Dangerous Provisions

Victorian Food Fraud

Every article capable of adulteration is made a cheat. Your wine is nearly all spurious; your brandy is coloured whisky; your tea is mixed with sloe leaves, and coloured blue by poisonous dyes; your ground coffee is mixed with peas and chicory; your tobacco is made of mullein, oak, and cabbage leaf; your beer is drugged with cocculus indicus; your bread is made with alum, soap, lard, potash, and plaster of Paris; your salt is stone; your sugar is sand; your ground spices are anything that comes handy.

—G. P. R. James, *The Smuggler* (1845)

As the previous chapter suggests, food proved a complicated hazard for the servant-keeping household. Here I turn to food adulteration, a gastronomic problem that potentially affected all Victorian households. Chemists and merchants invented the processes of adulteration as a way to increase sales and profits. What began as an indisputably human enterprise to boost earnings resulted in mute merchandise that brought adulteration silently into the Victorian home and, more noisily, into Victorian popular culture. A startlingly prevalent problem, food fraud proved a popular topic at mid-century when Parliament appointed the committee that attempted to draft the first food safety laws in England. The Parliamentary hearings produced a furor that initiated a national campaign to educate consumers and to warn merchants away from tampering with comestible products. Those efforts cultivated a stringently paranoid approach to reading, perhaps best epitomized by the scientific instrument the Parliamentary Committee extolled, namely, the microscope.

That approach conflicts fairly radically with the pleasure-based consumption of narrative I discuss in chapter 1. To some degree, the difference in
attitude had to do with the fact that the capital at risk in food fraud was the consumer’s own body. While various sardonic texts engage playfully with the perils of adulteration as a symbol of the country’s pervasive market corruption, generally the pleasures associated with reading, and reading about adulteration, derived from the practices of detection. Christina Rossetti’s “Goblin Market” offers a model for the complicated reading strategies “serious” domestic fraud promoted. At the close of this chapter, I turn to Mrs. J. H. Riddell’s 1866 novel *The Race for Wealth* to discuss how food adulteration worked to signal the danger of fraud in more popular plots.

**Commercial Poetry**

Like many Victorian texts, “Goblin Market” offers salient critical commentary about the deceptions and seductions of the capitalist marketplace. However, its scholarly history is largely silent about the materiality of both the poem’s luscious fruit and its clamorous market. Most early reviewers read Rossetti’s fantastic parable as parable, interpreting the goblin merchants’ remarkable wares as a bushel of Edenic apples, and the poem itself as a tale of sin and redemption. More recent critics again read the poem as metaphor, but as a more complicated fable of falling, in which Laura’s appetite tells a story of sexual difference not only between genders but also between women, the fallen and the pure. As Terrence Holt notes, “The emphasis in all of these readings has been on the goblins and the issues of gender and sexuality they seem to represent, while the ‘market’ of the title has received little attention” (1990, 51). Only recently have critics read “Goblin Market” as a tale of the market and, to the best of my knowledge, only three, Paula Marantz Cohen, Deborah Thompson, and Richard Menke, have heeded the goblins’ cries and bought the goblins’ fruit as actual food. If, as most critics have argued, the poem is a parable, I want in this chapter to emphasize it as one that attends carefully to literal economic and cultural concerns. Reading the goblins’ fruit as food allows us to cash in on the promise of the poem’s original title, to have “A Peep at the Goblins” and the Victorian spaces they haunt.

The luxurious inventory of the poem’s opening passage overtly invites materialist readings. I quote it in full to underscore its profound fusion of domestic and corporate concerns, its melding of dangers among goblin and fiscal markets:

Morning and evening
Maids heard the goblins cry:
“Come buy our orchard fruits,
Come buy, come buy:
Apples and quinces,
Lemons and oranges,
Plump unpecked cherries—
Melons and raspberries,
Bloom-down-cheeked peaches,
Swart-headed mulberries,
Wild free-born cranberries,
Crab-apples, dewberries,
Pine-apples, blackberries,
Apricots, strawberries—
All ripe together
In summer weather—
Morns that pass by,
Fair eves that fly;
Come buy, come buy;
Our grapes fresh from the vine,
Pomegranates full and fine,
Dates and sharp bullaces,
Rare pears and greengages,
Damsons and bilberries,
Taste them and try:
Currants and gooseberries,
Bright-fire-like barberries,
Figs to fill your mouth,
Citrons from the South,
Sweet to tongue and sound to eye,
Come buy, come buy.” (1–31)

As the goblins’ chants of “Come buy” call attention to their wares, “Goblin Market” highlights the impact of the market on the lives of those denizens who lived in its thick and on its margins. Marrying fetishized foodstuff with the more amorphous machinations of economic development, Rossetti’s first lines clearly link her fairy tale with the concerns of the modern world. Foregrounding the Victorian market’s propensity for offering sensuous, indeed charmed, commodities, the vocabulary that frames the poem’s pastoral story is, as Elizabeth Helsinger notes, “remarkably mercantile” (1991, 903). Terrence Holt observes how “Economic language and metaphors, terms of finance and commerce (‘buy,’ ‘offer,’ ‘merchant,’ ‘stock,’ ‘money,’ ‘golden,’
‘precious,’ ‘sell,’ ‘fee,’ ‘hawking,’ ‘coin,’ ‘rich,’ etc.) permeate the poem” (1990, 51). Further, the lush adjectives the goblins assign to their catalog of fruit (“plump unpecked,” “bloom-down-cheeked,” “fresh from the vine,” and simply “rare”), alongside its simple abundance and the hypnotic rhythm of their song, give this harvest an irresistible, mouth-watering appeal.

“Goblin Market” tells the story of two sisters, Lizzie, who abstains from eating the goblins’ fruit, and Laura, who succumbs to the goblins’ lavish, seductive voices and comes to buy and to eat. Although Rossetti encapsulates the prevailing wisdom of the period in Lizzie, the abstemious sister who advises suspicion, prudence, and a tight-lipped approach to the world of trade, she is clearly sympathetic to Laura’s susceptibility as well, writing that she “heard a voice like voice of doves / Cooing all together: / They sounded kind and full of loves” (77–79).

Alas for Laura, the fruits of this market, though “Sweet to tongue and sound to eye,” have markedly undesirable effects (30). Lured by the merchants’ promises of rich delights, “sweet-tooth Laura” trades a golden curl for her fill of fruit only to fall desperately ill: “Her hair grew thin and grey: / She dwindled, as the fair full moon doth turn / To swift decay and burn / Her fire away” (277–80). Like the poem’s cautionary figure of Jeanie, who had also eaten and then “dwindled and grew grey; / Then fell with the first snow” (156–57), Laura succumbs to a mysterious illness, one capable of bringing a healthy young woman to the grave: Jeanie “Fell sick and died / In her gay prime” (315–16), and Laura seems fated to follow her.

