ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: NURTURING CHANGE: LILLY MARTIN SPENCER'S IMAGES OF CHILDREN

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This dissertation is the first full-length study to concentrate on American genre painter Lilly Martin Spencer's images of children, which constituted nearly one half of her saleable production during the height of her artistic career from 1848 to 1869. At this time, many young parents received advice regarding child rearing through books and other publications, having moved away from their families of origin in search of employment. These literatures, which gained in popularity from the 1830s onward, focused on spiritual, emotional, and disciplinary matters. My study considers four major themes from the period's writing on child nurture that changed over time, including depravity and innocence, parent/child bonding, standards of behavior and moral rectitude, and children's influence on adults. It demonstrates how Spencer's paintings, prints, and drawings featuring children supported and challenged these evolving ideologies, helping to shed light not only on the artist's reception of child-rearing advice, but also on its possible impact on her middle-class audience, to whom she closely catered. In four chapters, I investigate Spencer's images of sleeping children as visual equivalents of

contemporary consolation literature during a time of high infant and child mortality rates; her paintings of parent/child interaction as promoting separation from mothers and emotional bonding with fathers; her prints of mischievous children as both considering changing ideals about children's behavior and comforting Anglo-American citizens afraid of what they saw as threatening minority groups; and her pictures with Civil War and Reconstruction subject matter as contending with the popular concept of the moral utility of children. By framing my interpretations of Spencer's output around key issues in the period's dynamic child-nurture literature, I advance new comprehensive readings of many of her most well-known paintings, including *Domestic Happiness*, *Fi, Fo, Fum!*, and *The Pic Nic or the Fourth of July*. I also consider work often overlooked by other art historians, but which received acclaim in Spencer's own time, including the lithographs of children made after her designs, and the allegorical painting *Truth Unveiling Falsehood*. Significantly, I provide the first in-depth analysis of a newly rediscovered Reconstruction-era painting, *The Home of the Red, White, and Blue*.

NURTURING CHANGE:
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by

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Introduction

The height of Lilly Martin Spencer's career, 1848–1869,[1] coincided with the mid-nineteenth-century surge in hortatory literature on child rearing that began in the 1830s and included advice manuals, children's books, and women's periodicals. In these works, Northeastern Protestant moral authorities adopted and reshaped Enlightenment ideas about child rearing to fit the needs of the nation. Concerned with the challenge of nurturing a fragile new democracy, they embraced the Lockean belief that malleable children could be taught the self-discipline and moral fortitude that would keep a country of equals together and functioning well. This was especially important as concerns grew about impending social instability caused by democratic self-rule, capitalist self-interest, industrialization, immigration, and war. During the middle decades, child-nurture ideologies, including beliefs in infant depravity and innocence, the roles of mothers and fathers, expectations for obedience and moral rectitude, and ideas about children's influence on adults, continued to evolve. The paintings, prints, and drawings of Lilly Martin Spencer (1822–1902), whose artistic output centered on children, often acknowledged these changing ideals. Her images, while at times containing resistant elements, often supported, and in some cases, may have even anticipated, certain of these transitions.

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With the move of many young adults to cities in the second quarter of the century, the demand for written forms of advice increased dramatically. New parents found

[1] This study concentrates on the twenty-year span between Spencer's move to New York in 1848 and the completion of her self-proclaimed allegorical masterpiece, *Truth Unveiling Falsehood*, in 1869.

themselves far removed from more experienced family members and could not rely on them for needed guidance.[2] Advice manuals and other writings acted as surrogates. Authors tended to be clergymen (such as John S. C. Abbott, Horace Bushnell, and Heman Humphrey), educators (such as Lyman Cobb and John Hall), writers (like Jacob Abbott, Theodore Dwight, Jr., and Samuel G. Goodrich) and women professionals (mothers, such as Lydia Sigourney, married women, like Lydia Maria Child, and unmarried women, like Catherine Beecher).[3] Their Protestant religious orientations were denominationally diverse, ranging from Congregationalist to Episcopalian to Unitarian. Their subjects also varied; they described practical issues, like proper food, clothing, and bedding, but concentrated most on spiritual, emotional, and disciplinary matters. While the elite could afford to purchase advice books, the middle class often received this child-nurture information through maternal associations' libraries and journals.[4]

In terms of the state of children's souls, moral authorities had mixed opinions in the 1830s. Many denominations still upheld the tenet of infant depravity, or the idea that all people were born sinful and in need of a new spiritual heart. More liberal thinkers, like

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[2] Mary Lynn Stevens Heininger, "Children, Childhood, and Change in America, 1820–1920," in *A Century of Childhood, 1820–1920*, ed. Mary Lynn Stevens Heininger (Rochester, NY: Margaret Woodbury Strong Museum, 1984), 4.

[3] A selection of the most popular books includes Lydia Maria Child, *The Mother's Book*, 1831; John S. C. Abbott, *The Mother at Home; or The Principles of Maternal Duty Familiarly Illustrated*, 1834; Theodore Dwight, Jr., *The Father's Book; or, Suggestions for the Government and Instruction of Young Children, on Principles Appropriate to a Christian Country*, 1835; John Hall, *On the Education of Children,* 1836; Lydia Howard Sigourney, *Letters to Mothers*, 1838; Heman Humphrey, *Domestic Education*, 1840; Catharine E. Beecher, *A Treatise on Domestic Economy, For the Use of Young Ladies at Home, and at School***,** 1841**;** Samuel G. Goodrich, *Sow Well and Reap Well; or, Fireside Education*, 1846; Horace Bushnell, *Christian Nurture*, 1847; Lyman Cobb, *The Evil Tendencies of Corporeal Punishment as a Means of Moral Discipline in Families and Schools, Examined and Discussed*, 1847; and Jacob Abbott, *Gentle Measures in the Management and Training of the Young*, 1871.

[4] Richard A. Meckel, "Educating a Ministry of Mothers: Evangelical Maternal Associations, 1815–1860," *Journal of the Early Republic* 2, no. 4 (Winter 1982): 405, 415.

Transcendentalist Bronson Alcott and Unitarian Lydia Maria Child, declared newborns innately innocent.[5] In the mid-1840s, Congregationalist Horace Bushnell articulated a compromise when he published his treatise, *Christian Nurture* (1847). Although he did not abandon totally the idea of sinfulness in children, Bushnell substantially moderated orthodox Calvinist views. He suggested that each child was born with the potential for good and bad and that it was the Christian parents' duty to cultivate the former and suppress the latter through proper nurture techniques. Bushnell initially printed his views in 1846, but the publication aroused opposition by conservatives and was removed from circulation. In 1847 he reissued his ideas, including an argument for their defense.[6] Not until just before the Civil War did many Protestant Americans embrace the idea of children's total innocence.

Experts, while sometimes still addressing fathers, directed their writings most often to mothers at midcentury. French Enlightenment philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) had advised that mothers be the primary caregivers of small children. However, the predominance of the mother in American thought on child nurture actually happened only after middle-class white men earned enough money to support their families on their income alone. Society increasingly came to believe that middle-class white women's rightful place was in the home, managing housework done by a servant and caring for children. Because Americans believed women were protected from the corruption of the outside world, so the argument went, they could inculcate morals

[5] Nancy F. Cott, "Notes Toward an Interpretation of Antebellum Childrearing," *Psychohistory Review* 6, no. 4 (Spring 1978): 6.

[6] Luther A. Weigle, introduction to *Christian Nurture*, by Horace Bushnell (1916; repr., New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1947), xxxii.

into their children better than their husbands. Advisors advocated that mothers begin forming tight emotional bonds with their children at birth, and especially before beginning ethical instruction: "The cultivation of the affections comes next to the development of the bodily senses; or rather they may be said to begin together, so early does the infant heart receive impressions."[7] Writers ultimately viewed these intense bonds, which mothers were to take advantage of during moral training, as detrimental to male children. They came to believe in the 1850s that boys had difficulty separating from their mothers when they neared adulthood. As historian Nancy Cott has observed, women's predominance in child rearing may have made adolescents feel guilty about joining the world of men.[8]

While advisors gave mothers the prime place in child nurture, they still believed fathers needed to remain involved in the upbringing of their children. Many, especially male authors, angrily advanced their perception in the 1830s and 1840s that men chose work in business and leisure pursuits with other men over their responsibilities in child rearing. By the 1850s, however, experts believed that men's primary duty in child rearing consisted of backing their wives' efforts financially and through moral support. They encouraged fathers to become close with their young children emotionally, and this happened often through play. Play not only benefited children, but tempered for men the rough world of the marketplace.[9]

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[7] Lydia Maria Child, *The Mother's Book* (1831; repr., New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1972), 6.

[8] Cott, "Notes," 16–17.

[9] Stephen M. Frank, *Life with Father: Parenthood and Masculinity in the Nineteenth-Century American North* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 114–15.

As advisors emphasized the maternal, they advocated that child rearing should be gentler in practice. Books and articles urged parents to spare the rod, teach by example, and give priority to feelings over intellect.[10] By the 1830s most specialists agreed that corporal punishment should not be used to enforce obedience. In a democracy, citizens had to follow laws willingly, not because of threats of physical force.[11] The formation of a moral conscience in children would ensure a willingness to obey parents now and authorities later. Advisors promoted what scholar Richard Brodhead has described as a theory of disciplinary intimacy to develop children's consciences.[12] The concept hinged on mothers forming close emotional bonds with their children. They believed that by showing love towards her child a mother would awaken love in that child and fix it back on herself. Love for the mother came to be seen as an allegiance to what she represented. The child then felt an obligation to uphold the values the mother taught through example. As a result, the mother's outward love became an inner regulating conscience. The mother no longer needed to be present to enforce behavior. The child's sense of guilt for going against the mother's morals guided his or her choices.

Child-nurture experts emphasized the principle of obedience to parents above all else. For those churchgoers who still believed in a child's depravity, insistence on obedience served to check the child's inevitable sinfulness.[13] But both mainstream and

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[10] Cott, "Notes," 9.

[11] Priscilla Ferguson Clement, *Growing Pains: Children in the Industrial Age, 1850–1890* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1997), 42.

[12] Richard H. Brodhead, "Spare the Rod: Discipline and Fiction in Antebellum America," *Representations* 21 (Winter 1988): 70–74.

[13] William G. McLoughlin, "Evangelical Child Rearing in the Age of Jackson: Francis Wayland's Views on When and How to Subdue the Willfulness of Children," in *Growing Up in America: Children in*

liberal thinkers agreed that parents needed to demand compliance in order that children learn self-discipline and self-restraint, which would serve themselves, God, and the nation when they grew to be adults. Congregational minister Heman Humphrey summed up these various reasons when he stated that

> it is nevertheless true, that in order to become good citizens in and after life, children must be accustomed to cheerful subordination in the family, from their earliest recollection…Moreover, without family government there will be very little *self-government* in any community. If you do not restrain the waywardness of your child, in its early developments, and thus assist him to get the mastery of it while yet the conquest is comparatively easy, it will be in vain for you to expect him ever to gain that self-control which is so essential to his happiness and safety.[14]

Indeed, people came to believe at this time that emphasis on control would protect children in a country perceived to be economically unstable and socially disordered.[15]

Publishers provided a wide array of children's books to reinforce the tenets espoused by advice authors. According to historian Anne MacLeod, the literature was wholly didactic. Ideal children who had learned to obey their parents very early in their lives always served as main characters. These figures also had internalized the corollary virtue of submissiveness, or the ability to put others' desires before their own. Their mastery of self-regulation, the object of obedience and submission, meant parents usually

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Historical Perspective, ed. N. Ray Hiner and Joseph M. Hawes (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 96.

[14] Heman Humphrey, *Domestic Education* (1840), reprinted in David Brion Davis, ed., *Antebellum American Culture: An Interpretive Anthology* (Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath, 1979), 11.

[15] Daniel T. Rodgers, "Socializing Middle-Class Children: Institutions, Fables, and Work Values in Nineteenth-Century America," in Hiner and Hawes, *Growing Up in America*, 124.

appeared only briefly in stories. The characters' highly-developed moral sense served them well against the chaos of the outside world.[16]

As the idea of innate innocence became more widely accepted in the 1850s and 1860s, views about demanding moral rectitude in children became increasingly obsolete. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the Romantic poets, such as William Wordsworth, advanced the concept that children should be allowed to receive feelings and sensations from nature and to cultivate their imaginations, rather than have their blank slates filled with habit and reason. This foundation would serve to nourish their adult souls in an increasingly systematized world. Another tenet of Romanticism, that children were closest to God and thus inherently innocent, became well known when Wordsworth published his *Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood* (1807). One stanza of the poem begins:

> Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:
> The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,
> Hath had elsewhere its setting,
> And cometh from afar:
> Not in entire forgetfulness,
> And not in utter nakedness,
> But trailing clouds of glory do we come
> From God, who is our home:
> Heaven lies about us in our infancy![17]

The popular work successfully perpetuated the idea that children's freshness made them more truthful and virtuous than adults, who lost their innocence the further they got from childhood.[18]

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[16] Anne Scott MacLeod, *A Moral Tale: Children's Fiction and American Culture, 1820–1860* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1975), 10, 16, 69–92.

[17] William Wordsworth, *Selected Poems*, ed. Stephen Gill (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), 159.

Romanticism's influence reached its height in the United States from about 1860 to 1930.[19] Americans thought of the initial stage of childhood as the high point in a person's life, followed regrettably by descent into adulthood. Consequently, child-rearing guides in the last third of the nineteenth century voiced concern about excessive restrictions in the home. Jacob Abbott, in the most popular manual of this period, called for allowing children their whims: "It seems to me that children are not generally indulged enough. They are thwarted and restrained in respect to the gratification of their harmless wishes a great deal too much."[20] Play was to be encouraged to cultivate the imagination. And now that adults believed children to be naturally good, there seemed no need to restrain them. In period literature, their bad qualities, allowed to show through, were portrayed not as moral failings but as minor faults over which the good would triumph.[21] Children even came to be pictured as the redeemers of parental failures or as rescuers of embittered adults. Thought to embody a moral utility, they had the ability to teach and inspire.

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During the years of the advice literature boom, Lilly Martin Spencer gave birth to thirteen children, seven of whom reached maturity.[22] She had her first child, Benjamin

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[18] For a good summary of Romanticism and its influence on the later nineteenth century, see Hugh Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western Society Since 1500*, 2nd ed. (Harlow, England: Pearson Education Limited, 2005), 67–72.

[19] Ibid., 69.

[20] Jacob Abbott, *Gentle Measures in the Management and Training of the Young* (New York, 1871), 32.

[21] Clement, *Growing Pains*, 165.

[22] This number came from the artist's granddaughter, Lillian Spencer Gates. There are no official records attesting to this fact. Robin Bolton-Smith and William H. Truettner, *Lilly Martin Spencer 1822–1902: The Joys of Sentiment* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press for National Collection of Fine Arts, 1973), 79n38.

Martin, in 1845 when she was twenty-two years old. The last of her recorded children, Flora Serena, was born in 1866 when Spencer was forty-three. Her large family was an anomaly at a time when middle-class women consciously began to have fewer children. Historian Mary P. Ryan reports that in Utica, New York, in the 1830s and 1840s, women limited their offspring to an average of 3.6 in order to give each child adequate financial and emotional support.[23] One reporter, fact-checking for a retrospective story on Spencer in 1876, voiced her surprise at the artist's procreative activities: "Again the number of your children has been variously stated to me and I wished to mention that [in the article] because [it is] something so remarkable for a woman to distance everybody in art while rearing a large family as corresponds to even the least of the numbers given me."[24] With multiple young children at any one time in the house, Spencer would have had plenty of reason to consult contemporary written advice. Because she did not live near her parents, siblings, or in-laws after bearing children, it seems likely that she looked to this literature for guidance instead.[25]

Spencer never explained her personal decision for thirteen pregnancies,[26] but her twenty-one childbearing years roughly mirrored her most prolific and well-received period of art production. Spencer moved her family to New York City from Cincinnati in

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[23] Mary P. Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790–1865* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 155.

[24] Ellen T. Lander to Lilly Martin Spencer (hereafter LMS), 18 April 1876, Lilly Martin Spencer papers, 1825–1971, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC (hereafter cited as LMS papers).

[25] No written evidence exists to prove absolutely that Spencer read child-rearing advice books.

[26] At this time Americans had many methods of birth control available to them, including nursing, abstinence, coitus interruptus, condoms, cervical caps, sponges, and abortion. Robert V. Wells, *Revolutions in Americans' Lives: A Demographic Perspective on the History of Americans, Their Families, and Their Society* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982), 96–97.

1848, hoping to find a better market. The fierce competition in New York forced her to develop skills and subject matter that would attract patronage.[27] Throughout the decade she mainly sold her work to the American Art-Union, the Cosmopolitan Art Association, and the print publisher Wilhelm Schaus, all of whom served a middle-class clientele. Obliged to relocate to Newark, New Jersey, in 1858 in order to accommodate the needs of her growing family, Spencer continued to paint portraits for private patrons and to make other kinds of art on speculation. In the late 1860s she received sponsorship from an unknown source to paint *Truth Unveiling Falsehood* (1869, fig. 1), the large allegory she had been planning for over twenty years.[28] Its exhibition up and down the East Coast brought her renewed fame, but also signaled the end of her viability as a relevant artist. By the 1870s, art collectors sought for purchase the Old Masters, more painterly contemporary European canvases, and work by native artists trained abroad.[29]

Spencer may have produced images of children because that is what she knew most intimately. While she and her husband, Benjamin Rush Spencer, shared parenting responsibilities more equally than was conventional, she still spent much of her time caring for her family. For example, even when she had a separate studio in Cincinnati,

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[27] LMS to Angélique Martin, 29 March 1850, LMS papers. This included taking drawing classes at the National Academy of Design to make up for her lack of early training and working in a tight, highly detailed style made popular by the newly-opened Düsseldorf Gallery. Linda Ayres, "The American Figure: Genre Paintings and Sculpture," in *An American Perspective: Nineteenth-Century Art from the Collection of Jo Ann and Julian Ganz, Jr.*, ed. John Wilmerding, Linda Ayres, and Earl A. Powell (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1981), 51.

[28] "'I am a Woman Rip Van Winkle,'" *New York World*, 22 September 1901, Sunday Magazine section; Mrs. Dr. C., "Lilly Spencer, The Painter," *Chicago Republican*[?], undated newspaper clipping, LMS papers.

[29] Samuel P. Avery, the famous art dealer, wrote to Spencer in 1886 in response to a box of paintings she sent him: "I wish that I could sell them for you—but have little hopes, the few clients I now have are buying only the great foreign names." Samuel P. Avery to LMS, 19 April 1886, LMS papers.

she brought her babies with her.[30] It makes sense, then, that for practical reasons she used children, and especially infants and toddlers, who would have needed the most attention, as the subject matter in the majority of her work. She was surrounded physically by them during the day while she labored and could easily use them as her models.

Most likely, though, the subject matter of her production was linked to circumstances of time and place. Images of children (along with portraits, still lifes, and pictures of animals, which Spencer also produced) were what Americans at midcentury expected women to paint. Spencer's initial career ambitions worked against this presumption, but a series of Shakespearian and other literary pieces did not sell well. Shortly after arriving in New York, she received a letter from a Cincinnati friend, Frank Carnes, spelling out her audience's preferences.

> The question thus arrises, why you have not sold many more pictures than you have done? It is my duty then, as your friend to do my best to answer this question. It is only because instead of two pictures of your peculiar "genre," you have not had twenty. The plain truth is that pictures remarkable for Maternal, infantine & feminine expressions in which little else is seen but flesh, white drapery, and fruits, constitute your triumphs, according to popular estimations. It is a pity that such pictures as your Ophelia, which I consider your chef d'oeuvre, don't take and "pity 'tis, 'tis true," as Shakespere says. If the picture you are now painting has ever so much genius in it, and ever so much sublimity, poetry and skill, I should have less hope of it, than of such as you sold to Mr. Stetson and Mr. Gregory. I much regret, that you have not followed my advice in making repetitions of them all. They would have sold at your own prices as fast as you made them.[31]

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[30] Spencer mentions not having wanted her brother, Charles, to bring a guest to her studio, as she had "several things of the baby's scattered about the room which I did not whish strangers to see." LMS to Angélique and Gilles Martin, 9 July 1848, LMS papers. Spencer did not maintain a separate studio in New York from 1848 to 1858. The portions of period letters transcribed in this dissertation are reproduced as written and maintain misspellings and other errors.

[31] Frank Carnes to LMS, 10 December 1848, LMS papers. Carnes quotes Polonius in *Hamlet*, Act II, scene ii, lines 97-98: "That he's mad, 'tis true, 'tis true 'tis pity, And pity 'tis 'tis true: a foolish figure!" William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2006), 244.

The Mr. Stetson mentioned above, president of the Western Art Union, had bought from Spencer *Life's Happy Hour* (fig. 2), a picture of a child tenderly threading flowers through his mother's hair. It catered so perfectly to audiences' desires to see "flesh and white drapery" that the Western Art Union engraved it in 1849 as their first member's premium.[32]

By the early 1850s, Spencer had changed her production to center on what would sell. As the primary breadwinner in a growing family, her priority shifted from fulfilling lofty artistic ambitions to making money. It remains unclear why she and her husband decided that she would be the sole financial supporter of the Spencer clan. Perhaps Benjamin had a hard time holding down a job, or they figured that Spencer could make more money through painting full-time than he could through his occupation as a tailor. Or possibly, Spencer refused to give up her professional career when she married and had a baby, yet could only justify this decision if she earned money. In a 1846 letter to the corresponding secretary of the American Art-Union, she confessed that "I am now a mother of a family—and however am extremely fond of painting and should like dearly to be able to continue it; but I must endeavor to make it useful to my family as well as agreable to myself, for *indeed* we are in need of it!"[33] She must have soon realized that pictures of children would support her family. A little less than half of the paintings she exhibited at art unions and associations, the National Academy of Design, and commercial galleries from 1847 to 1862 contained images of youngsters, and almost all

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[32] *Transactions of the Western Art Union, For the Year 1849* (Cincinnati, 1849), 14.

[33] LMS to Mr. Frasier, 17 October 1846, BV American Art-Union, The New-York Historical Society, photocopy in Colonel Merl M. Moore, Jr. files, Smithsonian American Art Museum and National Portrait Gallery Library, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC (hereafter cited as Col. Merl M. Moore, Jr. files).

of the paintings she sold to Wilhelm Schaus to be made into lithographs featured children.[34]

As a potential consumer of child-nurture writing, and as an artist willing to meet her middle-class viewers' expectations, Spencer, it seems logical to assume, would be cognizant of contemporary ideologies of child rearing. By illuminating her response through visual means to these beliefs, this study suggests three things. First, that the artist advocated her own opinions on child nurture that were often complex and at times progressive. Second, that the meanings contained within Spencer's images of children also may have reflected some of the attitudes of the audiences to which she catered, including members of the white middle class who participated in art unions and their lotteries, attended exhibitions, bought paintings at auction, and purchased lithographs for the decoration of their homes. And finally, that her art actually may have worked to help certain of her viewers, such as mourners of children and apprehensive city dwellers, to cope better with important issues of their time. In these ways, Spencer's images of children can be understood not just as illustrations of child-rearing advice from her era, but as active documents in their own right.

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Serious scholarship on Lilly Martin Spencer began in the 1970s, when American art historians' methodologies began to privilege a contextual over a connoisseurial approach, and their interest in subject matter broadened from a focus on landscape

[34] Author's statistics from an analysis of works listed in the catalogue portion of Bolton-Smith and Truettner, *Joys of Sentiment*, 92–239.

painting to inquiries into other genres.[35] Robin Bolton-Smith and William H. Truettner conducted the initial groundwork in 1973 when they organized a large monographic exhibition at the National Collection of Fine Arts in Washington, DC, and published a catalogue of all her known drawings and paintings, many of which are yet to be located. The catalogue's biographically-based essay echoed previous decades of writing that saw the domestic scenes Spencer painted as straightforward expressions of humorous, warm, and joyful times absent of tragedy.[36] Despite its lack of critical interpretation, this publication, as the most comprehensive survey of her oeuvre, remains the cornerstone reference on Spencer.

Scholars, especially curators, continued to portray Spencer's genre output as "natural" and unconflicted, emphasizing good times, abundance, and sanctified motherhood, until the early 1990s.[37] More substantial work in the 1990s and later by Helen Langa, Elizabeth Johns, David Lubin, Elizabeth O'Leary, Christine Bell, and Cristina Klee interpreted Spencer's images of mothers, housewives, and servants as showing signs of ambivalence, conflict, and resistance.[38] This work was groundbreaking,

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[35] Wanda Corn, "Coming of Age: Historical Scholarship in American Art," in *Critical Issues in American Art*, ed. Mary Ann Calo (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), 12.

[36] Bolton-Smith and Truettner, *Joys of Sentiment*, 45–46.

[37] These include Patricia Hills, *The Painters' America: Rural and Urban Life, 1810–1910* (New York: Praeger Publishers in association with the Whitney Museum of American Art, 1974); Donelson Hoopes, *American Narrative Painting* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1974); and John Wilmerding, Linda Ayres, and Earl A. Powell, *An American Perspective: Nineteenth-Century Art from the Collection of Jo Ann and Julian Ganz, Jr.* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1982). Lee M. Edwards began to read Spencer's output as sometimes supporting the status quo and at other times criticizing the system. *Domestic Bliss: Family Life in American Painting 1840–1910* (Yonkers, NY: Hudson River Museum, 1986).

[38]Helen S. Langa, "Lilly Martin Spencer: Genre, Aesthetics, and Gender in the Work of a Mid-Nineteenth Century American Woman Artist," *Athanor* (Florida State University) IX (1990): 37–45; Elizabeth Johns, *American Genre Painting: The Politics of Everyday Life* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), 160–75; David M. Lubin, *Picturing a Nation: Art and Social Change in Nineteenth-Century America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), 158–203; Elizabeth L. O'Leary, *At Beck and Call: The*

in that it understood Spencer's oeuvre as multivalent, having elements that both reflected middle-class norms and challenged class and gender domination.[39] All five studies, however, took as their main subjects Spencer's depictions of women in the midst of household chores and childcare. Her images of children, for which Spencer was most well known in her own time, received but cursory attention in these analyses.

The few who took seriously Spencer's depictions of children treated the subject from very different perspectives.[40] In her master's thesis, Diane Dykema read Spencer's images of children as portrayals of innocent childhood that she made specifically to please a middle-class audience. Dykema argued that the picturing of luxurious settings and sensual bodies in fashionable dress helped satisfy a desire to see middle-class white children in America as comfortable, secure, healthy, and able to live up to their potential as future adults. Johns also saw the images of children as fulfilling adult fantasies, but of a different kind. According to the author, Spencer was able to convey women's sexuality, which society tended to deny, more directly through her images of toddlers than through those depicting women. While viewers never acknowledged the strong sexual connotations of the soft-bodied infants in dishabille, Johns argued that the popularity of her prints proved that they did understand these messages. Through her pictures of young

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Representation of Domestic Servants in Nineteenth-Century American Painting (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996), 66–108; Christine Anne Bell, "A Family Conflict: Visual Imagery of the 'Homefront' and the War Between the States, 1860–1866" (PhD diss., Northwestern University, 1996), 157–93; and Cristina Bishop Klee, "The Happy Family and the Politics of Domesticity, 1840–1870" (PhD diss., University of Delaware, 2004), 115–59.

[39] Lubin, *Picturing a Nation*, 161.

[40] Diane Jeanne Dykema, "Lilly Martin Spencer: Images of Nineteenth Century American Childhood" (master's thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 1993), 1–54; Johns, *American Genre Painting*, 170–74, is the exception in the studies referred to in the previous paragraph; Wendy Jean Katz, *Regionalism and Reform: Art and Class Formation in Antebellum Cincinnati* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2002), 27–85. Spencer lived in Cincinnati from 1841 to 1848.

children, Spencer found a way to portray what women longed for—"recognition of their sexual natures."[41]

Until this dissertation, Wendy Katz was the only scholar to have devoted considerable attention to Spencer's images of children. She looked to etiquette manuals and children's textbooks published in Cincinnati in the 1840s for sources for some of Spencer's genre subjects, including her images of children. According to Katz, Spencer's paintings function like these manuals, instructing viewers on how to maintain a sense of social stability and community through proper behavior and moral reform. For instance, children and animals pictured violating social obligations clarified, through the use of humor, what was expected of adults. Pictures of children in sagging clothing (rather than being sexual, as Johns maintained), celebrated their free and unconstrained nature and reinforced the fact that adults, as separate from children, practiced refinement knowingly and willingly.[42] Katz believed that Spencer used images of children to remind adults of the importance of their own self-control.

Each of these art historians brought unique insight to this genre within Spencer's oeuvre, laying the groundwork on which my own scholarship builds. Dykema saw Spencer's images of children as straightforward celebrations of the innocence and promise of America's next generation; I show that the pictures are more complicated, that behind the apparent optimism often lay cynicism linked to contemporary social and political dilemmas. Johns speculated that Spencer transferred women's sexuality onto images of undressed infants; I argue that Spencer's pictures celebrated the sensual bonds

[41] Johns, *American Genre Painting*, 173.

[42] Katz, *Regionalism and Reform*, 51.

between women and children. Katz interpreted Spencer's images of children as working in confluence with etiquette manuals to offer moral instruction to other adults, showing them how *not* to conduct themselves in antebellum society; I contend that her work is a complex reaction to the ideologies presented in child-rearing manuals; sometimes she embraced these ideals and at other times she balked at them.

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In the 1980s and early 1990s, scholars of American art history concentrated their efforts on the postbellum production of child imagery. These inquiries, which focused especially on work by Winslow Homer and Eastman Johnson, investigated pictures of country children. Images of barefoot boys became popular with urban audiences nostalgic for a long-ago, rural way of life as they struggled with the effects of civil war, industrialization, and immigration.[43] Art historians also studied images of children by John George Brown, Thomas Eakins, and Seymour Guy.[44] Within the last ten years, Americanists have pursued the topic of images of American children in a broader scope. Books and exhibition catalogues, such as Anne Higonnet's *Pictures of Innocence: The History and Crisis of Ideal Childhood* (1998) and Claire Perry's *Young America: Childhood in Nineteenth-Century Art and Culture* (2006), highlighted the work of minority artists, focused on production from the early and late parts of the nineteenth

[43] See, for example, Sarah Burns, *Pastoral Inventions: Rural Life in Nineteenth-Century American Art and Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989). Exceptions to this generalization include a few survey texts and exhibition catalogues: Sandra Brant and Elissa Cullman, *Small Folk: A Celebration of Childhood in America* (New York: E. P. Dutton, in association with Museum of American Folk Art, 1980); Rosamond Olmsted Humm, *Children in America: A Study of Images and Attitudes* (Atlanta: High Museum of Art, 1978); and Mary Lynn Stevens Heininger, ed., *A Century of Childhood, 1820–1920* (Rochester, NY: Margaret Woodbury Strong Museum, 1984).

[44] See Martha J. Hoppin, *Country Paths and City Sidewalks: The Art of J. G. Brown* (Springfield, MA: George Walter Vincent Smith Art Museum, 1989); Jules David Prown, "Thomas Eakins' *Baby at Play*," *Studies in the History of Art* 18 (1985): 121–27; and David Lubin, "Guys and Dolls: Framing Femininity in Post-Civil War America," in *Picturing a Nation*, 205–71.

century, and considered images of African American and Native American children.[45] Johns's essay in the exhibition catalogue, *William Sidney Mount: Painter of American Life* (1998), focused attention on Mount's images of rural boyhood.[46] In 2004 the Brooklyn Museum organized an exhibition of the fin-de-siècle paintings of children by John Singer Sargent to highlight a neglected part of this well-researched artist's oeuvre.[47] The 2008 Conference of the American Antiquarian Society, entitled "Home, School, Play, Work: The Visual and Textual Worlds of Children," will feature new scholarship on the experience and representation of childhood through prints and other material culture. My dissertation contributes significantly to this marked interest in depictions of children in the United States. It joins the push to expand the field in its focus, concentrating as it does on a woman artist's antebellum and Civil War-era paintings, drawings, and prints of urban, middle-class children.

Surprisingly, no book-length study on Lilly Martin Spencer has been published since Bolton-Smith and Truettner's 1973 exhibition catalogue. Johns, Lubin, and O'Leary include an analysis of Spencer's production as a chapter or segment of a chapter in their studies of nineteenth-century painting, and Bell, Jochen Wierich, and Klee have

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[45] Anne Higonnet, *Pictures of Innocence: The History and Crisis of Ideal Childhood* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1998); and Claire Perry, *Young America: Childhood in Nineteenth-Century Art and Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press in association with Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Center for Visual Arts, Stanford University, 2006).

[46] Elizabeth Johns, "'Boys Will Be Boys': Notes on William Sidney Mount's Vision of Childhood," in *William Sidney Mount: Painter of American Life*, ed. Deborah J. Johnson, 9–15 (New York: American Federation of Arts, 1998).

[47] Barbara Dayer Gallati, *Great Expectations: John Singer Sargent Painting Children* (Brooklyn, NY: Brooklyn Museum in association with Bulfinch Press, 2004).

dedicated chapters to Spencer's work in their dissertations on the Civil War home front, the domestication of history painting, and the politics of the happy family respectively.[48] If, as I contend, Spencer was the most important American painter of children in the 1850s (just as Mount was in the 1830s and 1840s and Johnson and Homer were in the 1860s and 1870s), her work in this vein is long overdue for a thorough examination.

This dissertation continues the strain of Spencer scholarship initiated by Langa and developed further by Johns, Lubin, and Bell that thoughtfully examines specific images as layered and complicated, as often containing both accommodational and resistant messages.[49] It foregrounds objects that were extremely important in her own time (either to her audience or the trajectory of her career), but that until now often have been cursorily treated, passed over, misinterpreted, or simply unknown. In the process, I study her preparatory drawings and the prints made after her designs in a more comprehensive way than have scholars before me.

The following investigation of Lilly Martin Spencer's images of children is divided into four chapters. In Chapter 1, I discuss Spencer's images of sleeping children as visual equivalents of contemporary consolation literature. A series of drawings and one painting, her well-known *Domestic Happiness* (1849, fig. 3) contain elements, such as the conceptualization of death as sleep, the necessity of resignation, and the ideology of the child redeemer, which also appeared in writings meant to comfort parents who lost young children to illness and accidents. Spencer created these images at the same time that the idea that children had both good and evil elements replaced the belief in infant

[48] Jochen Wierich, "The Domestication of History in American Art, 1848–1876" (PhD diss., College of William and Mary, 1998), 200–235.

[49] This approach is most thoroughly formulated in Lubin, *Picturing a Nation*, 161–62.

depravity. Advisors now held parents responsible for their child's soul's destiny. Consolation literature, and perhaps these works by Spencer, worked as reassurances that parents had done their duty and that their children were saved and had the ability to encourage their family's salvation from their place in heaven.

In Chapter 2, I argue that Spencer's pictures of interactions between mothers and young children of the 1850s followed concurrent advice literature by promoting the idea of separation, yet also maintained an earlier viewpoint that advocated emotional bonding. During the 1830s and 1840s, child-rearing advisors endorsed intense physical and emotional bonds between mothers and children in preparation for their moral training. When it was discovered years later that these ties hampered a grown child's ability to make his way in the outside world, experts began to disparage "maternal knots." Spencer's images of mothers playing with sons seem to have advocated a compromise between these positions. While showing women teaching their boys to achieve selfhood, they still celebrated the idea that bonding was important. The second part of the chapter deals with advisors' changing views of men's responsibilities in child nurture. Many voiced concern during the 1830s and 1840s that fathers were neglecting their child-rearing duties. By the 1850s, however, they saw a man's primary role as supporter of his wife. As a consequence, play became fathers' principle emotional interaction with young children. Spencer's pictures of fathers frolicking with infants and toddlers reflected this evolving idea, yet contain hints of melancholy that may have revealed men's feelings of loss as their fathering role became more circumscribed.

Chapter 3 is devoted to prints of mischievous, middle-class white youngsters and to two lithographs of working-class mulatto youths that, I maintain, both considered

changing ideals about children's behavior and likely comforted Anglo-American citizens afraid of what they saw as threatening minority groups. Child-rearing manuals of the 1830s and 1840s placed considerable weight on obedience, but as the idea that children were innately good started to become more widely accepted some experts began to call for leniency. Spencer's 1850s designs for lithographs for publisher Wilhelm Schaus straddled these two points of view. While they seem to have been prescient in condoning mischievous behavior by young middle-class boys as innocent fun, they also appear to have expressed the public's existing misgivings about allowing them to join "boy culture," in which youths roamed outdoors unsupervised. At the same time, the prints can be interpreted as antidotes to what middle-class whites feared was the moral denigration of their cities. Humorous images of biracial children probably calmed fears about miscegenation between free blacks and the Irish, while lithographs of innocent, Anglo-Saxon children helped alleviate concern over the urban immigrant children who purportedly threatened the well-being of the city. The prints' tremendous popularity, which was reported in the contemporary press, supports the idea that the images resonated with Spencer's audience's belief systems.

In Chapter 4, I analyze several paintings with Civil War and Reconstruction subject matter in terms of the popular concept of the moral utility of children. People began to believe that children, as innocent beings, had the ability to be a source of relief, to teach adults about important concepts, such as peace, hope, and charity, and to influence their behavior. Children's therapeutic power was especially welcome during wartime. Spencer captured these beliefs in several paintings that she completed at the beginning of the hostilities. However, as the war lengthened, her belief in children's

moral utility seemed to wane. Perhaps she thought, like others, that the fratricidal conflict and the circumstances it created on the home front forced children to grow up too quickly. The pessimism seen in several of her war-era works spilled over into her Reconstruction period images, which incorporated references to the tensions between immigrants and native-born Americans into their war-inspired themes. Only with an ambitious figural painting, *The Home of the Red, White, and Blue* (c. 1867–1868, fig. 4), near the end of the decade did the artist again portray her belief that children could be a source of inspiration for adults. Finally, in the dissertation's conclusion, I interpret Spencer's allegorical painting *Truth Unveiling Falsehood* (1869, fig. 1) as a summation of the child nurture ideologies that engaged the artist and her audiences during the mid-nineteenth century.

Chapter 1
The Art of Consolation

In 1846 or 1847, Lilly Martin Spencer sat down in front of her recently deceased infant daughter and sketched the child's pain-wracked corpse in great detail (fig. 5).[1] The drawing portrays a violent seizure consistent with cholera infantum, or summer complaint, a gastrointestinal illness that claimed thousands of urban babies' lives during the summer months.[2] The artist shows Angelica with her right knee bent, her left big toe splayed, and her shoulders hunched, as if struck with the severe abdominal pain that accompanies chronic diarrhea. Her left arm is spread over a distended belly and her eyes appear sunken within their sockets, signs of dehydration. Although infants typically died after falling into a coma, Angelica's body seems frozen in an active state of distress, the disarray of the bedclothes and nightgown echoing the condition of the physical self.

The image acts as a forceful document of Spencer's lived experience. As the child's mother, she must have endured firsthand the agony of watching the baby become increasingly sicker while she tried futilely to nurse her back to health. Afterwards, when Spencer decided to sketch the corpse, she did not shy away from the afflictions Angelica suffered, nor the ravaged state of her body. In fact, this was the second such drawing

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[1] No birth or death date for Angelica was recorded, nor does Spencer mention her in any correspondence. The estimate of 1846–1847 is taken from Bolton-Smith and Truettner, *Joys of Sentiment*, 108. The drawing comes from *The Pedlar* sketchbook, dated to Spencer's Cincinnati period, 1842–1848. It makes sense that Angelica was born and died sometime in 1846 or 1847; this is between the birth of the Spencers' first child, Benjamin Martin (18 May 1845) and their second son, Angelo Paul (24 March 1848). Although Spencer told her parents that Angelo was named after her mother, there was also a tradition of memorializing a dead infant by giving his or her next sibling the same, or gender equivalent, name. LMS to Angélique and Gilles Martin, 9 July 1848, LMS papers; Wendy Simonds and Barbara Katz Rothman, *Centuries of Solace: Expressions of Maternal Grief in Popular Literature* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), 48.

[2] Richard A. Meckel, *Save the Babies: American Public Health Reform and the Prevention of Infant Mortality, 1850–1929* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 41–42.

Spencer made of the child in her effort to capture the corporeal reality of her death struggle.[3]

In contrast to the realistic portrayal of Angelica's body, the poem Spencer inscribed in the lower right corner of the sheet suggests a much more idealized view of her daughter's passing.

> My poor sweet little Angelica
> She took the cup of life to sip
> but bitter t'was to drain
> She meekly put it from her lip
> and went to sleep again[4]

The first line, "My poor sweet little Angelica," from which the drawing's present title derives, identifies the child by name, but it also works to associate the infant with an angel, the entity children were often thought to become after death. The next three lines explain that the child appeared briefly in this world, but rejected its harshness of her own accord by dying. The last line, "and went to sleep again," refers to the popular association of death with sleep at this time. By describing dead children as sleeping, people denied death's permanence and alluded to an awakening in the afterlife.

With the inclusion of this inscription, *My Poor Sweet Little Angelica* begins to take up themes that Spencer would explore in more depth in the next five years. In several drawings and in a painting she sent to the National Academy, all of which feature sleeping children, she referred to ideas circulating in contemporary consolation literature.

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[3] Bolton-Smith and Truettner list another drawing, *Angelica*, from the same sketchbook as preliminary to this one. *Joys of Sentiment*, 92, 108.

[4] All but the first line of the poem is an epitaph on a gravestone in Meole Churchyard, located outside Shrewsbury, England. "Versions and Translation," *Classical Review*, March 1908, 62. It is unclear how Spencer would have known this verse, unless she saw it replicated on an American tombstone. The rural cemetery movement, which started in the 1830s, encouraged visitors to stroll among the graves and read the inscriptions as a type of leisure activity. Many of the cemeteries even had published literary guides. Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977), 210.

This genre served to comfort parents of deceased children by focusing on death as a temporary sleep, on the necessity of resignation, and on an ideology of the child redeemer. Adults familiar with this literature would most likely have read into Spencer's works similar themes.

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Spencer's personal experience of loss went beyond Angelica, although she never again portrayed so graphically the death of another of her own children. Spencer's granddaughter Lillian Spencer Gates contended that Spencer lost six children, including Angelica and a child named Victor McClellan, who was born on May 7, 1862. Four more unnamed babies died at birth or in the first few months of life.[5] Although it is difficult to ascertain when these four other children lived and died, there is evidence that Spencer gave birth to and lost at least one more child between 1849 and 1850, or between 1852 and 1853.[6] If she lost the one child she herself documented through her drawings, or the

[5] Lillian Spencer Gates to Robin Bolton-Smith, 22 July 1973, National Museum of American Art, Curatorial Department, Exhibition Records, 1971–1982, Accession 97-004, Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, DC (hereafter cited as NMAA Exhibition Records). Date of Victor McClellan's birth stated in letter from LMS to Angélique and Gilles Martin, 12 May 1862, LMS papers. It was not uncommon for people to hold off naming their children for up to a year. Census files show many persons listed as "anonymous," "not named," or "unnamed." Lewis O. Saum, "Death in the Popular Mind of Pre-Civil War America," in *Death in America*, ed. David E. Stannard (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1975), 38.

[6] These are date spans before and after the July 24, 1851 birth of son Charles Francois. Frances Dana Gage, in an undated St. Louis newspaper excerpt, entitled "Mrs. L. M. Spencer, the Artist," writes: "She had five children, but death has taken some of her loved ones." Because this article mentions the exhibition of several lithographs, including *The Little Navigator* (1854), *The Little Sunshade* (1854), *The Power of Fashion* (1853) *and The Height of Fashion* (1854), it can be dated c. 1854. Thus, the five children Gage mentions would have been Benjamin Martin (born 1845), Angelica (born c. 1846–47), Angelo Paul (born 1848), Charles Francois (born 1851) and an unnamed child (born c. 1849–50 or c. 1852–53). Martin family papers and Campus Martius Museum records regarding Lilly Martin Spencer, 1825–1971, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC (hereafter cited as Martin family papers). The possibility also exists that Spencer was pregnant with twins in 1848 and lost one when Angelo Paul was born. Benjamin Rush Spencer, the artist's husband, added this cryptic line to one of Spencer's letters to her parents: "I thank God that I will in a short time have the pleasure to congratulate you on being the grand father and grand mother of two or more children." LMS to Angélique and Gilles Martin, 13 January 1848, LMS papers.

six children her granddaughter recounted, her experience was no different from thousands of parents in antebellum America.

Although lack of statistical records prevents demographers from calculating exact mortality rates for infants and children in the United States in the first half of the nineteenth century,[7] diaries, personal correspondence, and popular literature show that losing a young son or daughter was a common occurrence. By the 1840s, infant and child death in cities, where Spencer and much of her audience lived, was recognized to be much higher than that in rural areas.[8] Population growth outpaced cities' abilities to provide adequate housing, sanitation, and safe water supplies, making the spread of disease uncontrollable. Infants and children were vulnerable to cholera infantum and other gastrointestinal diseases, respiratory illnesses, and infections under these conditions.[9]

Because of the ever-present threat of illness and death to their children, mothers often felt great anxiety and even fear. They regarded as very real the possibility of losing a child and reminded others of that fact. Anna Colton Clayton wrote of her daughter to

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[7] George Alter, "Infant and Child Mortality in the United States and Canada," in *Infant and Child Mortality in the Past*, ed. Alain Bideau, Bertrand Desjardins, and Hector Perez-Brignoli (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 91–92.

[8] Sociomedical investigators making this observation included the editors of the *New York Journal of Medicine and Surgery* (1841); Lemuel Shattuck in the *American Journal of Medical Sciences* (1841); and John Griscom in *The Sanitary Condition of the Laboring Class of New York* (1845). Meckel, *Save the Babies*, 13–18.

