Reading and Disorder in Antebellum America

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CHAPTER 10

The Mysteries of Chumship

Immediately after their exchange over Matilda the Disconsolate, Mose and Lize have an actual spat that turns our attention from their intimacy to Mose's with other men. Having invited her to "a first-rate shin-dig" that evening, he is annoyed when she replies evasively, "Will Sykesy be on hand?" Sykesy is Mose's best friend.

MOSE. S'pose he is—what den?
LIZE. Nothin'.
MOSE. Now look a-here, Lize, I go in fur Bill Sykesy 'cos he runs wid our merchaine [fire engine]—but he mustn't come foolin' round my gal, or I'll give him fits!
LIZE. La! Mose, don't get huffy 'cause I mentioned him; but I'd rather go to Christy's. Did you ever see George Christy play de bones? Ain't he one of 'em?
MOSE. Well, he ain't nothin' else. (Glance at New York, 23–24)

Mose's jealousy recalls the competition for partners at Carpenter's dance school, except here Lize purposely provokes him to get something she wants. By using Mose's feelings against him, she assumes the same coercive role that women have played throughout. In A Glance at New York, Lize defines relations between men, including their volatility, which far from obstructing male intimacy, was its chief component.

Jealousy has not been our emotional focus, of course, and it will not be here, despite the fact that it has long been cited, along with competition, to explain what Stuart Miller calls the "thinness, insincerity and even chronic wariness" of
male friendship. Yet volatility we have seen has not been caused by jealously or competition, but by of love, shame, and honor, feelings tied directly to women. And by volatility, I mean more than violence, although it most often appears as such in their reading. Repeatedly I have drawn attention to sexual imagery in the closing pages of *The House Breaker*, when Henry Stuart peals the skin from Bill’s face, drives his white-hot iron rod through his cheek, and pours hot lead into his ear. What Thompson calls the “final tragedy” is caused by Bill’s “fiend-like murder” of a sister whom Stuart “loved with extraordinary tenderness.” Yet fiend or not, the rapist has a name, which for all her virtue, she does not. And tragic as it is, Bill’s death affords both men status they formerly lacked: Stuart’s affirmative (“men will applaud me”), Bill’s manfully defiant (“I killed your sister, curse her!”). All this occurs before her corpse, which marks the disciplinary divide across which they contend, prove themselves, and, if we credit the rape imagery, join in a social poetics much like that of husbands and wives.

Others, too, have found women key to the affections of antebellum men. Jonathan Ned Katz argues that fear of women intensified emotional bonds between young Abraham Lincoln and Joshua Fry Speed, bonds that dissolved when Speed married, leaving Lincoln bitter and alone. And in separate studies of 23-year-old James Blake and friend Wych Vanderholf, Karen Hansen and E. Anthony Rotundo find a textbook example of romantic love providing stability in an unstable world. But in 1851, Wych becomes engaged, and if James is not openly distressed, he does become obsessed with the fiancée, and this continues after they marry: “[I] have often thought of my two dear friends in a distant city, and now imagine the felicity of which they are now partaking in each other’s embrace; do they give one passing thought to a friend?” James appears to be jealous not of another man, but for him.

Mose is not immune to such feelings, though threatening to give Sykesy “fits” is more like Henry Stuart’s treatment of Bill: violence eroticized in an

4. Karen Hansen, “Our Eyes Behold Each Other: Masculinity and Intimate Friendship in Antebellum New England”; E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era*, 80–84. Blake writes about meeting a new friend: “The past year has also added another laurel to my head, and caused my heart to throb with new impulses of affection; I have found a friend! One upon whom I can repose every trust, and when in trouble and affliction can seek relief; that friend whom I have selected from among my large circle of acquaintances is N. S. W. Vanderholf. Long have I desired a friend, one whom I could trust myself with on this journey of life; long have I endeavored to find and select one from this cold, self-interested world, and now after an acquaintance of nearly 3 years I have chosen him as my friend, and he has reciprocated; may he live long and happy, and may the tie of pure friendship which has been formed between us, never be severed, but by the hand of death” (James Blake diary, January 5, 1851).
5. James Barnard Blake diary, May 11, 1851.
intimacy that joins at the same time as it annihilates. Things don’t go this far in *A Glance at New York*, or not exactly. Told at the play’s end that Sykesy is “in a muss,” Mose goes to his aid, while Lize urges him on: “Bravo! Mose, go to it!” (34). Earlier, I read this scene in terms of male duty to provide and protect.\(^6\) But just as striking is Lize’s influence over her b’hoy’s male relationships: first through jealousy, then by encouraging him to support his rival, risking violence himself to inflict it on others. Mose is Sykesy’s friend; but he could as easily have been on one side of the fight as the other, with Lize, once again, determining which.

Lize’s power lay, once again, in gendered obligation. Reformers leveraged affective resources produced in childhood to influence behavior outside the home through internal restraints such as honor and shame. Widely exploited in popular fiction, this influence helped elaborate a split male self personified in characters like Flash Bill and Tom Braxton whose “evil genius,” once contained, returned in the form of gesture and comportment. In the last chapter, the rhetorical means used to persuade men helped to explain intimacy in working homes. Here, it provides the terms of male relationship, where feminine suffering produced not just bodily style, but men obliged by it to correct those responsible. Yet all men by nature harbored evil genius, complicating male relations long treated as either romantic (“I go in fur Bill Sykesy”) or fraternal (“’cos he runs wid our merchaine”). If men who were properly socialized were compelled to correct other men who were not, all walked on both sides of the line as agents and objects of correction. The savage, sexy, sado-heroic showdown between Stuart and Bill enacts intimacy of a kind James Bell enjoyed with men in his tent who had agreed to police each other even before Augusta’s letter arrived insisting that they do just that. “It is a source of grief to me,” James read, having anticipated her concern, “that you are surrounded by *sin* and wickedness” (Oct. 25, 1861).

Lize hardly appears grieving as she affects the male relations around her. Yet when jealousy fails to persuade Mose, she changes tactics, targeting his sweet side, and here, amid various displacements of burnt cork and gender, we find grief-laden discipline turned to male affection. Having nearly started a fight in her attempt to see Christy’s blackface minstrels, Lize sings Mose one of their songs.

**DEAREST MAY**

Oh niggers come and listen, a story I’ll relate,
It happened in a valley in de ole Carolina state,

\(^6\). Chapter 4.
It was down in de meadow I used to make de hay,
I always work de harder when I think on you, dear May.

Oh dearest May your lovelier dan de day,
Your eyes so bright they shine at night,
When de moon am gone away.

My massa gibe me holiday I wish he’d give me more,
I thanked him very kindly as I shoved my boat from shore,
And down de ribber paddled with a heart as light and free,
To the cottage of my lovely May, I longed so much to see.
Oh dearest May, &c.

