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THE CORRUPTING CITY: ENVIRONMENTALISM IN THE MYSTERY AND MISERY TALES OF THE 1840s AND 1850s

by

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE MASTER OF ARTS

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ABSTRACT

The Corrupting City: Environmentalism in the Mystery and Misery Tales of the 1840s and 1850s

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Thomas Le Bien

Several popular authors of antebellum urban fiction, particularly George Lippard, George Foster, Ned Buntline, and George Thompson, articulate in novels written in the 1840s and 1850s the argument that urban paupers and criminals are products of a corrupt society. The prostitute, pauper, and thief, rather than being depicted as depraved or lazy, are shown to be blameless laborers compelled into degradation on account of physical circumstances and economic exploitation. Having found the primary causes of poverty and crime to reside in society, these authors recommend solutions that entail changing society. The authors' secular conception of the causes of society's ills led them to recommend secular solutions, which several attempted to put into practice. The authors' "material environmentalism" differentiates them from the vast majority of antebellum reformers who were informed by Protestant, particularly evangelical, theology.
Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Russell Motter for reading my thesis and offering important criticisms. His collegiality and enthusiasm for a project well outside his immediate interests were invaluable. All three of my readers, John Boles, Scott Derrick, and Thomas Haskell, helped me hone my argument and my writing. Lastly, I would like to thank my parents for their encouragement and support.
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A Reform-Minded Literature

A mesmerist manipulates evangelical revivals. A manufacturer uses electricity to excite the passions of a Lowell, Massachusetts, factory girl. A mother raises a pious daughter so she will fetch a higher price when sold into infamy. Bankers defraud their depositors, mock marriages dupe the innocent, and in "dens of crime" secret societies plot larceny and murder. This is the world depicted in the mid-nineteenth-century American "mystery and misery" tale, a genre of fiction that enjoyed remarkable popularity during the 1840s and 1850s. The mass production of these tales of deceit and avarice spiced with violence and sex was an antebellum phenomenon. Advances in technology, a large, untapped readership, and experiments with mass marketing made possible these precursors of the American "dime novel." Yet despite their popularity these novels, with a few notable exceptions, have been ignored by scholars and have never been examined in light of what many purported to be, namely social reform literature.¹ Promising adherence to facts, numerous authors wrote novels to expose social ills and offer solutions. In doing so, several authors developed one of the earliest manifestations in America of the idea that the

urban pauper and criminal, rather than being lazy or depraved, were products of society.

The authors of the "mystery and misery" tales joined a host of voices that tried to explain antebellum change and anxiety. Caught up in what one synthesis of the period terms a "market revolution," what another calls a "revolution in choices," antebellum Americans experienced extraordinary change.2 Several recent monographs examine middle-class cultural reactions to this change. New conventions governing propriety, the glorification of "sentimentalism" and civility, and the "moral imperative" of Christian self-control, are shown to help an emerging Northern middle class define itself as a class.3 The "mystery and misery" tales represent a different reaction. Sympathetic with and often not far removed from the working classes, several authors argue that self-control and civility depend upon equitable social and economic conditions. Within their novels the degraded individual--the pauper, the thief, the prostitute--is shown to be the product of economic exploitation and a society corrupted by a coterie of powerful, self-interested villains, America's rising untitled aristocracy.

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In arguments that anticipate those made forty years later by muckrakers and Progressives, several popular authors of the "mystery and misery" tales advance an environmentalist logic to explain poverty and crime. None of these authors were environmentalists by philosophical conviction. Likewise, they did not owe their environmentalism to any theory of aesthetics. Their environmentalist logic was the product of circumstances. They wrote at a time when a small number of Americans grew wealthy while a large number, particularly following the Panic of 1837, saw their social status and economic security erode. It was also a time when Americans felt uniquely able to question and manipulate the changes occurring everywhere around them. By one account, during the 1820s an "exploration of possibilities turned into a declaration of rights," such that after 1825 and on through the 1850s a popular passion for personal freedom fought to extend the range of these exhilarating new rights in a self-fueling process that propelled the participants as fast and as far as their impulses drove them.\footnote{Robert Wiebe, \textit{The Opening of American Society}, 146. Lewis Perry makes a similar argument in his \textit{Boats Against the Current: American Culture Between Revolution and Modernity, 1820-1860} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993). The "insubstantiality of American life" caused by rapid antebellum change created a "tense, critical, yet optimistic outlook [that] enabled some Americans to overcome worries about the lack of tradition and to set forth to create culture in America." See, 44.}

To borrow from Robert Darnton, the authors wrote during a period of "epistemological exhilaration," when the givenness of things seemed in doubt and certain individuals experienced a sense of boundless possibility.\footnote{My argument owes a debt to Robert Darnton's examination of lesser known authors active during the French Revolution and his discovery of their "possibilism," or a sense of boundless possibility and a unique freedom to question the "givenness of things." See Darnton's "What was
In this spirit, several authors set out to explore the antebellum metropolis and expose what they perceived as an artificial limit on personal freedom. Together they produced a remarkable body of literature that, read as casuistries, reflects a popular attempt to explain urban ills as the products of a physical and social environment.

Though the authors would not have used the term casuistries, there are two reasons for reading their novels as such. First, it accurately describes what the authors set out to do, expose instances of right and wrong and explain the extent to which circumstances mitigate the sinfulness of sinful behavior. For example, they often depict a seamstress's descent into prostitution, but place the onus of her sin on greedy employers who denied her a livable wage. Second, it makes explicit the authors' attention to questions of causal attribution and their selective privileging of the causal significance of place over person. The authors, not unlike seventeenth century casuists, were not impartial judges. The prostitute was forgiven on account of circumstances; the employer was not. The novels of several authors reflect a polemic against a detested "aristocracy of

Revolutionary About the French Revolution?" The Eleventh Charles Edmondson Historical Lectures (Waco, Texas: Markham Press Fund, 1990).

The term casuistry has long been defined as something derogatory. By showing the historical circumstances by which this useful term of rhetoric was given its nasty connotations in The Abuse of Casuistry. A History of Moral Reasoning (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), Albert R. Jonsen and Stephen Toulmin have attempted to salvage it from misuse. Casuists, authors of casuistries, wrote books to advise priests "whether a particular action, performed under particular circumstances, should be imputed as sinful and, if so, how seriously sinful." This is very similar to what several authors of the "mystery and misery" tales do. The quote is from Jonsen's "Casuistical" in Common Knowledge 2 (1993): 48-65, which brief outlines the argument in The Abuse of Casuistry.
wealth." It is an argument that does not require the authors to categorically abandon conventional assumptions as to the causes of poverty and crime. They, too, will speak of dark human passions and weak individuals lured by temptation. However, read as casuistries, what is distinctive about these authors' novels becomes apparent. Several of them repeatedly demonstrate their sympathies for the working classes by shifting causal responsibility for a degraded laborer's poverty or crime from the laborer and to physical circumstances and society.

In the "mystery and misery" tales events unfold in certain ways and not in others. To return to the seamstress, she never starts out depraved and rises to respectability through the aid of a benevolent society or the experience of a revival. The wife of a wealthy banker might begin licentious and sink to greater depths of perversion, but the seamstress is repeatedly shown to start off virtuous. Beset by lecherous aristocrats, hounded by landlord and bill collectors, and cheated by clients and employers, the seamstress follows a downward slide she is helpless to arrest. Read as casuistries, the novels make clear the authors' sympathies for the working classes. The principles the authors appeal to, with varying degrees of conviction, when making judgments of right and wrong are drawn from "producer ideology." Built upon a labor theory of value, this ideology offered a simple way of drawing class lines: there were producers and parasites. The chance for an ideal citizenry that pursued public before private interests, the ideology held, had been bought by the heroic efforts of a previous generation of revolutionaries. A society of virtuous, independent, and equal citizens was now being corrupted by selfish non-producers, ranging from certain politicians to every form of financier.
Manipulating money and legislation, parasites managed their tyranny over the producer. 7

It is my argument that by adhering to the principles of producer ideology the authors arrived at the conclusion that certain individuals' personal conduct and moral behavior were determined to a significant degree by their physical circumstances and a corrupt society. Producer ideology assumed the worker to be meritorious and the financier and aristocrat to be villainous. Promising to depict facts in fiction, several authors cast what in many cases was a journalist's trained eye on the metropolis and found the meritorious suffering privation and the villainous living in splendor. Just as producer ideology prefigured in certain respects what they would discover, so it also directed their conclusions. As reformers intent on offering solutions to the problems they exposed, these authors, guided by their sympathies, found that the individuals they believed to be virtuous were not responsible for their dire straits. The authors did not, then, argue the seamstress-turned-prostitute or the mechanic-turned-thief needed to change their ways but that society needed to change. Put differently, in their efforts to deny the agent's causal

responsibility for the act of sinning, the authors placed responsibility upon the society in which the sin took place. 8

The remainder of this chapter places the "mystery and misery" tales in historical context and makes a case as to why one can take seriously some authors' claims to having written novels for the purpose of effecting reform. The second chapter examines in detail how several authors' adherence to the principles of producer ideology resulted in an environmentalist explanation of crime and poverty. The third chapter examines the solutions proposed by three authors to solve the social ills their novels and non-fictional works claim to expose, namely suggestions to alter society. The distinctive nature of the authors' environmentalist logic is made evident by contrasting their solutions with those of contemporary reformers. Finally, there is a conclusion that suggests one way of qualifying the authors' environmentalism.

The "mystery and misery" tales have usually been examined for the light they shed on contemporary literature and the dime novels that

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8 Kenneth Burke's A Grammar of Motives (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1945), offers a way to conceptualize this shifting of responsibility. Burke argues that any statement imputing a motive to an action must address act (what was done), agent (who did the act), scene (the environment in which the act took place), agency (how the act was done), and purpose (why the act was done). While all five terms are necessary whenever we discuss causation, they function in "ratios," so that the "featuring" of one term will overshadow the causative importance of others. Burke notes, for example, "one may deflect attention from scenic matters by situating the motives of an act in the agent . . . or, conversely, one may deflect attention from the criticism of personal motives by deriving an act or attitude not from traits of the agent but from the nature of the situation." A very similar process is visible in the "mystery and misery" tales reviewed. In denying the responsibility of the agent for his or her own acts, several authors proportionately increased the causal responsibility of the scene in which the act took place.
followed them, not for their explanations of antebellum social ills and their recommended solutions. Characteristics of the genre have consequently been obscured. The "mystery and misery" tales reached their greatest popularity before the dime novel "fiction factories" of Beades & Adams and Street & Smith appeared in the early 1860s. In the late 1840s and 1850s writing and publishing easily admitted entrepreneurs, and mass marketing was an experiment not a technique. Increased demand and new technology suddenly admitted a wealth of new authors. Before 1842, American publishers offered an average of 100 books a year. In 1855 alone, more than 1,092 books were published.9 The authors I examine wrote at a time when a police-beat journalist, a malcontent Methodist, or a rabble-rousing Bowery b'hoy could, with far greater ease than ever before, pick up pen and paper and capture an audience. And they did so not by trying to become an American Shakespeare, but by examining in lurid detail the chaotic metropolis and by offering solutions to the problems they exposed.

Though historical opinion varies as to the extent and meaning of America's pace of change during the first half of the nineteenth century, no one denies that change occurred. Two recent surveys strongly argue that this change was profound, altering American society at all levels. Charles Sellers argues that market forces inexorably eroded the traditional values of a communitarian, self-sufficient rural America. While overly nostalgic and too apt to rely on abstract terms, Sellers's argument convincingly depicts the incompatibility between an older "antinomian" world view,

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which stressed equality, independence, and community, and an emerging middle class "arminian" world view, which posited self-control and self-determination. Sellers shows a pre-industrial democratic nation giving way to an industrial capitalist one, fundamentally changing society in everything from patterns of consumption to attitudes towards sex. By 1850 America had become a "Bourgeois Republic." Robert Wiebe's conception of change is simpler. Like Sellers, Wiebe argues that economic-based changes, such as expanded transportation networks and credit, radically altered America. But rather than market forces, Wiebe believes that a "revolution in choices" was the primary motor of change.

Wiebe argues that beginning in the early 1800s American dedication to the ideals of republican balance dissolved under the nation's rapidly expanding infrastructure and a growing faith in self-determination. Already underway when John C. Calhoun in 1817 enjoined, "Let us conquer space," a demand for roads, canals, steamboats, and eventually railroads worked in tandem with an enthusiasm for geographic mobility. Linked to American industrialization and participation in a national and international market economy, the rapid movement of goods and people altered such basic conceptual categories as space and time. The result was the destruction of traditional sources of authority and a search for replacements. Wiebe argues that by 1825 the new, broadly agreed-upon source of authority and legitimacy was the individual. A "democratic surge" altered American understandings of opportunity, authority,

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11 Robert Wiebe, The Opening of American Society. See particularly chapters seven and eight.
12 Quoted in Wiebe, The Opening of American Society, 137.
salvation, and health, "infect[ing] individuals everywhere with a heady feeling of command over their destinies, a sense of marvelous potential in their own lives that they came to project onto the nation as a whole."13

In consequence, political authority shifted from caucuses to campaigns conducted in the name of the people. When neither Whig nor Democrat would do, Americans formed their own parties: the Anti-Masonic Party, the American Party, the Working Man's Party. In medicine, medical quackery and appeals to supernatural interference gave way to Samuel Thomson's *New Guide to Health* (1822), and the motto, "Every man his own physician." Rather than purgatives and bleedings, Sylvester Graham prescribed exercise, cold water, fresh air, and, to encourage sexual restraint, the extant Graham cracker. Increased voluntarism in orthodox Protestantism transformed mankind's understanding of salvation. No longer a reflection of God's terrible justice, regeneration became, in the words of Charles Grandison Finney, "a plain, common-sense, practical business."14 Finney, Nathaniel Taylor, Horace Bushnell, William Ellery Channing, and others dismantled God's absolute sovereignty over mankind and asserted instead God's rational, moral government and mankind's freedom within it. Neither in politics, medicine, nor theology was the switch uncontested. In 1850 Bushnell was still fighting charges of heresy, and the caucuses had been replaced in part by the political machine. Rather than a smooth transition, the search for new sources of authority was a tumultuous and exhilarating process of exploration and explanation.