[9] Many illnesses were caused by consuming contaminated milk (which spoiled during the complicated delivery of that foodstuff from outside the city) during and after weaning. Richard H. Steckel, "The Health and Mortality of Women and Children, 1850–1860," *Journal of Economic History* 48, no. 2 (June 1988): 342.

her husband at midcentury, "Don't forget—she is not wholly ours."[10] While the likelihood of death was high, major sickness was thought to be inevitable. Mothers' writings constantly refer to their offspring's illnesses, accidents, and their recoveries, which were attended to with worry and doubt.[11] When Spencer mentioned her children in letters to her parents, she frequently reported the precarious state of their health. In July of 1846 she related that "our poor little baby [Benjamin] has been very very sick for a long time with the summer complaint, and cutting teeth—and vaccination,—We did not think he would live, but he ha[s] got much better, although he is still very thin and weak."[12] A few years later, Spencer had another scare. "I received your answer dear dear Mother, but was unable to write at the time owing to the severe sickness of our little Angelo, whom we did not expect to live, and when he got better I had a dreadful press of work which I had neglected and again I put off writing."[13] Spencer's experience of losing and nearly losing children was typical of the period. The frequency with which infants and young children became ill meant that the majority of mothers would face trying times in regard to their offspring's health.

While the mortality rates for infants and children probably did not increase from the days of the early Republic,[14] and antebellum parents certainly did not suffer more emotionally from the loss of a child than did earlier parents, the expression of that

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[10] Quoted in Charles R. King, *Children's Health in America: A History* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1993), 41.

[11] Nancy Schrom Dye and Daniel Blake Smith, "Mother Love and Infant Death, 1750–1920," *Journal of American History* 73, no. 2 (September 1986): 340.

[12] LMS to Angélique and Gilles Martin, 15 July 1846, LMS papers.

[13] LMS to Angélique and Gilles Martin, 29 March 1850, LMS papers.

[14] Brant and Cullman, *Small Folk*, 45. Proportionally as many children died in 1789 as in 1850.

suffering changed a great deal as a culture of sentiment flourished in the nineteenth century. Sentimentalism consisted of a set of assumptions for the "correct" way to feel and act, which often privileged compassion.[15] Within this milieu, the practice of mourning the dead took a much more prominent place in people's personal lives than previously. According to historian Karen Halttunen, the middle class believed that through mourning people experienced two of the deepest "right feelings" humans could have, bereavement and sympathy. These emotions were so valued because they were visible signs of one's piety, social benevolence, and sincerity, all qualities that made one gentile.[16]

In contrast to eighteenth-century colonists, who had focused on the event of death itself, the antebellum middle class concentrated on bereavement, or the act of mourning by the living. Earlier generations had mitigated the burden of grief by involving the whole community in their rituals. Nineteenth-century society, however, was organized into nuclear family units, making public ties less important than familial ones. With the death of a loved one, a family turned in on itself for a longer period to concentrate on the memory of the deceased and on their own sorrow. Mourning family members were set off from the rest of society by limitations on socializing and by the clothes they wore. Conventions of behavior were observed for different amounts of time, depending on who

[15] Shirley Samuels, introduction to *The Culture of Sentiment: Race, Gender, and Sentimentality in Nineteenth-Century America*, ed. Shirley Samuels (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 5.

[16] Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830–1870* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982), 124.

died. People mourned for grandparents and siblings for six months, for parents and children for one year, and for spouses for two years.[17]

While only close family participated in mourning the dead, friends and even mere acquaintances exercised sympathy for those left behind. By calling at a house after a death, attending a funeral, and by acknowledging mourners' grief, sympathizers fulfilled their genteel duties. The truest sympathy, however, came from people who had faced the tragedy of death themselves; these were the only people capable of sharing the feelings of the mourner.[18]

A genre of writing coined by scholar Ann Douglas "contemporary consolation literature" arose during the 1830s as a vehicle of mourning for the bereaved and as an outlet for expressing sympathy. Written mainly by women and ministers, it included poems, hymns, stories, essays, sermons, and advice manuals.[19] While consolation literature touched on the deaths of all members of society, it focused most often on child death. In antebellum society, many women had either suffered the death of their own child or a niece or nephew. Others fearfully anticipated the death of a sick infant or had premonitions about the future demise of a healthy one.[20] These women contributed to or

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[17] Halttunen, *Confidence Men*, 124–27; Lawrence Taylor, "Symbolic Death: An Anthropological View of Mourning Ritual in the Nineteenth Century," in *A Time to Mourn: Expressions of Grief in Nineteenth Century America*, ed. Martha V. Pike and Janice Gray Armstrong (Stony Brook, NY: Museums at Stony Brook, 1980), 40; Barbara Dodd Hillerman, "Chrysallis of Gloom," in *Time to Mourn*, 101.

[18] Halttunen, *Confidence Men*, 144–45, 150.

[19] Douglas, *Feminization*, 201–2. Douglas has been taken to task by later historians for her denigration of sentimental literature and her reading of it as rationalizing an oppressive social order. See especially Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790–1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985). She did, however, initiate work on this genre, which prompted others to study it after her.

[20] The anonymous "Born But to Die," published in the anthology *Fading Flowers,* edited by Margaret Lawrence (Boston, 1865), illustrates women's belief that some children were never theirs to keep: "I never

turned to this vast body of literature to be comforted, or to help evoke feelings of sympathy.

Consolation literature about child death often included a description of the events leading up to expiration, the mother's emotional distress during the child's last hours or moments, the physical features of the dying or dead, and recollections of the living child and its uncorrupt nature. Recognizing what must have been parents' main concern, that their child's soul not perish, but be carried to heaven where it could be reunited with the souls of parents and siblings at some later time, the passages most often ended with positive assurances of salvation. To this end, the three dominant themes that emerge in the literature include the equation of death with temporary sleep, the act of parental resignation to death, and the identification of the deceased as not only saved, but as a redeeming figure.

Addressed to a white, middle-class audience, consolation literature featured children who would have been ideal types by these readers' standards. They possessed blue eyes, curly hair, rosy lips, and fair skin. The qualities of their characters were romanticized as sweet, gentle, and bright. Often, authors omitted indications of age and gender. According to historians Wendy Simonds and Barbara Katz Rothman, the consistent descriptions that made death episodes seemingly identical and infants nearly indistinguishable from one another served to console the women who read them. The

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said it, but I knew, / From the first breath my baby drew, / That I must soon my boy resign / That he was God's, not mine, not mine!" Quoted in Simonds and Rothman, *Centuries of Solace*, 57.

similar events allowed women to feel they were not alone in their experience, and the repeated traits were symbols to them of spiritual transcendence.[21]

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In the four years following her daughter Angelica's death, Spencer produced an evocative series of drawings of mothers watching over sleeping infants and young children.[22] In one, a mother pulls back the bed curtains, a pencil in the opposite hand ready to capture the likeness of the babe in peaceful repose (fig. 6). In two others that treat the same subject, but from different angles, a mother has draped the limp body of a sleeping toddler in her lap; she looks down upon it, a hand to her brow (figs. 7 and 8). A fourth, inscribed by Spencer as *The Baby's Dream Or the Angels Whisper*, shows a mother clasping a necklace with a cross pendant and kneeling beside the bed of a slumbering infant whose head is surrounded by the faint faces of infant angels (fig. 9). Another features a baby and a young child curled up together in sleep, their mother looking down upon them from behind (fig. 10). The last drawing, inscribed *Don't Wake Them* (fig. 11), features the same pair of dozing children entwined in each other's arms. A mother holds back an eager father, whose right hand almost touches the curls of the older son.[23]

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[21] Simonds and Rothman, *Centuries of Solace*, 29, 53–57. The authors admit on page 53 that "then as now, idealized infancy takes on the characteristics of the elite members of society."

[22] This study is the first to consider these drawings as a series.

[23] Bolton-Smith and Truettner gave the four untitled drawings descriptive titles: *Mother Sketching a Sleeping Child*, *Mother with a Sleeping Child*, *Mother with a Sleeping Child*, and *Mother Watching Over Two Sleeping Children*. They also listed a seventh drawing, *Mother Holding a Sleeping Child,* but did not illustrate it.

The drawings were in all probability part of a sketchbook Spencer worked in from 1848 to 1852 when she first moved to New York.[24] Each was most likely a preliminary study for a painting, although only *Don't Wake Them* (1848) has a corresponding painting that survives—*Domestic Happiness* of 1849 (fig. 12). A notice in the January 1849 issue of *Sartain's Magazine* indicates that Spencer made at least one other drawing into a finished painting. What they describe as an oil of "a mother praying over her sleeping child" probably corresponds to *The Baby's Dream Or the Angels Whisper* (c. 1848).[25] Therefore, Spencer most likely did not mean the drawings for her private use, but planned to share them with a larger public through their exhibition or sale as paintings.

Spencer possibly intended the drawings of sleeping infants and children to operate as visual equivalents of contemporary consolation literature, both for her own bereavement purposes and as acts of sympathy with her audience. The drawings appear to expand the work the artist began when she included the poetic verse on her postmortem portrait of her daughter Angelica—transforming the reality of death into a meditation on the possibility of spiritual rebirth. They could have helped Spencer in her mourning for Angelica and perhaps a second child who died at birth or early infancy. In addition, the

[24] The drawings are on gray sheets measuring approximately 19½ by 15⅜ inches, which is consistent with leaves from the *Alas, Poor Yorick* sketchbook (dated 1848–1852 by Bolton-Smith and Truettner). Owned by the artist's granddaughter, Lillian Spencer Gates, the sketchbook was dismantled prior to the 1973 Spencer retrospective at the National Collection of Fine Arts (now the Smithsonian American Art Museum). Hirschl & Adler Galleries bought and gradually sold fourteen sheets, including *My Poor Sweet Little Angelica* and *Don't Wake Them* to private collectors, dealers, and one museum. Zachary Ross, e-mail message to author, 7 July 2006. Gates must have kept the rest. Their present location is unknown.

[25] "A Female Artist," *Sartain's Magazine*, January 1849, 77. *The Baby's Dream* can be re-dated from Bolton-Smith and Truettner's tentative 1848–1852 to c. 1848.

drawings may have been expressions of solace directed towards others in similar situations.

For Spencer, the act of making art about loss seemed to parallel the cathartic act of writing about loss exercised by many antebellum women. She never wrote about the death of any of her children in her letters to her parents, which are otherwise filled with detailed incidents, both happy and sad, from the Spencers' daily life. One story from the correspondence helps to illuminate Spencer's particular coping mechanism. In September of 1851, her brother Charles died of apoplexy at their parents' house in Braceville, Ohio. Benjamin Rush Spencer, the artist's husband, wrote to the Martins in despair: "My Poor Lilly is worse than I can dare describe. She is now trying to sketch his [likeness] from recollection. I wish you could send a soothing word to her."[26] This incident suggests that when distressed, Spencer turned to her sketchbook rather than her writing pad to work through grief in a nonverbal manner. In light of Benjamin's letter and the existence of *My Poor Sweet Little Angelica,* which implies the artist's presence drawing her daughter's corpse, the activity in the later drawing, *Mother Sketching a Sleeping Child* (fig. 6), appears ambiguous. The child could be read as both asleep and deceased.

While the drawings of sleeping infants may have served to help Spencer mourn her own loss(es), their more lofty purpose, especially in their finished state as paintings, might have been to console other women. Spencer was in a perfect position to do this; as a mother who had lost at least one child by 1848, she possessed the credentials of a true sympathizer. Lydia Sigourney wrote of mothers whose children had died: "Is she not moved to deeper sympathy with all who mourn? Is she not better fitted to become a

[26] Benjamin Rush Spencer (hereafter BRS) to Angélique and Gilles Martin, 13 September 1851, LMS papers.

comforter? more strongly incited to every deed of mercy? When she sees a little coffin pass, no matter whether the mother who mourns, be a stranger, or a mendicant, or burnt dark beneath an African sun, is she not to her, in the pitying thrill of that moment, as a sister?"[27] *Sartain's Magazine* recognized Spencer's abilities to commiserate when it mentioned *The Baby's Dream Or the Angels Whisper*. "Every thing Mrs. Spencer has done bears the impress of genius; and her ready sympathy and strong feeling invariably lead her to a happy [read appropriate] choice of subjects for the pencil."[28] Spencer's "choice of subjects" may have been influenced by the location of the Spencers' first apartment in New York—over a coffin store on Broadway. Perhaps the mothers in her drawings represent the many women Spencer imagined at home awaiting the caskets she saw leaving the shop each day.[29]

Importantly, the few contemporary sources that mention Spencer's series of drawings (turned paintings) refer to the babies as being asleep.[30] The images, many without original titles, are ambiguous and could just as likely depict an altered state of consciousness as they could death. In fact, the antebellum middle class was very interested in what transpired during an infant's sleep and therefore dwelled on the

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[27] Lydia Howard Sigourney, *Letters to Mothers* (Hartford, 1838), 206. Interestingly, Sigourney did not follow other writers in idealizing all dead infants as white. In fact, in her 1847 book of poetry, entitled *The Weeping Willow,* she rarely described the physical attributes of any of the deceased children she eulogized.

[28] "Female Artist," 77.

[29] "We have very comfortable lodgings over a cofin store in a very eligible situation in Broadway." LMS to Angélique and Gilles Martin, December 1848, LMS papers. As the ritualization of mourning increased in the mid-nineteenth century, people began buying caskets from undertakers rather than building plain coffins themselves or commissioning them from carpenters. James J. Farrell, *Inventing the American Way of Death, 1830–1920* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980), 148.

[30] See note 25 above, and notes 79 and 82 below.

subject. Poems in *Godey's Lady's Book* speculated that when babies dreamed, they were able to see God.

> I have heard that angels come,
> When our baby spirits roam,
> Round the slumberer's couch, to shower
> Visions of a glorious power.
> There are often dreams of Heaven
> To the infant spirit given.[31]

Spencer's drawing, *The Baby's Dream Or the Angels Whisper* (fig. 9), may depict this very phenomenon. The mother gazing at her infant could be imagining the presence of angelic heads around her child as she ponders the holy content of its dreams.

If the babies are alive, however, many of the mothers in the drawings tell us that they may not be well. The two figures in both *Mother with a Sleeping Child* sketches raise a hand to their head in a gesture that can be read as worry. The mother's praying pose in *The Baby's Dream Or the Angels Whisper* hints that the child pictured may hover between the living and the dead. The Biblical reference to Mary, John the Baptist, and the baby Jesus in *Mother Watching Over Two Sleeping Children* reminds the viewer of the Renaissance tradition that pictured a lamenting Madonna observing the sleeping Christ child. Therefore, the drawings can be read at the very least as ruminations on the emotional stresses of caring for a young child during a period of high mortality rates. Historian Sylvia Hoffert argues that mothers dealt with this strain by preparing themselves for the fact that their babies were likely to die; they participated in

[31] Marion H. Rand, "Infancy," *Godey's Lady's Book*, October 1845, 134. See also M. S. O. Farrell, "To a Sleeping Child," *Godey's Lady's Book*, November 1851, 303.

anticipatory grieving as a defense mechanism.[32] The mother figures in Spencer's works could be mourning for what they believe they will lose.

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Even if Spencer did not intend her drawings to be expressions of bereavement and sympathy, the strong association of death with sleep in Protestant religious belief, contemporary consolation literature, and other types of visual culture during this period may have led many of her viewers to see in the images mothers grieving over already dead children. The pairing of death and sleep goes back to ancient Greece, where the mythological gods of these states, Thanatos and Hypnos, were twins.[33] For American Protestants at midcentury, death was conceptualized as a state of sleep from which people would be awakened at resurrection.[34] To them, sleep was an apt metaphor, for they believed death to be a temporary condition prior to eternal life.

Consolation literature focused on children almost always described their deceased subjects as sleeping. Selections from Lydia Sigourney's *The Weeping Willow* of 1847 can serve as representative of verse that appeared in women's magazines, in gift books, and published collections throughout the period. Sigourney, described by scholar Carl Bode as "death's shrillest devotee," was one of the most celebrated producers of consolation

[32] Sylvia D. Hoffert, *Private Matters: American Attitudes toward Childbearing and Infant Nurture in the Urban North, 1800–1860* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 158, 160.

[33] Jay Ruby, *Secure the Shadow: Death and Photography in America* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), 63.

[34] Susan A. Newberry, "The Magic Mirror at Home," *Daguerreian Annual* (1999): 56.

literature, as well as a popular child-rearing advice manual author.[35] In one poem from her book, she describes a "lifeless" infant's corpse as blissfully at rest.

> And meekly in its snowy hand
> White rose-buds droop'd the head,
> As there, in peaceful sleep it lay
> Upon its cradle-bed.
>
> A line of coral mark'd its lip,
> A smile, its forehead clear,
> But not the changeful smile of those
> Who have their wakening here.[36]

In another, she writes about a buried child's repose.

> Sweet bud! whose brief perfume
> So cheer'd the parent's breast,
> Here, in this grassy tomb
> Enjoy unbroken rest.
> Sleep! free from thorn and strife,
> Safe from the Spoiler's rod,
> Germ of eternal life
> Sown in the lowly sod.[37]

Both of these poems refer to the children's death slumber as a prelude to their afterlives; the first expresses a smile indicating its heavenly future and the second is equated with a dormant seed, awaiting sustenance in paradise.

In addition to consolation literature, antebellum audiences may have called to mind several forms of visual culture when viewing Spencer's images. Sleeping children began to appear on gravemarkers in garden cemeteries beginning in the 1840s. Only middle- and upper-class families could afford these more elaborate tombstones, and

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[35] Carl Bode, *The Anatomy of American Popular Culture, 1840–1861* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959), 274.

[36] Lydia Howard Sigourney, "The Last of the Seven," in *The Weeping Willow* (Hartford, 1847), 20.

[37] Sigourney, "Death of an Infant," in *Weeping Willow*, 107.

therefore they exist in larger cemeteries bordering cities.[38] While the English carved monuments depicting sleeping children earlier in the century, it was not until Americans were entrenched in a cult of death in the antebellum period that they adopted this convention in the United States. Art historian Joy Kasson notes that the first memorial sculpture in Mount Auburn Cemetery, near Boston, was *The Binney Child,* carved by Henry Dexter in 1842. Known now through an engraving, the gravemarker portrayed the young girl Emily lying peacefully with arms and feet crossed on a bed covered with a canopy (fig. 13).[39] Another example, still extant in the White Plains (New York) Rural Cemetery, memorializes William P. and Lydia Groot, who died in 1849 and 1846 respectively (fig. 14). The sculpture shows the two siblings comfortably resting on a bed, bodies turned towards each other and arms bent in a loose embrace. In their repose, the children pictured on these various gravemarkers served to remind the grief-stricken that death was a temporary state for these small ones.

The contemporary practice of taking daguerreotypes of deceased infants would have been the visual tradition most likely to prompt Spencer's audience to read in her sleeping babies a theme of death. Postmortem portraits, as they are now called, became available in 1841. They caught on immediately, helped by the active advertising of daguerreotypists, who emphasized the importance of having a record of a dead loved one's likeness. Double the price of life portraits (partly because daguerreotypists brought

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[38] Ellen Marie Snyder, "Innocents in a Worldly World: Victorian Children's Gravemarkers," in *Cemeteries and Gravemarkers: Voices of American Culture*, ed. Richard E. Meyer (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1989), 14. The Groot children, discussed below, are illustrated on page 18 of her article.

[39] The most representative English memorials are *Monument to Penelope Boothby*, 1793, by Thomas Banks and *The Sleeping Children*, 1817, by Francis Chantrey (fig. 25). Joy S. Kasson, *Marble Queens and Captives: Women in Nineteenth-Century American Sculpture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), 110–12. Kasson describes *The Binney Child* on pages 109–10.

their equipment to the house to take the picture and partly because of the grim nature of the work), but still affordable at around twelve dollars, the postmortem images would have been widely available to the middle class.[40]

Daguerreotypists took postmortem portraits of both adults and children, but treated the two differently. Adults, who they photographed less often, were laid out on dark sheets or in their coffins to signify their deceased state (fig. 15). Children and infants, rather, were pictured in their mothers' laps, or gazed upon by parents (figs. 16 and 17), giving the illusion that they were asleep. A pose of sleep, especially if successfully arranged by the daguerreotypist to look beautiful and peaceful (fig. 18), staved off thoughts of decay and helped to reassure parents that their child had an afterlife.[41]

Thoughts about the state of children's souls were in a transitional period at exactly this time. Mainstream denominations had not yet universally rejected the concept of infant depravity, the belief that all children were born with original sin. Nor had they fully embraced the idea, posited by Unitarians like advice book author Lydia Maria Child, that "[children] come to us from heaven, with their little souls full of innocence and peace."[42] For the most part, the prescriptive literature of the 1830s and 1840s eschewed both conservatives, who insisted that only adults who had conversion experiences would be granted salvation, and liberals, who proclaimed the total innocence

[40] Newberry, "Magic Mirror," 54–55.

[41] Ibid., 57–58.

[42] Child, *Mother's Book*, 3.

of the child. Instead, advice books most often advanced the argument that unformed children had the potential to be either virtuous or evil.[43]

Congregational minister Horace Bushnell codified this viewpoint in 1847 in his publication *Christian Nurture*. He argued that it was parents' responsibility to raise children in such a way that the good in them thrived while the wickedness perished. The objective was, according to Bushnell,

> that the child is to grow up a Christian, and never know himself as being otherwise. In other words, the aim, effort and expectation should be, not, as is commonly assumed, that the child is to grow up in sin, to be converted after he comes to a mature age; but that he is to open on the world as one that is spiritually renewed, not remembering the time when he went through a technical experience, but seeming rather to have loved what is good from his earliest years…The Christian is one who has simply *begun* to love what is good for its own sake, and why should it be thought impossible for a child to have this love begotten in him? Take any scheme of depravity you please, there is yet nothing in it to forbid the possibility that a child should be led, in his first moral act, to cleave unto what is good and right, any more than in the first of his twentieth year.[44]

To accomplish this, parents had to "live the life of Christ, before him and with him," making themselves examples to be emulated. If they provided "the loveliness of a good life, the repose of faith, the confidence of righteous expectations, the sacred and cheerful liberty of the Spirit," their children would become Christian, and thus redeemable.[45]

This way of thinking put a heavy burden on mothers, who, at this point, were the main caregivers of children. They were being told that they were responsible for the fate

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[43] Spencer's religious beliefs are unknown, but her parents were members of St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Marietta, Ohio, while she was growing up. They became active followers of social critic Charles Fourier when they helped organize the Trumbull Phalanx outside of Branchville, Ohio, in 1845. This occurred after Spencer left home and married. Minna Tupper Nye, "Early Artists of Washington County" (1911), LMS papers; Elsie F. Freivogel, "Lilly Martin Spencer," *Archives of American Art Journal* 12, no. 4 (1972): 9. Perhaps she fell somewhere between these mainstream and more liberal belief systems.

[44] Horace Bushnell, *Christian Nurture* (1916; repr., New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1953), 4, 9.

[45] Ibid., 9, 12.

of their children's souls from the earliest age.[46] Advisor Samuel Goodrich exhorted, "You have a child on your knee. Listen a moment. Do you know what that child is? It is an immortal being; destined to live forever! It is destined to be happy or miserable! And who is to make it happy or miserable? You—the mother! You, who gave it birth, the mother of its body, are also the mother of its soul for good or ill. Its character is yet undecided; its destiny is placed in your hands. What shall it be?"[47] Describing or picturing dead children as in a state of peaceful sleep worked as a device of reassurance for parents that mothers had done their duty. Because of their mother's successful efforts at creating a Christian atmosphere within the home, the babies' situations were but temporary; they would awaken in heaven.

In the drawings Spencer made after that of Angelica, the infants and children could have been interpreted by viewers as well cared for in this life, or they may have been seen as having a good chance at eternal life. Their bodies relax in poses of comfort on soft mattresses or ample laps. Their brows are smooth, their expressions calm. *The Baby's Dream Or the Angels Whisper* (fig. 9) is especially evocative. Angel heads encircle the baby's own, as if calling it gently to them. Significantly, the infant's features mirror exactly the angels' chubby faces and bald heads. It seems ready to become one of

[46] Meckel, "Educating a Ministry of Mothers," 418. Sigourney wrote, "Do you ask, when shall we begin to teach our children religion? As soon as you see them. As soon as they are laid upon your breast. As soon as you feel the pure breath issuing from that wondrous tissue of air-vessels which God has wreathed around the heart. The religion of a new-born babe, is the prayer of its mother. Keep this sacred flame burning for it, in the shrine of the soul, until it is able to light its own feeble lamp, and fill its new censer with praise." *Letters to Mothers*, 31–32. Bushnell believed that "never is it too early for good to be communicated. Infancy and childhood are the ages most pliant to good. And who can think it necessary that the plastic nature of childhood must first be hardened into stone, and stiffened into enmity towards God and all duty, before it can become a candidate for Christian character!" *Christian Nurture*, 14.

[47] Samuel G. Goodrich, *Sow Well and Reap Well; or, Fireside Education*, 3rd ed. (Albany, 1846), 124.

them, as can also be evinced by the aura surrounding the bed and the similarity of the pillows to wings, which appear to sprout from the infant's back.

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Authors of consolation literature advocated resignation once a child had expired. This was consistent with general middle-class mourning practices of the time that prohibited Christians from grieving excessively, because, it was argued, unlike "heathens and Jews," they had hope of an afterlife for their dead.[48] Now that thinking about the state of children's souls was changing, Protestant parents who made reasonable efforts to bring out the good in their progeny could also anticipate their salvation. After recounting "the language of a mother's intense sorrow in the despairing blindness of a first terrible bereavement," author Grace Greenwood wrote in her essay, "A Spring Flower,"

> with the Christian mother, there succeeds to this storm of the soul, a sweet and holy calm, when balmy breathings from the celestial shore steal over the troubled waters, and the voice of divine love says, 'Peace, be still!'—the thick clouds part above her, grow silvery with brightness, and reveal a heaven starry with the glorious promises of God…She knows—that mother—that the child lost to her, had been found and cared for by the angels; that its spirit hath but passed, like a bird of passage, from the storms and chill airs of a wintry land, to a clime of unending summer, whose sunshine is the smile of love, whose atmosphere is the breath of peace. She knows that the fragile flower which faded on her bosom, hath sprung into lovelier life and sweeter bloom, in "the garden of the Lord."[49]

Sigourney explained in her advice manual why resignation was possible.

> You will not then, become a prey to despondence, though loneliness broods over your dwelling, when you realize that its once cherished inmates have but gone a little in advance, to those mansions which the Saviour hath prepared for all who love him. Can you not sometimes find it in your hearts to bless God that your loss is the gain of your children? While they were here below, it was your chief joy to see them happy. Yet

[48] Halttunen, *Confidence Men*, 134.

[49] Grace Greenwood, "A Spring Flower," *Godey's Lady's Book*, May 1848, 253.

> you were not sure of the continuance of their happiness for a single hour. Now, you are assured both of the fullness of their felicity, and of its fearless continuance.[50]

Mothers who know in their hearts that their children are saved do not despair, but rejoice in the fact that they have escaped this sinful world.

Comparison with an image from the colonial era helps to further illuminate the new attitudes in mourning for a child. Charles Willson Peale painted a picture of his deceased infant daughter, Margaret Bordley Peale, in 1772. The dead state of the child's body is apparent in the way she is laid out on the bed, the unbroken lines in her clothing showing the rigidity of the corpse beneath. Deforming rigor mortis has been countered by bands that hold the infant's mouth shut and her arms by her sides. In addition, all signs of life have left her flesh; her skin reflects the yellow-gray cast, not of the sleeping, but of the truly dead. Four years later he added a portrait of his grief-stricken first wife Rachel to the composition (fig. 19). She sits in a chair next to the child's bed, two glimmering tears rolling down her cheek and others welling in her eyes. The large size of her handkerchief reflects her huge burden of sorrow, for Margaret was the fourth consecutive child she had lost.

This altered image, now of "Rachel Weeping," recalls two passages in the Bible, the first from the Old Testament, when the Israelites were captured and led away to Babylon, and the second from the Gospel of Matthew, after the Massacre of the Innocents.[51]

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[50] Sigourney, *Letters to Mothers*, 211.

[51] While Peale and his contemporaries probably considered these biblical references when viewing the painting, the official title of *Rachel Weeping* was only given to the work by Peale descendants in the mid-twentieth century. Phoebe Lloyd, "A Death in the Family," *Bulletin* (Philadelphia Museum of Art) 78, no. 335 (Spring 1982): 12n13. My thanks to Sally M. Promey for directing me to the "Rachel crying for her children" passages in Jeremiah and Matthew.

> The Lord says, "A sound is heard in Ramah, the sound of bitter weeping. Rachel is crying for her children; they are gone, and she refuses to be comforted. Stop your crying and wipe away your tears. All that you have done for your children will not go unrewarded; they will return from the enemy's land. There is hope for your future; your children will come back home. I, the Lord, have spoken." (Jeremiah 31:15–17)
>
> In this way what the prophet Jeremiah had said came true: "A sound is heard in Ramah, the sound of bitter weeping. Rachel is crying for her children; she refuses to be comforted, for they are dead." (Matthew 2:17–18)

In biblical commentaries from the later eighteenth century, writers stressed that the figure of Rachel epitomized mothers' interminable grief over the loss or death of their children:

> The voice heard in Ramah, *Rachel weeping* for her children, and refusing to be comforted, because they were not to be found in life, signifies, that at the Chaldean captivity, and when the babes of Bethlehem were murdered by Herod, her daughters of the tribe of Benjamin, and their sisters of the tribe of Judah so bitterly bewailed the loss of their children, that their weeping was heard unto Ramah; and that if Rachel, who lay buried near by, could have risen from her grave, she, who was so fond of children, would have joined them in their lamentations.[52]

Likewise, the inscription that accompanied Peale's painting while he displayed it in his Philadelphia gallery in 1782 underscored his wife Rachel's unremitting sorrow:

> A child lies dead before your eyes
> And seems no more than molded clay.
> While the affected mother cries,
> And constant mourns from day to day.[53]

The expression Peale chose for Rachel also emphasized her hopelessness. According to art historian Phoebe Lloyd, the artist referred to his English translation of Charles Le

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[52] John Brown, *A Dictionary of the Holy Bible* (Philadelphia, 1798), 2:357.

[53] Quoted in Lloyd, "Death in the Family," 7. Susan Stewart likewise reads the painting as "an account of the stubborn material truth of death itself," and describes Rachel's tears as being so substantive that they appear to bead on the surface of the canvas. "Death and Life, in that order, in the Works of Charles Willson Peale," in *Visual Display: Culture Beyond Appearances*, ed. Lynne Cooke and Peter Wollen (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995), 37.

Brun's *The Conference on the Expression of the Passions* (London, 1701) and copied the facial expression for "Sadness" when he painted his wife into the composition.[54]

In viewing Spencer's images of sleeping infants and children, audiences would not have expected to see distraught mothers, even if they thought of them as mourning. For antebellum Protestant Americans, calm acceptance was assumed behavior. The mothers in the drawings may look longingly at the bodies of their children, as does the woman in *The Baby's Dream Or the Angels Whisper*, but they do not weep or make other gestures suggesting emotional breakdown. Importantly, the two drawings entitled *Mother with a Sleeping Child* (figs. 7 and 8) employ well-known gestures of resignation. Spencer borrowed iconography from mourning pictures, first popularized as silk and paint creations in the Federal period, then sold as prints by publishing companies, such as Currier and Ives, into midcentury. In these works, a mourning female bows her head beside an urn-topped monument in front of a weeping willow tree. Often she holds a hand to her forehead or eyes (fig. 20). The bowed head is a gesture that Christians derived from ancient Greece and denotes resignation.[55] In Spencer's works, the mothers' bowed heads and hands on foreheads certainly would have evoked in her audience recollections of the popular mourning pictures and their association with acquiescence.

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Many of Spencer's drawings of sleeping infants and children include references to the Madonna and Child. This religious imagery, once the purview of Catholics only, became increasingly popular in Anglo-American culture. One reason for its sanction and

[54] Lloyd, "Death in the Family," 5.

[55] Anita Schorsch, "Mourning Art: A Neoclassical Reflection in America," *American Art Journal* 8, no. 1 (May 1976): 14.

appeal can be attributed to the emerging view of motherhood as a holy vocation. Women, now believed to possess a better moral compass than men, were thought to be the best caregivers to impressionistic young children. Their purity and virtue, characteristics traditionally associated with Mary, would insure that children would be prepared to become religiously- and socially-responsible adults.[56]

The uncertainty caused by high mortality rates might also have sensitized mothers to identify with the Virgin. Faced with the ever-present threat of child illness and death, antebellum parents likely would have been interested in copies and prints of paintings that featured a melancholy Madonna watching over a sleeping Christ child. Renaissance artists had created an iconography that equated Jesus's infant sleep with his death sleep during the Passion (fig. 21).[57] Throughout the following centuries, artists continued to employ this type when picturing the slumbering Child. Mid-nineteenth-century viewers may have had access to prints after Baroque painter Guido Reni's *The Virgin and the Sleeping Child* (painting dated 1627, fig. 22), which features a pensive Mary praying over the baby Jesus.[58] More likely, they saw the image reproduced as an etching in Anna Jameson's popular *Legends of the Madonna as Represented in the Fine Arts*, first published in 1852.[59] They also may have seen mezzotints of John Singleton Copley's *The*

[56] The link antebellum Americans made between mothers and the Virgin Mary will be explored at greater length in Chapter 2.

[57] Phoebe Lloyd, "Death and American Painting: Charles Willson Peale to Albert Pinkham Ryder" (PhD diss., City University of New York, 1980), 19.

[58] Lloyd believes Charles Willson Peale had access to a copy of Cornelius Bloemaert's engraving of the work when he painted *Rachel Weeping*. Lloyd, "Death and American Painting," 19.

[59] Anna Jameson, *Legends of the Madonna as Represented in the Fine Arts*, new ed. (1890; repr., Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1972), 128. Americans would have first known of Jameson, an English art historian, from her articles reprinted in the June and July issues of the 1849 *Bulletin of the American Art-Union*.

Nativity (1776–1777, fig. 23), in which he painted a reclining Madonna looking down at her Son with what can be read as a gesture of resignation.[60]

Spencer's work shows that she was familiar with this iconographic tradition. In the drawing *Mother Watching Over Two Sleeping Children* (fig. 10), she sketched a Madonna-type figure, complete with veil and mantle, who hovers over and looks down upon two children who resemble, in their age difference and their hair (or lack of it), conventional depictions of John the Baptist and Jesus. The holy nature of the scene is reinforced by light hatching marks that radiate from the body of the mother.

Other drawings suggest not only the Renaissance Madonna and Sleeping Child tradition, but the trope of the pietà, in which a mournful Mary holds the dead Christ in her lap after the Crucifixion. The two drawings now titled *Mother with a Sleeping Child* (figs. 7 and 8) appear to refer to this imagery. The sketch in which the child's head is oriented to the left recalls the famous *Pietà* of Michelangelo (1497–1500, fig. 24). Jameson, who reproduced the Renaissance sculpture in her book, called it "celebrated" and one of the "two most perfect conceptions" of the motif. Significantly, she interpreted the Virgin's expression as "mingled sorrow and resignation, but the majestic resignation predominates."[61] In Spencer's image, which I have argued also contains an air of resignation, the baby's body is draped across the mother's lap, almost too large for her spread thighs. Its head falls back and its right arm hangs at its side, much like that of Michelangelo's Christ. Some have speculated that Mary's apparent youth in the

[60] Mezzotints by Jacob Hurd of *The Nativity* were published in Boston in 1785. Emily Ballew Neff, *John Singleton Copley in England* (London: Merrell Holberton, 1995), 96n4. Neff interprets Mary's suggestive gesture as merely shielding her eyes from the blinding divine light coming from the left. *John Singleton Copley*, 96.

[61] Jameson, *Legends of the Madonna*, 38–39.

sculptor's *Pietà* refers to the tradition that imagined the Virgin, in her lamentation, thinking back to the time when Christ was a baby sleeping in her arms.[62] Conversely, Spencer's audience may have extrapolated from her image to equate the child with Christ just before his resurrection and ascension to heaven. In its future state, the toddler would have the ability to save others.

In contemporary consolation literature, many deceased children came to be considered Christ-like in their ability to be catalysts for the redemption and reunification of a whole family in heaven. As early as 1838, Sigourney advocated this viewpoint. "The glorified spirit of the infant, is as a star to guide the mother to its own blissful clime. Is it not her wish to be where her babe is? And will she not strive to prepare herself for its pure society? If the cares or sins of earth, ever threaten to gain the victory, will she not see its little hand reaching from the skies, and be guided by the cherub voice which implores, 'Oh mother come to me.'"[63] It was not until the 1840s and 1850s that more and more writers used this strategy to help parents make sense of their babies' deaths.[64] They saw the dead children's purpose as instruments of salvation for the whole family. They would motivate family members to conduct themselves in such a way as to guarantee reunion in heaven. One poem describes how a couple's son would continue to be an influence on them from beyond the grave:

> Then will this world be full of him; the sky,
> With all its placid myriads, to your eye
> Will tell of him; the wind will breathe his tone;
> And, slumbering in the midnight, they alone,

[62] Howard Hibbard, *Michelangelo*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Harper & Row, 1985), 45.

[63] Sigourney, *Letters to Mothers*, 206–7.

[64] Hoffert, *Private Matters*, 170.

> Your Father and your child, will hover nigh.
> Believe in him—behold him everywhere—
> And sin will die within you; earthly care
> Fall to its earth—and heavenward, side by side,
> Ye shall go up, your infant for your guide:
> Ye shall go up, beyond this realm of storms,
> Quick and more quick, till welcomed there above,
> His voice shall bid ye in the might of love,
> Lay down these weeds of earth, and wear your native forms.[65]

People were ready to accept this reasoning for their young children's demise. Relatives of Lawrence Parker, for example, wrote to him after his baby died in 1845: "You have now one less object to attach you to the earth, and one more to draw you towards heaven. Undoubtedly this was God's design in taking the *Dear Babe*."[66]

The idea that deceased children could be salvific forces became widely popular after the appearance of Harriet Beecher Stowe's abolitionist novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* in 1852.[67] Stowe's character Evangeline St. Clare became the most famous child redeemer in nineteenth-century America. The influence of her death and subsequent installation in heaven led to various Christian acts in her biological and slave families. Her father's cousin, Miss Ophelia, vowed to love and convert the slave girl Topsy, and in turn Topsy strove to be good and eventually became a missionary. Augustine St. Clare, Eva's father, started reading the Bible and decided to free his slaves before his own untimely death.

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[65] James H. Perkins, "On the Death of a Young Child," *Godey's Lady's Book*, June 1846, 251.

[66] Quoted in Saum, "Death in the Popular Mind," 40.

[67] Stowe began *Uncle Tom's Cabin* after the death of her sixth child, Charlie, in the Cincinnati cholera epidemic of 1849. Jacqueline S. Reinier, *From Virtue to Character: American Childhood, 1775–1850* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996), 101. This is another example of a woman's creative output being influenced by the death of her child.

Often dying children were described in the literature as having extrasensory abilities to glimpse heaven and/or to communicate with family members already there. Uncle Tom wanted to be present when Eva died, because he was sure that heaven would be revealed. Sure enough, Eva exclaimed, "O, love,—joy,—peace!" as she expired, disclosing to her audience what they could expect when their time came.[68] Sigourney also wrote of a vision of paradise from a child's point of view:

> "I see green fields, and glowing flowers;
> I see bright streamlets flow;
> Sweet voices call to glorious bowers,
> Dear Mother! let me go."[69]

Another poem written in the first person described a child's reunion with his or her brother:

> "And *Willie dear*, who went to sleep,
> And never waked again,
> Is with me now with a sunny brow,
> And he harps an angel strain;
> And he calls to me with a silvery tone,
> And a look of melting love,
> To come and take my golden harp,
> In the beautiful land above."[70]

Douglas mentions a real-life case of this phenomenon, related in the 1852 writings of Eunice Hale Cobb. Her dying son James saw angels dancing in anticipation of his arrival in heaven and passed messages from deceased family members to his parents.[71] These episodes appear to be a renegotiation of the Puritan tradition of deathbed scenes (usually involving the visions and aural experiences of dying women and children) that reassured

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[68] This interpretation of Little Eva's deathbed scene is taken from Tompkins, *Sensational Designs*, 129.

[69] Sigourney, "The Consenting Mother," in *Weeping Willow*, 75.

[70] L. J. W., "The Sick Child," *Godey's Lady's Book*, November 1850, 298.

[71] Douglas, *Feminization*, 205, 207.

the living of the reality of a divine realm and their loved one's election into it.[72] The nineteenth-century poems and reports confirmed for adults that heaven existed and that dying babies could be relied on as agents between heaven and earth.

While Spencer alluded to Madonna and Child imagery in *Mother Watching Over Two Sleeping Children*, and pietà iconography in the two drawings entitled *Mother with a Sleeping Child*, the child redeemer theme also seems to be inferred in several works that do not evoke Biblical figures. The first was a painting entitled *Infancy,* shown at her 1841 exhibition in her hometown of Marietta, Ohio. Now lost, the painting cannot be described physically. However, Spencer included with the canvas a poem that had been written for her by a "young gentleman from the South,"[73] the content of which we can assume she endorsed. It describes the infant featured in the painting sleeping as if in a way "which knows no wakening," its body "marble-like" and "stirless," making its physical condition somewhat ambiguous. The poem lights on the idea that babies actually exist in a liminal state between heaven and earth as adults' conduit to paradise:

> A thing ye are, ye seem not of our world
> Though in it; but a link in that vast chain
> Of human being—half divine, half dust—
> Through which our earth-soiled souls are joined to Heaven.
> Oh, in this dark and sinning pilgrimage,
> If such as ye are not the chosen ones,
> Well may we, —our sandals heavy-laden
> With earth's dross, —our garments dim and darken'd—
> Well may we despair of welcome entrance
> To "the better land!"[74]

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[72] See Sally M. Promey, "Mirror Images: Framing the Self in Early New England Material Piety," in *Figures in the Carpet: Finding the Human Person in the American Past,* ed. Wilfred M. McClay (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2007), 85; and Sarah Rivett, "Tokenography: Narration and the Science of Dying in Puritan Deathbed Testimonies," *Early American Literature* 42, no. 3 (2007): 471–94.

[73] Partial transcription of Edmund Flagg, *Catalogue of Miss Martin's Paintings*, 1841, LMS papers. A poem accompanied each of the thirteen paintings displayed.

[74] Transcription of Edmund Flagg, *Catalogue of Miss Martin's Paintings*, 1841, Martin family papers.

Later in the decade, when Spencer created *The Baby's Dream Or the Angels Whisper,* she pictured these heavenly agents as tiny angels who surround a sleeping infant. The mother who prays next to the child either witnesses or imagines these beings (quite possibly children who have already died). Her Christian activity may be an effort to join them.

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The themes Spencer explored in her series of drawings after her daughter Angelica's death also find expression in her well-known painting *Domestic Happiness* (1849, fig. 12). While evidence suggests that Spencer made paintings from some of the other drawings,[75] she showed *Domestic Happiness* the most often and it received the most reviews. In other words, of all the images of sleeping infants and children, it reached the biggest audience. But how would viewers have interpreted the painting? Contemporary written comments give us little to go on. Many people probably would have come away from the work grasping only its most ostensible meaning, but others would have read in the image more subtle messages. By comparing *Domestic Happiness* to Spencer's other drawings, and especially to its own preliminary drawing, it becomes apparent that themes of resignation, redemption, and reunification are also present in this painting.

The work features a mother and father in a room with a darkened background. They peer over two of their children, who lie asleep together on a bed containing a large pillow and tussled bedclothes. As the father leans in, the mother holds up her hand to prevent him from disturbing the children's slumber. Seeing that their children are

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[75] See p. 32.

comfortable, one assumes they will soon settle into their own cozy bed. On the surface, therefore, the painting clearly celebrates the happiness and security of the white, middle-class nuclear family.

After completing the painting in early 1849, Spencer hoped to sell it to the American Art-Union.[76] She wrote to them on February 7, calling the work *"Hush don't wake them,"* a title similar to that inscribed on the preliminary drawing (*Don't Wake Them*), and pricing it at five hundred dollars.[77] The Art-Union must have declined to buy it, because it was for sale when she exhibited it as *Domestic Happiness* at the National Academy of Design that spring.[78] Two years later Spencer showed it with the modified title *Domestic Happiness—"Hush, Don't Wake Them"* at the Philadelphia Art Union. The painting was purchased privately by some of the directors of the Art Union, then sold for two hundred dollars to the Western Art Union in Cincinnati by August 1851.[79] They in turn distributed it through their annual lottery to a Captain Waterman.[80] The similar titles given to the work during its initial exhibition history attest to the fact that the contentment of home life was its main theme.

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[76] The painting is inscribed on its verso: Lilly M. Spencer / Painter 1849. Patricia Hills, catalogue entry for *Domestic Happiness*, in *American Paintings in the Detroit Institute of Arts,* vol. 2, *Works by Artists Born 1816–1847* (New York: Hudson Hills Press in association with Detroit Institute of Arts Founders Society, 1997), 220.

[77] LMS to Mr. Moore, 7 February 1849, Col. Merl M. Moore, Jr. files.

[78] Mary Bartlett Cowdrey, *National Academy of Design Exhibition Record, 1826–1860* (New York: New-York Historical Society, 1943), 2:134.

[79] Bolton-Smith and Truettner, *Joys of Sentiment*, 133. The authors do not give the year that it was sold to the Western Art Union, but Hadry discusses it in her August 1851 article. Henriette A. Hadry, "Mrs. Lilly M. Spencer," *Sartain's Union Magazine of Literature and Art*, August 1851, 153.

[80] Hills, *Domestic Happiness*, 219.

A contemporary account of the painting by Henriette Hadry also highlighted its blissful mood, although it did not dwell on the subject matter. In an August 1851 review for *Sartain's Union Magazine of Literature and Art*, she discussed the painting's reception at the Philadelphia Art Union exhibition earlier that year, where visitors were surprised when they saw that a woman had made such a skillfully executed work. Hadry's subsequent insistence that women artists should be judged on equal footing with men steered her discussion of *Domestic Felicity*, as she called the painting, to formal concerns. Her description of the subject matter remained brief. "The scene represented in this composition, it may be stated, consists of a mother and father, their faces beaming with affection, bending over the couch where repose their two children, in all the happy unconsciousness of peaceful slumber."[81] The only other known contemporary criticism of the painting appeared several years later in Elizabeth Ellet's 1859 profile of the artist. By this time, the painting seems to have lost some of its joyful resonance; Ellet commented laconically that "[*Domestic Felicity*] represented a mother and father bending over their sleeping children."[82]

Art historians of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have spilled much more ink over the meaning of *Domestic Happiness* than Spencer's contemporaries. For the most part, however, their interpretations take on the "obvious" subject matter of the painting, revolving as they do around deciphering Spencer's attitudes towards ideals of domesticity. David Lubin, the first to look at the painting critically, sees it as a statement that defended the sentimental family (based on the reciprocity of familial love

[81] Hadry, "Mrs. Lilly M. Spencer," 153.

