CULTURAL GENETICS: THEORIES OF INHERITANCE AND NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICAN LITERATURE

by
Philip J. Kowalski

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Approved by
Advisor: Jane F. Thrailkill
Reader: William L. Andrews
Reader: Robert S. Cantwell
Reader: Joy S. Kasson
Reader: Eliza C. Richards
PHILIP J. KOWALSKI: Cultural Genetics: Theories of Inheritance and Nineteenth-Century American Literature
(Under the direction of Jane F. Thrailkill)

Cultural Genetics provides a new way of conceiving the separate spheres debate in nineteenth-century American literature that has traditionally opposed the natural to the cultural, the home to the marketplace, and sentimentalism to naturalism. In this project, I situate the writings of major American authors such as Nathaniel Hawthorne and Harriet Beecher Stowe, among others, within what I theorize as the convergence of biological and cultural discourses in order to reframe classic arguments about sentimentalism as typified by Ann Douglas and Glenn Hendler. I employ the conceptual framework of what I term “reconstructed corporeality” in contemporary American culture to identify and locate the overlapping spheres of nature and nurture at play in domestic environments throughout the nineteenth century. Physically invasive practices such as plastic surgery, gastric bypass, and liposuction, as well as technological supplements such as titanium limbs and microchip insertions, presume that human bodies in their natural state are always susceptible to cultural interventions that regulate bodies while aesthetically altering them. These practices and perceptions that influence the way we think about human physicality are most notably codified by the post-modern feminist, Donna Haraway, but I argue that this manipulation of human development actually begins much earlier with Lamarckian theories of inheritance in antebellum America. Most readily equated with the inheritance of acquired characters, Lamarckism supplies a model that illuminates how nineteenth-century writers conceptualized human development. By privileging the trope of a
Lamarckian human cultivation over Darwinian natural selection that dominates the later nineteenth-century, this project illustrates how biological and environmental determinism can necessarily be brought under human control.
To my mother and father
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Introduction

“Nature Red in Tooth and Claw”: Searching for Tennyson in America

“‘So careful of the type?’ but no.
From scarped cliffs and quarried stone
She cries, ‘A thousand types are gone:
I care for nothing all shall go….””—Alfred, Lord Tennyson

This dissertation originated with the presumption that the religious and epistemological crisis that Tennyson experienced as a result of his reading The Principles of Geology by Charles Lyell, A Discourse on Natural Philosophy by John F. W. Herschel, and Vestiges of Creation by Robert Chambers was also occurring somewhere and with someone in America during the 1840s. Tennyson’s epic that prefigures the mechanism of natural selection in 1850, nine years before Charles Darwin’s publication of On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, and that conceives nature as “red in tooth and claw,” powerfully grapples with the untimely death of his friend and future brother-in-law, Arthur Henry Hallam, while simultaneously converting this personal struggle into a metaphysical treatise that interrogates the master plans of both the heavens and the earth. When I turned to the American nineteenth century to find Tennyson’s authorial counterpart, the closest I could come to identifying a comparable writer was the literary naturalist, Frank Norris. Yet Norris’ godless universe, which emerges much later in the century, lacked the sense of human agency still present in the

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1 Alfred, Lord Tennyson, In Memoriam, ed. Robert H. Ross (New York: W. W. Norton & Company), 35. This stanza is number 56 in the poem and the quotation above constitutes the first five lines of it.

early nineteenth century while cultural questions such as the role of the sentimental home played out alongside burgeoning scientific disciplines, in particular the biological sciences that come to dominate the nineteenth century with the rise of Darwinism.

Thinking about American literary parallels in 1850, I immediately latched on to Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*. I had long thought that it would be useful to study antebellum methods of child-rearing that, in the words of horticulturist Luther Burbank, “trained the human plant,” since Pearl is really the product of Hawthorne’s generation and not the Puritan past. The character of Pearl is that of a most complex child that localizes questions of inheritance and human development in the nineteenth century since she is literally the product of several fathers. Her multiple paternities consist of Dimmesdale as her biological father; Chillingworth as her surrogate or legal father as he makes her his heiress; the Puritan settlement of Boston as Reverend Wilson exhorts all men to treat her as their communal daughter; the diabolical in Mistress Hibbins’ characterization of Pearl as witch-baby and spawn of the Black Man; the mystical side of Nature since she is figured as fairy, nymph, or sprite; and Hawthorne himself as her literary creator. Hawthorne highlights an American epistemological crisis of human development, since children aren’t simply little adults, aren’t swayed easily by discipline, and even aren’t really all that good or angelic. Questions in the culture thus arise as to how to tame these witch-babies, who are neither genetic products nor disciplinary projects. *The Scarlet Letter* thus figured for me as a model text that posed these conundras of inheritance and physiology in order to explore larger questions about the convergence of the cultural and the biological realms in nineteenth-century American

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3 Luther Burbank, *Training the Human Plant* (New York: The Century Co., 1907). Although Burbank coins this phrase early in the twentieth century, I view him as an integral part of the telos of human cultivation that, I argue, begins in antebellum America.
literature that, in most cases, had nothing to do with Darwin before, during, and after he came to America.

This dissertation argues that contemporary conceptions of the human body as an entity that is always susceptible to improvement via physically invasive practices began in antebellum America with assumptions about bodily inheritance and human development typically associated with Lamarckism. Most readily equated with the inheritance of acquired characters, Lamarckism was actually an embedded and naturalized hereditarianism so widely taken for granted that it, as a biological explanatory system, was rarely and explicitly identified by writers, theorists, and naturalists. Only after the publication of Darwin’s *Origin of Species* did it become codified, addressed, recuperated, and less diffusively active. As historian of science Peter J. Bowler has amply demonstrated, it is highly unlikely that the authors I examine here had read Lamarck or even mentioned him by name, since his monumental *Zoölogical Philosophy*, first published in French in 1809, did not appear as an English translation until 1914, when Hugh Eliot undertook the task as part of a larger and later neo-Lamarckian enterprise. Despite this literary lack, Lamarckism as the default system of inheritance informed both the biological and cultural landscapes that, as I argue, shaped the literature of the so-called American Renaissance well into the emergence of American modernism in the twentieth century.

Nineteenth-century American literature has long suffered a critical bifurcation. Typically conceived as split into two halves with the Civil War as a dividing line, the American nineteenth century has been critically mapped as a series of oppositions:

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nature as opposed to culture, sentimentalism in contrast with naturalism, the domestic sphere as a haven from the workplace, genteel women and effete ministers deferring to business men and blue collar workers, and the pastoral certainty of antebellum America obliterated by an increasingly urban and industrial nation. While these models have traditionally triumphed in terms of American literary studies, I argue that Lamarckism provides a biological model of human development that actually unifies the nineteenth century conceptually, literally, and critically. By locating and focusing upon the convergent space of nature and culture, I reconfigure the traditional debate between critics who uphold the separate spheres of the sanctified home and the competitive marketplace, such as Ann Douglas; critics who wish to merge these two realms, such as

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5 This claim, a rather sweeping generalization, can be localized by focusing on the statements of a number of influential critics of the nineteenth century. Ann Douglas observes how “Northeastern clergymen and middle-class literary women lacked power of any crudely tangible kind, and they were careful not to lay claim to it. Instead they wished to exert ‘influence,’ which they eulogized as a religious force. They were asking for nothing more than offhand attention, and not even much of that: ‘influence’ was to be discreetly omnipresent and omnipotent. This was the suasion of moral and psychic nurture, and it had a good deal less to do with the faith of the past and a good deal more to do with the advertising industry of the future than its proponents would have liked to believe. They exerted their ‘influence’ chiefly through literature which was just in the process of becoming a mass medium. The Feminization of American Culture (New York: Noonday Press-Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998), 8-9. On the rise of the working class in America, Sean Willentz claims “…I do not mean to suggest that a single entity came into being in the antebellum years never to change or to be changed, ever bound by a unity of sentiment across the shifting barriers of trade, region, race, sex, or ethnicity, autonomous and eternally resentful to all other classes. The Working Class never existed, least of all before the Civil War. But a new order of human relations did emerge, primarily (but no exclusively) in the North and West, defined chiefly (though again not exclusively) by the subordination of wage labor to capital. What is more, men and women came in the same period to under that this was happening, and they began to think and act, in E. P. Thompson’s phrase, in new ‘class ways,’ unlike those of the mid-eighteenth century.” Chants Democratic: New York City & the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 18. The disappearance of a kind of “nature’s nation” as a result of technology and urban growth is typified by Leo Marx’s conclusion that “the power of these [pastoral] fables to move us derives from the magnitude of the protean conflict figured by the machine’s increasing domination of the visible world. This recurrent metaphor of contradiction makes vivid, as no other figure does, the bearing of public events on private lives. It discloses that our inherited symbols of order and beauty have been divested of meaning. It compels us to recognize that the aspirations once represented by the symbol of an ideal landscape have not, and probably cannot, be embodied in our traditional institutions. …The resolutions of our pastoral fables are unsatisfactory because the old symbol of reconciliation is obsolete. But the inability of our writers to create a surrogate for the ideal of the middle landscape can hardly be accounted artistic failure.” The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 364-365.
Monika Elbert in her advocacy of “separate spheres no more”;\textsuperscript{6} and those critics who revise the affective and gendered registers of sentimentalism with the figure of the “sentimental man,” such as Mary Chapman and Glenn Hendler.\textsuperscript{7} My examination of sentimentalism reveals that, even prior to the turn-of-the-century rise of scientific management in figures such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Frederick Taylor, the home was a productive domestic factory that lovingly manufactured virtuous offspring in sophisticated and scientific ways. Catharine Beecher’s invention of worldly housekeeping in her \textit{Treatise on Domestic Economy} in 1841, for example, installs mothers in their homes as queens of America who determine the course of the nation for good or ill in an updated and aggressive form of Republican Motherhood that instructs parents how to manipulate bodies in the domestic environment to achieve the desired physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual results. However, this seemingly straightforward practice that addresses all the components of the child privileges the corporeal over the spiritual, and it manifests as a systematic practice in dialogue more with secularism and less with Christianity. Beecher’s domestic economy is thus a biological science trading in the tenets of an implicit Lamarckism in the 1840s.

Her form of child-rearing and physiological development is guided by the tacit assumption that bodies are plastic, imperfect, and permanently in need of improvement and instruction. I thus argue that the contemporary fascination with altering, modifying, and sculpting the physical body is a form of what I term “reconstructed corporeality” that begins to evolve in early nineteenth-century American culture, and this phenomenon is


\textsuperscript{7} Mary Chapman and Glenn Hendler, eds., \textit{Sentimental Men: Masculinity and the Politics of Affect in American Culture} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).
fueled by a Lamarckian hereditarianism that determined the raising of children and the regulation of bodies. The assumption that acquired characters could be inherited was fodder for debate well into the twentieth-century, but the value of Lamarckism is that it really provides us with a biological and environmental determinism that is conceived as under human control. This sense of human agency enters nineteenth-century American literature and culture with the figure of the cultivator who wore many guises: professional botanists and amateur “botanizers”; scientific naturalists, traditional farmers, and gentlemen horticulturists; mothers, educators, and other child-trainers who attended to children’s bodies, as well as phrenologists, physiognomists, interior decorators and agribusinessmen who addressed the relationships between minds and bodies, and the impact that domestic and natural environments had on human beings. Although Darwinian natural selection dominates the later nineteenth-century, I argue that this form of bodily cultivation that emerges in antebellum American competes alongside the bleak environmental determinism of the literary naturalists until it finally loses its conceptual force at the dawn of high modernism when human bodies become dissected and destabilized with cultural practices such as Freudian psychoanalysis, Cubist painting, reconstructive surgery, among others.

This domestic Lamarckism—that human bodies benefit from an artificial selection and cultivation of virtuous traits—replaces the rhetoric of the series of moral handbooks addressed to mothers and fathers that gently advised them how to maintain a Christian and loving home in the first few decades of the nineteenth century. Both male and female writers such as John S. C. Abbott, William Alcott, Lydia Maria Child, and Lydia Sigourney implied that daily life was a largely ethereal affair and that bodies were
merely vessels that channeled Christ’s love to the world. By the 1840s, however, sentimental writers such as Catharine Sedgwick, Catharine Beecher, and Horace Bushnell conceived the home as improving its inhabitants as they interacted with the physical trappings of the domestic environment; thus, they perceived no contradiction in approaching traditionally spiritual questions by appealing to the physical body. From the Gothic architecture of Andrew Jackson Downing to the table manners of Sedgwick’s modest families, these home practices developed as increasingly secular habits paralleling the disestablishment of American Protestantism and the institutionalization of science in antebellum culture. This shift, however, was neither facile, nor instant, nor perceptible, since the substitution of the biological for the spiritual instantiated itself as an “uneven development,” as Mary Poovey theorizes. This glacial-like change—both massively constructed and slowly moving—is an example of “an ideological formulation” that “was uneven both in the sense of being experienced differently within the social formation (by sex, class, or race, for example) and in the sense of being articulated differently by the different institutions, discourses, and practices that it both constituted and was constituted by.”

Human bodies constructed as products of careful and loving cultivation that ultimately become Burbank’s “living plants” by 1907 also has an ugly side to it. This trope that gradually dominates domestic discourse, as the equation of women with flowers in the nineteenth century attests, also ignites a gender

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8 Poovey further clarifies how “for some groups of people some of the time, an ideological formulation of, for example, maternal nature might have seemed so accurate as to be true; for others, it probably felt less like a description than a goal or even a judgment—a description, that is, of what the individual should and has failed to be. For some institutions or, for that matter, for some individuals or groups within institutions, an ideological formulation received one emphasis or was put to one use; while for other institutions, individuals, or groups, the same ideological formulation received a different emphasis and was used for another—even competing—goal. For these reasons, this ideology was also uneven in the degree to which it could manage or symbolically resolve the contradictions it necessarily contained.” Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 3-4.
and rhetorical backlash as Nathaniel Hawthorne’s condemnation of this “damned mob of scribbling women” demonstrates. His critique exposes the potentially freakish eugenic implications of this artificial selection in his characterizations of mad scientist figures who tamper with secret knowledge and are never satisfied with the ways bodies naturally are, even if they are already beautiful and desirable. I argue that Hawthorne’s version of cultivating human beings by planting them in the hothouse of the home leads to a kind of monomaniacal attempt to control nature that ironically ends up being most unnatural. Hawthorne’s fictional examination of unfit husbands and fathers destroying their wives and daughters is a compensatory mechanism employed to assuage his manly fear of literary emasculation as the teller of silly tales. In his world, children are never beneficent creatures that are easily managed charges and seemingly pure products of the domestic environment. His children emerge as troubled, disruptive, and ill-equipped to survive. Hawthorne ultimately shows that the convergent space of the natural and the cultural, of cultivation in the garden and child-rearing in the home, also houses unpredictable and unwanted corporeal beings.

The domestic utopia that sentimental writers create throughout the nineteenth-century also must contend with an increasingly chaotic urban environment. In this sense, Harriet Beecher Stowe issues an updated sentimental cautionary tale about permitting mass-produced and needlessly costly objects from obliterating the spirit of the home. For her, the power of the domestic environment lies mainly in its spiritual and physical simplicity, but as generic parlor suites, framed prints, and expensive carpets become both readily available and desirable as indices to gentility, the home becomes literally invaded by cheap, tacky, or needlessly elegant furniture that lacks the feel and comfort of older,
handcrafted, and inherited furniture. The domestic ideals of Uncle Tom’s Cabin, even as it is situated on a slaveholding plantation, and the efficiency and moral suasion of the Quaker settlement, are wiped out as the maw of urbanity swallows up city outskirts that, as late as the 1870s, still resembled pastoral paradises. This problem of growing cities in the later nineteenth century is accompanied by a recuperation of Lamarck with the fundamentally American movement of neo-Lamarckism—a body of thought with which scientists of widely ranging specialties attempted to confront and repel the unsettling randomness of natural selection dependent upon chance variation by accounting specifically for species change. Writing within this context, Edith Wharton invents interior decorating in America in an attempt to stabilize bodies in their homes, especially as houses grow bigger and dwarf or even swallow their inhabitants. Her novels during the first two decades of the twentieth century illustrate how bodies become synonymous with their houses, and the power of an aesthetically pleasing interior decorating is a form of domestic environmental determinism opposed to that of the literary naturalists since it is essentially under human control. Good and bad living depends upon beautiful or ugly surroundings since houses and their inhabitants become interchangeable. The calm domesticity of Stowe’s homes transforms into a grotesque and gargantuan caricature of itself in the form of Wharton’s houses, in which her characters never feel at home in their dwellings but rather sustain an uneven and odd relationship to them, whether in the form of a nouveau-riche mansion, an ancestral home, a stuffy hotel, or a shabby boardinghouse.

In the first chapter, I situate Lamarckism in the early nineteenth-century American context by highlighting his theories of inheritance and development as codified
in his Zoölogical Philosophy; namely, the acquisition or loss of those physical changes in response to environmental conditions; the inheritance of these acquired characteristics; and an implicit account of variation and species change. I then illustrate this more clinical form of Lamarckism by examining three writers who theorized the ways human bodies were subject to change in the cultural or domestic environment: D. H. Jacques and his Hints Toward Physical Perfection (1859), Samuel R. Wells and his New Physiognomy (1866), and Ellen Key in The Century of the Child (1909). These texts that were aimed at a wide and general readership provide valuable information about the way bodies were being conceptualized shortly before the Civil War and into the early twentieth century. While much of their work can be seen as simple physiognomic and phrenological handbooks, I argue that the conversion from the spiritual to the material, or from moral guidebooks to secular self-help, shows how Jacques’, Wells’, and Key’s beliefs and conceptions about how the mind forms the body in the domestic setting become instantiated in the culture and play themselves out in nineteenth-century American literature.

Chapter 2 then backtracks to show how these theoretical models emerge from the reconstruction of the home in the 1830s and 1840s. In her novel, Home (1835), Catharine Sedgwick provides us with a self-consciously working-class “domestic man” who, while hard-working, dedicated, and efficient, makes sincere efforts to edify and instruct his family by modeling virtuous behavior in the home. While Christianity isn’t completely rejected, it is discounted as a somewhat tired and abstruse set of doctrines that put the children to sleep when they could be improving themselves through the practices of proper table manners, charity to others, and the raising of the younger children by the
older ones. Sedgwick’s model family always maintains the simplicity of the home, however, since an emerging gentility is perceived as vanity, and the home remains sacrosanct even though the family members participate fully in the public sphere.

Catharine Beecher takes up this project of systematic housekeeping in her *Treatise on Domestic Economy* (1841) by emphasizing the role that both parents play in the corporeal development of children in a program that eschews a bad diet, eliminates overly heated living quarters, and avoids corporal punishment. Beecher inverts the mother-at-home and father-in-the-world by emphasizing how the workplace is a bad place for everyone, and children who do not see their fathers, let alone spend any “quality time” with them, grow up to be surly, bitter, and bad. She thus insists that this kind of “domestic man” is really influential in the domestic sphere, not the marketplace. Beecher also employs a number of experts by excerpting them to show how the science of domestic economy is really in dialogue with contemporaneous accounts of human development, but she situates bodies in the home as the site that possesses the most influence on the education of children. Finally, Horace Bushnell recasts or recuperates the significance of his role as Puritan minister by converting to domestic Lamarckism as an updated way to instruct his readers. In his sermon, “On the Organic Unity of the Family” (1847), Bushnell bridges the gap between the religious and the scientific by popularizing what Sedgwick and Beecher have established and argued about the efficacy of a cultivated and cultivating home. He identifies and theorizes what he calls the “silent power of a domestic godliness” that permeates those homes where a balance between the spiritual and the domestic has been achieved via the Lamarckian emphasis on an environmental determinism under human control. This way of living thus ignites a kind
of flame of virtue that burns slowly and casts its warmth as a palpable feeling in the home. It’s a kind of energy of sympathy and love that increasingly becomes a secular substitute for Christianity throughout the nineteenth century, and it gradually plays itself out in the quasi-sciences of physiognomy, phrenology, mesmerism, Christian Science, and spiritualism.

In the third chapter, I trace Nathaniel Hawthorne’s distrust of this seemingly benevolent domestic godliness in the short story, “Rappaccini’s Daughter,” to illustrate that this Lamarckian enterprise was not as culturally naturalized as my examination of previous writers may imply. Hawthorne’s skepticism in this story permits us to see how cultivating children as if they are flowers or small animals leads to an unnatural relationship with the world that can only be contained in the confines of a poisonous garden. Beatrice Rappaccini is an antebellum cyborg or hybrid figure that betrays the unnaturalness of the seemingly natural. Hawthorne creates another hybrid daughter in the form of Pearl in The Scarlet Letter (1850), and not only does he export her to the outside world, but he renders her exceedingly multifaceted as the product of parents, fairies, nature, the Puritan community, the Black Man, and the authorial. Pearl is a worldly construction that can’t be tamed, especially by a single mother, and her ultimate status as obedient daughter and richest heiress in America demonstrates how the best efforts at child-rearing don’t account for the complex interiority, especially of children, that Hawthorne consistently privileges. The materialist sense of inheritance marked by aristocratic signs and of traits literally “in the blood,” as illustrated by the indiscernible and cryptic coats-of-arms in Hester’s original family home, the seals on the letters that Pearl sends to her mother in America, and Matthew Maule’s curse upon Colonel
Pyncheon that “God will give him blood to drink,” is reconciled in The House of the
Seven Gables (1851). The dusty and desiccated Pyncheon family results from
maintaining the same domestic environment for too long, as Hawthorne’s comments
about Salem in “The Custom House” attest. Hepzibah Pyncheon has long depended upon
her shabby aristocratic pretensions, and the romance condemns this clinging to a
European past, or the creation of an American aristocracy in a young and vibrant country.
The marriage between beautiful Phoebe and manly Holgrave opposes Hepzibah’s now
worthless and dried up virginity and Clifford’s hypersensitivity and femininity. The
fecundity of the mansion’s garden and the future offspring of the Holgraves also permit
Hawthorne to remove himself from the domestic realm of sentimental writers that he has
consistently viewed as emasculating and inartistic. The romance’s artificially imposed
and uneven happy ending, however, demonstrates that Hawthorne’s own aesthetic crisis
remains unresolved.

Chapter 4 provides a detailed treatment of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s household
papers and children’s stories that serve as a hands-on approach to manipulating and
shaping the domestic environment in danger of becoming destabilized by the very
occupants who are supposed to maintain it. In House and Home Papers (1864) and Little
Foxes (1865), Stowe crafts the home as a Lamarckian hothouse that serves as a
reinvigorated model of the genteel home toward the end of the Civil War that now faces
the threats of consumerism, urbanity, and immigrants radically reconfiguring a
traditionally Anglo-American New England. She cross-dresses as the genteel stay-at-
home father and writer, Christopher Crowfield, who theorizes about the “household
fairies” that give warmth to the home while he, as domestic man, also models as one.
Stowe uses Mr. Crowfield as her mouthpiece to expose the dangers of corporeal identification with expensive furniture that can’t be enjoyed, the threat of the obliteration of the natural world by disallowing pets and plants in the home since they are dirty, and, in effect, the risk of effacing the comforts of a shabby gentility by living in the home as if it were a museum or mausoleum where nothing can be touched but only gazed upon. As a result, real family life never occurs. Children are banished to makeshift playrooms in attics, and ultimately rebel and run away to sea or make a bad marriage. The emphasis on pets is particularly important, since animals, as living things and not inanimate objects, contribute to the feeling of aliveness in the home. Yet pets can pose as much of a danger as a cheap parlor suite, since surplus pets in nineteenth-century America were an even bigger problem than now before the practices of spaying and neutering were institutionalized. In her collection of children’s stories, Queer Little People (1867), Stowe, who emerges as everybody’s grandmother, advises her child readers that euthanasia of stray kittens and puppies is a triumphant act of domestic determinism that illustrates the child’s compassion and kindness rather than cruelty. Murdering small animals is thus converted into a decidedly bourgeois behavior that, in its seeming violence, actually provides a compensatory mechanism that maintains the balance between the domestic and the natural.

The final chapter situates Edith Wharton’s book on interior decorating and two of her major novels, The House of Mirth (1905) and The Age of Innocence (1920), in the neo-Lamarckian context as typified by Herbert Spencer. By focusing on Spencer’s concept of “organic memory”—that ancestral tastes, preferences, and thoughts are inherited as complements to acquired physical characters—I show how Wharton
conceives of a kind of neurological determinism that influences the way her characters lives play out. Wharton theorizes that bad living is the result of living in rooms the wrong way, since our ancestors, living differently as nomads or in more communal spaces, didn’t need to contend with the overly complicated domestic structures that the New York *nouveau-riche* insist on building. In her *Decoration of Houses* (1898), Wharton shows how the lavish houses and mansions that are the effects of wealth must be constructed consciously so that architecture, interior decoration, and living spaces harmoniously adapt to human bodies rather than corporeality conforming to the structural given. Bodies become synonymous with houses, as Mrs. Manson Mingott’s overly fleshy body remains firmly and immovably at home in the peculiar mansion she has built on the edge of town. Additionally, one’s physical, emotional, and spiritual conditions engage in a reciprocity with living spaces, as Lily Bart demonstrates, since her worsening material and moral conditions condemn her to deteriorating domestic arrangements. The horrible hall bedroom of a boardinghouse where she dies attests to the conflicted and uneven relationship between a body bred to exude and luxuriate in beauty ends up in the most unsympathetic environment. Structures that are not built with an eye towards the inhabitant’s physical well-being and aesthetic sensibilities can potentially destroy her if the cultivation of the interior and the psychological doesn’t parallel the manipulation of the exterior and the domestic.

The memory of the late nineteenth century that Edith Wharton reestablishes by 1920 in *The Age of Innocence* finally parallels the waning power of neo-Lamarckism and Lamarckism generally in the twentieth century. Lamarckism continues as a vestigial explanatory system well into the 1950s, though these swan songs are quickly discredited.
as the work of anachronistic hacks. Yet Lamarckism is alive and well today in the science of epigenetics, which essentially theorizes that genetics do not equal destiny and that environmental factors do play a role in human development. The convergence of the biological and the cultural, and the natural and the nurturing that nineteenth-century writers firmly believed in and subscribed to, provides a historical model of human development that is resurfacing today.
Chapter 1
“Fearfully and Wonderfully Made”:
Embodied Narratives and Nineteenth-Century American Literature

“There are some who look up to Lamarck as the greatest biological teacher that has ever lived”—Hugh Eliot

On the frontispiece to The House I Live In (1842) by Dr. William A. Alcott, a human skeleton stands in front of the door of an unassuming house. With bony arm and hand raised as if in greeting, it exclaims, “I am fearfully and wonderfully made!” Dr. Alcott uses this sentimentally grotesque image to show his child readers how the body is not only the temple of the soul, but also the literal “house they live in.” This charming conception of the human body thus equates it with the domestic, the man-made, and the artificial, yet it is still very much part of the heavens and the earth. “It is one of the most wonderful buildings in the world,” Dr. Alcott continues, “on account of the skill and wisdom of the great Master Workman who planned it.” Dr. Alcott’s desire to popularize and disseminate an understanding of the body depends upon descriptions of the physiological and the spiritual, but the cheerful skeleton’s location in front of the door of a home not only associates it with the domestic, but also reinforces how this “bare bones” approach fits nicely within the context of reconstructed physicality (or corporeal reconstruction) that, as I will argue, originates in antebellum America. In other words, no such entity as a “natural body” exists in contemporary American culture, as an obsession with plastic surgery, weight loss, teeth whiteners, titanium limbs, and any number of


implants attests. In the 1830s and 1840s in Boston, Dr. Alcott is already characterizing the human body as “a machine so ingeniously constructed” (13), and this seemingly post-modern and cybernetic conception of corporeality actually germinates among reformist discourse⁴ as well as a nascent Victorian fear of the body that leaves one to believe that the body was in the process of being erased altogether.⁴ In other words, we are all cyborgs who can ironically trace our lineage to the wholesome and moralizing discourse of domestic reform in the nineteenth century.⁵

The physical altering of the body by outside forces and invasive practices that we take for granted today germinates in nineteenth-century hereditarian theory that privileged the mind’s ability to sculpt the body physically and transmit these acquired characters to offspring. In the discourse of what I call nineteenth-century “domestic Lamarckism,” mothers and fathers were exhorted to and instructed by sentimental writers to manipulate the child’s physical environment to achieve the desired effect. Alcott


⁵ As John S. Haller and Robin M. Haller have usefully pointed out, much of this bodily fear stemmed from a dread of contracting syphilis which could gradually make its presence known as it corroded the nose. Thus, observers could read the signs of interior depravity on the exterior body. See The Physician and Sexuality in Victorian America (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1974), 252-270. Additionally, Sander L. Gilman explains how plastic surgery really began as a process of nasal reconstruction for those afflicted with syphilis who desired, through this method of corporeal reconstruction, to continue looking like everybody else. The aim of plastic surgery is actually to look “normal” as opposed to different, and this goal creates and perpetuates the cultural obsession with beauty because standards for attractiveness are so exaggerated. See Making the Body Beautiful: A Cultural History of Aesthetic Surgery (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 49-60, and Naomi Wolf, The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women (New York: Perennial-Harper Collins, 2002).

⁵ According to Donna Haraway, “a cyborg is a hybrid creature, composed of organism and machine. But cyborgs are compounded of special kinds of machines and special kinds of organisms appropriate to the late twentieth century. Cyborgs are post-Second World War hybrid entities made of…ourselves and other organic creatures in our unchosen ‘high-technological’ guise as information systems, texts, and ergonomically controlled labouring, desiring, and reproducing systems.” Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature (New York: Routledge, 1991), 1. I am not arguing that nineteenth-century writers recognized the category of the cyborg, but their emphasis on the conscious intervention to mould bodies really begins in the discourse of antebellum and, as I will show, domestic Lamarckism.
explains to his little readers how “bodies act upon our minds in a wonderful manner; for if anything in the body is wrong, it affects either our thoughts or our feelings, or both” (13-14). According to this principle, the body influences the mind, but, as the nineteenth century unfolds, mind will increasingly be constructed as modifying the body. The foundation of this construct is built upon Lamarckism as conceived in the nineteenth century before, during, and after Charles Darwin’s theory of transmutation by natural selection.⁶ In his monumental Zoölogical Philosophy (1809), Lamarck states how “the influence of the environment as a matter of fact is in all times and places operative on living bodies; but what makes this influence difficult to perceive is that its effects only become perceptible or recognisable…after a long period of time.”⁷ The Lamarckian lens thus magnifies two crucial problems of evolutionary theory—that of visibility, since a product of environmental conditioning can’t readily be perceived, and that of temporality, since change over time highlights the ultimate plasticity and mutability of organisms that appear to be set, eternal, and rigid. As environmental products, bodies are shaped and imprinted, but this process of sculpting is also subject to deep geologic time or history. The recognition among the nineteenth century writers I will examine also presupposes this sense of deep time, since change can be immediately effected though its results may not be readily perceived. The development of little bodies in Catharine Beecher, Horace Bushnell, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Harriet Beecher Stowe is somewhat abbreviated, however, since the manipulation of the domestic setting can enact modifications in

⁶ Peter J. Bowler explains how the neo-Lamarckist and paleontologist Edward Drinker Cope believed that “all animals…possess some degree of consciousness, and this mental power expresses an underlying element of divine creativity implanted in nature to guide evolution. The Lamarckian process also ensured that evolution would be progressive, because animals would use their intelligence more in each succeeding generation.” Darwinism (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1993), 46.

⁷ Lamarck, Zoölogical Philosophy, 106. Hereafter cited in the text.
behavior and thinking in children that are much more readily perceptible than the kind of changes Lamarck describes here. These authors thus employ children for both moral and practical reasons because their rapid development (the problem of temporality) highlighted bodily changes that are always happening more slowly and less perceptibly (the problem of visibility). The domestic Lamarckism of these sentimental writers dictates the practice of certain habits to produce, transmit, and perpetuate these bodily changes, as will be seen most explicitly in the household papers and stories of Stowe. According to Lamarck, “great alterations in the environment of animals lead to great alterations in their needs, and these alterations in their needs necessarily lead to other activities. Now if the new needs become permanent, the animals then adopt new habits which last as long as the needs that evoked them” (107). In a natural setting, animals are forced to conform to changes in the environment in order to survive, but in the nineteenth-century New England home, sentimentalists capitalized upon and expedited this process in order to perpetuate the propriety and morality of these genteel families.

Lamarck is stereotypically associated with the inheritance of acquired characters, yet his theory of evolution is much more complicated and sophisticated than this popular conception suggests. An additional aspect of his system is the biological equivalent of “use it or lose it,” but also of “need it and grow it.” From the Lamarckian perspective, the strengthening or atrophying of an organ depends on a crucial mechanism, one that can be modulated by human effort and design: habit. This emphasis on habit also underscores the difference between antebellum sentimentalists who privileged human agency, and the literary naturalists who saw humans as the product of environmental determinism. “If a new environment,” Lamarck continues, “which has become
permanent for some race of animals, induces new habits in these animals, that is to say, leads them to new activities which become habitual, the result will be the use of some one part in preference to some other part, and in some cases the total disuse of some part no longer necessary” (108). This phenomenon of use and disuse translates itself easily to human development, since encouraging moral behavior and discouraging immoral habits changes the child mentally, physically, and spiritually. Although it might sound odd to think of human development in the nineteenth-century home as somehow in dialogue with Lamarckism, I wish to emphasize at this point that Lamarck really codified a pre-existing hereditarian belief system, and it wasn’t until Darwin published his *Origin of the Species* in 1859 that ignited a mental earthquake do we see by contrast just how influential and pervasive Lamarckism (for lack of a better word) actually was. These habits that are developed and practiced ultimately lead to a new race, according to Lamarck, so if Darwin’s theory of evolution is accurately described as “by means of natural selection,” then of Lamarck we may say that his theory of evolution is characterized by habit and artificial selection. “What nature does in the course of long periods,” Lamarck says, “we do every day when we suddenly change the environment in which some species of living plant is situated” (109). Again we see the difference between deep time and domestic time. While Darwin writing fifty years after Lamarck’s *Zoölogical Philosophy* was also aware of the effects of artificial selection, the Lamarckian hereditarian paradigm found its way into the middle-class home of the nineteenth century as attested by moral handbooks, self-help texts, and sentimental fiction; thus, his emphasis on change that results from the principle of use and disuse translates easily into the domestic setting.
Lamarck synthesizes his sprawling system by issuing two laws of nature that succinctly summarize the major points of his theory of inheritance that dominated the way careful parents thought about child development in antebellum America. His first law is that of the principle of use and disuse. “In every animal which has not passed the limit of its development,” Lamarck claims, “a more frequent and continuous use of any organ gradually strengthens, develops, and enlarges that organ, and gives it a power proportional to the length of time it has been so used; while the permanent disuse of any organ imperceptibly weakens and deteriorates it, and progressively diminishes its functional capacity, until it finally disappears” (113). Nineteenth-century hereditarian theory assumed this proposition, but the effects of use and disuse had more to do with developing moral behavior and virtuous habits rather than any physically recognizable traits; though, of course, if parents desired bodily change in their children or even themselves then this alteration could also be achieved according to the logic of Lamarck’s first law. His second law codifies the most common association with Lamarckism—the inheritance of acquired characters. “All the acquisitions or losses wrought by nature on individuals,” Lamarck continues, “through the influence of the environment in which their race has long been placed, and hence through the influence of the predominant use or permanent disuse of any organ; all these are preserved by reproduction to the new individuals which arise, provided that the acquired modifications are common to both sexes, or at least to the individuals which produce the young.” This Lamarckian sense of an environmental determinism assumes that organisms or animals are completely at the mercy of their natural surroundings, and the sense of agency prominent in antebellum reform is conspicuously absent. Despite the profound influence
of Darwinism, for writers and thinkers in antebellum America, human beings were
distinct from animals, and therefore were not subject to “wild” or natural surroundings.
Instead, the conscious and deliberate manipulation of body and domestic environment
pervades the discourse of sentimentalism throughout the nineteenth century. As a result,
while Lamarckism provides a convenient starting point to examine the relationship
between bodies and their environments, this process of reconstructed corporeality is a
much more complex cultural project that engaged some of the major nineteenth-century
writers that needs to be explored further.

Lamarck’s explanation for how these bodily changes occur involves a vague and
somewhat confusing process that involves both visible and invisible fluids, yet my point
in emphasizing this form of energy is that, as I will argue, it functions as a kind of
ancestral fluid flowing down to later nineteenth-century phenomena, including
spiritualism, mesmerism, Christian Science, haunted houses, and, as Horace Bushnell
characterizes the energy of the antebellum home, a kind of “domestic godliness.”
Lamarck’s scientific ideas, when cast in narrative and fictional forms, thus develop into
many of the cultural concerns—from orphanages to ectoplasm—that nineteenth-century
writers addressed. Lamarck’s distinction between these fluids consists of “the visible
fluids, which are contained in living bodies and there undergo constant change and
movement” and “subtle fluids which are always invisible but which animate these bodies
and are indispensable to the existence of life” (188). The visible fluids do much of the
work of bodily change: “The function of the movement of the fluids in the supple parts
of the living bodies which contain them, is to cut out paths and establish depots and exits,
to create canals and afterwards various organs; to cause variation in these canals and
organisms,” and “to enlarge, elongate, divide and solidify gradually these canals and organs by substances…of which one part becomes assimilated and united with the organs while the other is thrown out” (189). Environmental factors ignite this constant movement of fluids and accretion of bodily tissues into organs, and if this logic is extended to the nineteenth-century home, parents who wanted to effect internal change adjusted the domestic environment in order to facilitate this modification; for a “special force” governs interiority, and it is this inner energy that was tapped in order to effect physical change. Lamarck characterizes “every body possessing life” as “permanently or temporarily animated by a special force, which incessantly stimulates movements in its internal parts and uninterruptedly produces changes of state in these parts” (193). Life comes into being through the interplay of two other fluids, which Lamarck describes as the caloric and the electric. “It seems to me,” he says, “that caloric and the electric substance together are quite sufficient to constitute the essential cause of life, the one by setting the parts and internal fluids in a proper condition for the existence of life, and the other by arousing…the various stimuli which give rise to the organic activities and the active part of life” (217).

Grafting Lamarck onto nineteenth-century domesticity is an endeavor that provides the foundation for, or subtext to, the nascent connection between mind and body that grows stronger beginning in the 1830s and 1840s. Additionally, this program forces us to rethink the separate spheres ideology of home as the spiritual haven in opposition to the working world as a harsh and cutthroat arena. Initially this link between Lamarckism and domestic reform may look like odd bedfellows, especially since Lamarck has been discredited for much of the twentieth century. I claim that these bedfellows were far
from odd, since they were mutually reinforcing and fruitfully productive, and thus require us to rethink or reconfigure the traditional separate spheres account of nineteenth-century culture. We are now better equipped to see the interaction of the scientific and the domestic with the reclamation of Lamarckian thinking in recent years. 

This complex relation between bodies and the environment increasingly takes into account the role of mind in human development, specifically in the quasi-sciences of physiognomy and phrenology, as the nineteenth-century progresses. The model text to look at in terms of physiognomy is Samuel R. Wells’ *New Physiognomy*, first published in 1866 by the famous phrenologists, the Fowler brothers. Wells makes explicit how the brain, the mind, and the will control the body, and how physicality is really a matter of direct thought control. The brain, Wells explains, is “the organ through which mind is manifested,” but “we can comprehend…almost nothing of the mind itself, save that it occupies and uses the body for a time, and then drops it to return to the God who gave it.”

Although Wells divides mind from brain, it’s a key but curious move on his part since he says that we can know almost nothing of it. The human sense of agency that nullifies a vestigial and passive environmental determinism that can be found in Lamarckism plays a complicated game with phrenology and physiognomy, since if character can be read from the shape of the head, nose, chin and even a person’s handwriting or palm lines (in short, all bodily manifestations both natural and cultural provide clues to character), then the individual can consciously choose to modify bodily

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structure through mind and thought. As Wells describes this phenomenon, “as we look, so we feel, so we act, and so we are. But we may direct and control even our thoughts, our feelings, and our acts, and thus, to some extent—by the aid of grace—become what we will” (iii). This “new physiognomy” thus maintains that the mind, through brain, completely controls the body, and the astute individual capitalizes upon this connection in terms of self-improvement. Wells also advocates a convenient and quick Lamarckian sense of acquired characters, so the imperceptible and glacier-like pace of change in the natural environment is easily dismissed here: “We are free to choose what course we will pursue, and our bodies, our brains, and our features readily adapt themselves and clearly indicate the lives we lead and the characters we form.” The study of physiognomy assumes an instant Lamarckian transmission that Wells seems to be implying occurs almost spontaneously, and the passage between the internal and the external encounters no barriers. Wells even insists that radical change is possible as one treads the physiognomic path to self-improvement, since by “knowing ourselves aright, we can…reconstruct ourselves on an improved plan, correcting unhandsome deviations, moderating excessive developments, supplying deficiencies, molding our characters, and with them our bodies, into symmetry and harmony” (xxii). The implicit logic of this line of thinking is that spiritual, physical, and mental perfection are thus possible if one only takes the time to read and decode the semiotics of the body.

10 The emphasis on the power of the will dominates much antebellum reform, though traditionally it is in a religious context of “thy will be done, Lord.” Despite this orthodoxy, founder of Mount Holyoke Female Seminary, Mary Lyon, explained to her students, “We have great powers within us. We may become what we will.” See Edward Hitchcock, The Power of Christian Benevolence Illustrated in the Life and Labors of Mary Lyon (Northampton: Hopkins, Bridgman, and Company, 1852), ?. For a related discussion on how feeling or “affect” complicates my discussion of mind control see Silvan S. Tompkins, “The Psychology of Commitment: The Constructive Role of Violence and Suffering for the Individual and for His Society” in Davis, ed., Ante-Bellum Reform, 46-62.
Nineteenth-century physiognomy and phrenology assume that character can be read from the shape of the body and its organs, but altering behavior literally sculpts the body for good or ill. This phenomenon is most acutely illustrated in Wells’ version of antebellum child rearing, for “it is in childhood that the effects of training and external influences generally upon the character, and through that upon the brain, the face, and the general form, are most observable and striking” (661). Raising children presents concerned parents with the Lockean tabula rasa upon which experience inscribes knowledge, but what is written upon this blank slate and the inscribing instruments are under parental control. Because children are “soft and pliable,” parents “can mold the plastic being at will.” Wells’ impressionable child benefits from a Lamarckian physiological system that facilitates growth, since “the particles which make up the child’s body are quickly changed, and with every change of matter may come a change of form. If the straight twig may be made crooked, so may the crooked twig be made straight.” Making straight twigs requires a proper domestic setting and moral parents, and a reciprocity or exchange exists among child, parents, and home. Good parents will provide the home with Christian love and moral furniture, for all of the aspects of domesticity contribute to or detract from the child’s well-being: “The influences and surroundings under which we come up through infancy into manhood, have a marked effect upon our characters, organizations, and features. How important, then, that parents themselves be what they would have their children become—inelligent, kind, useful, Christian men and women!” (663). Becoming good means that children will be good, and they will literally wear the marks of their virtue on their faces. While this work of bodily modification takes place after birth, children also inherit a “natural tendency of mind”
according to parental vice, virtue, and even talent such as musical ability (664). Inheritance consists of a confluence of physical, mental, and spiritual “peculiarities” dependent upon parental essence when the child is being conceived: “Children inherit a predisposition to vice or virtue, depending upon the state of the mind of the parents under which they come into existence. Godless parents will beget children of a godless tendency. Christian parents who are sincerely devout will impart this spirit or its tendency to their progeny.” The larger point to infer here is how morality actually enters into Lamarckian domestic practice, since grafting Lamarck onto domesticity can seem clinical, objective, and value-neutral. Wells shows us how the work of child-rearing is not being conducted by some mad scientist delighted to experiment on human beings, but is actually morally and spiritually enhancing.

