c. 1774), the depression exerts a “gravitational pull that draws the viewers eyes toward it to contemplate the very inscrutability of its surface, as it drains the landscape around it of its waters and its visual definition.”¹⁹⁸ Gaudio’s comments could just as easily describe maps that purport to show the open polar sea, such as Gerardus Mercator’s *Septentrionalium Terrarum* (1595) (Fig. 104). This map draws from an account of the polar region found in the *Inventio Fortunata* (or, “The Discovery of Fortunata”), a lost fourteenth-century book written by an anonymous Oxford monk that describes the north pole as

¹⁹⁶ Michael Gaudio, “Swallowing the Evidence: William Bartrum and the Limits of Enlightenment,” *Winterthur Portfolio* 36:1 (Spring 2001), 1-17.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.* 9.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

a small, barren, thirty-mile wide magnetic island in the midst of a whirlpool that drains the water of the world's oceans.¹⁹⁹ In this earliest known separately printed map of the arctic, the north pole is positioned at the fulcrum of the composition. The design of the *Septentrionalium Terrarum* served as a model for later polar maps such as Mark Beaufoy's 1818 "Map of the Countries Around the North Pole According to the Latest Discoveries" (Fig 105).²⁰⁰ Jessica Richard provides an astute reading of this image as "sexualized geography, in which fissures in the polar ice will open up to English prows to reveal liquid warmth." Devoid of any trace of the magnetic island that occupied the central point of Mercator's map, the lines of longitude here "touch, but do not penetrate, the perimeter of the small circle marked 'North Pole,'" where "there are no more topographical features" at the "blank center."²⁰¹ Within this circle, there is indeed nothing but a void, a *mare incognita*, a vanishing point. The words "North" and "Pole" respectively bracket the top and bottom of this zone of blank, white space, a visual cue that magnifies the pull that the area exerts on the viewer's eyes (Fig. 106). Yet even these two words, which denote the spot at the center of the map, are pushed out to the margins of the inner circle of latitude. The North Pole appears to repel its own name. The area doggedly resists the encroachment of longitude, and the graphic enterprise of measurement and

¹⁹⁹ See Peter Davidson, *The Idea of North* (London: Reaktion, 2005): 51. One copy of Mercator's map is in the collection of Yale University. My knowledge of the map's history derives from the information posted on the website of the Yale Map Collection:

<http://www.library.yale.edu/MapColl/curious.html> (accessed on May 22, 2006).

²⁰⁰ See Richard, 301-02. The map serves as the frontispiece for Colonel Mark Beaufoy, F.R.S., *The Possibility of Approaching the North Pole Asserted by the Hon. D. Barrington. A New Edition with an Appendix, containing papers on the same subject, and on a Northwest Passage* (London: 1818; New York: James Eastburn & Co., 1818).

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 302.

domination that goes along with it.²⁰² Unnamable and unmeasurable, the center of the map swallows up intelligibility in the manner of William Bartrum's sinkholes.

There really is no *there* there.

Although not a map, the lithograph designed by Sarony, Major, & Knapp that serves as the frontispiece for Louis Legrand Noble's *After Icebergs with a Painter* (Fig. 107) exhibits the same radial orientation as many polar maps in circulation during the nineteenth century. On this page, a serpentine band of fancifully rendered polar topography curls clockwise around a central scene entitled "Iceberg at Sunset." While reminiscent of the "icy hoop" said to surround the open polar sea, this frozen barrier does not quite complete a three-hundred and sixty degree loop. The resulting gap in the lower right section of the page endows the band with a zoomorphic quality, as if it were some sort of snake or dragon guarding its lair.²⁰³ This area serves as a backdrop for a number of small vignettes. A large sailing ship carefully navigates a partially-frozen sea near the bottom of the page, just behind what appears to be a pair of Inuit hunters with their dog. Birds fly among a foreboding series of cliffs and

²⁰² Ironically, Beaufoy's map, used as evidence to muster support for further expeditions to discover the Open Polar Sea, derives in part from an earlier 1778 polar projection by the Comte de Buffon that argued for precisely the opposite view. Buffon's map, which also features lines of longitude that terminate a few degrees of latitude south of the pole, and was intended to demonstrate not the existence of a body of warm, navigable water at the top of the world, but to show how ice caps were thickening and expanding as the temperature of the planet gradually cooled. The pole in Buffon's map also marginalizes the words "Pole Boreal," just as Beaufoy's map would later do. See Martin Rudwick, "Picturing Nature in the Age of Enlightenment," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 149:3 (September 2005): 293-294.

²⁰³ If such is the case, the "head" of this snake, near the right edge of the frontispiece, is possessed with two dark "eyes," above a large, gaping gray "mouth" above a dangling "beard" of long icicles. For a study of anthropomorphism in American landscape painting, see J. Gray Sweeney, "The Nude of Landscape Painting: Emblematic Personification in the Art of the Hudson River school," *Smithsonian Studies in American Art* 3:4 (Fall 1989): 42-65. See also, Noble, *After Icebergs with a Painter*, 376-77. Church himself furnished a drawing of an explicitly anthropomorphic iceberg that was used to illustrate a children's story written by his friend Isaac Hayes. Engraved by Harry Fenn, *Entering the Ice* illustrates Hayes's "Cast Away in the Cold: An Old Man's Story of a Young Man's Adventures. II," published in *Our Young Folks* (New York), September 1867. This image is illustrated and discussed in Carr, *In Search of the Promised Land*, 81-82.

ledges on the left that give way to a small plain where a group of men—it is unclear whether they are Inuits or European explorers—haul their gear on a sledge through the base of the letter “A” in “After Icebergs.” The desolate landscape crests from left to right over the top of the roundel and down the right side of the page where it abruptly terminates just before the point where it would reconnect with the bottom section.

Set against the loosely rendered, sketchy wash of this outer band of ice, “Iceberg at Sunset” stands out in sharp focus, as if viewed through the port-hole of a ship. Drawn in a higher degree of resolution than anything else on the page, the scene features dramatic contrasts between untouched white sections of paper that define areas of ice and snow and opaque masses of solid, nearly-black ink that register deep, dark stretches of ocean. The composition is organized around the fulcrum of the setting sun, located in the exact center of both the roundel and the page. The sun sets over a relatively ice-free section of ocean in the distance, flanked by only one distant berg to the left. Cordoned off from this area, the viewer is hemmed into the foreground by an unruly wall of icebergs battered by white-capped waves.

Although there is a clear formal affinity between pole-centered maps such as the one that serves as the frontispiece for Beaufoy’s *The Possibility of Approaching the North Pole* and the design for the frontispiece of Noble’s *After Icebergs with a Painter*, the realities of Arctic geography complicate such a reading. In the far northern latitudes, the sun remains visible only in the *southern* horizon. In other words, in “Iceberg at Sunset,” the viewer does not wistfully gaze through the final barrier of ice into the open polar sea, but southward or—at the very least, if the sun is

setting—southwestward, away from the pole itself. Whether or not viewers were conscious of this, or of the general resemblance of the composition to polar-centric maps, the sunset is nevertheless positioned as a vortex, a blank spot upon which all the longitudinal diagonals of the composition originate and converge.

