1995

Encoding Imperialism: Homelessness in American Naturalism, 1890-1918.

Janet M. Whyde

Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College

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ENCODING IMPERIALISM:
HOMELESSNESS IN AMERICAN NATURALISM
1890-1918

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of English

by
Janet M. Whyde
B.A., Texas A&M University, 1985
M.A., North Carolina State University, 1991
August 1995
Dedication

Jakob William Hendrix
Acknowledgments

I wish to acknowledge my gratitude to all those who saw me through the sometimes exhilarating, often painful, process of writing this dissertation. Of especial importance, of course, are the members of my committee—Carol Mattingly, Carl Freedman, Panthea Reid, Richard Moreland, David Wills—all of whom expressed unreserved support for my project. The chair of this committee, Dr. John Lowe, deserves inexpressible thanks for his unwavering faith in and perceptive criticisms of my work. I thank all of these people with the hope that someday I may repay their kindnesses.

Others, however, also contributed to the completion of this work, which came about despite, or perhaps because of, particularly distressing obstacles. I thank all of my friends, but especially those who helped me when I was unable to help myself: Charlotte McInnis Curtis and family, Judith Duplessis, Paul Nielsen, Lynna Dunn, Laurie Arnston, and Robert Peneguy. For their support and faith in me, I also thank Erik Bledsoe, Keith Hendrix, James and Janet Hendrix, and Terry Newgard. And although they often questioned the wisdom of spending a lifetime reading and writing about novels, I thank my family for trusting my judgment and my aspirations.

I give special thanks to Drayton Vincent, without whom this dissertation would never have gotten finished.

But most of all I thank my son, Jakob, whose unconditional love and acceptance often served as a reason to continue.
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Abstract

Homelessness occurs with uncommon regularity in the works of American naturalists, and in each case, the result of a character's homelessness results in a crisis of social identity and self definition. This pattern recurs in the works of the canonically identified naturalists, such as Stephen Crane, Frank Norris, and Theodore Dreiser, as well as other writers who have only been tangentially associated with naturalism—Edith Wharton and Paul Laurence Dunbar, for example. In this study, I analyze the relationship between homelessness as it is represented in the novels and the political debate over the United States's imperialist aspirations at the turn of the nineteenth century.

In chapter 2, I look closely at the effects that the loss of home has on the protagonists of Dunbar's The Sport of the Gods (1901), Norris's Vandover and the Brute (1894), and Wharton's The House of Mirth (1903). Through the physical dislocation of the characters, these writers explore the integral relationship between identification of the self within the structure of a home and the subsequent disruption of self identity caused by its loss.

Chapter 3 expands the definition of home by looking specifically at the coterminous relationship between the woman's body and the space that she inhabits. Examining Wharton's Summer (1918) and Dreiser's Jennie Gerhardt (1911), I demonstrate that, because of the social expectations that women should embody domestic values, women's homelessness is represented as a process of failure to project the self into the world.
The final chapter demonstrates that the structure of the narratives enact the process of display necessary for the domination of the other and that this structure dramatizes and exposes the mechanism of colonialization. American naturalism ultimately reinforces the values of imperialism while critiquing the destructiveness of conspicuous consumption.
Chapter 1
Introduction: Establishing Boundaries

In the city at that time there were a number of charities, similar in nature to the Captain's, which Hurstwood patronized in a similarly unfortunate way. One was a convent mission-house of the Sisters of Mercy in 15th Street—a row of red brick family dwellings before the door of which hung a plain wooden contribution box, on which was painted the statement that every noon a meal was given free to all those who might apply and ask for aid. This simple announcement was modest in the extreme, covering as it did a charity so broad. Institutions and charities are so large and so numerous in New York that such things as this are not often noticed by the more comfortably situated. But to one whose mind is upon the matter, they grow exceedingly under inspection.

—Sister Carrie (1900)

One of the first boundaries that individuals encounter is the one that defines the home and family from the outside. Who are the members of the family and the community? What are the parameters of the home territory? For the United States, these basic questions took on a public character at the turn of the nineteenth century, fueled by the announcement of the closing of the American frontier in 1890. Add to this event an influx of immigrants coming to take advantage of the nation's industrial prosperity, and the result was a public debate over national political and cultural identity.

At the same time, American thinkers were discovering Darwin's work on biological evolution, Herbert Spencer's application of Darwin's ideas to social theory, and, of course, the writings of European naturalists, such Zola, Flaubert, or Tolstoy. The result was the American naturalists, who created characters who confront the forces of social change that often exclude those people who fall between the social boundaries or definitions of legitimacy. In short, the historical struggles facing the nation parallel the fictional struggles of these characters, as "the common character of the reactions to reality... in history and literature produce analogous subjects..."
and forms of historical consciousness." Just as these characters search for place and identity within the bounds of their fictional worlds, so the nation sought to define its physical and political boundaries in the historical world.

In this study, I hope to show that as characters in naturalist texts struggle to define themselves in the context of "homelessness," they reveal at the same time the parallel effort that marked U.S. struggles to redefine itself in the face of a changing world role as an imperial power.

Reading the texts of the canonically identified naturalists, such as Stephen Crane, Frank Norris, or Theodore Dreiser, I was struck by the number of characters who at one time or another lost their homes during the course of the novel. The characters were not always poor or immigrant or female—markers that often signal a character living in the margins of society—but in each case the circumstance of becoming homeless inevitably led to a crisis of social identity and self definition. When I expanded my reading to include other writers, such as Edith Wharton and Paul Laurence Dunbar, who have only conditionally been granted the status of naturalist writer, I noticed a similar pattern in some of their works, a pattern that I did not see in the writings of their "realist" contemporaries, such as William Dean Howells or Henry James.

Having noticed the pattern, I began to search for an explanation that might link these diverse writers. What I discovered was a connection derived from what Georg Lukács calls "the given historico-philosophical realities with which the authors were confronted." In particular, I looked to the tremendous social, economic, and political transformations occurring both in the United States and abroad at this time and noted that
many of these writers worked as journalists and had firsthand knowledge and even experience of key events.

One such event was the Spanish-American War of 1898, which shaped the U.S.'s international role for years and the effects of which can be seen even today at Guantanamo Bay or Puerto Rico. Few historians would argue that the United States first established itself as an imperial power at the turn of the nineteenth century. Competing with the Europeans, who were far ahead in the acquisition of foreign territories, the U.S. began testing its muscle overseas in the 1890s. Not until the Spanish-American War in 1898, however, did the U.S. actively intervene in the affairs of another country, when it fought to free native Cubans from Spanish colonial rule and then extended its involvement into Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines, other Spanish colonies. And although these military adventures were staged ostensibly for humanitarian reasons, they resulted in the establishment of U.S. colonies abroad. Such colonization, however, had broad popular support, fed by Joseph Pulitzer’s New York World and William Randolph Hearst’s Journal, and the support of many U.S. businesses who felt that the federal government’s increased intervention would open up foreign markets for their U.S. goods. Especially attractive was the well-populated China, which was in the process of being divided up among France, England, and Germany.

In the past fifteen years, especially since the publication of Edward Said’s Orientalism and the work of Gayatri Spivak, studies of the consequences of Europe’s colonization on dominated cultures have proliferated, and their work has subsequently influenced work on and about U.S. colonialism. As Said concedes, however, terms such as
"imperialism" and "colonialism" are not self explanatory. In his more recent *Culture and Imperialism*, he differentiates imperialism and colonialism, defining "imperialism" as "the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan center ruling a distant territory" and "colonialism" as the consequence of imperialism whereby settlements are implanted on distant territory. Both imperialism and colonialism, he asserts, "are supported and perhaps even impelled by impressive ideological formations that include notions that certain territories and people require and beseech domination, as well as forms of knowledge affiliated with domination." The United States established and maintained its presence in their foreign acquisitions by supporting Christian missionaries, fueling bases, and American business enterprises, and they achieved wide-scale cultural domination that has continued to the 1990s.

Regardless of the means that one country uses to establish its colonies, colonization by definition requires the control of a specific geographic space and the bodies that live within that space. Before this process can move forward, those who must be controlled must first be identified as "foreign" (Other), an identification that may occur according to skin color or language or residence in a particular space or all three. Furthermore, the identified and defined Other must be marked as not only different but also inferior.

In its crudest form, control may manifest itself as physical occupation and oppression, as in the case of Dutch and British occupation of the South Africa, for example; but control may also be exerted in more subtle ways through the domination of native cultural forms, such as the Anglicizing of the Indian educational system or the Americanization of
Filipino economic and political forms. The consequences of this latter form of control are far reaching both for the native peoples who have these institutions imposed upon them, and for those who effect the imposition. Said has pointed out that cultural colonialism operates in two directions at once; thus the dominator is altered by that which it dominates, and the dominated is altered by the dominator, though this bi-directional interplay of cultural influence is implicitly unequal and non-totalizing. Said's analysis, however, also suggests that the duality of the dominator/dominated dichotomy is more rhetorical than operative, since both privileges and oppressive forces are distributed unequally through any given population. In short, no being internalizes entirely and in "unadulterated" form the cultural forms of the other.

In recent studies of American literature and culture at the turn of the century, scholars have concentrated on ways that the United States' burgeoning imperialist enterprises and the ideological construction of those enterprises became incorporated, disseminated, and, finally, accepted as foreign policy in a country that had heretofore been isolationist—in large part because of its relative weak military and naval position, but also because of a general understanding that the Constitution precluded outward expansion. Until the 1890s and early years of the twentieth century, the United States government focused its energies on the internal construction of the country: the settlement of the west, the Civil War, and then Reconstruction. By the time then that the U.S. government had the power and the influence to turn its attention outward, it had acquired already significant experience with colonizing non-Anglo-Saxon populations, and politicians had begun to reinterpret the Constitution to
support acquisition of territories outside the natural boundaries of the country.

Settlement of the west, for example, required the internal colonization of native populations and their resettlement onto reservations. And while the period of Reconstruction following the Civil War led to the passage of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, the political debates surrounding the Spanish-American War resulted ultimately in the Supreme Court's interpretation of these amendments as legal protections of property and businesses, not individuals, thereby assuring that African Americans could exercise neither their right to full citizenship, nor all the rights that full citizenship should have entailed. At the same time, immigrant groups were flooding into the country. So long as these people were needed to settle empty land or to work in the new factories and industries, they were welcomed, but by 1890, the continent was industrialized and settled, and some immigrants into the country, instead of being seen as necessary for settlement or labor, were deemed as surplus labor and "threats" to the employment opportunities and the pure blood of the earlier immigrants. Hostility toward some immigrants was heightened by the economic depressions in 1893–94 and 1907, which resulted in high unemployment and inflation, and by the shift of immigration patterns from northern and western European Protestants to the eastern and the southern European Catholics and Jews and to the Chinese. In all of these cases, entire ethnic groups were identified, relegated to specific geographic areas, and denied access to power and opportunity, either economic or legal or both. While the different groups did not necessarily receive equally bad treatment, they were all, to one
extent or another, marked as "foreign" and separated into ghettos or specific neighborhoods as a direct result of public attitudes and policy.8

While historians disagree about the cause(s) of the economic and demographic transformations of the period, they do agree that the period between 1865 and 1919 saw a radical transformation of the United States and its relations to the larger world. Amy Kaplan examines the ideological construction of these relations and its "embodiment" in a cult of masculinity in the bestsellers of the day, historical romance novels. "The analogy between nationhood and manhood in the 1890s ultimately relies on their spectacular nature rather than their rooted physical organicism. Furthermore, the tension between the disembodied empire and the embodied American man is reproduced within the figure of masculinity itself, between nostalgia for the body and the spectacle of its display."9 She points out that these novels, set usually in a romanticized time past and often in a foreign country, "contribute to a broader cultural dynamic that simultaneously represents and renders invisible the politics of empire building."10

The representation of the politics of empire, however, was not always invisible and occurred somewhat less subtly in other cultural arenas, such as state fairs, expositions, and department stores.11 Filipinos, for example, were put on display at the center of numerous American world's fairs. Wild Bill Hikock included "savages" in his travelling show, and P.T. Barnum imported and exploited the "wild men" of Borneo and other exotic peoples in his "Greatest Show on Earth." Window displays and interior design at the time also took on a stereotyped Eastern—or Oriental—aspect with yards of silk and piles of pillows used to create the
image of the harem, for instance. Given the widespread representation of
the products/commodities of imperial conquest within the upper- and
middle-class cultural arena, we should not be surprised that this
representation occurs in novels, even ones more often noted for their
critique of domestic policy than their concern with foreign policy. I refer
specifically to the novels of the naturalists, whose critiques of the structural
and cultural causes and effects of poverty have often been examined, but
whose concern with the process of empire building has usually gone
unnoted.13

Past critics of American naturalism, such as Lars Åhnebrink and
Donald Pizer, have focused on the work of a core group of novelists—
primarily Frank Norris, Theodore Dreiser, Stephen Crane, and Jack
London—and analyzed their writing either as derivative of European
naturalism as exemplified in the work of Émile Zola, or as a deterministic
variant of American literary realism. Unlike the French naturalists,
American naturalists lacked the consciousness of their work as science;
although they were undoubtedly influenced by Zola and considered the
subjects of their novels to be derived from close, disinterested observation
of the world, they were concerned primarily with the aesthetics aspects of
their writing, the creation of a piece of art. Pizer, especially, has influenced
the tone for scholarship on American naturalism in his important studies of
nineteenth- and twentieth-century naturalism.14 His work emphasizes the
complexity of works that were largely dismissed by proponents of
modernism in the 1920s and 1930s. Pizer argues that "the distinctiveness of
the form of the naturalistic novel lies in the attempt of that form to
persuade us, in the context of a fully depicted concrete world, that only the
questioning, seeking, timeless self is real, that the temporal world outside
the self is often treacherous and always apparent."\textsuperscript{15}

This definition, however, is vague, presuming a theory of
essentialism much like that which informed the earlier realist heroes, and
neither Pizer nor any other critic to date has satisfactorily defined
naturalism or identified clear criteria for declaring one work naturalism
and another realism. Most have simply accepted a priori that group of
writers that has been handed down as "naturalists." Furthermore, no one as
of yet has explained why such a distinction is even necessary or helpful in
understanding the development of an American literary tradition.
Nonetheless, a number of critics beginning in the 1980s have tried and have
made inroads in our understanding of naturalism as a distinct form.

June Howard, for example, identifies the "plot of decline" as a
defining feature. She contends that the naturalist novels she examines
process ideological material that characteristically invents a
lived relation to two increasingly inescapable aspects of the
conditions of existence in late nineteenth-century America: the
decisive dominance in economic and social life of market
relations in a national and even global economy; and the
presence of class struggle in a nation with a constantly
increasing, largely immigrant urban proletariat that was both
very vulnerable to the recurrent economic depressions and
relatively visible to other classes.\textsuperscript{16}

Insightful and interesting as many of her observations are, she
unfortunately does not subject her chosen texts to close scrutiny to reveal
this ideological process in operation.

Lee Clark Mitchell goes further in providing criteria for identifying
a naturalist text in his revealing close readings of texts by London, Crane,
Dreiser, and Norris. His readings illustrate how particular narrative
strategies employed by naturalist writers, such as repetition, alternative
points of view, and fragmented syntax, define the form. He answers the common charge that naturalist writers are bad stylists by arguing that they are so intentionally, that bad style serves in their "attack on the reader by undermining narrative assumptions that realist authors invoked in their fiction, assumptions by which we otherwise more generally author our own selves into life. The naturalists assaulted the reader by writing iconoclastically, inverting the strategies implicit in any structuring of a moral self."\textsuperscript{17} In other words, he sees bad style as undermining the expectations of a privileged, bourgeois culture.

Mark Seltzer and Walter Benn Michaels both look to questions of representation that arise out of these novels. Seltzer focuses especially on the relation between the naturalist body and machines and suggests that rival models of persons, representations, and actions as either material or abstract "epitomize the rival models and tendencies of market culture and machine culture at the turn of the century."\textsuperscript{18} Michaels deconstructs naturalism in the context of the debate at the turn of the century over the gold standard. Should gold be replaced by greenbacks? Michaels argues that this debate constituted a struggle over representation, which the naturalists manifested in their novels: "One could, perhaps, best describe naturalism as the working-out of a set of conflicts between pretty things and curious ones, material and representation, hard money and soft, beast and soul. . . . The consistency—indeed, the identity—of naturalism resides in the logics and in their antithetical relation to one another, not necessarily in any individual, any text, or even any single sentence."\textsuperscript{19} At the same time that Michaels defines the logic of naturalism, he disperses it, making location potentially impossible. A similar charge might be leveled at Eric
Sundquist, whose volume of important essays includes studies of Norris, Dreiser, Crane, and other traditional naturalists in a book entitled *American Realism: New Essays*. In effect, Sundquist obscures in his title any ideological distinction between the work of a Twain or Howells and a Norris or Dreiser.

Whatever shortcomings these and other studies of naturalism may have, they all still have revealed a more complex aesthetic underlying naturalism than has heretofore been acknowledged. Extending the work of these scholars, drawing especially on the previous work of Howard and Mitchell, I will examine ways in which historical and political concerns over U.S. expansionism and boundary definition at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century were written into naturalist narratives, both thematically and structurally. Of more specific interest is the way in which issues raised in the public debate over imperialism and colonialism become encoded and addressed in these narratives of dispossession.

Stephen Crane in his role as a war correspondent during the Spanish-American War is perhaps the most famous naturalist writer to be associated with U.S. imperialism, but Dunbar, Norris, Wharton, and Dreiser were all also politically sympathetic with U.S. imperialist activities, though also aware of the destructive potential of the process. In choosing texts and authors to examine, I limited myself neither to the traditional core group of naturalists (Crane, Norris, London, and Dreiser), nor to texts that address imperialism explicitly, if not modestly (such as *The Octopus*). Moreover, my observations are applicable to texts other than these examined. Because I am interested in expanding the way we
understand American naturalism and noted a similarity between these and more commonly recognized naturalist works, I have in fact chosen some novels that are not often analyzed as naturalism—Paul Laurence Dunbar's *The Sport of the Gods* (1901) and Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth* (1903) and *Summer* (1918). I also include readings of traditional, though lesser known, naturalist works—Frank Norris's *Vandover and the Brute* (1894) and Theodore Dreiser's *Jennie Gerhardt* (1911)—in order to highlight the value of these works. As diverse as these writers are from one another, I would like to demonstrate that each of them, to one degree or another, participate in a common aesthetic and political project.

In chapter 2, I examine *The Sport of the Gods, Vandover and the Brute*, and *The House of Mirth* to show how the displacement of characters from their homes results in a re-evaluation of the immutability of their values associated with that institution. In each of these novels, the authors explore the integral relationship between identification of the self within the structure of a home and the subsequent disruption of self identity caused by its loss.

I place my discussion of homeless characters in the context of historico-cultural attitudes toward the institution of the home and the phenomenon of homelessness at the turn of the century. The scant information available on the magnitude of this problem is limited and relates primarily to males, but there is evidence that homelessness was a fairly common problem that was addressed by communities primarily through the passage of vagrancy laws, which were modeled largely on the European model. The few social histories written about homeless women
at the turn of the nineteenth century focus in large part on the plight of prostitutes, so I address this issue separately in chapter 3.

The first novel I examine is Paul Laurence Dunbar's *The Sport of the Gods*; the central characters, the Hamiltons, are ex-slaves who have made good as loyal servants to the Oakleys. In the course of the novel, Berry Hamilton, the father, is convicted of theft and imprisoned. Socially ostracized, his family—Kit, Joe, and Fannie—moves to New York where it quickly succumbs to the corrupting influences of the city. Berry is eventually released when the true culprit of the theft is discovered, and he and Fannie return to their cottage.

The novel both opens and closes with a description of the Hamilton family and its cottage—the symbol in the beginning of the family's material circumstances, and in the end of their submission to "some Will infinitely stronger than their own" (255). When Berry Hamilton is imprisoned and the family loses its home and is forced to move to the unknown spaces of New York City, each member undergoes a subsequent disruption of his or her self identity. They struggle to forge new identities that will allow them to acclimate to the changed social context and to establish themselves as accepted members of society; but misreading various social codes, Joe becomes a "professional" beggar, Kit goes on stage as a less-than-reputable dancer, and Fannie, believing her husband's imprisonment has effected their divorce and needing a means of support, marries a physically abusive man. These characters' inability to maintain stable identities when they are thrust into the realm of the unknown suggests that the identities formed in their hometown lack coherence once they are outside the sight of the meaningful landmarks of their home, the familiar houses, chimneys, and
spires of that place. Lacking understanding of the landmarks in New York City (the minstrel show, the Banner Club) and forced to live in a series of boarding houses, they fail to maintain or to recreate the family.

At the same time, Dunbar also traces the parallel dissolution of the Oakley family, attributing Maurice Oakley's madness to the shock of discovering that his own constructed social identity is a fiction. The destruction of these two families and their homes alters the very romantic but widely held notions of home; the very symbol of stability and order is exposed as a constructed fiction.

In Frank Norris's *Vandover and the Brute*, Vandover undergoes a similar process of loss. From a well-to-do family in San Francisco, he attends Harvard and plans to study art in Paris. Slowly, through a combination of accident and personal dissolution, he loses the large family home and replaces it with a small apartment. As his inheritance dwindles, he moves into smaller and seedier spaces, substituting in one place placards with the names of lost objects for the objects themselves. Finally, living on the street, he gets a job from an old Harvard friend cleaning rental houses—houses built from the profits earned after his friend intentionally cheated him out of the valuable property across the street.

Vandover, in contrast to the Hamiltons, is all too capable of adopting an identity commensurate with his living spaces. He transforms each living space into a home and adopts the values suggestive of that space, no matter how debasing. He moves easily from the middle class into the ranks of the homeless, from a sense of himself as cultivated and socially recognized artist, to the non-sense of himself as a brute—the object of pity who is vilified. His inability to maintain a stable self identity is marked by
symptoms of lycanthropy that overcome him without warning and over which he has no control.

Norris, like Dunbar, also compares the trajectory of Vandover's circumstances with other characters', in this case with his friends Dolly Haight and Charlie Geary, in order to demonstrate the weaknesses of varying responses to the world and to dramatize his plea for romantic fiction. Vandover's tale serves ultimately as a negative example of the struggle, both internally and socially, between the civilized and moral with the animal.

Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth* traces the end of the "career" of Lily Bart, orphaned and homeless, as she moves from house to house in search of a rich husband. Born into the upper class, she is "relatively" poor and finds herself at the mercy of an unscrupulous husband of a friend who has invested, or so she believes, money for her. Her self identity is based on self-deception, which she maintains in the face of the destructive superficialities of the society that she desires. Acculturated into its values but never allowed full membership, her banishment slowly leads her to recognize her "foreigner" status and her homelessness and reveals to her that she does not have the capacity to recreate herself as she would if she had, or ever had had, a web of familial connections. Her relationship with the class that claims hereditary and cultural superiority exposes the underlying economic foundation of those boundaries.

John Hollander traces the various connotations of the word home and points out that "the ways in which domicile of choice ceases to be coextensive with domicile of origin are part of the story of the developing and growing self in modernity" (31–32). In the three novels discussed
above, we see American naturalists exploring the effects that the
disjunction of "domiciles of choice" and "domiciles of origin" have on the
formation and maintenance of characters' identities. American naturalists
consistently dramatize the failure of characters to maintain coherent
identities when they become cut off from their origins, their homes. The
loss of home—the site where culture first and primarily becomes
disseminated—signals a disruption of that culture and exposes the
constructedness of cultural values, leaving both characters and readers in a
morass of uncertainty about the very boundaries of home and the
immutability of its associated values.

In chapter 3, I examine *Summer* and *Jennie Gerhardt* to demonstrate
how naturalists include the body in their conceptualization of the home;
dislocations occur doubly in female characters who are forced into sexual
relationships (either as prostitutes or mistresses) that alienate the
character's self-representation from the social. Both Charity Royall and
Jennie Gerhardt suffer from literal homelessness, followed by metaphoric
homelessness. In losing or recognizing the absence of a web of their
familial and social connections, they are each left silenced and powerless to
articulate her own identity. Moreover, the disruption of identity that
occurs as characters are cut off from the spaces and objects they use to
project themselves into the world reinforces a hierarchical structure that
privileges the us over the "other," a structure evocative of the relationship
of the colonized to the colonizer.

As noted above, historical studies of the homeless population at the
turn of the nineteenth century focus primarily on homeless men. Homeless
women, however, do appear in some of the naturalist fiction of the day—
Stephen Crane's Maggie, for example, who is thrown out of her home or the Hooven women in Frank Norris's *The Octopus*. Their choices are prostitution or begging. The old mother and the youngest Hooven daughter fail at begging and die of starvation, while the teenage daughter survives, having been taken in as a prostitute in a brothel. Given that historically any woman who could not demonstrate a place of residence could be charged with vagrancy, prostitution, or both, whether or not Norris's representation of homeless women is an accurate assessment of women's choices if they should find themselves destitute and living on the streets is moot.

To complicate matters, the particular historical, economic, legal, and social position of women meant that they were nearly always on the verge physical homelessness anyway. Expected to embody social stability and domestic values, women were thought to be capable of creating a home wherever they resided. Behavior that was deemed a threat to domestic values, such as openly sexual behavior or vagrancy, was often criminalized, such that social validation was possible only if women submitted to the social limitations or regulations that were placed on their bodies.

Naturalists establish a coterminous relationship between one's home and one's body whey they examine the relationship between place and identity and the effect that loss of place or home has on identity definition. In representing women as homeless, Wharton and Dreiser effect a form of disembodiment whereby their women are cut off from acts of "making" and from their own "impulse" to project themself into the world. These writers achieve this literary disembodiment by focusing on spaces and the
way these spaces function as a means of alienating and controlling the other.

In Wharton's *Summer*, Charity Royall searches for social legitimacy in one of three geographical spaces—North Dormer, the Mountain, and the city. Her ambiguous relationship with each of these spaces reflects the internal and external conflicts that surround her search. Charity eventually achieves social legitimacy, but only by accepting the role of Lawyer Royall's wife in order to provide her unborn child with a legitimate name. Faced with the choices of a life of abject poverty on the Mountain or prostitution in the city, she agrees to marry him; but too weak, tired, and inarticulate to refuse, she becomes silent at this key moment in the novel.

At the same time, however, Wharton does not completely condemn the actions of Lawyer Royall. Fallible though he is, his "adoption" of Charity, first as ward then as wife, is presented as being fundamentally benevolent acts. In fact, Wharton felt strongly about Lawyer Royall and wrote that he, not Charity, was the subject of her novel.

Dreiser's *Jennie Gerhardt*, like his first novel, *Sister Carrie* (1900), explores the failure of a woman to define a self as she becomes cut off from her body, and Jennie's trajectory closely parallels that of Charity. Dreiser's novel focuses on the various conflicts that center around the question of what Jennie's body is worth to certain buyers, what its exchange value is for the family. These conflicts, moreover, may center on Jennie, but they also serve to reveal the destructive potential such conflicts have on society itself.

Like Wharton, Dreiser uses space as a means to dramatize Jennie's conflicts with society and with herself. He does so by exploring the various
ways that space functions to alienate and control. From the very opening of the novel, Jennie is cut off from others. Eventually, as she reforms herself into the woman that first Senator Brander and then Lester Kane wants, she becomes cut off from her own sense of identity. Finally, she accedes to the social definition of herself as "bad," and unable to achieve legitimacy in her relationship with Kane, first because of his marriage to another woman and then because of his death, she falls entirely into the typographical silence of the dash and the question mark that indicate the end of the novel.

Furthermore, Dreiser, like Wharton, does not demonize the central male character. In Jennie Gerhardt, Lester Kane refuses out of love to abandon Jennie for his inheritance until the last possible moment, and when he does, he provides her and her daughter with a trust fund that will keep them in comfort. Dreiser reinforces Lester's continuing, though conflicted, loyalty to and love for Jennie when he has Lester call Jennie to his deathbed. Even Senator Brander is spared complete censure, since it is his untimely death that interrupts his plans to marry Jennie, his social inferior.

Both novels examine the social construction of value, specifically the value of women, and the social conflicts surrounding the determination of value. Because of social expectations about the significance of women and their bodies as the purveyors of home values, Charity's and Jennie's respective failures to live up to these expectations effect their loss of the power to self-represent, to project themselves into the world. Instead, their respective representations are ceded over to a more "legitimate" authority, Lawyer Royall in Charity's case and "society" in Jennie's. Like the homeless discussed in chapter 2, they are exiles within the structure of their own
society, and their respective positions as mistresses place them in opposition to such dominant cultural structures as the institution of marriage, which their position inherently threatens—structures that they both have internalized as the only legitimate ones. In accepting the definition as the "other," they become alienated from their own bodies as that body interacts with the world in socially unaccepted ways, and they lose or give up the capacity to define themselves. Both Wharton and Dreiser offer telling analyses of the process of acculturation that serves to alienate those who for whatever reason become homeless, an alienation that replicates and expands our conception of homelessness.

At the same time, the sympathetic representation of the male characters complicit in Charity's and Jennie's respective alienation makes problematic a simple dominator/dominated reading. In fact, these relationships suggest the possibility of productive relationships that are thwarted by the socially destructive emphasis on consumption, an issue I explore in more detail in chapter 4.

Chapters 2 and 3 focus on homelessness and the crises of identity that homelessness engenders. The relationship of characters to the novelistic spaces in which they struggle to define themselves—be it geographic living space or the more intimate space of the body—reflects characters' repeated failures to transform poetically their space so that it conforms to the desires and demands of their self. This continual fragmentation and dislocation results in their identification as foreigner.