Although we might productively read this strange illness as metaphor for sin, sexual fall, or capitalism, I want to suggest the profits of a more literal reading. Specifically, the widespread problem of food adulteration provides an apt framework for this tale of a young woman sickened by the food she consumes. An 1855 pamphlet, *How to Detect Adulteration in Our Daily Food and Drink*, explicitly states that “traders have been proved to be the coadjutors of death, and it is not to be doubted that the physical strength, the stature, perhaps the moral dignity of our people, have all deteriorated under the steady action of impure food, impure water, and poisonous preparations” (3). Food poisoning was no longer a rare occurrence, and the story of a young girl eating beautiful food only to sicken unto death was not so unusual as one might imagine.
Thus, as the breadth and complexity of its scholarship suggests, “Goblin Market” is no simple pastoral story. In reading this tale of sumptuous fruit, dubious merchants, and near-fatal illness, I understand both “Goblin Market” and the literature of adulteration with which I contextualize it to be concrete and specific examples of a more widespread condition that equally infected food, economics, and social exchange. Through the story of Laura’s illness and recovery, Rossetti makes overt and narrative the poem’s subtext about the home and the market’s operations within it—a point she emphasizes by making these merchants brothers who sell their wares to cohabiting sisters. Although the sisters live in bucolic space that seems well removed from the market and its interests, the merchant brothers’ capacity to invade and infect that home life emphasizes the proximity of economic and domestic concerns. Adulteration was a serious issue, touching actual material goods, but further, as the Victorian biologist Arthur Hill Hassall noted, it “is . . . a great national question, closely affecting the pocket of the consumer, the revenue, and the health and morals of the people” (Adulterations Detected 1857, 17).

More than just an epidemiological problem, food adulteration entered the field of literature, thereby helping to shape private responses to public fraud. In Mary Price, for example, one of Mary’s many masters is a shopkeeper, whom she discovers chuckling to himself as he adulterates his goods. “There!” he says. “I have put the sloe-leaves into all that tea—the sand into this sugar—the turmeric into that mustard—the potato-flour into the arrow-root—the prepared starch into that cocoa—the chicory into the bean coffee—and the stuff out of the deal box into the ground coffee” (Reynolds 1852, 1: 43). Mr. Messiter compounds the horror of Mary’s discovery by mixing it with religious deception. Mr. Messiter had declared that he was going down to the shop to commune with himself in a pious manner, [but] had in reality taken advantage of that leisure time on the Sunday morning to do, as he expressed it, “a pretty good hour’s business.” And what was that business? how had his Sunday morning been employed? In a pursuit which I should call the most wicked dishonesty, mixing improper things with his goods—in fact practising the most scandalous adulterations! (ibid., 1: 44; emphasis in original)

The adulteration of food accompanies an adulteration of both spirit and business, serving to mark Mr. Messiter’s descent not only into the shop, but into a state of “wicked dishonesty.” Food fraud serves a similar function in Tennyson’s “Maud” (1855), in which it appears within the speaker’s opening litany as a marker of widespread social corruption. “But these are the days
of advance, the works of the men of mind,” / Tennyson’s speaker laments, “When who but a fool would have faith in a tradesman’s ware or his word?” (25–26); three stanzas later, he observes that “chalk and alum and plaster are sold to the poor for bread” (39). Alongside pamphlets, articles, and full-length books on the subject, literary publications of the 1850s testify to an established concern about short weights and measures and a new consciousness about the dangers of adulteration.

**Adulterations Detected**

Food adulteration was already a popular concern in the eighteenth century and, by the early 1800s, various texts were available about spurious additions to the British daily meal. For example, in 1820, Frederick Accum published *A Treatise on Adulterations of Food . . . and Methods of Detecting Them*. Accum’s premise was that, although it was only one small manifestation of a larger quandary within the British market economy, food adulteration was the worst of all schools of fraud:

> Of all possible nefarious traffic and deception, practised by mercenary dealers, that of adulterating the articles intended for human food with ingredients deleterious to health, is the most criminal, and, in the mind of every honest man, must excite feelings of regret and disgust. Numerous facts are on record, of human food, contaminated with poisonous ingredients, having been vended to the public; and the annals of medicine record tragical events ensuing from the use of such food. (iv)

Accum stresses food adulteration as a particularly virulent form of contamination because it crosses so many boundaries. This “nefarious traffic” drives into the consumer’s body, destroying corporeal integrity as well as commercial trust. It is fitting, then, that his outrage focuses on fraud’s incursion into the home, on “mercenary dealers” who taint health and hearth simultaneously by poisoning the private spaces of the body and the supper table. Although Accum writes ostensibly in protection of “the public,” he does so from a markedly private perspective.

Accum’s treatise was still current in the mid-nineteenth century, when food adulteration became sufficiently prevalent to provoke action by an “Analytical Sanitary Commission.” The commission’s discoveries, which appeared in the *Lancet* between 1851 and 1854, were so unsettling that Parliament formed a Select Committee in 1855 to inquire into the situation. The reports were
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horrifying. Arthur Hill Hassall, the committee’s star witness and the author of the *Lancet* articles, details the extent of the problem in his 1857 text, *Adulterations Detected*:

With the potted meats and fish, anchovies, red sauces or cayenne, taken at breakfast, [the average person] would consume more or less bole Armenian, Venetian red, red lead, or even bisulphuret of mercury. At dinner, with his curry or cayenne, he would run the chance of a second dose of lead or mercury; with the pickles, bottled fruits and vegetables, he would be nearly sure to have copper administered to him; while if he partook of bon bons at dessert, there is no telling what number of poisonous pigments he might consume. Again, in his tea, of mixed or green, he would certainly not escape without the administration of a little Prussian blue, and it might be worse things: if he were a snuff-taker, he would be pretty sure to be putting up his nostrils from time to time, small quantities of either some ferruginous earth, bichromate of potash, chromate of lead, or red lead: finally, if he indulged himself with a glass or so of grog before going to bed, he would incur the risk of having the coats of his stomach burned and irritated with tincture of capsicum or essence of cayenne. . . . This is no fanciful or exaggerated picture, but one based upon the results derived from the repeated analysis of different articles as furnished to the consumer. (22)

To be fair, *fresh* fruit rarely produced such dangerous consequences as those Laura suffers, but potted fruits were perilous. As the author of *How to Detect Adulteration* notes, grocers had an “abominable practice of adulterating all green fruits with copper. Gooseberries, greengages, olives, limes and rhubarb are almost invariably coppered to give them a false colour. The purchaser of these fruits is advised to abstain from any that have a bright green look, for it is impossible to preserve greenness in preparations of this kind without the use of copper; but a bad colour is preferable to poison” (1855, 22–23). Further, a particular danger to “sweet-tooth” girls like Laura was colored sugar confectionery, which proved to be the most toxic food source of all. According to Hassall, candy was so powerfully and so frequently adulterated that it might be considered straight poison.