On de bank ob de ribber where de trees dey hang so low,
When de coon among de branches play, and de mink he keeps below,
Oh dere is de spot, and May she looks so sweet,
Her eyes dey sparkle like de stars and her lips am red as beet.
Oh dearest May, &c.

Beneath de shady old oak tree I sot for many an hour,
As happy as de buzzard bird dat sports among de flowers,
But dearest May I left her, and she cried when both we parted,
I gave her a long and farewell kiss, and back to massa started.
Oh dearest, May, &c. 7

Oblivious to the caricature Christy played for laughs, Mose, the script tells us, is “affected” by Lize’s performance, which taps the song’s emotional power without the mawkish comedy of a white man pretending to be black and singing about female heartbreak (24).

In other texts, Lize taps these resources directly, sometimes as a heartbroken female. But my point has less to do with her character than the extent to which listeners were moved, like Mose, in response to the man she imitates: a white entertainer who is himself enamored of his black object. Lott explains

7. “Dearest May.” A version published in 1864 has a final verse in which the comedy is broader, even as May’s sorrow turns fatal. This version uses the same spelling of Mae as in the play.

My master then was taken sick, and poor old man he died,
And I was sold, way down below, close by the river side;
When lovely Mae did hear the news, she wilted like a flower,
And now lies low, beneath the tree where the owl hoots every hour.
(“Dearest Mae”)
the affection of minstrel performers for those they imitated as a result of “pre-industrial’ joys” identified with the black body, which in comic disguise white workers could enjoy. Here again my concern is not with the emotionalized object of their attention, but with the pleasures it bore. These Lott treats as calculations of class, when “a shopkeeper raised a shout he may have retracted with a raised eyebrow. Amusement at the antics of the vulgar distanced them; petit-bourgeois mastery of minstrel show spectatorship, which included taking in the spectators as part of the show.” “Dearest May” invited similar distancing, not from shouting fans, but the hush that fell over them as Lize, impersonating George Christy, sparked affections that were undercut by idioms not even she could save, as dulcet her tones or “red as beet” her lips.

Lize drew men together even as she drove them apart. Feminine authority compelled corrective desire at the heart of male intimacy, a social poetics that crossed various social divides, including the vertical ones that Lott worries about. Recall that the “Uncles and Nephews,” the club of Boston journalists and pressmen that Thompson joins at the end of My Life, signifies peace he cannot achieve with his disciplinarian real uncle, who raised him demanding that he learn the “luxury of abstinence.” Violence plagues Thompson throughout, from beatings as a boy, to grief and dishonor as a man. His personal story merges with that of the nation in an event treated at length in chapter 6, when he and the “Uncles” are jailed for a July Fourth brawl. All are drunk, including their opponents, students from Cambridge, who enter a bar where they are celebrating dressed as characters from Shakespeare. A fight erupts when one of the students proclaims, “What fools are these, dressed up in this absurd manner? Oh, they must be monkeys, the property of some enterprising organ-grinder. Let them dance before me, for my soul is heavy, and I would be gay!”

Sounding distinctly like “genuine negro fun,” “amusement at the antics of the vulgar” sends both parties to jail. The law acts as leveler, denying the codes of dress and conduct that identify Uncles and Nephews as “monkeys,” and students as sons of “enterprising organ-grinders.” This leveling extends to the terms of their release, which occurs when both sides agree to split the cost of repairs to the barroom they damaged. But economic equivalence and shared guilt are not all. They are freed from their “dungeon” at just the moment they raise their voices to sing a line from another Christy tune: “Did they tell thee I was false, Katy Darling?” Suddenly, to our great joy, the ponderous iron door of the dungeon was unlocked and thrown open” (84). Workingmen are again

9. Lott, Love and Theft, 158.
10. George Thompson, My Life; or, The Adventures of George Thompson, 82. Further references are cited parenthetically in the text.
caught in a web of accusation defined by women and capital, which we have seen associated with employment (Easy Nat’s boss) and other material pressures (the landlord in “Specie Claws”). The Cambridge students represent the economics of Lott’s class politics. We are not told what they sing to open their “iron door.” But Katy’s tears are caused as much by “they” who tell as those who are “false,” and the rich too were subject to their power.

In “Dearest May,” working spectators witnessed their subjection to “ massa” capital, and in the usual form: “I always work de harder when I think on you, dear May.” If Christy made the b’hoys laugh, Lize showed them themselves in his performance: embarrassment by those who had to paint themselves black to profit from their race. Here “shame creativity” is social rather than self-reflexive, the swaggering not of individuals as they walked down the street, but of relations that were ambivalent insofar as race and gender exposed more than they contained. Such swaggering also applied to class, the pleasures that Thompson evokes in the heroic battle of monkeys and organ-grinders’ sons: “Chairs were brandished, canes were flourished and decanters were hurled, to the great destruction of mirrors and other fragile property. The din of battle was awful to hear” (82). The account continues, its tone similar to that of an earlier fight when the young Thompson determines to resist his uncle’s beatings: “I’m going in,” he says (Mose’s shout in joining a “muss”), “I immediately pitched into that portion of his person where he was accustomed to stow away his Sabbath beans” (8). Exuberance stems from language alternately grandiose and self-deprecating: “the bird of victory seemed about to perch upon the banner of the ‘Uncles and Nephews,’ when some reckless, hardened individual turned off the gas” (83). It also comes from intimacy enacted between revolving positionalities of rectitude and remorse, as each side saw in the other all they were and were not. Such intimacy occurs in Greenfield when mechanics shouted outside a dance they were barred from, making it impossible for “big bugs” to hear the music (ECJ, July 17, 1844); or when they too encountered Cambridge students whose public mischief caused them to raised a police force to restrain them (ECJ, August 10, 1844). Reporting these events, Carpenter is at times defensive, at times defiant, but always intimately engaged.

The erotics of otherness is territory well traveled, and Lott, among others, treats it in the same context I do of antebellum race and class relations. In violence as sadistic as Henry Stuart’s, or as “fiend-like” as Bill’s, Thompson projects ambivalence between men drawn together even as they gradually split historically, beginning with the shopkeeper’s raised eyebrow. As social poetics, this ambivalence is legible in that the identity categories it operated between were produced by reading that exploited vulnerabilities inherent in male socialization. I have argued throughout that rhetoric targeting emotions helps us
treat workingmen as performative subjects. More than vague historical schemas ("preindustrial’ joys") or anachronistic distinctions of race and class, the poetics of language tied to bodies engaged in “constant struggle to gain a precarious and transitory advantage” broadens our ability to understand this struggle, the advantages it produced, and affections it bore.\footnote{Michael Herzfeld, \textit{Poetics of Manhood: Contest and Identity in a Cretan Mountain Village}, 11}