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13 Ibid., 143.
14 Quoted in Wiebe, *The Opening of American Society*, 159.
It is against this cultural backdrop that the "mystery and misery" tales must be viewed. In particular, the genre must be read as a reflection of the period's extraordinary urban growth and as part of the country's first information boom. By one account, between 1820 and 1860, when overall population grew by 230 percent, populations in urban centers of more than 8,000 inhabitants grew by 800 percent. And during the 1840s, the decade of the genre's greatest popularity, urban population increased over 92 percent. The three northeastern cities of New York, Philadelphia, and Boston bore the brunt of this growth. In 1840 the three cities had populations of 360,323, 220,423, and 118,857 respectively. By 1850 New York's percentage increase over 1840 was 81.62; Philadelphia's, 54.27; and Boston's, 76.12. By 1860 New York contained over one million inhabitants, its nearest competitor being Philadelphia with slightly more than half a million.15 With increasing size came a host of new urban landmarks and problems. Though the landmarks bear period names, from Phineas Barnum's American Museum to the Old Brewery tenement building, the problems are all too familiar. Overcrowding, poor housing, xenophobia, pollution, violence, crime, and pauperism attended America's first urban sprawl.

To help make sense of their changing world, to help conceptualize their changing relationship with it, Americans became readers and correspondents. In 1820 the U.S. Postal Service handled over 27 million

15 Figures were compiled from Laurie's *Artisans into Workers*, 25; Seigel's *The Image of the American City*, 3.; the United States Bureau of the Census, *Compendium of the Seventh Census of the United States*, table CCV; and Allan Pred's *Urban Growth and City-Systems in the United States, 1840-1860* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), tables 2.1, 2.2.
letters. By 1850 it was handling over 69 million; and in 1860, over 160 million. In 1854 over 6 million letters and newspapers passed between the United States and foreign countries. Letters were just a minor part of what became a flood of information. "Everything that occurs," wrote the Philadelphian diarist Sidney George Fisher in 1849, "of the slightest public importance is almost instantly known throughout the civilized world. We have every morning news from all parts of the Union up to the previous evening, and every week a steamer comes to astonish us with the wonderful things that are happening every day in Europe." In 1840 America supported 1,404 newspapers with a total annual circulation of over 180 million. By 1850 newspapers nearly doubled in number, and total circulation rose to over 400 million. Ten years later both had more than doubled. Technological innovations, cheaper high grade paper, and the flatbed and cylinder presses made the rapid growth in newspapers possible. But it was a readership eager for reading material that fueled the boom.

Literacy figures are notoriously difficult to substantiate. For the present study exact figures are not as important as noting several general trends. The amount of reading material, from private letters to penny papers, vastly increased. And this reading material was "democratized."

"Just as political revolt against class deference opened the era of mass politics," argues Alexander Saxton, "so the cultural transformation of the

16 See Pred, Urban Growth and City-Systems in the United States, 1840-1860, tables A.42 and A.45. And related material in A.43 and A.44.
18 For newspaper figures see Pred, Urban Growth, tables A.40 and A.41, and the Seventh Census Compendium, tables CLXI, CLXII, and CLXIII.
1830s and 1840s swept the nation into the age of mass media."19 Saxton's point is exhaustively supported by Lee Soltow and Edward Stevens's study of the rise of literacy and the common school in America to 1870. Soltow and Stevens show that the decline in American illiteracy at all socioeconomic levels was precipitous after 1840. They also note that the increase in literacy was more pronounced in the cities. By the 1840s the vast majority of Americans, particularly urban Americans, had become readers.20

The "mystery and misery" tales reflect this. A part of what John Tebbel calls America's first "paperback revolution," which began in the 1840s,21 the genre reached its greatest popularity during the period of America's fastest urban growth. Adrienne Siegel found only 38 urban novels published from 1774 to 1839. In the 1840s 173 works of urban fiction appeared, and in the 1850s another 167. In contrast, in the 1840s only 54 works of fiction were published that dealt with the American

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20 Lee Soltow and Edward Stevens, The Rise of Literacy and the Common School in the United States. A Socioeconomic Analysis to 1870 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981). For the North, the drop in illiteracy was remarkable from 1800 to 1840. In 1800 approximately 25% of the population was illiterate; by 1840, 3-9% was illiterate. It was after 1840, however, that illiteracy declined rapidly among the lower half of the wealth distribution. Though Soltow and Stevens do not give any absolute figures for urban America, they note a "basic causal linkage between urbanity and literacy," that was pronounced after 1840. See particularly 189-201.
frontier, in the 1850s only 61.22 The urban novel held a unique appeal at a time when Americans were proving themselves to be voracious reader. An 1855 American Publishers' Circular and Literary Gazette commented that when in England the best fiction might only sell 10,000 copies, a mediocre work could expect sales of 50,000 in the United States. That same year the Circular boasted American publishers had "a reading empire to supply with books, the likes of which the sun never shone before upon."23 They were proclaiming what publishers already knew. In the early 1840s the penny papers New World and Brother Jonathan had started to make money in mass marketed fiction with serialized novels published as newspaper "supplements." Advertising themselves as "the friends of the people," the New World asked, "You are not so green as to pay a dollar for what you can get for eighteen pence or a shilling--not you!"24

The supplements started a price war that ultimately drove the price for a paperback to around twelve and a half cents and a clothbound book to fifty cents. As long as the price wars continued, which Tebbel dates from 1845 to 1857, these prices remained relatively stable.25 The boom was maintained by the technology of Napier and Hoe presses and the entrance of new publishing firms dedicated to the sensational novel. P.T. Peterson

22 Siegel, The Image of the American City 6. For her figures on fiction with a western theme see "Brothels, Bets and Bars: Popular Literature as Guidebook to the Urban Underground, 1840-1870," North Dakota Quarterly, (Spring, 1976) 6, footnote 3.
24 Quoted in Tebbel, A History of Book Publishing in the United States, Volume 1, 244.
& Bros. of Philadelphia is emblematic. Started by a typesetter with $300, it grew into a major firm spending as much as $6,000 in advertising a single book. Peterson & Bros.'s success was due to its commitment to cheap sensational fiction and cutthroat pricing. When Lady Charlotte Bury's *Ensnared* sold in London in three volumes at $7.50, Peterson & Bros. offered it in the States in one volume at twenty-five cents.26 As long as costs were low, entry-level publishers and authors could seek out new audiences. The "mystery and misery" tales captured one by telling titillating, sometimes shocking stories with reform-minded zeal.

For contemporaries and historians the difficulty lies in disentangling these two characteristics of the "mystery and misery" tale. Finding the story lines to be utterly preposterous, scholars have found the authors' repeated claims to have told the truth to be equally preposterous. As the biographer of the highly popular Edward C. Z. Judson, alias Ned Buntline, concluded, Buntline's swearing to tell the truth was merely prelude to "tell[ing] a whopper . . . nobody could believe."27 It was her inability to believe their promises of verisimilitude that, in part, led Janis P. Stout to find it impossible to take "these novels at all seriously."28 The authors themselves questioned each other's accuracy and sincerity. Buntline accused Harrison Gray Buchanan of writing exposés for the purpose of blackmail. Buchanan returned the charge through a mocking exposé of a

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"Bob Towline." More frequent were contemporary claims that the authors assumed a pious language to publish lascivious works. George Lippard's highly successful *The Quaker City; or, The Monks of Monk Hall. A Romance of Philadelphia Life, Mystery and Crime* (1844) was labeled "a disgusting mass of filth," and "the most immoral work of the age."30

Certainly there were authors who assumed a moral reformer's language to publish erotica. Henri Foster's *Ellen Grafton; or, The Den of Crimes. A Romance of Secret Life in the Empire City* (1850) stole Lippard's story line in *The Quaker City* but dropped the social satire and expository sermons to accent the sensational and the sexual. Similarly, *The Sharps and Flats; or, The Perils of City Life. Being the Adventures of One Who Lived By His Wits* (1850) and *Adventures of a Pickpocket; or, Life at a Fashionable Watering Place* (1849) made nods to reform-minded intentions but offered up racy characters and plots, the latter including an illustration of topless prostitutes putting on their stockings. On the other end of the spectrum were authors who simply fictionalized etiquette manuals. Timothy Shay Arthur's *Anna Milnor, the Young Lady Who was Not Punctual* (1845) is representative. Yet compelling reasons exist for accepting in some measure some authors' claims to have depicted truthfully


the metropolis as they saw it, and to have done so for the purpose of effecting reform.

Fiction often mimicked fact. Several of the authors began as urban journalists, and current events and police-blotter news became the material out of which fictional tales were spun. The murder of Mary Rogers, a New York "cigar girl" who disappeared and was subsequently found murdered near Hoboken, was popular. Following Edgar Allen Poe's *The Mystery of Marie Roget* (1842), Joseph H. Ingraham wrote about the unsolved murder in *La Bonita Cigarera; or, The Beautiful Cigar Vender. A Tale of New York* (1844). His work was popular enough to warrant a sequel, and the "cigar girl" became a reference point for other novels, a way of authenticating fictional horrors as they unfolded in a story.\(^{31}\) The murder of the prostitute Ellen Jewett, bludgeoned with an axe, and the acquittal of her accused murderer Richard P. Robinson, provides the conclusion to Ingraham's *Frank Rivers; or, The Dangers of the Town* (1843). George Lippard's *The Monks of Monks Hall* fictionalized the factual murder of Mahlon Herberton by Singleton Mercer. This so enraged several powerful Philadelphians that the dramatic version of the book was kept from production. Mercer, a wealthy Philadelphian, had been acquitted after proving in court that Herberton had enticed his sister into a house of assignation and raped her at gun point.

Fact, or course, could outstrip fiction. Even Lippard's gory details pale beside the widely publicized case of Samuel Colt. Colt murdered Samuel Adams, dissected the body, salted it, crated it, and tried to send it to New Orleans. He was caught and convicted. The day he was to be

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executed, Colt married his mistress and then managed to stab himself in the heart with a Spanish stiletto. The fantastic plots of the "mystery and misery" tales had stiff competition with the factual events appearing in newspapers and the penny press.

The libidinous ministers that recur in the genre had their factual counterpart in the Reverend Benjamin T. Onderdonk, a New York bishop tried in 1844 on charges of intemperance and sexual misconduct. More gruesome was the case of Ephraim K. Avery, a Methodist preacher who in 1833 was tried for seducing and then murdering a convert. Fiction's avaricious bankers, forgers, and aristocratic swindlers had their factual counterparts, too. In late 1839 a cashier of the Schuylkill Bank of Philadelphia over issued stock certificates and pocketed the money. In 1842 Monroe Edwards defrauded acquaintances of up to $50,000; and in 1843 Edward Nicol embezzled the Life and Trust Company of up to $2,000,000. For years the charges against Nicholas Biddle for mismanaging the Stephen Girard Trust filled newspaper column space. America's cities during the 1840s and 1850s witnessed race riots, church burnings, and violent gang warfare.32 Violence, grisly murders, and grand thefts, of course, are not unique to antebellum America. Their rapid passing into the national consciousness via print, however, was.

The well-to-do diarists Sidney George Fisher and Philip Hone offer a way to contrast fictional and personal representations of the mid-century metropolis and contemporary events. What is notable is that when

confronted with gross social transgressions, both diarists blame rampant corruption and fantastic conspiracies. After the Schuylkill Bank theft, Fisher wrote, "This is the greatest swindling transaction yet, tho [sic] similar instances are now of constant occurrence."33 When the murderer Ezra C. White was acquitted, Hone claimed the jury was rigged. "I have no doubt," he wrote, "that the banditti who infest our city . . . have already celebrated their detestable orgies on the escape of their brother ruffians and devised plans to disturb the peace of the city, commit outrages upon peaceful citizens, and murder as many as shall obstruct them in their unhallowed excesses."34 Mary Roger's murder was the result of the "brutal lust of some of the gang of banditti."35 The Harpers Fire was set by "robbers who infest the city," for the purposes of "conceal[ing] a robbery of some $18 or $20."36 The nation's finances were in the hands of "stock jobbers," banks hid "enormous corruption," demagogues pandered to "bands of ruffians," and America was threatened by "the irruption of the dark masses of ignorance & brutality which lie beneath it."37

To find the "mystery and misery" novels fantastic is only to find that they were written in an age that accepted as common occurrence sense what a later generation would consider sensational or absurd. The novels' story lines were not far removed from factual events and the authors' explanations as to how events unfold do not differ greatly from either

35 Ibid., 555.
36 Ibid., 604.
Fisher's or Hone's. And far more than either Fisher or Hone, the authors were suited to examine and explain the seamier side of the metropolis. In many cases the authors never abandon the habits they learned as journalists, and their novels are often written with the investigative zeal of a reporter. George Foster's fiction lifts whole passages from his factual sketches of New York, and Ned Buntline swore to having "visited every den of vice which is herein after described."³⁸ But more important is the fact that as second- and third-rung authors they were economically and socially not far removed from the mechanics and seamstresses they wrote of, lauded, and defended. When Buntline argued that people were thrown in jail unjustly, he did so while writing in jail. When George Lippard found that the poor had few options other than to starve or steal, he simply reflected his own past as a penniless law clerk sleeping in abandoned buildings in 1837-1838. It is within this context that the authors' claims to having told the truth for the purpose of effecting reform must be read.