[82] Elizabeth F. Ellet, *Women Artists in All Ages and Countries* (New York, 1859), 324.

and the concept of separate spheres) against the politics of conservatives, who wanted to maintain patriarchal hierarchy, and liberals, who advocated communitarianism over nuclear families.[83] Cristina Klee argues instead that works such as *Domestic Happiness* asserted a feminist stance, which at that time meant protesting the unrealistic standards of sentimental domestic ideology while defending the basic structure of the system.[84] Wendy Katz, on a different note, sees *Domestic Happiness* as providing a model of behavior for adults by contrasting the freeing unconsciousness of the children with the mother, who shows restraint and reminds her husband to do the same.[85]

Patricia Hills has been the only art historian until now to recognize the subtext of infant and child mortality in *Domestic Happiness*. In her entry for the Detroit Institute of Arts' American paintings catalogue, she reads the work as Spencer's statement of concern for the welfare of her own children. Hills compares the entwined babies in *Domestic Happiness,* whom she identifies as Spencer's sons, Benjamin (aged 3½ years) and Angelo (aged 9–10 months), to examples on tombstones. For her, the allusion to cemetery sculpture underscores Spencer and her contemporaries' anxiety that the death of children was always a possibility. But, she says, "Spencer's children…at the moment are not dead, but alive, for which Spencer would have been most grateful."[86]

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[83] Lubin, *Picturing a Nation*, 162–69. In the most recent published article on Spencer, April Masten agrees with Lubin, also arguing that the group depicted in *Domestic Happiness* signifies the sentimental family. April F. Masten, "Shake Hands? Lilly Martin Spencer and the Politics of Art," *American Quarterly* 56, no. 2 (June 2004): 358.

[84] Klee uses *Domestic Happiness* in the introduction to her chapter, but does not fully describe how its subject matter supports her argument, except that the mother asserts control by raising her hand to stop her husband from waking the children. "Happy Family," 115–19.

[85] Katz, *Regionalism and Reform*, 62.

[86] Hills, *Domestic Happiness*, 218–20. Quote from p. 220.

Most likely, Spencer did not intend the children in the painting to represent her own, as Hills contends. Aiming to sell to the American Art-Union, she would have wanted the painting to appeal to the widest possible audience.[87] Spencer may have used her sons as models in order to get the anatomy and poses correct, but the finished work features an idealized group with which other white, middle-class nuclear families could identify. While the babies' ages in the painting do correspond to those of Benjamin and Angelo in early 1849, their features conform too well to contemporary majority descriptions of the idealized child—fair skin, ringlets, rosy lips—to be interpreted as portraits. In addition, Spencer turned the smallest infant's face, which had once shown in the preliminary drawing (fig. 11), into a generic profile, and eliminated the part in the older child's hair to make its gender more ambiguous.[88] These changes obscure any sense of individuality in the figures.

Surely, Hills's argument that Spencer portrayed in *Domestic Happiness* the worry all parents felt at a time of widespread illness and ineffective medical knowledge is astute, and as I have mentioned above, this sentiment can be found in Spencer's drawings of sleeping infants and children as well. Additionally, I would suggest, audiences could have seen in the painting an allusion to actual loss. Spencer's casting of the parents' gestures, as well as her particular portrayal of the children, suggest that the painting may

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[87] The administrators of the American Art-Union themselves made it a point to purchase a diverse array of pictures, because they knew to win an audience they would need broad appeal. For this reason, their policy forbid the purchase of portraits. Rachel N. Klein, "Art and Authority in Antebellum New York City: The Rise and Fall of the American Art-Union," *Journal of American History* 81, no. 4 (March 1995): 1541.

[88] During the mid-nineteenth century parents maintained similar hairstyles for little boys and girls—either long and curled or cropped. The only gender distinction came from the part in the hair. In an analysis of over fourteen hundred folk portraits of children, Jennifer A. Yunginger found that boys' hair was more often parted on the side (48% vs. 8%) and girls' hair in the middle (67% vs. 5%). The statistic for children without parts was closer: 45% for boys and 21% for girls. Introduction to *Is She or Isn't He? Identifying Gender in Folk Portraits of Children* (Sandwich, MA: Heritage Plantation of Sandwich, 1995), 18.

contain a gloss on the necessity of parental resignation and the hope of redemption and reunification in the event of child death.

Given that sleep, especially that characterized as peaceful, was widely used as a euphemism for death by the 1840s, the possibility exists that Spencer's contemporaries may have read the two children's state in such a way. People viewing the painting would have been able to refer to any number of consolation poems or daguerreotypes that made the same connection. In addition, as Hills mentions, they could have linked the pair to sleeping children cemetery sculptures, popular first in Great Britain and then in the United States. These included tombstones topped with the bodies of two children entwined, such as Francis Chantrey's *The Sleeping Children* (1817, fig. 25), a famous mortuary sculpture which was made into engravings and small ceramic copies for distribution both in England and America.[89] The carver of the more modest gravemarker of the Groot children may have been inspired by its example (fig. 14). While images like these often represented siblings who died years apart, it was not uncommon to have several children from one family die within weeks of each other during an epidemic. Consolation poems, such as Sigourney's "The Brothers," referred to these tragic events.

> The rose of June was fresh and fair,
> The morning sun was bright,
> As from their pleasant home they turn'd,
> Replete with young delight.
> ……
> But sudden as the archer's bow
> Bereaves the warbling nest,
> The burning fever's deadly shaft
> Stood rankling in their breast.
>
> Sad change came o'er each polished brow,
> And so, we say, *they died*,

[89] Hills, *Domestic Happiness*, 220.

Yet rather let us say they rose
To their Redeemer's side.[90]

The suggestion of loss is further evoked in *Domestic Happiness* by the patterns on the bedspread and father's dressing gown, which contain not flowers, but autumn leaves. Fallen foliage, which will soon decay, leads to the deadened season of winter.[91]

Spencer's audience may have seen in the painting allusions to death, even without the presence of grieving parents. Resignation was believed to be the most appropriate response to child mortality at this time, and Spencer seems to have promoted this idea in the way she arranged the parents' gestures. The preliminary drawing, which is inscribed *Don't Wake Them* (fig. 11), seems to be more about the family bond. The parents, who may have just had an intimate encounter (as suggested by the mother's slipping bodice), stand over their children, the product of their love. The father places his arm around his wife and hovers closely over the children. His right hand rests on the pillow with fingers outstretched near the older child's curls. The mother must forcefully push on his chest in a warning not to disturb their sleep. Spencer altered the parents' poses in the painting quite significantly, which changed the mood of intimacy to one of distance, and of acquiescence. The father now seems less eager. He detaches himself from the bodies, curling in the fingers of his right hand. In turn, the mother no longer uses a gesture of

[90] Sigourney, "The Brothers," in *Weeping Willow*, 103.

[91] The overall composition of *Domestic Happiness* resembles quite closely the organization of a much more sinister image, James Northcote's rendition of Act IV, Scene III from *King Richard the Third* in Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery. The painting, which depicts the murder by smothering of the two princes in the tower, was engraved in 1790 by Frances Legat (fig. 26). David and Alfred Smart Gallery, *Alderman Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery* (Chicago: The Gallery, 1978), 33. Given Spencer's interest in Shakespearean subjects (she filled her sketchbooks of this period with scenes from *Hamlet, King Lear, Measure for Measure, A Midsummer Night's Dream,* and *Romeo and Juliet*), it would not be surprising if she knew of this print. The idea that she may have used an image of murder as the basis of a painting about domestic happiness is disturbing, but it further supports the undertones of death in the work. My thanks to Anna O. Marley for drawing my attention to this print, an impression of which hangs at Homewood Museum in Baltimore.

restraint. Rather, her upturned hand reads more ambiguously. She might be signaling to him to keep quiet, so that she can check on the children's breathing. Alternatively, the gesture suggests that of a benediction, or final blessing, for children who will take earthly leave of their parents.[92]

The children in the painting do seem to be more than just terrestrial beings. Rather, they appear to inhabit that liminal state between heaven and earth described in the poem that accompanied Spencer's painting, *Infancy*, at her 1841 exhibition:

> What dignity
> Is on that cherub-lip, so exquisite,
> In curve and teint, and yet, so proudly firm!
> How beautiful—ay, more that beautiful—
> The thread-like tracery of those asure veins,
> Stealing along the drooped and snow-white lid!
> Do angels whisper thee, thou blessed one,
> That on those fairy lips flutters a smile
> So spirit-like and sad? So fair, so frail
> A thing ye are, ye seem not of our world…[93]

Their almost nude bodies, deliberately bare of blankets, cannot be explained by the weather—their father has on long sleeves and their mother is wrapped in a shawl. Instead, their meager, nearly transparent dress may indicate a lack of moral "blemishes"—their pure nature means they have nothing to hide.[94] Their purity is also symbolized by the white linens on which they lie. Reflecting the light, which emanates from the right, the sheets create a glowing focal point in an otherwise dark room. Because of their physical portrayal, it is tempting to read the large white pillow enclosing the older child's body as

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[92] My thanks to Cynthia Mills for helping me to see these differences between the preliminary drawing and the painting.

[93] Flagg, *Catalogue*, Martin family papers.

[94] Snyder, "Innocents in a Worldly World," 20. Snyder refers here to children on gravemarkers, but the concept relates to other visual forms.

angel's wings, similar to the passage in *The Baby's Dream Or the Angels Whisper*. The painting, then, contains many resonances of spiritual transcendence.

In fact, the infants in *Domestic Happiness* can be read as child redeemers if we take the iconography in other drawings in the series into account. They resemble closely the figures I have identified as referring to the Christ child and John the Baptist in *Mother Watching Over Two Sleeping Children*, who huddle together beneath a vigilant Madonna-like mother. The mother in *Don't Wake Them* wears a similar Marian head covering, which allows one to read the children she watches over as referring to the two holy children as well. In *Domestic Happiness* Spencer loosened the embrace of the older figure and enlarged the view of the smallest child's body. The infant's newly emphasized splayed arms and crossed ankles hint at Christ's body during the Crucifixion. The prominence of the palm of the strangely positioned left hand and the sole of the right foot focuses viewers' attention on the location of Christ's stigmata. Additionally, the infant's ambiguous garment suggests both the swaddling clothes of the baby Jesus and the shroud of the dead Christ. The religious references present in *Domestic Happiness*, coupled with the infants' angelic appearance, must have called to audiences' minds the current societal belief in deceased children's powers to act as conduits between heaven and earth for the rest of their family.

The title, *Domestic Happiness*, certainly refers to the present when one reads the painting as a tender moment in which parents pause to admire their sleeping children. It may also refer to a future moment, when the whole family will be reunited in an afterlife resembling home. American Protestants began to view heaven as a replication of earthly life, and especially domestic life, in the mid-nineteenth century. Non-evangelicals were

the first to exchange the idea of paradise as a place completely foreign to human experience for a concept of a domestic afterlife. By the early 1850s, however, even more mainstream denominations started picturing heaven as home. Reverend George Cheever wrote,"it is not the dim incomprehensible universality of Omnipresence merely, but a place for our abode, as determinate as place is for us now, and with as intimate a home relation, as the dearest fireside on this earth can have, nay incomparably more intimate and personal and definitely local, in our Father's House in heaven."[95] If, in fact, Spencer's audience saw in the sleeping children the qualities of child redeemers, the title could have held a double meaning for them.

By comparing Spencer's drawings of sleeping children and her painting *Domestic Happiness* to contemporary consolation literature and its corresponding visual culture, one begins to see the images not just as depictions of blissful familial experiences, but also as pictures that may have evoked in viewers ruminations on infant and child illness and/or death. Parents who had nursed a child during a severe sickness or even worried about a healthy child's probability of becoming ill would have identified with images of mothers intently watching over sleeping babies. Others who had experienced the loss of a child may have read in these works an air of mourning and resignation. If so, the images, like the literature, could have worked to comfort viewers with messages about the promise of child salvation and the chance for family redemption and reunification.

[95] George B. Cheever, *The Powers of the World to Come* (New York, 1853), 221, quoted in Douglas, *Feminization*, 222.

Chapter 2
Play: To Bond or Not to Bond

In 1849 the Western Art Union, based in Cincinnati, chose to engrave as its very first distribution to members a composition by Lilly Martin Spencer entitled *Life's Happy Hour* (fig. 27).[1] The Art Union's president, Charles Stetson, owned the painting and allowed the organization to borrow it for their purposes. They must have been invested in the project, for they hired New York engraver Alfred Jones, who had also translated works by William Sidney Mount and Francis W. Edmonds for the American Art-Union, to make the print for twelve hundred dollars (fig. 28).[2]

The Western Art Union actively built anticipation for the engraving by making a proof available to the curious months in advance. Giving a hint of its tone and subject matter, they tantalized subscribers in May 1849: "The plate is now in the hands of [the engraver], and will be executed in the style of the justly celebrated print, after Landseer, of the Queen and her Children; and will be ready for the printer's hands on the first of

[1] Bolton-Smith and Truettner date the painting c. 1849. However, Spencer writes to her parents from Cincinnati on January 13, 1848 that she is sending two paintings, entitled *One of Life's Happy Hours* and *Youth and Old Age,* to New York. One is to be sold to a private individual and the other is to go to the American Art-Union. LMS papers. While *Youth and Old Age* was distributed by the American Art-Union in 1849 as *Youth and Age*, *One of Life's Happy Hours* must have been returned to Spencer, who then sold it to Charles Stetson. Therefore, the painting can be dated c. 1847–1848. The title used here comes from the May 1849 *Record of the Western Art Union*: "The engraving for 1849…is from Mrs. Lilly M. Spencer's picture, entitled 'Life's Happy Hour,' and will measure fifteen by twenty inches." Quoted in Bolton-Smith and Truettner, *Joys of Sentiment*, 151.

[2] *Transactions of the Western Art Union, For the Year 1849*, 14. The Western Art Union had hoped that the plan to engrave a painting by an American artist each year would be beneficial to American art by helping to stimulate production. However, they report in *Transactions* that "in the three years of our existence, there has not been one picture painted and offered to the Society for this purpose." Their choice of *Life's Happy Hour*, then, which they picked not from a pool of artists' submissions, but from a private collection, seems significant as a work that epitomized American middle-class taste in art at that time. The finished print is titled *One of Life's Happy Hours*. Twelve hundred dollars in 1849 equals about $51,500 in 2008. Tom R. Halfhill, "Tom's Inflation Calculator," http://www.halfhill.com/inflation.html. Jones engraved Mount's *Farmers Nooning* and Edmonds's *Sparking* for the American Art-Union. "Bank-Note Engraving," Notices of the Fine Arts, *Godey's Lady's Book*, February 1848, 127.

November next. A Daguerreotype of the picture to be engraved, and a copy of the print above referred to, may be seen in the Gallery of the Art-Union."[3] The *Bulletin of the American Art-Union*, the organ of the New York institution, publicized the print in October 1849.[4] The distributed engraving did not disappoint. The *Literary World* praised the composition, commenting that the print would help raise the number of subscriptions to the Western Art Union in the coming year. The writer explained the subject matter:

> A beautiful boy in a slight linen tunic stands on his mother's lap, one bare foot resting on her hand, and is playfully adorning her head with flowers and fruits from a glass vase on a table beside her chair. Her arm is thrown round his waist and her head leans on his shoulder, her eyes are thrown back to catch a glimpse of her laughing boy, and are filled with an expression of deep and tranquil pleasure. The child is gay and joyous without being boisterous, and has not yet attained those plethoric proportions which are usually characteristic of infants in Mrs. Spencer's maternal compositions.[5]

The description of the print in the *Literary World* picks up on the physical closeness of the mother and child and the mother's emotional response: bare foot on hand, arm around waist, and head on shoulder equals "deep and tranquil pleasure." The toddler's gesture of placing flowers in his mother's hair adds to the feeling of intimacy in the work. He tenderly presses his cheek to the locks at her right temple, while gently

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[3] *Record*, quoted in Bolton-Smith and Truettner, *Joys of Sentiment*, 151. Samuel Cousins engraved Sir Edwin Landseer's *Queen and Children*. James Dafforne, *Pictures by Sir Edwin Landseer, Royal Academician* (London: Virtue, Spalding, and Daldy, n.d.), 90. The image, showing Victoria interacting with two of her children, must have been popular, because *Godey's Lady's Book* reproduced the picture, which they renamed *Household Treasures*, for the frontispiece of their November 1849 issue (fig. 29).

[4] "It is announced that the Cincinnati Art-Union have decided to engrave for their subscribers of the present year the picture of 'Life's Happy Hour," by L. M. Spencer." "Fine Art Gossip," *Bulletin of the American Art-Union*, October 1849, 26.

[5] *Literary World*, 13 July 1850, 35, Col. Merl M. Moore, Jr. files. Although this article refers to the print as *One of Life's Happiest Hours,* the plate is actually inscribed *One of Life's Happy Hours.* Inexplicably, Spencer was not as content with the print as *The Literary World*, complaining to her mother: "I send you Mother the engraving of my picture in Cincinnati but I must first tell you that the engraver has done his work very badly, and has not done justice in his copy of my picture—but it will give you a tolerable idea of the picture." LMS to Angélique Martin, 29 March 1850, LMS papers.

steadying the flowers at the crown of her head. The action of tucking a bud into the tresses above her right ear causes the strap of his tunic to slip from his left shoulder, revealing the soft flesh of his arm and chest. The sensual quality of the mother and child's embrace is further emphasized by their diaphanous clothing, which reveals the curve of the mother's breasts and calls attention to the location of the boy child's genitals. These sex organs appear adjacent to each other at the exact center of the composition.

While Spencer never again described the physical relationship between a mother and child in such terms, her oeuvre includes many images of mothers holding and playing with infants and toddlers that contain sensual undertones. During the late 1840s and 1850s, Spencer used these works to explore the nature of the intense bond between mothers and children, which was first endorsed and later disparaged by child-rearing experts. At the same time, she embarked on painting a number of pictures of youngsters playing with fathers that also responded to concerns put forth in contemporary advice manuals.

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Spencer created her images of mothers interacting with young children at a time when ideas about the initial steps of raising a child were changing. When belief in depravity was dominant, many Protestant parents delayed moral education until they thought a conversion experience was possible.[6] As the idea that children were born with both bad and good tendencies began to take hold in the 1830s and 1840s, prescriptive literature authors increasingly stressed the importance of early moral training to stamp

[6] Bushnell denounced this practice in *Christian Nurture*, 8–10.

out wickedness. Lydia Maria Child described how evil proclivities were called into action.

> First, by the influences of the nursery—those early influences, which, beginning as they do with life itself, are easily mistaken for the operations of nature; and in the second place, by the temptations of the world. Now, if a child has ever so bad propensities, if the influences of the nursery be pure and holy, his evils will never be excited, or roused into action, until his understanding is enlightened, and his principles formed, so that he has power to resist them. The temptations of the world will then do him no harm; he will 'overcome evil with good.'[7]

Because they believed that children were still highly vulnerable to moral corruption, authors urged parents to place the strongest emphasis on moral development within the safe confines of the home from the earliest age.

Simultaneously, middle-class families were becoming smaller units divided into distinct spheres. As farm and craft work began to yield to industrial production in the United States in the first half of the nineteenth century, work life became increasingly separated from home life, especially in cities. Men of the middle class took jobs outside the domestic sphere that paid enough to support their families. This meant their wives no longer needed to participate economically; rather, they now managed the household. The cementing of women's place in the home happened gradually and not without conflict. Historians Mary P. Ryan and Carroll Smith-Rosenberg have shown that the majority of American middle-class men and women actually did not structure themselves as task-divided nuclear families until the mid-1840s.[8]

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[7] Child, *Mother's Book*, 8.

[8] In Chapter 3 of *Cradle of the Middle Class*, "The Era of Association: Between Family and Society, 1825–1845," Ryan explains how associations (maternal, young men's, temperance) were just as important as families as agents of socialization until cities became too large from industrial capitalism. *Cradle*, 105–44. Smith-Rosenberg's chapter entitled "The Cross and the Pedestal: Women, Anti-Ritualism, and the Emergence of the American Bourgeoisie" tracks how women who gained a public voice during the Second Great Awakening became restricted to a domestic sphere by the 1840s. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg,

In their increasingly isolated place within the home, women were believed to be more moral than men, who were thought to be exposed everyday to the corrupt outside world.[9] Therefore, advice manual authors considered mothers the best parents to raise small children and addressed their books directly to them. Indeed, mothers' initial duties were considered essential not only for the character development of their own children, but for the stability and success of the nation. Authors made women feel their responsibility keenly. Child dedicated her book to "American mothers, on whose intelligence and discretion the safety and prosperity of our republic so much depend."[10] Reverend John S. C. Abbott forewarned that "as the mother is the guardian and guide of the early years of life, from her goes the most powerful influence in the formation of the character of man…Mothers have as powerful an influence over the welfare of future generations as all other causes combined…When our land is filled with virtuous and patriotic mothers, then will it be filled with virtuous and patriotic men."[11] Lydia Sigourney concurred: "The degree of [a mother's] diligence in preparing her children to be good citizens of a just government, will be the true measure of her patriotism."[12]

Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), 129–64. Interestingly, the Spencers' lives echo in microcosm the transition Ryan describes. In 1848 they left Cincinnati, a small city where they had been involved in the temperance movement, for New York, a large metropolitan area. It was there that Spencer began to produce her most well-known paintings of nuclear family life. "Sons and daughters of temperance are in a flourishing condition. Lilly and myself are both members of the order." BRS to Angélique and Gilles Martin, 11 February 1848, LMS papers.

[9] Jan Lewis, "Mother's Love: The Constitution of an Emotion in Nineteenth-Century America," in *Social History and Issues in Human Consciousness: Some Interdisciplinary Connections*, ed. Andrew E. Barnes and Peter N. Stearns (New York: New York University Press, 1989), 213.

[10] Child, *Mother's Book*, dedication page.

[11] John S. C. Abbott, *The Mother at Home; or The Principles of Maternal Duty Familiarly Illustrated* (1834; repr., New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1972), 2, 165–66.

[12] Sigourney, *Letters to Mothers*, 15.

A major aspect of children's moral training was the installation of a conscience that would regulate the child's behavior from within. In the recently formed Republic, people were concerned that freedom could lead to immorality and chaos. The next generation would need to learn self-control in order to maintain a lawful society. Mothers were encouraged to develop a loving bond with their child in order to form an obligation within the child to follow the morals the mother represented.[13] Rather than corporal punishment, the mother used the temporary withdrawal of affection, which she had been cultivating between herself and the child from an early age, to develop a sense of guilt within the child, which in turn, would hinder future misbehavior.[14]

Besides self-control, affection for one's fellow human beings was thought to be another way to maintain social order. At this time, women were believed to possess superior emotional faculties and to be naturally affectionate. A mother's love, especially, was considered irrepressible and eternal.[15] The poem accompanying Spencer's painting entitled *The First Born*, which was exhibited in Marietta in 1841, well reflected this attitude:

> Oh, there is not, in all this cold, and false,
> And hollow-hearted world, one fount of love
> So pure, so deep, so deathless, strong as death,—
> A love, whose joy might swell an angel's breast,—
> Whose tear would sully not an angel's cheek,—
> Upon whose pride a Deity might smile,—
> As that, which in a youthful mother's breast
> Wells up, while bending o'er her first-born child!
> ……
> Unchill'd—unfever'd—evermore it glows,

[13] Brodhead, "Spare the Rod," 72.

[14] Mary P. Ryan, *The Empire of the Mother: American Writing about Domesticity, 1830–1860* (New York: Institute for Research in History / Haworth Press, 1982), 53–54.

[15] Lewis, "Mother's Love," 209–10; 214.

Unchanged, unchanging;—in this fickle world
The one thing stable,—evermore the same![16]

Mothers, by loving their children deeply and inspiring reciprocal devotion, would set an example that their children would carry with them into adulthood, thus countering the selfishness endemic to an individualistic society.[17]

Mothers were encouraged to cater to their infants' and toddlers' physical needs in order to gain their affections,[18] a necessary part of preparation for their moral development. Rather than hardening devices, such as cold baths, which were popular earlier, nurture books advocated maintaining an infant's complete comfort. This meant breastfeeding, shielding the eyes and ears from strong stimuli, minimizing violent motion, dressing the child in loose clothing, and allowing crawling, so they could develop their senses, muscles, and motor skills at their own pace. After weaning, which should have been carried out as undisruptively as possible, the toddler was to be kept well fed, clean, in a temperate environment, and with opportunity for plenty of exercise.[19]

Child-rearing experts who encouraged mothers to shower love on their children and be hyper-attentive to their physical needs in preparation for their moral education were condoning the development of a very tight "maternal knot," as Ryan labels it. According to this historian, "ante-bellum writers were unrestrained in their celebration of maternal bonds, and were willing to paint them in graphically physical, almost erotic,

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[16] Flagg, *Catalogue,* Martin family papers.

[17] Lewis, "Mother's Love," 214–15.

[18] Child, *Mother's Book*, 6; Abbott, *Mother at Home,* 56.

[19] Child, *Mother's Book*, 2; Sigourney, *Letters to Mothers*, 28–29; Catharine E. Beecher, *A Treatise on Domestic Economy, For the Use of Young Ladies at Home, and at School* (1841; repr., New York: Source Book Press, 1970), 223; Ryan, *Empire of the Mother*, 54–55.

tones."[20] She uses as her main example physician William P. Dewees, whose *Treatise on the Physical and Medical Treatment of Children* was in its seventh edition in 1838.

For Dewees, a mother's love for her child is expressed through the physical act of breastfeeding. "God has declared almost in every part of his living creation, that the female, for a certain time, is the natural protector of her offspring; to the human female he has been particularly emphatic, implanting in her affections, which are rarely subdued; and by giving her an organization [i.e. breasts] most wonderfully fitted for the exercise of her best and most enviable feelings."[21] Dewees believed breastfeeding should be exercised not only because it provides essential nourishment for the infant, but because it gives physical pleasure to the mother:

> If we can believe the *fond mother* upon this point, there is not earthly pleasure equal to that of suckling her child—and if any reliance can be placed upon external signs, she is every way worthy of belief. This pleasure does not seem to be the mere exercise of social feeling while the mother is witnessing the delight of the little hungry urchin, as it seizes upon the breast—nor from the rapturous expression of its speaking eye, nor the writhing of its little body from excess of joy—but from a positive pleasure derived from the act itself; for most truly it may be said, when "The starting beverage meets its thirsty lip, 'Tis joy to yield it, as 'tis joy to sip."[22]

In his description of breastfeeding, Dewees focused on the mother's "earthly" feelings, and also described the infant's experience in orgiastic terms. To him, the act was one of equal enjoyment of mutual touching.

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[20] Ryan, *Empire of the Mother*, 57.

[21] William P. Dewees, *A Treatise on the Physical and Medical Treatment of Children*, 7th ed. (Philadelphia, 1838), 56–57.

[22] Dewees, *Treatise*, 59.

Although not always verging on erotic, descriptions of mother/child bonds often focused on the physical senses. A poem in *Godey's Lady's Book* from October 1833 concentrates on the employment of both touch and smell:

> Our little one is sleeping on my breast:
> Its soft warm cheek is pressed against my lip,
> In sweet unconscious innocence! I hear
> The soft and hallowed music of its breath
> And drink its balmy fragrance!
> ……
> 'Tis a precious thing
> A choice rich boon of heaven, to be a mother,
> And taste the nameless uncompanioned bliss,
> Which springs from such relationship![23]

The poem in *Godey's Lady's Book* that accompanied the reproductive print of Queen Victoria and two of her children after Landseer celebrated shared touch:

> Fair lady! thou art beautiful,
> And happy too, I trow—
> For a calm and holy feeling
> Is written on thy brow:
> And a wealth of pure affection
> Is centered in thy breast
> As thou gazest on thy little ones—
> Caressing and caressed![24]

Sigourney also believed the greatest contentment derived from physical closeness with one's child. "You are sitting with your child in your arms. So am I. And I have never been as happy before. Have you? How this new affection seems to spread a soft, fresh green over the soul. Does not the whole heart blossom thick with plants of hope,

[23] Mrs. H. M. Dodge, "The Husband's First Error," *Godey's Lady's Book*, October 1833, 190.

[24] See note 3 above. Richard Coe, Jr., "Household Treasures," *Godey's Lady's Book*, November 1849, 303.

sparkling with perpetual dew-drops? What a loss, had we passed through the world without tasting this purest, most exquisite fount of love."[25]

The tying of the maternal knot was not seen as unhealthy by child-rearing experts of the 1830s and 1840s. According to Ryan, these authors

> had not anticipated Freud's notion of the Oedipal crisis. Indeed, they were largely oblivious to the dangers of excessive attachments—both social and sexual—between mothers and sons. They did not express the understanding that children develop independence, initiative, or individual achievement by progressively differentiating themselves from their mothers. To the contrary, ante-bellum writers hoped to foster and prolong children's dependence on their parents. Boys as well as girls were invited to linger as long as possible in the feminine sphere of the home.[26]

In this relatively new familial experiment, which had gained proponents in the 1830s and become established in the 1840s, middle-class women focused wholeheartedly on the physical and emotional wellbeing of their children within the home. This led for many to an intense bond that was celebrated in sensual descriptions in advice books and poetry, as we have seen, and also in the visual arts.

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One category of art in particular, that of Madonna and Child imagery, was reinterpreted to glorify the mother/child bond. Americans read Renaissance originals and their copies in a new way and borrowed from their iconography to create new compositions. The paintings of the Madonna and Child by Raphael specifically appealed to nineteenth-century viewers, because Americans appreciated both the artist's

[25] Sigourney, *Letters to Mothers,* vii.

[26] Ryan, *Empire of the Mother*, 57–58.

spirituality and what they saw as domestic, nurturing renditions of the holy pair.[27] At that time it was commonly believed that he had been the first artist to concentrate on the feelings between the Mother and Child.[28] For a nineteenth-century audience, these images contained not only a religious resonance, but personified, in the figures of Mary and Jesus, the undying love between a mother and her child.

Raphael's *Madonna of the Chair* (*Madonna della Sedia,* 1514, fig. 30) was, by 1860, the best known of all of Raphael's Mother and Child images.[29] Nathaniel Hawthorne saw the original in Florence in 1858, but he had known about it earlier from "a hundred engravings and copies" he had seen in the United States.[30] In light of the nineteenth-century's emphasis on the emotional qualities in Raphael's images, it may be surmised that the *Madonna of the Chair*'s popularity arose in part from the emphasis on touch between the two figures. Jesus nestles closely on Mary's lap. The two look out at the viewer, pressing temple to forehead as the mother wraps her arms tightly around the Child, grasping the wrist of her left hand with her right. Jesus tucks his left hand and forearm under Mary's shawl, perhaps in preparation for suckling. His right foot flexes upwards, seemingly in anticipation as he finds her breast.

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[27] Jenny Franchot, *Roads to Rome: The Antebellum Protestant Encounter with Catholicism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 235.

[28] David Alan Brown, *Raphael in America* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1983), 16.

[29] The *Book of Raphael's Madonnas* by James P. Walker (New York, 1860) stated that *Madonna of the Chair* was "without exception, the best known of Raphael's Madonnas, and that from which the greatest number of copies have been taken. It is, therefore, incontestably the favorite with the public, if not with artists and amateurs." Quoted in Brown, *Raphael in America*, 24.

[30] Quoted in Brown, *Raphael in America*, 25.

Not coincidently, these Madonna and Child images were gaining in popularity precisely at the time when motherhood was being exalted as a holy vocation.[31] Mothers, thought of as virtuous and pure, had the vital responsibility of raising a morally sound generation that would live righteously and go on to eternal life. "That she may be enabled to fulfill a mission so sacred, Heaven has given her priority and power," wrote Sigourney.[32] Sarah Josepha Hale, one of the editors of *Godey's Lady's Book*, actually believed mothers' sanctity originated in the figure of Mary.

> The Mother's heart, was hallowed from above;
> And how her mortal hopes must intertwine
> With hopes immortal,—and she may not move
> From this high station which her Saviour sealed,
> When in maternal arms he lay revealed.[33]

Pictures of the Madonna and Child thus served to reinforce the idea that the role of mother was sacred. If the Madonna was depicted and interpreted as a mother, then all mothers must be holy.[34] "How have the divine Madonnas of Raphael, with the maternal instinct warm upon them, served to make all maternity divine!" declared one writer.[35]

This idea of American mothers being equated with Mary was not isolated to Raphael's *Madonna of the Chair*, although it was the most well-known image of the Virgin. The extremely popular women's magazine, *Godey's Lady's Book*, which

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[31] According to Franchot, this is precisely why many Protestants could admire pictures of the Madonna without fear of committing Mariolatry. *Roads to Rome*, 253. The publication of several books at midcentury attests to the popularity of Madonna and Child imagery at this time. One was the *Book of Raphael's Madonnas* (see note 29 above) and another was Jameson's *Legends of the Madonna*, first printed in 1852.

[32] Sigourney, *Letters to Mothers,* 15.

[33] Sarah Josepha Hale, "The Empire of Woman," *Godey's Lady's Book*, July 1845, 12.

[34] Higonnet, *Pictures of Innocence*, 42.

[35] "The Artist—His Mission—His Life," Notices of the Fine Arts, *Godey's Lady's Book*, February 1849, 147.

increased the number of images with religious subject matter in their publications in the 1840s and 1850s,[36] published an engraving entitled *The Christian Mother* after a Madonna by Murillo in August of 1850 (fig. 31). In using the general title, *The Christian Mother*, the editors equated Mary with all other Protestant and Catholic maternal figures and in turn declared these mothers holy.

In viewing these various Madonna and Child images, mothers most likely identified with Mary, and thus took pleasure in what Mary and Jesus were commonly believed to be enjoying within the image—the expression of mutual affection through physical touch.[37] These works, which contained a religious charge of sanction, invoked a clear message to nineteenth-century viewers: if the mother of God took pleasure in her baby's body, other mothers, themselves elevated to a holy position, should do likewise with their own infants and toddlers. Coupled with the beliefs of advice book authors, images of the Madonna and Child circulating within middle-class culture bolstered the idea that extreme maternal bonding was acceptable.[38]

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[36] Dominic Ricciotti, "Popular Art in *Godey's Lady's Book*: An Image of the American Woman, 1830–1860," *Historical New Hampshire* 27, no. 1 (Spring 1972): 20. For example, they published *The Sisters of Bethany* in February 1845; *The Deliverance of St. Peter from Prison* in August 1845; *Behold the Place Where They Laid Him* in October 1845; *Jesus Preaching by the Sea-side* in May 1850; *The Crucifixion* in July 1850; *Christ Entering Jerusalem* in February 1851; and *The Infant Saviour and St. John* in March 1851.

[37] Higonnet, *Pictures of Innocence*, 43. Higonnet writes that during the nineteenth century Madonna and Child images worked to create desire in women for *images* of children's bodies, but I would argue that in the climate of the 1830s and 1840s, when women were being encouraged in tie tight maternal knots with their infants and toddlers, images of the Madonna and Child served to condone an actual close physical relationship between mother and child.

[38] For Renaissance viewers, the sensual overtones in images of the Madonna and Child served a different purpose—they symbolized the theological idea that the mother of God is also the bride of her Son, that Christ, "having chosen her for his mother, was choosing her for his eternal consort in heaven." Leo Steinberg, *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion* (New York: Pantheon, 1983), 3, 24, 39.

Some people chose to celebrate the emotional and physical closeness between a living mother and child by borrowing from the Madonna and Child iconography. There are several instances in which artists used the *Madonna of the Chair* as the model for a double portrait. As a herald to the larger phenomenon that occurred in the nineteenth century, Benjamin West painted four versions of his wife Elizabeth and their first-born son using as inspiration a copy of the famous Renaissance composition that he had painted himself (fig. 32).[39] More than half a century later, Thomas Sully painted the portrait *Louisa Catherine Carroll and Her Child* in direct response to the *Madonna of the Chair* (fig. 33).[40] The painting is dated between 1834 and 1844, corresponding to the years when mothers were being encouraged to form strong emotional and physical bonds with their children. Like the original, Louisa and her son embrace each other tightly, pressing their heads together as they turn towards the spectator. The mother enfolds the child in her arms, while he reaches under her shawl for her bosom. The picture celebrates the connection between the two, the circular composition echoing the reciprocal and unending love they share.

Spencer created her own pictures of mothers and children that refer to the Madonna and Child imagery popular at midcentury. Her works are not portraits, but represent in more general terms mothers intimately interacting with their infants and toddlers. The earliest are drawings dating from 1842 to 1852 that she probably intended

[39] Brown, *Raphael in America*, 17.

[40] Brown, *Raphael in America*, 97n18. The image is reproduced in Ann C. Van Devanter, *"Anywhere So Long As There Be Freedom": Charles Carroll of Carrollton, His Family & His Maryland* (Baltimore: Baltimore Museum of Art, 1975), 263. In this catalogue, the painting, which is unsigned, is attributed to Sully.

as preliminary sketches for paintings.[41] *Mother Holding a Child in Her Arms* (1842–1848, fig. 34) is the most obviously Marian in conception. A woman with a veil typical of the one often depicted on the Madonna holds an infant close to her chest. Her left arm envelopes the child's torso, while her right supports its behind. The mother's left hand presses the infant's own left hand to her body as she looks with fondness into its eyes. The baby, in turn, caresses the mother with its right hand while returning her gaze. The sheet is hand-cut into a circle, perhaps in reference to Raphael's *Madonna of the Chair*, and probably meant to indicate the eternal love between the pair.

Two other drawings, which share similar compositions, also approach the Madonna and Child theme. The earlier sketch of 1842–1848 (fig. 35) is not as finished as the later drawing of 1848–1852 (fig. 36). Both descriptively titled *Allegorical Figure Blessing a Child* by Robin Bolton-Smith and William Truettner in 1973, the works seem just as likely to reference imagery of the holy pair, especially if one takes into account a very lightly drawn vignette of a *Madonna and Child* in *The Pedlar* sketchbook (fig. 37). Spencer has repositioned the child, who as Jesus stands between Mary's legs facing her in *Madonna and Child*, to lean against the mother's lap, facing out, in both versions of *Allegorical Figure Blessing a Child*. In addition, the later, more complete drawing shows the mother wearing a Marian veil and mantle similar to that in *Madonna and Child,* and seated in an outdoor setting, denoted by the mound of earth on which she rests and the garland of flowers held by the child. This could refer to the landscape in which the

[41] Johns, too, has recognized that Spencer drew on the tradition of Madonna and Child imagery in her sketchbook drawings of mothers and infants. *American Genre Painting*, 174. The drawings discussed here are part of *The Pedlar* and *Alas, Poor Yorick* sketchbooks, dated 1842–1848 and 1848–1852 respectively. Spencer made many of the images in these books into finished paintings; however, no oils matching these drawings have been located.

Madonna and Child are often depicted when shown full-length.[42] In these two drawings, the affection the mother and child share is portrayed through the mother's tender gesture of laying her hands on the toddler's head, the child's comfort in leaning back and almost fusing with the mother's body, and the loving gaze between the two.

Placed in context with the three previous drawings, the painting (and subsequent engraving) *Life's Happy Hour*, discussed at the beginning of the chapter in terms of the emotional and physical closeness it describes, can be included in this category of images that refer broadly to the Madonna and Child. The toddler balances on his mother's lap, one foot touching her hand, a trope common to images of Mary and Jesus (fig. 38). The mother wears a veil, which, although obscured by the baby's activity, can be seen resting against her hair along the right side of her face. One of the flowers the child is actively placing in his mother's hair, a red rose, is a symbol of the Virgin that at this time denoted love.[43]

Unlike West and Sully, who chose to replicate Raphael's *Madonna of the Chair*, in which the mother and child look out to engage the viewer as a *sacra conversazione,* or devotional group, Spencer used in her drawings and painting the convention of the *sacra famiglia*, or domestic group, in which the figures are depicted in direct relation to each other.[44] This is a significant change, because it places emphasis totally on the connection *between* the mother and child; the pair concentrates solely on their feelings for each other

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[42] Jameson, *Legends of the Madonna*, 121.

[43] Jameson, *Legends of the Madonna*, xlv. In the mid-nineteenth-century emblematic tradition associated with the Virgin, the lily represented purity and the rose symbolized love and beauty.

[44] Jameson, *Legends of the Madonna*, 250, makes this distinction clear. Although Spencer completed her "Madonna and Child" works before Jameson published her text in 1852, the proximity in time of these written and visual documents shows that ideas about the Madonna and Child were circulating through Anglo-American culture.

without recognizing the presence of a third person inside or outside the picture. It is not surprising that Spencer chose the formula of the *sacra famiglia* at this time for her images that play on the theme of the Madonna and Child. Her work on these drawings and painting coincided with the height of the trend to encourage extreme bonding between mothers and children.

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The emphasis on intense bonding produced parents anxious about allowing their young adult children to leave home for a world they considered menacing. In the novel *Alderbrook*, Fanny Forrester expressed a mother's fears by comparing her son's experience during his early childhood with what he faced as a young adult: "Her first born, her only son, the darling of her young heart, her pride in the first years of wedded life, he whom she had loved so fondly and cherished so tenderly—to what vice, what suffering might he be exposed."[45] Clearly, this mother does not feel confident in her son's future. On the other hand, these practices created youths reluctant to make their way independently from their parents. Boys especially had a hard time. They grew up in an atmosphere where their physical needs were met consistently and their emotional lives centered on one person—their mother, who had reciprocated their love without fail. With this kind of upbringing, they were not prepared to transition to the competitive and unpredictable world of commerce.[46]

In the 1850s, physicians, educators, and authors began to condemn the extreme attachments between mothers and children that had been advocated wholeheartedly

[45] Fanny Forrester, *Alderbrook* (Boston, 1849), 37, quoted in Ryan, *Empire of the Mother*, 64.

[46] Ryan, *Empire of the Mother*, 59–60; Cott, "Notes," 16–17.

throughout the previous two decades. Whereas once they had promoted breastfeeding as an activity from which both mother and baby would derive great pleasure, now writers conceived of it as an impersonal act requiring scientific accuracy. For example, Alfred Donné, the court pediatrician to Louis Phillippe whose book was translated into English in 1859, believed breastfeeding should be for the purpose of nourishment, not as an "exaggeration of the sentiments of nature and maternal love."[47] He advised that "nursing requires to be conducted with a certain method. It must take place at intervals as well-regulated as possible; the caprices which manifest themselves thus early must be wisely resisted, and bad habits must be avoided; and, when the mother is certain that her child has all which he needs, that he has nursed sufficiently, and that he does not suffer, she must know how to divert his attention, and even be able to bear his cries, without yielding to new importunities."[48]

Indeed, advice givers cautioned mothers that they could not and should not fulfill all of their child's needs. Special types of furniture, like the high chair, swing, and jumper were marketed to replace maternal laps and arms and to keep infants happy by themselves. For example, Rogers's Patent Infant Gymnasium, or Baby Jumper, must have been popular in the United States by 1848, because a Dr. Conquest recommended an imported version to English parents that year.[49] Advisors also encouraged parents to find playmates for their offspring: "It is well to seek companions, of their own age, for children,—to make them play together, and accustom them early to live in the society

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[47] Alfred Donné, *Mothers and Infants, Nurses and Nursing* (Boston, 1859), 35, quoted in Ryan, *Empire of the Mother*, 99.

[48] Donné, *Mothers and Infants*, 55–56.

[49] Christina Hardyment, *Dream Babies: Three Centuries of Good Advice on Child Care* (New York: Harper and Row, 1983), 66.

which suits them."[50] Advocates of kindergarten maintained that children should not be insulated in the home after the age of three, but exposed to peers in preparation for adult interactions with co-workers. School, they had begun to believe, was a more comprehensive site for socialization, being able to provide tools for the development of relational and vocational skills.[51]

Authors provided advice on tempering what they saw as excessive maternal affection, and they also published warnings about what might happen to grown sons if mothers did not follow their recommendations. T. S. Arthur's *Ten Nights in a Bar Room* (1854) described a young man full of promise whose innocent affability, stemming from his overly close relationship to his mother, made him susceptible to the influences of confidence men. He ended up a slave to alcohol and a disgrace to his family.[52] Besides receiving words of caution like these from the popular press, Spencer may have been admonished by her own parents not to tie the maternal knot too tightly. Followers of the philosopher Charles Fourier, they had joined a phalanx, or utopian community, near Braceville, Ohio, in late 1847.[53] Fourierists denounced extreme maternal bonding as a vice stemming from idleness.[54]

Spencer's paintings from the mid- to late-1850s demonstrate, however, that mothers were not ready to give up the intense attachments with their children that experts

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[50] Donné, *Mothers and Infants*, 209.

[51] Ryan, *Empire of the Mother*, 100–101.

[52] The plot of this novel is summarized in Ryan, *Empire of the Mother*, 68–69.

[53] While her parents' papers at the Archives of American Art contain correspondence from 1845 mentioning the Trumbull Phalanx, Spencer's letters were not addressed to Braceville until January 1848. Martin family papers and LMS papers.

[54] Ryan, *Empire of the Mother*, 84.

had earlier encouraged. In many compositions from this period, including *Patty-Cake* (mid-1850s, fig. 39), *This Little Pig Went to Market* (1857, fig. 40),[55] *Bo-Peep* (1858, fig. 41) and *Mother and Child* (1858, fig. 42), she celebrated the close emotional and physical bond between mothers and their infants and toddlers. This is established in the setting, clothing, and interaction between the figures.