I have examined thus far the process of imbuing space with meaning as it is represented within the novels and the reciprocal process of space as a means of projecting the self into the world. Chapter 4 examines how
naturalists, in their display of the socially dispossessed, structurally reaffirm the position of these individuals as "domestic foreigners" at the same time as they expose the failure of a society to capitalize on the potential of these individuals because of its emphasis on conspicuous consumption. I argue that the representation of this process and the incumbent social critique parallels the public debate over U.S. imperialism and the resulting foreign policy. I use both historical and biographical evidence to show that these naturalists were supportive of imperialism as a general policy, but critical of a policy of exploitation, and that their concerns are apparent in their naturalist novels.

Each of these writers uses similar structuring devices in their narratives, devices that reflect the structure of colonization as defined by Edward Said. Said in Orientalism examines the textual production of the Orient by the West and the significance of the "nexus of knowledge and power." In the case of American naturalists, the native population being represented, defined, and thus controlled, is the population of the domestic foreigner—the poor, the homeless, and the prostitute—all deemed threats to social order and all objects of study and concern at the turn of the nineteenth century. This population, while perhaps not the "white man's burden" as the Filipinos and Hawaiians and Cubans were to North Americans at the time, was the "burden" of the middle and upper classes. In making the "other" known to the relatively affluent population through their novels, naturalists function both as authorities on the "other," offering scientific and sociologic explanations for their existence, and as social critics of indiscriminate consumerism. Their central characters become tragedies of lost potential and wasted commodities. At the same
time, these strategies reenact and reinforce the notion that the "foreign" is a potential threat that must be contained.

Overall, I read these novels as addressing questions being debated in the public sphere at the turn of the nineteenth century: What are going to be the boundaries of the homeland? And who are we going to allow in as members of the "family"?

This study is not an attempt to redefine naturalism as a doctrinal mode of support for imperialism, nor to generalize about the specific foreign policy beliefs of any particular writer. While I believe that many of the observations I make in regards to particular texts may apply to other texts of this period, I do not presuppose this to be an exhaustive study. I do hope to show that the fiction of the American naturalists is of far more interest than simple historical curiosity or anomaly. And although I do admit to participating in the current program of canon definition and reformation going on in literary studies today, I am more interested in exploring strategies used by these writers to encode a particular political concern of a defined historical moment into the thematics and structure of a literary product. In the case of the American naturalists, their works are neither simplistic nor reductive explorations of the unknowable determinants that shape individuals or their fates; nor are they simple narratives of dispossession and its representation. American naturalists provide a complex and telling analysis of the relationship between the individual and the external world, and their focus on personal definition within space reflects, in large part, a concern with national space manifested in the political issues of the last decade of the nineteenth century and first decade of the twentieth.
NOTES


6. The Fourteenth Amendment (ratified in 1868) provided freed slaves the rights of citizenship, due process, equal protection, and the right to be counted for purposes of determining representation. The Fifteenth Amendment (ratified in 1870) guaranteed black male suffrage. Both amendments were effectively gutted in the 1890s, the first by Plessy v. Ferguson (1896), which ruled separate-but-equal constitutional; the second by Williams v. Mississippi (1898), which ruled that property requirements, literacy, and poll taxes were legal for determining the right to vote. All women, black or white, were denied the right to vote until passage of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920.

7. The Irish were able to parlay their numbers and disaffection into powerful political machines in Boston, New York City, and Chicago, something that would have been impossible for either Native Americans or African Americans.


12. In fact, what this paper should show is that domestic policy and foreign policy are coextensive, despite the common practice of distinguishing the two. A government's policies toward its own population, or certain segments of that population, will be reflected in its treatment of some foreign populations, and vice versa.

13. There are some exceptions to this, however. For example, Heinz Wüstehagen argues that naturalism fits into the anti-imperialist movement and thought of the time; he writes that naturalists "protested . . . against concrete social and spiritual phenomena in American life engendered by the change from laissez-faire capitalism to imperialism and by the crisis of social life which sprang from this change" (346). See Heinz Wüstehagen, "American Literary Naturalism and Anti-Imperialist Movement and Thought," Zeitschrift fur Anglistik und Amerikanistik 31 (1983): 343–48. Even Frank Norris's The Octopus, which provides as a solution to the farmers' plight the opening up of a market for their grain in China, has not been examined for its connection with American empire building.


Chapter 2
Homelessness: Exposing the Mutability of Social Boundaries

Home, home on the range,
Where the deer and the antelope play,
Where seldom is heard
A discouraging word,
And the skies are not cloudy all day.
—American Folksong

There's no place like home.
—Dorothy, The Wizard of Oz

A home is not a house, and a house is not a home.
—Edie Brickell

Characters become homeless with disturbing regularity in the works of American naturalist writers, those identified as such both traditionally and conditionally. Moreover, regardless of a character's class, ethnicity, or gender at the time of becoming homeless, the result of losing the home inevitably precipitates a crisis of social identity and self definition, as the loss of the home serves to make ambiguous the other social boundaries—from accepted social conventions to sexual mores to employment—that had heretofore marked a character's relative position in the social hierarchy. In other words, those values that at one time were accepted by characters (and readers) as given, divine or otherwise, become questioned by characters who suffer the disorientation of being cast from the one institution that served to reinforce the belief that those boundaries were immutable—the home.

The seeming obsession with the home is not, I believe, an historical accident, especially given the enormously complex political, social, and economic restructuring that occurred in the United States from Reconstruction to the Great War. In this chapter, I examine three novelists of the period who, despite (or because of) the diversity of their
backgrounds, styles, and literary reputations, all use homelessness as a means to dramatize the severe dislocation and disorientation of values and social identity that follow the central character's loss of home: Paul Laurence Dunbar in *The Sport of the Gods* (1902), Frank Norris in *Vandover and the Brute* (written in the mid-1890s, published 1914), and Edith Wharton in *The House of Mirth* (1905). In chapter 4, I will show how homelessness, or losing one's home, relates to the increasing social anxiety over the United States' colonization of "alien" populations, both at home and abroad. Suffice to say here that both homelessness and colonialism point to the political struggle that occurs when groups disagree about the delimitation of supposedly accepted social boundaries. In short, what belongs in and what belongs out?

The extent of homelessness as a social problem in the 1890s and the first decade of the twentieth century is impossible to measure.¹ Historians estimate that in the period between the Civil War and the Great Depression there were millions, possibly tens of millions, of homeless men.² The reasons for the displacement of so many men vary. Some men were displaced economically in factory layoffs during the cycle of depressions in the late nineteenth century, but others simply chose to repudiate "the new work disciplines and institutional strictures of industrial society."³ The population of homeless men, while not stable, included both unskilled and skilled workers, including white-collar workers, and despite a popular myth of the time, most were native-born citizens, not immigrants. Regardless of whether they were forced unwillingly from a job or chose the intinerant life, the majority of homeless men spent some of their time working at low-paying odd jobs or performing migrant agricultural labor.

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The prevailing social attitude toward these men, while somewhat ambivalent, was overwhelmingly negative or hostile. In an informational pamphlet distributed by the Conference of Charities of the City of New York in 1894, entitled "How to Help Homeless People," the homeless are described as "a curse to themselves and a menace and injury to the city." In the 1880s and 1890s, in response to this "menace," many charity organizations recommended a "scientific" approach to aiding the homeless, such as creating controlled environments innocuously called "municipal lodging houses or private wayfarers' lodges"—though they were in fact work camps. Into the early twentieth century, these tramp farm colonies were places "where miscreants would be sentenced to indeterminate terms until they learned the joys of labor." Recommendations such as these were not universally adopted and, in fact, were often undermined by the charity of individual citizens and Gospel missions, like the Salvation Army, which set up soup kitchens and dispensed free bread to the needy. The widespread passing of punitive vagrancy laws does reflect, however, the fear of the larger society, especially but not exclusively middle- and upper-class Anglo-Saxon society, that the homeless were subversive to both the established order and to their way of life. The "tramp symbolized the breakdown of the community-centered life and decentralized control that was one of the primary experiences that defined nineteenth-century American society." Kim Hopper argues that "what was dangerous about the tramp was not his 'otherness' but his familiarity (our repressed otherness, as it were). He embodied some of the strongest yearnings, regrets or misgivings—however one wants to characterize a deeply felt skepticism—of a working populace only newly and imperfectly harnessed
to the wheel of the factory." This combination of fear and a sense of recognition may explain the ambivalence that marked the public and private response to homeless men.

I have used the term "homeless" as if its meaning were self-explanatory, but the word is as problematic as the term "home." Is one's home a place or an idea? Is it a construction of material or mind? What precisely has one lost if one has lost a home, if one is home-less? The difficulty in identifying a home is suggested, ironically, in popular icons of homes. Go to almost any crafts bazaar or flea market in the United States and you will likely find a variety of wall hangings, usually either wooden or cross-stitched, often "homemade," that read "Home is where the heart is" or "Home is where the hearth is" or "Home, sweet home." These pieces of folk art, hanging in kitchens all over the country, often depict a little white cottage with a garden and white picket fence, smoke pouring from a chimney, or perhaps a smiling matronly woman wearing an apron, usually holding a cooking implement. Despite the visual simplicity of these icons of home, they represent the complex values and desires that define for many the term home and that evoke an idyllic sense of an ordered sphere in which the family lives in peace and harmony—well fed, protected, warm. These representations of home, then, indicate that a home is not simply a place, but a condition of life and a web of familial, often specifically maternal, associations. Loss of a home may or may not indicate the loss of a particular space; more important, perhaps, is the notion that homelessness really indicates the loss of a particular condition of life and loss of the web of familial connections that provide the individual with a
sense of legitimacy in a society that invests so much meaning in the structure of families and homes.

The etymology and historical usage of the term home points to both the place of origin and the place of refuge—a place, simultaneously physical and psychological, from which one comes and develops and a place to which one retreats in times of distress. The condition of being homeless, therefore, may occur when one loses, or becomes alienated from, either or both of these places such that one has no physical space in which to experience the condition of feeling well fed, protected, and warm, or connected to one’s origins. In other words, homelessness may entail the loss of a fixed place to live, but the condition of being homeless does not indicate necessarily that such a loss has occurred.

In the late nineteenth century, homes held many of the same associations as they do in the late twentieth century; the ideal home included a breadwinning father to whom wife, children, and perhaps grandparents were obedient—the nuclear family. This decidedly patriarchal model was replicated and reinforced in a myriad of ways on a larger political and economic scale: citizens were deemed to be obedient children of the republic; workers were conceptualized as the obedient children of the benevolent factory owner who always knew what would be best for his "children," be it pay cuts or layoffs. Any deviations from the model disrupted this ideal of order and power relations; therefore, becoming homeless was tantamount to social rebellion and perceived as being dangerous and subversive to social order, the order represented by the home. Homeless men were transients—often forming their own communities, sometimes violent, on the outskirts of established
communities; the home was symbol of stable, lawful communities. The homeless were poor beggars, tramps, and vagabonds, usually unemployed; the home was symbol of material success. The "figure of the tramp . . . represented not only the outsider and rebel, but the image of failure in a society long dominated by the success ethic."9 In short, to be homeless is to be an exile, not merely outside the dominant cultural and economic system and institutions, but in opposition to that system. To lose one's home was to lose not simply a place to sleep, but also all the things associated with that place, including status in the world and sense of identity as the web of associations is broken and the individual is cast into a foreign, often hostile, environment, where, as a homeless person, he or she has no legitimate claim to make on society.10 In the words of Dr. Holland in an 1880s issue of Scribner's Monthly, "He has no more rights than the sow that wallows in the gutter, or the lost dog that hovers around the city squares. He is no more to be consulted, in his wishes or his will, in the settlement of the question as to what is to be done with him, than if he were a bullock in a corral."11 Homelessness confers upon the individual the status of a beast.

Given this radical transformation that occurred whenever individuals found themselves cut off from the very structure that marked their social legitimacy, it is little wonder that novelists at the turn of the century, suffused as they were in the evolutionary theories of Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer, focused on homelessness as a transformative event. I contend, in fact, that a defining concern of American naturalists was their interest in the effects of homelessness on the individual's ability to construct a legitimate relationship between the self and society.
Naturalists, I would argue, see homelessness and its incumbent exile—an exile that occurs nearly always within a character's own homeland, Heimat—as more than a metaphor for the tenuousness of the human condition and as more than simply a plot device to reveal the plight of the poor. Instead, these novelists draw on the importance of the home as a material manifestation of the social and cultural values through which individuals define their relationship to the world, and they explore the effects, both material and psychological, that its loss has on characters.

Often overlooked in the traditional studies of American naturalism is this emphasis on identity formation that separates American naturalism from the more sociological naturalism of Zola; American naturalism is more than a poor man's realism or a fictionalized scientific study of the principles of Darwin or Spencer. In fact, most characters who suffer the transformation engendered by homelessness begin in the middle class, or, in the case of Edith Wharton's characters, sometimes in the upper class. Even in a work like Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*, which focuses specifically on the exploitation of poor immigrants and sets forth an explicit argument for socialism, the family initially comes from the middle class in Poland. Characters, in other words, originate as legitimate members of society, socialized into its values and proponents of its sanctioned goals, even if their position in society may be economically tenuous. In each of the novels I will look at, the authors explore the integral relationship between identification of the self within the structure of a home and the subsequent disruption of self identity caused by its loss.

Paul Laurence Dunbar—better known for his poetry, praised by W. D. Howells in 1896 for representing "the simple, sensuous, joyous nature of
his race"—published his novel The Sport of the Gods in 1902. The critics, in large part, have since read the novel in terms of its success, or failure, as an African-American novel: To what extent did Dunbar capitulate to the demands or values of white publishers and a white audience? How accurate is his portrayal of black life? How far does the novel go in engaging the racial politics of the time? More recently, Houston Baker has taken the position that such criticism assumes a coherent and identifiable form for African-American art, and he calls for a reassessment of the novel based on its "symbolic potency" as opposed to its success or failure as a racial jeremiad or historical representation of black life: "mythic and literary acts thus defined [as forms of symbolic freedom] are different orders of phenomena from normative, historical acts of criticism." In other words, instead of focusing on the degree of realism with which Dunbar represents the racial politics of his time, this novel should also be read within the space of its symbolic freedom, where I see Dunbar critiquing the process of social boundary construction while resisting the idealization or hierarchization that often accompanies such a critique. As Julia Kristeva notes apropos of women in Desire in Language,

the idealization of woman (of the Other) signifies the refusal of a society to constitute itself through the recognition of the differential but nonhierarchizing status of opposed groups. It also signifies the structural necessity for this society to give itself a permutative center, an Other entity, which has no value except as an object of exchange among members of the Same." It is just such a desire to recognize difference without hierarchizing or idealizing one group or another that undergirds The Sport of the Gods, a novel that announces by its very title a repudiation of recognized aesthetic and racial expectations or boundaries.
The title, however apt it seems in the context of widespread belief in determinism, is ironic. It comes from Shakespeare's King Lear during the madness scene on the heath, when the blinded and despairing Gloucester's laments that "As flies to wanton boys are we to th' gods./They kill us for their sport" (IV.1). In Lear the lines suggest man's insignificance and powerlessness in the face of the gods's arbitrary exercise of will; in the novel, the Hamiltons also discover that they are subjected to an irrational system of power based largely on racial and economic fictions. At the same time, the Hamiltons (and the Oakleys) suffer precisely because they choose to believe in those fictions.

In the first paragraph the narrator makes clear the broader focus of the novel: the fictions of race perpetuated in the novels and stories of the plantation tradition. The narrator establishes that he intends to use the experience of Berry Hamilton to find "relief from the monotony of tiresome iteration" (471) of the popular plantation fictions of the time. These novels, associated primarily with Thomas Nelson Page, Joel Chandler Harris, Irwin Russell, and at times George Washington Cable, present a romanticized version of plantation life, representing it as having been like a happy extended "family." These novels and stories appeared in the postbellum period and are generally thought to have functioned as a means to reassure Northerners that Southerners had the former slaves under control. Lucinda MacKethan reads these novels as an attempt to recreate arcady in the South by envisioning the Old South as a place of "graciousness and class distinctions, scorn for material values, and free enjoyment of a rural environment, a slow pace, and a strict code of honor." Dunbar subtly undermines this view, and despite Berry
Hamilton’s downfall, his is not a story that looks with regret on "the old days when there were plantations and overseers and masters and slaves" (471). The novel can ultimately be seen as celebrating Berry's freedom to make choices, even bad choices, and criticizing the belief that the fates of African-Americans would be much improved if they just left the choice making to the white masters.

The irony, however, extends beyond the Hamiltons. Dunbar locates the cause of the loss of home in the misreadings perpetuated by the both the Hamiltons and the Oakleys of their respective systems of values. The Hamiltons—ignoring the very real boundaries of race and class—subscribe to the [white] bourgeois values of the capitalist society in which they attempt to participate, and the Oakleys accept as real the romanticized version of themselves as benevolent masters reinforced in late nineteenth-century plantation fiction. Each family—and by extension, their respective social identities—is literally destroyed when their belief systems are undermined by events. Dunbar specifically uses linguistic differences and misinterpretation or confusion of literal and figurative discourse to fuel these events and the subsequent disintegration of these systems.

To this end, Dunbar dramatizes specifically the various misreadings of values and meanings caused by linguistic differences between characters and cultures. These misreadings occur most often in the context of the home and characters' desire to define their respective homes. The importance of home in The Sport of the Gods is established in the second paragraph:

The little cottage in which he lived with his wife, Fannie, who was housekeeper to the Oakleys, and his son and daughter, Joe and Kit, sat back in the yard some hundred paces from the mansion of his employer. It was somewhat in the manner of the
old cabin in the quarters, with which usage as well as tradition had made both master and servant familiar. But, unlike the cabin of the elder day, it was a neatly furnished, modern house, the home of a typical, good-living negro. (471)

The opening chapter of the story traces the establishment of Berry Hamilton's home. He has a house, a family, a job; the Hamiltons live in a "bower of peace and comfort" (472). They not only are surrounded by all the outward signs of material success, but also are imbued with an inward sense of security and order: "the two doting parents had their chats and their jokes at each other's expense and went bravely on, doing their duties and spoiling their children much as white fathers and mothers are wont to do" (473). The effect of this opening scene is to establish a tableau of middle-class values. Hard, honest work, good living, and devotion to family would seem to guarantee a measure of material success in the world, even for those who are not white. Security and order and all the benefits thereof reside in the cottage in which the Hamiltons live, a home that, though it has its origins in the master/slave relationship of the plantation, is a "modern house" (471).

The narrator, however, suggests that not all is as perfect as the scene would imply. Dunbar subtly points to the social boundaries—boundaries that are supposedly overcome by adoption of white, middle-class values—that exist between the Hamiltons and the Oakleys and between the Hamiltons and their black neighbors. These are boundaries to which the Hamiltons are oblivious; they believe that the middle-class values they have adopted are a kind of talisman against bad things, that they will continue to reap the material and social benefits of those values so long as they hold them and live by them. This is, in fact, the fiction of Horatio
Alger and all the other rags-to-riches success stories popular in the late nineteenth century.

The first hint that all is not perfect occurs on the second page of the novel when Berry Hamilton first speaks. The voice of the narrator up to this point has been formal, standard English, but Berry speaks in dialect: "It's de p'opah thing fu' a man what waits on quality to have quality mannahs an' to waih quality clothes" (472). Although the Hamiltons have mastered standard "white" values, they do not have the mastery of standard, "white" English. They are marked in this scene not by color, but by their language, which immediately signals difference to the audience, itself predominantly white and middle class. The dialect is, in fact, so foreign, that the reader must work to translate it, which may be reassuring to an audience who fears the entry of blacks into realms that the mastery of their language might allow. Furthermore, as Erik Cheyfitz has argued, translation replicates the process of imperial domination by allowing the translator to interpret what the subject really "means." The use of dialect actually comes unexpectedly in the text, signalled by the overly formal "said he," which draws attention to the marked difference of linguistic forms.

The Hamiltons, furthermore, are doubly bounded by their failure to master white discourse and authority and by the black community, from which their material success and pride keeps them aloof. The narrator ironically notes, "What the less fortunate negroes of the community said of them and their offspring is really not worth while. Envy has a sharp tongue, and when has not the aristocrat been the target for the plebeian's sneers?" (473). While envy may indeed be a cause of the Hamiltons' partial
exclusion from the black community, the narrator suggests with his use of
the terms "aristocrat" and "plebeian" an alternate cause, one based on a
feudal class structure, reproduced in the institution of slavery, and
reproduced yet again in a capitalist class structure based on material
success. The narrator very early, then, implicitly critiques the idea so
popular with the Carnegies and Rockefellers that genetic superiority could
be measured by the size of one's financial holdings. While the Hamiltons
are not aware of the fact, they exist in a social limbo, neither fully inside nor
outside any single community, and this ambiguous state, this failure to
recognize the boundaries that confront them, is emblematic of the
problems they face throughout the novel.

In short, the Hamiltons believe in a rational system of identifiable
cause and effect that is shown in the novel to be a fiction, and they dispense
with their belief only when they confront the nonrational boundaries of
race and class. They believe that their hard work and honesty will be
rewarded with material and social status and that material and social status
are accurate signs of virtue. In the course of the story, the whole notion of
rational cause and effect is slowly eroded as the social barriers become
increasingly evident through the Hamiltons' continual misreadings of their
social situation, their underestimation of the importance of race and class
as meaningful categories within American culture.

The beginning of the erosion occurs with the loss of their home,
which signals the family's crisis of social identity and self definition. This
loss, presaged in those hints of doubt in the initial chapter, occurs precisely
because of the moral gap that such differences are assumed to signify.
When Francis Oakley refuses to confess his theft of his own money and
clear Berry Hamilton of the crime, his equivocation convicts Berry Hamilton as it exploits a belief both that words accurately and literally represent phenomenon and that the code of the Southern gentleman ensures an immediate presumption of innocence, especially when the issue is "black and white." The event hearkens back to and repeats the plantation tyranny in which the words of the white master completely supersedes the word of the slave; the master represses equivocality such that "the literal and the figurative aspects of language become hierarchized into absolute and oppositional entities, with the masters occupying the territory of the literal or proper and consigning the slaves to that of the figurative." The proper, standard English of Maurice's accusation, coupled with his social status, takes precedence over the dialect of Berry's refutation. It empowers Maurice with authority of interpretation, and given the opportunity to interpret Francis's claim that his travel money had been stolen, Maurice immediately concludes on the basis of Berry's race that the culprit must be Berry Hamilton. His dismissal of Berry's protestations to the contrary and interpretation of the circumstantial deposit of Berry's life savings as evidence of his guilt simply reinforce his faulty generalizations about African-Americans. No other option can ever seriously be considered without undermining the popularly held notions about racial difference and Southern chivalry.

Berry's conviction exposes to his wife and children the ambiguity of their social status and the class and racial boundaries that they have heretofore ignored. It is not, however, enough to alter their consciousness or cause them to reevaluate their acceptance of bourgeois values. Banished from their home, they cling to their belief in all that that home has
represented to them in the past—happiness, security, status; and once they have relocated to New York, they seek to reconstruct a home, but fail in large part because they never recognize the underlying cause for its dissolution in the South.

In the same way that their banishment by the Oakleys and the white community resulted from their misrecognition of the discrepancy of power between white and black and which is manifested in the difference between standard English and dialect, so their rejection by the black community, to which they are allied by both race and language, results from a linguistic boundary of a different sort that they have themselves constructed between themselves and their neighbors. In effect, their homelessness results from the transformation of their family that occurs when their own words come back to haunt them in the form of taunts and jeers, which mirror the language of superiority to which they have previously subjected their less prosperous neighbors. The narrator, when he describes Joe after his futile search for work, describes the entire Hamilton family: "He was proscribed, and the letters of his ban were writ large throughout the town, where all who ran might read" (502). Dunbar uses the image of the public, written condemnation to locate implicitly the boundary separating the Hamiltons from the black community in the realm of language. The Hamiltons are denied the power of self definition and thus become exiles from this place where they can no longer control the way others see them or the way they see themselves. Still, as one might expect, they look with regret on their loss—not so much on the loss of Berry, but on the loss of place: "Fannie and her daughter let their eyes linger upon it [the town] until the last house, the last chimney and the last
spire faded from their sight, and their tears fell and mingled as they were whirled away toward the unknown" (506).

To adjust to this unknown, to construct a new home and new identities, the Hamiltons initially resort to the same patterns of thought that marked their life in the South. They discover early, however, that they suffer the same basic problems despite the change in place: an inability to recognize and accept the social and cultural boundaries with which they are confronted. Once they get off the train, they get advice about where to live from a porter, Mr. Thomas, who promptly sizes them up as provincial. He escorts them to a minstrel show and introduces Joe to the Banner Club, where he is offered up as a pigeon to hawks. Joe begins to drink heavily, ultimately murders his mistress, Hattie Sterling, and is put into prison. Kit is so entranced by the theater that she decides to go on stage against the advice and wishes of her mother. Fannie, despairing for the loss of her children, is conned into believing she is divorced and marries a physically abusive gambler. These misrecognitions of boundaries undermine their respective attempts to establish a stable home or socially appropriate self identities and ultimately lead to the complete dissolution of the family and all it had formerly seemed to represent. Dunbar uses the social club, the theater, and the con man gambler to effect the respective dissolution of Joe, Kitty, and Fannie Hamilton. Lacking a home and thus a clear sense of self identity, each Hamilton struggles to redefine him or herself and eventually falls victim to the seductiveness of deceptive appearances, entering once again into ambiguous relationship with their community.

Both Joe and Kit, however, are issued warnings that they fail to heed. Sadness and Hattie are insiders in this New York milieu and each attempts
to impress upon the two the dangers of their respective courses. Sadness lives as a parasite on the uninitiated who come into the Banner Club; he tells Joe, "It's a pity you weren't born older. It's a pity most men aren't. They wouldn't have to take so much time and lose so many good things learning. . . . [Wallace] spent his two thousand learning. . . . From now on Wallace will live, eat, drink, and sleep at the expense of others, and will forget to mourn his lost money. He will go on this way until, broken and useless, the poorhouse or the potter's field gets him. Oh, it's a fine, rich life, my lad" (536-37). When Kit decides to go on stage, Hattie, herself an actress, warns her

"Now, . . . you'll have to begin in the chorus any way and work your way up. It wouldn't take long for you, with your looks and voice, to put one of the 'up and ups' out o' the business. Only hope it won't be me. . . ."

She gave a laugh that had just a touch of bitterness in it, for she began to recognise that although she had been on the stage only a short time, she was no longer the all-conquering Hattie Sterling, in the first freshness of her youth.

"Oh, I wouldn't want to push anybody out," Kit expostulated.

"Oh, never mind, you'll soon get bravely over that feeling, and even if you didn't it wouldn't matter much. The thing has to happen. Somebody's got to go down. We don't last long in this life: it soon wears us out, and when we're worn out and sung out, danced out and played out, the manager has no further use for us. . . ." (544)

Both Sadness and Hattie warn of future social obsolescence if Joe and Kit follow the courses they have chosen; neither of them listen to the warnings.

Joe is the first to succumb, in large part because he has the weakest attachment to the nostalgia of his old life and a weakness of character made worse by the family's woes, which had "made all the evil of his nature [flourish]" (497). Joe finds his new home in the Banner Club:

an institution for the lower education of negro youth. It drew its pupils from every class of people and from every part of the
country. It was composed of all sorts and conditions of men, educated and uneducated, dishonest and less so, of the good, the bad, and the —unexposed. Parasites came there to find victims, politicians for votes, reporters for news, and artists of all kinds for colour and inspiration. It was the place of assembly for a number of really bright men, who after days of hard and often unrewarded work came there and drunk themselves drunk in each other's company, and when they were drunk talked of the eternal verities. . . . It stood to the stranger and the man and woman without connections for the whole social life. It was a substitute—poor, it must be confessed—to many youths for the home life which is so lacking among certain classes in New York. (523)

Although Joe fails to recognize the connection, the Banner Club hearkens back to that "ban" writ large that had driven him from his first home. In this club, Joe discovers a microcosm of the alienated, and misreading the "banner," so to speak, he adopts alienation as his mode of being in the world. Once he becomes proficient in the language of the place, he willingly and happily joins into the family "of foolish men and immoral women" (538): "He found that all of his former feelings had been silly and quite out of place; that all he had learned in his earlier years was false. It was very plain to him now that to want a good reputation was the sign of unpardonable immaturity, and that dishonour was the only real thing worth while" (italics mine; 538-39). For Joe, home is located unconsciously on the outside, characterized by instability, sexually illicit relationships, and, finally, loss of self control and murder. Losing that initial home has dislocated Joe's sense of values, such that a "good reputation" is bad and "dishonour" is honorable. He suffers, the narrator says, from "a sort of moral and mental astigmatism that made him see everything wrong. . . . He gave to all he saw a wrong value and upon it based his ignorant desires" (516). In reforming himself to conform to the expectations of his new "home," he mistakes total rejection of his old way of life for
rehabilitation; he suffers a misreading that turns out to be more tragic even than his father's.

In Joe's case, his fate results from a combination of events with inherent personality traits. Failing, either consciously or unconsciously, to heed Sadness's warning, Joe becomes increasingly bestial until finally, upon being arrested for Hattie's murder, he is left nearly mute and without the humanizing qualities of spirit or feeling: "He moved mechanically, as if without sense or volition... He was as one whose soul is dead, and perhaps it was; for all the little soul of him had been wrapped up in the body of this one woman, and the stroke that took her life had killed him too" (566). In this way, Joe's fate foreshadows Maurice's and, to a lesser extent, his father's.

