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Editor's Introduction: Botanizing in the Mushroom Cities

1. KA-BOOM!

Season Three of HBO's *The Wire* opens as the Franklin Terrace Towers are about to be demolished in the name of "a new beginning for West Baltimore." In previous seasons, the towers were a crucial hub in the Baltimore drug trafficking network. Now the mayor, Clarence V. Royce, is staging the demolition as a public spectacle advertising his administration's commitment to the urban poor. "Reform," he states, "is not just a watchword with my administration. No, it's a philosophy." Residents of the community congregate in lawn chairs and cheer at his speech. Royce casts the towers as symbols of Baltimore's "most entrenched problems": destroy the symbols, he implies, and you destroy the problems.

En route to the demolition, Malik "Poot" Carr and Preston "Bodie" Broadus, two young men who work street corners for the drug-running Barksdale gang, discuss the projects' destruction more thoughtfully than Royce does. Proleptically nostalgic, Poot appeals to the projects' place in his memory: "I done seen some shit happen up in them Towers that still make me smile, yo." The destruction of the projects will deprive these memories of their anchor in place, a loss that will in turn, Poot fears, leave him feeling bereft of a home. Unimpressed with Poot's sentimentality, the tough-minded Bodie counters that the buildings are only steel and concrete, and that the urban planners who have slated the buildings for destruction "don't give a fuck about [the] people" who have lived in them. He notes, too, the economic loss that the Barksdale gang will suffer by losing these addresses to the city:

> Man, look, you live in the projects, you ain't shit. But you sling product there? You got the game by the ass, man. Shit, now these downtown suit-wearing-ass bitches done snatched up the best territory in the city from y'all. You wanna cry over some shit, cry over that.

Bodie thereby casts the projects' demolition not as a high-minded attempt at urban reform but instead as a grubby land grab. (And as the season unfolds Bodie is proved right in at least one respect: the destruction of the housing projects and the dispersal of the "game" presage the decline of the Barksdale gang and the rise of a competitor, Marlo Stanfield.) Thus while Poot speaks to the affective power of place, Bodie is alert to the economic stakes of urban renewal.

The buildings come down, but the scene does not end. Clouds of dust from the collapsing buildings billow out and envelop all the spectators, rich and poor alike; those staging the event have placed the audience for the demolition too close to the site. Bodie squints stoically through the dust; Poot covers his mouth with a fist and coughs; Royce turns his back

and lifts a handkerchief to his lips. The last shot before the titles begin is of a traffic light burning red through the haze: progress, it implies, has come to a halt. On the commentary track accompanying the episode on DVD, David Simon, the creator of *The Wire*, editorializes: "Okay, that's reform. How do you like it?"

Simon and producer Nina K. Noble assert that Season Three engages with wider contemporary events, however obliquely. Simon says: "We were using the idea of a housing project being demolished, presumably for a new and more vibrant Baltimore, as being a metaphor for reform, and we were taking a glancing blow at the idea of the post-9/11 world." The feud between the Barksdale gang and the "insurgent" Marlo Stanfield echoes the deadly factional struggles for power in post-2003 Iraq; and the clouds that billow across the streets of West Baltimore evoke the clouds over Lower Manhattan on 9/11. Like a historical novel in the Walter Scott mode, *The Wire* meditates on national themes; tacitly, Simon is suggesting, the collapse of an obscure Baltimore housing project has the same national significance as the collapse of the World Trade Centre, a tragedy of equal stature, even if none of its witnesses perceive it as such.

In this introduction to the second volume of *At the Edge*, I use Simon's association of the Franklin Terrace Towers with the World Trade Centre as a means to discuss American modernity, specifically the nearly two-century-long tradition of images and narratives focusing on the destruction of American cities. Necessarily superficial, this discussion will nonetheless offer a means of historicizing not only *The Wire* but also the strange sensation many felt when watching the collapse of the twin towers in Manhattan, the guilty sense that on other occasions – watching David Fincher's *Fight Club*, say – one had taken pleasure in representations of urban destruction that now were being grotesquely imitated in life. Watching the climax of

Fincher's film, when buildings in New York's financial district collapse one after another – the culmination of Tyler Durden's assault on the forces oppressing all those sad American men – I felt that an otherwise banal movie had been in part redeemed by a daring and poetic sequence. In the aftermath of 9/11, I queasily remembered the pleasure I took in it: this introduction historicizes that pleasure. And, looking past the vertiginous transformations of the past two centuries, it points to the persistent American will to imagine the death of its cities, a will rooted in the distinctively modern phenomenon of creative destruction.

Slavoj Žižek's influential essay on 9/11, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, notes the uncanny similarity between the terrorist attack on Lower Manhattan, as witnessed on television by "the great majority of the public," and the scenes of urban destruction in "catastrophe movies" (11). The similarity suggests, Žižek argues, that "the space for [9/11] had already been prepared in ideological fantasizing" (15). The "terrorist threat," he asserts,

> was also obviously libidinally invested – just remember the series of movies from *Escape from New York* to *Independence Day*. That is the rationale of the often-mentioned association of the attacks with Hollywood disaster movies: the unthinkable which happened was the object of fantasy, so that, in a way, America got what it fantasized about, and that was the biggest surprise. (15-16)

The Hollywood blockbuster's reliance on spectacles of urban destruction is so obvious as barely to rate mention and so thoroughgoing that even 9/11 – as Žižek puts it, a day when the Real intruded into the fantasy – could not kill the genre, the post-9/11 abeyance of such films proving remarkably brief. (When I wrote these remarks, the Transformers were destroying Chicago's architectural landmarks in multiplexes across the globe; as I edit them for

publication, Bane's League of Shadows has been occupying Gotham City in *The Dark Knight Rises*.)

Žižek's examples of disaster movies – *Escape from New York* (1981) and *Independence Day* (1996) – might suggest that the genre is of relatively recent vintage, contemporaneous with what Sean Wilentz has called the Age of Reagan or, to use a different periodization, the Age of the Event Film, both of which date from the mid 1970s. But fantasias on the destruction of American cities exceed the medium of film and have a much longer history than Žižek's two examples imply (a fact that only makes his insights into the ideological and libidinal investments in 9/11 more interesting). Visions of the destruction of the American city originate in the nineteenth century.[1]

It is therefore fitting that one agonized response to 9/11, Art Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers*, is firmly anchored in late nineteenth-century contexts. Modeled formally on the funnies pages of Gilded Age newspapers, and borrowing a variety of their characters, *In the Shadow of No Towers* revisits the attack and its *sequelae* as Spiegelman experienced them while furiously attacking the Bush Administration for its post-9/11 actions. Spiegelman characterizes the Gilded Age influences on *In the Shadow of No Towers* as therapeutic: he writes that in the face of the attacks he "searched for solace in old newspaper comics" (10). Alongside images of the collapsing towers and compressed narratives describing Spiegelman's movement through Lower Manhattan on 9/11, there appear allusions to Winsor McCay's *Little Nemo in Slumberland*, Rudolph Dirks's *The Katzenjammer Kids*, and Gustave Verbeek's ingenious *The Upside-Downs of Little Lady Lovekins and Old Man Muffaroo*, among others – the often astonishing works of art that flourished at the birth of the newspaper comic strip.

But the frontispiece of the collected edition suggests a haunting parallel between the two turns of the century at odds with the early newspaper strips' nominally consolatory role. Spiegelman reprints the front page of the September 11, 1901 edition of Joseph Pulitzer's *The World*. Dedicated to news about the anarchist Leon Czolgosz's ultimately fatal shooting of President William McKinley, the page charges the term "anarchist" with as much menace as the term "terrorist" has today. Stories on *The World*'s cover page report, for instance, the breakup of a "band of Anarchists" in much the same way that media post-9/11 might describe the disruption of a terrorist cell; likewise, the paper reports the arrest and interrogation of the so-called "anarchist queen" Emma Goldman, suspected of complicity in Czolgosz's plan. The early twentieth century was as deeply in the throes of mass panic as was the early twenty-first.

The frontispiece thus implies that the late nineteenth-century newspaper strips that inspired Spiegelman themselves respond, however indirectly, to this aspect of the *fin-de-siècle*. Thus he reprints a *Little Nemo in Slumberland* strip from September 29, 1907, in which the boy protagonist, grown to Brobdingnagian proportions, clambers on the skyscrapers of a modern city in the company of the babbling, primitive "Jungle Imp," both of them pursued by Flip, the strip's cigar-chomping spirit of destruction (Figure 1). In the five panels preceding Flip's arrival, Nemo and the Imp have painstakingly climbed down the buildings without damaging them, then tried to escape from an urban labyrinth without crushing the pedestrians visible at their feet. When Flip appears in the sixth panel, he heedlessly pushes buildings aside in a desperate bid to overtake his friends; the towers in his vicinity topple and crumble in a halo of comic catastrophe, the tiny human figures visible on the city wharves in grave danger of being crushed by falling buildings or by Flip's gigantic feet. (Spiegelman does not reprint the strips that McCay published in the following two weeks, which show the consequences of Flip's

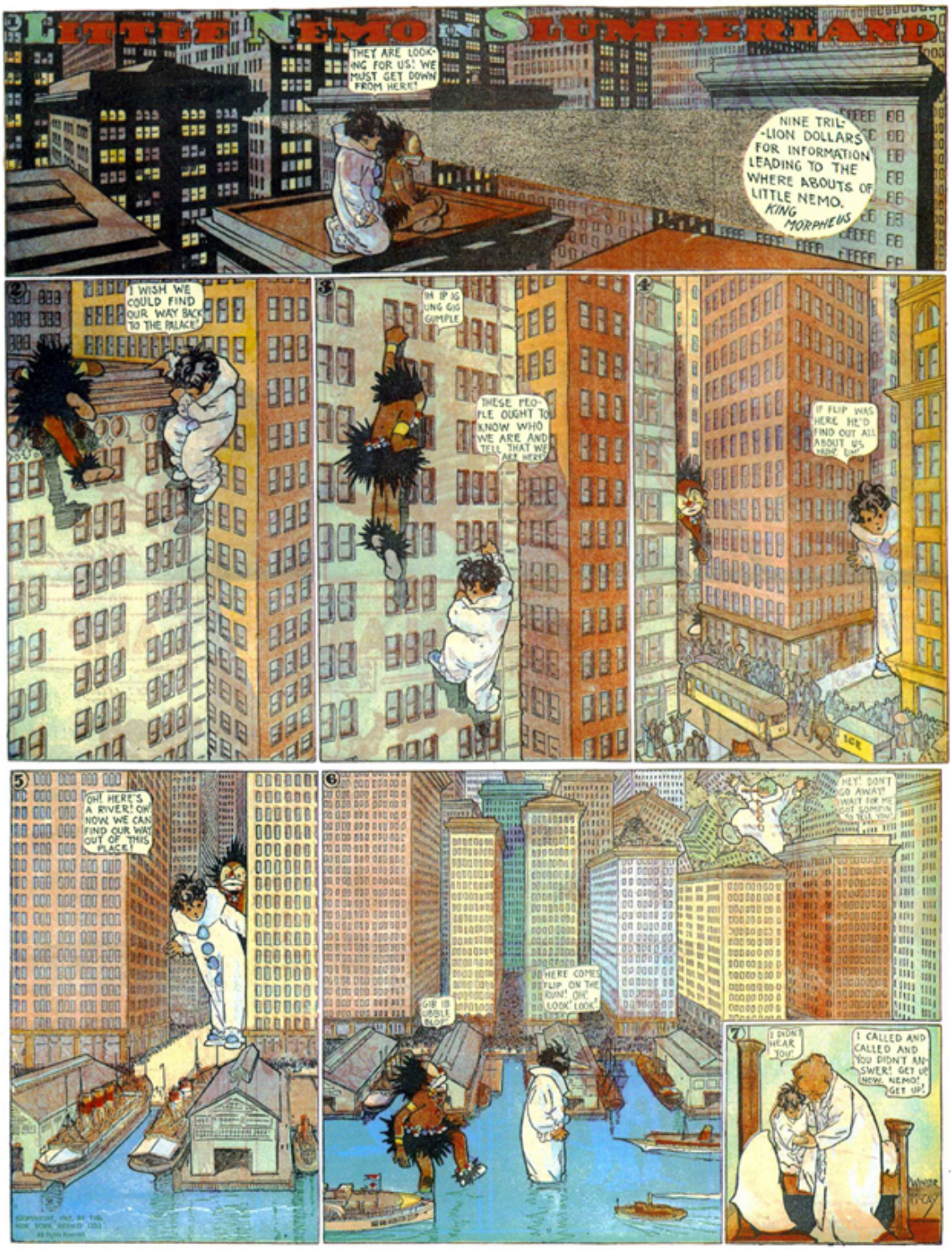

Figure 1. *Little Nemo in Slumberland*. 29 Sept. 1907.

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heedlessness: the collapsing buildings explode in flames and the city burns to the ground, an apocalypse that provokes the city's navy to attack Nemo and his confederates in scenes that anticipate the climax of *King Kong* [Figures 2 and 3]). *In the Shadow of No Towers* casts the strip of 9/29/1901 as an eerie anticipation of 9/11/2001, and invites readers to link it to the spectre of anarchism stalking turn-of-the-century America.