In three of the four images (where the setting is described most fully), the mother and child are pictured in the parents' bedroom rather than the nursery. This is shown by the elaborate canopied bed in the right background of *Patty-Cake* and the ornate bassinet in the background of *This Little Pig Went to Market* and *Mother and Child*. At this time, bassinets were placed in the parlor or master bedroom and served as a presentation device to display the baby to the public (fig. 43).[56] These works, however, are set at times when visitors would not be calling: either at the beginning of the day, as shown by the rumpled bedclothes in *This Little Pig Went to Market* and the clock that reads nine in *Mother and Child*, or the end of the day, signified by the cozy fire that lights the room in *Patty-Cake*. This transitional time between wake and sleep is also indicated by the mothers' lace

[55] This dissertation will use the version of *This Little Pig Went to Market* in the collection of the Ohio Historical Society. It is inscribed 1857 in the lower left and is 16 by 12 inches in dimension. Another version with the same dimensions exists at the New Britain Museum of America Art, but contains no inscribed date. It is still not clear how these two paintings, which are very similar to each other, relate to a third version, now lost, that measured 24 by 20 inches and that was raffled to Cosmopolitan Art Association subscriber Mrs. E. W. Collins in 1860. They might be preliminary studies for, or copies after, the larger painting. An engraving of the subject, which appeared as the frontispiece of the December 1859 issue of the *Cosmopolitan Art Journal*, contains several details (like a cup on the table, different patterns on the mother's clothing, and a more somber expression on the baby's face) that suggest it was made from the unlocated version.

[56] Karin Calvert, "Cradle to Crib: The Revolution in Nineteenth-Century Children's Furniture," in Heininger, *Century of Childhood*, 54–55. By the mid-1850s, cribs used in nurseries were made of white painted metal and were unadorned. Karin Calvert, *Children in the House: The Material of Early Childhood, 1660–1900* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1992), 132–33. The toddler in *Mother and Child* seems too old to sleep in a bassinet, but it may be present for use by a younger sibling.

nightgowns beneath rich dressing gowns.[57] The setting of an adult bedroom at the beginning or end of the day, often a place and time for intimacy, lends the pictures a sensual air.

Adding to this atmosphere is the lack of clothing worn by the infants and toddlers. Their semi-nude state does not demonstrate a belief in hardening young children through exposure, for that idea had been rejected by the 1850s. Instead, the picturing of skin hints at the close physical relationship between each mother and child pair. The babies are outfitted in short white nightclothes or undergarments made from gauzy material. For many the clothing has slipped down to reveal rounded shoulders and bare chests with faint nipples. The infant in *Bo-Peep* has removed one of his arms completely from his shift; a pink ribbon and gold clasp, which trims the front of the left strap, also can be seen as part of the right strap, resting on a pile of fabric above his right knee. Additionally, the edging up of the filmy garments along the babies' thighs reveals soft, plump folds of flesh. The nakedness of the infants is further emphasized by the full covering of each mother. In *Mother and Child*, the toddler's undress is also accentuated by the fact that his mother holds his shoes and socks.

The touching and interacting of the dyads also reveals the emotional and physical bond between mother and child. In some of the works, the pair seems almost to fuse with each other in the conflation of their white nightclothes. In *Patty-Cake*, the baby's thighs and shift appear to emerge from the mother's lace-covered lap. The infant's undergarments in *This Little Pig Went to Market* form a diagonal shape that mimics the

[57] Lesley Wright, catalogue entry for *This Little Pig Went to Market*, in *New Britain Museum of American Art: Highlights of the Collection*, ed. Pamela T. Barr (New Britain, CT: The Museum in association with Prestel, 1999), 1:152.

portion of the mother's white nightgown covered by his body. In these two works, each mother holds the child on her lap and touches his extremities, creating several contact points between the two. The baby in *This Little Pig Went to Market*, in turn, reaches beneath his mother's clothes at the level of her breasts, implying that he desires to start, or has just finished suckling, that most pleasurable of bonding activities.[58] In *Mother and Child*, the pair does not make a physical connection, but instead shares eye contact and a loving smile. The composition of *Bo-Peep,* which features a toddler directly confronting the viewer, implies that he is looking out at his mother as he lifts the blanket away from his face.[59] The fact that the baby takes up the majority of the composition, that he appears at eye level, and that the viewer cannot see the nearest edge of the cushion on which he sits points to the implied closeness of the mother figure during their interaction.

However, Spencer certainly tempered the representation of the mother/child emotional bond with the more obvious subject matter of the works: the playing of nursery games with children of various ages and abilities. In *Patty-Cake,* the mother claps the hands of an infant who does not have sufficient motor skills yet to do it himself, while she sings the accompanying rhyme.[60] *This Little Pig Went to Market* shows a baby

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[58] Johns also acknowledged the bond between the mother and infant in *This Little Pig Went to Market* when she wrote, "This is a room absolutely devoted to the child's comfort and, the modern viewer feels, the comfort that both child and mother feel with their bodies. The child is alive with pleasure, secure in being at the center of his mother's universe. In turn, the sumptuously dressed mother seems completely fulfilled." *American Genre Painting*, 174–75.

[59] While both men and women bought lithographs after Spencer's designs, and therefore either sex could have been the viewer in reality, the narrative of the work implies a female audience. Spencer, as a rule, did not picture fathers interacting with children who were in such a state of undress. See my analysis of children's interactions with fathers later in this chapter.

[60] One version of the rhyme goes: "Patty Cake, Patty Cake, / Baker's Man; / That I will Master, / As fast as I can; / Prick it and prick it, / And mark it with a T, / And there will be enough / For Jackey and me." Quoted in William S. Baring-Gould and Ceil Baring-Gould, *The Annotated Mother Goose* (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, 1962), 239.

holding up his foot so that his mother can recite verses using his toes as markers. The toddler in *Bo-Peep* lifts a blanket from his head to reveal a delighted expression; he is old enough to play the game without the assistance of his mother.[61] *Mother and Child* shows a toddler who can now walk taking turns at what I read as a game of peekaboo with his mother. She waits to use the draped fabric to screen her upper body from the child, while he reveals himself to her from behind the chair.[62]

The group of four images, completed within three or four years of each other, seem to refer to the process of a child's development of a separate self-identity. All the pictures feature blonde-headed boys, identified as such by the side part in their hair.[63] They could be interpreted as portraying the same child making incremental progress towards selfhood.[64] Alternatively, they could be seen as picturing several children at different stages of separation from their mothers. In either case, Spencer appears to present in these works the gentle and gradual breaking of the maternal bond between a

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[61] James O. Halliwell, writing about nursery rhymes in the 1840s, explained a version of the game Bo-peep in this way: "a nurse would conceal the head of the infant for an instant and then remove the covering quickly, crying, 'Bo-peep!'" Quoted in Baring-Gould and Baring-Gould, *Annotated Mother Goose*, 96. In 1872, Eastman Johnson depicted another adaptation, in which the toddler covers not his or her own face, but that of the mother (fig. 44).

[62] Anne Fernald and Daniela K. O'Neill observed in the 1990s that a baby's participation in peekaboo changes from passive to active as the child gets older. Between eight or nine and fifteen months he or she assumes the roles of both agent and observer. When he or she begins to walk, the toddler may hide behind furniture and reappear on his or her own, smiling. "Peekaboo across Cultures: How Mothers and Infants Play with Voices, Faces, and Expectations," in *Parent-Child Play: Descriptions and Implications*, ed. Kevin MacDonald (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 270–271.

[63] See Chapter 1, note 88.

[64] Evidence for this reading includes the fact that all mothers pictured seem to be the same individual, based on Spencer's own features, and the similarity of the bassinet in *This Little Pig Went to Market* and *Mother and Child* suggest the two are set in the same bedroom (although the carpets do not appear to match). In addition, the chronology of paintings and lithograph match the progression of the child from passivity to activity.

mother and her offspring that had once been so desired, but which was now seen to be detrimental to the future of both son and country.

Antebellum parents conceived of play not as carefree and imaginative, but as an activity that could and should teach children morally and intellectually.[65] Therefore, the games in which the mothers and children engage in Spencer's works may be interpreted as meant to accomplish something. Amusements, or nursery rhymes involving non-soothing touch like clapping, bouncing, and tickling, are believed by twentieth- and twenty-first-century psychologists to address the child's most basic fears at the time between fourteen and twenty-four months when the toddler begins to perceive itself as a separate being. These fears are understood to include fragmentation or going to pieces, complete isolation, and losing the mother and her love. Through the sharing of jostling touch and more soothing language, rhyming games, it has been argued, help young children express and master fears in order to achieve selfhood without totally insulating themselves from others.[66] While these ideas have only been expressed in our own time, the amusements to which they refer existed in the nineteenth century as well. The fact that Spencer chose to portray the very games that modern psychologists have identified as aids to developing an individual self at the very time child-rearing advisors and others were promoting separation between mothers and children seems provocative.

In *Patty-Cake*, Spencer portrays what would now be considered the least threatening amusement being played with a child just old enough to begin the separation-

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[65] Gary Cross, *Kids' Stuff: Toys and the Changing World of American Childhood* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 19.

[66] Lucy Rollin, *Cradle and All: A Cultural and Psychoanalytic Reading of Nursery Rhymes* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1992), 75–77.

individuation process. A mother's act of taking a toddler's arms and clapping its hands together is believed to emphasize their separateness.[67] Spencer appears to show both the child beginning to realize that the body parts being clapped belong to him and the mother's reinforcement of this—his gaze and that of his mother's now meet at the site of his hands, whereas in the preliminary sketch Spencer had portrayed the two looking into each other's eyes (fig. 45).

Another amusement that psychologists have argued helps children through the process of separation involves the dividing of the body into parts. Spencer seems to portray this activity in *This Little Pig Went to Market*, a painting whose title refers to the nursery rhyme accompanying the counting of the child's toes by the mother:

> This little pig went to market,
> This little pig stayed home,
> This little pig had roast beef,
> This little pig had none,
> This little pig cried, Wee-wee-wee-wee-wee,
> I can't find my way home.[68]

According to modern psychologists, the rhyme gives expression to toddlers' fears of hunger and separation from parents, while the action of pinching each toe arouses anxiety about fragmentation. Lucy Rollin postulates that "such games may threaten, but they reward the child's trust in the adult with restoration to wholeness and a reinforcement of the cohesive self that the child is working to develop."[69] Spencer's painting seems to hint at this idea: the toddler is already smiling, even though his mother has just begun to tug at

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[67] Ibid., 85.

[68] Rollin, *Cradle and All*, 87. A common, alternate last line to the nursery rhyme is: "All the way home." Baring-Gould and Baring-Gould, *Annotated Mother Goose*, 235. In either case, the two last lines refer to the little pig's anxiety caused by not being home.

[69] Rollin, *Cradle and All*, 99.

his big toe. He seems to anticipate that the rhyme will end with laughter, a hug, and the pressing together of the separated "piggies."

The images *Bo-Peep* and *Mother and Child* appear to show more straightforwardly toddlers separating from their mothers. Psychologists have argued that the finding and seeing of body parts by the mother that the bo-peep and peekaboo games allow builds body self-awareness in the child.[70] In *Bo-Peep*, the mother's merely implied presence reinforces the idea that the child is an individuated being. In *Mother and Child*, the physical division made by both the mother, who holds the fabric up before her, and the child, who stands behind the chair, can be interpreted as signaling the end point of the process: through the activity of games, the child has successfully separated himself from his parent. In fact, the picture suggests not just separation, but willfulness in the toddler's preference for playing over getting dressed. His hiding can be read as a refusal to submit to his mother's entreaties to don his socks and shoes, which she holds in her right hand.[71]

Spencer's seeming willingness to depict mothers' attempts to help their children form a selfhood in these pictures does not negate her portrayal of their intimate bond. *Patty-Cake* and *This Little Pig Went to Market* clearly refer to the Madonna and Child theme still popular in the United States in the 1850s and explored fully by Spencer in the 1840s.[72] The arched format in *This Little Pig Went to Market* harks back to Renaissance

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[70] Margaret S. Mahler, Fred Pine, and Anni Bergman, *The Psychological Birth of the Human Infant: Symbiosis and Individuation*, 1st pbk. ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 221.

[71] Katz reads the image as a mother trying to dress her resisting female child. According to this author, the child is learning through her mother's example (of stability, order, self-monitoring) to act in the way expected of her. The mother uses play to persuade the child to the correct behavior. *Regionalism and Reform*, 38. Katz's interpretation relies on the idea that the child is a girl, but the side part reveals that the child is actually a boy.

[72] Some art historians have railed against a Madonna and Child reading for *This Little Pig Went to Market*. Both Lubin and Klee see the work as comical; according to these scholars, the nursery rhyme referring to

altarpieces and the figures' poses replicate the *sacra conversazione,* or devotional group type, that artists like West and Sully copied from Raphael.[73] *Mother and Child*, also painted on an arched board, emphasizes the youthful body of the toddler, a body that will still be cuddled and caressed, and the pleasure-filled look shared by the pair. This bond is underscored when the picture is compared to an engraving of the same year published in the *Cosmopolitan Art Journal*. In *The First Pair of Boots* (fig. 46), a mother holds a tiny pair of shoes, just like Spencer's figure. However, this women looks sullen as she watches her son practice walking in his new boots. He is so absorbed in this grown-up endeavor that he ignores his mother altogether.[74]

Spencer's careful balance between the sensuous depiction of the mother/child bond and the mothers' active participation in games that may have helped untie the maternal knot shows she advocated a compromise. Responding to the alarmists of the 1850s, who believed that extreme bonding between mothers and infants later ruined boys' chances to thrive in the outside world, Spencer showed through these images that the intense bonding that took place early in an infant's life was acceptable, because it could be gradually mitigated without emotional harm to either mother or child, and without serious consequence for society at large.[75]

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the haves and have nots and the "impish grin" of the infant make it more of a satire than a statement about the purity of motherhood. Lubin, *Picturing a Nation*, 169; Klee, "Happy Family," 125.

[73] The version of *This Little Pig Went to Market* in the New Britain Museum of American Art has a hand-cut arched top, which indicates that the "sacred" format was very intentional. Wright, *This Little Pig*, 153.

[74] Jo B. Paoletti and Carol L. Kregloh note that the experience of firsts, like haircuts and breeches, were described in nineteenth-century periodicals as distressing events for mothers. They were considered the "first steps toward the inevitable day when she would lose her son forever to the world outside the home." "The Children's Department," in *Men and Women: Dressing the Part*, ed. Claudia Brush Kidwell and Valerie Steele (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989), 33.

[75] Spencer's message about compromise would have reached a wide audience, because three of the four images discussed here were made into prints. John Rogers engraved *This Little Pig Went to Market* for the

Only one painting from this period that features a mother interacting with her children (but not playing games), seems to reject the idea of balance. *Choose Between*, painted around 1857 (fig. 47), shows a mother holding a litter of kittens on her lap. She has gathered her two children to her for the purpose of selecting one to keep. Her young son is quick to pick, but the little girl has a harder time, knowing that those who are not chosen will be put to death. Lubin has interpreted the title, *Choose Between*, as referring to the mother's emotional choice between a son, who in his decisive act shows that he will inevitably join the unprincipled male sphere, and a daughter, whose wavering indicates that she will remain in the moral female sphere.[76] The details of the work make clear that the mother will choose her daughter over her son: she turns towards the girl and curves her left arm around her; the child is thus engulfed in the space made by the mother's arm, her skirts, and the domestic object of the cloth-covered table. The boy, despite the fact that his left hand grabs his mother's shoulder and his right hand intrudes into her womb-like lap, is ignored—the mother's gaze rests solely on her daughter. Her disregard is further emphasized by the boy's blurred facial features; his eyes only appear as smudges, while his sister's are crisply delineated. Rather than maintaining a loving bond as she gently weans her son from her affections, the mother seems to show an abrupt rejection that is reinforced by the painting's allusion to the future fate of the unwanted kittens.

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frontispiece of the December 1859 issue of the *Cosmopolitan Art Journal*. Jean-Baptiste Adolphe Lafosse translated *Bo-Peep* into a lithograph for publisher Wilhelm Schaus. *Patty-Cake* was engraved by 1859, according to Ellet. *Women Artists*, 325.

[76] Lubin, *Picturing a Nation*, 198.

Spencer's images from the 1850s featuring interactions between fathers and young children are not as extensive as those focused on mothers. This may not be surprising, as the role of fathers in day-to-day childcare gradually diminished as more and more men began to work outside the home. Midcentury advice books signaled concern over a perceived lack of fathers' involvement with their children, blaming increased interest in success in business as the cause of their absence from the home, their disregard for child-rearing responsibilities, and their lack of emotional investment. Spencer's work, however, shows that men still found it important to bond with their young children, even if they no longer participated as closely in the duties of child nurture.

Spencer's own personal experience of fatherhood in no way matched middle-class conventions of the time. Her husband Benjamin Rush Spencer did not work outside the home once they moved to New York in 1848, but instead helped with the technical and business aspects of Spencer's career, and participated in housework and caring for their children.[77] Because he looked after and nursed the children on a daily basis, he probably found it easier to form emotional attachments with his offspring than other fathers at this time. Spencer wrote to her parents after their first son was born: "he perfectly dotes on

[77] According to the Spencers' granddaughter, Lillian Spencer Gates, Benjamin Rush Spencer was born in England in 1808 to a lord. After living in Ireland, where his father had been sent to quell a rebellion, he immigrated to Virginia with his brothers and then moved to Cincinnati, where he met and married Lilly Martin in 1844. Ann Byrd Schumer, "Lilly Martin Spencer: American Painter of the Nineteenth Century" (master's thesis, Ohio State University, Columbus, 1959), 30. Gates described her grandfather as a merchant tailor who imported cloth and made suits for gentlemen. Lillian Spencer Gates to Robin Bolton-Smith, 22 July 1973, NMAA Exhibition Records. Spencer may have discouraged her husband from continuing as a tailor, for she wrote to her parents in 1847: "Ben has had nothing to do for some time in the way of tailoring and is not likely to get any for a long time yet—for my own part I whish he never went to it again—neither himself nor myself like the society it throws him in." LMS to Angélique and Gilles Martin, 14 February 1847, LMS papers. Soon afterwards she reported that he had a job painting magic lantern slides. LMS to Angélique and Gilles Martin, 2 October 1847, LMS papers. Not until 1852, when her career began to flourish in New York, did she write to her parents that "Ben is as busy as Myself, he helps me also at painting now—and it enables me to engage more work at once, than I could otherwise do." LMS to Angélique Martin, 11 August 1852, LMS papers. In other letters she described how he prepared the frames for her paintings, delivered art, and served as her agent. Freivogel, "Lilly Martin Spencer," 14.

his baby."[78] She reported later an accident involving their second son, Angelo, in which Benjamin constantly held him for several days until he got better, something a father who worked outside the home could never do.[79] Benjamin's attachment to children apparently characterized his personality; he was remembered by one of his grown granddaughters when she saw a painting by Spencer depicting a figure, who has been identified as Benjamin, with a child on his knee: "That would be just like him he always had children around him and was a jovial and cheerful man."[80]

Spencer's drawing, *The Artist's Family*, from the *Alas, Poor Yorick* sketchbook (c. 1850, fig. 48), shows her perspective on her husband's place within their family. The group of four forms a tight circular composition. Spencer wraps her arms around each of her small sons and Benjamin engulfs the whole family in his leaning pose; he supports his wife by pressing up to her back and reaches his left arm around so that it is in line with his youngest son's body. One can imagine that if the sketch was finished, Benjamin's lower torso or legs would be shown resting behind his older son's upright figure on the left. Benjamin's presence is not hierarchical, however. His and Spencer's heads appear at the same level, attesting to their companionate marriage. Comparing this to other family portraits from around the same time shows that Benjamin's close bond with his young family may have been unusual. For example, *The Reverend John Atwood and His Family* by Henry Darby (1845, fig. 49) features a father whose parental duties seem to be related mainly to the religious education of his children—there are no less

[78] LMS to Angélique and Gilles Martin, 26 March 1846, LMS papers.

[79] LMS to Angélique and Gilles Martin, 6 March 1852, LMS papers.

[80] Mary Spencer Conkling, daughter of Spencer's son Benjamin Martin Spencer, quoted by her husband Frederick M. Conkling in a letter to Edith S. Reiter, 11 October 1949, Martin family papers. The painting precipitating the comment was *The Centennial*, 1895–1902.

than five bibles in the picture. The great physical separation between the father and his smallest children implies emotional distance between the patriarch and these youngsters; the only sense of connection occurs in one older son's gesture of placing his foot on the rung of his father's chair.

Starting in the 1830s and continuing into the 1850s, advice authors recognized and decried men's absence from the home, lack of interest in child-rearing responsibilities, and emotional distance, which they blamed on pursuit of economic success and of outside social pleasures, like smoking and drinking. Both John S. C. Abbott and Theodore Dwight, Jr. admonished in 1834:

> The temptation is very great for men who are engaged in literary pursuits, and overwhelmed by public cares, to neglect their domestic duties. But how ruinous is this to usefulness and happiness! It is better to be a poor man, and it is better to be an humble man, than to be disgraced in life by the profligacy of those who call us father…Every man, whatever be his situation in life, is bound to regard the duties he owes his children as among the most sacred he has to discharge. If he neglect them, he must reap the bitter consequences.[81]

> Although so large a share of the care of children devolves upon the mother, let the father be careful not to underrate his own duties or influence. There are few who do all they might for the physical, intellectual, moral and religious education of their children; and when the importance of their own proper task is considered, and the improper influences by which they are too often induced to neglect it, they must acknowledge it is their duty to make new exertions in behalf of their children.[82]

Nearly a decade later, the problem was seen as still existing. In *The Mother's Magazine* in 1842, Abbott continued to criticize "the father [who]…eager in the pursuit of business,

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[81] Abbott, *Mother at Home*, 169–70.

[82] Theodore Dwight, Jr., *The Father's Book; or Suggestions for the government and instruction of young children, on principles appropriate to a Christian country* (Springfield, MA, 1835), vii, quoted in Frank, *Life with Father*, 28–29.

toils early and late, and finds no time to fulfill…duties to his children."[83] A story in *The Lily* of 1849 described a man's apathy towards his wife and children. "[He] consoles himself with cigars, oysters, whiskey punch and politics; and looks upon his 'home' as a very indifferent boarding house. A family of children grow up about him; but neither him nor his [wife] knows anything about training them; so they come up helter-skelter…and not one quiet, happy, hearty, homely hour is known throughout the whole household."[84]

Even into the 1850s, these writers lobbied men to temper their career ambitions with an intense love for home and its occupants.[85] They wanted men to commit more emotional energy to their families. However, advisors did capitulate somewhat. As they increasingly promoted women as the primary caregivers and moral educators of young children, they came to understand men's role as husband as more important than that of father. A good father, historian Stephen Frank has argued, was believed to be a good husband who would support his wife materially, cultivate her maternal love, and reinforce her authority with their children.[86]

A comparison of two prints in popular women's magazines from this period shows how the ideal father changed over time. *The Happy Family* (fig. 50), engraved by John Sartain as the frontispiece for the January 1843 issue of *Miss Leslie's Magazine*, depicts a father seated at a breakfast table literally surrounded by his children. With small book in hand, he takes time during the meal to impart knowledge to his offspring, the

[83] Quoted in Hardyment, *Dream Babies*, 34.

[84] "Home Sweet Home," *The Lily*, 1 February 1849, 10, quoted in Lubin, *Picturing a Nation*, 168.

[85] Robert L. Griswold, *Fatherhood in America: A History* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 14; Frank, *Life with Father*, 2; Klee, "Happy Family," 131.

[86] Frank, *Life with Father*, 25, 37.

transmission of which is signified by his hand, placed on the head of a child who leans on his knee and listens carefully. All three children are situated nearest their father, while their mother looks on at right. Twelve years later, the father in *The Happy Home* (fig. 51), the frontispiece of *Godey's Lady's Book* for February 1855, is pushed out of the family circle to occupy a place of his own on the left. Now reading a newspaper, which conveys information about the political and business worlds, he is practically ignored by the rest of the family, who congregate around the seated mother in the background (except for one child who interacts with a grandfather figure). The image appears to report that during the 1850s the happy family was one in which the father was present, but located on the periphery.

Recent scholarship by historians Stephen Frank and Shawn Johansen has shown that while men's responsibilities towards the moral instruction of young children waned, the role of fathers as companions to these children increased to such an extent that play became the most important aspect of their participation in childcare.[87] Advice manual authors advocated that rather than being the prime authoritarian figures to infants and toddlers, fathers should develop emotional ties to their children. By the 1850s, these writers were urging fathers to adopt a "childlike spirit" and cultivate more affectionate relationships with their offspring than had previous generations.[88] This was not just for their children's benefit, but importantly, sustained the men, who, as breadwinners, used play with their youngsters as a form of relief from the stresses of the business world. In Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's poem, "The Children's Hour," reprinted in the

[87] Frank, *Life with Father*, 114; Shawn Johansen, *Family Men: Middle-Class Fatherhood in Early Industrializing America* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 75.

[88] Frank, *Life with Father*, 33, 115, 123.

November 1860 issue of *The Crayon*, the poet relishes the interruption from work that play with his children brings, especially because it is a chance for all to convey their mutual affection towards each other. In the poem, he is "surprised" by his three daughters, who climb his "castle wall" of an armchair to devour him with hugs and kisses, to which he replies:

> Do you think, O blue-eyed banditti,
> Because you have scaled the wall,
> Such an old moustache as I am
> Is not a match for you all?
>
> I have you fast in my fortress,
> And will not let you depart,
> But put you down into the dungeons
> In the round-tower of my heart.[89]

Men only played with children up to a certain age, however. The Romantic idea that young children were closest to nature and thus freest from the constraints of the world meant that men could receive the most respite from them. More practically, by ages six or seven, girls became integrated into their mother's social world and boys began spending time outdoors, roaming in an independent group with its own culture.[90]

Spencer shows the importance to fathers of play with young children in several images from the 1850s. Probably aware that her own familial situation was unique, she explored more general middle-class attitudes towards male involvement in the emotional life of the family, with which her audience would have been more familiar. In these genre

[89] Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, "The Children's Hour," *The Crayon*, November 1860, 329.

[90] Frank, *Life with Father*, 129. For more about boy culture, see Chapter 3.

paintings, men who have occupations outside the home spend their leisure time engaged in play with their children in order to cultivate emotional relationships with them.[91]

Conversation Piece (c. 1851–52, fig. 52) depicts a family of three relaxing in a dining room after dinner, as indicated by the final course of nuts, fruit, and wine left on the table.[92] The mother holds an infant on her lap; a teething ring on the edge of the table suggests he or she is between six and twelve months old. The father stands over the group. Directing the action, he dangles a pair of cherries that he has picked from the compote above the reaching baby.

The rich interior, which includes a parquet floor, a wallpapered screen, and a marble fireplace, as well as sculpture, ceramics, and crystal, alludes to the wealth the father, in business suit accented by gold watch chain, cuff links, and pinky ring, has procured for his family. Also indicative of the station of the group is the Zouave doll lying on the floor in the lower right. Manufactured toys were a novelty in the United States between 1850 and 1880, because they had to be imported from Europe.[93] Only after the Civil War did middle-class children have an abundance of dolls.[94] Therefore,

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[91] The following discussion considers two works, *Conversation Piece* and *Listening to Father's Watch*. Although the figures in each of these works have been identified by scholars as Spencer, her husband, and their third and fourth sons, Charles Francois and William Henry, I contend that Spencer meant them to represent anonymous middle-class Americans engaged in typical domestic activities. Carrie Rebora Barratt, entry for *Conversation Piece* in "North America 1700–1900," *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 57, no. 2 (Fall 1999): 52; Ayres, "American Figure," 166; Carol Troyen, "*Listening to Father's Watch*—Lilly Martin Spencer," *Exploring American Art: An Online Resource for the American Collections*, Currier Museum of Art, http://collections.currier.org/Obj70$35.

[92] Elisabeth Donaghy Garrett, *At Home: The American Family 1750–1870* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1990), 82.

[93] Bernard Mergen, "Children's Play in American Autobiographies, 1820–1914," in *Hard at Play: Leisure in America, 1840–1940*, ed. Kathryn Grover (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press; Rochester, NY: The Strong Museum, 1992), 179.

[94] Miriam Formanek-Brunell, *Made to Play House: Dolls and the Commercialization of American Girlhood, 1830–1930* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 15.

this plaything represents the affluence of the family, but it could also stand for a new practice among businessmen to demonstrate their love for their children through bought toys, especially on birthdays or at Christmas.[95]

The fact that the doll has been discarded, either via the waving hands of the infant, or by the father who bought the toy, shows that this monetary display of affection is secondary to the one nurtured by the father through his presence and his play. He holds two cherries above the infant, recalling the English game of bob cherry, in which children jump at fruits above their heads, trying to catch them in their mouths.[96] An American version of the game probably existed for younger children, as a review of the National Academy of Design exhibition of 1863 makes clear: "Mr. G. C. Lambdin…paints a page from nursery life, *Cherries are Ripe, give the Baby one.*"[97] The cherries represent play between the father and child; the pentimento of a previous version of the child's arms now emphasizes even further the delighted movement of the infant in reaction to his or her father's teasing hold on the fruits just beyond the baby's reach. On a symbolic level, the twin cherries are an emblem of love, one that was used as far back as colonial times in portraits of American children (fig. 53).[98] Here, the cherries signify the affection being developed between father and child, and also that which already exists between husband and wife, whose love is embodied in their progeny. *Conversation Piece* illustrates a new

[95] Ibid., 17–18.

[96] Alice Bertha Gomme, *The Traditional Games of England, Scotland, and Ireland* (1894–1898; repr., New York: Thames and Hudson, 1984), 41.

[97] "The Academy Exhibition," The Lounger, *Harper's Weekly*, 9 May 1863, 290.

[98] Roland E. Fleischer, "Emblems and Colonial American Painting," *American Art Journal* 20, no. 3 (1988): 18, 26, 30.

idea during the period—that the purpose of father's play was to contribute to family cohesion.[99]

Listening to Father's Watch of 1857 (fig. 54) portrays a father holding a pocket watch up to the ear of a small child seated on his lap.[100] The bright daylight streaming into the room from the window at left and the man's attire of dressing gown and carpet slippers indicate that it could be Sunday, the day when fathers devoted much time to their children.[101] Clearly, the two are enjoying each other's company. The father appears relaxed, leaning back in his chair with his left leg crossed on his right knee. He gently nestles the little child into the space he has created with his legs, resting one hand tenderly on his or her thigh. He gazes with an amused expression at his offspring, who grabs his vest and intently presses the watch to his or her ear in order to hear the movement of the mechanics inside; the child's open mouth might be repeating "tick, tock, tick, tock" in imitation of the watch. The activity delights the toddler, who smiles gleefully.[102]

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[99] Frank, *Life with Father*, 130.

[100] Carol Troyen and others have identified the child as a boy (see note 91 above), but I argue that Spencer meant the toddler's gender to appear ambiguous. Both small girls and boys would have worn frilly, beribboned dresses, like the one pictured here. Parents also kept their hairstyles similar, often long and curled. If anything, the center part shown on the child here would indicate femaleness. Overall, however, the figure appears androgynous and thus its youth and innocence are emphasized. Calvert, *Children in the House,* 100–103.

[101] Frank, *Life with Father*, 69.

[102] Perhaps the vibrations of the watch tickle his or her ear. A Currier and Ives print of 1873 that depicts a young girl holding a pocket watch up to her ear is entitled *Tick—Tick—Tickle!* Gale Research Company, *Currier & Ives: A Catalogue Raisonné* (Detroit: Gale Research, 1984), 2:668. Spencer painted babies listening to watches twice during her early career. In each of these juvenile works, now lost, the father and child apparently play happily together as well, although a mother is also involved. One appeared in her first exhibition in Marietta: "*The Infant and Time* is a pretty domestic scene, suggested by some verse of Mrs. Sigourney, I believe, under the same title; and represents an infant in its mother's arms, playing with a watch held up before its eyes by a very youthful-looking father." Transcription of an article by Edward D. Mansfield in *The Marietta Intelligencer*, 25 August 1841, LMS papers. The other she drew on the wall of her parents' home outside Marietta: "On the other side [of the hall], she had painted the interior of a room,

The fact that the father and small child engage in little more than happy play is made clear when *Listening to Father's Watch* is compared to a print by Currier and Ives entitled *Father's Pride* (undated, fig. 55). In the print, a father holds up a similar pocket watch to the ear of a child on his lap. The child, however, is not an ambiguously gendered toddler, but an older boy, who is dressed in dark clothes approaching in style the suit his father wears. The father, rather than relaxing in his chair, sits forward and makes a pointing gesture with his right hand. The scene shows an act of teaching rather than of play. The boy, "father's pride," because he will follow in his footsteps to become a businessman, is receiving a lesson about time. Perhaps the father is pointing out that time is money and should be used wisely rather than squandered. Or maybe the boy is learning to be punctual, orderly, and self-regulating, all traits that will serve him well in an industrialized society. Possibly the father is weaning the boy from home time, set by women in observance of natural cycles and religious precepts, and introducing him to public time, set by men and based on the science of astronomical observation.[103]

The pocket watch in *Listening to Father's Watch* does not refer to the importance of time in business or factory life, but instead is both an object of amusement and a symbol that the time for father/child play, and thus for emotional attachment, is fleeting. The child is still young enough to enjoy playing with his or her father, and the innocence epitomized by his or her androgynous nature makes the toddler especially attractive to a man wanting a reprieve from the complicated outside world. However, emphasis on the

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and seated round a supper table a gentleman, his wife and little child—the father holding out his watch to the laughing infant." Transcription of an article by Edward D. Mansfield in *The Marietta Intelligencer*, 26 August 1841, LMS papers.

[103] Michael O'Malley, *Keeping Watch: A History of American Time* (New York: Viking, 1990), 50–52.

ticking clock, whose gold casing glimmers and whose sound the toddler amplifies and repeats, reminds the viewer that the child will grow up and thus time to play and bond is but brief. Frances S. Osgood expressed a parent's futile wish to stop time from aging their youngster in her poem, "The Child Playing with a Watch."

> Art thou playing with Time in thy sweet baby-glee?
> Will he pause on his pinions to frolic with thee?
> Oh! show him those shadowless, innocent eyes,
> That smile of bewilder'd and beaming surprise;
> ……
> Perhaps thy bewitching and infantine sweetness
> May win him, for once, to delay in his fleetness;
> To pause, ere he rifle, relentless in flight,
> A blossom so glowing of bloom and of light.
> Then, then would I keep thee, my beautiful child,
> With thy blue eyes unshadow'd, thy blush undefiled;
> With thy innocence only to guard thee from ill,
> In life's sunny dawning, a lily-bud still![104]

The figurine on the table in *Listening to Father's Watch* may hint at this father's feelings about what is to come. The bronze nude squats and places both arms in front of its face, as if to shield its eyes from the brightness streaming through the window—rays from the sun, another device used to mark the passage of time.[105]

Listening to Father's Watch might have been a pendant to *This Little Pig Went to Market*.[106] While no written evidence exists that Spencer meant the two to go together,

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[104] This poem was known to Spencer, because she included it with *The Infant and Time* in her 1841 exhibition in Marietta. While reporter Edward D. Mansfield identified it as "some verse of Mrs. Sigourney, I believe" (see note 102 above), it was actually written by Frances S. Osgood. Caroline May, *The American Female Poets: With Biographical and Critical Notes* (Philadelphia, 1848), 401–2.

[105] Spencer carried the theme of fleeting time into other works from this period that depict a father playing with his child. According to Ellet, *Both at Play* (1850s, now lost) "represents a father teasing his little girl by holding an air-balloon just out of her reach." *Women Artists*, 325. The balloon, a fragile toy that will eventually break or deflate, could be considered another symbol of time lost, never to be recovered. Likewise, the cherries in *Conversation Piece* are not a permanent toy to be played with multiple times, but are organic and thus will decompose quickly.

[106] To the best of my knowledge, no other scholar has suggested this possibility, although several have speculated that *Listening to Father's Watch* and *Mother and Child* are pendants. Ayres, "American Figure,"

their visual similarities make it a good possibility. Both works date from 1857 and are painted on composition board that has a rounded top and measures sixteen by twelve inches. The figures of mother and father are posed as mirror images, both holding on their laps infants who grasp at their clothing (fig. 56). The two works are not set in the same room, but the red cloth-draped tables on the left and right in each would work to balance the images, if they were to be hung together. In concert, the images speak about the differences in mothers' and fathers' play with children. Spencer's mothers seem to use play to release the intense bonds they formed with their infants early in life. The fathers she portrays, on the other hand, employ play to cultivate affectionate connections with their young children before they join social groups to which fathers had limited access. Once children were older, fathers were expected to maintain an emotionally restrained relationship with them.[107] Spencer hinted at the loss fathers may have felt by picturing play with organic, fragile, or time-related objects.

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The next year, 1858, Spencer created a painting about parent/child emotional bonding that incorporated both parents into one composition. In *Fi! Fo! Fum!* (fig. 57), a father and mother appear together with their two children, engaged in a night of storytelling. The title refers to the fairy tale "Jack and the Beanstalk," a story originating in England in the eighteenth century.[108] The painting combines elements from the story with the themes of play, attachment, and letting go as a way to summarize issues Spencer

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166; Edwards, *Domestic Bliss*, 89. Because each parent holds a child on her or his lap, *This Little Pig Went to Market* and *Listening to Father's Watch* make more sense as a pair.

[107] Frank, *Life with Father*, 129.

[108] Jack Zipes, ed. *The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 266.

had been exploring over the past decade. The work was powerful enough to win her praise in *The Crayon* and the *Cosmopolitan Art Journal*. According to the review in the latter, it gained a reputation at the National Academy of Design, where Spencer exhibited the painting in the spring of 1858. The critic especially appreciated the expressions of the figures, which he or she thought gave the work an emotional charge.[109]

Indeed, in the painting, expressions and gestures carry the narrative. A father with wide-open eyes and dramatically arched brows recites the tale to a spellbound girl of six or seven standing at his right and a small, scared boy on his left knee.[110] He has an arm firmly around each, gripping them firmly to him. They, in turn, hover close; the girl leans against the father's leg, placing both hands together on his thigh, while the boy grasps the father's tie like it is a security blanket. In contrast, a mother sits behind the three, listening calmly and intently. The atmosphere of the room contributes to the drama of the scene. The warm lamplight and cool moonlight streaming in from opposite sides of the canvas transform the large piece of elaborately-carved furniture in the right foreground

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[109] "Exhibition of the National Academy of Design (Concluded)," *The Crayon*, June 1858, 177; and "Catalogue of Premiums," *Cosmopolitan Art Journal*, December 1858, Art Journal Supplement, 55: "The faces and attitudes of the group show the wonderful power of the artist in portraying passion and emotion." The Cosmopolitan Art Association bought *Fi! Fo! Fum!* from Spencer for their annual lottery. It was distributed to a Mrs. A. C. Toppan of Lowell, Massachusetts, in early 1859. *Cosmopolitan Art Journal*, March 1859, 95.

[110] In the past, the children have been identified as two boys, specifically the Spencers' sons Charles Francois (who would have been almost seven years old) and William Henry (who would have been about three). Schumer, "Lilly Martin Spencer," 56–57; Bolton-Smith and Truettner, *Joys of Sentiment*, 135. This information comes from an inscription on one of two preliminary drawings, which was made by a descendant of the artist. Bolton-Smith and Truettner, *Joys of Sentiment*, 136. Lubin and Klee, the two other scholars who have interpreted this work, refer to the figures only as "children." Lubin, *Picturing a Nation*, 189; Klee, "Happy Family," 132. I would like to posit that the older child is not a boy, as previously stated, but a girl. While Spencer depicted both boys and girls in dresses when they were very young, she followed societal convention and dressed boys older than six in short trousers. See, for example, the many boys pictured in her lithographs, illustrated in Chapter 3 of this dissertation. For a discussion of age-appropriate fashions for boys, see Yunginger, introduction, 18.

into the twisting beanstalk, and reminds the viewer of the repeated nighttime scenes in which Jack hides from the giant before reclaiming his father's treasures.

By the 1850s, when Spencer painted this work, the middle-class American public knew fairy tales through printed editions rather than through oral transmission.[111] Therefore, one can conjecture that the father in *Fi! Fo! Fum!* retells a version of "Jack and the Beanstalk" that he once read from a book. He might be spinning a story similar to the one published in *The Home Treasury*, a series of fairy tales edited by Sir Henry Cole that first appeared in London in 1843. This series initiated a new movement in England to publish fairy tales meant mainly for entertainment rather than as lessons in morality.[112] During the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the upper and middle classes condemned fairy tales as amoral and harmful to children, who, they were afraid, might rebel against authority upon reading them.[113] Many authors rewrote the tales into didactic stories that emphasized bourgeois values and limited violence. Cole deplored these works and wanted to "cultivate the affections, fancy, imagination and taste of children." [114] He still managed to include some lessons by praising the characters' virtues and condemning their vices.[115] In the United States, parents preferred didactic texts to fantasy stories in the 1830s and 1840s. However, Anne MacLeod has identified the year 1857 as the time

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[111] Steven Swann Jones, *The Fairy Tale: The Magic Mirror of Imagination* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995), 32.

[112] Christa Kamenetsky, *The Brothers Grimm & Their Critics: Folktales and the Quest for Meaning* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1992), 225.

[113] Jack Zipes, *Breaking the Spell: Radical Theories of Folk & Fairy Tales*, rev. and exp. ed. (Lexington: University of Kentucky, 2002), 15.

[114] Henry Cole, *The Traditional Faëry Tales of Little Red Riding Hood, Beauty and the Beast, & Jack and the Bean Stalk* (1845; repr., New York: Garland Publishing, 1977), iii.

[115] Kamenetsky, *Brothers Grimm*, 225–26.

around which the goal of instruction began to shift to that of entertainment.[116] For Spencer, then, "Jack and the Beanstalk" probably contained both amusement and educational value.

To summarize from Cole's 1845 version,[117] "Jack and the Beanstalk" tells the story of a daring boy, son of a widow who, out of love, spoils him so much that he selfishly plays all the time rather than works. Because of his idleness, his mother must sell everything they own to feed them. Finally, the only thing she has left to sell is her cow. She entrusts Jack to take the cow to market, but on the way there he is seduced by some pretty beans a butcher offers in trade for the cow. Because his mother always gives him what he wants, he believes she will be happy with the beans, but instead she angrily throws them into the garden when he shows them to her.

The next morning, one of the beans has grown magically into a giant beanstalk, which Jack eagerly climbs. At the top, he meets a fairy who shows him in pictures the story of his benevolent father's murder at the hands of a giant, who then stole the family's treasure. Jack, finding himself tired and hungry, goes to the nearest house to request succor. The woman who answers the door warns him that her husband, the giant, will eat him if he finds Jack there, but Jack persuades her to let him in. Upon the giant's return, the woman hides Jack in the oven and makes excuses when the giant thinks he smells Jack. Jack is very afraid that he will be found, but the giant becomes preoccupied with his meal and playing with his hen that lays golden eggs, and so Jack is safe. When

[116] MacLeod, *Moral Tale*, 24.

[117] Cole, *Traditional Faëry Tales*, 3–32.

the giant passes out from drunkenness, Jack takes back the hen, which had once belonged to his father, and escapes.

The hen provides for him and his mother, but Jack soon itches to go up the beanstalk once more. Against his mother's wishes, he disguises himself, convinces the giant's wife to help him, and hides in the cupboard. The giant again smells the terrified Jack, but his wife dissuades him from looking for the boy. When the giant falls asleep, Jack takes his father's gold and silver coins, which the giant had been counting, back to his mother. Some time later, restless yet again, Jack makes a third trip up the beanstalk to retrieve his father's singing harp. However, the harp yells when Jack grabs it, awakening the drunken giant, who runs after Jack. Jack is able to get to the bottom of the beanstalk and cut it down with the pursuing giant still in it. The giant falls to the ground, dying instantly. That night the fairy appears again, telling Jack that she made the beanstalk grow in order to test his courage. Because he showed initiative rather than idleness, the fairy says that she helped him recover his father's property, of which she knows he will take advantage to become a useful and good man.

Spencer's title, *Fi! Fo! Fum!*, indicates that the father is at one of the three most tense parts in the story—when Jack, trembling in his hiding place, hears the giant's frightening recognition that he smells the blood of an earthly man.[118] All the figures in the painting react differently to the giant's ominous roar. The father embodies the giant with his open mouth, bulging eyes, and raised brows. The older girl wears an expression of awe, thoroughly absorbed in the tale. The small boy draws back in fear, as Jack did

[118] In Cole's version of the story, the giant screams: "Snouk but, Snouk ben, I smell the smell of earthly men." Cole, *Traditional Faëry Tales*, 18, 25, 28. However, the Baring-Goulds cite the American version of the giant's slogan, which comes close to Spencer's title: "Fee, Faw, Fum, I smell the Blood of an Earthly Man. Let him be alive or dead, off Goes his Head." *Annotated Mother Goose*, 102–3.

when he first glimpsed the giant. The mother sits with her chin to her hand, thoughtfully contemplating the unfolding plot. Their varied reactions are not surprising, because fairy tales have always been recognized to have multiple levels of meaning for audience members, including both adults and children. The symbols they employ are often ambiguous, so that they may have resonance for a wide range of people over a long period of time.[119]

For the father in the painting, the story and his part in telling it possibly refer to the ideal, but conflicting roles of businessman and emotionally-available father at this time. In his dual identities as giant and narrator, he can be read as switching back and forth between the outside world of commerce and the interior world of the home. As giant (mouthing the words "Fi! Fo! Fum!"), he possesses the traits needed to succeed in a business career: aggressiveness, avarice, and even cannibalism. Necessary to provide for one's family, these characteristics nevertheless threatened the tranquility and morality of the home if allowed to spill in; the frightened attitude of the small boy show they have no place there.

On the other hand, as narrator, the father seems to show his ability, though play, to be emotionally present for his young children. He becomes fully engaged in the activity of telling an exciting story. The dramatic expression on his face conveys the fact that the fairy tale is meant to be entertaining. The scary episodes allow him to be affectionate and comforting; he puts his arms around his children and draws them near to his body.[120] However, elements in the painting hint that the passage of time threatens to

[119] D. L. Ashliman, *Folk and Fairy Tales: A Handbook* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004), 5; 10–11.

[120] Klee also identifies the father in *Fi! Fo! Fum!* as fun-filled, light-hearted, and emotionally engaged. But whereas she sees him only in this vein, and not as "worldly and separate," I argue that his identification

change his relationships with his children. The cat who primps in the lower left reminds the viewer that the adjacent six- or seven-year-old girl, now fully absorbed in her father's presence as shown by her expression, will soon enter into the process of female socialization, thus permanently altering the father/daughter bond.