Kitty's dissolution occurs much slower than Joe's, but it is no less totalizing. Joe redefines himself and his home according to the desires of the body—desires that reduce him to the level of brute—but Kitty turns to the transformative power of the stage: "The cheap dresses on the street had not fooled Kitty for an instant, but take the same cheese-cloth, put a little water starch into it, and put it on the stage, and she could see only chiffon" (516–17). While Kitty does not reject outright the values of her lost home, she does revise her understanding of her beliefs in order to satisfy her desire both to establish a new home on the stage and to remain faithful to her previous beliefs. In participating in this popular form of entertainment, she becomes complicit with the perpetuation of antebellum stereotypes and exploitation of black culture in the minstrel show. The "home" she chooses is like the plantation where she will be discarded whenever she becomes "useless." She deceives herself through a process
of simple substitutions: the North for the South, the stage for the church, the minstrel show for the choir. She does not understand, as her mother does, that the dances and songs on the northern stage are the transplanted "dancing . . . she could see any day from the loafers on the street corners down home" (518). Kitty, in other words, believes that a change in venue may alter the fundamental value of the thing itself. Like the loafers' dances that become "art" on the stage, Kitty believes that her presence on stage will transform her into a creature "from fairy-land" (516). She does not recognize that her relocation effects her dislocation.

Like Joe, she ignores the warning of someone on the inside who explains the life of the stage in blunt, Darwinian terms. Ignoring the implications of Hattie's warning and believing that stage people in the North were deemed respectable, Kitty goes onto the stage, losing her respectability in proportion to her gains in notoriety.

Of the three, only Fannie recognizes the effect of their relocation to the North; she understands that the failure to find a stable home in New York has led to the complete dissolution of the family. Like Joe and Kitty, she succumbs to her desires, but only reluctantly. Just like her husband Berry, she is undone by a lie. Prompted by the loss of her son and daughter and in need of companionship and economic security, she accepts Tom Gibson's assertion that Berry Hamilton's conviction effected a divorce. She understands that her decision to marry Gibson marks her acceptance of a new, deteriorated state of being: "'All right,' she said, 'I'll do it; I'll ma'y him. I might as well go de way both my chillen's gone. . . .' And Mrs. Hamilton rose and tottered from the room, as if the old age she anticipated had already come upon her" (547). Appropriately, Fannie's
transformation is marked in the text by her literal declaration of intent spoken in dialect and the figurative narrative interpretation of her body as manifesting her spiritual decline. The juxtaposition here of dialect and standard English and of literal and figurative discourse points to the parallels between the failures of the Hamiltons in both the North and the South.

The Hamilton's failure to thrive as a family in the North results not only because of the disruption of social identity that occurs from their homelessness, but also because of their inability to define themselves as a family in their new social and cultural context. The opening of chapter 7 focuses on the responses that the provincial has upon coming to New York: "A new emotion will take his heart as the people hasten by him,—a feeling of loneliness, almost of grief, that with all of these souls about him he knows not one and not one of them cares for him" (507). The alienation of becoming invisible in the mass of people when the Hamiltons enter into this strange place not surprisingly disorients them, which is exacerbated by their general incapacity to understand the practical ramifications of their surroundings. Their inability to acculturate results from their failure to understand the cultural boundaries that they confront; they misunderstand the social codes of the North just as thoroughly as they had misread their social position in the South. Both Joe and Kitty attempt to find new homes by making themselves visible within smaller arenas than "New York," and in doing so, they are so caught up in satisfying their individual desires, in believing as true what they want to believe, that they ignore the warnings. Fannie, having watched her family dissolve and failed to find work at
which she can make a living wage, consciously gives herself up to the defining power of Tom Gibson.

Dunbar does not attribute the dissolution of the Hamiltons solely to the change in place, the move from South to North, as some critics would have it, nor does he suggest that their respective transformations are the result of some overly simplified biological or social determinism. The various failures of characters to achieve coherent self identities all differ in particulars, but occur as the result of misreadings, either of explicit warnings or of promises made by others. Dunbar avoids over simplifying the North/South dichotomy; he offers a variety of explanations, from the pernicious influence of the city to the cruel "sport of the gods," using the various dialogues between characters to theorize about the possible causes of the Hamiltons' downfall. Given the pattern of failures predicated on misreadings of cultural boundaries, we can understand these misreadings to be the underlying cause of both the loss of the home in the South and the failure to reconstruct a home in the North. In short, Dunbar presents the Hamiltons as attempting to build their home and family around a fiction, a misunderstanding of the contingencies of their culture, be it Southern or Northern.

Such a lack of understanding, however, is not limited to the Hamiltons. Dunbar shows that Maurice Oakley is also a victim of a fiction—the romanticized version of plantation life:

"as soon as a negro like Hamilton learns the value of money and begins to earn it, at the same time he begins to covet some easy and rapid way of securing it. The old negro knew nothing of the value of money. When he stole, he stole hams and bacon and chickens. These were his immediate necessities and things he valued. The present laughs at this tendency without knowing the cause. The present negro resents the laugh and he
has learned to value other things than those which satisfy his belly." (481)

Locating the cause of theft in the crossing of the boundary from the literal to the figurative—between immediate physical necessity and the representative power of money, between hams and the possibility of hams—Maurice Oakley subjects the Other to a misinterpretation as he laments the entry of African-Americans into what he believes is the realm of white power represented by the figurative power of money in a capitalist society.

In believing the fiction of the white master/black slave dichotomy, Maurice positions himself for a downfall, just as Berry's belief in black/white equality had set him up. Accepting out of hand his younger brother's lie, which exploits Maurice's belief in an antebellum order, Maurice eventually must face the evidence that contradicts this social paradigm and that destroys his home and family. Just as Hester Prynne wears the scarlet letter that publicly marks her transgression, Maurice wears the confessional letter of his brother on his breast, a letter that becomes public through the efforts of the yellow journalist, Skaggs. The result of the revelation that his brother was responsible for the theft is madness, which serves as the most potent evidence of the innocence of Berry and of the destructive potential of the fiction to which Maurice ascribes. The man who was master because he was master of language loses his command of that language and speaks now only the inarticulate shrieks that mark the destruction of the two families.

Dunbar parallels the course of both Maurice and Berry such that the two merge. Maurice, the master of the house, transforms his home into his prison as he falls "to the floor in impotent fear and madness" (578), while
Berry exchanges the literal prison for the figurative prison that is his home. Berry comes out of prison, "his quick wits . . . dulled and imbruted" (580), and "His hair, that had hardly shown a white streak, was as white as Maurice Oakley's own" (580). The two men have been transformed into brutes by their respective belief in fictions. Their transformation destroys the past order that both had known, and left without an alternative system of beliefs, they both succumb to a "Will infinitely stronger than their own" (586). Dunbar's reference to "Will" is ironic; the Will that shapes each of them is not that of a supreme being, but of the vestiges of Reconstruction that pit the desires of the emancipated slave against the fears of a white society that desires a social order like that reproduced in plantation fiction.

Not only are characters unalterably changed in the novel, but so is the idea of home; the very place that had once represented stability and order comes to represent powerlessness and chaos. After Fannie's "husband" dies, Berry and Fanny return to their cottage on the Oakley plantation, and just as Berry and Fanny have been changed into shadows of their former selves, so their home is transformed by the "shrieks of the madman across the yard" (586) into a constant reminder of their losses. In other words, the metamorphosis of the Oakleys' and Hamiltons' home follows the same course as the individuals who comprise those homes.

What Dunbar achieves in The Sport of the Gods is an interesting dramatization of the ramifications of the belief that black culture and white culture, between the dialect and folk art of black Americans and the standard English and "high" art of Anglo-European culture (references to Shakespeare, Mary Shelley, etc. are sprinkled throughout) must be in conflict with each other. Dunbar's title is ironic in as much as he
demonstrates that individuals' fates are the result of conflicting desires and self-deceptions, anything but the work of capricious gods.

Dunbar's novel also examines critically the romanticization of antebellum America—reflected in plantation fiction—as order and the opposite romanticization of capitalism, with its fiction of equal opportunity and democracy for all Americans promised to the freed slaves with emancipation. Dunbar exposes both fictions and traces the role they play in the destruction of homes, families, and even cultures, both white and black, by showing the way these fictions cause misreadings of social and cultural phenomena. In this way, Dunbar points to the limitations of ascribing to a particular fiction to serve as a framework for individuals' cultural or social identity or to provide a stable cultural home for those who attempt to build an identity bounded entirely by such problematic categories as class, race, or gender.

Frank Norris, the American naturalist most often compared to Zola, also examines the role of homelessness in the transformation of the individual into a brute in Vandover and the Brute. Unlike Dunbar, he does not critique the process of social boundary construction so much as expose these boundaries as part of a struggle within the individual between culture and brutishness. For Norris, the home is the representative site of civilization, and the further removed from the home that the individual becomes, the more brutish that individual behaves. Norris examines the implications of this notion on the development of the individual in an amoral universe and on fiction itself by exploring the parallel fates of Vandover, Doliver (Dolly) Haight, and Charlie Geary.
Most of the criticism of this novel, considered one of Norris's minor works, has been devoted to excavating either the naturalistic and romantic philosophies buried in the text, or the social forces that contribute to Vandover's degeneration. In the past ten years, critics have applied various literary theories to the text—most notably psychoanalytic and deconstructive—to explore variously "the primitive sleeping in Everyman" or "the ways a repressive language encourages the spread of diseased patterns of thought." Overall, however, relative little work has been devoted to this novel, especially compared to the attention given his more popular McTeague and The Octopus.

The novel traces the decline of Vandover, a young aspiring artist from an upper middle-class San Francisco family. In general, Vandover is tempted by the desires of the flesh and becomes increasingly addicted to alcohol, gambling, and sex. When his role in a young girl's suicide becomes known (whether she is pregnant or infected with syphilis is debatable), he is ostracized by his social peers. On his return from a rest in Coronada, he is involved in a shipwreck, which triggers his father's death. Left to his own skills, he quickly squanders his modest inheritance, loses the homestead, and eventually becomes a vagrant on the verge of starvation.

Vandover's homelessness occurs in three stages, each of which exposes the increasing failure of metonymy to function as a totalizing means of moral control; in other words, people and objects increasingly fail to manifest symbolic power over him and his behavior. By examining Vandover's relationship to his various homes and comparing the trajectory of his decline to the fates of his two friends, we can see how Norris
explored "the unplumbed depths of the human heart, and the mystery of sex, and the problems of life, and the black, unsearched penetralia of the soul of man."30 As McElrath has argued, Norris exposes genteel values as simply a superficial system of behaviors that cover animalistic impulses that are amoral, barbaric, and even bestial: "We see an anarchic second personality with the self conditioned to socially proper behavior—an amoral, barbaric, and perhaps bestial dimension of human nature that has not been eliminated despite centuries of civilizing influence."31 Civilization is represented as a system of empty signs that are nonetheless necessary for the maintenance of human dignity in an amoral universe.

The novel opens during a change in homes, from Boston to San Francisco, remembered by Vandover primarily because of the death of his mother in the Boston train depot. Barbara Hochman has claimed, rightfully I believe, that the mother's death determines the frame through which Vandover interprets all of his subsequent losses such that "the issue of loss is the true imaginative center of Vandover."32 While her death is undeniably an important psychological event, it also leads to the unmediated influence of Vandover's father, who suffers from a "mortal ennui and weariness of the spirit" (5) that drives him out of retirement. This same ennui eventually infects Vandover, "who hated to be bored and worried" (24), but instead of driving him to work, it drives him into a life of immediate physical gratification and irresponsibility.33 It is in this home atmosphere that Vandover comes to maturity, and the path of Vandover's decline traces the various ways that the weak influence of the father shapes Vandover's subsequent choices.
The relationship of Vandover with his father, while seemingly healthy, is marked by distance and absenteeism. His nameless father is known about town as "the Old Gentleman" and addressed by Vandover as "Governor." This title is a misnomer, however, because Vandover's father exerts very little governance, though we learn that he is also, ironically, a practicing lawyer: "At the time of his father's greatest prosperity Vandover himself began to draw toward his fifteenth year, entering upon that period of change when the first raw elements of character began to assert themselves and when, if ever, there was a crying need for the influence of his mother.... Vandover grew in a haphazard way and after school hours ran about the streets almost at will" (6). His father neither provides guidance into manhood, nor any feminine influence that might serve to transmit the values of the home to Vandover.

Moreover, his father indulges Vandover's dilettantism, allowing him to pursue a career as an artist. His artistic sensibilities are shaped by the sentimental and melodramatic pictures found in *A Home Book of Art*, "calculated to meet popular and general demand" (10), and his talent is modest. (Vandover's early attempts at drawing are described as "hideous" [10], and his more mature efforts fail "to catch subtle intellectual distinctions in a face," though "his feeling for the flesh, and for the movement and character of a pose, was admirable" [48].) In other words, Vandover's father encourages him to pursue a romantic though impractical dream of the life of an artist on the left bank of Paris.

At the same time, Vandover conceives of or accepts his father as representative of genteel values. For example, he feels so guilty immediately after his sexual initiation that he writes to his father "asking
for his forgiveness and reiterating his resolve to shun such a thing
[fornication] forever after" (18). Unfortunately, while Vandover turns to his
father for guidance each time that he finds himself in an ambiguous moral
situation, figuratively, the father and the values he represents for Vandover
exert a weak influence over Vandover's behavior; Vandover suffers guilt
for his vices when he reflects on how he has violated his father's moral
code, but not when he is actually in the process of choosing whether or not
to succumb to some vice.

The father, in other words, represents bourgeois values for
Vandover, but because of the father's distance (and the mother's absence),
the regulatory function of the home is only imperfectly imparted to
Vandover. Vandover's father may represent sobriety, moderation, hard
work, and economic success, but Vandover fails to adopt these behaviors
and values. Vandover's admiration of his father and what he represents is
not a powerful enough force to overcome the immediate physical desires
of the body, though it is powerful enough to generate feelings of shame
and guilt. In this sense, Vandover is conscious only of the present moment,
and though he recognizes the metonymic relation between the father and
the abstract values he stands for, his recognition seldom translates itself
into action or self regulation, which would require a consideration of both
future consequences and past results.

For example, an important part of Vandover's life while his father is
alive is spent with Turner Ravis, with whom Vandover has been carrying
on a long and socially recognized courtship. But to demonstrate how weak
social conventions are to effect behavior (either male or female), Norris
contrasts the restrained behavior of Vandover and his male friends at a
party to their behavior at a bar, the Imperial: "they lounged clumsily upon
their seats, their legs stretched out, their waistcoats unbuttoned, caring
only to be at their ease. Their talk and manners became blunt, rude,
unconstrained, the coarser masculine fibre reasserting itself. With the
exception of young Haight they were all profane enough, and it was not
very long before their conversation became obscene" (35). Only Dolly
Haight refuses to drop the veneer of civilized behavior, while Vandover
and his male friends do not hesitate to take advantage of their freedom
from the gaze of the representatives of their class, namely women, to
explore their brutish natures.

If the influence of Vandover's father is weak while he is alive, then it
dissipates considerably when he dies, and Vandover moves even further
away from the regulatory power of the home and the values represented
therein. But as Vandover creates for himself a new home, he discovers a
surrogate for the lost father, though the influence of the surrogate is
necessarily weaker than the object it replaces.

Vandover initially reacts to his father's death with "weeping and
groaning" (114), but he quickly recovers, "rearranging himself" to suit his
new environment, which is marked by a change in abodes. As is
characteristic, Vandover quickly tires of managing his own affairs, turning
them over to a management company, in exchange for "his freedom from
annoyance and responsibility" (125). For the first time in the novel, we see
Vandover struggle to make a concrete decision for himself as he agonizes
to choose between two apartments—one that has an excellent studio space
for his art, and one that has a nice sitting room. His decision in favor of the
nice sitting room is predicated on his ability to visualize himself in the
space lounging "in the window-seat of a morning, with a paper, a cigarette, and a cup of coffee, watching the people [i.e., women] on their way downtown" (129). As with all of Vandover's decisions, past and future, he chooses the route that offers the most immediate physical gratification and that most repudiates, though seemingly unconsciously, a rigid, genteel conventionality. Vandover makes for himself what Halttunen calls a "cozy corner": "The cozy corner openly violated the 'stiff, immutable laws' dictating the placement of furniture along the walls of the moral parlor. . . . [It] was thus intended to provide, within the parlor itself a semisecluded retreat from the rigid requirements of polite parlor conduct—a retreat, in other words, from the demands of character." Vandover's creation of his "cozy corner" signals a complete retreat from the formality of the "Old Gentleman's" world.

The centerpiece of this home is "a tiled stove with a brass fender and with curious flamboyant ornaments of cast-iron—a jewel of a stove" (128). Since values of the home often inhere in stoves, as the stove as a kind of hearth symbolizes especially warmth and food, Vandover's stove ultimately comes to replace Vandover's father as the one object that exerts any sort of control over his behavior:

the stove, the famous tiled stove with flamboyant ornaments, was the chiefest joy of Vandover's new life. He was delighted with it; it was so artistic, so curious, it kept the fire so well, it looked so cheerful and inviting; a stove that was the life and soul of the whole room, a stove to draw up to and talk to; no, never was there such a stove! There was hardly a minute of the day he was not fussing with it, raking it down, turning the damper off and on, opening and shutting the door, filling it with coal, putting the blower on and then taking it off again, sweeping away the ashes with a little brass-handled broom, or studying the pictures upon the tiles: the "Punishment of Caliban and His Associates," "Romeo and Juliet," the "Fall of Phaeton." He even pretended to the chambermaid that he alone understood how to
manage the stove, forbidding her to touch it, assuring her that it had to be coaxed and humoured. Often late in the evening as he was going to bed he would find the fire in it drowsing; then he would hustle it sharply to arouse it, punching it with the poker, talking to it, saying: "Wake up there, you!" (134)

In this passage, the hyperbole is the result of Vandover's consciousness, not Norris's. As Joseph R. McElrath, Jr., has pointed out, "Norris impressionistically conforms his language to Van's consciousness, not his own response to the events that transpire in the novel." As Vandover anthropomorphizes the stove, the stove plays an increasingly important role in Vandover's day-to-day conduct, placing demands on Vandover. The fact that Vandover establishes a personal relationship with a stove has its parodic elements, but it also reveals the extent to which the father, the other object that had made demands on Vandover's behavior, might itself be deemed a meaningless category.

Vandover's figurative replacement of the father with a stove supports Lee Clark Mitchell's argument that "scenes [of listing] defy the usual logic of realist metonymy by introducing gratuitous detail that expresses how little appearances happen to reveal. As the physically irrelevant accumulates, the novel gradually calls into question the normal process by which material sign is imbued with cultural significance." While I agree with Mitchell's contention that Norris questions the "process" of imbuing significance to material signs, I disagree that the material sign "points to nothing other than itself" or that the use of the stove is gratuitous. The hyperbole and parodic element of Vandover's relationship with the stove emphasize the insignificance, not of the stove, but of the father it replaces, though for Vandover, and the reader, the stove is a
recognizable cultural representation of the home that he has lost and then remade for himself.

Given the importance of the stove to Vandover, it is no surprise that when the stove is repossessed, along with his other bric-à-brac, including the chair his father died in, Vandover's response is not far removed from the one he had when his father died:

He felt it almost as a dishonour to have strangers using this furniture, sitting in the great leather chair in which the Old Gentleman had died.... Above all, it was torture to think that other hands than his own would tend the famous tiled and flamboyant stove, a stove that had its moods, its caprices, like any living person, a stove that had to be coaxed and humoured, a stove that he alone could understand.... At first its absence had been a matter for the keenest regret and grief. (206)

In fact, Vandover adjusts to this loss less easily than to the loss of his father, perhaps because this loss signals the double loss of both his first and second homes.

Chapter 16 opens with a long description of the hotel room in the Lick House that is to be Vandover's third home, and then a flashback to the events of the previous year that led to his adoption of this room as his home: "The walls were whitewashed and bare of pictures or ornaments, and the floor was covered with a dull red carpet.... The blank, white monotony of one side of the room was jarred upon by the grate and mantelpiece, iron, painted black.... Everything was clean, defiantly, aggressively clean, and there was a clean smell of new soap in the air" (199–200). Norris, in foregrounding here the description of Vandover's new home—moving in his description from the dreary window view of rusting roofs, black-and-white advertisements, and smokestacks to the stark interior—once again impressionistically duplicates Vandover's consciousness of the immediately physical and his limited consciousness.
of either the past or future. At the same time, Norris reinforces the close
association of Vandover with his physical environment, which he has
narratively done throughout by the repetitive variation of the phrase
"rearrange himself," like so much furniture in a room.

The move to this room marks Vandover's most dramatic
deterioration because it signals Vandover's entry into homelessness.
Vandover sells his homestead "with as much indifference as he had parted
from his block in the Mission. Vandover signed the deed that made him
homeless" (206). With his signature and the symbolic relinquishment of his
home/property, Vandover ironically signs his divorce from the system of
signs that has to this point framed his understanding of American culture,
a system that depends on metonymy. Vandover's incapacity to find a
surrogate for either the lost father or the lost stove and to access the social
values these objects represent is not the result of a lack of economic means,
but a loss of ability to understand the connection between the object and
that which the object stands for.

Although the sale of the homestead would provide him with the
economic means to replace the furniture he has lost, he does not do so
because "he had so often rearranged his pliable nature to suit his changing
environment that at last he found that he could be content in almost any
circumstances. He had no pleasures, no cares, no ambitions, no regrets, no
hopes" (205). In other words, cut off from these abstract cultural values, the
values that frame and define his cultural home, he has no regulatory check
on his behavior as he interacts within that culture, and he begins to
manifest symptoms of lycanthropy, probably as a result of syphilis
contracted from Flossie. His one anemic attempt to imaginatively
transcend his homelessness by pinning little placards around the room—"Pipe-rack Here." "Mona Lisa Here." "Stove Here." "Window-seat Here" (207)—comes too late, and words come simply to be empty expressions of his desire; "he had lost the taste for them" (207). The only desire left for Vandover is that of fulfilling his immediate physical needs, primarily for food, though the full extent of his homelessness is not realized until he is left with nothing but his hunger, the need that can never be sated.

Vandover reaches this point after squandering all the money from the sale of his home by spending money and indiscriminately consuming in order to mask the symptoms of his disease rather than to satiate any particular desire. Blind consumption serves as a substitute for thought and feeling. In a scene at the end of chapter 17 that echoes an earlier description of Vandover in chapter 3, Norris shows Vandover—filthy, ragged, and starving—sitting in the sun "very happy, content merely to be warm, to be well fed, to be comfortable" (239). Vandover has spent his last quarter eating, "even after his hunger was satisfied" (239), satisfying the immediate desire of the body without considering its future needs. At the same time, "he had drifted about the city, living now here and now there, a real hand-to-mouth existence, sinking a little lower each day. . . . He had even lost regard for decency and cleanliness. . . . He had literally become the brute" (232, 233). Homeless, his identity resides entirely in his bodily needs, a body that he has increasingly lost control of because of the social disease he contracted by satisfying those related needs. He has completely lost the human capacity for abstraction.

The novel ends appropriately enough with the image of a small, over-indulged little boy consuming bread and butter while watching
Vandover wallow in filth. Vandover cleans what will be the boy's family's new home in order to earn enough money to satisfy his hunger for one more day. Like the child who watches and the child he once was, Vandover's self is defined entirely by self gratification, and the juxtaposition of the young boy and the decrepit man evokes the trajectory that Vandover's life has followed in the novel.

Read as the central event of the novel, the process of Vandover's decline, as figured in his increasing alienation from the home, may arguably be Norris's means of exposing the superficial veneer of civilization that overlays the human brute. But Vandover's decline is not an isolated event; it occurs juxtaposed to the fates of Dolly Haight and Charlie Geary.

Both Dolly and Charlie are friends of Vandover. They are of the same social class, they attend the same schools, they have the same friends, and they spend time in each other's company. The outcomes of their lives, however, vary greatly in large part, I would argue, because of their individual understanding of cultural signs.

Dolly, for example, is a sentimentalist who believes in an ideal world with immutable class boundaries that clearly define behavior both inside and outside the boundaries. Men and women of his class are expected to abide by certain standards; Dolly laments both the womanizing of his peers and the fondness for champagne demonstrated by some girls in the Cotillon: "Why not call it "getting drunk?" Why not call things by their right name? You can see just how bad they are then; and I think it's shameful that such things can go on in an organization that is supposed to contain the very best people in the city" (71). His complaint is that the
"very best people" do not behave in the very best way, that the mark of social class, which presumably holds by a particular set of values, does not predict behavior. In ignoring the realities of modern life, however, he discovers that behaving in the most virtuous way does not act as a prophylactic against the corruption of the very worse behavior: he becomes infected with syphilis through a cut lip when Flossie forces a kiss on him.

Both Dolly and Vandover suffer, and as Donald Pizer has suggested are destroyed by this social disease. The difference is that while Vandover manifests the disease in the form of madness (lycanthropy), Dolly does so through the signs on his body; he looks like a "death's-head" (223). He does not fail to understand the disease of his body, but to understand his disease as a sign of the corruption that infects his society as a whole. In other words, in the face of all evidence to the contrary, Dolly insists on holding onto to his romanticized version of the world. At his nadir, he attempts to help Vandover, who proceeds to rob him. Still, "Vandover would gladly have changed places with him. Young Haight had the affection and respect of even those that knew. He, Vandover, had thrown away his friends' love and their esteem with the rest of the things he had once valued" (225). Given the same disease and similar life circumstances (Dolly also lost his mother when he was young), the difference of response can be traced in the difference in their respective understanding of the nature of signs: Vandover cannot transform the abstraction (e.g., self control) represented by a sign (e.g., the father) into behavior, and Dolly cannot accept the fact that signs (e.g., the marks of his disease) are unreliable signifiers of those abstractions (e.g., virtue).
If there is a character who truly understands the nature of signs in the modern world, it is Geary, who believes in a world that operates by the Spencerian precept of "survival of the fittest" and thrives on the practice of manipulating signs. Like Vandover, he is oriented toward physical gratification, and much of his conversation centers around the materiality of his life: what he ate for lunch, what he said to his tailor, how he would proceed to get ahead of another clerk in the law office. He practices many of the same vices as Vandover, but he makes certain he is not caught: he tells Vandover, "'You see, you always have to be awfully careful in those things [sexual liaisons], or you'll get into a box. Ah, you bet I don't let any girl I go with know my last name or my address if I can help it. I'm clever enough for that; you have to manage very carefully; ah, you bet!'" (148). In other words, only what shows matters.

He measures his success in money, the modern signifier of self value and virtue, and in holding with his belief that selfishness is "human nature" (148), he acquires money, even when it means intentionally violating the ethics of the law profession by representing both sides in a single lawsuit and self-servingly swindling Vandover out of real estate that he knows he can sell to a third party at a profit. In the end, this paragon of modern values gets the girl, Turner Ravis, who has throughout the novel positioned herself as a prize to be won by the most socially successful young man.

No doubt, Geary succeeds in the material world where Vandover and Dolly fail. He has power, respectability, financial means, and Turner Ravis. He has enjoyed both the experience of vice, like Vandover, and the esteem of society, like Dolly, by explicitly endorsing the social Darwinism popular in the 1890s. Geary is the extreme embodiment of realism, which,
Norris writes, "stultifies itself. It notes only the surface of things. For it
Beauty is not even skin-deep, but only a geometrical plane, without
dimensions of depth, a mere outside."39

The combined experiences of Vandover, Dolly, and Geary, then,
dramatize Norris's plea for romantic fiction. Dolly's sentimentalism is
exposed as divorced from the reality of experience, and Geary's realistic
emphasis on the outward appearance of things is exposed as
mechanistically destructive. Vandover's experience, however degrading,
exemplifies Norris's contention that romance should delve into the
commonplace and teach by showing, even if by negative example. It can be
no accident that Vandover "follows" Norris's suggestion that the
personified Romance should peer "into that little iron box screwed to the
lower shelf of the closet in the library... and a memory carefully secreted
in the master's deedbox."40 The story, as McElrath has noted, is no simple
morality tale and not easily categorized; it attacks nineteenth-century
genteel sensibilities at the same time as it critiques the limitations of
realism.41 In Vandover and the Brute, Norris explores the potential value
in the sordid to express both the truth and beauty in the world as Vandover
struggles with the conflicting desires to establish a home for himself in the
world and to satisfy his animal needs. Although he fails in the sense that he
is incapable of reconciling the moral with the animal, his struggle reveals
to the reader the underlying nature of the struggle.

Both Dunbar and Norris use homelessness to destabilize the concept
of immutable social boundaries. Dunbar shows how different systems of
cultural values may fail to account for experience and thus undermine a
particular set of held values, and Norris explores the struggle within
individuals between civilizing forms and brutish instinct. Wharton in The House of Mirth also questions the stability of boundaries by exposing the historical/biological foundations of social difference as being, in fact, economic ones.

The number of studies published since the 1970s on The House of Mirth is staggering, the result of new-found interest in nineteenth-century women writers. But, as Amy Kaplan notes, Wharton is distinguished by being one of the first women writers in the U.S. to see her writing as a profession, not as an extension of her domestic role; her "writing undermines those boundaries between feminine and masculine, private and public, home and business, boundaries which both arise from and collapse into the medium of the market." Perhaps this fact helps to explain why critics have often noted her fascination with the workings of the marketplace as it is played out in the novel and have examined in detail Lily's role in a system of exchange. Wai-Chee Dimock sees the marketplace as the "controlling logic" of the novel, as it provides the frame for "human conduct and human association, the market place is everywhere and nowhere, ubiquitous and invisible." Whether Lily be read as an art object, as Cynthia Griffin Wolff and Reginald Abbott do, or as the commodified woman that reveals the nexus between sexuality and exchange value, as Dimock and Ellen Goldner do, these studies provide insight into the economic machinations of a society intent on consumption, even of people (a kind of cannibalistic orgy, perhaps?).