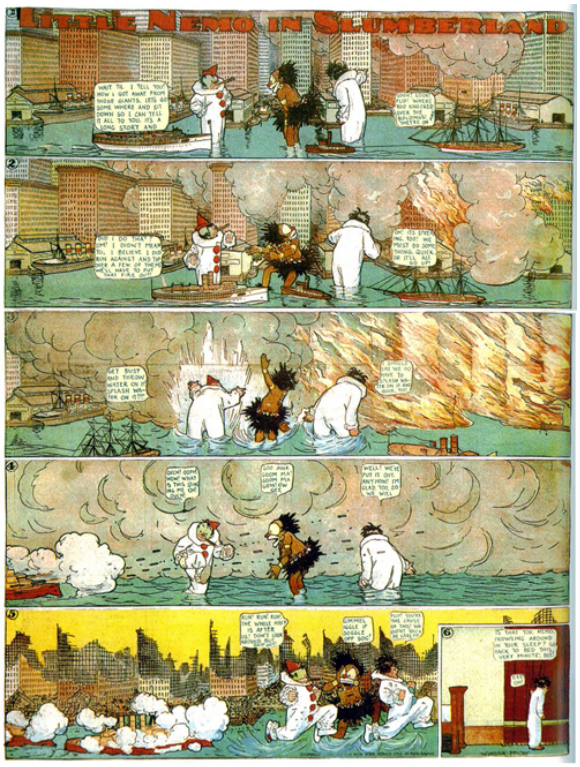

Figure 2. *Little Nemo in Slumberland*. 6 Oct. 1907.
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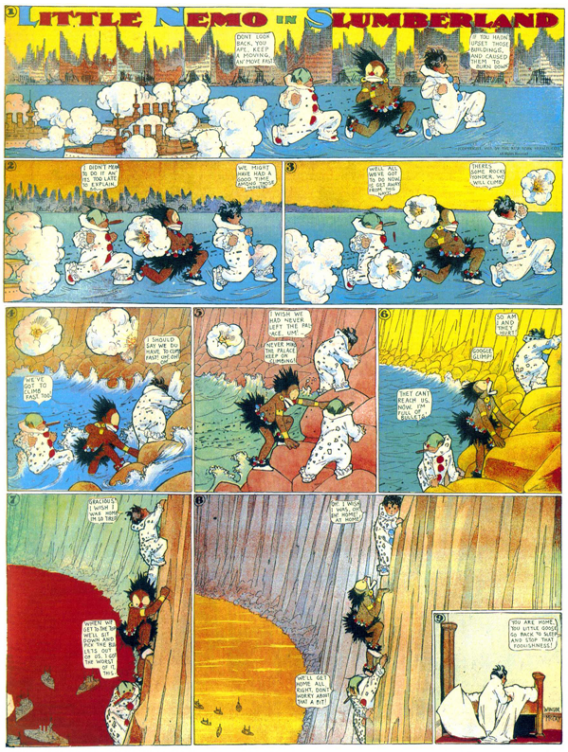

Figure 3. *Little Nemo in Slumberland*. 13 Oct. 1907.
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In a narrow sense this reading of the *Little Nemo* strip is unwarranted. Flip is a clumsy visitor to the city, not an anarchist with a grievance. The larger narrative of which these pages are instalments is not political. As the first panel of the September 7 strip suggests, Nemo and his companions are lost and looking for a way back to Slumberland. Prior to this urban episode, they have been menaced by forest-dwelling giants, and in subsequent episodes, they flee from

the devastated city to an Africanesque desert, where the Jungle Imp teaches them to ride lions: in this appropriately dream-like series of narrative and geographic leaps there are no coherent political themes. The strip's representation of urban destruction is in this sense purely a matter of spectacle.

It is possible, however, that this spectacle is as ideologically and libidinally invested as are, per Žižek, *Independence Day* on film and 9/11 on the small screen. The strip furnishes clues as to the character of those ideological investments, and these clues bring us closer to seeing how fears of anarchism might be at play in the strip. Most interpretations of Nemo's place in American newspaper strips characterize him as a reassuring alternative to the violent working-class and immigrant children populating newspaper strips of the 1890s like Outcault's Yellow Kid strips and Rudolph Dirks's *The Katzenjammer Kids*. Outcault's Yellow Kid is a child of the working classes, for instance, resident in New York slums and participant in an anarchic and violent street culture over which adults have little influence. By contrast, Nemo is plainly a child of the middle classes, never seen outside of his comfortable bedroom except during his nocturnal adventures in Slumberland, where he is an unfailingly polite and gentle boy. And however extravagant Nemo's dreams, he always returns to a reality where he is subject to parental authority: he awakes under the thumb of his parents and grandparents (who comfort or, alternately, cajole and threaten him with beatings whenever he wakes from his troubled sleep). The strips' final panels are therefore exercises in containment, the Waking Lent that concludes the Dreaming Carnival (until the next week). *Little Nemo in Slumberland* thereby placates readers who feared the corruptive example undisciplined children would offer to a presumed child audience: he is akin less to Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn than to Louisa May Alcott's Theodore "Laurie" Laurence. Hence Nemo's class associations are not idle

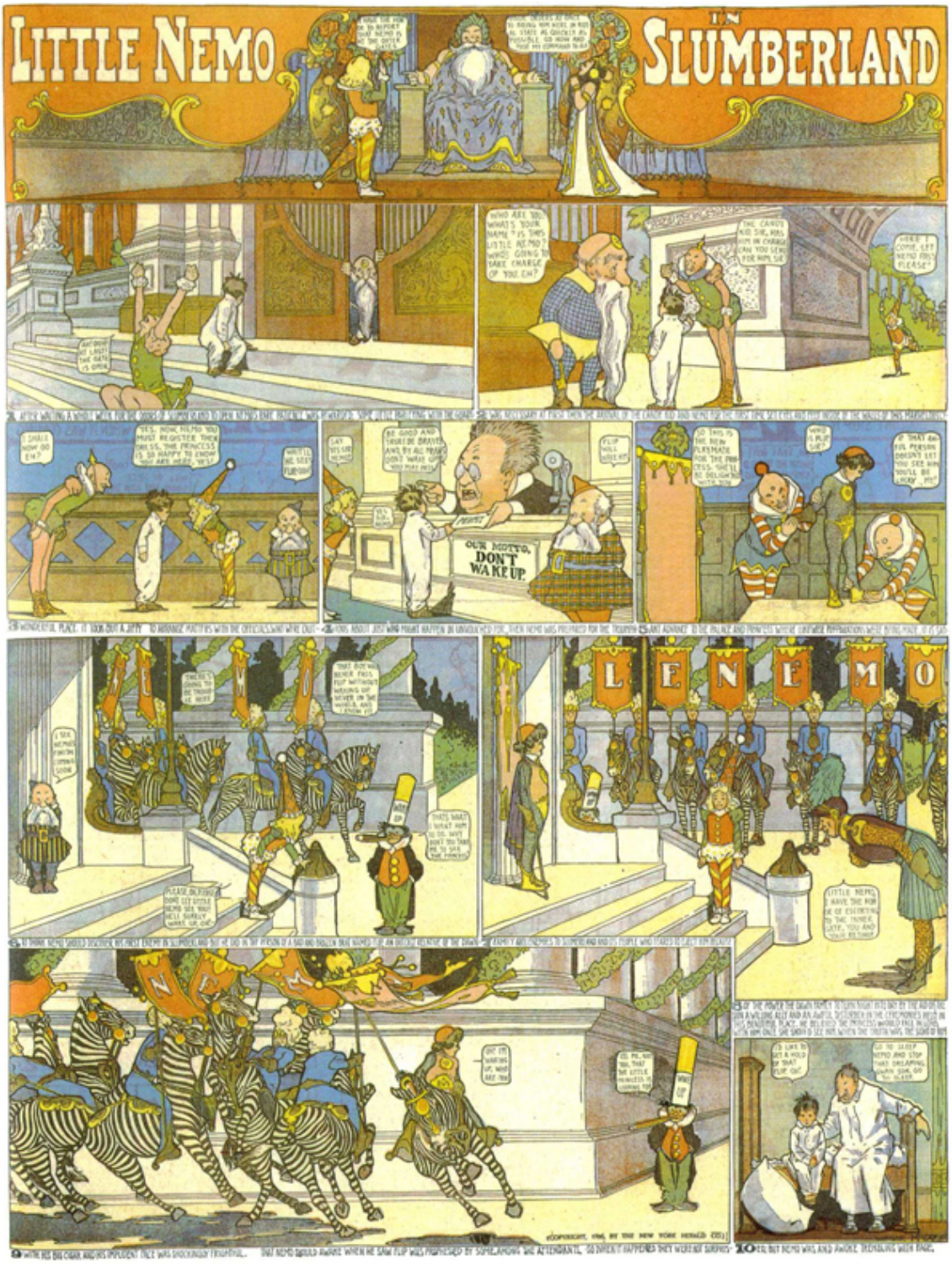

Figure 4. *Little Nemo in Slumberland*. 4. Mar. 1906.

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details strictly internal to the strip, but also calculated attempts to exorcise contemporary spectres of juvenile delinquency. Yet despite Nemo's docility, McCay's banishment of the violent urban child is incomplete, since Flip is plainly in the same vein as the Yellow Kid and the Katzenjammers. He first appears in the strip as "a bad and brazen brat named Flip, an outcast relative of the dawn family" (Figure 4).[2] Turn-of-the-century readers would have associated him with specific social identities. John Canemaker's biography of McCay relates two surviving accounts of Flip's inspiration: according to one, McCay modeled him on "a tough newsboy midget [McCay] knew in Cincinnati, a fellow who smoked big cigars and dressed in oversized uniforms given to him by the local firemen" (94); according to the other, McCay modeled him on a "rotund black man with a greenish cast to his face" whom McCay allegedly encountered in Brooklyn (quoted on 94). Both accounts are less important for their accuracy (impossible now to gauge) than for their shared identification of Flip with urban working-class identities. The Nemo strip that concerns Spiegelman links the city's destruction by fire to a reckless working-class brat.

The link between urban destruction and working-class violence is also at play in two late nineteenth-century novels of urban destruction, Ignatius Donnelly's *Caesar's Column: A Story of the Twentieth-Century* (1890) and Joaquin Miller's *The Destruction of Gotham* (1885). Like the Nemo strips, both novels vividly portray an urban apocalypse, but unlike the Nemo strips, they are expressly political, bleak jeremiads about the widening gap between rich and poor in the Gilded Age. Donnelly's prologue fears that "indifference to the great bond of brotherhood which lies at the base of Christianity . . . must . . . eventuate in the overthrow of society and the destruction of civilization" (3). Similarly, Miller's prologue laments that

> Here in this wonderful city you have all the wealth at one end. You have all the poverty at the other. . . . The distance between the poor and the rich is not great. The line that divides . . . may be crossed or erased at any moment.
>
> Hunger, oppression, drunkenness; a hundred drunken men; a puff of smoke! The end! (8)

Both novels climax as working-class revolutionaries destroy New York; between them they justify Spiegelman in his intuition that the Nemo strips refract, however benignly, *fin-de-siècle* fears of anarchism.

Caesar's Column responds to the utopianism of Edward Bellamy's better remembered *Looking Backward 2000-1887* by inverting that novel's premises. *Looking Backward* transports its protagonist, a resident of nineteenth-century Boston, one hundred years into the future. There he discovers that Boston has peacefully transformed into a technocratic socialist utopia. The protagonist, Julian West, so completely acculturates to this new society that, when he briefly returns to nineteenth-century Boston in the final chapter of the novel, he finds it nightmarish by comparison (and wakes to discover with relief that his return literally was a nightmare). Within Bellamy's optimistic narrative, however, there lurks a pessimistic alternative, the future that might have been if the "labor question" of the nineteenth century had not been answered adequately; given "the widespread industrial and social troubles, and the underlying dissatisfaction of all classes with the inequalities of society, and the general misery of mankind" (29) in nineteenth-century Boston, Julian confesses to his twentieth-century host that "I should not have been surprised had I looked down from your house-top to-day on a heap of charred and moss-grown ruins instead of this glorious city" (30). It is this alternate future that *Caesar's Column* dramatizes, in what Fredric Jameson has called "the first genuine

totalitarian dystopia" (144n3). In its portrayal of New York in 1985, the gap between rich and poor has only widened. The city is in the grip of plutocrats who live in luxury while the underclass they exploit suffers in devastating poverty. (In Donnelly's portrait of class conflict, this new "aristocracy of the world [is] almost altogether of Hebrew origin" (37), reflecting both the burgeoning anti-Semitism of late nineteenth-century Anglo-America and also stubborn resistance to the notion that American capitalism could in itself produce the class divisions to which Donnelly's novel was responding.) The novel climaxes in revolution: "like a huge flood, long dammed up, turbulent, turbid, muddy, loaded with wrecks and debris," the narrator reports,

> the gigantic mass [of working-class New Yorkers] broke loose, full of foam and terror, and flowed in every direction. A foul and brutal and ravenous multitude it was, dark with dust and sweat, armed with the weapons of civilization, but possessing only the instincts of wild beasts. (299)

This working-class tsunami overwhelms New York, and the novel ends as a small circle of survivors flees the doomed city.

The novel's deep ambivalence about its working-class revolutionaries is visible in its characterization of Caesar Lomellini, one of the revolution's three leaders and the Caesar of the novel's title. Originally a farmer in "the then newly settled State of Jefferson, on the upper waters of the Saskatchewan" (145), Caesar becomes a revolutionary only after a banker forecloses on his mortgages (and after one of the banker's lawyers seduces his daughter, in a conventional nineteenth-century linkage of femininity and property). "Then," Donnelly writes,

> all the devil that lay hid in the depths of the man's nature broke forth. That night the lawyer was attacked in his bed and literally hewed to pieces: the same fate overtook the money-lender. Before morning Caesar and his family had fled to

> the inhospitable mountain regions north of the settlement. There he gathered around him a band of men as desperate as himself, and waged bloody and incessant war on society. (146)

Caesar's bloody war is moveable: he later leads "the terrible negro insurrection [that] broke out in the lower Mississippi Valley" (147) and eventually arrives in New York to lead the revolutionary "Brotherhood of Destruction" against the plutocracy. Caesar's grievances are legitimate, with Donnelly casting him as a Jeffersonian yeoman abused by a heartless moneyed elite. But there also lurks a "devil . . . in the depths of the man's nature" that bursts forth under provocation, a lurking devil that reveals itself in his monstrous physiognomy. Conforming to nineteenth-century discourses on race that identify racial blackness with primitivism, Donnelly describes Caesar in animalistic and atavistic terms: "He was," the narrator states,

> not less than six feet six inches high, and broad in proportion. His great arms hung down until the monstrous hands almost touched the knees. His skin was quite dark, almost negroid; and a thick, close mat of curly black hair covered his huge head like a thatch. His face was muscular, ligamentous; with great bars, ridges and whelks of flesh, especially about the jaws and on the forehead. But the eyes fascinated me. They were the eyes of a wild beast, deep-set, sullen and glaring; they seemed to shine like those of the cat-tribe, with a luminosity of their own. (172)

The revolution may be rooted in legitimate grievance but it is brought to fruition by monsters. The name Donnelly gives this particular monster evokes Cesare Lombroso, the early criminologist and author of *L'uomo delinquente* (1876) – *Criminal Man* – who asserted that criminal propensities are visible in physiognomy.[3] Donnelly's references to a "devil . . . in the

depths" of Caesar's nature imply that the abuses Caesar suffers only draw out an already existing criminality.