"The duty of the present age," wrote George Foster in *New York By Gas-Light* (1850), "is to discover the real facts of the actual condition of the wicked and wretched classes... In our own humble way we profess to seek for and depict the truth. Let it speak for itself."³⁹ *New York By Gas Light*, a collection of Foster's sketches of New York City, claimed to be utterly factual. In *Celio; or, New York Above Ground and Under Ground* (1850), Foster sets out to "introduc[e] a new idea into fictional literature," that facts cast in fiction can effect reform.⁴⁰ Ned Buntline makes a similar

⁴⁰ George Foster, *Celio; or, New York Above Ground and Under Ground* (New York: 1850), 4.
argument when he writes, "To be generally read now-a-days, TRUTH must be hidden under the veil of fiction."\textsuperscript{41} The Reverend Chauncey Burr captured the prevailing sentiment when he wrote in his favorable biography of George Lippard, "The novelist's task . . . was not to show what it ought to be, but rather what it is."

\textsuperscript{42} For Foster, Buntline, Lippard, and others who either began as journalists or wrote for newspapers to augment their income, pursuing what "it is" entailed blurring the line between reporting news and writing fiction. Foster footnoted newspaper stories to corroborate fictional characters' authenticity. Buntline listed statistics, named the actual citizens his characters represented, and noted in appendixes the arrests his novels led to. Lippard's \textit{The Killers. A Narrative of Real Life in Philadelphia} (1850) purported to explain the causes behind that city's election riots of October 10, 1849, and his novels repeatedly digress into op-ed pieces targeting prominent institutions and individuals.

To back up their claims that they showed things as they truly were, authors filled their tales with concrete descriptions of actual cities. As Adrienne Siegel notes, some would have been accurate enough to function as guide books.\textsuperscript{43} In the \textit{Mysteries of New York} (1845) you learn that on Sundays, New York "Quakers bowed their broad beavers under the arches of a high brick wall in Pearl Street, and Catholics flocked to their churches

\textsuperscript{41} Ned Buntline, \textit{Three Years After; A Sequel to the Mysteries and Miseries of New York, Part One} (New York, 1949), 5.

\textsuperscript{42} Chauncey's biography appears at the end of Lippard's \textit{Washington and his Generals; or, Legends of the Revolution} (Philadelphia: 1847). For quote, see v.

\textsuperscript{43} Siegel, "Brothels, Bets and Bars: Popular Literature as Guidebook to the Urban Underground, 1840-1870," \textit{North Dakota Quarterly}, (Spring, 1976).
in Barclay and Prince. The author of the *Mysteries of Philadelphia* informs his readers that a fallen girl lives at 50 Spruce Street, that "Dandy Hall," where thieves and prostitutes covert, is on Shippen Street, and you can recognize a member of the "Bouncer" gang because they turn up their pants bottoms to show white linen. To help the reader understand his authentic dialogue, Buntline included in his five volume *The Mysteries and Miseries of New York. A Story of Real Life* (1848) a glossary of 112 "flash" words. The reader learns a "mountain-dew" is a scotch whiskey, "swag" is plunder, "dust" is money. In his scornful look at evangelical revivals, *Memoirs of a Preacher; or, A Revelation of the Church and the Home* (1849), George Lippard avoids libel by identifying a church by stating it "was not in Camden, nor was it west of Broad Street. Further, . . . it was not south of Market Street, much less was it north of Poplar Street."

The crowning claim of a factual exposé comes from Harrison Gray Buchanan: *Asmodeus; or, Legends of New York. Being a complete exposé of the Mysteries, Vices, and Doings, as exhibited by the fashionable circles of New York. Including the haunts of Gamblers, their Names, Places and Visitors--Also, the Names, Places, and Visitors at the 'Fashionable Houses of Fashionable Prices' with a full development of all the Ways and Mysteries of the Upper Ten Thousand.* Within its pages the

46 The glossary appears at the end of Buntline's *Mysteries and Miseries of New York, Part One*, 113-16.
reader learns that at Miss Frances Okille's house, between 55 and 50 Lombard Street, are kept fourteen prostitutes. At 694 Houston Street resides the noted gambler John Harrison. Go to 252 Broadway for good food, and near Mitchell's Olympic Theater, at 448 Broadway, is a fashionable saloon. "Proceeding down Broadway, passing Canal Street, we keep on our way till we reach the corner of Duane." At 84 Duane is Mrs. Pastor's saloon. At 72 Duane, a Mrs. Jane Williams houses ten prostitutes.48

As social critics and satirists, the authors actively participated through their fiction in public debates over current events. In 1849 George Foster railed against New York City politicians, writing, "so long as the party in power can maintain the ascendancy by winking at [150 gambling houses and 1,500 brothels] and licensing two thousand superfluous groggeries, so long we shall look in vain for any thorough, radical, all-embracing system of municipal reform."49 At the conclusion of his Mysteries and Miseries of New York, Ned Buntline endorsed the new reformist Mayor William Havermeyer and the not so reputable Police Chief G. W. Matsell. Of the authors, George Lippard most frequently used satire. One character confuses Henry Clay and a race horse, stating, "Grand speech that: his farewell to the Senate! Wait a moment and I'll go

48 Harrison Gray Buchanan, Asmodeus; or, Legends of New York. Being a complete expose of the Mysteries, Vices, and Doings, as exhibited by the fashionable circles of New York. Including the haunts of Gamblers, their Names, Places and Visitors--Also, the Names, Places, and Visitors at the 'Fashionable Houses of Fashionable Prices' with a full development of all the Ways and Mysteries of the Upper Ten Thousand (New York: 1848).
round to the stable and order the servant to trot him out."50 In *New York: Its Upper Ten and Lower Million* (1853), Lippard casts Daniel Webster as the fictional character Gabriel Godlike. In the Reverend Dr. F. Altamont T. Pyne, or F. A. T. Pyne, and his Universal American Patent-Gospel School, Lippard pilloried nearly every sect of Protestantism, depicting them as led by debauchees, uninterested in the plight of the urban poor, and set up to fleece their followers.51

The authors' claim to be social-reformers, however, rests less with their satire than with their promises to have told truths to effect change. "Let no unsophisticated reader of this work fancy that the developments about to be made respecting crimes and criminals in New York are purely fiction," writes Ned Buntline.

[M]y motive in writing this book is to instruct as well as amuse you; . . . to show you the subterranean channels from which arises that great mass of crime, the details of which furnish food for our metropolitan newspapers, and the reading of which so horrifies our tender-hearted, and in many cases tender-headed, philanthropists.52

In *The Gay Girls of New York; or, Life on Broadway* (1853), George Thompson makes clear his reformist intentions. "Thus, in the two instances which we have given, can be seen the manner in which many of the 'gay girls of New York' are manufactured for the market." Some are prostitutes "because they are unable to resist their own evil . . . propensities," some are seduced. But, "Many--very, very many

51 Ibid., 221-228.
unfortunate girls--God help them!--are driven into a life of prostitution by hunger, by want and privation." They are "ground down to the very dust by tyrannical and rascally proprietors of slop-shops" and "compelled to . . . that polluted lake whose foul waters are destined to swallow them up forever!" In his similar tale, *The G'hal's of New York* (1853), one of Ned Buntline's solutions to prostitution and crime is visible in his understanding of their causes: "Low Wages, Wages Slowly Paid, and Wages Never Paid at all." Pay the laborer what he or she is worth, Buntline exhorts at the end of the novel, and you start to provide a cure.

Often with a passion they carried over from their personal lives, the authors of the "mystery and misery" tales adopted the format of popular fiction to examine and explain what they saw as the more pernicious effects of a period of rapid change. They viewed that change in light of their sympathies for the working classes and their active disdain for America's rising "aristocracy of wealth." It was a sympathy that took the form of adopting producer ideology as the touchstone of their exposés and critiques. As we will see, the pitting of producer against parasite within their stories increasingly brought out a conflict between individuals and circumstances. As the authors variously expressed it in their books, it was not that a producer was individually pitted against a parasite, but that the producers were trapped within, and ground down by, the society the parasites had made. Society, to borrow George Thompson's word, "manufactured" the criminal and the destitute. The authors' efforts to

explain and solve this process led several of them to adopt environmentalist arguments to explain culpability and suggest solutions.
An Environmentalist Logic

For authors writing to an audience paying approximately twelve and a half cents a novel, it made sense to demonstrate a sympathy for the working classes, to laud the honest, struggling laborer and vilify the idle, wealthy aristocrat. Yet several authors attempt to do something more. "[A] literature which does not work practically for the advancement of social reform," writes George Lippard, "is just good for nothing at all."¹ Authors such as Lippard, George Foster, Ned Buntline, A. J. H. Duganne, George Thompson, and Joseph H. Ingraham all wrote novels following the same dictum. To effect reform through literature they thought it necessary to depict actual places, events, people, and the conditions in which real people lived. As Edward Pessen found, the facts of antebellum urban life were that a little splendor existed besides much squalor; and there was little hope of leaving the latter for the former.² When these journalists-turned-novelists argue that self-made men are myths, that poverty was not due to sloth, they describe what was in fact often the case. This is not to suggest they examined the metropolis objectively. What they saw and depicted was shaped by their adherence to the principles of producer ideology. Central among these are: the belief that all wealth proceeds from labor, that virtue consists of placing public interests before private, that this necessitates an

² Edward Pessen, Riches, Class, and Power Before the Civil War (Lexington, Massachusetts: D. C. Heath and Company), 1973. Chapter three particularly draws out the financial difference between the urban poor and wealthy. For example, in Boston in 1848 one percent of the population was worth $90,000 or more while eighty-one percent was worth under $4,000. See 31-43.
independent citizenry, and that an independent citizenry requires financially self-sufficient citizens. These principles lay behind the environmentalist logic several authors express in their novels.

As social reformers these authors wrote with the intent of exposing problems and assigning responsibility for them. As observers of the antebellum metropolis they were keenly aware of both its splendor and squalor. Their sympathy for the working classes caused them to strive to show that working men and women were at heart industrious and virtuous. Yet they realized that it was from amongst the working classes that the majority of the city's paupers and criminals, its thieves and prostitutes, arose. Their assigning of blame for poverty and crime was informed by their animosity towards America's emerging "aristocracy of wealth." The principles of producer ideology led them to find villainous economic parasites and the corrupt social system that facilitated their tyranny over the worker to be at fault.

In *The Empire City; or, New York by Night and Day* (1850), George Lippard writes, "Wealth, after all, call it what you will, let it appear in the shape of a coin, or take the form of land, or manifest itself in paper money, splendid edifices, or luxurious apparel, is but the representation of so much sweat, so many tears, so much blood." This clear articulation of a simple labor theory of value, the keystone to producer ideology, is echoed by other authors, often in the demand that labor be paid its true worth. In *Celio; or, New York Above Ground and Below Ground* (1850), George Foster decries "the totally inadequate compensation given those patient men who perform all the hard and hurtful

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3 George Lippard, *The Empire City; or, New York by Night and Day* (New York: 1850), 28, hereafter referred to as *The Empire City*. 
... labor of society."4 Joseph Ingraham accuses the wealthy employer of living off "the laborer in the wages due for his toil."5 At the conclusion of *The G'hals of New York* (1850), Ned Buntline states, "for the poor, God help them! must have fair living wages by which to live .... If you are a preacher of Christ's gospel, let your text be justice and fair wages to the toiling poor."6 The novel was advertised as being particularly timely, appearing when "the working man is rising in his might to shake off the chains that weigh him down to the earth, and to demand a just equivalent for his labor." The ad also claims this "book for the people" had been written to give "the laboring man a just appreciation of his rights."7

The importance of placing public interests before private is expressed in the authors' call for disinterested brotherhood. "[E]veryman," George Lippard writes, "is responsible before God for the welfare of his brother." In a similar vein, A. J. H. Duganne, the labor poet and novelist, noting the lack of fraternity in the city, defines it as "making harmony only with pure interests, beholding kindred only in loftier attributes .... a bond of virtuous ambition between all classes of men."8 In his *The Tenant House; or, Embers from Poverty's Hearthstone* (1857), self-interest is shown to result in the privation of one's neighbors. Believing society to

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4 George Foster, *Celio; or, New York Above Ground and Under Ground* (New York, 1850), 69, hereafter referred to as *Celio*.
7 The advertisement for Buntline's *The G'hals of New York* appears on an unnumbered page at the end of Foster's *Celio*.
have gone awry, these authors bemoan the absence of any disinterested pursuit of public interests in the metropolis. The wisdom of a Ned Buntline seamstress lies in the fact that, "She had lived long enough in this all-selfish world of ours to know that few good acts are performed without some self-interested cause." George Thompson finds conditions in Philadelphia permit "no room in any heart for the holy feeling of human brotherhood." Describing a tenement, Thompson writes, "One would have thought, in such a little city of itself as this house presented, there would have been mutual dependence and assistance . . . but no . . . all was cold selfishness." Armed with a labor theory of value and these principles of right and wrong, the authors set out to discover and describe the American metropolis. In the words of one novelist, what he depicted were "facts seen by [my] own eye . . . the reality of which you may, if you choose, yourself witness." In *The Secrets of the Twin Cities; or, The Great Metropolis Unmasked* (1849), Charles E. Averill claims the wrongs he uncovers are too current to permit him, for reasons of personal safety, to give the actual names of the miscreants he unmask. Another author embraces the maxim, "The greater the truth, the greater the libel," and promises his work is the "most libelous book ever printed." A George Lippard novel is billed as

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12 Harrison Gray Buchanan, *Revelations of Asmodeus; or, Mysteries of Upper Ten-Dom: Being a Spirit Stirring, A Powerful and Felicitous*
being "a dark and bitter page torn from the book of society." Like Lippard, Ned Buntline got his start working for penny presses and used the success of his novels to start his own. Also like Lippard, Buntline promises his "mystery and misery" tales were "drawn from life, heart-sickening, too-real, life." George Foster wrote for the New York Tribune, and it was his sketches of New York printed by that paper that gave him his launch into fiction. Like the other authors, his journalism and his fiction were guided by the same principle. "NEW YORK BY GAS LIGHT!" Foster writes in a book of the same title, "What a task have we undertaken! To penetrate beneath the thick veil of night and lay bare the fearful mysteries of darkness in the metropolis."