Yet Herzfeld provides more than a better handle on the mixed social pleasures of \textit{The House Breaker} and “Dearest May.” The notion of social poetics reveals these pleasures in the “thinness, insincerity and even chronic wariness” of intimacy between men who were not neatly divided by race, class, country of birth, or if a chap “runs wid our merchaine.” Such intimacy between social peers is harder to detect, especially as most did not share or express feelings of romantic friendship. Relations were wary, much as they were with their wives, not because they were insincere, but because they often thinned to a “muss.” Carpenter’s intimates thrash a “great brag” for artlessly flouting behavioral canons that had they been more skillfully violated may have made them friends. Such canons ground revolving disciplinary flirtations (a look, a wink, a cap cocked, a wry ‘howdy do’) enacted between men in James Bell’s tent after they quit “this swearing, drinking and playing card business” (October 25, 1861). James’s success in Augusta’s “school” suggests Carpenter’s wish to study dancing, only to have many men attend the ball who had not received instruction (\textit{ECJ}, Feb. 7, 1845). Some resented the invasion. Yet more important was an evening spent alternating between dancers trained and untrained that “tired what girls there were all out”; or the feelings of young men who walked home after, having been measured by these girls against standards not all they once seemed to be: lessons provided little advantage, it turned out; dancing was permitted whether you knew the steps or not. Carpenter may have felt the injustice, which may have excited play with Dexter, his regular sleeping partner, who enjoyed himself that evening without attending the class. Or resentment may not have been his response. He may have been impressed that Dexter successfully finessed obligations that constrained them both.

By this account, Dexter behaves much like the smooth-tongued Tom Braxton or Jack Slack who tempted the young and the green. But Dexter was not an “evil genius”; he was a co-worker and a friend whose desires Carpenter generally shared. We can also assume that whatever success he enjoyed that night, Dexter was not blind to his co-worker’s cotillion skills, any more than the girls they danced with. Edward may not have been a player, but he was a catch: honest, hardworking, a young man who would become a good husband and father.

\footnote{Michael Herzfeld, \textit{Poetics of Manhood: Contest and Identity in a Cretan Mountain Village}, 11}
Each joke or slap on the back as he and Dexter returned home, every jostle for space once they got into bed, bore a mix of accusation and desire, insecurity and pride, in a social poetics performed as always before the corpse of Henry Stuart’s sister. Clearly precarious, often transitory, such intimacy was cultural, Herzfeld says, based on provocations enacted in the field of normative expectations. Failing these expectations was embarrassing; but flouting them in a way that focuses “the audience’s attention on the performance itself” verified them as norms while distinguishing the performer according to the canons of creative innovation.\textsuperscript{12} In a culture that saw workingmen as innately embarrassing, to feel so in the company of others provided “assurance of common sociality.”\textsuperscript{13} Raising his eyebrow the moment he surrendered his partner to the unschooled Dexter may have signaled Carpenter’s emerging middle-class identity. But it also enacted their intimacy as men.

Such intimacy is insincere or thin only if we assume a definition based on constancy and depth. Locating both within norms inflected by “ideological propositions and historical antecedents” consigns the self to one’s capacity to defy these norms, while sustaining them as such.\textsuperscript{14} Carpenter’s chums showed no want of sincerity when they gave White “some hard knocks” or elected twenty-five of their number to catch town pranksters. It was this sincerity that troubled Thompson, who identified its source in feelings not \textit{deep}, but driven by rhetoric intended to manipulate conduct. Stuart’s sister embodied this rhetoric: her welfare required respectability and property; her death demanded Bill be tortured and killed. Men who were properly socialized corrected those who were not; yet passions incited to this end were often lethal. Thompson kills Jack in “self-defense,” happily ridding himself of the temptation he embodies (\textit{My Life}, 41). But then, harp-playing Mrs. Raymond appears, objectifying his wish to better himself as the “champion of beauty” and recruiting him for a project in which another man is stabbed to death (43). And Raymond’s effect on men is not only to have them punish each other. Walking through the city looking to pawn her harp, she and Thompson meet “friends of mine” loafing outside a hotel, and before he can turn away they spot him and in loud voices question his ability to play the instrument and praise the “beauty” at his side (54). Embarrassed, he apologizes for their conduct; but Mrs. Raymond, he notices, seems oddly pleased by the attention.

Raymond’s sexual immodesty suggests that hypocrisy drives the savagery of revenge exacted for her pain. Yet if “beauty” causes strife between men, it also produces the “Uncles and Nephews.” This does not deny Thompson’s feelings

\textsuperscript{12} Herzfeld, \textit{Poetics of Manhood}, 10–11.
\textsuperscript{13} Michael Herzfeld, \textit{Cultural Intimacy: Social Poetics in the Nation-State}, 3.
\textsuperscript{14} Herzfeld, \textit{Poetics of Manhood}, 10.
for Mrs. Raymond—or Jack, whose death “I never regretted” (41). Once again, questions arise about her power to direct male conduct, especially toward other men. These questions (raised but not answered) provide space for working-men to be social in the wake of socializing that made all men objects to be corrected and punished. Yet resisting Mrs. Raymond’s power to drive these acts only turns in counterpoint with the codes she polices. This occurs in language used when Uncles and Nephews address each other, from cheeky street banter (“Thompson, give us a tune!” [54]) to the redemptive but teasing, “Did they tell thee I was false Katie Darling?” (84). Intimacy was enacted between men—each an uncle and a nephew—by way of a self-allusive poetics of male relationship amid a revolving necessity to violate and to correct.

Thompson treats male intimacy at greater length in another memoir: *Ten Days in the Tombs: or, A Key to the Modern Bastille*. Writing in the first person under the pseudonym John McGinn, Thompson recounts ten days in the life of “the Fat Philosopher” (sometimes referred to as Falstaff, reprising his persona from *My Life*) jailed for intoxication. Reference to the Bastille begins Thompson’s protest against the institutional injustice of punishing drunkards as criminals. But his title also faults disciplinary culture more broadly. A year before *Ten Days in the Tombs*, T. S. Arthur published *Ten Nights in a Bar-Room*, a hugely successful novel often referred to as the *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* of temperance literature. Like *Married and Single*, *Ten Nights* relies on a structural conceit: the narrator travels to a town on business and stays the night at the “Sickle and Sheaf,” a new hotel and drinking establishment. He returns several times over the next decade, and each time he sees changes caused by alcohol. These include a decline in service, cleanliness, and quality of food at the hotel; and in the decency and order of the town. Not everything goes downhill. The owner’s wealth increases, as does his size and sensuality. The number of men who patronize the bar grows, along with the suffering of their families. Most striking is its influence on society in the town, which by novel’s end descends into riot and murder. Yet, nothing measures the evils of drink like victimized innocence. In a scene by now predictable, a girl named Mary, daughter of a drunkard, comes to the bar one day to take her father home, when a glass hurled at him by the bar’s proprietor misses and strikes her instead.