While these critics often note the role that economic need plays in explaining Lily's choices, they tend to read her actions as evidence for her endorsement, if not entirely wholehearted, of the system that has placed her
in her current situation and that disallows any dissension. No one has yet, however, satisfactorily explained how a character so fully assimilated into such a totalizing system can come to question it. Elaine Orr argues that in addition to the system of exchange and profit that proscribes Lily's society, "the novel also sketches an open space (not an escape but a means of imaginative coming and going), a 'dreamed-of' or 'whispered' space of relational and empathetic problem solving, where the equivocal language of question and discovery is spoken and people negotiate 'closely' (that is, in close physical proximity) with one another to make change."45 Her explanation of a system of negotiation that operates within and against the dominate mode of negotiation is convincing and is supported by the spatial analysis of Annette Benert who points out that "all the crucial events occur in the transitional spaces, on the stairs and thresholds, in the trains and carriages, that mark the modes and margins between city and country, public and private, outside and inside."46 These scholar provide some important insight into the text, but both work from the premise that Lily Bart is trapped inside a "gilt cage" and that any modicum freedom she achieves during the course of her decline in status only occurs in the small space of a cage door left slightly ajar.

I would like to suggest that instead of being imprisoned within the constricting boundaries of society, Lily is excluded, and her fall from grace actually serves to more clearly define social boundaries as culturally erected structures that function like permeable membranes—they serve to identify and keep out any foreign matter. In fact, Lily never completely enters into the system, though she knows the rules well. She is throughout the novel an outsider, and Wharton traces Lily's recognition of her outside
status in four identifiable stages, only the final three of which the reader sees: First is her probationary acceptance into society on the basis of tradition and a web of familial connections. Second is her tenuous hold onto her status because of dwindling money and beauty. Third is social ostracism, and fourth is recognition. The story narrates Lily's growing consciousness of herself as homeless and alienated, confronted with daunting social boundaries.

The first stage of Lily's consciousness occurs before the story proper and covers the period of Lily's education into the values of society. We learn about her early life at first through Lily's flashback. Her father died just a year after her "dazzling" début and left her and her mother literally homeless, wandering "from place to place, now paying long visits to relations whose house-keeping Mrs. Bart criticized and who deplored the fact that she let Lily breakfast in bed when the girl had no prospects before her, and now vegetating in cheap continental refuges" (37). Although Lily's mother had certainly been successful as a hostess, her real claim to fame was that she could produce "unlimited effect" on limited means, "and to the lady and her acquaintances there was something heroic in living as though one were much richer than one's bank-book denoted" (33). When Mrs. Bart finally dies, Lily comes under the care of her paternal aunt, Mrs. Peniston, who is related through her grandmother to the Van Alstynes, one of the members of the old New York society.

Lily's own position in this social hierarchy is apparent in the family's overwhelming reluctance to accept her as a ward upon her mother's death. While Mrs. Peniston does so, she fears that Lily will prove to be "headstrong, critical, and 'foreign'—for even Mrs. Peniston, though she
occasionally went abroad, had the family dread of foreignness—but the girl showed a pliancy which, to a more penetrating mind than her aunt's, might have been less reassuring than the open selfishness of youth" (40). Lily is a "foreigner" even among her own relatives, but she has the adaptiveness or pliability to become what others want of her in order to use the asset of her beauty to escape the "dinginess" that her mother taught her to hate.

This flashback begins through Lily's point of view but shifts to the third-person as soon as Lily gets through a catalog of fine objects and privileges she had enjoyed at the height of her family's fortunes. Wharton's shift to third-person point of view coincides with a narrative of Lily's father's financial ruin and mother's decline and subtly suggests a reluctance on Lily's part to acknowledge the significance of these less pleasant events on her current life. In fact, the death of her mother signals her entry into the world of permanent houseguest, where she is trapped in a netherworld between her father's house and her husband's.

If Lily's early career suggests self-deception or denial of her outside status, the bulk of book one of the novel makes this status clear by tracing her final failure to penetrate this world, her failure to find a home. Stage two of her growing awareness is a story of self-deception. Wondering why she had failed to find a husband, she asks herself, "Had she shown an undue eagerness for victory? Had she lacked patience, pliancy, and dissimulation? Whether she charged herself with these faults or absolved herself from them made no difference in the sum-total of her failure. Younger and plainer girls had been married off by dozens and she was nine-and-twenty, and still Miss Bart" (42). Lily questions her technique; the narrator steps in and provides the facts, which Lily herself must be aware.
The remainder of the novel sets out to explain why Lily has failed and to reveal how Lily's self-deception contributes to this failure.

The novel begins with her calculating her debts and attempting to balance her checkbook against a negative balance. Her only source of money is a "scanty" income and occasional though unpredictable gifts from her aunt, such that her presence at various houseparties may be pleasant, but her position and "sense of servitude" (43) is reinforced when she is obliged to fill the gap whenever a "secretary" is called away. The party at Bellomont provides a backdrop for "capturing" Percy Gryce for a husband; reputedly worth $800 thousand a year and more when his mother dies, he would be a catch that would assure Lily's place in this world. Her failure has typically been attributed by critics to an underlying ambivalence about the value of those things she is trying to gain—status, money, inclusion—which we get a hint of during a walk with Lawrence Selden. She asks him, "Why do you make the things I have chosen seem hateful to me if you have nothing to give me instead?" (76). This uncertainty, however, is not the cause of her failure; she fails because Bertha Dorset, jealous of Lily's walk with Selden, retaliates by telling Percy about Lily's past love affairs and, more significantly, her gambling debts. The day spent with Selden is important not because it frightens Percy or signals ambivalence, but because it violates the rules of the matchmaking game in which, according to Judy Trenor, everybody is to "play fair" (80); and it sets in motion Bertha's revenge plot.

The narrator sums up Lily's position, equating it as being as far from Mrs. Trenor's imagination as the charwoman's. While Mrs. Trenor castigates Lily for her miscalculation, she exacerbates Lily's anxieties:
Affluence, unless stimulated by a keen imagination, forms but the vaguest notion of the practical strain of poverty. Judy knew it must be "horrid" for poor Lily to have to stop to consider whether she could afford real lace on her petticoats, and not to have a motor car and a steam-yacht at her orders; but the daily friction of unpaid bills, the daily nibble of small temptations to expenditure, were trials as far out of her experience as the domestic problems of the charwoman. Mrs. Trenor's unconsciousness of the real stress of the situation had the effect of making it more galling to Lily. While her friend reproached her for missing the opportunity to eclipse her rivals, she was once more battling in imagination with the mounting tide of indebtedness from which she had so nearly escaped. (82)

This passage highlights the gap between the Trenors and Lily, a gap that the narrator makes clear but that Lily understands simply as "anxieties." Although she is far from being a charwoman, she might as well be, as she increasingly becomes invisible to her "friends."

Further evidence of Lily's lack of awareness can be found in her reference to her search as a "career." While looking for a husband, or a lover, is a major activity of the women in this class, it is considered a game that is played with simple rules: women tacitly agree to allow one another to pursue the man of their choice, unless that woman is pursuing the prey of her competitor. While Lily is certainly familiar with this game—Judy Trenor, after all, smooths the way for Lily by keeping two other ladies away from Percy and by inviting Selden to her party to keep Bertha happy—she does not see it as a game, since for her, her livelihood is seriously at stake.

Lily conceives of courtship as work, which in fact actually places her in opposition to the values of the leisure class. To consider herself as having a career allies her with the working class, since to work, or to have a "career," is considered in Veblen's formulation of the leisure class to be akin to being uncivilized. It is not especially surprising, then, when she literally joins the ranks of the working girls in book two.
Lily’s obtuse understanding of the nature of her desires and her social position is juxtaposed to the more accurate assessments of Gerty Farish and Simon Rosedale, both of whom are conscious of where they stand. Gerty, for example, lives independently in a "dingy" (by Lily’s standards) apartment and has "taken up philanthropy and symphony concerts" (94). In fact, she helps to run a Girls’ Club, much like a home for unwed mothers or Jane Addams’s Chicago-based Hull House for educating and training poor women. Lily disparages Gerty’s freedom and vocation as being the consequence of being unattractive and "unmarriageable," but Gerty’s benevolence, the narrator tells us, is sharpened by the "moral vision which makes all human suffering so near and insistent that the other aspects of life fade into remoteness" (160). William Cain argues that Wharton may be ambiguous about Gerty’s philanthropy, a "parasite" on the moral order. But this narrative ambiguity may simply be the result of Gerty’s multiple and sometimes conflicting desires. Lily’s belief to the contrary, Gerty does not live a one-dimensional life; she suffers jealousy, love, pity, passion like most other women. The difference between the two is that Gerty is selfless and nurturing and incapable of understanding the desires and motives for conspicuous consumption that drive the narcissistic Lily.

The effect of Gerty’s myopia in regards to Lily is that Lily turns to Gerty at moments of crises, such as when her relationship to Gus Trenor, ambiguous though it is, becomes known, and again when she discovers that she has been cut from Mrs. Peniston’s will. Gerty’s apartment, in other words, serves as Lily’s place of refuge when she is in distress. After her encounter with Gus, for example, she runs to Gerty telling her that "I came
here because I couldn't bear to be alone. . . . I couldn't bear to lie awake in my room till morning. I hate my room at Aunt Julia's—so I came here—" (172). Gerty responds despite her ambivalent feelings about Lily's relationship with Selden, whom she loves. And despite Gerty's own desire for Selden, which Lily cannot fathom since she equates physical beauty with the capacity to feel, Gerty reassures Lily of Selden's reciprocal desire:

... "if I told him everything, would he loathe me? Or would he pity me, and understand me, and save me from loathing myself?"

Gerty stood cold and passive. She knew the hour of her probation had come, and her poor heart beat wildly against its destiny. As a dark river sweeps by under a lightning flash, she saw her chance of happiness surge past under a flash of temptation. What prevented her from saying: "He is like other men"? She was not so sure of him, after all! But to do so would have been like blaspheming her love. She could not put him before herself in any light but the noblest; she must trust him to the height of her own passion. (175)

Cain argues that this loyalty derives from "interpretative innocence" and that Gerty simply "does not really know Lily," but this passage indicates that she does indeed recognize the power of Lily's beauty to overshadow her own gifts and to take from her what she desires. The fact that Lily believes that Gerty is not capable of passion is hateful to her, but she is capable of setting aside her own needs in order to help the distraught Lily. Unlike Bertha Dorset, Gerty does not respond to jealousy through retaliation.

Lily's lack of self understanding is further measured against a history of the rise and acceptance into society of various nouveau riche, most notably Rosedale, who recognizes that entry is a matter of money and connections, not heredity. Although he is initially rejected by the Trenors and Van Osburghs, his increasing wealth and his association with Jack
Stepney begin to open social doors, especially during a particular downturn on Wall Street that allowed him to purchase the newly finished house of one of its victims—"who, in the space of twelve short months, had made the same number of millions, built a house in Fifth Avenue, filled a picture-gallery with old masters, entertained all New York in it, and been smuggled out of the country between a trained nurse and a doctor" (128). By the end of the novel, his name "began to figure on municipal committees and charitable boards; he appeared at banquets to distinguished strangers; and his candidacy at one of the fashionable clubs was discussed with diminishing opposition" (249). His position is stable enough, in other words, that he does not need to possess Lily in order to open doors into the inner sanctum of society. Unfortunately for Lily, the means for acquiring money are more limited for her than they are for Rosedale, but Lily refuses Rosedale's marriage proposals hanging onto her belief that heredity and connections are the most important determining factors and that Rosedale will not be accepted on his own.

Stage three of Lily's developing self-awareness occurs when Lily finally consents to marry Rosedale, after he has in fact firmly established himself. He rejects her, however, telling her that she is no longer a desirable match:

"If [the rumors] are not true," she said, "doesn't that alter the situation?"

He met this with a steady gaze of his small, stock-taking eyes, which made her feel herself no more than some superfine human merchandise. "I believe it does in novels, but I'm certain it don't in real life. You know that as well as I do; if we're speaking the truth, let's speak the whole truth. Last year I was wild to marry you, and you wouldn't look at me; this year—well, you appear to be willing. Now, what has changed in the interval? Your situation, that's all. Then you thought you could do better; now—"
"You think you can?" broke from her ironically. "Why, yes, I do. . . . I've had a pretty steady grind of it these last years, working up my social position. . . . Why should I mind saying I want to get into society? . . . Well, a taste for society's just another kind of hobby. Perhaps I want to get even with some of the people who cold-shouldered me last year."

(265)

This exchange exposes Rosedale's assessment of social position as just another commodity to acquire. He recognizes that it can be bought in the same way as a "racing stable" or a "picture gallery" or even a woman.

At the same time, it reveals Lily's growing awareness of herself as "merchandise." In the tableaux vivants scene, Lily revelled in being looked at and admired by the audience, especially the men; in this scene, however, she understands that her beauty is not so much an asset for her use but a commodity subject to the assessment of others.

This scene takes place as Lily continues to move down the social ladder, though she still has hopes that she can be "rehabilitated," primarily through association with the up-and-coming of the Gormers who are establishing themselves into society via lavish parties and conspicuous consumption. As the Gormers come closer to achieving their goal with the Dorsets and the Trenors, however, Lily is abandoned, and she is forced farther into the fringes while she waits for a small legacy to live on.

Ostracized even by those who are simply aspiring to society, her dwindling money forces her into finding a job. Unfortunately, her skills, such as they are, are limited to husband hunting. And among the milliners she is also a foreigner. "The consciousness of her different point of view merely kept them at a little distance from her, as though she were a foreigner with whom it was an effort to talk" (296). The beginning of her path toward self-recognition is marked by a desire to remain unseen. She
chooses to live in a boardinghouse rather than with Gerty: "Something of her mother's fierce shrinking from observation and sympathy was beginning to develop in her, and the promiscuity of small quarters and close intimacy seemed, on the whole, less endurable than the solitude of a hall bedroom in a house where she could come and go unremarked among other workers" (297). At the same time, the desire for invisibility is fed by the remnants of her old attitude of being above the working class, "an instinctive shrinking from all that was unpolished and promiscuous" (296). She suffers at this point from a double consciousness; on one hand, she sees herself as more refined and superior, and on the other, as "on a level with them" (297).

Her resolution of this doubleness occurs when she refuses to return to society by blackmailing Bertha Dorset for a reconciliation and marrying Rosedale. To resort to blackmail is to capitulate to society's definition of her as uncivilized; she faces the paradox that to use Bertha's methods to return to the fold constitutes a deed that would justify her banishment: "She seemed suddenly to see her action [blackmail] as [Selden] would see it; and the fact of his own connection with it, the fact that, to attain her end, she must trade on his name, and profit by a secret of his past, chilled her blood with shame" (314). She attains at this moment the capacity to empathize, to consider the consequences of her actions on the lives of others. In fact, she achieves the ability to nurture.

After her visit to Selden at which she burns the Bertha letters, she meets Nettie Struther, a former recipient of Gerty's and Lily's aid. This particular scene has been read as problematic, as not reinforcing the sense of Lily as victim of society and/or desire. I read this scene, however, as
evidence of Lily's discovery not of some lost maternal instinct, but of her position outside the social realm she has spent most of the novel attempting to penetrate. Holding the baby, she loses awareness of herself: "as she continued to hold it, the weight increased, sinking deeper and penetrating her with a strange sense of weakness as though the child entered into her and became a part of herself" (328). The child that disappears into her, that causes her to forget herself, represents an integration of her past—her heredity, her upbringing—with her present circumstances. In no longer defining herself as having been unjustly driven out of a place where she once felt she should be, she sees herself as whole, as being in the place where she always has been.

When she returns to her room, she takes stock of her belongings. Her dresses, which had figured so importantly in her social presentation and search for a husband, had mostly been passed on to her former maid. The remaining dresses are simply memories of that past life: "it was the life she had been made for: every dawning tendency in her had been carefully directed toward, all her interests and activities had been taught to centre around it" (329). Although she had been made for it, she had remained outside of it:

It was no longer . . . from the vision of material poverty that she turned with the greatest shrinking. She had a sense of deeper impoverishment, of an inner destitution compared to which outward conditions dwindled into insignificance. . . . [A]s she looked back she saw that there had never been a time when she had had any real relation to life. . . . She herself had grown up without any one spot of earth being dearer to her than another; there was no centre of early pieties, of grave endearing traditions, to which her heart could revert and from which it could draw strength for itself and tenderness for others. In whatever form a slowly accumulated past lives in the blood—whether in the concrete image of the old house stored with visual memories or in the conception of the house not built.
with hands but made up of inherited passions and loyalties—it has the same power of broadening and deepening the individual existence, of attaching it by mysterious links of kinship to all the mighty sum of human striving. (331)

This moment of recognition is narrated through the third-person point of view, but it reveals an acquiescence on Lily's part to her homelessness. She has no real point of origin—her parents had themselves been rootless—nor a place of refuge, either literal or metaphoric. She has gone beyond the place where Gerty can protect her from the truth of her condition. Without a home, a connection to the world, Lily is without the inner resources to recreate herself.

In the scene of her death, she replays the scene of Gerty's selflessness, only reversing the roles:

"Hold me, Gerty, hold me, or I shall think of things," she moaned; and Gerty silently slipped an arm under her, pillow her head in its hollow as a mother makes a nest for a tossing child. In the warm hollow Lily lay still and her breathing grew low and regular. Her hand still clung to Gerty's as if to ward off evil dreams, but the hold of her fingers relaxed, her head sank deeper into its shelter, and Gerty felt that she slept. (175-76)

It was odd, but Nettie Struther's child was lying on her arm; she felt the pressure of its little head against her shoulder. . . . She settled herself into an easier position, hollowing her arm to pillow the round, downy head and holding her breath lest a sound should disturb the sleeping child. (336)

Wharton's repetition of the act of cradling in similar terms connects the two scenes; the difference is in the point of view that Wharton employs. In the first, Wharton uses the third-person to dramatize Lily's unconscious dependence on the sacrifices that others make to her needs. At the moment of Lily's death, the point of view is that of Lily as she recognizes the existence of others' needs, human interdependence. Ironically, this moment of clarity occurs at the point when she has only one thing to
sacrifice—herself. It is a sacrifice that saves her from returning to the same self-deceptions that had served to define her life to this point.

Wharton made the claim that you can judge a society by what it destroys. But *The House of Mirth* is not the story of Lily Bart's destruction. In their quest for pleasure and power, Bertha Dorset, the Trenors, and the others of their set expose the destructiveness of their standards of civilized, moral behavior. Although they claim a cultural and hereditary right to superiority and exclusiveness, they reveal the boundaries of their class as being built on the less-than-stable foundation of economic fortunes. As they integrate the new fortunes with their own, the boundaries become increasingly wider, but never less flexible. Nevertheless, Lily's exclusion results because she deceives herself about the nature of these boundaries, and the process of her exclusion brings into sharp relief the obstacles she confronts. The story of Lily is a story of her self-deception and self-recognition. She accepts in the end that she is and always has been homeless and that her training, her way of understanding of the world, was as false as her illusion of belonging. As we will see in chapter 4, however, the significance of her death is apparent only to herself (and the reader), and perhaps this limited significance is what reinforces the sense of tragedy in Lily's death.

In Dunbar's *Sport of the Gods*, Norris's *Vandover and the Brute*, and Wharton's *The House of Mirth*, the central issue is the struggle of the individual to create for himself or herself an identity in a world that demands that the individual choose a fiction through which to understand that world, be it a sentimental fiction or a Darwinian one. The authors use the home as the primary site where these fictions get culturally
disseminated, and homelessness inevitably engenders a crisis of identity as the individual characters attempt to redefine themselves without that most important cultural frame. Homelessness, then, serves to expose the constructedness of cultural values and inevitably leaves both the characters and the reader in a morass of uncertainty. This uncertainty, as we shall see, reflects a more general uncertainty about the social changes brought about by the process of redefining the boundaries of the United States as a home.

NOTES

1. I begin this chapter with a caveat: The few social histories written about the homeless at the turn of the nineteenth century in the United States have focused primarily on homeless men. The plight of homeless women in this time period has largely been ignored, covered unevenly in studies of prostitution. I am writing this chapter, therefore, with the understanding that most references to statistics or generalizations about the homeless refer particularly to homeless men and do not usually include information about women who faced the same, and more, obstacles that homeless men did. While I will assume some overlap in the experiences of both homeless men and women, I will address some of the unique problems confronting women of this time in chapter 3.


5. Kusmer 104.


10. The fate of Hurstwood in Sister Carrie is a case in point. When Hurstwood meets Carrie and subsequently ignores his own home and

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family, these acts signal the beginning of his decline. By the end of the novel, he has become a "weak-looking object... All his old corpulence had fled. His face was thin and pale, his hands white, his body flabby" (463). Begging for a dime, he is given it and then forgotten, being treated just as he had treated beggars in his better days. His homelessness has made him invisible to the world. Theodore Dreiser, *Sister Carrie* (New York: Penguin, 1981).


12. *The Sport of the Gods* first appeared in May 1901 in magazine form in *Lippincott's* and then in book form by Dodd, Mead in 1902. It was also released in an English edition at this time as *The Jest of Fate*. Dunbar was ambivalent about Howells's endorsement, since Howells praised only his vernacular poems, not the ones written in standard English in traditional European verse forms. See Joanne Braxton's introduction to Dunbar's *The Collected Poetry of Paul Laurence Dunbar* (Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1993).


15. Although I am responding to Baker’s call to evaluate the novel in symbolic terms, as opposed to my own political expectations, I insist that such a reading would require a bracketing off of history, a critical move that I find both untenable and not particularly fruitful or useful. My intent is to place the novel more firmly in a historical and symbolic context that looks beyond the mimetic accuracy of the work. While Dunbar, no doubt, was concerned with racial relations, there is no reason to believe that racism was his sole aesthetic concern—or as some critics would have it, nonconcern. I go so far as to argue that Dunbar not only goes beyond simplistic racial categorization, but also implicitly questions the very act of reductively categorizing human experience solely in terms of race, class, gender, sexuality, etc.


17. I agree with Baker that the use of Shakespeare’s line, or the use of a "white form"—if such a thing can be defined—does not represent a capitulation on the part of Dunbar to white values any more than Wharton’s use of the novel form to write a distinctively nonsentimental story signals a capitulation to masculine values. (She was accused, however, as being derivative of Henry James.)


20. The focus on the cottage is itself a strategy that undermines plantation fiction. The typical opening of these novels would actually focus on the plantation house, and the plot would often center on the threat of loss facing the destitute but honorable master. The name "Oakley" echoes Page’s "Oakland," the name of the plantation home that Page uses in
his stories; but while Oakland stands as a symbol of social and moral order, the Oakley home is a place of dishonor and madness. See MacKethan 3685 for her discussion of Page's fiction.


22. I call this act an equivocation instead of a lie because the money has indeed been stolen—by Francis himself. Francis manipulates the racial codes by accusing Berry only by implication. He attempts to protect Berry from prosecution by interceding on Berry's behalf, but his fortuitous departure for Paris leaves Berry in the hands of a racist system of justice in which his word carries no authority.


25. An exact date for the composition of the novel is unknown. It is commonly accepted that Norris wrote the bulk of the novel during his year at Harvard in 1894–95. He may very well have tinkered with it later, but it was never published in his lifetime. His brother, Charles G. Norris edited and published it in 1914, though the extent of his input is not known. Frank Norris's "Plea for Romantic Fiction," which is important for understanding the novel, was written in 1901, which suggests that his aesthetic theory was generally stable between 1894 and 1901.


29. The shipwreck occurs in the middle of the novel and is often read as a key moment in Vandover's development. In this scene, Vandover sees first hand that the universe is amoral: morality is an abstraction that holds very little meaning in the face of survival. The virtuous die and when push comes to shove, the instinct for survival is stronger than any abstract morality.


34. Similar pictures appear in McTeague in the description of Trina Sieppe's bedroom. See Norris, McTeague, Frank Norris: Novels and Essays, esp. 374-75.


38. Mitchell 387.


41. See McElrath, "Narrative Technique and the Socio-Critical Viewpoint" 177, 199-200n4.


47. All references are made parenthetically in the text to Edith Wharton, *The House of Mirth* (New York: Signet, 1980).


49. Cain 2.
Chapter 3
The Body as "Domicile of Origin": Homeless Women in Space

"The nation behaves well if it treats its natural resources as assets which it must turn over to the next generation increased and not impaired in value."
—Theodore Roosevelt

As we have seen in the previous chapter, the loss of the home precipitates a crisis of self identity in characters who ultimately fail to redefine themselves in response to the realization that their values and respective world views are not as immutable as they had presumed. These values often inhere in specific places, and the loss of the place amounts to the destabilization of the values.

The situation of women, however, is even more precarious and paradoxical. While women historically were almost always on the verge of homelessness—by virtue of inheritance laws and traditions that favored male children, unequal access to education, professions, or jobs,¹ and marriage expectations based more on need than choice—they were at the same time expected to embody social stability and domestic values. In other words, despite few legal or social provisions available to assure that women had a place to do so, they were expected to create a home wherever they may have resided. Failure to find a place or to establish familial connections would often mark the woman as either a prostitute, feebleminded, or both, thereby criminalizing her in much the same way that vagrancy criminalized homeless men.² The threat of such criminalization, or social ostracism, at the very least, forced women to accept the social limitations or regulations placed on their bodies in order to achieve social validation. For women, to have a physical structure called a home was not enough; to have a home required that she also have
public recognition of her capacity to embody the values of the home. A woman could be made homeless both literally and metaphorically if she lacked that public recognition or if she internalized that lack.

Because of the historical connection between homeless women and prostitution, it can be no coincidence that American naturalists often represented homeless women as prostitutes. Perhaps the most well-known literary prostitute is Stephen Crane's Maggie; however, prostitution in naturalist fiction often, if not usually, takes the form of women, like Dreiser's Sister Carrie, who are provided for materially by men in exchange for sex and companionship. This broad conceptualization of prostitution mirrors the historical one. Vagrancy and prostitution were integrally related under the law; both women and men could be charged with vagrancy if they had no visible means of support. The woman, however, could also be charged with prostitution even if she received no money in exchange for her favors. (One possible explanation for a lack of historical studies of homeless women may be that homeless men were charged with vagrancy while homeless women were more often charged with prostitution or street-walking.3) A woman could be labelled a prostitute and legally charged as such simply for being sexually active outside of marriage.

Furthermore, prostitution reached its heydey in the United States in the 1880s and 1890s and became the subject of numerous vice commission reports between 1900 and 1920. Reflected in these reports was a fear that prostitution, like vagrancy, was the result of immigration. Thus, immigration acts were passed in 1903, 1907, and 1910; the Mann Act of 1910 limited the importation of immigrant women to the U.S. for prostitution.
and provided the federal government with broad deportation powers over both immigrant women who became prostitutes after their entry and employers who harbored them.

The significance of increasing social concern with prostitution may be located in the general anxiety about the industrialization of the U.S. and the role that women were to play in industrial America. Women, who were supposed to be the embodiment "of all the humane values absent in the squalid world of economic and business transactions, were found to be the basic component in the outrageous example of depersonalized commodity exchange. . . . When [the vice reports] referred to a prostitute's working or earning money, the verbs were placed in quotation marks," a practice that points to the problematic nature of considering the body as a legitimate unit of exchange.4

Women perceived as prostitutes were not only seen as undermining society, like vagrant men, but were moreover identified as a social evil, as the title of the most influential vice commission report suggests (The Social Evil in Chicago, 1911). And like the homeless man, the prostitute was considered a destabilizing social force. To be labeled a prostitute or to be perceived as such was tantamount to social exile. To accept that definition for oneself would have profound consequences on how one would project, or not project, oneself into the world.

The destabilization of values that we saw in the previous chapter in characters who lost literal homes may occur for a woman even if she is situated firmly in a specific place. Because her body has been culturally invested as a meaningful sign of domestic values, her body becomes the site where conflicts over those values get narratively fought. In narrative
literature, in which there is a "narrative aesthetics of embodiment, where meaning and truth are made carnal," the battle over the body becomes a battle over meaning and truth. What we discover in some naturalistic novels that focus on women, especially openly sexual women, is that female characters so thoroughly embody meaning that their internalization of the public repudiation they suffer signals a disembodiment and a transition into homelessness. For a woman, the destabilization of her social identity can also mean that of her self, her ego; thus, while we as readers assume that the character continues to perform bodily functions (i.e., she does not die at the end), we also recognize that the character has been rendered silent and unable or unwilling to project herself into the world, into space. In American naturalist fiction in general, we see that women become truly homeless and suffer their crisis of self identity not simply when they lose a place, but when they lose control over their self representation, such that social construction of their public identity supersedes the self's construction of its private identity.

In this chapter I consider Edith Wharton's *Summer* and Theodore Dreiser's *Jennie Gerhardt* as examples of texts that illustrate the unique condition of homeless women. Both Charity Royall and Jennie Gerhardt suffer through a process of literal homelessness, followed by metaphoric homelessness. What both characters ultimately lose is that web of familial connections that provides them with a home, a place of origin and refuge. They accept lives of silence in which they are powerless to define themselves either socially or domestically. They do not embody stability and domestic values (like the sentimental heroine), nor do they represent independence and self determination (like the New Woman): they
represent the condition of the colonialized subject—isolated, silenced, and redefined by the dominant other.

In the previous chapter we examined homelessness as a loss of place resulting in the characters' loss of a particular condition of life and sense of social legitimacy. Because the physical home is so imbued with meaning—social order vested in the structure of the family—its loss inevitably precipitates a crisis, both for the family and for society. For women, who are expected to embody the values of the home, the loss of a specific place may become significant only if it also results in an attack on the individual body. Since a woman embodies the home, she can be made truly homeless only when she is divested of the power to signify that which she embodies (i.e., she becomes disembodied, incapable of embodiment).