The metropolis these authors unveil is transformed in their novels by their working class sympathies into a world of unmistakable heroes and villains, the stock characters of the virtuous mechanic and seamstress, and the villainous financier and aristocrat. Again reflecting the values of producer ideology, the author's vitriol targeted the non-producer, the banker, middle-man, speculator, landlord, lawyer, or idle rich. Foster decries "inbred aristocrat[s]" and the wealthy "hypocrites of society."

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13 George Lippard, The Midnight Queen; or, Leaves from New York Life (New York: 1853), 3, hereafter referred to as The Midnight Queen.
16 Foster, Celio, 33.
(1853), George Lippard introduces a thieving banker, a fraudulent politician, a greedy "merchant prince," an aristocratic libertine, and a virtuous mechanic. The *Mysteries and Miseries of New York. A Story of Real Life, Part Two* (1848), illustrates a money-lender counting coins as the grim reaper approaches. Below the picture Ned Buntline writes, "Look at it, ye close-fisted, griping, money-loving *wretches!*" 17 In another novel, Lippard attacks the "Unjust Judge, . . . whose sword is sharp only for the poor man's throat," and the lawyer, "with a hand always grasping, always itching for the wages of pollution." 18 Joseph Ingraham looked over a metropolis to find the "watch-light . . . shone only upon misery and crime, or upon Avarice counting his gains, or upon the powerful oppressing the weak." 19

While attacking the non-producer, the authors applaud the producer. George Lippard's educated Arthur Dermoyne proudly states, "I am still a shoemaker--a workman at the bench--because I cannot in *conscience* enter one of the professions called learned." 20 A shoemaker is the besieged seamstress's savior in Ned Buntline's *The B'hoys of New York* (1850). Similarly, the mechanic-fireman Mose is forever foiling lecherous

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19 Ingraham, *Santa Claus; or, The Merry King of Christmas*, 8.
aristocrats in Buntline's *The Mysteries and Miseries of New York*, as does the butcher Dick Granger in his *The G'hals of New York* (1850). Joseph Ingraham's *Charles Blackford; or, The Adventures of a Student in Search of a Profession* (1845), was written to show the "false estimate between professions and trades." In it Blackford's desire for status and wealth in the city, which lands him in jail, is compared to the humbler pursuits of a mechanic, which lead to security and happiness. "Give me the honest Mechanic at the bench," proclaims another Lippard character, "if we must have a nobility, . . . not the dishonest Bank-Director at the desk!" George Foster wrote admiringly of the New York Bowery b'hoy, the city's working mechanics who adopted a distinctive dress, hair style, and vocabulary, noting with approval their "hatred of the self-styled 'aristocracy'--what is that but an exaggeration of a virtuous contempt for coxcombrv, affectation, sham and snobbery?"

As journalists depicting facts, these novelists acknowledge that the working classes, from which their heroes arise, were economically far worse off than their counterpart non-producers. Consequently, the authors set out to refute the idea that poverty reflected weakness or vice. "The existence of poverty," writes Joseph Ingraham, "is not the sign of

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22 George Lippard, *Quaker City; or, The Monks of Monk Hall. A Romance of Philadelphia Life, Mystery and Crime* (Philadelphia: 1876), 156, hereafter referred to as *Quaker City*. The novel first appeared in complete form in 1844. This 1876 edition is a reprint of the version that appeared in 1845, and contains material then added by Lippard.
depravity."24 A. J. H. Duganne writes, "If poverty be a sin, there was a poor widow who . . . might be said to be very wicked indeed; if patience and industry be virtues, this same widow was nearly angelic."25 In George Thompson's *The Gay Girls of New York; or, Life on Broadway; Being a Mirror of the Fashions, Follies, and Crimes of a Great City* (1853), two down-and-out characters fleece a soused and lecherous deacon, hand out the loot, and so "indicate that poverty had not deprived them of their virtue [or] noble soul."26 "Can it be true," asks Lippard in *The Midnight Queen; or, Leaves from New York Life* (1853), "that no one is poor but those who deserve to be so? That success is the test of virtue; the want of it, the badge of crime?" Fine talk "for a couple of portly gentlemen, gravely engaged at beefsteak and old Port," but patently false. "At the worst, scarcely one-fourth of the poor are poor from their own fault."27 Great wealth, not poverty, is the true indicator of vice.

Instead of opportunities for the poor to socially or economically advance, the authors find them barely sustaining themselves. A popular way to depict this was with the downward slide of the urban seamstress. The image of the chaste, consumptive yet beautiful girl's fall to infamy was useful for the pathos it could evoke. But it also had a basis in fact. A competitive market, fluctuating demand, and piecemeal pay that brought in from $.75 to $1.50 per week, kept seamstresses in stark privation. Their

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work was exhausting, poorly paid, and occasionally led to sexual abuse by their contractors. Rather than advance through hard work and self-denial, the seamstresses are shown to suffer diminishing choices until faced with starvation or prostitution.

"If she had been able to live by her honorable labor," Ned Buntline writes, "that poor girl would rather have died than have sprung into the dead sea of pollution and infamy." Buntline elsewhere tells his reader to seek out a seamstress. "Ask her what is the prospect of herself and fellow-toilers in regard to honorable labor, honorable wages, and an honorable living and she will tell you that it is blacker than midnight!" "And so it goes," writes George Foster in *New York in Slices* (1849), the owners "growing rich and aristocratic, and the poor girls turning out upon the world to die of starvation and despair, or sell themselves to infamy." George Lippard finds that the seamstress must either dig "her grave with her needle," or sacrifice "her priceless virtue for bread, clothing, and


something like a home."33 George Thompson finds that seamstresses,
"Unable to gain sufficient food and raiment by toiling with their needles--
ground down to the very dust by tyrannical and rascally proprietors of
slop-shops . . . are compelled" into prostitution.34 Likewise, Foster writes
of the "barbarous outrages practised upon these helpless creatures by their
mercenary and soulless employers."35

The helpless seamstress was a particularly pathetic example of the
helpless urban worker. "[M]any an unhappy inmate of houses of
wretchedness has been driven there by this very extortion of labor;" writes
Ned Buntline, "many an inmate of our city prison has been forced into
crime and depravity, by hunger and cold."36 In his Miseries of New
York; or, The Burglar and the Counsellor (1844), Joseph Ingraham
concluded, "Crime is become a virtue to him, who but for it perishes."37
In George Thompson's Mysteries and Miseries of Philadelphia (n.d.), a
character who has chosen a life of gambling defends his career saying, "the
choice is not one which either you or I would make, were other paths
fairly opened to our view."38 A George Foster prostitute defends her
trade by arguing, "From the victim of a cruel world I became one of its
victimizers, its self-created scourges."39 A Ned Buntline criminal states,

33 Quoted from George Lippard's The Monk of the Wissahickeon, in
Reynold's Prophet of Protest, 59.
34 Thompson, The Gay Girls, 72-73.
35 Foster, Celio, 69.
36 Buntline, Mysteries and Miseries of New York. A Story of Real Live,
Part One, 28.
37 Ingraham, Miseries of New York; or, The Burglar and the Counsellor,
14.
38 Thompson, Mysteries and Miseries of Philadelphia, 19.
39 Foster, Celio, 38-39.
"Without money and without means, cut off from sympathy and credit, I had to make a choice of theft or starvation." 40 Though characters do choose, virtue intact, to starve, often they find that circumstances force them to abandon honesty for dishonesty, virtue for vice. Captain Ernest, head of a gang of robbers in Foster's *Celio*, explains:

> [D]riven by the shameless oppression and injustice which pervade society in all its walks, we occupy a position of hostility to the world. It has deprived us of the means and the opportunities of being honest and acquiring a livelihood without degradation. It was a choice simply between war and the infamy of beggary. 41

In several "mystery and misery" tales responsibility is allocated in such a way as to place the blame for poverty and crime upon the greed of an aristocracy of wealth and the laborer's diminishing opportunities for honorable work. This stemmed from the authors' assumptions that wealth proceeded from labor and that the worker was virtuous. If labor produces all wealth and the laborer is impoverished and the non-producer lives in splendor, then the laborer is being robbed. The question that followed was, If the worker is virtuous, why were some of them prostitutes, criminals, and paupers? At no point do the authors find prostitution or theft to be sinless occupations. Rather, they depict them as unavoidable due to circumstances, and so understandable. The authors do not blame the individual prostitute or thief, but instead ascribe the cause of their sins to the nature of the situation in which their sins took place. Several authors' polemic against an aristocracy of wealth entails presuming the personal motives of the degraded to be at heart virtuous and the circumstances

41 Foster, *Celio*, 91.
caused by a self-interested, villainous few to be determining. Their rhetorical strategy is to acknowledge in the urban criminal and poor as much virtue as their stations will permit, and to increase the causal responsibility of circumstances until society itself is shown to be at fault.

The authors' metropolis is found to be inhabited by a variety of antebellum Robin Hoods. "Where the rich rogue be found, then and there will he meet me as a foe," states a George Thompson character whose aim is "promoting an equality in the distribution of riches."42 Similarly, it is explained of a Thaddeus Beach character, wronged by society and driven to thieving, "He never robbed the poor, but to the poor often gave."43 George Foster, Ned Buntline, and George Lippard all have their bands of virtuous thieves, victims of circumstances who transform their plight into a blessing for their fellow sufferers. They also dispense justice. In Joseph Ingraham's *Miseries of New York*, the greedy and libidinous lawyer is kidnapped, tried by his victims, and sentenced to hang. George Lippard's characters routinely shoot the libertine, hang the false minister, strike down the cruel banker, and foil the wealthy lecher. Even the fallen woman, sunk in those lakes of pollution, is not without merit. Thompson apologizes for giving a prostitute "attributes of generosity and humanity" and argues, "The loss of virtue in a woman does not necessarily involve the destruction of all the good qualities of her nature."44 Buntline's wronged but benevolent prostitute Big Lize trounces aristocrats, distributes ill gotten

42 Thompson, *Mysteries and Miseries of Philadelphia*, 98, 82.
goods to the needy, and keeps an eye out for the not-yet-fallen seamstress.45

Within the thematic structures of the novels it was easy to show why good people were doing bad things. In Buntline's five-volume *Mysteries and Miseries of New York*, the gambler Gus Livingston and the wealthy libertine Henry Carlton trap, trick, and abuse the clerk Charles Meadows, his sister Isabella, and the saintly seamstress Angelina. When Angelina is dead, Isabella nearly ruined, and Charles made a thief and a murderer, the reader is sure that Gus and Henry are to blame. But several authors were not content to remain within the thematic structures of their tales. The plot was simply a vehicle by which to teach a moral, a way to expose a social ill and suggest a solution.

In the first volume of his *Mysteries and Miseries of New York*, Ned Buntline notes, "this is a book where we must at times break aside from the thread of our story to moralize."46 Likewise, George Lippard ends a chapter addressing his reader, "You, that wish to pursue only the plot of this narrative, may skip the ensuing chapter. But you that wish to hear a Sermon, with Girard College for a pulpit, will do well to read the words which follow."47 After a grisly episode involving a corpse and a girl's ruin, George Thompson suspends his plot to assert, "Reader, do not say that these things are altogether too horrible for belief; we know them to be true." This begins a two-page discussion as to how prostitutes are

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45 Big Lize appears throughout Buntline's *Mysteries and Miseries of New York* series.
46 Buntline, *Mysteries and Miseries of New York, Part One*, 47.
"manufactured for the market" in New York City. In their roles as reformers, the authors abandon their fictional tales to range widely on the subject of the causes and consequences of urban poverty and crime.

To show that the individual was not fully responsible for his or her behavior, the authors blame circumstances. The metropolis provided a commanding backdrop for the authors, one that was depicted as inherently antagonistic to disinterested brotherly love and personal morality. An A. J. H. Duganne character warns, "go not to the great cities of our republic; for in their midst you will find thousands of human beings left to become thieves and to uprear their children thieves--to sink into pauperism, and make of their offspring paupers."49 "[G]aze upon the distant city," George Lippard commands. "A sadder battle-field, sun never shone upon ... in which millions are battling every moment of the hour, and battling all life long for fame, for wealth, for bread, for life."50 In *Jack Harold; The Criminal's Career* (1856), George Thompson writes of New York: "in commerce, a monster--in vice, a hell--in splendor, almost equal to the fabled oriental cities of the East--and in licentiousness a rival of gay, voluptuous Paris."51 When Harrison Gray Buchanan looks at New York, he sees "images of selfishness, sensuality, distrust, hypocrisy, chicanery, pretension and egoism."52 Thompson writes of Philadelphia, "To each,

each seemed a foe, and even the common courtesies of life were submerged in the conflict to exist."53

The individual struggled, often pointlessly, against a corrupt and corrupting metropolis. "Are we the victim of circumstances," asks a fallen woman, "or are we in every case the authors of our own fortune?, or of our own ruin? . . . Are there none who, from no fault of their own, are suddenly hurled from a life of calm innocence into an abyss of shame that has no hope; of crime that has no lower deep?"54 In the repeated depiction of the downward slide of the virtuous, the authors portray their characters as victims of circumstances. Destitute, a Lippard seamstress contemplates her "iron fate," either to starve or sell herself.55 Of a prostitute George Thompson states, "She had done nothing to deserve the horrible punishment which we are describing, . . . her faults had been those of circumstances—not of inclinations."56 Ingraham writes of a criminal, "these vicious habits and evils of character are the result of the peculiar circumstances into which he was thrown."57 Elsewhere Ingraham writes, "The poor man has no choice, he is the victim of circumstances."58 Of "Life's youthful strugglers," Ned Buntline states, "let them battle never so bravely, let them strive never so zealously, the moment they step into the

54 Lippard, *The Midnight Queen*, 22.
world, they become tainted with its errors, imbued with its vices, and swallowed up and lost."

For authors such as George Thompson, Ned Buntline, George Foster, and George Lippard it was not enough to find individuals to be compelled by circumstances to commit vice. Seeking the source of these ruinous circumstances, they find it in a corrupt society. Speaking of a prostitute, Lippard asks, "Why do a hundred such as her, thrive and grow rich in the large cities?