The principal colours employed are yellows, reds, including pink and scarlet, browns, purples, blues, and greens. Of the yellows it appeared that 59 were coloured with chromate of lead; 11 with gamboge; while the colour of the majority was confined to the surface, in many cases it was diffused equally throughout the whole mass of the sugar used. . . . In four samples, the colours
used were painted on with white lead, or carbonate of lead. . . . Scarcely a year passes without very serious accidents happening from the employment of poisonous pigments in confectionery; there are instances of persons who have been killed by them, and many more of persons who have been taken seriously ill. The chief consumption of such confectionery is among children, upon whom the effect of adulteration is likely to be much greater than upon a grown person. I remember the instance of a public dinner in Essex, in which a person died in consequence of eating some of the confectionery thus adulterated; and several other cases are recorded in the Lancet. (Adulteration of Food, Drink, and Drugs [1855], 25–26)

Although Rossetti’s Laura suffers from delirium, nausea, and hearing and visual problems, I don’t know that it’s necessary to link her malaise directly to lead poisoning: the dangers associated with sweets led to a plethora of perils. How to Detect Adulteration notes, “A sweetmeat shop is a juvenile paradise, where all the elements of human happiness are sold in cake, rock, comfit, and bolus; happiness, alas! but temporary, and to be paid for dearly, in spoilt appetites, ruined stomachs, pale looks, intestinal worms, and a long catalogue of ills, to which the termination is sometimes a coroner’s inquest” (1855, 19–20). Even the Sadleir inquest commented on the dangers of sweets. When the chemist defended himself against his sale to Sadleir, he noted that “essential oil of bitter almonds was sold by every confectioner in the kingdom.” The coroner replied sardonically, “A pleasant reflection for those who eat confectionery. (A laugh.) Some custards that I have seen I know have contained the essential oil of bitter almonds in poisonous quantities” (Evans 1859, 247–48).

Paranoid Reading

As the consumer seeking to purchase happiness, Rossetti’s hungry girl renders allegory actual: because food is a commodity one literally consumes, food adulteration makes material the grossest fears about capitalist corruption and thus justifies the most paranoid attitudes toward market culture in general. Many popular Victorian texts on food adulteration overtly linked comestible consumption with commodity consumption as a way of representing fraud as a pandemic problem. Adulterated food thus worked as a signifier that all commodities and people that vended them were potentially poisonous.

For example, popular cartoons like this one from Punch articulate an increasingly skeptical consumer class (see figure 3.1).
The incongruity between the child’s youth and her canny request forms the basis of both humor and social commentary: “If you please, sir, Mother says, will you let her have a quarter of a pound of your best tea to kill the rats with and an ounce of chocolate as would get rid of black beadles.” She asks for what she is likely to get, and the grocer’s stock of bole armenian, lead, and nux vomica testifies to his easy ability to fill such a bill. Other popular forms carried a similarly perspicacious tune; one ballad entitled “London Adulterations” lilts,

London tradesmen, ‘tis plain, at no roguery stop;  
They adulterate every thing they have in their shop:
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You must buy what they sell, and they sell what they please,
For they would if they could sell the moon for green Cheese.
    Sing Tantarumtara, what terrible rogues!

Imitation, 'tis well known, is now all the rage;
Every thing imitated is in this rare age;
Tea, Coffee, Beer, Butter, Gin, Milk—and in brief,
No doubt they'll soon imitate Mutton and Beef.

The Grocer sel[1]s ash leaves and sloe leaves for Tea
    Ting'd with Dutch pink and Verdigris just like Bohea,
What sloe Poison means slomon has now found out,
We shall all to a T. soon be poison'd no doubt. 14

The ballad endorses what it frames as a healthy mistrust in response to the marketplace. As a commentary on consumerism, “London Adulterations” works from the specific—cheese, tea, coffee, beer, butter, gin, milk, mutton, and beef—to draw conclusions about the general state of the market: “Every thing” is adulterated or imitated, and “We shall all . . . soon be poison'd.” The market here seems limitless, without either physical or moral boundaries; the tradesmen “at no roguery stop,” poisoned goods pass from shop to kitchen to body, and even the moon may be brought to sale, not glowing and desirable in its own right, but rather as false cheese. Furthermore, because “imitation . . . is now all the rage,” one can never be quite sure what one is getting—or, perhaps, one can be pretty sure one is getting poisoned—hence the embedded tragicomedy in the Punch girl’s request for “tea to kill the rats with.”

The ballad figures this tea as “ash leaves and sloe leaves . . . Ting’d with Dutch pink and Verdigris,” which references another important aspect of adulteration. The Parliamentary Committee discovered not only that bread, flour, milk, and other such staples were cut with adulterants such as alum, chalk, and sawdust, but also that additives for the enhancement of appearance were contributing a new and different venue for corruption. In other words, the issue was no longer simply one of increasing quantity by cutting “pure” substance; it had grown to include a primary feature of merchandising, namely, that of increasing apparent desirability or value. Not only were merchants treating their bottled fruits and vegetables with copper and other metals (as in the example, above, of greengages, gooseberries, olives, limes, and rhubarb); but, in the attempt to make their wares more marketworthy, they added brick dust to cayenne, Bole Armenian and Venetian Red to anchovies, lobsters, shrimps, and tomato sauce, and Chromate of Lead to custard, egg powders, and, as we
have seen, colored sugar confectionery (Hassall 1857, 11–17).

Rossetti’s poem reflects this emphasis. The fruit is “bloom-down-cheeked,” “full and fine,” “Bright-fire-like” and “sound to eye,” yet its substance is rather problematic. Laura claims, “I ate and ate my fill, / Yet my mouth waters still” (“Goblin Market,” 165–66); and indeed she gets less satisfaction and more trouble than she had bargained for. Behind its apparent wholesomeness, the goblins’ fruit proves decidedly sinister. Testifying before the Parliamentary committee, the chemist Alphonse Normandy commented on such deceptive appearances within the context of capitalism:

At present competition, instead of being what it ought, a competition of skill as to who shall produce the best article at the cheapest price, is now really a competition as to who shall adulterate with the greatest cleverness. What a tradesman tries to do now, is not to gain a victory over his neighbours by supplying either a better article or the same article at a cheaper price, but his endeavour is, “How shall I take my neighbour’s custom from him by offering an article which will look as well, but which will cost me less?” (Adulteration of Food, Drink, and Drugs [1855], 85; emphasis added)

Within the tiny space of “Goblin Market,” we find many “article[s] which . . . look as well” but are far from what they promise to be. In fact, nothing is quite what it seems. This is strange fruit; the merchants are “cat-faced,” “rat-paced,” “obtuse and furry,” and prone to disappearance; and the maidens are more desiring and knowing than your average girls. In both hermeneutic structure and content, “Goblin Market” discourages faith in appearances, primarily through the vehicle of the canny Lizzie, who cautions Laura not to “peep” at goblin men. Even Laura asks early in the poem, “Who knows upon what soil they fed / Their hungry thirsty roots?” warning her sister not to trust the goblins’ fruit, and promoting a healthy measure of doubt in the face of market seductions (45–46).