The difference between my interpretation of Lamarckism here and Darwinian evolutionary theory is an over-emphasis on artificial rather than natural selection, on human agency rather than environmental determinism, and on a potentially perfect and moral world rather than a cruel and godless one. The rhetoric of these physiological antebellum reformists that implies self-improvement in an effort to achieve individual and human perfectibility is nicely typified by D. H. Jacques in his *Hints Toward Physical Perfection*, also published by the Fowler brothers in 1859. Jacques underscores the translation of artificial selection from animals and plants to humans as a means of attaining this bodily perfection: “We have hitherto devoted our attention mainly to the improvement of the various species of animals and vegetables which have proved useful or agreeable to us, to the almost total neglect of our own nobler race.”¹¹ Jacques opens

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up a connection between horticulture and animal husbandry, and the moral education of human beings: if the selection and improvement of animals and plants have long been practiced, he inquires, then why not humans? It’s an obvious and aggressive practice that privileges the bodily and the material and puts people in charge, and it is this sense of human agency invested in antebellum Lamarckism that really marks the difference between Darwin’s theory of evolution by natural selection and domestic Lamarckism.

This phenomenon of bodily sculpting is not simply reformism, perfectibility, and science, but it is evolution itself. It is the conscious manipulation of human beings to create what we will, and our post-modern fascination with reconstructed corporeality has its roots in antebellum hereditarianism. Jacques emphasizes this sense of human control over human bodies: “Experience has taught us,” he begins, “that [animals and vegetables] are completely under our control—that we can so order their propagation and development as to modify their shapes, sizes, colors, and other qualities at will” (xi). Plants, animals, and people can be modified, and children in the domestic setting are merely another kind of horse, dog, or flower that the skillful cultivator can change at will. “It seems no great exploit to give a pear the desired flavor,” Jacques continues, “to stripe a tulip to our liking, or to impart the hue we fancy to a rose; but to mold the manly or the womanly form into symmetry and grace…is deemed too far beyond the reach of human science and skill to be seriously proposed” (xiii). Physically altering the body can begin at gestation, but it’s never too late to make improvements to the fully grown person, and Jacques attributes the belief in the acquisition of acquired characters to phrenology: “The already existing and even matured physical organization may, under certain conditions, and by the use of perfectly legitimate means, be modified, both in its internal conditions
and in its external forms, to an almost unlimited extent” (xvi). Mind and will can change bodily characters, and the power of the mind presupposed here by Jacques also renders human beings as more than mere physical containers passively colliding with environmental conditions. This form of Lamarckism maintains consciousness and even spirituality in the dawn of Darwinism, since Darwin is publishing *On the Origin of Species* the same year that Jacques’ work appears.

Jacques conceives bodies as malleable, plastic, and infused with vital forces that implicitly can delay old age and even mortality, so reconstructing the body is a way to renew and replenish these forces. According to Jacques, “the human form is plastic. Until age has hardened its parts, it is but an image of soft clay, which we may mold at will; and we have…shown how we may impart fresh vitality to the languid frame; give strength to the weak limb; substitute grace of motion for awkwardness; remodel the ill-formed body and homely features into symmetry and beauty, and postpone indefinitely the infirmities and deformities of age” (xvi). Jacques’ vitalism also partakes of the magnetism of mesmerism, Bushnell’s domestic godliness, and Harriet Beecher Stowe’s Lamarckian-like “caloric” in her household papers. The emphasis on the physical always assumes some kind of inner force coupled with the conception of mind that can be manipulated to control how the body physically manifests itself, and this agency belongs to every human being astute enough to acknowledge and direct its current.

This interpretation of physicality as plastic and not immutable is the key to achieving the perfectibility sought by so many antebellum reformists. According to Jacques’ model, children can be trained to be virtuous beings, but perfection must also partake of a morality of beauty that the body reflects. Goodness can be read literally on
the body as well as exhibited by one’s actions and behavior. This proposition that beauty is the mark of angels and ugliness the sign of criminals is somewhat of a cultural given, but Jacques describes this phenomenon in more secular terms. “Physical goodness (or health),” he explains, “and beauty will always be found to bear a strict relation to each other…. A lack of beauty in any member or system of the body indicates a lack of goodness or health in the member of that system” (32). In other words, deformities indicate this “lack of goodness” in the body—they render it ugly and disagreeable—so illness also functions as an index to morality. According to this belief, when something is “wrong” with the body, or when one doesn’t “feel right,” it is the result of bad thinking, and the individual suffering physically, mentally, and spiritually must train or realign mind in order to attain Jacques’ enviable physical perfection: “Any functional defect or derangement manifests itself at once externally. A dyspeptic stomach or a diseased liver records its condition on face and form in characters which can not be misunderstood. Beauty, the sign of health, has no fellowship with disease” (33). The soul is the channel through which mind controls the body, since it “shapes the body and not the body the soul” (55). Jacques’ model of the soul also adapts the body to environmental changes and is the descendant of Lamarck’s mysterious fluids. While Jacques’ description of his own “very subtile fluid” retains some of its mystical legacy, it sounds remarkably mesmeric in terms of its power over the body.12 “We do not see it,”

12 According to Robert C. Fuller, Viennese physician, Franz Anton Mesmer, theorized mesmerism as entirely dependent upon a “curative agent” that was “an invisible energy, or fluid, which he called animal magnetism. He believed that he had at last come upon the etheric medium through which sensations of every kind—light, heat, magnetism, electricity—were able to pass from one physical object to another. Mesmer thus proclaimed animal magnetism to be a universal substance linking together every orderly process throughout nature. Moreover, this cosmic essence was also said to be more or less evenly distributed throughout the healthy human body. If for any reason an individual’s supply of animal magnetism were to be thrown out of equilibrium, one or more bodily organs would consequently be
he says, “it can hardly be said that we feel it; but we recognize it as an influence running along the nervous fibers…. This fluid seems to form the connecting link between soul and body, and to be the instrument by means of which the former builds, rebuilds, and shapes the latter. It is generally supposed to be magnetic or electric in its nature” (55-56). This fluid is so charged with the spirit of the individual that Jacques cites a case in which a somnambulist, in his semi-conscious state, was able to describe a person whose lock of hair he was given; thus pure mind derived from a hypnotic state possesses an extrasensory perception that transcends the limits of brain and body.

This “nervous fluid or vital force” functions in specifically Lamarckian terms according to the principle of use and disuse (58), and “its currents are controlled” by consciously directing its energy and by simple exercise. Studying, for example, enlarges one’s head, and Jacques includes a quotation from the American Phrenological Journal describing a “Mr. R. Beamish” who “stated at the meeting of an Edinburgh Phrenological Society, that a bust taken from his head could not be recognized as his own, after he had spent two years in severe study” (61). Whether Mr. Beamish’s head really became that big it’s difficult to say, but the physiological system that Jacques unpacks here takes as its foundation the Lamarckian transmission of acquired characters that, for the most part, are consciously developed by people. This process can also be used to eliminate or atrophy organs as well as to grow and strengthen them. This power of mind over body is particularly crucial for a woman who is pregnant, for her thoughts govern and influence both her body and that of her child’s: “Every thought which passes through her mind; every emotion, no matter how transitory; every impression from external objects affects, deprived of sufficient amounts of this vital force and would begin to falter.” Mesmerism and the American Cure of Souls (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), 2-3.
in a greater or less degree, the fetal being. Intense grief, violent anger, or uncontrolled terror may cause its destruction or mar irretrievably its symmetry, both of character and form” (59). The child can be scarred physically, mentally, or even spiritually, as I will demonstrate with the wildness of Pearl in The Scarlet Letter. The impressionable child is vulnerable to the state of the mother’s mind during gestation, and the child absorbs her nervousness or calmness with other vital fluids passing from the mother into the infant’s body. At birth, a child may display what Jacques refers to as these “mother’s marks” or *naevi materni*, a bizarre example of which is a woman whose mother was scared by a mouse while pregnant with her. This woman was therefore born with “the perfect impression of a mouse, hair and all, flattened down to the surface of her skin” situated on her back between her shoulders. It is thus essential for mothers to control their thoughts and to experience only “love, hope, happiness, and the contemplation of beautiful objects in nature and in art” (60).

This contemplation of beautiful objects functions as a way to use or manipulate the environment that the child will soon be entering for the benefit of his moral and physical development. After birth, parents must adjust themselves to a different kind of training that depends upon externals influencing the child and no longer the mother’s interiority. Simply moving about “causes the nervo-vital fluid to circulate in every part” of the child’s body (61), and the parents must be careful to address both the child’s physical development as well as intellect, since an over-developed brain in a weak body is just as bad as an atrophied brain in a brute’s body. This emphasis on education that I will examine in Catharine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe is thus the ruling principle by which to create perfect little bodies that are both intellectually solid and physically
sound. Jacques explains how the growing child’s vital fluid or “life-spirit” contributes to his physical growth by partaking of “the nutritive elements furnished by the blood” as the blood bathes these organs that are growing stronger (62). This developing habit of attention has profound results, since “man becomes insensibly transformed into a resemblance of an object attentively contemplated.” The child’s relationship to mind, body, environment, and the objects contemplated, such as beautiful artifacts in the domestic setting, determines his happiness or misery.

The growing child still must deal with his raw genetic material, and Jacques describes the process by which the child inherits traits from his parents as specifically Lamarckian via the handy phrase “like begets like”: “Like produces like everywhere and always—in general forms and in particular features—in mental qualities and in bodily conditions—in tendencies of thought and in habits of action” (65). The tone of Jacques’ rhetoric leaves us with a sense of an overwhelming and universal law, but it doesn’t really account for variation among members of the same species—the most important question that neo-Lamarckians will ask themselves during the last three decades of the nineteenth century. For now, however, the garden variety Lamarckism reigns, and Jacques reasons himself out of this quandary by placing emphasis on the moment of conception as determining differences among members of the same family. “Both the maternal germ and the vitalizing fluid,” he says, “must represent not only permanent traits of character and configuration, but whatever is temporary and accidental in physical and mental states; and especially must the condition of the body and soul existing at the moment in which the generative act is consummated impress itself upon the germ thereby vitalized” (67). We return to the moment of conception, though Jacques is really saying
that copulation equals destiny. If like invariably begets like, then like produces
difference when “the maternal germ and vitalizing fluid” are affected by anger, disease,
or any other bad mood or bodily irregularity. Nonetheless, the Lamarckian march to
perfection can still occur, since “gentle and loving moods” and “earnest thoughtfulness”
will produce a child superior to his parents. If the moment of conception is significant,
then gestation naturally is as well, since “during the whole period of gestation, every
influence which affects the maternal organism makes a corresponding impression upon
the fetus” (68). Quoting the memoirs of the Margravine (or princess) of Anspach,
Jacques tells us how “when a female is likely to become a mother, she ought to be doubly
careful of her temper; and in particular, to indulge no ideas that are not cheerful, and no
sentiments that are not kind” (69). Indeed, the Margravine astutely highlights the
relationship of mother’s mind to child’s body, for “the features of the face are molded
commonly into an expression of the internal disposition; and is it not natural to think that
an infant, before it is born, may be affected by the temper of its mother?” Jacques
provides examples such as the woman so interested in the career of Napoleon that her son
developed martial tastes; a mother who read the Iliad for six months before her son’s
birth bore an Achilles, and the music teacher whose children could play any instrument as
if by instinct (70-71). The bodies of children can be greatly altered during gestation as
well, and Jacques provides the amusing example of a monkey boy from Boston: “There
is a child now living in Boston whose countenance bears a striking resemblance to a
monkey…. The mother visited a menagerie during her pregnancy, where a monkey
jumped upon her” (71). Though amusing, these examples also illustrate how much of
Lamarckism entered the culture as old wives’ tales and medical folklore; thus, its
popularity and availability as a hereditarian model speaks volumes about its presence and influence, especially on the nineteenth-century writers and thinkers I examine here.

This doctrine of fetal impression also possesses consequences for the ordering of the domestic environment, and the manipulation of the home’s furnishings will be seen most prominently in the household papers and stories by Stowe. Jacques recalls how “the sages of ancient Greece…directed that women, and especially those in the condition of child-bearing, should devoutly worship Apollo, Narcissus, Hyacinthus, Castor and Pollux” as models of beautiful men; as a result, “the fair and pious daughters of Attica placed the statues of these gods in their bed-chambers, and, fixing their eyes upon their seducing forms and their features of ideal purity, adored them with loving fervor” (72). In some ways this practice sounds simply like an example of classical pornography, but the highly stylized and idealized manliness somehow imprints the physical body of the child through a kind of mental and emotional osmosis with the mother functioning as this channel of beauty. It is not clear if statues of Athena, Hera, and Artemis were similarly employed for anticipated girls, but the homoeroticism of Apollo, Narcissus and Hyacinthus may have compensated for this absence. This contemplation of fine art, Jacques suggests, can also sculpt anyone’s body, not just the impressionable fetus, so it’s helpful to furnish the home with beautiful objects since “forms habitually contemplated tend to repeat themselves in our features or in the contours of our bodies” (108). This practice is another example of like begetting like, and the influence of statues and paintings, according to Jacques, really does transform household bodies. This possibility is available to anyone, not merely the rich, but as I have been arguing, it is distinctly part of the middle-class home: “Loving wife and mother, if you would be beautiful, and see
beautiful children grow up around you, adorn your rooms with beautiful objects” (108).

As we shall see, Edith Wharton will take this process even further by instructing interior decorators how to design the entire home so tastefully that it constantly edifies, but Jacques tells his readers that this phenomenon isn’t available only to the rich. “If you cannot get paintings and statues,” he continues, “you may at least have engravings, statuettes, and medallions, as they are within the reach of every one above the grade of absolute poverty. No sitting-room, parlor, or bedroom should be destitute of them” (108-109).

This emphasis on child development in the nineteenth century culminates in the publication at the turn of the twentieth century with Ellen Key’s *The Century of the Child* published in 1909. Influenced by evolutionary thought herself, Key figures for my purposes as a way to bring in the American school of neo-Lamarckism that held sway until the 1920s or so, though vestiges of this school of thought can be found even today. Specifically, Key focuses on the transformation of bodies via new technology, and is therefore an early example of reconstructed corporeality. Key identifies “an incompletely man, out of whom, by infinite modifications in an infinite space of time, a new being can come into existence.”¹³ The sense of infinity or deep geologic time here conflates evolutionary theory and human development, and man is figured as both a material and a spiritual being. Key complicates the mind/body connection that I have been tracing with a much more sophisticated conception of directing thought to modify physicality, and she explains how “almost every day…tells us of power extended physically or psychically. We hear of a closer reciprocal action between the external and internal world” and “of

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increased insight into the laws of physical and psychical origins” (4). Key explains how the physical and the psychical are counterparts, but they work in tandem to overcome some of the body’s most challenging problems, such as blindness and even death.

Jacques’ ennobled child that outdistances his parents, and who will eventually be inferior to his own children, establishes this sense of cultural superiority within an evolutionary context. Key employs the variation of Lamarckism that I have been unpacking by privileging the power of the will to convert humble man into a model of perfection. According to her, “he who knows that man has become what he now is under constant transformations, recognises the possibility of so influencing his future development that a higher type of man will be produced” (5); and this potential can be realized by the power of “the human will” that, in terms of artificial selection, has been “found to be a decisive factor in the production of the higher types in the world of animal and plant life.” While the will is important in its altering effects, Key highlights “the significance of the body” (6), since she advocates an honest view of sex that opposes rampant bourgeois repression. This sexual education should begin in childhood since, as Freud is demonstrating to his contemporaries, children are sexual beings that puzzle their way through the world of sexuality by asking questions, and these questions should be answered straightforwardly, according to Key.14 This honesty really contributes to the child’s development: “One should be in this way completely enlightened about one’s own nature as man or woman, and so acquire a deep feeling of responsibility in relation to one’s future duty as man or woman. …In this way alone can there come into existence a higher type of sex with a higher type of morality” (9-10).

This informed bodily change parallels Jacques’ physical perfection, but Key refers to the doctrine of fetal impression as ontogeny, which is “a really new science in our century” (14). The fusion of science and culture renders this physical perfectibility, and ontogeny teaches us, among other tenets, that “by changing the diet of the mother the sex of the child can be determined,” and this study also helps us to perceive that “about three fifths of all men of genius were firstborn children.” This parental care is influenced by “the theory of heredity, where there is a struggle between Darwin’s view, that even acquired characteristics are inherited, and Galton’s and Weissmann’s conviction that this is not the case” (16). Key is really talking about Lamarckism, but the confusion here stems from Darwin’s subsequent editions of *Origin of the Species* in which it’s possible to trace Darwin’s complex revisions to his theory of natural selection, the role that acquired characters played, and an inability or hesitation to extricate Lamarckism from his complex body of thought.¹⁵ Key doesn’t advocate the extremism of Galton’s eugenics in terms of artificially selecting humans somehow permitted to reproduce, but human perfectibility is still subject to the unpredictability of the laws of inheritance. “In the inherited tendencies of children,” she explains, “often another form is taken from that which appears in their parents. Of three hundred idiots, one hundred and forty-five had alcoholic parents” (23-24). Whether the causes of idiocy or epilepsy or any other imperfection are organic or environmental, “individuals endowed with power of will can resist certain dangerous inherited weaknesses” (23-24). Will power and mind control, she suggests, can thus be exerted to resist illness and deformity. This rhetoric of the will is derived from Nietzsche, but Key explains how his concept of the “superman” is

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actually the logical outcome of Darwinism, though it is an end product that he did not foresee. This concept of the superman is important for my study, since I also wish to trace, in Darwinian terms, the “descent of man,” or the connection between the human and the animal, as well as what Donna Haraway refers to as “companion species,” such as dogs, cats, horses, and especially primates. Key explains how Nietzsche firmly believed that “man as he now is, is only a bridge, only a transition between the animal and the ‘superman’” (26). While I will not take his claim that far, I do think it fruitful to consider the complex relationship between humans and animals in the nineteenth century, especially since their presence figures as part of the furnishing and manipulation of the domestic environment. How well or poorly they are treated also provides an index to a person’s gentility, especially in the children’s stories of Harriet Beecher Stowe that I will examine here.

If the home is crucial in forming the child, this domestic Lamarckism must be codified or systematized via the child’s education, and Key explains, according to Goethe, “how the future power of will lies hidden in the characteristics of the child, and how along with every fault of the child an uncorrupted germ capable of producing good is enclosed” (106). The power of the will or mind must be drawn out mesmerically to modify the germs contained in the child’s body. Key’s familiarity with biology naturally leads one to believe that these germs in the child are conceived as somehow part of the germ plasm, and that mind or will can be directed or guided to change the internal body. In terms of the child’s education, Key also exhorts educators to understand that Herbert Spencer’s sense of organic memory—that children inherit their ancestors’ physical and mental traits—also forms part of the raw material that must be shaped: “The child comes
into life with the inheritance of the preceding members of the race; and this inheritance is modified by adaptation to the environment” (116). The child will also demonstrate his own “individual variations from the type of the species”; thus, according to Key, he must be shaped and modeled by his education through household and personal habits that form the basis of instinctual behavior. Alluding to the French moral philosopher Henri Frédéric Amiel, Key describes habits as “principles which have become instincts, and have passed over into flesh and blood. To change habits…means to attack life in its very essence, for life is only a web of habits” (117). The life of the child is a web of habits that develop into instincts, and these habits are formed by domestic conditions influencing and imprinting the child, while parents manipulate the trappings of the home and model their child’s behavior. This kind of Lamarckian education is really the central point of my project, and I will be tracing this rich confluence of evolutionary theory, cultural genetics, and the transformation of the child in the nineteenth-century bourgeois home.

Habits are rendered instinctual because “habits will become impressed in the flesh and blood of the child” (125), so habitual behavior is merely another acquired character. In terms of developing these habits in the domestic setting, Key dismisses “our modern crowded rooms” because “during the year in which the real education of the child is proceeding by touching, tasting, biting, feeling…every moment he is hearing the cry, ‘Let it alone’” (127). As a result, the best kind of room for the curious child is “a large light nursery, adorned with handsome lithographs, wood-cuts” and “provided with some simple furniture, where he may enjoy the fullest freedom of movement.” Such a room is decorated with edifying objects that instruct yet remain out of reach of the child, but once
he is older other artifacts may be introduced that perpetuate this kind of education. The home in general is still significant to the child’s development, however. Key describes the home as “a home for the souls of children, not for their bodies alone. For such homes to be formed, that in their turn will mould children, the children must be given back to the home” (163). In other words, the home must furnish the setting for the child’s education, and the demands of the outside world diminish as the domestic environment grows harmonious and the family functions as an organic being. “Thus natural training in the spirit of Rousseau and Spencer,” she continues, “will be realised; a training for life, by life at home” (164). Key’s early version of home schooling is necessary to combat the increasing problem of “homelessness,” which she defines as the home left untenanted all day while fathers are at work, mothers pay calls, and children are banished to school (191-193). Indeed, schools are such mind-numbing, robotic, and horrible places for children that Key refers to education as a process of “soul murder in the schools” (203). Key explains that “a minority of conscientious mothers and fathers” exist “who in a real sense live only for the children. They mould their whole life for the life of the children; and the children get the idea that they are the central point of existence” (196). Children must be allowed to be treated as children and not ape the manners of adults, yet at the same time they must be addressed and treated as equals, not inferiors. In other words, parents should talk to their children as if they were big persons in little bodies, and this attitude towards children really makes a difference: “Homes which send out men and women with the strongest morality, with the freshest stimulus to work, are those where…parents regard the younger members of their household as their equals; where parents by being children with children, being youthful with young people, help those
who are growing up…to develop into human beings, always treating them as human beings” (198). This outcome is the culmination of nineteenth-century domestic Lamarckism. The goal of the bourgeois household is to convert children into real people while acknowledging and accounting for their youth, but also treating them as they would any adult. “Such parents,” she continues, “without artificial condescension or previous consideration gain the sympathy of children and unconsciously educate them in a free exchange of thought and opinions” (198-199). Key’s book, The Century of the Child, thus concentrates the core issues of this project, for ultimately the manipulation of the domestic environment is informed by nineteenth-century hereditarian thought so embedded in the culture that it is necessary to denaturalize it in order to study how these complex forces developed human beings and their bodies.
Chapter 2

“The Silent Power of a Domestic Godliness”: Domestic Lamarckism in Catharine Sedgwick, Catharine Beecher, and Horace Bushnell

“Understand that it is the family spirit, the organic life of the house, that which works by an unconscious, unseen power, and perpetually...this it is which forms your children to God.”—Horace Bushnell, “The Organic Unity of the Family” (1847)¹

Horace Bushnell’s characterization of the family as an organic unity—as a living, breathing, connected entity—partakes of hereditarian rhetoric in antebellum America that remained immutable until the publication of Charles Darwin’s On the Origin of Species in 1859. In this chapter, I examine this antebellum rhetoric of inheritance and transmission beginning with the publication of Catharine Sedgwick’s sentimental novel, Home (1835). Widely popular in its day, Home represents one novel among many handbooks on child development appearing in the 1830s that instructed mothers, fathers, and Sunday school teachers how to infuse the home environment with the aura of moral education.² Sedgwick’s novel and the other texts I examine here, namely, the sections on child-rearing from Catharine Beecher’s Treatise on Domestic Economy (1841), and Bushnell’s sermon on the organic unity of the family, can be viewed simply as additional examples of these moral education handbooks. Yet the development, dominance, and eventual ascendancy of Victorian geological and biological sciences attest to the


² Typical examples of these moral education handbooks include, among others, John S. C. Abbott, The Mother at Home; or the Principles of Maternal Duty (Boston: Crocker and Brewster, 1833), and Gardiner Spring, Hints to Parents on the Religious Education of Children (New York: Taylor & Gould, 1835).
dismantling of traditional Calvinist rhetoric,\(^3\) and to the establishment of early
evolutionary theory, or “the transmutation of the species” as it was more commonly
called, as a mode of explaining cosmological development, as in the case of Robert
Chambers’ *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (1844), and the long-standing
belief in the inheritance of acquired characteristics—an idea most closely associated with
Lamarck even though this concept was merely popularized by him.\(^4\) Finally, Charles
Lyell’s *Principles of Geology* (1830-1833) also influences my focus on the 1830s and
1840s in this chapter. Lyell’s extended refutation of Lamarckism introduces this school
of thought to the Victorians, since Lamarck’s major work, *Zoological Philosophy* (1809),
was not translated into English until 1914, so it’s safe to assume that many scientists
didn’t even read Lamarck. As a catch-all phrase for this embedded hereditarianism, the
term “Lamarckism” merely identifies the completely naturalized and un-interrogated
theories of biological development fully absorbed by early nineteenth-century European
and American culture. Hereditary rhetoric and moral educational discourse that intersect
within the texts I examine in this chapter weren’t merely companionate ideas that were
“in the air at the time,”; and which somehow feebly interacted after being spewed out of a
collective cultural unconscious. I argue that a Victorian anxiety and a hyper-awareness
of such phenomena as the Higher Criticism of the Bible, the evidence of the fossil record,
the revised estimate of the Earth’s age, the work of Lyell, Lamarck, and Louis Agassiz,

\(^3\) For an overview of this Calvinist revision in antebellum America, see E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in
America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University

\(^4\) According to Richard M. Burkhardt, Jr., Lamarck’s “contemporaries took exception to his claim that
organic change could proceed beyond the limits of the species type, but they did not doubt that within these
limits the results of habits tended to become hereditary. For them, as for Lamarck himself, the reality of
the inheritance of acquired characteristics was not an issue.” Richard W. Burkhardt, Jr., *The Spirit of
coupled with the sentimental discourse of home influence, functioned as an ideological realm within which Victorian parents sincerely and consciously sought to instill both taste and virtue in their children. The exact process by which parents transmitted these traits to their children is magnified and clarified by viewing it through the lens of Lamarckian evolutionary discourse.

The literary terrain of nineteenth-century American literature and culture can be remapped if we acknowledge the publication of Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* as the watershed in evolutionary thought, but not as an ideological monolith that instantly overshadowed evolutionary and biological discourses already in rhetorical play. This critical overemphasis on Darwin has led to a sense that evolutionary theory only mattered to late-nineteenth century writers and to naturalists in particular. I argue that evolutionary and hereditarian thinking was prevalent among antebellum writers, so a genealogy can be mapped between sentimentalism and naturalism. Darwin’s theory of natural selection stipulates that those physical characteristics already present in an organism assist in its ability to survive and flourish. Those serviceable traits will then be disseminated by the parent organism and inherited by its offspring. From a purely materialist perspective, the physical environment determines the physical, mental, and even emotional conditions of beings. Yet this kind of determinism is by no means the classic, Zolaesque environmental determinism of the literary naturalists. Bushnell, for example, interprets the traits children develop in response to the home environment as influenced by a kind of spiritual Lamarckian transmission; in other words, physical characteristics develop in response to an environmental need: it’s the biological
equivalent of “use it or lose it” but also of “need it and grow it.” The classic image of Lamarckian evolution is the giraffe’s long neck. “It is interesting to observe,” Lamarck says, “the result of habit in the peculiar shape and size of the giraffe…this animal…is known to live in the interior of Africa in places where the soil is nearly always arid and barren, so that it is obliged to browse on the leaves of trees and to make constant efforts to reach them. From this habit long maintained in all its race, it has resulted that the animals fore-legs have become longer than its hind legs, and that its neck lengthened to such a degree that the giraffe…attains a height of six metres (nearly 20 feet).” This newly developed trait, a result of habit, is passed along to its offspring provided that both parents possess it after being in the same or similar environment. As Bushnell claims, “it is well understood that qualities received by training and not in themselves natural, do…pass by transmission. It is said, for example, that the dog used in hunting was originally trained by great care and effort, and that now almost no training is necessary; for the artificial quality has become, to a great extent, natural in the stock” (189). I thus argue that the human counterpart to Bushnell’s canine theory—the transmission of

5 In Zoölogical Philosophy (1809), Lamarck issues two laws that govern his theory of evolution. The first law states, “In every animal which has not passed the limit of its development, a more frequent and continuous use of any organ gradually strengthens, develops and enlarges that organ, and gives it a power proportional to the length of time it has been so used; while the permanent disuse of any organ imperceptibly weakens and deteriorates it, and progressively diminishes its functional capacity, until it finally disappears.” The second law describes how these “acquisitions or losses wrought by nature on individuals” by the process of use and disuse “are preserved by reproduction to the new individuals which arise, provided that the acquired modifications are common to both sexes, or at least to the individuals which produce the young.” J. B. Lamarck, Zoölogical Philosophy: An Exposition with Regard to the Natural History of Animals (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 113.

6 Lamarck, Zoölogical Philosophy, 122.

7 To reiterate, Lamarck’s specific method of transmission consists of “the power of the movement of the fluids in the very supple parts which contain them”; and, “according as this movement is accelerated, the fluids modify the cellular tissue in which they move, open passages in them, form various canals, and finally create different organs, according to the state of the organization in which they are placed.” Lamarck, Zoölogical Philosophy, 189.
virtuous character traits by the parents and in the home—informs the domestic Lamarkcism embodied in the texts of Sedgwick, Beecher, and Bushnell.

The narrative developed by these three authors must be recast in order to permit biology as a participant in the debate between nature and culture in nineteenth-century American literature. One of the more recent developments in this debate is the discourse of the “sentimental man.” Mary Chapman and Glenn Hendler aptly note how critics of sentimental literature “have tended to reinforce rather than question the gender binary, to such an extent that the origins of American sentimentality in the ‘man of feeling’…have been all but lost.” The replication of this binary ensures “the middle-class, white, and heterosexual biases of the doctrine of separate spheres are left unexamined and unchallenged….”8 The other side of this debate is the “separate spheres no more” argument, which is typified by Monika M. Elbert’s assertion that since “nineteenth-century gender studies [are] now permitting an emotional study of public man gone private, it is time to examine the assertive and rational side of private woman gone public.”9 While I agree that the separate sphere binary is reductive and needs complicating, I differ with these critics along the following lines: seeing the man at home instead of at work, and the woman at work instead of at home, merely inverts these traditional binaries, and the critical structures of completely separated or wholly converged spheres remain intact. I argue that the traditional debate can be further complicated by examining these three writers, since their implicit or explicit biologizing of the discourse of “domestic godliness” allows us to see how the antebellum home

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becomes a kind of little factory that manufactures virtuous bodies and produces cultivated persons.

In the first section of this chapter, I analyze Sedgwick’s depiction of a cultivated working-class family that is hyperaware of the role of the home in raising children while eschewing the waste and dissipation of pretentious gentility they see among their neighbors. I argue that, in Home, she challenges notions of inherited aristocracy with a systematic account of how domestic space can be configured to produce morally superior children. This configuration produces a form of hereditarian determinism that is culturally manipulable yet crucially woven into the corporeal fabric of household members. Rather than constructing the body, with its passions and appetites, as in some way at odds with cultivation, Sedgwick’s novel demonstrates how the traditional binaries of sentimentalism and naturalism, or nature and culture, are critical spaces neither completely separated nor wholly fused. The kind of biologized domesticity that I trace here is best represented as a Venn diagram; in other words, Sedgwick, Beecher, and Bushnell occupy the convergent space of nature and culture. This figure evades the either-all approach to nineteenth-century sentimentalism, since the two terms are not amputated from one another. In the second section, I analyze Beecher’s Treatise on Domestic Economy as a handbook that guides parents in the kind of home training that Sedgwick illustrates. Sedgwick, who crucially realigns our understanding of familial cultivation, generates a new set of concerns which she leaves unattended. Beecher supplies a new set of conceptions that attends to these deficiencies or ellipses in Sedgwick. She clearly wishes to institutionalize some of the changes in the way the home is understood, as well as to systematize them, rather than permit a space for parent
to act arbitrarily and idiosyncratically. The Beecher discourse highlights how the
“natural” process of parenting requires a good deal of cultural training for the parents. If
Sedgwick concentrates on the “products” of the home—i.e. the children—then Beecher
focuses on how to train the parents to “naturally produce” their children. In section three,
I analyze Bushnell’s sermon, “On the Organic Unity of the Family,” to illustrate further
the convergence of the nature and culture binary. While Beecher’s manual educates
parents as artificial selectors, the influence of her how-to book, though widely popular,
was still relegated to the privacy of the home. Bushnell, on the other hand, theorizes,
propagates, and imports this proactive form of child-rearing to the public realm. He
mediates between the private home and the public sphere, and popularizes the discourse
of home influence generated by Sedgwick and Beecher. My reading of Bushnell in this
chapter ultimately challenges the most traditional argument about Bushnell as abdicating
a more muscular Christianity (as advanced by Ann Douglas), since this view must
construct the domestic sphere as hermetically sealed rather than as part of the interplay of
private and public.

I. Sedgwick’s Family Inheritance

In this section I argue that Home, a consciously agrarian and working-class tale of
William Barclay’s attempts to repossess the New England parsonage where he grew up,
engages in its own form of domestic Lamarckism by demonstrating how the children of
this working-class family “inherit” the characteristics of taste and virtue as originally
acquired by their parents. The Barclay children are taught to curb their passions, to deny
their appetites for the benefit of others, and to improve their neighborhood through
charitable work. This consideration that historicizes the novel also highlights the link
between disciplinary practices toward children, as in Richard Brodhead’s discussion of “sparing the rod,” and the establishment of home and family life in the 1830s.\(^\text{10}\)

Sedgwick dedicates the novel “To Farmers and Mechanics,” since it is a paean to the simply tasteful and virtuous life uncorrupted by urban excess and greed. Sedgwick also interjects scenes in which William categorically dismisses his neighbor’s accusations that he is trying to mould his children into ladies and gentlemen, yet she preserves the possibility that working-class children can possess all the benefits of gentility without its pretensions.

The material conditions of domesticity that produce such children need to be consciously manipulated by parents, so this process begins by exerting control over the physical trappings of the home before engaging in any behavioral intervention. The “small, newly built, two-story house in Greenwich Street” that Mr. and Mrs. Barclay occupy in New York is emphatically “a small house” as opposed to “a cottage,” or the kind of rural domicile that Andrew Jackson Downing will popularize in the 1850s.\(^\text{11}\) Mrs. Barclay, as ideal wife, interprets the house’s floor plan as perfect for their needs, even though it lacks the aesthetic agreeableness of the parsonage where William grew up, and the spaciousness of her own father’s home she has just left. Though small, ordinary, and located in the claustrophobic confines of the city, the house is transformed into a

\(^{10}\) According to Brodhead, “sparing the rod” was a form of “disciplinary intimacy” that was “propagated so largely in home-management manuals of the 1830s and 1840s,” and “bespeaks this idea’s connection, in a dominant way, with nineteenth-century middle-class domesticity.” Books such as *Home* “quite overtly posit as their audience a family closed off from extended relations; a family prosperous, but not luxuriously wealthy; a family where home life is relieved from the heavy labor of primary economic production; a family in which the mother, now the chief presence of the home, is able to devote her whole attention to raising her children.” *Home* thus exemplifies the “new middle-class paradigm in the decades around 1830,” and it taught “families…how to ‘make’ a home in this new sense.” Richard Brodhead, *Cultures of Letters: Scenes of Reading and Writing in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 22.

“home” that “expresses every motive and aid to virtue, and indicates almost every source of happiness” (6). Notwithstanding the size of the house, the Barclays engineer the environment within and conduct themselves frugally as they commence their interior decorating. The small parlor proves to be advantageous, since, as Mrs. Barclay notes, “nothing looks so forlorn as a large, desolate, cold, half-furnished, shabby parlor” (7). Among the furniture they buy, “there were no superfluities,—no gewgaws of any description; no mantel-glass, ornamental-lamp, vase of Paris flowers, [or] tawdry pictures” (9). These objects that they reject aren’t merely expensive and fashionable—they are also useless since they provide neither comfort nor edification. The Barclays stock their house with utilitarian furniture so that the pursuits of “cultivated” taste and of virtue (those that mark old New England or “shabby” gentility) can be undertaken with minimum distraction. Really fine furniture consists of “ample stores of household linen, fine mattresses, as nice an apparatus for ablutions as a disciple of Combe could wish, jugs, basins, and tubs…and finally one luxury, which long habit and cultivated taste had rendered essential to happiness,—a book-case filled with well-selected and well-bound volumes” (9-10). The significance of well-chosen furniture and books is really the informed selection of home objects influenced by “the economy of domestic happiness” (16). The physical environment that rules or modifies behavior can thus be culturally transmitted to others and, most importantly, to one’s children, and this form of cultural evolution possesses a thoroughly Lamarckian ancestry to it. The ultimate goal of this interior decorating is not mere survival, but a kind of domestic beatification. Mr. Barclay “believed that a household, governed in obedience to the Christian social law, would present as perfect an image of heaven, as the infirmity of human nature, and the
imperfections in the constitution of human affairs, would admit” (16); but the real test of
home efficacy occurs once children begin inhabiting the home environment.

Sedgwick initially expresses this gentle and guided form of domestic Lamarckism
by equating human development with the cultivation of plants; and, as the work of
Sedgwick’s contemporary, the female educator Almira H. L. Phelps (also the younger
sister of Emma Willard) and Asa Gray later in the century illustrate, their emphasis upon
the importance of botany in understanding the world also teaches children how to order
themselves and arrange their own lives.12 In one of the key child-rearing scenes,
Sedgwick says, “the skilful cultivator discerns in germination of the bud the perfection,
or the disease, that a superficial observer would first perceive in the ripening or the
blighted fruit. And the moral observer, if equally skilled, might predict the manhood
from the promise of the youth” (17). This view of development implies the nascent
perfection (or imperfection) in the embryo, and it’s a domestic version of ontogeny
recapitulating phylogeny, or the history of the species evinced by the developing embryo.

12 In her children’s handbook to the study of botany, Almira H. L. Phelps explains to her young readers
how “the study of botany will teach you to be systematic in other things: you will find that men of science
have so arranged plants that all...have their exact place in the system of classification. ...Now some
children are very careless with respect to the arrangement of their clothes, books, and other articles with
which their kind friends provide them: well, it appears to me when they see how beautiful is the systematic
arrangement of plants in Botany, they will at once resolve that every thing which belongs to them, or that
they have the care of, shall be arranged according to some rule, so that they may always find what they
want, without being obliged to make a long search for it.” Almira H. L. Phelps, Botany for Beginners: An
Introduction to Mrs. Lincoln’s Lectures on Botany (Hartford: F. J. Huntington, 1833), 15; 16. Though he
writes over twenty years later, Asa Gray, in his introduction to botany for children, explains how “when
Christ himself directs us to consider with attention the plants around us,—to notice how they grow,—how
varied, how numerous, and how elegant they are, and with what exquisite sill they are fashioned and
adorned,—we shall surely find it profitable and please to learn the lessons which they teach.” He further
notes that the powers of observation and discernment are “surprisingly deficient” in otherwise well-
educated people. Asa Gray, How Plants Grow, A Simple Introduction to Structural Botany (New York:
American Book Company, 1858), 1-2. Finally, as Elizabeth B. Keeney has amply demonstrated, many
members of antebellum gentility “botanized,” or practiced botany as amateurs and hobbyists beginning in
the 1820s, until botany became a professionalized science later in the nineteenth-century. The “botanizers”
were thus rejected as novices by true “botanists” who separated themselves from these tyros. The
Botanizers: Amateur Scientists in Nineteenth-Century America (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina
This ontological phenomenon anticipates Louis Agassiz’s popularization of it, so Sedgwick attributes the success of the Barclays to conscious decision-making; and, along with the “cultivated taste” of their parlor, the virtuous lives they lead imbue the domestic environment for the good of their children: “…the Barclays had begun right…they had proposed to themselves rational objects, and had pursued them with all the power of conscience and of an unslacking energy” (18). As a result of this energy, the family flourishes. The Barclays have several children, move to a bigger house, and enjoy the quiet joys of ideal domesticity. The key child-rearing scene occurs when four-year-old Haddy cuts a hole in the new kite of her brother, Wallace. She uses it as a kind of ruff for her Maltese kitten by “thrust[ing] into it the head of her pet,” and “holding it by its fore paws and making it dance on her lap; the little animal looking as demure and formal as one of Queen Elizabeth’s maids of honor” (19). The maid has already brought in the requisite “tub of scalding water,” so Sedgwick has prepared the reader for the classic kitten-killing scene of the sentimental novel: “At once the ruin of the kite, and the indignity to which it was subjected, flashed on [Wallace], and perhaps little Haddy’s very satisfied air exasperated him. In a breath he seized the kitten, and dashed it into the tub of scalding water” (20). Sedgwick underscores the brutality of this most ungenteel act—that the killing of animals characterizes the lower classes—with the gesture of Charles, an older brother, who “at the risk of his own hand, rescued the kitten; but seeing its agony, with most characteristic consideration…dropped it in again, and thus put the speediest

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13 According to Agassiz’s biographer, Edward Lurie, “Agassiz was…very impressed with the ‘biogenetic law,’ that ontogeny or individual development is a recapitulation of phylogeny or racial history, the history of the type being the cause of the history of the individual. His student Joseph Le Conte claimed that Agassiz had discovered this ‘law.’ This was an unfounded assertion, because the concept had been known since the late eighteenth century, and Agassiz had learned it from his teacher [Friedrich] Tiedemann. Agassiz’s specific contribution to the recapitulation concept was empirical.” Edward Lurie, Louis Agassiz: A Life in Science (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 286.
termination to its sufferings.”¹⁴ The heavy-handed didacticism of this scene is meant to illustrate how Wallace, according to his father, ranks among those “creatures who are the slaves of their passions,” and he is “like beasts of prey, fit only for solitude” (21). Mr. Barclay thus banishes him to his room. Wallace can only regain his “right to a place among us,” his father continues, once he “can give me some proof that you dread the sin and danger of yielding to your passions so much that you can govern them.”

Aunt Betsey, the difficult sister of Mrs. Barclay, objects to Wallace’s solitary confinement on the grounds that he is being “mewed up” merely “for a little flash of temper” (24). Aunt Betsey proves to be the adult version of the child whom “such fuss at home” was never made, and somehow, unlike her sister, the Bushnellian home influence escaped her. Sedgwick thus characterizes her as “poor Aunt Betsey, with many virtues” who “had a temper that made her a nuisance where she was. The Barclays alone got on tolerably with her. There was a disinfecting principle in the moral atmosphere of their house” (25). The Barclays have managed to cultivate this sanitizing principle in the domestic atmosphere, since lax and improper child rearing and discipline are the agents of a “moral disease” that is as bad as bodily disease. As Mrs. Barclay explains to Aunt Betsey, “with all [of Wallace’s] good resolutions, his passionate temper is constantly getting the better of him. There is no easy cure for such a fault. If Wallace had the seeds of consumption, you would not think it the extreme folly not to submit to a few weeks’ confinement…and how much worse than a consumption is a moral disease!” (24). This rhetoric of disease reinforces the role of these environmental agents in determining

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¹⁴ Keith Thomas argues, in effect, that pet-keeping, a thoroughly middle-class phenomenon, functioned as an index to gentility in the mid-nineteenth century. The care and nurturing of pets thus contrasted starkly with the proverbial fly-wing-pulling brutes that delighted in drowning puppies and other forms of animal cruelty. See Keith Thomas, Man and the Natural World: A History of the Modern Sensibility (New York: Pantheon, 1983), 150-165, 119.
behavior and character, for, if this illness were not extirpated from Wallace’s being, then assumedly he will grow up like the disagreeable Aunt Betsey, run a miserable household, and transmit this bad character Lamarckian-like to his children. Even Wallace discerns the wisdom of his father’s discipline in his upbringing, for he thinks to himself upon hearing Aunt Betsey’s objection to his confinement, “maybe…if there had been a little more fuss when [she] were younger, it would have been pleasanter living with [her] now…..” Wallace is able to curb his passions and offers the “proof” required by his father (he grows angry at a schoolmate who snatches his cap, and at another who knocks over his inkwell and ruins his arithmetic notebook), and he effects his liberation with the lesson, as Mr. Barclay explains, of “how much good may be done by a single right action” and “how much harm by a single wrong one” (27). Indeed, the schoolmate who spilled the inkwell offers Wallace a new notebook the next day and helps him copy his sums into it. The real point in terms of the home is that the whole happiness of the family depends upon individual action, and that it is the duty of the parents to facilitate and ensure the proper training to create a happy home. In other words, as Mr. Barclay continues to Wallace, “not only your own happiness, but the happiness of your father, and mother, and brothers, and sisters,—of our home, depends on your success” (28).