We are forced to accept one of these two answers. 1. A bad social state, based upon enormous wealth and enormous power, a social state which gives to the few the very extravagancies of luxury, and deprives the countless many of the barest rights and comforts of life . . . 2. Human nature is thoroughly depraved. A certain portion of the race are born to be damned in this world, as well as the next.

Lippard's conclusion was that something had gone wrong with society, and he was echoed by the other authors. The greed of a few, they believed, had damned the many. A powerful coterie of parasites, protected by money and position, manipulated influence and legislation to oppress the masses.

"Justice, and in the Quaker City," sneers a Lippard character. Not so long as the "Bank-Director, who boasts his ten thousand victims," goes free and "the poor devil, who has stolen a loaf of bread to save himself from starvation," is locked up. A wronged, impoverished character in an Ingraham novel notes public opinion is against him and "the law denies me

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59 Buntline, The G'hal's of New York, 75.
60 Lippard, New York: Its Upper Ten and Lower Million, 124.
61 Lippard, Quaker City, 174.
its aid for want of means."62 What is more, the parasites manipulate the law to perpetrate their tyranny. George Thompson writes, "I hate--I contemn--I despise the laws that give protection to the monied rascals of the world, and shirk from assisting the low and poverty-stricken wretch; that allow the rich man to be honored though a villain; and the poor to be condemned."63 Lippard's politician, Gabriel Godlike, is eventually brought before an ad hoc court of avengers. Godlike stood accused of having "lent his influence, sold his intellect, mortgaged his official position, to those who enslave labor in workshop and factory, defraud it in banks, and rob the laborer . . . of a piece of land."64 More boldly, George Foster wrote, "So long as the party in power can maintain the ascendancy . . . so long we shall look in vain for any thorough, radical, all-embracing system of municipal reform."65

In the process of robbing the laborer, and to perpetrate and conceal their crime, the aristocracy of wealth had corrupted American society. George Foster wrote, "In every branch of human interest--in the workshop, the counting-house, the store, the office of the professional man--Fraud and Falsehood rear their heads, twin demons of the epoch."66 George Lippard writes that "the Rag Aristocracy of the Banks!" mock the American ideal of democracy. "[W]hat is [democracy], so long as we hold

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62 Ingraham, Miseries of New York; or The Burglar and the Counsellor, 28.
63 Thompson, Mysteries and Miseries of Philadelphia, 98.
64 Lippard, New York; Its Upper Ten and Lower Million, 164.
65 Foster, New York in Slices, 30.
66 Foster, Celio, 68.
the Veto of Starvation over the People?"67 Everywhere Lippard looked he saw oppression: "this banker is a king, this merchant a tyrant, that church a despot."68 In Paul Ardenheim, The Monk of the Wissahickon (1848), Lippard tells the reader, "your Free Land is cursed by the White and the Black Slavery." The "White Slave swelters in the factory, giving life and lungs, breath and heart, to the rich man's coffers," and the "Black Slave . . . is sold in sight of your Capital."69 Lippard's antebellum America was split between "the victims or the criminals of society--of a bad social world, which on every hand contrasts immense wealth and voluptuous indulgence with fathomless poverty and withering want."70

History and the lie of human progress completed the picture. When George Foster's still optimistic Celio sets out his lists of beliefs, including abolitionism, transcendentalism, and Swedenborgianism, Captain Ernest retorts, "Pray, where did you manage to pick up all these precious relics of the shipwrecked vessel 'Progress?'"71 "Strange word! Human Progress!," Lippard writes, "To the poor, it says more poverty, deeper kennels, no lands at all. To the preacher it means more pulpits; to the judge more jails and gibbets; to the statesman, more--presidents."72 In the same novel Lippard states, "Battle-fields, Botany-Bays, gibbets, jails, and factories--old forms of Death, and old Deaths in new forms--sweep the millions into dust.

68 Lippard, The Empire City, 30.
69 Quoted from George Lippard, Paul Ardenheim, The Monk of the Wissahickon (1848), in Reynolds, Prophet of Protest, 61.
70 Lippard, New York. Its Top Ten and Lower Million (1853), 47.
71 Foster, Celio, 51.
72 Ibid., 41.
The same old story, which has been telling for six thousand years.\textsuperscript{73} In \textit{Adonai: The Pilgrim of Eternity} (1850), Lippard offers his gloomiest view of society and history. Travelling to the near future, Adonai finds black and white slaves for sale in the great "Slave-Pen of the City of Washington," and the factory has become "the Temple devoted to the God of the Nineteenth Century, and who is called CAPITAL." Even the virtuous homesteader who has escaped out West has only forestalled the inevitable, the rule of the money-changers and the Lords of the Land.\textsuperscript{74}

Within several "mystery and misery" tales is visible the following process. Personal responsibility shifts first from individuals doing sinful things to their fictional foils, the aristocrat and financier. It shifts again when the aristocrat and financier are shown to be emblematic of a metropolis that does not admit the pursuit of public interests and protects the idle rich. It shifts once more when the metropolis is found to be the most bitter fruit of a corrupt social system. The final result is the character foreswearing responsibility for his own conduct and foisting it upon society. Of the authors, George Lippard articulated this with particular clarity. "No!--No! I am not answerable for my crimes," cries a character. "I am what I am. And what I am, the religion of society has made me. . . . I fling back into society my crimes, and demand that it shall answer for the result of its own Work!\textsuperscript{75} As the authors held to the principles of producer ideology and pushed their explanations as to why blameless people lived degraded lives, they arrived at the conclusion that

\textsuperscript{73} Lippard, \textit{The Empire City}, 41.
\textsuperscript{74} George Lippard, \textit{Adonai: The Pilgrim of Eternity} (1850), substantially reprinted in Reynolds, \textit{Prophet of Protest}, 131-154.
\textsuperscript{75} Lippard, \textit{The Memoirs of a Preacher}, 99.
society bore the primary responsibility for the individual's economic straits and so their personal conduct.

These authors were not backward looking, nostalgic republicans hoping to return to a lost and virtuous past. As will be explored at greater length in the next chapter, they were too involved in current events to believe a turning back of the clock either possible or desirable. Not only did they not quit the city for the countryside, but they actively participated in politics, labor strikes, and even riots to further what they believed was just. George Lippard was profoundly aware of his place in history. He applauded the French Revolution and defended the Terror and keenly watched the European revolutions of 1848, predicting similar revolutions for America. When conservatism triumphed in Europe, he gloomily argued the same fate awaited the New World. This is not to deny the authors' repeated appeals to traditional republican values. Indeed, that they did so in the form of appealing to producer ideology is central to understanding their reaction to antebellum urbanization and industrialization. They attempted to salvage these values by applying them to radically altered conditions. In the process of doing so they arrived at what was for the time a very novel idea, that an individual's behavior was to a significant degree determined by his or her physical circumstances and social environment.

It was an idea that had immediate relevance for the authors. When Ned Buntline argues that wealthy aristocrats manipulate money and laws to unjustly jail virtuous individuals, he occasionally does so from within jail. If not criminals, many of the authors were poor. Despite his extraordinary literary output, Joseph H. Ingraham was chronically short of cash. George Lippard was abandoned by his parents as a child, grew up in poverty in
Germantown, Pennsylvania, and spent the years of 1837-1838 living off of friends and occasionally in abandoned buildings. As George Foster notes, "a host of writers, some good, some indifferent, some intolerably bad . . . write as they are forced to live, from hand to mouth, and never can pause in the petty round driven by necessity." Foster, who was caught forging checks when his writing no longer made ends meet, could have assuaged a guilty conscience by reading his own works. In short, the people they found injured and trapped by a corrupt society included themselves. Like their fictional heroes and heroines, they too felt more sinned against than sinning.

The environmentalist logic evident in these authors' novels found a wide audience. Several of the authors did manage to make a living from their writing, often by being extraordinarily prolific, and a few manage to gain a wide regional, even national, notoriety. None of them wrote "mystery and misery" tales exclusively. Joseph Ingraham, who by one critic's guess individually accounted for ten percent of the titles published in the 1840s, wrote all manner of sensational novels, from historical fiction to ecumenical tales. Similarly, Ned Buntline produced numerous sea-yarns and romances, and several of his "mystery and misery" tales devolve into pirate adventures told with little reform-minded zeal. Nevertheless, throughout these novels appear the same working class sympathies that mark the "mystery and misery" tales, and it is of note that Buntline received his initial fame for his five-volume Mysteries and Miseries of New York. It also of note that George Lippard, the most adamant adherent

76 Foster, Celio, 25.
of producer ideology and critic of society, became the most popular author within the genre. Indeed, he was among the most popular authors of his time. Lippard's *The Quaker City; or, The Monks of Monk Hall. A Romance of Philadelphia Life, Mystery, and Crime* (1844), among the first of the "mystery and misery" tales to appear, sold between 60,000 and 175,000 copies its first year, and was by David S. Reynolds's reckoning, "the best-selling American novel before the appearance of [Harriet Beecher Stowe's] *Uncle Tom's Cabin.*"78 In 1848 *Godey's Lady's Book*, a magazine Lippard openly detested, wrote "[Lippard] is unquestionably the most popular writer of the day, and his books are sold edition after edition, thousand after thousand." Derided as immoral, labeled a "redhot locofoco" and a "political pothouse brawler," at his death a Philadelphia paper lamented the loss of an author "whose works have been read probably as extensively as those of any other writer in the country."79

How or why a historical actor reads a book is difficult, if not impossible, to tell. Reading is solitary work and we can never know if George Lippard's readers were drawn to his novels because of his vehement critiques of society, his environmentalist logic, or rather his titillating scenes of sex and violence. What is certain is that the latter had nothing to do with the solutions Lippard and other authors suggest for the problems they expose. Ned Buntline was not thrown in jail for libel or

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pornography, but for leading a class-based riot in New York City in 1849. George Lippard was personally prepared to attempt more radical solutions than any of his fictional heroes. In *New York; or, Its Upper Ten and Lower Million*, the fictional character Arthur Dermoyne hopes for a Utopian community out West, free of society's evil influences. Lippard sought to alter society and so end the evil. He advocated the nation-wide organization of labor for the purposes of taking control of both the production and distribution of goods. And, in the last five years of his life, he set about making his vision a reality.

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Social Regeneration

Just as it had helped diagnose the problem, producer ideology pointed several authors towards a solution. End the tyranny of the parasites and the producers would cease being poor, would cease being driven to crime and sin. The virtuous workers, once paid their true value and given an opportunity to perform their chosen trades, would no longer act morally corrupt. Having found society to be at fault, several authors sought a solution in changing society. Their environmentalist conception of the problem led them to this conclusion, and it is this that distinguishes them from the majority of their contemporary reformers. Rather than attempt to change structures within the individual, either to spur a corrupt soul to turn to God or rebuild a failing or failed moral sense, these authors looked to change social structures. The solutions offered by three "mystery and misery" authors, George Foster, Ned Buntline, and George Lippard, reflect the environmentalist assumptions evident in their novels. Each author was certain that society bore the primary responsibility for urban poverty and crime. They were equally certain that in the majority of cases the pauper and the criminal were at heart virtuous laborers. Lift from them the heavy burden of maintaining the economic parasites and provide them with means and these producers would, by definition, become industrious and virtuous.

All three authors believed that society and the non-producer bore the primary responsibility for the plight of the working classes and, by extension, for poverty and crime. George Lippard writes, "The present social system of Capital and Labor . . . degrades Men into pieces of a vast Machinery which, supported by custom and law, moves on, and on, for the
good of ONE MAN."¹ In Cello; or, New York Above Ground and Below Ground (1850), George Foster writes of the "false organization of society," "The injustices practised upon the laboring classes," "shameless oppression and injustice" and of the laborer "deprived . . . of the means and opportunities of being honest and acquiring a livelihood."² At the conclusion to The Mysteries and Miseries of New York. A Story of Real Life (1849), Ned Buntline places responsibility not on the degraded individual, but on society. Charles Meadows, a once honest clerk turned thief and murderer, a fact that drives his mother insane, blames himself. Not so, Buntline argues:

[H]e did not go to the root of the evil. If he had not been first duped, and led into a gambling house, by a gambler's genteel outside assistant, he never would have gamed; had the authorities of the city done their duty, and suppressed gambling here, he never could have been led astray, therefore, we will charge, as the principle and first cause of the murder, and all of this wretchedness and ruin, the neglect of city authorities in doing their duty!³

These authors frequently followed their environmentalist arguments to the point of relieving the individual of all personal responsibility. After detailing the pitiful fall of the helpless seamstresses Mary and Susan, Ned Buntline argues, "And Low-Wages and Wages-Slowly-Paid have done it all!"⁴ Rather than the fate of the actual prostitutes, Buntline parades

² George Foster, Cello; or, New York Above Ground and Below Ground (New York: 1850), 92, 69, 91. Hereafter referred to as Cello.
before his reader "those employers who grow rich by following the system," and the "sleek, fat, greasy churchmen," who pocket charity rather than dispense it. Mary and Susan are left to their sin and society with its guilt. Finding the fault to lie outside the person, the authors argue solutions rest almost entirely with changes to society. George Foster argues that, "under the influences of favorable circumstances and beneficent social institutions, all might and would be good." George Lippard was more specific. "Ill-paid and landless Labor is the cause of seven-eighths of the drunkenness that now curses" America. Give him decent wages and "repeal all Laws which rob the Laborer," and Lippard believes the worker-turned-alcoholic would cease to drink.

These authors were certain that the majority of urban paupers, thieves, and prostitutes were at heart virtuous and only awaited the means by which they could evidence industry and morality. Of a gang of robbers made up of beleaguered mechanics, George Foster writes, "a company of nobler and truer hearts than yours cannot be found on the globe." A Ned Buntline seamstress prior to her fall is shown to posses "spotless virtue," and he condemns any who would fault her when she "rushes from nakedness and starvation . . . [and] hurling a curse on those who would not let her live the life of a virtuous girl, yields herself up to the lewd, loose life of a wanton!"