Rossetti emphasizes the soundness of suspicion in a series of menacing mimickries. To begin, the “Apples and quinces, / Lemons and oranges, / Plump unpecked cherries—/ Melons and raspberries, / Bloom-down-cheeked peaches, / Swart-headed mulberries, / Wild free-born cranberries, / Crab-apples, dewberries, / Pine-apples, blackberries, / Apricots, strawberries” and so on repeat surfaces that look good and wholesome, but their poisonous contents radically contradict those appearances. This sense recurs in the goblins’ dissimulations when Lizzie finally condescends to visit the market with “a silver penny in her purse” to purchase fruit for the “dwindling” Laura. The goblins greet her with apparent amiability:
Laughed every goblin
When they spied her peeping:
Came towards her hobbling,
Flying, running, leaping,
Puffing and blowing,
Chuckling, clapping, crowing,
Clucking and gobbling,
Mopping and mowing,
Full of airs and graces,
Pulling wry faces
Demure grimaces, . . .
Hugged her and kissed her,
Squeezed and caressed her:
Stretched up their dishes,
Panniers, and plates. (329–39, 348–50)

As if Laura’s fate isn’t warning enough, this passage contains a cadre of very red flags. The goblins are “Full of airs and graces” and they put on wry faces and demure grimaces: these are not “natural” spontaneous expressions, but rather pulled, performed in the interests of profit and exploitation. When Lizzie refuses to eat with them, the goblins’ mimicry of fellowship quickly breaks down and they turn abruptly from alacrity to aggression: “They began to scratch their pates, / No longer wagging, purring, / But visibly demurring, / Grunting and snarling. / One called her proud, / Cross-grained uncivil; / Their tones waxed loud, / Their looks were evil” (390–96).

As “purring” becomes “demurring,” and “civil” finds its echo in “evil,” “Goblin Market” offers a cautionary tale about the perils of mimicry. Both goblins and goblin fruit call into question the value of appearances. The poem certainly valorizes some construction of truth in nature, but it does so by expressing powerful misgivings that nature may be just as susceptible to construction as anything else. Rossetti sets up two valences of repetition: one imitative in innocent replication of wholesome tasks and values, the other decidedly unwholesome, threatening the very concept of innocence. Although the poem seems to construct one space of apparent safety in the agrarian home in which the girls “Fetched in honey, milked the cows, / Aired and set to rights the house, / Kneaded cakes of whitest wheat, / Cakes for dainty mouths to eat, / Next churned butter, whipped up cream, / Fed their poultry, sat and sewed” (203–8), one cannot help noting that this space is not necessarily any more genuine than the goblin market. Domestic life participated as well in strategically calculated repetitions, a dynamic under-
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scored, perhaps, by the very acts of milking, kneading, churning, and sewing which depend on reduplications of the same actions over and over again. Even Lizzie’s articulation of market peril is reiterative: “‘No,’ said Lizzie: ‘No, no, no; / Their offers should not charm us, / Their evil gifts would harm us’” (64–66). Setting the “natural” domain in contradistinction to the sinister deceptions of the marketplace, Rossetti appears to posit the country/home as the site of originality, realness, and guilelessness, but the poem’s entire plot emphasizes that the pastoral home is not safe from the threats inherent in mass production and cheap reduplication. The poem delivers an almost wistful apotheosis of integrity at the same time as it suggests that such realness is a hot commodity only because it is so rare.16

The Pleasures of Paranoia

“Goblin Market” manifests no simple nostalgia about prelapsarian gardens, however, nor are its enjoinders to suspicion uncomplicated. Rossetti’s market poem thus offers up valuable fodder for modern critics, given that paranoia has acquired rather a bad scholarly reputation in recent years. As Eve Sedgwick observes ruefully in her introduction to Novel Gazing, paranoia has become so much a part of current critical methodology as to preclude nuanced readings that might explore more than surveillance and transgression. “Subversive and demystifying parody, suspicious archaeologies of the present, the detection of hidden patterns of violence and their exposure: . . . these infinitely doable and teachable protocols of unveiling,” she writes, “have become the common currency of cultural and historicist studies” (1997, 21). Sedgwick has a point: certainly, the tenor and tendencies of Foucauldian scholarship ought not to circumscribe our sole critical options. However, as these reading practices testify to the critical pleasures of detecting moments of ideological exposure, and of policing the police in Victorian texts, there is something to be said for tracking down earlier incarnations of those pleasures.

First of all, for our nineteenth-century readerly counterparts, a “hermeneutics of suspicion” was entirely appropriate at times—for example, in the efforts to define, regulate, and prevent food adulteration. Lizzie’s just circumspection—and the prevalence of frequently suitable wariness among Victorian “goblins”—suggests that paranoid reading was immediately relevant to many aspects of Victorian culture.17 Furthermore, as I note above, “Goblin Market” is not simply a paranoid text. It also delights in the dynamics of apprehension: Laura’s fall into bad shopping bespeaks undeniable fascination with a dangerous market, just as Lizzie’s valiant prudence demonstrates the
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satisfactions of rightly placed suspicion. “Goblin Market” reminds us that we are often right to detect a predilection for detection, yet it encourages us also to see how often pleasure accompanies paranoia, and how diverse were Victorian responses to the hazards of a complicated market. Fresh perils in Victorian culture facilitated an ideological shift that frankly encouraged commercial anxiety, and authorities attempted, on a variety of fronts, to fortify consumers against the goblins of the modern economy. Teaching people to protect themselves (economically, physically, personally) meant engaging them in a defense against fraud, both at home and at large. That project could be more or less playful.

The illustrative context of food adulteration encapsulates the spirit of a larger conceptual change, as public activists scrambled to establish clearinghouses where the lower classes could bring their food to be tested; and scientific texts, newspaper articles, and home economics manuals encouraged middle-class consumers to protect themselves by acquiring the accoutrements of home laboratories. Hassall’s *Adulterations Detected* is classic, carefully instructing the middle-class Victorian customer how to suspend, incinerate, evaporate, and utilize an exhaustive supply of chemicals to prepare samples for microscopic examination at home. That rhetoric of sampling resonates with both Rossetti’s poem and with more general cultural perspectives.

To illustrate: in the climax of “Goblin Market,” Lizzie provides an antidote to her wasting sister. In entering the market, Lizzie does not want to eat, but rather to carry home the goblins’ wares: “One waits / At home for me” (383–84), she says, declining their offer to “Sit down and feast with us” (380), and ignoring their claim that “Such fruits as these / No man can carry” (375–76). Lizzie’s refusal either to engage the integrity of her body in trade or to eat with the goblin men leads to an assault that famously allows her to carry home to her sister what Richard Menke refers to as a “free sample” (1998, 128). “Tho’ the goblins cuffed and caught her, / Coaxed and fought her,” Rossetti writes, Lizzie “Would not open lip from lip / Lest they should cram a mouthful in / But laughed in heart to feel the drip / Of juice that syrupped all her face, / And lodged in dimples of her chin, / And streaked her neck which quaked like curd” (“Goblin Market,” 424–25, 431–36).