In Miller's *The Destruction of Gotham* a mob of the urban poor is also instrumental in ravaging the city, but unlike Donnelly, Miller gives that mob no leaders. The crowd is largely undifferentiated, Miller's focus occasionally lighting on individual participants but never on Caesar-like leaders. Instead Miller emphasizes the collective nature of the revolution against property: "The people had endured much," he asserts; "They had begged for better pay, for fewer hours. . . . Do you suppose their hands were to be stayed now?" (178). At the novel's climax, a mob from the working-class Bowery overruns an opulent hotel on Fifth Avenue and burns it to the ground, then fans out across Manhattan singing "Sherman's March Through Georgia." The fires they set metastasize into a conflagration that consumes all Manhattan. The novel's principal character, a newspaper reporter, "sweep[s] his eyes over the burning island":

> For it was literally a burning island now. The very earth was on fire. The oil, the gas, the rum, the thousands of filthy things which man in his drunken greed had allowed to accumulate on the face of the island appealed to heaven for purification.
>
> And so the flame laid hungry and hard hold of the face of the earth, and burned and burned and burned to the very bed-rock! (213)

Miller's lurid vision of a holocaustal Manhattan anticipates McCay's *Nemo* strips by two decades, but in the novel, the causes of the city's destruction are expressly political.

The class dimension to these fantasies of urban destruction derives from Gilded Age anxieties about the relation between labor and capital. In 1890, the same year that Donnelly published his macabre prophecy of New York's future, Jacob Riis published *How the Other*

Half Lives, his famous survey of the tenements of lower Manhattan. Riis's survey ends with the warning that

> The sea of a mighty population, held in galling fetters, heaves uneasily in the tenements. . . . If it rise . . . , no human power may avail to check it. The gap between the classes in which it surges, unseen . . . is widening day by day. . . . Against all other dangers our system of government may offer defence and shelter; against this not. (Riis 166)

The cultural historian Alan Trachtenberg has noted a late-century "fear manifest throughout the popular media . . . of uprisings and insurrection, of a smoldering volcano under the streets" (48). This fear was not entirely phantasmal. In the 1880s there were frequent clashes between workers and capitalists (or their proxies), most notably in the Haymarket bombing. In early May, 1886, workers in Chicago demanding an eight-hour working day led a protest that ended violently: police demanded that the working-class activists disband and, in response, an unknown assailant hurled a bomb into the ranks of policemen, killing seven. In the ensuing confusion, police opened fire on the crowd, and three of the protesters were killed. As Paul Avrich and other historians of the Haymarket tragedy have observed, the media – and much of the public – blamed Chicago anarchists; what followed amounted to America's first Red Scare, and contributed to the image in mass culture of the mad, bomb-throwing anarchist. *Caesar's Column* participates in this cultural panic. Donnelly's prologue openly refers to the spectre of anarchist violence. Denying that he himself is an anarchist, Donnelly asserts that "I paint a dreadful picture of the world-wreck which successful anarchism would produce" (3).[4]

These contexts are crucial to understanding the specific occasions for Miller's and Donnelly's fantasies of urban destruction; but *Caesar's Column* and *The Destruction of*

Gotham are still not the first American novels to entertain such apocalyptic fantasies. Rather, they revisit and extend narrative episodes already present in novels on urban themes of the 1840s. In this decade, Eugène Sue published *Les Mystères de Paris*, inaugurating a genre that, in Trachtnenberg's words, "employed Gothic devices and motifs to portray [the city as] a dense, lurid, forbidding terrain" (143).[5] In 1846, George Lippard published the first American city-mysteries novel, *The Quaker City, or, The Monks of Monk Hall*. Informed by Lippard's radical politics, *The Quaker City* focuses on corruption in Philadelphia; as David S. Reynolds notes, Lippard's novel "attack[s] nearly every type of 'respectable' Philadelphian: capitalists, clergymen, lawyers, politicians, bankers, editors, and merchants [are] guilty of the most heinous crimes, including incest, rape, and murder" (xvi). *The Quaker City*'s remarkable portraits of urban vice inform and justify one of the novel's climactic episodes, when a central character has a vision of Philadelphia's Day of Doom.

Although *The Quaker City*'s roots in class critique lead it to emphasize the corruption of an urban "money power," as in many city mysteries it also embodies urban vice in a single, socially abject figure, in this case a physically and morally deformed man born Abijah Jones but styling himself Devil-Bug.[6] Lippard relates that Devil-Bug was born in a brothel, "the offspring of foulest sin and pollution" (105), and from early childhood witnessed "scenes of vice, wretchedness and squalor" that have left him with the conviction that there is "no such thing as *good* in the world" (106, Lippard's emphasis). In adulthood he is given to extravagantly violent crimes. Although in early chapters Devil-Bug seems irredeemably vicious, in later chapters his character acquires a measure of nuance, becoming, as Reynolds suggests, "a remorseful figure . . . capable of doing good" (xl).

In the process of this partial rehabilitation, Devil-Bug has "an awful night-mare" (369) envisioning the city's destruction at the hands of an angry God. In Devil-Bug's Scrooge-like vision of Philadelphia Future, the American republic is on the brink of transforming itself into a monarchy, its new aristocracy made up of "a pack of swindlin' Bank d'rectors" (374) (as Devil-Bug puts it), as well as "the Cotton Lord and the Factory Prince" (389). On the site of Independence Hall there stands a new "royal mansion" (373), and on the site of Washington Square there stands a prison, a "dark and gloomy building" in which are interned "the brave men who struck the last blow for the liberty of the land, against the tyranny of this new-risen nobility" (374). In Devil-Bug's vision, Philadelphia does not survive the extinction of American republicanism, instead suffering the fate of the Biblical Sodom. Devil-Bug watches as

> houses [begin] to sink into the earth, slowly, slowly, inch by inch…. Then from the earth burst streams of vapor, hissing and whirling as they [spout] upwards into the blue sky. Around each pillar of vapor, in an instant there [lies] a circle of blackened corpses. That steam [smites] the living to the heart, it wither[s] their eye-balls; it crisp[s] the flesh on their bones, like the bark peeling from the log before the flame. (391)

Finally, Devil-Bug hears a "ghastly voice" instructing him to

> behold the wreck of the doomed city. Temples and domes, heaps of dead and piles of solid earth mingled in one awful ruin! . . . At last the voice of Blood crying from the very stones of the idolatrous city, has pierced the ear of God. Look beneath, and look upon the wreck of the Doomed City! Look below and

> with the angels of eternal justice, shout the amen to the litany of the city's crimes, shout Wo, WO UNTO SODOM." (393)

The destruction of Lippard's Philadelphia differs from those of Miller's Gotham and Donnelly's 1980s New York in two respects: it explicitly casts the destruction as God's judgment on the city; and within the action of the novel it is an apocalyptic vision rather than apocalypse itself (and, however the reader responds, the vision inculcates no lesson in the visionary; whereas the witnesses to New York's destruction in Miller and Donnelly's novels moralize heavily, Devil-Bug's un-Scrooge-like response to his vision is to exclaim that "I've had sich dreams . . . o' death an' hell, that I could murder a man jest now, for the wery fun o' th' thing!" [399]).

But *The Quaker City* plainly resembles *The Destruction of Gotham* and *Caesar's Column* in that its apocalyptic episode arises in part from class tensions in the period of its publication. In the prolonged depression that began with the Panic of 1837, Americans expressed anxieties about the division of the republic into a wealthy "upper ten" and an impoverished "lower million."[7] The reformer Orestes Brownson's 1840 essay on "The Laboring Classes" went so far as to prophesy an American class war:

> the hereditary descent of property, an anomaly in our American system, . . . must be removed, or the system itself will be destroyed. . . . The rich, the business community, will never voluntarily consent to it. . . . It will be effected only by the strong arm of physical force. It will come, if it ever come at all, only at the conclusion of war, the like of which the world as yet has never witnessed. . . . (24)

Lippard's novel shares with Brownson's essay a conviction that the interests of rich Americans radically differ from those of poor Americans; and Brownson's vision of an unprecedented war has affinities with Devil-Bug's vision of a future Philadelphia in perceiving class conflict as the central force in American culture.

Hence class tensions are crucial in all three of these nineteenth-century novels, providing both narrative and contextual explanations for their respective imaginings of disaster. Hollywood spectacles of urban destruction typically offer three sources of the urban apocalypse: external forces (that is, invasion, as in *Independence Day*); internal pressures not necessarily related to class conflict (as in *Escape from New York* and *Fight Club*); and a combination of the two (as in Steven Spielberg's post-9/11 adaptation of *The War of the Worlds*, where the alien "invaders" turn out to have been lurking for millennia under American soil, in the manner of sleeper cells). The dominant responses to 9/11 reconciled it to the first and third categories; those commentators who framed it in relation to the second category (either in a neo-Puritan spirit that saw the attack as evidence of God's controversy with America or in an anti-imperial spirit that saw it as evidence of blowback for adventures abroad) were loudly rebuked. By contrast, the nineteenth-century novels I have been discussing fall primarily under this second category. *The Wire*'s portrait of the Franklin Terrace Towers' demolition sits squarely in that category, too.

But there is a still larger context for the nineteenth-century fantasies of urban destruction: the staggering growth of the nineteenth-century American city. The scale and pace of this growth can scarcely be exaggerated. New York City's was the most spectacular – from 33,131 residents in 1790 to 3,437,202 in 1900 – but it was only the most striking example of a nation-wide demographic phenomenon, the urbanization of an initially agrarian country. As

Adna Ferrin Weber noted in his groundbreaking statistical analysis of the nineteenth-century city, in 1790, only 3.35% of Americans lived in cities with populations of 8000 or more, while in 1890, 29.2% did. What is more, in 1790, there were only six cities with populations above 8000; in 1890, there were 448. As a consequence, the nineteenth-century American city was a volatile place, growing frenetically and changing quickly: in *Letters from New York* (1843), Lydia Maria Child characterized the city as "a place of rapid fluctuation and never-ceasing change" (56). Accordingly it was hard to grasp; Miller asserts in his preface to *The Destruction of Gotham* that "[the] great book of this great city has never been written. The stream of life here has been too swift for any mind to follow it or depict it with truth and precision" (8). In an exemplary analysis of modernization in nineteenth-century Paris, the urbanist David Harvey remarks that "The rapid and seemingly chaotic growth of Paris in the early nineteenth century rendered city life difficult to decipher, decode, and represent" (25). If Harvey is right to link rapid urban growth to the difficulties of rendering urban life intelligible, then these difficulties must have been as great in New York as in Paris. Reynolds long ago noted the link between the popularity of the city-mysteries genre in America and the growth of American cities: "It is understandable," he wrote in *Beneath the American Renaissance*,

> that the dark city-mysteries genre . . . would arise in the 1840s, for such novels reflected the profound fears and fantasies of an American population faced with rapid urbanization and industrialization. Most historians agree that during the 1840s American city dwellers lost social knowledge and physical contact with each other for the first time. The city was suddenly an overwhelming place, filled with hidden horrors and savage struggles as fascinating as they were appalling. (82)

Aspects of this claim may be dubious: for instance, what does "social knowledge" entail if it were available to New Yorkers when the city's population was roughly 123,000 (as it was in 1820) but not when it was roughly 312,000 (as it was in 1840)? Nonetheless Reynolds's broad claim is compelling, as is suggested by Child's reflections on the psychic costs of anonymity in the New York crowd (in remarks that follow closely on her comment about the velocity and flux of urban life):

> There is something impressive, even to painfulness, in this dense crowding of human existence. . . . It has sometimes forced upon me, for a few moments, an appalling night-mare sensation of vanishing identity; as if I were but an unknown, unnoticed, and unseparated drop in the great ocean of human existence; as if the uncomfortable old theory were true, and we were but portions of a Great Mundane Soul, to which we ultimately return, to be swallowed up in its infinity. (57)

Struggling to articulate her reaction to the urban crowd, Child makes the same appeals to nightmare and pain that animate the city-mysteries genre. Her response bolsters Reynolds's suggestion that the city-mysteries were popular because their representations of a chaotic and incomprehensible city resonated with readers (even, one presumes, as those readers recognized the novels' exaggerations).