Arthur’s time-lapse device supplied what all reformers needed, a way to demonstrate the cumulative ills of an activity that in isolation seemed only harmless fun. His success with *Ten Nights in a Bar-Room* can be attributed to several factors, among them his use of the ten-night format to narrate the redemption, not of an individual, or even a family, but of an entire community. He also joins a standard temperance message to an array of economic and social misgivings that come between men. The main character is Simon Slade,
a successful miller who sells his business because he “got tired of hard work, and determined to lead an easier life.” But Slade’s easier life costs the job of his employee, Joe Morgan, a man who was once his fellow apprentice. The new owner saves money by firing Joe, an economic expediency he regrets when his inexperience causes him to fail. Local residents also suffer as they must now travel to the next county to grind their grain. A local gentleman, Judge Hammond, buys the mill, retooling it as a “factory” to distill liquor (41). According to Simon, “Everyman desires to make as much money as possible and with the least labor” (14). Despite his selfish beliefs, Slade is a family man, who regards his children, Frank and Flora, with great affection. When the narrator questions whether the boy should be mixing drinks, Slade replies, “Nothing to fear, I can assure you. Frank has no taste for liquor, and might pour it out for months without a drop finding its way to his lips. Nothing to apprehend there, sir—nothing” (10).

Characters enter to suggest otherwise, and as they do Arthur’s larger scheme emerges. Simon’s wife supervises dinner with “a peculiar expression of the mouth never observed in one whose mind is entirely at ease” (17). Like Mrs. Trueman (Married and Single), Ann Slade is the moral monitor of the family, objecting to the new venture and eventually going mad at what transpires. Also present is Willy Hammond, promising son of the Judge, whom Simon hopes he may one day equal in wealth and esteem. Besides selling Willy rum-toddlies, which he learns to like very much, Slade helps gamblers fleece the young man after his father put him in charge of the distillery, hoping responsibility will make a man of him. The plan fails, and giving Willy money increases the incentive to ruin him. Third is Morgan, Simon’s old friend, brother apprentice, partner, and finally employee, after the more calculating Slade buys him out. Now Joe is the tavern’s best customer. While working, his easygoing ways were charming, and were it not for Slade’s ambition Joe’s slide from easy to errant would not have occurred. A year later, that violence between the two will cost Mary her life. The first night, only words fly, however, and these cease when she enters. “Father!” Mary calls from the door, “Come, father! won’t you come home?” “I have never heard this word spoken in a voice that sent such a thrill along every nerve,” the narrator testifies. “It was full of sorrowful love—full of tender concern that had its origin too deep for the heart of a child. [ . . . ] I hear that low, pleading voice even now, and my heart gives a quicker throb. [ . . . ] Morgan arose, and suffered the child to lead him from the room. He seemed passive in her hands” (23–24).

To the novel’s temperance agenda, Mary and Mrs. Slade supply leverage and men social content. Slade challenges Hammond as a figure who represents traditional elites who were gradually being displaced by artisanal entrepreneurs. That Arthur intended their relations to be understood this way is suggested at several points, notably Slade’s practice of buying the property of men who fail, implicitly with cash they paid for the drink that caused their ruin. Land that once signified Hammond’s status now marks his rival’s upward mobility. This is not Slade’s intension so much as an intemperate appetite in itself, greed that is innate to his character, but which comes to intoxicate due to weakness and temptation. “A tavern-keeper,” he says, “is just as respectable as a miller—in fact, the very people who used to call me ‘Simon,’ or ‘Neighbor Dustycoat,’ now say ‘Landlord,’ or Mr. Slade, and treat me in every way more as if I were an equal than ever they did before” (15). In ease and wealth, Slade finds distinction, what I have described as vertical desire, not yet class identity, but an impulse driven by duty (i.e., to one’s family) in a market-driven economy, and by the pleasure of accumulation. This impulse is encouraged by another big bug, Judge Lyman, a lawyer, who applauds Slade’s ambition. Along with gambler Harvey Green, they target young men like Willy Hammond, innocents in the new marketplace. An only son, Willy dies in his mother’s arms, on the floor of a room Slade hires out for cards, stabbed by Green in a dispute over losses.

Much of *Ten Nights* treats Willy’s demise and its consequences: Green is killed and Slade badly injured by a drunken mob; Lyman’s political career is ruined; Hammond is left with no heir, regretting “that his hands should have unbarred the door and thrown it wide, for the wolf to enter” (227). With moral guides gone (Mrs. Slade mad, Mrs. Hammond dead from grief, Flora at the asylum nursing her mother), events progress toward the final tragedy when Frank, himself now a drunkard, strikes his father with a liquor bottle and kills him. The message is clear: Slade, like Hammond, spawns his own destruction. A generational allegory expands the merely regulatory into a wider critique of conditions that cause men to stray. While “enterprising organ-grinders” trade their sons for “accursed gold,” their method likens the free market to a tavern where all are doomed (227). In nights five to the end, Arthur attacks the *intemperance* of men like Hammond, respected only for his wealth, and Slade, whose ambitions drive the new economy. Their relations he calls “dog eat dog,” with the principal victims not them or their heirs, but those whose “sorrowful love—full of tender concern” they all betray (223).

Fathers and sons vie with each other in *Ten Nights*, inflicting pain on the women who bear, care for, and rely on them. As a revolving relational poetics, this occurs most notably when Frank kills his father with a bottle, which
the elder Slade gave him ten years before and in the end struggles to remove. Yet the paradigmatic moment comes earlier and in a male relationship not generational but fraternal: Simon and Joe. Arthur grounds his case against the present not on laissez faire competition played out across a card table between existing elites, but on the social split that occurs when Slade joins the game. Here we find nostalgia for intimacy that predates capitalism. Simon and Joe were childhood friends, and like Carpenter and Dexter Hosley, they served their apprenticeships under the same master, Joe’s father. The various transactions whereby Simon gradually acquired the mill strike many as sharp dealing, all the more dubious given his filial link to a family whose roof sheltered him for years. But no one faults his industry, especially as Joe preferred fishing to milling. Slade ran the business well and continued to employ its former owner. But then industry yielded to easy money, the mill became a “factory,” Joe lost his job, and Simon left “Neighbor Dustycoat” behind.

While plotting the rift between brother tradesmen in economic terms, Arthur figures its cost as familial, born by individual homes and by society generally as neighborliness bows to self-interest. He does this by extending Slade’s link with the Morgans to attachments that transcend the change in social relations, paternalistic forms of obligation now driven by the affects of victimization. “I wish Mr. Slade wouldn’t look so cross at me,” Mary moans from her death bed, Slade’s wife attending along with her parents. “He never did when I went to the mill. He doesn’t take me on his knee now, and stroke my hair. Oh dear!” (67). Slade is troubled when Mary seeks her father at the “Sickle and Sheaf,” recalling debts acquired at a time when human relations were not determined by material interests. Mary’s pain marks Slade’s fault in the flesh, as it does her father’s. Slade aims the glass at Joe, driving him out the door as she enters. He orders Joe out because he too reminds him who pays the price for his easy life. Unlike Mary, though, Joe disturbs “good feeling among gentleman” not with pity, but by exposing the pretexts that betray past ties. Dropping his last coin in Slade’s hand, he remarks on the new trade his “old friend” has mastered: “No more use for me here tonight. That’s the way of the world. How apt a scholar is our good friend Dustycoat, in this new school!” (22).