Obviously, a woman cannot literally be separated from her body. A woman, however, can be made unable to project herself "out in the space beyond the boundaries of the body," thus effectively denying her the power of self representation or access to the place of refuge and self origins. The coterminous relationship between one's home and one's body is not an arbitrary one:

In normal contexts, the room, the simplest form of shelter, expresses the most benign potential of human life. It is, on the one hand, an enlargement of the body: it keeps warm and safe the individual it houses in the same way the body encloses and protects the individual within; like the body, its walls put boundaries around the self preventing undifferentiated contact with the world, yet in its windows and doors, crude versions of the senses, it enables the self to move out into the world and allows that world to enter. But while the room is a magnification of the body, it is simultaneously a miniaturization of the world, of civilization. . . . the walls are also . . . objects which stand apart from and free of the body, objects which realize the human being's impulse to project himself out into a space beyond the boundaries of the body in
acts of making, either physical or verbal, that once multiplied, collected, and shared are called civilization.6

If a room and a body are coterminous, the space being both a "magnification of the body" and "miniaturization" of civilization, then a human being cut off from acts of "making" is cut off from the world, cut off from the human "impulse" for projection into the world, and cut off, in essence, from the body.

Edith Wharton was herself interested in the coterminous relationship between the room and the individual. According to her biographer R. W. B. Lewis, she often equated women with houses in which there are public rooms for display and hidden rooms that the woman herself may not be aware of. Her first published nonfiction work focuses on the interior decor of a house as a projection of its residents, especially the woman as head of the domestic domain. In The Decoration of Houses she argues that interior decorating is both an art and a science that should conform to principles of simplicity and utility and should follow organically from the architectural plan of the house.7 She concludes that decorating a home should combine the standards of traditional artistic expression with principles of architecture; the combination, if done well with regard to symmetry, will tend "to make the average room not only easier to furnish, but more comfortable to live in."8 She emphasizes a kind of pragmatic organicity where an interior space becomes an extension both of the individual and the culture. The space, then, that the individual designs for oneself becomes an extension of that individual into the world, an extension often circumscribed by tradition and the architecture of the building.

To represent the severance of the self from its projection into the world, the condition of homelessness, Wharton and Dreiser focus on
specific spaces and the way these spaces function as a means of alienating and controlling the other. Both writers explore the creation of meaning through space and the importance of using space as an identifier of an individual's meaning. In their representations of the relationship between the individual and space, they recreate the structure of colonialism, demonstrating one way that characters, even native-born ones, can become colonized subjects.

Such colonialization always requires the manipulation of space, since the colonialization of another requires first the identification of the other, as "the definition of otherness, the degree to which others can be persuasively shown to be discordant with the putative norm, provides a rationale for conquest."9 Such identification is made easy if one examines the implications of considering space an extension of the individual. Gaston Bachelard has explored in Poetics of Space the way that spaces are imbued with meaning through the human imagination.10 Bachelard, for example, describes the associations that are imbued in attics and basements—attics being evocative of memory and imagination, basements of the unknown. These spaces may be small—a closet or an attic—or large—a neighborhood or a country. Regardless of the size of the space, meaning may be ascribed and then rules imposed in order to define or limit access to the space. Meaning of a particular space is determined by cultural consensus, and recognition of and conformity to the rules of the space are expected of individuals; violation of the rules immediately marks the individual as a "foreigner," someone who does not belong. In some cases, violation of the rules is constituted simply by an individual's skin color or social class or ethnic background.11
Regardless of the location of the space, each space is also marked; that is, there are visual or spatial clues that delineate one space from another, and often there are objects that fill the space and that serve as clues to the meaning ascribed to a particular space. The most obvious marker of space may be a door, which separates inside from outside, but delineation may not always be so obvious. For instance, recognizing difference may require knowledge of an invisible line of demarcation, such as a particular street that separates the "good" part of town from the "bad." Like a door, a particular street (or a set of railroad tracks) may function to separate those who are legitimate, fully integrated members of society from those who are not. Moreover, the ability to recognize the markers functions as well as a means of revealing to others whether or not an individual belongs. These lines, these markers, whatever form they take, serve to separate communities and thus make identification of the outsider easier.

In *Summer*, Wharton consciously uses three primary geographical markers—North Dormer, the Mountain, and the city (Nettleton)—to symbolize the internal and external conflicts surrounding Charity Royall's futile search for social legitimacy and a coherent sense of self. Despite a marginally respectable position in Lawyer Royall's household, she is permanently marked as an outsider; this position makes it impossible either for her to return to the place of her origins, or for her to move on to the city, where she would need skills that she does not possess, in order to become something other than a prostitute. In the end, she relinquishes the rights to self-representation in order to provide social legitimacy (a paternal name) for her child. Charity, in carrying in herself the illegitimate child, embodies the roots of her own homelessness.
The plot of *Summer* is simple and, as Nancy Walker has noted, uses "the conventional 'seduced and abandoned' theme so pervasive in both popular and serious fiction of the period." On the surface, the novel traces the events that lead up to Charity Royall's entry into the world of sexual experience and her "salvation" by marriage. Like *Ethan Frome*, *Summer*, the hot Ethan as Wharton termed it, is set in the Berkshire Mountains of New England, primarily in North Dormer, and covers a period from June to the first snow fall in autumn. In this time frame, Charity Royall becomes sexually involved with a young architect, Lucius Harney, who, at the end of the summer, abandons her, unknowingly leaving her pregnant, and becomes engaged to Annabel Balch, a young lady of his own social class. Charity's first impulse is to visit the abortionist in Nettleton, but rejecting that option, she tries to escape to the mountain to live with her mother. Finding the life of the mountain intolerable, she submits finally to Lawyer Royall's marriage proposal.

The issue of sexuality and the politics surrounding it has been the focus of most of the critical studies of *Summer*. These studies tend either to follow Elizabeth Ammons's lead and conclude generally that Charity falls victim to Lawyer Royall's incestuous seduction/rape, or to expand on Cynthia Griffin Wolff's thesis that *Summer* is a female *bildungsroman* in which Wharton "develops a complex system of imagery to convey the necessary sexual components of the search for adult identity as it is experienced by a young woman" experiencing her sexual awakening in the metaphoric summer of her life. Regardless of the critic's attitude toward or explanation of sexuality, whether it is seen as a sign of
patriarchal oppression or positive feminine development, sexuality has been identified as the controlling metaphor of the novel.

But as Barbara White convincingly argues, it is "the existence of a double perspective in Summer [that] accounts for the opposite interpretations the novel has been given," interpretations that are manifestly contradictory. The double perspective, with the resultant conflicting interpretations, not only subverts the traditional "seduced and abandoned" plot by "breaking the traditional identification in woman's fiction of the reader with the heroine," but also points to a reading that goes beyond the either/or readings of sexuality as a measure of individual growth or of power. As a consequence, we can read the novel as being more than either a bildungroman or a feminist critique of patriarchal politics. While questions of sexuality—both female and male—are important to our understanding of the novel, the underlying conflict facing Charity is one that is symbolically rooted in sexuality because it is fundamentally a conflict over the body. Sexuality may be read as representing the conflicting desires not just of individuals, but of the newly modernizing nation, conflicts of the body politic.

The source of Charity's conflict with the world is her indeterminate position in society. She exists in a no-man's land torn between three opposing forces—the civilizing force of North Dormer, the savage force of the Mountain, and the modern force of the city. Compared to the Mountain, North Dormer represents "all the blessings of the most refined civilization" (11), though it has not made the transition into the modern world: there are "no shops, no theatres, no lectures, no 'business block'; only a church that was opened every other Sunday if the state of the roads
permitted, and a library for which no new books had been bought for twenty years, and where the old ones mouldered undisturbed on the damp shelves" (11). The picture Wharton paints of North Dormer is a bleak one; it is a small town where intellectual pursuits seem pointless when entertainment consists largely of gossip and youthful "love making," which is not enough to halt the exodus of the young from the town to the city.

Its Home Week celebration, which is fueled rather by "those who had left North Dormer than from those who had been obliged to stay" (170), attempts to commemorate "the old ideals, the family and the homestead, and so on" (173)—all of the vaguely articulated values associated with an agrarian past. This is a past that is largely rejected by the modern experience of many of the towns' citizens who threaten the "old ideals." The experiences of Julia Hawes and Rose Cole, for example, expose not only the failings of the old ideal of home, but also the small mindedness and hypocrisy of the community that "had treasures of indulgence for brands in the burning, but only derision for those who succeeded in getting snatched from it" (235). At the same time, the town's response to Julia and Rose also illustrates that the town is a community predicated on notions of tradition and the law; its social hierarchy serves to protect and enforce preindustrial, white, middle-class standards of behavior, punishing those who violate those standards.

In the geography of the story, North Dormer quite literally lies between the Mountain and the city. The mountain looms over the village and serves as a constant reminder of North Dormer's superiority; at the same time, however, Nettleton and cities beyond influence the young and thus threaten the "old ideals" of North Dormer. Lawyer Royall, who "ruled
in North Dormer" (23), is conscious of the threat to North Dormer represented by the city and argues for those who have left to return and do "good" for the town:

But the fact that we had failed elsewhere is no reason why we should fail here. Our very experiments in larger places, even if they were unsuccessful, ought to have helped us to make North Dormer a larger place... and you young men who are preparing even now to follow the call of ambition, and turn your back on the old homes—well, let me say this to you, that if ever you do come back to them it's worth while to come back to them for their good. (194-95)

Lawyer Royall recognizes the stagnation that has occurred as a consequence of the town's ignoring changes in the outside world and believes that the town will completely atrophy if it does not change itself.

The mountain that looms so large over North Dormer, and especially Charity, is a place beyond the law. Until Charity goes up to the mountain, we learn very little about it. Charity tacitly accepts North Dormers' vague disparagement of it until Lucius Harney romanticizes the "outlaws" there who "must have a good deal of character" (65). Lawyer Royall, who has been on the Mountain, describes it to Harney as a "blot":

The Mountain belongs to this township, and it's North Dormer's fault if there's a gang of thieves and outlaws living over there, in sight of us, defying the laws of their country... The only man that ever goes up is the minister, and he goes because they send down and get him whenever there's any of them dies. They think a lot of Christian burial on the Mountain—but I never heard of their having the minister up to marry them. And they never trouble the Justice of the Peace either. They just herd together like the heathen. (71)

His description is somewhat belied, however, by his story of Charity, whose father, convicted of manslaughter, asked that his daughter be "brought down and reared like a Christian" (73).
The vague impressions of life on the Mountain comes into focus only when Charity goes there to find her mother and to have her baby. What she finds is a group of people living in extreme poverty and squalor, slowly drinking themselves to death. Wharton uses terms like "vile," "drunken," "apathetic," and "squalid" to describe both the people on the mountain and their lives. The Mountain is hard and cruel and exacts a high toll from those who live there, but it is neither a romanticized place of "noble savages," nor a hostile region of lawless savagery. It is, however, a primitive place outside the realm or control of either Nettleton or North Dormer. In this sense, it is a place where the very harshness of the life of the people serves as an argument for its conquest and civilization by Christian capitalists and as an indictment against those who are indifferent to the misery.21

Nettleton, where the young from North Dormer go to start a new, successful life, is the closest city to North Dormer, and it has entered fully into the commerce of industrial America. It offers all the accoutrements of a city: shops with plate glass windows behind which are displayed a variety of goods; French restaurants; trolley cars; elegant people, a glittering movie theater; prostitutes; and an abortionist. The Fourth of July scene is a spectacle of conspicuous consumption, and Wharton associates the sensuality of nature with the desire of accumulation when she weaves imagery of nature in with a catalogue of anthropomorphized commodities:

In some [window displays], waves of silk and ribbon broke over shores of imitation moss from which ravishing hats rose like tropical orchids. In others, the pink throats of gramophones opened their giant convolutions in a soundless chorus; or bicycles shining in neat ranks seemed to await the signal of an invisible starter; or tiers of fancy-goods in leatherette and paste and celluloid dangled their insidious graces; and, in one vast bay that seemed to project them into
exciting contact with the public, wax ladies in daring dresses chatted elegantly, or, with gestures intimate yet blameless, pointed to their pink corsets and transparent hosiery. (133-34)

The sensuality of the experience of the city—the sights, sounds, smells—reinforces sexual desire, which the size and anonymity of the city allows to be explored. Lawyer Royall can consort with Julia Hawes and other "disreputable girls," and Lucius Harney and Charity can boat alone on the lake, an activity associated at the time with sexual activity and sometimes even cited as evidence of prostitution.2

Nettleton, then, is a place where materialism manifests itself even within personal relationships. The exchange of affection is transformed into an exchange of capital: Lawyer Royall presumably uses cash, while Lucius Harney uses jewelry. Both, ultimately, are buying the commodified body of the woman.

None of these places serves as a home for Charity, whose relationship with North Dormer, the Mountain, and the city varies. The closest that she comes to a home of her own creation is the abandoned cottage, lying between North Dormer and the Mountain, where she and Lucius Harney carry on their liaisons:

The little old house—its wooden walls sun-bleached to a ghostly gray—stood in an orchard above the road. . . . Inside, also, wind and weather had blanced everything to the same wan silvery tint: the house was as dry and pure as the interior of a long-empty shell. But it must have been exceptionally well built, for the little rooms had kept something of their human aspect. (166)

Later, she decorates the cottage, adding a table, wildflowers, and a mattress and blanket. Unfortunately, Lawyer Royall intrudes into the paradisical place and shows that physical desire must eventually address the conflicting proscriptions of social law. Lucius soon after returns to his life.
in Boston, and Charity is left to confront the very real consequences of their passion. Wharton exposes, in this scenario, the complex relationship that the woman has with society and with her own body. Charity discovers that the woman whose body ultimately fails to signify the proscribed values of society remains forever homeless precisely because she can never fit into any of the available milieus.

Although Charity has been reared in North Dormer by one of the most prestigious men in town, and she holds many of the same views of world as others there, she is and always will be an outsider; "everyone in the village had told her so ever since she had been brought there as a child" (11). Her status as outsider is maintained by the constant references to her past and reinforced by the Mountain, which is always in sight to remind her of her difference as it rises "so abruptly from the lower hills that it seemed almost to cast its shadow over North Dormer" (11–12). Although she has been provided with food, shelter, and clothing, her position remains constantly tenuous and marginal. She has no home in the community, and only her association with Lawyer Royall provides her any social legitimacy or power, much of that gained by manipulating Miss Hatchard's fear of scandal and Lawyer Royall's sexual desires. The library where she works is a "prison-house" (14) to her of unread books, and Lawyer Royall's red house is more of a battlefield than a refuge for her, as she struggles with her guardian over control of her body. Even her name is not hers. Lawyer Royall christened her "Charity," and the the community, through usage, provided her with her surname. The name given to her by her mother is available neither to her nor to the reader; she lacks the linguistic mark of her origins.
Wharton, however, does not allow us to sympathize with Charity despite her less than enviable situation. We learn about Charity primarily through an omniscient narrator who reveals her as being generally narrow, ignorant, and egocentric. She disdains reading, working, or creating in any way. Her speech supports this negative characterization, from the initial "How I hate everything!" (9) to the petulant and short-lived insistence to Mr. Miles that "These [mountain people] are my folks. I'm going to stay with them" (256). Even her treatment of Lawyer Royall might be seen as being gratuitously contemptuous. For example, after Lawyer Royall's failed attempt to forcibly enter her bedroom, she demands to have a woman in the house "far less for her own defense than for his humiliation. She needed no one to defend her: his humbled pride was her surest protection. . . . Nothing now would ever shake her rule in the red house" (38). Charity's quest for authority and meaning in the red house overrides any concern she may have for her safety. This double perspective, as discussed earlier, allows us to recognize Charity's plight while maintaining distance between us and the heroine; this dynamic of recognition and repulsion actually reinforces the sense of Charity's alienation so prevalent throughout the novel and also in effect replicates the dilemma of social charity, which often asks that we sympathize with and help those we may not necessarily approve or like.

Her "rule" in the red house is, of course, predicated on Lawyer Royall's willingness to allow her to stay, the limits of his charity. Although Charity does not see the situation as such—"she felt no particular affection for him, and not the slightest gratitude" (25)—she only precariously has a place in this household. Despite her belief in her mastery, she is an
outsider even within Royall's house. Her alienation from the community and from Lawyer Royall leaves her figuratively homeless in North Dormer, a situation Charity seems to intuit only after her relationship with Lucius Harney and the knowledge of its consequences.

If she is an outsider in North Dormer by virtue of her origins, she is equally an outsider on the Mountain by virtue of her experiences with the "civilized" world. In the case of the Mountain, however, alienation is an internal one. As Liff Hyatt has told her, the people on the Mountain "would never hurt her" (56), but Charity's general response reflects the North Dormer one—indifference. Not until Lucius Harney romanticizes the Mountain people does Charity express the least curiosity about her origins, and her first reaction to contact with a mountain family who has moved down—other than Liff Hyatt who serves as a sort of liaison between North Dormer and the Mountain—is that of repulsion: "Every instinct and habit made her a stranger among these poor swamp-people living like vermin in their lair" (86). Her life in North Dormer has bestowed on her a distance between herself and her familial web on the mountain and a recognition of that distance.

When she learns of her pregnancy, however, she decides that her experience as unwed and pregnant allies her with her mother, so she sets off to return to a figurative place of maternal refuge. This ideal, however, is shattered by the reality on the Mountain, which she finds is even worse than the state of the repulsive "swamp-people" she had encountered earlier. What Charity discovers is that her mother is dead both literally and figuratively, and while she recovers, in a sense, her surname (Hyatt), she cannot overcome the distance that exists between herself and these people...
who are her relatives by blood. The acculturation of North Dormer has resulted not only in an experiential alienation from her family, but also a carnal alienation, and no act of the imagination can bridge the gap between Charity and the dead mother whose body shows "no sign in it of anything human: she lay there like a dead dog in a ditch" (250). The body of Charity's mother fails to embody or signify the home that Charity was seeking—"She . . . felt as remote from the poor creature she had seen lowered into her hastily dug grave as if the height of the heavens had divided them" (259)—which leaves Charity cut off symbolically from her origins. So firmly do the bodies on the Mountain represent Charity's alienation from both North Dormer society and her blood relations, that although a family on the Mountain allows Charity into its home, she runs away, believing that a life in Nettleton as a prostitute would be better than a life either on the Mountain or in North Dormer.

Nettleton, of course, is seen by Charity as a place of opportunity, though the limits of her access to those opportunities become increasingly apparent over the course of the novel. Her experiences of Nettleton are characterized by unfulfilled desire and frustration, as the place comes to reinforce her alienation from the objects of her desire and prompts her recognition of her own disembodiment.

Her first experience of the city leads to her discovery of North Dormer as a "small place" (10), but she fails to capitalize on her knowledge as her memories of the city fade: "she found it easier to take North Dormer as the norm of the universe than to go on reading" (10). The appearance of Lucius Harney once more triggers her imagination about the possibilities
of the city, and her surreptitious Fourth of July visit reinforces the city as a place of desire, both for objects and for Lucius.

This important scene gradually reveals to Charity that desire is inherently unsatisfiable. The shops are closed for the holiday, and Charity is limited to window shopping, locked out of most of the commercial opportunities of the city. Her relationship with Lucius is unveiled to her as an "amusement" (142); after he gives the driver of a run-about ten dollar, he buys her a beautiful brooch, but not an engagement ring: "it seemed unimaginable that anyone should be able to buy amusement at that rate. With ten dollars he might have bought her an engagement ring. . . . She wondered what the girl was like whose hand was waiting for his ring. . . ." (142–43). And her body is redefined by Lawyer Royall who reads her loss of a hat as a sign of her loss of virginity: "'You whore—you damn—bare-headed whore, you!'" (151). The public denunciation of her as a "whore" prompts a rereading of herself, and she begins to see herself transformed by the mirror image of Lawyer Royall and his band of disreputable women: "she had a vision of herself, hatless, dishevelled, with a man's arm about her, confronting that drunken crew, headed by her guardian's pitiable figure. The picture filled her with shame" (151–52). At this moment of shame, marking an alienation from her own actions and self-concept, she internalizes the public perception of her relationship with Lucius Harney, and the next day she fulfills those expectations by establishing a sexual relationship with him. Her desire for a place of refuge, a place safe to explore the world, her relationship with Lucius, and the sensuality of her nature free from the censorious eyes of North Dormer, is thwarted, and she
discovers limitations and boundaries where she once believed there were open possibilities.

Her subsequent imaginings of and visits to Nettleton simply reinforce her alienation from the community and from her body. She is powerless to define herself. For example, when she confirms her pregnancy at Dr. Merkle's, she is most distressed to find that the "woman had taken her for a miserable creature like Julia" (225). While her pregnancy initially presages hope—"She would never again know what it was to feel herself alone. Everything seemed to have grown suddenly clear and simple. She no longer had any difficulty in picturing herself as Harney's wife now that she was the mother of his child" (228)—it is short-lived, shattered by a letter from Lucius that "was an avowal of Annabel Balch's prior claim" (230). The idea that she may be able to establish a family and a home with Lucius is destroyed by the acceptance of North Dormer's attitude toward young women who have gotten pregnant out of wedlock; "Her five minutes face to face with Mr. Royall had stripped her of her last illusion, and brought her back to North Dormer's point of view" (234).

This has always been a point of view that defined her as an alien, and as Charity accepts it as accurate, she necessarily becomes alienated from herself; her body as it has been marked by pregnancy signals to her not home, family, and creative potential, but difference. In fact, her return to the Mountain can be read as an attempt to erase her difference and bridge the gap between herself and the community. As discussed above, however, the attempt is a futile one since the reality of the Mountain is also an alienating one. Further, the city, with its profound materialism and
commercialism, alienates by commodifying; the woman cannot project herself into the world as a self-creating subject; in this context, she can only be projected upon as if she were a shop window display, her value determined by the desires of others and reduced to a unit of exchange.

Charity’s reaction to her recognition of her own homelessness is to give up her belief in her own mastery and to acquiesce to Lawyer Royall’s role as guardian/husband to her. Her decision to become a prostitute in Nettleton signals an acceptance on her part of her self as a commodity, an object of desire alienated from its own desires and self-creating potential. She resigns herself to the definition imposed by others’ readings of her. Although she does not actually become a street-walker, she does finally capitulate to Lawyer Royall’s desire to have her as his wife. She exchanges her body to Lawyer Royall for the legitimacy that her marriage will bring to her illegitimate child. At the moment when she agrees to marry him, she becomes voiceless, and he defines her for herself as wanting to be "took home and be took care o f" (271), a definition she rejects but is too weak, tired, and inarticulate to refute.

The future of her marriage is one of stability, but not passion: "She knew that where he was there would be warmth, rest, silence" (273; emphasis mine). Unlike her imagined marriage to Lucius Harney, her marriage to Lawyer Royall does not mark for her an end to her aloneness; it means an acceptance of the reversed hierarchy. She takes the place of the dead wife and, we can assume, the disreputable girls with whom Lawyer Royall consorts, and she acquires a name for her child (though like hers, it will be a name that reflects neither its maternity nor paternity). Although she accepts Lawyer Royall’s proposal and tells him that she guesses him to
be "good," this endorsement hardly reflects the physical passion that she felt for Lucius Harney or mitigates the revulsion she has expressed toward him throughout the novel. The key to this relationship lies in her acceptance of his guardianship—the "warmth" and security that will accompany her entry into his world. The nature of their future life may also be measured by the difference inherent in her creation of her own home space in the abandoned cottage as opposed to her subsequent "enthronement" into the Royall home space, one that has been predefined by the first Mrs. Royall. Her one last rebellious act before she capitulates to the life offered by Lawyer Royall is to buy back the brooch given to her by Harney instead of a new wardrobe that will mark her new status as Royall's wife. She ultimately enters into a relationship that, like the loveless marriage of the Skeffs, reinforces her exile and denies her the possibility of escaping. She is the recipient of charity, but only at the price of herself.

The figure of Lawyer Royall, however, is not one dimensional, as some critics, such as Ammons, would have it. Wharton claimed that the novel, in fact, was about him. Although he appears seldom in the novel, he comes at key moments into the narrative to civilize or contain the "uncontrollable" passions of Charity and the young. In his bringing of Charity from the mountain, his exhortations to the young to return to North Dormer, his intrusion into the cottage to force Lucius to marry Charity, and finally, his own marriage to Charity, he imposes the order of civilization and law onto a force (sexual) that accepts no constraints. Wharton shows him to be fallible, a man who is himself subject to passion, but also "forgiving" of Charity's transgressions.
Charity Royall, then, does symbolize the uncivilized subject in need of colonialization. Cut off from the maternal home of her origins, ostracized in her adoptive home, commodified in the alternate home of the city, and divested of the power of self projection, she never surmounts the boundaries that culturally define her as other. The only true home she has ever known was, perhaps, the temporary home she set up with Lucius Harney in the abandoned house that lies between North Dormer and the Mountain, but like the other places she has access to, this home has proven to be illusory, and her search for a place of refuge ends only when she accepts her own disembodiment, figured in her silence and her incapacity to project herself and her desires into the world. Her pregnancy marks her difference, not her fulfillment of social expectations or creative potential, and, divested of the power to define herself, she remains, finally, radically homeless.

In this sense, Charity Royall and Jennie Gerhardt are similar. The trajectories of their homelessness follow parallel paths, and the places they inhabit reinforce that homelessness. Socially assigned to the margins, Charity and Jennie attempt to establish homes where they can express their own desires but are denied those places as they are denied the power of self expression.

Jennie Gerhardt has been called Dreiser's most sentimental novel. It was his second, which he began writing in 1901 and 1902 and published in 1911, and, like Sister Carrie, was based broadly on the experience of one of his sisters. The central character is Jennie, a poor girl who exchanges sex and companionship to rich men for economic relief for herself and her family (a daughter, a mother and father, three brothers, and two sisters).
The novel is set primarily in the 1880s and 1890s (ending with Lester Kane's death in 1906). Jennie's first relationship is with a U.S. senator from Ohio, Senator Brander, who promises to marry her. Unfortunately, he dies after he has impregnated her but before he can marry her. Accepting that her pregnancy has made her unmarriageable and wishing to help her family, which is on the brink of starvation, Jennie quits her job as a personal maid and enters into an illicit relationship with Lester Kane, a wealthy businessman from Cincinnati. Although their relationship is mutually satisfying, if not completely socially legitimated, Kane is ultimately forced by his family to abandon Jennie in order to claim his inheritance.

Just as the U.S. was caught up in conflicts around the world—conflicts that centered on the ultimate control of territory and people—so the central conflict of Jennie Gerhardt is the control of Jennie and what she represents. The novel focuses on the various conflicts that center around Jennie's body, which is caught up inextricably in the question of what it is worth to certain buyers, what its exchange value is for the family. Furthermore, while these conflicts may center on Jennie, they also serve to reveal the destructive potential such conflicts have on society itself.

In Jennie Gerhardt, Dreiser manipulates space primarily in three ways to illustrate the ways that space can serve to alienate and control: through Jennie's recognition of her otherness when she enters certain spaces, through isolation from family and familiar spaces, and through emphasis on the public language of "private" spaces.

Dreiser first explores Jennie's sense of her own alienation in the opening scene of the novel, which shows us Jennie and her mother standing out of place in a fashionable Columbus, Ohio, hotel asking for work. Not
only do they not fit into the milieu of the hotel, but they are also violating the traditional place of women, this "tragic culmination" (4) caused by the long illness of the father. After they secure work at the hotel, the women are so conscious of the fact that they do not belong within this space, that they affect a physical position of extreme humility even when in the process of scrubbing the floor:

Mother and daughter, brought into this realm of brightness, saw only that which was far off and immensely superior. They went about too timid to touch anything, for fear of giving offense. The great red-carpeted hallway, which they were set to sweep, overawed them so that they constantly kept their eyes down and spoke in their lowest tones. When it came to scrubbing the steps, and polishing the brass work of the splendid stairs, both needed to steel themselves, the mother against her timidity, the daughter against her shame at so public an exposure. Wide beneath lay the imposing lobby, and men, lounging, smoking, passing constantly in and out, could see them both. (7)

Entering into this public space—a space that is made "far off" by its material difference from the home space in which they are comfortable—subjects the women to social humiliation, and for Jennie, sexual humiliation as she becomes publicly exposed to the gaze of strange men. The space itself takes on human qualities for the two women who fear to offend it by touching it. Jennie and her mother immediately assume the position of subservient others without ever being told that they do not belong in this space. This recognition not only of difference, but also of otherness simply by entering into a space indicates an internalization and acceptance on the women's part of social difference and otherness. They are in effect dispossessed of individual identity, becoming invisible to the "rightful" occupants of this space. Even to the other workers in the hotel.
they are invisible, such that "when they were working about him [the desk clerk] on their knees, he did not feel irritated at all" (13).

Near the end of Jennie's relationship with Lester Kane, a relationship that lasts nearly sixteen years, she realizes once again that despite her long association with Lester she cannot enter into certain places. Significantly, this moment occurs in Egypt, a country filled with colonialized people. Like the "dirty and oily" (316) natives who crowd Cairo, Jennie will always be considered an outsider, even in her own country: "She would go back to simple things, to a side street, a poor cottage, to old clothes. . . . She would never be accepted, even if he married her. And she could understand why. She could look into the charming, smiling, genial face of this woman [Mrs. Gerald] who was now with Lester and see that she considered her very nice, perhaps, but not of Lester's class" (317). She is marked as a "native" not by her clothes or her jewels, but by her language, her inability "to make quick retorts and witty replies—to mix, mingle, bow, be polite, do a hundred and say a hundred sweet, gracious things in an hour" (318). It is not her inability to dance that keeps her out of the ballroom; it is her inability to speak the specialized language of the colonizer.

Her entry into these places constitutes a kind of pollution of a sanctified space, a pollution that Jennie is cognizant of, whether she is invited into the space or not. For example, she is invited into Lester Kane's room while he is dying, but since her entry, if discovered, would be perceived as a violation, she must sneak in and out of his room.