The punishment that Wallace endured prevented him from dining with his family, and all concluded that mealtimes simply weren’t the same with one member missing. Once Wallace is restored to the family table, Sedgwick uses “the right ministration of the table as an important item in home education” (33). Three meals a day prove to be “opportunities of improvement and social happiness…which may teach, at the rate of three lessons a day, punctuality, order, neatness, temperance, self-denial, kindness,
generosity, and hospitality.” This list is rather formidable, but Sedgwick emphasizes that these aren’t simply “the conventional manners of high-bred people…meant to express these virtues,” since “with them the sign often exists without the thing signified.” Sedgwick squarely places the Barclays as a family occupying “middling life,” and they are implicitly superior to the upper classes since, among the middle class, “the form cannot exist without the spirit.” Sedgwick arrives at this conclusion by exhorting working men and women not to work like slaves to their employment, but rather to work wisely so as to have time devoted “to such a ministration of their meals, as shall secure ‘Earth’s best angel, health,’ as a guest at the family board,—as shall develop the mind by conversation, and cultivate refined manners” (34). Parents who conduct their household in this way shall “find the amount of good resulting to the home circle incalculable.” As the Barclays enjoy their frugal meal among perfectly placed table settings, their neighbor, Mr. Anthon, visits and joins them. He and his family are everything that the Barclays are not, and Sedgwick uses him as a foil to illustrate the superiority of the Barclays as a cultivated but modest family.

Specifically, Sedgwick employs Mr. Anthon’s observation that, since the Barclay children are ready to give up their places and their strawberries to him (there’s not enough to go around for dessert), “there’s a great difference in children; yours, Barclay, seem gentlemen and ladies, ready made to your hand”: “Mr. Barclay well knew they were not ‘ready made’ but he abstained from disturbing the self-complacent belief that all differences were made by nature” (40). In other words, home education and home influence really mould the “nature” of the child, and if left untutored, the child will grow into a lawless brute, one that is “ready made” to toss a kitten into a tub of boiling water.
Mr. Anthon somewhat tactlessly points out the shabby gentility of the Barclay family, which also appears to be the subject of local gossip: “They say, Barclay, that you are very inconsistent; that your family is the plainest dressed family for people of your property…that your furniture…is as neat and comfortable here as can be;—but they say you might afford to have things a little smarter…” (44). Mr. Barclay reiterates that he’d rather spend money on his children’s education rather than the useless, fashionable articles he and his wife have always rejected. As he explains to Mr. Anthon, “I had rather Alice should learn to draw, than that she should wear the prettiest ear-rings in New York…. I would rather my boys should learn from Professor Griscom something of the nature and riches of the world they live in, than to have a mirror the whole length of my mantel-piece” (44-45). Sedgwick’s opposition to a kind of high gentility crystallizes in Mr. Barclay’s response to Mr. Anthon’s accusation that he is “such an ambitious man…calculating to make all [his] children gentlemen and ladies” (45). Sedgwick’s working definition of gentility is what Mr. Barclay refers to as “the learned professions,” but what we would today call the professional class of doctors, lawyers, and ministers; or, that socioeconomic stratum of middle- to upper-middle class. Of course, Mr. Barclay is horrified, and counters how his “boys know that I should be mortified if they selected these professions, from the vulgar notion that they were more genteel,—a vulgar word that, that ought to be banished from an American’s vocabulary,—more genteel than agriculture and the mechanic arts.” Sedgwick engages in her own form of nation-building, for Mr. Barclay’s disgust at the belief that “it is certainly a false notion in a democratic republic, that a lawyer has any higher claim to respectability,—gentility, if you please,—than a tanner, a goldsmith, a printer, or a builder” (46). Because the
country is founded on equality, democracy, and Republican values, it is up to the working
class to unite, for a worker “is of the lower orders, only when he is self-degraded by the
ignorance and coarse manners which are associated with manual labor in countries where
society is divided into castes, and have therefore come to be considered inseparable from
it.” In other words, according to Mr. Barclay, “talent and worth are the only eternal
grounds of distinction.”

Mr. Barclay’s vision is thus that of a “new form of society” (47), or a meritocratic
utopia where the domestic environment functions as the laboratory where children are
taught to be restrained, rational, educated, and polished but not genteel in a Sedgwickian
sense. Despite this continual and conscious rejection of class, Sedgwick is really writing
in the Lockean tradition, and an earlier reference to John Locke—that learning to dance is
like “learning to make legs, as Locke says” (42)—implies his influence upon her fiction.
Indeed, the novel is in many ways a dramatization of Locke’s Some Thoughts on
Education (1693); and the similarities between Sedgwick and Locke grow increasingly
obvious.15 Mr. Anthon concedes this difference between his own children and the
Barclay children, for he points out to Mr. Barclay “here are yours listening to our talk,
and taking pleasure in it. …mine would have been out at the doors and the windows
before this time” (49). If the dinner table is thus an ideal site of edifying conversation
and mealtime etiquette, then the home generally and the parents specifically are the
means of encouraging these acquired characters. Mr. Barclay is convinced his “doctrine
will prevail” as long as the equality of the mechanics and printers with a pretentious

15 Sedgwick’s novel does indeed read like Locke’s Some Thoughts Concerning Education, as a random
example demonstrates: “The great Mistake I have observed in People’s breeding their Children has been,
that this has not been taken care enough of in its due Season; That the Mind has not been made obedient to
Discipline, and Pliant to Reason, when at first it was most tender, most easy to be bowed.” John Locke,
gentility is effected rather than simply claimed. This equalization is enacted “by the
careful use of all the means we possess to train these young creatures; by giving them
sound minds in sound bodies,” and “by making them feel the dignity of well-informed
minds, pure hearts and refined manners” (50). Part of Mr. Barclay’s rejection of gentility
also encompasses the objection to going to college or hiring foreign tutors, since “home
is the best school,—the parent the best teacher. It is the opinion of some wise people,
that the habits are fixed at twelve.” Sedgwick demonstrates the wisdom of Mr. Barclay’s
child-rearing techniques with “the reverse of the picture” (52), or the chaotic family table
at Mr. Anthon’s house, and she gently reminds the reader “for whom it is not too late, to
think of ‘these matters’.” Sedgwick reinforces this lesson through Mr. Barclay’s
statement to Mr. Anthon how “I always allow myself an hour with my family at dinner”
(51). As a domestic man and head of the household, Mr. Barclay balances his home life
with his employment, and his explanation to Mr. Anthon further evinces the dissolution
of the separate spheres argument. “I know that I am more diligent and active in
business,” he continues, “for having such an object ahead as a happy hour at home…and
I return to my office with more strength and spirits, for the little rest I give myself after I
have swallowed my food” (51-52). In the Anthon household conversely, the children are
screaming to each other, fighting over chairs, racing to the table, slamming the door,
spilling cider, dropping the bread-tray, picking their teeth, and smacking their lips at
dessert (52-56); and, in short, dinner at the Anthons is over in fifteen minutes rather than
the whole hour Mr. Barclay allots to this important daily occasion. Although Mr. Anthon
thinks it’s too late for him and his children, Sedgwick highlights the ignorance of Mr.
Anthon via the treatment of his one-year-old baby. Though the baby is “an object of
general fondness” (57), one of the children “fed her with pudding, another gave her a crumb of cheese, and a taste of cider.” Mrs. Anthon gives her “a mutton-chop bone for her to suck,” and Mr. Anthon “poured into her little blue lips the last drop of his bumper of wine.” Of course, Sedgwick observes that the Anthon children will grow up to be “sadly deficient in the social virtues” (58), but their social infractions are but symptomatic of a much larger problem, one that has to do with the moral fabric of the nation. The Barclay children, “when grown up…might convey their food to their mouths with a knife instead of a fork,” but they “would not be found wanting in the weightier matters,” such as “that politeness which comes from the heart,” or “in the very soul of good-breeding, Christian grace and gentleness” (58; 59).

Sedgwick shows the reverse of “the reverse of the picture”—the ignorant care taken with the Anthons’ baby—with the Barclay’s “dedication service” to their new baby, Euphemia or “Effie.” Baby Euphemia epitomizes the untouched Lockean slate upon which will be inscribed the tenets of Mr. Barclay’s ideal education,16 but Sedgwick also indicates how the presence of a baby in the house facilitates or assists in the continuous upbringing of the other children: “Children are most easily impressed through the medium of their senses, and the presence of their baby sister served to enforce the simple exhortation which followed from their father” (62). Mr. Barclay emphasizes to his children that they are, in effect, responsible for “the happiness or

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16 In An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, Locke explains how infants are, in effect, non-thinking beings until experience imprints and awakens them as they become socialized by the world of ideas: “A Fœtus in the Mother’s Womb, differs not much from the State of a Vegetable; but passes the greatest part of its time without Perception or Thought, doing very little, but sleep in a Place…where there is little or no variety, or change of Objects, to move the Senses. Follow a Child from its Birth, and observe the alterations that time makes, and you shall find, as the Mind by the Senses comes more and more to be furnished with Ideas, it comes to be more and more awake; thinks more, the more it has matter to think on.” John Locke, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 117.
misery that await[s]” Effie (63), and that they are to instruct her by their own good
eexample. In other words, the mature Effie will be a product of the home environment,
and the children “realize that there was a glorious nature embodied in the little form
before them, capable, if rightly developed and cherished, of becoming the child of Jesus,
and child of God” (64).

II. Beecher’s How-To Book

Though Sedgwick’s family deduces how children should be raised, and how the
acquired characters of taste, virtue, and self-discipline are to be transmitted, Catharine
Beecher, working within the same school of thought, recognizes that this domestic
Lamarckism needs to be codified. Only a fraction of her A Treatise on Domestic
Economy devotes itself to child-rearing (she is much more interested in the physical
running of the household), but in Chapter XIX, “On the Care of Infants,” we see her
mapping the Lamarckian terrain contemporaneously with Sedgwick’s own discussion of
how to raise infants well (or poorly). Beecher essentially reprints passages from “Dr.
Combe’s Physiology of Digestion,” but the allusion to Combe as well as the kind of food
infants should eat echo similar passages from Sedgwick. Beecher quotes, “It is
astonishing, indeed, with what exclusiveness of understanding eating is regarded, even by
intelligent parents, as the grand solatium, or panacea for all the pains which afflict the
young. …Because the mouth is open when the child is crying…parents jump to the

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17 Beecher’s main biographer, Kathryn Kish Sklar, explains how “insofar as Catharine Beecher’s career
can be said to have had a widespread and immediate impact on her society, that effect was achieved
through the publication of her Treatise on Domestic Economy.” Sklar attributes its influence and
popularity to the fact that it “appeared at a time when there was a great need for such a standardized text.
Many cultural indicators point to the heightened concern over the quality of domestic life in the 1840s—a
concern that grew more emphatic when increasing geographic mobility removed many families from
traditional sources of domestic knowledge. Just when Americans began to expect more from their
domestic lives than ever before, the ability of the average American woman to meet this expectation
diminished as she moved away from communal and familial ties that might have fortified her skills.”
conclusion, that it is open for the purpose of being filled.” In a biological or even zoological metaphor, Combe concludes via Beecher how “the lower animals instinctively avoid this error…and…rather allow themselves to be strongly solicited, before yielding to the wishes of their young.”\footnote{Catharine Beecher, \textit{A Treatise On Domestic Economy} New York: Schocken Books, 1977), 209. Hereafter cited in the text.} This middle road to satisfying a child’s appetite clearly consists of the manipulation of its environment; yet, whereas “the lower animals instinctively” know not to indulge their offspring, Beecher’s “young mothers of America” must be taught this method. Beecher incorporates other experts as she adduces the benefits of a simple diet for children rather than one laden with meat, but one of her more instructive examples in the chapter concerns the Orphan Asylum at Albany, New York. During the first three years after the asylum’s establishment, attendants fed children what today would be considered a balanced diet of meat, fruit, and vegetables, and they encouraged fresh air and exercise. Despite this attention, the mortality rate remained rather high because, as Beecher implies, the children were bathed only once every three weeks. After “daily ablutions of the whole body were practiced; bread of unbolted flour was substituted for that of fine wheat; and all animal food was banished” (214), the mortality rate not only declined considerably, but the children’s “teachers also testified that there was a very manifest increase of intellectual vigor and activity, while there was much less irritability of temper.”\footnote{Both Catharine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe took advantage of the benefits of hydropathy or the “water cure” popularized during the 1840s. In her \textit{Letters to the People on Health and Happiness} (1855), Beecher claims, “the medical and scientific application of cold water for the cure of disease is only one of the benefits to be obtained in these health establishments. The great thing secured is a rational, intelligent commencement of \textit{obedience to the laws of health}. As the body is, by the use of cold water, dissolved and carried off by quickened action, so it is built up with pure and healthful materials by a simple diet. Tea, coffee, alcoholic drinks, opium, tobacco, spices, and condiments of all sorts are relinquished. Fruits, vegetables, broths, one kind of meat, coarse bread, and a great variety of simples, such as cracked wheat,}
Beecher’s insistence on systematic order and bodily cleanliness, but the manipulation of environmental agents promotes a Lamarckian response—in other words, once the children encountered alternative influences recently introduced, their bodies adjusted accordingly.

Beecher’s primary domestic concern—the structure and floor-plan of the house—becomes paramount to the health and vitality of children; indeed, the home emerges as a hothouse where children will flourish, or as a kind of poisoned site where they will wither and die. Quoting “Dr. Bell,” Beecher writes, “An action, brought by the Commonwealth, ought to lie against those persons, who build houses for sale or rent, in which rooms are so constructed as not to allow of free ventilation; and a writ of lunacy taken out against those, who…with the common-sense experience which all have on this head, should spend any portion of their time, still more, should sleep, in rooms thus nearly air-tight” (219-220). Through the use of these several accounts, Beecher explains how nurseries and bedrooms should be ventilated and not overly heated, and fresh air should be allowed to flow through these rooms lest the discomfort of the child lead to various ailments if not death. As part of her antebellum domestic reform effort, Beecher also recommends country walks, daily baths, properly fitting clothes, and the avoidance of stimulants and meat. For Beecher, consuming “animal food” lies at the basis of much of the nineteenth century’s ills. “The Writer,” she explains, “knows a family of eleven children, all but one born with robust constitutions, and reared in the country…. But they were allowed to eat meat, twice a day…and every one, in afterlife, suffered severely, either from chronic hominy, and the like, are provided, and the patient must eat these or starve, or go somewhere else for food.” Catharine E. Beecher, Letters to the People on Health and Happiness (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1855), 143. For an account of Beecher’s experience with hydropathy, see Sklar, Catharine Beecher, 205-206.
cutaneous eruptions, or from dyspepsy, or from liver complaints, or from excessive nervous excitability. Not one escaped” (223). The vitality of all Americans is thus at risk from such a diet, but the wise mother who eschews meat-laden meals contributes to the perfection of her children.

Whereas Sedgwick indicates that the parent’s primary role is teaching children to govern their passions, and thus become perfect, little, Lockean products, Beecher views the parents as a kind of Calvinist duo that impresses upon their children those “habits of self-denying benevolence” (225). In Chapter XX, “On the Management of Young Children,” Beecher proclaims how “the happiness of our race” depends upon these habits of personal penury, and naturally she works within the tradition of her father, Lyman Beecher, in saving Western civilization from the evils of Catholics and other heathenish ilk.20 Sounding much like her father, Beecher informs her readers, “as the commands of the Supreme Ruler are the only sure guide to a right course of benevolent action, submission of the will, to the will of a superior, is the best preparative course for such a course of benevolent action.” Sedgwick’s own quiet form of Christianity is apparent in Home, for it lays the foundation of the moral, compassionate life—an antebellum Golden Rule at best, or an institutionalized nominalism at its worst. Still, it is present. Beecher’s prose, on the other hand, leaps from the page with the tone of a pulpit orator, but she also differs from Bushnell whose religious ideology is more in line with Sedgwick’s. Beecher codifies a progressive Lamarckian transmission since these traits instilled in the child will

20 In 1830, Lyman Beecher wrote to Catharine of his plan to save the West from moral corruption: “The moral destiny of our nation, and all our institutions and hopes, and the world’s hopes, turns on the character of the West, and the competition is now is for that preoccupancy in the education of the rising generation in which Catholics and infidels have got the start of us…. I have thought seriously of going over to Cincinnati, the London of the West, to spend the remnant of my days in that great conflict, and in consecrating all my children to God in that region who are willing to go…. …if I go, it will be a part of my own plan that you go.” Quoted in Sklar, Catharine Beecher, 102.
determine environmental circumstances, as in Cincinnati—a kind of laboratory experiment for her father. The “happiness of the species” is at stake, and she is really a product of the influence of her own father’s home. Beecher encourages a middle road that lies somewhere between rigid discipline and careless apathy: “The medium course, is, for the parent to take the attitude of a superior in age, knowledge, and relation; who has a perfect right to control every action of the child, and to exact respectful language and manners; and, whenever an express command is given, to demand prompt obedience, without hesitation or dispute” (226). The child should be encouraged to realize that this obedience is for his own good, and the parents should act as benevolent despots rather than Draconian dictators. Beecher explains that the parents who come to understand their children the most, and who have the most influence over them, are those that play with them and form an integral part of the child’s sphere. She also reinforces the trope of the domestic man by urging fathers to spend more time at home and with their children exactly like Mr. Barclay. The greatest problem for the nation, Beecher explains, is “that so many fathers are absorbed in making money, for mere show or physical enjoyments, and so many mothers engaged in using it for the same ignoble ends, that they find no time to share in the sports or pursuits of their children” (227-228). Such parents “relinquish this most powerful mode of influence to domestics and playmates” (228). This lack of care results in the child associating with companions who use their influence “for the most pernicious purposes.” Beecher’s implicit Lamarckian argument addresses the welfare of the nation, since one child gone bad indeed does spoil the whole national bunch.
Beecher’s ideal of governing children incorporates consistency, compassion, and discipline, and the “reverse of this picture,” like Mr. Anthon’s household, is the complete absence of any form of domestic training. Beecher qualifies these assertions by explaining that both inconsistency in home education and an overwhelming strictness with children are just as bad as no training at all. In order for children to flourish, to obviate their desire for what they can not have, and to avoid turning them into little misanthropes, Beecher recommends parents must “advise and request” rather than “command”: “The most important duties of life should be enforced by commands; but all the little acts of heedlessness, or awkwardness, or ill-manners, so frequently occurring with children, should pass as instances of forgetfulness, and not as acts of direct disobedience” (230). The willfully disobedient child should, of course, be accordingly punished, but overlooking Beecher’s misdemeanors of manners will ensure the naturally obedient child. As with the Barclay family, Beecher encourages establishing family meals as occasions to impress upon children selflessness and self-denial. The Anthon child that is poorly and recklessly fed also serves as a model for the kind of practices Beecher rejects, for “food which is proper for grown persons, is often not suitable for children” (231). Additionally, and perhaps more important as elements or tools of home influence, are table manners and sharing with others. “Requiring children to wait till others are helped,” Beecher continues, “and to refrain from conversation at table, except when addressed by their elders, is another mode of forming habits of self-denial and self-control. Requiring them to help others, first, and to offer the best to others, has a similar influence.”
Of course, home education only works well insofar as a child’s parents are good teachers, who impress by example, who attend to their own deficiencies, and who cultivate habits of honesty and virtue. Parents transmit these traits to their children partially because “children are creatures of sympathy and imitation,” and when they observe their parents “respecting rights of property” or being “exact when stating the truth,” for example, they are imprinted with “uprightness” (232). Parental consistency also requires strict definitions of vices because children are so easily influenced. Beecher explains how “the effect of sympathy and example is very manifest, in some families, where the parents have very strict notions respecting truth and honesty,” whereas dishonest parents “never can impart an admiration for virtues” in their children “which they do not possess” themselves, nor impose “great disgust for vices which” the parents “daily practise” (232; 233). Beecher’s own domestic chain of being—virtuous parents transmit honesty to their children, and these parents are superior to deceitful parents who transmit vices to their children—form an endless cycle of two kinds of families, and the genetic mechanism continues to be this simple morphological phenomenon of influence and imprinting. For Beecher, however, the most important traits children can inherit are mental rather than spiritual or biological, since immorality and “dreadful penalties…result from indulged impurity of thought” (233). Beecher accrues her evidence for this assertion from “the records of our insane retreats, and the pages of medical writers” that demonstrate how “even in solitude, and without being aware of the sin or the danger, children may inflict evils on themselves, which not infrequently terminate in disease, delirium, and death.” Most likely, Beecher refers to the sinful and bestial practice of masturbation, yet she warns against “disclosing the details of vice, in
order to awaken dread of its possibilities” since such explicit discussion “often leads to the very evils feared” (233-234). The greatest lessons that parents can teach their children thus consist of “cultivat[ing] habits of modesty and delicacy,” inculcating them with the belief “that all impure thoughts, words, and actions, are forbidden by God,” and, finally, by instilling in them the conviction “that all which God has instituted, is wise and right and pure” (234).

III. Bushnell’s Popularization of Domestic Lamarckism

Beecher’s codification of child-rearing in her treatise makes these methods available to domestic readers needing instruction in systematizing the home and training children to be cultivated persons. Bushnell’s account of children in his sermon on “The Organic Unity of the Family” reaches out to a wider public realm that isn’t solely constituted of genteel mothers. As Anne L. Kuhn succinctly claims, Bushnell’s Views of Christian Nurture figures as “the most important single contribution in print to the cause of domestic education as it was related to religion.”21 According to his biographer, Robert Bruce Mullin, Bushnell “had eagerly embraced Harvard scientist Louis Agassiz’s idea of multiple successive creations,” since “it suggested that in each individual species one saw the handprint of God.”22 Despite his admiration for Agassiz, Bushnell is clearly in dialogue with the prevalent form of domestic Lamarckism saturating antebellum culture. One of the best examples of Bushnell’s Lamarckian rhetoric (and a favorite illustration of those theorizing on characters acquired as a result of an external influence) occurs in the later sermon “The Capacity of Religion Extirpated by Disuse,” printed in Sermons for the


New Life (1858). Bushnell explains how “all living members, whether of body or mind, require use, or exercise. It is necessary to their development, and, without it, they even die. Thus, if one of the arms be kept in free use, from childhood onward, while the other is drawn up over the head and made rigid there, by long and violent detention…the free arm and shoulder will grow to full size, and the other will gradually shrink and perish.”

Bushnell also figures as one of Ann Douglas’ clergymen who contributed to the feminization of American culture. This assertion is apt if Bushnell is viewed through the lens of the domestic male, but it’s also true that within the home, according to the main points of this sermon, Bushnell exerts an influence upon and control of family life that is much more powerful and far-reaching than Douglas would attribute to him. Bushnell objects to what he perceives as a heightened sense of possessive individualism, laments the loss of “the idea of organic powers and relations” (184), and explains how national, religious, and domestic institutions have “become mere collections of units.” Most likely, Bushnell’s idea of organicism is partly in dialogue with Coleridge’s Aids to Reflection (first published in America in 1829), though the metaphoric value of the organic unity of the plant or animal cell is also pertinent here. According to Mullin, however, “Bushnell’s discussion of ‘organic connection’ and his image of character being


24 While Ann Douglas disparages ministerial influence as a weakness, I view it as a strength within the cultural context I am exploring. According to Douglas, “Northeastern clergymen and middle-class literary women lacked power of any crudely tangible kind, and they were careful not to lay claim to it. Instead they wished to exert ‘influence,’ which they eulogized as a religious force. They were asking for nothing more than offhand attention, and not even much of that: ‘influence’ was to be discreetly omnipresent and omnipotent. This was the suasion of moral and psychic nurture, and it had a good deal less to do with the faith of the past and a good deal more to do with the advertising industry of the future than its proponents would have liked to believe. They exerted their ‘influence’ chiefly through literature which was just in the process of becoming a mass medium.” Ann Douglas, The Feminization of American Culture (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux-Noonday Press, 1998), 8-9.

passed on ‘as a seed is formed in the capsule’ are intriguing and evocative, but they are so incomplete that they raise more questions than they answer. As before Bushnell was better at offering an intuitive solution to a problem than in rationally explaining his method.  

Situated within this cultural context, Bushnell proposes his “design…to restore, if possible, the conception of one of these organic forms [i.e. the state, the church, the family], viz. the family…which, if…not rectified, will assuredly bring disastrous consequences.” These horrific consequences will result from an egocentrism encouraged by the doctrines of free will and original sin that “have cleared individual responsibility…where most especially it needs to be felt, that is, in Christian families” (184-185).

Bushnell’s own working definition of “the organic unity of the family” somewhat qualifies the phenomenon of home influence that pervades the home of the Barclay family in Sedgwick, and within the families known by Beecher, since he conceives of the family “as such a body, that a power over character is exerted therein, which cannot properly be called influence” (185). Bushnell deprecates influence as an occasional, persuasive power enlisted to enact a specific, momentary purpose, but within the organicized and unified family “a power is exerted by parents over children…without any purposed control whatever. The bond is so intimate that they do it unconsciously and

26 Mullin, Puritan as Yankee, 119.

27 Barbara M. Cross explains how “according to New England Calvinism, children were depraved, and regeneration came in a shattering choice with which the individual began a new life. According to the accepted psychology, the child was a pliant entity whose eventual decisions were governed by early association. Given the orthodox rationale, the minister should logically have concentrated upon the adult congregation. Yet he had found middle-class adults prone to criticism, pride, and religious apathy, while the business world, which engrossed their interests, seemed hostile to the traditions in which piety and the ‘fireside’ had flourished together. Only in concern for the education of the young did the interests of religion and the middle-class adult population meet without friction. Out of the conflict of dogma and situation came the opportunity for a new reading of theology.” Barbara M. Cross, Horace Bushnell, 63-64.
undesignedly—they must do it. Their character, feelings, spirit and principles must propagate themselves, whether they will or not.” Bushnell characterizes this principle of a kind of mind control as “an absolute force” rather than influence; for children are unable to make reasoned and informed choices on their own. Parents must establish a disciplinary program that naturally pervades the home; and this parental phenomenon and domestic environment that create conditions in which children mature are characterized by Bushnell as “organic power” operating much like “a law of simple contagion” (186). In such a concerted environment, “the manners, personal views, prejudices, practical motives and spirit of the house” become “an atmosphere which passes into all and pervades all, as naturally as the air they breathe.” Bushnell notes, however, that this all-consuming process doesn’t preclude either “room for individual distinctions” or “the sphere of other causes” as the child is socialized. He acquires a “character partially distinct” but “never wholly” so, for “the order of the house will always be in his garments, and the internal difficulties with which he has to struggle, will spring of the family seeds planted in his nature.”

Bushnell’s motley rhetoric partakes of the imagery of organicism, disease, atmospherics, botany, and garments invested with a domestic energy that is sometimes more intuitive than logical. This rhetoric thus underscores the transmission of acquired traits between parents and offspring, and from one generation to the next. Bushnell implies the existence of a genetic mechanism to transmit these “qualities received by training and not in themselves natural” (189), as the previously mentioned episode of the hunting dog indicates, but this mode of transmission exists “in the human species” even more markedly. Bushnell claims that the conversion of “the Jewish race” from an
agrarian people to one with “singular devotion...to money and traffic” stems from the Lamarckian transmission of this trait or “devotion” because of the extreme conditions of the social environment or ecosystem they’ve inhabited. The genetics of what he calls this “change” can be easily traced throughout a history that provides “the mournful answer” to his question, “Whence the change?” Since some nations have consistently constructed Jews as “a hated and down-trodden people” who have been “allowed no rights in the soil, shut up within some narrow and foul precinct in the cities, compelled to subsist by some meager traffic,” and “denied every possession but money” (189-190), they have developed “an artificial nature” or an “instinct...to get money by small traffic and sharp bargains” (190). Bushnell’s example is both sympathetic and condescending, since it trades in the stereotypes of antebellum race science; but he employs it to conclude how “there is little room to doubt that every sort of character and employment...passes an effect and works some predisposition in those who come after.” Bushnell supplies this racial example of the Jews, and the zoological example of the hunting dog, as evidence of fully formed “species” having evolved in response to certain environmental pressures consciously exerted, either by dog breeders or invidious, Christian neighbors. These are really minor points, however, since Bushnell returns to the child developing in response to domestic forces that he will officially call “Christian nurture” in the 1861 text of the same name. He characterizes the child as a kind of pupa without free will or the ability to choose, since “he is not as yet a complete individual, he has only powers and capacities that prepare him to be, when they are unfolded” (191). These powers and capacities, Bushnell continues, “are in him only as wings and a capacity to fly are in the egg. Meantime he is open to impressions from every thing he sees. His character is forming,
under a principle, not of choice, but of nurture.” Most importantly, “the spirit of the house is breathed into his nature, day by day,” so every feeling, emotion, passion, or manner that the parents exhibit inside the home “pass into” the child “as impressions and become seeds of character in him—not because the parents will, but because it must be so, whether they will or not.” The child as embryonic insect, or as the fertile ground upon which seeds of impressions are sown, invokes more organic imagery that is at the core of this sermon.

Laws of growth that govern the plant and animal kingdoms have a domestic counterpart in another Bushnellian law of contagion. In other words, parents “propagate their own evil in the child, not by design, but under a law of moral infection,” since “the spirit of the house is in the members by nurture, not by teaching, not by any attempt to communicate the same, but because it is the air the children breathe.” Bushnell echoes both Sedgwick and Beecher as he admonishes his readers that “our race have fallen…into moral corruption and apostasy” (191-192). Bushnell isn’t as concerned as Sedgwick with nation building, since his biological and anthropological rhetoric here attempts to account for the genetics of this fallen state of the species. The version of Lamarckian transmission implicit in Bushnell’s rhetoric is fully grounded in evolutionary theory, for Bushnell claims, “the sin of no person can be transmitted, as a sin, or charged to the account of another” (192). The inconsistent parent, the irrational child, or an unsympathetic aunt poisons the atmosphere of the home. Instead of a healthful, oxygenated hothouse, fellow family members find themselves living in the sickly sweet confines described in Hawthorne’s “Rappaccini’s Daughter” (1844), where the inhabitants of the mad scientist’s garden seem to inhale a beneficent and blissful aroma
but are actually being insidiously sickened. This phenomenon occurs since the organic unit of the family is the race in miniature or as a microcosm. “If we are units,” Bushnell continues, “so also are we a race, and the race is one—one family, one organic whole; such that the fall of the head involves the fall of all the members.” The doctrine of original sin encompasses the prototype for the head of the domestic household, since in Adam’s fall man effected the first spiritual stain upon humanity and destroyed the Edenic household. But now the head of the household can mitigate this archetypical moral corruption via systematic home management: “Under the old doctrines of original sin, federal headship and the like…there yet lies a great and momentous truth…that in Adam all die, that by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, that death hath passed upon all men for that all have sinned.” The value of this passage really lies in establishing Adam as first father of the Biblical household—one that permeates the Judeo-Christian tradition and influences Sedgwick, Beecher, Bushnell, and Harriet Beecher Stowe. For Bushnell, the allusion to Adam and the doctrine of original sin is a didactic one, and he employs it to impress upon his readers how “no greater credulity” exists “than for any man to expect that a sinful and death-struck being, one who has fallen out of the harmony of his mold by sin, should yet communicate no trace of evil from himself, no diseased or damaged quality, no moral discolor to the generations that derive their existence from him.” The very laws of nature would have to be suspended for it to be otherwise, or “every law of physiology must be adjourned” for the reverse to be true.

The fundamental legal principle that does function is “the law of family infection” (193), and again we have the analogy of the individual unit that poisons the body politic,
or the race or species as a whole. Human depravity follows its own kind of genetics of history, and while this Puritan doctrine influences the child in its own way, the parent must intervene between religion and history to alter the home environment in an effort to assuage this doctrine of “human depravation,” since “it shows the past descending on the present, the present on the future, by an inevitable law.” Nonetheless, it “gives every parent the hope of mitigating the sad legacy of mischief he entails upon his children, by whatever improvements of character and conduct he is able to make,” so that “his child may be set forth into responsible action, as a Christian person.” These laws of infection or contagion are capable of functioning because of the “spirit of the house” that infects or affects all family members, particularly the child, who “breathes the atmosphere of the house” and “sees the world through his parents’ eyes”: “Their objects become his. Their life and spirit mold him. If they are carnal, coarse, passionate, profane, sensual, devilish, his little plastic nature takes the poison of course. Their very motives, manners and voices, will be distinguished in him. He lives and moves and has his being in him” (196). The domestic institution completely molds the plastic or ductile child, but this isn’t mere environmental determinism—parents can consciously manipulate the trappings of the home in order to raise the virtuous child. With this belief Bushnell is implicitly in dialogue with Lamarck, especially since other social institutions affect the child who emerges as the product of both nature and nurture.

Despite this balance that Bushnell attributes to both family and the social environment, the habits of the family are necessarily imprinted upon the child. An infant born into a family of thieves, for example, “is swaddled as a thief, the child wears a thief’s garments and feeds the growth of his body on stolen meat; and, in due time, he
will have the trade upon him, without ever knowing that he has taken it up, or when he took it up” (197). The influence of home and familial imprinting are so strong that a drunken father will have drunken children, and parents who are idle beggars teach their children “to lie skillfully and maintain their false pretences with a plausible effrontery….” Bushnell concedes that these are extreme examples, but he exaggerates in order to show how even minor parental lapses inculcate bad habits in children as they become “accessaries and apprentices” (198). Such recreant parents include the scandal-mongering mother who turns her children into “spies and eavesdroppers.” The mother whose home is “a den of disorder and filth” forces her children to “be at home in it.” The father who writes a business letter on Sunday sends his child to deliver it; and the parents who “laugh at religion…will put a face upon it, which will make their children justify the contempt they express.” Mothers and fathers who poison the atmosphere of the home convert the principle of home influence into a contagious moral disease; thus the house becomes “a school of wrong, and the life of the home is only a practical drill in evil” (199). Bushnell qualifies his condemnation of such parents by acknowledging how “few parents are so base, or so lost to natural affection, as really to intend the injury of their children” (205-206). The problem isn’t intentional but ontological, since “you perceive it is not what you intend for your children, so much as what you are, that is to have its effect” (206). In other words, children “are connected, by an organic unity, not with your instructions, but with your life.” Bushnell demonstrates the cultural dimension of Lamarckism because the transmission of these characters is subject to domestic rather than biological time. “What you are they will almost necessarily be,” he continues, whether for good or ill; and this process occurs simply and smoothly because the parents
have “actuated” a moral or immoral home influence, or “the spirit of the house, which is your spirit….” Continuing to address the reader directly, Bushnell builds to a crescendo, and concludes this section of his essay with what is perhaps its core truth. He exhorts his readers, as parents, “to admit other and worthier thoughts,” or thoughts much safer to entertain for both parents and children, and he commands his readers to “understand that it is the family spirit, the organic life of the house, that which works by an unconscious, unseen power, and perpetually—the silent power of a domestic godliness—this it is which forms your children to God” (207). Lacking this understanding, parents “will be as likely to annoy and harden as to bless.”

IV. Conclusion

The implicitly biologized and hereditarian rhetoric that characterizes these three writers from the 1830s and 1840s becomes more explicit in the fiction of Nathaniel Hawthorne into the 1850s. In Chapter 3, I argue that Hawthorne consciously uses a pre-Darwinian rhetoric of heredity in order to examine the relationship between science and children in “Rappaccini’s Daughter” (1844), an account of Puritan child-rearing gone wrong in The Scarlet Letter (1850), and the transmission of acquired characters via the bad blood of a family curse in The House of the Seven Gables (1852). Reading Hawthorne in these ways best illustrates the theories of inheritance that were culturally available in the 1850s. I thus argue in the second chapter that the traditional interpretations of Hawthorne as fully a product of American Renaissance idealism fail to account for a hereditarian materialism that pervades his major novels.
Chapter 3

“God Will Give Him Blood to Drink!”: Hawthorne’s Hereditarian Rhetoric

“Behold, O parents! …the destinies of your DEAR PROSPECTIVE CHILDREN are thus placed completely within your control. Nay, willing or unwilling, you are COMPELLED to wield them, or else not to become parents. A NECESSITY exists. Your children are OBLIGED to be what you are, and cannot help themselves.”

--Orson S. Fowler, *Hereditary Descent* (1847)

Famous phrenologist, Orson Fowler, crystallizes the logic of antebellum hereditarian theory in this exhortation to parents—a belief that also found expression throughout the nineteenth century via the familiar adage, “Like begets like; each after its kind.”

Before Darwin’s theory of natural selection, and before the renaissance of Mendelian genetics at the turn of the twentieth century, popularizers of antebellum inheritance theory such as Fowler, George Combe, and Hester Pendleton, subscribed to and perpetuated the biologically reductive belief that the mental and physical well- or ill-being of parents determined their children’s outcome. If a child was born deaf, dumb, blind or brilliant, the fault or benefit lay entirely in parental constitutions. Historian of science Charles E. Rosenberg has aptly summarized the tenets of early nineteenth-century hereditarian logic: the tacit acceptance of the Lamarckian inheritance of acquired characters; the belief that “heredity was a dynamic process beginning with conception

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2 In a companion volume to *Hereditary Descent*, Fowler also describes “the philosophy of parentage, or modus operandi by which it stamps its ‘own image and likeness’ on progeny” as “governed throughout, even to its minutiae, by its laws, one of which is, “each after its kind.” Else, our children might be born brutes, or trees, at perfect random. But this law renders them like their parents, and thereby preserves the unity of both our own species and every other.” O. S. Fowler, *Love and Parentage, Applied to the Improvement of Offspring*, 40th ed. (New York: Fowler and Wells, Publishers, 1857), 23, 24.
and extending through weaning”; the transmission of “character, disease, and temperament” as a “protean affair of tendency and predisposition,” and the general consensus that “the sexes played a necessarily different role in heredity.” The widespread belief in the inheritance of acquired characters and behaviors only becomes fodder for debate after Darwin publishes *Origin of Species* in 1859, as evinced by Hester Pendleton’s curt dismissal of the power of artificial selection in *The Parents’ Guide* (1871). Whereas Fowler and Combe applauded nurturing techniques to improve the well-being of the sickly babe, Pendleton discounts them as negligible: “Favorable conditions may, indeed, work marvelously towards the development of a feeble germ,—we may nourish the weakest plant into something like vigor and hardiness, but one strong and rare seedling is worth many hundreds of any common variety.” The nature and culture debate that Pendleton raises also interrogates Combe’s assertion that “the peculiar tone of mind is given at the first inception of existence,” for she claims “the experience of many observing mothers, who have recognized in their children the same sentiments in which they had indulged during the whole period of their gestation” (20). Gestation, for the post-Darwin writer, equals destiny.

Antebellum theories of inheritance initiated in the writings of Catharine Sedgwick, Catharine Beecher, and Horace Bushnell, become modified with the rise of

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5 Fowler’s explanation for the Lamarckian transmission of hereditary traits partakes of a blend of phrenology and mesmerism, and he describes the mechanism of inheritance as “magnetism, or electricity, or galvanism” which to him are “all only different names for the same thing differently applied.” Specifically, since “man has a two-fold organization; the one, anatomical—the other, magnetic or vital which are intimately interwoven throughout; the latter, by means of its affinities and natural superiority,
Darwinism, the heated responses of its supporters and detractors, and an increasing belief in the efficacy of eugenics. Indeed, the eugenicists will transmogrify artificial selection, which for Beecher was a mode of reform and transformation, into a tool to obviate the mating of those considered physically and mentally undesirable. Nathaniel Hawthorne, whose tales and romances trace an increasing interest in child-rearing techniques, infantile development, accursed bloodlines, and familial inheritance, contributes to the discourse of antebellum hereditarian thought and reveals contemporaneously with Beecher and Bushnell. While the criticism surrounding Hawthorne has emphasized the historical, political, and psychological contexts of Hawthorne’s writings, no work has been done that explores his fascination with ancestry in the kinship sense, and that materializes inheritance by placing it within the realm of shifting hereditarian theory. In this chapter, I argue that Hawthorne employs tropes of cultivation, both horticultural and physical, to critique Beecher’s and Bushnell’s assumptions that children can be nurtured controlling the form, texture, &c., of the former, and secures its action through the instrumentality of various magnetic connexions, depots, &c., called poles, which, put in action, produce and constitute all the phenomena of life. This magnetic constitution has two great central poles: the one, in the head—the other, in the chest. This magnetic nature of parentage is imparted to the germ of life, or imbibed in it, only that it is yet folded up or concentrated in that great central pole in the chest, where embryo life commences, and then deposited, by that function which imparts being, in the place provided for its nutrition, where, also, nature has stationed a full supply of maternal vitality, to feed it till it can germinate, as does the egg when subjected to incubation, or seeds supplied with terrestrial magnetism.” While the punctuation and logic of the first part of this description seems designed to keep readers out, the analogy that Fowler eventually develops is that of a kind of giant, human egg that sustains itself by this magnetism. Love and Parentage, 25, 26. Additionally, in a comment on Oliver Wendell Holmes’ Elsie Venner (1861), Taylor Stoehr describes “the chief doctrine of the novel, Holmes’s answer to original sin” as “the hereditary transmission of moral propensities” as “a relatively new pseudoscience that was developing out of various phrenological and other theories.” I consider this assessment of Lamarckian transmission too facile given the case I am building here. Stoehr, Hawthorne’s Mad Scientists: Pseudoscience and Social Science in Nineteenth-Century Life and Letters (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1978), 128.


7 The closest biological argument about Hawthorne that I have been able to find is Roy R. Male’s reading of The House of the Seven Gables, though he merely casts contextual sideglances at Lamarck, Darwin, and evolutionary theory in general. See “Evolution and Regeneration: The House of the Seven Gables” in Hawthorne’s Tragic Vision (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1957), 119-138.
as merely additional versions of organic and vegetable material. In section one, I show how Hawthorne, in the early tale of “Rappaccini’s Daughter” (1844), uses the botanical imagery of grafting that was familiar to him as a result of the pomological expertise of his uncle, Robert Manning, in order to expose the nightmare world of artificial selection taken to a freakish eugenicist extreme in the figure of Beatrice Rappaccini. In section two, I examine The Scarlet Letter (1850) to demonstrate how contemporaneous theories of gestation and weaning are exploited by Hawthorne in his depiction of the raising of Pearl, whose literal paternity via Dimmesdale, and her ultimate co-optation by the estate of Chillingworth, constructs her as the hereditary puzzle of biological bloodline and cultural lineage. In section three, I extend Hawthorne’s examination of heraldic and physical bloodlines with a reading of The House of the Seven Gables (1851), in which the grafted-on happy ending of the romance resists the nineteenth-century’s ultimate logic of eugenics. Dispelling the curse of literally drinking blood for Hawthorne effects a new plebeian heritage equipped to deal with the democratic changes that the mansion has statically blocked for over two centuries. In other words, the inheritance of the landed estate that Hepzibah and Clifford Pyncheon receive restores the sanctity of the family laboring under a curse of blood, imposes a new kind of order, and permits them to cultivate the fruits of their genteel garden, rather than falling prey to the monomania of a eugenicist like Dr. Rappaccini. In these three works, Hawthorne identifies and localizes a gentle and nurturing form of Lamarckism thought that forefends the eugenicist consequences of extreme versions of artificial selection. Finally, I conclude with an analysis of Oliver Wendell Holmes’ Elsie Venner: A Romance of Destiny (1861), which presents us with another kind of venomous daughter raised among snakes rather than in a
poisonous garden. In this sense, Holmes caps Hawthorne with a medical and herpetological awareness of the wild child upon whom neither parental cultivation nor home influence prove effective. Elsie is ultimately ejected from the civilized world of genteel New England because of her extremely aberrant nature.