The mother's contemplative nature suggests that, unlike the histrionic father, she is thinking over the lessons embedded in the tale. The story's emphasis on the necessity of a boy's courage and initiative may allow her to assess the consequences of an extreme mother/child attachment. She sits closest to her young son, who clearly identifies with Jack by his fearful expression upon hearing the words, "Fi! Fo! Fum!" As a child who likely has been recently weaned, he may also feel connected to the boy in the story, whose mother sent him to sell her cow.[121] The fairy tale could be teaching him that, like Jack, he must face his fears alone and take action independently of his mother.[122] The boy seems scared, but his grasp on his father's tie shows that he may be able to climb his own beanstalk soon. Spencer shows the mother as willing to be supportive of the child's endeavor to detach from her. She is physically distanced from him, blocked by the chair back. She also gazes into space rather than at the little boy. This reticent pose in the final

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with the giant acknowledges his place in the business sphere as well. "Happy Family," 131–32. Lubin suggests the painting refers to the dangers in the marketplace, made apparent by the Panic of 1857, and to husbands' ineptitude and fearfulness. *Picturing a Nation*, 189. I do not read the father's expression as fear, but as total engagement in his role as narrator.

[121] Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976), 188. In the version of the story to which Bettelheim refers, the mother decides to sell her cow because it has stopped giving milk. I believe Bettelheim's weaning metaphor is helpful here, but I do not propose to incorporate the rest of his interpretation, which uses Freud's concepts of the oral and phallic stages of development.

[122] Fairy tales are known to be highly functional. Their messages to children often involve aspects of maturation: overcoming separation anxiety, authoritarian anxiety, and jealousy, finding independence, and gaining social competence. Jones, *Fairy Tale*, 19–22. In addition, children's books from this time, like the Rollo series by Jacob Abbott, encouraged boys to master their fears on their own. Peter N. Stearns and Timothy Haggerty, "The Role of Fear: Transitions in American Emotional Standards for Children, 1850–1950," *American Historical Review* 96, no. 1 (February 1991): 70.

painting appears to be a studied decision by Spencer. In the earliest preliminary sketch, she pictured the mother as standing over the back of the chair in a more active position (fig. 58), and in the most finished drawing, she drew the mother looking steadily down at the boy (fig. 59). The fingers that creep over the chair back in the painting, however, show that the mother is still available to the child; just as Jack needed the helping hand of the giant's wife to hide from the giant in the story, this little boy will require maternal assistance as he grows up.

Fi! Fo! Fum! examines issues surrounding parent/child emotional bonding that writers of advice manuals, medical texts, and other hortatory literature were interested in exploring in the 1850s. Using the entertainment of telling a fairy tale as its subject matter, it appears to denounce the presence in the home of the male world of business, as symbolized in the giant the father impersonates. At the same time, the work celebrates strong emotional ties between fathers and their young children, shown in the willingness of the father to play in a way with his daughter and son that promotes closeness. There is also evidence in the painting that the mother is meant to serve as a model of the period's ideal maternal figure. No longer a type of Madonna who revels in creating a tight emotional, even physically sensual, knot with her child, she sits behind the main group. She looks ready to relinquish hold on her son in order to prepare him for entrance into a male world of commerce and competition. Whether bonding or letting go, the parents in Spencer's paintings from this time show that play with children was not mere amusement, but had significant implications.

Chapter 3
Mischievous Children

In February of 1856, a reporter for the *Home Journal*, writing about artists' studios west of lower Broadway, chose to focus on Spencer's designs for lithographs in his brief sketch of her work space: "Her negro boy and girl, published in colored lithograph by Schaus, are to be seen everywhere. Equally clever and humorous are several small pieces, lately completed, reflecting the charming mischief of children."[1] Indeed, a major portion of her output during the mid- and late 1850s consisted of paintings of single children, which she sold to print publisher Wilhelm Schaus for reproduction as hand-colored lithographs. Spencer had initially believed that prints bearing her name would advance her reputation and secure her more painting commissions. She wrote to her mother in March of 1852: "This will be of no pecuniary benefit to me, but it helps to spread my name."[2] While the lithographs did bring her recognition, they did not procure her extra work. Still, she continued to sell to Schaus, who became a steady source of income in the years between the dismantling of the American Art-Union and the founding of the Cosmopolitan Art Association.[3]

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[1] "Studios of American Artists. Third Sketch," *Home Journal*, 16 February 1856, 1. Col. Merl M. Moore, Jr. files. The author went on the say: "She has just finished a very poetic pair of pictures, to be published by Schaus, entitled 'Sunshine' and 'Shadow': the one is a child of wealth, playing with a sunbeam; the other a child of poverty, sporting with the shadow of its hand." No lithographs of *Sunshine* and *Shadow* appear to have survived, and so it is hard to know if Schaus ever did publish them. Because so little is known about them, the images will not be considered in this study.

[2] LMS to Angélique and Gilles Martin, 6 March 1852, LMS papers. The print she refers to in her letter, which she mentions as being published by the Parisian firm of Goupil, is not located. The earliest known lithograph after one of her designs is *Power of Fashion*, dated 1853 and published by Schaus.

[3] Schaus purchased and reproduced at least fourteen of Spencer's paintings between 1853 and 1860: *Power of Fashion* (1853), *Height of Fashion* (1854), *The Little Sunshade* (1854), *The Little Navigator* (1854), *Our Pet* (1854), *The Young Soldier* (1856), *My Birthday Present* (1856), *Hush* (1856), *Oh!* (1856), *The First Polka* (1858), *The Young Teacher* (1858), *Bo-Peep* (1858), *The Young Students* (1858), and *The First Pants*

The *Home Journal* article hit on the major themes present in Spencer's designs for prints: the harmless pranks of white, middle-class children and the humorous representation of "negro" children. It is unclear whether Spencer created these images on her own, or if Schaus suggested their subject matter based on his knowledge of the market. We do know, however, that the lithographs made from her paintings were wildly popular. One later estimate put the total number of prints distributed at one million.[4] Clearly, the Spencer/Schaus prints spoke to a broad audience. On the one hand, they brought to the fore new ideals about child rearing that accepted misbehavior and undirected play by white, bourgeois children increasingly perceived to be innocent. On the other, they may have worked to comfort citizens afraid of what they saw as threatening minority groups, including African Americans and Irish and German immigrants.

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Child-rearing manuals of the 1830s and 1840s addressed to the Protestant middle class placed considerable weight on obedience and self-discipline.[5] According to this literature, well-trained children would grow into God-fearing, law-abiding, and productive citizens, which was crucial to the survival of the Republic. Believing, like Horace Bushnell did, that children had a real potential for wickedness, advisors stressed

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(1860). Two paintings owned by the Newark Museum, *Child Playing with Fish Bowl* and *Child Playing with Cat* (both 1856), given their format and subject matter, are likely designs for lithographs as well, although no prints are presently known. Bolton-Smith and Truettner, *Joys of Sentiment*, 127. The price Schaus paid for the paintings is unknown, but William Sidney Mount received between $150 and $200 for paintings commissioned by both Goupil and Schaus. Autobiographical Press Release by William Schaus [1855?], and Diary Entry of William Sidney Mount, February 1854, both reprinted in Alfred Frankenstein, *William Sidney Mount* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1975), 153, 165.

[4] "Art Items," *Philadelphia Daily Evening Bulletin*, 3 March 1870, 2. Col. Merl M. Moore, Jr. files.

[5] Child, *Mother's Book*, 27; Abbott, *Mother at Home*, 18; Sigourney, *Letters to Mothers*, 33; Beecher, *Treatise*, 225; Goodrich, *Fireside Education*, 75–76.

parents' duty to steer their offspring towards good. Rejecting the use of corporal punishment to enforce virtuous behavior, they encouraged parents instead to employ "gentler methods" to develop a moral conscience within their children. Samuel Goodrich counseled that "the object should be, not merely to make the child obey externally, but internally; to make the obedience sincere and hearty, and to make it flow alike from affection, a sense of duty, and a conviction that he consults his true interest in so doing."[6] Authors advocated a technique described by present scholars as disciplinary intimacy, which they advised parents to utilize very early in a child's life.[7] According to the theory, the parent (usually the mother) cultivates a loving bond with the child. With this bond, she gains the child's allegiance to her values, which she painstakingly demonstrates through her own example. When misbehavior occurs, the mother temporarily withdraws her love. The resulting emotional pain deters the child from future disobedience. If successful, the child, with guilty conscience, conducts himself in an upright manner even when adults are not present, and grows into an adult who possesses self-control.

At the same time that advice books promulgated a theory of disciplinary intimacy for young children, American artists took up the theme of the naughty boy. Some scholars have argued that naughty children in works of art show traits (such as independence, aggressiveness, and daring) that adults celebrated as being crucial to a democratic and capitalist economy.[8] Others have interpreted these paintings as allegories about antebellum "go-aheadism;" boys substitute for men, whose ambitions encouraged

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[6] Goodrich, *Fireside Education*, 90.

[7] See Brodhead, "Spare the Rod," 70–74.

[8] Jadviga M. da Costa Nunes, "The Naughty Child in Nineteenth-Century American Art," *Journal of American Studies* 21, no. 2 (August 1987): 231, 233; Edwards, *Domestic Bliss*, 25–26.

them to "scheme and risk being caught" in their pursuit of economic gain.[9] It is important to recognize that many of the paintings prior to the 1850s show children actually caught, or about to be apprehended for their misdeeds. Therefore, an alternative way to view these particular works, in which boys fight, steal, and gamble, might be as warnings to parents that morals need to be taught early to children capable of wickedness, before misbehavior escalates and necessitates a last resort—corporal punishment.

In paintings by William Sidney Mount, George Comegys, and Albertus D. O. Browere, boys of school age (perhaps seven to fourteen) do not engage in minor mischief, but commit more serious offenses. In *School Boys Quarreling* (1830, fig. 60), a sneering lad has given one boy a bloody nose and clenches his fist to fight the next. *The Truant Gamblers (Undutiful Boys)* (1835, fig. 61) and *Boys Hustling Coppers (The Disagreeable Surprise)* (1843, fig. 62) show youths skipping school or ignoring their chores in order to play games of chance for money. *Boys Stealing Watermelons* (1839, fig. 63) and *Mrs. McCormick's General Store* (1844, fig. 64) feature boys who have purloined food. In *Caught Napping* (1848, fig. 65), three youths have abandoned their shepherding duties; a goat's skull in the tree alerts the viewer to the consequences of their negligence.[10]

It seems the ideal of disciplinary intimacy, as outlined in the profusion of child-rearing manuals of the 1830s and 1840s, has been ignored by the parents of these mostly rural children. They do not have an instilled conscience that would have prevented them

[9] Johns, "'Boys Will Be Boys,'" 11–12.

[10] "Collections: American Art: Collection Highlights," Brooklyn Museum, http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/collections/american_art/39.608.php. Sarah Burns has described the boys as "hardened loafers and cardplayers, about to be visited by retribution in the form of an older man." Sarah Burns, "Barefoot Boys and Other Country Children: Sentiment and Ideology in Nineteenth-Century American Art," *American Art Journal* 20, no. 1 (1988): 34.

from acts of violence, gambling, and theft. Rather, physical punishment must be meted out on boys who lack self-control and may now be too old to develop proper moral principles. In *The Truant Gamblers, Boys Hustling Coppers*, and *Caught Napping*, two men and a woman are ready with switches and a cane to beat the young offenders. The farmer in the background of *Boys Stealing Watermelons* points towards the three miscreants; the nervous expression of one of the boys hints that their hiding place will soon be found out. The shopkeeper in *Mrs. McCormick's General Store* holds tightly the offending youth's shoulder; the original title of *Boy in Trouble* alludes to the punishment to come.[11]

As Elizabeth Johns maintains in *American Genre Painting: The Politics of Everyday Life*, paintings that portrayed types, such as Yankees, Westerners, blacks, and women, were condoned by a newly successful merchant class that wanted to maintain social order at a time of increasing heterogeneity in the population, commercialization of society, and egalitarianism in the social sphere.[12] Likewise, I would argue that images of naughty country boys and city urchins (who are about to be caught) made white, urban, upper- and middle-class parents, who had the time and resources to inculcate a moral conscience in their young children, feel superior to their rural and poor counterparts.[13]

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[11] Johns, *American Genre Painting*, 153. Johns interprets the painting as an image that subversively stated that women were helpless in controlling the behavior of both middle-class and street children. If one takes the original title into account, the shopkeeper does seem to have the upper hand, at least with the boy she grabs.

[12] Johns, *American Genre Painting*, 7–23.

[13] While upper-class merchants owned these works, the middle class would have seen them when they were exhibited at the National Academy of Design. *School Boys Quarreling* was shown at the National Academy in 1831; *The Truant Gamblers* in 1836; *Boys Hustling Coppers* in 1844; *Mrs. McCormick's General Store* (as *Boy in Trouble*) in 1844; and *Caught Napping* in 1848. Some, such as Mount's *Boys Hustling Coppers (The Disagreeable Surprise),* were engraved for wider distribution. Deborah J. Johnson, "William Sidney Mount: Painter of American Life," in Johnson, *William Sidney Mount*, 58.

Images like these probably also confirmed for parents the consequences of neglecting this important step of child rearing. One of the paintings' messages appears to be a warning that morals need to be taught—children have to be steered toward goodness—or the Republic's future is in danger.[14]

In the 1850s, when Schaus published Spencer's designs of mischievous children, authors of hortatory literature seemed no longer to be in consensus about their expectations for children's behavior. Some continued to stress the importance of demanding obedience in young children. Alfred Donné firmly stated, "I do not hesitate to say that, till the age of six or seven years, there is every advantage, as regards physical education as well as moral, in preserving undisputed authority over children, and in appealing to no motive but the sentiment of obedience, freed from all which other more complicated notions of duty will add to this at a later period."[15] Others, recognizing that children should not be held to adult standards, called for some leniency. "When I see how very strict and strait-laced some people are with children, I feel disposed to put in a plea or two in their behalf. Pray be a little tolerant of our mirth and noise, because of the excess of our animal spirits; which we can no more repress wholly than you can stop the gushing fountains and flowing brooks of spring."[16] Historian Linda Pollock even noted a lack of information on discipline in American texts of the 1850s.[17]

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[14] Burns also sees moralistic strains about controlling behavior in Mount's images of country boys. *Pastoral Inventions*, 298.

[15] Donné, *Mothers and Infants*, 226.

[16] Excerpt from "My Mother, or Recollections of Maternal Influence," reprinted in *The Mother's Rule, or The Right Way and the Wrong Way*, ed. T. S. Arthur (Rochester, NY, 1856), 252.

[17] Linda A. Pollock, *Forgotten Children: Parent-Child Relations from 1500 to 1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 187.

An examination of children's literature from the 1850s also suggests that concerns about moral rectitude in children were beginning to wane. Ann MacLeod, in her analysis of antebellum fiction, has shown that new writers conceived of society's problems as more complex and unmanageable than had previous, more optimistic authors. They began to doubt the efficacy of instilling a conscience in children; they saw that following a moral code of self-discipline, honesty, and generosity did not put an end to America's problems of materialism, crime, and poverty. While still paying lip service to old values, they filled their melodramatic plots with luck and coincidence. Now children did not get ahead through good behavior and merit, but by chance circumstance or the intervention of wealthy benefactors.[18]

By the late 1860s and 1870s, many authors of children's literature actually began condoning the misconduct of children. While the ideology of childhood innocence, originating in the philosophy of Rousseau and perpetuated in the poetry of the English Romantics, was gradually being accepted during the middle third of the nineteenth century in the United States, only after the Civil War did the idea that children were innately good achieve dominance.[19] Because children were now viewed as blameless, it followed that misbehavior could be tolerated. The perception of their inherent goodness meant children were incapable of serious wrong. Books such as Thomas Bailey Aldrich's *The Story of a Bad Boy* (1869) and Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1875) celebrated their main characters' naughtiness. The authors describe their young protagonists as "real" boys who, despite their participation in antisocial behavior, are not

[18] MacLeod, *Moral Tale*, 118–41.

[19] Lubin, *Picturing a Nation*, 212–14.

truly bad. The adults in the stories do not put limits on their charges' activities and the boys feel no sense of obligation to behave. However, the rules they break are conventional ones that never call into question the belief in their intrinsic goodness.[20]

At the same time in the visual arts, painters like Winslow Homer and Eastman Johnson portrayed children engaged in carefree play, which earlier in the century might have been construed as irresponsible or frivolous. They visualized on canvas the idea that childhood should be a time free of adult concerns and behavior, and the belief that the youth of America should be shielded from experiencing the reality of a hostile, unstable world for as long as possible. Sarah Burns has read the lads in Homer's *Boys in a Pasture* (1874, fig. 66) as "simply in their element." They are allowed to be idle without consequence, unlike the boys in earlier works by Mount.[21] Spontaneous, imaginative amusement is the subject of Johnson's *The Old Stage Coach* (1871, fig. 67). The fact that the children have abandoned their school books in a heap to usurp someone's private property does not seem to matter in this image that celebrates the joys of childhood play and indulges in nostalgia for the past.

In the 1850s, when Spencer created her designs for lithographs, the majority of which feature white, middle-class urban children engaged in slightly mischievous behavior, ideas about children's innate innocence were becoming accepted among the general population. Viewed as a body of work, the images seem to reflect some of these new attitudes, which would be more clearly articulated in the late 1860s and 1870s. The

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[20] This interpretation of the two Toms is taken from Anne Scott MacLeod, *American Childhood: Essays on Children's Literature of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994), 69–75.

[21] Burns, "Barefoot Boys," 34.

lithographs, which appear to convey the message that parents should not demand so strenuously the moral rectitude of younger children, follows the advice manuals that began to call for leniency in obedience expectations. They also seem to prefigure the ideas of advisors like Jacob Abbott, who, in the early 1870s, chided parents to let their children act as they naturally would, rather than require them to behave as models of virtue: "the more that children are gratified in respect to their childish fancies and impulses, and even their caprices, when no danger or evil is to be apprehended, the better."[22] At the same time, however, the subject matter of the prints suggests the preservation of certain older ideas.

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During the 1840s, the American Art-Union (AA-U) whet the middle class's appetite for owning American art through reproductive prints. By subscribing to the Art-Union, people received a premium in the form of a highly-finished reproductive engraving. At first, the AA-U created prints from paintings they borrowed. Starting in 1847, engravers copied images the American Art-Union bought for distribution in their annual lottery.[23] At this point, members were content to own reproductive engravings, even if distribution was often delayed due to the extraordinary amount of labor involved. The belief, as relayed by critic George W. Bethune in 1840, was that "a good engraving of a good picture, in its effect on the mind, is incomparably superior to a painting of ordinary merit."[24]

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[22] Abbott, *Gentle Measures*, 32.

[23] Jay Cantor, "Prints and the American Art-Union," in *Prints in and of America to 1850*, ed. John D. Morse (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia for the Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, 1970), 298.

[24] George W. Bethune, *The Prospects of Art in the United States* (Philadelphia, 1840), 11.

In 1848, the French printmaking firm of Goupil, Vibert and Company set up a branch in New York to compete directly with the American Art-Union in reproducing American paintings.[25] The French were known innovators in the medium of lithography and could reproduce images more quickly and at a much lower cost than the Americans could engravings. In 1848 and 1849, the AA-U responded to its new competition and a demand by subscribers for more images by distributing bonus sets of six small engravings by Felix O. Darley illustrating Washington Irving's *Rip Van Winkle* and *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*.[26] During its last two years of existence, the organization produced, in addition to the one large premium, five small, less labor-intensive engravings for its members. These works consisted of reproductions of landscapes and genre paintings by prominent artists such as Mount, Thomas Cole, and Richard Caton Woodville.[27] Despite its antiquated methods, the AA-U could rightly boast in the 1849 *Bulletin* article "What Has the American Art-Union Accomplished?" that it had participated in improving the market for prints in the United States.[28]

While the American Art-Union never gave up engraving as its preferred method of reproducing paintings (the medium required great skill, and thus they thought it more "artistic"[29]), the broader industry had embraced lithography as a favored means of reproducing images by the late 1840s. Lithography was easier to master, it was less

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[25] Elliot Bostwick Davis, "The Currency of Culture: Prints in New York City," in *Art and the Empire City: New York, 1825–1861*, ed. Catherine Hoover Voorsanger and John K. Howat (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 208.

[26] Subscribers tired of seeing the same image in everyone's home. Cantor, "Prints," 314.

[27] Ibid., 313, 316.

[28] Quoted in Bode, *Anatomy*, 63.

[29] Cantor, "Prints," 323.

expensive, it had a more rapid production time, and it could yield tens of thousands of impressions. Because of these changes in technology, prints came to be regarded less as vehicles for "high-minded" edification and more as means for communication that was immediate and accessible. In response to the rise in lithography's popularity, print publishers changed their business model from one that relied on preordered jobs to one that worked on speculation.[30] In order to be successful, then, they had to be very attuned to their customers' desires and produce only what they knew would sell.

Wilhelm Schaus came to the United States in 1847 as an agent for Goupil, Vibert and Company (after 1850, Goupil and Company). Sent to New York to set up the firm's International Art Union, he later worked to procure American paintings for reproduction as lithographs at the parent facilities in Paris. Because of the strong market for prints, Schaus was able to break from Goupil to create his own business in August 1852.[31] For the next decade he cultivated relationships with artists who had worked with him at Goupil, such as Mount, and new artists, such as Spencer.

No correspondence between Schaus and Spencer exists to ascertain their arrangements vis-à-vis the production of lithographs after her designs. However, Schaus became good friends with Mount during his tenure at Goupil and their exchange of letters during the late 1840s and the 1850s indicates Schaus's business practices.[32] In effect, Schaus negotiated the rights to reproduce paintings owned by others, or commissioned

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[30] Bernard F. Reilly, Jr., "Translation and Transformation: The Prints After William Sidney Mount," in Johnson, *William Sidney Mount*, 134, 139, 144.

[31] Neil Harris, *The Artist in American Society, The Formative Years, 1790–1860* (New York: George Braziller, 1966), 262; Reilly, "Translation and Transformation," 144.

[32] Frankenstein, Johnson, and Reilly have thoroughly studied and analyzed this correspondence in the above-cited publications. The letters reside at the Museums at Stony Brook and the New-York Historical Society.

paintings for which he designated the content. Once an artist had furnished the artwork, he or she ceased involvement in the process. Schaus arranged for its reproduction in Paris (location of expert lithographers and efficient steam presses[33]), and the resulting prints' distribution in Europe and the United States. If Schaus owned the original painting, he probably displayed it in his showroom for marketing purposes, then disposed of it at auction.[34]

It seems Schaus's degree of involvement in dictating subject matter for reproduction varied, but increased as time passed. In the case of Mount, of the ten paintings Goupil/Schaus reproduced, five were preexisting works owned by others and five were commissioned specifically by the publishers for lithographs.[35] However, of the Mount paintings reproduced from 1853 to 1857 (the years Schaus also worked with Spencer), seventy-five percent were ordered by the two firms. Most often the commissions involved rather vague instructions—for *The Banjo Player* and *The Bone Player* (figs. 68 and 69), Schaus merely indicated that he wanted designs representing a "Negro playing the Banjo and singing" and a "Negro playing the bones."[36] For *The Lucky*

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[33] Peter C. Marzio, "American Lithographic Technology before the Civil War," in Morse, *Prints in and of America*, 216, 243.

[34] Bolton-Smith and Truettner, *Joys of Sentiment*, 54. Schaus sold the works he purchased from Spencer at auctions at Henry H. Leeds & Co. For example, *Hush* and *Oh!* were auctioned on May 28, 1857, and *Bo-Peep* and *The Young Teacher* on March 14, 1860. American Art Auction Catalogue Collection, 1785–1962, reel N312, frames 215 and 432, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution (hereafter cited as American Art Auction Catalogue Collection). None of the paintings Schaus lithographed are currently located, except for *Height of Fashion*, which sold at Sotheby's on September 26, 1991.

[35] The preexisting paintings include: *The Power of Music* (published by Goupil in 1848), *Music is Contagious* (Goupil, 1849), *Catching Rabbits* (Goupil, 1850), *Just in Tune* (Goupil, 1851), and *Coming to the Point* (Schaus, 1855). The commissioned paintings include: *Raffling for a Goose* (Goupil, 1851), *Right and Left* (Goupil, 1852), *The "Herald" in the Country* (Goupil, 1854), *The Banjo Player* (Schaus, 1857), and *The Bone Player* (Schaus, 1857). Johnson, "William Sidney Mount," 71–81; Frankenstein, *William Sidney Mount*, 152–69.

[36] Wilhelm Schaus to William Sidney Mount, September 1852, reprinted in Frankenstein, *William Sidney Mount*, 164.

Throw (the lithograph of which was renamed *Raffling for a Goose*, fig. 70), however, his indications were more specific: "one picture Negro—African—head life size—laughing, showing his white teeth and holding something funny in his hand—*Goose, a Duck, or a squirrel* etc. Size 25 x 30."[37]

From Schaus's dealings with Mount, we can make some educated guesses about the extent to which the print publisher influenced the subject matter of Spencer's images of children. The first work from which Schaus made a lithograph, *Power of Fashion* (fig. 71), had already been painted by Spencer by late 1851.[38] Sensing its commercial potential, perhaps when it was exhibited at the National Academy of Design in 1852, he published the print in 1853, and very likely commissioned the pendant, *Height of Fashion* (fig. 72) around this time, if his dealings with Mount can be taken as precedent.[39] The pair was a popular success, which likely led him to commission work from her over the next several years. It seems that by 1854 Spencer sold many of her paintings to Schaus directly after completing them, without any attempt at exhibition: "I have five beautiful pictures which the public have not yet seen, and which are all to be engraved [*sic*]—in the best style—by the gentleman who owns them."[40] Knowing her reputation for domestic scenes, and the success of *Power of Fashion*, he may have trusted her to create

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[37] William Sidney Mount diary entry, 15 September 1850, reprinted in Frankenstein, *William Sidney Mount*, 162.

[38] Spencer offered the painting to the American Art-Union for three hundred dollars in November 1851. Bolton-Smith and Truettner, *Joys of Sentiment*, 163.

[39] As an agent for Goupil, Schaus had procured the rights to Mount's *Just in Tune* (fig. 73) in 1849 for publication in 1851. In early 1850, he commissioned its pair, *Right and Left* (fig. 74), which was released in 1852. Johnson, "William Sidney Mount," 71. Similarly, *Height of Fashion* came out in 1854, a year after *Power of Fashion*.

[40] LMS to Angélique and Gilles Martin, 20 April 1854, LMS papers.

the compositions, giving her only vague instructions, as he did with Mount. At the same time, she probably responded to the market more astutely after being exposed to Schaus's expertise.[41] Schaus's and Spencer's professional relationship was probably one of collaboration, the results of which were lithographs that appealed to a wide middle-class audience.[42]

Of the fourteen lithographs that Schaus produced from Spencer's designs, eleven feature single white children and one portrays three Caucasian youngsters (figs. 41, 75–80, 83–86).[43] I also consider two paintings of white boys, *Child Playing with Fish Bowl* and *Child Playing with Cat* (figs. 81 and 82), as part of this group, because Spencer most likely created these for lithographic translation.[44] By analyzing the consistencies in this

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[41] While working with the print publisher, Mount became more skilled at developing his work for a commercial market. Reilly, "Translation and Transformation," 141. Spencer probably did likewise.

[42] If in reality it was a collaboration, Spencer's admirers did not sense it: "'The Jolly Washerwoman,' 'Little Navigator,' 'Little Sunshade,' and 'Shake Hands,' are some of her well-known pictures. They are fresh, finely-colored, delightful designs, showing something merry and genial *in the soul of their author*" (italics added). "Masters of Art and Literature. Second Article." *Cosmopolitan Art Journal*, November 1856, 50.

[43] For the most part, it appears that Schaus had the French lithographer Jean-Baptiste Adolphe Lafosse faithfully copy Spencer's compositions. However, the publisher reduced two of the designs from multiple figures to one, possibly to maintain consistency with the other works, or perhaps so that the pictures read better as graphic statements. The painting for *Oh!* is described in the May 28, 1857 Henry H. Leeds auction catalogue as "representing a group of children, blowing soap bubbles and expressing surprise at the beautiful colors therein reflected." American Art Auction Catalogue Collection, reel N312, frame 215. The Schaus lithograph shows only one mesmerized girl. Likewise, the painting for *The First Polka* includes in the background a mother engrossed with a baby she holds in her arms, whereas the print shows the boy dancing with the cat alone. Photograph of painting in LMS papers. A third print, *The First Pants* (1860, fig. 86), features a boy and dog who are very similar in design to those in a more elaborate engraving reproduced in the November 1860 issue of *Peterson's Magazine* (fig. 87). While the inscription on *Peterson's* version does not give credit to Spencer, Schaus, or Lafosse, it seems likely that the boy and dog motif was lifted from the Spencer/Schaus lithograph and inserted into a different design (which includes a mother and rustic background), as the engraving came out at the end of 1860. No lithograph of *The Young Soldier* has been located. In the Old Print Shop's May 1943 *Portfolio*, the subject is described as "a little boy in military costume…the boy wears green and brown and stands beside a red upholstered chair." Copy of pages 211–12 in LMS papers. Unfortunately, this description does not mention anything about the boy's specific pose or activities.

[44] See note 3 above.

body of work, it becomes apparent that the lithographs comment on changing ideals about white, middle-class children's behavior and parent-enforced discipline.

Unlike the images of country children of the 1840s, which I have argued reinforced bourgeois parental superiority, the Spencer/Schaus prints of the 1850s show youngsters who could be the offspring of the print publisher's customers. They are well dressed, appear in fashionable Victorian interiors, and possess manufactured toys, a luxury imported from Europe.[45] In this they resemble many of the children in lithographs by Currier and Ives. Understandably, the youngsters in the Spencer/Schaus prints do not act like naughty country children, who, a decade earlier, skipped school, stole, and fought. But they also do not behave like Currier and Ives's darlings, either. The majority of prints of children that Currier and Ives published pictured them in a good light.[46] For example, *The Young Soldier* (c. 1850, fig. 88) stands tall, a picture of George Washington in the background announcing the boy's similarly noble character. *The Prize Boy* (1857, fig. 89) sits quietly with crop in hand, perhaps waiting for his riding lesson. These images reflect ideals popular in advice manuals of the 1830s and 1840s, which carried over into the 1850s.

Conversely, the Spencer/Schaus lithographs feature children engaged in slightly mischievous activities, such as damaging toys, like the child who has busted the head of his drum (fig. 83), or misusing household supplies, like the boy who provokes the cat with a yard of lace (fig. 82). These are harmless pranks compared to the wrongdoings of the country boys, yet real misbehaviors when contrasted to the uprightness of the Currier

[45] Mergen, "Children's Play," 179.

[46] Bryan F. Le Beau, *Currier & Ives: America Imagined* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001), 213.

and Ives children. The images hint at a reassessment of principles about what constitutes misbehavior and attest to an emerging attitude that children are inherently innocent. The youngsters in the prints may act up, but their activities are portrayed as those of children who, at heart, are full of goodness.

One key to this interpretation is that the presence of the viewer (most likely an adult and a parent) is often implied by the children, who look out beyond the picture plane. Thus, there is an opportunity to discipline, yet the children's smiling faces show that the viewer/parent condones their behavior. For example, *The Little Navigator* (fig. 76), who has placed his dirty shoe in a bowl meant to be used for adults' personal grooming, tilts his head and glances out at the viewer with a mirthful expression. Art historian Anita Schorsch has interpreted the motif of "one shoe off and one shoe on," popular in nineteenth-century paintings of young boys, as suggesting "the little devil submerged within the child."[47] If a parent wanted to employ techniques of disciplinary intimacy, this would be a perfect time to do so. However, the child's coy smile infers that the parent is in on the joke, rather than interested in punishing by withdrawing affection. Similarly, in *The Young Students* (fig. 85), the boy on the left looks out and leans back in a relaxed gesture that implies the viewer is not angry about the mayhem caused by the restless kittens and blindfolded dog, but is sharing in his laugh.

Comparisons with other works from the period emphasize the permissive attitude displayed in the Spencer/Schaus prints. In images like *Mother's Watch* by James

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[47] Anita Schorsch, *Images of Childhood: An Illustrated Social History* (New York: Mayflower Books, 1979), 163. Schorsch refers here to the nursery rhyme: "Diddle, diddle, dumpling, my son John, / Went to bed with his trousers on; / One shoe off, and one shoe on, / Diddle, diddle, dumpling, my son John." Baring-Gould and Baring-Gould, *Annotated Mother Goose*, 106. According to the Baring-Goulds, "John" refers to a hot-dumpling seller whose partial state of undress is due to inebriation. *Annotated Mother Goose*, 105.

Goodwyn Clonney (c. 1852–1856, fig. 90) and *A Cat Nap* by Louis Maurer (1859, fig. 91), middle-class children are pictured as mischievous only when their mother is sleeping. Rather than portraying parents as tolerant of roguish behavior, these images seem to send a message that parents need to be vigilant, for wicked children will always misbehave if left unsupervised. The only print in which Spencer conveyed these sentiments is *Fruit of Temptation* (1857, fig. 92), which, interestingly, is the only one of her designs to be published by Goupil and Company rather than by Wilhelm Schaus. The image shows a dismayed mother suddenly discovering her children gorging on fruits and sugary treats while the family pets lick milk out of a pitcher and eat a large piece of cake, and the Irish maid ignores her duties to groom herself in the mirror. One can imagine that all involved will soon be punished for their surreptitious trespasses. It seems that indulging in food was the only form of mischievous behavior that Spencer would not tolerate in children—it does not appear in any of the Spencer/Schaus lithographs that imply a condoning parental figure.[48] This may reflect warnings circulating at the time about the dangers of a rich, immoderate diet for children.[49] Harriet Martineau, in response to a report of forty thousand child deaths in England in a single year, advocated that all sweets and spicy foods be eliminated from children's diets.[50] William Alcott cautioned caregivers not to encourage children to eat too much: "by dint of variety of food and kind attention, and a natural curiosity and love of novelty, he is stuffed…and the stuffing

[48] Katz has observed that the boy addressing the audience in the foreground knows he is caught. *Regionalism and Reform*, 32–33.This is the only occurrence in a Spencer design where the implied viewer does not sanction the behavior of a mischievous child.

[49] Calvert, "Cradle to Crib," 46; Perry, *Young America*, 65.

[50] Bernard Wishy, *The Child and the Republic: The Dawn of Modern American Child Nurture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1968), 36.

practice is continued, at least until he gets sick, which, thanks to this and other wrong practices, frequently happens very soon. Nearly one-half of all who are born die under ten years of age, and at some seasons of the year and in some places, more than one-half. Did God intend it should be so?"[51] Spencer and Goupil and Company, then, in all good conscience, could not picture children getting away with this perilous activity.[52]

In the Spencer/Schaus lithographs, several other points support the idea that the children's featured behavior, which probably would have been thought wayward by many former and current advice manual authors, is being reinterpreted by the makers as innocent fun. The point of view in the lithographs is always low and nearby, which suggests a feeling of camaraderie,[53] rather than an air of opposition. If the parent were contemplating punishment for these various acts, he or she would want to be in a towering position of authority. Rather, the viewer's close proximity to the children suggests a willingness to play along. In *Hush* (fig. 79), the child even gives the parent instructions to cease talking, raising his hand in a stop gesture and opening his mouth slightly to whisper his admonition. It is as if the child and viewer are accomplices. Second, the humor that pervades the prints acts to dismiss any sense of wrongdoing on the children's part. Their pranks, such as angling in the fishbowl (*Child Playing with*

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[51] William A. Alcott, *The Laws of Health: or, Sequel to "The House I Live In"* (Boston, 1857), 138.

[52] Most scholars have interpreted *Fruit of Temptation* as displaying Spencer's frustration with servants, who, she increasingly came to believe, were incompetent and unreliable. Lubin, *Picturing a Nation*, 194–95; O'Leary, *At Beck and Call*, 96. In these readings, the maid, not the children themselves, becomes the source of blame for the display of overindulgence. Graham Corray Boettcher, on the other hand, sees the print as placing responsibility on mothers; he interprets the work as an admonishment—children will end up "spoiled rotten" if not properly supervised. "Domestic Violence: The Politics of Family and Nation in Antebellum American Art" (PhD diss., Yale University, 2006), 142–44.

[53] Ellwood C. Parry, "Some Distant Relatives and American Cousins of Thomas Eakins's Children at Play," *American Art Journal* 18, no. 1 (1986): 36. Parry discusses the implications of this point of view in his analysis of Eakins's *Elizabeth Crowell and Her Dog*, c. 1871–1872.

Fishbowl, fig 81) giving the cat a sock hat (*The First Polka*, fig. 83), or blindfolding the dog (*The Young Students*, fig. 85), provoke a laugh in the viewer rather than cause a frown. Lastly, the titles of the lithographs are not negative, like the 1840s paintings of country boys (*The Truant Gamblers, Boy in Trouble)*, but instead emphasize the children's youth (*The Little Sunshade, The Little Navigator, The Young Soldier, The Young Teacher, The Young Students)* and thus their innocence, which is maintained through their lack of experience in a corrupt adult world.

Around this time, people started to picture childhood not as a time of training for adulthood, but as a separate period for children to be carefree and oblivious to adult concerns. Middle-class Americans began to consider childhood the most attractive stage of life, when one was occupied only with eating, sleeping, and playing, "happily ignorant of the future."[54] Whereas in the recent past, play consisted of didactic activities with a secondary function of pleasure, now advisors began to condone amusement for its own sake.[55] The girl in *Oh!* (fig. 80), for instance, looks out of the picture plane, presumably at a bubble like the one currently clinging to her pipe, simply mesmerized by the colors it reflects in the sunlight.[56]

The period's popular literature also began to compare children to animals. By referring to them as "pet," "bunny," "kitten," or "pup," adults conveyed their belief that children were not fully developed.[57] In the Spencer/Schaus lithograph *Our Pet* (fig. 77), the image's nickname title and the animal-print blanket on which the child sits

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[54] Heininger, "Children, Childhood, and Change," 15.

[55] Ibid., 16.

[56] See note 43 above.

[57] Heininger, "Children, Childhood, and Change," 15.

underscores the fact that the baby, at this point, is considered like an animal. The Spencer/Schaus lithographs regularly pictured youngsters accompanied by animals as well, their rowdy interactions with the creatures reminding the viewer that the children themselves are not yet tame. In *The Young Students* (fig. 85), the children put aside their school books to enjoy the antics of the frolicking pets at their feet. They have had a hand in stirring up the dog, at least, who they have blindfolded with an orange sash. The dark and light kittens that wrestle in the lower right serve to stand in for the two boys, dressed in light and dark outfits. One can imagine that they have engaged in rough and tumble play themselves. Although the students are further along the path to adulthood than some of the other children in the lithographs, Spencer has kept their world separate from that of adults. They remain in the foreground, seated on crickets, or small stools commonly used as children's seats.[58] The "adult" furniture of side chairs, sofa, and table remain for the most part in the background;[59] the children may be near the civility of adulthood, but they have not entered it yet.

It is important to remember that ideas about innocent misbehavior and carefree play were relatively new in the 1850s. Accordingly, contemporaries probably saw some facets of the Spencer/Schaus lithographs as forward-looking. There is enough of the traditional remaining in the prints, however, to indicate that refashioning ideologies took time. Analysis of the group suggests that while the images made gestures towards advocating leniency and untroubled play, Spencer and Schaus did not yet embrace the

[58] Garrett, *At Home*, 90.

[59] Katz, *Regionalism and Reform*, 54, 56.

type of behavior that was lauded in the 1870s in books like *The Story of a Bad Boy* and *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, and in artwork by Homer and Johnson.

Historian E. Anthony Rotundo has outlined a phenomenon in nineteenth-century middle-class childhood that he describes as "boy culture." An intermediary stage between early childhood, which took place in the domestic realm, and manhood, which centered on the business world, it consisted of a period of time starting around the age of six when boys roamed outdoors, free from the surveillance of parents. According to Rotundo, boy culture assisted youths in transitioning from the nurturing sphere of the home to the impersonal, competitive domain of commerce. With other boys, they participated in strenuous physical activity, competed in games, fought with each other, tortured and killed small animals, play-acted, and built and collected things.[60]

While this boy culture seems to have existed during most of the nineteenth century (or at least since mothers took over child rearing and fathers' work became separate from the home[61]), attitudes towards it varied, depending on the ideologies popular at the time. In the 1850s, it seemed objectionable, as "Mrs. Manners" related in 1853: "Why is it that there must be a period in the lives of boys when they should be spoken of as 'disagreeable cubs'? Why is a gentle, polite boy such a rarity?"[62]

Accordingly, the Spencer/Schaus lithographs, while picturing at least half the lads at an age when they would be joining boy culture, played down the types of behavior that

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[60] E. Anthony Rotundo, "Boy Culture: Middle-Class Boyhood in Nineteenth-Century America," in *Meanings for Manhood: Constructions of Masculinity in Victorian America*, ed. Mark C. Carnes and Clyde Griffen (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 15–36.

[61] Ibid., 32–33.

[62] "Mrs. Manners," *At Home and Abroad; or, How to Behave* (New York, 1853), quoted in Rotundo, "Boy Culture," 15.

would, by the 1870s, be appreciated in popular literature and art. Each of the five boys (in *Child Playing with Fish Bowl, Hush*, *The Young Students*, *The First Pants*, and presumably *The Young Soldier*) wears short trousers or pants, denoting their entry into boy culture. The dresses boys wore until about age six curtailed their physical activities and therefore were not practical.[63] On a more symbolic level, the shedding of frocks initiated gender differentiation between boys and their sisters, who would wear dresses throughout childhood and their adult lives. *The First Pants* (fig. 86) calls attention to this right of passage. The empty spool on the table indicates that the trousers are freshly finished. The boy takes full advantage of his new clothing by teasing the dog with something he has placed, or pretended to place, in his pockets.

While these boys appear to be around age six or older, they do not participate in a boy culture, but instead are seen as still under the influence of the domestic sphere. For one thing, they appear indoors (except for the boy in *Hush*). The youngsters are not outside, roaming the neighborhood and thus out of contact with mothers, but instead play inside, near implied parents. Second, their penchant is to tease their pet dogs and cats; they are not shown killing animals for food or gratuitous pleasure.[64] Lastly, many of the prints' pendants feature girls, who may be interpreted as sisters to the boys represented. Their calm presence tempers the boys' activities, and gives each pair of lithographs an air

[63] Rotundo, "Boy Culture," 16–17. The babies in *Bo-Peep* and *Our Pet* wear a shift and a long dress, denoting their toddler status. The boys in *The Little Navigator*, *Child Playing with Cat*, and *The First Polka* sport pantaloons and off-the-shoulder blouses that are similar in style to dresses popular for both boys and girls under the age of six during the nineteenth century. Yunginger, introduction, 16. The children in *Child Playing with Fish Bowl* and *Hush* wear more masculine short- and long-sleeve shirts. According to Estelle Ansley Worrell, "Boys up to seven or eight years of age had buttons on the waistline of their shirts for the trousers to fasten onto." *Children's Costume in America 1607–1910* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1980), 118. The boys in *The Young Students* and *The First Pants*, who don long trousers and pants with suspenders, are probably meant to be age eight or older. Worrell, *Children's Costume*, 118.

[64] The exceptions are *Hush* and *Child Playing with Fishbowl*; in these, Spencer hints at activities to come—one boy will soon start his insect collection and the other practices for a future fishing expedition.

of domesticity. For example, the girl in *My Birthday Present* prominently displays a fashionable doll, which serves to remind the viewer that *The Young Soldier* is merely dressed in a costume as well. The lass in *Oh!* stands on cobblestones, hinting that she and the lad in *Hush* are likely close to home. It is unclear in many of the prints if the boys pictured have yet to join other boys to create a world separate from their mothers and sisters, or if they are pictured in a rare moment at home. The prints do suggest, however, in their disavowal of boys' outside activities, that Spencer's audience refused to celebrate, or even recognize boy culture at this point in time. While they may have been able to tolerate, and even enjoy the pictured boys' minor peccadilloes, they seem not to have wanted to see images of boys out of parental control.

Spencer and Schaus appear to have supplied customers with what they wanted to see, if production figures are any indication. Elizabeth Ellet related in 1859 that "perhaps more of her paintings have been engraved than of any American artist…Mrs. Spencer's pictures may be seen in many shops where works of art are for sale, and the prints engraved from them are very numerous."[65] A later (probably more exaggerated) estimate put the number of lithographs printed at one million.[66] The prints were sold in eastern cities, such as New York and Philadelphia, and as far west as St. Louis.[67] The price of each of Spencer's prints is unknown, but Schaus's former employer Goupil sold lithographs of Mount's paintings for three dollars (black and white) and five dollars

[65] Ellet, *Women Artists*, 325, 326.

[66] See note 4 above.

[67] Spencer's "original designs in New York and in the print-stores of our own city [Philadelphia] are the admiration of all window-gazers." Unfootnoted quote from *Godey's Lady's Book* in Schumer, "Lilly Martin Spencer," 61–62. *The Little Navigator, The Little Sunshade, The Power of Fashion,* and *The Height of Fashion* were displayed in the window of looking glass and picture frame shop D&S Spencer, 92 Fourth Street, St. Louis. Gage, "Mrs. L. M. Spencer, the Artist," Martin family papers.

(hand-colored) in the late 1840s and early 1850s. By the mid-1850s, they advertised lithographs similar in size to Lafosse's prints after Spencer for three and six dollars.[68] This was certainly within reach of middle-class consumers' budgets.[69]

The popularity of the Spencer/Schaus prints can be further determined by looking at Schaus's competition. While Currier and Ives mainly produced images of decorous children, occasionally they published lithographs of unchaperoned children behaving badly (see for example, *A Cat Nap*, fig. 91). However, in at least two instances, their prints resemble closely Spencer's designs that imply a condoning parent/viewer. In 1858, four years after Schaus published *The Little Navigator*, Currier and Ives brought out *The Young Navigator* (fig. 93). Here, a boy, also in a leaning pose with one hand resting on his knee, floats his small shoe in a stream. Another image by Louis Maurer, entitled *Into Mischief* (1857, fig. 94), does not directly lift any motifs from Spencer, but is similar in tone to many of the lithographs being published by Schaus at this time.[70] The children's engaging smiles towards the viewer are reminiscent of the Spencer/Schaus prints and intimate a parent's mutual delight in their mischievous endeavors. The fact that Currier and Ives published prints imitating those distributed by Schaus shows that pictures of mischievous white, middle-class children struck a chord with consumers.