In fact, Lizzie enters the market much like the members of the *Lancet* commission, feigning innocent engagement, offering to pay quietly for her food, but refusing to consume it. Arthur Hill Hassall found this method immeasurably superior to an aggressive seizure of goods practiced by the Excise commission. He preferred the dual methods of science and publicity, of purchasing goods incognito, and educating the public about the results.
of his committee’s analysis. Consumers would then know from whom they might safely “come buy,” while dishonest shopkeepers would be encouraged to mend their ways (the commission planned to release new results every three months). Hassall writes,

The Excise has . . . been driven to adopt a system of espionage, . . . the rude and inquisitorial proceeding of entering forcibly upon suspected premises, and of seizing on any adulterated articles or substances employed in adulteration, and which, per chance, they might find in the course of search. The method adopted by “The Lancet” Commission was in striking contrast to this. It simply purchased the different articles as sold in the ordinary way of business, and applied to their analyses all the resources of science, especially the microscope and chemistry. By this proceeding it was not necessary, as in the case of the Excise, to maintain an Army of “4000” Excise inspectors, neither was it requisite to violate the sanctity of men’s private dwellings. (1857, 33)

Little Lizzie returns triumphant from her trip to market, drenched in “samples” in the form of nectar. While I am reluctant to dismiss the frank sensuality of the passage in which she bids Laura, “Hug me, kiss me, suck my juices / Squeezed from goblin fruits for you” (468–69), I do want to suggest that it reverberates with biological approaches: the sample prudently brought home acts to remedy the foolish purchasing habits of the ailing sister. This reading breaks down as literal analogy, of course, when we consider that Laura does suck those juices, does again consume the fruits of the market, and that, as Hassall observed, both lead and copper “collect and accumulate in the system,—so that, no matter how small the quantity of them introduced at one time or in a single dose, the system, or particular parts of it, are at length brought under their influence, and certain diseases are induced, characteristic of poisoning” (1855, 34). However, within the context of public education about food adulteration, it seems significant that Laura’s experience, mediated through the wary Lizzie, is markedly different: she suffers what seems like a seizure, then collapse, and then release. The following morning, “Laura woke as from a dream, / Laughed in the innocent old way / Hugged Lizzie but not twice or thrice” (537–39). Restored and moderate, Laura never again frequents the merchants whose wares proved so poisonous.

The principles of sampling and self-protection—in short, of caveat emptor—accurately describe the only recourse most consumers had. There were no effective laws to regulate, discipline, or discourage food adulteration, and the attempts of the Parliamentary Select Committee to pass legislation
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indicate the larger legal climate. An 1869 essay, “The Adulteration of Food and Drugs,” recalls how those laws in place “were both at once too troublesome and too expensive to be at all generally adopted. . . . The committee, therefore, recommended that a change should be made in the law, with the object of placing within the reach of every one a cheap and expeditious legal remedy” (1869, 191). However, the general principles of laissez-faire economics impeded any such legislation. The bill was found to interfere with free market competition, to privilege unfairly those merchants whose goods weren’t sampled, to be too vulnerable to the corruption of inspectors. In short, the bill went through three drafts before it became an Act in 1860, at which time it “was speedily seen to be almost totally useless, and further experience has only made its uselessness the more abundantly apparent” (ibid., 193–94). Hassall found the Act to be “weak, diluted, and itself adulterated” (quoted in Searle 1998, 93). Hence the importance of bringing suspicion home. There were some laws on the books to discipline the worst offenders, but general governmental indifference and free-market ethics suggested that individuals were responsible for their own protection.

Detecting Fraud

It is difficult to regard this responsibility without thinking of Foucault’s argument that modern discipline operates not through force but through coercive cooperation. Although the Victorian period institutionalized the work of policing, alongside that institution existed a far more pervasive dynamic that emphasized the centrality of individual accountability. As D. A. Miller has argued, the power of discipline “cannot be identified with an institution or state apparatus, though these may certainly employ or underwrite it. . . . The mobility it enjoys allows precisely for its wide diffusion which extends from obviously disciplinary institutions (such as the prison) to institutions officially determined by ‘other’ functions (such as the school) down to the tiniest practices of everyday social life” (1988, 17). The practices surrounding food adulteration demonstrate in microcosm that the disciplinary regulations designed to discourage fraud concerned individual and private practices, far more than any state institution. Herein we find the work of private and self-policing made material, literal, and specific.

Mercantile fraud did not compromise the success of capitalism as an economic system. Rather, the potential for financial corruption set up alongside capitalism—indeed, within it—an ideological paradigm based in prospective guilt and the need for caution. Private forms of assessment are basic compo-
nents of the capitalist system, as fraud (and/or its potential) is inherent in it. Ironically, this presupposition of materialist methodology supports rather than limits fiscal power. As Foucault notes, “If the economic take-off of the West began with the techniques that made possible the accumulation of capital, it might perhaps be said that the methods for administering the accumulation of men made possible a political take-off in relation to the traditional, ritual, costly violent forms of power which soon fell into disuse and were superseded by a subtle, calculated technology of subjection” (1979, 220–21). A penchant for scrutiny evolved alongside the development of capitalism and its abuses. In the context of food fraud, we find this strand of inquiry encapsulated and magnified, both, in the Victorian fascination with the microscope.

A quieter, gentler technology than the often clumsy interventions of actual police work, the microscope is literally and marks metaphorically a shift in perspective on vision and authenticity. The literature of food fraud celebrates the microscope as a key to all mythologies, a mystical instrument capable of disclosing Truth and vanquishing sin. Far more capable than chemistry in detecting sophistications of substance, the microscope seemed to offer a solution to the problems of adulteration. While chemical properties might be mimicked (sugars and starches often registered identically in chemical tests, and it was nearly impossible to tell coffee from chicory), the visual appearance of each substance was unique under the lens. “Until the microscope was brought to bear upon the subject,” Hassall notes, “. . . no means existed whereby the great majority of adulterations could be discovered; and the parties practising them little dreamt that an instrument existed capable of bringing to light even these secret and guilty proceedings. . . . Now this feeling of security has been destroyed, and the adulterator knows that at any time he is liable to discovery” (quoted in “Adulteration of Food and Drugs” [1869], 189).

Satirizing the analytical chemist’s inefficiency, the Westminster Review parodies Wordsworth (“The starch within the crusty rim / Is but a grain of starch to him, / And it is nothing more”) to reveal in the capacities of the microscope to reveal chemical deceptions. “But to the microscopist,” the writer observes, the grain of rice “is something more.” The microscope operates as a magical instrument that can unmask authentic identity and thereby empower the individual through the power of scrutiny. “Armed with [illustrations of cellular structure] and a small microscope it is possible for any who are so inclined to assure themselves of the purity or impurity of most of the articles of their ordinary consumption,” he declares. Furthermore, he emphasizes the benefits of revealing individual characteristics and the truth of their origins. Under the microscope, “Each grain of starch has a well-defined individuality of its
own, bearing upon it the legible impress of its history, and announcing in no dubious terms, by its size, shape, and superficial tracings, the particular source whence it was derived” (ibid., 189). Stressing each cell’s difference from its brothers, the *Westminster Review* trumpets the microscope’s ability to “announce” an ontological fingerprint. As Hillel Schwartz observes, despite the fact that the technology itself was far from perfect, subject to illusions from diffracted light, “the cultural *sense* of the microscope was that through its eyepiece one could see the inner truth” (1996, 184; emphasis in original). Authorities promised that, faced with the technology of the microscope, “the puny efforts of human fraud are rendered powerless to deceive” (“Adulteration of Food and Drugs” [1869], 188).