Section I: Cultivating Monstrous Offspring in “Rappaccini’s Daughter”

The tropes of cultivation and horticulture, and the imagery of fountains, flowers, and gardens that populate much of Hawthorne’s stories, accrue added significance when we view these fictional devices in light of contemporaneous theories of inheritance and child-rearing. Hawthorne distorts the seemingly innocuous and benevolent practice of cultivating children like plants in a garden, and engages in an anti-sentimental critique of Sedgwick’s families, Beecher’s babies, and Bushnell’s children.⁸ “Rappaccini’s Daughter” provides an early example of Hawthorne’s familiarity with the horticultural technique of grafting, as evinced by Robert Manning’s New England Fruit Book (1838) and references to Judge Pyncheon’s practice of it in The House of the Seven Gables.⁹ But Beatrice Rappaccini outdistances any kind of gestational power of a pear or an apple tree to produce multiple kinds of fruits, since grafting doesn’t produce hybridized fruit,

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⁸ In a notebook entry dated August 10, 1842, Hawthorne is explicit about the comparison between plants and children: “I find that I am a good deal interested in our garden…. It is something like nursing and educating another person’s children. …It is as if something were being created under my own inspection, and partly by my own aid.” The American Notebooks, ed. Claude M. Simpson (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1972), 328-329.

⁹ According to Manning, “the cleft, or stock grafting, is the most generally practiced in New England” and “is performed in the following manner:—The head of the stock or branch being cut off, a slit is made in the top deep enough to receive the scion, which should be cute sloping, like a wedge, so as to fit the slit made in the stock. Care must be taken that the side of the wedge which is to be placed outward be thicker than the other, and in placing the scion into the slit it must be so adjusted that the rind of the scion join that of the stock; the whole should then be clayed, or covered with grafting wax, to keep out the air.” The value of considering this practice for my purposes lies in the fact that this method of artificial selection replicates the production of the fruit of a kind of acquired characteristic. Robert Manning, The New England Fruit Book Being A Descriptive Catalogue of the most Valuable Varieties of the Pear, Apple, Peach, Plum, and Cherry, for New England Culture, 2nd ed. (Salem: W. & S. B. Ives, 1844), 14-15.
such as half-pear and half-apple, but rather exploits the procreative power of fruit trees to sustain more than one kind of pear, apple, peach, or plum. Beatrice Rappaccini, however, is such a hybrid. Neither complete girl nor flower, Beatrice ranks among the victims of Hawthorne’s mad scientists, whose monomania for discovering original knowledge always dooms their female subjects. In this section, I argue that Hawthorne’s hereditarian rhetoric isolates the dangerous potential implicit in the practice of artificial selection when practiced in the home and with family members. Whereas Sedgwick, Beecher, and Bushnell demonstrate the efficacy of home and parental influence in the training of children, Hawthorne in essence critiques the model families portrayed in their works. “Rappaccini’s Daughter” is an anti-sentimental work that takes Bushnell’s child-rearing techniques—his cultivation of children like plants—to its artificial extreme, and Hawthorne illustrates that this Bushnellian logic erupts into a monstrous, distorted, and illogical family. Dr. Rappaccini provides Beatrice with a nominal mate in the figure of Giovanni, but any marriage between the two would yield even more poisonous offspring. Normal children would not be possible, so the narrative defuses this potential by isolating the young couple in a toxic garden. Hawthorne exposes how the beneficent manipulation of children’s behavior can easily shift to the prevention of physical and mental outcasts from reproducing. As a result, Hawthorne shows how the familial utopia that Sedgwick, Beecher, and Bushnell see themselves as creating is naïve. This short story opposes the eugenicist world of Fowler and Pendleton, which, in discounting individual difference for the sake of a scientific society, replicates the experimental madness of Dr. Rappaccini.

Hawthorne foregrounds his fascination with heraldry, a symbolic and literal form of bloodlines, at the beginning of the tale as Giovanni Guascanti, who has come to study
at the University of Padua, discerns “the armorial bearing of a family long since extinct” above the entrance of the “old edifice which looked not unworthy to have been the palace of a Paduan noble,” and the place where he has taken his lodgings. The brief references to coats-of-arms and ancestral nobility scattered among the pages of Hawthorne’s American Notebooks, as well as his own family’s claim of a coat-or-arms, attest to a fascination with heraldic bloodlines that transcends an idle curiosity about his past, as The Scarlet Letter most notably illustrates. In this tale, Hawthorne materializes the trope of ancestry into a literal examination of theories of inheritance in dialogue with antebellum popularizers of these beliefs. The image of a kind of horticultural nurturing of Beatrice undermines the careful culturing of children in homes that have been transformed into greenhouses for humans. The plants and flowers that reflect “tokens of assiduous care” (189) are overshadowed by one particular shrub that serves as the focal point of the garden. This “one shrub” is “set in a marble vase in the midst of the pool,” and it “bore a profusion of purple blossoms, each of which had the luster and richness of a gem.” It is described in familial terms: sometimes a substitute for Beatrice in the eyes of her father, at other moments as her sister, daughter, or even mother. This thwarted family configuration is rounded out by the “scientific gardener,” Dr. Rappaccini, whose dessicated quest for knowledge contrasts with the garden’s plants “that seemed to require


12 According to Brenda Wineapple, “Nathaniel Hathorne, as the name was then spelled, belonged to one of Salem’s first families, which meant that he was a sixth-generation Hathorne who prayed for redemption at the Congregationalist First Church, where his Puritan great-great-grandfather, had occupied the first pew. This was important. Said the Reverend Dr. Bentley, Salem’s connoisseur of kinship, ‘No family had more pride of descent’ than the Hathornes. Accordingly, they claimed to bear the coat of arms described in the story ‘The White Old Maid’: ‘Azure, a lion’s head erased, between three flower de luces.’” Hawthorne: A Life (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), 14.
a plentiful supply of moisture for the nourishment of gigantic leaves.” Hawthorne describes him as “a tall, emaciated, sallow, and sickly-looking man, dressed in a scholar’s garb of black,” with “a face singularly marked with intellect and cultivation, but which could never, even in his more youthful days, have expressed much warmth of heart.” Despite Dr. Rappaccini’s unhealthiness, he is one of the few representative human beings in the story, since the luxuriance of the garden, the poisonous beauty of Beatrice, and the eventual absorption of the good-looking Giovanni into the botanically toxic atmosphere of the garden bespeak their own sweet sickliness. Dr. Rappaccini’s clinical caution in avoiding the “the magnificent plant” with its “purple gems” reinforces the bizarre family dynamic among himself, his daughter, and this plant: “...he placed a kind of mask over his mouth and nostrils, as if all this beauty did but conceal a deadlier malice; but, finding his task still too dangerous, he drew back, removed the mask, and called loudly, but in the infirm voice of a person affected with inward disease,—‘Beatrice! Beatrice!’” (190). Though described as possessing “inward disease,” Dr. Rappaccini’s illness is spiritual rather than physical, but the healthiness or heartiness implicit in cultivation, grafting, and artificial selection that is here taken to an extreme implies a eugenicist logic that Hawthorne resists—namely, that the eugenicist is precisely “the artist of the beautiful” that sculpts human souls via their flesh. Beatrice is also a stand-in for the hazards of artistic creation, as the struggles of so many of Hawthorne’s artist figures and the author himself illustrate. The dazzling beauty of plants or prose often conceals the somewhat sinister attempt to remake, reframe, or rewrite the natural, for Hawthorne, in his own writings, betrays uneasiness with his own ability to impart life to characters such as scientists and artists who, like sentimentalists, assume the assuaging effects of cultural
production will remake homes and gardens. As his letters demonstrate, Hawthorne possesses a sense in the 1840s that he is merely a replicator of traditional children’s stories or of the standard tropes of European romances. American literature is as barren or sterile as Beatrice and Giovanni are; or, if it is merely hack writing to make money in the literary marketplace, produces endless copies of popular and stale sentimental writing that not only competes with his own tales and romances, but also marks Hawthorne as unmanly while it impoverishes him.

Beatrice exhibits the overripeness of a fruit or flower that is on the verge of death, and this paradox of bountiful life that incorporates death develops into the homeopathic principle of mimicking disease in order to cure it. While homeopathy figures as a comparatively innocuous method of treating illness, Hawthorne’s distant allusion to it signals a physically invasive practice that, in the wrong hands, exacerbates sickness rather than eliminating it. Beatrice appears “redundant with life, health, and energy”; she possesses an excessive aliveness that precedes its own demise, and she strikes Giovanni as “another flower, the human sister of those vegetable ones…but still to be touched only with a glove, nor to be approached without a mask.” Her ability to tend to the poisonous plants that her father must avoid demonstrates that any child-rearing techniques employed with her rendered her immune to floral toxicity, and she is a weird hybrid of her sister/mother plant and her human father. The offspring that Dr. Rappaccini has produced blends his own poisonous intellect with dangerous beauty, but this union bars

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13 In a letter to his wife, Sophia, dated October 4, 1840, Hawthorne writes, “Here sits thy husband in his old accustomed chamber… Here I have written many tales—many that have been burned to ashes—many that doubtless deserved the same fate. This deserves to be called a haunted chamber; for thousands upon thousands of visions have appeared to me in it; and some few of them have become visible to the world. …here I sat a long, long time, waiting patiently for the world to know me, and sometimes wondering why it did not know me sooner, or whether it would ever know me at all—at least, till I were in my grave.” The Letters, 1813-1843, ed. Thomas Woodson, et al. (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1984), 494.
him from fully interacting with the fruits he has created. The gorgeous centerpiece of the garden “must be consigned to your sole charge,” he tells Beatrice; and she readily and happily obeys. “Yes, my sister, my splendor,” she says to the plant, “it shall be Beatrice’s task to nurse and serve thee; and thou shalt reward her with thy kisses and perfumed breath, which to her is the breath of life.” Beatrice is both sister and offspring of this plant, since the tale precludes the possibility of her having had a human mother. Both the plant and Beatrice thus figure as the incestuous, hybridized fruit borne and cultivated by Dr. Rappaccini.

The contradictory nature of a garden that can support so much life but that actually enervates human vitality lies within the complex properties of poisonous plants and in Dr. Rappaccini’s extreme homeopathic theory “that all medicinal virtues are comprised within those substances which we term vegetable poisons” (192). Professor Baglioni further explains to Giovanni how Dr. Rappaccini “cultivates” these poisons “with his own hands, and is said even to have produced new varieties of poison, more horribly deleterious than Nature.” Dr. Rappaccini’s garden, while cultivated with great care, is stocked with plants that are the obverse of what a gentlemanly garden or orchard normally contains, and this paradox permits Beatrice to be both incestuous daughter and

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14 In “Hawthorne’s Venomous Beatrice,” Margaret Hallissy has thoroughly documented Hawthorne’s awareness of poisonous plants as well as the ability to be sustained by poison. She explains how “eating enough poison…could be beneficial” according to Antonio Guaineri (ca. 1440) in his De Venenis, who “says that he has seen an old surgeon who preserved his youthful appearance because he ate the flesh of venomous serpents.” Hallissy also mentions how Hawthorne, through his reading of Sir Thomas Browne, would have been familiar with “the rule of homeopathic medicine, ‘that one contrary hath another, and poison is not without a poison unto itself.’” Studies in Short Fiction 19.3 (Summer 1982): 231, 234. In his American Notebooks sometime between 1842 and 1844, Hawthorne also describes how “Madame Calderon de la B (in Life in Mexico) speaks of persons who have been inoculated with the venom of rattlesnakes, by pricking them in various places with the tooth. These persons are thus secured forever after against the bite of any venomous reptile. They have the power of calling snakes, and feel great pleasure in playing with and handling them. Their own bite becomes poisonous to people not inoculated in the same manner. Thus a part of the serpent’s nature appears to be transfused into them.” American Notebooks, 238.
hybridized flower. As a poisonous plant herself, Beatrice sustains her own life by breathing in the scent of the purple flowers, and her relationship with this plant takes the form of “an intimate embrace” (193): “Give me thy breath, my sister” she says, “for I am faint with common air” (193-194). Rather than purifying the air, the plants in this garden taint it by their scent and by drops of moisture that fall from them. Giovanni begins to feel the influence of this beautiful poison in “his system” (195), and Hawthorne ignites this fatal aura that is neither “love” nor “horror,” but rather “a wild offspring of both love and horror that had each parent in it, and burned like one and shivered like the other.”

Giovanni experiences the extremes of both love and death in the toxic overripeness of Beatrice and the plant of purple flowers, yet Dr. Rappaccini is also orchestrating a kind of grotesque marriage between Beatrice and Giovanni, with himself and the shrub as Giovanni’s in-laws. Dr. Rappaccini’s own botanical and horticultural practices create a bizarre family romance that produces offspring in ways that are neither sexual nor procreative.

Giovanni’s entrance into the garden that provides him with a first-hand experience of the constitution of the various plants attests to the artificiality of Dr. Rappaccini’s method of cross-breeding and cultivation. The various shrubs exude an unnaturalness that have resulted from Dr. Rappaccini’s own sort of grafting techniques, so pure products of nature are hybridized with highly suspect fruits of his cultivation. The baffling “appearance of artificialness” that Giovanni recognizes betrays a “commixture” and “adultery of various vegetable species” that are “no longer of God’s making, but the monstrous offspring of man’s depraved fancy”; and the only ones that Giovanni is able to identify are “those of a kind that he well knew to be poisonous” (198).
As Giovanni’s interaction increases with Beatrice and he distances himself from the outside world, Professor Baglioni pays him a visit and identifies the essence of Beatrice with an old tale about Alexander the Great and the Beatrice-like woman sent to him as a gift. Baglioni explains how “this lovely woman…had been nourished with poisons from her birth upward, until her whole nature was so imbued with them that she herself had become the deadliest poison in existence” (202). Any physical intimacy with her was literally the kiss of death, and Baglioni recognizes a comparison between this tale and the “singular fragrance” now surrounding him as he sits in Giovanni’s room, which he characterizes as “faint, but delicious” but “by no means agreeable. Were I to breathe it long,” he concludes, “methinks it would make me ill” (202; 203). This disagreeable odor that pervades the room is emitted by Giovanni himself, whose youth, beauty, and vigor have rendered him a male Beatrice even though he has not been raised solely among the poisonous influence of the garden. Hawthorne shows how Giovanni is a product of a curious home influence that is able to enact the acquisition of a domestic toxicity. The little family that Beatrice and Giovanni constitute would naturally pass these traits along to their children (were it possible to have children), and the couple emblematize the fruit of a household that employs the principles of domestic science for the most bizarre and unnatural purposes.

Hawthorne renders the conjoining of man and woman as biologically impossible and morally obscene with the potential for incest here as a technical possibility and cultural taboo. This final family portrait is completed by the appearance of Dr. Rappaccini pleased with his work and beaming as if “imploring a blessing upon his children” (208). But the twisted family dynamic that he has enacted, with himself as
father/husband to Beatrice, the gorgeous shrub as mother/sister to her, and Giovanni as her brother/lover, is the unviable product of a monstrous artificial selection. Beatrice demands why he sacrificed her well-being for the sake of an experiment, yet he dismisses her accusation about her “miserable doom” by championing the power of crafting human cultural artifacts. “Dost thou deem it misery,” he asks her, “to be endowed with marvellous gifts against which no power nor strength could avail an enemy—misery, to be able to quell the mightiest with a breath—misery, to be as terrible as thou art beautiful? Wouldst thou, then, have preferred the condition of a weak woman, exposed to all evil and capable of none?” (208-209). Dr. Rappaccini’s pseudo-feminist rhetoric fails to recuperate Beatrice as either naturally born child or loving product of home influence. Because of the Hawthornean horror of her situation, she willingly drinks the antidote given her by Giovanni and dies at his feet. Hawthorne concludes her fate with a sense of her poisonous life obliterated by a putative cure. “So radically had her earthly part been wrought upon by Rappaccini’s skill” that Beatrice, “as the poor victim of man’s ingenuity and of thwarted nature, and of the fatality that attends all such efforts of perverted wisdom, perished there, at the feet of her father and Giovanni” (209). Dr. Rappaccini’s unnatural selection obliterates the corrupt family romance conjured by this unhealthful practice.

Section II: Dancing on the Armorial Grave in The Scarlet Letter

The impasse that Hawthorne’s critique of the sentimental family reaches in “Rappaccini’s Daughter”—that cultivating children like plants in a garden is a simplistic and naïve approach to a complex problem—is circumvented in The Scarlet Letter. By assigning Pearl double paternal inheritances, Hawthorne rearticulates and reformulates
the problem of “Rappaccini’s Daughter” by ensuring that Pearl ultimately possesses both legal and paternal protection via her surrogate father, Roger Chillingworth, since Arthur Dimmesdale, her biological father, repeatedly refuses to claim Pearl as his own daughter. The Scarlet Letter pretends to be a detective story that solves the puzzle of Pearl’s paternity, but readers are never in doubt as to who her father really is. In this section, I argue that this pseudo-empirical approach of discerning the identity of a parent, whether actual or symbolic, is a cultural construct that is bureaucratically initiated, administered and perpetuated. Chillingworth neither sires nor raises Pearl, yet he claims her as his heir with the vast fortune he leaves her. The “Custom-House” preface thus asserts an antebellum bureaucratic element that determines the legality of American goods rather than a coy and clever account as to the origin of the scarlet letter. Whereas readers come to accept Dimmesdale as Pearl’s natural father, Chillingworth figures as the given cultural father who imposes himself by the letter of the law in his legacy to Pearl. This legalistic intervention obviates the sentimental rearing of Pearl, since Chillingworth had no hand in her education. It also affirms that which is stipulated in writing and contracts: precisely, the kinds of documents that Hawthorne, first as Custom House surveyor and later as American consul in England, stamped, signed, and disseminated.

During a key scene in the romance, as Hester and Pearl traverse the graveyard next to the lodgings of Chillingworth and Dimmesdale, Pearl exhibits her characteristic “perverse merriment”: “She now skipped irreverently from one grave to another; until, coming to the broad, flat, armorial tomb-stone of a departed worthy,—perhaps of Isaac Johnson himself,—she began to dance upon it.”15 The heraldic tombstone upon which

Pearl dances not only prefigures her later status as Anglo-American heiress, but also showcases her naturally wild spirit that is later tamed and cultivated by the acknowledgement of her natural father and the legacy bestowed upon her by her surrogate father. In other words, the wild and chaotic Pearl occupies a physical space that symbolizes her subsequent cultural and social status, yet her irreverent dance upon it also defaces and erodes that symbol, rendering it unfamiliar or indiscernible just as the other coats-of-arms featured in the romance. In the character of Pearl, Hawthorne recuperates the monstrous offspring motif in “Rappaccini’s Daughter” by taming the wild daughter via a legal intervention. In Pearl’s triumphant inheritance, Hawthorne more effectively resists the scientific madness of a Dr. Rappaccini-like artificial selection since Pearl has not had the benefit of any domestic training, yet grows up to be a conscientious wife and daughter.

Hawthorne foregrounds antebellum hereditarian belief in his description of first-generation Puritans, since adaptation to physical circumstances determines their heartiness and the delicacy of their offspring. The “fair descendants” of “those wives and maidens of old English birth and breeding” who originally possessed “a coarser fiber” both “morally, as well as materially,” have inherited traits that are adaptations to New England geography and Puritan theocracy. After “six or seven generations” of these women “every successive mother has transmitted to her child a fainter bloom, a more delicate and briefer beauty, and a slighter physical frame, if not a character of less force and solidity, than her own” (38). The traditional reading of these beefy matrons identifies them as narrow-minded Puritan fanatics, but Hawthorne takes a more scientific and even clinical view of these women as fully the products of their heritage and their
surroundings. In other words, a traditionally persecuted people will persecute others. Furthermore, these women probably have not had the benefits that Pearl will enjoy or even that Hester has experienced. Despite her sin or crime, Hester, while standing in view of the public, has known a “paternal home” that was “a decayed house of gray stone, with a poverty-stricken aspect, but retaining a half-obliterated shield of arms over the portal, in token of antique gentility” (43). Hester has known both a paternal home and a father in contrast to the solely maternal home that Pearl will experience, but the indistinctness of all of Hawthorne’s heraldic symbols dismisses traditional aristocratic bloodlines and creates a space for hereditarian thought that is scientifically, socially, and legally inflected.

The theories of heredity that Fowler espouses also derive from his popular guides to phrenology, and this belief that the inside can be read on the outside by tracing one’s physiognomy manifests itself in the figures of Chillingworth and Dimmesdale.16 While Dimmesdale’s self-torture is purportedly indexed by a physical scarlet A over his heart (the genre of the romance that Hawthorne privileges crafts this event as one of many “there but not there” fictional numina), Chillingworth’s physiognomy is immediately highlighted by Hawthorne in exactly the same way that Dr. Rappaccini’s sallow and sickly body betrayed his monomaniacal scientific interests. Hester immediately recognizes her husband by “the remarkable intelligence in his features, as of a person who had so cultivated his mental part that it could not fail to mould the physical to itself,

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16 An additional account of the connection between phrenology and heredity is supplied by George Combe who, in his widely popular Constitution of Man, explains how “phrenology reveals the principle on which dispositions and talents are thus hereditary. Mental qualities are determined by the size, form, and constitution of the brain. The brain is a portion of our organized system, and, as such, is subject to the organic laws, by one of which…its form, size, and qualities are transmitted by hereditary descent.” Combe, The Constitution of Man Considered in Relation to External Objects (New York: Fowler & Wells Co., Publishers, 1835), 169.
and become manifest by unmistakable tokens” (44). The thwarted familial dynamic in the romance is initiated by the call to Hester to identify Pearl’s biological father, and the intuitive sense that Dimmesdale is Pearl’s father is indicated by “the same influence” of Dimmesdale’s “sweet, rich, deep, and broken” voice that the baby experiences as “it directed its hitherto vacant gaze towards Mr. Dimmesdale, and held up its little arms, with a half pleased, half plaintive murmur” (49). The significance of this scene really involves the assignment of a father to Pearl merely by Hester’s naming him, and the fact that Chillingworth exhorts Hester to “speak; and give your child a father” (50) illustrates how none of the villagers is inclined to read the physiognomy of Pearl to match it to one of his neighbors. Hester constructs a different paternal framework by refusing to name the natural father and assigning Pearl “a heavenly Father” instead, since “she shall never know an earthly one.” Hester’s refusal to name a father anticipates the legal intervention that later assimilates Pearl, yet the only option available to her that doesn’t betray Dimmesdale is a theological paternity. Hawthorne also suggests the contemporaneous belief in the influence of the mother’s state of mind while weaning the baby. “There was much need of professional assistance,” Hawthorne explains as Hester returns to prison, “not merely for Hester herself, but still more urgently for the child; who, drawing its sustenance from the maternal bosom, seemed to have drank in with it all the turmoil, the anguish and despair, which pervaded the mother’s system” (50-51). Though Chillingworth tells Hester “the child is yours,—she is none of mine,—neither will she recognize my voice or aspect as a father’s” (51), and Pearl has intuited Dimmesdale as her father, the doctor inserts himself into the family as a kind of husband of hatred in his subsequent relationship with Dimmesdale. Hawthorne later speculates “whether hatred
and love be not the same thing at bottom” (164), since “each renders one individual
dependent for the food of his affections and spiritual life upon another.” This family is
all that Chillingworth has got. As he says to Hester, “I find here a woman, a man, a child,
amongst whom and myself there exist the closest ligaments” (54). The imposition of
himself within this configuration underscores the social and the legal dimensions to
antebellum hereditarianism that complete the biological foundation always already
naturalized in early-nineteenth century American culture.

Pearl has consistently been read as the product of the Puritan sin of adultery and
transgression; yet this reading doesn’t pierce much beneath the surface of her true
complexity. First, as Hester’s child, she will “connect her parent forever with the race
and descent of mortals” so that Hester will become “finally a blessed soul in heaven”
(61). Although this observation is obvious to the most casual reader of the romance, it
permits us to view Pearl, Hester, Dimmesdale and Chillingworth as products of descent
and genealogy. Second, as an uncontrollable child, Pearl isn’t easily catechized, trained,
or influenced by the child-rearing techniques familiar to Hawthorne and his
contemporaries, as his own comment about his daughter, Una, implies. “There is
something that almost frightens me about the child,” Hawthorne writes, “I know not
whether elfish or angelic, but, at all events, supernatural. …I now and then catch an
aspect of her, in which I cannot believe her to be my own human child, but a spirit
strangely mingled with good and evil, haunting the house where I dwell.”17 Though
Hester is afraid that she will “detect some dark and wild peculiarity” as a result of her
own sin and state of mind while breastfeeding her daughter (indeed, the whole
community interprets Pearl as a diabolically-bred sign), Pearl exhibits “no physical

17 American Notebooks, 430-431.
defect” in her “perfect shape,” “vigor,” “natural dexterity,” “native grace,” and “faultless beauty.” Hester’s transgression does appear in the child in the form of her clothing, but this fact stems from a cultural imposition on Hester’s part rather than from Pearl’s natural essence, for Hester “had bought the richest tissues that could be procured, and allowed her imaginative faculty its full play in the arrangement and decoration of the dresses which the child wore, before the public eye” (62). Third, Hawthorne crafts Pearl as both natural and cultural product, since “in this one child there were many children, comprehending the full scope between the wild-flower prettiness of a peasant-baby, and the pomp, in little, of an infant princess.” Finally, Hester recognizes Pearl as bearing the stamp of heritability, and she attributes it to “what she herself had been, during that momentous period while Pearl was imbibing her soul from the spiritual world, and her bodily frame from its material of earth.” Hawthorne thus demonstrates that sentimental methods of child-rearing don’t fully account for the complexity of children, since Pearl resists the platitudes of home influence meant to tame the natural instincts of children.

If we recall the discussion of Bushnellian home influence in Chapter 1, then we really see how much of a failure Pearl is in terms of her moral education and Hester’s parental training. Bad, undisciplined children are the fault of parents,¹⁸ and this additional belief only exacerbates Hester’s already difficult position. Hester “early

¹⁸ Karen Sánchez-Eppler succinctly states how “America’s Calvinist traditions rooted child-rearing in the concept of ‘infantile depravity’—the belief that all children were born steeped in original sin. Such depraved children needed to be wrenched from Satan, their will broken, before they could learn to choose right. …But if this grim and punitive attitude toward childhood persisted in evangelical families, the tendency throughout the century—following Locke’s notion of childhood as a blank slate and Rousseau’s portrait of Emile as naturally innocent and receptive—was toward ever more Romantic and idealized images of childhood…. The goal of nurturing the good in children, rather than subduing the bad, is a harbinger not only of changing attitudes toward children, but also of gradual shifts in the whole structure of the middle-class family.” It should be obvious that I read Hester as a contemporary of Hawthorne’s generation. Eppler, “Hawthorne and the Writing of Childhood” in The Cambridge Companion to Nathaniel Hawthorne, ed. Richard H. Millington (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 145.
sought to impose a tender, but strict control…but the task was beyond her skill. After
testing both smiles and frowns, and proving that neither mode of treatment possessed any
calculable influence, Hester was ultimately compelled to stand aside…. Physical
compulsion or restraint was effectual, of course, while it lasted” (63). Hester does indeed
employ the disciplinary middle way that Catharine Beecher advocates, but this cultural
technique hardly assuages Pearl’s wildness because of “enmity and passion” that “Pearl
inherited, by inalienable right, out of Hester’s heart” (64). It takes years for “those
unquiet elements” to be “soothed away by the softening influences of maternity” (65), but
this influence isn’t enough early on to satisfy Puritan elders who emphasize the
connection between Pearl’s moral education and its role in molding her character. Like
good antebellum mothers, the elders favor cultural training to offset the child’s natural
chaotic impulses. “If the child,” Hawthorne explains, “were really capable of moral and
religious growth, and possessed the elements of ultimate salvation, then, surely, it would
enjoy all the fairer prospect of these advantages, by being transferred to wiser and better
guardianship than Hester Prynne’s” (68). As “the daughter of a pious home” herself (75),
Hester has taken pains to catechize and educate Pearl, and the child’s eventual pliability
seems the result of this maternal influence. Pearl “could have borne a fair examination in
the New England Primer, or the first column of the Westminster Catechisms.” Although
these texts weren’t available until later in the seventeenth century, Hawthorne’s point is
that Pearl is naturally intelligent but with a native intellect that exhibits itself in distorted
form, and the child’s irregularity leads to the Puritan elders’ decision to remove her from
Hester’s care and place her elsewhere. Dimmesdale’s defense of Hester’s right to keep
her child is striking because of the irony of his own relationship to this little family, yet
he also highlights Hester’s unique ability to nurture Pearl because their natures are so similar. Dimmesdale’s argument that “God gave her the child, and gave her, too, an instinctive knowledge of its nature and requirements…which no other mortal being can possess” makes sound, logical sense (75), and it impresses Governor Bellingham and Reverend Wilson, since, he continues, Hester’s sin has imparted her with the necessary maternal influence: “…it is good for this poor, sinful woman that she hath an infant immortality, a being capable of eternal joy or sorrow, confided to her care,—to be trained up by her to righteousness…if she bring the child to heaven, the child will also bring its parent thither!” This scene also foregrounds an emerging sense in the nineteenth century of the efficacy of state or legal apparatuses removing children from parents and placing them in a kind of foster care (along the same lines as Beecher’s orphanage in Albany, New York) for the benefit of all involved. Hawthorne highlights this developing awareness of the need for socially institutionalized child care in Reverend Wilson’s conclusion: “Thereby, every good Christian man hath a title to show a father’s kindness towards the poor, deserted babe” (78).

Pearl’s strange nature identifies her as a product of both Hester and sin because no known or identifiable father exists, and the Puritan attempt to discern Pearl’s origins based upon her behavior involves a phrenological or physiognomic interpretation that Chillingworth makes explicit. The Puritan elders and villagers thus suspect that the child can only be the product of a demonic paternal influence, as indicated by the legend of the Black Man who would have fornicated with Hester to produce Pearl. As a man of

19 The tacit assumption that witches engaged in sexual relations with the Devil was rarely discussed in the rhetoric of witchcraft. Carol F. Karlsen notes how “women who confessed to witchcraft during the early years of witchcraft prosecutions tended to make the erotic content of witches’ seduction more obvious than their accusers did. Admitting carnal knowledge of both men and devils, these women seldom cloaked their
science, Chillingworth dismisses these superstitions and suggests to Mr. Wilson “a philosopher’s research…to analyze that child’s nature, and, from its make and mould, to give a shrewd guess at the father.” Reverend Wilson condemns this as “profane philosophy” and recommends rather that they “fast and pray upon it” until “Providence reveal it of its own accord,” but this rejection distinguishes Chillingworth since Hawthorne ventriloquizes antebellum hereditarianism through him. He knows that Dimmesdale is Pearl’s father, and he speculates that “this man…hath inherited a strong animal nature from his father or his mother” (86-87). Animal nature opposes parental influence; and Dimmedale may have imparted his “strong animal nature” to Pearl, which may partially account for her own unruliness. Chillingworth embodies the materialist basis of heredity and perpetuates it with the strange weeds that he has gathered in the graveyard. “I found them growing on a grave,” he explains to Dimmesdale, “which bore no tomb-stone, nor other memorial of the dead man, save these ugly weeds…. They grew out of his heart, and typify, it may be, some hideous secret that was buried with him, and which he had done better to confess during his lifetime” (87). The physical marks of internal anguish, sin, or evil continue to deform Chillingworth and also account for the literal scarlet letter over Dimmesdale’s heart.

Fowler’s assertions that magnetism and electricity imbues the body’s vitalism illuminate the ambivalent and complex attachment Pearl has to her mother; and both spiritual, physical, and even psychic forces begin to bind her to Hester. More naturally

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descriptions in vague language. …After the 1660s, the sexual content of confessions became more muted. During the Salem outbreak, many women confessed that Satan had them ‘soul and body,’ but only occasionally during the latter part of the century did accused women offer specific sexual information. When fifty-three-year old Rebecca Eames of Andover admitted in 1692 that she had given herself soul and body to the Devil, she made it clear that she considered herself an adulterer—but she was a rare exception.” The Devil in the Shape of a Woman: Witchcraft in Colonial New England (New York: Norton, 1987), 140-141.
wise than scientifically trained, Pearl possesses a secret knowledge that outdistances even Chillingworth, for she recognizes him during her walk through the graveyard as “yonder old Black Man” who “hath got hold of the minister already.” “Come away, mother,” she continues, “or he will catch you! But he cannot catch little Pearl!” (90). Pearl’s maturity parallels this parental-like warning to her mother that will evolve into her later care for her. Pearl’s claiming of her mother extends itself even to Dimmesdale, for it is during his vigil that she demands the minister own up to being her father. Hawthorne configurations this family as a kind of galvanistic trio, since “the three formed an electric chain” (101). As Hester holds Pearl by the hand and joins Dimmesdale on the scaffold, he “felt for the child’s other hand, and took it. The moment that he did so, there came what seemed a tumultuous rush of new life, other life than his own, pouring like a torrent into his heart, and hurrying through all his veins, as if the mother and the child were communicating their vital warmth to his half-torpid system.” The surge of energy that Dimmesdale experiences confirms the integrity of this family unit, but his weakness in not acknowledging his paternal role to the public is highlighted by Pearl, who asks him “Wilt thou stand here with mother and me, to-morrow noontide?” His refusal to do so undermines Pearl’s claiming of both mother and father, or Beecher’s recommendation that fathers as well as mothers play a crucial role in the upbringing of children. Pearl’s perception of the minister’s ignorance of this fact outrages her, and she accuses Dimmesdale of sheer cowardice and parental irresponsibility. “Thou wast not bold!—thou wast not true!” she says, “Thou wouldst not promise to take my hand, and mother’s hand, to-morrow noontide!” (103). Pearl’s anger evinces a growing awareness of her situation, but she is also simply growing up. Her gradual maturity is also exhibited by the
cultivation of natural talent and ability, for “she inherited her mother’s gift for devising drapery and costume” (115). This minor example is buttressed by Hester’s perception that the raw material Pearl possesses can be manipulated, crafted, even adorned like the scarlet letter itself, for “in the little chaos of Pearl’s character, there might be seen emerging...the steadfast principles of an unflinching courage,—an uncontrollable will,—a sturdy pride, which might be disciplined into self-respect” (116). Antebellum home influence assuages the internal depravity of Puritan original sin, yet Pearl isn’t the product of either a straightforward moral or sentimental education: “With all these sterling attributes, thought Hester, the evil which she inherited must be great indeed, if a noble woman do not grow out of this elfish child” (117).

The gradual consolidation of this family unit that really begins in the forest scene with Hester, Dimmesdale, and Pearl also stages a hereditarian reading of Pearl that attempts to account for her origins and that produces conflicting interpretations. Neither the Puritan elders nor the villagers try to discern the father in Pearl’s physiognomy, but that doesn’t mean that this commonsensical method isn’t available to Hester’s contemporaries. In her attempt to bring together Pearl and Dimmesdale, Hester remarks to the minister, “I know whose brow she has!” (132). “Methought,” Dimmesdale responds, “that my own features were partly repeated in her face, and so strikingly that the world might see them!” Hester also describes this natural and obvious attempt to read family members into the face of a child as an attempt “to trace whose child she is.” Tracing the origins of the child also reinforces the Puritan belief that Pearl is, as Mistress Hibbins explains during the New England holiday scene, “of the lineage of the Prince of the Air,” and she asks Pearl if she will “ride with me, some fine night, to see thy father”
Somewhat used to this rhetoric, Pearl also identifies herself as the child of the Black Man. As she explains to the master of the ship in which Hester and Dimmesdale are planning to escape, and who refers to Pearl as a “witch-baby” (156), how “Mistress Hibbins says my father is the Prince of the Air! …if thou callest me that ill name, I shall tell him of thee; and he will chase thy ship with a tempest!” In effect, then, according to the contours of the romance, Pearl is the product of four fathers and thus a product of a bundle of inheritances via the paternities of Dimmesdale (biological or natural), Chillingworth (surrogate or bureaucratic), the Black Man (cultural or religious), and even Hawthorne himself (authorial).

Hawthorne’s adjudication among these various modes keyed to different accounts of heredity shows how parenting involves complexities that partake of the natural, the legal, the cultural, and the literary. Once Dimmesdale publicly acknowledges Pearl as his daughter, she becomes the benefactress of the nineteenth-century’s emphasis on home influence but with a bureaucratic twist. As Hester and Pearl join Dimmesdale on the scaffold in broad daylight, Pearl kisses the minister and “a spell was broken. The great scene of grief, in which the wild infant bore a part, had developed all her sympathies; and as her tears fell upon her father’s cheek, they were the pledge that she would grow up amid human joy and sorrow, nor forever do battle with the world, but be a woman in it” (162). No longer considered a demonic offspring, and given a biological father, Pearl also enters the realm of defunct nobility with the death of Chillingworth, whose “considerable amount of property” that he leaves her renders her “the richest heiress of her day in the New World” (164). Though Chillingworth grants Pearl entry into the world of ancestral culture, the letters that arrive “with armorial seals upon them” are of
“bearings unknown to English heraldry” (165). These indiscernible signs that echo Pearl’s dance upon the armorial grave suggest Hawthorne’s dismissal of the artificial selection of nobility marrying only their own kind. A newer, fresher, and vibrant intermingling is needed to reinvigorate the depleted soil of Puritan communities such as Hester’s Boston or Hawthorne’s own Salem. “Human nature will not flourish,” he writes in “The Custom-House” preface, “any more than a potato, if it be planted and replanted, for too long a series of generations, in the same worn-out soil” (13). Still, Pearl is apparently “married, and happy, and mindful of her mother,” and “she would most joyfully have entertained that sad and lone mother at her fireside” (165). Hawthorne’s rejection of these cryptic armorial bearings is reinforced by the novel’s conclusion that resurrects this view of traditional heraldry. “All around” the tombstone of both Hester and Dimmesdale “there were monuments carved with armorial bearings; and on this simple slab of slate—as the curious investigator may still discern, and perplex himself with the purport—there appeared the semblance of an engraved escutcheon. It bore a device, a herald’s wording of which might serve for a motto and brief description of our now concluded legend...” (166). Hawthorne describes this sign as “ON A FIELD, SABLE, THE LETTER A, GULES.” Douglas Greenwood perceptively notes how many readers, and even some critics, have interpreted this line as a literal inscription on the tombstone, or even as a scarlet A upon a black background. The fact that one needs to know the language of heraldry—the A is merely vertical lines over a background of crisscrossing lines the color of slate—renders it somewhat meaningless to most readers. This mystery, as Hawthorne acknowledges in the line about “the curious investigator,” is really his

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point. The language of heraldry, those envied coats-of-arms, and the Puritan exhaustion of both Boston and Salem are dead. Pearl’s cryptic location attests to a life in a new land that collapses distinctions among blood, culture, and the law, and their use in determining whose child she really is.

Section III: Dispelling the Curse of Blood in The House of the Seven Gables

In The House of the Seven Gables, Hawthorne literalizes the issues he raises concerning blood and kinship in The Scarlet Letter by exploiting a physical domestic structure, a faded pseudo-noble family, and a curious hematological interest that culminates in an obtrusive happy ending. If the problem with Hester, Dimmesdale and Pearl is that the family lacks definition, then The House of the Seven Gables reconfigures this ambiguity with a romance about a family overly conscious of their shadowy, aristocratic past, and quasi-incestuous in its obsession with maintaining a purified bloodline. Hawthorne’s comments about the ending of this story, that “it darkens damnably towards the close, but I shall try hard to pour some setting sunshine over it,” prepare readers for a romance that consciously resists the hereditarian logic of Dr. Rappaccini’s artificial selection, as well as the Puritan refusal of a kind of rotation of human crops. Colonel Pyncheon’s bold but unpropitious start in trying to create a family of American landed gentry decays into descendants who are spinsters, bachelors, and

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21 Susan L. Mizruchi describes the ending of House of the Seven Gables as “peculiar for a work that ridicules the pretensions of its characters, and whose preface criticizes the debilitating effects of inheritance.” The Power of Historical Knowledge: Narrating the Past in Hawthorne, James, and Dreiser (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 84.

heads of families that produce either few or weakly offspring. Critics such as Roy P. Male, who claim the theories of inheritance at Hawthorne’s disposal were merely sidelong glances he cast at some vague, folkloric idea of “it’s all in the blood,” don’t appreciate or perceive that “in the blood” for Hawthorne meant a blend of Lamarckian theories of influence, and a hematological interest in the literalness of drinking blood in both the form and effect of an historical curse, and a physiological understanding of apoplexy and hemorrhaging. In this section, I argue that dispelling the curse of blood thus entails the gradual weeding out of ancestors who provoked and perpetuated this curse, and the removal of a nefarious past that permeates the very timbers of the house and the bloodline of the Pyncheon family. In so doing, Hawthorne rewards Hepzibah, Clifford, and Phoebe Pyncheon, as well as the descendant of Matthew Maule, Holgrave, for a grittiness to escape an unproductive generational curse, and to start anew with the vigor of a generation of Holgrave babies that will benefit from a history that had long enervated and haunted their forefathers. Despite this triumph, the anti-climax of the romance is a kind of _deus ex machina_ that mitigates the hereditarian logic that Hawthorne has patiently unpacked; yet, a brief examination of _Elsie Venner_ by Oliver Wendell Holmes will show how Holmes recuperates the seeming failure of nineteenth-century theories of inheritance as he proposes a kind of medicalized Lamarckism that converts the folkloric into the scientific.

Hawthorne establishes the hereditarian rhetoric that dominates the romance by framing it with the generational and horticultural, but the absence of children transforms

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23 Christopher Castiglia views the bachelors and spinsters in the romance as exhibiting a kind of veiled homosexuality. See “The Marvelous Queer Interiors of The House of the Seven Gables” in Millington, ed. _Cambridge Companion to Nathaniel Hawthorne_, 186-206.

24 Male, _Hawthorne’s Tragic Vision_, 122.
his previous interest in the hazards of artificial selection into the need for this old Salem family to reinvigorate its bloodline by confronting the present. Hawthorne explains how “the act of the passing generation is the germ which may and must produce good or evil fruit,” and that this action combined “with the seed of the merely temporary crop, which mortals term expediency” will “inevitably sow the acorns of a more enduring growth, which may darkly overshadow their posterity.”25 The hematological dimension of heredity in the romance, that a curse of blood somehow perpetuates itself in the bloodline of the Pyncheon family, is initiated by Matthew Maule’s malediction upon Colonel Pyncheon (the most vigorous accuser of Maule as a wizard in order to take his land), “God will give him blood to drink!” (8). Hawthorne ironically distorts the nature of the curse, since the romance ultimately accounts for its visible results in both Colonel Pyncheon and Judge Pyncheon as the effect of witchcraft, physiology, and even exploitation on the part of the Maule family, who may have perceived this hereditary hemorrhaging in the family and merely identified it for dramatic effect. The death of Colonel Pyncheon, described as rendering “an unnatural distortion in the fixedness of Colonel Pyncheon’s stare,” with “blood on his ruff” and “his hoary beard…saturated with it” (15), while a violent and gothic image, is really less significant in terms of the visible embodiment of the curse, and more important in terms of the stench of a decayed gentility inhabiting exhausted soil. Hawthorne portrays this family as believing itself part of another strain of pseudo-nobility in America, and Colonel Pyncheon’s death is interpreted providentially as “his duties all performed,—the highest propensity attained,—his race and future generations fixed on a stable basis, and with a stately roof

to shelter them,” that no “other upward step remained for this good man to take, save the final step from earth to the golden gate of Heaven!” (17). The greater part of his legacy, however, consists of “a vast, and as yet unexplored and unmeasured tract of eastern lands” in Maine that are “more extensive than many a dukedom, or even a reigning prince’s territory, on European soil” (18). The deed to this kingdom, long since lost and obviated by subsequent settlers with squatters’ rights, inspires “an absurd delusion of family importance, which all along characterized the Pyncheons. It caused the poorest member of the race to feel as if he inherited a kind of nobility, and might yet come into the possession of princely wealth to support it” (19).