Lippard's faith in the working classes is visible in what

5 Ibid., 148.
6 Foster, Celio, 4.
7 Reynolds, George Lippard: Prophet of Protest, 188.
8 Foster, Celio, 92.
9 Buntline, G'hals of New York, 14, 35.
he expects of them. In *New York; Its Upper Ten and Lower Million*, he envisions:

A community where every man shall work with his hands, and where every man will also have the opportunity to cultivate his mind . . . There every one will have a place to work and every one will receive the fruits of his work. And there . . . will we, without priest, or monopolist, or slaveholder, establish in the midst of a band of brothers, the worship of Christ who was himself a workman.10

On the one hand, these journalists-turned-novelists used their empirical observations of the antebellum metropolis to criticize the more pernicious effects of industrialization, urbanization, and an expanding market economy. Writing for and often not far removed from the working classes, these authors were acutely aware of the nation's growing disparity of wealth and the exploitation of the common laborer. On the other hand, these authors married their empirical observations to an idealized vision of the producer and, by extension, the pauper and criminal. Their environmentalist arguments led them to relieve the individual of almost all responsibility for his currently degraded position. While this made all the more vehement their critiques of society, it tended to press their solutions away from the practical and towards the visionary. Reform via the ballot-box gave way to violent confrontations with society and the promise of Utopia.

All three authors periodically express the hope that change could be effected through political action. George Foster blamed the lack of any meaningful municipal reform on the inactivity, even complicity, of local

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politicians and police. Similarly, Ned Buntline writes, "I charge the misery of every man who is ruined at a gaming table and the consequent misery of his family, to the authorities of [New York] city." Buntline became personally involved in the turbulent politics of New York in the 1840s and 1850s. Along with Isaiah Rynders and the Empire Club of thug-politicos, Buntline followed the lead of Michael Walsh, the flamboyant Irish immigrant and leader of Tammany Hall's working class partisans, in asserting egalitarianism while threatening any opposition with violence. In time Buntline became a confirmed nativist active in the American Party and, by one account, was responsible for naming the Know-Nothings. Though George Lippard unsuccessfully ran for a local office in Philadelphia, and was briefly persuaded to stump for Zachary Taylor, he soon concluded political parties were yet another way elites oppressed the working classes. "Two Tyrants," discussing how to keep labor from organizing to "crush us," decide, "We shall divide them into Parties . . . array them against each other, and set them to fighting for the shell while we eat the oyster."

Violent confrontation with the representatives of corrupt society seemed to hold more promise than politics. Within the story-lines of the "mystery and misery" tales this took the form of the robber redistributing wealth, the mechanic foiling the aristocrat, the ad hoc court meting out

14 Reynolds, *George Lippard: Prophet of Protest*, 64.
justice to the corrupt and powerful. George Foster's band of thieves chose "war" over the "infamy of begging." In Adonai; the Pilgrim of Eternity (1850), George Lippard's character advises, "Then must the poor teach unto these [Lords of Land and Labor] the Gospel of the Rifle." In an article published in his Quaker City Weekly, Lippard is more emphatic. "When Labor has tried all other means in vain . . . then we would advise Labor to go to War, in any and all forms--War with the Rifle, Sword and Knife." Ned Buntline came closest to taking Lippard's advice. He was sentenced to one year hard labor at New York's Blackwell Island Prison for his leading role in the 1849 Astor Place Riots that left 34 dead and 141 wounded. This riot, sparked by a British actor's performance of Macbeth, reflected the city's deepening class animosities. Outside the theater in which a wealthy elite watched the performance, a working class crowd yelled, "Burn the damned den of the aristocracy," and at a rally following the bloodshed, the violence was explained as the "revenge of the aristocrats of this city against the working classes." Not surprisingly, Buntline's trial was cast in terms of the "right of rebellion" versus "law and order." Of the three, Ned Buntline preferred to confront society rather than to change it. Nevertheless, when pressed to suggest an improvement on

15 Foster, Celio, 90.
16 Reynolds, George Lippard: Prophet of Protest, 146.
17 Ibid., 219.
18 Lawrence W. Levine draws out the class nature of the Astor Place riots. See Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1988), 64-68. The quoted material appears on 64 and 65.
19 For a detailed look at the legal arguments and ramifications of the Astor Place Riots, see Harold Earl Hammond's A Commoner's Judge: The Life and Times of Charles Patrick Daly (Boston: The Christopher Publishing House, 1954), 65-95.
current reform efforts he evidences the assumption that given the means to act on their own, the degraded would cease being sinful. Critical of current philanthropic efforts which were "not conducted with a due regard to the natures of those whom they would reform," Buntline recommends a "HOME FOR THE POOR." Its underlying premise is that if given the chance, criminals would give up crime. Rather than any reformation of character, they need only to forget their past. "Their crimes shall be forgotten, and all encouragement shall be given to them to live in the right way." Such encouragement entailed a community where, "The men shall work the farm, raise their own food; or such as are mechanics, shall have tools and employment." In Celio, George Foster depicts a similar solution. Workshops "with an abundance of tools" and a "large and excellent farm," await Foster's noble-hearted robbers. So long as each worker kept in mind the wants of his neighbors, he was encouraged to pursue his own vocation. "[L]et us distribute ourselves according to our capacities and inclinations, in the workshop, in the school-room, in the field--changing from one to the other, whenever the inclination posses us." Room was even made for those, a presumed minority, who didn't care to work. "Should any be sick or indolent, or from any other cause neglect to work, let a sufficient provision for his support be made from the general stock--you will find that it will be ample."

While Ned Buntline's and George Foster's utopian visions were attempted only within the pages of their fiction, George Lippard set about

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21 Buntline, The Mysteries and Miseries of New York, Part Two, 35.
22 Foster, Celio, 90-94.
realizing his. The most popular author of the "mystery and misery" tale was also the genre's most fully realized utopian socialist. Lippard applied his readings of Francois Fourier, Louis Blanc, and Ledru Rollin, as well as the inspiration he received from the French Revolution and European revolutions of 1848, to explaining antebellum America's economic disparities and rapid change. Despite his brief training as a Methodist minister, he arrived at a profoundly secular solution. Indeed, Lippard directly challenged tenets of Protestant theology and strongly criticized the benevolent societies whose reform efforts drew their inspiration from it. The solution Lippard arrived at anticipates in many ways Edward Bellamy's 1888 vision of America as a cooperative commonwealth. Nothing less than the nation-wide reorganization of labor into a single union for all workers who would control production, distribution, and wages, would provide the working classes the means of realizing their potential.

"Protestantism," Lippard wrote, "is the paid vassal of usurped Capital."23 Calvinist theology, Lippard held, had become a pernicious excuse for the wealthy elite to justify themselves, disguise their guilt, and co-opt the masses they oppressed. One need only carry orthodox Calvinism "into political action, and you have at once, the explanation or the theory of the growth of our Modern Civilization, which treats the largest portion of the Race, as beings born to utter misery, and the Few as the chosen people of God." The "Modern Oligarchy of the Money power," he argued, was "the richest blossom of John Calvin's Idea."24 Not

24 Ibid., 97.
surprisingly, Lippard discarded the idea that innate depravity accounted for one's sins and social station. To end intemperance, he believed, one must "strike at those Evils which create intemperance. Every man who advocates those Laws which make one class rich at the expense of another is a digger of Drunkard's graves."25 Rather than the individual's conversion, Lippard looked forward to "Social Regeneration."

"COMBINATION! ASSOCIATION! These are the words of the last Gospel which God has uttered to man. The combination of labor until labor produces capital. The Association of workers for their own good, until every worker is a capitalist."26

George Lippard intended to create a society designed along the lines of equality and cooperation. In 1849 he founded his Brotherhood of the Union, the organization which was to make real his vaunted hopes. Behind its motto of "TRUTH, HOPE, AND LOVE," and its stated method of reform, "The Combination of all true men into Circles of Brotherhood,"27 was an elaborate plan to manage the market for everyone's mutual benefit. To eliminate the economic parasites, the working classes had to gain control of both production and distribution. At the local level, what Lippard termed "Circles," or trade associations, would control wages and production, opening stores where goods were to be sold or exchanged for the goods of other Circles. Once formed, Circles would combine into "Unions of Capital," which would purchase and provide materials and goods with other Unions nationally, and, Lippard even hinted, internationally. "One Circle corresponds with another--one Union of

25 Ibid., 188.
26 Ibid., 198
27 Ibid., 209.
Capital with another—and thus the Workers of the United States and Canada will always be conversant with the rates of wages, the prices of produce, and the designs of those who would oppress them."28 In an ascending hierarchy of governing bodies, Circles would oversee their members, Unions of Capital the exchange of goods, and in each state "Grand Circles" would govern the various Unions of Capital, and a "Supreme Circle" would govern the Grand Circles and so the entire Brotherhood.

Lippard joined the promise of an immediate social reformation to the belief that once given control over the process of production and exchange, the working classes would not only be out from under the heel of the tyrants but would conduct their affairs with industry and honesty. "Does it appear as an iron fact to you," Lippard asks his reader in an article, "that you must continue in your present degradation?" Only form "at once, in every city, town, and hamlet of the United States, associations for your own preservation. Establish stores, governed by these associations, where you may buy the necessaries of life," and soon "the Idler, the Agent, the Employer will be classed with the highwaymen of a previous century."29 Addressing female tailors, Lippard enjoins them to "form work-shops in which every woman is a worker and a proprietor. . . . Let their stores be governed in such a manner that every woman concerned therein—every woman whose savings or labor is deposited there—shall have a direct 'say' in the managing of said store or work-shop."30

In another article he cites the success of "Progress Circle No. 93" in Philadelphia. "Combining their labor, they are about to become their own

28 Ibid., 201.
29 Ibid., 198-9.
30 Ibid., 216.
masters. The profits which have hitherto flowed into the hands of idle
employers will now flow into their own. Is it not a glorious prospect?"31

The Brotherhood of the Union never came close to accomplishing
what George Lippard hoped. Nevertheless, its early growth gave Lippard,
who died in 1854, some cause for hope. The Brotherhood boasted circles
in nineteen states in 1850. By 1853 there were almost 150 circles in
twenty-four states. Because Lippard formed the Brotherhood along the
lines of a secret society, early membership figures are not known.
Nevertheless, the speed with which it initially grew, its longevity (though
altered it is extant today) and its continued popularity into the early
twentieth century (it counted 30,000 members in 1917) indicate that
Lippard's ideas struck a responsive cord. Both the Brotherhood and the
popularity of several authors of the "mystery and misery" tales suggest an
audience of some size found credible the belief that individuals were to a
significant degree compelled by an unjust society into immoral behavior,
that changes to society could solve the problem, and that a change called
for was increasing the working classes' control over their work. This is
suggestive, for in their understanding of the causes of urban poverty and
crime and in their articulation of possible solutions, these authors
contradicted the arguments made by the majority of contemporary urban
and social reformers.

Informed by producer ideology, the authors arrived at secular
solutions to social ills. In contrast, contemporary reformers were
overwhelmingly informed by evangelical Protestantism and the revivalist's
faith in the imminent millennium. This was particularly true of urban

31 Ibid., 201.
reformers, who, even as they adopted more pragmatic solutions to end poverty and crime, held to a belief in Christian perfectionism. Not surprisingly, they viewed the works of numerous authors as misguided if not immoral. No more surprising is the fact that the authors reviewed held many contemporary reform efforts in contempt. "[M]any of the so called charitable Societies and Asylums," writes Ned Buntline, "are rather speculating associations [more] than anything else." George Lippard characterized them as "large corporation[s], well supplied with Boards of Managers, and eloquently glorified in Annual Reports," who "poke [their] goodness into the very teeth of the world." Clergymen, who by one account "inspired the dominant social movement of the period, the crusade for humanitarian reform," are consistently mocked and censured by the authors. Behind the critical opinions the authors and reformers held for

32 Timothy L. Smith, Revivalism and Social Reform in Mid-Nineteenth-Century American (New York: Abingdon Press, 1957); Carrol Smith Rosenberg, Religion and the Rise of the American City: The New York City an Movement, 1812-1870 (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1971). In her appendix Rosenberg notes of twenty-four randomly chosen charities active in New York City and Brooklyn between 1830-1860, twenty-one were "distinctively religious in character" and fourteen "not only shared in the general pietistic expressions of the period but espoused, as well, decidedly evangelical and missionary aims." See, 277-281.


34 Reynolds, Prophet of Protest, 173.

35 Smith, Revivalism and Social Reform, 36. George Lippard wrote two novels dedicated to depicting evangelical revivalism as fraudulent: Memoirs of a Preacher, a Revelation of the Church and the Home and The Man with the Mask; a Sequel to the Memoirs of a Preacher, both published in 1849. In a similar vein is C. W. Webber's Spiritual Vampirism. The History of Ethereal Softdown and her Friends of the New Light published in 1853. Both Ned Buntline and George Thompson people their novels with
one another was a profound difference in opinion as to what lay at the heart of society's ills.