Three maps of New York City published at different moments in the long nineteenth century (Figures 5-7) give a broad sense of the scale and pace of the city's growth. Published for different audiences and purposes – one is drawn from a 1789 directory of the city's residents; one is an insurance map published in 1852; one is from an 1897 world atlas – the three nonetheless provide a visual index of the city's northward race up Manhattan Island and

Figure 5. New York City in 1789. Courtesy, American Antiquarian Society.
http://journals.library.mun.ca/ate/v2/Editorial%20Introduction/Figure%205.tif

show the transformations in urban infrastructure that mark New York's emergence as a modern city. The earliest of these maps shows a New York that has only just emerged from the Revolution (when it was occupied by the British) and still concentrated on the island's southern tip, barely reaching "Crown Point or Corlars Hook." It is only a mile and a half from the Battery to Byards Lane (now Broome Street), the northern skirt of the city. But the map shows a city pregnant with its future: as Paul E. Cohen and Robert T. Augustyn note, the beginnings of a grid are visible on the north-eastern side of the city, anticipating the formal adoption of a grid system in 1811. In the 1852 map, that grid has been filled to about Twenty-Fifth Street,[8] accommodating a population that had grown from 33,131 to 515,547. Surveyed and drawn by

Figure 6. New York City in 1852.

http://journals.library.mun.ca/ate/v2/Editorial%20Introduction/Figure%206.jpg

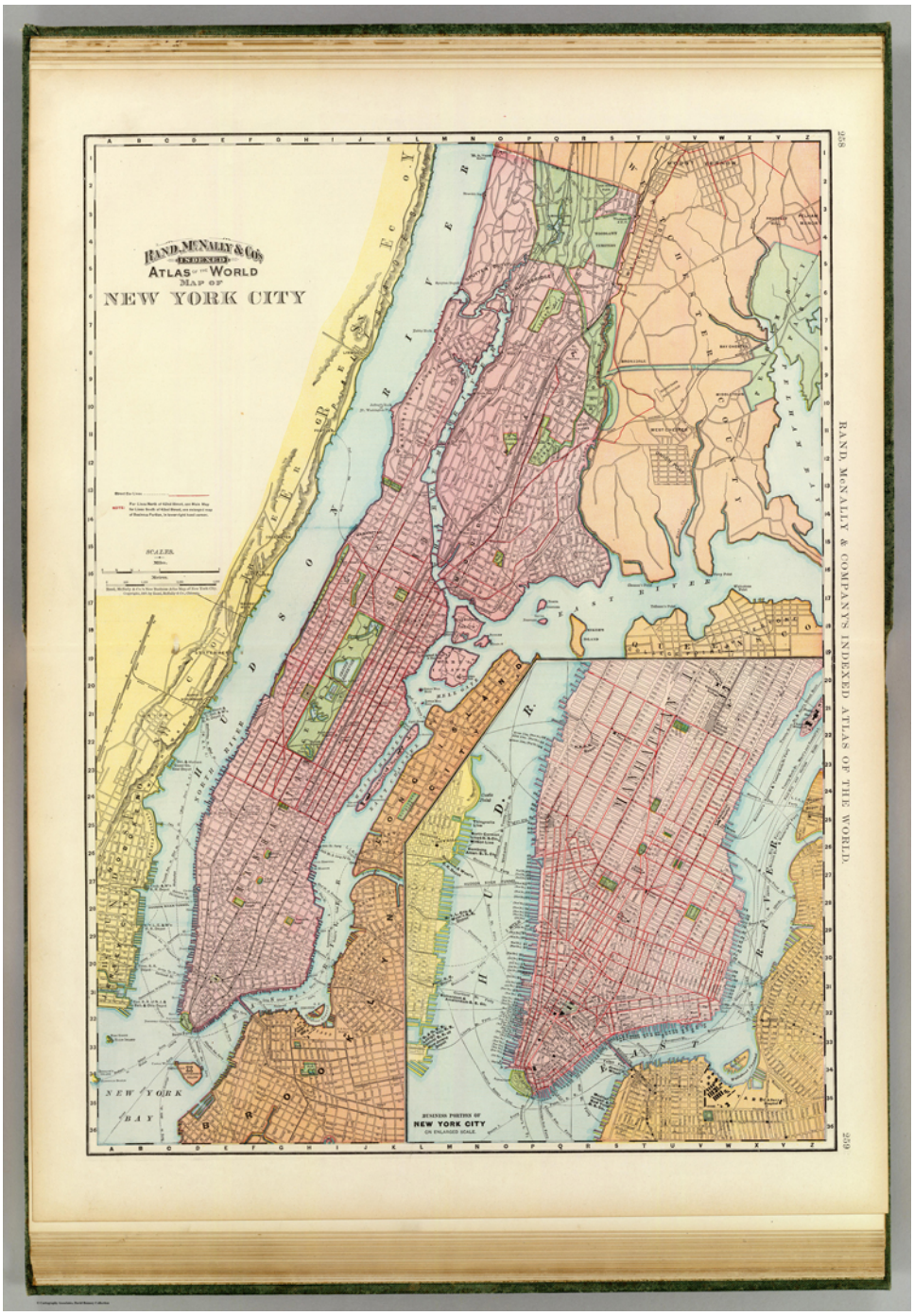


Figure 7. New York City in 1897.

http://journals.library.mun.ca/ate/v2/Editorial%20Introduction/Figure%207.jpg

John F. Harrison and published by Matthew Dripps, the enormous map vividly shows the dramatic changes to New York in the intervening 63 years. A crucial change is visible, for instance, in the means of circulating fresh water. The Collect Pond visible in the 1789 map is missing from the 1852 map, filled in between 1802 and 1813. By the 1830s, Manhattan's water needs far outstripped the ability of any local source to supply it, and a plan was conceived to transport water to the city from 40 miles away; the early 1840s saw the completion of this plan when an aqueduct that transported water from the Croton River began operation. On the 1852 map, Reservoir Square, adjoining the distributing reservoir, is visible at the corners of 6th Ave and 42nd St., at the northern end of the map (and, testifying to the importance of the water system to mid-century Manhattan's sense of self, an image of the distributing reservoir itself appears in the upper right circle of the map's frame). This kind of infrastructural improvement is even more strikingly visible in the map published by Rand McNally in 1897, the year before the amalgamation of Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, the Bronx, and Staten Island – the Five Boroughs – into greater New York. Perhaps the most striking difference between the Dripps map and the Rand McNally map – apart from the extent of the city's half century of growth – is the appearance in the latter of Central Park, the vast green space designed by Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux to provide urbanites a mite of nature amidst the asphalt. On the Rand McNally map, Central Park is a striking green block in a sea of metropolitan pink. Testifying to Manhattan's developing transportation networks and its increasing interconnectedness with the other boroughs, the map shows the Brooklyn Bridge linking Brooklyn and New York. And the 1897 map also offers some suggestion of the urban development in the vicinity of Manhattan, giving the island a context almost entirely absent from the two earlier maps. The sheer scale of New York's transformation is perhaps most

easily understood by superimposing them on one another (Figure 8). The spectacular changes that they document justify Adna Ferrin Weber in calling America "the land of mushroom cities" (20).

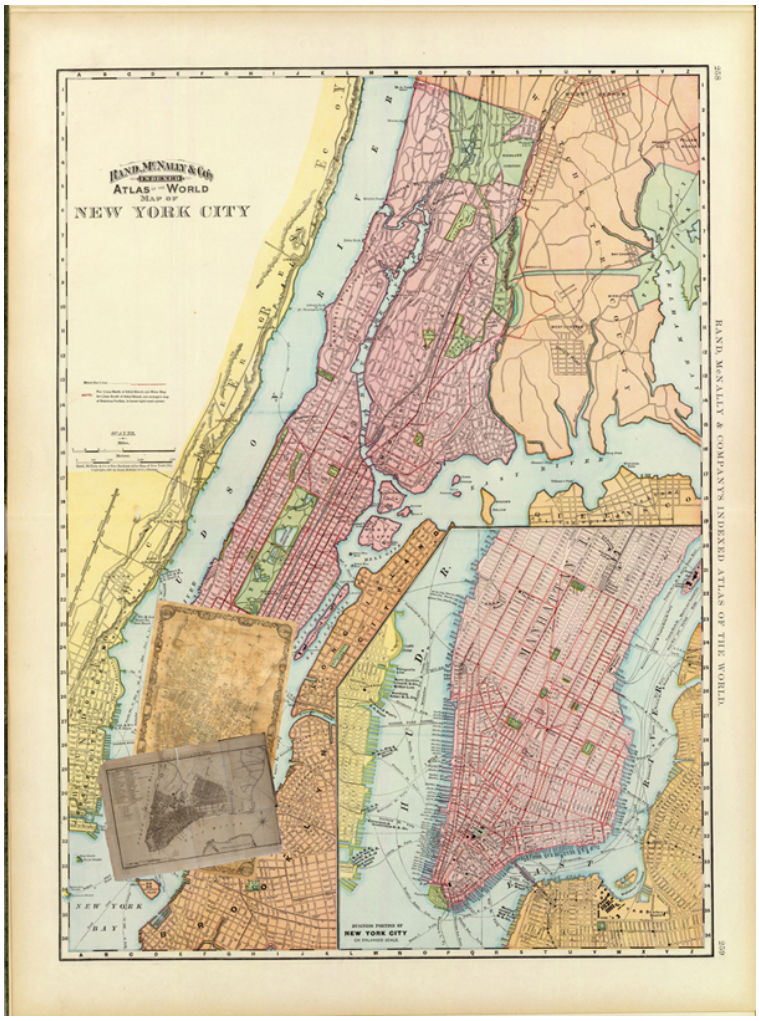


Figure 8. New York City in 1789, 1852, and 1897.
http://journals.library.mun.ca/ate/v2/Editorial%20Introduction/Figure%208.jpg

Washington Irving's story cycle "The Money-Diggers" (Part IV of *Tales of a Traveller*) is an early nineteenth-century meditation on the island's rapid urbanization. The stories in this *Rahmenerzählung*, or frame narrative, are nominally devoted to the "tales of pirates and their

buried money" that the narrator, Diedrich Knickerbocker, purports to have collected (239). But as in "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," where Ichabod Crane's wooing of Katrina van Tassel allegorizes the early republic's grasping romance with money,[9] in "The Money-Diggers" Irving is centrally concerned with matters of political economy and questions of value – here, ultimately, with the volatilization of property value. The story cycle begins with a sketch of the pirate William Kidd, relating legends that he buried treasure in the vicinity of New York prior to his arrest and execution. It ends with "Wolfert Webber, or Golden Dreams," in which a farmer on Manhattan Island faces "the growing prosperity of the city" (287). The latest patriarch of a long line of Dutch farmers, Wolfert Webber struggles to maintain his wealth as his expenses increase two- and threefold, because "he [cannot] double and treble the magnitude of his cabbages; and the number of competitors [prevents] the increase of price: thus, therefore, while every one around him [grows] richer, Wolfert [grows] poorer" (287). After listening to fireside legends of supposed money buriers including Kidd and Peter Stuyvesant, Webber has a dream in which he

> discover[s] an immense treasure in the centre of his garden. At every stroke of the spade he [lays] bare a golden ingot: diamond crosses [sparkle] out of the dust; bags up money [turn] up their bellies, corpulent with pieces of eight or venerable doubloons; and chests, wedged close with moidores, ducats, and pistareens, [yawn] before his ravished eyes, and [vomit] forth their glittering contents. (303)

This vision prompts Wolfert to undertake frantic but futile treasure hunts, and comes true only when he discovers that the value of his farms has rocketed upwards as the city has expanded and enfolded them. The story ends with Wolfert Webber subdividing his property into lots and growing wealthy from the rents. The narrator relates that Webber

> [is] one of those many worthy Dutch burghers of the Manhattoes, whose fortunes have been made in a manner in spite of themselves; who have tenaciously held on to their hereditary acres, raising turnips and cabbages about the skirts of the city, hardly able to make both ends meet, until the corporation has cruelly driven streets through their abodes, and they have suddenly awakened out of a lethargy, and to their astonishment found themselves rich men! (392)

Jennifer J. Baker notes that Webber belatedly discovers that land itself is a commodity (164). But Webber's epiphany only benefits him because of the rapid inflation of that commodity's value, which in turn owes everything to the city's rapid growth. Significantly, although Irving set the action in the early eighteenth century, he published the story in the 1820s, a decade when, according to the Census, New York's population ballooned from 123,706 to 202,589. It was also the decade in which the surveyor and cartographer John Randel, Jr., published "The City of New York as laid out by the Commissioners," the final and most accurate version of the series of maps establishing the rectilinear grid as the template for Manhattan's development all the way north to 155th Street.[10] "Wolfert Webber" is a fascinating meditation on New York's nineteenth-century expansion, one of the earliest American fictions to thematize the cultural and social transformations that would characterize America's experience of modernity.

This experience is not an uncomplicated experience of progress but one shadowed by loss. As Marshall Berman memorably puts it, modernity unleashes the "capacity and drive for development: for permanent change, for perpetual upheaval and renewal in every mode of personal and social life" (94). And this change, upheaval, and renewal require the forfeiture of stasis, stability, and peaceful maturation; the phenomenon is as destructive as it is creative.

Drawn from Marx and Engels's "The Communist Manifesto," this characterization of modernity as creative destruction offers a powerful explanation for America's two-century-long fascination with fantasies of urban catastrophe: such fantasies are normal in an age of extravagant urban expansion, which is also, inevitably, an age of extravagant destruction. *The Destruction of Gotham* explicitly represents the city's immolation as a consequence of its explosive growth. The prologue hyperbolically characterizes New York as

> trembling, panting, quivering in her wild, white heat of intoxication, excitement, madness. . . .
>
> . . . Never grew a city so great, so suddenly great. And her glory, her greatness, her sudden power and splendor have made her mad. She is drunk; not drunk entirely with drink, but she is drunk with riches and with the love of pleasure. Altogether, she is madly, desperately drunk. (7)

This description of New York as an intoxicated, sexually excited madwoman is so extravagant that its central claim about New York – that the city's growth and destruction are linked – is easy to disregard.

One of the most famous English-language descriptions of the destructive aspects of modernization appears in Charles Dickens's account of 1840s Camden Town in *Dombey and Son* (1846-8). Dickens writes:

> The first shock of a great earthquake had, just at that period, rent the whole neighbourhood to its centre. Traces of its course were visible on every side. Houses were knocked down; streets broken through and stopped; deep pits and trenches dug in the ground; enormous heaps of earth and clay thrown up; buildings that were undermined and shaking, propped by great beams of wood.