Although Hawthorne describes the mansion as somewhat akin to an “oozy heart” (27), the curse of blood that courses through the bloodline of the Pyncheon family figures as less of a medical consideration, for it really takes its toll socially and economically upon them. The current generation consists of a few family members, mostly childless and poor, and as the romance’s representative Pyncheon, Hepzibah reopens the cent shop originally undertaken years ago by an ancestor who demonstrated how “he had the blood of a petty huckster in his veins” (29), and was something of a “spurious interloper” since “instead of seeking office from the King or the royal Governor, or urging his hereditary claim to eastern lands” took it upon himself to earn an impoverished independence (28-29). Hepzibah is his descendant as Judge Pyncheon will be shown to be the Colonel’s, yet her decision to become shopkeeper redux signals “the final term of what called itself old gentility” (37). Long since nourished “from childhood with the shadowy food of aristocratic reminiscences,” Hepzibah, as “the born” or “patrician lady,” becomes “the plebeian woman” (37; 38). Hawthorne deprecates those signs of traditional heraldry—
marks of an Old World artificial selection that have no place “in this republican country,” for “with us, rank is the grosser substance of wealth and a splendid establishment, and has no spiritual existence after the death of these, but dies hopelessly along with them” (38). Hepzibah thus represents “the immemorial lady” in both America and Europe who has lost the social cachet of “antique portraits, pedigrees, coats of arms, records, and traditions, and her claim, as joint heiress, to that princely territory to the eastward.” Uncle Venner, as the representative of history and the past with the wisdom of his homely philosophy, reinforces this sentiment about the ludicrousness of clinging to peerage and rank, especially toward the middle of the nineteenth century. He reminds Hepzibah how “those old gentlemen, that grew up before the revolution, used to put on grand airs. In my young days, the great man of the town was commonly called King, and his wife—not Queen, to be sure—but Lady” (63). As Uncle Venner perceptively reasons, anyone who today “feels himself a little above common folks…only stoops so much the lower to them.” Hawthorne confronts New England history and his ancestral past by denouncing the dusty claims of the Pyncheon family, and this sense of an enervated and puny stock that feeds itself on a diet of imaginary rank and Old World memories only renders itself like the wild flowers in the garden behind the mansion, thriving on decay, and similar to the hens and chickens that are incapable of laying a single egg.

Hawthorne engages in this characteristic horticultural rhetoric with the propitious arrival of Phoebe, Hepzibah’s young cousin from the country, who will be constructed as most un-Pyncheon-like. Phoebe necessarily dispels the gloom from the stuffy mansion, for, even though Hepzibah has embraced her own compromised position, she still dreams
that “the member of parliament, now at the head of the English branch of the family…might invite Hepzibah…to dwell with her kindred, at Pyncheon Hall” (64; 65), or that she will finally inherit the territory in Maine where she “would build a palace, and look down from its highest tower on hill, dale, forest, field, and town, as her own share of the ancestral territory” (65). The country-bred and industrious Phoebe has inherited, as her “exclusive patrimony” (71), what Hawthorne appreciated in his wife, Sophia, “the gift of practical arrangement,” “a kind of natural magic, that enables these favored ones to bring out the hidden capabilities of things around them; and particularly to give a look of comfort and habitableness to any place which…may happen to be their home” (71-72).

Phoebe instinctively understands the nature of home influence, and she manipulates the domestic environment both literally and figuratively in order to refresh and vivify the dusty and mildewed mansion. With her light touch, she cleans, dusts, arranges flowers and moves furniture, and this basic form of interior decorating transforms her room from the embodiment of death, decay, and sterility into a “maiden’s bed-chamber” that has “been purified of all former evil and sorrow by her sweet breath and happy thoughts” (72). Phoebe’s minimal efforts have extensive consequences, but the weight of history, curses, ghosts, and non-fecundity has grown only heavier over the centuries, and a bit of housekeeping is hardly enough to defuse the energy that has accumulated over the years. Only too familiar with the physical, mental, and emotional effects that the house exerts on its inhabitants, Hepzibah tells Phoebe how “it is a wretched thought, that you should fling away your young days in a place like this. Those cheeks would not be so rosy, after a month or two” (74). According to Hepzibah, Phoebe’s strength is also her weakness, not only physically but also ancestrally, for the fact that Phoebe determines to “keep
[her]self healthy with exercise in the open air” will mark her, in Hepzibah’s eyes, as not a Pyncheon (75).

Delighted with Phoebe but defensive about her rank, Hepzibah unpacks the signs of her heraldic decay, and Hawthorne anticipates what isn’t really a conflict of old rank with fresh bodies, but rather a gentle encounter between the vanishing past and the vibrant present: “Hepzibah brought out some old silver spoons, with the family crest upon them, and a China tea-set, painted over with grotesque figures of man, bird, and beast, in as grotesque a landscape” (76-77). Thecrudeness of the figures attests to the tea set’s age, and Hepzibah is quick to point out to Phoebe how their ancestress “had these cups, when she was married,” and how “she was a Davenport, of a good family” (77).

Hepzibah also engages in her own hereditarian theory, since she traces Phoebe’s ability to be “a nice little housewife” to the non-Pyncheon side of her family. “These things must have come to you with your mother’s blood,” she continues, “I never knew a Pyncheon that had any turn for them!” Despite Hepzibah’s veiled condemnation, Phoebe’s inheritance of a talent for the domestic will prove an organic advantage, which she employs in manipulating the home environment to influence her own children. Hepzibah’s recognition of Phoebe’s ability to be both housewife and shopkeeper means that Phoebe is neither a Pyncheon nor a lady, but Hawthorne dismisses these complaints by crafting Phoebe as a representative of “new Plebeianism” as opposed to “old Gentility” (81), or the confrontation between Phoebe’s ability to nurture as opposed to Hepzibah’s desire to preserve rank. Phoebe figures “as the example of feminine grace and availability combined, in a state of society, if there were any such, where ladies did not exist. There, it should be woman’s office to move in the midst of practical affairs,
and to gild them all—the very homeliest, were it even the scouring of pots and kettles—with an atmosphere of loveliness and joy” (80).

In the garden behind the mansion, Hawthorne stages the key scene of this new order of culture, cultivation, and nurturing that defaces Hepzibah’s “deeply cherished and ridiculous consciousness of long descent, her shadowy claims to princely territory; and, in the way of accomplishment, her recollections…of having formerly thrummed on a harpsichord, and walked a minuet, and worked on an antique tapestry-stitch on her sampler” (80-81). The union of Phoebe’s Pyncheon ancestry with Holgrave’s Maulean descent renders the family crests on Hepzibah’s spoons empty signifiers. Her existence as an antique memory is reinforced by the garden’s decay and the puniness of its chickens and hens that have reverted to biological type since they haven’t been reinvigorated by conscious and careful artificial selection. The garden already shows signs of this expert cultivation, and Phoebe “wonder[s] whose care and toil it could have been, that had planted these vegetables, and kept the soil so clean and orderly. Not, surely, her Cousin Hepzibah’s, who had no taste nor spirits for the ladylike employment of cultivating flowers,” for Hepzibah “would hardly have come forth, under the speck of open sky, to weed and hoe, among the fraternity of beans and squashes” (87). As longtime residents of the garden, the fowls also have not been invigorated by careful cross-breeding, and they parallel the inhabitants of the mansion. “It was evident that the race had degenerated,” Hawthorne continues, “like many a noble race besides, in consequence of too strict a watchfulness to keep it pure. These feathered people had existed too long, in their distinct variety; a fact of which the present representatives, judging by their lugubrious deportment, seemed to be aware” (89). Exoticism and purity
ultimately renders the species obsolete and sterile, and the hens are compared to and equated with Hepzibah since they also possess a family crest “of lamentably scanty growth…but so oddly and wickedly analogous to Hepzibah’s turban, that Phoebe…was led to fancy a general resemblance betwixt these forlorn bipeds and her respectable relative.” Hawthorne confirms the powers of nurture and cultivation in this Lamarckian garden scene, but he inflects this hereditarian aspect of “like begetting like” with the added factor of species survival with these flowers, fowls, and families. The traditional type of the Pyncheon family that still thrives is embodied by Hepzibah’s fleshy and repugnant cousin, Judge Pyncheon. Phoebe’s disgusted encounter with the Judge typifies Hawthornean hereditarian doctrine that “the weaknesses and defects, the bad passions, the mean tendencies, and the moral diseases which lead to crime, are handed down from one generation to another, by a far surer process of transmission than human law has been able to establish” (119). The logic implicit in this interpretation of Judge Pynchon sounds like a justification for the eugenics of Fowler and Pendleton, but the happy ending of the romance will obviate this course in the deaths of Judge Pyncheon and his son, the dispelling of the curse of blood, and the inheritance of the Judge’s landed estate by Hepzibah and Clifford.

Phoebe’s conflicted relationships with both Hepzibah and Judge Pyncheon are trumped, however, by her union with Clifford. Wrongly accused for his relative’s murder, Clifford gradually emerges as injured and ethereal, and his love for beauty converts Phoebe into a kind of daughter of Rappaccini, but this time the effects are for good and not ill. Her ministering to Clifford is not entirely without consequences to herself, for the burden of history and the family curse still pervade the house. “Phoebe
afforded her patient,” Hawthorne explains, “a supply of purer air. She impregnated it…with the perfume of garden-roses, pinks, and other blossoms of much sweetness.… Yet, it must be said, her petals sometimes drooped a little, in consequence of the heavy atmosphere about her” (143). Clifford’s intensity may drain the energy from Phoebe, since he is constitutionally opposed to the ugly Hepzibah and the gloomy mansion; but a balance is eventually achieved as the romance moves toward blessing rather than cursing the Pyncheons. The garden behind the mansion is again the scene of high cultivation, culture, as well as an androgyny that results from home influence, and Clifford and Phoebe function as its representatives here. Clifford’s “feeling for flowers was very exquisite, and seemed not so much a taste, as an emotion; he was fond of sitting with one in his hand, intently observing it, and looking from its petals into Phoebe’s face, as if the garden-flower were the sister of this household-maiden” (147). Phoebe is sister to the flower, but they exude innocence and beauty, not poison. Men and women also exist on a kind of plane of beauty with each other, and do not involve themselves in quasi-incestuous relationships that thwart the natural order. As Hawthorne explains, “this affection and sympathy for flowers is almost exclusively a woman’s trait. Men, if endowed with it by nature, soon lose, forget, and learn to despise it, in their contact with coarser things than flowers. Clifford, too, had long forgotten it, but found it again, now, as he slowly revived from the chill torpor of his life.” Men are “by nature” opposed to the admiration of flowers once infected by the business of the outside world and the cultural demands of masculinity, so they naturally reject any signs of womanly weakness. In this example, however, Hawthorne recognizes and advocates this love for the beautiful and models the Lamarckian convergence of culture and nature.
This revivifying influence of Hawthornean horticulture and animal husbandry also begin to affect the garden fowls, who still reflect the stubborn gentility of Hepzibah, “their lady-patroness” (151). The puny chicken, for example, “seemed to have aggregated into itself the ages, not only of these living specimens of the breed, but of all its forefathers and fore-mothers, whose united excellencies and oddities were squeezed into its little body.” The cumulative effects of history and the lack of care taken to strengthen the species render their poultry pride as ridiculous as Hepzibah’s refusal to part with her rank, since the chicken’s “hereditary marks” of “the peculiar speckle of its plumage, the funny tuft on its head, and a knob on each of its legs…betokened the oddities of the Pyncheon family” (152). The chicken also functions as “a symbol of the life of the old house.” As a kind of benefactress of the care and attention given to it, one of the hens even lays an egg, though Hepzibah “sacrifice[s] the continuance…of an ancient feathered race…to supply her brother with a dainty that hardly filled the bowl of a teaspoon” (153). While not really a eugenicist act, Hepzibah’s snatching of the egg betrays her distance from Phoebe, Clifford, and Holgrave, who enjoy the sun and the fruits of the garden. She does join them under the arbor, but Hawthorne describes her deportment in the garden as “stately as ever, at heart, and yielding not an inch of her old gentility, but resting upon it so much the more, as justifying a princesslike condescension…” (155). “Lady as she was,” Hepzibah still has not learned the lessons of her family’s history. Hawthorne’s comparison of the Pyncheons with the fowls is most apt, since this implicit belief in culture, rather than a biological stasis, also entails removal, reinvigoration, and a rotation of family crops.
The spokesperson for Hawthorne’s belief in the sterility of familial soil is the wanderer Holgrave who, although he can trace his family roots as far back as the Pyncheons in Salem, has also attempted a wealth of other professions. Talking to Phoebe, with whom he will appropriately be married to obliterate the Maule family curse upon the Pyncheons, Holgrave condemns “the idea” of “plant[ing] a family,” as opposed to a garden, as “at the bottom of most of the wrong and mischief which men do”: “The truth is, that, once in every half-century, at longest, a family should be merged into the great, obscure mass of humanity, and forget all about its ancestors. Human blood, in order to keep its freshness, should run in hidden streams…. In the family existence of these Pyncheons…in their brief New England pedigree, there has been time enough to infect them all with one kind of lunacy or another” (185). Hawthorne thus champions a kind of natural or voluntary selection of mates, rather than the eugenicist artificial selection that forcibly excludes the undesirables. Fresh, human blood of a diverse species also triumphs over the enfeebled, anemic blood of long ancestry, or the blood that the Pyncheon men have been cursed to drink because of Colonel Pyncheon’s determination “to plant a family” in seventeenth-century Salem with the house of the seven gables. The old potatoes of the Custom House, the tiny fowl of the garden, and the idiosyncracies of Hepzibah and Clifford can all be obviated through unions which dismiss the pride of rank and focus instead on mutual attraction and the integrity of the individual regardless of working-class, genteel, or aristocratic origins. As Susan L. Mizruchi concludes, “the littlest chicken” is “a symbol for the new American republic” that “represents the hope of his historical era, standing among his fellow chickens as America stands among the nations of the world.”

IV. Conclusion: Tracing Uncle Venner to Elsie Venner

In *Elsie Venner: A Romance of Destiny* (1861), Oliver Wendell Holmes converts Lamarckism from the phrenological and the folkloric into a medicalized subset of professional science during the latter half of the nineteenth century. Holmes’ examination of the serpentine Elsie reveals human beings’ complex ancestry inherited from the natural environment and the animal world. This lineage takes on a specifically Lamarckian cast, since Elsie is the product of her mother’s womb and the bite of a snake. Her weird nature is also culturally inflected in the Hawthornean sense, since she grows up among a New England aristocracy that is, quite literally, not in touch with itself. Holmes immediately points out “there is nothing in New England corresponding at all to the feudal aristocracies of the Old World,” and this aristocracy consists of “merely the richer part of the community,” or the Brahmin caste that “by the repetition of the same influences, generation after generation…has acquired a distinct organization and physiognomy” (15; 16). Elsie Venner belongs to this Lamarckian world, though she also disrupts the whole system. Elsie lives with her distant father, whom she coolly refers to by his first name, Dudley, but she has really been raised by their African-American servant, Sophy, an exotic herself. Her peculiarities can be traced to the fact that her mother, while pregnant with Elsie, was bitten by a snake. Elsie is thus the culmination of Hawthorne’s characters, since she is a poisonous hybrid like Beatrice, a wild and uncontrollable child like Pearl, and marriageable, in love, and an eventual heiress like Phoebe. The Dudley estate retains its name despite the presence of the Venners, since the marriage of Dudley Venner to Elsie’s mother reconfigured the bloodline. The mansion

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also resembles the House of the Seven Gables in its own fascination with heraldry, since it contains “portraits of different date on the walls of the various apartments” and “old painted coats-of-arms” (116), yet Holmes’ interest in bloodlines has more to do with the force of inheritance medically considered rather than Hawthorne’s own conflicted relationship with his ancestors. As a product of the hazards attendant upon gestation, Elsie, despite her genuine aristocratic lineage, opposes the assuaging aura of sentiment that permeates this “romance of destiny” with its happy ending of double marriages, for she becomes the victim of the natural world of the Mountain’s nest of snakes that abuts her family’s estate.

Elsie is even more resistant to the effects of home influence than even Pearl, since “she had been a very hard creature to manage. Her father could influence, but not govern her. Old Sophy, born of a slave mother in the house, could do more for her than anybody, knowing her by long instinctive study. The other servants were afraid of her” (117). Elsie is much more than an uncontrollable daughter, since Holmes employs the Lamarckian assumption that the venom of the snake bite inflicted upon Elsie’s mother coursed through her bloodstream and entered the infant during gestation. She also exhibits a strange mesmeric power in her diamond shaped eyes that possess “a strange fascination…which at times was quite irresistible,” and Elsie’s acquaintances often “feel…drawn to her by a power which seemed to take away [their] will for a moment” (126). Physically she becomes a snake when provoked: “She threw her head back, her eyes narrowing and her forehead drawing down so that…her head actually flattened itself.” The romance attributes Elsie’s unique constitution to “evidence that human beings can be infected or wrought upon by poisons…so that they shall manifest any of
the peculiarities belonging to beings of a lower nature” that are “transmitted by inheritance” (168).

Whereas Beatrice Rappaccini suffers as a result of her father’s artificial selection, Holmes demonstrates how Elsie’s animal nature is beyond her control and immune to moral education. Unable to conform or adapt, Elsie is eventually annihilated by a serpentine constitution that still permits her to fall in love with her teacher, Bernard Langdon. Elsie is a product of the superabundance of hereditarian rhetoric that pervades the romance, yet the presence of history and tradition surrounding her as embodied in her home and ancestry effects a physiological and cultural response in both her infatuation with Bernard and her desire to marry him. Elsie confesses to Sophy, “Nobody loves me. I cannot love anybody. What is love, Sophy?” (309). Her inability to “love anybody” stems from the refusal of others to love her, since Sophy demonstrates that Elsie is capable of being loved. Love is “what poor Ol’ Sophy’s got for her Elsie.” Love is also what triumphs in the end, though “it was all over with poor Elsie” (313). Dr. Kittredge explains his hope “that the lower nature which had become engrafted on the higher would die out, and leave the real woman’s life she inherited to outlive this accidental principle which had so poisoned her childhood and youth,” but “it has involved the centres of life in its own decay” (328). Elsie thus finally figures as the inability of medicine to untangle the complexities of an aristocratic girl whose nature has been radically altered by a snakebite.

The happy ending to the romance that consists of the double marriage echoes the happy ending to The House of the Seven Gables. The death of Judge Pyncheon drinking his own blood, the discovery behind the portrait of Colonel Pyncheon of the now
worthless deed to the Maine territory, the inheritance of the Judge’s landed estate by Hepzibah and Clifford, and the impending marriage of Phoebe and Holgrave attest to the new order of reinvigorated blood of which Holgrave speaks. In this sense, the social order is somewhat altered, though vestiges of a shabby gentility remain in the culture. Still, Hawthorne finally avoids the logic of eugenics demonstrated most fitfully in “Rappaccini’s Daughter,” and discards the obsession with family rank that has rendered the Pyncheon family useless and ridiculous. In Chapter 4, I will show how this cultural belief in a New England shabby gentility plays itself out in the household papers and children’s stories of Harriet Beecher Stowe, and the abundance of manuals of home influence, throughout the 1860s and 1870s. The creation of this kind of home atmosphere transforms Hawthorne’s old New England families into the fully productive and modestly proud members of what today we would refer to as the middle class, yet without physical trappings of sham gentility. In this sense, the home becomes a beneficent institution that creates good parents and children, and it also fuels the reaction to Darwin’s emphasis on natural selection in what is increasingly perceived as neo-Lamarckism and the importance of the role of culture rather than the impersonal determinism of biology.
Chapter 4
Habits Form a Second Nature: Harriet Beecher Stowe’s Lamarckian Laboratory

“You should see the joy with which I gaze on manure-heaps, in which the eye of faith sees Delaware grapes and d’Angoulême pears, and all sorts of roses and posies, which at some future day I hope you will be able to enjoy.”—Harriet Beecher Stowe

While building her dream house, Oakholm, on the outskirts of Hartford in the summer of 1864, Stowe praised the piles of manure that would nourish the garden she would lovingly cultivate. Her horticultural techniques, however, would prove to be an exercise in cultivating imperfection. Drafty, unwieldy, impractical, and expensive, Stowe’s house of the eight gables was sold at a loss in 1870 after she and her family had inhabited it for only six years. Eventually sold to the Underwood Typewriter Company and converted into apartments for its employees, Oakholm was unceremoniously torn down in 1905. Stowe’s effort at mansion-building signaled a domestic failure.

Despite this historical disappointment, Stowe’s house possesses larger significance within the context of the Gothic Revival movement in architecture popularized between the years 1840 and 1870. Oakholm, a representative of this type of domestic architecture, as well as the Victorian belief that the physical structure of the house influenced the character and behavior of its occupants, exemplifies this complex fusion of spirituality and sentiment believed to pervade the household and to encourage

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The household papers and children’s stories that Stowe wrote during the 1860s and 1870s evince this belief in the interaction of moral behavior and home design that attempts to compensate for the limits of sentimentalism minus the harsh edge of Hawthorne’s anti-sentimental critique. As the high sentimental novel of the 1850s fades, Stowe adapts and recuperates her domestic writing as she engages in a study of the home that recognizes domestic imperfection, human frailty, and communal cruelty. In order to correct these defects, she reconstructs the home as a type of Lamarckian laboratory that acknowledges and identifies human and domestic limitations in an effort to solve the problems of the home. In this realistic and key move, she demonstrates her understanding that the perfect, sentimental household does not exist. In *House and Home Papers* (1865), *The Little Foxes* (1866), and *Queer Little People* (1867), Stowe instructs readers how to build the perfectly modest home, how to make its inhabitants better people, and how to cultivate a shabby gentility. Whereas phrenology and Lamarckism converge in the writings of Hawthorne, Stowe’s Lamarckian thought emphasizes personal improvement that subsequent generations inherit, and it partakes of the discourse of the nascent cult of self-help emerging after the Civil War. Stowe thus revises the basic tenets of Romantic reform to assuage the unhappiness of the home and to check the moral deficiencies of its inhabitants.

Lamarck’s theory of acquired characters emerges from his conception of the physical environment as the site of adaptation through bodily modification. In Chapter VII of *Zoological Philosophy*, “Of the Influence of the Environment on the Activities and Habits of Animals, and the Influence of the Activities and Habits of These Living Bodies

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in Modifying Their Organisation and Structure,” Lamarck explains how the environment “does not work any direct modification whatever in the shape and organization of animals” (107). Bodies do not respond reflexively or directly to environmental conditions, but rather “great alterations in the environment of animals lead to great alterations in their needs,” and if these “new needs become permanent, the animals then adopt new habits which last as long as the needs that evoked them.” Lamarck’s quotation of the proverb, “Habits form a second nature” (114), thus refers to the organism’s ability to develop new habits in response to these environmental fluctuations or modifications that eventuate in “the use of some one part in preference to some other part, and in some cases the total disuse of some part no longer necessary” (108). Lamarck codifies this theory into a law that states how these physical gains and losses “are preserved by reproduction to the new individuals which arise, provided that the acquired modifications are common to both sexes, or at least to the individuals which produce the young” (113). If we apply this basic theoretical framework to the domestic papers of Stowe, then we begin to see how her recommendations for home improvement, and her recognition of its limits, partake of a Lamarckian environmental hereditarianism even in the first decade of Darwin. As Robert S. Cox explains this seemingly historical contradiction, “Although Darwin catalyzed the acceptance of evolutionary thought in the formal scientific canon, in the absence of any workable theory of inheritance, natural selection struggled for its very existence. Until the rediscovery of Mendel at the turn of the twentieth century, natural selection was nowhere as popular a theory for accounting for descent with modification as Lamarckism….“

Elaine Scarry permits us to domesticate Lamarckism if we think about the interaction of inanimate objects with sentient beings, since, as she claims, “it is part of the work of creating to deprive the external world of the privilege of being inanimate”—of, in other words, its privilege of being irresponsible to sentient inhabitants on the basis that it is itself nonsentient.” Although Stowe thinks differently about the world of ready-made, consumer goods, Scarry sees in mass-produced items a kind of wish for the consumer to be well, since even “anonymous, mass-produced objects contain a collective and equally extraordinary message: Whoever you are, and whether or not I personally like or even know you, in at least this small way, be well.” In other words, “whether [these objects] reach someone in the extreme conditions of imprisonment or the benign and ordinary conditions of everyday life, the handkerchief, blanket, and bucket of white paint contain within them the wish for well-being: ‘Don’t cry; be warm; watch now, in a few minutes even these constricting walls will look more spacious.’” In this chapter, I argue that Stowe’s household papers appearing in the 1860s constitute this kind of domestic Lamarckism that consciously constructs the ideal home environment and transmits culture to its inhabitants; yet the papers do so by acknowledging petty personal habits and even outright juvenile violence that disrupts the system. My model for this version of a nineteenth-century cultural transmission is best described by the anthropologists Robert Boyd and Peter J. Richerson, who claim that “cultural information acquired by an individual may be affected by the events of his or her life, and, if so, the changes will be transmitted to an individual’s cultural offspring. This property of cultural transmission makes for a kind of ‘Lamarckian’ evolution, in the sense that acquired variation is

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In section one, I read *House and Home Papers* as the conscious manipulation of domestic material culture that ideally effects this form of cultural transmission in order to raise virtuous children while eschewing the dangers of fashionable gentility. The second section analyzes the inveterate habits of family members that contribute to the deterioration of the model home in *The Little Foxes*. In section three, I conclude with a brief treatment of two children’s stories collected in the volume *Queer Little People*. In these stories, Stowe engages in a kind of zoological gentility that admonishes young people (boys especially) about the cruelties that some individuals heartlessly inflict upon pets, especially dogs, which appealed to her enormously. Her explicit acceptance of a kind of nineteenth-century euthanasia, however, attests to her awareness that the difficulties of domestic life need to be directly addressed as aggressively as the cultivation of its virtues.

I. Fashionable Threats

Stowe wrote *House and Home Papers* toward the end of the Civil War in an effort to avoid it. The papers appeared originally as monthly installments in the *Atlantic* throughout 1864, and were then bound by Ticknor and Fields and published as a volume.

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6 Patricia R. Hill suggests that “Stowe consciously strove to avert her gaze from the war” by writing *House and Home Papers*, among other non-fiction and novels during the war years; but the significance of her writings on domesticity really coincides with “a move up the social ladder” that she was “negotiating” while designing and building her impractical mansion, Oakholm in Hartford, which departed wildly from the practical “cottage” that Mrs. Crowfield will design for her daughter. See Patricia R. Hill, “Writing Out the War: Harriet Beecher Stowe’s Averted Gaze,” in *Divided Houses: Gender and the Civil War*, eds. Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 260-267. Of course, Stowe’s so-called “averted gaze” only brought the ravages of war closer to home. In a letter to her publisher, James T. Fields, she explains the necessity of engaging in this “sort of sprightly writing” in an effort “in these days to keep from thinking of things that make me dizzy & blind & fill my eyes with tears so that I can’t see the paper. I mean such things as are being done where our heroes are dying as Shaw did. It is not wise that all our literature should run in rut cut thro our hearts & red with our blood. I feel the need of a little gentle household merriment & talk of common things....” See James C. Austin, *Fields of the Atlantic Monthly: Letters to an Editor*, 1861-1870 (San Marino, CA: The Huntington Library, 1953), 275.
in 1865. The frame story of the genteel Crowfield family—a father, mother, two boys (appropriately no longer at home), and three girls, the oldest of which is married (she is never given a name), the middle girl, Marianne, who is about to get married, and the youngest, Jenny, approaching marriageability—provides the context within which Stowe defines domesticity, examines proper housekeeping, and offers “an evangelical, sentimental ideal of domestic warmth and comfort.” Of course, given its coincidence with the Civil War and Stowe’s own literary legacy, these papers obliquely invoke slavery, as Lori Merish observes. “Ravages of a Carpet” is the best-known, most delightful, and most fully fictionalized of the Crowfield sketches, and it functions as a sophisticated short story that introduces the problem of buying things that banish this family to domestic and ideological margins, and highlights the threat from fashion that transmogrifies an already ideal home environment. Hence, the cultural work that Stowe undertakes in these pieces is to construct a Lamarckian laboratory or hothouse within which model family members both grow and replicate themselves. Mrs. Crowfield’s desire to buy a real Brussels carpet because of its reduced price per yard effects a kind of psychological terror for Mr. Crowfield. In other words, it is a “presentiment” of worse to come, and he “presages” the impending domestic crisis. He consents to his wife’s wish to have the carpet, and in a curious admixture of classical and Christian imagery that pervades the entire series of papers (hence, the significance of his own lucky purchase of a first edition Milton), he explains “whenever I think of myself at that moment, I always


8 According to Merish, Stowe’s “reformulation of sentimental ownership” was “responding to the crisis in liberal social forms generated by the national debate over slavery. Stowe’s homemaking writings and novels construct the ‘inside’ realm of domesticity as the sphere of fulfillment and plentitude, and indicate the new, quasi-spiritual significance of consumer goods in establishing…the ‘attractions of home.’” See Merish, Sentimental Materialism, 137.
am reminded, in a small way, of Adam taking the apple; and my wife, seated on that roll of carpet, has more than once suggested to my mind the classic image of Pandora opening her unlucky box. In fact...there came a load on my prophetic soul.... I presaged, I know not what, of coming woe; and all I presaged came to pass." The rhetoric partakes of a glib and genteel mock heroicism that echoes the classical learning that Mr. Crowfield also parades, yet his pseudo-indifferent dodge functions to evade the impending domestic crisis for which all of the subsequent papers attempt to overcompensate. The Crowfields inhabit an historical and ideological midpoint along the sentimental spectrum that ranges from shabby and genteel sincerity to active and conspicuous consumption, as Mr. Crowfield patiently describes “the house and home into which this carpet was introduced”: “…our house was a thing to be lived in, and…furniture was made to be used. …in our house there was to be nothing too good for ourselves…no best parlor from which we were to be excluded,—no silver plate to be kept in the safe in the bank, and brought home only in case of a grand festival, while our daily meals were served with dingy Britannia” (5). The Crowfields’ identification with their house renders it a home, and they possess a genteel ability to invest their personality, their feelings, and their sincerity in the structure and objects which surround them, and these qualities of warmth and sentiment will come to be personified by the “household fairies” that Mr.


10 Katherine Grier describes “Ravages of a Carpet” as a “moral tale of furnishing” that equates classic gentility with sincerity. According to Grier, “middle-class comfort had no façade; middle-class people, because they were naturally sincere, did not need to present a different public face to society. [Stowe’s] contention that the contents of the homey middle-class parlor reflected the family in its true character articulated an alternate conception of room décor, one that contrasted the parlor as a reflection of middle-class character, empty rhetoric versus sincere statement.” See Katherine C. Grier, Culture & Comfort: Parlor Making and Middle-Class Identity, 1850-1930 (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1988), 108-109.
Crowfield imagines. They wish to avoid becoming like those people who shut up rooms, lock up the best china, and sequester themselves in the back of their house, yet this undermining of family life is exactly what Mr. Crowfield fears. The best things are purchased with limited funds and are never to be used, and their shadowy existence is like money in the bank that will never be spent on those things that contribute to the happiness of the home.

The imagery of Roman mythology and government underscores a domestic necessity for moderation that Mr. Crowfield originally advocated when he and his wife began housekeeping.11 “‘Strike a broad, plain average,’ I said to my wife; ‘have everything abundant, serviceable; and give all our friends exactly what we have ourselves, no better and no worse.’” The home that isn’t fashionably invaded is transformed into a quiet resting place, posited as a site for self-cultivation, and localized in the parlor where inhabitants and guests feel at home and engage in moral and edifying past times that buttress the integrity of this solidly genteel family: “The first thing our parlor said to any one was, that we were not people to be put out, that we were wide-spread, easy-going, and jolly folk. … it was written on the face of things, that everybody there was to do just as he or she pleased” (6).

11 Mr. Crowfield’s constant allusions to Roman mythology and government really characterize him as somewhat anachronistic. According to Caroline Winterer, “Hellenism, though ultimately deployed for differing political ends in North and South by the eve of the Civil War, testified to a gradual shift in the uses of antiquity during the antebellum era. At the heart of this shift was the change in emphasis from Rome to Greece that emerged as the political and social structure that had supported eighteenth-century classicism began to erode. … Classical scholars formed an important constituency of Americans who imagined a new role for antiquity in American political culture: as antidote to economic and scientific materialism, a bulwark against mobocracy, a corrective to uncouth rhetoric, and, in the South, a compelling model for an agrarian slave society beset by attacks from an industrializing, free North.” Mr. Crowfield’s Roman Republicanism is an implicit critique of Gilded Age decadence, though his seeming unawareness of this contradiction signals the waning power of domesticity as civilizing agent toward the end of the Civil War. See Caroline Winterer, The Culture of Classicism: Ancient Greece and Rome in American Intellectual Life, 1780-1910 (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 76.
As in all of Stowe’s writings, the home becomes the site of civilization, morality, and comfort\textsuperscript{12}; but the parlor’s most important function lies in its ability to elicit a blend of individual and collective affect, and the presence of children, animals, and friends most notably multiply the pleasures of the home. Households with children, pets, and even plants, can never be spotless and perfect places, since the very presence of life itself results in crayon markings on the walls, dirty little paw prints on the carpet, and excessive water spilling from plant pots. Since the home is the arena for living, certain “best rooms” should not be cordoned off as exhibits in a museum to be neither touched nor experienced. As the heart of the home, the parlor becomes preferable to the nursery once the Crowfield children arrive, and they poignantly respond, when asked “why don’t you take your blocks upstairs?” that “I want to be where oo are,” and this is “said with a piteous under-lip” and is recognized as “generally a most convincing answer” (8). Though a very minor incident, the Crowfield children still managed to break the hearts of their parents, simply from saying, most genuinely, that we “want to be where oo are.” Significantly, then, the parlor cultivates this ability to acknowledge and react to “the piteous melancholy with which Rover would look through the window-panes” after the Crowfield sons are “warned…with awful gravity” that Rover “was never to be a parlor dog; but, somehow, what with little beggings and pleadings on the part of Arthur and Tom…it at last came to pass that Rover gained a regular corner at the hearth, a regular \textit{status} in every family-convocation” (9). The same response occurs with “a little black-and-tan English terrier for the girls; and then a fleecy poodle…and for each of these some

little voices pleaded, and some little heart would be so near broken at any slight,” that Mr. and Mrs. Crowfield naturally resign themselves to the presence of these “four-footed children.”

The presence of this level of affect assumes a state of comfort, even of mild luxury, since daily cares are attended to by well-trained servants, and culture and sociability are freely pursued and acquired by family members and visitors. As Mr. Crowfield explains, “People seemed to find it good to be there; they said it was somehow home-like and pleasant, and that there was a kind of charm about it that made it easy to talk and easy to live” (9-10). The Crowfields and their friends and guests pursue culture and sociability easily, for the parlor enacts and perpetuates this free and happy exchange of ideas and pleasurables. The parlor is not simply a lived-in space, but a sphere for the easy expression of who they really are as opposed to a theatrical shell showcasing the inanity of “genteel performance.”

Because of the parlor’s lived-in aspect, it necessarily becomes subject to “that decay to which things sublunary are liable” (10), yet these signs of wear don’t disturb Mr. Crowfield as much as they do his daughters. Mr. Crowfield, anticipating a kind of anti-modernism, as T.J. Jackson Lears suggests, takes offense at their invidious...
condemnation of “this old rag of a carpet!” “My feelings were hurt,” he claims, and the parlor is reconstructed as a center of feeling, where guests, children, and animals can be both petted and wounded. Naturally he interprets this seemingly savage attack on the carpet as a personal affront, or an insensitive criticism of an old friend. This facilitates the entrance of the new Brussels carpet into the parlor, and even Mrs. Crowfield has been infected not so much by its beauty, but by its cheapness in comparison to its market value. The Crowfield house is thus a home where tangible domestic objects register the level of affect one feels, and the manipulation of the physical environment edifies its inhabitants. Yet the arrival of the new carpet invests Mr. Crowfield with a psychic power that predicts the ultimate transmogrification of the friendly parlor into a stuffy Victorian living room. Even though all seems well to him despite the intrusion of the new carpet,

fulfillment; there were also contradictions at the heart of the domestic ideal. It was impossible for the home to remain altogether isolated from the market society. Inevitably the haven embodied many values of the heartless world outside. If the home was meant to be a refuge from the marketplace, it was also meant to socialize people (particularly males) to succeed in the competitive realm. If it encouraged mutual harmony, it also taught the aggressive traits of the self-made man.” See T. J. Jackson Lears, No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 16.

16 The Brussels carpet traveled as a convenient metaphor for Stowe who, four years later in 1869, would contribute the “Home Decoration” chapter to Catharine Beecher’s The American Woman’s Home. Stowe’s exemplary foolish housewife succumbs to the temptation of a Brussels carpet that is “so cheap,” and, in doing so, can’t afford to buy anything else to decorate her parlor. After purchasing the carpet, the foolish housewife “comes home” to “find that she has spent, we will say eighty dollars, for a very homely carpet whose greatest merit it is an affliction to remember—namely, that it will outlast three ordinary carpets. And because she has bought this carpet she can not afford to paper the walls or put up any window-curtains, and can not even begin to think of buying any pictures.” See Catharine E. Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe, The American Woman’s Home (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 72.

17 In 1864, when the “House and Home Papers” were first being serialized, Calvert Vaux was objecting to the “best parlor…intended to be a strong point in every American house, is often made its least satisfactory feature.” Among its most notable characteristics is “a carpet of excellent quality, and of a large and decidedly sprawling pattern, made up of scrolls and flowers in gay and vivid colors”; yet this “choice room, with the pretty view, is sacrificed, to keep up a conventional show of finery that pleases no one, and is a great, though unacknowledged, bore to the proprietors. …A drawing-room like this becomes a sort of quarantine in which to put each plague of a visitor that calls; and one almost expects to see the lady of the house walk in with a bottle of camphor in her hand to prevent infection, she seems to have such a fear that any one should step within the bounds of her real every-day life. All this is absurd. No room in any house,
he confesses to experiencing “that light and delicate presage of changes to come which indefinitely brooded over me” (12); and “the first premonitory symptom” occurs when his wife and daughters immediately express uneasiness with the ephemerality of all interior decorating and they wish to keep the carpet clean and unfaded. The youngest daughter, Jenny, effects the expulsion of all things live and dirty, or those things that really make a house a home: “And that dirty little canary must really be hung in the kitchen,” she says, “he always did make such a litter, scattering his seed-chippings about…. And, mamma, it appears to me it will never do to have the plants here. Plants are always leaking through the pots upon the carpet…. It was no matter, you know, when we had the old carpet; but this we really want to have kept nice” (13).

In conjunction with an incipient anti-modernist stance, Mr. Crowfield expresses a kind of antebellum Druidicism, as represented by one of the family’s prized possessions, an etching hung on the parlor wall, “the subject of which was the gambols of the household fairies in a baronial library after the household were in bed” (14). These fairies dance and play among inkstands, paperweights, and other library furniture. They function as fantastic Muses or an updated version of Roman lares and penates, and Mr. Crowfield is convinced “that much of the peculiar feeling of security, composure, and

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18 One way to account for the significance of fairies in the Crowfield household is to consider the “population explosion” of fairies in Victorian England. According to Diane Purkiss, “many Victorians…wanted somehow to have the benefits of the countryside and the Industrial Revolution…. The Victorians took up the Romantic notion of the child as the perfect innocent, and linked that innocent child with fairies.” The overwhelming presence of fairies in Stowe’s sketch opposes the machinery and technology of war, yet for Mr. Crowfield these beings seem to occupy the room and the furniture in a Druidic kind of way. In other words, the old furniture is friendly and inviting because it is inhabited by these loyal sprites. See Diane Purkiss, At the Bottom of the Garden: A Dark History of Fairies, Hobgoblins, and Other Troublesome Things (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 220.
enjoyment” of the parlor stems “from the unsuspected presence of these little people, the household fairies,” whose presence is “a solemn article of faith” with him (15). These quintessentially Victorian creatures inhabit desks, chairs, and couches, and infuse the friendly old furniture with a spirit of comfort and cordiality. Lynn Wardley explains how “Stowe’s belief that some spirit inhabits all things” reiterates “the formative nature of both the mother and the interior” that Bushnell and Beecher have already “described [as] ‘the spirit of the house’ that passes ‘by transmission’ into the ‘little plastic nature of the child.’” According to Wardley, when “Bushnell refers to the ‘spirit of the house,’ he means not only the influence of the ‘parents but also the impact of inanimate objects on the developing child.’” These fairies that mediate between reposing bodies and inherited furniture thus represent Scarry’s account of the intimate relationship between human bodies and inanimate objects. A simple chair, for example, “as though it were itself put in pain, as though it knew from the inside the problem of body weight, will only then accommodate and eliminate the problem.” The Crowfield’s old parlor furniture thus reaches out, very likely wears the indentation of seated bodies, and welcomes the family with the “be well” of Scarry’s artifacts.

The traditional Crowfield furniture, because of its sentimental value and inherited status, possesses this domestic energy opposed to the sterility of newer parlor suites that, by the 1870s, had grown increasingly popular as signs of middle-class success, and


therefore fostered anonymity via their facelessness and availability. This otherworldly belief in the fairies recalls Mr. Crowfield’s premonitory power and his own sense of this sentimentally sacred parlor space, and he confesses to “a prophetic dream” involving these parlor fairies the night after the new carpet is installed: “In the region of the bow-window I observed a tribe of them standing with tiny valises and carpet-bags in their hand, as though to depart on a journey. …others of them appeared to be collecting and packing away in tiny trunks certain fairy treasures, preparatory to a general departure. …It was evident that the household fairies were discussing the question of a general and simultaneous removal” (15-16). His dream about their concerted removal telescopes the conflicts this short story explores—distaste for the old-fashioned as opposed to a desire for the modern; custom-built, ancestral furniture instead of mass-produced, pedestrian parlor suites, and traditional men rather than progressive women, or their differing positions in the domestic sphere that Mr. Crowfield’s occupation as stay-at-home contributor to the Brahmin journal, the “North American,” cleverly conflates. While he is not exactly caught in the middle of his daughters’ efforts to recuperate their shabby gentility, his opposition to newness is firmly established in response to his wife’s wish to “give way to the girls a little…. It is natural, you know, that they should wish us to appear a little as other people do”: “‘I hate new furniture,’ I remarked, in the bitterness of my soul. ‘I hate anything new’” (16). Mr. Crowfield’s glib, mock-heroic tone partakes of the polite humor permeating these papers, but the complete usurpation of the

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21 Katherine Grier explains that “by the early 1870s, the seven-piece suite formula had became a staple of furniture manufacture…. Almost all such suites included a tete (sofa), an upholstered armchair (a gentleman’s chair), an upholstered armless chair (a lady’s chair), and four small chairs having “brace” backs (small brackets support and connect the back to the seat) or “stuffed” backs and upholstered seats. …That so many trade catalogs offered seven-piece suites in the 1870s suggests the presence of a large audience for new parlor furniture; it also implies that these consumers recognized how the ownership of a parlor suite would ‘make’ a modern parlor.” See Grier, Culture and Comfort, 179.
old parlor in favor of “newness”—the desire to appear as other people do by expelling their inherited furniture—shows how this home environment is culturally at risk in the face of Stowe’s attempt to preserve it.