As the centerpiece of a frontispiece, “Iceberg at Sunset” is doubly invested with the task of concentrating and summarizing the contents of Noble’s book. The aim of Church’s expedition was neither to reach, nor even to approach the pole, but to concentrate his attention upon the formal particularities of icebergs found at latitudes well below the Arctic Circle. Nevertheless, the spatial organization of the central roundel casts icebergs as impediments to a distant point of convergence. The claustrophobic massing of the icebergs in the foreground leads the eye to look not at, but *past* the nominal subjects of the composition. The central section of the berg features two ridges that taper to a sharp peak that rises and “points” into the center of the sunset, as if to acknowledge the true target of the viewer’s gaze. But the target is a moving one, a body in transit, paradoxically employed as a stable point of reference here despite its tendency to evoke a sense of nostalgia and reverie for time past. The poignancy and power of sunsets derive from their brevity, their immanent extinction. In this sense, the alignment of a sun soon to set with an iceberg soon to melt pairs together hot and cold signifiers of impermanence, two things about to disappear from view. There is nothing in “Iceberg at Sunset” that is solid, stable, or easily graspable. The frontispiece, like the narrative of Noble’s book, participates in the conceit of romance, focusing attention on the pursuit, rather than the attainment of objects

perpetually in retreat. It, like the title of Noble's book, *After Icebergs with a Painter*, emphasizes the thrill of the chase.

The frontispiece induces, in the words of William Hogarth, "*a wanton kind of chace* [sic], from the pleasure it gives the mind," by juxtaposing the unity and homogeneity of the sun with the assortment of sinuous and imaginative forms taken by the icebergs.²⁰⁴ Hogarth's concept of beauty revolved around the use of the serpentine line, a formal device he believed to enhance the intricacy and variety of a composition. The idea was to keep the eye in flux, moving from one element to the next (Fig. 108). "The active mind is ever bent to be employ'd," Hogarth writes, "Pursuing is the business of our lives; and *even abstracted from any other view*, gives pleasure."²⁰⁵ That is to say, even without any application to the purposive acquisition, apprehension, or understanding of an object, visual "pursuit" has value. Extended beyond the realm of taste and the evaluation of qualitative judgments, aesthetics is marked out as a self-contained practice, not merely a means to an end.

Unlike the gravitational pull of the sun that draws the eye past the formal variety of the foreground in the frontispiece for *After Icebergs With a Painter*, the compositional core of Frederic Church's *The Icebergs* is a triangularly shaped blank

²⁰⁴ William Hogarth, *The Analysis of Beauty* (1753): 25, William Vaughn, ed., on-line version at: <http://merlin.cch.kcl.ac.uk/hogarth/chapter5/ch5page25.html>. Accessed on 06/02/2006.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 24. Italics mine. My reading of *The Analysis of Beauty* follows that of Frédéric Ogée, "The Flesh of Theory: The Erotics of Hogarth's Lines," in *The Other Hogarth: Aesthetics of Difference*, Bernadette Fort and Angela Rosenthal, eds. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001): 62-75. As Ogée writes, "beauty in Hogarth is experienced in the visual pursuit, in the 'progress,' in the flux, and not in the final outcome." Quoting his earlier research on the appeal of Hogarth's dense compositions, he argues that "instead of being subservient to some global architectonic structure, a centrifugal whole, the forms of these images of these images of disorder, which, as Pope put it, may only be 'harmony not understood,' are divided into local zones of meaning, which invite the eye from one area of the picture to another, and produce a network of perception each time renewed and different, from which moral and aesthetic beauty will perhaps emerge." Ogée, "And Universal Darkness Buries All: Hogarth and Excess," in *The Dumb Show: Image and Society in the Works of William Hogarth*, Frédéric Ogée, ed. (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1997): 86; quoted in Idem., "The Flesh of Theory," 72.

white screen of snow (Fig. 109). Like William Bartrum's dark, incomprehensible sinkholes, this white swath of canvas is an undifferentiated void, a uniformly colored and motionless vortex, a fulcrum that orders the surrounding composition. But instead of attracting the gaze and fixing it upon its surface, the blazing, glaring "blank zone" in the middle of *The Icebergs* displaces it to other parts of the painting. The viewer looks, squints, and moves on. The axis of form and formlessness around which, I argue, this picture turns, can therefore be discerned on two levels: the relationship between liquid and solid water (discussed earlier in this chapter), and the stark juxtaposition of a central zone of unarticulated uniformity set against the carefully delineated and radiantly tinted elements that populate the remainder of the canvas. This relationship aligns formlessness with unity, and form with variety in way that recalls Hogarth's ideal of unity-in-diversity, exemplified in the frontispiece he designed for *The Analysis of Beauty* (1753).

Embedded within the ordering structure of a pyramid, Hogarth's serpentine line is drawn as an actual serpent, complete with a small but discernable head. The serpent, a figuration of "variety," alludes to Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and is displayed under a short quotation from the poem:

So Varyd he, and of his torturous train
Curl'd many a wanton wreath, in sight of Eve,
To lure her eye...

Yet the threat posed to Eve, and the one potentially posed to the viewer by the serpent's, and—by extension—the serpentine line's mesmerizing variety and erotic charge, are neutralized by enclosing the shape inside of what the art historian

Johannes Endres has aptly described as a “crystalline...transparent capsule.”²⁰⁶ It is as if the line is frozen inside the pyramid, its movement arrested and harnessed to allow the form to be seen, but not touched. Not only is this pyramid, again, in the words of Endres, a “cipher for Analysis,” one that tames and “instills discipline upon the wild growth” entailed in the rippling fluctuation of the serpent²⁰⁷, it also prevents physical contact. By encapsulating and mediating the snake, the pyramid also encapsulates and insulates the viewer within a protected set of boundaries. Moreover, the juxtaposition of this illustration with Milton’s text unmasks and demystifies the serpent’s ulterior motives. Disinterested analysis, where subjects and objects remain separated and noncontiguous, allows for a safe, regulated level of visual pleasure, one that maintains and replenishes the engine of desire without allowing it to expand uncontrollably and burn itself out.

The subtitle of Hogarth’s *The Analysis of Beauty* reads “Written with a View of Fixing the Fluctuating Ideas of Taste.” It seems ironic that the unifying concept Hogarth arrives at through this effort is, in essence, fluctuation itself. Instead of unifying diversity into a single, quantifiable concept, Hogarth discovers in his *Analysis* that diversity has a unity all its own. Movement is a vital force, aptly embodied in his sinuous, flowing snakeline that ensures novelty and variety’s continued propagation. Hogarth’s aesthetic mission, to fix “fluctuating ideas” can be aligned with the scientific mission of Robert Walton in Shelley’s *Frankenstein* who wishes to discover the mysterious source of the force that attracts his compass needle so that he may solve the riddle of celestial mechanics and “render their seeming

²⁰⁶ Johannes Endres, “Diederot, Hogarth, and the Aesthetics of Depilation,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 38:1 (2004): 28.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

eccentricities consistent for ever.”²⁰⁸ Walton seeks to attain a point, an *axis mundi* from where there is no direction but out, a zone of singularity where magnetic forces of centripetal attraction run up against a countervailing centrifugal push. For him, the pole is the ultimate point of reference, a spot of concentric radiation from which the mysteries of the physical universe can be clearly understood.