> Here, a chaos of carts, overthrown and jumbled together, lay topsy-turvy at the bottom of a steep unnatural hill; there, confused treasures of iron soaked and rusted in something that had accidentally become a pond. Everywhere were bridges that led nowhere; thoroughfares that were wholly impassable; Babel towers of chimneys, wanting half their height; temporary wooden houses and enclosures, in the most unlikely situations; carcases of ragged tenements, and fragments of unfinished walls and arches, and piles of scaffolding, and wildernesses of bricks, and giant forms of cranes, and tripods straddling above nothing. There were a hundred thousand shapes and substances of incompleteness, wildly mingled out of their places, upside down, burrowing in the earth, aspiring in the air, mouldering in the water, and unintelligible as any dream. Hot springs and fiery eruptions, the usual attendants upon earthquakes, lent their contributions of confusion to the scene. Boiling water hissed and heaved within dilapidated walls; whence, also, the glare and roar of flames came issuing forth; and mounds of ashes blocked up rights of way, and wholly changed the law and custom of the neighbourhood.
>
> In short, the yet unfinished and unopened Railroad was in progress; and, from the very core of all this dire disorder, trailed smoothly away, upon its mighty course of civilisation and improvement. (68)

The "tripods straddling" this scene of urban devastation might easily come from one of the great apocalyptic English novels of the late nineteenth century, H. G. Wells's *The War of the Worlds* (1898); remove the concluding revelation that the "great earthquake" is the effect of railroad construction, and it is easily reconcilable with the fictions I have been discussing.

No passages in nineteenth-century American literature compare directly with Dickens's meditation on modernization's effects on working-class London – there are no literary portraits of comparable power showing the effects of "civilization and improvement" on an already existing urban community. Nor is there a program of transformation as mythic in New York's memory as Haussmannization is in the memory of Paris. But this absence derives not from historical amnesia or from failures of literary imagination but rather from the particular circumstances in which American modernization took place. Unlike London and Paris, New York displaced no long-settled urban population as it modernized: there was no medieval New York to destroy, no ancient houses to be broken down.[11] And, while periodically there were major riots in New York (of which the 1863 Draft Riots are the best remembered), there was no uprising comparable to the European 1848. Literary representations of American modernization will accordingly have a different character from English and French versions.

Even so it would be wrong to suppose that modernization was more benign in New York than elsewhere. As Eric Sanderson has recently shown in the Welikia Project, the urbanization of New York constituted a serious assault upon the island's original topography and ecology. Even a project like the development of New York's public water system – one that proved to have remarkable benefits to all classes in the city – was accompanied by strikes serious enough to cause the mayor to deploy cavalry and to ready the Seventh Regiment "to suppress [the laborers'] riotous proceedings" (Clark 145). A companion to David Harvey's study of modernization in nineteenth-century Paris that focused on the process as it unfolded in nineteenth-century New York would note myriad similarities between the two.

That process of modernization is ongoing. What makes David Simon's portrait of Poot and Bodie so resonant in *The Wire* is that these characters are experiencing with fresh eyes a

phenomenon that, although by definition mutable, has nonetheless structured the American urban experience for two centuries. Poot's inchoate sense of personal loss and Bodie's shrewd analysis of the reform's economic stakes are not new: these responses repeat, *mutatis mutandis*, those of subjects in capitalist societies who have witnessed the sublimation of things – buildings, technologies, institutions, people – that once seemed solid.

Likewise, the urban destruction that Royce transforms into spectacle for the residents of West Baltimore is an episode in what is by now a venerable story. Simon declares that the destruction of the Franklin Terrace Towers evokes 9/11, but 9/11 in turn evokes a long history of fictional spectacles of urban destruction, from the Event Films of the present to the city mysteries of the past. The horror of 9/11 derives in part from its uncanny similarity to mass cultural representations of urban destruction that themselves demonically parody the destructive aspects of America's urbanization.

2. American Modernity – for Kids!

One way to map the American experience of modernity is to look for variations on the European experience – that is, to look for episodes in American literature that resemble ones elsewhere that have been cast as distinctively modern. Berman's preface to the Penguin edition of *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air* responds to readers who "wondered why I didn't write about all sorts of people, places, ideas and movements that would seem to fit my overall project at least as well as the subjects I chose" (9). He didn't, Berman writes, because he hoped "to develop a series of visions and paradigms that could enable people to explore *their own* experience and history in greater detail and depth" (9, Berman's emphasis). One might begin to chart American modernity, then, by translating Berman's "visions and paradigms" of

nineteenth-century cities to the American scene. I will briefly do so here, with specific reference to children's culture since, in these nurseries of American identity, responses to modernization were particularly blunt and urgent.

Consider, for instance, an early episode in Horatio Alger's *Ragged Dick* (1868), the famous novel about an upwardly mobile city boy. The first chapters detail the adventures of the eponymous protagonist as he leads Frank Whitney on a tour through Manhattan. In the process, Dick gives this moneyed young greenhorn an important lesson in the art of urban survival, teaching him how to negotiate crowded streets and to recognize confidence men.[12] When Frank and Dick venture to cross Broadway, the difference between their experiences reveals Dick's mastery of urban space:

> [Crossing Broadway] was easier proposed than done. There is always such a throng of omnibuses, drays, carriages, and vehicles of all kinds in the neighborhood of the Astor House, that the crossing is formidable to one who is not used to it. Dick made nothing of it, dodging in and out among the horses and wagons with perfect self-possession. Reaching the opposite sidewalk, he looked back, and found that Frank had retreated in dismay, and that the width of the street was between them. (18)

Dick's expert negotiation of the crowded street shows that he is at home in the city, which is a place not to fear, as in novels like *The Destruction of Gotham* and *Caesar's Column*, but one instead to enjoy and to master.

Dick's crossing of the busy New York street recalls a traversal that Berman discusses in detail, that of a Parisian boulevard in Charles Baudelaire's prose poem "*Perte d'auréole*." The poem is a dialogue between two men who encounter one another somewhere undefined but

seedy – a "*mauvais lieu*," as one of them puts it, expressing his surprise at encountering the other, an exalted poet, in such bad company. The poet jokingly accounts for his presence by stating that he lost his halo in the "*la fange de la macadam*" when crossing a crowded boulevard (but he prefers life without it because "*je puis maintenant me promener incognito, faire des actions basses, et me livrer à la crapule, comme les simples mortels. Et me voici, tout semblable à vous, comme vous voyez!*"). Reading this poem, Berman focuses on the boulevard, which he likens to a classroom in which the pedestrian learns to be modern. "[Thrown] into this maelstrom," Berman writes,

> The man on the modern street . . . is driven back on his own resources . . . and forced to stretch them desperately. . . . In order to cross the moving chaos, he must attune and adapt himself to its moves. . . . He must become adept at *soubresauts* and *mouvements brusques*, at sudden, abrupt, jagged twists and shifts – and not only with his legs and his body, but with his mind and his sensibility as well. (159)

Reading *Ragged Dick* alongside "*Perte d'auréole*" allows us to read Dick as a graduate of this school of modernity, while Frank, his social superior, is a faltering student. It also emphasizes crucial differences in the texts' construction of the modern subject. Baudelaire's poet loses his halo as he traverses the street and ends up somewhere "*mauvais*." He finds status a burden and revels in the anonymity that modernity affords him, indulging in "*actions basses*" such as slumming in bad places. By contrast, Dick is already in a bad place – when the novel begins, he is sleeping on the street – and he gradually climbs to somewhere better. He is already one of the "dangerous classes"[13] of modernity who must secure patronage and submit to disciplinary processes in order to improve his circumstances and prospects. Hence the trajectory of the two

characters is in opposite directions. Reading these texts alongside one another emphasizes that Alger's novel is preoccupied with the American experience of modernity, and is accordingly more significant to American literary studies than as the ill-remembered source of the Alger myth.

Baudelaire's *The Painter of Modern Life*, with its celebration of a passionate observer of urban life, has been still more important than "*Perte d'auréole*" in analyses of the French experience of modernity. Linked to the figure of the *flâneur* – the idler who spectates for pleasure – Baudelaire's painter is a "lover of universal life [who] enters into a crowd as though it were an immense reservoir of electrical energy . . . looking for that quality which you must allow me to call 'modernity'" (9-10, 12). In Walter Benjamin's remarkable writings on the nineteenth-century city, the *flâneur* is a critical figure. He is at once, as Susan Buck-Morss notes, a figure quickly superseded as the intensification of vehicle traffic made conditions unwelcoming for leisurely, observant pedestrianism and one whose "perceptive attitude saturates modern existence, specifically, the society of mass consumption" (104). We are all *flâneurs*, Buck-Morss argues, hence Benjamin's fascination with the figure is a way of comprehending the present.

An inextricable part of the *flâneur*'s gaze is a will to classify. Benjamin memorably describes *flâneurs* "botanizing on the asphalt" (36) – that is, creating taxonomies of urban types. In this respect, Benjamin argues, the *flâneur* is a relative of the nineteenth-century French *physiologues* – that is, investigators of "types that might be encountered by a person taking a look at the marketplace" (35). And this investigation of types is implicitly an exercise in crafting social hierarchies. Baudelaire likens his painter to the narrator of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Man of the Crowd" because, Baudelaire notes, Poe's narrator is "a convalescent,

pleasurably absorbed in gazing at the crowd [and] rapturously breathing in all the odours and essences of life" (7). Baudelaire's appropriation disregards the classed and classifying dimensions of the convalescent's gaze, however, which moves inexorably from high to low, beginning with "noblemen, merchants, attorneys, tradesmen, stockjobbers – the Eupatrids and the common-places of society – men of leisure and men actively engaged in affairs of their own – conducting business upon their own responsibility" (399-400) and extending to what Marx and Engels called the *lumpenproletariat*: "pie-men, porters, coal-heavers, sweeps; organ-grinders, monkey-exhibiters and ballad mongers, those who vended with those who sang; ragged artisans and exhausted laborers of every description" (402).

Benjamin's focus on Paris might imply that *flânerie* is European phenomenon, but Baudelaire's appropriation of Poe points to American equivalents. Dana Brand is one of several critics to have demonstrated that America produced its own literature of urban observers. And although Brand focuses on the works of Poe, Whitman, and Hawthorne, this literature was not confined to fiction and poetry, nor written only by canonic authors. Popular plays like Benjamin Baker's 1848 *A Glance at New York* (itself heavily modeled on Pierce Egan's *Life in London*) put audiences in the *flâneur*'s position by surveying the cultures of the city. These plays were deeply involved in botanizing on the asphalt, most memorably introducing Mose, a distinctly working-class type quickly claimed (by George G. Foster, among others) as a type embodying the "*free development to Anglo-Saxon nature*" that American society enabled (170; Foster's emphasis).[14] Riis's *How the Other Half Lives* is a survey of Lower East tenement culture that weds the classificatory impulse to reform discourses (in the tradition of Henry Mayhew). Further examples of an American literary culture of urban spectatorship abound.

Figures 9-12. Cards from *The Game of City Life, or The Boys of New York*. Accession #2000.749. Collection of the New York Historical Society.

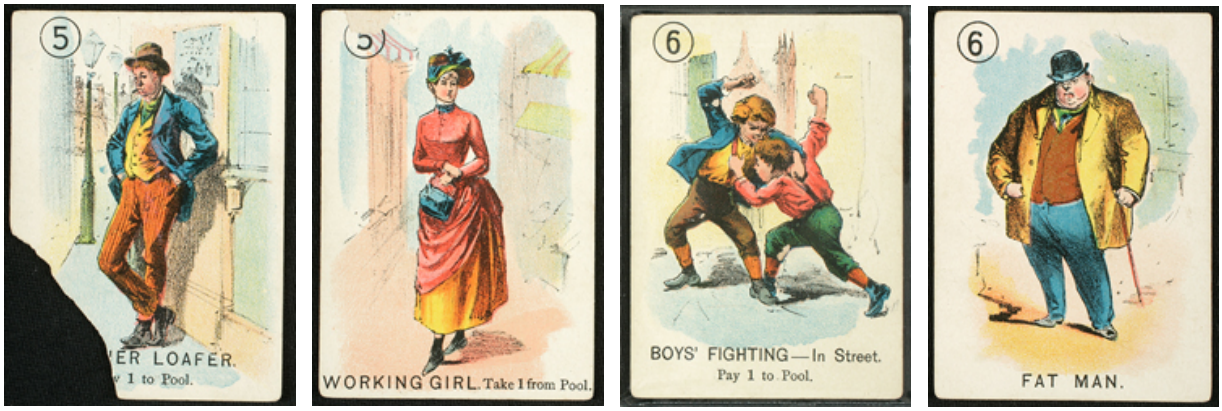
http://journals.library.mun.ca/ate/v2/Editorial%20Introduction/Figure%209%20Dude.jpg
http://journals.library.mun.ca/ate/v2/Editorial%20Introduction/Figure%2010%20Hand%20Cart.jpg
http://journals.library.mun.ca/ate/v2/Editorial%20Introduction/Figure%2011%20Street%20Gamin.jpg
http://journals.library.mun.ca/ate/v2/Editorial%20Introduction/Figure%2012%20Washerwoman.jpg

The taxonomical impulse underpinning such spectatorship struck me with particular force when I discovered it in a nineteenth-century card game for children: *flânerie* had become part of the socializing process (Figures 9-51). Called *The Game of City Life or The Boys of New York* and published in 1889 by McLoughlin Bros., the game illustrates – according to an 1899 catalogue – "the good and bad characters of city life" (68).[15] The game furnishes a spectrum of male characters, including a "dude" or fashionable middle-class man (who attracts the surreptitious glance of a well-dressed woman), a "street gamin" (a homeless child), a "street musician," a "rum seller," a "truant school boy," a "drunkard," a "capitalist," a "wife beater,"[16] and a "corner loafer." The game includes only five female characters – a "washerwoman," a "beggar," a "cruel woman" (hand raised to strike a cowering boy), a "working girl," and a "strong-minded woman." The cards with the highest face values are all figures of state power, and all men: a "detective," a "police captain," the "inspector of police," the "chief of police," a