The evening Mary plays her role in leveraging relations between tradesmen, one on his way up, the other on his way down, they have stooped to name calling, “vagabond” and “rum-seller,” ending with questions of “decency” (50–51). Slade fares worst. A goodhearted husband and father, Joe is led astray, but saved finally when his “very soul the piercing cry of his child had penetrated” (50). When Mrs. Slade arrives, her look “can hardly be forgotten.” “Oh, Simon!” she scolds, “has it come to this” (53). It has little effect, however.
Like Flash Bill who flouts Stuart’s moral license (“I killed your sister, curse her!”), Slade too is defiant. “Blast her little picture!” he says when someone says Mary’s injury may cost him. “What business has she creeping in here every night?” (60). But of Joe’s wife, he speaks differently: “I couldn’t look at her last night,” he says with a “touch of feeling.” Fanny Morgan was “the loveliest and best woman in Cedarville . . . Oh dear! What a life her miserable husband has caused her to lead” (60–61). Slade’s “Oh dear!” echoes Mary’s, and reminds us that the fault is not his alone. When Mary arrives to save her father, Joe too holds a glass, goading Slade to throw his. But he, like Stuart, is transformed, while Slade remains in denial. This explains why Fanny chose Joe, even when she had “her pick of the young men” (29). Successful as he is, Slade envies the poor man who got the prize. Fanny objectifies all he lost in mastering the new “way of the world.”

Pierced to the heart, Joe never drinks again. He also begins to show more fondness for business than pleasure. When we next meet him, Slade is dead, and he and Fanny occupy a “neat little cottage” near town center. Sober and industrious, Joe has returned to his father’s mill, though he is still an employee working for wages, apparently a permanent shift in status that indeed reflected the “way of the world” (32). Decency was the question between all men, and
whatever its terms—drinking liquor or selling it, easy money or useful labor, social rank or republican brotherhood—it was measured the same way, and with direct effect on intimate relations. If liquor promoted sociability, the power of Mary and her mother are seen beneath the arch of “The Drunkard's Progress” (figure 24), explaining the low thrill of men on a spree, along with the volatility of their fellowship, which as often as not ended in trouble.

Again, it was the sincerity of such violence that troubled Thompson, the fact that it was driven by impulses mutually annihilating and all but irresistible thanks to rhetoric that fixed them as obligatory responses in male relations. His rejoinder one year after Arthur published Ten Nights in a Bar-room does not dispute the misfortune of drink, any more than he regrets killing Jack Slack or becoming the “champion of beauty.” To this extent, Thompson agreed with Arthur that some things should not be done. Ten Days in the Tombs differs in resisting the violence this caused in male relations, where some men corrected others by putting them in jail—or worse. Thompson himself winds up there one night after a spree, providing the basis for his observations on “the discipline of the ‘Tombs.’” He faults this discipline three ways: by declaring the laws that govern drunkenness unfair and prisons cruel; by saying that drunkenness should not be treated as a criminal offense at all; and by once more questioning the rhetoric he holds responsible. The victim in this case is “poor leettle Louise,” so called by her father, a Frenchman also serving time for public intoxication. But unlike others, Louise is not vengeful, nor is her pain a cue for men to be so. She is a fine daughter like Mary Morgan, but not a moral bully whose “sorrowful love—full of tender concern” forces Joe to take the pledge. If we have seen Louise before, it is the injured but forgiving Katy Darling, to whom the Uncles and Nephews sing to free themselves from prison. Louise too frees men, not by denying the laws they police, but by reminding them that, before her, all transgress, and this binds them as intimates.

Ten Days in the Tombs is a slim book (122 pages), far shorter than Ten Nights, and with a paper cover. Its publisher, P. F. Harris, specialized in “sporting” literature, including The Broadway Belle, a pornographic weekly Thompson often edited. Among Harris titles advertised in Ten Days are Gay Grisettes and their Young Lovers and Matrimony Made Easy. Tempting as they sound, such books were no threat to Arthur. Ten Nights in a Bar-Room was the second most popular novel of the 1850s, next to Uncle Tom's Cabin, with innumerable reprints, including gift editions and a stage play. It is unlikely that any of Thompson’s books were printed more than once or circulated in large

16. George Thompson, Ten Days in the Tombs; or, A Key to the Modern Bastille, 12. Further references are cited parenthetically in the text.
numbers. This is not because obscenity laws blocked their sales. Indeed, *Ten Days* is tame by its author’s usual standards, beginning with a mission statement, then setting out a case for judicial fairness and leniency not unlike what we read today in the liberal press. Yet if Arthur’s bland moralizing sold millions in a cultural marketplace driven increasingly by mass appeal, such appeal eluded Thompson—and others who found the popularity they enjoyed in the 1840s slip in the new decade. Hounded by the law, his on-again/off-again relationship with Harris increasingly off, Thompson moved to Boston in the 1860s, where his name appears in the city directory with his occupation listed variously as editor, writer, and printer, depending on work he could get from year to year. His writing fell off substantially during this time, and in 1871 he died. He was forty-seven, widowed, and his estate amounted to $513.15 in the Boston Five Cents Saving Bank.

Thompson and Arthur, one on his way up in 1855, the other on his way down, invite comparison with Joe Morgan and Simon Slade. The two writers probably never met; but to see Thompson as a man, like Morgan, left behind with the majority of workaday penny-a-liners, while a few prospered, helps us treat *Ten Days in the Tombs* as a social text beyond its auto-erotics of style. This style constituted a counter-aesthetic, I claimed in chapter 4, trashy reading that metabolized the adaptations of workingmen to coercive disciplinary print culture. As himself a worker in the industry that performed this coercion, Thompson helped us track these adaptations in his writing and in the pose he struck in climbing the steps of the Tombs to defy laws meant to domesticate his trade (figure 14). And it was domesticated, although not so much by laws, and only partly by the persuasive arts of reformers like Arthur. These arts no doubt influenced how readers responded to Thompson’s claim that drink was a harmless social pleasure, when just one year before they heard Simon Slade, worst villain since Simon Legree, say just that: “Nothing to apprehend there, sir—nothing.”