Her consciousness and acceptance of the exclusionary power of spaces come in the final scene. At the train station where she watched his
casket be loaded onto the train, she contemplates the space that divided her from him, the space, as it were, that she could never enter:

Through the iron grating which separated her from her beloved, she could get one last look at the coffin, or the great wooden box which held it. . . . He [the porter] could not see how wealth and position, in this hour, were represented to her mind as a great force, a wall, which divided her eternally from her beloved. Had it not always been so? Was not her life a patchwork of conditions made and affected by these things which she saw—wealth and force—which had found her unfit? This panoply of power had been paraded before her since childhood. (416-17)

Gates, walls, and fences appear throughout this scene representing and defining the boundary of those spaces that are and that are not accessible to the other: there is the "iron grating" that blocks her way onto the platform, the "wooden box" that hide Lester, and the veils that hide her from Lester's family. Jennie recognizes the boundaries of social status and heredity as powerful forces of self identification. Her internalization of the belief that she has not only trangressed the boundaries between the socially legitimate and the poverty stricken, the powerful and the powerless, but also violated that space has lead ultimately to her self negation as she discovers that life in either space has become untenable.

In addition to providing Jennie with a consciousness of the social distinctions inherent in particular spaces and the relations of power represented by those spaces, Dreiser uses isolation from the familiar to reinforce the importance of space as a means of control. Much like Charity, Jennie is first and foremost a creature allied with the sensual, natural world. Dreiser devotes all of chapter 2 to a pastoral description of her character. She responds to natural beauty and empathizes with natural objects, like clouds; she envisions life as "a true wonderland, a thing of
infinite beauty, which could they but wander into it, wonderingly, would be heaven enough. . . . Trees, flowers, the world of sound and the world of color. . . . Nature's fine curves and shadows touched her as a song itself" (16–17).

Such a view of the world, Dreiser notes, is beautiful but ultimately alienating, since it ignores the realities of the culture: "Caged in the world of the material . . . such a nature is almost invariably an anomaly. . . . The hands of the actual are forever reaching toward such as these—forever seizing greedily upon them. It is of such that the bondservants are made" (16). According to Dreiser, then, Jennie's nature marks her for a life of servitude, of being possessed by others for their benefit, and her isolation from nature can be seen as an act of radical dispossession, a traumatic removal or separation of an individual from her nature (in both senses of the word). Such dispossession of Jennie is enacted repeatedly throughout the novel as her alienation from both nature and her family forces her into relationships of servitude, "bondservant" either through her own misplaced desires or through material necessity.

For instance, the first example of dispossession occurs during her affair with Senator Brander, who literally "brands" her as sexually active and thus, by the standards of the day, a prostitute. Their affair is carried on during those private opportunities when she is literally working as his servant, returning his washed clothing. Separated from her mother and physically isolated in the hotel room, which is filled with objects she desires but can never hope to have, she is seduced by the satisfaction of fulfilling her desire for objects as well as by the extra money that Brander occasionally sends home to her family. Although her affair occurs in large
part with the approval of her mother, it has the effect ultimately of leading
to her disaffection from the family. Moreover, although Brander professes
to want to marry her, their relationship is carried on surreptitiously within
the confines of either his hotel room or his carriage, in which he can take
possession of her, first metaphorically with the announcement, "You're my
girl anyhow . . . I'm going to take care of you in the future" (35), and then
sexually. Conducting the affair—or courtship—in isolation, either in his
room or on lone drives, assures that he can exploit Jennie's ignorance and
derive whatever benefit he may from her presence without much risk to his
own reputation, even if it compromises hers. When he attempts to conduct
the affair openly by talking with her father, his discovers that his ability to
control Jennie is superseded by her father's superior claims to her body
and the effect that her conduct may have on the entire family.

Lester Kane also finds that possession of Jennie requires first an act of
dispossession, but he takes Brander's method one step further in order to
remake her, to produce a companion who will fulfill his desires as a
consumer:

This atmosphere into which she was so quickly plunged was
so wonderful, so illuminating, that she could scarcely believe
this was the same world she had inhabited before . . . He
knew at a glance what Jennie needed, and he bought for her
with discrimination and care. It was his pleasure on this
occasion and afterward to explain forms and customs to her,
to tell her quietly what she must and must not do . . . It was
Lester's pleasure in these days to see what he could do with
her to make her look like someone truly worthy of him. (166–
67)

Like Brander, Kane first isolates and defamiliarizes her by setting her into a
world that is inconceivable to her. Then, he indoctrinates her into the
"forms and customs" of this alien world. Kane functions not as lover, but as
teacher and producer. Jennie is acquired, produced, and then placed on display. Finding herself in a world that is so utterly alien, Jennie can do nothing but acquiesce and submit to his superior knowledge of the cultural forms if she is to maintain the relationship that is mutually beneficial to her and her family. As in the case of Brander, she is seduced by the combination of material need and material desires generated by the "new" world.

But Jennie's isolation and dispossession occurs on yet another level. Not only is she appropriated and recreated, but she is also denied entry into the world she for which she has been recreated. Although Jennie eventually expands her immediate circle of isolation, taking in her illegitimate daughter and her father who has been abandoned by her other siblings, she remains physically isolated from the bourgeois world to which she aspires and which surrounds her. Despite her adoption of bourgeois equipage, she can never hope to interact intimately and on equal terms with her neighbors because of Kane's refusal to publicly legitimate their relationship, which ensures his mastery of her, and her complete material and psychological dependence on him. It is a mastery, furthermore, completely dependent on his capacity to limit her access to the outside world. As she becomes more and more visible to his family and to his friends, she becomes increasingly a threat to Kane's own social position. In the end, he essentially banishes her to the country, placing her, the sign of his own transgression of social decorum, out of sight of the dominant culture to which he remains allied.

Over the course of the latter part of the novel, she gradually enacts her own dispossession as she moves from a small apartment to a suburban

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home on the outskirts of Chicago to a small cottage in the country and then to the South Side where she lives anonymously as Mrs. J. G. Stover. As she increasingly internalizes and desires the values and meaning instilled in her by Kane, the greater her loss of control of her own meaning. Even after their separation, Jennie remains bound to Lester, such that "in spite of the individuality she possessed, her ways had become so involved with his—all her thoughts and actions—that there seemed to be no way of disentangling them. Constantly she was with him in thought and action, just as though they had never separated" (377).

Space, then, not only marks difference—in Jennie's case by making her aware of own inappropriateness in certain places—but also makes possible dispossession through a process of isolating, defamiliarizing, and remaking. Jennie's needs and desires, for example, eventually become so inextricably entangled with those of Kane's that his definition of and mastery over her occurs even in his absence. In Jennie Gerhardt, the strict enforcement of physical boundaries signals a strict enforcement of cultural ones, so that physical spaces work simultaneously to mark and enforce difference while providing a place where the process of dispossession can occur.

Dreiser exploits this dual functioning even further by showing space—with all its decoration and design—to be a public language that has the potential both to reflect and to obscure the identity of the inhabitants of a particular space. Like many of his contemporaries, such as Henry James and Edith Wharton,25 Dreiser examines the way the distinction between the individual and the surrounding commodities may be blurred, creating what Jean-Christophe Agnew calls a "commodity aesthetic," a phrase

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intended to capture the artists' changing conceptualization of the self's relations with goods. "In [the leisure class's] hands the commodified home became something more than a likeness or even an expression of the selves placed within it: it became something interchangeable with those selves, something out of which those selves were at once improvised and imprisoned, constructed and confined." Karen Halttunen, furthermore, has traced the transformation of attitudes toward interior space and interior design at the turn of the century and concludes that "the replacement of the parlor with the living room had collapsed the distinction between the public and the private self; the new focus of interior decoration collapsed the distinction between the self and the commodities surrounding it." In Jennie Gerhardt, interior spaces and the objects inside reveal, even to the degree that the space may serve to obscure, the character of its inhabitant and the nature of the relationship between and among characters. Dreiser's concern is not so much to demonstrate that one's space may be an extension of the self, but to show how such an extension may open the self up to the scrutiny and condemnation of the outside world, a process of reading space that subjects the other to public exposure and definition.

A key scene that illustrates this process occurs when Lester Kane's sister Louise discovers the relationship between her brother and Jennie. Arriving unexpectedly at their apartment, Louise finds herself in the sitting-room, which gave into the bedroom where Lester was lying. Vesta happened to be playing in one corner of the room and stood up to eye the new-comer. The bedroom door, which stood open, showed Lester quite plainly lying in bed, a window to the left of him, his eyes closed. . . . [She] turned about to find Jennie dazedly gathering up certain articles in the adjoining room and looking dreadfully distraught. . . . His sister swept the place with an
observing eye. It took in an open wardrobe with certain garments of Lester's side by side with those of Jennie thus accidentally exposed to her gaze. There was a dress of Jennie's lying across a chair in a familiar way which caused Miss Kane to draw herself up warily. (226)

The nature of their relationship is manifest in both the layout of the apartment, which links the private area of the bedroom directly to the public area of the sitting room, and the intimate conjoining and exposure of "certain articles." At the same time, this space expresses Jennie's self, whose "trouble," we are told by the narrator, "was that she had no guile. She could not be subtle. She did not know how to conceal" (199). The apartment and its arrangement so openly reflects Jennie and her relation to Lester that it exposes her to public criticism, which leads to a kind of self scrutiny and criticism: "Now she [Jennie] could see what the world thought. . . . She was a vile woman far beneath him socially, far beneath him mentally and morally, a creature of the streets. And she had so hoped somehow to rehabilitate herself in the eyes of the world. It cut her as nothing that had ever happened before in her life had. It tore a great, gaping wound in her sensibilities. She was really low and vile in her—Louise's—eyes, in the world's eyes, basically so in Lester's eyes" (228). And because, as we have seen, Jennie's view of herself has become coextensive with Lester's, she is vile in her own eyes as well. Such open exposure of the self, even within the ostensibly private domain of the home and bedroom, thereby results in the public definition and pronunciation on Jennie's most private and personal space—her character. Moreover, the public pronunciation of her character effectively controls her contact with the outside world as gossip about her condemns her to social ostracization and reinforces her physical isolation.
Dreiser, however, demonstrates how the powerful can actually use interior design to control what outsiders know about them. In contrast to Jennie's open expression and exposure of herself within the confines of her home is the concealment of character that occurs within the Kane's carefully designed household: "Kane senior had learned years before that the thing to do in any case where you were in doubt as to your own judgement was to put the task or the work in the hands of someone who was not in doubt and whose judgement was certified by public approval" (138). Precisely because he does not wish to expose himself, Kane buys the sensibilities of a decorator who can create the illusion of a "charming" (138) household without revealing the private character of its inhabitants. For the Kanes, even the private space of the home is a public space, and Kane senior consciously manipulates the public language of his private domain as a means to reflect socially a certain type of public character, a character that has no necessary correspondence to the self. Recognizing the coextension of the self with one's space, Kane senior controls public knowledge of and attitudes toward the family by manipulating the signs that are generally understood to reveal.

Moreover, the very fineness of the objects that fill the Kane household contrasts with the simplicity of Jennie's self-decorated homes and serves also to mark her as inferior. "In a world alive with social Darwinian ideas of evolution, displays of material and natural abundance became an outward sign of inward racial 'fitness' and culture." In contrasting Jennie's and the Kane family's respective households, Dreiser reveals the constructed nature of notions of "racial fitness" and "culture,"
showing them to be just types of commodities available to anyone with the money.

Space and its demarcations and delimitations has import that goes beyond the individual, however. Dreiser shows that boundaries, instead of maintaining social order, may actually destroy order, a fact that Lester Kane discovers in his relationship with Jennie.

Kane, no less than Jennie, demonstrates a consciousness of the importance of physical and social boundaries; he, however, only gradually and late learns the material and social consequences of their maintenance. He enters into his relationship with Jennie fully cognizant at the outset of the limitations their social differences place on the relationship. He is, as Dreiser puts it, one of those men "who look[s] upon women outside their own circle as creatures suited for the purposes of a temporary companionship, as it were" (129). In fact, he has no intention in the beginning of establishing anything more than a temporary sexual liaison, which would be well within the acceptable limits of behavior for men of his social class. Moreover, his discovery and acquisition of Jennie occurs at the same time as his contemplation of the expansion of the Kane carriage company into other parts of the world:

The problem of the Gerhardt family and its relationship to himself comparatively settled, Kane betook himself to Cincinnati and those commercial duties that ordinarily held him in reasonable check. . . . He liked to think of the immense office building in the heart of the business section of Cincinnati, of its far-reaching ramifications. Carriages were shipped to Australia and South America and China. He liked to feel that he was part of it, necessary, vital. . . . Everyone gladly recognized him as a personage because of this. He and his brother and his father were big men in consequence. (168)
The business of his personal life and his work merge, the one becoming an extension or reflection of the other. The ability to enter into and control foreign markets parallels the successful negotiations for Jennie that immediately precedes this scene. Unfortunately for Kane, he does not recognize that the conflation of business with personal spaces constitutes a violation of boundaries, and it is only late in the novel that he learns that he has failed to maintain the boundary between himself and Jennie, between his relationship with Jennie and the relationship with his family.

Although he discovers that women outside his social class may complement his life and acts to protect the relationship in a way unacceptable to his family and associates, he maintains the delusion that so long as he controls the signification of Jennie, he also sustains the boundary between them as well as his alliance or allegiance to his class. He tells Jennie at one point that "fortune is a thing that adjusts itself automatically to a person's capabilities and desires. If you see anybody who wants anything very badly and is capable of enjoying it, he is apt to get it. Not always, but most people get what they are capable of enjoying" (195).

By the end of the novel, Kane's view of the world has changed, and he sees himself as someone "endowed with a peculiar brain and a certain amount of talent, and he had inherited a certain amount of wealth—which he now scarcely believed he deserved, only luck had favored him. . . . Was not the world going steadily forward of its own volition, whether he would or no?" (395). This change in views is brought about by two significant events—his near disinheritance and his failure at land speculation.

Dreiser takes pains to show that these catastrophes in Kane's life undermine his belief that he can control his life by maintaining certain
boundaries. The relationship of the two events again emphasizes the
conflation of the personal and the public life, Kane's relationship with
Jennie and his identity as a businessman. Not only is the threatened
disinheritance the motive for his land speculation, but also is the result of
his refusal to abandon Jennie; his continued violation of the boundary
between social classes ostensibly indicates a lack of judgment that may
harm the business. Perhaps not so ironically, the failure of the land deal is
cased by a similar concern with the definition and enforcement of
boundaries, though in this case the boundaries are both social and
physical.

Dreiser provides us with a considerable number of details
concerning the deal, replete with precise figures of outlays of cash and
business strategies. The deal basically involves the conversion of an
outlying area into a suburban residence area; it sours because of rumors
that a packing company will be moving into the adjacent area. The rumor
prompts an advertising battle over the land:

Lester, who was pretty shrewd in the matter of safe-guarding
his private interests, suggested that some more indirect
method might be advisable. Would it not be possible, while
continuing the general advertising—in order to give the place
current prestige—to get some ulterior method of persuading
people that this was an ideal section—to fight rumor with
rumor—and hire workers who, for a percentage, would "tip
off" friends or associates in a number of the big industrial
enterprises in the city that this was an ideal home section. . . .
There was some little result from this—a few lots were sold—but
the rumor that the International Packing Company might
move out into that territory was persistent and deadly; and
from any point of view, save that of a foreign-population
neighborhood, the enterprise was a failure. (334)

In other words, the land becomes devalued simply because the residents
are most likely going to be "foreign"—immigrants who, in the late
nineteenth century, would most likely have been the employees of the future packing plant and who would be deemed a form of pollution. The penetration of aliens onto native ground poses a dilemma; while their labor is necessary, their presence constitutes a social threat, a threat that can be controlled only by marking off their territory as distinct—separate and identifiable.

In Jennie Gerhardt, the failure to win the war of rumors and advertisement leads directly to the ghettoization of the land, which is based not on any inherent quality of the land itself, but on the relative social value assigned to the residents. While the boundaries between respectable neighborhood and "foreign-population neighborhood" are marked and defined arbitrarily, they are powerful signifiers nonetheless, signifiers that have a significant concrete effect on the personal fortunes of Lester Kane and Jennie. They are also boundaries of social domination, as the demarcation of the living space of the relative valueless "foreigners" serves to isolate or separate them from the valuable territory that constitutes the living space of "real" Americans.

Kane's failure to define and control the meaning of this land and its subsequent devaluation comes at the same time that he fails to define for his family his relationship with Jennie by choosing either marriage or outright abandonment. And although he discovers in Jennie a personality that complements his own needs, in the end he succumbs to the "armed forces of convention" (368) and repudiates the alliance, choosing to live a life that values domination and consumption of the other. He becomes "a little hard" (399). Just as Jennie's desires have been molded by material need and articulated by Kane, so Kane's desires are shaped by his material
need and articulated by his family and his social peers, especially Mrs. Gerald, although the final recognition that he is not his own man comes late in his life.

Regulation of spaces—their boundaries, their decor, and ultimately their meaning—is of critical importance and inextricably linked to the regulation of bodies within those spaces. As we have seen, Jennie is controlled, defined, and recreated in large part by using space to reinforce her sense of otherness, to defamiliarize and isolate her within specific spaces in order to remake and retrain her, and to expose publicly her interior space (i.e., her character) through the mediation of the objects that surround her. But regulation extends directly beyond the surrounding space to the body itself, and through the unmediated control of the body, Dreiser reveals the way that Jennie's "remaking" serves to incorporate her, a woman associated explicitly with nature, into civilization. Just as Jennie is isolated and alienated in space, she is, like Charity Royall, also divested of her capacity to project herself into the world. Her creative potential and her capacity to embody domestic values are undermined by the negative social meanings assigned to the body.

For Dreiser, the human body functions to mediate or regulate the individual's relationship to the outside world. In the novel, Jennie's body, denied the power of self-representation and self-expression, is, therefore, taken over and transformed into the very embodiment of the culture that makes her. In her analysis of the structure of "making," Elaine Scarry looks to the Bible and to Marx's Capital to illustrate the way the embodiment and transformation of the self occurs in the act of creating. "For Marx, material making is a recreation of the body and the body is itself recreated in that
activity. He thus identifies an interior structure that, though very different in idiom from that presented in the Judeo-Christian scriptures, is close in idea. In each, the material artifact is a surrogate or substitute for the human body, and the human body in turn becomes an artifact; in each, the object is a displacement of sentient pain by a materialized clarification of creation; in each, the object is the locus of a reciprocal action.”

In Jennie Gerhardt, this reciprocal action occurs at the site of Jennie’s body; it is the process of creating her as cultural artifact—an object—that exposes the destructive potential of the process of empire making.

Jennie’s body goes through the process of recreation two times in the novel: first by Senator Brander and then by Lester Kane. We learn very little about Jennie’s body—its shape, size, appearance. Unlike space, which is described in detail, Jennie’s body receives only the most cursory mention: Senator Brander "saw the high, white forehead, with its smoothly parted and plaited hair. The eyes he knew were blue, the complexion fair. He had even time to admire the mouth and full cheeks, but most of all, the well-rounded, graceful form, full of youth, health, and all that futurity of hope, which to the middle-aged and waning, is so suggestive of all that is worth begging of Providence" (8). Senator Brander’s production of Jennie occurs primarily on the biological level and actually involves an act of profound embodiment as he marks her as a social transgressor. Brander exploits her natural fecundity and impregnates her, both embodying American culture quite literally in her body through the figure of Vesta and disembodifying her by making her sexual experience known and thus subjecting her to the representations of society.
Significantly, Brander is a U.S. senator and thus part of that political body responsible for ratifying treaties with foreign territories. His seduction of Jennie may be seen as mimicking his public duties inasmuch as he enters into a kind of contractual agreement with her, exchanging material goods and necessities for the regenerative powers of her natural resources (i.e., youth and sexuality); his relationship with Jennie, then, reenacts the relationship of a dominant economic power (like the United States) that enters into an agreement with a nonindustrialized country filled with abundant natural resources (like Cuba or the Philippines) to exchange those resources for American goods. Although the balance of power between the two parties is unequal, the relationship can be mutually beneficial, even if not wholly legitimated (or should I say ratified?).

The combination of political power with fecund youth produces "Vesta"—goddess both of the home and the state—and suggests that Senator Brander has inscribed on Jennie's body the narrative of colonialism in a rewriting of the American narrative at the end of the nineteenth century when the United States was first beginning to explore the limits of its power both here and abroad. Although society perceives the relationship as illicit and the product of that relationship as illegitimate, in fact, the combination of Brander's power—tempered as it is with a certain amount of compassion for the poor—with Jennie's virtue and creative potential produces the very object that the U.S. sought in its pursuit of a manifest destiny, a destiny that necessitated the use of means that were more often expedient than kind in order to form that "most perfect union."
The paradoxical result is that the production of Vesta also means the
destruction of Jennie's potential, as she is left pregnant and husbandless, destined for a life of social illegitimacy.

Jennie might potentially have capitalized on her fecundity and used it as a means of recreating herself, but Dreiser implies that society made such a possibility ultimately impossible. In naming her child Vesta, she embodies her with her own virginity, that invisible condition that has heretofore made her "whole." Motherhood has not only made visible her potential as a body out of which something valuable can be produced, but also marked her potential as a creator, someone who can extend herself out into the world through the objects she creates, namely children. This act of naming Vesta suggests that Jennie could have a double but reciprocal relationship with her own body: at the same time that she reproduces her wholeness in the form of Vesta, she might also recreate herself as mother and creator.³¹

Pregnancy, however, instead of marking her creative potential, becomes the sign of her destruction:

To have no body is to have no limits on one's extension out into the world; conversely, to have a body, a body made emphatic by being continually altered through various forms of creation, instruction (e.g., bodily cleansing), and wounding, is to have one's sphere of extension contracted down to the small circle of one's immediate physical presence. Consequently to be intensely embodied is the equivalent of being unrepresented and (here [in the Bible] as in many secular contexts) is almost always the condition of those without power.³²

For Jennie, both her full creative potential and the capacity to use this potential for self-definition are eventually frustrated because both her creation (Vesta) and her motherhood (her recreated self) occur out of wedlock and thus outside the bounds of cultural legitimacy. Her pregnancy, while representing the ideal fulfillment of the union between

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political power and nature—the embodiment of American culture—also makes visible a social transgression and thus exposes her to the abuse and condemnation of both her family and society. Jennie's response to her pregnancy, then, parallels society's as she repudiates her reproductive potential. She in fact disavows her child and her body's function, hiding Vesta with her family and denying her own fertility.

Dreiser implicitly suggests that Jennie's repudiation of motherhood, though resulting from social forces, also threatens social order. Jennie's body, in this case, can be read as more than simply the passive receptacle for the insemination and reproduction of masculine power, though she certainly fits into this tradition in American culture that associates the maternal and exploitable with the land or nature. Her body functions as a kind of barometer of social order; the greater Jennie's control over her own representation, the greater the degree of order. Ironically, not until Kane learns of and accepts Vesta—in large part because of her patrimony—does their relationship achieve a semblance of a real marriage, and they all move to the suburbs and behave as a family. The instability of the relationship is maintained, however, by his refusal to marry Jennie and to adopt Vesta.

Lester Kane continues the process of rewriting Jennie's body, not only by dressing her and training her in the manners of the upper class, as discussed above, but by reinforcing her repudiation of her reproductive potential. In a scene censored from the original edition but restored in the Pennsylvania edition, Jennie explicitly renounces her desire to have children as part of her agreement to enter into an illicit relationship with Kane. He not only suggests the possibility of birth control, thus reaffirming her own decision, but also usurps her control of her own body's functions:
"You don't need to have a child unless you want to. And I don't want you to... But if you did [become pregnant], I wouldn't let any trouble come to you. I'd take you away. There won't be any trouble about that. Only I don't want any children. There wouldn't be any satisfaction in that proposition for me at this time. I'd rather wait. But there won't be—don't worry."

... She half-wondered what it was he knew and how he could be so sure, but he did not trouble to explain." (158–59)

Instead of reaching an accord with her in this negotiation scene, he literally takes over her desire and body as his own—undermining the self-assertion that she has attempted by raising the question of her potential pregnancy—by denying her the knowledge that would allow her to control her own fertility. She is thus made powerless first by the embodiment of creativity in the body and second by the undermining of Jennie's capacity to define herself through that body. Kane displaces her creative self, which would allow her to define herself in the world, from the very means of achieving that self-definition, her body, when he affirms her repudiation of herself—the desire not to have children—as the socially preferable one. The "marriage" of the mutually destructive desires occurs at the very end of this scene and chapter with Jennie's words, "I will" (159).

These words, in sealing Jennie's part in a "marriage"—one that is largely successful while it lasts, though unlegitimated—effectively divest her of any future power to assert an identity besides the one defined and expressed by Kane. As a way of reinforcing this divestment, Dreiser narratively silences her, more so as the novel progresses; thus, she is represented as increasingly silent and powerless, not only by virtue of the social control exerted over her body and its creative function and potential, but also by the narrative separation of Jennie from her voice. In contrast to Kane and Senator Brander, Jennie's dialog is rendered most often indirectly.
through the voice of the narrator, and her interior thoughts are expressed either by the narrator or by Kane. Significantly, the only exception to this pattern occurs prior to her seduction by Brander as she explains to her brothers and sisters her belief that all living things have a home in nature.

Such silencing eventually results in her incapacity to make choices. Even after Kane abandons her for Mrs. Gerald, Jennie continues to keep track of his whereabouts and his activities and to define herself in relation to him. As a consequence, his death leaves her in a vacuum. She is unable not only to express a future narrative for herself, but also to conceive of one that is separate from the defining framework erected and represented by Lester Kane: "Jennie did not hear that or anything else of the chatter and bustle around her. Before her was stretching a vista of lonely years down which she was steadily gazing. Now what? She was not so old yet. There were these two orphans children to raise. They would marry and leave after awhile, and then what? Days and days, an endless reiteration of days, and then—? THE END" (418). While not truly without identity, she is left without any kind of touchstone outside of herself for articulating that identity even, or especially, for herself. And while she may continue to live in the world, she does so anonymously—without either her name or her past; thus, "Mrs. J. G. Stover" is left utterly inarticulate, both internally and externally.

The conflict over Jennie's body has consequences for Lester Kane as well, and Dreiser shows that the process of creating and then abandoning Jennie also has its negative repercussions. While Jennie is certainly the central figure of the novel, her character overall changes very little through the course of the book; her experience simply reaffirms the idea that the
underprivileged internalize and reinforce their own oppression. However, consistent with Foucault's analysis of the operation of power as an "integrated" system organized to assure anonymity so that it functions as a "network of relations from top to bottom, but also to a certain extent from bottom to top and laterally," Dreiser demonstrates that Kane's act of oppression operates in both directions; thus, the social logic that underpins Jennie's oppression also in the end oppresses him as he is forced into a situation counter to his own desires. In other words, he, like Jennie, is trapped within a system of power relations over which he ultimately has little control. While Jennie understands early in her life and submits to the social forces that dictate her life choices, Kane discovers their control of him only later, and his submission to them destroys him as thoroughly as they destroy Jennie.

Kane's resignation to his family's demands figures itself in his body, as the logic that leads to his abandonment of Jennie and subsequent marriage to Mrs. Gerald becomes the logic of his business transactions. Contrary to the objections he has lodged against his brother Robert's business methods, he employs these same methods as he comes to recognize the inherent connection between his public and private lives. The values of his brother, his family, and his associates privilege acts of domination over alliance (e.g., the formation of trusts as opposed to mergers) and consumption over production (e.g., the generation of and spending of capital as opposed to the making of objects), and as he increasingly exploits these values in his business dealings, they become literally embodied. Ultimately, the radical embodiment of the values of consumption destroy him.
His temperament, as the narrator writes, had "its solid, material manifestation at every point" (404), and, indeed, his death is directly associated with his post-Jennie life of over consumption:

Drifting in this fashion, wining, dining, drinking the waters of this curative spring and that, travelling to this city and that meeting, finally altered his body from a vigorous, quick-moving, well-balanced organism into one where plethora of substance was clogging every necessitous function. His liver, kidneys, spleen, pancreas—every organ, in fact—had been overtaxed for some time, keeping up the digestion, construction, elimination of the nutrients and wastes of his body. In the past seven years he had become uncomfortably heavy. His kidneys were weak, and so were the arteries of his brain. (406)

As he has become more prosperous as a result of his business methods, he has become a consumer of the superfluous—liveries for his servants, the best food and drink, travel free of annoyance, etc.—such that his body is destroyed by the extreme materiality that has become his life: "All he had to sustain him in his acceptance of its [life's] reality, from hour to hour and day to day, was apparent contact with this or that material proposition" (403). As a source of sustenance, however, material existence is as inadequate for Kane as it is for Jennie, and he falls victim to the siege of the same "armed conventions" that destroyed her chance for happiness.

Throughout the novel, Dreiser explores the pervasive influence of the regulatory forces of society, such that all characters in the novel, regardless of class, education, or ethnicity, are shown to some extent to suffer the limitations of social regulation. At the same time, however, Dreiser explicitly recognizes that these conventions and rules stem from human culture, not nature, and as such, they may, albeit in rare instances, be manipulated by individuals or societies. "Society, in the mass, lacks woefully in the matter of discrimination. Its one criterion is the opinion of
others. Its one test, that of self-preservation. . . . Only in rare instances, and with rare individuals, does there seem to be any guiding light from within" (87-88). In other words, the power of social convention is pervasive but not total. Indeed, the novel is less focused on the tragic outcome of Jennie and Lester's relationship than on the debilitating effects of oppressive social customs, regardless of the relative economic or social power of the individual.