Figures 13-16. Cards from *The Game of City Life, or The Boys of New York.* Accession #2000.749. Collection of the New York Historical Society.

http://journals.library.mun.ca/ate/v2/Editorial%20Introduction/Figure%2013%20Cruel%20Woman.jpg
http://journals.library.mun.ca/ate/v2/Editorial%20Introduction/Figure%2014%20Laborer.jpg
http://journals.library.mun.ca/ate/v2/Editorial%20Introduction/Figure%2015%20Beggar.jpg
http://journals.library.mun.ca/ate/v2/Editorial%20Introduction/Figure%2016%20Street%20Musician.jpg

"judge," and the "mayor." In most cases, the characters are designated as either good or bad: the figures of state power, for instance, are all figures of virtue, and are often represented delivering righteous judgments against the game's malefactors.[17] People perpetrating acts of violence – the wife beater, the cruel woman, and two fighting boys – are all figures of vice, as are the non-laboring poor, such as the street gamin and the beggar (who, the card tells us, is not a real beggar at all but rather an "impostor"). Testifying to the conservatism of the game's cultural work, in the camp of virtue the game includes the capitalist and a merchant, while among the "evil doers" the game includes two members of the petty bourgeoisie, a "defaulting bank cashier" and a "dishonest clerk."[18] Linking the convalescent in Poe's "The Man of the Crowd" to C. Auguste Dupin in Poe's trio of mysteries, Brand has argued that "the detective is . . . a dialectical adaptation of [the *flâneur*] that is better adapted to the changing intellectual and aesthetic expectations of [Poe's] audience" (105); forty years later, in *The Game of City*



Figures 17-20. Cards from *The Game of City Life, or The Boys of New York.* Accession #2000.749. Collection of the New York Historical Society.

http://journals.library.mun.ca/ate/v2/Editorial%20Introduction/Figure%2017%20Corner%20Loafer.jpg
http://journals.library.mun.ca/ate/v2/Editorial%20Introduction/Figure%2018%20Working%20Girl.jpg
http://journals.library.mun.ca/ate/v2/Editorial%20Introduction/Figure%2018%20Working%20Girl.jpg
http://journals.library.mun.ca/ate/v2/Editorial%20Introduction/Figure%2020%20Fat%20Man.jpg

Life, the classificatory enterprise of *flânerie* has become deeply entwined with police work. And also with pedagogy: the card depicting the police captain has him seizing the "truant school boy" by the shoulder. Pictured fishing off of a pier, that school boy is a worse offender in the game's moral economy than the street gamin, as bad as the wife beater, and outstripped in villainy only by the defaulting bank cashier.

In *The Political Unconscious*, Jameson writes that "texts come before us as the always-already-read; we apprehend them through sedimented layers of previous interpretations" (9). In Jameson's metaphor, the text and its interpretations appear to us as a single geographic feature – a mountain, say. The crucial first insight that the interpreter must achieve is that this textual mountain is a historically contingent feature of the cultural landscape, and the task that the interpreter must then undertake is to read that feature historically, distinguishing and

Figures 21-24. Cards from *The Game of City Life, or The Boys of New York*. Accession #2000.749. Collection of the New York Historical Society.

http://journals.library.mun.ca/ate/v2/Editorial%20Introduction/Figure%2021%20Sailor.jpg
http://journals.library.mun.ca/ate/v2/Editorial%20Introduction/Figure%2022%20Sneak%20Thief.jpg
http://journals.library.mun.ca/ate/v2/Editorial%20Introduction/Figure%2023%20Gambler.jpg
http://journals.library.mun.ca/ate/v2/Editorial%20Introduction/Figure%2024%20Mechanic.jpg

periodizing the layers of interpretive sediment in the name of achieving a nuanced sense of the mountain's history.[19]

The first players of *The Game of City Life* apprehended the figures on the cards through similar layers of sediment. In spite of the naivety of the presumed audience, and despite the simple character of the images – one or two figures posed against a lightly sketched background – the character types they represent are rich distillations of figures from nineteenth-century literature and history alike. For instance, the "strong-minded woman" may be a stereotype of the *fin-de-siècle* feminist, but she also seems to be modeled specifically on Susan B. Anthony. In *The Women of New York* (1869) – itself an elaborate catalogue of urban women[20] – George Ellington includes a chapter titled "Strong-Minded Women" in which he describes major figures of the feminist movement, including Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Fanny Fern. Anthony, Ellington writes,

Figures 25-28. Cards from *The Game of City Life, or The Boys of New York*. Accession #2000.749. Collection of the New York Historical Society.

http://journals.library.mun.ca/ate/v2/Editorial%20Introduction/Figure%2025%20Soldier.jpg
http://journals.library.mun.ca/ate/v2/Editorial%20Introduction/Figure%2026%20Street%20Accident.jpg
http://journals.library.mun.ca/ate/v2/Editorial%20Introduction/Figure%2027%20Strong%20Minded%20Woman.jpg
http://journals.library.mun.ca/ate/v2/Editorial%20Introduction/Figure%2028%20Drunkard.jpg

> is a very earnest, hard-working, strong-minded woman, and has the appearance of being entirely sincere in her opinions. She is radical in religion as well as in politics, and it is very probable some of her social and domestic views would shock many good orthodox and sensitive souls.
>
> Miss Anthony is a tall, slender lady, and not beautiful. Her cheek bones are high and prominent; her face thin; she wears spectacles, and has the look of one who possesses a great deal of determination and is thoroughly self-reliant. (563)

Although in 1886 Anthony was in her sixties, the card represents a younger woman who nonetheless palpably resembles Ellington's description. Similarly, the representation of two boys fighting in the street recalls many earlier representations of boys scrapping in public: one thinks of the scenes in *Ragged Dick* when Dick confronts the menacing Five-Points tough

Figures 29-32. Cards from *The Game of City Life, or The Boys of New York*. Accession #2000.749. Collection of the New York Historical Society.

http://journals.library.mun.ca/ate/v2/Editorial%20Introduction/Figure%2029%20Priest.jpg
http://journals.library.mun.ca/ate/v2/Editorial%20Introduction/Figure%2030%20Burglar.jpg
http://journals.library.mun.ca/ate/v2/Editorial%20Introduction/Figure%2031%20Merchant.jpg
http://journals.library.mun.ca/ate/v2/Editorial%20Introduction/Figure%2032%20Capitalist.jpg

Micky Maguire, or of the scene in Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* when Tom fights the new boy with the "citified air" on the streets of St. Petersburgh (57).

From our vantage point, we can perceive post-1889 iterations of these types, too. The fighting boys not only recall Dick and Micky, or Tom and the newcomer, but also look forward to the brawling children populating Richard Outcault's Yellow Kid strips in the mid-1890s. Likewise, two cards representing accidents involving horse-drawn vehicles – the "street accident" and the "reckless driver" cards (Figures 26 and 33) – not only recall the threat to Frank Whitney on Broadway (and, across the Atlantic, to the poet in "*Perte d'auréole*"), but also point forward to tropes in early American film. Films like *Police Force, New York City* (1910) and *The Life of an American Policeman* (1905) show the police at work in New York; both of these films emphasize the peril of out-of-control horses, with the police heroically intervening to recover the horses and to rescue the riders.

Figures 33-36. Cards from *The Game of City Life, or The Boys of New York*. Accession #2000.749. Collection of the New York Historical Society.

http://journals.library.mun.ca/ate/v2/Editorial%20Introduction/Figure%2033%20Reckless%20Driver.jpg
http://journals.library.mun.ca/ate/v2/Editorial%20Introduction/Figure%2034%20Alderman.jpg
http://journals.library.mun.ca/ate/v2/Editorial%20Introduction/Figure%2035%20Dishonest%20Clerk.jpg
http://journals.library.mun.ca/ate/v2/Editorial%20Introduction/Figure%2036%20Ambulance.jpg

The game thus furnishes us with a number of different access points to nineteenth-century urban America. It provides us with a short lexicon of urban types from the vantage of the nineteenth century. It shows the power relations structuring urban spectatorship. Above all, it shows that cities in general, and New York in particular, had become central enough to American culture that a manufacturer of children's games found it lucrative to make one devoted to urban identities.[21]

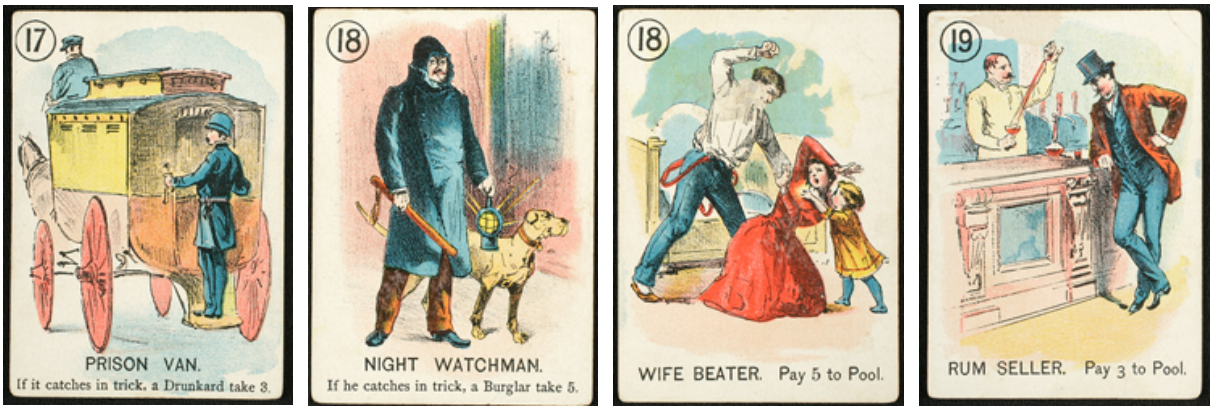
3. Four Wrestlers

In the graduate seminar for which these articles were first written, *Representations of the American City, 1790-1915*, we were interested in tracing how various works from the nineteenth century grappled, Menelaus-like, with the Protean American city: how, in the face of the dramatic changes attendant on America's modernization, these works adopted new

Figures 37-40. Cards from *The Game of City Life, or The Boys of New York*. Accession #2000.749. Collection of the New York Historical Society.

http://journals.library.mun.ca/ate/v2/Editorial%20Introduction/Figure%2037%20Truant%20School%20Boy.jpg
http://journals.library.mun.ca/ate/v2/Editorial%20Introduction/Figure%2038%20Child%20Lost.jpg
http://journals.library.mun.ca/ate/v2/Editorial%20Introduction/Figure%2039%20Fireman.jpg
http://journals.library.mun.ca/ate/v2/Editorial%20Introduction/Figure%2040%20Defaulting%20Bank%20Cashier.jpg

representational strategies or, just as interestingly, how they persisted in promulgating old ones. We began with Charles Brockden Brown's *Arthur Mervyn* (1799/1800), a novel set in Philadelphia during the 1793 yellow fever epidemic, and ended with Thomas Ince and Reginald Barker's *The Italian* (1915), a film dramatizing the struggles of Italian immigrants in New York. As the work closing the course suggests, we extended beyond canonic literary works. Although we examined major novels and stories with urban settings like Nathaniel Hawthorne's "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" (1832) and "Lady Eleanore's Mantle" (1837), Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1844), Herman Melville's *Pierre* (1852), Frank Norris's *McTeague* (1899), and Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* (1900), we also examined sensation novels (George Thompson's 1849 *City Crimes*), reportage (Lydia Maria Child's 1843 *Letters from New York*), urban anthropology (Riis's *How the Other Half Lives*), plays on urban themes (Baker's *A Glance at New York*), works of early American criminology (George



Figures 41-44. Cards from *The Game of City Life, or The Boys of New York*. Accession #2000.749. Collection of the New York Historical Society.

http://journals.library.mun.ca/ate/v2/Editorial%20Introduction/Figure%2041%20Prison%20Van.jpg
http://journals.library.mun.ca/ate/v2/Editorial%20Introduction/Figure%2042%20Night%20Watchman.jpg
http://journals.library.mun.ca/ate/v2/Editorial%20Introduction/Figure%2043%20Wife%20Beater.jpg
http://journals.library.mun.ca/ate/v2/Editorial%20Introduction/Figure%2044%20Rum%20Seller.jpg

Washington Matsell's 1859 *Vocabulum; or, The Rogue's Lexicon* and Thomas Byrnes's 1886 *Professional Criminals of America*), and the emergent form of graphic narrative (Outcault's various strips from the 1890s featuring Mickey Dugan, the famous Yellow Kid). Organized chronologically, these works allowed us to see America's first urban generations responding to their strange new environment.