In a recent book that considers the aesthetic implications of mesmerism upon the writings of Edgar Allan Poe and Margaret Fuller, the literary historian Bruce Mills discusses and illustrates a number of antebellum visualizations of the forces that underlay animal magnetism.²⁰⁹ The diagram that graces the title page of the first issue of *The Magnet*, a short-lived mesmeric journal published by LaRoy Sunderland, presents an abstract rendering of these powers (Fig. 110).²¹⁰ This illustration consists of a circle with tightly-packed lines that radiate from a central point. The shading of these lines, a pale gray at the periphery, grows increasingly dark until they combine into an undifferentiated, unified black mass in the middle of the circle. A lightly-colored band subdivides the center from the rest of the circle at the very point where the lines are no longer distinguishable from one another. At eleven, one, five, and seven o’ clock, four other small, round, dark areas are lodged near the circle’s edge.²¹¹ Relating the diagram to the cosmological ideas that permeate Edgar Allan Poe’s *Eureka*, Mills discerns an “outward and inward movement that Poe characterized both as a kind of pulsing and, at another point, as embodying centripetal

²⁰⁸ Shelly, *Frankenstein*, 11.

²⁰⁹ Bruce Mills, *Poe, Fuller, and the Mesmeric Arts: Transition States in the American Renaissance* (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 2006), 67-93; and esp. Figs. 1-3, pg. 79-81.

²¹⁰ *The Magnet* (New York) 1:1 (June 1842).

²¹¹ If we read this diagram as a cross-section of the Earth, these peripheral dark areas align with the periodic variance of the magnetic North Pole from the geographic North Pole.

and centrifugal forces,” where the eye oscillates between the periphery and the center of the image.²¹² A brilliant but tortured essay written only a year before Poe’s 1849 death from alcoholism, *Eureka* offers a remarkable synthesis of popular science, religion, and poetics—a veritable theory of everything—that all hinges upon a reciprocal relationship between unity and diversity. “A diffusion from Unity,” writes Poe, “...involves a tendency to return into Unity—a tendency ineradicable until satisfied.”²¹³ Yet magnetism, which Poe confounds with gravitation, is dependent upon heterogeneity and difference, “...the design of variety out of unity—diversity out of sameness—heterogeneity out of homogeneity—complexity out of simplicity—in a word, the utmost possible multiplicity of relation out of the emphatically irrelative One.”²¹⁴ Put simply, he contends that magnetism drives an engine of expansion and contraction around a point of abstract, undifferentiated wholeness. Harmony exists only during rare occurrences when these forces are set in equilibrium.

Poe dedicated *Eureka* to none other than Alexander von Humboldt, who likewise sought to rectify discursive tensions between unity and diversity.²¹⁵ “Nature considered rationally,” Humboldt writes in the first volume of *Cosmos*, “that is to say, nature submitted to the process of thought, is a unity in diversity of phenomena; a harmony, blending together all created things, however dissimilar in form and

²¹² Mills, 78. The title page for the third issue of *The Magnet* inscribes a similar pulsing rhythm upon “a cross-section of the human brain; such an evolution of the image affirms that little distinction existed between what Poe termed the ‘universe of the stars’ and what Sunderland might have called the universe of the mind.”

²¹³ Edgar Allan Poe, *Eureka*, e-text online at <http://whitewolf.newcastle.edu.au/words/authors/P/PoeEdgarAllan/essay/misc/eureka.html> (last accessed February 26th, 2006).

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ My interpretation of Humboldt’s influence on Poe’s *Eureka* in this paragraph parallels that of James V. Werner, “‘Ground Moles’ and Cosmic Flaneurs: Poe, Humboldt, and Nineteenth-Century Science,” *Edgar Allan Poe Review* 3:1 (Spring 2002): 45-69. See also idem., *American Flaneur: The Cosmic Physiognomy of Edgar Allan Poe* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

attributes.”²¹⁶ Humboldt’s project, again in his own words, “is not, however, to be regarded as a mere encyclopedic aggregation of the most important and general results that have been collected together from special branches of knowledge.”²¹⁷ Instead, Humboldt seeks to unite this myriad of disparate facts collected and described during his travels into a singular, subjective impression. This data must be “fertilized by the powers of the mind”²¹⁸ in order to generate a subjective impression upon the feelings, to synthesize and generalize empirical description into something that might be felt.²¹⁹ In *Eureka*, Poe attempted in a similar way “to take such a survey of the Universe that the mind may be able really to receive and to perceive an individual impression.”²²⁰ That is to say, Poe wants to condense the variety and multiplicity of the cosmos into a single, potent, instantaneously graspable image. Yet this unifying task is only possible through an abstractive process, such as that described in the following example provided by Poe:

He who from the top of Aetna casts his eyes leisurely around, is affected chiefly by the extent and diversity of the scene. Only by a rapid whirling on his heel could he hope to comprehend the panorama in the sublimity of its oneness.²²¹

Situated at center of a veritable panorama, the spectator rotates on his own axis.

Where “man,” according to Humboldt, “. . .amid ceaseless change seeks the

²¹⁶ Alexander von Humboldt, *Cosmos: A Sketch of a Physical Description of the Universe* vol. 1, Michael Dettelbach, ed. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997): 24; quoted in Werner, “‘Ground Moles’ and Cosmic Flaneurs,” 49.

²¹⁷ Ibid. 36; quoted in Chunglin Kwa, “Alexander von Humboldt’s Invention of the Natural Landscape,” *The European Legacy* 10:2 (April 2005): 156.

²¹⁸ Ibid.; Humboldt, *Cosmos*, Vol. 2, footnote 13.

²¹⁹ Humboldt’s attempt to combine objective and subjective representational strategies is discussed in Nigel Lesak, “Wandering Through Eblis”; Absorption and Containment in Romantic Exoticism,” in *Romanticism and Exoticism: Writing and Empire*, Tim Fulford and Peter J. Kitson, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998): 165-188.

²²⁰ Poe, *Eureka*, Ibid.