Once imported into the parlor, the new furniture makes the “old-fashioned” things that remain in the room appear even more dingy, and Jenny facilitates the final remodeling campaign: “‘We don’t have any parlor,’ said Jenny, one day. ‘Our parlor has always been a sort of log-cabin,—library, study, nursery, greenhouse, all combined. We never have had things like other people’” (18). Never having had things like other people figures as the determining force that drives Jenny’s desire for a parlor to be only a parlor. In some ways, this partakes of a secular kind of compartmentalization, the result of which clearly defines and demarcates the purpose of each living space, and thus dictates or directs the behavior of the people living in or visiting them. If the parlor’s primary function is a room in which to meet and greet guests, and to remain the best room so that visitors are appropriately awed, then she is very much attuned to those dominating cultural forces at work.22 Jenny is most opposed to her father’s writing table remaining in what she now envisions as the parlor per se, and encourages a south room to become his study: “I wonder why papa never had a study to himself; I’m sure I should think he would like it better than sitting here among us all. …then we should have a parlor fit to be seen.” Jenny assesses the purpose of the parlor as “fit to be seen” rather than used

22 John Kasson’s conclusion about “Ravages of a Carpet” also considers the house that Stowe would buy in the Nook Farm community in Hartford in 1873 after selling the drafty and disastrous Oakholm. He suggests that “throughout the house, as in middle-class urban culture as a whole, the segmentation of space acknowledged and preserved the multiplicity of roles its owners played even within the domestic circle and channeled into ‘appropriate’ forms the behavior and feeling that would transpire in each part.” Kasson additionally notes that, in the Nook Farm house, Stowe preserved a lavish front parlor in which to greet guests, and used the rear parlor as the center for family and domestic activities. See Kasson, Rudeness & Civility: Manners in Nineteenth-Century Urban America (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux-Hill and Wang, 1990), 180.
vigorously or lived in fully, like the undefined and catch-all space of a log cabin. Mr. Crowfield’s aggravation grows, and separate spheres begin to split the household. “There are certain crises in a man’s life,” he observes, “when the female element in his household asserts itself in dominant forms that seem to threaten to overwhelm him. The fair creatures, who in most matters have depended on his judgment, evidently look upon him at these seasons as only a forlorn, incapable male creature…” (19). Jenny also concludes, “men can’t understand such things. What can men know of housekeeping, and how things ought to look?” The whole purpose of House and Home Papers, however, is that a man does know. This point is rather complicated by the fact that Stowe is cross-dressing as a man as she is writing them; and the household fairies also signify that Mr. Crowfield, as genteel, stay-at-home husband and father, is a dainty and dandy household fairy himself. But the moral of this short story is that trying to appear as other people do, and believing that only women can know about housekeeping, enacts an egregious act of inhospitality that forever changes the way the Crowfield family has lived: “It was as proper and orderly a parlor as those of our most fashionable neighbors; and when our friends called, we took them stumbling into its darkened solitude…. Our old friends rebelled at this, and asked what they had done to be treated so…” (20-21). The most fashionable room, devoid of “all the household fairies” (21), is a chilly fait accompli, an institution with museum-like status, yet without the sociability of historical

23 Despite Jenny’s dismissal of the log cabin, Calvert Vaux’s Villages and Cottages included a design for a comfortable “log-house,” the centerpiece of which was a large “living room” with dimensions of 16 x 20 ft. In front of the living room was a smaller veranda, to the left were two small bedrooms, and to the right a store room and “sink room.” Vaux’s rhetoric implies that “log-houses” can also be made “beautifully and well.” See Vaux, Villas and Cottages, 116, 115.
parlor performances. It’s a place no one wishes to be, let alone stay. The references to the Roman Republic also allude to acts of hospitality, more Greek than Roman, but still upheld as a classical virtue by Mr. Crowfield, whose study becomes the room of choice, since all the old furniture has been moved there, with the canary bird singing and a crackling wood stove instead of “a hole in the floor which kept the parlor warm” (20). As a study, this room that replicates the old parlor also functions as a site of work, for there Mr. Crowfield reads and writes, his daughters do their needlepoint, and Mrs. Crowfield tends to her plants. The new parlor attains ceremonial status only, and is the consummate sign of a bourgeois consumerism that marks the Crowfields as “moderns” struggling to transform their shabby gentility into what is and what will become a sign of the older American aristocracy—old merchant, Revolutionary wealth that becomes somewhat adulterated or tempered by the emerging, immense fortunes of the *nouveaux riches*. This is the crisis that *House and Home Papers* signals, since Stowe “absorbs an ideal of aristocratic ease and effortlessness into sentimental, middle-class practice,” yet resists, at least textually, a secular materialism that obliterates the importance of an evangelical piety and sincerity that characterized the best, moral families in antebellum New England.

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24 According to Karen Halttunen, “sentimental anxieties about the hypocrisy of social disguise and formal ritual were yielding before a growing middle-class fascination with the theatrical arts of everyday life. This fascination was most evident in the explosive popularity of theatrical parlor games in the 1850s and 1860s. As they built parlor stages, donned costumes and stage makeup, and learned to perform amateur theatricals in their homes, the American middle-class embraced theatricality for its own sake…..” See Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women*, 174.

25 Lori Merish, *Sentimental Materialism*, 148. Merish also observes that “Stow rejects both a Puritan model of domestic frugality and a genteel model of domestic formality, offering in the place of these models an evangelical, sentimental ideal of domestic warmth and comfort.” If Catharine Beecher can be seen as an inconsistent imprint of their father, Lyman Beecher, Stowe, in *House and Home Papers*, manages a synthesis of these overwhelming ideological influences on her. See Stephen H. Snyder, *Lyman Beecher and His Children: The Transformation of a Religious Tradition* (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing, 1991) for the cultural and familial power that Beecher exerted over his children.
Though the daughters do wish to use the parlor rather than simply preserving it, most of the guests rebel, especially the men, who want to sit in a room where they can be men. As Arthur, one of the Crowfield sons expresses, “‘let a fellow stay where he can do as he pleases and feels at home’; and to this view of the matter would respond divers of the nice young bachelors who where Arthur’s and Tom’s sworn friends” (21-22). The perfection of the parlor, and the rise of the living room, concurs with the cult of the bachelor, and Stowe clearly views the necessity of people, especially men, in this case, to be permitted a space to “do as they please,” to “work” at being themselves, and to engage in those particularly domestic masculine activities that replicate what men are. The Crowfield women thus function as the economic barometer of home life, and are much more anxious about “appearing as other people do,” or the wealthy, fashionable, and modern. Since the parlor has become “a cold, correct, accomplished fact,” and “the house-hold fairies…left it” (22), no one wishes to stay in the parlor. Mr. Crowfield explains that no degree of elegance can supersede the sense of feeling at home that these domestic sprites provide, and part of the purpose of this volume, and this story especially, is to provide readers with that vicarious sense of “feeling at home” that the sentimental book ideally transmits to its audience and to highlight the inability to “have a good time without [the fairies].” In other words, the acquisition of virtuous character traits facilitated by the Crowfield home is really for the benefit of Stowe’s audience, and, in this sense, House and Home Papers also functions as a kind of Lamarckian handbook like her sister’s Treatise on Domestic Economy. The singular domesticity that constitutes these fairies, metaphors for the Lamarckian and cultural transmission of comfort, ease, sociability, and even carelessness that some rooms provide (certainly not all, for “there
are rooms where they will not stay, and rooms where they will"), also reinforces the significance of a parlor that transcends merely ceremonial purposes and functions as a domestic haven where people really live.

II. Followers of Saint Martha

Stowe advocates and perpetuates her form of domestic Lamarckism in “Home-Keeping vs. House-Keeping” by demonstrating how houses that are poorly maintained become tombs that smother their occupants; and this architectural asphyxiation results from the refusal to use those rooms decorated after the latest fashion because something might get dirty or scratched. As Mr. Crowfield explains, now that the women of the house have “an undeniable best parlor,” they do not use it: “Like other folks they had a parlor…too good for human nature’s daily food; and being sustained by this consciousness, they cheerfully went on receiving their friends in the study…for did not everybody know that this room was not their best? and if the furniture was old-fashioned and a little the worse for antiquity, was it not certain that they had better, which they could use, if they would?” (23). This miserly approach to the new furniture minimizes the dynamic between these objects and their owners, and this interaction transmutes easily into the preservation of those objects of self-interest which, while not empty signifiers, denote a museum-like status that overrides mere utilitarianism. Of course, they could use the new room if they wanted, but they don’t, and don’t really want to, since the best parlor becomes a symbolic space of middle-class membership that provides a dubious sense of security—money in the bank, a savings account they won’t touch even when needed, since some proverbial worse rainy day might arrive, and what would they do then? Although the old parlor is physically moved and displaced, it is still the ideal
setting for molding virtuous family members, and Stowe reiterates the folly of a fashionable whim that renders them momentarily like everybody else, and not as individuals self-consciously constructing themselves. Their guests and even they prefer the familiarity, the friendship, and the solidity of the old furniture, for if anything is scratched, torn, or soiled, what did it matter? It’s old, and, besides, there’s a best parlor whose presence and semiotic functioning make up for it; indeed, more than compensate for the dirty old junk. The girls are delighted, however, that their father has chosen to ridicule them in the story, “Ravages of a Carpet,” that he has sent to the “Atlantic,” and fearing that the new Brussels carpet will invade the hall and the stairs since its presence has made everything else look shabby, and the girls are conspiring to effect this move, Mr. Crowfield announces that he has “written another article for the ‘Atlantic,’ which I will read to you” (28). This article constitutes, of course, this second chapter, and the frame story of the Crowfield family further embellishes the domestic bliss—the vicarious feeling of being at home with the Crowfields via these papers—that Stowe intends to provide her readers: “‘Well, wait one minute, papa, till we get our work,’ said the girls, who, to say the truth, always exhibit a flattering interest in anything their papa writes…. Jane, or Jenny, as I call her in my good-natured moods, put on a fresh clear stick of hickory…emitting such a delicious perfume in burning, that I would not change it with the millionaire who kept up his fire with cinnamon.” Mr. Crowfield foregrounds Jenny here because the paper he is about to read composes part of her domestic education, for “she is the very attar, not of roses, but of housekeeping” (29), and the “kind of woman [who] needs carefully to be idealized in the process of education, or she will stiffen and
dry, as she grows old, into a veritable household Pharisee, a sort of domestic tyrant” (29-30).

The sketch recalls Bill Carberry, Mr. Crowfield’s “boon companion” of “bachelor days” (31), and his impending marriage to Sophie, a “good girl” who “came of a race of women in whom house-keeping was more than an art or a science,—it was, so to speak, a religion” (34). Because of this domestic mania that the women of Sophie’s family possess, his friend Bill discovers that the difference between a house and a home is “that his house and furniture were to be kept at such an ideal point of perfection that he needed another house to live in” (36), and he finds comfort in the cozy study/parlor of Mr. and Mrs. Crowfield. The domestic tyrant of Bill’s house is the formidable Aunt Zeruah, Sophie’s spinster aunt, who, according to Bill, “mounts guard at our house, and keeps up such strict police-regulations that a fellow can’t do a thing. The parlors are splendid, but so lonesome and dismal!” (36-37). Aunt Zeruah’s idea of housekeeping is to keep everything spotless and shut up, and to sit in the bedroom so nothing gets broken, misplaced, or disturbed. Aunt Zeruah constructs Bill as the enemy since he’s a man, and he’s discouraged from inviting his friends over to see his library or to take dinner with them: “We mustn’t ask them, unless we open the dining-room, and have out all the best china, and get the silver home from the bank; and if we do that, Aunt Zeruah does n’t sleep for a week beforehand, getting ready for it, and for a week after, getting things put away…so I invite fellows to dine with me at Delmonico’s…and Sophie’s mother says it does n’t look respectable…but, hang it, a fellow wants a home somewhere!” (39). Aunt Zeruah never allows Bill or visitors to feel at home, for she’s always ready on their departure to pounce and clean things up and shut rooms down, and, for her, that’s the
ideal domestic situation. “Everybody has stopped coming now,” Bill continues, and Aunt Zeruah says ‘it is such a comfort, for now the rooms are always in order. How poor Mrs. Crowfield lives, with her house such a thoroughfare, she is sure she can’t see…”’ (41). Of course, the Crowfield house invites people in because of its informality, its friendliness, and its life. This relaxed way of living, however, isn’t simply good manners—it’s also crucial to the way children are raised and made to feel at home in their own house, since, according to Stowe, this sense of security is necessary for them to grow up to be balanced and productive people.\(^{26}\)

Stowe thus demonstrates the inverse of the Lamarckian laboratory by showing how easy it is for children to go bad in a home environment not properly and strictly conducted with regard to children. After the birth of Bill’s and Sophie’s six children, the household becomes a war zone, as Mr. Crowfield explains, and “their whole childhood was a long battle, children versus furniture, and furniture always carried the day” (43). The Carberry children have become a liability for Aunt Zeruah, and no opportunities exist for them to “be where oo are.” The energy necessary for their proper upbringing, what Stowe refers to here as “the vital force,” is dissipated in favor of keeping the house clean and the furniture undisturbed. The rules they learn and the education they receive consist merely of domestic don’ts, and hardly the stuff that converts them into the best of people: “Naughty children were those who went up the front-stairs, or sat on the best sofa, or fingered any of the books in the library, or got out one of the best teacups, or

\(^{26}\) Stowe would have been well aware of Catharine Beecher’s assessment of parents who are “strict and pertinacious” in their method of child-rearing: “Such, keep the young mind in a state of constant apprehension, lest some of the multiplied requisitions be omitted, and a penalty be inflicted. The result of such management, is, that children gradually acquire, either obtuseness of conscience and an indifference to rebukes, or else they become excessively irritable or misanthropic.” See Catharine Beecher, A Treatise on Domestic Economy (New York: Schocken Books, 1997), 229.
drank out of the cut-glass goblets” (44). Aunt Zeruah’s nemesis is Tom, the oldest son who’s the spitting image of his father, who naturally rebels and is impatiently tolerated until he is sent away to boarding school, and no convenient time is ever found to have him home again. The conflict between the genders is interestingly nuanced by Stowe, since men and boys are clumsy and ignorant slobs, yet Stowe indicates the need for little Tom to be understood and tolerated as he experiences a normal and healthy rebellion. The downfall of little Tom, as well as the whole family, comes as a result of Aunt Zeruah’s perverse pleasure in banishing the children to maintain an ordered and quiet home. Stowe’s own brand of Lamarckian and cultural transmission opposes the uninhabitable house—uninhabitable because too anxiously furnished and arranged for those dirty paw prints and crayon markings, or the signs of the real life of a burgeoning family that should really be much more concerned with its inhabitants rather than its things: “Parents may depend upon it, that, if they do not make an attractive resort for their boys, Satan will. There are places enough, kept warm and light and bright and merry, where boys can go whose mothers’ parlors are too fine for them to sit in” (45).

The mother, Sophie, becomes a “hard-visaged, angular woman”—the physical manifestation of living in a bad home. One of the sons runs away to sea, and the oldest, Tom, comes home to claim his birthright by “spread[ing] wide desolation among the household gods” as he actually lives in the house but goes one step further by ruining the place. He appears “to hate any appearance of luxury or taste or order,—he was a perfect Philistine (46)”. Philistinism thus becomes the logical outcome of those housekeepers (and their aunts) who preserve their furnishings by not using them, and displaying them

27 Like Stowe’s son, Fred, the Carberry son that becomes a sailor opts out of bourgeois culture, and Aunt Zeruah’s social mobility campaign yields an inverse result in this case. After leaving home, Fred Stowe was never heard from again.
as if part of a museum exhibit, or locking them up as if they were valuables in a vault. Stowe’s didactic Lamarckism is abundantly clear, and the moral of the story that “[i]t is the greatest possible misery to a man and to his children to be homeless” reflects Stowe’s version of homelessness as a kind of domestic vagrancy (47). Women and girls acquire character traits that render them dry and gnarled, while men and boys resemble Jacob Riis’ children,\(^ {28}\) or they try to capture or create a family life in the homosocial confines of college or a ship.\(^ {29}\) As for Bill, he transmogrifies from “the pleasantest and most genial of fellows” to “a morose, misanthropic man” (46), and finally appears a mere cipher in his own household. Stowe thus illustrates that Lamarckian transmission can work for good or ill.

Showing what a house or a home is not (or should not be) naturally prompts Jenny to ask her father, “What is a home?” This question provides a convenient transition to the next paper, in which Mr. Crowfield addresses this inquiry by advising Marianne and her husband, Bob Stephens, how to establish a household in the most economic way possible. Marianne and Bob function as foils to Sophie and Bill Carberry, but Aunt Zeruah is reincarnated as Aunt Easygo, full of expensive advice for her niece since she has ten thousand a year with which to furnish her own home. As Stowe

\(^ {28}\) Though Jacob Riis talks specifically of poor children, his description of late nineteenth-century child development discourse echoes Stowe’s. In the chapter “The Problem of the Children” in How the Other Half Lives, Riis writes, “For, be it remembered, these children with the training they receive—or do not receive—with the instincts they inherit and absorb in their growing up, are to be our future rulers, if our theory of government is worth anything. …Home, the greatest factor of all in the training of the young, means nothing to him but a pigeon-hole in a coop along with so many other human animals. Its influence is scarcely of the elevating kind, if it have any.” See Jacob A. Riis, How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York (New York: Penguin, 1997), 135, 136.

\(^ {29}\) My use of the term “homosocial” follows, of course, Eve Kosofky Sedgwick’s use of the term “male homosocial desire” as characteristic of “the emerging pattern of male friendship, mentorship, entitlement, rivalry, and hetero- and homosexuality” in mid-eighteenth to mid-nineteenth English culture that “was in an intimate and shifting relation to class; and that no element of that pattern can be understood outside of its relation to women and the gender system as a whole.” See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 1.
patiently demonstrates, in no way does a much more modest income prevent people from living well and respectably, especially if housekeeping is approached as the art that it truly is, and the domestic environment crafted carefully for the edification of its inhabitants. Mr. Crowfield begins his paper with the lofty observation that “of so great dignity and worth is this holy and sacred thing, that the power to create a HOME ought to be ranked above all creative faculties. …A true home should be called the noblest work of art possible to human creatures, inasmuch as it is the very image chosen to represent the last and highest rest of the soul, the consummation of man’s blessedness” (56). This description compresses the logic and sensibility Stowe advocates in terms of not living beyond one’s means, but it also highlights the ministerial and artistic role of women as housekeepers, the moral gatekeepers of civilization, and even as scientists equipping the Lamarckian laboratory with its proper equipment. This insistence on the importance of the home also signals the crisis that incites the writing of these papers—that the nation has become a house divided against itself that cannot stand—and Stowe overcompensates for this subtext via her relentless echoing of the importance of the microcosmic home that assists in shoring up Lincoln’s allegorical house while continuing to avoid the war by focusing on domestic matters.

The first element that composes a home is, quite simply, love, though Mr. Crowfield’s presumptuous use of the term is devoid of the complex socio-historical

30 Such a straightforward assertion applies to Stowe, though, as Ann Douglas has amply demonstrated, the cultural influence of women is much more complicated, and, in her assessment, constituted an even greater loss of power. Nonetheless, her description of how Victorian women saw themselves is still apt, and applies as much to Stowe as it did to Catharine Beecher: “…they were Christians reinterpreting their faith as best they could in terms of the needs of their society. …Whatever their ambiguities of motivation, [they] believed they had a genuine redemptive mission in their society: to propagate the potentially matriarchal virtues of nurture, generosity, and acceptance, to create the ‘culture of the feelings’…” See Ann Douglas, The Feminization of American Culture (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux-Noonday Press, 1998), 10-11.
heritage that valorizes this term, but his main point is really that this kind of marriage forcibly opposes marriages undertaken as mere business arrangements, which Mr. Crowfield claims are “gaining foothold in America” (58). Stowe invests marriages of love with a peculiar Yankee twist, since, she asserts, the word “home” is utterly untranslatable into other languages, and “one finds how Anglo-Saxon is the very genius of the word” (59). Her account of the term’s untranslatability is both a strange and ethnocentric claim to make, but, in doing so, she coöpts and recuperates an antebellum domesticity of which Catharine Beecher is a real product, and a tradition she has lamented in The Minister’s Wooing, even though it smacks of an incipient nativism which, according to John Higham, was out of character during this “Age of Confidence.”

Mr. Crowfield telescopes his disgust at the lunacy of mercenary marriages as he rails, “How intolerable such a marriage! we say, with the close intimacies of Anglo-Saxon life in our minds.” This specifically American take on marriage is reinforced by Mr. Crowfield’s “next axiom” that the genuine home is also the seat of liberty where one, particularly “the man of business,” may do as he pleases (60; 61). Stowe emphasizes that this freedom stems from a practical, domestic materiality, since “much house-furnishing is too fine for liberty” (61). In other words, a home invites its occupants to use its furniture freely, not maintain an aesthetic distance from it as if touring a museum, and the more hodgepodge and irregular, the more patriotic and middle-class it makes a family, since their uniqueness and individuality is fully expressed

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31 For an historical treatment of the shifting status of marriage in the American nineteenth-century, and within the context of the ministerial scandal surrounding Henry Ward Beecher, Stowe’s brother, see Altina L. Waller, Reverend Beecher and Mrs. Tilton: Sex and Class in Victorian America (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1982).

in their choices of an interior decorating subject neither to the whim of fashion nor the standardized parlor suite: “In America there is no such thing as rank and station which impose a sort of prescriptive style on people of certain income. The consequence is that all sorts of furniture and belongings, which in the Old World have a recognized relation to certain possibilities of income…are thrown in the way of all sorts of people.” The importance of things in the home, such as cherished furniture, highlights how the physical domestic trappings play a crucial role in evoking responses and actions from the home’s inhabitants, and this cultural Lamarckism forms and perpetuates proper personal habits of taste and virtue. Stowe obliterates socioeconomic strata in Mr. Crowfield’s comment about “rank and station,” but her point is really that furniture that is too fine enacts a kind of domestic slavery, since “there is no freedom in a house where things are too expensive and choice to be handled and easily replaced” (64). Stowe also seems to be arguing for the maintenance of a moderate middle station, where the household reflects this quiet gentility and doesn’t spuriously conspire in the act of aping the old landed aristocracy but with insufficient funds. The truly wise and sensible are the most honest, genuine, and genteel, and the simplest solution is to go without what one simply can’t afford; for, “so long as articles must be shrouded from use, or used with fear and trembling, because their cost is above the general level of our means, we had better be without them, even though the most lucky of accidents may put their possession in our power” (64).

The refusal to live in some rooms and use some furniture so that everything remains clean and decent also opposes the conscious manipulation of the elements of the home, and children begin to feel barred, oppressed, and unwanted. The “blessed
followers of Saint Martha” and “dear shade of Aunt Mehitabel,” like Aunt Zeruah, clean and shut up rooms to avoid light, dirt, and flies, and the inhabitants of such a house are driven outside to perform domestic tasks (65). As a boy, Mr. Crowfield remembers how “the impression was burned with overpowering force into my mind, that houses and furniture, scrubbed floors, white curtains, bright tins and brasses were the great, awful, permanent facts of existence,—and that men and women, and particularly children, were the meddlesome intruders upon this divine order, every trace of whose inter-meddling must be scrubbed out and obliterated in the quickest way possible. It seemed evident to me that houses would be far more perfect, if nobody lived in them at all…” (66-67). The perfect house retains its museum- or tomb-like status because, like these institutions, they are meant to be visited and gazed upon in order to spur a ceremonial recollection of past people or events, since the real living has already passed into memory. Once an object of everyday use is isolated to be gazed upon, it attains a kind of sacralized status that removes it from the realm of the domestic and the livable, and Stowe’s obsessive housewives accomplish this reification in their own homes even though daily life struggles to continue in this environment. The house of Aunt Mehitabel becomes a shrine to its former ghostly inhabitants via its sanitized and silent vacancy, since current family members are prevented from really living in it. No real living is permitted in this home since it functions as a surrogate domestic space to be viewed from a distance, and one which conceals servants’ quarters, kitchens, and back stairwells which would provide overwhelming evidence that people do actually live there. The discussion of children recalls the corruption of the Carberry children, ruined because of an undue emphasis on keeping things new because of what they cost, not because of any inherent beautiful or
moral qualities. The domestic desire for beauty and order is commonplace and acceptable, but sacrificing a child’s moral education to a fashionable parlor is a dangerous and foolish expenditure, and one that destroys the child’s well-being: “It is well that one of the sunniest and airiest rooms in the house be the children’s nursery. It is good philosophy, too, to furnish it attractively, even if the sum expended lower the standard of parlor-luxuries” (69). Children are often annoying and underfoot, Mr. Crowfield implies, because they are banished to a cold, ugly, attic room that has been made into a makeshift nursery. The rooms that are really lived in, such as the nursery, should be made more attractive than ceremonial parlors or guest rooms that signal social standing rather than contribute to the edification of a family’s daily life. Catharine Beecher’s middle road is still important, however, since all of this should be accomplished with benign neglect so that children don’t become egotistical brats and spoiled monsters.

Housekeeping, for Stowe, thus organizes all of one’s daily life, from the education of children to the comforts of leisure time, yet it is also the site of education in the broadest sense of the word, for both children and adults can benefit. If Lamarckism dictates that characters are continually acquired by a species, then biology doesn’t necessarily equal destiny. This principle is converted and domesticated as part of a reciprocal cultural transmission that benefits all inhabitants of the home. A significant part of this education is learning to adapt to newer methods and models more appropriate to home life in America. “We are ashamed and afraid to conform honestly and hardily to a state of things purely American,” Mr. Crowfield explains, since household practices, from large dinners to having servants, are still tainted by European models with clearly
stratified social hierarchies within which everyone knows his or her place. Stowe calls for something different, and particularly nationalist: “America is the land of subdivided fortunes, of a general average of wealth and comfort, and there ought to be, therefore, an understanding in the social basis far more simple than in the Old World” (71). The “broad, plain average” that Mr. Crowfield exhorted his wife to “strike” as they undertook housekeeping reiterates or reflects this comfortable blend of the domestic and the national—that moderation in wealth dictates a level-headed gentility in the home among the middle class. Stowe’s leveling of the economic playing field, however, strikes one as odd, given her awareness of class differences (at their extreme in Uncle Tom’s Cabin), and the reality of the economic spectrum at the time.33

Awareness of a disparity in wealth does seem to exist among the genteel classes, though, who aren’t willing to share their small or moderate bounty with others “because it is such a fuss to get out the best things, and then to put them back again” (71). Of course, moderation is the answer once again, and this is the difference between “having company” and “easy daily hospitality” (72). “Why not give your friend,” Mr. Crowfield asks, “what he would like a thousand times better, a bit of your average home-life, a seat at any time at your board, a seat at your fire? If he sees that there is a crack across one of your plates, he only thinks, with a sigh of relief, ‘Well, mine are n’t the only things that meet with accidents,’ and he feels nearer to you ever after.” This comparison of “cracks in his teacups” that your friend will then let you see at his own table effects a kind of personal or social bond based upon “the transient nature of earthly possessions.” The implicit sense of bourgeois superiority that he seems to bring to the table is nullified by the fact that “you” don’t really have nice

things either, so in no way are you or can you feel superior to him. At the very least, you aren’t as “rich” as he and pose no kind of threat; thus, friendship and good feeling are fostered for the home’s inhabitants even if socioeconomics still forms a precarious base to this relationship.

The core of this friendship also betrays the sentimental anxiety about genuine affect among the bourgeoisie, and the infiltration of the parlor by Halttunen’s “confidence men and painted women.” The advice that Stowe offers here, that “if the man is a true man, he will thank you for such unpretending, sincere welcome; if he is a man of straw, then he is not worth wasting” (73), figures as the embedded and naturalized cultural construct of friendship that signals the crisis of bad home life, and perhaps initiates the social assumption that still dominates today in terms of a “real” friend’s unconditional acceptance of you. Of course, this true man will appreciate the imperfections of one’s domestic economy, will not judge the behavior of children or servants, and will subsequently feel really at home, especially if he is a visitor from abroad with those clear class stratifications: “A man who has any heart in him values a genuine, little bit of home more than anything else you can give him. …the traveler, though ever so rich and ever so well-served at home, is, after all, nothing but a man as you are, and he is craving something that does n’t seem like an hotel,—some bit of real, genuine, heart-life” (74). This “real, genuine, heart-life” thus opposes showy and pretentious Continental manners, and implicitly denigrates the genteel performance of the 1830s onward. The best hospitality welcomes the guest and humbly offers him what little one has—the truly American belief of a somewhat polished but still scrappy nation that doesn’t put on airs, and is comfortable, proud, and happy to act this way, socially,
economically, and emotionally. The inverse of giving him “something real and human” is “a bad dress-rehearsal, and bad dress-rehearsals always provoke criticism” (75). The bad dress-rehearsal glories in this spurious class consciousness that alienates friends and guests rather than welcomes them. Mr. Crowfield imagines this foreigner experiencing homesickness, missing his wife, and going to visit “you” (his gentle reader) “hoping for something like home, and you first receive him in a parlor opened only on state occasions, and that has been circumstantially and exactly furnished, as the upholsterer assures you, as every other parlor of the kind in the city is furnished. You treat him to a dinner got up for the occasion, with hired waiters,—a dinner which it has taken [your wife] a week to prepare for, and will take her a week to recover from” (74). As a result, everything is a failure, since it lacks heart-feeling, sincerity, warmth, and true friendship. It’s merely an implicit display of consumptive superiority, meant to impress, intimidate, or belittle “your traveller” who “eats your dinner, and finds it inferior, as a work of art, to other dinners,—a poor imitation. He goes away and criticizes; you hear of it, and resolve never to invite a foreigner again” (75). Such a show ignites a fissure along both domestic and international relations, and, in the end, both guest and host are left disturbed and dissatisfied.

What is a home? The final answer to this question concerns the fate of young men of solid backgrounds who have left home for the city, set up themselves as bachelors, inhabit boardinghouses, and lack the nurturing influence of the genteel household. The great housekeeper performs “a sacred charity” by opening up her home to the “morally wearied, wandering, [and] disabled” (75). Stowe thus voices through Mr. Crowfield that “when a mother has sent her son to the temptations of a distant city, what
news is so glad to her heart as that he has found some quiet family where he visits often
and is made to feel AT HOME?” This emphasis on young men is really in dialogue with
the issues of the culture of compensatory masculinity ultimately typified by Theodore
Roosevelt’s The Strenuous Life (1900). Urban temptations and the lure of the sea, or
those inclinations toward homosociality rather than bourgeois existence are, by
implication here in Stowe, tempered or annulled by these “good women” who welcome
rather than banish these young men. The Lamarckian laboratory is therefore capable of
perpetuating itself, or establishing itself across family lines. In her characteristic
ministerial rhetoric, Stowe exhorts these queens of housekeeping to share their gifts:
“Let those who have accomplished this beautiful and perfect work of divine art be liberal
of its influence. Let them not seek to bolt the doors and draw the curtains; for they know
not, and will never know till the future life, of the good they may do by the ministration
of this great charity of the home” (76). Thus “the restricted sphere of woman,” in
Stowe’s words, becomes an enchanted kingdom of enormous social good, and their role
as surrogate mothers is crucial to the continuity of the nation at this critical time, for they
have given and continue to offer a domestic haven to “the heroes and martyrs, faithful
unto death, who have given their precious lives to use during these three years of our
agony!” (76-77). According to Stowe, no higher calling exists for women, though some
women may consider themselves “far too great, too wise, too high, for mere
housekeeping,” but none is too good “to spend herself in creating a home” (76). Such a
housekeeper maintains order and perfection behind the scenes, and her absence would
result in gross neglect, the extent to which the rest of the family wouldn’t notice unless
she removed herself from the domestic sphere. So important is her work, Stowe
reiterates, that the home is a microcosm of heaven on earth, and functions as part of the inevitable teleology of the Puritan forefathers, since “her soul must ever have affiance with God” (78). As Mr. Crowfield concludes, “The New Jerusalem of a perfect home cometh from God out of heaven. But to make such a home is ambition high and worthy enough for any woman, be she what she may.” Why should any woman care to abandon the home for worldly uncertainty and possible ignominy when she literally effects God’s work on earth in her very own home? When she is married to a loving husband and spiritually “affianced with God”? Cooking, interior decorating, and the care of children constitute the true home of the woman who has chosen “to embrace life heroically, to encounter labor and sacrifice.” Her reward is both earthly and celestial, and as a member of the middle class she is also one to whom “this divinest power” of homemaking “shall…be given to create on earth that which is the nearest image of heaven.” What more could anyone, man or woman, possibly want?

III. Objects of Self-Interest

As Colleen McDannell suggests, domestic architecture and the inclusion of religious artifacts such as crosses and Bibles in the home “combined aesthetics with morality, causing an emotional and aesthetic response, which simultaneously evoked a moral and domestic response.”34 Stowe’s choice and placement of objects in the home is more secular than those families whom McDannell examines, yet this same principle of artifacts influencing behavior and even affecting the physical body is omnipresent in these household papers. This dynamic also reinforces the connection between body and object, since the Crowfield daughters worry that their home won’t adequately represent what Stowe is loosely constructing as their personality. Mr. Crowfield’s pervasive

34 McDannell, “The Home as Sacred Space,” 165.
emphasis on moderation prompts his girls to question their father, since, they believe, if
domestic *accoutrements* are relatively inexpensive—an ingrain as opposed to a Brussels
carpet—then are they really expected to sacrifice beauty to economy? Are they not
supposed to furnish their house with items that do reflect, however modestly, who they
really are? Mr. Crowfield issues his response in the paper, “The Economy of the
Beautiful,” where he argues, essentially, that his daughters can live tastefully and well
within their means. Still in the process of furnishing a new home for her husband and
herself, Marianne says, “I can’t help feeling sorry that one can’t live in such a way as to
have beautiful things around one. I’m sorry they cost so much, and take so much care,
for I am made so that I really want them. I do so like to see pretty things! …I can’t bear
mean, common-looking rooms. I should so like to have my house look beautiful!” (81-
82). Marianne’s acknowledgment that she is “made” to want beautiful things already
attests to Bushnell’s “silent power of a domestic godliness” in that the Crowfields have
rather tastefully and modestly engineered their domestic environment to produce children
that instinctively respond to the good and the beautiful. Her protest also raises the core
issue of the middle-class aesthetic—how far she should or shouldn’t go in exercising her
taste, and buying objects that satisfy her artistic sense without becoming prey to
exorbitance. Mr. Crowfield dismisses his daughters’ accusations that, as a man, he
simply expects the women to run the household with seeming effortlessness and without
its daily machinations exposed. He maintains, quite simply, “there’s nothing so
economical as beauty” (83), and he illustrates this point with the story of Philip and John,
two young men building houses “on the new land in Boston” (84).
The parable-like nature of this story is highlighted by the apostolically named characters, as well as Mr. Crowfield’s earlier injunction “that he who prepares a home with no eye to beauty neglects the example of the great Father who has filled our earth-home with such elaborate ornament” (82). God becomes the great Lamarckist, since religious faith, progressive evolution, and human improvement cohabit comfortably under his aegis. Philip and his wife, however, miss the point. Equipped with endless means, they easily furnish their house with the best wallpaper, carpets, and furniture for their two parlors, spending about three thousand dollars for the entire ménage, yet a lack of order reigns since there isn’t “a single object of Art of any kind” in the rooms: “…the different articles we have supposed, having been ordered without reference to one another or the rooms, have, when brought together, no unity of effect, and the general result is scattering and confused” (87). The visitor is left merely with the sense that the “owner is rich, and able to get good, handsome things, such as all other rich people get,” for Bushnell’s sense of organic unity among the furniture and artifacts of the house, as well as the domestic spirit that mysteriously inhabits objects, are egregiously missing. This lack partially obtains because the house simply hasn’t been lived in yet, and the little family hasn’t had time to imprint or impress upon the furniture the dynamic that exists between furniture and bodies. John, his wife, and their two little girls move in the same social circle as Philip and his wife, but they understand this principle; and it’s possible to decorate a home modestly and tastefully with an eye to inviting the household fairies to live among them.

John has only “a few hundred dollars” with which to furnish his house, “the twin of the one Philip has been furnishing,” but with a mortgage (88). Economy is thus
circumstantially determined, yet Mr. Crowfield naturalizes this liability with his belief that the simple and the practical is always more beautiful than the luxurious because it partakes of the order and harmony of the natural world—a kind of Frank Lloyd Wright-like symbiosis of house and nature rather than an ugly imposition upon the landscape. John’s approach to interior decoration functions as a continual critique or commentary upon the disastrous outcome (according to Mr. Crowfield) of their own fashionable parlor featured in “The Ravages of a Carpet.” Rather than shutting up the parlor for fear of fading the carpet, they open the windows to the sunshine “that insures flowers all winter” (88); rather than importing expensive French wallpaper, John finds the color scheme he and his wife have settled upon with “good American paper” (89); instead of a hodgepodge of stylish and fashionable furniture, and a costly Brussels carpet, John and his wife decide upon those colors that will best complement their prized possession, a landscape painting that harmonizes everything in the parlor (90). Sunshine, flowers, and the landscape painting import nature into the home, and this move emblematizes Stowe’s sense of cultivation of plants and children both outside and inside the home. Stowe makes this interest of hers most explicit in the chapter she would later contribute to Beecher’s revision of her treatise on domestic economy in 1869. In the chapter on “Home Decoration,” Stowe writes, “If you live in the country, or can get into the country, and have your eyes opened and your wits about you, your house need not be condemned to an absolute bareness. Not so long as the woods are full of beautiful ferns and mosses, while every swamp shakes and nods with tremulous grasses, need you feel yourself an utterly disinherited child of nature, and deprived of its artistic sense.”35 The painting of the “autumn landscape,” which John providentially finds in a store window, also

35 Beecher and Stowe, American Woman’s Home, 78.
functions as a way of representing nature in homes that are increasingly becoming part of larger urban units. The landscape is composed of “red maples and sumachs…purple and crimson oaks…swathed and harmonized together in the hazy Indian-summer atmosphere. There was a great yellow chestnut-tree, on a distant hill, which stood out so naturally that John instinctively felt his fingers tingling for a basket, and his heels alive with a desire to bound over on to the rustling hillside and pick up the glossy brown nuts. Everything was there of autumn, even to the golden-rod and purple asters and scarlet creepers in the foreground” (91). The importance of this painting perhaps stresses and opposes a kind of antebellum suburban sprawl, since John’s desire to gallop among the forest trees contrasts with the picture’s ultimate location, over the fireplace in the house which has been built on “the new land” in Boston, and where he will artificially (and artifactually) inhabit this autumn scene. As a stand-in for Mr. Crowfield, John instinctively knows and enacts the proper techniques for raising his family in the most suitable environment possible, but the rather big role he plays in interior decoration and in his dainty desire to run in the forest with a basket that feminizes him also points to his ability to lure the fairies in the home since he is a kind of household fairy himself.

The significance of the painting, however, lies in its ability to harmonize the elements of the parlor, and to draw attention to itself as a focal piece that discourages visitors from noticing the room’s relatively unfurnished state. As John explains to his wife, Mary, “[w]e must put things into our rooms that people will look at, so that they will forget to look at the furniture, and never once trouble their heads about it. People never look at furniture so long as there is anything else to look at” (94). “Beauty” thus consists of the old furniture they have, but recuperated, recovered, and refreshed, with
interesting books on the shelves and the lithographs and busts of classical and Renaissance treasures that they’ve collected as souvenirs of other times and places.\textsuperscript{36} The crowning glory, “the picture,” will finally be complemented by these items as well as “flowers blooming” and “ivies wandering and rambling…and hanging in the most graceful ways and places, and…little shells and ferns and vases…tastefully arranged,” so that visitors will exclaim “‘How beautiful!’ when they enter, than if we spent three times the money on new furniture” (97). While the domestic objects aren’t costly, they are arranged in such a way as to give viewers the proper effect, and much of this has to do with the construction of a Lamarckian laboratory that endows their children with habitual responses to these objects that will effect Lamarck’s “second nature.” They will thus be properly trained and groomed to appreciate the tasteful and the virtuous, and to be content with the signs of shabby gentility as opposed to the fashionable threats of a Brussels carpet bargain that exiles inhabitants from the parlor rather than inviting them in. John and Mary are akin to stage directors, who instinctively know those tiny, right touches that give a textured simplicity to their parlor. Of course, everyone feels most comfortable there: “Such beautiful rooms,—so charmingly furnished,—you must go and see them. What does make them so much pleasanter than those rooms in the other house, which have everything in them that money can buy?” The obvious answer to that is the presence of the fairies whose soothing energy is ignited by this domestic Lamarckism. The point seems ultimately a very bourgeois one—that the middle road is always the best or even the only way, that one live within and not beyond his or her means, and that the sign of gentility is an economic wisdom free of aristocratic pretension and white trash.

\textsuperscript{36} For a rich discussion of souvenirs as objects capable of capturing the past in relation to the body see Susan Stewart, On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 132-169.
contentment. In contrast to their expensive neighbors, the childless Philip and his wife, the Mertons have created a house, with its museum-like arrangement of statues, books, and paintings, that appropriately functions as a Dewey-like school for their children, since it isn’t overly stuffed and is free from “the tantalizing beauty of expensive and frail knick-knacks” that would prompt a child to touch and damage them (99). As Karin Calvert shrewdly observes, however, this separation of child from objects maintained the safety of the child as well, since children in the Victorian home could be injured as much by the trappings of the house as they could damage the house itself. Mr. Crowfield grandly concludes, “[n]o child is ever stimulated to draw or to read by an Axminster carpet or a carved centre-table; but a room surrounded with photographs and pictures and fine casts suggests a thousand inquiries, stimulates the little eye and hand. The child is found with its pencil, drawing; or he asks for a book on Venice, or wants to hear the history of the Roman Forum.” Because of the eternal nature of Beauty, these artifacts that can be safely displayed out of reach of the hands of children also insures the domestic integrity of a parlor that can be both enjoyed and used, “though the mother be ill in her chamber, she has no fears that she shall find it all wrecked and shattered” upon her recovery. The properly arranged and economically beautiful house seems to run itself.

IV. Stowe’s Self-Help Movement

My contention that Stowe emerges as an early figure in the American self-help movement after the Civil War is supported by her belief in a bodily energy that she somewhat crudely refers to as “caloric,” but is, in my assessment, really comparable to the mesmeric principle of animal magnetism as adopted and adapted by Phineas

Parkhurst Quimby, who, according to Robert C. Fuller, “is the rightful father of the many self-help psychologies which to this day help churched and unchurched Americans alike achieve inner wholeness.” Of course, Quimby has been historically overshadowed by his follower, Mary Baker Eddy, but his death in 1866 coincides with the publication of Stowé’s second series of domestic papers *Little Foxes*. Her emphasis in these essays, however, shifts from the materiality of the domestic environment to “those unsuspected, unwatched, insignificant little causes that nibble away domestic happiness, and make home less than so noble an institution should be.” In other words, even though the home’s physical space is ideal, its inhabitants still need to be conscious of bad personal habits that anger and irritate others, and infect the home like a contagion. If the feeling of the home’s heavy Gothic Revival architecture was believed to influence its inhabitants, then family members themselves certainly emanated their own moods or auras affecting one another. Mr. Crowfield characterizes the typical home as “a little community of people, all of whom would be willing to die for each other,” yet who “may not be able to live happily together; that is, they may have far less happiness than their circumstances, their fine and excellent traits, entitle them to expect” (9). I am arguing in this section that Lamarckian concepts of inheritance form the basis of Stowé’s particular brand of the self-help movement gradually emerging after the Civil War, and that her version of self-help blends both the idea of animal magnetism from mesmerism, and George Beard’s early observations on neurasthenia. In the home of physical and personal perfection, traits


acquired by family members to moderate desire and police the self were thought to be naturally transmitted to their children.