We were alert to the range of responses that this environment engendered. If many writers often responded to the urban environment using the codes of the gothic, representing the city as a threatening mystery, others responded with delight. For instance, although Lydia Maria Child begins her *Letters from New York* by noting the stark juxtapositions of wealth and poverty in New York – "Wealth," she states, "dozes on French couches, thrice piled, and canopied with damask, while Poverty camps on the dirty pavement, or sleeps off its wretchedness in the watch-house" (1) – she subsequently records the pleasure she takes in the

Figures 45-48. Cards from *The Game of City Life, or The Boys of New York*. Accession #2000.749. Collection of the New York Historical Society.

http://journals.library.mun.ca/ate/v2/Editorial%20Introduction/Figure%2045%20Detective.jpg
http://journals.library.mun.ca/ate/v2/Editorial%20Introduction/Figure%2046%20Police%20Captain.jpg
http://journals.library.mun.ca/ate/v2/Editorial%20Introduction/Figure%2047%20Inspector%20of%20Police.jpg
http://journals.library.mun.ca/ate/v2/Editorial%20Introduction/Figure%2048%20Chief%20of%20Police.jpg

urban experience, as when she reports ecstatically on the new fountains made possible by the Croton Aqueduct. “I shall never forget my sensations,” she states,

> when I first looked upon the Fountains. My soul jumped, and clapped its hands, rejoicing in exceeding beauty. I am a novice, and easily made wild by the play of graceful forms; but those accustomed to the splendid displays of France and Italy say the world offers nothing to equal the magnificence of the New-York *jets*. . . . As the sun shone on the sparkling drops, through mist and feathery foam, rainbows glimmered at the sides, as if they came to celebrate a marriage between Spirits of Light and Water Nymphs. (200)

And while the travails of rustics arriving in the unfamiliar city frequently recurred in these works, some of them defied this convention and featured urban protagonists at home in the city, enjoying it and lamenting their absence from it if forced to leave. Alger’s Ragged Dick is a

Figures 49-50. Cards from *The Game of City Life, or The Boys of New York.* Accession #2000.749. Collection of the New York Historical Society.
http://journals.library.mun.ca/ate/v2/Editorial%20Introduction/Figure%2049%20Judge.jpg
http://journals.library.mun.ca/ate/v2/Editorial%20Introduction/Figure%2050%20Mayor.jpg

happy New Yorker even when he is homeless, and he listens sympathetically when one of his confederates in homelessness decries reformers' efforts to rehabilitate street youth by taking them to the country. "[It] is often the case," Alger writes, "that the young vagabond of the streets . . . gets . . . accustomed to the noise and bustle and ever-varied life of the streets, and in the quiet scenes of the country misses the excitement in the midst of which he has always dwelt" (9). As Robert Alter notes in a discussion of Virginia Woolf's urban fiction, from such perspectives, cities can appear as "places of excitement and enlivening energy that can elicit a sense of exuberance in the urbanite" (103-4); works written in this vein comprise what Alter calls "urban pastoral" (105).

The following essays focus not on urban pastoral, however, but on representations of delinquency and crime. In this respect at least, they recall Poe's narrator in "The Man of the Crowd," who is drawn to dark subjects, and whose gaze travels downward from the

Figure 51. Box Art for *The Game of City Life, or The Boys of New York.* Accession #2000.749. Collection of the New York Historical Society.

http://journals.library.mun.ca/ate/v2/Editorial%20Introduction/Figure%2051%20Game%20Cover.jpg

"Eupatrids . . . of society," classifying as it goes. When he sees a man that troubles his categories, he abandons his comfortable seat in the coffeehouse and goes out into the street in pursuit, trying to make sense of his quarry. He fails in this enterprise, declaring that the man he tails is like a book that refuses to divulge its secrets. For the narrator, this illegibility makes the man the "type and genius of deep crime" (406): criminality consists, in other words, of being a scandal to the bourgeoisie's taxonomizing impulse. Focused on the same dark themes as the narrator, the authors of these essays nonetheless reject this hasty ascription of delinquency to figures resistant to bourgeois order. Indeed the authors implicate the narrator in his own systems, upending the notion of disinterested spectatorship. They shadow Poe's narrator, walking invisibly alongside him, in the service of an interpretive project at odds with his own.

Meaghan Malone's "Whoring the *Flâneur*: Re-visioning the American Woman of the Town" is built around the remarkable insight that, in various early nineteenth-century fictions of the city, prostitutes do not stroll freely on the street but rather are confined to interior spaces. In *Arthur Mervyn*, "My Kinsman, Major Molineux," and *City Crimes*, the protagonists encounter prostitutes in homes and stores or, at most, on their thresholds. Malone therefore challenges writers like Susan Buck-Morss and Janet Wolff, who have argued that the prostitute is the female equivalent of the *flâneur*. The literary prostitutes that Malone examines are homebodies, and as such they do not exist in ironic relation to *flânerie* but rather to domestic ideology. (In this sense, the prostitute is reminiscent of the prospective adulteress, who, as Richard Helgerson has noted in a study of early modern adultery narratives, has a complicated and potent relation to domestic space.)[22] Malone's powerful argument extends a tacit invitation to revisit nineteenth-century American discourses on prostitution and to reconsider the whore's relation to urban space. The conventional identification of the prostitute as a street-walker will

certainly remain in evidence. George G. Foster's first sketch in *New York by Gaslight*, for instance, begins with a portrait of Broadway at night, where Foster encounters "two ladies. . . . magnificently attired, with their large arms and voluptuous bosoms half naked, and their bright eyes looking invitation at every passer by" (70). But armed with Malone's insight one will also note many departures from this yoking of prostitute to street. Consider George Ellington's survey of "women of pleasure" in *Women of New York*, which defines three "localities devoted to prostitution" in New York: "the saloons with the waiter girls, the houses of prostitution, and those of assignation" (173). Of these localities, only the saloons are unambiguously public places, and even they differ fundamentally from the street; meanwhile, the houses are sites of market transactions that nonetheless present to the eye the appearance of domesticity. Or consider Ellington's sketch of a woman's first entrapment into prostitution:

> A young girl, aged only eighteen . . . arrived in the city alone. . . . [She] endeavored to find her way to the Girls' Lodging House. . . . On going along Canal street, she was met by a young woman . . . who . . . offered to accompany her to that house, but instead . . . took her to a famous "parlor-house" in Greene street. On arriving there she was cordially received by the "madam," and took dinner in company with a dozen or more other girls. She was then shown a room on the top floor, and . . . compelled to remove her own clothing, and don a pair of red gaiters and a low-necked dress. . . .
>
> …
>
> The poor girl was detained in this house for several days, and compelled by force to gratify the base passions of several heartless men. (202)

This identification of prostitution with imprisonment in a quasi-domestic interior echoes Thompson's account of the prostitute Maria Archer's dilemma in *City Crimes*: she is not a street walker; rather, her husband-pimp brings men to their apartments for assignations.[23] Such evidence complicates any easy association of prostitution with *flânerie*. Rather, it calls to mind Franco Moretti's provocative assertion, in "Homo palpitans," that the "great novelty of urban life . . . does not consist in having thrown the people into the street, but in having raked them up and shut them into offices and houses" (127). Malone's insight suggests that the prostitute is part of this privatization of life within bourgeois culture.

Matt Lidstone's "'This Departure from the True Nature of Words': Matsell's Attempt to Un-Babelize New York" focuses on Matsell's lexicon of "rogue" diction, *Vocabulum*. Lidstone argues that Matsell's dictionary is not an empirical record of a criminal vocabulary but rather an attempt to invent criminal identity through strategic appropriations of popular speech. Following the historian Julie Coleman, Lidstone notes that most of the terms Matsell characterizes as the secret language of an international criminal culture derive from English sources like Francis Grose's *Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue*: they are slang words, not a code, and popular, not criminal. Lidstone sees the publication of the *Vocabulum* as a strategy designed to give the emergent New York police forces the aura of authority as they anxiously surveyed a mushrooming city.

Lidstone contends that Matsell is attempting to "un-Babelize" New York, a novel formulation proceeding from Lidstone's recognition that allusions to the Tower of Babel appear frequently in the literature of the nineteenth-century city. Lidstone's article notes these allusions in works as varied as Riis's *How the Other Half Lives*, Melville's *Pierre*, and Child's *Letters from New York*.[24] Registering that the recurrence of the image testifies to nineteenth-

century anxieties about the modern city as a site of confusion (figured, significantly, in linguistic terms), Lidstone characterizes Matsell's project as an attempt to restore linguistic unity and hence coherency to the city.

Or rather, *Vocabulum* only masquerades as such an attempt, since not only is it largely plagiarized but also, still more culpably, it stigmatizes working-class speech as criminal and hence travesties the object it purports to represent. It conjures up a criminal community out of the urban working classes, or, to put the matter more bluntly, it criminalizes poverty. Matsell's project is kindred to other disciplinary projects in nineteenth-century America designed to curb crime: it is the lexical cousin, for instance, of Police Inspector Thomas Byrnes's photographic record of criminals, the Rogue's Gallery of mug shots that was prominently displayed in Metropolitan police headquarters from the 1880s (Figure 52).[25] Yet if both projects justify Foucault's analysis of the disciplinary society, Matsell's is further complicated by its tenuous relation to its object: Byrnes photographed prisoners arrested, however spuriously, for crimes; Matsell confected his lexicon not from overhearing criminal speech but rather from combing slang dictionaries, transplanting words suggestive of crime.

To note Matsell's unacknowledged debt to Grose, however, and to note the construction of criminal identity that the *Vocabulum* undertakes, may prevent us from seeing what the lexicon reveals when read against the grain. Matsell's debt to an English dictionary of the vulgar tongue is deeply interesting. It is true that Matsell calumniates the users of this "vulgar" vocabulary by casting vulgar speech as criminal. But the manifest debt to Grose does not prove that the *Vocabulum*'s characterization of American urban speech is inaccurate; it may point instead to continuities between the vulgar tongue in England and the equivalent in America. If one grants the possibility that Matsell's lexicon accurately records some of the slang on

nineteenth-century American lips (there is some evidence suggesting that this is indeed the case) then it points to the existence of transatlantic dialectal communities that have not as yet been adequately explored.

Figure 52. The Rogue's Gallery in 1909.
http://journals.library.mun.ca/ate/v2/Editorial%20Introduction/Figure%2052.tif

Moreover, it points to a mid-nineteenth-century fascination with dialect that has not as yet been sufficiently examined in accounts of the politics of American English (to borrow the title of David Simpson's study on the subject). Matsell's project is linked in fascinating ways to

the sensation literature of the 1840s on the one hand and, on the other, to more ambitious dictionary projects like Noah Webster's *American Dictionary*. In *Strange Talk: The Politics of Dialect Literature in Gilded Age America*, Gavin Jones has plausibly characterized late nineteenth-century America as "crazy about dialect literature." A fascination with dialect is visible significantly earlier than the Gilded Age, however. As Jones notes, it appears already on the antebellum stage in minstrel shows (2). It also informs plays featuring stage Yankees and Bowery B'hoys and G'hals. And it regularly appears in the city mysteries. When the villainous Dead Man speaks in Thompson's *City Crimes*, he uses terms that would appear a decade later in Matsell's *Vocabulum*.[26] Dialect is so constituent a part of Ned Buntline's *Mysteries and Miseries of New York* (1849) that at the end of the first part there appears "A Glossary of 'Flash Terms' and 'Slang Language' Used in this Work." It includes several terms that appear in Matsell's lexicon (and many that do not). Lidstone's analysis therefore opens a rich vein for students of urban history to mine.

The cultural anxieties about urban crime that gave Matsell's *Vocabulum* its urgency were particularly intense in relation to children, in two respects. Upper tendom feared that its children would become victims of crime, and sentimentally celebrated their precarious innocence; it feared, conversely, that the children of the lower million would mature into the dangerous classes, and anxiously ruminated on their threatening delinquency. Paul Moffett's "All Children Must Be in Class: Popular Representations of Class and Childhood in Nineteenth-Century America" examines Thompson's *City Crimes* and Outcault's *fin-de-siècle* Yellow Kid strips, charting manifestations of these differing views of childhood. Moffett argues that the innocent child predominates in *City Crimes*, even granting the memorable portrait of juvenile delinquency in the Dead Man's son, Jack the Prig. Conversely, he argues

that the dangerous child predominates in the Yellow Kid strips. The construction of children in these popular works shows us, Moffett argues, that class was a constituent element in representations of childhood.

Thompson and Outcault published at considerably different moments in the nineteenth century, and although the Dead Man's Jack the Prig plainly looks forward to the Yellow Kid, he has specific affinities with other dangerous children of antebellum literature. Jack the Prig first figures in the novel when the Dead Man obliges him to recite a rogue's catechism to an audience of thieves. In this parody of the Christian catechism Jack the Prig declares, to cheers, that his maker is "His Majesty, old Beelzebub!" (135). This scene, in which a child mischievously, perversely, or innocently travesties the catechism, has distinct echoes in two better known works of nineteenth-century American literature published almost contemporaneously with *City Crimes*. In Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), Pearl inspires panic and outrage in the Puritan magistracy when, to the clergyman Mr. Wilson's question "Who made thee?" (111), she quixotically answers that "she had not been made at all, but had been plucked by her mother off the bush of wild roses that grew by the prison-door" (112). Similarly, in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), Topsy answers Ophelia's question "Have you ever heard anything about God, Topsy? . . . Do you know who made you?" with a laugh and the disconcerting reply that "Nobody, as I knows on. . . . I spect I grow'd. Don't think nobody never made me" (249). Moffett convincingly argues that Jack the Prig's answer, while blasphemous, does not flout nineteenth-century notions of childhood innocence, since he defers in all innocence to paternal authority. This characterization of Jack the Prig distinguishes him from Pearl and Topsy, neither of whom is easily reconciled with notions of childhood innocence. From birth these girls have been trapped in antagonistic relation to the

hegemonic culture, and either novel accords them fully human status: Pearl is likened to an imp, Topsy to a goblin. As an adulterine bastard, Pearl has no knowledge of her biological father, and accordingly repudiates her heavenly one when catechized; as a slave, Topsy has never known either parent.[27] By contrast, as the heir of the ostentatiously vicious Dead Man, Jack the Prig knows his father, and therefore innocently models himself on his paternal example.

Unlike Pearl and Topsy, who, in floods of tears, join Christian communities at crucial moments in *The Scarlet Letter* and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Jack the Prig never has a moment of redemption. Frank Sydney subsequently discovers (and murders) the boy's mother, and at the climax of the novel colludes in the murder of the Dead Man, too. In a moment of philanthropic reverie, after discovering Jack the Prig asleep and discerning the tattoo of a man hanging from the gallows inscribed on his chest, Frank pledges that, "If I ever get the father in my power, I will look after the welfare of this unfortunate lad" (200). But at the end of the novel, Frank forgets his pledge. He emigrates from the city with his new wife Sophia into the romantic wilderness of Vermont, and no delinquent child troubles their pastoral. Jack the Prig slips from the novel entirely: he becomes a lost boy. Denied the rehabilitation that both Topsy and Pearl enjoy, he remains estranged from society, seemingly condemned to live out the "criminal's doom" that his father has prophesied for him (200).