²²¹ Ibid.

unchanging pole,”²²² Poe’s spectator atop the volcano has become his *own* pole, vortex, or sinkhole, where optical diversity is distilled into the pure gist of sentiment. In *Eureka*, Poe emphasizes the very different means through which one is able to apprehend unity and variety: “Unity, as I have explained it, is a truth—I feel it. Diffusion is a truth—I see it. Radiation, by which alone these two truths are reconciled, is a consequent truth—I perceive it.”²²³ The best the subject can do, this seems to mean, is intuit the alternation between unity and diffusion through the motive process of perception; and moreover, to fix perception at an optimal point in between seeing and feeling. This will help avoid the shortcomings of ocular, object-oriented empiricism, where:

The error of our progenitors was quite analogous with that of the wiseacre who fancies he must necessarily see an object the more distinctly, the more closely he holds it to his eyes. They blinded themselves, too, with the impalpable, titillating Scotch snuff of detail...²²⁴

Blinded by the distinctness and clarity of facts, the empiricist fails to recognize the value and necessity of their opposite, yet equally revealing transitory properties. In his 1841 essay “Circles,” Ralph Waldo Emerson writes that “Every ultimate fact is only the first of a new series.”²²⁵ Stubbornly and perpetually referential and contingent, facts refuse to sit still long enough to serve as any final or ultimate point

²²² *Cosmos* 1:36; quoted in Werner, “‘Ground Moles and Cosmic Flaneurs,’” 52; Werner also notes that here, “...Poe’s scientific observer stands at a central point, around which he sets the cosmic panorama revolving.”

²²³ *Eureka*; quoted in *ibid.* 62. Werner writes that “One cannot ‘read’ a wholly regular universe anymore than one can orient oneself on a purely level plane, or interpret a featureless face; it is the peculiarities that allow the cosmic physiognomist to understand the world. They permit the ‘intuitive leap’ that advances scientific thought, the instinctive grasping of the fact that there is a solution, once which can only be perceived through the acknowledgement of the ‘peculiarity.’”

²²⁴ *Eureka*; quoted in *ibid.* 57.

²²⁵ Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Circles,” in *Selected Essays*, Larzer Ziff, ed. (New York: Penguin, 1982): 226; The scholar Lee Rust Brown has given much needed attention to the role that factual opacity and occlusion played in Emerson’s engagement with the *Jardin des Plantes* in Paris. See Lee Rust Brown, “Emerson, Paris, and the Opening of the Scientific Eye,” *Prospects* 19 (1994): 315-347.

of reference. “There are no fixtures in nature,” Emerson argues, “The universe is fluid and volatile. Permanence is but a word of degrees. Our globe seen by God is a transparent law, not a mass of facts. The law dissolves the fact and holds it fluid.”²²⁶ Like Poe and Humboldt, Emerson discerns a productive ambiguity at the heart of perception, where we might strive for a God’s-eye view in order to reveal the pendulum-like swing, the incessant back and forth of specificity and generality. For all three of these authors, optimal perception hinges upon the interplay between perspicuity and legibility on the one hand, and obscurity and abstraction on the other, between the object, and the hazy atmosphere of its illuminating gas.²²⁷

This toggling of the eye between a clearly delineated, self-referential material fact and an abstract, unified, and undifferentiated ideal is played out in an illustration included in *The History and Philosophy of Animal Magnetism, with Practical Instructions for the Exercise of their Power* (1843), a study penned by an anonymous author (Fig. 111).²²⁸ Here, an image of the Sun, labeled “TRUTH,” is surrounded by a triangle, a ring of twenty-one stars, and an oroborus, a depiction of a snake biting its own tail. Between the edges of the triangle and the band of stars, the words “FAITH,” “WILL,” and “POWER” refer to three prerequisites that must be present for a mesmerist to induce a state of magnetic sleep.²²⁹ These words, which stand for the initiation of the mesmeric process, divide this image into two concentric zones of unity and variety. Outside of this region of transformation, the finely articulated

²²⁶ Emerson, “Circles,” 226.

²²⁷ It is my intention here to call to mind once more Marcel Duchamp’s *Etant donnés*, and its full title: *Etant donnés: 1. la chute d'eau /2. le gaz d'éclairage*, which translates as *Given: 1. The Waterfall /2. The Illuminating Gas*.

²²⁸ This illustration is reproduced and discussed at length in Mills, 128-131.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 130-131.

snake proceeds scale by scale from head to tail, looping around the entire image like an Emersonian procession of facts. There is no gap, no beginning or end to the self-reflexive oroborus. The snake conveys a sense transience and instability, as if it were poised to resume its counter-productive task at any moment, or about to roll away like a loose wheel. In a similar way, the outer band of stars, divided into three groups of seven by the tips of the inner triangle, lead the eye around in a circle, from one to the next, and so on. The stars, like the scales of the snake, are all identical, each one no different than the last. Scales and stars alike call forth the meaninglessness of multiplicity exhausted of its variety, and renders the relentless desire for the next object yet another torturous step on a monotonous, never-ending loop.

The three words that register the initiation of a magnetic trance, however, offer a way off this recursive visual carousel. Once inside, the round oroborus is transformed into a triangle, a shape which has long symbolized stability, endurance, and the rectification and unification of opposites, such as the three-in-oneness of the Christian trinity. Within this triangle, the twenty-one stars have been condensed into a single sun, in the center of which “TRUTH” may be found. Crucial to this reading is the recognition of magnetic sleep as a state that only allows access to an extraordinary degree of sensitivity through the relinquishment of rational and conscious modes of perception. The truth sought by those magnetized in the nineteenth century was, *pace* Poe, not to be seen, but felt. But the parade of facts surrounding the center of this image is not labeled as a truth or truths in and of themselves. The optically discernable variety on the periphery is not given equal weight, and serves instead as a precursor—or at worst, an impediment—to the

transcendental, extra-sensory unity at the center. While the eye certainly toggles between unity and variety, the rhetoric of the image unconditionally favors the former, and therefore neglects the visible truth-as-diffusion postulated by Poe. As a consequence, the image does not so much elicit a meditation upon “radiation,” Poe’s term for the transformational forces that maintain unity and variety in their proper, harmonic flux, but privileges a unidirectional quest for a singular “point” of reference. As such, this 1843 illustration is the antithesis of the image employed in the frontispiece of William Hogarth’s *Analysis of Beauty*. Instead of emphasizing the distinction between multiplicity and unity and positioning his serpent as an obstacle to be overcome on the way to some abstruse ideal, Hogarth instead combines the two and embeds his serpent into the center of a translucent, crystalline matrix.

Anticipating the aesthetic thought of Humboldt and Poe, Hogarth’s emblem stresses the interdependence of unity and variety. “TRUTH,” if such a thing exists to be found, exists not in one or the other state, but is bound up in the centripetal and centrifugal dynamics that animate their relationship.