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[68] Johnson, "William Sidney Mount," 103n153; Goupil & Co., *Second Supplement to Catalogue of Goupil & Co.* (New York: Goupil & Co., 1856), 4.

[69] Catherine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe recommended in 1869 that middle-class housewives spend between $5 and $12 each on chromolithographs to decorate their parlors. Catharine E. Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe, *The American Woman's Home* (1869; repr., Watkins Glen, NY: Library of Victorian Culture, 1979), 91. Accounting for inflation, the Spencer/Schaus hand-colored lithographs would fit within this range. In 1869, a $6 print from 1856 would cost $8.77. Tom R. Halfhill, "Tom's Inflation Calculator," http://www.halfhill.com/inflation.html.

[70] *Into Mischief* so closely resembles the subject matter of the Spencer/Schaus prints that Perry attributed it (incorrectly) to Spencer in her *Young America* exhibition catalogue (p. 64). The design is actually by Louis Maurer. Gale, *Currier & Ives*, 1:348.

It seems that purchasers often placed these kinds of images in nurseries. The Currier and Ives print *The First Step: "Come to Mama"* (1859, fig. 95) features a framed copy of their lithograph *Into Mischief* hung in a room containing a crib.[71] Parents may have been encouraged to hang pictures in nurseries from descriptions in popular literature. Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote extensively about Eva's well-appointed room in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The interior decoration included statues of angels and Jesus receiving little children, and "two or three exquisite paintings of children, in various attitudes…In short, the eye could turn nowhere without meeting images of childhood, of beauty, and of peace. Those little eyes never opened, in the morning light, without falling on something which suggested to the heart soothing and beautiful thoughts."[72] By 1862, however, it appears that parents needed to be reminded that the pictures in nurseries were meant for the instruction of their children. A writer in *Arthur's Home Magazine* urged mothers to

> let your pictures teach lessons of love and gentleness, of tender care and affection for even the humblest of God's creatures, and guard well your collection from anything repulsive or degrading. Shun, as you would vipers, the coarse, comic caricatures, which a depraved public taste has caused to abound so extensively at the present day. Never suffer your children to pore over them, any more than you would permit him to listen and mingle with the coarse slang of the street. The tendency of both is precisely the same, though the pictures to the eye are, if any difference, more vivid and enduring.[73]

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[71] The lithographs *Hush* and *Oh!* are hung in the nursery at the historic house museum, Orchard House – Home of the Alcotts, in Concord, Massachusetts (fig. 96). The provenance of the prints is not clear, but could very likely have been possessions of the Amos Bronson Alcott family, who lived in the house from 1858 to 1877. The nursery was built in the 1870s; if the Alcotts did place them there, they may have been following a trend dating back to the 1850s. Conversation with Maria Powers, Interim Curator, Orchard House – Home of the Alcotts, 4 August 2006.

[72] Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852; repr., New York: Barnes and Noble Classics, 2003), 327.

[73] J. E. M'C, "Hang up a Picture," *Arthur's Home Magazine*, February 1862, 116.

While this account is surely exaggerated, it suggests that parents may have been buying prints of naughty children for their own edification rather than to teach their offspring any kind of lesson. By placing a print like *Into Mischief* or *The First Polka* in a nursery, a mother would be reminded each time she spent time there of the inherent innocence of white, middle-class children. The mischievous behavior pictured is acceptable, because it is minor, nonviolent, within the home, and under adult supervision. This imagery would have been comforting to many parents who, at this point in time, viewed the world outside their doors as quickly being turned upside-down.

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Indeed, for Spencer's urban audience at least, American society in the 1850s appeared to be growing more dangerous and more immoral as demographics shifted. In the 1840s, immigrants from Ireland sailed for the United States to escape the potato famine. In the early 1850s, Germans came, looking for relief from the political turmoil in their mother country. Not having resources or knowledge of the greater area, many immigrants settled within a few miles of the docks in major seaports, such as Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore, causing a surge in those cities' populations.[74] By 1855, Irish immigrants made up twenty-eight percent of the New York population and Germans sixteen percent.[75] The free black population, on the other hand, was decreasing in New York (from 16,000 in 1840 to 12,500 in 1860). According to historian Leslie Harris, this was due to the incoming Irish, who took their jobs, and to the passage of the

[74] Paul Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820–1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), 67.

[75] Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789–1860* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986), 44.

Fugitive Slave law in 1850 that led many to move further north or west for fear of kidnapping and enslavement.[76] The falling population did not prevent middle- and upper-class whites from being apprehensive of some working-class black activities, however. Overall, native-born whites were alarmed by the changes in their city.

The swell in population from immigration made careful urban planning impossible and good employment opportunities scarce. Slums quickly developed to house the poor working class, which now included immigrants from Ireland and Germany along with free blacks. The slums were overcrowded, sanitation hard to manage, and therefore disease was prevalent. Many immigrants engaged in outwork in their apartments, producing high-demand luxury consumer goods. To make ends meet, they sweated their children, or had them work on the streets, selling things or scavenging.[77] Scavengers were six or seven years old, too young to be employed in wage work or the street trades. They collected from the streets, docks, and lumberyards stray pieces of coal, rags, bits of metal, and broken glass, which they sold at junk shops to be recycled. The line between scavenging and stealing was thin, and many children engaged in petty theft. Some even participated in prostitution.[78]

By the mid-1850s, slum children who "worked" the streets had become a symbol of all that was wrong with urban life.[79] As Christine Stansell has argued, the familiar

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[76] Leslie M. Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery: African Americans in New York City, 1626–1863* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 7.

[77] Reinier, *From Virtue to Character*, 126, 138. The street trades became the only option for children once the apprentice system collapsed for boys and young women replaced girls in domestic service. Stansell, *City of Women*, 203.

[78] Stansell, *City of Women*, 50–51.

[79] Ibid., 54.

sight of street sellers, scavengers, and child prostitutes in New York was sensationally recast by the police, authors, and religious reformers into a spectacle of horror.[80] Working-class children were pictured as dangerous and a threat to the social stability of the whole city. Police chief George Matsell called attention to "a deplorable and growing evil" in an 1849 report. "I allude to the constantly increasing number of vagrants, idle and vicious children of both sexes, who infest our public thoroughfares…their numbers are almost incredible…the degrading and disgusting habits of these almost infants…it is humiliating to be compelled to recognize them as a part and portion of the human family…clothed in rags…filthy in the extreme…cunning and adroit…[frequenters of] the lowest dens of drunkenness and disease."[81] This attitude spread in the coming decade. The New York Children's Aid Society report of 1854 railed against crimes perpetrated by poor children.

> This Association…has sprung from the increasing sense among our citizens of the evils of the city. Thirty years ago, the proposal of an important organization, which should devote itself entirely to the class of vagrant, homeless and criminal children in New York, would have seemed absurd…Crime among boys and girls has become organized, as it never was, previously. The Police state that picking pockets is now a profession among a certain class of boys…Cotton-picking on the wharves, iron stealing in the drydocks, "smashing" of baggage, in other words, pilfering under pretense of carrying it, and "book-bluffing," which is a species of mock book-selling, are all means of livelihood for the dishonest poor boys of New York."[82]

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[80] Ibid., 195–96.

[81] "Semi-Annual Report of the Chief of Police," *Documents of the Board of Aldermen* 17, pt 1 (New York, 1850), quoted in Stansell, *City of Women*, 194–95.

[82] Excerpt from New York Children's Aid Society, *First Annual Report* (1854), reprinted in *Children and Youth in America: A Documentary History*, ed. Robert H. Bremner, vol. 1, 1600–1865 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), 420–21.

The efforts at propaganda worked because the upper- and middle-class neighborhoods were, for the most part, geographically separated from the working-class slums. People formed their opinions largely through the media, rather than from firsthand experience.[83]

Artist David Gilmour Blythe directly expressed through visual means the fears of the middle class during this time. Pittsburgh, where he had settled in 1856, had a large Irish and German immigrant population; citizens there, just as in New York, believed that these foreigners and their offspring brought poverty, crime, and epidemics to the area.[84] Between 1856 and 1860, Blythe created a series of over twenty paintings that pictured Pittsburgh street children as the public imagined them: slovenly, lazy, inebriated, and prone to make trouble.[85] *The Urchin* (c. 1856, fig. 97) features a young boy leaning against a barrel of wine, sipping through a straw that he has shoved between the staves. His half-closed eyes and wine-stained face, chest, and arms suggest drunkenness. His extremely tattered clothes and shoeless feet show that his addiction trumps all other bodily needs. Another lone figure, *A Match Seller* (c. 1859, fig. 98), also has drooping eyes, which hint at a drug-induced state. He kneels in the shadows while biting into an apple, perhaps an allusion to the biblical episode of the Fall of Man. Several loose matches lay on top of the bundled ones, ready to use rather than to sell. As Sarah Burns has observed, his full basket seems threatening, as it could fuel a major conflagration.[86]

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[83] Boyer, *Urban Masses*, 74–75.

[84] Johns, *American Genre Painting*, 192.

[85] Bruce W. Chambers gives a good overview of this series in *The World of David Gilmour Blythe (1815–1865)* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press for National Collection of Fine Arts, 1980), 37–53.

[86] Sarah Burns, *Painting the Dark Side: Art and the Gothic Imagination in Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 70.

Probably for Blythe's audience, his most terrifying picture was *Street Urchins* (1856–1860, fig. 99). At least eight small scoundrels crowd the picture plane. Many smoke cigars, while the boy in the front lights a small cannon that is aimed to go off in the viewer's face.[87] Burnt matches in the foreground suggest this is not the first time it is to be lit, while the package of gunpowder on the left implies that it will not be the last. The painting captures all that the middle class feared: the barrels to the right, which literally sandwich one of the boys, symbolize their penchant for alcohol; the phallic cannon and cigars call attention to their budding sexuality, and therefore their future danger to women; and the incendiary device probably reminded viewers of the great 1851 fire in Pittsburgh, thought to have been caused by vagrant youths.[88] Finally, the number of boys, cut off in the background to imply that they exist as a multitude behind the main figure, would have provoked the public's fear of gang formation. Reformers like Charles Loring Brace, who founded the Children's Aid Society in New York in 1853, cited as the major danger to society large groups of wandering children, who might use their collective power as young adults.[89]

Pittsburghers were fascinated by Blythe's paintings. He showed them in the shop window of print dealer J. J. Gillespie. Often the works attracted crowds large enough to clog the streets.[90] Sarah Burns argues that the popularity of the display stemmed from the fact that viewers were able to safely project their anxieties about the perceived problem

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[87] Burns, *Painting the Dark Side*, 70.

[88] Johns, *American Genre Painting*, 193.

[89] Boyer, *Urban Masses*, 96.

[90] Burns, *Painting the Dark Side*, 46.

of urban urchins onto the paintings, because they remained behind glass.[91] Blythe's pessimistic works were an anomaly during the 1850s, however. Some artists painted street children in a positive light, choosing to focus on hard-working newsboys and chaste flower girls, who, they suggested, would rise above their circumstances in fulfillment of the American dream. The majority ignored the problem altogether.[92] Spencer did not shy away from the issues like many, but certainly took a different tack than Blythe. At first, she designed works that used sympathy or humor to disarm the purported danger. Later, likely with the input of Schaus, she chose to deal with the issues indirectly through her portrayals of white, middle-class children.

Spencer first attempted the subject of working-class children with the painting *Buy My Flowers* in 1848 (fig. 100). Two barefoot young girls sit at the base of a column, which likely situates them in an urban business district. The older of the two balances a basket of flowers on her knee, while the younger leans against her sister and sleeps, hinting at the length of their work and the late hour. The forlorn look of the older sister, coupled with the full basket, suggests the day's honest work has amounted to little. Will they be forced into selling their bodies ("flowers") instead? Their low-cut bodices, fashionable on middle-class children, here hint at their vulnerability to lascivious advances by men who pass by. Spencer's depiction of the girls' hopeless situation was surely meant to evoke sympathy in viewers.

[91] Ibid., 72.

[92] Johns, *American Genre Painting*, 184; Burns, "Barefoot Boys," 42–43.

While this strategy may have worked in the 1840s, by the early 1850s, propaganda against the urban poor had turned middle-class compassion to anxiety.[93] At the same time that police reports, literary sketches, and reformer's accounts warned of the dangerous threat of immigrant street children to New York's social stability, proslavery and anti-equality newspapers and conservative religious reformers' publications linked amalgamation between Irish immigrants and working-class blacks to the declining morality of the city, to poverty, and to crime.[94] As the Irish moved into the city, they settled in the Five Points, an area in the Sixth Ward that was traditionally home to poor African Americans. Thus in the 1840s and 1850s, these two groups "uneasily shared geographic, social, economic, and cultural space" within five city blocks. Middle-class whites, reading the sensationalized accounts of journalists and reformers describing this mixing, came to believe that the Five Points was "the center of what they saw as a maelstrom of prostitution, interracial sex, murder, and theft that threatened to engulf the city."[95]

The Spencer/Schaus pendant lithographs, *Power of Fashion* (1853, fig. 71) and *Height of Fashion* (1854, fig. 72), which feature mulatto children, refer to middle-class anxieties about Irish/black miscegenation.[96] The children's biracial status is reported in Spencer's account of the origins of *Power of Fashion,* and in the Schaus pamphlet

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[93] Spencer attempted once more in the mid-1850s to create a "poetic" image of urban poverty with the pendants *Sunlight* and *Shadow* (see note 1 above). While the *Home Journal* reported that Schaus would publish lithographs after the paintings in 1856, no copies exist. This suggests that he decided not to print the subject matter after all, or that lithographs made did not win audience favor.

[94] Harris, *Shadow of Slavery*, 247–48.

[95] Ibid., 251–52.

[96] My thanks to Renée Ater for suggesting the bibliographic sources that helped me to formulate the following reading.

advertising the sale of lithographs of *Height of Fashion*.[97] In Spencer's recollection, she describes a walk down Broadway with her husband, on which they came across a mulatto boy smoking a cigar on the steps of Wallack's Theatre. Wallack's, which had opened at Broadway and Broome Street in September 1852,[98] was about twelve blocks from the Five Points. Spencer most likely, then, meant for the paired figures in the two prints to be seen as the outcome of Irish and African American sexual contact.

The Spencer/Schaus prints, if they had been read by Spencer's audience as featuring biracial children (and most likely viewers would have intuited this from the light hand-coloring of their skin), would have played on many New Yorkers' worst fears. Here were products of immigrant Irish and working-class black amalgamation encroaching on their territory of Broadway. Indeed, Harris has observed that "the proximity of the Five Points to the center of the city and to Broadway fueled white middle-class anxiety."[99] The boy and girl depicted may have reminded middle-class viewers of the potential composition of the city's future citizenry: a class of people for whom "rum [was their] first medicine, theft [their] first lesson, a prison [their] first house, and the Potter's Field [their] final resting-place."[100]

The figures may also have been interpreted as threatening to middle-class viewers' own sense of Anglo-Saxon racial superiority. They are shown by Spencer acting

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[97] Katz, *Regionalism and Reform*, 67–68.

[98] Lester Wallack, *Memories of Fifty Years* (New York, 1889), 13–14. The painting *Power of Fashion* is dated 1851, a year before the opening of Wallack's. Therefore, the incident that inspired it probably actually took place at Broughham's Lyceum, the theater Wallack's would replace in 1852.

[99] Harris, *Shadow of Slavery*, 252.

[100] From the 1861 account of missionary Benjamin Barlow, who ruminated on the fate of a mulatto infant he observed in the apartment of an Irish woman and black man. Quoted in Harris, *Shadow of Slavery*, 261.

similarly to "dandies," characters featured in the popular entertainment form known as minstrelsy (to be discussed in more detail below).[101] The dandy stereotype consisted of a Northern free black who imitated the dress and affectations of the white upper classes. The male dandy, often referred to as Zip Coon, was the subject of a minstrel song of the same name that detailed his penchant for amalgamation (fig. 101).[102] The white middle class vilified miscegenation between its members and blacks, because it was believed to threaten the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race. The theory of polygenesis, that each race is a biologically-distinct species with its own set of inherited physical, moral, and intellectual abilities, became widely accepted in antebellum, middle-class America. In the hierarchy invented, Anglo-Saxons took their place at the top, while all blacks were relegated to the bottom. It was believed that if Anglo-Saxons mixed their blood with blacks, it interfered with the process of transmitting their exceptional racial characteristics to their heirs.[103] The young Zip Coon character in the Spencer/Schaus lithograph, already of mixed race (between blacks and Irish, no less), probably would have been recognized as having the potential to perpetuate acts of miscegenation himself, this time with a member of the class to which he aspires. White middle-class viewers

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[101] Katz is the first scholar to recognize that *Power of Fashion* and *Height of Fashion* have references to minstrelsy. *Regionalism and Reform*, 62–70. She cites the Schaus pamphlet as praising Spencer "for her 'Christy and Buckley' (popular minstrel performers) philosophy of Negro character." *Regionalism and Reform*, 68. In her interpretation, Katz sees the prints as vehicles for whites to reproach other whites for ungenteel behavior.

[102] Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 133.

[103] Shawn Michelle Smith, *American Archives: Gender, Race, and Class in Visual Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 30. The idea of race is now considered an artificial social and political construct. See Martin A. Berger, *Sight Unseen: Whiteness and American Visual Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 4–7.

likely would have registered concern over this possible "contamination" of their race while looking at the image.

However, Spencer's use of humor and parody in the lithographs works to render the children unthreatening and inferior, thus helping to alleviate at least some of the anxiety her audience may have experienced. As a writer observed in the September 1858 *Cosmopolitan Art Journal*, "There always is humor in a real vagabond; —when the humorous ceases to predominate the vagabond is changed to the villain, the cut-throat."[104] Likewise, the humor in *Power of Fashion* and *Height of Fashion* prevents the children from being perceived as the urban urchins of the Five Points who supposedly lurk, loiter, steal, and threaten the safety of the general populace. At the same time, the parodic elements act to keep the mulatto children, who ultimately would have been considered "black," in their place as inferior members of society.[105]

Both the boy and girl play-act as wealthy adults by dressing up and assuming grown-up mannerisms. The full basket at the boy's feet suggests his job as a helper to a washerwoman. He might collect laundry from others' households for his employer (or mother) to wash at her own home.[106] Perhaps he has "borrowed" one of her customers' jackets, in the pile to be mended. Its many folds of fabric indicate that it is meant for a man, not a boy. With velvet cap and cigar poised at lips, he pretends to be a man of

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[104] *Cosmopolitan Art Journal*, September 1858, 210.

[105] Judith Wilson discusses how North Americans have been rigid in only seeing two races, white and black, despite the existence of interracial mixing. Judith Wilson, "Optical Illusions: Images of Miscegenation in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century American Art," *American Art* 5, no. 3 (Summer 1991): 88. Joel Williamson explains that white Americans in all but the lower South believed in the one-drop rule (the idea that one is black if one has any African black ancestry) from early in the eighteenth century. Joel Williamson, *Miscegenation and Mulattoes in the United States* (New York: Free Press, 1980), 2–3.

[106] Harris describes washing in one's home as a common employment for black women in antebellum New York. *Shadow of Slavery*, 81.

leisure. His companion has also found something that interests her in the basket. She wears a fashionable dress, described in the advertisement for the print as having "décolletage [that] would satisfy the *exigent* demands of Fifth Avenue, Chestnut Street, or the dress circle of Broadway or the Metropolitan."[107] To augment her outfit, the girl has wrapped herself in a fringed shawl and has fashioned jewelry and a quizzing glass from a handful of beads, string, and scrap metal. She also carries in her arms a pup "drawn from the identical lapdog of the aristocratic Lady Pompion."[108] With her many accoutrements and mock gesture of appraisal, she feigns upper-class superiority.

Spencer's depiction of the children, whose smiles attest to the humor they, as well as the audience, find in their play, contradicted the tendency to describe or picture working class children as thuggish. They are shown fully engaged in their make-believe; occupied thusly, they have little time to form gangs, create trouble, or commit crime. The portrayal of their physiognomy as clean and attractive probably further dissuaded viewers from believing in their ability for corrupt action. They in no way resemble the street youths of Blythe's imagination, who look perpetually dirty and inebriated. Finally, each print features a dog, which serves, as in many of Spencer's images of middle-class white children, as a tool of comparison. But whereas in several of the lithographs of the bourgeois youngsters their rambunctious pets show the children's uncivilized natures (fig. 82), here the canines are pictured as well-behaved, calm, and tame. Their composed presence confirms their master's and mistress's own undisruptive behavior.

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[107] Katz, *Regionalism and Reform*, 68. This is Katz's paraphrase of a section in *The Height of Fashion, A Painting by Mrs. Lilly Martin Spencer*.

[108] *The Height of Fashion, A Painting by Mrs. Lilly Martin Spencer*, quoted in Katz, *Regionalism and Reform*, 68. Lady Pompion was a character in the play *Old Heads and Young Hearts*. Katz, *Regionalism and Reform*, 194n90.

Simultaneously, the black children are kept in what would have been considered at the time their "rightful place" by referring to the "humorous" caricatures developed on the minstrel stage. Minstrelsy had been created in New York City and it was centered there during the antebellum period.[109] By producing stereotypes of Northern free blacks and Southern slaves, white minstrel actors colluded with their white audiences to rationalize racial oppression.[110] Performing in blackface, they portrayed African Americans as either subhuman or as dependent children, with incompetent and lazy tendencies, deserving to be enslaved, or if free, subordinated to the very bottom of the political, economic, and social ladders. As noted above, the children refer specifically to the stereotype of the Northern dandy. Historian David Roediger writes that in this role minstrels parodied "fancy dress, 'l'arned' speech, temperance, and religion among Blacks as ridiculous attempts to 'act white.'"[111] These prints, then, which show black children dressed awkwardly in the oversized clothes of the wealthy and comically attempting to behave like them, are a form of mockery similar to that of the minstrel tradition.[112]

In minstrelsy, the black dandy sometimes functioned to make fun of whites who acted above their place,[113] but the titles of the Spencer/Schaus lithographs, *Power of Fashion* and *Height of Fashion*, maintain focus on the absurdity of the black children's

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[109] Robert C. Toll, *Blacking Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 32.

[110] Eric Lott, "'The Seeming Counterfeit': Racial Politics and Early Blackface Minstrelsy," *American Quarterly* 43, no. 2 (June 1991): 223.

[111] David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*, rev. ed. (New York: Verso, 1999), 125.

[112] White audiences often confused blackface performers, who were white, for actual black people, so the fact that black children are playing as dandies in the Spencer/Schaus prints would have seemed natural to period viewers. Toll, *Blacking Up*, 38.

[113] Ibid., 69.

efforts. In his 1843 essay "Taste and Fashion," Congregational minister Horace Bushnell championed the development of the trait of taste to displace fashion's negative influence. According to Bushnell, taste is characterized by truth and originality, while its opposite, fashion, consists of falsity, vulgarity, and imitation. Bushnell believed that "the term *fashion* carries a sense of imitation with it, on this side of the Atlantic…Fashionable people are, with us, a caste-like people for the most part, such as covet the air and show of caste, whatever may become of the substance. They watch the modes of noble dandyism and royalty, on the other side of the water, hasting to receive the very things which the originators invent to put them at a distance, and wearing them, not to give their assent to the insult, as we might think, but with the highest satisfaction or even pride!"[114] Ten years later, Spencer and Schaus adopted this unfavorable definition of fashion when labeling their images of the black youths. The titles of the lithographs suggest that the children's mastery of fashion (not taste) makes them vulgar imitators. Like Bushnell's Americans who mimic the attire of European aristocrats, these black children copy the dress of whites of the upper classes. Because they are phonies, the children in the images are no real threat, but instead can be ridiculed as inferior and foolish by the groups they seek to emulate.

The prints' parody of blacks aspiring to middle- and upper-class status goes beyond the theatrical genre of minstrelsy and the ramifications of pursuing fashion. It also refers to the long-standing concerns of all classes of whites about the growing population of middle-class blacks in the urban North. For example, historian Emma Jones Lapsansky has shown that in the late 1820s and early 1830s, as blacks gained some economic security in Philadelphia, upper- and middle-class whites' published comments

[114] Horace Bushnell, "Taste and Fashion," *New Englander*, April 1843, 155.

and visual imagery reflected a reaction of being threaten from below by people who they believed had stepped out of their place.

> A joke of no ordinary magnitude was enacted last night, by getting up a Coloured Fancy Ball, at the Assembly-Room…Carriages arrived, with *ladies* and *gentlemen* of colour, dressed in "character" in the most grotesque style…It is worthy of remark, that many of the coaches containing these sable divinities were attended by white coachmen and *white footmen*. It is indeed high time that some serious attention was paid to the conduct and pursuits of the class of persons alluded to, and it may be well to inquire if matters progress at this rate how long it will be before masters and servants change places.[115]

This idea continued even after Emancipation, as evinced by the popular Blackville Sketches in *Harper's Weekly* in the 1870s and the Darktown Comics published by Currier and Ives in the 1880s. These images suggested, in the words of scholar Shawn Michelle Smith, that "African American sophistication can only ever *be* mimicry."[116] For lower-class whites, blacks' attainment of middle-class status was believed to have very real economic repercussions. The 1834 race riots in Philadelphia, in which poor whites attacked and destroyed well-to-do blacks' institutions, homes, and personal property, was explained at the time as protest against African Americans who were perceived to have consistently edged out working-class whites in competition for employment.[117]

Viewers concerned with black aspirations may have been placated by observing that the children themselves see the silliness in their act. Both smile at the viewer,

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[115] Quoted in Emma Jones Lapsansky, "'Since They Got Those Separate Churches': Afro-Americans and Racism in Jacksonian Philadelphia," *American Quarterly* 32, no. 1 (Spring 1980): 67.

[116] Shawn Michelle Smith, *Photography on the Color Line: W. E. B. Du Bois, Race, and Visual Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 82.

[117] Lapsansky, "Separate Churches," 61.

acknowledging that their dressing up is only a fantasy, not a serious ambition.[118] Importantly, by showing them with the laundry of whites, as signified by the basket of clothes prominently situated in the left foreground of *Power of Fashion,* Spencer hints at their probable future as a washerwoman and her assistant. These were considered "black" jobs, taken by African American women as their husbands were forced out of other menial occupations, like hod carrying and stevedoring, by white immigrants. The men would then help their wives by transporting the laundry to and from clients.[119] According to these prints, free blacks' proper place remained below that of all white economic classes.

Alternatively, rather than alluding to the youngsters' future, the Spencer/Schaus prints may have been depicting in a literal way how antebellum whites perceived African American *adults*—as childlike, carefree, and happy. By arguing that blacks, as a race apart, were naturally naive and dependent (like children), whites justified their oppression of them through slavery, or by treating free blacks as permanently inferior. The average white, both Southern and Northern, believed that in their carefree, childlike state blacks were satisfied to remain under the rule of whites, who fashioned themselves as parental figures. The toothy smiles of the children in *Power of Fashion* and *Height of Fashion*, then, relate to the cheerful grins blacked-up minstrels painted on their faces in the deluded belief that all African Americans were content in their circumstances.[120]

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[118] Spencer related how the boy outside of Wallack's who inspired her to paint *Power of Fashion* returned her husband's laughter at his make-believe with a "shout of real, hearty laughter, showing that he enjoyed the joke of his position as intensely as anybody." Quoted in Katz, *Regionalism and Reform*, 68.

[119] Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 110.

[120] The extent of the girl's smile is emphasized by her prominent dimples. For a discussion of white attitudes, see Albert Boime, *The Art of Exclusion: Representing Blacks in the Nineteenth Century* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990), 86–87.

Schaus obviously saw the commercial potential in images of happy, carefree blacks. He commissioned Mount to paint *Right and Left* (fig. 74) and *The Lucky Throw* (now known through the lithographic reproduction, *Raffling for a Goose*, fig. 70) for Goupil in the early 1850s, and when he broke from the French publisher in the summer of 1852, he ordered two minstrel-themed works from Mount, which became *The Bone Player* and *The Banjo Player* (figs. 68 and 69).[121] At this time, he was also making plans to publish Spencer's designs for *Power of Fashion* and *Height of Fashion*. Spencer's painting of *Power of Fashion* likely piqued his interest because of its similarity to *The Lucky Throw*, another picture of a youthful black dandy that Johns has shown to be an invective against abolition.[122] *Power of Fashion* and *Height of Fashion* were highly celebrated (one publication called them "two of her most successful works," and another reported that they "found their way to the furthest corners of this continent").[123] Most likely, their popularity stemmed from their ability to calm white middle-class fears and their reinforcement of the idea that free blacks were content in their inferior status. It is hard to know why Schaus did not have Spencer continue in this vein. Perhaps their reference to mulatto children and the problems believed brewing in the Five Points made similar works untenable as the decade progressed. Harris explains that the purported

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[121] Wilhelm Schaus to William Sidney Mount, September 1852, reprinted in Frankenstein, *William Sidney Mount*, 164.

[122] A contemporary reviewer in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* described the boy's clothing in *The Lucky Throw* as "the rough coat, the gay worsted comforter and cap, disposed with the native tendency to dandyism, which forms so conspicuous an element of the negro character." Quoted in Boime, *Art of Exclusion*, 90. Johns recognizes that the lad wears a tam-o'-shanter, a symbol of abolitionism, but that the goose he holds alludes to the vernacular expression, "sound on the goose," referring to a negative stand on the movement. *American Genre Painting*, 123–24.

[123] "Masters of Art and Literature," 50; unidentified New York City newspaper clipping quoted in Bolton-Smith and Truettner, *Joys of Sentiment*, 143.

threat that amalgamation between free blacks and the Irish posed grew even stronger during the last part of the 1850s.[124] More generally, the white middle class probably wanted to steer clear of images that smacked of the dilution of Anglo-Saxon blood (more will be said about this later).

Schaus brought out *The Little Sunshade* and *The Little Navigator* in 1854, the same year as *Height of Fashion*. Thereafter, Spencer created only images of white children for the publisher. This shift in subject matter suggests that the audience for the lithographs found in the images of middle-class youngsters an antidote to the threat they perceived in street children, both immigrant and mixed-race, that they read about in the newspapers and other media. The prints reinforced both the hope that middle-class children would remain insulated from the influence of immoral working-class guttersnipes, and that the supremacy of the Anglo-Saxon race was secure. They also fortified bourgeois adults' belief in a model to which they thought immigrant parents should aspire for their own children.

In Burns's chapter on country children in *Pastoral Inventions: Rural Life in Nineteenth-Century American Art and Culture*, she argues that images of barefoot boys in the postbellum era are significant as much for what they did not portray as for what they did. "These versions of rural childhood were stringently selective and idealized. However innocuous on the surface, such images offer clues to anxieties buried or ignored. It is just as important here to consider what was left out of childhood imagery as to examine what was represented."[125] For her, country children depicted by artists like Homer and Johnson

[124] Harris, *Shadow of Slavery*, 262.

[125] Burns, *Pastoral Inventions*, 297.

not only satisfied viewers' nostalgia for their youth, but "functioned as immunization against the anxiety-generating social ills of impoverished urban youth."[126] I would contend that the Spencer/Schaus images of urban middle-class children of the 1850s functioned in much the same way as the country children of twenty years later. By portraying the ideal, Spencer's designs worked to banish fears of the (perceived) real.

Spencer employed several elements consistently to convince her audience that middle-class children were far removed from the evil tendencies of street urchins. Nearly all of the lithographs show children in interiors, which would certainly prevent them from any chance encounters with a dangerous influence. Parental anxiety over their children's possible contact with roughs is illustrated in "Charlie's Side-Walk Acquaintances," published in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* in November 1857.[127] In the illustrated story, Charlie, a foppish five-year-old, has a knack for attracting working-class figures, who take advantage of his innocence with increasing temerity. The final vignette shows a black-eyed, wrist-sprained Charlie, who has been "licked" by a young vagrant whose father is a repeat offender (fig. 102). While the story is meant to be humorous, making fun of Charlie's naiveté, it also calls readers' attention to the fact that inexperienced upper- and middle-class white children are in danger, even just outside their door. The Spencer/Schaus children, ensconced in comfortable interiors, are safe from boys like Charlie's "acquaintances."

The interior views would have also reminded viewers that middle-class children did not have to begin working at a young age, like immigrant children, but could enjoy a

[126] Ibid., 308.

[127] "Charlie's Side-Walk Acquaintances," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, November 1857, 861–62.

childhood free from adult cares. Tucked away in parlors and bedrooms, the children have the luxury of playing with their pets and toys under implied maternal supervision. They will never be sent to scavenge on the docks or in the shipyards, the activities of impoverished youth that were thought to lead to criminal acts. Indeed, the lithographs, which show middle-class children acting in ways that could be construed as only mildly mischievous (as outlined extensively above), set them apart from street urchins, who were being decried in the popular media as thieves, vandals, and prostitutes. The lithographic children's minor foibles served as a welcome relief from the far worse behavior described by police, government officials, and reform workers. Parents of shoe-floaters and cat-teasers could be assured that the only punishment that might be needed was a little time spent in the corner (fig. 103), rather than police intervention and months in a house of refuge or reformatory.

The prints also show the children as healthy.[128] Their rosy cheeks and rounded bodies, often showcased in off-the-shoulder or short-sleeved clothing, would be in direct contrast to viewer's knowledge of immigrant children, who were prone to sickness because of their crowded living conditions and lack of sound nutrition. To be certain, fear existed that street children would spread disease from the "fever-nests" of the tenements where they resided.[129] However, the Spencer/Schaus images allayed concern with their depiction of robust bodies. These children do not suffer from illness.

The lithographs, importantly, support the idea that middle-class children have a productive future ahead of them. *The Little Navigator* will participate in commerce as a

[128] This has also been observed by Dykema, "Lilly Martin Spencer," 16.

[129] New York Assembly, *Report of the Select Committee into the Condition of Tenant Houses in New-York and Brooklyn*, doc. 205, 80th sess. (1857), quoted in Stansell, *City of Women*, 202.

ship's captain, *The Young Soldier* will defend the nation and its principles of democracy, the small angler in *Child Playing with Fish Bowl* will provide the population with food, and *The Young Teacher* will prepare future generations to become useful citizens.[130] Unlike working-class children, who were thought to drain the system, these youngsters are preparing to contribute.

Further, by abandoning picturing biracial children, as they did after the publication of *Power of Fashion* and *Height of Fashion*, in order to picture exclusively the experience of white, middle-class childhood, Spencer and Schaus acted to promote the cause of maintaining Anglo-Saxon racial supremacy. Interestingly, ethnologist Josiah Nott's book, *Types of Mankind*, which made the polygenist theory of the origin of races available to a broader audience,[131] was published in 1854, the year *Height of Fashion* came out. In the book, Nott argued that the inferiority of the black race was a biological fact and warned against the intermixing of Anglo-Saxons with blacks, which he believed "contaminated" white blood lines. In his words, "the superior races ought to be kept free from all adulterations, otherwise the world will retrograde, instead of advancing, in civilization."[132] After 1854, Spencer produced designs for lithographs that celebrated only the products of "pure breeding" between Caucasians. This series of white children, therefore, seems to have functioned in part as an assurance that "the forward march of white Western progress" was still in place.[133]

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[130] Dykema, "Lilly Martin Spencer," 18–19.

[131] Thomas F. Gossett, *Race: The History of an Idea in America* (New York: Schocken Books, 1973), 65.

[132] Quoted in Smith, *American Archives*, 33.

[133] Smith, *American Archives*, 33.

The Spencer/Schaus images show a middle-class childhood insulated from the threats posed by slum children and by interracial mixing. At the same time, they promoted an ideal that many people hoped could be replicated in white immigrant children themselves (but not in African Americans, who needed to be kept oppressed). By the mid-1850s, working-class parents were being blamed for the purported problem of street children. Middle-class reformers, imposing their own value system that cherished domesticity, believed that trouble stemmed from immigrants who did not provide for their children a "home" (meaning an atmosphere of material comfort in which the mother's primary duty was to raise her offspring). They alleged that working-class parents' corrupt values, rather than their poor economic circumstances, led to their children's immoral behavior of stealing and vagrancy.[134]

A member of the Children's Aid Society related the idea of parental depravity through the voice of a new arrival when he visited an Irish tenement in 1853. "In an attic room, a young woman with a black eye and bloody face was making a fire of shavings, and a child was beside her. 'Children!' she said, wildly, hardly looking at me—'No, thank God! I have none but her. Why should I have children?…They say the childer here all is ruined—I know it,' and, turning abruptly to me, 'Yes, Sir, there be paple down below that set their ain children to stale cotton. I've seen it—I know it, Sir. They *makes* 'em thieves.'"[135] Another visitor, this time to the German quarter, reported that "not one family in a hundred ever send their children to school…The boys, some of them, do well—though very many fall in with the multitude of young thieves and vagrants of that

[134] Stansell, *City of Women*, 202, 205, 208.

[135] Excerpt from "Walks among the New-York poor," *New-York Daily Times*, 28 June 1853, reprinted in Bremner, *Children and Youth*, 417.

Ward. The girls, in the great proportion of cases, as soon as they mature, are more or less dissolute in morals. The filthy habits of their parents, and the open street-life which they must pursue, seem of necessity to degrade their morals."[136] Spencer herself showed this kind of patronizing attitude in her painting entitled *The Gossips* (1857, unlocated). The picture, as described by contemporary sources, made a statement about the maternal deficiencies of working-class women.

> "The Gossips," a large painting *de genre*, with ten figures of women and children, has attracted much attention [at exhibitions at the National Academy of Design and the Washington Art Association]. The scene represents the yard of a tenement-building, where women are engaged in washing, preserving fruit, cooking, and other sorts of work. They have gathered into a group to listen to some tale of scandal from a stranger, with a basket of bread; and the children are getting into mischief the while. A little boy has fallen into the bluing-tub of clothes, while a younger girl is laughing violently at his mishap; a dog has laid hold of the meat a boy has forgotten to look after, and a cat in the window is skimming the pan of milk.[137]

Spencer's work, while containing her characteristic humor tempering the message, still criticized immigrant mothers, whose inferior moral sensibility led them to gossip at the expense of minding their children.

Reformers held that if the unscrupulous influence of immigrant parents was removed or rehabilitated, working-class children would have a chance to be redeemed. Brace initiated a campaign to place boys on farms. This, he believed, would be an effective means of separating them from their biological parents and would expose them to a "proper" home life that included honest labor and moral training.[138] An annual report

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[136] Ibid., 426.

[137] Ellet, *Women Artists*, 325–26.

[138] Stansell, *City of Women*, 211.

of the Children's Aid Society declared, "We have wished to make every kind or religious family, who desired the responsibility, an Asylum or a Reformatory Institution…by throwing about the wild, neglected little outcast of the streets, the love and gentleness of home."[139] The women volunteers of the Society took a different approach, organizing meetings with mothers of their students to teach them bourgeois habits and methods of housekeeping, which they believed, would turn tenement apartments into homes. They also tried to persuade women to allow their children to attend school rather than force them to work on the streets. According to Stansell, "the Mother's Meetings tried to wean away laboring women from such customary patterns to what the ladies believed to be a moral geography of family life: men at work, women at home, children inside."[140]

The Spencer/Schaus lithographs of white children featured ideal products of an upbringing in a "proper" middle-class home—children, it was believed by reformers, whom immigrant parents should strive to create themselves. By picturing these youngsters as playing rather than working, as mischievous rather than wicked, as healthy rather than sick, as productive rather than indolent, and as perpetuating Anglo-Saxon racial superiority, the prints upheld the dominant ideology of domesticity that the middle-class wanted to maintain and to reproduce in (white) others' lives. While working-class people probably did not view or own these images, just as the majority did not send their sons to the country, nor have their wives stop working, the prints most likely comforted bourgeois parents who were frightened by propaganda that warned of the spread of immortality via urban urchins and the diminishment of white supremacy.

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[139] Children's Aid Society, *Second Annual Report*, 1855, quoted in Stansell, *City of Women*, 211.

[140] Stansell, *City of Women*, 213.

Chapter 4
The Moral Utility of Children

In June of 1862, more than a year into the Civil War, Lilly Martin Spencer's mother, Angélique Martin, wrote to her: "Great demands will be made upon Sculpture, Painting, Drama and even Architecture to record to the future, the extraordinary events of this remarkable period. And if my Lilly perseveres…she will be beaten by none in the Sublime, noble, heroick, touching and beautiful. I would advise her to leave to others the representation of brutal cruelty, not to soil her heart and soul with its horrors!"[1] By then, Spencer had already embarked on several paintings that fit her mother's criteria, such as *Dixie's Land* (1861–1862, fig. 104) and *The Pic Nic or the Fourth of July* (c. 1861–1862, fig. 105).[2] Knowing that the market for portraits and still lifes (her bread and butter since moving to Newark, New Jersey, in 1858) was drying up in a war-time economy,[3] she may have seen in the current events an opportunity to return to the historical, literary, and allegorical subject matter that she had aspired to at the very beginning of her career.[4] Most likely the combination of her mother's encouragement and the new trend of historical genre painting, as typified in the works of Winslow Homer and Eastman

[1] Angélique Martin to LMS, 11 June 1862, LMS papers.

[2] *The Pic Nic or the Fourth of July* is now known as *The Artist and Her Family at a Fourth of July Picnic*. The title used here derives from a contemporary reproductive engraving of the painting. It is also the title given in Bolton-Smith and Truettner, *Joys of Sentiment*, 195.

[3] "Things have gone steadily from bad to worse, until we have given up all hopes of any much better times for the present at least…I have painted a great many fancy pieces in order to be able to dispense them in various places, in hopes of making a sale somewhere, for as to portraits, there is no money [for] any such thing." LMS to Angélique and Gilles Martin, 12 May 1862, LMS papers.

[4] Spencer was especially interested in Shakespearian subjects during the 1840s and early 1850s, as seen in her sketchbooks from that period.

Johnson,[5] led her by 1866 to create many more scenes referencing the conflict and its results, including *War Spirit at Home; or, Celebrating the Victory at Vicksburg* (1866, fig. 106), *Shoddy the Maker and Shoddy the Wearer* (c. 1866, unlocated), *Beauty is for the Brave* (c. 1866, unlocated), *The Union Home* (c. 1866, unlocated), *The Home of the Red, White, and Blue* (c. 1867–1868, fig. 107), *The Starry Flag* (c. 1866–1868, unlocated), *The Camp Fire* (before 1869, unlocated), and *The Home Guard* (c. 1870, unlocated).[6] Several of these sold shortly after completion, confirming for Spencer her mother's prediction that American collectors would want subjects related to the war.[7]

For Spencer, a woman who experienced the internecine conflict as a resident of Newark, New Jersey, picturing the Civil War and its immediate aftermath meant creating images of the Union home front. And like the majority of works in her oeuvre, these paintings foregrounded white, middle-class Northern children as the makers of meaning.[8]

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[5] Wierich, in his study of *War Spirit at Home*, identifies the work as painted in the same vein as postwar pictures by Winslow Homer and Eastman Johnson that "address[ed] a historical moment from the perspective of genre painting." I would argue that most of Spencer's Civil War-related works fall into this category. "War Spirit at Home: Lilly Martin Spencer, Domestic Painting, and Artistic Hierarchy," *Winterthur Portfolio* 37, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 25.

[6] Unlocated works are referred to in the following contemporary sources: *Shoddy the Maker and Shoddy the Wearer* and *Beauty is for the Brave* are described in the *Newark Daily Advertiser* of May 25, 1866 (Transcription, Curatorial Files, Newark Museum); *The Union Home* is listed as no. 52 in the auction catalogue for the December 28, 1866 sale at the Leeds' Art Galleries, New York (Col. Merl M. Moore, Jr. files); *The Starry Flag* is referenced in an advertisement for *Dandelion Time*, a chromolithograph after a Spencer painting, in the December 1868 issue of *American Agriculturalist* (NMAA Exhibition Records); *The Camp Fire* is mentioned among other war-related titles in "Mrs. Lily M. Spencer," *American Phrenological Journal*, February 1869, 62. Both the *New York Evening Post* and the *New York Albion* refer to Spencer's work on *The Home Guard* on October 6, 1869 and October 9, 1869, respectively. Col. Merl M. Moore, Jr. files.

[7] *The Pic Nic or the Fourth of July* sold to print publishers Henry Peters and P. and J. Levy. Copy of advertising brochure in Col. Merl M. Moore, Jr. files. The *Newark Daily Advertiser* reported on May 25, 1866 that *Shoddy the Maker and Shoddy the Wearer* and *Beauty is for the Brave* had been purchased from Campbell's frame shop in Newark (see note 6 above). *The Union Home* sold to "Bachia," according to annotations in a copy of the Leeds' Art Galleries auction catalogue (see note 6 above).

[8] This chapter will focus on the four located paintings with Civil War-related subject matter: *Dixie's Land*, *The Pic Nic or the Fourth of July, War Spirit at Home; or, Celebrating the Victory at Vicksburg,* and *The Home of the Red, White, and Blue*, all of which have children at their center. Of the six unlocated works,

Children constituted more than one-third of the population of the United States in 1860, a year before the Civil War began.[9] Obviously, they were affected physically and mentally by the country's upheaval. Southern children experienced the most hardship as the victims of sieges and invasions, starvation and disease, but Northern children also suffered when they served in the military as drummers and buglers, lost fathers and older brothers, or had to go to work to support their struggling families.[10] Spencer's paintings, however, did not document the actual lives of Northern children during and after the war. Rather, I would argue, the children in these works served as modern allegorical figures—often as sources of strength for weary adults, as seers of truth, and as embodiments of hope for reunification.[11]

Spencer was not the only artist of the period to use white children in a metaphorical way. Johnson, for example, also created images in the 1860s featuring home-front and postbellum children whom art historians have interpreted as symbolic of larger issues. For example, Suzaan Boettger has read the children in *Christmas-Time (The Blodgett Family)* (1864, fig. 108) as representing chief sources of happiness within the

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only two have existing accounts. *Shoddy the Maker and Shoddy the Wearer* is described as "a Thanksgiving Evening Scene, in which a poor, shivering, blue-clad soldier is looking longingly at an inviting array of poultry and provisions, displayed in a gas-lit show window in front of a restaurant; while in the background are seen a couple of pompous and wealthy upstarts who have just dined to repletion." *Beauty is for the Brave* consists of "a gorgeous bouquet…decorated with streaming ribbons of patriotic colors…fastened in the muzzle of a soldier's rifle. In the distance flags are flying from the houses, and we know that the veteran is marching home." *Newark Daily Advertiser,* 25 May 1866 (see note 6 above). While these missing paintings do not seem to feature children, it is likely that some of the four others did.