Stowe invokes this idea of modifying or even creating new species with another of her horticultural examples that have by now become commonplace in these papers. Mr. Crowfield explains to his family how, “with cultivation and care,” “the family state…might be a great deal happier” (13), and he compares this process to a kind of Hawthornean grafting of fruit trees: “Very fair pears have been raised by dropping a seed into a good soil and letting it alone for years; but finer and choicer are raised by the watchings, tendings, prunings, of the gardener” (13-14). He reinforces this image with the further example of a good friend of his who, by “studying the laws of Nature, conjured up new species of rarer fruit and flavor out of the old” grapevines growing wildly (14). The first of these “little foxes” spoiling the vines of home life is fault-finding, and this bad habit is especially malicious when applied by parent to child. The mother constantly berating her son as lazy and dirty, and blaming him for every household accident cultivates her garden with poison rather than love. Mr. Crowfield characterizes this phenomenon as most dangerous to the happiness of the home. “Children are more hurt,” he says, “by indiscriminate, thoughtless fault-finding than by any other thing. Often a child has all the sensitiveness and all the susceptibility of a grown person, added to the faults of childhood. Nothing about him is right as yet; he is immature and faulty at all points, and everybody feels at perfect liberty to criticize him…till he takes refuge either in callous hardness or irritable moroseness” (31). The faults of children must be corrected, but this discipline should take the form of Beecher’s middle way. Stowe’s point, however, is that those adults finding fault with spouses,
children, and friends need to discipline themselves, to offer praise rather than criticism, or simply to silence themselves. Both the families in Stowe’s sketches and her readers can begin to make their homes a better place by modifying their behavior so as not to hurt others. “But, gentle reader,” Mr. Crowfield says, “let us look over life, our own lives, and ask, How much of the fault-finding which prevails has the least tendency to do any good? How much of it is well-timed, well-pointed, deliberate and just, so spoken as to be effective?” (38-39). Domestic bliss thus begins with self-improvement.

Stowe’s engagement with the emerging self-help movement surfaces in her paper on irritability, and the seemingly perfect domestic man, Mr. Crowfield, confesses to a bastion of very ungenteel traits. He is annoyed with the extravagance of his family, his noisy grandchildren, chipped plates and glasses, careless servants and even poor Rover who receives the brunt of his frustration: “I threw out my leg impatiently, and hit Rover, who yelped a yelp that finished the upset of my nerves. I gave him a hearty kick, that he might have something to yelp for…” (61). This act of animal cruelty anticipates Stowe’s vaster treatment of it in her children’s stories, but here it really signals a mildly brutal act that demonstrates the darker side of the domestic interior. In other words, Stowe is being explicit about the limits or the unreality of sentimental perfection, and her understanding of the way things really are in the home is influenced by her neurasthenic-like observation about the finite amount of energy available in human bodies.40 Mr. George Beard first describes this condition of nervous exhaustion in 1869 as “result[ing] from any causes that exhaust the nervous system. Hereditary descent terribly predisposes to neurasthenia, just as it predisposes to all forms of nervous derangement. The law of reversion is frequently illustrated here, and sick headache, epilepsy or insanity or dyspepsia in the grandfather may skip over a generation and show itself as neurasthenia in the grandchildren. Among the special exciting causes of neurasthenia may be mentioned the pressures of bereavement, business and family cares, parturition and abortion, sexual excesses, the abuse of stimulants and narcotics, and civilized starvation, such as is sometimes observed even among the wealthy order of society, and sudden retirement from business.” “Neurasthenia, or Nervous Exhaustion,” The Boston Medical and Surgical Journal New Series III.13 (April 29, 1869), 218.

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Crowfield realizes that “things were much as they had been” and he is the one who is “cross” (64). As a result of the pleasures, excitements, and strains of a recent and busy Christmas, he has “used up in ten days the capital of nervous energy that was meant to last…ten weeks,” for “when the nervous-fluid source of cheerfulness, giver of pleasant sensations and pleasant view, is all spent, you can’t feel cheerful; things cannot look as they did when you were full of life and vigor” (64-65).

Stowe converts the traditional tenets of moral and religious education by focusing on the needs of the physical body rather than a more abstract and intellectual discussion about character traits. It is this emphasis, I argue, that aligns her with the self-help movement that becomes much more explicit toward the end of the nineteenth-centuries with figures such as Horatio Dresser, Annie Payson Call, and William James. By cross-dressing through Mr. Crowfield, Stowe understands that “the power…by which the brain thinks and wills, the stomach digests,” and “the blood circulates” consists of a bodily force or energy resembling the Lamarckian fluid that modifies physical characteristics (70), and of Mesmer’s animal magnetism that rules and regulates the body. In 1837, the pioneer French mesmeric healer, Charles Poyen, described this bodily energy for his American readers as “a nervous, magnetic or vital atmosphere” that “every human being carries within himself,”\(^{41}\) which Stowe describes as “nervous fluid, nervous power, vital energy, life-force, or anything else that you will” that “is a perfectly understood, if not a definable thing” (357). Stowe begins to theorize George Beard’s more fully formulated description of this condition in the 1870s when she says “most nervous, irritable states of temper are the mere physical result of a used-up condition,” since “the person has overspent his nervous energy” (71). Americans are nervous because of the rapid pace of

life in the United States with its technological inventions and sweeping changes; thus, “unless men and women make a conscience, a religion, of saving and sparing something of themselves expressly for home-life and home-consumption, it must follow that home will often be merely a sort of refuge for us to creep into when we are used up and irritable” (73). Stowe shifts the emphasis from engineering the domestic environment in House and Home Papers to a kind of policing of the body here that also invokes Sylvester Graham’s ideas on diet and nutrition. “It is almost impossible for a confirmed dyspeptic to act like a good Christian,” Mr. Crowfield explains, “but a good Christian ought not to become a confirmed dyspeptic. Reasonable self-control, abstaining from all unseasonable indulgence, may prevent or put an end to dyspepsia, and many suffer and make their friends suffer only because they will persist in eating what they know is hurtful to them” (78).

Stowe interprets many of these traits to the misfortune of inheritance, and her discussion of hypochondria resurrects the Lamarckian influence of the domestic perpetuation of character traits for good or ill. The “temperament called the HYPOCHONDRIAC” consists of “a want of balance of the nervous powers, which tends constantly to periods of high excitement and of consequent depression.” This imbalance proves to be “an unfortunate inheritance for the possessor, though accompanied often with the greatest talents” (85). For Stowe, hypochondria is a real organic disease neither imagined by the hysteric nor invented by the attention-seeker. Mr. Crowfield explains that “the evils and burdens of such a temperament are half removed when a man once knows it for a disease” (86). Since hypochondria borders on insanity, according to Stowe, parents must be hypervigilant about modifying their children’s behavior in order to
obliterate it from the familial, hereditarian order. Hypochondria “appears in early childhood; and a child inclined to fits of depression should be marked as a subject of the most thoughtful, painstaking physical and moral training” (89). This kind of “judicious education may do much to mitigate the unavoidable pains and penalties of this most undesirable inheritance.”

Stowe’s Lamarckian and mesmeric sense of a bodily energy is carried over into her paper on repression, and in this description Mr. Crowfield explains how “a substance called Caloric exists in all bodies. In some it exists in a latent state: it is there, but it affects neither the senses nor the thermometer. Certain causes develop it, when it raises the mercury and warms the hands” (92). This substance permeates the material objects of the house, and its spiritual equivalent is love “which exists in human hearts dumb and unseen, but which has no real life, no warming power, till set free by expression.” Repression, or the refusal or inability to express warmth and affection to one’s friends and family, warms neither the heart nor the body. In this sense, someone who is referred to as a “cold person” is exactly so both literally and metaphorically. Mr. Crowfield describes home repression with the example of his youngest sister, Emily, who married into a family whose home “had not the slightest appearance of being lived in, not a door or window open, not a wink or blink of life…” (98). Stowe’s conversion of Lamarckian fluid and animal magnetism into caloric also translates into a kind of energy that permeates homes, or the sense upon entering another person’s home that renders it a “warm” or a “chilly” place. “Rooms, I verily believe,” Mr. Crowfield says, “get saturated with the aroma of their spiritual atmosphere; and there are some so stately, so correct, that they would paralyze even the friskiest kitten or the most impudent Scotch
terrier” (100). Rooms and houses thus take on the character of their owners and inhabitants, and Mr. Crowfield’s experience at his sister’s in-laws demonstrates how this frosty domestic power physically affects both body and mind. He confesses to feeling “slowly stiffening,” “gently chilly,” and even “slightly insane” as a result of his visit (105; 106), and he and his sister contrast the propriety of this house with the one where they grew up as a home where “everybody…did just what they wanted to...” (107). A home where children neither receive nor give verbal or physical expressions of love has rendered their power to do so obsolete, and Mr. Crowfield attributes this to the principle of use-inheritance. His sister Emily explains how the members of her husband’s family “have lost the power of expression” (115), and Mr. Crowfield says how “they are like the fakirs who have held up an arm till it has become stiffened,—they cannot now change its position; like the poor mutes, who, being deaf, have become dumb through disuse of the organs of speech.” The acquisition and transmission of character traits to children in the home begins with the dispositions of the parents, who influence and mould their children into little versions of themselves. The stunning examples Stowe provides here illustrate just how crucial the manipulation of home life really is to every family member’s development.

Because of the nefarious nature of the energy pervading the house of his sister’s in-laws, Mr. Crowfield exhorts that she and her husband move farther away since this force, localized in her mother-in-law, will necessarily affect her children: “[S]he influences; she lives, she looks, she is there; and while she is there…the old spell will be on your husband, on your children, if you have any; you will feel it in the air; it will constrain, it will sway you, it will rule your house, it will bring up your children” (118).
This “quiet, invisible, pervading spirit” that “will be around you in the very air you breathe,” like Bushnell’s “silent power of a domestic godliness” (119), works conversely if fueled by indifference rather than love. It’s an energy that makes a house a home or a house a tomb, depending upon the raw material with which it has to work. Of course, Emily prevails upon her husband, they move farther away from his parents, their marriage blossoms, children are born, and their household is a model of domestic bliss since love is fully expressed and warmth and affection are not repressed. Stowe acknowledges the dangers of a bad home life, and the perfect sentimental home really doesn’t exist. She does subscribe, however, to the Bushnellian belief in cultivating children like flowers or fruit trees, and this process is facilitated by the warm and loving home. “Love must be cultivated,” Mr. Crowfield concludes, “and can be increased by judicious culture, as wild fruits may double their bearing under the hand of a gardener; and love can dwindle and die out by neglect, as choice flower-seeds planted in poor soil dwindle and grow single” (130). The spiritual, the natural, and the emotional are all seeds to be planted and nurtured in the garden of domesticity.

V. A Great Advocate for Killing Animals

We come full circle to Oakholm, where Stowe wrote the collection of children’s stories, Queer Little People, in 1867; but instead of bringing nature into the home, Stowe imposes the domestic upon the natural world. In so doing, she eliminates all that is wild and dangerous as she purports to respect it, and her attempts to establish a site of culture and transmit its practices are as doomed as the domestic dream that her mansion signifies. In “Our Country Neighbors,” she informs her child readers that, as her family and she were struggling through the woods to supervise the building of Oakholm, they discerned
a snake “regaling himself by sucking down his maw a small frog, which he had begun to
swallow at the toes, and had drawn about half down.” Startled and disturbed by this
sight, Stowe explains how “there was immense sympathy, however, excited for him in
the family circle; and it was voted that a snake which indulged in such very disagreeable
modes of eating his dinner was not to be tolerated in our vicinity. So I have reason to
believe that that was his last meal.” 42 This domestication and policing of nature for the
sake of the relatively distant and hermetically sealed world of Oakholm is a sinister
enterprise, since as much as Stowe appreciates the animals and trees of the woods, she
has destroyed them in order to construct the house that represents the pinnacle of
domestic happiness and her financial success. Annihilating the natural world translates
quickly and easily into the killing of more familiar animals that by the nineteenth-century
have become family members. In “Dogs and Cats” and “Aunt Esther’s Rules,“ the index
to gentility in the form of a privileged human kindness becomes nuanced, even darkened,
by the euthanasia-like rules that Stowe establishes in order to put pets out of their misery
when necessary. If proper pet-keeping shows how good a person is, the extermination of
unwanted or surplus animals is constructed as both merciful and even didactic. In other
words, boys and girls who follow Aunt Esther’s rules for the killing of pets contribute to
the stability of the home and the community. In these stories, Stowe portrays a much
more unstable version of the home that increasingly dominates her later household
papers. As Stowe has become more prolific and more wealthy, she leaves the sizzling
meals and welcoming hearth of Uncle Tom’s cabin far behind.

42 Harriet Beecher Stowe, Queer Little People (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1867), 83. Hereafter cited in
the text.
In “Dogs and Cats,” Stowe supplies another Lamarckian explanation for the development of domesticated dogs rather than wild dogs, and in this initial description she divides these animals into two groups of the wanted and the unwanted. The transmission of desirable character traits results from a dog’s inserting itself into the company of humans, since “domestic animals that associate with human beings develop a very different character from what they would possess in a wild state” (142). This association with humans not only benefits the dog, but also renders it a companion in need of cultivation and love, and thus is situated somewhere between Stowe’s plants and children. “A dog without a master is a forlorn creature,” she continues, “no society of other dogs seems to console him; he wanders about disconsolate, till he finds some human being to whom to attach himself, and then he is made a dog,—he pads about with an air of dignity, like a dog that is settled in life” (142). Of course, we can’t forget that stray dogs roamed about unlike today, but this difference actually highlights how a “wanted dog” also benefits from the power of cultural transmission. A dog that finds itself in a good home is thus “made a dog” and is no longer just an animal. The dog is “made” such by partaking of the domestic culture of a good home, yet its own self-improvement constitutes a reciprocal relationship with family members, who subsequently enjoy its companionship, playfulness, and loyalty.  

Sounding remarkably like a representative from an animal shelter today, Stowe cautions her young readers about the effort and the hazards that attend the adoption of a

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43 In a later story, “A Dog’s Mission,” Stowe illustrates how the abandoned and abused dog, Trip, who is taken in by the old spinster, Miss Zarviah Avery, possesses the power to recuperate compassion in his mistress that eventually leads to her reuniting with her brother’s family. Though Stowe’s children’s stories here suggest an uneasy relationship between the advantages of pet-keeping and the specter of euthanasia, the beneficent presence of a dog in the domestic environment is never in doubt. See A Dog’s Mission; or, the Story of the Old Avery House and Other Stories (New York: Fords, Howard, and Hulbert, 1880), 7-65.
dog or a cat. The care of a pet, like the cultivation of plants and the raising of children, must be undertaken consciously and carefully, since the proper or improper training of a dog renders it either loving or offensive; and, if offensive, owners might quickly discard their pet through no fault of its own. “Don’t do it,” Stowe admonishes the child thinking about adopting a pet, “without making up your mind to be really and thoroughly kind to them, and feeding them as carefully as you feed yourself, and giving them appropriate shelter from the inclemency of the weather” (146). Stowe explains how the casual care of a pet by throwing him a stray scrap now and then seems to many people as “taking abundant care of him,” but if the child reader were treated the same way he “would think this a hard measure; yet a dog’s or cat’s stomach digests as rapidly as yours” (146; 147).

Stowe effects her didactic pet-keeping by equating dogs with children, especially her young readers, and animals, like plants in the parlor, become pleasant additions and even improvements to the home. She characteristically concludes with a moral, but the lesson is a Lamarckian one as well, since “watchfulness, kindness, and care will develop a nature in animals such as we little dream of. Love will beget love, regular care and attention will give regular habits, and thus domestic pets may be made agreeable and interesting” (150). Those families not interested in having a pet transformed into a full member of the family “ought conscientiously to abstain from having one in charge.”

Stowe informs her readers about the joys and effort behind pet-keeping, but in “Aunt Esther’s Rules” she makes explicit what should be done with those miserable and abandoned pets that nobody wants. Her directions for the ultimate treatment of them sound harsh, yet it’s another implicit acknowledgment of the dangers and risks of the home that has been made unhappy through a family’s ignorance, neglect, and
indifference. The title character is based upon Stowe’s real and admired aunt, Aunt Esther, who used to sit in her parlor and tell her niece many happy stories about “the habits and character of different animals, and their various ways and instincts” (152). Since this was her aunt’s “favorite subject,” Stowe passes these “rules for the treatment and care of animals” along to her readers. Avoiding needless cruelty to an animal or practical jokes for sport are obvious injunctions for children to follow, but Aunt Esther also advises that “when there were domestic animals about a house which were not wanted in a family, it was far kind to have them killed in some quick and certain way than to chase them out of the house, and leave them to wander homeless, to be starved, beaten, and abused” (153). Despite her gentility and kindness, “Aunt Esther was a great advocate for killing animals,” and “she gave us many instructions in the kindest and quickest way of disposing of one whose life must be sacrificed” (154). Gone is any idea of domestic perfection, of unconditional kindness, and of the house that runs itself. The transmission of a Bushnellian domestic godliness is tempered by mercy-killing once external realities render the community an unfit place to live, and it is now proper to annihilate these disruptions in the orderly system. Stowe recalls “one little girl, who had been trained under Aunt Esther’s care” dispatching a half-dead kitten that had been tortured by a group of boys and dogs, and since she couldn’t take it home with her, she ceremoniously drowns it. “‘Poor kit,’” the little girl says, “‘you must die, but I will see that you are not tormented’;—and she knelt bravely down and held the little thing under water, with the tears running down her own cheeks…. This was real brave humanity” (154; 155). Stowe’s domestic logic has become either curiously or cleverly inverted, yet it signifies another aspect of the kind of moral and personal improvement campaign that
she establishes in Little Foxes. The refusal to kill an animal because of sentimental weakness undermines the strength of the individual and does the creature no good, since the misery of unwanted and neglected pets will only increase exponentially. Stowe exclaims to her young readers “how much kinder and more really humane to take upon ourselves the momentary suffering of causing the death of an animal than to turn our back and leave it to drag out a life of torture and misery!” (155). Like Stowe’s disastrous mansion, Oakholm, the killing of animals signals yet another domestic failure.

Stowe’s earlier statements about interior decorating, the raising of children, and the exhibition of plants both inside the parlor and outside in gardens nourished with precious manure sets the scene of Edith Wharton’s own brand of interior decorating that she explores in her The Decoration of Houses, published in 1897. The gap of three decades between Stowe’s House and Home Papers and Wharton’s own study permits us to view how the pervasiveness of Lamarckism becomes revised by the late-nineteenth century movement of neo-Lamarckism that springs up as a sustained reaction to Darwin’s theory of natural selection. In the next chapter, I argue that in The Decoration of Houses and in the novels, The House of Mirth (1905) and The Age of Innocence (1920), Wharton interrogates the environmental determinism of the Social Darwinists and the literary naturalists to demonstrate that a balance exists between environmental responses and the individual will. Although she concedes that bad choices can seem to doom her characters, the role of domestic interiority still functions as a site where risks to individual expression and development can be assuaged and even countered.
Chapter 5

“That Little Atrophied Organ”: Edith Wharton’s Neo-Lamarckism

I must protest, & emphatically, against the suggestion that I have “stripped” New York society. New York society is still amply clad, & the little corner of its garment that I lifted was meant to show only that little atrophied organ—the group of idle & dull people—that exists in any big & wealthy social body.

—Edith Wharton to William Roscoe Thayer, 11 November 1905

Edith Wharton’s characterization of New York society as a body with an atrophied organ demonstrates how one of the most sophisticated social groups in American history can be biologized in Lamarckian terms. The fact that Wharton characterizes her compeers as experiencing the effects of organic disuse also suggests that bigger social consequences were at stake for the “useful” part of society; and these heartier and more productive individuals can be fruitfully examined by listening to the contemporaneous sociologist, Lester Frank Ward, who asked his own audience “why may we not learn to select on some broad and comprehensive plan with a view to a general building up and rounding out of the race of human beings?”

Ward’s application of neo-Lamarckism to humanity clarifies the rather muddied waters of this American school of evolutionary thought that Peter J. Bowler typifies as “an uneasy alliance between two quite different approaches to the theory” of neo-Lamarckism. Although we have already seen the benefits and hazards of artificial selection in Beecher, Bushnell,

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Hawthorne, and Stowe. Ward distinguishes between natural selection as “the chief agent in the transformation of species and the evolution of life,” and “artificial selection” as that which “has given to man the most that he possesses of value in the organic products of the earth.” These definitions illustrate the neo-Lamarckian compromise with Darwin since natural selection is admitted as an evolutionary force although it doesn’t wholly explain the variation within a species that must, according to Herbert Spencer most prominently, result from the hereditary transmission of characters acquired after birth. As Ward explains, “Neo-Lamarckism, as I understand it, while recognizing natural selection as the more potent of the two agencies, also recognizes that the increments of change impressed upon individuals during their lifetime or brought about by individual efforts or habits are also perpetuated in some measure through heredity and form an important factor in the general process of organic development” (12). Ward draws the conclusion by asking, “May not men and women be selected as well as sheep and horses?” (71). This selective practice assumes an evolutionary complexity or perfection similar to the telos implicit in Lamarckism, but it also leads to an evolutionary linearity that results in highly specialized beings, as the paleontologist Edward Drinker Cope theorizes.⁴ Cope also stresses a theoretical need for neo-Lamarckism, especially in terms of accounting for variation among a species, since “the variations that result in evolution are not multifarious or promiscuous, but definite and direct, contrary to the method which

⁴ Bowler, Eclipse of Darwinism, 119. In an additional discussion of neo-Lamarckism, Bowler summarizes the evolutionary process favored by these theorists: “Once the ancestors of a group had adopted a particular habit of life, their bodily structure would adapt to the new behavior-pattern. The resulting acquired characters, if inherited, would guide the group’s evolution toward an even higher degree of specialization for the chosen life style. All species within the group would advance through the same pattern of specialization in parallel.” Bowler, The Non-Darwinian Revolution: Reinterpreting a Historical Myth (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 100.
seeks no origin for variations other than natural selection.”\(^5\) Ward thus transfers this sense or need for order to the social realm, for “when the day comes,” he concludes, “that society shall be as profoundly shocked at the crime of perpetuating the least taint of hereditary disease, insanity, or other serious defect as it now is at the comparatively harmless crime of incest, the way to practical and successful stirpiculture will have already been found.”

Whether Ward’s artificial selection leads to a perfect humanity or eugenicist nightmare is an important issue, but I am more interested in the neo-Lamarckian emphasis on increasing specialization, especially as it plays itself out in the works of Edith Wharton. Although Lamarck posits a \textit{telos}, an organism’s constant buffeting against environmental forces prevents it from achieving this perfection, yet the neo-Lamarckist model of the linearity of evolution leading to specialization functions as the \textit{telos} in Wharton’s own writing. Wharton’s wealthy characters build and maintain their houses in conscious and complex ways; they orchestrate social settings and arrange marriages to maintain desirable hereditary lines and preserve immense wealth in certain families; and, most significantly, they are highly specialized though ineffective products that, according to Wharton, are the problem in her society, since their very beings perpetuate and transmit those qualities that do not lead to Ward’s vision of social perfection. A product of this society yet objective about it, Wharton as novelist and cultural critic scrutinizes her comppeers to show her more general readership that their own simpler and more industrious lives enact much greater social consequences than those of the little atrophied organ.

In this chapter, I argue that Wharton literalizes her interest in houses and interior decorating by developing her characters as outgrowths of their immediate domestic environment. In so doing, she shows how this relationship between bodies and houses plays itself out in Old New York society, and that the enormous wealth available to her characters not only defines them domestically, but also renders them ineffective in all worlds except the hermetically confined boundaries of their own social circle. As a result, these highly specialized and ineffective characters do not lead the march to perfection but grow increasingly obsolete as they are replaced by more vigorous and aggressive beings, and the world of Old New York eventually implodes upon itself, as the memory of The Age of Innocence demonstrates by recollecting the 1870s-1880s upon being published in 1920. In the first section, I connect Wharton’s The Decoration of Houses (1897) with Charles Eastlake’s Hints on Household Taste, first published in America in 1872. Eastlake, whom I consider the first English interior decorator of note, wishes to refine taste while perpetuating the Gothic Revival ideal that we saw at play in the writings of Harriet Beecher Stowe. This attempt at fashioning taste is the most conscious and aggressive manipulation of the domestic environment, and the significance of the American publication really lies in the editor’s comments that adapt Eastlake to an American audience and provide the most significant information for his American readers. In the second section, I read The House of Mirth (1905) as fulfilling what Wharton defines as the “purely decorative mission” in the novel, since Lily Bart, while she fumbles and becomes victimized by her social circle, is really too refined and cultivated to survive, and her unceremonious death that ultimately and, quite simply, ejects her from the novel signals her social extinction. In the last section, I show how, in
The Age of Innocence (1920), the house maketh the man, or, in most cases, the woman, since Countess Olenska’s extended family are all invariably defined in Wharton’s initial descriptions of them by their houses. In this sense, the obesity of Mrs. Mingott, for example, grounds her quite literally to the first floor of her lavish mansion, and she is somewhat entombed by the relative isolation and grandeur of her home. Although the narrative voice pilots a mild admiration for Mrs. Mingott, Wharton finally demonstrates that the home and its atmosphere, its ambience, feeling or mood, even, has palpable physical effects on the body. Homes for these human beings become their last imposing refuge as a new social order dawns and heralds their extinction.

I. Imbued with a New Spirit: The Natural Selection of Furniture

In his preface to the American edition of Charles Eastlake’s Hints on Household Taste, editor Charles Perkins explains how Eastlake “rightly thinks that the public taste is corrupt,” and “he finds a lamentable want of demand for really well-designed objects of household use” since “fashion rules” and “few are shocked by sham and pretension.”

This morality of furniture recalls Stowe’s fashionable threats, as well as her desire for objects that are useful, beautiful, and edifying. Although the genteel penury she advocated is now usurped by more intricate and more expensive furnishings, both Stowe and Eastlake agree that items that are both faddish and gaudy violate the integrity of a Ruskinian architecture and decoration that conjures humility, awe, and a kind of sectarian sacredness in the home and family. This anxiety surrounding how the house and its contents really influence its inhabitants and the way they live grows even more pressing, since the gaudiness and excesses of monstrous Gilded Age houses seem to be covering

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every piece of furniture with tacky gold paint. Perkins thus calls for professional
tastemakers who, like the Greeks, achieve unity among variety in interior decoration, but
this unity is merely an extension of the human body. “The body is the dwelling-place of
the soul,” Perkins explains, “which, though agitated by divers passions and interests, acts
with a certain uniformity of purpose, and forms what we call a man’s character” (x). As
we have seen in Downing and Stowe, the Gothic house that elicits and induces certain
feelings and thoughts in its inhabitants also functions as a physicality or a kind of
surrogate body. “Now let us reason from the man to his dwelling,” Perkins continues,
“which we may call his artificial body, as every part of it has its special ends and
appointed uses.” This harmony is the Bushnellian organic unity of the family and the
house in which physical correspondences or indices of the occupants exist in the
architecture, furniture, and objects of the home that encases them and signals their
physical presence to the wider world. One is thus known and judged by what he displays
in his home, for when the man “voluntarily surrounds himself with ugly shapes we know
that he is ignorant, or that his taste is bad.”

This architectural idealism that recalls the past must be “imbue[d]…with a new
spirit” (xi), since “slavishly” copying older styles can do no good. Yet this “new spirit”
that Perkins discusses I take to be the feeling of the home, comparable to Bushnell’s
“spirit of domestic godliness,” and there are good homes and bad homes, houses with
fairies and those that are haunted, which also possess a kind of psychic connection with
those sensitive inhabitants who either feel at home, alienated, or even frightened by their
domestic structures. The materialism of architectural styles is really a manifestation of
geographic and temporal “peculiarities, habits, and modes of thought…reflecting as they
do the spirit of the people who developed them.” Thus this sense of spirit or thought invested in the home is both ideological and personal, and the house as an extension of the physical body will prove to be among Wharton’s greatest concerns, since these structures function as surrogate bodies for her characters and everyone else. Perkins’ emphasis on the physical or material is also a matter of Darwinian natural selection. As he explains, “If the theoretical law of ‘natural selection’ could have operated upon furniture, we should now have a résumé of all its best forms in those which surround us. Whether such a law regulates human evolution it is not our business to inquire; but even if it be an imaginary law, we may follow it in developing our own creations, and arrive at harmonious perfection through voluntary selection” (xii). Perkins’ understanding of natural selection isn’t quite accurate, since his recommendation is really one of artificial or “voluntary” selection. His emphasis on perfection, however, underscores the fact that the design and decoration of houses, while functioning metaphorically as a human body, physically affect those bodies residing within the model home. Perkins also privileges the antebellum belief that domestic environments train people to virtue, and he aligns himself with Beecher, Bushnell, and Stowe though his familiarity with Darwinism casts it in much more materialist terms: “The law of natural selection, to which we have just referred, works, if it works at all, unconsciously, while, if we work, we must work consciously, with a full knowledge of good and evil” (xiii). It seems somewhat obvious that if the home isn’t initially the site of moral education then it’s very unlikely that any other venue will prove to be so.

Yet Perkins’ characterization of a benign “natural” (i.e. artificial) selection that can be manipulated demonstrates that creating and decorating homes is part of the
biological or botanical sciences, for interior decoration, especially in the “modern sterility” of America that hasn’t yet developed or acquired a “national taste,” must take as its model those plants which are “peculiar to America” (xiv): “Our plants, for instance, when we have learnt how to study them, will suggest ideas born of the soil. Only the other day we entered a greenhouse and there saw a species of lily…whose conventionalized form would make the gas-burner, that most prosaic of all household objects, poetical.” This lily, in other words, with its delicately crafted structure, provides an architectural model in its perfection, such as its “long narrow pendent flower-leaves” that resemble “flying buttresses.” Interior decoration turns the dull or useful into something beautiful, and in its ability to make the gas-burner poetical, the lily is a way to make domestic architecture literary and uplifting. Of course, this implementation of nature into architecture is nothing new, as neo-classicism long incorporated acanthus leaves into columns, for example. But the difference here lies within the use of natural models for beautifying the nineteenth-century home and edifying its inhabitants. Moreover, this process crafts natural selection into a benevolent practice that has ramifications for art and industry and that will necessarily lead, for Perkins at least, to an evolutionary perfection: “Who can deny the possible development of an original school of art which shall imprint itself upon American architecture, sculpture, and painting, and upon the industrial products of the country, the value of which must eventually depend in a great measure upon the extent to which they have been influenced by those arts whose aim is beauty?” (xv). Perkins nationalizes the reciprocity between the domestic gas-burner and the greenhouse lily by his suggestion that architecture and other fine arts can
make even ugly industry palatable. The biological model of individual development thus functions as the basic model for the progress of a more general humanity.

In their respective interior decoration guides, then, both Eastlake and Wharton (as the first English and American interior decorators of note) illustrate how what Eastlake refers to as “the effect of every room” promotes both affective and intellectual responses in the individual (xxvii) that, by implication, mould this representative human being. Gaudy and fashionable objects of everyday use may be useful but not beautiful, since “the commonplace taste…pervades and infects the judgment by which we are accustomed to select and approve” these domestic trappings. This tacky and uninformed taste thus “crosses our path in the Brussels carpet of our drawing-rooms; it is about our bed in the shape of gaudy chintz…. It sends us metal-work from Birmingham which is as vulgar in form as it is flimsy in execution. …It lines our walls with silly representations of vegetable life,” and we “furnish our houses…with no more sense of real beauty than if art were a dead letter” (2). This ability to furnish expensively but gauchely that eventuates from revolutions in industry must be corrected by self-appointed Arnoldian tastemakers such as Eastlake and Wharton, whose own educations and social status license them to do so. Yet the alarmist note in their rhetoric can be construed as less of an impending or present social crisis and more of a threat to individual bodies that daily confront the sordid atmospheres of rooms that, in extreme cases, might even endanger the inhabitants’ lives. Eastlake’s American editor Charles Perkins thus points our attention to “the evil effects” in certain green wallpaper, as Dr. Frank W. Draper describes it in his study for the Massachusetts State Board of Health.7 Eastlake also notes how taste is

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somewhat a matter of gendered inheritance, since “the faculty of distinguishing good from bad design in the familiar objects of domestic life is a faculty which most educated people—and women especially—conceive that they possess” (7). Though the acquisition of this ability remains ambiguous, Eastlake suspects that “it is the peculiar inheritance of gentle blood, and independent of all training,” and challenging a woman’s taste is “sure to offend” (8). Wharton, however, in The Decoration of Houses, defines the matter of taste as inhering in the structural elements of the house that functions as a living being in possession of its own organic unity. She thus objects to the “superficial application of ornament totally independent of structure” in favor of employing “those architectural features which are part of the organism of every house, inside as well as out.” Of course, this process requires the close collaboration of architect and interior decorator, or an architect who is also an interior decorator; but she advocates this cooperative effort because the occupants of a home are influenced by inherited desires that no longer accord with the ways rooms are now used. As Wharton explains, “every one is unconsciously tyrannized over by…the wants of dead and gone predecessors, who have an inconvenient way of thrusting their different habits and tastes across the current of later existences. The unsatisfactory relations of some people with their rooms” result from this strange genetic phenomenon, since “they have still in their blood the traditional uses to which these rooms were put in times quite different from the present” (18). This bizarre explanation captures the web of relations among inheritance, blood, bodies, interior decorating, and domestic spaces that typifies the influence of the home’s environment with its palpable effects on its inhabitants. As strange as this assertion seems, however,

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Wharton explicitly subscribes to what Herbert Spencer defined as “unconscious or organic memory.” Laura Otis helpfully points out that the idea of organic memory is a purely Lamarckian one, since memories are acquired characters that also enter the bloodline and are transmitted to later generations. “[N]ineteenth-century organic memory theory,” she explains, “proposed that memory and heredity were essentially the same and that one inherited memories from ancestors along with their physical features. …just as people remembered some of their own experiences consciously, they remembered their racial and ancestral experiences unconsciously, through their instincts.”

Wharton’s emphasis on the classical aspects of symmetry and harmony, and the house as a living organism, mirror Eastlake’s trope of the house as an extension of the human body. Even the most insensitive inhabitants of their home possess an unconscious “sense of restfulness and comfort” that is “produced by certain rooms,” and this ambient ease “depends on the due adjustment” of a room’s “fundamental parts” (19). A home’s architecture also plays itself out microcosmically in the human body. Ugly, uncomfortable, or even haunted rooms make their occupants feel not at home, and guests wish to flee or not visit at all. Of course, a home’s most sensitive inhabitants, and those for whom developmental issues are essential, are the children. Towards the end of her handbook, Wharton patiently unpacks the importance and influence that the school-room and nursery have in terms of the child’s upbringing, and she contends that the careful decoration of this part of the house is necessary in order to avoid inflicting pain upon the

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10 Laura Otis, Organic Memory: History and the Body in the Late Nineteenth & Early Twentieth Centuries (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 2; 3.
child. “The aesthetic sensibilities wake early in some children,” she explains, “and these, if able to analyze their emotions, could testify to what suffering they have been subjected by the habit of sending to school-room and nurseries whatever furniture is too ugly or threadbare to be used in any other part of the house” (173). Instead of functioning as a catch-all for superfluous furniture, the room dedicated to the child’s physical and intellectual development should function as a little museum where the purpose is to cultivate his taste and surround him with beauty. Otherwise, his moral education is a dangerous failure: “To teach a child to appreciate any form of beauty is to develop his intelligence and thereby to enlarge his capacity for wholesome enjoyment,” and “to teach a child to distinguish between a good and a bad painting, a well or an ill-modelled statue…will at least develop those habits of observation that are the base of all sound judgments” (174). A child’s intelligence and his ability to discern among good and bad choices must be developed by the availability of beautiful objects in the home, but this education isn’t merely an empty exercise in dilettantism since art can not be considered “a thing apart from life.” In effect, Wharton implies that “a house full of ugly furniture, badly designed wall-papers and worthless knick-knacks,” as well as “poor pictures, trashy ‘ornaments’ and badly designed furniture” actually stymie the child’s development and render him incapable of functioning successfully in the wider world because of a daily and steady diet of cold rooms with their haphazard and garish contents (175).

Somewhat akin to the unconscious power of Bushnell’s home influence or “domestic godliness” as he has notably termed it, “the child’s visible surroundings,” according to Wharton, “form the basis of the best, because of the most unconscious, cultivation” that “indirectly broadens the whole view of life” (183). Having the best and being surrounded
by the best interior decoration thus makes children better people, productive citizens, and happier individuals. Parents may effect their child’s successful development merely by the conscious manipulation of the nursery and schoolroom environments.

II. A Better Drawing Room, A Better Woman: The Highly Specialized Lily Bart

When Lily Bart makes her ill-fated visit to Lawrence Selden’s bachelor pad at the beginning of *The House of Mirth*, she confesses to him the dissatisfaction she experiences while living with her sober relation, Aunt Peniston. Feeling at home nowhere, Lily says, “If I could only do over my aunt’s drawing-room I know I should be a better woman.”11 This seeming throwaway line speaks volumes about one of Wharton’s most famous heroines, as well as one of her most popular novels—Lily Bart, as much as she might appear a victim of the New York society to which she belongs, is inextricably linked not only to that society, but also to the places where she lives, stays, or sojourns. In this section, I argue that Lily, as the highly specialized product of the society in which she has been born and raised, must necessarily be viewed in relation to the houses, hotels, and boarding houses where she subsequently resides. Wharton produces her protagonist as influenced not by the urban environment, as other turn-of-the-century authors such as Stephen Crane and Theodore Dreiser were fond of doing, but by the domestic environment. In this sense, Wharton’s characters can be interpreted most fruitfully through the lens of Lamarckism, but Lily’s increasing specialization that leads to her social and physical extinction can be more compellingly viewed if we consider the work of neo-Lamarckist Edward Drinker Cope in this regard. Ultimately, *The House of*

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Mirth, for all of its condemnation of Wharton’s “frivolous society,”\textsuperscript{12} is really about houses that fashion their inhabitants or outcasts; and this examination of domestic Lamarckism culminates in Wharton’s Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, The Age of Innocence, published fifteen years after The House of Mirth.

The symbiosis between a domestic environment and its occupant that both Eastlake and Wharton have developed in their respective interior decorating manuals is established by Lily’s contrast (though also eventual comparison or equation) with Gerty Farish. Somewhat envious of Gerty’s ability to live alone in a “cramped flat, with its cheap conveniences and hideous wallpapers,” Lily reflects that “she was not made for mean and shabby surroundings, for the squalid compromises of poverty” (23). Her sense of having “not been made” to be poor really highlights how the quality of domestic surroundings actively sculpt her, though the subtlety of the home’s power feels like a passive phenomenon to her. As the specter of not having enough money, or any money at all, haunts Lily, she is constantly aware of a pervasive dinginess, cramped staircases, and bad interior decorating for which she fears she may be destined. Her highly specialized nature demands an appropriate setting, since “her whole being dilated in an atmosphere of luxury; it was the background she required, the only climate she could

\textsuperscript{12} Wharton’s most famous quotation about this novel is worth repeating given the context in which I am situating Lily. Wharton explains how her “problem was how to make use of a subject—fashionable New York…in all its flatness and futility, asking to be dealt with as the theme most available to my hand, since I had been steeped in it since infancy…and yet! …In what aspect could a society of irresponsible pleasure-seekers be said to have, on the ‘old woe of the world,’ any deeper bearing than the people composing such a society could guess? The answer was that a frivolous society can acquire dramatic significance only through what its frivolity destroys. Its tragic implication lies in its power of debasing people and ideals. The answer, in short, was my heroine, Lily Bart.” A Backward Glance (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1964), 206-207.
Setting, atmosphere, background, and climate attest to the environmental focus that Wharton tracks here, yet, again, this narrative interest doesn’t simply align her with Maggie of the streets or Carrie Meeber of the factories, though they are very close literary companions. Lily is the product of her environment, but not just any environment. Houses are constructed and decorated with certain ends in mind and with certain effects to be achieved, and these domestic organisms have a palpable influence on their inhabitants. Being in a better drawing-room would, in Lily’s case, make her a better woman, and could even ensure her survival.

The crux of Lily’s problem was engendered in the house where she grew up. A site of chaos and disorder, “the turbulent element called home” is run by “the vigorous and determined figure of a mother still young enough to dance her ball-dresses to rags” and supported by “the hazy outline of a neutral-tinted father” who “filled an intermediate space between the butler and the man who came to wind the clocks” (25). The Bart household is defined by absence rather than presence, and this marriage of convenience that seems to have benefited mostly Mrs. Bart is both emotionally and almost literally bankrupt. The fear of dinginess always dogging Lily comes from Mrs. Bart’s “worst reproach to her husband” which “was to ask him if he expected her to ‘live like a pig’” (26). Lily’s disgust with living like a pig is the quasi-moral and aesthetic objection to existing as a rather simple and direct animal that lacks the complexity and beauty of a more highly specialized being. This disgust with uncensored bodily needs, the dinginess

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13 In terms similar to mine, though focusing more on race rather than evolution, Jennie A Kassannoff explains how “Lily’s evolutionary advantages are evident. Her vulnerabilities, however, are equally so. Despite the appearance that Lily belongs to the ‘same race’—the human race—Wharton will gradually insist that Lily represents an exclusive albeit imperiled race, at once superior and fatally overspecialized.” Furthermore, “Lily is, in a sense, overbred.... Too refined for her own good, Lily is racially doomed.” See “Extinction, Taxidermy, Tableaux Vivants: Staging Race and Class in The House of Mirth” in PMLA 115.1 (January 2000): 62-63.
of a spinster flat, and her repulsion to Gus Trenor’s sweaty body and Bertha Dorset’s omnivorous sexuality, handicap her as she grows increasingly incapable to run with her set, play by its rules, and survive in this world. While her gradual but steady descent functions as a kind of environmental determinism, the environment that dooms her is domestic rather than geographical. Her upbringing permits her to inhabit only the most rarefied of atmospheres, as obviously attested by her flowery name and hothouse conditions of her existence. Despite being a victim of circumstances, Lily believes that to live like a pig is a matter of choice—a fissure in one’s moral education—and that dinginess and despair are one’s own stupid fault. “Lily knew people who lived like pigs,” Wharton explains, “and their appearance and surroundings justified her mother’s repugnance to that form of existence. They were mostly cousins, who inhabited dingy houses with…slatternly parlour-maids who said ‘I’ll go and see’ to visitors calling at an hour when all right-minded persons are conventionally if not actually out” (26-27). Laconic and slovenly parlor maids betray how these wealthy members of society possess the means but lack the “right-mindedness” of their privileged existences, and this drawing-room error violates Lily’s sense of the social performance at which she is an expert. She also believes this stupidity on their part is both conscious and voluntary, so her sense of free will in the novel is always tied to how much money one has: “The disgusting part of it was that many of these cousins were rich, so that Lily imbibed the idea that if people lived like pigs it was from choice, and through the lack of any proper standard of conduct” (27). Part of Lily’s own domestic education has taught her to live lavishly, but her excess isn’t simply a matter of being casual about or careless with money. It contributes to her own highly specialized nature upon which the narrative
voice dwells at length, since she is literally like no one else. Although her uniqueness sets her apart from the colorless existences of others, in the end it renders her non-adaptable and extinct.

Beauty provides the strongest opposition to dinginess, especially in the form of Lily’s awareness of her own good looks, which functions as a kind of cultural transmitter that will improve the existence of her fellow dingy beings as she acts as tastemaker: “She liked to think of her beauty as a power for good, as giving her the opportunity to attain a position where she should make her influence felt in the vague diffusion of refinement and good taste” (30). Lily somewhat adopts and adapts Bushnell’s home influence and fuels it in the direction of increasing popular taste that is also the goal of Perkins, Eastlake, and Wharton in their interior decoration manuals. She construes her upbringing as having a larger purpose, and instead of being rendered obsolete or non-adaptive, she actually performs a greater environmental function. Lily’s purpose is frustrated, however, by the fact that dinginess “is a quality which assumes all manner of disguises” (31), and despite the “opulent interior” of Aunt Peniston’s home, Lily discovers that dinginess “was as latent in the expensive routine of her aunt’s life as in the makeshift existence” of the drab watering-holes to which she and her mother were reduced after her father’s death. Aunt Peniston’s existence strikes Lily as meager because her aunt exposes the guts of the house, and she’s dismayed by the annual cleaning sprees and soapy water on the stairs that betray the fact that a house doesn’t run itself. For Lily, being immaculate is a state that should sustain itself at all levels, and a house that demonstrates a domestic weakness by displaying its dependence means that those who inhabit it are necessarily incomplete as well. Despite being dependent on her aunt, Lily possesses
many advantages that stymie her and pull her down into the terrible state of dinginess: “She knew that she hated dinginess as much as her mother had hated it, and to her last breath she meant to fight against it, dragging herself up again and again above its flood till she gained the bright pinnacles of success which presented such a slippery surface to her clutch” (33).