With Hogarth in mind, we may consider the blank center of *The Icebergs* as its own emblem of disinterested analysis, but one purged of its object. It is, in effect, an empty Hogarthian pyramid, a shape that suggests stability and unity, yet one that is paradoxically doomed to rupture and disintegrate. Just as it appears to serve as a self-critical prefiguration of modernist aesthetics, *The Icebergs* contravenes the position of the critic, and presents disinterestedness as a temporary condition, one that eventually melts away, a process accelerated by the heat of the subject’s touch. Romantic and Modern at the same time, the painting’s power derives from the friction of these

internal contradictions. Church's achievement in *The Icebergs* results directly from his willingness to push the capacity of pictorial representation to its limits, to discern the precise temperature that affects the collapse of critical distance.²³⁰ The painting aligns the dissolution of the object of visceral incorporation and penetrative sight with the breakdown of the very set of epistemological mechanics on which the appropriation of the object depends. That is to say, the painting functions as a kind of proximity thermometer, one that measures and diagnoses the point where disinterestedness gives way to (cold) fusion. Because the painting so cleverly reveals and demystifies these conditions, it exhausts the practice of imaginative projection, and leaves in its wake a thoroughly emasculated visual field. *The Icebergs* therefore plays an important role both in clearing the way for the feminization of American aesthetics that takes place during the years surrounding the Civil War (another cataclysm of male aggression), and in the disambiguation of the realm of aesthetics—that of high art—from the object oriented, masculine terrain of the market.²³¹

In Church's oeuvre, the conversation between ice and water, between tangible, measurable objects and the protean matrix out of which they crystallize in

²³⁰ It is under these extreme conditions that Church's painting ceases to be merely a representation of icebergs, but a representation *of* representation. That is to say, *The Icebergs* is not just representation of an appropriately sublime theme, but a representation of the internal dynamics of sublimity, a discourse of sublime experience as such. As Peter de Bolla writes: "The only way in which it is possible to identify this newly mutated discursive form is via its propensity to produce to excess. The production to excess might be expected as the 'natural' result of a discourse on the sublime; enquiries into the nature and causes of sublime sensation were necessarily led to an investigation of the 'transport' of sublime experience. The experience was itself defined as one which broke through a boundary, which was, in some sense at least, excessive. Hence the discourse on the sublime, in its function as an analytic discourse on the nature of excessive experience, became increasingly preoccupied with the discursive production of the excess;... There is, then, a natural tendency for the discourse on the sublime to produce the conditions necessary for the construction of the discourse of the sublime, a discourse which produced from within itself sublime experience." Peter de Bolla, *The Discourse of the Sublime* (Oxford and New York: Basil Blackwell, 1989): 12.

²³¹ For a thorough account of this transformation in American Landscape Painting, see Angela Miller, *The Empire of the Eye*, 243-288.

The Icebergs had its antecedent in *The Heart of the Andes*. Here, the summit of Chimborazo stands in the upper left-hand corner, covered with a permanent layer of ice and snow. Theodore Winthrop describes the “isolated snow-peak” as “the sublimest of material objects, and worthiest of daring art, if art but dare. Here it has dared and done.”²³² He later deems the mountain:

...the Alpha and Omega of the picture—first to take the eye as the principal light, and the last object of recurring thought when study proves that all the wealth below lies tribute at its feet, and every mild light only recalls its mild benignancy.²³³

Winthrop contends that the snowy white blankness of the mountain ought to be privileged over the diffracted and variegated color of the foreground. This mountain’s “mild” light gives way to a vivacity and variety, or what might be considered a comparatively harsh multiplicity of color that increases dramatically as the eye moves from the upper left to the lower right corner of the picture, where the descent in altitude fosters a concomitant augmentation and diversification of life forms. A procession through the picture downward from the summit also follows the processes of melting ice and snow. The river that spills out into the foreground after it turns toward the picture plane just to the left of the center of the canvas is presumably fed by runoff from the transitional areas of snow and earth midway down the mountainside. The volcano represents the source of both creation and destruction for the luxuriant valley, but its peak in this picture stands for an icy stasis, where nothing ever melts, moves, or changes. If even a minor eruption were to occur, however, the resulting flood would no doubt engulf much of the valley, washing away most of the foliage in the foreground. The acceleration of water in Church’s

²³² Winthrop, 16.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 20-21.

picture is analogous to the acceleration of time, with the viewer positioned at the terminus of the process. The precariously perched trees on the right, discussed earlier in this chapter, suggest an impending, tragic collapse into the water, whose swift flow is registered by the large waterfall in the middle of the painting, and further amplified by the smaller set of rapids just above the bottom edge of the center of the picture. To proceed into the fictive space of *the Heart of the Andes*, then, is to struggle against the current of the river, to travel back into an ideal past. To view the picture was to vicariously engage in a vainglorious quest for re-assimilation into a new-world Eden, a pre-lapsarian, or at the very least a pre-natal state of existence before time's inception.

In her analysis of another painting completed in 1859, George Inness's *Hackensack Meadows, Sunset* (Fig. 112), however, the art historian Rachel DeLue comments upon the way that the outward flow of water in that picture works to "compromise any fantasy of entrance and traversal," and "contradicts the viewer's impulse to penetrate the scene visually or imaginatively."²³⁴ Likewise, in his analysis of the landscapes of Gustave Courbet that depict rivers emerging from womblike caverns, the art historian Michael Fried writes that:

Without exception, caves and grottoes in Courbet's paintings are not simply enclosing spaces toward which the artist is regressively drawn; they are also sources of water coursing outward toward the painter/holder, a direction of flow I have described as reciprocating the latter's quasi-corporeal movement into the painting.²³⁵

"But once we recognize," Fried continues:

... what is finally at stake in all these works isn't simply a fascination with a central dark vaginal-like opening or womblike enclosure but rather a double

²³⁴ DeLue, 108.

²³⁵ Michael Fried, *Courbet's Realism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990): 212.

movement into and out from the painting, the strictly morphological resemblance between, for example, the Zurich and Buffalo version of the *Source of the Loue* on the one hand and the *Nude With White Stockings* or *The Origin of the World* on the other comes to seem, while not exactly irrelevant, at any rate not quite key to the meaning of either.²³⁶

Psychosexual fantasy is thus impeded by temporality. We also recall the way that the middle putto in William Hogarth's *Boys Peeping at Nature's Secrets* disrupts the older, sexually-motivated satyr's endeavor to peer under Nature's dress. What comes between the satyr and the object of his desire, then, is time, here embodied in the figure of an infant.

Commenting on the Ephesian Diana, the antique statue that serves as the model for the personification of Nature in this engraving, Ronald Paulson writes that:

...the most playful aspect of the imagination projected in Hogarth's image is that in fact—as anyone knew who was familiar with images of Diana of the Ephesians—it is not a full body but a herm, only a column tapering downward from the head and breasts, and there is nothing to see beneath the skirt but smooth stone.²³⁷

This is, in fact, not true.²³⁸ This serendipitous oversight nevertheless raises the question: Just what is—or ought to be—under Nature's skirt? Paulson's interpretation of the smooth-stoned herm, if such were the case, offers an answer: nothing. This sense of blankness, blindness, of voyeurism and pictorial immersion indulged to the point of extinction, provides a clue to the powerful effects produced by Church's paintings; but the gravitational pull of his compositions, the way that they draw the viewer into their fictive spaces, is counterbalanced and sometimes forcefully resisted by the insuperable force of time registered as a centrifugal flow.

²³⁶ Ibid. 213-14.

²³⁷ Paulson, *Hogarth, Volume 1*, "The Modern Moral Subject," 278.