Of course, social life and biology operate differently. Microscopic technology pledged, by establishing appearance as the site of authenticity, to reveal the simple, clear, uncomplicated truth of things. However, not only were microscopes expensive investments, but, as an array of swindlers and scams affirmed, the market at large was a visually tricky place, and most of its subjects would not fit under a slide. The microscope, in other words, offers tenuous ideological cognates. Thus, even as government authorities and popular texts advocated interpersonal observation, inquiry, and suspicion, these strategies hardly amounted to so precise a science as biology. In this tension between scrutiny and futility, one finds a dynamic that approaches, but has not yet become, modern cynicism. Despite the hopelessness of establishing uncontestable *social* ontology, of shoring up a place of surety, truth, and realness within a market that had given over its dedication to such values, Victorian texts continued to invest in investigation.

That investment signals two key aspects of Victorian paranoid reading. First, many texts that associated economic dishonesty with individuals rather than institutions, with specific moments rather than epidemic conditions, had little interest in minimizing the scope of public risk, even as they worked toward its reduction. Rather, they stressed the toxicity of their contemporary culture to incite their readers to desire the perspectives (outrage, humor, suspicion, sarcasm) they offered on that world. For example, a popular ballad, “The Chapter of Cheats,” uses the logic of synecdoche to signal the larger community for which each individual stands:

The first is the lawyer, he will bother you with jaw,
He knows well how to cheat you with a little bit of law;
And in comes the doctor, who to handle you so rough,
One guinea he will charge you for a shilling’s worth of stuff.
And we’re a’ cheating, [cheat, cheat, cheating
And we’re a’ cheating through country and town.

The next is the pawnbroker, with his ticket in his hand,
He well knows how to cheat for the interest of his pawn;
And the grocer sands his sugar, and sells sloe leaves for tea,
As for the dusty miller who is a bigger rogue than he[?]
And we’re a’ cheating, &c.

*The* lawyer, *the* doctor, *the* pawnbroker, *the* grocer, *the* dusty miller—as this ballad comically laments the practices of the day, it also personalizes those practices, linking “a’ cheating” to actions and identities that are singular and personal, but are also indices of widespread conditions. Like Rossetti’s goblins (“One had a cat’s face, / One whisked a tail, / One tramped at a rat’s pace, / One crawled like a snail” [71–74]), the ballad’s frauds are specific and individual, yet even as each cheater is a “one,” each nonetheless functions to describe a much larger group.21

Like many Victorian texts, “Goblin Market” reads national suspicion through local instances, registering capitalist peril as a problem of individual corruption and vulnerability, and its detection as individual responsibility.22 Yet, Laura says to Lizzie, “We must not look at goblin men, / We must not buy their fruits” (42–43), not “We must not go to market.” In other words, the impetus toward paranoia maintained its share of pleasures. Hassell’s handbook offered serious warnings, but it also demonstrated the ways in which self-defense could be fun—and not only for those who could afford a home laboratory. While many documents about fraud in general promoted apprehension as both demeanor and activity, those texts functioned to entertain as well as to warn. Scare tactics, whether delivered through scientific reporting or creative narrative, stressed the wisdom of suspicion, encouraged consumers to keep a wary eye out for trouble, and fed a growing interest in the play of detection.

However much they may have shaped popular rhetoric, in other words, the ideological principles of microscopy ultimately did little to restore stability or security. Certainly, fraud closed the garden gate on easy trust, leaving warier consumers in its wake; but if popular texts sought to stimulate and represent a suspicious citizenry whose attitudes toward consumption had changed, so too did those texts stimulate and represent a change in demand. Considering the number of popular Victorian texts that include mysteries to be solved, and considering that detective fiction became increasingly popular after the 1840s, it seems clear that these and other related narrative forms were not simply “about” paranoia. Rather, they whetted their readers’ appe-
tites for the opportunity to discover surprises, bad and otherwise.23

“Goblin Market” closes with its domestic securities marked with doubt, much like securities in the “real” market. The sample brought home, comfort and constitution restored, Laura and Lizzie grow to marry and have children of their own. Many critics have read Rossetti’s closing lines as a fantasized withdrawal from the market, and the poem’s concluding domestic scene may indeed seem hermetic.24 However, although Lizzie and Laura “both were wives / With children of their own /,” Rossetti emphasizes that “Their mother-hearts [were] beset with fears, / Their lives bound up in tender lives” (544–46). Lizzie and Laura have become savvy shoppers, and the poem promotes a powerful economic message, one that seeks to educate about, rather than to avoid, the perils of capitalism. The women warn their own children of “wicked, quaint fruit-merchant men, / Their fruits like honey to the throat / But poison in the blood” (553–55). Like the growing propensity for home examination that echoed a larger national cry of caveat emptor, like the plethora of texts that cautioned against both urban and individual risk, the poem’s happy conclusion emphasizes the happiness that ensues from suspicion.

In other words, while Lizzie’s militant caution defines one reigning ideological response to the “real” market, the power of Laura’s appetite cannot be ignored, and here we find additional support for Sedgwick’s argument that paranoia ought not to mark the end of our reading, but perhaps the beginning. Like the many consumers who entered the market despite its goblins, Laura’s desire sends her sailing into peril, “Like a vessel at the launch / When its last restraint is gone” (85–86).25 Her illness brings her domestic body into the financial field, literally as a singular case of food poisoning, and metaphorically as a victim of a larger syndrome in which many individuals were ruined by fraudulent market practices that affected investments as well as goods.26

Yet, if Laura’s poisoned body is another metaphor for the kingdom, for a country poisoned by fraud, it is also a body that persistently craves that poison even as it decays. Laura’s enduring “passionate yearning” bespeaks an incontrovertible taste for that which defiles (266). Hence, “Goblin Market” and the literature of food adulteration not only signal the prevalence of culinary fraud within Victorian England, but also comment on the larger social implications of adulteration for the self, the community, and the relationship of both to a growing range of commodities.

**Adulterating Plots**

One of those commodities was the narrative of domestic fraud itself, in which
food adulteration often operated as shorthand for broader forms of deception, as it does in “Goblin Market,” and in the aforementioned examples of “Maud” and Mary Price. As I’ve been arguing, these texts use food fraud to consider the ramifications of pervasive market dishonesty for sacred domestic relationships (between sisters, between lovers, between a man and his god).\(^{27}\) The following passage from Wilkie Collins’s *Man and Wife* (1870), in which Sir Patrick Lundie references adulteration to quiz his niece’s suitor about courtship, plays in this same mode:

You go to the tea-shop and get your moist sugar. You take it on the understanding that it is moist sugar. But it isn’t any thing of the sort. It’s a compound of adulterations made up to look like sugar. You shut your eyes to that awkward fact, and swallow your adulterated mess in various articles of food; and you and your sugar get on together as well as you can. . . . You go to the marriage-shop and get a wife. You take her on the understanding—let us say—that she has lovely yellow hair, that she has an exquisite complexion, that her figure is the perfection of plumpness, and that she is just tall enough to carry the plumpness off. You bring her home, and you discover that it’s the old story of the sugar over again. Your wife is an adulterated article. Her lovely yellow hair is—dye. Her exquisite skin is—pearl powder. Her plumpness is—padding. And three inches of her height are—in the boot-maker’s heels. (38)

Collins’s inventory of adulterated articles offers a comic commentary on the deceptions inherent in attraction and courtship, on the design of stimulating appetite with the knowledge that one will leave one’s target unsatisfied (you must simply “get on together as well as you can”). While Sir Patrick’s commentary on Blanche remains within the genre of humor, the potential adulterations involved in courtship can also be serious business, especially in mid-century England when the “mess” of fraud takes center stage with regard to marriage, rather than food, as I discuss in the following chapter.