But domesticating Thompson’s trade also proceeded from defying these arts and the laws they produced. In addition to recreational identity, such reading metabolized the very codes it seemed to deny. The resulting aesthetic would ruin Thompson, where his transgressive gusto, titillating as it was, set affective markers at which eyebrows were raised among readers whose yearnings were ever upward. Opposing Arthur’s moralizing produced his market for

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17. George Lippard and George Foster also experienced declining readership.
18. Information on Thompson after he leaves New York is scant. This account I derive from Paul Erickson’s “New Books, New Men: City-Mystery Fiction, Authorship, and the Literary Marketplace.” David S. Reynolds and Kimberly R. Gladman provide further details in their introduction to *Venus in Boston and Other Tales of Nineteenth-Century City Life*, ix–liv.
19. That Slade and Legree shared the same first name cannot have been an accident.
him, bland subjects with whom Thompson enjoyed a poetic intimacy as self-immolating as Slade’s. So in *My Life*, when we find him not posing in front of a city jail, but locked inside, he and the rest of his Grub Street troublemakers swaggered far less. Thompson’s rendition of “Katy Darling” is sad, regretful, even as he evades the question the song raises (*My Life*, 84). If this opens the dungeon door and returns him to social life, the same way it does when he swaggers in front of the Tombs (and on the cover of *Broadway Belle*), his song to Katy portends the struggle this will increasingly entail, including ten days when he will again be locked inside with no song to get him out.

That this struggle involves Thompson’s aesthetic is first suggested by his self-splitting pseudonym, which to aid a legal argument made in *Ten Days* dissociates him from a literary persona who for years publicly scorned the law. Not that this reduces his bluster: “since the adoption of the Prohibitory Liquor Law, MADAME JUSTICE has taken up her abode elsewhere” (1). But tone aside, the claims that follow are sensible and, again, not unlike liberal positions today. They begin with the injustice of a penalty—ten dollars or ten days—that discriminates against workers who for want of cash must serve time, while men of means go free. Fiscal inequity also means that once a poor man is jailed, he cannot purchase food to supplement meager rations supplied by prison authorities. And while subject to hunger, cold, and bullies inside, a man is “separated from his wife and children, who are suffering for the bread which he is unable to earn them” (10–11). Thompson’s humanitarian plea also applies to the wrong punished, which he insists is not a crime, but a misfortune. A drunkard is driven to the “fatal habit” by circumstances: “there is no effect without an adequate cause” (109–10). And on the effect of jailing men in order to reform them, he quotes an inmate who says “I have always been an honest man, but there are ten chances to one that I shall now become a thief and a rogue” (40). “Thus does the barbarous usage of the ‘ten day men’ in the Tombs, by inspiring the victims with the consciousness of their wrongs and a spirit of revenge, arm them against society, making them enemies to the law and order, preparing them to become criminals, and converting comparatively harmless men into a class of dangerous reprobates” (41).

When he wanted to, Thompson wrote with intelligence, even grace, whether the topic was justice, antisocial behavior, or the effects of drink—which he recounts here with some sensitivity:

The habit of drunkenness, when persisted in, is a great—an overwhelming misfortune. It deprives a man of his best friends; it breaks up families, and severs the husband from the wife; it destroys all confidence in him; it takes away his self-respect; it ruins his reputation and health; it reduces him to rage
and beggary; it converts him to an object of public ridicule and contempt; it
impairs the intellect, and deadens the noble and God-like faculties of thought
and reason . . .

But sensitive or not, the passage takes a sudden dive that recalls the volatility
that betrays Henry Ward Beecher:

. . . and it places him completely at the mercy of every cowardly and swindling
scoundrel who is base enough to take advantage of his melancholy infirmity. The
white-livered poltroon may abuse him with impunity, while the speculating
and designing knave can easily make a tool of him in every shape and manner.

Next he attacks “the rum-seller,” who in raising

the reeking cup of horror to the inebriate’s lips . . . grows rich, and becometh
much respected, and hath honors heaped upon him; while he deserves—But
stop! We must not keep on in this strain, or we shall lose our temper, and
become indignant. Besides, we do not mean to preach a temperance sermon
by any means. (108–9; original emphasis)

The final flourish (“But stop!”), including a dig at temperance sermons, is
the kind of turn Thompson excelled at: amid touching regard for the inebri-
ate’s plight, he explodes in personal venom that, pseudonym aside, identifies
him with his subject. Both the mockish shift in tone and concluding wink to
the reader highlight (“background,” Herzfeld would say) the rhetorical context
before which he performs. Thompson swaggers similarly when he first joins
context and complaint in setting out his plan for the project: “My principal
reason for writing this pamphlet is that the authorities and the public may
become acquainted with the internal affairs of the institution which is to them
a sealed book” (12). This is the language of an exposé that promises to open
the city and make it legible, so that “Philanthropy and Justice may plant their
blows aright.”20 But like George Foster (and Beecher), Thompson’s drift was
prurient, so polemic degenerates into lurid tales of crime and vice. By liken-
ing the Tombs to a “sealed book,” he figures a culture ruled by the rhetoric of
temperance, which he then defies with intemperate publication, even while he
appears to have bought their line on drink.

If Thompson differed from the others, it was in the degree to which he
highlighted his context and the distance “in front of” it he performed. Self-

allusiveness varies in *Ten Days* from the caddish tweak of “But stop!” to a milder humor he uses to cast his intemperate self not as an “evil genius” or greedy capitalist, but a man out to enjoy a much needed break from the toils of the day. Chapter One, “Showing How the Fat Philosopher Fell into the Hands of the Philistines,” includes his own version of “The Drunkard’s Progress.”

**THE LADDER THAT DESCENDS FROM SOBRIETY TO INTOXICATION AS TRAVERSED BY THE FAT PHILOSOPHER**

Round First.—Falstaff, who standeth at the top of the ladder, feeleth sociable, and drinketh with a friend or two.
Round Second.—He becometh confidential, and communicateth his plans for the future.
Round Third.—He treateth the party again, and becometh darkly mysterious.
Round Fourth.—More drinks; protestations of eternal friendship, and a general shaking of hands.
Round Fifth.—Falstaff essayeth to sing, but breaketh down in the effort, and covereth his confusion by “asking ’em all up.”
Round Sixth.—He has a dispute with the bar-keeper about incorrect change. He becometh valiant, and challengeth the aforesaid publican to personal combat.
Round Seventh.—He descendeth into a lager bier saloon, and drinketh several pints of that Germanic fluid, which, mixed with other potations, produceth somnific sensations.
Round Eighth.—He is pretty well down the ladder by this time, and waxeth stupid.
Round Ninth.—He hath arrived at the bottom of the ladder, and slumbereth upon the “cold, cold ground.” Whereupon he falleth into the hands of the Philistines. (17–18)

Performing before a rhetorical field that marks him as a pariah, Thompson accommodates his protagonist socially through humor. Our Fat Philosopher threatens no one, except perhaps himself, as he stumbles down the ladder of intoxication.