Wharton characterizes Mrs. Peniston’s annual cleaning as “the domestic equivalent of a religious retreat” (78), and the equation of cleaning with soul-searching magnifies the significance of domestic environmentalism here with the implication that the conditions of one’s home influence spiritual as well as physical existence: “She ‘went through’ the linen and blankets in the precise spirit of the penitent exploring the inner folds of conscience; she sought for moths as the stricken soul seeks for lurking infirmities,” and “as a final stage in the lustral rites, the entire house was swathed in penitential white and deluged with expiatory soapsuds.” Mrs. Peniston’s rites of purification render her house a place that has become infected, and the bad spirits must be ritually driven out via this annual, anthropological practice. (This sense of a domestic infection or disease is most acutely illustrated after Grace Stepney sabotages Lily by telling her aunt about Lily’s scandalous behavior, and “Mrs. Peniston felt as if there had been a contagious illness in the house, and she was doomed to sit shivering among her contaminated furniture” [100]). The assumption that the home, left tenantless since the last social season, has become plagued is naturally sensed by the sensitive Lily. Setting the house in order again strikes her as a very bad sign: “As was always the case with her, this moral repulsion found a physical outlet in a quickened distaste for her surroundings. She revolted from the complacent ugliness of Mrs. Peniston’s black walnut, from the
slippery gloss of the vestibule tiles, and the mingled odour of sapolio and furniture-polish that met her at the door” (78). Though Lily “usually contrived to avoid being at home during the season of domestic renewal” (79), her decreasing social options force her to stay with her aunt in the “tomb” of her house to be “buried alive in the stifling limits of Mrs. Peniston’s existence.” The house, described as in a “state of unnatural immaculateness and order,” requires too much time and effort to work properly. Lily wants her aunt’s house to form the background of her social victories, and, if only she could do her Aunt Peniston’s drawing-room over, Lily would exude nothing but her essence: “She could not figure herself as anywhere but in a drawing-room, diffusing elegance as a flower sheds perfume.”

Wharton repeatedly emphasizes how Lily is intricately constructed, and the metaphoric power of Lily as a rare and delicate flower transcends the traditional nineteenth-century trope that equates women with flowers, especially “Lilies” as pure, sweet, and modest, as illustrated by J. J. Grandville’s Les Fleurs Animées and its first American translation published simultaneously in 1847. Most significantly, Grandville captures the essence of the beauty of the lily as well as its noxious influence when confined to the home. “Beauty, dignity, exquisite fragrance, are the inheritance of this majestic flower,” he explains. “In the open air the odor of the Lily is delicious, but it is dangerous in confined apartments. Not only is it unpleasant in its effects upon the animal economy—it is sometimes sufficiently powerful to produce asphyxia.”

Lily instinctively eschews these “confined apartments” that are personally dangerous for her and potentially poisonous to others. Her inability to be at home anywhere seems to stem

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from her aversion to those places available to her, and in her revulsion to these limited
and disagreeable options, she tends to flee, even as far as Alaska with the Gormers at one
point. Exacerbating this problem, Lily is of course very expensive; and she discerns how
her complex being cashes in on the socially dross and undesirable: “[S]uch existences as
hers were pedestalled on foundations of obscure humanity. The dreary limbo of
dinginess lay all around and beneath that little illuminated circle in which life reached its
finest efflorescence, as the mud and sleet of a winter night enclose a hot-house filled with
tropical flowers” (119). These protected tropical flowers that flourish within a bubble
from the harsh realities of a winter night conjure a cozy domesticity and complacent
comfort in the hothouse, but it’s also a kind of weird home influence that opposes
environmental conditions. Despite this blend of the natural and the unnatural, the rare
orchid, while not a lily, typifies Lily’s own state perfectly. “All this was in the natural
order of things,” Wharton continues, “and the orchid basking in its artificially created
atmosphere could round the delicate curves of its petals undisturbed by the ice on the
panes.” The similarity to antebellum hothouse culture that runs through this study, the
presence of botanizers with their portable Ward boxes to cultivate plants, and the
comparison between Lily and the tropical flower compound the method of artificial
selection in both Lamarck and Darwin, but it’s also significant to realize that the “orchid
basking in its artificially created atmosphere” can exist only within the most contrived or
artificial of environments. Lily does experience a social fall, is banned from her society
and reduced to its edges, but the neo-Lamarckian emphasis on the highly specialized and
non-adaptive variation recuperates Lily from the merely prosaic interpretations that view
The House of Mirth as an exercise in environmental determinism. Simon Rosedale,
whom Lily perceives as dim-witted and despicable, actually understands Lily better than
any other character in the novel, and he posits a marriage proposal to her as a business
arrangement in which she will reign as the lavish queen of his household and the
crowning beauty that will outdo the anti-Semitic society matrons who shun him for his
newly acquired wealth. In many ways, the capital of the recently rich functions as a
superb example of Lamarckian and cultural transmission, since the acquisition of this
wealth literally changes or even creates the domestic environment, and these assets will
be inherited by offspring who, barring a great loss or scandal, are also fundamentally
altered by this legacy. Rosedale tells Lily that he desires “a woman who’ll hold her head
higher the more diamonds I put on it,” and the “kind of woman” who “costs more than all
the rest of ’em put together. …I should want my wife to be able to take the earth for
granted if she wanted to” (140). Rosedale figures Lily as even more expensive than all of
her social circle just as Lily realizes that her existence enriches the dingy lives of those
beneath her. This rare and expensive flower thus occupies a biological site that is rarified
because of the exquisite cultivation it requires.

These literal and metaphoric senses of inheritance also affect Lily directly as she
expects to inherit the bulk of Aunt Peniston’s private fortune after her death. But the fact
that Lily is disinherited because of her perceived scandalous behavior while vacationing

15 Irene C. Goldman-Price argues that tacit assumptions about any subtextual anti-Semitism in the novel are
misguided. As she explains, “critics have frequently unconsciously shared in the [racial] stereotyping by
calling Rosedale a Jew despite any references to his religious behavior. The challenge to literary critics,
then, is to stop either unconsciously sharing literary stereotypes or glossing over them with labels such as
‘anti-Semitic’ and to open the doors to full conversation on the depiction of Jews and other ethnic
minorities in literary works.” While Goldman-Price makes a convincing historical and textual case for this
assertion, Lily’s repugnance to Rosedale simply confirms that part of her dislike of him does stem from the
fact that he is Jewish. Additionally, her argument is so fine-tuned that perceiving Rosedale as anything
other than Jewish would require every reader of Wharton’s novel to be a sophisticated literary critic in
order to appreciate her point. In other words, Goldman-Price isn’t uncovering an embedded though present
ethnicity in terms of Rosedale, but is creating one that he simply doesn’t possess. See “The ‘Perfect’ Jew
and The House of Mirth: A Study in Point of View” in Edith Wharton’s The House of Mirth: A Casebook,
with the Dorsets dislodges Lily as one of the beautiful people and installs her dumpy
cousin, Grace Stepney, as heiress to what Lily always assumed would be hers. This role
reversal further renders Lily an increasingly dingy nobody who must form the foundation
for the social class which has outcast her: “Lily stood apart from the general movement,
feeling herself for the first time utterly alone. No one looked at her, no one seemed
aware of her presence; she was probing the very depths of insignificance. And under her
sense of the collective indifference came the acuter pang of hopes deceived.
Disinherited—she had been disinherited—and for Grace Stepney!” (174). Wharton
literalizes this sense of inheritance in Lily’s confession to Gerty Farish that her aunt
disowned her because her “faults,” as part of Spencer’s idea of organic memory, are “in
my blood” that she received “from some wicked pleasure-loving ancestress, who reacted
against homely virtues of New Amsterdam, and wanted to be back at the court of the
Charlese” (176). The “ugliness of failure” will reduce Lily to a boardinghouse while
Grace Stepney emerges from a boardinghouse to take residence in Aunt Peniston’s
mansion, the door of which shuts on Lily “taking a leave of her old life. The future
stretched before her dull and bare as the deserted length of Fifth Avenue, and
opportunities showed as meagerly as the few cabs trailing in quest of fares that did not
come” (177; 180). In the interim, Lily takes up with those of questionable repute as she
lives a whirlwind life mostly in hotels and still dependent upon others. In the first hotel
she inhabits she finds herself in a set of “rooms with their cramped outlook down a
sallow vista of brick walls and fire-escapes,” and taking “her lonely meals in the dark
restaurant with its surcharged ceiling and haunting smell of coffee” (193). Lily’s
opportunities dwindle in direct proportion to her environments, and her highly specialized
nature renders her completely non-adaptive. She’s also physically affected by her domestic surroundings since her sensitivity to the way rooms look and feel is consistently compromised and offended. No feeling of being at home anywhere exists for Lily. Her increasingly unpalatable living arrangements that oppose her nature also fuel her gradual extinction.

Despite her exquisite nature, Lily is increasingly forced to ascend those narrow staircases of life frequented by dull and dingy people, and the poverty of her surroundings has visible and palpable effects on her physical being. The “ever-revolving wheels of the great social machine” that now sweep by her lonely figure make Lily “more than ever conscious of the steepness and narrowness of Gerty’s stairs, and of the cramped blind-alley of life to which they led” (205). Lily’s social ostracism and lack of money throw into relief how the physical environment to which she is accustomed really depends on having wealth that builds, shapes, and manipulates the domestic scene. The bodily responses that one’s surroundings induce are themselves subject to the fluctuating variable of cash, since the fortunes of all her former cohorts grow or shrink depending on the stability of the stock or rental market. The misery of her surroundings causes Lily to conclude that “dull stairs” are “destined to be mounted by dull people: how many thousands of insignificant figures were going up and down stairs all over the world at that very moment—figures as shabby and uninteresting as that of the middle-aged lady in limp black who descended Gerty’s flight as Lily climbed to it!” In Lily’s world, a few people exist who matter, but the rest of humanity is literally made up of negligible thousands who don’t count because of the drab domestic environments that they inhabit. Interior decorating also equals destiny.
Lily finds temporary shelter from the horrors of this realm of insignificance as she takes up as a kind of social secretary to the gate-crashing Mrs. Hatch, and she luxuriates in the Emporium Hotel even among its “excesses of the upholstery” and “restless convolutions of the furniture” (212). Lily is unfamiliar with the denizens of hotel life who live in a permanent state of semi-homelessness: “The environment in which Lily found herself was as strange to her as its inhabitants. She was unacquainted with the world of the fashionable New York hotel—a world over-heated, over-upholstered, and over-fitted with mechanical appliances…while the comforts of a civilized life were as unattainable as in a desert” (213). It’s a make-believe domestic world of “torrid splendour” peopled by “wan beings as richly upholstered as the furniture…who drifted on a languid tide of curiosity” from place to place. Hotel beings that are synonymous with their rented rooms are like the pieces of furniture in these rooms that have fixity yet are merely empty signifiers of domestic life, or as homely props which stage home living. This vagueness of place still offers a garish comfort that the boardinghouse does not, but, of course, Lily is not meant to stay with Mrs. Hatch for long after being drawn into another compromising social situation. The biggest defeat for Lily is really the tragedy of interior decoration, for the boardinghouse into which she descends provides her with nothing more than a makeshift hall bedroom, like something out of one of Jacob Riis’ cramped tenements. Lily “dreaded her return to her narrow room, with its blotched wallpaper and shabby paint; and she hated every step of the walk thither through the degradation of a New York street in the last stages of decline from fashion to commerce” (225). Her situation is shocking to Rosedale, but Lily grows wearily accustomed to it and recognizes her quasi-extinction: “Since she had been brought up to be ornamental, she
could hardly blame herself for failing to serve any practical purpose (232). The dinginess that Lily has always dreaded, and that her mother commanded her to outstrip, now infects Rosedale, who “in the peacock-blue parlour, with its bunches of dried pampas grass, and discoloured steel engravings of sentimental episodes…looked about him with unconcealed disgust, laying his hat distrustfully on the dusty console adorned with a Rogers statuette.” The parlor isn’t only tacky but dirty, and Lily, always fastidiously neat and clean, with her dislike of being touched and having to confront sexualized bodies, now sits resignedly among the mass-produced and trashy bric-a-brac that Wharton has urged the readers of her interior decoration manual to avoid.

Lily’s ornamental status that is bolstered or repressed by her domestic environment is really a biologized function curiously at odds with the social situations in which she has long played a part: “Inherited tendencies had combined with early training to make her the highly specialized product she was: an organism as helpless out of its narrow range as the sea-anemone torn from the rock. She had been fashioned to adorn and delight; to what other end does nature round the rose-leaf and paint the hummingbird’s breast?” (235). Though the rose and hummingbird might be construed in these aesthetic terms, many of these traits ensure their survival and characterize reproductive capability. The socio-biological function of Lily’s beauty has never been put to any real test. She has used it to manipulate others, but it hasn’t guaranteed marriage or children.16 The closest she gets to childbirth is the hallucination of Nettie Struther’s baby in the

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16 Elaine Showalter observes how “whereas childbirth and maternity are the emotional and spiritual centers of the nineteenth-century female world, in *The House of Mirth* they have been banished to the margins. Childbirth seems to be one of the dingier attributes of the working class; the Perfect Lady cannot mar her body or betray her sexuality in giving birth.” “The Death of the Lady (Novelist): Wharton’s *House of Mirth*” in Edith Wharton’s *The House of Mirth*: A Casebook, ed. Carol J. Singley (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 46.
confused dreamscape preceding her death. The narrative recognition of this disjunct affirms the non-adaptive nature of Lily’s indexical status: “And was it her fault that the purely decorative mission is less easily and harmoniously fulfilled among social beings than in the world of nature? That it is apt to be hampered by material necessities or complicated by moral scruples?” Acting as a kind of surrogate mother or even fairy godmother to Nettie’s baby also demonstrates Lily’s responsibility for its existence. Because of her generosity to the girls of Gerty’s woman’s club, Lily’s money cleared the way for a happy life for Nettie, left alone and pregnant by one man yet cared for and married by another. Lily experiences the pleasure of her good work while sitting in Nettie’s small apartment which is nonetheless immaculate: “It was warm in the kitchen, which, when Nettie Struther’s match had made a flame leap from the gas-jet above the table, revealed itself to Lily as extraordinarily small and almost miraculously clean. A fire shone through the polished flanks of the iron stove…” (244). This survival of Nettie, who hasn’t been the fittest, is reified by the cleanliness of the kitchen, the support of a good man, and the hope embodied by the baby—a small life and a little body that Lily isn’t afraid to touch.

If Lily were to be saved by the love of a good man, she would then be required to be sexually active and shed her position as “some rare flower grown for exhibition…from which every bud had been nipped except the crowning blossom of her beauty” (247). Marrying for love rather than money would provide stability in opposition to the chaotic

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17 Joan Lidoff characterizes Lily as “a creature of beauty and sensual charm” for whom “sexuality is not an acceptable part of her self-image.” Additionally, “no image of Lily as wife is possible in the imaginative world of the novel” since “marriage…is a symbolic affirmation of maturity. Lily cannot marry because she is incapable of love.” Lily’s death is thus “necessary because she cannot live. A grown and beautiful woman, she can no longer exist as a child, but neither can she become an adult. We feel the pull of human character in Lily, a growing sympathy and self-knowledge, but society cannot support her development.” See “Another Sleeping Beauty: Narcissism in The House of Mirth” in American Realism: New Essays ed. Eric J. Sundquist (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), 249; 251; 255.
and zigzag past of her rootless life: “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” (248). The “past” that “lives in the blood” functions as an organic memory that
is based upon personal experience rather than inherited dispositions. According to
Wharton’s system here, environmental conditions are capable of penetrating the body’s
materiality to render the personal past an instinctive memory that subsequently influences
future behavior. Domestic interiors and psychological interiority are thus
interchangeable in terms of human development in both biological and philosophical
senses, and they also provide Lily with “her first glimpse of the continuity of life” that
“had come to her that evening in Nettie Struther’s kitchen.” This ultimate emphasis on
Lily’s boardinghouse existence as surpassing bodily concerns is punctuated by Selden’s
realization as he stands near her dead body, that, aside from some small “traces of
luxury” Lily has managed to preserve, he discerns “no other token of her personality
about the room, unless it showed itself in the scrupulous neatness of the scant articles of
furniture” (254). For Wharton’s characters existence is tied to and even depends upon
domestic architecture and its interiors, and this link Wharton triumphantly perfects in The
Age of Innocence, in which she converts her characters into houses themselves.

III. Philosophically Remaining at Home: Memory’s Furniture in The Age of
Innocence
Although Wharton’s framework for The Age of Innocence is more anthropological than biological, the complex genealogies, kinship rituals, and the distrust of Countess Olenska’s foreignness underscore the presence of ancestry, offspring, and inheritance that permeate practically every page. This socio-genetic awareness is initially embodied in the character of Sillerton Jackson, who functions as Old New York society’s preeminent genealogist, since “he knew all the ramifications of New York’s cousinships; and could not only elucidate such complicated questions as that of the connection between the Mingotts (through the Thorleys) with the Dallases of South Carolina…but could also enumerate the leading characteristics of each family.” ¹⁸ The “forest of family trees” that Sillerton Jackson ambles so ably through also reminds Wharton’s readers of the inheritance of good and bad physical traits, such as “the insanity recurring in every second generation of the Albany Chiverses, with whom their New York cousins had always refused to intermarry” (8; 7). The inheritance of physical characters, whether perceived as acquired or organic, figures as prominently as the inheritance of money and property, but the neo-Lamarckian subtext that informs this cultural situation is somewhat exaggerated as Wharton constructs many of the major characters as extensions of, or stand-ins for, their houses. In other words, the symbiosis of character and domestic environment points to Wharton’s continued belief in the way that home conditions determine character, yet these beings risk vanishing into their overwrought houses. In this section, I argue that The Age of Innocence employs Lamarckian hereditarian rhetoric as it trades in the ideas of acquired inheritances, both materially and bodily, as well as the reciprocity that exists between bodies and houses. By setting the novel during the 1870s

and 1880s, Wharton uses this cultural and personal memory to privilege more traditional beliefs about biological inheritance, human development, and cultural transmission. This historical memory is also crucially influenced by her reaction to the excesses of her twentieth-century *nouveaux-riche* social compeers, as well as the loss of the perceived, imagined, or actual stability of Old New York. Her gradual and profound sense of alienation that expatriates her to France betrays this sense of an interior decoration that has gotten out of control.

The best example of this equation of person with dwelling is Mrs. Manson Mingott, whose obesity restricts her to the first floor of “a large house of pale cream-colored stone…in an inaccessible wilderness near the Central Park” (9). As big as a house (or as big as her house), Mrs. Manson (Mansion?) Mingott “philosophically remained at home” in her mansion that stands “as a visible proof of her moral courage; and she throned in it, among pre-Revolutionary furniture and souvenirs of the Tuileries of Louis Napoleon…as placidly as if there were nothing peculiar…in having French windows that opened like doors instead of sashes that pushed up.” This blend of furniture inherited from Dutch ancestors and collected during her time abroad mark her as a potential foreigner, since two of her daughters married Europeans and her granddaughter, Ellen Olenska, married a Polish count. But the impeccable reputation of her blameless family guarantees her own royal status among Old New York society, and her house, though oddly composed to some, stands as a testament to her morality. Her obesity that restricts her to the first floor of her mansion, however, illustrates an excessive bodily investment that is the result of a kind of narcissistic self-indulgence that prevents her from fully utilizing the mansion, and that marks her as odd because of an
unconventional first-floor bedroom that permits public scrutiny. Thus far, the domestic environment has been influencing physical development, but Mrs. Mingott’s massive physicality is the engine driving the construction and decoration of an exaggerated structure that is too big for even her corporeality to reside comfortably within it.

This tense juxtaposition of home and body isn’t sufficient to demolish Mrs. Mingott’s house of morality that stands in defiance to the mansion of the questionable Julius Beaufort. The superfluity and redundancy of his home thus atones for his lack of respectability. Most impressive to his peers is the fact that “the Beauforts’ house was one of the few in New York that possessed a ballroom…and at a time when it was beginning to be thought ‘provincial’ to put a ‘crash’ over the drawing-room floor and move the furniture upstairs, the possession of a ballroom that was used for no other purpose, and left for three-hundred-and-sixty-four days of the year to shuttered darkness…was felt to compensate for whatever was regrettable in the Beaufort past” (13). The Beaufort mansion has a kind of rejuvenating effect, since it recuperates any ambiguity regarding Julius Beauforts’ past. The house also renders Mrs. Beaufort younger and more beautiful because she has nothing to do except reign in it: “She was indolent, passive, the caustic even called her dull; but dressed like an idol, hung with pearls, growing younger and blonder and more beautiful each year, she throned in Mr. Beaufort’s heavy brownstone palace, and drew all the world there without lifting her jewelled little finger” (14).

Doubtless the Beaufort’s figure as representatives of American royalty, and the significance of the aristocratic rhetoric with which Wharton surrounds these characters has everything to do with inheritance, since one’s blood, position, property, and wealth are determined by being born into such a family that can genetically and culturally
transmit these attributes. But the fact that Beaufort supplies his social colleagues a ballroom that is used only once annually is a gimmick that facilitates his entry into New York society and substitutes for his lack of pedigree. The revitalizing effect of the mansion on Mrs. Beaufort, although a stellar example of the domestic environment influencing its inhabitant, renders her lazy, passive, and disagreeable, and is a noxious influence possessing none of the beneficent and invigorating power of a Bushnellian domestic godliness.

This sense of a necessarily European royalty also recovers the fear of the foreign that Old New York society partially distrusts in the imposing figure of Mrs. Mingott. Because she is too large to go upstairs, her bedroom is on the ground floor rather than the second floor, and “her visitors were startled and fascinated by the foreignness of this arrangement, which recalled scenes in French fiction, and architectural incentives to immortality such as the simple American had never dreamed of” (19). Because too big to move, Mrs. Mingott simply stays at home while the world comes to see her. The largeness that she shares with her house makes them synonymous, but her sedentary and stationary being possesses the potential of a natural catastrophe. Wharton thus characterizes her as more of a geological rather than domestic phenomenon: “The immense accretion of flesh which had descended on her in middle life like a flood of lava on a doomed city had changed her…into something as vast and august as a natural phenomenon” (18). She’s the victim of volcanic forces, since the changeability of the body that is gradual but all-encompassing also converts her into a geological monument. The body sculpted by fat is still recognizably a body that renders her a kind of family memorial that is visited and regarded reverently. At the same time, this “venerable
ancestress” emerges as a comic figure who seems content with the joke. Her “almost unwrinkled expanse of firm pink and white flesh, in the center of which the traces of a small face survived as if awaiting excavation” is accompanied by “a flight of smooth double chins” that “led down to the dizzy depths of a still-snowy bosom” and “with two tiny white hands poised like gulls on the surface of the billows” (18; 19). Mrs. Mingott’s tremendous body presents a physical challenge to be scaled or confronted, and the glorious but under-tenanted mansion she built in the middle of relative isolation is the most apt setting to magnify her demanding obesity and formidable presence.

The beauty of Countess Olenska that contrasts with her grandmother’s obesity nonetheless isn’t sufficient to assuage the ill effects of her “eccentric bringing-up” by her capricious aunt, Medora Manson. Her physical splendor renders her even more exotic, and she figures as an outsider or outcast who is both fascinating and fearful. Medora’s own unpredictability and foreignness are in stark contrast to the “Archer-Newland-vander-Luyden tribe, who were devoted to…horticulture” and “cultivated ferns in Wardian cases” (22). This conscious and careful cultivation in the home of Mrs. Archer invests Newland with a domestic and personal perfection, so his gradual attraction to Countess Olenska is all the more dangerous as he strays from his virtuous tribe. Yet Newland also understands that the simplicity of his betrothed, May Welland, is also an “artificial product” hereditarily determined. This “creation of factitious purity, so cunningly manufactured by a conspiracy of mothers and aunts and grandmothers and long-dead ancestresses” was “supposed to be what he wanted, what he had a right to, in order that he might exercise his lordly pleasure in smashing it like an image made of snow” (30). Countess Olenska’s alien independence and mysterious ways appeal refreshingly to
Newland who grows unenthusiastic about May’s boring vapidity. Furthermore, the Countess had always figured as a unique and strange being to him since their childhood together: “She was a fearless and familiar little thing, who asked disconcerting questions, made precious comments, and possessed outlandish arts, such as dancing a Spanish shawl dance and singing Neapolitan love-songs to a guitar” (38). Her very strange nature that exiles her somewhat in Old New York society invests her with those qualities that Newland finds so appealing ever since his reading of the books on “Primitive Man” have permitted him to pierce both the banality and surface of this tedious society that now annoys him (29). The Lamarckian basis to the Countess’ being and behavior has all to do with the foreign environment in which she grew up and the erratic upbringing given her by her aunt after being orphaned. As a “little girl,” Ellen Olenska thus “received an expensive but incoherent education, which included ‘drawing from the model,’ a thing never dreamed of before, and playing the piano in quintets with professional musicians” (38). In her youth, May Welland would never have been found in close proximity to a nude model, and though necessarily unheard of, this invariable fact only confirms May’s blandness to Newland and makes Countess Olenska appear all that more attractive.

These differing ways that commend Madame Olenska to Newland are also part of a training provided by her foreign experiences and backgrounds. Although she had “lost her looks,” she possesses “a mysterious authority of beauty, a sureness in the carriage of the head” and a “movement of the eyes” that appear to Newland as “highly trained and full of a conscious power” (38; 39). Countess Olenska also strikes Newland as “simpler in manner than most of the ladies” because “she was so quiet—quiet in her movements, her voice, and the tones of her low-pitched voice.” The overly adorned, exaggerated, and
uptight behavior of most of the women Newland knows results from their own kind of
hothouse training that he now perceives as unnatural and suffocating—that the
environmental conditions of his own background can mould individuals into disagreeable
beings. The Countess, long outside her own society, liberates and readjusts Newland’s
view of his own people, and the foreignness that his peers mistrust renders her an
agreeable product now that she is back in America and unfamiliar with its ways. Both
the Duke of St. Austrey and Countess Olenska unconsciously break the rules of New
York drawing rooms while at the Lovell Mingotts, and she leaves the Duke to approach
Newland to speak with him: “Etiquette required that she should wait, immovable as an
idol, while the men who wished to converse with her succeeded each other at her side.
But the Countess was apparently unaware of having broken any rule” (41). Like Lily
Bart’s dread of dinginess, the members of Old New York society fear contamination by
foreigners, though they will readily marry their daughters to them. Strictly following the
rules of etiquette thus functions as a cleansing ritual that maintains tribal purity, shared
conduct, and social integrity.

The house that Madame Olenska and Medora Manson have hired, and that the rest
of her family do not want her living in, says most about her character, yet its simplicity,
unlike the novel’s sprawling and swallowing mansions, sanctifies her. While waiting for
the Countess, Newland experiences “the faded shadowy charm of a room unlike any he
had ever known” (44), and “the atmosphere of the room was so different from any he had
ever breathed that self-consciousness vanished in the sense of adventure” (45). Like the
parlor of Lily Bart’s boardinghouse, this house has its requisite tacky pampas grass and
Rogers statuettes, but Countess Olenska also possesses Lily’s knack for interior
decorating. “By a turn of the hand, and the skilful use of a few properties,” she converts the room “into something intimate, ‘foreign,’ subtly suggestive of old romantic scenes and sentiments.” Interior decorating transforms the feared foreignness into something wholesomely domestic and attractive signified by the language and placement of “only two Jacqeminot roses (of which nobody ever bought less than a dozen)” that “had been placed in the slender vase at his elbow.” Beauty results here from an individual simplicity rather than a dozen redundant roses or the superabundance of furniture stuffed into an elaborate and gigantic house. This domestic environment affects Newland most palpably, and he feels as if he literally has entered another realm, foreign or otherwise. He also feels this pleasure most acutely since he really isn’t anticipating his life with May in their new home where the only consolation provided him will be “his library…which would be, of course, [furnished] with ‘sincere’ Eastlake furniture, and the plain new bookcases without glass doors” (46). This room that is synonymous with Countess Olenska also contributes to Newland’s satisfaction as he is “being too deeply drawn into the atmosphere of the room, which was her atmosphere” (49). Foreign, exotic, quaint and cozy, this room in her “funny house” that seems to her “like heaven” figures suddenly for

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19 Both Judith Fryer and Ada Van Gastel view Newland’s choice of Eastlake furniture as a supreme example of his personal weakness as well as a “devastating criticism” inflicted upon him by Wharton. Van Gastel summarizes their views by explaining how “Wharton believed that decoration should be a branch of architecture, that there should be a harmonious balance between every element in the house and the overall structure. Wharton thus objected to the fact that Charles Eastlake merely looked at furniture as ornament; that he failed to take into account the architectural design of the building. …Newland’s preference for Eastlake suggests that he can only see parts of larger wholes—Newland only sees a part of the whole May, a part of the whole Ellen.” While this assertion may or may not be true, I find their collective points an exceedingly picayune instance of what the thrust of the novel clearly demonstrates about Newland’s limitations. Additionally, the poignancy of the Eastlake writing table held onto by Newland in the novel’s conclusion signifies universal human loss that renders Newland more tragic and sympathetic rather than simply tacky and conventional. See “The Location and Decoration of Houses in The Age of Innocence” in Edith Wharton, The Age of Innocence, ed. Carol J. Singley (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000), 329-330, and Judith Fryer, Felicitous Space: The Imaginative Structures of Edith Wharton and Willa Cather (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 120-125.
Newland as his domestic ideal, even though the Countess doesn’t seem like a woman he or any other of his set would likely marry (47).

Newland figures this discrepancy between May and Countess Olenska in Lamarckian terms as he ponders his impending marriage that entails “his task to take the bandage from this young woman’s eyes, and bid her look forth on the world” (52). May is the consummate product of her biological and social inheritance since “many generations of the women who had gone to her making had descended bandaged to the family vault.” Newland recalls “some of the new ideas in his scientific books” and wonders if May, once her eyes are opened, may be blind to the world about her because she has lost the sense of sight as a result of disuse. Newland compares her situation to “the much-cited instance of the Kentucky cave-fish, which had ceased to develop eyes because they had no use for them” (52-53). This Lamarckian example of an inverted form of use-inheritance constructs May’s domestic environment as limited, smothering, and dark—at least according to Newland. The glorious home she herself has perhaps “throned” in, as a dutiful daughter and Diana-like princess with her considerable athletic ability, stymies her growth because of its grandiose and redundant domesticity. Yet, like the Kentucky cave-fish, May really doesn’t know the difference, and her ignorance of her natural state unnerves Newland who increasingly visits the simple genuineness of the Countess and her small, odd house. Wharton pushes this rhetoric a step further with her use of the concept of instinct, which she constructs as a biological focal point that results from a process of behavioral accretion.\(^{20}\) In other words, instinct is a reflexive behavior

\(^{20}\) My reading of Wharton’s conceptual use of instinct is motivated by C. Lloyd Morgan’s definition of it that appeared in his essay, “On the Study of Animal Intelligence,” that first appeared in the journal *Mind* in 1886. As historian of behavioral science, Robert J. Richards, succinctly explains, “reflexes responded to definite stimuli and were confined to particular organs in a group of animals; *instincts* were inherited habits
that is the sum of previous generations, and Newland thinks of May and himself as “he saw that he was saying all the things that young men in the same situation were expected to say, and that she was making the answers that instinct and tradition taught her to make” (53). Their collective behavior determined by tradition and social rules is also biologically based as genetically and culturally transmitted over the years, and Countess Olenska’s foreignness and novelty are a refreshing break, since it shows that modifications of one’s environment shatter a dusty tedium and cultural expectation that make Newland feel as if the highly specialized nature of May is neither biologically hardy nor culturally interesting; and “a haunting horror of doing the same thing every day at the same time besieged his brain” (54).

Newland’s sense of Madame Olenska’s novelty that opposes May’s instinctual upbringing springs from his belief that “chance and circumstance played a small part in shaping people’s lots compared with their tendency to have things happen to them” (73). This Darwinian natural selection that contributes to the Countess’ complexity improves upon the artificial selection of so many arranged marriages within Newland’s social set that is cast here teleologically, for he thinks her “exactly the kind of person to whom things were bound to happen, no matter how much she shrank from them and went out of her way to avoid them. The exciting fact was her having lived in an atmosphere so thick with drama that her own tendency to provoke it had apparently passed unperceived.” The atmosphere that surrounds Madame Olenska is charged with destiny and drama, and she figures as a complex being whom biological and cultural conditions uphold and privilege

(STEMMING FROM NATURAL SELECTION OR LAPSED INTELLIGENCE) THAT UNIFORMLY CHARACTERIZED A CLASS OF ANIMALS; AND INTELLIGENT ACTS AROSE IN AN INDIVIDUAL’S ADAPTATIONS TO SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES.” ITALICS MINE. SEE DARWIN AND THE EMERGENCE OF EVOLUTIONARY THEORIES OF MIND AND BEHAVIOR (CHICAGO: UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS, 1987), 386-387.
much as the hothouse flower status of Lily Bart. Indeed, the floral imagery that binds the two characters and possesses obvious metaphoric value is also an overdetermined metonymy that functions as a convenient shorthand that speaks volumes about these flower girls, but that also presages their expulsion and extinction.

The Countess also experiences a truly defined sense of the possibility of being her “self” as a result of being entombed in the chilly home of the patriarchal van der Luydens at Skuytercliff. This \textit{faux} Italian villa “loomed up rather grimly,” and “even in summer it kept its distance” (82). Although Mr. van der Luyden has land and interest enough for the horticultural techniques that Andrew Jackson Downing made famous in this region of the Hudson, the house seems amputated from or immune to the more domestic aspects of nature, since “the boldest coleus had never ventured nearer than thirty feet from its awful front.” The house strikes Newland as a “a mausoleum” as “the surprise of the butler who at length responded to the call was as great as though he had been summoned from his final sleep.” This cold and cheerless house that rejects any sense of life still seems to run itself, and its incessant functioning irritates Countess Olenska, who feels that American homes stage themselves too much in contrast to the foreign privacy of her odd hired house. “One can’t be alone for a minute in that great seminary of a house,” she complains to Newland, “with all the doors wide open, and always a servant bringing tea, or a log for the fire, or the newspaper! Is there nowhere in an American house where one may be by one’s self?” (83). This public invasion of her quiet ways dramatizes the visibility that Old New York has thrust upon her, and she is always already open, foreign, and up-for-grabs because of her scandalous ways. An “American house” also supplies the stage and scenery for the expected and acknowledged public performance that her
social peers perform, as the ritual of *tableaux vivants* in *The House of Mirth* also demonstrates. A domesticity which is supposed to be private and personal by definition explodes into a public sphere not very conducive to having a private family life and raising one’s own children. Hence, May Welland serves as the epitome of the programmed automaton that this society successfully and consistently produces. Despite Newland’s mental revolts, he marries May Welland only to live in the memory of Madame Olenska once his marriage prevents continued intimacy with her. Unlike her grandmother’s obesity that equates Mrs. Mingott with her house, or renders her physically “big as a house,” Countess Olenska provides Newland with a spiritual house or memory palace, since “he had built up within himself a kind of sanctuary in which she throned among his secret thoughts and longings” (159). Newland lives literally in his mind while May happily goes about living in the palpable physical world of their home and society where “he moved with a growing sense of unreality and insufficiency, blundering against familiar prejudices and traditional points of view as an absent-minded man goes on bumping into the furniture of his room.” Domesticity for Newland becomes literally interiorized as the only life he really comes to live in the novel is within his psyche.

The dinner held in Countess Olenska’s honor as she returns for good to Europe that is somewhat sinisterly arranged and manipulated by May in order to oust her competitor once and for all figures as the final break between Newland and the woman he loves. And the novel concludes many years later with the Archers’ children now grown up, May buried in the Archer family vault, and one last chance for Newland to see Countess Olenska. Of course, this fantasy never materializes, so the novel also ends with
a note of interior decoration that sums up the narrative arc nicely. Newland’s library, which increasingly became the site of his mental and literal life consisting of his memories of Madame Olenska, has been redecorated by his architect son, Dallas, “with English mezzotints, Chippendale cabinets, bits of chosen blue-and-white and pleasantly shaded electric lamps,” as well as “the old Eastlake writing-table that he had never been willing to banish, and to his first photograph of May, which still kept its place beside his inkstand” (208). The Eastlake writing table which initially figured as a benchmark of taste and a sign of sincerity is the most important object in Newland’s library if not his life. While the photograph of May is touching in its permanence of place in Newland’s domestic realm, Newland recalls that he has lost “the flower of life” once represented by Madame Olenska and the superabundance of flowers sent her by many admirers that she used to decorate her own small home. The Countess, who represents the home that Newland has lived a significant part of his life in, emerges finally as the sincere writing table that embodies Newland’s dutifulness and loyalty to the complexities of a social status he was unable to shed. The life of the mind rather than the body figures for him as the ultimate goal. “It’s more real to me here than if I went up,” he says as he ponders seeing the Countess for one last time. Like the world of Henry James, a rich mentality becomes the most satisfying place for Newland to inhabit.
Conclusion
“A Social Outburst”: The Cope-Baldwin Debate and the History of American Consciousness

Neo-Lamarckism didn’t die. It faded slowly and gradually into an indiscernible vanishing point that its absence can only be perceived in hindsight. Looking backward, we can discern how the more convincing proofs of the biological school of neo-Darwinism, now propped up by the rediscovery of Mendelian genetics, as well as the suicide in 1926 of Paul Kammerer, the Viennese biologist who purportedly faked a crucial acquired character in his famous Midwife Toad experiments, really signaled the end of neo-Lamarckism in the 1920s. One critic of neo-Lamarckism, the psychologist James Mark Baldwin, took aim at Edward Drinker Cope’s contention that the development of consciousness is really a Lamarckian phenomenon that originated as members of a species became aware of which organs they wanted to use and develop. As historian of science Peter J. Bowler explains, “Consciousness was thus a prime guiding force throughout the evolution of animal kingdom…. The course of evolution was thus guided…by the fundamental consciousness of life which the biologist will never be able

to explain in material terms.”2 Baldwin somewhat petulantly dismisses Cope’s non-Darwinian construction of consciousness as “a causal interchange between body and mind” as well as akin to a kind of “deus ex machina.”3 For Baldwin, consciousness develops as part of “psychophysical evolution” or “the evolution of mind and body together” (2), and it also constitutes part of what Baldwin refers to as “social heredity” (53), which is readily apparent in the growth of any child.

Baldwin’s child must be extremely malleable, since “his entire learning is a process of conforming to social patterns.” The child “has to learn everything for himself, and in order to do this he must begin in a state of great plasticity and mobility.” Baldwin rejects the inheritance of acquired characters like so many critics of neo-Lamarckism who were quick to point out the dearth of evidence for this phenomenon. His emphasis on the social environment determining the child’s development is nonetheless part of the process of domestic Lamarckism that I have been tracing here. In many ways, he sounds like a good sentimental writer talking about the child’s growth in the nineteenth-century home, but a neo-Lamarckist Baldwin is not because “these social lessons” that the child “learns for himself take the place largely of the heredity of particular parental acquisitions.” In other words, the child inherits paternal plasticity which Baldwin defines as “the nervous condition of consciousness” and is thus shaped and molded by the social climate. Baldwin concludes that this being is thus “the child of Darwinism” though it’s not exactly clear how natural selection functions as a social mechanism. The child is really the product of cultural transmission, which is a kind of social Lamarckism that

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Baldwin reinforces with his “law of dynamogenesis.” This law dictates how “the thought of a movement tends to discharge motor energy into the channels as near as may be to those necessary for that movement” (54-55). Although Baldwin could be much clearer in his explanation of this “law,” it seems that it translates to “the tendency to learn by imitation, suggestion, etc.” that “is present, as a matter of fact, with greater or less range, in man and many other animals as well” (55).

My point in concluding with this Cope-Baldwin debate on the evolution of consciousness—a juxtaposition of neo-Lamarckism and (purportedly) neo-Darwinism—is that their disagreement figures as the culmination of my project on the complex confluence of body, mind, vitalism, and Lamarckism throughout most of the nineteenth century. Of course, the stereotypical association with Lamarckism is the inheritance of acquired characters, which Baldwin is quick to banish to the realm of pseudo-science. He explains that this form of heredity, if it were true, would stymie the child’s growth, since it renders him with a kind of pre-fabricated and immutable inheritance. As a result, “such inheritance would tend so to bind up the child’s nervous substance in fixed forms that he would have less or possibly no plastic substance left to learn anything with,” and render him “not in the mobile connection represented by high consciousness.” Baldwin’s system of social inheritance thus conceives the child as a flexible blank slate that society, and not individual experience, inscribes upon, since individual experience is always already communal; but children do possess different aptitudes, and Baldwin uses this physiological fact to account for the presence of variation that neo-Lamarckians consistently used as evidence against the fickleness of natural selection.
Baldwin’s social heredity maintains a Darwinist backbone while also being able to account for variation, so this explanation accounts for the gaps in both neo-Lamarckism and neo-Darwinism. Baldwin provides his colleagues and contemporaries the best of both hereditarian worlds. Since some children are simply better, smarter, and quicker (or more plastic), Baldwin theorizes how “the most plastic individuals will be preserved to do the advantageous things for which their variations show them to be the most fit. And the next generation will show an emphasis of just this direction in its variations” (57). The problem is solved via this system of variation and natural selection, and social heredity and the survival of the fittest, since “the fact of social acquisition” is “the fact of acute consciousness in ontogeny.” The conscious and the social negate use-inheritance, and Baldwin attacks a favorite example of the neo-Lamarckists who were fond of pointing to the Bach family as illustrative of the hereditary transmission of musical ability. Baldwin counters this claim by explaining how consciousness in the communal setting actually ignites a kind of critical mass, for “we find such endowments showing themselves in many individuals at about the same time, in the same communities, and under common social conditions” (58). Artists, musicians, and writers result from variation in a sudden “social outburst” that is not dependent on parental ability, and “intellectual and moral progress is gradual improvement, through improved relationships on the part of individuals to one another” (59). The evolution of the individual is the progress of society through cultural transmission, and “all of this is through that wonderful instrument of acquisition, consciousness; for consciousness is the avenue of all social influences” (60).
In his delightful book on spiritualism in America, Peter Washington describes how, in her New York apartment, the queen of theosophy, Madame Blavatsky, possessed a collection of stuffed animals, among them a baboon dressed up to ridicule Darwin carrying a copy of the *Origin of the Species* under its arm. Of course, it was meant to deny the material in favor of the spiritual, but my examination of Lamarckian hereditarian theory acknowledges the importance and brilliance of Darwin, while arguing that Lamarckism was alive and well in the culture of nineteenth-century American domesticity. The study of use-inheritance is alive and well today, but at the complicated level of the epigenome that is influenced by environmental factors as it directs the genome; and while this research is undoubtedly changing the way we will think about the Modern Synthesis of natural selection and Mendelian genetics, Lamarck is still the historical oddity who stupidly got it all wrong. Despite this misunderstanding, it’s nice to think that in some fantasy land Madame Blavatsky’s baboon and Lamarck’s fabled giraffes are happily living in a genetic paradise.

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