In *Jennie Gerhardt*, the implicit critique is of domination, which destroys both the dominated and the dominator. Dreiser emphasizes the combination or assimilation of virtue with material power. In fact, the virtues that Jennie possesses—simplicity, honesty, industriousness—are valuable only so long as they are allied with the power of Senator Brander or the pragmatism of Lester Kane. No character functions particularly well alone; only in combination do they achieve a certain level of harmony and productivity on the personal and public levels. Complications in the novel arise when the harmony achieved on the level of the private is opposed to the social rules of middle-class and upper middle-class customs, which as a whole encourage domination.

In both *Summer* and *Jennie Gerhardt*, the woman's body is the site where the conflicts of a materialistic, consumer-oriented society get fought out. Because women were expected to embody the values of home and hearth—values supposedly differentiated from the public sphere of commerce—they were susceptible to the clashes between values of home and values of business and politics engendered by an industrializing nation. In these two novels, Charity and Jennie, who react to the dilemma of the changing nation by rejecting, either out of necessity or desire, the
values of home and by becoming themselves actively desiring subjects, are socially marked as alien and transformed in the process into colonialized commodities.

Both Charity and Jennie are faced with the reality of a changed world that has rendered them homeless, without a place of refuge. Their respective responses to their homelessness is to turn outward and actively seek what they do not have. The social response to their search results in the loss of self-representative power. Their presence threatens the public sphere as it makes manifest the hidden desires of those who are not supposed to have desires, who are not supposed to have been affected by the process of modernization. In defining the women as nonlegitimate members, society attempts to obfuscate the consequences of its own industrialization—unemployment, a wide gap between the rich and poor, commodification of the worker, alienation—by marking them as "other." The women accept and internalize their redefinition and render themselves even more profoundly homeless as they acquiesce to the public recreation of them. In other words, they become alienated from their own bodies as they forfeit their own capacity to signify, to define themselves outward in the world.

In the next chapter, we will examine how this process of redefinition and homelessness reenacts a narrative of colonialism as the cultural desire for accumulation and domination of the other gets played out domestically. As we shall see, such a process reflects a general anxiety over the changing role of the individual engendered by industrialization and imperialism. For the alienated, like Dreiser and Wharton who were
outsiders in their own communities, the treatment of the outsider without
must have served as a reflection of the threat to the outsider within.

NOTES

1. Women did not achieve the right to vote until the ratification of
the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920. And although working-class women
performed wage labor outside of the home, their income often served only
as a supplement to the father's or the husband's. Women were, of course,
paid much less for the same work as their male relatives. In a debate on
wage equity published in 1886, Van Buren Denslow argues not only that
women are physically unsuited for work in the free market, but that they
prefer "flattery" to wages. Lillie Devereux Blake responds with the more
balanced view that "as woman has entered the arena of competitive toil, she
ought to be allowed proper preparation for the contest, equality of
protection, and adequate weapons for the warfare" (211). For a further
elaboration of these arguments posed both for and against wage equity, see
Lillie Devereaux Blake and Van Buren Denslow, "Are Women Fairly

2. See Mark Thomas Connelly's The Response to Prostitution in the
of social attitudes toward women identified as prostitutes in the first
decade of the twentieth century.

3. See Connelly. Also see Barbara Meil Hobson's Uneasy Virtue:
The Politics of Prostitution and the American Reform Tradition (New
York: Basic, 1987); Thomas C. Mackey's Red Lights Out: A Legal History of
Prostitution, Disorderly Houses, and Vice Districts, 1870-1917 (New York:
Garland, 1987); and Ruth Rosen's The Lost Sisterhood: Prostitution in
America, 1900-1918 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1982).


5. Peter Brooks, Body Work: Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative


7. See Wharton and Ogden Codman's The Decoration of Houses
(1902; New York: Norton, 1978). She obliquely criticizes many of her
contemporaries throughout the book, calling the 1890s "the gilded age of
decoration" (196). Furthermore, she draws a direct connection between
interior design to art: "The relation of proportion to decoration is like that
of anatomy to sculpture: underneath are the everlasting laws . . . . Where
each detail had its determinate part, no superficial accessories were needed
to make up a whole: a great draughtsman represents with a few strokes what lesser artists can express only by a multiplicity of lines" (197).

8. Wharton, Decoration of Houses 34.


11. In some cases the rules are so ingrained in the cultural imagination that explicit changes in the rules do not lead immediately to integration. For example, in a recent interview of two middle-class African Americans, they described their experiences in predominately white spaces (e.g., white neighborhoods and Harvard University) as making them feel fragmented, out of place; conversely, when they moved into predominately black spaces—black neighborhoods and Howard University—they felt comfortable, whole (Interview, on Morning Edition, National Public Radio, 10 May 1994). While the experience of these two individuals may not be typical, it certainly illustrates the phenomenon of disjunction that may occur when an individual enters into a space that she feels she does not belong, whether the barrier is stated or not.

12. Doors as separators always run the risk of ambiguity, of course. For example, to be inside may represent exclusiveness and acceptance into a community, or it may represent imprisonment or entrapment. Edgar Allan Poe’s short story "Mask of the Red Death” illustrates this latter. Dreiser also sees the possibility of entrapment associated with being a member of an exclusive group. Lester Kane’s downfall, in fact, can be attributed to his inability to escape his ties with his family and its social circle.

13. Consider, for example, the tourists in Miami, Florida, who, in the summer of 1994, happened to get off at the “wrong” exit and found themselves victims of violent crimes, including murder.


15. The year of the story is never indicated, though the presence of a moving picture house in Nettleton indicates that the events occur sometime after 1912. Charity’s exact age is also not stated. She is probably 18 or 19; we learn she was appointed town librarian at age 17, at least a year previous to the events of the story.


20. Julia became a prostitute and Rose was forced into a "miserable marriage" to Halston Skeff, whose mother would humiliate Rose with reminders of her "seven months' child" (235).

21. See Monika M. Elbert's "The Politics of Maternality in Summer" (Edith Wharton Review 7.2 [1990]: 4-9, 24). Although I agree with Elbert's insightful argument that the Mountain represents the place of the other, which is associated with motherhood and female creativity, I do not see that "male civilization . . . comes out ahead of female nurturing" (8). Wharton, I believe, avoids this kind of hierarchizing by revealing both the purely primitive and the civilized to be destructive and unproductive.

22. See Connelly. Compare this scene with Clyde and Roberta's boating scene in Dreiser's An American Tragedy (1925).

23. These are essentially her last complete sentences. Her later attempts to speak are terse and usually broken or incomplete.

24. I am using the Pennsylvania edition of Jennie Gerhardt, edited by James L. W. West, III. This edition incorporates 16,000 words that were cut in the edition issued in 1911 by Harper and Brothers and available up until this 1992. This edition offers a more complete and accurate view of Dreiser's work, since the cuts in large part were made against his—and H. L. Mencken's—will.

25. Some obvious examples would be James's Portrait of a Lady or The Golden Bowl or Wharton's The House of Mirth, The Age of Innocence.
or *The Custom of the Country*, all of which use rooms and their decorations to illuminate the central character. In *The Portrait of a Lady*, of course, Isabel Archer is used by her husband as a room decoration.


30. See Sir James Frazer's *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (New York, Macmillan, 1950) for an overview of the mythological significance of Vesta. Diana, the huntress responsible for blessing men and women with offspring and guaranteeing expectant mothers easy delivery, also assumed the character of Vesta, and according to the myth a perpetual fire in honor of Diana was maintained by Vestal virgins.

31. While Dreiser privileges female creative potential in *Jennie Gerhardt* only in terms of the woman's reproductive capacity, which would therefore put him at odds with women writers of the day such as Kate Chopin and Charlotte Perkins Gilman, he does so, I think, in large part to address specific historical limitations placed on the bodies of those in the lower classes. The Gerhardt family faces starvation primarily because the body of the father becomes damaged in an industrial accident and he is no longer capable of participating in the productive process. We can also look to *Sister Carrie* to see how the mind- and body-wrecking options available to women in the labor market destroyed the bodies of most women in Jennie’s class. Writing and painting were activities available only to women in the leisure classes, and acting, at least in the case of Carrie Meeber, was tantamount to prostitution and denial of true self-expression. While limiting female creativity to the traditional role of motherhood does perpetuate a masculinist construction of women’s role, at the same time it also has the advantage of focusing attention on the fact that self-definition begins with the individual’s relationship with his or her own body.

32. Scarry 207.

34. Senator Brander dies before the consequences of his actions with Jennie manifest themselves on his body.

Chapter 4
Arguing Imperialism:
Naturalism's Structural Display of the Other

Take up the White Man's burden—
Send forth the best ye breed—
Go, bind your sons to exile
To serve your captives' need;
To wait, in heavy harness,
On fluttered folk and wild—
Your new-caught sullen peoples,
Half devil and half child.

—"The White Man's Burden,"
Rudyard Kipling (1899)

Pile on the brown man's burden,
Compel him to be free;
Let all your manifestoes
Reek with philanthropy.
And if with heathen folly
He dares your will dispute,
Then in the name of freedom
Don't hesitate to shoot.

—"The Brown Man's Burden,"
Henry Labouchère (1899)

In the preceding chapters, we have examined the treatment of homelessness in the works of various naturalist writers and shown how homelessness engenders crises of social identity in the protagonists of these novels. In this chapter, I will demonstrate how these crises reflect a more generalized social anxiety originating in the profound economic, political, and social changes at the turn of the century. More specifically, I will examine the United States' entry into the international race for colonies, an entry made possible in large part because of economic and technological changes, and analyze the process by which Dunbar, Norris, Wharton, and Dreiser reconcile their support of U.S. imperialist policy with a critique of the society that enacts it.

Defining the boundaries of both U.S. territory and U.S. power in the world became an increasingly important and public issue at the turn of the nineteenth century. In 1890 the American frontier was declared closed by the superintendent of the U.S. census as settlements stretched from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean.¹ In this same year, the battle at Wounded Knee marked the end of the Indian Wars (1820–1890), which had been fed in large part by the ever-increasing demand for land by white settlers...
following the imperatives of a declared Manifest Destiny. Three years after Wounded Knee, historian Frederick Jackson Turner articulated a new historical model for explaining the importance of this Manifest Destiny in the development of a unique "American" character. According to his frontier theory, as expressed in his influential address to the American Historical Association at the Chicago World's Fair, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," gave academic legitimacy to the frontier as a symbol "of infinite possibility and unlimited desire, an inexhaustible material and spiritual resource that would always keep America the land of opportunity and newness." Thus, the close of the frontier signaled for many public leaders a need to find new frontiers if the American character, as defined by Turner, was to continue to evolve economically, culturally, and politically.

Of primary importance for this social evolution was the continual engagement of the civilized with the primitive: "American social development has been continually beginning over again on the frontier. This perennial rebirth, this fluidity of American life, this expansion westward with its new opportunities, its continuous touch with the simplicity of primitive society, furnish the forces dominating American character." (Like many of the thinkers of his day, Turner was influenced by Darwin's theory of evolution and believed, like Herbert Spencer, that society was a type of organism that would evolve into increasingly higher forms.) As Turner's argument would have it, the U.S. must look beyond its own immediate boundaries toward the "primitive" beyond to keep U.S. institutions and the American "character" evolving until, ostensibly, they will achieve their highest, most advanced state. Such engagement with the
primitive supposedly refines those qualities such as self-reliance, independent initiative, and entrepreneurship to create such notable capitalists as John D. Rockefeller or Andrew Carnegie, figures like those described by Georg Lukács as "separated from the real driving forces of their epoch, and their deeds, thus rendered incomprehensible, acquire a decorative magnificence by virtue of their very incomprehensibility. This decorative portrayal is further intensified by the special emphasis and central place given to the brutal excesses of history."^4

In this regard, Turner was supporting expansionism in the Great Debate that had been taking shape since Secretary of State John Quincy Adams announced in 1823 that Cuba and Puerto Rico "are natural appendages to the North American continent."^5 President Peirce attempted to acquire Cuba in the 1850s and President Grant tried to annex Santo Domingo in the 1870s. In 1889, the U.S. gained its first "colony" when it entered into a tripartite protectorate arrangement with England and Germany for a portion of the Samoan Islands. It was not until 1892–93, however, that the question of acquiring Hawaii more clearly divided the imperialists and the anti-imperialists and provided the focus for a debate that would not be fully defined until after the Spanish-American War. According to Albert K. Weinberg, there was a "new desire for 'a vigorous foreign policy,' which became widespread as the nation emerged from domestic reconstruction to a keen consciousness of moral and politico-commercial interests beyond its borders."^6

The positions of both imperialists and anti-imperialists were sufficiently heterogeneous to make generalizations about either difficult. For the imperialists, the issues of concern centered primarily around trade,
national defense, international duty, and even Christian mission. The primacy of any single issue depended upon the individual speaking. Admiral Alfred T. Mahan, author of the important The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660–1783 (1890), argued for an enlarged and modernized U.S. navy and merchant marine, an isthmian canal, and island colonies to serve as naval fueling bases. In an article first published in March 1893 in Forum on the importance of securing Hawaii as a colony, Mahan compares the decision confronting the United States with that facing Rome when it was deciding to expand outside the Italian peninsula: "The issue cannot be dodged. Absolute inaction in such a case is a decision as truly as the most vehement action. We can now advance, but, the conditions of the world being what they are, if we do not advance we recede; for there is involved not so much a particular action as a question of principle pregnant of great consequences in one direction or in the other." In other words, a failure to capitalize on the opportunity for expansion offered by the strategic location of Hawaii would result in the U.S.'s assuming a subordinate position to the other imperialist powers.

Mahan's argument for expansion based on the need for military strength and defensive positions was supplemented by the equally loud voices in favor of expansion as a means to increase trade. Republican senator from Indiana and vocal supporter of "trade follows the flag" diplomacy, Albert J. Beveridge sums up this position in a letter written in May 1898: "Territorial extension is not desirable for itself alone. It is and will be merely an incident of commercial extension. And commercial extension is the absolutely necessary result of the overwhelming productive energy and capacity of the American people." For Beveridge
and others of like mind, U.S. imperialism was necessary for continued economic growth and industrial development, though his rhetoric suggests that such growth was not simply a desired goal, but a "necessary" or natural outgrowth of the American character, inherent in the nation's Manifest Destiny.

Perhaps the most important, if not most outspoken, proponent of imperialism was Theodore Roosevelt—assistant secretary of the navy immediately prior to the Spanish-American War, organizer of the Rough Riders, and president from 1901 to 1909. An ardent supporter of Admiral Mahan and his positions on expansion, Roosevelt also saw U.S. imperialism as a moral imperative and proof to the world of American (Anglo-Saxon) superiority. The struggle for power, he asserts in a letter of 1899 that echoes Turner, is the measure of a nation's character:

> A small nation will break down under heavy responsibilities, because it is a small nation; but if a nation is great, as we claim that ours is, it can remain so only by doing a great work and achieving dangerous and difficult tasks... If we lead soft and easy lives, concerning ourselves with little things only, we shall occupy but an ignoble place in the great world drama of the centuries that are opening. It is only through strife—righteous strife—righteously conducted, but still strife, that we can expect to win to the higher levels where the victors in the struggle are crowned. ¹⁰

Conquest for conquest's sake—made righteous, one presumes, by the result that it denies territory to the strong European powers—is the ultimate goal of any strong and great nation.

For all the appeals to American greatness and to the need for aggressive economic and strategic policies, anti-imperialists countered with references to tradition and the social repercussions of colonizing foreign peoples. William G. Sumner, a sociologist and professor at Yale...
University, considered U.S. imperialism to be a violation of the intent of the Founding Fathers and a potential threat to the security of the State, inasmuch as territorial acquisitions "will lessen liberty and require discipline. It will increase taxation and all the pressure of government. It will divert the national energy from the provision of self-maintenance and comfort for the people, and will necessitate stronger and more elaborate governmental machinery."\textsuperscript{11}

For Carl Schurz, a German immigrant who served one term as senator from Missouri and then as Secretary of the Interior in the Hayes Administration, the danger of imperialism stemmed from the difficulties of defending territories outside the boundaries of the nation, which expansion would necessitate. He also feared "that the incorporation of the American tropics in our national system would essentially transform the constituency of our government, and be fraught with incalculable dangers to the vitality of our democratic institutions."\textsuperscript{12} The question of imperialism, then, was one of defense, both of distant territories and democratic institutions defined by a "temperate zone" sensibility.

Not all anti-imperialists, however, objected to colonialism on the basis of perceived negative repercussions on the resources or institutions of the United States. Some, like philosopher William James, objected on the grounds that outside intervention actually violated or impeded the natural evolution of other cultures. Between 1899 and 1901, he wrote a number of letters to the editor of the Boston Evening Transcript criticizing U.S. policy in the Philippines and the rhetoric of then-governor of New York, Theodore Roosevelt and his ilk. In a letter written to Senator George F. Hoar, an outspoken opponent of American imperialism, James equates
imperialist nations with "professional pirates." He asks, in response to U.S. policy in the Philippines,

Has [McKinley] not deliberately used the strength of the U.S. to crush what is on the whole the sacredest thing on earth: the successful attempt of an aspiring people to embody its own ideals in its own institutions? Is anything of value, that has no roots in history? Could our violent and artificial irruption into their affairs with our remote ideals & habits (even had they submitted without war) possibly have been as good for them as their own evolution?13

James, questioning the feasibility of imposing outside values and institutions upon a foreign culture, implicitly argues for allowing national self-determination by these "primitive" societies.

In general, the most common threads running through both the arguments of imperialists and anti-imperialists were appeals to national defense and American superiority, to be achieved, depending on which side of the issue one stood, either by an international show of military strength or by a policy of isolationism that would demonstrate that the U.S. was above the power grabbing of corrupt European governments. In other words, regardless of one's stance, the ends of foreign policy were largely deemed the same, but the means to achieving those ends differed significantly.

Reflected in the differences between the general strategies for achieving U.S. dominance—whether military, economic, or moral—were differing attitudes toward the colonized subjects. With few exceptions, such as William James (who believed that "the Malay and Tagalog possessed racial virtues as well as human rights" and who considered such diminutive labels as "Little Brown Brother" to be insulting14), anti-imperialists were often no less racist than their imperialist counterparts; the fear of disrupting the racial or cultural balance of power in the country...
served as an important part of their argument against imperialism, since they believed that the Constitution required any colony to be added as a new state and would thus alter the composition of representative government. Imperialists did not agree that colonies would need to be granted statehood and were more likely to argue that foreign cultures were in need of control from the outside; they often defined the quest for new territories in terms of a benevolent philanthropy, which reflected "humanitarianism and a belligerent spirit of national self-assertion."\

The argument used for justifying imperialism was that these non-European, non-Anglo-Saxon cultures were not only racially inferior to those of the colonial powers', but actually underdeveloped, primitive. In his famous poem "The White Man's Burden," written in celebration of the U.S.'s victory over Spain, Kipling repeatedly calls the colonial subjects "Half devil and half child." But the image of the barbarian child is used by other imperialists as well. Mahan, for example, described the Filipinos as "people in the childhood stage of race development." The metaphor of the child effects a wholesale infantilization of both the individual subjects and their cultural traditions and makes possible a relation of power based on a parent/child hierarchy. Such a model implies that the "mature" colonizer has the power and the moral responsibility to step in to guide the growth and development of these "children" into a state of maturity.

Not all imperialists veiled their colonial aspirations in such a philanthropic metaphor, however. Roosevelt simply defined the colonial subject as "barbarian," though he omitted a clear definition of what he meant by this label. He argued that barbarians should be colonized in
order to maintain peace in the world because they are inherently incapable of peace:

With a barbarous nation peace is the exceptional condition. On the border between civilization and barbarism war is generally normal because it must be under the conditions of barbarism. Whether the barbarian be the Red Indian on the frontier of the United States, the Afghan on the border of British India, or the Turkoman who confronts the Siberian Cossack, the result is the same. In the long run civilized man finds he can keep the peace only by subduing his barbarian neighbor; for the barbarian will yield only to force, save in instances so exceptional that they may be disregarded.17

The barbarians at the gate—conveniently located on strategic archipelagos and resource-laden lands—must be conquered and controlled before they disrupt the peace and order of civilization.

Such rhetoric, of course, served to rationalize the colonization of foreign territories. Edward Said argues in Culture and Imperialism that such a rhetorical move is a means of incorporating or integrating the other into civilization, what he identifies as one of the fundamental "needs" of colonialization: "experience in the dominant society comes to depend uncritically on natives and their territories perceived as in need of la mission civilisatrice. . . . The outlying regions of the world have no life, history, or culture to speak of, no independence or integrity worth representing without the West. And when there is something to be described it is . . . unutterably corrupt, degenerate, irredeemable."18 But colonizing the other requires more than rhetoric; it requires the physical presence of the dominating society in the form of colonies where the dominant culture and its institutions can be replicated and disseminated. "La mission civilisatrice" demands that the barbarian children be educated into the ways of their conquerors.
Such a mission, however, is not limited to the barbarians without. Roosevelt, for example, points to the "Red Indian" as an example of a barbarous nation existing within the boundaries of the United States. At the same time, an increasing number of immigrants in the 1890s, especially those from eastern and southern European countries, who were alienated by language and customs, began forming the ghettos and ethnic communities that were often perceived as being a threat to social order and American values and often located on the fringes of the city, the outlying areas. And perhaps even more than the barbarians overseas, these immediate additions to the U.S. population, combined with a significant population of former slaves, raised questions in the minds of the middle class about the ethnic composition of American society. To what extent were these "outsiders" to be allowed to participate in and benefit from a system dominated by a white, Protestant, middle class so entrenched in a theory of social Darwinism that it measured individuals' evolutionary or biological "fitness" in terms of their capacity to earn and to consume?

The questions of incorporation posed in the debate between imperialists and anti-imperialist were in fact coterminous with those raised by widescale immigration, and critics such as Amy Kaplan and Eric Cheyfitz have looked at popular texts of the day such as When Knighthood Was in Flower and Tarzan. They demonstrate how issues of domestic and foreign policy were transfigured in popular romance novels at the turn of the century, novels that were usually set in foreign climes and/or times. Cheyfitz argues that the function of such transfiguration is "radically to reduce or homogenize domestic political complexities by displacing them onto a foreign scene, whose own political complexities are thereby
radically homogenized in the vision of the romance" and to repress the differences between the policies through "a particular ideological representation of the foreign." But representing the foreign is more complex than identifying and isolating a particular ethnic group.

As pointed out earlier, immigrants were often made scapegoats for many of the social ills of the day, such as "vagrancy" and prostitution, but they were not typically, and certainly not exclusively, the primary victims/perpetrators of these problems. This tendency to associate the immigrant—the foreigner—with all social dysfunctions points to the fundamental insecurity of a society that refused to recognize or address problems of poverty, unemployment, and exploitation and economic marginalization of workers, native and immigrant alike, inherent in its ideological construct. The society in effect displaced its own domestic problems and fears onto the foreign, such that anyone, regardless of country of birth, who failed to mirror the standards or habits of that society became the "foreigner."

For both the imperialist and the anti-imperialist, the concern was that the colonized subject would not or could not fit into the American "family." For the naturalist novelist, the issue of belonging in the "family" is also a central concern that gets figured almost literally in the emphasis on home and homelessness. Characters who undergo a process of social dispossession, who become homeless, fail to establish or to maintain their identification with the values of the dominant society, and as we explored in the previous chapters, this failure destabilizes their self identity as well as the cultural boundaries erected by society. In representing these characters struggling to come to terms with homelessness, naturalist
writers also expose the process of defining the "domestic foreigner," thereby displacing or transposing the complexities of imperialism and colonialism onto the domestic sphere.

Although Dunbar, Norris, Wharton, and Dreiser do not address directly the issue of imperialism in any of the novels we have examined, they all did, in other ways, express their support for U.S. expansion into foreign territories. Moreover, as Said has shown in his analysis of Jane Austen, especially, the economics of imperialism, whether explicit or not, is present inasmuch as it underwrites the prosperity of the leisure class to which many of the characters aspire.

Dunbar wrote poetry that indirectly points to his support of American expansionism: "The Conquerors" celebrates the role of the black troops in the Spanish-American War and suggests that the contributions of African-American soldiers to freedom may one day be a means to acceptance and recognition by an American society that will cry "for their love of you, not for your woes." While this poem may be considered simply an addition to Dunbar's numerous celebrations of black soldiers' bravery in war, especially the Civil War, his 1906 poem, "For Theodore Roosevelt," expresses unequivocal support for the soldier president: "we're not afraid to show/That we all revere him so/To dissentients of our own and other lands." Although Dunbar did not participate directly in the Spanish-American War, these poems suggest that he joined in the widespread public support for that war and the following period of expansionism led by Roosevelt.

Like Stephen Crane, Norris had firsthand experience with colonialism, first in South Africa and then in Cuba. He participated in the
1895–96 Jameson Raid on Johannesburg, which was staged as an attempt by the British to overthrow the Boer government by inciting an uprising of the Uitlanders.24 "The results of the illegal raid [by Dr. Jameson, lieutenant to Cecil Rhodes] were disastrous; Jameson and the Uitlander leaders were imprisoned, Rhodes was thoroughly discredited, and the world looked upon the event as an unjustifiable attempt on the part of the British to add the Transvaal to their fast-growing South African empire."25 Norris, supportive of the war, later went to Cuba in 1898 as a war correspondent for McClure's Magazine, though he apparently felt that the carnage of that war was abhorrent.

Wharton, of course, never made it to Cuba, but she was a friend with Theodore Roosevelt, Henry Adams, John Hay, and other influential and vocal supporters of U.S. imperialism. She supported imperialism in general and Roosevelt's policies in particular; in fact, she criticized McKinley and, later, Wilson, for their slowness in engaging the U.S. in international conflicts.

For Dreiser, imperialism was a more complicated issue because of a strong anti-German bias in America, and he did not sign up as a correspondent in Cuba as did many of his contemporaries. According to his biographer, Dreiser did not "share the urge to prove himself and the valor of the Anglo-Saxon 'race' exhibited by the likes of [Richard Harding] Davis, [Stephen] Crane, and [Frank] Norris. He was coming to realize that Anglo-Saxon 'blood' was considered bluer than the Teutonic strain. The German-language press in the United States was generally opposed to the war; some papers on socialistic grounds, others because of U.S. designs on German Samoa."26 Dreiser did, however, write a poem ("Exordium") and
four articles on war-related subjects. His lack of participation, of course, can also be attributed to the fact that he was in the midst of preparing *Sister Carrie* for publication at the time and eager to pursue his career as a professional writer.

The interest of these writers in imperialism gets expressed obliquely in their fiction, primarily in narrative structures that affirm the potential of the "foreigner" for incorporation into modern industrial capitalism while critiquing the limitations of a system (the status quo) that values only consumption. The structure of these and other naturalist novels follows a similar pattern: First, the writers identify and then specularize their central character as the other. Second, they describe the forces—biological, social, economic—that have shaped this character. Third, they expose the narrow and repressive nature of the society that isolates and destroys the character. Finally, and implicitly, they critique the failure of society to capitalize on the other as a natural resource. Ultimately, the reader comes to understand these characters as tragedies of lost potential, wasted commodities, whose value gets overlooked by the indiscriminate consumer.27

The first step is to specularize the other, but this strategy was certainly not unique to novelists. Robert W. Rydell, for example, discusses how Filipinos, in a model of their village, were displayed at the center of numerous American world's fairs:

By giving the exhibit of Filipinos a central location within the broader world of goods displayed at the fair, the exhibit's organizers created the impression that Filipinos not only would be producers and consumers in the American empire but also could be regarded and manipulated as commodities themselves. . . . Nonwhites on display at America's turn-of-the-century fairs were linked most closely to the natural world and were displayed as natural resources to be exploited as readily as mineral deposits.28
In publicly displaying the Filipinos in native dress among thatch houses, the promoters of imperialism demystify the foreign, not to promote possible integration of these new colonial subjects, but to alleviate any public fear of the unknown by making them familiar and thus assuring the spectators of their own superiority. Such displays, according to Said, are often justified in the name of science, and serve as a means for the colonizer to "pronounce on the reality of native peoples as from an invisible point of super-objective perspective using the protocols and jargon of new sciences to displace 'the natives' point of view." The displays also provide the opportunity for the spectator/consumer to become complicit in the act of colonialization by participating directly in identifying, interpreting, and evaluating foreign peoples.

Dunbar, Norris, Wharton, and Dreiser all do precisely the same thing with their central characters: they place their central characters on display and identify their difference—and their inferiority—from the white, middle-class reader of the novel. In all of the novels examined, the opening scenes establish the central character's isolation and difference, and the closing scenes emphasize the silence that results from their otherness.

In *The Sport of the Gods*, Dunbar's opening scene establishes the Hamiltons' isolation and difference from both the white and the black communities. Berry Hamilton may be prosperous and living in "the home of a typical good-living negro" (471), but he is still black working as a servant and living isolated from his black neighbors in the former slave quarters on the Oakley plantation. And although his children are better dressed than their peers in the black community, effectively setting them
apart, their clothes are still secondhand from the Oakleys. In short, Berry's life in certain respects is only marginally different from that of a slave, but his material success has the unfortunate result of alienating him from the black community.

Norris begins Vandover and the Brute with a description of Vandover's alienation from his own history: "It was always a matter of wonder to Vandover that he was able to recall so little of his past life. With the exception of the most recent events he could remember nothing connectedly. What he at first imagined to be the story of his life, on closer inspection turned out to be but a few disconnected incidents that his memory had preserved with the greatest capriciousness, absolutely independent of their importance" (3). The perspective from which this amnesia is noted does not become apparent until the end, but the narrator's use of "was always" suggests that it is an amnesia that Vandover has had all of his life. If, as Barbara Hochman suggests, Norris's "work comes to affirm the stabilizing power of memory, language, and art," then such amnesia marks Vandover as being destabilized. Like the colonized subject, he is without a history, and in lacking a coherent memory, he lacks the historical framework to construct a coherent self for himself. By implication, such construction must come from the outside, from the narrator of the story.