To this point, we are still talking about Thompson’s auto-erotics of style, his pose as an individual before the normative context in which he lived and wrote. But there is no want of social content, including two instances when he expresses violent feelings about those like Simon Slade who profit from the “fatal habit.” As intemperate publication, *Ten Days* also enacts the cocked-hat intimacy of James Bell’s tent as its pseudo-author (John McGinn) and pro-
tagonist (Fat Philosopher) pretend to hide a figure (Thompson) well known in the literary and probably legal community.

But it is the Tombs itself that provides Thompson’s primary meditation on the poetics of male intimacy. The world he describes is a microcosm of the society that imprisoned him: corrupt officials starving inmates and allowing “black and Irish thieves” to steal what little they have to sell it back to them, while lawyers, preachers, Jews, and “foreigners” take advantage of anyone who has “the misfortune to be an American” (11, 34). Yet here too we find accommodation, as the author takes pains to show. Chapter 6 includes an extended account of men singing and joking one evening as though their differences mean nothing—or provide grounds for fellowship when “harmony [was] disturbed by a slight misunderstanding between a bottle-nosed chimney-sweep and a dissipated gatherer of soap-fat. These gentlemen having punched each other’s heads in a manner that was deemed entirely satisfactory, shook hands fraternally, and retired to their repose” (69). Appended to this fraternity of trouble is a remark that recalls Franklin’s fish-eating episode: “Our Philosopher, who had contrived to render himself somewhat popular among the masses—for there is nothing like a man’s adapting himself as far as possible to the company into which chance may have thrown him—was next called on for a song” (69).

Thompson not only “adapts” to the company, he is drawn to one of its most despised members, a foreigner, with whom he develops a relationship more affirmative than others we have seen, while remaining fundamentally conflicted. Monsieur Pappin is a small man, entirely bald, always happy, with exaggerated manners and poor English. All make him an object of ridicule among the prisoners. A music teacher by trade, his sentence is nearly over when Thompson arrives. By now he is filthy and half-starved, and he has given away most of his possessions due to boundless “civility” and indifference to personal property. Subject to the “often heartless jeers of his companions,” the “poor little Frenchman” is one day set upon by a loutish Irishman and the Philosopher steps in. But when the Frenchman is released, all wish him well, his “good nature” touching even those who abused him, the Irishman included. Pappin’s departure causes wistful, rising to indignant reflection on how “cruelty and oppression” cause good men to turn bad: “‘Ah!’ thought the Philosopher, with a sigh—‘Would that all mankind, and womankind, too, possessed such good hearts and such simple, guileless natures as thine, poor little Frenchman!’”

21. Thompson remarks throughout on conditions in the Tombs, but this is the focus of chapter 4, “Life in the Stone Jug,” in which he cites abuse by a wide range of “foreigners and rogues” (37) all the while claiming discrimination for anyone “an American” (34). Cf. page 66 on preachers, 52 on lawyers, and 35 on “Uncle Simpson,” a Jew who takes his watch in pawn.
“Take care,” he warns, “hypocrites and worshippers of mammon! Your slaves may get to heaven before you!” (85–86).

But the next day “Monsieur” returns, much to the Philosopher’s surprise, victim once again of the Prohibitory Liquor Law and his own bad habits. He is clean, though, and bears food and gifts that he gives out before stopping to reply to questions. “Oui—ah, mon Dieu!—poor leetle Louise!” said the Frenchman, as his eyes filled with tears. The Philosopher had unwittingly awakened in the breast of his strange companion emotions that were evidently painful.” Pressed, Pappin tells his story, which began as a “decent birth and good education,” after which he enjoyed a modest family life. All was ruined when a friend cheated him out of his property and ran off with his wife. Happily though, he retains his “only treasure—my daughter, the little Louise.”

Ah! she is like an angel. She works hard and never scolds me when I get drunk. In return, I never beat her, or speak unkindly to her—such treatment would break her heart—she is so good, so gentle, so affectionate! Sometimes I keep sober a long time, and then I earn money for my little Louise, and make her presents of little caps and gay ribbons—each as her mother used to wear—she is very like her bad mother, is little Louise! But I mean in person, not in disposition.

Sometimes Louise is well fed, sometimes not; but she never complains. Memory of “her bad mother” causes Pappin to drink, which causes Louise to weep, although she hides her tears so not to embarrass her father. The first time he is jailed, “she thought me lost, or dead—she went almost distracted.” On his return, “her kisses covered my lips, my cheeks, and her embraces well nigh smothered me.” This time, he vows to change: “I’ll no longer be a drunkard—I’ll be a temperance man—I swear it! This reform I owe to myself—to my Louise.” He swears also to “think no more of my bad wife” and “hereafter live very happily together, Louise and I” (87–88).

The poor little Frenchman’s account of life with poor little Louise fills much of three pages. In eroticizing their relationship, and in having Louise play the roles of mother, wife, and daughter, Thompson again figures violated femininity as a key fixture of reform. Joining father and daughter—both in desperate need of “reform I owe to myself—to my Louise”—also suggests the regime of familial dependence on which the device drew. All we have seen before in the fatal relations of men enchanted by beauty, except that here they are not fatal. Monsieur indeed reforms and lives happily with Louise. More important, Thompson has feelings for the pair, and these are reciprocated, unlike the sexualized violence of The House Breaker or murderous rage of Ten
Nights in a Bar Room. As he begins to tell the story of his life, the “Frenchman grasped the hand of the Philosopher,” prompting him to offer his own gesture of affection: “Pardon me if I have wounded your feelings,’ said our friend gently—‘I did not mean to do it’” (87).

In consoling Pappin, Thompson’s Fat Philosopher closes the divide between them caused in part by his nativism, but also other factors. As a man of letters with an impulse to moralize, he assumes an elevated distance between himself and other inmates that is at once ethnographic and condescending. It also denies that he is indeed one of them. While he insists that drunkenness is not a crime, Pappin’s rearrest causes him to assume superior airs based on what he infers is his greater self-control. But names like Falstaff and Fat Philosopher hardly connote restraint, and all such pretense soon collapses before the mirror of Pappin. Far from refusing on principle to pay his fine, as he claims, events suggest that the Philosopher, like the Frenchman, is in jail because he is broke. Bad habits and financial embarrassment account for affection between the two, both of whom, it should be added, are cultural producers of small and struggling distinction.

Thompson again backgrounds the economic when, after his release, Falstaff visits the reformed Pappin, finding him and Louise living in a workers’ tenement. But if their residence is proletarian, their apartment occupies the top floor, where access is difficult for a “man who has the misfortune to weigh over two hundred pounds.” Recalling that earlier Thompson’s size was taken to suggest his success in resisting bodily constraints, the tables have turned as he ascends to a flat where the “luxury of abstinence” reigns and his appetites are now the misfortune (91). Arriving, he is met by Pappin in a night cap and wearing a “calico dressing-gown that was many sizes too big for him, enveloping his little figure like an awning wrapped around a clothes-pin” (91).