As a general rule, food fraud keeps to a supporting role in the novel, and it makes just a brief cameo in *Man and Wife*. In closing my discussion here, I turn to Mrs. J. H. Riddell’s *The Race for Wealth* (1866), perhaps the only Victorian novel to feature an adulterator as protagonist.\(^ {28}\) In its way, *The Race for Wealth* is an Übernovel of Victorian fraud. Addressing a multitude of commercial and domestic depredations, the novel works through a series of horsy metaphors, to develop complicated arguments about market deception and about the fantasies of class transcendence that kept that market going. It maps the undesirable social consequences of modern commerce, it offers long
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soliloquies about servants who function like bad clerks, and it begins with an extended exploration of the science behind food adulteration. Across its many plots, the novel insists that the ethics of swindling seep between categories, so that nothing separates market fraud from domestic fraud. That formulation becomes particularly concrete in a painful anti-marriage plot that traces the disintegration of domestic bodies, trust, and relationships.

Published nearly a decade after the Parliamentary hearings, however, *The Race for Wealth* offers less opportunity for and maintains less interest in detection than its earlier popular counterparts. Its general tone is decidedly more mordant than exhortatory, testifying to a switch of lenses, as it were, to an acceptance of the fact of fraud, even as readers continue to suffer under it. In one scene late in the novel, for example, Riddell remarks that

The cholera and Limited Liability reached a point at about the same period. The same post that brought newspapers containing the Registrar-General’s report to quiet country districts brought likewise unwonted-looking letters inclosing samples of all manner of new fabrics, prospectuses of wonderful companies, forms of application for shares, moderate calculations of the thousand per cent. returns to be expected, and such flourishing statements, combined with such lists of names, as caused Paterfamilias to place his spectacles on his honored nose and peruse the document with much interest and astonishment. (132)

Stock fraud enters the home like the tainted food that provides the protagonist his financial start in the world. The daily mail to the breakfast table brings not only news but also invitations to speculate. Significantly, Paterfamilias’s spectacles don’t allow him to see that all the “declared schemes which promised such returns without trouble, or large individual expenditure, contained of necessity the germ of failure, and bore on their faces unmistakable marks of jobbery and fraud” (133). In other words, the paranoid reading practices that authors like Rossetti, Reynolds, and Hassell advocate have had little efficacy in a culture so thoroughly saturated in fraud.

The novel begins on Lower Thames Street, “where the air is literally foul with the smell of foreign fruits, . . . and the side paths are lined with open shops, that seem overflowing into the dirty gutters, with nuts, and shaddocks, and lemons” (5). In the sensory overload that characterizes the food of the East End market, oranges mix with “big baskets of fish” and filth to produce an effect of commercial nausea made literal (5). Riddell then establishes how flimsy is the boundary that separates this working-class street from the upper-class home:
Dangerous Provisions

Yes, my dear madam, it is indeed from Thames Street, by Billingsgate, that many of the fruits you have at dessert, and the delicate lemons wherewith you season your puddings, are originally procured; . . . that the cod-liver oil which the great Doctor Belgravia declares your consumptive daughter must either take or die is to be had in its integrity; . . . that the lemon juice and the lime-water which you find so valuable in a sick room make their way into genteel society; . . . that the bloaters the Londoners eat at breakfast, and the oysters they swallow for supper, and the salmon milor has at a fabulous price per pound, and the turbot you order from your suburban fishmonger, are all had “first hand,” as it is called. (ibid.)

Conjoining vile market and cozy home through the conduit of food, Riddell sketches a world in which the comestible delicacies of the West End dining table and the accouterments of the West End sick room emerge from a “Babel where the Easterners congregate together to cheat the Westerns if they can,” and where the look of the wares “are enough to make one loathe the sight of food for a month” (6).

On Thames Street, the reader meets Lawrence Barbour, an honest young man of a good but fallen family, who arrives in London with the project of earning sufficient funds to buy back Mallingford End, his familial estate. “I saw a vulgar, illiterate snob buy the place where we had lived for centuries,” Lawrence tells his patron’s partner, Mr. Sondes, “and then I saw that snob sell Mallingford End to a worse snob; and I saw the whole country-side bow down and worship Mammon” (17). By initially juxtaposing Lawrence against the corruptions of a corrupt marketplace, Riddell establishes the stakes of his fall: he starts the novel as an embodiment of just and righteous principles, an adversary to the capitalist ethic that has allowed a family of “snobs” to displace his own.

Lawrence crosses the miasma of Lower Thames Street to join the business of Josiah Perkins, a middle-class relation of the Barbours who offers him a place. Perkins proves an immediate disappointment, however, for his manners are crass, and his trade turns out to be a suspicious side-field of chemistry—as Riddell writes, “Mr. Perkins was less a manufacturing chemist than a manufacturing grocer” (10). The novel sardonically presents the creative side of food adulteration; it is, at the least, a profession that rewards evasive invention. “I try to cheat nobody but the analytical chemists!” Perkins claims. “But then,” Riddell notes, “Mr. Perkins was continually trying to cheat those gentlemen; and it may safely be affirmed that he felt as proud of inventing any new process likely to delude them as Watt did of his condensing steam-engine or Arkwright of his spinning-jenny” (10). Of course, Perkins’s milieu will never
grant him the accord of a Watt or an Arkwright. Relegated by circumstance and class to a much lower innovative field, Perkins contents himself with the smaller triumph of keeping the analytical chemists on their toes.

One of the first signs of Lawrence’s demise is his natural talent for adulteration: soon he too “delights in cheating the analyzers. He adds and he takes away, and he keeps them in a continual ferment” (100). His propensity for the trade is so impressive that Mr. Perkins actually rues Lawrence’s professional fate. “Pity he had not gone in for regular chemistry. . . . He might have made a name and a fortune to talk about” (100). Of course, a career in “regular chemistry” would not produce money enough to buy back Mallingford End anytime soon, requiring that Lawrence’s domestic aspirations ironically compromise his range of professional choices. Here, the novel displays a surprisingly sophisticated moral perspective on food adulteration. Earlier, Perkins’s partner, Mr. Sondes, explains to Lawrence, “It is the rage for cheapness that induces a trade like ours: people would rather pay twopence for an inferior article than threepence for genuine goods. . . . The consequence of which is, grocers must adulterate, and the grocers must be able to procure the wherewithal to adulterate from a firm like ours, where every ingredient used is perfectly pure of its kind and harmless” (18). Riddell throws blame back on the consumer, suggesting the larger context in which commercial corruption occurs. The purveyor of pure adulteratives signals the complexity of her vision, which becomes even more knotty as the novel loses its focus on food, and Riddell directs her energies to exploring other venues for fraud, including that form of domestic commerce that ultimately completes Lawrence’s ruin, namely, the business of marriage.