Similarly, Lily Bart becomes the focus of Lawrence Seldon's scrutiny in the opening of The House of Mirth just as she will be the focus of the reader's scrutiny throughout the novel. Seldon proceeds to define and interpret Lily's presence in the train station as she stands alone and unaware of his gaze:

She stood apart from the crowd, letting it drift by her to the platform or the street, and wearing an air of irresolution which
might, as he surmised, be the mask of a very definite purpose. It struck him at once that she was waiting for some one, but he hardly knew why the idea arrested him. There was nothing new about Lily Bart, yet he could never see her without a faint movement of interest: It was characteristic of her that she always roused speculation, that her simplest acts seemed the result of far-reaching intentions. (5)

Despite the revelation in the next paragraph that his reading of her is less than prescient, his allusion to her beauty and her difference from the "sallow-faced girls in preposterous hats and flat-chested women struggling with paper bundles and palm-leaf fans" (7) underscores her isolation from the people who surround her, most of whom are representative of the readers of novels—middle-class women. Her spontaneous and bold ascent into his bachelor quarters further marks her as outside the ranks of the respectable, which she tacitly acknowledges when she lies to Rosedale about the visit.

In Summer, Wharton initially places Charity Royall in the position of the watcher—the Lawrence Selden—as she stands alone on the doorstep looking toward the town, watching a young man chase his hat. Very quickly, however, she is transformed self-consciously into the watched, as she withdraws from her position even though she remains unseen. "Her heart contracted a little, and the shrinking that sometimes came over her when she saw people with holiday faces made her draw back into the house and pretend to look for the key that she knew she had already put into her pocket. A narrow greenish mirror with a gilt eagle over it hung on the passage wall, and she looked critically at her reflection" (8). Her alienation from those people with "holiday faces" is given voice in the inarticulate and uninformative declaration of hatred for everything, and the progress of the novel reveals that their respective positions in the
community as established in this scene are actually reversed—he is the insider, she the outsider.

For Jenny Gerhardt, a certain amount of naivety saves her from the general dissatisfaction with her life that is expressed by Charity, though she too is alienated from those around her. At the opening of the novel, Dreiser makes apparent that her beauty and sensitivity sets her apart from the other women of her class, and her class sets her apart from the world in which she works as a maid. At the same time, Jenny Gerhardt begins with mother and daughter begging for work in a fashionable hotel, where it is "the innocent helplessness of the daughter [that] made their lot seem hard" (3). The pathos of the scene does not obscure the details of their less-than romantic material circumstances. When asked what they can do, the mother responds, "I could wash the floors" (3). Jennie and her mother are the replacement scrubwomen.

These opening scenes do more than simply introduce the central character, which would be common enough in a novel; they serve to alienate the reader from the character by emphasizing the outside status of the protagonists, even ones like Lily Bart who ostensibly are part of the most exclusive part of society. They also work in conjunction with the endings to frame these narratives of dispossession. The endings are really little more than repetitions of the openings where the consequence of these characters' difference is exposed. In some instances, such as Summer and The Sport of the Gods, the setting of the novel's close is geographically the same as its opening.

In each case, the novels end much like they begin by focusing on the central character's isolation, but with the added emphasis on the
character's silence. The Hamiltons return to their house on the Oakley plantation, Berry beaten down by prison and Fanny griefstricken by the fates of her children and her own abuse at the hands of Gibson, but their fate is to live out the remainder of their lives listening to the shrieks of the madman who had set events in motion, Maurice Oakley. Vandover, we learn, is a brute, not only with no coherent history, but also with no home and only a tenuous hold on existence. Although Lily Bart silences herself through suicide, the novel actually ends with Lawrence Seldon once again subjecting her to his reading (and possible misreading), not allowing her suicide to speak for itself. She is silenced twice: first in death, then in interpretation. We find Charity Royall once again at the door of the red house, this time facing inward as the wife of her ward, Lawyer Royall. It is a cold autumn night, and neither speaks. Appropriately enough, their last exchange with one another had actually been an unspoken one; he agrees not to question her about the money he had given her for a new wardrobe, and she submits to him as she acknowledges and thanks him for his restraint: he gives her "a look that made her feel ashamed and yet secure," and in exchange, she responds, "I guess you're good, too" (291), thus signaling her acceptance of their marriage. And finally, Jennie, as discussed in detail in chapter 3, ends alone amidst a crowd, separated from her love by death and a fence, and contemplating the future "reiteration of days" (418) and isolation.

The framing scenes of these stories define the subject of the display as other and provide a gloss for these exotic creatures. Contrary to the view of June Howard that naturalism employs a "plot of decline," I see this frame as emphasizing the general stasis of characters; that is, in the
beginning is simply the unelaborated end. This framing strategy indicates that while the material circumstances of a character may change, the fundamental circumstances of a character's life does not; it simply becomes more obvious in the course of its display. Using the vehicle of the novel, the authors make the domestic foreigner—the servant, the poor, unmarried woman, the brutish vagrant—familiar to the reader; and the reader, like the spectators of the Filipinos on display, acts in complicity with the narrator in defining, interpreting, and evaluating these characters as the other. As Howard points out, instrumental to the naturalists' strategy is the conception of facts, data, knowledge as means of control, and the novel is the arena for collecting facts, data, knowledge about certain types of "foreigners."

In the course of defining these characters, authors resort to the common practice of the imperialist who turns to a language of science in order to explain the inherent inferiority of the other. In each case, the novelist provides a scientific or sociologic explanation for the difference and inferiority of these characters. Past explanations of naturalism have focused on naturalists' representations of the victory of bestiality over culture in central characters, read usually as evidence of the writers' response to principles of pessimistic determinism, but a belief in the bestiality of the other was also commonly cited as a justification for colonization.

Just as imperialists (and anti-imperialists) had varying conceptions of their potential colonial subjects, naturalists had a more complex perspective of the otherness of their characters; and I believe the terms "bestial" or "brutish" oversimplify their views. I do agree, however, that
naturalists look to the new science of sociology and biology to emphasize to varying degrees the combination of environment and genetic factors that supposedly underlie otherness. For example, Dunbar and Wharton in The Sport of the Gods and The House of Mirth focus more specifically on the environmental forces that have shaped characters. The downfall of both the Hamiltons and the Oakleys is predicated on their respective acceptance of a particular set of beliefs about the world—equality and capitalism on the part of the Hamiltons and white superiority and a plantation order for the Oakleys. For Dunbar, the blind adherence to these belief systems in the face of contrary evidence and contradictory experience is destructive. A similar claim can be made for Lily Bart, though in her last moment she does recognize her alienation from the social system that she has been attempting to penetrate. We discover that she lacks the proper "instincts" for survival in this milieu for which she has been trained, and that this same training makes her equally incapable of surviving in the one to which she is allied by circumstances. Neither Dunbar nor Wharton in these works explicitly attributes the failure of their characters to genetic inheritance or to an "immutable bestiality," though they both make references to the importance of heredity.35

Wharton in Summer joins Norris and Dreiser in exploring in more detail the inherited forces that shape character. Of central importance in Summer is Charity Royall's parentage: a convict father and an alcoholic prostitute, both of whom live in the "lawless" community of the Mountain where "they ain't half human" (73). Social awareness of her origins mediates her assimilation into North Dormer society as well as her acceptance of herself: "Charity was not very clear about the Mountain; but
she knew it was a bad place, and a shame to have come from, and that, whatever befell her in North Dormer, she ought, as Miss Hatchard had once reminded her, to remember that she had been brought down from there, and hold her tongue and be thankful” (12; emphasis mine). Implicit in this advice, of course, is the demand for Charity’s silence, which is ultimately effected by the end of the novel.

Frank Norris addresses the issue of heredity and race more directly in all of his novels, but the issue of inheritance is nearly always qualified by questions surrounding the influence of culture. In Vandover, Vandover escapes the social scandal associated with the suicide of one of his unfortunate alliances by going away on a vacation with the intention of leaving for Paris upon his return. However, he books his return voyage on a second-class steamer, the Mazatlan, which is over-crowded and unmaintained, and these conditions contribute to an explosion that leads to the ship’s sinking. Norris uses this episode to examine the limitations of culture, including religion, to occlude the primal instinct for survival, which "had come to the surface in an instant, the primal instinct of the brute striving for its life and for the life of its young" (103) as the drowning Jew threatens to swamp the lifeboat. At the same time, Norris actually avoids generalizing the experience to the middle class by populating the sinking boat with people from the lower classes. And while Vandover is an exception in the group, he is, by this time in the story, already well on his way to a life of complete dissipation and thus implicitly allied by predispositions.

For Dreiser, culture is an inherited trait. Jennie, in fact, mirrors many of the qualities of her father, though Dreiser also points out that she
is an "anomaly" (16) in her family and the world. For example, both she and her father are described as having natures that feel rather than reason. But William Gerhardt is also scrupulously honest and a religious zealot "outside the pale of rational religious conception" (51), while Jennie largely rejects religious orthodoxy in the course of effecting a number of deceptions—obscuring her marital status from her family and society, hiding her child from Lester, lying about the source of the money she is contributing to the family. Ironically, honesty is the source of her father's pride, and Dreiser attributes it to his genetic background: "honesty, like his religious propensity, was wholly due to inheritance. He had never reasoned about it. Father and grandfather before him were sturdy German artisans who had never cheated anybody out of a dollar, and this honesty of intention came into his veins undiminished" (50). Implicit, of course, is the view that "this honesty of intention" did not come into Jennie's veins "undiminished."

Such scientific explanations legitimate the identification of difference by ostensibly providing a means to quantify it—a quantification made possible through display—and make possible the continued subjection of the other. The "visibility [of the other] assures the hold of the power that is exercised over them. It is the fact of being constantly seen, of being able always to be seen, that maintains the disciplined individual in his subjection."37 And science provides an official and legitimating discourse to rationalize such subjection.38

At the same time that the naturalists place their central characters on display in order to define their difference, these writers also expose the hypocrisy of the dominant culture against whose values their characters
are measured. This strategy of critiquing society, however, does not serve to then reverse the hierarchy of values that ultimately defines these characters as "foreigners"; instead, it functions to expose the destructive potential of a society intent on blind consumption, what Thorstein Veblen memorably called "conspicuous consumption."\textsuperscript{39}

Structurally, the dominating society is marginalized in these novels to the display of the central character, such that the element of critique usually occurs obliquely in the narrative. While the narrator may comment negatively on a particular character or social practice, these comments do not hold a prominent place in the novel. In effect, naturalists examine, interpret, define, and analyze in close detail the central character for the reader, but they leave the behaviors of the surrounding characters, the representatives of society, largely unglossed. This marginalization of dominant society, however, should not be read as an attempt on the part of the novelists to obfuscate the destructiveness of society.

In each novel naturalists represent society in acts of consuming and implicitly condemn the destructive effects of consumption both on social values and the central character. The Sport of the Gods begins with the elaborate preparations for a going-away party, and the remainder of the novel includes many scenes of overindulgence. A key instance occurs with Berry Hamilton's release from prison and the ironic consequences thereof. Berry is released not as a result of anyone's desire for justice, but as a means for Skaggs, the reporter, and his Northern newspaper to capitalize and profit on the sensational elements of Berry's story.\textsuperscript{40} Skaggs's paper, the Universe, gets Berry released only to put him on display for as long as his presence will sell papers:
Once in New York, [Berry] found that people wished to see him, some fools, some philanthropists, and a great many reporters. He had to be photographed—all this before he could seek those whom he longed to see. They printed his picture as he was before he went to prison and as he was now, a sort of before-and-after-taking comment . . .

No one of them was brave enough to stand to look in his eyes when he asked for his son and daughter, and they shifted their responsibility by pretending to themselves that they were doing it for his own good. (581)

Dunbar does not critique here the newspaper's role in getting Berry released from prison, or even the public display of Berry afterward; he does, however, indict the paper and its representatives for failing in their act of philanthropy to address the trauma Berry would face upon learning of his family's fate during his incarceration. In other words, they do not consider the repercussions of freedom for Berry. After his usefulness in selling papers is over, they provide for him an "under janitorship" at the paper without helping him to adapt to changes in his social and familial conditions. Figuratively, Berry is destroyed by his imprisonment, exploited in his release, and then buried and forgotten, a pattern that resonates with that of "benevolent" colonialism, which justifies its colonization in the name of "freedom" and social advancement for the natives, but results in the exploitation and social repudiation of the ostensible objects of its humanitarianism.

The social critique Norris offers follows a similar pattern. He criticizes not the social exclusion of Vandover, but the exploitation of Vandover's situation for personal profit and the failure of his friends to recognize that Vandover's deterioration is simply a grotesque consequence of behavior much like their own. The novel is filled with scenes of eating and drinking and buying, and the socializing that occurs within
Vandover's surrounding society does so nearly exclusively in the context of parties. Notable among all of these scenes of consumption is Geary's act of hiring Vandover as a cleaning man, a scene that echoes the Berry Hamilton/Universe relationship.

While Geary provides Vandover with work cleaning his rental property (at wages that will barely cover the expenses of shelter and food), he does so quite literally in the context of a fantasy that he has to enter into national politics:

something large, something inspiring, something on a tremendous scale, something to which one could give up one's whole life and energy, something to which one could sacrifice everything—friendships, fortunes, scruples, principles, life itself, no matter what, anything to be a "success," to "arrive," to "get there," to attain the desired object in spite of the whole world, to ride on at it, trampling down or smashing through everything that stood in the way, blind, deaf, fists and teeth shut tight. (241)

This fantasy exposes the vision of conquest and acquisition that drives Geary and the dominant culture inasmuch as his successes are socially recognized and lauded; it also emphasizes the hypocrisy of Geary's philanthropic act toward Vandover, an act whose irony Norris further underscores by pointing out that the rental cottages Vandover is to clean are across from the property Geary had sold for "fifteen thousand dollars, the same property Geary had bought from Vandover for eight [thousand]" (250). Geary hires Vandover but he does so "marvelling as that which his old chum had come to be. He was sorry for him, too, yet, nevertheless, he felt a certain indefinite satisfaction, a faint exultation over his misfortunes, glad that their positions were not reversed, pleased that he had been clever enough to keep free from those habits, those modes of life that ended in such fashion" (245). Not only is Geary's pity qualified, but his "exultation"
is derived from a lie that the reader will recognize: Geary, of course, did enjoy "those modes of life" that had led to Vandover's degradation. Like Berry, Vandover is exploited and then forgotten by the "humanitarian" capitalist.

Similarly, Wharton and Dreiser emphasize the destructive potential of consumption in their novels. Lily's difficulties, for example, are made even worse by the card-playing Dorsets and Trenors, who in their "conspicuous leisure" gamble away hundreds of dollars and expect their guests to do likewise. She is, furthermore, ultimately destroyed by her losses at bridge, which set in motion her approach to Gus Trenor for the financial help that will finally be used as evidence for her social unfitness. Lily's value is determined by the size of the "financial" holdings of her prospective husband; without a husband, she must work, and to work, as Veblen points out, is "to be associated in men's habits of thought with weakness and subjection to a master. It is therefore a mark of inferiority, and therefore comes to be accounted unworthy of man [or woman] in his best estate." Marked as no longer useful to society's hostesses, Lily is banished and forgotten like the last season's dresses they pass on to her.

Wharton's critique of consumption is less pronounced in *Summer*, but as I discussed in chapter 3, the city of Nettleton is a place associated with the display and sell of goods, including, if not especially, women. Wharton suggests in the tale of Julia Hawes that the girls who become "women of the town" are often the girls whose "indiscretions" become public; "almost every village could show a victim of the perilous venture" of going with a city fellow (63). Furthermore, Wharton implies that these women are well on the way to bestiality; Julia is represented as having
become coarse and loud, and Charity’s mother, Lawyer Royall reveals in his story to Lucius Harney, was a prostitute in Nettleton before she ran away to the Mountain. These women in *Summer* are "made love to" by the likes of the respectable Lucius Harney and Lawyer Royall and then consequently placed in the paradoxical situation of earning a living by selling their bodies to the same people who effected their "ruin." This, of course, is the choice that Charity makes before Lawyer Royall finds and marries her. As a prostitute, she and her peers subject themselves to the same type of market forces that determine the price of pork bellies or company stock.

In *Jennie Gerhardt*, Dreiser addresses the issue of commodification by consistently conflating public business and private decision making. For example, he often uses business metaphors to describe personal relationships. (At one point, Lester describes his relationship with Jennie and its effect on his family relations as "bad business" [237].) In addition, he explores the destructiveness of overconsumption, most vividly in the death of Lester Kane, as I discussed in the previous chapter, but also in his representation of business practices.

Throughout the novel, Dreiser includes details about the management of the Kane's Carriage Company. Specifically, he focuses on the infiltration of foreign markets by this company and on the formation of the carriage company into a giant transportation trust. Although Dreiser provides little narrative philosophic gloss on specific political and economic policies, he does represent Robert Kane's business philosophy as being profitable but predatory. For Robert, who is characterized by Lester
as "straightlaced," "vital," and "energetic," pursuit of profit supersedes any human relationship, even familial:

Robert's strict attention to business; his constant observance of the conventions of trade progress; his insistence that men must conduct themselves righteously in matters, morals, and their private lives irritated Lester... How he reasoned Lester did not know—he could not follow the ramifications of a logic which could combine hard business tactics with social and moral rigidity, but his brother managed to do it. "He's got a Scotch Presbyterian conscience mixed with an Asiatic perception of the main chance," Lester once told somebody, and he had the situation accurately measured. Nevertheless he could not rout his brother from his positions or defy him, for somehow he had the public conscience with him. He was in line with convention—practically, advisably, perhaps sophisticatedly.

In this passage, Dreiser allies Robert's values with those of society at the same time that he criticizes the paradoxical combination of moral rigidity and opportunism. He reductively uses popular stereotypes of Scotch Presbyterians and Asian businessmen to describe Robert's hypocritical connection of rigid morality with predatory or devious business practices. These stereotypes allow for the reader to extrapolate Dreiser's social critique through the framework of the private lives of his characters.

While explicit critiques of social values do not occupy a central place in the structure of these novels—as they do in more reform-minded novels of the day—they do, nonetheless, form the basis of the naturalists' understanding of the advantages, and potential dangers, of colonialism. In each novel we have looked at, consumption figures as a socially destructive force. Businessmen, who may be honored by social convention, are presented as being cold or ruthless and often dishonest when it comes to the act of acquiring. Social leaders, who are very often benevolent and the protectors of beauty and culture, are shown at the same
time to be morally bankrupt or dissipated from their time spent in conspicuous leisure. In each case, the writers identify the source of weakness as the desire to consume—to do away with completely, to spend wastefully, to use up, and to eat or drink.

Structurally, as well as figuratively, society and its conventions frame the central character, serving not only as a measure of the protagonist's difference, but also as a context for understanding the implications of imposing one set of values on the "other." While the central characters' respective fates are figured in the opening scenes, they are effected through a process by which the characters become consumed in or by the social desires that define them. In other words, the desires of the other—of the Hamiltons, Vandover, Lily, Charity, Jennie, and other protagonists of naturalist novels—are to be understood as distorted manifestations of society's desires.

In terms of colonialism, these characters suffer the same paradox as most other colonial subjects; that is, they must reconcile and reshape their own desires to conform to those of the dominating society. They must struggle to make a home in the context of the dispossession of their space and body (the power of self-representation). Within these novels, the authors endow each character with a unique or valuable talent or skill—artistic potential, beauty, fecundity, honesty—such that, like the Filipinos imported for display, they represent natural resources to be developed and used. Instead, in the context of the novels, they are invariably procured, produced, displayed, and consumed by that dominating society that frames them.
That the issue of foreign colonialization occurs in novels centering on domestic situations should not be seen as accidental, incidental, or far-fetched. The debate surrounding U.S. imperialism was an especially important one between 1890 and 1918 in terms of defining the nation's international role and identity, and it was a debate influenced by domestic factors such as immigration, freed slaves, labor relations, and other social, demographic, and economic upheavals. Supportive of a policy of imperialism and colonization, but also critical of the oppressive and destructive potential of cultural or social domination, naturalists not surprisingly engage issues implicit in the debate over colonialism in their fiction.

One of the key issues, of course, involves the definition of home and family. In 1892, the U.S. formed a protectorate over the Samoan Islands. In 1898 Spain ceded Puerto Rico and Guam to the U.S., and the Hawaiian islands were annexed. While Cuba initially received its independence at the end of the Spanish-American War, the Platt Amendment of 1900, which was first invoked in 1906, transformed it into an American client state where the U.S. held the right to intervene to protect Cuban independence, maintain a stable government, or protect life and property.43 The U.S. purchased the Philippine islands from Spain at the end of the Spanish-American War for $20 million, but the Filipino insurgents soon began their own war for independence from America, engaging in bloody and often brutal battles with American forces from February 1899 until July 1902. Trade with China also dominated both the European and American search for new territories and markets.
Clearly, the boundaries of the American homeland were expanding outward, but these boundaries incorporated peoples deemed to be subhuman, savage, and certainly uncivilized. British Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain welcomed the U.S. into the field of colonial enterprise in 1898 by claiming in Scribner's that "every Englishman would heartily rejoice in the co-operation of the United States in the great work of tropical civilization."44 Such expansion of "home" and national mission necessarily raised questions about the role these peoples would play in the American "family." Given the personal engagement most naturalists had with American imperialism, including firsthand experience, and the historical context in which these narratives were written, the parallel of these public questions to the issues central to naturalism should not be considered coincidental. The emphasis in naturalist fiction on homelessness and the importance of home and alienation from socially recognized family units strongly suggest a convergence or conflation of naturalist and imperialist ideology.

Moreover, the structure of their narratives reinforce the colonial act of display in the service of demystifying the other. Said argues that in the imperialist novels of Conrad the native in the fictions that deal with non-European settings is silenced by the reconstitution of "difference as identity." Domination of the other is achieved by representing the ruling powers, not the "inactive inhabitants" of the space, whose presence and function are marginalized and made to seem insignificant except as they reveal the need for European guidance.45 In American naturalism, the pattern is reversed; the domination and silencing of the other occurs in full view of the reader, the mechanism of social control exposed. Whatever
critique the authors provide of the mechanism, it is made as a call for modification, not total repudiation. The other must be cultivated and developed, civilized, not simply acquired and consumed. The process of civilizing produces and benefits; consumption destroys the conquered and conqueror alike. If naturalism is pessimistic, it is so only in the fact that Dreiser's "armed conventions" invariably prevail. Naturalist novels, as narratives of dispossession, still contain the possibility that these others who reside in their centers may be transformed like wild orchids in a hothouse.

NOTES

1. This assessment was based on a population of two inhabitants per square mile.


4. Lukács, The Historical Novel (London: Merlin, 1962), 179. Of interest is the series of profiles of "great" men that the young Theodore Dreiser wrote while working as a journalist. These profiles mix admiration with recognition of the exploitative business practices of some of these men. What Lukács says of Burckhardt's representation of the capitalist is equally relevant to Dreiser's profiles: "the Renaissance man of violence becomes the ideal model of a 'cultured' capitalism which has overcome every manifestation of democracy.... these men... combine 'deep depravity with noblest harmony'" (Historical Novel 179).


7. Among Mahan's most enthusiastic supporters were Theodore Roosevelt and Leopold von Bismarck.


14. Welch 104.

15. Weinberg 285.


20. Norris's *The Octopus* comes closest to a naturalist novel that examines imperialism directly, though the issue assumes prominence only at the end of the novel when questions of the distribution of wheat to China weigh heavily on S. Behrman, the speculator.

21. "The Conquerors" was first published in Dunbar's collection *Lyrics of the Hearthside* (1899):
The Black Troops in Cuba

Round the wide earth, from the red field your valor has won,
Blown with the breath of the far-speaking gun,
Goes the word.
Bravely you spoke through the battle cloud heavy and dun.
Tossed though the speech toward the mist-hidden sun,
The world heard.

Hell would have shrunk from you seeking it fresh from the fray,
Grim with the dust of the battle, and gray
From the fight.
Heaven would have crowned you, with crowns not of bold but of bay,
Owning you fit for the light of her day,
Men of night.

Far through the cycle of years and of lives that shall come,
There shall speak voices long muffled and dumb,
Out of fear.
And through the noises of trade and the turbulent hum,
Loud and clear.

Then on the cheek of the honester nation that grows,
All for their love of you, not for your woes,
There shall lie
Tears that shall be to your souls as the dew to the rose;
Afterward thanks, that the present yet knows
Not to ply!

22. "For Theodore Roosevelt" was published in the Dayton, Ohio, Daily News on 10 February 1906:

There's a mighty sound a-comin'
From the East, and there's a hummin'
And a hummin' from the bosom of the West,
While the North has given tongue
And the South will be among
Those who holler that our Roosevelt is best.

We have heard of him in battle
And amid the roar and rattle
When the foeman fled like cattle to their stalls;
We have seen him staunch and grim
When the only battle hymn
Was the shrieking of the Spanish mauser balls.
Product of a worthy sireling,
Fearless, honest, brave, untiring—
In the forefront of the firing there he stands;
And we’re not afraid to show
That we all revere him so
To dissentients of our own and other lands.

Now the fight in on in earnest,
And we care not if the sternest
Of encounters try our valor or the quality of him,
For they’re few who stoop to fear
As the glorious day draws near
For you'll find him hell to handle when he gets in fightin' trim.

23. Ironically, perhaps, Roosevelt was not a supporter of African-American rights, and, in his memoirs of the war, he falsely accused black troops of cowardice in Cuba.

24. Uitlanders were considered any of the "foreigners," that is, non-Boers or Englishmen. Norris actually considered the Boers to be the "natives."


27. In some ways, this critique may reflect these writers' complaints about the taste of the reading public.


29. Culture and Imperialism 167-68.


33. Howard 146.

34. For discussions of the influence of social Darwinism on American naturalists, see Lars Åhnebrink, *The Beginnings of Naturalism in American Fiction* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1950). That naturalists represent the other as a brute is largely accepted as a truism in criticism, though critics most often cite the most obvious characters from Norris, Crane, Dreiser, or London. Eric J. Sundquist argues that naturalism reveals "in the extraordinary, the excessive, and the grotesque in order to reveal the immutable bestiality of Man in Nature" (13). Howard critiques the naturalists' representations of the brute as 'not simply a misrecognition of the Other, an inaccurate, ignorant stereotype of the proletariat or lumpenproletariat . . . , but a representation of the relation of a relatively privileged class to conditions of existence that produce this range of inconsistent fears" (95). References to determinism are scattered throughout the writings of imperialists and anti-imperialists alike. It was not uncommon to blame the "semicivilized" level of social development on the tropical climate. See Eric J. Sundquist, ed., *American Realism: New Essays* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1982); and Howard See Welch's *Imperialists vs Anti-Imperialist* for a representative sample of arguments that represent the colonial subject (the Hawaiian, the Filipino) as subhuman.

35. Dunbar attributes certain positive traits in Joe Hamilton to heredity: "Joe, charmed and pleased, kept his head well. There is a great deal in heredity, and his father had not been Maurice Oakley's butler for so many years for nothing" (523). In *The House of Mirth*, Lily frequently questions her failures: "But why had she failed? Was it her own fault or that of destiny?" (32). Although Wharton never definitively answers this question, she clearly points to the determining factor of Lily's course—her beauty. "Only one thought consoled [Lily's mother], and that was the contemplation of Lily's beauty. . . . It was the last asset in their fortunes, the nucleus around which their life was to be rebuilt" (37). It was also an asset, of course, deriving from nature.


38. See especially Foucault's analysis of discipline, pages 135–94.


40. Dunbar obliquely criticizes the Supreme Court's interpretation in *Coughlin, California v. Southern Pacific* (1882) of businesses and corporations as "persons," as in English common law, and thus subject to the same protections offered to citizens under the Fourteenth Amendment. Skaggs justifies his deceptive means of attaining the evidence of Berry's evidence, which results ironically in the madness of Maurice Oakley, by arguing that if a corporation "had no soul, and therefore no conscience..., then, should so small a part of a great corporation as himself be expected to have them?" (577).

41. Veblen argues that leisure serves as a measure of wealth as much as consumption does. The many references of Lily to her "career" and her "job" of husband hunting while ostensibly enjoying leisure reinforces the gap between her and the "leisure" class she is attempting to penetrate. As Wharton makes clear, Lily must sometimes even pay for her inclusion in these weekends in the country by performing social drudgery when called upon by her hostess, including the diversion of a husband while his wife has a dalliance.

42. Veblen 41.

43. The Platt Amendment also restricted the right of Cuba to enter into a treaty with any foreign government without American approval, and it granted the U.S. coaling stations and naval bases. In 1906, it established a provisional government after a rebellion and the resignation of Estrada Palma, then president of Cuba.

44. Cited in G. J. A. O'Toole 379.

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Vita

Janet Marciel Whyde was born in Kansas in 1963 to working-class parents. She supported herself through Texas A&M University with a combination of a scholarship and jobs, including soccer referee and bookstore clerk. Upon graduation, she married and went to work as a secretary at the University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill, where she took occasional graduate classes in literary theory and linguistics. She entered graduate school after the birth of her son and earned her Masters degree in English from North Carolina State University.

Her dissertation reflects themes and concerns, such as homelessness, class conflict, and social isolation, relevant both to her own and society's history in the late twentieth century. When she is not reading, writing, or spending time with her son, she volunteers with Habitat for Humanity or works as a freelance copyeditor.
DOCTORAL EXAMINATION AND DISSERTATION REPORT

Candidate: Janet M. Whyde

Major Field: English

Title of Dissertation: Encoding Imperialism: Homelessness in American Naturalism, 1890-1918

Approved:

[Signature]
Major Professor and Chairman

[Signature]
Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

[Signatures]

Date of Examination:

May 18, 1995