Unlike the authors, the majority of antebellum reformers believed the individual to be complicit in, if not the sole cause of, his moral depravity and economic straits. Behind the corrupting metropolis, they saw an easily corrupted individual, hobbled by a weak or hardened moral sense, a fallen and depraved soul. Rebuild the ruined moral structures inherent in every individual, bring to bear the grace of the Holy Spirit, and the righteous would turn to God and again walk morally upright despite circumstances. Or, he would sink into a helpless, if not deserved, degradation. The justifications for their view were rooted in an intellectual heritage broadly defined by Common Sense philosophy, Lockean psychology, and Orthodox Protestantism. None of these were isolated or static traditions, and nowhere is this more apparent than in the divisiveness of antebellum New England theology. The controversy over the imputation of original sin and the extent of human agency in regeneration defined by the Orthodox position of Bennett Tyler and the "Arminian" position of Nathaniel Taylor, the Unitarian debate over the Trinity and atonement, and the challenge to supernatural intervention posed by transcendental intuitionism were the most prominent debates. Obscured by the controversies are shared assumptions, including the belief that despite outward differences individuals contained within them common moral instincts and the seeds of divine grace.

lecherous, greedy ministers of various denominations. Indeed, there was almost a sub-genre on licentious clergymen. See Joseph Ingraham's *Mary Wilbur; or, The Deacon and the Widow's Daughter* (Boston, 1845) and Joseph Boughton's *Solon Grind; or, The Thunderstruck Hypocrite* (New York: 1845).
Antebellum divines, moral philosophers, and social reformers sought for, and believed themselves to have found, the source of evil. In particulars there was little agreement, but in general there existed a broad consensus. Weighed down by ignorance and sin, beset by internal passions and buffeted by external circumstances, the individual was a weak vessel imperfectly piloted by a God-given sense of divinity and innate moral faculties. If a person succumbed to ignorance, sin, passions, or circumstances and perpetrated evil, he either lacked, or willfully disregarded, God and man's moral faculties. The orthodox theologian Charles Hodge might emphasize the importance of sin and grace, the transcendentalist Unitarian Theodore Parker passions and instincts, but both understood the contested terrain and locus of obligation to reside within the individual. Their assumptions drew upon two influential intellectual traditions that can be traced back to John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Tradition* and John Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*.

The first book of the 1559 edition of Calvin's *Institutes* asks how we know anything about God. In part, Calvin argued, we know God by virtue of the "sense of divinity," the "seed of religion," He has implanted in every human heart. Among other things, this "sense" accounts for our troubled conscience.36 Later Protestant theologians found it also accounted for a Christian's anxiety. Man could neither ignore God nor, due to his corrupted nature, approach Him. Further, Calvin's collapsing of

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justification into sanctification, so that faith alone made one acceptable in the sight of God and assured ethical conduct, discouraged good works prior to a regeneration one was helpless to effect. In the 1630s, John Preston led several English theologians to find a solution in God's covenant of grace, in effect a bargain the anxious sinner could strike with God. If he lived by God's law, the sinner was assured salvation. Regeneration remained a supernatural intervention, but a procurable one, characterized by Perry Miller as a "reinvigoration of slumbering capacities already existing in the unregenerated soul." While reformed theology's "Arminian drift," or the sinner's increasing ability to effect his own salvation, did not go uncontested, the belief that a profound change in the inner man was what produced outward adherence to God's moral law became presumed.

The Orthodox Calvinism of Charles Hodge and voluntaristic evangelicalism of Charles Grandison Finney are illustrative. Hodge spent his entire career in that bastion of orthodoxy, the Princeton Seminary, and opposed what he viewed as Finney's heretical Arminianism. Hodge believed regeneration to be a supernatural act of God. The sinner knew God's moral law sufficiently to realize his sins, but only God could awaken in the sinner the "holy habit or principle in the soul" that enabled him to successfully live by that law. Once regenerated, the Christian could not help but be moral. Hodge argued it is "the inward principles which control the inward and outward life," such that with regeneration a change is effected "in the state of the soul which accounts for its perceptions.

purposes and feelings," a "renewal of the inner man." In short, the regenerated's "new heart" or "new nature" insured his "new character." Finney paired a similar understanding of human psychology with the belief that regeneration was a matter of personal deliberate choice. He concluded perfectionism was the achievable result. Individuals were divided by a "deep-seated disposition or preference" for God or self. Regeneration followed the individual's act of choosing a Godly preference and entailed "an entire change of moral character." Finney believed, "When a person is truly born again, his choice is habitually right, and of course his conduct is in the main right." Finney's faith in the postmillennial "Benevolent Empire" proved a powerful impetus for social reform. Indeed, few theologians exercised so pervasive or profound an influence on antebellum reform efforts. But as a biographer notes, "Evangelism and the conversion of the individual remained the first priority with Finney, and without that nothing further could be done." The transformed society followed the transformed individual.

During the years between Calvin and Finney a God-centered universe gave more ground to a man-centered one. John Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* was influential in widening the breach.

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39 I have likewise based my depiction of Charles Finney's theology and grasp of human psychology on Hewitt's *Regeneration and Morality*. See, 21-52.
The Lockean assertion that all we know comes from either sensation or reflection led some philosophers to account for moral knowledge as the exercise of the human faculty by which it was perceived. First articulated by Lord Shaftesbury, a moral sense, by which man perceived and approved of virtue, became the centerpiece of Scottish Common Sense Philosophy. Francis Hutcheson, by situating Shaftesbury's moral sense within Lockean psychology, assured its dissemination. Arising from our reflection upon original perceptions, he argued, the individual received "amiable or disagreeable ideas of actions." The moral sense not only discerned right from wrong, but provided benevolent impulses directing us to perform what was right. Why, then, did some men commit wicked acts? Just as some are born blind or visually impaired, so others have a defective, or failed, moral sense.41 By the 1840s and 1850s, "there was a growing conviction that crime was a disease of the finer sensibilities, to be prevented by improved education and social reform."42 Social reform, however, began and ended with the individual.

Earlier strategies of reform had changed by the 1840s and 1850s. Moral suasion and the effort to impose on the metropolis the social controls of rural America had proven inefficacious. Increasingly, antebellum reformers turned to "morality by persuasion and morality by

compulsion."43 They also adopted ever more secular means of effecting the reform of the individual. Rather than the threat of damnation, they held out the carrot of economic success for the convert and the whip of physical torments for the sinner. The drunk would know the horrors of delirium-tremens; the morally wayward prison and the gallows. Particularly in the cause of temperance, politicians and the law were appealed to.44 Both society and sinner were best helped, it was concluded, by preserving society. It was a solution born out of anxiety. David Rothman argues, "The idea of the [penitentiary] took form in the perception, in fact the fear, that once stable social relationships were now in the process of unraveling."45 Similarly, Paul Boyer finds that by the 1840s the two impetuses that "would continue to shape urban charitable work for decades, [were] that poverty was (1) a massive threat to social stability and (2) the direct consequence of individual moral depravity."46 Yet it is important to note that their anxiety also reflected a profound optimism. "These reformers," Carroll Rosenberg notes, "desired both to

44 Clifford argues that "in the two decades following 1835," reform efforts that did not have the aid of politicians were failures. He uses the temperance cause to make his point. See, 136.
save souls and to control social stress--but saw the two goals as essentially the same thing."  

In 1857 an analysis by the managers of the American Bible Society separated the urban poor into the pious and those given to "vicious indulgences." "These evils and not external economic conditions forced poor people into crowded tenements, where they were 'congregated in filth and bound together by the horrid ties of vicious and beastly appetites. In their sensual sty the man is transformed into the brute."  

Paul Boyer notes that neither "sentimentality toward the poor" nor "distress over their physical sufferings" guided mid-nineteenth century attempts to "solve" urban poverty. Robert Hartley, who founded the Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor (AICP) in 1843, believed the causes of poverty were "chiefly moral," and "admit only moral remedies." Hartley's solution was to send his members to the homes of urban poor to both monitor and to awaken them "to the flaws of character that underlay their degradation and to lead them to change their ways."  

The AICP proved popular, at least among its members. In several cities, volunteers and employees of benevolent societies conducted systematic visitations, compiled a census of America's urban poor, and worked to "inculcate

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47 Rosenberg, Religion and the Rise of the American City, 9. Rosenberg, quite properly in my opinion, goes on to state, "Emphasis by historians on the religious benevolence of the period as a form of social control thus creates an artificial distinction, a misinterpretation of the Jacksonian worldview, by assuming a nonexistent distinction between the realms of the secular and the spiritual, and thus, by a kind of necessary extension, seeing as conspiratorial design a common vision of the good society."

48 Griffin, Their Brothers Keeper, 50.

49 Boyer, Urban Masses and Moral Order, 89.

50 Ibid., 90.
habits of industry, and cleanliness."\(^5^1\) These interfering, self-appointed
moral stewards reflect the turn towards the reform tactics of compulsion.

"If ever there was a curse when a Government should interfere
between parent and child," the popular Protestant divine Henry Ward
Beecher argued, "that seems to be the one, where children are started in
life with an education in vice."\(^5^2\) In *The Sanitary Conditions of the
Laboring Population of New York* (1845), the physician John Griscom
concluded, "Men's passions are kept in check by the restrictions of the
society in which they live. Remove these checks . . . and the evil passions
will rise." Conversely, enforce those checks and the passions are
restrained.\(^5^3\) The newsman and reformer Horace Greeley advocated laws
to regulate personal conduct, believing the depraved portion of the urban
lower classes "morally certain to prove unfaithful to their duties as parents,
children, etc."\(^5^4\) Believing the urban poor depraved, the antebellum
reformer viewed them as a threat to society, and increasingly looked to the
state for protection.

In the 1830s and 1840s American reformers began to see an answer
to all manner of social ills in incarceration. David Rothman's *The
Discovery of the Asylum* examines the increased use of prisons, insane
asylums, and work houses. For present purposes, just two aspects of
Rothman's argument need to be noted: that the advocates of the asylum
aimed to alter the degraded individual, and that they understood the

\(^{51}\) Ibid., 91.
\(^{52}\) Henry Ward Beecher, *Lectures to Young Men on Various Important
Subjects* (New York: 1846), 42.
\(^{53}\) John Griscom, *The Sanitary Conditions of the Laboring Population of
New York, with Suggestions for its Improvement* (New York: 1845), 23.
\(^{54}\) Quoted in Boyer's *Urban Masses and Moral Order*, 76.
individual to be the point of departure for any cure. Rothman writes of
these advocates that "their solutions as exemplified in the asylum routine
looked more to individual reformation . . . than to an altered group
consciousness."55 Indeed, the individual was occasionally understood as
the best means to effect reform. Rothman characterizes the point of
isolating the convict in the Philadelphia penitentiary as follows: "Thrown
upon his own innate sentiments, with no evil example to lead him astray,
and with kindness and proper instruction at hand to bolster his resolution,
the criminal would start his rehabilitation."56 As the Boston Prison
Discipline Society explained it, the convict "surrendered body and soul, to
be experimented upon."57 In short, it was something within the degraded
individual that interested these reformers. Rothman characterizes the goal
directing antebellum insane asylums as being to "arrange and administer a
disciplined routine that would curb [the] uncontrolled impulses" of the
patient.58 Again, the problem lay within the individual, with his innate
sentiments, his impulses.

Rothman makes quite clear that the reformers he examines were
aware of the potentially damaging influences external surroundings could
have on individuals. But the evidence he introduces never satisfactorily
answers the question, Did they believe corrupting circumstances ensnare
otherwise blameless people, or were weak individuals felled by them? It is
a distinction Rothman frequently blurs. Of prison reformers he writes,
they were "[c]onvinced that deviance was primarily the result of the

55 Rothman, The Discovery of the Asylum, xxxix.
56 Ibid., 86.
57 Ibid., 84.
58 Ibid., 133.
corruptions pervading the community," and quotes as evidence part of a prayer Samuel Gridly Howe composed for prisoners, "do not surround me with bad associates and with evil influences, do not subject me to unnecessary temptation." 59 Howe's imaginary convict seems to be one tempted by evil, not compelled by it. This confusion is again apparent in Rothman's discussion of the reformers' beliefs concerning the causes of insanity. He quotes one authority who states, "If the exciting causes of the disease are avoided, the strongest predisposition need not result in insanity." From this Rothman concludes, "The 'exciting causes' were the key to the problem." 60 Rather, it would seem, the "predisposition" is what makes the "exciting causes" a problem at all. Rothman must finally attempt to explain why these environmentalist reformers were so eager to preserve society and so unwilling to set about altering it. He argues, "the very magnitude of the problem ruled out a frontal assault." He goes on to pose the following question on behalf of the proponents of the asylum: "Where would one begin to limit ambition and intellectual independence . . . to alter the economic, political, religious, and social character of the new republic?" 61 George Lippard, for one, thought he had an answer.

It would, however, be misleading to suggest that what separates these authors from contemporary reformers was environmentalism. Rothman is correct in noting during the 1830s, 1840s, and 1850s an increased awareness of the causative role of a person's surroundings on his character. But neither the proponents of the asylum nor the authors were in this way unique. The theologian Horace Bushnell spoke of the infant as a "mere

59 Ibid., 82-3.
60 Ibid., 126.
61 Ibid., 128.
passive lump" awaiting the conscious and unconscious influences of those around him.62 The Reverend. E. H. Chapin in *Moral Aspects of City Life* (1856) tentatively asserted, "I do not say, then, that circumstances are all; but that the circumstances are mighty, and must be modified and removed before the higher influences . . . of Religion can effectively work or find admittance."63 Paul Boyer hints at the difficulty in using the term environmentalism as a defining characteristic of any reformer of the 1840s and 1850s. He notes the AICP occasionally involved itself in efforts to improve public housing, build public baths, and launched pure-milk campaigns. "But these environmentalist concerns," he notes, "were rooted in the movement's fundamental moral purpose." An attempt to disentangle environmental causes from moral character flaws, Boyer argues, would have seemed incoherent to Robert Hartley and his associates.64

It is the "mystery and misery" authors' less sophisticated understanding of human nature that separates them from the majority of antebellum reformers. The criminal and the pauper, in the authors' estimation, were simply noble workers forced by economic oppression into their current degradation and merely awaited the opportunity to exhibit their virtue and industry. In contrast, most antebellum reform efforts were informed by evangelical revivalism, which in turn was informed by a faith in Christian perfectionism and an increasingly complex understanding of human psychology. Between 1840 and 1857 a revival fervor galvanized urban religious life and reform efforts, bringing together an

interdenominational brotherhood of concerned citizens and clergy who strove to "precipitate a national Pentecost which they hoped would baptize America in the Holy Spirit and in some mystic manner destroy the evils of slavery, poverty, and greed."65 Glenn A. Hewitt's study of how several antebellum theologians related their soteriologies to ethics gives some specificity to this anticipated "mystical" regeneration of America. What Hewitt demonstrates is that an increasingly complicated understanding of human psychology was brought to bear on the long-held belief that a profound alteration within the individual was what permitted him to act morally. The regenerated Christian, regardless of whether his conversion was considered utterly the result of supernatural intervention or in large measure due to his own agency, was understood as someone inwardly transformed and so able to manifest a certain morality in life and action.