²³⁸ Although the lower section of the body of the Ephesian Diana indeed takes the shape of an elongated herm, it is not "smooth stone," but covered with multiple sets of animal figures rendered in high relief.

This is precisely the same dynamic the animates *El Khansé, Petra* (1874) (Fig. 113), a painting based upon a visit Church made during his 1868 trip to the holy land.²³⁹ With its spare, reductive composition, the painting induced a sense of wonder and expectation in its viewers, vicariously positioned near the end of a long, dark chasm that leads to Petra's brightly lit, rock-hewn treasury. Hung in a prominent location among some 400 other paintings at the 1874 Annual Exhibition at the National Academy of Design, *El Khansé, Petra* drew the praise of the *New York Times*. The first work considered in the lengthy review, Church's painting is described as "a very striking picture," where "the contrast between the dark, gloomy walls of rock and the white, rose-colored marble of the building is absolutely startling. In the foreground is a group of crouching Arabs waiting for some unfortunate traveler, and within the jaws of the pass is a pool of mirror-like water. This is absolutely all."²⁴⁰ We might consider the *Sîk*, an Arabic word meaning "cleft" that denotes the long, narrow ravine that leads from a nearby plain to the ruins of Petra, as a *vagina dentate*, complete with "jaws" and teeth in the form of the two aggressively postured Arabs (brigands, perhaps?), who stand "waiting for some unfortunate traveler."²⁴¹

The narrow, suffocating passage, guarded by two armed assailants, frustrates the viewer's attempt to access the shining treasury. John Davis likens this state "of anxiety and anticipation" in the painting "where the desired projection and release

²³⁹ The most thorough treatment of this important painting remains that undertaken by John Davis in *The Landscape of Belief*, 193-197. My interpretation of *El Khansé, Petra* owes much to Davis's thorough research and analysis.

²⁴⁰ *New York Times* (Apr. 13, 1874): 5. For accounts of the picture's prominent location in the 1874 exhibition, see Davis, 241-42, n. 62.

²⁴¹ Davis notes the callous and regrettable assessment and treatment of the local inhabitants of the area by many western writers and tourists. *Ibid.*, 196.

into the freedom of the teasing distance is withheld” to “an unreachable sexual climax.”²⁴² Adding to this force of resistance is the water, not a mirror-like pool as described in the *New York Times*, but in fact a noticeably moving current that sweeps into the terminus of the *Sík* and flows toward the picture plane, registering a set of small but clearly discernable rapids near the bottom of the composition.²⁴³ Time, while reduced to a trickle here, nevertheless asserts its presence. Church’s bold attempt—here, in the tropics, and in the arctic—to visualize a world before time, generates a series of remarkable pictures that tantalize their viewers with glowing, palpable illusions of new and old world Edens. *El Khansé, Petra*, a potent reduction of these concerns, was dedicated to the artist’s wife, and remains at Olana, the artist’s eclectically styled mansion perched high above the Hudson River some thirty miles south of Albany, New York. Here, the painting is installed, just as Cole’s *Consummation of Empire* had been in the home of Luman Reed, in a prominent position over the fireplace. It represents, in many ways, a similar scene, the farthest point of advancement before the dream of psychosexual reunification explodes into violence and tragedy at the hands of armed men that guard the final, gate-like cleft of rock.

²⁴² Ibid. Initially astounded by the grandeur of the scene, Church regained his composure and commenced his sketches of Petra in a highly charged, aggressive manner. “When I came to my senses, I selected my view point—took my portfolio from the Arab who carried it, *opened it and dashed at the subject with all fury.*” [italics mine] Letter from Frederic Church to William Osborn, 1 April, 1868, typescript, Olana; cited in Davis, 194.

²⁴³ The apprehension of the water as a “mirror-like pool” makes a possible another reading of the painting as an image that presents the viewer with a narcissistic reflection of the self that lay at the ultimate end of immersive sight.

Heart and Home

Like a photograph, a museum, or an encyclopedia, *The Heart of the Andes* seduced its viewers by generating an effect of completion and containment.²⁴⁴ The same ambitious quest for wholeness that produced *The Heart of the Andes* also informed the building and furnishing of Olana, the artist's home high above the Hudson River.²⁴⁵ In it, Church installed mementoes of his travels in every available nook and cranny. Church's project at Olana—his drive to collect, arrange and synthesize—mirrored his project as a landscape painter. *The Heart of the Andes* and Olana, *omnium gatherums* of collections and recollections, are sites of transfixed time where Church attempted to render memory in a material form.²⁴⁶ In her book *Nature and Culture: American Landscape and Painting, 1825-1875*, Barbara Novak deftly compares the vivid attention to detail in *The Heart of the Andes* with the Olana's oriental architectural fantasy.²⁴⁷ Olana, like *The Heart of the Andes*, might be understood according to Novak's description as "a congress of glittering parts" and "a delirium of exotic effects."²⁴⁸ David Huntington has also considered compositional

²⁴⁴ My phrasing here borrows from Jennifer Green-Lewis's analysis of the power of early photographs to produce such effects. Lewis writes that "One of photography's more seductive effects is of completion and containment, but it is, of course, a part posing as a whole, and every photograph, like every historical account, should be marked 'incomplete' as well as 'no access,' for while it promises completion and connection it embodies fragmentation and dislocation." See Jennifer Green-Lewis, "Not Fading Away: Photography in the Age of Oblivion," *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 22 (2001): 579.

²⁴⁵ For a theoretical analysis of the dialectics of interiority and exteriority in relation to the home, see Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (1964; Boston: Beacon Press, 1994): esp. 3-37.

²⁴⁶ My understanding of the relationship between memory and photography has benefited immensely from Green Lewis, "Not Fading Away: Photography in the Age of Oblivion," and DeLue, *George Inness and the Science of Landscape*, 91-143.

²⁴⁷ Novak, *Nature and Culture*, 27. For an excellent analysis of the design and decoration of Olana, see James Anthony Ryan, "Frederic Church's Olana: Architecture and Landscape as Art," in *Frederic Edwin Church*, ex. cat., Franklin Kelly, ed. (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1989) 126-157.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.* To this end, Novak cites James Jackson Jarves's harsh criticism of Church's paintings. Jarves rhetorically asked of his readers: "Who can rival his [Church's] wonderful memory of details, vivid perception of color, quick, sparkling, though monotonous touch, and iridescent effects, dexterous manipulation, magical judgment of tint and composition, picturesque arrangements of material facts

similarities between this painting and Church's home, noting that "Olana's stairwell is a compendium of exotica paralleling the compendium of flora in *The Heart of the Andes*."²⁴⁹ Huntington develops this analogy further, and argues that:

Olana has the same infinity of incident which Church painted in *The Heart of the Andes* and *Niagara*. In his house, the ever-marveling painter surrounded himself with no end of possible discoveries. Through objects and architecture he was expressing 'the world's worth.' Church's aim was to make his home alive visually and symbolically. The visitor is aware of this at every turn. Upon entering the vestibule, one senses straitaway that he is present in a setting for real, ideal experience.²⁵⁰

In an oft-quoted letter to the sculptor Erastus Dow Palmer, Church remarked of Olana that "About an hour this side of Albany is the Center of the World—I own it."²⁵¹

Without question, Olana was for Church a place possessed of its own gravity. Like the scene depicted in *The Heart of the Andes*, it was a fixed point of reference, Church's own core, kernel, and pith.²⁵² Just as *The Heart of the Andes* extended the fiction that its viewers were situated inside of a South American hacienda, subsumed into the very subject they beheld, so Olana offered a similar absorptive experience,

and general cleverness? With him color is an Arabian Nights' Entertainment, a pyrotechnic display, brilliantly enchanting on first view, but leaving no permanent satisfaction to the mind, as all things fail to do which delight more in astonishing than instructing." James Jackson Jarves, *The Art-Idea*, (1864) repr., Benjamin Rowland, Jr., ed., (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, Belknap Press, 1960): 190.