Monsieur Pappin was in raptures with himself, and with everyone else; he danced and jumped about like one possessed. The Philosopher, at first, thought that the little man was drunk; but the whispered assurance of the happy Louise removed that suspicion.

The table was soon spread, laden with delicacies, including fruit, and a bottle of wine; but neither the Frenchman nor his daughter would touch the wine, and our friend was obliged to become a solitary convivialist.

“A leetle cat zat is burned sall dread ze fire,” said Monsieur, who was evidently thinking of the Tombs. (94)

Afterward, Louise plays the guitar and sings; her father plays violin and erupts periodically in fits of ecstasy. Eventually the evening ends and Thompson leaves, vowing one day to return.
The scene at the Pappins’ home is remarkable for many reasons, not least of which is that it suggests domestic happiness is incestuous and mutually infantilizing. Thompson sends Falstaff up “six long flights of stairs” to see the man of the house, with whom he shared affection when both were social outcasts. But now the little Frenchman is a temperance man, and in rising above his appetites—and to the top of his tenement—he resembles Henry Stuart, for whom redemption means a wealthy home and sexless marriage. Sacrifices must be made, and these are policed by more than just “thinking of the Tombs.” “Ze fire” that burns Pappin flows from Louise’s weeping eyes, as it did from the wounds that Bill inflicts on the body of Stuart’s sister. Failing beauty locks men in prison, supplying a basis for romantic affection that transcends difference: Stuart once identified with “common working men” like those he eventually murders invading his new home. So when Pappin becomes his daughter’s champion, a split seems inevitable. It is not a good sign when the Philosopher is “obliged to become a solitary convivialist” when eating so often bears democratic value.

Yet no split occurs, or none of the kind characterized as violence between Stuart and Bill or Slade and Joe Morgan. Not only is the Frenchman pleased to see his guest, by having him appear “drunk,” Thompson suggests that the terms of their attachment remain, regardless of whether or not he abstains from drink and, more important, regardless of the means used to persuade him. If male relations are again arbitrated by a victim, this one’s beauty possesses qualities that resolve hostility produced by her injury. The long climb to the top of the stairs is motivated less by Falstaff’s wish to see again his “eccentric acquaintance” than “to behold the prodigy of beauty and amiability—this daughter of his, the charming Louise.” Perhaps, he speculates, “she is nothing but a Parisian grizette with a brown skin, course features, red hair, and breath tainted by the odor of garlic—a creature, in short, positively repulsive to an American taste. . . . Well I shall soon see” (90).

Louise is everything Pappin promised: “beauty and amiability” ideally suited to his “American taste.” He finds this first in their domicile: “The divine presence of a womanly purity hallowed that humble abode, and seemed to shed a halo of glory all around.” When he enters, Louise, a girl of sixteen, is seated at a table making artificial flowers, which she sells during the day. Unlike other victimized figures, Louise answers contradictory demands of reform and sociability, resolving conflict between them. In her eyes Thompson finds “the passionate depth of an enthusiastic soul”; but they are also “deeply sad, full of a mysterious sorrow that is holy and resigned” (92–93). But to this again romantic account of difference, Thompson adds another that turns from sublime to social reconciliation through language by now synonymous with male relations:
Her hair, so darkly brown and shining like the softest satin, is smoothly parted over her fair girlish forehead—but it revenges itself for its forced quaker-like simplicity in front, by falling down behind her ears in a rich shower of tresses, that finely contrast with her rounded shoulders and alabaster whiteness. (93)

Thompson figures the “thinness, insincerity and even chronic wariness” of male relations in hair that “revenges itself” behind for “forced” piety in front, and in so doing falls “darkly” on Louise’s luminous flesh. Verbs like these speak of intimacy indeed precarious and transitory. There is also no escape. Corrective force fuels revenge, which in dark curls falls on that body whose violation produces more “quaker-like” expectations, which Thompson and Pappin can only finally disappoint.

But fraught as they are, Thompson’s verbs generate others more promising, though with little to construe as romantic in the relations they represent—which on the evening of his visit are anything but. Pappin continues to play the holy fool, ecstatic in his abstinence and in his daughter’s virtue, which he trusts to the leering eyes of a guest who ogles her the entire night with scarcely concealed relish. Not that Falstaff does more than look, which while contained by civility (to his host) and honor (before her alabaster whiteness), descends from pious awe to scopic salaciousness. Force and revenge meet in every male relation we have seen. But here, the result is not violence, but “a rich shower of tresses,” which do not violate beauty, but “finely contrast” it. The difference is partly Louise, who adds “amiability” to this beauty. Together they serve as the revolving terms of a poetics that Thompson keys to the need for reform, on one hand, and for republican sociability, on the other. We find like values in Joe and Simon, a gracious drunkard and a businessman who counts profit before community. Arthur looks to a solution: suffering innocence that reforms one and kills the other. Thompson seeks to counter such violence, while not denying its source.

In Thompson’s fiction, champions of beauty murder its betrayers; in his life, men who abstained from drink imprisoned those who did not. Some fortunes rose, others fell, and feminine suffering validated both. To join beauty and amiability—transcending violence, but sustaining opposition—constitutes a democratic mystery of great interest to Thompson, whose own fortunes

22. “When the Philosopher saw her, she was dressed in a very simple and becoming manner, wearing no ornaments whatever, although her youth and extraordinary beauty might have excused some little artificial embellishments. But could the costliest gems add ought to the loveliness of that radiant creature? Where are the diamonds that could sparkle more brilliantly than her eyes? Where are the rubies that could compare with the rich hues of her cheeks and lips? And where are the pearls that could vie with the delicate enamel of her teeth, whose rosy portals, when wreathed into a smile, suggesting thoughts of honeyed kisses and the sweet fragrance of spring flowers?” (93).
were decidedly in decline. High atop Pappin’s tenement, from which he will soon descend once more to the thin intimacies of men, Thompson is “a solitary convivialist,” but welcome at the table. The nature of this fellowship he alludes to in the “voluptuous symmetry” of Louise’s body and “rich shower” that waters the canonic shoulders on which she bears ruin as contrast (93). This contrast reflects the specific social poetics shared by Louise’s guest and father at times when, by Thompson’s account, she is “especially and irresistibly captivating.” This occurs “when she talked,” speaking “our rude language” badly, even unintelligibly, but with a “graceful French accent” that covers her mistakes with laughter (94; original emphasis). Beauty and amiability merge in Louise’s grace before the rude realities of the world, performing waywardness not “in front of” internalized social norms, but before two men: one who speaks her tongue and whose self-denial guards her purity, the other who doesn’t and whose intemperance violates it. Each finesses intimacy in the other’s captivation with her.