The authors' degraded, idealized worker needed a farm and tools, or, more drastically, control over the production and distribution of goods to end his or her degradation. This secular solution stands in stark contrast to the perceived needs of the unregenerated sinner. "The fact is, our prime object should be, to induce the sinner to obey God. His comfort ought to be with us, and with him, but a secondary object." So Charles Grandison Finney argues in his sermon, "False Comforts for Sinners."66 It is a small jump from this to the AICP's guiding aim to "not merely . . . alleviate wretchedness, but to reform character."67 Similarly, Clifford S. Griffin writes of the "moral stewards" who led the "Big Eight" antebellum

65 Smith, Revivalism and Social Reform, 62.
67 Boyer, Urban Masses and Moral Order, 90.
benevolent societies, "The core of the American trusteeship was the obligation to make people conform to a particular Protestant interpretation of the gospel."68 As Carroll Rosenberg notes, the urban reformers of the 1840s and 1850s simply assumed that on the heels of a consciousness of grace more "mundane benefits would be garnered inevitably."69 Behind the illiberal reform tactics of compulsion was a narrow understanding, drawn from antebellum theology, of what permitted and entailed moral behavior. The arguments of Charles Finney, Charles Hodge, and Horace Bushnell are illustrative. While these three theologians differed widely as to the importance of the sinner's ability to influence his regeneration, all understood regeneration as a transformation within the individual that allowed him to recognize right from wrong and to invariably perform what was morally right.

For Charles Finney, once a sinner had abandoned a disposition for self and accepted a disposition for God, unerringly correct, self-regulated moral behavior followed.

I hold that a change in the ultimate intention or ruling preference of the mind, necessarily carries with it the whole man; that the affections, emotions, outward life, are all carried and controlled, directly or indirectly, by the will and hence a change in the supreme preference or ultimate intention of the will, necessarily carries with it a change of feeling, purpose, desire, affection, effort, and makes the regenerate man a 'new creature.'70

For all their differences, Charles Hodge argues much the same thing.

68 Griffin, Their Brothers' Keepers, 9.
69 Rosenberg, Religion and the Rise of the American City, 8.
70 Hewitt, Regeneration and Morality, 31.
There is in regeneration a change effected in the state of the soul which accounts for its perceptions, purposes and feelings being different from what they were before, and for their so continuing. The cause of this difference is sometimes called a new heart, or grace, or the spirit, or the new man, or the renewal of the inner man.71

Regeneration, then, is the assuming of a holy "principle in the soul" that disposes the individual to perform "holy acts."72 While accenting the role of "Christian character" and "nurturing," Bushnell arrives at a similar conclusion. The true Christian, he argues, is in a state of mind that cleaves instinctively, and by hidden sympathies, to all that is in the Lord's person. Where the reasons of understanding are short of reach, and ethical solutions of all kinds doubtful, he is drawn by the indelible affinities of his heart, into easy coincidence with all that Christ means for him, and so into certain divine morality.73

Finney's belief in the possibility of the "Benevolent Empire" of the postmillennium turned on his belief that all regenerated individuals would follow the same disposition for God, would have the same moral compass, the same ethical North and South. Likewise for Bushnell: once the Christian's "full surrender" to God and reception of a character of moral goodness, he "will as naturally communicate good as the sun communicates his beams."74 At least in the case of adherents of Finney and Bushnell, the proposition was highly liberating. An act of man, in Finney's case the act of turning to God and in Bushnell's case the act of nurturing one's child

71 Ibid., 64.
72 Ibid., 63.
73 Ibid., 152.
74 Ibid., 148.
and fellows, could bring about perpetual adherence to unquestionably right moral laws "naturally." Here was a powerful prescription to encourage humanitarian concern. It was not, however, a prescription for tolerance.
Conclusion: "Material Environmentalism"

Ask George Lippard when the prostitute was not accountable for her sin and he had a ready answer. She is guiltless when "Virtue by custom of the large city, only bears injustice, starvation, and cankered lungs," when the "Poor Girl, tired of struggling for the bitter crust . . . while the rich have their banquets . . . sacrifice[s] her priceless virtue for bread, clothing, and something like a home."¹ The same question would have struck Charles Grandison Finney as absurd. Glenn Hewitt notes, "Finney's position permits no ambiguity. . . . A person is either saved or damned. A decision must be made for sin completely or for God completely."² For the regenerated, material circumstances could never interfere with discerning or performing the good. "[J]ust change [the] governing purpose and you will find obedience [to God's law] equally natural and equally easy in all its executive acts. It will . . . become natural to please God in everything."³ Likewise for Horace Bushnell. The individual imbued with Christian character could not fail to be moral. "What we call virtue," he states, "is now no more a will-work, or a something done according to law, but it is a continuous and living ingeneration of God, who has thus become a divine impulse or quickening in us."⁴ Voluntarism joined to a faith in

¹ See George Lippard, Memoirs of a Preacher; or, Mysteries of the Pulpit (Philadelphia: 1864), 125, and David S. Reynolds, ed., George Lippard: Prophet of Protest. Writings of an American Radical (New York: Peter Lang, 1989), 58 respectively.
³ Ibid., 30.
⁴ Ibid., 149.
Christian perfectionism strongly encouraged the belief that unvaryingly correct moral behavior was not only possible but something that could be induced in, or nurtured in, the sinner.

What legitimated the reform tactics of compulsion was the widely held belief on the part of theologians and reformers that what was good and virtuous was both knowable and universal. The antebellum American moral philosopher Thomas C. Upham argues, "We are constituted intellectually in such a manner, that, whenever occasions of right and wrong occur...the ideas of RIGHT and WRONG naturally and necessarily arise within us."5 At least potentially, all individuals could both know and agree upon right and wrong, and so act accordingly. Numerous things intervened, from vicious habits to damaged moral faculties. The greatest threat, however, was posed by the individual's sensual appetites and passions. Individuals were sinful because, Upham states, "The Appetites, which before had their appropriate place and offices, have now broken over their allotted limits, and are, on every hand, leading their victims into various forms of excess and debauch."6 The solution was obvious. Awaken in the degenerate their moral sensibilities, inculcate in them habits that would check their passions, make evident to all right from wrong, and error and misconduct would not occur.

It was this assumption that rooted the charity work of the 1840s and 1850s in a fundamentally moral purpose. For Robert Hartley and the Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor, to address external circumstances without first administering "moral remedies" would be to

5 Thomas C. Upham, Abridgement of Mental Philosophy (Delmar, New York: Scholar's Facsimiles and Reproductions, 1979), 133.
6 Ibid., 400.
ignore "the great inward sources of [the poor's] misery." Speaking to Boston's Society for the Prevention of Pauperism, the Reverend Robert C. Waterston recommended reformers not "aid persons in poverty," but instead "remove them out of it" by "inculcating temperance, frugality, and industry," which alone could lift them above their "idleness and sensuality," the causes of their "low and groveling life." Advising young men as to how to avoid degradation, Henry Ward Beecher concluded, "Your only recourse is to avoid the uprising of your giant passions." During an 1858 revival in New York City, Edwin F. Hatfield admonished the sinful, saying, "You seek to cast [your guilt] off--either wholly or in part. You cannot believe, that the difficulty is entirely with yourself." The Reverend E. H. Chapin summed up the prevailing belief when, while admitting that "circumstances are mighty," he nevertheless asked, "Do not accuse me of being merely an outside reformer holding the theory that all man requires to make him stand erect is a few circumstantial props." Rather, "everything grows from the center outward; and so humanity grows from moral and intellectual aspirations."

The authors reviewed were "outside reformers," and it is as such that their environmentalist logic needs to be qualified. It also needs to be

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8 Quoted in Boyer, 92.
12 Ibid., 120.
recalled that they arrived at their environmentalism through a polemic against America's rising class of idle wealthy. They were not environmentalists by conviction. They nowhere claim allegiance to a school of thought that embraces the idea that all individuals are products of their circumstances, or an aesthetic theory that assumes values to arise from facts. Their intellectual debts were few and miscellaneous. None of the authors reviewed were adamant Owenites or Fourierists. What gives their novels and arguments coherence is less their environmentalist logic than their adherence to the principles of producer ideology. Yet, it was their adherence to those principles while exposing causes of poverty and crime in the mid-nineteenth century metropolis that caused them to articulate an environmentalist logic. The ideology held that all wealth came from labor, that producers were virtuous and non-producers villainous, and that the good society required the self-sufficiency of the virtuous. When these journalists-turned-novelists examined the antebellum metropolis, they discovered the virtuous were degraded and the villainous were enjoying luxury. They concluded that labor was being robbed and society was corrupt. The currently degraded worker by definition would not voluntarily choose degradation, and, only given the means, would evidence morality and industry.

Their polemic against an aristocracy of wealth entailed shifting responsibility from the degraded individual and to the society in which the sinful committed their sins. They adopted a rhetorical strategy that presumed the prostitute and thief to be noble and virtuous at heart, and helpless, and so blameless, in their degradation. Physical circumstances were such that the degraded worker's ability to act and choose was so curtailed that his or her conduct became determined by their environment.
Further, this corrupting environment, the authors argue, is a consequence of a society that protects the designs of a self-interested few, an untitled aristocracy of wealth. "If she had been able to live by her honorable labor that poor girl would rather have died than have sprung into the dead sea of pollution and infamy."13 Criminals are "forced into crime and depravity, by hunger and cold."14 What was it that forced them? "Among the many forms of Slavery which curse the earth none is half so frightful, half so appalling as the Wage Slavery which, in the large cities of the North, crush [workers] into a life of shame."15 "Are they not terrible foes to grapple with: Low Wages, Wages Slowly Paid, and Wages Never Paid at all? .... [T]he men of business ... swindle their work-people in this way, and thus drive them, step by step, into the dark avenues of guilt and shame."16

Deprived by a corrupt society of the "means and the opportunity of being honest and acquiring a livelihood without degradation," blameless, virtuous workers faced starvation.17 "The great truth broke in upon her, like a stream of light breaking through the windows of a dark chamber, that Want, as well as Error, helps swell the cyprian tide and hurls in it thousands, yearly, to keep the dance a-going in the prison, the brothel, and the hell."18 Basic physiological needs made a mockery of virtue. "I know that want will melt, as sunlight melts the first frost, the strongest courage

14 Ibid., 28.
17 George Foster, *Cello; or, New York Above Ground and Under Ground* (New York, 1850), 91.
of man's great heart, and make it yield, on terms the lowliest, humblest and most abject, for bread.\textsuperscript{19} Physiological needs also denied an individual the ability to exercise choice. "Without money and without means . . . I had to make a choice of theft or starvation."\textsuperscript{20} "The poor man has no choice, he is the victim of circumstances."\textsuperscript{21} "It was a choice simply between war and the infancy of begging."\textsuperscript{22} "[T]he choice [of living by gambling] is not one which either you or I would make, were other paths fairly open to our view."\textsuperscript{23}

I would suggest qualifying the authors environmentalist logic as "material environmentalism." That is, the authors' environmentalist logic assumes the ability to meet basic physiological needs to be a precondition of self-determination, and that people are determined by their environment to the degree it denies them any choice as to how they can satisfy those needs. Ironically, at the center of the authors' belief that certain individuals were determined by society was a concern with self-determination. Yet in this they merely reflect the period during which they wrote. Between the 1820s and 1850s, Robert Wiebe argues, "an exploration of possibilities turned into a declaration of rights," and an American passion for personal liberties and self-determination "generated a revolution in choices that

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\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 146. \\
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 112. \\
\textsuperscript{21} Ingraham, \textit{Miseries of New York; or, The Burglar and the Counsellor} (Boston: 1844), 11. \\
\textsuperscript{22} Foster, \textit{Celio}, 91. \\
\textsuperscript{23} George Thompson, \textit{Mysteries and Miseries of Philadelphia} (New York: n.d.), 19.
\end{flushleft}
transformed the character of American society." The authors reviewed participated in this exploration of the limits of personal freedom. They protested what they perceived as an artificial limit. Poverty, rather than being a moral disease, was a form of economic oppression. Where other reformers saw a moral or theological problem, the authors saw a secular one.

In articulating this belief these authors anticipate the arguments of the social reformers who follow them forty years later. The individual did not need to be reformed, society needed to be transformed. This was the argument they put into wide currency through their novels. But while the authors anticipate, they did not influence through their novels subsequent reformers. It is likely because the authors were involved in a polemical argument particular to a place and time that their "mystery and misery" tales so rapidly lost their audience on the eve of disunion. No doubt the impending crises drew attention away from the iniquities of the metropolis, but also those iniquities, so glaring after the Panic of 1837 and subsequent depression, had steadily improved. As the most popular author writing in the genre, George Lippard is emblematic. His popularity as a novelist dissipated after his death in 1854 and after the Civil War reprints of his novels attracted few readers and sank into obscurity. But while his novels were rapidly forgotten, his solutions were not. Not only did his Brotherhood of the Union continue to grow, but he had a direct influence on the ideas and individuals who formed the Knights of Labor.25 The

25 David Reynolds' notes that at least one founding member of the Knights had previously belonged to Lippard's Brotherhood, and that in the
authors are remarkable less for the titillating tales they told than for their reactions to antebellum change, and the realization that the forces altering the physical and cultural landscape of America were fundamentally secular and required a fundamentally secular response.

judgement of George E. McNeill, a labor historian writing in the early 1890s, there was a strong connection between Lippard and Uriah S. Stephens, the first Master Workman of the Knights. Reynolds goes on to state that, "the Knights of Labor, in its early stages, was virtually a carbon copy of Lippard's organization," and draws parallels between Lippard's Brotherhood and the National Labor Union (1867-72) and the AFL-CIO. See Prophet of Protest, 38-42.
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