²⁴⁹ Huntington draws similar analogies between this painting and the ground surrounding the house, noting that the fifteen-acre artificial lake created by Church a few hundred yards below his home mirrors "the effect Church painted in *The Heart of the Andes*." See David C. Huntington, *The Landscapes of Frederic Edwin Church: Vision of an American Era* (New York: George Braziller, 1966): 116.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 122. Huntington makes similar arguments about the landscape surrounding the house. He contends that the visual toggling between intimate foregrounds and sweeping vistas that "Church suggests in his paintings is realized at Olana in three dimensions." See *Ibid.* 117.

²⁵¹ Frederic Church to Erastus Dow Palmer, July 7, 1869. Albany Institute of History and Art.

²⁵² Although he does not develop the idea, Carr insightfully refers to Olana as Church's "thesaurus." See Carr, *In Search of the Promised Land*, 105. Huntington notes that "consonant to the explicit claim" made by Church that his home was the center of the world, was "a piece of ironware fastened to the floor of the gallery loggia which describes a huge X inside a circle, with bars indicating the points of the compass...suggesting [a place] where east, west, north and south all meet." See David C. Huntington, "Olana: The Center of the Center of the World," in *World Art: Themes of Unity in Diversity* vol. III, Irving Lavin, ed. (University Park and London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1990): 771, n.20.

one that positioned the viewer, a literal guest of the artist, inside an architectural cipher of Church's own mind.²⁵³ For Church, Olana was a fulcrum of both centripetal and centrifugal forces, a center-point to and from which the artist ventured out and returned home. We might visualize Olana's role in Church's psyche as the central point in a diagram published in *The Magnet* by Henry Hall Sherwood in an 1842 article entitled "The Magnetic Forces" (Fig. 114). This image illustrates the alternation between inwardly and outwardly directed currents that emit, respectively, from a negatively and positively charged magnetic plate.²⁵⁴ In his own way, Church sought to unite centrifugal and centripetal forces into a unified subject, one who is able to stop time, and be everywhere all at once.

²⁵³ Here I acknowledge, but extend David Huntington's arguments that Olana was a kind of "religious box," where Church "found himself living in his own religious paintings." See Huntington, *The Landscapes of Frederic Edwin Church*, 125.

²⁵⁴ Henry Hall Sherwood, M.D., "The Magnetic Forces," *The Magnet* (New York) 1:3 (June 1842); discussed and illustrated in Mills, 78, 80.

Chapter 6:

Conclusion: The Aesthetics of Intoxication

Church's obsessive articulation of objects in *The Heart of the Andes* stands in sharp contrast to the evacuated composition of *The Icebergs*. Instead of articulating objects, Church here provides the viewer with an image of articulation *without* an object. The blank, triangular sheet of blazing white snow that forms the core of *The Icebergs* resists and seems to actively repel any fantasy of ocular traversal and appropriation. There is nothing whatsoever in the visual field for the eye to feed on except the skeletal remains of a sailing vessel, its bones already picked clean by wind, waves, and weather. Everything about the painting evokes the intangible, ungraspable slipperiness of objects degraded by the procession of time. Church's shipwreck, with its fallen crow's nest, recalls once again Herman Melville's cautionary advice in *Moby Dick* to avoid immersive, obsessive searching for truth in some embodied, material shape.¹ It marks the limits of a literal-minded, object-oriented, and coldly analytical ocular quest to peer into the heart of things; but like *The Heart of the Andes*, its immediacy is foreboding, almost threatening. Like its predecessor, it lacks any discernable film or atmosphere that separates the viewer from the pictorial space. The painting's remarkable reality effects imbue it with a palpability that aligns the failure of the ship—crashed and embedded into an iceberg—with the fateful trajectory of the viewer, who is also impelled, as it were, into the painting, and met there by an aggressive blankness rendered with

¹ See my earlier treatment of Melville in the Introduction to this dissertation, pg. 8-9, above.

excruciating precision that resists the eye's caress. The discipline that *The Icebergs* seems to demand of the beholder is to look, and only to look—to resist the temptation to allow the senses of touch and taste to intrude upon the sense of sight. Like a ship at sail in the polar sea, the eye is asked to navigate the painting while avoiding the danger becoming physically embedded in the subject matter. With this in mind, Church's painting marks a transitional state in American aesthetic theory, one that is the subject of this study. That is, the development of art theory during antebellum period was largely defined by the eye's uneasy alignment with, and subsequent dissociation from the stomach, of vision's discursive entanglement with, and ultimate disentanglement from ingestion in medical and scientific thought.²

More generally, the four case-studies undertaken here reveal the emergence of aesthetics in the United States during the decades leading up to the Civil War as the product of a dialogue—a series of counterpoints—between obfuscation and clarity, romance and reality, and free and adherent beauty. In the 1830s, Charles Deas's *Walking the Chalk* and other temperance narratives expressed anxiety over the blurred vision and blunted perceptual accuracy caused by alcohol, and in response, emphasized the utility of the straight line to re-orient and re-balance bleary-eyed drunkards. Yet, for Thomas Cole, the straight and narrow path, expressed as the direct, incessant practicality of the railroad, was an emblem of excessive efficiency, of utilitarianism gone too far. Instead of acting in allegiance with such programs that sought to stimulate, accelerate, and maximize the productivity of their subjects, art

² This prefigures a similar process that would later lay the groundwork for high modernism in the twentieth century as expressed in the criticism of Clement Greenberg. See Caroline A. Jones, *Eyesight Alone: Clement Greenberg's Modernism and the Bureaucratization of the Senses* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

ought instead to insulate the subject from the strict and uncompromising demands of the marketplace. In other words, beginning with the theoretical writings of Cole in his published and unpublished essays and journal entries of the 1830s and 1840s, the usefulness of art in America began to derive specifically from its resistance to utility. Cole's deliberate indirectness, his elevation of the sinuous, Hogarthian S-curve over the unrelenting legibility and utility of the straight line portended the decline of use value as a virtue in American aesthetics.