[9] James Marten, *Children for the Union: The War Spirit on the Northern Home Front* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2004), 7.

[10] Clement, *Growing Pains*, 9.

[11] My ideas about Spencer's use of allegory in her paintings dealing with the Civil War and Reconstruction have been informed by my work as a research assistant for Eleanor Jones Harvey, who is organizing a comprehensive exhibition around this theme as it pertains to the output of artists such as David Gilmour Blythe, Frederic Church, Winslow Homer, and Eastman Johnson.

family, an institution with the ability to be a stabilizing force in a war-weary city beset with racial and class strife.[12] John Davis sees another family portrait, *The Brown Family* (1869, fig. 109), as centered on the young male heir, who, at only three years old, is already associated with the postwar realm of business.[13] Often during this troubled time, white children were pictured as a redeeming presence, as the hope and promise of the future.

An analysis of Spencer's located Civil War paintings that feature children reveals an equivocating attitude, however—at first supporting Northern middle-class society's dominant ideologies and then veering away from them seemingly in frustration. At the beginning of the Civil War, Spencer appeared to embrace wholeheartedly the optimistic concept of the moral utility of children—that their example could help guide the country through its difficult times. Later, after the war had dragged on for four long years and the country was struggling to reunify, Spencer's works introduce a definite sense of pessimism into her earlier hopefulness. In the end, Spencer created both what her mother called for: paintings that were "Sublime, noble, heroick, touching and beautiful," and what she had condemned: works describing in their own way the "brutal cruelty" of humanity.

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The moral utility of children, as author Henry Giles termed the ideology in 1863,[14] was an evolving concept at this time. As outlined in Chapter 1, in the late 1840s

[12] Suzaan Boettger, "Eastman Johnson's *Blodgett Family* and Domestic Values During the Civil War Era," *American Art* 6, no. 4 (Autumn 1992): 65.

[13] John Davis, "Children in the Parlor: Eastman Johnson's *Brown Family* and the Post-Civil War Luxury Interior," *American Art* 10, no. 2 (Summer 1996): 74.

[14] Henry Giles, "Moral Utility of Children," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, November 1863, 801–9.

and early 1850s, adults came to view deceased children as capable of influencing family members to actions that would ultimately lead the family to reunification in heaven. By the 1860s, because of their perceived innocence (a belief that had taken years to become dominant), living children were recognized as having the ability to teach and inspire adults. According to Giles, "children are in many ways our teachers, and if we are wise to learn, very profound teachers. If *we* give them lessons of knowledge and experience, *they* give us lessons of nature and simplicity…They give us strong and sacred motives to be in all worthiness the best we can be for their highest good and for our own."[15] Significantly, the qualities Giles believed children could impart on adults include those that would be most valued in times of war—peace, hope, and charity.

> Children in the home not only draw out its affections, but also help much to its contentment and tranquility. They are, by their relations to domestic life, mediators, peace-makers, reconcilers …Children are a good influence in the neighborhood as well as in the home. Though sometimes they occasion quarrels, in a larger degree they calm animosities and inspire merciful dispositions.[16]

> Moreover, children are the hope of life itself; for it is children that keep the world a *living* world…It is thus neverceasingly a living race; but, likewise, it is always a dying race: children keep it a living race; without them it would be wholly a dying race, and would rapidly disappear from existence.[17]

> It is, then, as a general fact, true that the care and habit of providing for a family tend to open and enlarge the heart, tend to make it generous and sympathetic. Even where economy would seem to be the most stringently demanded by the number of children in the household there is a charitable willingness to find a surplus to help the needy.[18]

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[15] Ibid., 805.

[16] Ibid., 805, 808.

[17] Ibid., 808.

[18] Ibid., 807.

Other writers agreed with Giles's assessment. After the Civil War, Unitarian minister and author Samuel Osgood published an essay entitled "Little Children," which spoke of the child as "a well-spring of comfort that refreshes the whole house with living water," having a smile able to take "fifty years from our shoulders." The child can prevent his or her father from needing "brandy or billiard table to give his spirits a reaction from the yoke of labor."[19] Thus, children were sources not only of relief, but of influence over adults' behavior.

Many authors of children's literature also believed that children had a moral utility to rejuvenate adults with their innocent outlook and to provide examples of good conduct from which adults could learn. Writers often portrayed their protagonists as the redeemers of their parents. Martha Farquahrson Finley's *Elsie Dinsmore* (1867), Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* (1868), and Horatio Alger's *Ragged Dick* (1868) all contain characters who have positive effects on adults.[20] In the fine arts, critic Henry Tuckerman transferred Giles's and Osgood's rhetoric about actual children to artistic renderings of them when he wrote in 1867 that "always and everywhere the image of childhood to poet and painters, to the landscape, the household, the shrine, the temple and the grave—is a redeeming presence, a harmonizing and hopeful element."[21] Although his statement erringly assigns mid-nineteenth-century beliefs to the long history of Western art, it does

[19] Samuel Osgood, *American Leaves* (1866; repr., Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1972), 27, 31.

[20] Jean Taylor Baxter, "Burdens and Rewards: Some Issues for American Artists, 1865–1876" (PhD diss., University of Maryland, 1988), 242–43. Wishy also describes this trend in children's literature of the period. *Child and the Republic*, 85–93.

[21] Henry T. Tuckerman, "Children," *Galaxy*, July 1867, 318.

capture the spirit of Spencer's early Civil War images, which convey the therapeutic power white, middle-class Northern children possessed in the eyes of adults.

Spencer's first work related to the Civil War was *Dixie's Land* (fig. 104), a painting that is inscribed in the lower right "1862," but which she exhibited as early as December 1861 at the Young Men's Association in Buffalo, New York.[22] The image depicts a white toddler sitting in a lush landscape of orange trees and ferns (meant to evoke a Southern setting) beside a black woman playing the accordion. Behind the baby girl a large dog either rests or sleeps. Spencer described the subject matter to one of the organizers of the Buffalo exhibition as "a scene in the flowery south a little human sunbeam, the light and hope of a happy home, is playing among her native orange groves equally as unconscious as guiltless of the right or wrong around her. Dinah her nurse, is playing the accordion and singing Dixies land more we think to amuse herself than the baby. there is one though, near by, whose silent and disinterested watchfulness can be trusted for old dog Tray is ever faithfull."[23]

Art historian Elizabeth O'Leary was the first to identify the figures in *Dixie's Land* as referencing characters from the St. Clare household in Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.[24] Spencer's descriptive phrase, "little human sunbeam," as well as her depiction of the child in blonde curls and a white dress clearly allude to Eva, the saintly daughter of Augustine St. Clare. Stowe likened Eva to "one of those busy,

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[22] James L. Yarnall and William H. Gerdts, *The National Museum of American Art's Index to American Art Exhibition Catalogs: From the Beginning through the 1876 Centennial Year* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1986), 5:3335.

[23] LMS to Tallmadge Ewers, 5 February 1862, Charles Roberts Autograph Collection, reel P88, frame 276, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

[24] O'Leary, *At Beck and Call*, 100–103.

tripping creatures, that can be no more contained in one place than a sunbeam or a summer breeze," and gave her physical attributes of golden brown hair, violet blue eyes, and a white wardrobe.[25] For the child's nurse, Spencer conflated several characters from the St. Clare household. She conferred upon her the name of the cook, Dinah; she pictured the slave wearing jewelry, like the dandified chambermaids, Jane and Rosa; and drew her expression like the one characteristic of Topsy, the mischievous youth "in the Jim Crow line" who shot "cunning glances…askance from the corners of her eyes."[26] As a combination of all three women, the nurse in *Dixie's Land* can be seen as representing the slave population in the St. Clare household.

Elements in Spencer's picture also derived from Northern minstrel shows. Most obviously, the title *Dixie's Land* comes out of that tradition. "Dixie's Land" was a song introduced into the minstrelsy repertoire in 1859. At the time, it was thought to have been written by a white Northerner, the performer Dan Emmett.[27] By 1861, the song had become famous nation-wide, being "one of the most popular compositions ever produced…[it] had been sung, whistled and played in every quarter of the globe."[28] The South adopted it as their anthem during the Civil War, but Spencer's Northern audience also would have associated it with minstrel show walkarounds, in which performers acted

[25] Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, 168.

[26] Ibid., 274–75.

[27] Richard Crawford, *America's Musical Life: A History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001), 264. More recently, scholars have disputed Emmett's authorship, arguing that the Snowden family from Ohio taught him the song. Howard L. Sacks and Judith Rose Sacks, *Way Up North in Dixie: A Black Family's Claim to the Confederate Anthem* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993).

[28] *New York Clipper*, 10 August 1861, quoted in Sacks and Sacks, *Way Up North in Dixie*, 3.

like Southern plantation hands.[29] Entertainers, catering to their audiences' beliefs, depicted plantation slaves as cavorting, playful juveniles. They portrayed them as loyal kindred to the parental figures of master and mistress, as "emotional children to be protected and guided for their own good."[30] This not only satisfied whites wary of the consequences of a freed slave population who might come North in search of work, but also abolitionists, whose rhetoric had paternalistic overtones.

In *Dixie's Land*, the slave plays the chords of the popular minstrel tune on her accordion. The reference to the song in the title likely would have called to the audience's mind the lyrics, "I wish I was in de land ob cotton, Old times dar am not forgotten…In Dixie Land, I'll take my stand, To lib an die in Dixie."[31] This may have reassured them of the idea that blacks wanted to remain in the South, no matter their status. Thinking of minstrelsy stereotypes, they also may have read the nurse as possessing a childlike nature. This would have been reinforced by her inattentiveness to the child, the reason Spencer gave for including the "watchful" dog. On one level then, *Dixie's Land* was an assurance, coming at the beginning of the war, that Northerners had nothing to fear from the South's slave population.

The focus of the painting's composition, however, is clearly the white child sitting next to the nurse. As O'Leary notes, the youngster has been placed directly in a beam of light, which causes her white dress, fair skin, and golden hair to glow.[32] The backdrop of the dog's white fur and the gleaming patch of grass that she reaches towards magnify the

[29] Crawford, *America's Musical Life*, 266.

[30] Toll, *Blacking Up*, 78.

[31] Crawford, *America's Musical Life*, 264.

[32] O'Leary, *At Beck and Call*, 101.

child's presence and draw the viewer's eye immediately to that section of the canvas. This brightness matches visually Spencer's written description of the baby as "the light and hope of a happy home…equally as unconscious as guiltless of the right or wrong around her." In other words, the child, because of her moral utility, has the ability to make her family happy with her qualities of hope and purity.

Despite Spencer's mention of the child's obliviousness to the "right or wrong around her," her strong association with Eva means that the child's moral utility also rests in her capacity to provide a model for the treatment of African Americans, and to awaken adults to the evils of slavery. Over and over again in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Eva shows compassion for her father's slaves, kissing the gathered group upon her return to New Orleans, giving Mammy reading lessons, and declaring her love for Topsy.[33] This last incident opens Miss Ophelia's heart to the slave child, who she then takes under her wing. Upon introducing the character of Eva, Stowe describes her generosity to the slaves on the New Orleans-bound ship in terms of the food she offers them. "Often and often she walked mournfully round the place where Haley's gang of men and women sat in their chains. She would glide in among them, and look at them with an air of perplexed and sorrowful earnestness; and sometimes she would lift their chains with her slender hands, and then sigh woefully, as she glided away. Several times she appeared suddenly among them, with her hands full of candy, nuts, and oranges, which she would distribute joyfully to them, and then be gone again."[34] In *Dixie's Land*, Eva's kind actions are

[33] Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, 190, 305, 325.

[34] Ibid., 169.

evoked in the child's reaching for the oranges on the ground in front of her. One can easily imagine that once acquired, the fruit will be offered up to the nurse.

The oranges also may serve as an obscure reference to Eva's impending death and its impact on her father's beliefs. Spencer painted an orange in the hand of Nicholas Longworth Ward in her posthumous mourning portrait of him a few years earlier (1858–1860, fig. 110). Although scholars have not uncovered the exact symbolism of the fruit, its presence with other emblems, such as the broken-stemmed rose in the vase behind him, allows one to be assured of its general allusion to death.[35] Just before she passes, Eva requests that her father free his slaves and make it his mission to persuade others to do the same. (Unfortunately he is killed before he can carry out these plans.) Again through the oranges, the child in *Dixie's Land* is related to Eva and thus to her ability to convince adults that the institution of slavery is wrong. Set in the South, the painting alludes to the moral utility of a child to bring about the rejection of a whole lifestyle. Additionally, its reference to the minstrelsy tradition infers that Spencer may have meant the child in the work to be a model as well for Northern whites, who did not generally support emancipation at the beginning of the Civil War.[36]

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[35] Lloyd, "Death and American Painting," 97. Spencer seems to have taken up the practice of creating posthumous mourning portraits for grieving families by the late 1850s. In addition to *Nicholas Longworth Ward*, she painted at least two other paintings of this nature: *Will You Have Some Fruit?* (1871, fig. 111) and *Telford McGuffey* (1871, fig. 112). This type of portrait, usually of a child, was contemplated during the mourning period and on the anniversary of death. Because the child is always pictured alive, written documentation or symbols within the work itself, such as wilted flowers, water, and uncaged birds, are the only way to recognize the deceased state of the sitter. One scholar suggests that the works helped families to recall the child as he or she was before death and/or to imagine the child visiting from the afterlife. Phoebe Lloyd, "A Young Boy in His First and Last Suit," *Minneapolis Institute of Arts Bulletin* 64 (1978–1980): 105–9.

[36] This interpretation of *Dixie's Land* assumes Spencer's belief in emancipation. Although her views are not known, her earlier involvement in the temperance movement (see Chapter 2, note 8), and her parents' activism in Fourierism and women's rights leads one to speculate that Spencer leaned towards the liberal cause of abolition. This, however, did not mean that she believed African Americans to be equal to Anglo-Americans (see discussion of *Power of Fashion* and *Height of Fashion*, pp. 140–50). As Caroline Levanter

At the same time Spencer was completing *Dixie's Land*, the popular women's magazine *Godey's Lady's Book* commissioned her to design a frontispiece for their January 1862 edition. The image, entitled *A Sister's Influence* (fig. 113), shows a girl seated in a bedroom with her younger brother kneeling at her feet. Looking heavenward, she forms her sibling's hands into a gesture of prayer. The engraving's subtitle, *Our Father Who Art in Heaven*, implies that she is teaching him the Lord's Prayer. The editors relayed to readers that "the idea was suggested by a nursery incident in our own home,"[37] giving the children's behavior in the print a note of authenticity. The message is clear: the sister, unprompted by any adult, instructs her brother to be pious. She is a good influence not only on him, but on the viewer as well, who witnesses the lesson.

Soon after *Godey's* published *A Sister's Influence*, Spencer wrote to Tallmadge Ewers, the secretary of the Fine Art Committee of the Young Men's Association in Buffalo, New York, to request the return of *Dixie's Land* from exhibition there. "Dixie's Land I whish to have home, as I am finishing its mate (which is one of my best pictures) its title is The Home of the Red White and Blue. I intended that they should have come out together but was not able to finish it in time."[38] O'Leary suggests that Spencer refers here to the painting later to be engraved as *The Pic Nic or the Fourth of July* (fig. 105).[39]

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has shown, even abolitionists the likes of Stowe believed in white supremacy. Levanter argues that "the comparison that Stowe draws between [Eva] 'the Saxon, born of ages of cultivation, command, education, physical and moral eminence; [and Topsy] the Afric, born of ages of oppression' illustrates how abolitionist rhetoric strategically uses the child to insist that the white superiority that has historically structured the nation will continue to unequivocally and forcefully organize it, once freedom is granted to all." Caroline F. Levander, *Cradle of Liberty: Race, the Child, and National Belonging from Thomas Jefferson to W. E. B. Du Bois* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 41–42.

[37] "Our Illustrations," Godey's Arm-Chair, *Godey's Lady's Book*, January 1862, 97.

[38] LMS to Tallmadge Ewers, 5 February 1862 (see note 23 above).

[39] O'Leary, *At Beck and Call*, 103.

The paintings' discrepant sizes (20 x 25 inches for *Dixie's Land* versus 49½ x 63 inches for *The Pic Nic or the Fourth of July*) preclude them from being pendants in the traditional sense, but Spencer's inclusion of the figural group from *Dixie's Land* in the lower right corner of *The Pic Nic or the Fourth of July* does make them related in subject matter. Perhaps Spencer had *Dixie's Land* returned from Buffalo so that she could copy its composition into the larger work. Even if the ambitious, multi-figured *The Pic Nic or the Fourth of July* is not the painting Spencer refers to in her letter to Ewers (although with the description "one of my best pictures," it seems likely), it appears that she was at work on it at the same time. An 1866 broadside advertising the publication of the print of the painting states that "the Engraving has been the work of Four Years…The painting was the labor of a WHOLE YEAR."[40] This would date the painting to 1861–1862.[41]

Given the probable date of the painting, the image can be interpreted as commemorating an Independence Day celebration on July 4, 1861. The Civil War had begun on April 12, 1861, when Fort Sumter was attacked by Confederate troops, but the first major confrontation on land, the First Battle of Bull Run (Manassas), in which the Union army was defeated, would not take place until July 21, 1861. The revelers, then, are depicted as jolly and carefree at this Fourth of July celebration. The main group, including a soldier, laughs heartily at their fellow picnicker's mishap on a swing, a

[40] "The Pic-Nic; or, the 4th of July" (New York: Henry Peters and P. & J. Levy, 1866), Col. Merl M. Moore, Jr. files.

[41] Until this study, scholars have dated the painting *The Pic Nic or the Fourth of July* c. 1864. This is probably in response to the 1864 copyright date on the Peter and Levy engraving, which also contains the publishing date of 1866 (fig. 114). Peter and Levy may have purchased and reworked an existing copyrighted plate from the New York Engraving, Printing & Publishing Company, which put out a version of the image as a subscription premium for *Demorest's Monthly Magazine* in 1864, according to Bolton-Smith and Truettner, *Joys of Sentiment*, 195. I have been unable to locate a copy of the *Demorest's* premium to compare the 1864 and 1866 editions of the engraving. In any case, the painting should be dated well before the issue of any engraving, making 1861–1862 seem reasonable.

lounging man in the background reads, and a couple in the lower left corner goes courting. Echoing popular belief in the North, they act as though they still think the war will be easily won and that things will go on as always after the South is put in its place.[42]

If Spencer did give the painting the initial title *The Home of the Red, White, and Blue*, the nurse in the lower right can no longer be read as playing "Dixie's Land" on her accordion. Rather, she may be serenading the crowd with a patriotic Northern tune, such as "The Red, White & Blue of '61." A song written by G. Gumpert and published by Lee & Walker in Philadelphia, it was part of the "flagmania" that occurred at the beginning of the war after the star-spangled banner became a casualty of the attack on Fort Sumter. The flag quickly turned into a potent symbol that rallied people to the Union cause.[43] The lyrics of "The Red, White & Blue of '61" are characteristically optimistic about the North's ability to quench the rebellion.

> May God bless our flag and our land,
> United in strength and for freedom we stand.
> The chains of oppression are broken in two.
> All hail to our Colors The Red, White and Blue
> ……
> Great nation of Freedom, Great Land of the Brave,
> Unfurl now thy Banner, for e'er may it wave,
> As a sign to all nations, as an emblem to you,
> That no foe is too mighty, for the Red, White and Blue.[44]

The picnickers in Spencer's painting fly the stars and stripes on their boats and one little girl, lifted high in the air by a figure resembling Abraham Lincoln, holds an American

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[42] James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 333.

[43] Mark E. Neely, Jr. and Harold Holzer, *The Union Image: Popular Prints of the Civil War North* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 3.

[44] Benjamin Robert Tubb, "American Civil War Music (1861–1865)," Public Domain Music, http://pdmusic.org/civilwar2/61trwaboso.txt.

flag at the apex of the main figural group. They all seem certain that, united under the flag, the Union will prevail.[45]

Painting *The Pic Nic or the Fourth of July* at the end of 1861 and the beginning of 1862, Spencer knew that the war would not be won so easily. The Union's defeat at Bull Run at the end of July dealt a psychological blow to the overconfident mindset of the North.[46] Many, believing that the rebels would be vanquished after one confrontation, journeyed to the battlefield with their own picnic provisions in order not to miss what they believed would be the only encounter.[47] But the South's will to fight had been greatly underestimated; the spectators were sent scrambling for safety as the Army of the Potomac retreated.

With this hindsight, Spencer injected a few disturbances into the otherwise jolly occasion in order to hint at the troubles to come. The 1866 broadside advertising the engraving of the painting identifies these upsets to viewers as "the breaking down of the scup on which they have all been swinging" when the fat man takes his turn; the distracted black servant's pouring of soda on "the lady's handsome silk dress;" and the commotion soon to be made when the boy "pops" his gun behind the courting couple. Several art historians have noted that these unsettling vignettes, which also include a

[45] Lubin's observation that *The Pic Nic or the Fourth of July* has allusions to Antoine Watteau's painting *Pilgrimage to the Isle of Cythera* (1717, fig. 115) and Jean-Honoré Fragonard's *The Swing* (1769, fig. 116) seems appropriate. He argues that Spencer likens the merry-making Northerners to French aristocrats on the eve of the Revolution. *Picturing a Nation*, 191.

[46] McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 347–48.

[47] Neely and Holzer, *Union Image*, 83.

young lady wearing a soldier's kepi hat, contribute to the "world-upside-down" quality of the painting.[48]

The disordered nature of the work truly stands out when it is compared to other picnic scenes, which had become popular as subject matter in the later 1850s. According to scholars, picnic excursions were thought to be therapeutic, because they brought urbanites closer to nature and allowed them to relax the rigid decorum they practiced in everyday life.[49] A writer in *Appleton's Journal* mused: "the great charm of this social device is undoubtedly the freedom it affords. It is to eat, to chat, to lie, to sit, to talk, to walk, with something of the unconstraint of primitive life."[50] Spencer made an initial foray into this subgenre with the small 1856 landscape entitled *Picnic Scene* (fig. 117). It shows a couple lying on the grass under a tree, the father playing with an infant seated on his stomach. Another woman prepares the meal, helped by a little girl who spreads out a blanket in the bottom center. On the right, a boy frolics on the ground with his dog. In the distant background, a couple strolls through the field. Currier and Ives's *The Pic-Nic Party* (1858, fig. 118) concentrates on courting couples. They dance, swing, and sit in intimate conversation.

Although the picnickers have certainly relaxed conventions of behavior, the pictures stress harmonious social interaction. This was especially important in picnic scenes painted during the Civil War. According to art historian Angela Miller, these

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[48] Lubin, *Picturing a Nation*, 191; Cynthia Wiedemann Empen, "Public and Exposed: The Female Body Imaged in American Visual Culture, 1848–1875" (PhD diss., Indiana University, 2003), 141.

[49] Angela L. Miller, "Nature's Transformations: The Meaning of the Picnic Theme in Nineteenth-Century American Art," *Winterthur Portfolio* 24, no. 2/3 (Summer–Autumn 1989): 134; Mary Ellen Hern, "Picnicking in the Northeastern United States, 1840–1900," *Winterthur Portfolio* 24, no. 2/3 (Summer–Autumn 1989): 146.

[50] "Picnic Excursions," *Appleton's Journal*, 14 August 1869, 625.

images "furnished reassurances of family and communal ties and palliated sectional feeling with sentimental appeals to unity, abating the urgency of political claims and loyalties."[51] Two examples from the 1860s illustrate this attitude. Thomas P. Rossiter's *A Pic-Nic on the Hudson* (1863, fig. 119) shows a subdued group of the artist's friends, including several men in uniform, relaxing, reading, talking, and exchanging flowers on the banks of the river. In a more eventful composition entitled *Reminiscences of Lake Mahopac: Ladies Preparing for a Boat Race* (1864, fig. 120), Louis Lang depicts the arrangements being made for a friendly competition. The foreground group works in unison to ready the boats, while others line up on shore to watch the race.

Unlike these escapist works, *The Pic Nic or the Fourth of July* hints at the upheaval to be caused by the war (such as the fall of government and the disruption of traditional gender roles), at the same time that it celebrates the nation's independence from Great Britain. None of the adults, however, seem to notice the foreboding signs. They appear oblivious, merely laughing at their companion's accident. Only the artist, David Lubin notes, in a self-portrait with concerned expression and arms outstretched, seems to "fully grasp the consequences."[52] But there is another group that appears conscious of the gravity of the times. Like the innocent child who announces that the emperor wears no clothes in Hans Christian Anderson's 1837 fairy tale, the children in *The Pic Nic or the Fourth of July* realize the truth of the situation while the adults remain in denial. Possessing the clarity of youth, they serve to identify the trouble to the viewer.

[51] Miller, "Nature's Transformations," 138.

[52] Lubin, *Picturing a Nation*, 193.

The most prominent child is a boy dressed in a bright red shirt and white pantaloons at the center of the composition. With a concerned look, he works to help his fallen father, who came down when the swing's rope snapped in two. No other person attempts to assist the patriarch.[53] The child's burden is huge, just as will be the needed effort to reunite the split government. A little girl, possibly the boy's younger sister, who stands to the left of the main group, hides her face behind an upraised arm and clutches a woman's skirt. She exhibits worry and fear upon witnessing the man's collapse, reinforcing the idea that the Southern secession will not be easily reversed.

In the left foreground, a mischievous boy plans to fire a toy pistol behind the courting couple. His actions, at once humorous, have serious consequences. The noise produced will interrupt the love making of the pair, and thus thwart the beginning of a new family. He reminds all that war, which takes away young men, disrupts the cycle of human reproduction and renewal. Seated in the right foreground is a baby that may be the last for some merrymaking couple in the large group behind it. The toddler reaches a hand out towards a package of firecrackers, one of several on the ground in front of its nurse. One bundle is already unwrapped and its packaging partially reads: FOURTH OF JULY FIR—— / REME——BER! Not only a practical warning about taking the proper safety precautions when igniting the incendiaries, the writing, which the baby effectively points out with its reaching gesture, reminds viewers of what their forebears fought for during the Revolution and, more importantly, that these rights, celebrated on Independence Day, are not possessed by all, including the nearby African American servants and their enslaved brethren. Finally, the flag-waving girl mentioned earlier adds

[53] Not even Spencer aids the man, who is identified by scholars to be a portrait of her husband. Lubin sees her figure as "curiously static." *Picturing a Nation*, 193.

a bright note to the other children's more sobering messages. As a diminutive "Liberty Leading the People," the youngster inspires those below her to fight on, despite the sacrifices that lie ahead.

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While belief in the moral utility of children worked as a source of comfort and possibly even strength for many middle-class Anglo-Americans during the Civil War, for others, the sectional conflict eroded their confidence in the hopefulness of youth. In a telling example, Clara Barton, the school teacher-turned-Civil War nurse who later organized the Red Cross, often imagined that the soldiers she cared for were former students. "The same fair heads…that I have smoothed and patted in fond approval of some good or well-learned task, so soon to lie low in the Southern sands, blood-matted and tangled, trampled under foot of man and horse, buried in a common trench 'unwept, uncoffined, and unknown.'"[54] In her eyes, the children for whom she once expected a promising future had been mown down even before getting to start out.

Many thought that the parricidal war had forced American children to grow up too fast, losing their innocent outlook and therefore their ability to rejuvenate adults and to be examples from whom grown-ups could learn. In the North, thousands of children experienced the stress of an absent father, which included worrying about their parent's safety on the front, enduring material hardships, caring for younger siblings, and going to work in factories or on farms much earlier than expected. Some children had firsthand experience of the war, either working as army musicians, or witnessing battles and/or the resulting wounded. The majority of children, if not directly affected, were aware of the

[54] Quoted in George M. Fredrickson, *The Inner Civil War: Northern Intellectuals and the Crisis of the Union*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 89.

conflict through exposure to political debates, military parades, news in the weekly papers, and stories in magazines.[55]

As the war ground on, pessimism about the promise of youth began to creep into Spencer's works. Perhaps this was due to personal tragedy. A baby son, whom she greeted with enthusiasm during a period of heavy causalities in the Union army (such as in the Battle of Shiloh), died during infancy.[56] Her war-inspired work in the latter half of the 1860s also responds, I believe, to the period's lament over children's lost innocence. One can already see hints of this in the earlier *The Pic Nic or the Fourth of July*. The children may be naive truth-tellers, but at the same time they can be read as hardened: one boy brandishes a gun, two children witness the "fall" of their father, a baby is exposed to the slavery issue. Spencer would go on to make more determinedly cynical statements during the late war and early Reconstruction years.

A double portrait of two children from the mid-1860s infers the heavy toll the war has taken on the country's youngest citizens. Known as *Our Future Americans* (fig. 121), the picture features a girl and boy in a landscape.[57] The girl, who wears an elaborate

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[55] General sources on the experiences of children during the war include Clement, *Growing Pains*, 9–35; Steven Mintz, *Huck's Raft: A History of American Childhood* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press / Harvard University Press, 2004), 118–32; and Emmy E. Werner, *Reluctant Witnesses: Children's Voices from the Civil War* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998).

[56] "We have just got another baby—he (for it is a boy) was born the 7th. of May at two o'clock in the morning…as he was born among a series of noble victories, that of Yorktown, and of Norfolk, and the blowing up of that ugly nightmare, the Merimac, and so on, we thought we would call him Victoir Mclelan [for General George McClellan]…You may wonder dear Mother that I do not feel more down hearted at having another little responsibility, which I hope not lose while he is small, but look at it poetically, and what Mother with her heart aright! will be sorry to see her baby's face, and then look at [it] practically and finally, there have been so many men distroyed that I think it is quit a good thing for the country and the girls in future, that all the boys that can come should come." LMS to Angélique and Gilles Martin, 12 May 1862, LMS papers. Victor McClellan's death in infancy is noted by Spencer's granddaughter, Lillian Spencer Gates, on a typed sheet entitled "History of Angélique Le Petit," LMS papers.

[57] It is unclear if this is the original title. It derives from a brass tablet attached to the frame that housed the painting when it was acquired by Berry-Hill Galleries in 1972. The dealer discarded this frame, leading one

dress, stands leaning against a pedestal table topped with a pot of flowers. She stares out to the left while absently fondling a pet parrot. The boy, seated below her, straddles a drum. He holds a drumstick in his right hand, while an American flag rests on his lap. Like his sister, he stares out of the picture to the left. Two large dogs, one in the immediate foreground and one behind the table, accompany the pair.

A total lack of surviving documentation for the painting has led scholars to speculate about the identity of the sitters. Robin Bolton-Smith and William Truettner have suggested that its large size and unique composition point to a commission by a prominent Newark family, such as the Marcus L. Wards, for whom Spencer had created several other family portraits. They hypothesize that the children are Catherine and Francis Ward, who both appear in the earlier portrait *Four Children of Marcus L. Ward* (1858–1860, fig. 122). If so, *Our Future Americans* would be a posthumous mourning portrait, because Catherine died in 1860 and Francis died in 1864.[58] Jochen Wierich agrees with their assessment, noting that Spencer may have painted this for Ward in lieu of a cash installment for the house she and Benjamin had bought from him in 1858.[59]

If these speculations about the sitters are correct and the title is original, the painting appears to be a wholly negative statement about the viability of the postbellum

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to believe that it was not original and therefore that the title could have been bestowed later than the 1860s. Frederick D. Hill to Robin Bolton-Smith, 20 April 1972, NMAA Exhibition Records.

[58] Bolton-Smith and Truettner, *Joys of Sentiment*, 193–95.

[59] Wierich, "Domestication of History," 228. The Spencers owed Ward eighteen hundred dollars as of April 1, 1860, to be paid over three years. Agreement between LMS and Marcus L. Ward, 26 December 1857, LMS papers. Boettcher also believes this to be a posthumous portrait of Catherine and Francis. "Domestic Violence," 172.

generation.[60] Spencer seems to imply that the future of the American citizenry is in doubt. Be they children taken before their time, like the boy and girl pictured here, young soldiers killed in battle, or babies never born to war widows, they no longer, nor ever will, exist to lead the country into its next phase of rebuilding.

A close reading of the work, however, precludes its identification as a posthumous mourning portrait. There are none of the disguised symbols typically used by Spencer, such as dead flowers, water sources, or offered pieces of fruit, which would indicate the deceased state of the sitters.[61] Rather, the children appear alive, but weary. It seems that the experience of the war has made them older than their years. Each stares out with a blank look, as if lost in thought. Their facial expressions, especially that of the young boy, have a somber quality. The portrait is in line with a lithograph of the same period published by Kellogg and Bulkeley (fig. 123). A baby, identified as "Our Future President," sits in a carriage on the veranda of a house. He looks out at the viewer with a grave expression as he calmly fingers the sleeve of a red velvet coat, perhaps to suggest his potential status. The image of the solemn toddler is in vivid contrast to a painting that Spencer created in the early 1850s entitled *Future President* (location unknown). A critic

[60] Wierich interprets the painting differently. He reads it as a continuation of the Young America allegory, popularized in the photograph and print culture of the 1850s, that equated the promising youth of America with the fledgling nation itself. He writes, "Spencer's effort to turn death into a life affirming allegory was quite in line with the psychological mechanisms through which many Northerners learned to look at death and suffering as positive, even rejuvenating forces." "Domestication of History," 228–29. However, Fredrickson (whom he cites) describes Northern intellectuals' view of wartime suffering as a way to cleanse the nation of its sinful ways, such as its antebellum tolerance of slavery. Fredrickson, *Inner Civil War*, 80–82. Children would not have been seen as blameful for these offenses and in need of redemption. Boettcher views the children as models of good behavior, but does not address what he reads as an ironic title. "Domestic Violence," 172–73.

[61] See note 35 above. Uncaged domesticated birds and dogs appear in some posthumous mourning portraits, according to Edwards, *Domestic Bliss*, 104, and Lloyd, "Young Boy," 106. However, Spencer included dogs in many of her pictures of children and a parrot appears prominently in *The Children of Marcus Ward*, which is known to be a traditional portrait. Therefore, the animals in *Our Future Americans* cannot be linked to death symbolism.

disparagingly described the work as a portrait of a "chuckling, crowing, slobbering baby, laid out upon a pillow."[62] Happy and active, this prospective commander-in-chief may have exuded optimism, while his 1867 counterpart seems to balance the weight of the world on his shoulders. Likewise, the boy in *Our Future Americans* appears tired. He does not beat his drum, nor proudly fly the flag. Instead, the stars and stripes droop near the ground, perhaps a sign of the children's deflated emotional state.

Spencer's final two extant paintings that deal with the pessimism engendered by the Civil War and its immediate aftermath, *War Spirit at Home; or, Celebrating the Victory at Vicksburg* (1866, fig. 106) and *The Home of the Red, White, and Blue* (c. 1867–1868, fig. 107), were painted during the initial volatile years of Reconstruction. The period of Reconstruction is typically thought to have centered on the contentious efforts to reunify the United States and to grant rights to newly freed slaves. In the industrial North, tensions also continued to issue from relations between native-born Americans and the growing population of immigrants who came to work in factories and as domestics. And for returning soldiers and their families, conflict often ensued as they tried to return to "normal" prewar life. Spencer's pictures from this time, then, deal with questions about whether and how different constituencies could live together peacefully in the postbellum domestic setting. In the two analyzed here, children play a large role in their meaning. While Spencer continued with her cynical attitude in *War Spirit at Home*, she was able to offer a somewhat more hopeful picture of children's potential for moral utility in *The Home of the Red, White, and Blue*.

[62] *Albion*, 15 May 1852, 237, quoted in Wierich, "War Spirit at Home," 37.

War Spirit at Home features a group of three children playacting as a soldier, drummer boy, and bugler in a Victorian kitchen in celebration of the surrender of Vicksburg, Mississippi, to Ulysses S. Grant on July 4, 1863. In the right foreground, their mother pauses from nursing the baby to read about the victory in the *New York Times*. Meanwhile, a servant works at washing and drying a pile of dishes stacked on the table in the background.

Art historians have been most interested in the figure of the mother in *War Spirit at Home*. They have read the work as a comment on the war's disruption to conventional family life: when the husband is away, the wife is forced to become the head of the household (as symbolized by the masculine attribute of the newspaper). To some scholars, Spencer showed that women were up to the task.[63] Others, however, see the chaos of raucous children, disorderly dishes, and a precariously-balanced baby as Spencer's warning that mothers could not be interested in worldly events, for it distracted them from their proper role of maintaining domestic harmony and stability.[64] Often when interpreters of the painting have acknowledged the playing children, it has been to contrast their gaiety to the somberness of the women.[65] To Lubin, "the two adults…are no doubt chastened by their knowledge of the human cost of war and perhaps have even lost loved ones during the course of the 'great victory.' To this the children are oblivious,

[63] Hills, *Painters' America*, 65; O'Leary, *At Beck and Call*, 107.

[64] Bell, "Family Conflict," 173–74; Holly Pyne Connor, "Not at Home: The Nineteenth-Century New Woman," in *Off the Pedestal: New Women in the Art of Homer, Chase, and Sargent*, ed. Holly Pyne Connor (Newark, NJ: Newark Museum; New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006), 9–12.

[65] Hills, *Painters' America*, 65; Wierich, "War Spirit at Home," 28.

creating a pandemonium of their own that parodies the chaos of battle."[66] In other words, the children, in their innocence, see war as just a game.

One group of actual children were certainly aware of the suffering taking place. Historians estimate that forty thousand boys (many under the age of fourteen) served as musicians for the Union army. As drummers, fifers, and buglers, they called the soldiers to meals, provided drill music, signaled reveille and taps, and performed non-musical tasks, like carrying water, digging trenches, and gathering wood. Besides these more mundane duties, they participated fully in battle by communicating orders to troops, removing the wounded, and burying the dead.[67] Exposed not only to the bodily dangers and emotional toll of actual warfare, they were also susceptible to the rampant spread of disease in camp and the influence of immoral soldiers, who drank and gambled.[68]

Following the ideology of the moral utility of children, popular literature often lauded fictional drummer boys for their bravery and their ability to inspire patriotism in adults, as well as for their good influence on "grizzled, sinful" soldiers.[69] But books and magazines just as often decried the harm to which youthful musicians were thought to be exposed during their tours of duty. The novella, "Captain George, the Drummer Boy," describes daily life in the army in grim terms; for the fourteen-year-old main character "all his former ideas of warfare were soon proved to be very fanciful."[70] In the short story

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[66] Lubin, *Picturing a Nation*, 195.

[67] Werner, *Reluctant Witnesses,* 9–10.

[68] Marten, *Children for the Union*, 132.

[69] Ibid., 145.

[70] M. E. Dodge, *The Irvington Stories* (New York, 1865), 89–90, quoted in Marten, *Children for the Union*, 134.

"The Boy of Chancellorville," twelve-year-old Robert witnesses battles, maiming, and death, is captured and sent to Libby Prison, and becomes ill and nearly dies.[71]

During the time that *War Spirit at Home* recalls, the summer of 1863, the army had no age restrictions for child musicians. Not until March 1864 would military officials set the minimum age at sixteen.[72] Therefore, the boy of ten or eleven blowing the makeshift horn in the background could be a potential recruit.[73] Spencer actually uses the group as a whole to hint at the dangers faced by the portion of the North's child population who participated on the front lines. Although the children in the painting appear to be playing, certain details recall the alarming circumstances of real boys. The toddler leading the march is dressed not in the beautiful uniforms often portrayed on playing soldiers (figs. 124 and 125), but in weather-exposing rags and a torn paper hat. The tattered state of his clothing suggests the lack of provisions available to members of the army. The second child, a drummer girl, has left her sash loosely tied. The trailing red cloth becomes a tease for the family cat, but in its frayed state it can also be read as blood gushing from a wound. Spencer has rendered the oldest boy the least articulated of the children. He is the furthest from the foreground and only his bust and a deathly pale hand appear. His head is shown in profile, which prevents any portrayal of individuality. It is as if the boy is not a real presence at all—as if he is already deceased. With these

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[71] Edmund Kirke, "The Boy of Chancellorville," *Our Young Folks*, September 1865, 600–608, described in Marten, *Children for the Union*, 137–38.

[72] Clement, *Growing Pains*, 12.

[73] The children in *War Spirit at Home* have been identified (from back to front) by Spencer's granddaughter as the Spencer children Charles (b. 1851), Lilly (b. 1859), Pierre (b. 1863), and Flora (b. 1866). O'Leary, *At Beck and Call*, 280n112. I agree, however, with O'Leary, who writes: "Although Spencer once again used the likenesses of her own intimates, she probably intended the painting to represent…an anonymous family whose husband and father had gone to war." *At Beck and Call*, 107. It seems more likely that Spencer used William, born in 1855, as the model for the oldest boy in the painting, who looks like he could be eleven years old.

disturbing details, Spencer implies that many children had been made to grow up (and die) too soon during the conflict.

In addition to drawing attention to the dangers child musicians were exposed to during the Civil War, *War Spirit of Home* also alludes to the purported threat posed to white, middle-class home-front children by Irish domestics. The Irish made up the largest ethnic group of servants in the United States during this period, and monopolized these positions in northern cities.[74] Therefore, the nationality of the dish-washing maid in the background of the painting most likely would have been assumed Irish by Spencer's Northeastern audience.[75] Her severe countenance may be explained by the newspaper's reminder of the gravity of war, but as an immigrant, she had much more to be disturbed about.

Christine Bell, in her dissertation entitled "A Family Conflict: Visual Imagery of the 'Homefront' and the War Between the States, 1860–1866," also sees the Irish domestic as an antagonistic figure in the work. She explains that the painting refers back to the brief period between the Vicksburg surrender on July 4, 1863 and the New York City draft riots, which took place from July 13 to July 17. The riots were led by disgruntled Irish residents who resented the new, stricter federal draft law. Thus, the

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[74] O'Leary, *At Beck and Call*, 79, 112–13.

[75] To be sure, one cannot tell from the oblique view of her face what nationality the maid is meant to be. However, other white servants Spencer depicted around this time, particularly in *Fruit of Temptation* (1857, fig. 92) and *The Home of the Red, White, and Blue* (c. 1866–1868, fig. 107), are painted in profile, revealing the small, upturned nose used in period caricatures of the Irish. Spencer also had personal experience with Irish servants during this period, employing a maid named Mary Carpenter around 1860. O'Leary, *At Beck and Call*, 100. Christine Bell has identified the servant as associated with both Irish immigrants and African Americans: "the dark complexion of Spencer's house maid blurs her racial identity, associating her with both of the working class groups." "Family Conflict," 184. However, the servant, whose darker skin can be explained by the fact that she stands in the shadows, does not have any of the stereotypical features, like tight curls, broad noses, and thick lips, that Spencer used when depicting black adults in other works, such as *Dixie's Land* (1861–1862, fig. 104) and *The Pic Nic or the Fourth of July* (c. 1861–1862, fig. 105).

servant can be seen to represent the seditious working class that by the mid-1860s were thought to be reproducing at a rate greater than that of native-born whites. According to Bell, Spencer's depiction of the mother breastfeeding in the foreground deflects Anglo-Americans' fears about becoming outnumbered; she shows that fecundity is the middle-class woman's contribution to the war effort (both the Civil War and the war between the races).[76]

The mother in *War Spirit at Home* may be protecting the future of the native-born population with her procreative powers, but I would contend that Spencer simultaneously makes a negative statement about the threat Irish servants were perceived to be to the middle-class children with whom they had daily contact during the war. Anglo-Americans were vexed and often frightened by the harmful influence they believed Irish servants might have on their offspring. For one, they saw these domestics as totally inept at childcare. Robert Tomes, writing about the incompetence of "Bridget" in 1864, described her typical nurturing way as "chok[ing] baby, who hasn't cut a tooth, with a chicken bone," and "letting baby fall into the fire." This can only be expected, he continues, for "her ideas of tending a baby are derived from an affectionate reminiscence of a sturdy brat of an infant brother or sister sprawling, naked, in the mud, in close proximity, and mingling its cries with the sonorous grunt of the pig."[77] Protestant employers were also very concerned about Irish domestics' religious orientation. Tomes noted that "there are still many fastidiously pious folks, who [see] in every Catholic servant a Jesuit in disguise," referring to the priests often accused of violent acts against

[76] Bell, "Family Conflict," 177–93.

[77] Robert Tomes, "Your Humble Servant," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, June 1864, 54.

Protestants.[78] Even the less pious were concerned that the maid might try to convert their children to Catholicism. One writer warned that she may "secretly carry the infant to a priest, and have it baptized in the Catholic church, herself standing godmother."[79]

While these anxieties about employing Irish servants went back to the 1850s, the middle class's perception of the violent nature of the Irish was reinforced by the 1863 draft riots. At the beginning of the Civil War, the Irish population backed the war effort, but as the cause became increasingly linked to the emancipation of slaves, they withdrew their support. They feared that if the slaves were freed, they would move North and compete with the unskilled Irish for jobs. Lincoln's issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863 put the Irish on edge, and when he signed a federal draft law two months later, it was effectively the last straw. The act made all white males between the ages of twenty and thirty-five and all unmarried white men between the ages of thirty-five and forty-five eligible for service, but excluded black males, who were not considered citizens. It also exempted men who could pay a substitute or a three hundred dollar fee. Incited by antiwar newspapers, Irish mobs went on a five-day rampage in July, attacking and looting property associated with the free black population in the city, but also destroying government buildings and the homes of the elite, whose privilege and power they resented.[80]

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[78] Tomes, "Your Humble Servant," 57; O'Leary, *At Beck and Call*, 114.

[79] Timothy Titcomb [Josiah Gilbert Holland], *Titcomb's Letters to Young People, Single and Married* (New York, 1858), quoted in O'Leary, *At Beck and Call*, 115.

[80] This summation of the cause of the riots is taken from Harris, *Shadow of Slavery*, 279–84; and Ross Barrett, "On Forgetting: Thomas Nast, the Middle Class, and the Visual Culture of the Draft Riots," *Prospects* 29 (2004): 28.