Shortly after he begins his adulterating career, Lawrence suffers a sort of moral amnesia that erases his original motivations: the desire to buy Mallingford End effectively evaporates from Lawrence’s consciousness. The novel shifts its focus from adulteration to adultery, as Lawrence expands his business prospects, finding new venues for fraud. In typical Victorian fashion, the novel features a pair of women of the familiar fair and dark variety. Sondes’s angelic daughter, Olivine, sums up blonde innocence and domestic desirability, while the brunette Henrietta Alwyn, daughter of the current “snob” owner of Mallingford End, “was a flirt; not an innocent, harmless flirt, like many a girl who settles down after a time into a sufficiently sober and discreet matronhood—but a flirt ingrain, a flirt who did not care at what price her success was purchased, what tears flowed, what wounds were inflicted, so as she was satisfied—she triumphant” (35). Riddell underscores the domestic consequences of Lawrence’s professional choices by opposing not simply the
women’s “types” but the relationships of their families to Lawrence. There are no heroes here. Sondes is an adulterator, but he positions himself to help Lawrence, while Alwyn has gained possession of Lawrence's family estate and is an unrepentant capitalist who “did not make his money over honestly” (18). Brought into contact with the Alwyns, his declared adversaries at the start of the novel, Lawrence continues in his personal life the departure from the moral high road he has already begun professionally: he falls in love with the beautiful Etta, who encourages his attentions only to jilt him for Mr. Gainswoode, a rich man considerably older than herself.

Lawrence's subsequent engagement to Olivine Sondes offers a brief moment of light in the novel's otherwise bleak landscape. Olivine radiates potential salvation in her simple devotion to Lawrence and to her father, and in her general kind regard for others. “Far away down in the natures of most,” Riddell writes, “I suppose there is some well of purity that bubbles up to the surface rejoicingly when touched by a hand which is still perfectly unstained and unconscious of evil” (113). But the ambitious adulterator has no taste for purity, and he finds neither value in Olivine's charms, nor salvation in her wholesomeness. “Honey-moons, he decided, were mistakes,” Riddell writes. “He ought never to have married Olivine Sondes” (101).

After the marriages, Lawrence turns his attentions to dubious business ventures, replacing the poisonous East End market with which the novel opens with the toxic Victorian stock market. As Lawrence's trade shifts from one form of poison to another, he begins a long, sordid, and surprisingly explicit affair with Etta Alwyn Gainswoode. Like the contagion of cholera that characterizes the perilously seductive stock prospectuses, the lexicon of financial and culinary fraud reframes the language of infidelity to characterize adultery in fiscal terms, and to suggest that the diseased morality of Lawrence's work cannot help but infect his domestic practices. Even pure Olivine, when she begins to suspect her husband's infidelity, expresses her moral and emotional responses in the language of the stock market. “Mrs. Barbour had now her stake in the national proprieties. She owned a husband whom she should not like to see on his knees before Etta Gainswoode or any other woman living” (114). Olivine has a more sophisticated understanding of her own race for wealth than might appear on the surface. Her “stake in the national proprieties” involves keeping her property, namely, the husband that she “owns.” Although she is ready and willing to put her money where her heart is, that strategy keeps Lawrence only briefly, and she refuses Etta's own advice to “Let him imagine you have something else to think about occasionally. . . . What is had cheaply is rarely prized highly” (117). And Etta
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is right: Lawrence sells Olivine’s charms short.

The novel balances its devaluation of pure womanhood with a wry commentary on the attractions of such rare commodities as rich widows, when Etta’s husband dies. The novel offers little redemption. Olivine discovers her husband passionately kissing Etta, she offers him a divorce, and he offers to marry Etta. But Etta Gainswoode discounts his affections as just so many bills. His attempt to cash in on passion fails as miserably as will, shortly, his creditors’ attempts to collect from him. “Marry indeed! . . . when every shilling I have in the world goes from me if I take to myself a second husband,” Etta exclaims. When Lawrence assures her he has money “enough for both,” she retorts, “I like something more substantial to depend on than shares in all sorts of companies. It is very profitable while the companies are good for any thing, doubtless; but I have seen so much of business ups and downs that now I am independent of trade I should like to keep so, thank you” (165). Canny about the fluctuating values of both the stock market and the marriage market, Etta Gainswoode knows enough to keep a tight hold on her assets. Independence has both economic and relational valences. On the one hand, Etta’s appraisal of Lawrence’s offer figures her as a decidedly unfeminine, cold woman when one considers the general value of romance, but it looks very much like reason given the state of the Victorian stock market and the laws governing women’s property around 1866. When Lawrence’s notes are unexpectedly called in, it is hard not to give Etta the credit of wisdom: his affairs are in “such a state that failure in one venture meant failure in all” (165).

The novel closes as Lawrence goes smash physically as well, falling into a delirium that obliterates all but his happy childhood. Olivine returns to nurse him, as “the long years of his struggling youth and unhappy manhood faded out of his recollection as breath fades away from the surface of a mirror, and the only things which remained fresh and unchanged as ever were the bright, idle, sunshiny days, spent in boyish pursuits, filled with folly and joy” (166). Returning to prelapsarian idylls, Lawrence’s end echoes the close of “Goblin Market” both in its nostalgic construction of “the simple pleasures, the trivial distresses of his earlier life” and in its powerful deconstruction of that very vision. Lawrence, Riddell writes, “departed with the leaves, poor as the day when he first entered London. And yet not so. He was rich in love” (167).

Transforming the measure of Lawrence’s success from economic to moral to emotional capital, Riddell juxtaposes family and finance as competing fields in which a man may transform his worth. On the surface, it seems that Lawrence would have done well to give over his pursuit of money and to exchange his interest in the assessments of speculators, capitalists, clerks, and “plodding business folks,” for that in the “honest men and women . . . in
whose eyes most of all he desired to stand well” (160). However, *The Race for Wealth* suggests family as the solution to finance only fleetingly. Although Riddell positions Olivine’s pure simplicity as a redemptive alternative to the market, the novel nonetheless emphasizes how thoroughly affairs of the heart are implicated in economic ventures. If Lawrence is “rich in love” at the novel’s close, he is so despite his best efforts to defraud the institution of marriage; if he learns, finally, how to cash in on the goods of the heart, we must note that he has been trading on Olivine’s affections throughout, speculating on the constancy of her devotion, and his death finds him still a Midas, only in a different guise. “The wealth he once coveted the Lord in mercy took away; the wealth he once despised the Lord in mercy gave him in his hour of need” (167). Lawrence’s frail redemption is little more than a shift in economic contexts, a short hop from one field of speculation to another.

*The Race for Wealth* works on a variety of fronts to foreground the relationship between domestic and corporate markets. Although the novel is unique in its extended focus on food adulteration, its ultimate concentration on marriage brings it into a much larger family of Victorian novels that speak romantic engagement in the vocabulary of market investment. The following chapter takes up that business, and the tenor of capitulation and play that characterizes its plots.