Tensions between qualities of directness and indirectness, expressed through the formal and compositional elements of artworks themselves, and reciprocated by the strategies that viewers employed to behold them, were also articulated in literary circles in the guise of an ongoing effort to define the parameters of romance and reality. This issue, perhaps more than any other single concern, dominated the prefaces of Nathaniel Hawthorne's four published novels. There, and throughout much of his prose, as I demonstrate in the final three chapters of this study, Hawthorne expresses uneasiness and apprehension toward the prospect of hyperclarity, unfiltered visibility, and the notion that, in regard to *The Blithedale Romance*, his readers might mistake his fiction for a thinly-veiled replication or exposé of actual events. *The Blithedale Romance* hinges upon the juxtaposition of two women, one (Zenobia) who exemplifies manifest exposure and accessibility, symbolized by the fully bloomed flower pinned to her dress, and another (Priscilla), who represents the resistance to visual access, symbolized by her hard-to-open purses, and especially by the obscuring swath of fabric she dons as "The Veiled Lady" in series of theatrical performances. While playing this role, Priscilla serves as

a spiritual medium, one whose ability to serve as a conduit between this world and the next is enabled by her concealment. Thin, frail, and barely embodied at all, Priscilla abstractly exemplifies “media,” an entity that is neither here nor there, deliberately transient, almost devoid of any material substance of her own. In the final line of Hawthorne’s novel, Theodore, the story’s protagonist, who had throughout the book repeatedly tried and failed to win the heart of Zenobia, confesses, “I—I myself—was in love—with—Priscilla!”³ Only at the end of the book, when it was too late, after Zenobia had committed suicide and Priscilla had married Hollingsworth, did Theodore realize that his true and deepest feelings were aligned with not with Zenobia’s manifestly visible tropical flower, but with the obdurate opacity of Priscilla’s impenetrable veil.

The veil is potent metaphor not only in Hawthorne’s novel, but in the dialectics of romance and reality that I also see inflecting the reception of Frederic Church’s *The Heart of the Andes*, a work that many critics suggested threw forth before its audience a relentless clarity, unmitigated—and *unmediated*—by a veil of atmosphere. It is, we might say, too “Zenobian” in its lack of mystery, and overbearing forthrightness. By disrupting the transparency of the picture plane, atmospheric veils reinforce the integrity of the gap between subject and object, and temper the appetite of the carnal eye. Hiram Powers’s *The Greek Slave* thus appeared to emit her own protective atmosphere, a rosy tinge that, as we have seen in Chapter Two, one critic compared to a hazy sunset. This effect served to abstract and further idealize the statue, placing her at a farther remove from the lurid fact of her indecent exposure. Viewers were expected to strenuously adhere to *The Greek Slave*’s official,

³ Hawthorne, *The Blithedale Romance*, 218.

Christian narrative, one that Powers and his agents hoped would further insulate the public from close encounters, step down their compulsion to play the role of Pygmalion and animate the sculpture in the unrestricted and unmonitored realm of their imaginations, and quash their desire to literally reach out and touch “her” skin. No mere suggestion, the narrative stipulated a series of proper interpretive practices that audiences were expected to follow. Like a temperance pledge, it drew out a set of guidelines that viewers were expected to walk.

Taken together, these narrative strands that connect the chapters of *The Aesthetics of Intoxication* elucidate how American attitudes toward viewing works of art changed so dramatically from the time of Charles Willson Peale, who argued that advisable acts of consumption avoid wasteful and unapplied stimulation, to that of James McNeil Whistler, who advocated Art for Art’s Sake, where looking for the sake of looking at paintings that were, at heart, about the act of painting, was the ultimate aim of aesthetic contemplation. Whereas the function, purpose, and ramifications of vision were, in Peale’s time, firmly entangled with that of taste, the writing of critics in the late 1840s such as Elizabeth Peabody and Henry N. Day sought to elevate eyesight above what they considered to be the less refined domain of the stomach. This discursive dissociation helped to enable a new kind of art with subject matter whose subject was no longer *matter* at all, but form—form liberated from and unburdened by the obdurate carnality of the object.⁴ It marked out a safe

⁴ I refer here, of course, to the work of the aesthetic movement, and other aligned movements and artists who created work that, while possessing a nominal subject, used that subject primarily as a ground to explore the formal arrangement of colors, shapes, and lines. An excellent summary of this transition and its relationship to changing attitudes toward empirical science can be found in Rebecca Bedell, *The Anatomy of Nature: Geology and American Landscape Painting, 1825-1875* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001): 150-151.

space for aesthetic contemplation, a realm of pure opticality that circumvented the appetite by evacuating the object from the artwork. It allowed viewers to look without fear of reproach at images that were, in a manner of speaking, calorie-free.

John William Draper in fact described the mechanics of eyesight as a photographic process, where for “photographic effects, as well as calorific, the essential condition is absorption.”⁵ Images materially absorbed into the body in this way carried with them an attendant amount of chemical energy—of heat—that many physicians of the time feared would provide undue stimulation to the body and mind. Images that presented the eye with a palpable, fleshy, meticulously delineated object, particularly one that might produce an excessive amount of excitement, such as a sublime landscape or a nude figure, thus harbored the potential to overheat the system. By the 1850s, however, art critics began to advocate for images that refused this recourse to corporeality, a condition enabled and augmented by clarity and mimetic transparency. As a result, images evacuated of objects—works of art that denied or repressed the matter of their subjects—came to populate the emergent category of high art, one defined by an aestheticism that forced viewers to work as they beheld, to expend, rather than absorb energy and heat. By emphasizing the opacity of their media, pictures that featured expressive brushstrokes, or buried their subjects behind barely translucent films of color, in effect tempered the appetites of their viewers. Their tranquilizing effects were due in no small part to their ability to ostracize hunger and thirst from the mechanics of eyesight.

⁵ Draper, *Human Physiology, Statistical and Dynamical: or, The Conditions and Course of the Life of Man*, 393-94, as in pg. 6, n. 6, above.

In conclusion, the aspect of intoxication that many moral reformers in antebellum America feared most—self-reflexive consumption that disengaged the viewer from practical concerns—paradoxically provided the template for the subsequent emergence of high modernism.⁶ The aesthetic movement in fact drew upon opaque, blurred vision, the very symptom of drunkenness that the central figure in Charles Deas's *Walking the Chalk* tried to withstand by concentrating upon the straight line, and made it a virtue in a new category of “visionary” paintings. But only when vision was liberated from the base desires of appetite and its attendant vicious cycles of over-stimulation and debility, could the aesthetics of intoxication that I have attempted to delineate here be turned on its head and inverted into the intoxication of aesthetics.

⁶ Vision here essentially migrates from what Denise Gigante, drawing upon categories formulated by Georges Bataille, calls a “*general* economy, which produces excesses that cannot be tastefully reincorporated,” to “a *restricted* economy of waste-free circulation.” An aesthetic economy must be free of unproductive expenditures, and to this end, must substitute symbolic for material consumption. See Denise Gigante, *Taste: A Literary History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005): 25-26. On notions of general and restricted economies and the importance of waste-free expenditure, see Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy* (New York: Zone Books, 1991).

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