Thus, Spencer would have reason to picture an Irish domestic with a potential for violence during this period of unrest. In Newark, where Spencer lived, draft officials who visited Irish sections in June 1863 were stoned by Irish women.[81] In 1864, certainly referencing the tumult of the previous summer, Tomes called for elevating the character of Irish servants, for, he predicted "if we do not do something toward civilizing Bridget and Patrick…we may continue to live in fear of having our houses pulled down over our heads, or our throats cut every time the foreign element of our large cities is stirred to fermentation by some malicious demagogue."[82]

In *War Spirit at Home*, painted by Spencer in 1866, but looking back to the summer of 1863, the Irish maid can be read as not appreciative of the celebration occurring in her employer's house. News of another victory on July 4 (for Gettysburg had been won the day before) would mean to her that the North was that much closer to freeing the slaves who could potentially threaten the livelihoods of the Irish. The servant looks with a seemingly hostile expression (described by O'Leary as "almost glowering"[83]) at the back of the newspaper, while the children parade directly in front of her, as if rubbing the two-time triumph in her face.

Spencer's composition puts the tiny, celebrating soldier-musicians in a vulnerable position. This is especially apparent if the painting is compared to a Thomas Nast print published by Currier and Ives in 1862. Entitled *The Domestic Blockade* (fig. 125), the lithograph depicts two children "protecting" their home against a broom-welding Irish

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[81] Dermot Quinn, *The Irish in New Jersey: Four Centuries of American Life* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 106.

[82] Tomes, "Your Humble Servant," 59.

[83] O'Leary, *At Beck and Call*, 107.

maid. They have stacked buckets, baskets, and chairs against the overturned kitchen table in an effort to prevent the servant's entrance into another room. The boy, elevated to the servant's eye level in his position on the table, points his bayoneted rifle directly at her chest in a rather threatening gesture. In addition, he has positioned several bottles, like cannon, on the rampart he has constructed. Meanwhile, his sister waves a large American flag to indicate their loyalty to the Union. The children in *War Spirit at Home*, on the other hand, do not have a door frame and table to separate them from the "enemy." They have their backs turned and are unarmed, save for the fire poker the youngest child holds in a drilling posture, rather than one ready for attack. The mother's upheld newspaper creates a barrier that blocks her view of the children. In her distracted state, she cannot be counted on for protection. The maid, then, free from her mistress's watchful eye and with unhindered access to the children, could potentially use her plate like a stone to put an end to the celebration.

From the standpoint of the children, *War Spirit at Home* appears to be a negative work, looking back in time in order to both reference the dangers children faced in the military during the war and the threat Irish domestics were imagined to pose to the wellbeing of those remaining on the home front. Soon after painting this canvas, however, Spencer provided a moderately optimistic message that the Reconstruction period might not only be a time to reunite the North and South, but also to mend antagonisms between the returning soldier and his family and between the native-born and immigrant.[84] *The Home of the Red, White, and Blue* (c. 1867–1868), which depicts an

[84] *The Home of the Red, White, and Blue* recently came to the market after being in a private collection for many years. No scholar has yet written about the work. In unpublished promotional materials, an employee of Debra Force Fine Art, Inc. has interpreted the work as providing "optimistic hope for the healing of the

extended family interacting with an Italian organ grinder outside their country home,[85] is set in the present of the later 1860s and as such, offers a view of the "immigrant issue" no longer tinged with apprehension.[86] Rather, this painting contains a message that encourages, if somewhat tentatively, spreading charity to the underprivileged.

Spencer's most obvious change when moving from *War Spirit at Home* to *The Home of the Red, White, and Blue* is her depiction of the Irish servant. Gone is the middle-aged, pale woman with sunken eyes and cheeks who displays a glowering expression. The aproned maid in the lower right corner of *The Home of the Red, White, and Blue* is a young, ruddy-complected girl with a jovial expression. She holds the baby in one steady, strong arm (no chance of letting it "fall in the fire"), while carrying a pitcher of milk in her left hand. Overall, she is pictured as a nurturing figure, not as a potentially dangerous one.

How could Spencer have altered her portrayal of Irish domestics in such a short time? O'Leary, not knowing of the existence of *The Home of the Red, White, and Blue*,

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Nation," but in the more traditional sense of bringing together North and South. Debra Force materials provided to author by George J. Turak, Turak Gallery of American Art, Philadelphia.

[85] The majority of street musicians in the North were immigrants from Italy, many of whom moved to other parts of Europe and the United States during a depression in Italy, which lasted from 1860 to 1875. Arthur W. J. G. Ord-Hume, *Barrel Organ: The Story of the Mechanical Organ and Its Repair* (New York: A. S. Barnes, 1978), 235.

[86] Because there are no contemporary descriptions of *The Home of the Red, White, and Blue,* we cannot be absolutely sure that the painting written about here originally bore that title. It might be *The Union Home* (c. 1866), *The Starry Flag* (c. 1866–1868), both mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, or *Organ Grinder,* which was exhibited at the Utica Art Association in 1868. Yarnall and Gerdts, *American Art Exhibition Catalogs*, 5:3333. However, the presence of the large flag in the foreground and the main group of women, who are dressed in red, white, and blue, would make *The Home of the Red, White, and Blue* a logical title. In addition, Spencer copied the motif of the crying girl and her comforting mother directly from *The Pic Nic or the Fourth of July,* which may have once been titled *The Home of the Red, White, and Blue* (see pp. 168–69). Perhaps Spencer decided to reuse the title when she placed those same figures in her new composition. Therefore, this study will refer to the painting as *The Home of the Red, White, and Blue.* The date range c. 1867–1868 is my estimate, based on an advertisement in the December 1868 issue of *American Agriculturalist* that notes it "among her latest productions." NMAA Exhibition Records. Bolton-Smith and Truettner date the painting c. 1867. *Joys of Sentiment*, 189.

argued that the artist turned from empathetic depictions of female servants in the early 1850s to pictures more in line with the general public's negative attitudes in the later 1850s and early 1860s as she grew increasingly frustrated in her experience with her own "girls."[87] When Spencer painted the Irish servant in *War Spirit at Home* in 1866, then, she may have been recalling and recording her attitude of the early 1860s rather than that of the present day. In *The Home of the Red, White, and Blue*, on the other hand, Spencer seems to have attempted to put aside her war-era prejudices to create a depiction more in line with her earlier stance and also in accord with writers, such as the Beecher sisters, who began in the late 1860s to see domestics as heroic daughters who worked in the United States to support their families in Ireland.[88] The authors placed blame on housewives for servants' defects, believing that their ill treatment of their employees was what made the servants incompetent and unstable. Recalling the sacrifices of the Civil War, the Beechers made it clear that the United States would never be an aristocracy.

> Finally, the bitter baptism through which we have passed, the life-blood dearer than our own which has drenched distant fields, should remind us of the preciousness of distinctive American ideas. They who would seek in their foolish pride to establish the pomp of liveried servants in America are doing that which is simply absurd. A servant can never in our country be the mere appendage to another man, to be marked like a sheep with the color of his owner; he must be a fellow-citizen, with an established position of his own, free to make contracts, free to come and go, and having in his sphere titles to consideration and respect just as definite as those of any trade or profession whatever.[89]

Spencer pictured the maid as cheerful, hinting that her employers treat her with regard. She is still set apart from the main family grouping, however. Stationed on the stairs

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[87] See O'Leary, *At Beck and Call*, 79–108.

[88] Beecher and Stowe, *American Woman's Home*, 327.

[89] Ibid., 333.

leading out to the veranda, she remains firmly associated with her subordinate role as nurse and cook.

In fact, the composition of the painting clearly divides the middle-class family from its Irish servant and the Italian organ grinder and his daughter, who have come from the city to play for the more affluent, who were increasingly leaving urban areas for the suburbs during the postwar years.[90] For the most part, the "immigrant zone" occupies the right one-third of the canvas and is demarcated by the large tree that divides the dark ("other") from the light ("American") sections of the background landscape. Significantly, the large flag, lying in the foreground, mirrors in its severance of stars from stripes the separation of the two groups. While most obviously referring to the North and South, still divided politically during the early years of Reconstruction, the dismantled flag's positioning more subtly alludes to the problems between native-born Americans and immigrants in the North.

Another dilemma Spencer addressed using the flag and the light/dark motif was the difficulty inherent in the reunification of families after the war. The man who is presumably the father of the Anglo-American children appears on the extreme left. A war veteran, he still wears his blue Union army uniform. A pair of crutches leaning against the back of the chair indicates that he has been wounded in combat. His presence recalls the many returning soldier scenes of the nineteenth century, such as Richard Caton Woodville's *Old '76 and Young '48* (1849, fig. 126), in which a family, including a veteran of the Revolutionary War, gathers around a young man in a sling, who regales them with stories from the recent Mexican War. This tradition continued in the print

[90] Boyer, *Urban Masses*, 124.

culture of the Civil War. For example, in *The Soldier's Return to His Home* (1866, fig. 127), a veteran, also having to use a crutch, commands the attention of his concerned family with a raised arm as he describes his adventures, or possibly how he was wounded. In *The Home of the Red, White, and Blue*, however, the returning father is not the focus of the group's attention in the least. Seated off to one side, in a part of the canvas as equally dark as the "immigrant zone," he has not been reincorporated into the family. His face, seen in profile, is merely sketched in. His eyes are not delineated at all. The ghostly quality of the figure seems a confirmation of many fathers' fears during the war that their children would forget them. The future president James Garfield wrote to his wife of his daughter: "Have her say [papa], so that when I come she may know me." Five-year-old Hamlin Garland did not remember his father; he was "only a strange man with big eyes and [a] care-worn face."[91] The closeness that is absent between the father and his family in *The Home of the Red, White, and Blue* is something else that, with the flag, still needs to be reconstructed.

While ignoring the Irish servant and the returning father, the family engages the organ grinder. Accompanied by his tambourine-toting daughter, the Italian immigrant extends his hand for a coin held by the little American girl, who is frightened by his pet monkey. She clings to her mother's dress and wipes tears from her eyes. The rest of the group finds her fear very amusing, including the girl's mother, who grins and places her fingers lightly on the girl's shoulder to comfort her, a family friend, aunt, or older sister, who hides behind the girl's mother to conceal her laughter, and two grandparents, who

[91] Quoted in Mintz, 129 and 132.

smile knowingly. The girl's brother, on the other hand, shows his bravery by striking a cocky pose.

Spencer's depiction of the organ grinder holding his instrument, but not playing it, seems strange when compared to earlier pictures with the same theme. A Nathaniel Currier print from midcentury shows a man cranking an organ at the front gate of a house, while two girls dance joyfully to the music. Their invalid sister, seated next to their mother, looks wistful that she cannot join them in their fun (fig. 128). Christian Schussele's portrayal of 1857 also features a musician working his contraption (fig. 129). He is surrounded by the neighborhood children, who dance, give piggybacks, and tease his monkey. The enthusiasm created by his arrival is certainly evident.

By the 1860s, organ grinders were viewed with annoyance in the northern United States. They had a reputation for not keeping their instrument in tune and playing the same song over and over again.[92] An 1867 article in *Harper's Weekly* reprinted a poem agonizing over the "music" of Italian immigrants:

> Did you ever know a brother, whether civilized or wild,
> From the pale-faced son of Europe to the dusky Afric child,
> Who could find a charm of music in the strangulary wheeze
> That is twisted from the organ of the nomad Genoese?
> ……
> Up and down the highways gathered in a Heaven-ascending pyre,
> Should those dreadful organs perish in a holocaust of fire,
> And if any swarthy beggar thenceforth broke the rest of sound
> I would grind him, by the Powers, finer than the tunes he ground![93]

[92] Ord-Hume, *Barrel Organ,* 237.

[93] "The Music of the Street," *Harper's Weekly*, 26 October 1867, 673.

Many people paid the musicians not to play, but to take their hated instrument elsewhere.[94] The subdued atmosphere in the painting, then, might stem from the fact that the girl is paying the organ grinder to leave without performing.

The girl's trepidation in regard to the monkey, coupled with the group's negative opinion of the organ grinder's music, speak to the general discord between the middle classes and the immigrant poor during this time. But Spencer's choice of featuring an Italian over another ethnic group is significant. Although sometimes considered a nuisance, at this point they were not believed to be troublemakers. For one, Italians, though small in number, remained loyal to the Union cause.[95] Secondly, at this time, they were not known to be overly faithful to Catholicism.[96] Most importantly, the earliest immigrants, who came from the northern parts of Italy, were considered lawful and hard-working. The *New York Times*, looking back a decade in 1875, reported:

> Until within the last three years the Italian population of this City was exceptionally well conducted. The number of Italians who were brought before our Police Courts was smaller, in proportion to the number of Italian residents, than the number of arrested persons belonging to any other nationality. The Italian colony was made up almost exclusively of industrious and honest people from Genoa and the towns of the Ligurian coast, with a few emigrants from Piedmont and an occasional Livornese. Three years ago, however, there arrived here a large number of

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[94] Ord-Hume, *Barrel Organ,* 237.

[95] Luciano J. Iorizzo and Salvatore Mondello, *The Italian Americans* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1980), 49.

[96] Reverend J. B. Torricelli, working with Italian immigrants in Boston, reported in 1861: "The obstacles I have met on my way have been many, and not easily removed; especially the utter indifference, the deadly apathy, with which every thing spiritual is regarded by the class of people committed to my care." Selections from the *27th Annual Report of the Executive Committee of the Benevolent Fraternity of Churches*, reprinted in Bremner, *Children and Youth*, 426. Charles Loring Brace and A. E. Cerqua, describing their efforts to form a school for Italian immigrants in New York, noted that Italians "seldom [attend] any religious service" and that "these people are not fanatics in religion." Charles Loring Brace, *The Dangerous Classes of New York, and Twenty Years' Work Among Them*, 3rd ed. (1880; repr., Montclair, NJ: Patterson Smith, 1967), 195, 198. This book, originally published in 1872, was a retrospective look at the years 1852 to 1872.

> immigrants from the south of Italy…It is to this latest addition to our Italian population that the Italians belong who are now so frequently guilty of crimes of violence.[97]

Therefore, Spencer deliberately pictured someone deserving of help rather than scorn.

The artist's inclusion of the organ grinder's daughter underscores her intent that the immigrants be viewed sympathetically. The girl would not have been identified as part of the infamous padrone system, in which Italian parents indentured their children to masters who sent them out on the streets alone or in pairs to earn daily quotas. By the 1860s, children working for padrones played harps and violins.[98] Rather, the daughter accompanies her father as they work together. Unlike the street sellers-turned-thieves that concerned the middle class in the 1850s, the organ grinder's daughter participates in morally appropriate, if annoying, work. Her evident sense of humor may have also endeared her to viewers; the child does not appear to have any evil tendencies.

The pair's depiction is similar in tone to a musical family featured in *Harper's Weekly* (fig. 130). The author of the accompanying article wrote that "our artist, Mr. W. S. L. Jewett, who has drawn the beautiful engraving which we present on this page, is evidently of a romantic turn of mind, and able to see sentiment of a serious sort even in the common, everyday scene which he has reproduced."[99] The two immigrants are pictured resting on the steps of a city building. Their long and unsuccessful day is implied by the weary look of the father and the sleep of the daughter, who holds sideways her

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[97] *New York Times*, 12 November 1875, quoted in Salvatore J. LaGumina, ed., *Wop! A Documentary History of Anti-Italian Discrimination in the United States* (San Francisco, CA: Straight Arrow Books, 1973), 41.

[98] Martha J. Hoppin, "The 'Little White Slaves' of New York: Paintings of Child Street Musicians by J. G. Brown," *American Art Journal* 26, no. 1/2 (1994): 9.

[99] "The Music of the Street," 673.

cup, empty of coins. The inconsistency of the profession is also shown in *The Home of the Red, White, and Blue.* Both father and daughter wear patched and tattered clothing, and the little girl does not sport any shoes. Her physical needs likely would have pulled on viewers' heartstrings.

By using Italians as her protagonists, Spencer could argue that immigrants were deserving of charity. At this point, they were still considered among the virtuous poor. Because of their clean living, however, the Italian population had fallen between the cracks of the aid system. As A. E. Cerqua, a colleague of Charles Loring Brace who helped found a school for Italian immigrants in the Five Points, explained, "Had they displayed the vices or criminal inclinations which prevail to a deplorable extent among the low classes of other nationalities, they would soon have been brought to public notice and taken care of by our benevolent and religious societies; but they cannot be reproached with intoxication, prostitution, quarreling, stealing, etc.; and thus, escaping the unenviable notoriety of the criminal, they fell into a privacy that deprived them of the advantages of American benevolence."[100] *The Home of the Red, White, and Blue,* then, seems like a call to help those in need, but forgotten.

Significantly, the artist shows the middle-class children as the possessors of alms. The girl fingers a coin while the boy holds up a goblet of milk. Money is a traditional form of charity, but the milk could refer to a problem specific to the times. In cities during the 1860s the milk supply was unhealthy. It came from distant farms on unrefrigerated trains, then was watered down by middle men, who added adulterants to

[100] A. E. Cerqua, quoted in Brace, *Dangerous Classes*, 197.

disguise spoilage.[101] Giving milk fresh from the country to an urban child, then, would have seemed like a special gift. The organ grinder's gesture, which lines his hand up with the base of the goblet, can be read as a reaching for the glass of milk as well as for the coin. It appears that he wants to accept both offerings.

Children's ability for charitable giving was stressed during the Civil War. Children's literature taught young citizens to sacrifice for the cause. Lydia Maria Child, in "The Two Christmas Evenings," wrote of children who learned that giving is better than receiving one Christmas and went on the next year to raise money to purchase toys and books for the local orphan asylum and for Southern black children. Another story spoke of children who willingly sent their best clothing and favorite toys to the "contraband" children who needed provisions for the winter.[102] Real children also rose to the occasion. They scraped lint from linen, which was used to dress wounds, packed up boxes of food and bedding to send to the troops, and raised money by holding performances and making craft items.[103]

In *The Home of the Red, White, and Blue*, however, the children's generosity does not seem as genuine as that of the children in the stories described above. The little girl might be giving her coin to the organ grinder not as a gesture of charity, but to bribe him from playing and to take away his frightening monkey. The boy may be offering his glass of milk, but the tilted angle at which he holds it implies that he is not interested in giving

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[101] Meckel, *Save the Babies*, 65–66.

[102] Lydia Maria Child, "The Two Christmas Evenings," *Our Young Folks,* January 1866, 2–13; and Christine Pearl, "The Contraband," *The Student and Schoolmate*, February 1862, 45–48, reprinted in James Marten, ed., *Lessons of War: The Civil War in Children's Magazines* (Wilmington, DE: SR Books, 1999), 187–203.

[103] Marten, *Children for the Union*, 85–91.

it away at all. In his distracted state of observing the monkey, he looks like he is wastefully spilling it instead. The children's ambivalent gestures seem to be in line with comments by the Beechers, who saw the spirit of giving lacking in middle-class children around this time.

> In the vicinity of our large towns and cities will be seen spacious mansions inhabited by professed followers of Jesus Christ…Not far from them will be seen small tenement-houses…[in which] the boys rise early and go forth with the father to work from eight to ten hours, with little opportunity for amusement or for reading or study. In the large houses, the boys sleep till a late breakfast, then lounge about till school-time, then spend three hours in school, stimulating brain and nerves…So with the girls: in the tenement-houses, they go to kitchens and shops to work most of the day…In the large mansions, the daughters sleep late, do little or no labor for the family, and spend their time in school, or in light reading, ornamental accomplishments, or amusement…Thus one class are trained to feel that they are a privileged few for whom others are to work, while they do little or nothing to promote the improvement or enjoyment of their poorer neighbors.[104]

The hesitation of the wealthy girl and boy in Spencer's composition seems all the more egregious when they are directly contrasted to the poor daughter of the organ grinder, who goes without shoes and stockings, and presumably, without healthy food.

The one figure in the composition who seems to be hopeful that the nation can be reunited in the political, social, and familial realms is the small baby being held by the Irish nurse in the lower right foreground. It is the only figure to acknowledge the dismantled flag on the ground. The infant reaches with both hands towards the pieces, as if it desires to take up needle and thread from the basket to mend it. Its gesture could also be read as an attempt to embrace the father figure on the far left, who everyone else disregards. Finally, the baby is the only one of the middle-class group who occupies space on the "immigrant side" of the canvas, implying its potential ability of empathy

[104] Beecher and Stowe, *American Woman's Home*, 437–38.

with those less fortunate. The baby's gestures and placement, as well as its pure white gown trimmed with red, white, and blue ribbons, suggest that it has the promise to be a redeemer figure for a nation still in upheaval. Born after the conflict, it has not lost its innocence, but possesses an optimism that can inspire adults to work towards tolerance and understanding. With this small infant, Spencer seems to say that, like Samuel Osgood and Henry Tuckerman, she believes again in the moral utility of children.

Coda
Truth Unveiling Falsehood

In June of 1869, Lilly Martin Spencer copyrighted *Truth Unveiling Falsehood* (fig. 131), the large allegorical painting she considered her masterpiece.[1] Using an explanation supplied by the artist (fig. 132), reviewers typically described the grandiose composition for their readers as

> a group of six figures representing truth unveiling falsehood. The main personage is Truth, a female figure of eminent stature and dignified air, in whose aspect the artist has sought to express that calm and serene repose that absence of either love or hate, which may fitly be attributed to the impartiality of Truth. With her right hand she is lifting a veil which had concealed the deformed features of falsehood, a crouching figure wrapped in folds of crimson velvet and ermine. The scowl of hate and anger is on the face of Falsehood as her features are exposed and the gilded crown falls from her head. At the feet of Falsehood is Ignorance on her knees, with her face bowed to the earth, entrusting a helpless infant to the care of Falsehood. On the left of Truth is a beautiful female figure in whose countenance is expressed maternal tenderness and satisfaction, seated with an infant on her lap, whose eyes are fixed on Truth with an expression of delight.[2]

Apparently supported financially by an unknown benefactor, Spencer labored over the didactic painting for three years in a New York studio, while still making her home in Newark.[3] Perhaps inspired by her return to the center of the American art world, she

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[1] Letter from E. Mercer Shreve, Clerk of the District Court of the United States at Trenton, NJ, to LMS, 18 June 1869, LMS papers. Spencer's esteem for the painting is shown in her $20,000 insurance valuation and her refusal to sell it, despite reports that Senator Sprague from New Jersey and even department store mogul John Wanamaker offered to buy the work for $20,000. LMS papers. Bolton-Smith and Truettner believe these offers to be myths, because, they write, Spencer's perpetual need for money would have led her to sell for that enormous sum if given the opportunity. *Joys of Sentiment*, 205.

[2] "Truth Unveiling Falsehood," unidentified newspaper clipping, c. June 1869, LMS papers.

[3] A 1901 newspaper article reported that the "picture was made possible by the generosity of a wealthy merchant. He placed at Mrs. Spencer's disposal a sum of money which enabled her to forsake portrait painting for a time devotes her energies to a different-variety of art." "Woman Rip Van Winkle"; W. T., "Lilly M. Spencer," *New York Evening Post*, 1 March 1870, 4, Col. Merl M. Moore, Jr. files; Mrs. Dr. C., "Lilly Spencer, The Painter," *Chicago Republican*[?], undated newspaper clipping, LMS papers.

created the work on what some reporters hailed as "the largest piece of canvas ever used by an American woman."[4]

Spencer possibly felt compelled to paint her composition on such a grand scale because it had been two decades in the planning. One visitor to her studio at 609 Broadway wrote, after speaking with her, that "this work has been in the mind of the artist for twenty years, and amid all her discouragements and constant struggles to support her family, this great conception has never left her mind, but has been carefully nurtured and cherished, and has now assumed a form of life and beauty in this wonderful painting which will cover her name with glory and achieve independence, fortune and fame for this brave little woman. It is a poem in colors, an allegorical work, and like the allegory of old John Bunyan, will live forever."[5] If, in fact, the idea for *Truth Unveiling Falsehood* had been germinating in her mind for twenty years, she had been contemplating its execution while creating all the other work featured in this study—the images of sleeping infants and toddlers, the pictures of mothers and fathers interacting with their offspring, the designs of mischievous youngsters, and the paintings of morally-useful children. While Spencer had a definite sense of how she wanted *Truth Unveiling Falsehood* to be interpreted, making it explicit in her printed explanation, the work's very nature as an allegory of universal concepts, such as "truth," "confidence," "innocence," "falsehood," and "ignorance," allowed for many different readings by her viewing public. Interestingly, some of her audience's interpretations coincide with ideas Spencer had been working through in her previous two decades' output. Therefore, although not her

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[4] Unidentified, undated newspaper clipping, LMS papers.

[5] Mrs. Dr. C., "Lilly Spencer, The Painter."

intention, *Truth Unveiling Falsehood* can be interpreted as a summation of sorts of the ideas embodied in her work featuring children from the late 1840s, the 1850s, and the 1860s.

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With *Truth Unveiling Falsehood*, Spencer seems to have realized most completely her earliest artistic goal of producing allegorical and literary works, as seen in the many studies in her sketchbooks of the 1840s, as well as in some of the paintings she produced during her years in Cincinnati. While financial necessity prevented her from continuing in this line (her genre paintings of domestic life sold much more readily), she appears to have retained over the years her initial aspiration, as expressed to her parents in 1847, of trying to " make my paintings have a tendency towards morale improvement at least as far as it is in the power of painting and oh! a fine painting has a beautiful power over the human pasions."[6] Spencer most likely derived her philosophy from the tradition of Romantic allegorical painting that was popular when she began her career. Painters such as Thomas Cole, Rembrandt Peale, and Daniel Huntington all believed in an artist's moral role in conveying certain Christian themes to his audience.[7]

Daniel Huntington, especially, would have been an inspiration to Spencer. He produced figural allegories meant to convey moral lessons and Christian principles between 1839 and 1868. In these pictures, he often substituted traditional topics, such as the Gospels, with more abstract subjects, which could be "composed without the trammels of a fixed costume; [were] confined to no age or country, and depend[ed] upon

[6] LMS to Angélique and Gilles Martin, 11 July 1847, Martin family papers.

[7] Harris, *Artist in American Society*, 312; Wierich, "Domestication of History," 230–32.

no temporary excitement for their interest—but appeal[ed] to those feelings which belong to the human race."[8] Often, as art historian Wendy Greenhouse has noted, the works revolved around "the symbolic agency of the ideal female form" (fig. 133).[9]

Spencer must have been thinking of Huntington's allegories (many of which had been exhibited in 1850 in a monographic show at the American Art-Union) when she portrayed her Truth as an idealized female figure directing the action of removing Falsehood's mask to reveal a monster beneath. She further linked her work to his when she contacted the venerable artist in the early 1870s, perhaps to request his assistance in promoting *Truth Unveiling Falsehood*. On July 10, 1874 he replied that, having forgotten to send her a line of introduction, he was enclosing a few of his cards to serve the same purpose.[10] Huntington's influence on Spencer does not appear to have been lost on her colleagues. In a letter from the Office of the Insurance Monitor, C. C. Hine suggested that Spencer arrange to have made "a fine large steel engraving similar in size to Barlow's engraving of *Mercy's Dream.*"[11] The writer here seems to equate *Truth Unveiling Falsehood* with Huntington's famous painting inspired by John Bunyan's book, *The Pilgrim's Progress* (fig. 134).

Although *Truth Unveiling Falsehood* seems almost retarditaire, referring back to Romantic pictures from the first half of the century, and coming as it did at the tail end of Huntington's body of allegorical work, the painting appears to have been a popular

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[8] Daniel Huntington, *Catalogue of Paintings, by Daniel Huntington, N. A., Exhibiting at the Art Union Buildings, 497 Broadway* (New York, 1850), 11, quoted in Wendy Greenhouse, "Daniel Huntington and the Ideal of Christian Art," *Winterthur Portfolio* 31, no. 2/3 (Summer–Autumn 1996): 115.

[9] Greenhouse, "Daniel Huntington," 110.

[10] Daniel Huntington to LMS, 10 July 1874, LMS papers.

[11] C. C. Hine to LMS, 19 April 1869, LMS papers.

success for over a decade. Spencer exhibited it up and down the East Coast, including Boston and Portland, Maine, in the summer of 1869, the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia in 1876, the permanent International Exhibition in Philadelphia's Fairmount Park from 1877 to 1880, and Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, New York, in late 1880 or early 1881. She may also have shown the allegory in Newark, Baltimore, and New York City during the early 1870s.[12] Not satisfied with seeing the work only once, many viewers bought photographic reproductions of the painting as mementos.

Although one critic called *Truth Unveiling Falsehood* "a farrago of allegorical and metaphysical balderdash,"[13] the popularity of the painting with the general public certainly revolved around viewers' fascination with the subject matter. While many found Spencer's artistic execution lacking, they greatly admired the concept of the work. "He who can look on this touching work, and not be moved, must be made of sterner stuff than the writer. We care not what those may say who will hereafter write critiques to exhibit their own knowledge, and make easy suggestions, couched in academician slang, about the handling, and the relief, and the pose, and all that; we only know that the

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[12] A. A. Childs & Company rented the painting for a three-month exhibit at the Studio Building Gallery in Boston from May 29 to August 31, 1869. During this time, the work appears to have been shown in Portland as well. Letters in the LMS papers indicate that Spencer may also have exhibited *Truth Unveiling Falsehood* at the Industrial Exhibition in Newark in late summer 1872, the Myers & Hedian Gallery in Baltimore in fall 1872, the Peabody Home in New York in summer 1875, and Miss Gibbon's Gallery in New York in early spring 1876. In 1876, she showed the painting in the Women's Pavilion at the Centennial Exhibition. Jesse H. Jones, "Truth Unveiling Falsehood," *Boston Woman's Journal*, 30 December 1876, 418. From the correspondence, it appears that Spencer wished to exhibit the work in Memorial Hall (and received permission to do so from Chief of the Art Bureau, John Sartain), but a misunderstanding between the Ladies Art Association, the New York Women's Centennial Union, and Spencer caused the painting to be sent to the Women's Pavilion instead. Perhaps the confusion prevented the painting from being listed in the official catalogue. United States Centennial Commission, *Official Catalogue Complete in One Volume* (Philadelphia, 1876). After the Centennial Exhibition closed, *Truth Unveiling Falsehood* hung in the permanent International Exhibition for several years, until Spencer requested it be returned to her in March 1880, presumably to satisfy Vassar College's petition to show it in their art gallery. By August 1881, the painting was no longer on view in Poughkeepsie. Various correspondence, LMS papers.

[13] "Art Notes," *New York Herald,* 19 June 1870, 3, Col. Merl M. Moore, Jr. files.

intense humanity of that dear mother moved our love, that the pure and searching eyes, and the calm, strong, peaceful face of Truth, claimed our profound respect and reverence."[14] Another critic exclaimed, "Not to compare her with Bouguereau for the exquisite charm of flesh-coloring and modeling; with Meissonier for marvelous force and finish; nor with Gérôme for faultless drawing, we may say that she ranks with these masters, or above them, by the innate value of genius with its happy conceptions, exquisite sensibilities, and worthy thoughts and aims."[15] The artist also received praise for the subject in personal letters from admirers.

By providing a comprehensive description to her viewing public, Spencer made it clear that she wanted her allegory to be interpreted in a specific way.[16] In her explanation she identified each figure as a principle or quality of the human condition and described the action of each on the other. According to the artist, the painting serves to compare the results of Truth on Confidence and Innocence with those of Falsehood and Selfishness on Ignorance and Innocence. Truth, personified as a beautiful and impartial young woman at the center of the composition, effortlessly exposes Selfishness, depicted as a monster, under the cover of Falsehood, portrayed as a royal figure with a noble visage, a crown, and a robe of velvet and ermine (seen more clearly in the painted sketch, fig. 135). By doing this, Truth permits all to see that under the disguise of Falsehood, Selfishness, the "originator of all man's evil passions," has destroyed "human trust and human Innocence," typified by the baby in its arms, which Ignorance, a cowering woman in the

[14] "Truth Unveiling Falsehood: Mrs. Lilly M. Spencer's Great Picture," unidentified, undated newspaper clipping, LMS papers.

[15] "Allegory of Truth Unveiling Falsehood," *Home Journal*, 12 May 1869, LMS papers.

[16] A contemporary copy of the description appears in the LMS papers and is also transcribed in Bolton-Smith and Truettner, *Joys of Sentiment*, 204–5.

lower left, has entrusted to it. At the same time that Truth unveils Falsehood, she encompasses Confidence with her left arm as the fecund mother nestles against her. Spencer relates that under Truth's protection and guidance, "all that is good prospers." This includes Innocence, the baby who pauses from feeding at Confidence's breast to look up at Truth, being the only one of the group who can "bear undazzled its beneficent light."

The last paragraph of the explanation shows, however, that Spencer intended the work not only as a commentary on universal and timeless ideas. Unlike her model Huntington, who meant his allegories featuring young women to avoid topical implications, Spencer wanted her painting, at least to some extent, to speak to issues of the day: "Truth is represented assuming the human form, not by any means (we are sorry to say) because humanity, or especially female humanity, are types of Truth, because it is humanity that needs Truth to enlighten and protect it, and woman in particular, that her smile and her words, which are the first that mankind in its innocence looks up to, may not teach it error." Indeed, it is no coincidence that Confidence and Ignorance are shown as mothers to two "innocent" babes. In addition to the more general allegory, Spencer meant this work to impress upon viewers the still important responsibility of American mothers to raise a generation of ethical children.

Spencer's objective that *Truth Unveiling Falsehood* deliver a forceful message about mothers' roles as instructors of morals relates back to concerns advanced by child-rearing advice manual authors and other advisors during the antebellum period. As previously discussed in Chapter 2, writers such as Lydia Maria Child, John S. C. Abbott, and Lydia Sigourney stressed the fact that "as the mother is the guardian and guide of the

early years of life, from her goes the most powerful influence in the formation of the character of man."[17] The mission of their books, therefore, was primarily to teach middle-class Protestant women how to raise children who would live by Christian moral principles as adults. Spencer similarly aimed to steer mothers away from "error" in her didactic painting by portraying both the benefits of leaning towards truth and the consequences of bowing to falsehood. She showed that if mothers aligned themselves with truth, their children would have an affinity to the principle. As one reviewer observed, the live infant's "eyes are fixed on Truth with an expression of delight."[18] On the other hand, if mothers used falsehood as their support (as Spencer explains the groveling mother on the left does), their children would be consumed by selfishness, a quality dangerous to society at large.

The first paragraph of Spencer's description of *Truth Unveiling Falsehood* does demonstrate her willingness to allow viewers to interpret the allegory as they wished, as long as they made their reading consistent with the components represented on the canvas: "One thing must be remembered, that it is Allegorical, by which means a great number of ideas or facts can be rendered in the most vivid and impressive manner; but, in order that this end may be fully attained, the allegory must be strictly consistent with the facts or ideas to be represented, whether it pleases or displeases the preconceived opinions of the spectator." In fact, it seems the popularity of work can be attributed directly to the malleable nature of the subject matter. The various interpretations her audience put into writing attest to viewers' enthusiasm to see in the composition alternate

[17] Abbott, *Mother at Home*, 2.

[18] "Fine Arts," *New York Evening Post*, 4 December 1868, 2, Col. Merl M. Moore, Jr. files.

meanings revolving around contemporary issues important to them. For example, a sonnet inspired by the painting read in part:

> In these our days of cant, pretense & sham
> Another Spencer chants a holier psalm,
> ……
> With grandest skill her magic art affords
> She flashes on the sight a nobler vision,
> An essence spiritual & a form Elysian
> *Truth* in a shape so exquisitely pure
> Of azure eyes, with locks of clustering gold[19]

The reference to "cant, pretense & sham" could very well refer to the general anxiety during the mid-nineteenth century of being duped by confidence men or deceived by painted women that historian Karen Halttunen has described.[20] For this poet, Spencer's Truth is an antidote to the perceived hypocrisy of the time. In another example, an article by a Mrs. Dr. C., the writer interprets the two sides as a comparison between competent and incompetent mothers' choices in medical care for their young.

> To me the picture reads thus: The fair, young mother, with her healthy babe at her bosom, was a type of an earnest, sensible woman who lived according to the rules of nature throwing "physics to the dogs," seeking her home in some quiet little nook—in the blessed country where her children could grow up healthy, pure, and strong. Falsehood, the vile monster, personifies a pompous, ignorant doctor, one of the "Soothing Syrup" race, who would dose a child with patent medicines when it should be *let alone*, who grabs the gold of the ignorant parent, and deals out drugs and death![21]

[19] "Sonnet," LMS Papers.

[20] Halttunen, *Confidence Men*, xiii–xviii, 1–55.

[21] Mrs. Dr. C., "Lilly Spencer, The Painter."

The viewer's reading hints at the mistrust in doctors that many Americans felt between 1840 and 1880, when medical fads and patent remedies multiplied and the public called for new standards in licensing and in medical school practices.[22]

Even recently, art historians have forwarded interpretations of *Truth Unveiling Falsehood* that bolster their arguments involving Spencer's larger oeuvre. David Lubin, continuing his evaluation of the artist's work as a reflection of her life's struggles, sees the painting as a representation of the feelings of selflessness and selfishness Spencer experienced as she tried to balance family and career.[23] Christine Bell, on the other hand, reads *Truth Unveiling Falsehood* in terms of what she sees as Spencer's preoccupation with women's reproductive abilities and abortion, as embodied in the "Madonna-like nursing mother" and the monster consuming the infant.[24] While none of the period interpretations of the painting were based on the artist's biography, some of them did correspond with ideas about mid-nineteenth century child rearing that Spencer contemplated in her pictures of children. The following accounts intimate concepts discussed in several of the previous chapters, making *Truth Unveiling Falsehood*, in effect, a kind of summary of child-rearing issues of interest at the time.

For many commentators, the figures of Confidence, a young mother, and Innocence, her healthy infant, attracted their attention and admiration the most. One reporter, a Jesse Jones, went so far as to declare the pair a Madonna and Child greater than those of Renaissance artists.

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[22] Wells, *Revolutions*, 138–39.

[23] Lubin, *Picturing a Nation*, 200.

[24] Bell, "Family Conflict," 189n85.

> I have never traveled abroad, and so have never seen the originals of the great masters; but, so far as one can judge from print and chromo copies, (and I cannot but think that they fairly give the general expression, the idea, moral tone, and intellectual scope of the originals, however much they may fail in giving the delicacy of their color and finish,) there is not a Madonna and her child, among the art treasures of the world, which can bear comparison with this mother and her child, in any important respect. They both belong to an altogether higher order of life than any that a Raphael or an Angelo has ever portrayed; they belong to the realm of spiritual art which Christianity has at length made possible in the world.[25]

By identifying Confidence and Innocence with images of the Virgin Mary and the Christ child, he alludes to the Protestant appropriation of traditionally Catholic devotional images that became popular in the United States by midcentury.[26]

At the same time that Jones concentrated on the religious significance of the vignette, he also saw in the seated mother and her swaddled babe a quality that many by now associated with images of the Madonna and Child: mutual affection demonstrated through pleasurable touch. Perhaps encouraged by Spencer's own explanation to see the mother nursing her infant as "human, warm, palpitating, frail, tender, loving," he and other writers interpreted the relationship between the pair as almost rapturous. For Jones, "this mother's face is filled with the light and radiant with the smile of that peaceful bliss and sweet content and holy joy which overflows the heart of the loved and loving young mother, as she folds to her breast her first born babe…Deliciously resting thus in the blissful consciousness of her own supreme joy, the mother holds in her lap her holy first-born, her blessed love-child."[27] Another person reported, "Confidence exhibits a most charming combination of rest, security, and perfect peace; while the sleeping [*sic*] babe

[25] Jones, "Truth Unveiling Falsehood," 418.

[26] Franchot, *Roads to Rome*, 256; Brown, *Raphael in America*, 16.

[27] Jones, "Truth Unveiling Falsehood," 418.

seems to smile as if in a state of the highest blissful enjoyment."[28] This language calls to mind the ideal of the maternal knot, the physically- and emotionally-close relationship advisors encouraged mothers to create with their young children in preparation for their offspring's moral education. For some viewers, then, Spencer appears to have continued her work of creating pictures, such as *Life's Happy Hour* (c. 1847–1848, fig. 27), that celebrated in sensual terms the tight bonds between mothers and young children.

Other viewers chose to focus on the more ominous left side of the canvas when interpreting *Truth Unveiling Falsehood*. Fixated on the figure groveling at the feet of Falsehood, they described her as "a woman of the lower type, with coarse, hardened, uncouth features," "a figure of brutish appearance."[29] These epithets suggest that they equated her with the many European immigrants that Anglo-Americans believed to be an increasingly dangerous and unstablizing force in Northeastern cities. Often the poverty-stricken Irish, for example, were stereotyped as "*low-browed* and *savage*, *grovelling* and *bestial*."[30] One writer's unsympathetic exegesis on the subject spelled out what others merely insinuated. "The abject prostration of this figure, pressed down into poverty and misery by the very power the veiled demon holds over her, the determined turning away of her face and covering of her eyes from the light shed by Truth upon Falsehood, and which, if she would only look, she would see drawing away the mask that hides her hideousness, is wonderfully typical of the state of millions who, to-day, are afraid of the

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[28] "Mrs. Lily M. Spencer," *American Phrenological Journal*, February 1869, 62.

[29] "Mrs. Lily M. Spencer," 62; "Fine Arts," *New York Evening Post*, 3 November 1875, 1, Col. Merl M. Moore, Jr. files; "Art and Artists," *Boston Daily Evening Transcript*, 9 November 1875, 6, Col. Merl M. Moore, Jr. files.

[30] Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness*, 133.

light of truth, of reform, and prefer clinging to the skirts of imposture."[31] While a generalized grievance, this commentary could very well refer to the idea circulating during the middle third of the nineteenth century that immigrants' corrupt values led to their low economic condition. Furthermore, it was thought that what was perceived as their unwillingness to create domestic arrangements mirroring that of the middle class led to problems with their children (see Chapter 3). Without the moralizing influence of a nonworking mother, these "urchins" were believed to evolve into dangerous threats to the welfare of urban society. The child on the left in *Truth Unveiling Falsehood*, then, who has been given up to Falsehood/Selfishness by its ignorant mother, is in direct contrast to the many innocently mischievous, healthy, and promisingly productive Anglo-American children who had been featured in Spencer's lithographs.

A third interpretative strain was very timely, in that it suggested people were looking at *Truth Unveiling Falsehood* as an allegory of the evils and hopes of the current Reconstruction period. For instance, one reviewer, describing the landscape related to Falsehood, wrote that "the dense clouds sullenly yield to the irradiating light, and dimly show us the blighted earth around the feet of Falsehood and Ignorance; and beyond looms dimly the horrent landscape, shrouded in eclipse, with its murderous encounters, the human corpses handing from skeleton trees, the yawning abysses and other ominous forms, that naturally typify the reign of the powers of darkness."[32] This reference to hanging human corpses (which, if they exist, are not visible in the photograph of the painting) surely related to the occurrence of lynchings in the South at the time Spencer

[31] "Truth Unveiling Falsehood," unidentified New York newspaper clipping, 1869, LMS papers.

[32] "Allegory of Truth Unveiling Falsehood."

was exhibiting the painting. Unable to come to terms with the idea of treating former slaves as equals rather than as inferiors after emancipation, many whites turned to violence.[33] Brutalities were perpetrated not only on blacks, but also on those helping them, such as Northern Republicans, Freedmen's Bureau agents, and United States soldiers. The March 23, 1867 issue of *Harper's Weekly* records various acts of bloodshed against both blacks and Northerners by Southern hands. In the surrounding cartoon by Thomas Nast, entitled *Southern Justice* (fig. 136), one of the three main panels prominently displays a "Yankee" and a "Nigger" swinging from the same tree branch. In seeing hanged bodies in the left background of Spencer's painting, the *Home Journal* writer in essence identified Falsehood and Selfishness, "the powers of darkness," with the South's new brand of vigilantism.

Spencer pictured Falsehood, however, as a monarch, crowned in gold and wrapped in velvet and ermine. To her, "the falling crown is symbolical of the power of Truth over the 'Divine Right of Kings,' which must fall when Truth is near." Several commentators picked up on this detail, one writing that Falsehood's crown is "typical of falsely acquired power."[34] His or her remark may well refer to President Andrew Johnson, a man who assumed the highest office in the land not by vote, but through the consequence of Abraham Lincoln's assassination. While many felt optimistic when Johnson became president that he would make the South pay for its actions, his policies (put into effect when Congress was not in session) were lenient and allowed the South's state governments to deny privileges to freedmen. He vetoed most legislation regarding

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[33] Philip Dray, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown: The Lynching of Black America* (New York: Random House, 2002), 35–39.

[34] Unidentified, undated newspaper clipping, LMS papers.

Reconstruction and black civil rights during his term in office, and often slandered his Radical Republican opponents.[35] Because of Johnson's perceived obstinacy, Thomas Nast chose to caricature him as a king or caesar (fig. 137).

The action of Truth toppling Falsehood's crown in Spencer's painting, therefore, could have been read at the time as indicating the change in office from Andrew Johnson to Ulysses S. Grant, which took place in March of 1869, just as Spencer was finishing her masterpiece. Nast celebrated the dethronement of the "tyrannical" leader in his cartoon entitled *The Political Death of the Bogus Caesar* (fig. 138). Grant, who began his presidency with eighty percent of the electoral vote,[36] was seen by many in the disgruntled North as a new hope. If viewers did read the allegory this way, they also may have seen the beaming baby on the right of *Truth Unveiling Falsehood* as the future of the United States. Allied with Truth (as the only figure who "can bear undazzled its beneficent light"), the infant could represent the younger generation as equipped to lead the way to a better attempt at Reconstruction. Again in this work, Spencer's children show their moral utility to aid an adult world.

In these ways, *Truth Unveiling Falsehood* can be seen as a summary of several of the themes that Spencer promoted in her body of work featuring children. Interestingly, the painting was one of the last of her productions to receive positive public notice. After 1870, viewers perceived her art as out-of-date. Images of white, middle-class children interacting with parents or tucked away in Victorian interiors did not satisfy the

[35] For a review of key events in Johnson's presidency, see Claudine L. Ferrell, *Reconstruction* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2003), 16–41.

[36] Ibid., 47.

postbellum public. Instead, they craved pictures that evoked carefree and imaginative childhoods, as well as nostalgic images of country life of days gone by.

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