Or perhaps Thompson's faulty craftsmanship is a blessing to Jack the Prig. Neither *The Scarlet Letter* nor *Uncle Tom's Cabin* finds a way to instate the redeemed children in their communities. Pearl forsakes the Puritan errand altogether, leaving Boston for marriage in Europe. Topsy becomes a missionary, leaving America for "one of the stations in Africa" as part of the novel's colonizationist project (Stowe 443). Never fully forgiven for their early

estrangement from society, neither of them is accorded the privilege of (proto-)American identity in adulthood. Conversely, Jack the Prig, the genius of urban delinquency, continues to dwell in possibility in the American city. In the ambivalence he provokes in reformers like Frank Sydney – fear of delinquency at war with paternalist sympathy – his ghost animates future good bad city boys like Ragged Dick and Mickey Dugan, the Yellow Kid.

Moffett's article insightfully and eloquently traces the differences between the constructions of childhood in *City Crimes* and the Yellow Kid strips, and to his reading I will add only two remarks: first, that the Yellow Kid is distinct from Jack the Prig by dint of his association with throngs of children; second, that he is thoroughly a child of the street. Appearing as an ancillary character in a novel where the protagonists are adult, Jack the Prig has no community of children with whom to socialize, play, or conspire (or even to fight with, as Pearl does with the children of colonial Boston). He has no contact with the other children occasionally mentioned in *City Crimes*, not even with his own brother, the grotesque Image.[28] By contrast, with few exceptions Outcault's strips represent the Yellow Kid as part of an urban street culture that teems chaotically with violent, ragged children. His world is outdoors; he rarely appears inside, and still more rarely in interiors identifiable as his home: he is the boy of the crowd.

As such, one can link him productively to discourses on the urban loiterer, a child figure that supplements the gendered, adult poles of *flâneur* and the street-walking prostitute. As Buck-Morss notes, this opposition emphasizes "the privileged position of males within public space": "the flâneur," she notes, "was simply the name of a man who loitered, but all women who loitered risked being seen as whores, as the terms 'streetwalker' and 'tramp' applied to women makes clear" (119). Children are absent from this calculus of the loafer's

privilege, but they too would emphasize the privilege of the adult, middle-class man. The middle-class child who loitered risked being seen as truant (as two of the cards from *The Game of City Life* make clear [Figures 37 and 46]), and the working-class child who loitered risked being seen as a juvenile delinquent.

In light of the Yellow Kid's identity as urban loiterer, the relation of his body to text is particularly significant to discourses on the commoditized public body. The Yellow Kid strips abound with what comics theorist Ann Miller calls iconic text – that is, text that appears within the image and as part of it, rather than superimposed upon it in speech balloons or narrative boxes. Advertisements and announcements, banners and books, street signs and sheet music, placards and flags – all jockey for attention in the strip, contributing substantially to the chaos of the Yellow Kid's world.[29] In the course of the strip's publication, this avalanche of text comes to cover the body of the Yellow Kid himself; his commentary on the action begins to appear as text on his nightshirt.[30] In this respect the Yellow Kid recalls a third figure that both Benjamin and Buck-Morss identify in their discussions of street walkers: the sandwichman. This "urban destitute" transforms his or her body into a perambulating advertisement, and accordingly resembles the prostitute in turning the body into a commodity (Buck-Morss 110). In the spirit of recovering the feminine presence in cultural history, Buck-Morss notes that the so-called sandwichman was often a sandwichwoman. In a similar spirit, one might recover the juvenile presence in cultural history by noting the role of children in this degrading form of advertising culture. Charles Dickens, the author who gave the perambulating advertisement its defining metaphor, used it in reference to a child. In a sketch first published in 1835 in *Bell's Life in London, and Sporting Chronicle*, and later incorporated into *Sketches by Boz*, Dickens refers to "an animated sandwich, composed of a boy between two boards" ([1835] 1). Dickens

uses the metaphor in an antic spirit – this boy is not a politicized representation of urban poverty in the way that other urban children are in his oeuvre – but we can infer the urban poverty that the boy's existence implies. The Yellow Kid is as much the descendant of this Dickensian boy as of Jack the Prig.[31]

The Yellow Kid is evidently an eccentric sandwichboy, since he does not wear boards and the text that appears on his nightshirt does not advertise goods to consumers within the strip's diegetic world. But the direct address the Yellow Kid makes to readers allows us to see his commodification in different terms. The Yellow Kid served as an eminently effective advertisement for the New York *Journal* and the New York *World*, the newspapers in which he appeared, and his image was used to hawk a plethora of other commodities, too, including cookies, candies, and cigarettes. Robert C. Harvey has noted that "The Yellow Kid occupies his niche in the history of U. S. newspaper cartooning not because he was actually the first newspaper comic character . . . but because he was the first newspaper comic character to prove he could sell newspapers" (37), and Ian Gordon has asserted that "the Yellow Kid . . . introduced comic strip characters that could be created and sold in the market (33). In this respect he was as commoditized as any other placard-wearing urban destitute.

At the Edge 2 concludes with Zaren Healey White's "(Illicit) Sex and the City: Transgressive Female Sexuality and the 'Porno-Gothic' Genre in George Thompson's *City Crimes*." White devastatingly critiques the assertion of David S. Reynolds and Kimberly R. Gladman that Thompson's portrait of libidinous women "may have created for women readers a tantalizing space of sexual imagination" (xl). It is true, White argues, that Thompson's libidinous women are scandals to the nineteenth-century cult of true womanhood. It may also be the case that women reading *City Crimes* identified with and were aroused by the ardent

sexual appetites of characters like Frank Sydney's estranged wife Julia, who tells her husband that "my nature is impregnated with desires and longings which you would pronounce absurd, unnatural, and criminal" (152). But White argues that the fates to which the sexually voracious women are consigned in the novel's climax and denouement vitiate any feminist potential in the novel. Julia murders her elderly husband Mr. Hedge, then dies by suicide when she leaps from a bridge into the Charles River in Boston. Another sexual woman, the lascivious Josephine Franklin, rejects the advances of the Dead Man, and he retaliates by splashing acid in her face, permanently and grotesquely disfiguring her; subsequently, with the collusion of her mother, she poisons herself. Compared to these grisly deaths, the punishment that Lady Eleanore experiences for her pride in Hawthorne's "Lady Eleanore's Mantle" and Alice Pyncheon experiences for her class condescension in *The House of the Seven Gables* is mild. Given the relish with which those stories rebuke their unruly women, the comparison is a coruscating indictment of *City Crimes*.

In effect, Reynolds and Gladman offer an interpretation that requires them to disregard the brutal comeuppance that these transgressive women experience. In this stance they are influenced, I suspect, by Mikhail Bakhtin's reading of carnival, which claims that carnival's inversion of social norms is liberatory. Bakhtin's characterization of the revolutionary potential of carnival has been enormously influential and has considerable interpretive power – power that Reynolds and Gladman, as I read them, have embraced. But one risks overstating the revolutionary power of carnival. As Terry Eagleton has noted,

> carnival is so vivaciously celebrated [in Bakhtin] that the necessary political criticism is almost too obvious to make. Carnival, after all, is a *licensed* affair in every sense, a permissible rupture of hegemony, a contained popular blow-off as

> disturbing and relatively ineffectual as a revolutionary work of art. (148; Eagleton's emphasis)

This critique of carnival that Eagleton summarizes is indeed obvious, but it is useful to insist upon as a way to focus attention on the fragility of carnival's provocation. On the other hand, as Eagleton describes it the critique is itself too absolute. The containment of carnival's "blow-off" is not inevitable or complete, hinging as it does on the power of the "hegemony" trying to reassert itself.[32] The revolutionary potential of carnival depends on the scale of the carnivalesque challenge to official culture and the repressive power that culture is able to bring to bear to preserve the status quo. The topsy-turvy world of a *Little Nemo in Slumberland* page vastly overpowers the containment of the strip's modest final panel; conversely, the brutal repercussions that women in *City Crimes* experience for indulging their desires is vastly disproportionate to any liberation they might experience. Women readers tempted to identify with Josephine and Julia would suffer a rude awakening as the novel mutilated and massacred their avatars.

4. And Last

Concluding a study of urban spectatorship in nineteenth-century America, Dana Brand confesses to feeling "a certain disappointment that American authors in the first half of the nineteenth century could not have come up with something more than they did" (188-89). With disarming honesty, Brand writes that

> I would love to read a mid-nineteenth-century American panorama of city life, one that did justice to the complexity and density of that life as it was lived by all kinds of people, as it can now be reconstructed from historical, journalistic,

> and popular cultural records. I find that I am moved by what I imagine of this lost world, as I am rarely moved by what survives to record it, and I cannot conclude this discussion without confessing to my disappointment. (189)

Brand attributes the absence of a moving record of urban life to a historically anti-urban temper in American culture, and expresses the wish (couched, with some ironic distance, as prescription) that America would gain a healthier perspective on urban modernity.

I respect Brand's frankness but do not share his disappointment. And reading these essays, which focus on works from both high culture and low, which cross literary genres and representational modes, and which adopt methods of literary criticism ranging from the new historicist to the feminist to the deconstructive, I feel justified in finding America's early engagement with modernity to be complex, varied, subtle, and challenging. It is a privilege to introduce these essays to *At the Edge*'s readers. I trust you'll find them as provocative and engaging as I do.

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[1] I distinguish here between narratives envisioning the destruction of American cities specifically and those envisioning the destruction of the city in general. The latter has a long history, too. In American film one might trace it as far back as D. W. Griffith's *Intolerance* (1916), with its scenes of the fall of Babylon; and, as the Biblical reference suggests, one might play a much deeper genealogical game and trace the motif to *The Book of Isaiah* or even

Genesis and the myth of Babel. For a recent history of representations of urban apocalypse focused specifically on New York – one that I discovered only after writing this introduction – see Max Page's *The City's End: Two Centuries of Fantasies, Fears, and Premonitions of New York's Destruction*. And for a brilliant study of ruins in the nineteenth-century American imagination, see Nick Yablon's *Untimely Ruins: An Archaeology of American Urban Modernity, 1819-1919*.

[2] As a member of this family, Flip is briefly associated with disenchantment; the stovepipe hat he wears in early strips has "Wake Up" written on it, and Nemo cannot see him without being jolted into consciousness. But Flip quickly sheds this role to become Nemo's companion in adventure.

[3] Hence in *L'uomo delinquente*, Lombroso asserts that

> When . . . one [studies] the entire spectrum [of the criminal world] one has to conclude that . . . there is nearly always something strange about their appearance. It can even be said that each type of crime is committed by men with particular physiognomic characteristics, such as lack of a beard or an abundance of hair. . . . Habitual murderers have a cold, glassy stare and eyes that are sometimes bloodshot and filmy; the nose is often hawklike and always large; the jaw is strong, the cheekbones broad; and their hair is dark, abundant, and crisply textured. The beards are scanty, their canine teeth very developed, and their lips thin. (51)

[4] The anarchist scare may account for an otherwise perplexing detail in the novel. Donnelly asserts that Caesar Lomellini originally farmed on the "upper waters of the Saskatchewan," which by the mid twentieth century, the novel declares, had joined the States. This unusual topographic specificity may derive from anarchists' sympathy for the Métis fighting against the Canadian government in the Northwest Rebellion of 1885. Steven Sapolsky has noted that Chicago anarchists memorialized the Rebellion's leader, Louis Riel, after his execution in November, 1885. One of Riel's followers, William Henry Jackson, escaped to the States and joined the anarchist movement in Chicago, where his contributions included, in Sapolsky's words, the development of "a paramilitary strategy" to be used during strikes, including the use of force against scabs (105).

[5] Various works of early American fiction used gothic tropes to represent the city prior to the 1840s: Charles Brockden Brown's *Arthur Mervyn* (1799) and Nathaniel Hawthorne's "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" (1832) are only the two most famous ones. But Sue's example inspired a remarkable number of imitations: as David Reynolds notes, the 1840s and 1850s saw city-mysteries set in a wide array of cities, including New York, Boston, Baltimore, Philadelphia, and New Orleans, among many others.

[6] Hans Bergmann identifies Dickens's Quilp, from *The Old Curiosity Shop*, as the inspiration for Devil-Bug and his kin (the Dead Man in George Thompson's *City Crimes*, for instance). See Bergmann 115-30, especially 127-28.

[7] The opposition of the "upper ten" and "lower million" is conventional in the period, but see Lippard's novel *New York: Its Upper Ten and Lower Million* (1854) for a specific example.

[8] Which is not to say that the city ended at Twenty-Fifth Street: the city had no firm boundary; nonetheless, north of Twenty-Fifth, the number of buildings per block begins to decline precipitously.

[9] See David Anthony's *Paper-Money Men: Commerce, Manhood, and the Sensational Public Sphere in Antebellum America*, 41-69.

[10] Cohen and Augustyn characterize the first map of the series, published in1811, as the most influential map in New York's history based in part on its influence over the subsequent development of the city, and in part on its startling ambition in projecting development of so great a magnitude in the first place.

[11] Broadly true, this generalization nonetheless draws a veil over the many displacements precipitated by New York's gallop up Manhattan. A single example will suggest the more complicated reality. As Roy Rosenzweig and Elizabeth Blackmar have documented, various small communities were evicted from the land that would be appropriated and developed as Central Park in the 1850s. Among these was Seneca Village, a predominantly African-American community dating from the 1820s. Along with others dwelling on the land destined to become Central Park, the residents of Seneca Village were dispersed by 1857. See Rosenzweig and Blackmar 65-73 and 88-91.

[12] Although Herman Melville sets *The Confidence-Man* (1857) on a riverboat, the figure is distinctly urban. He first appears in literature of the 1840s and 1850s. George Washington Matsell's *Vocabulum* (1859) defines the figure in the following terms:

> A fellow that by means of extraordinary powers of persuasion gains the confidence of his victims to the extent of drawing upon their treasury, almost to an unlimited extent. . . . Of all the rogue tribe, the Confidence man is, perhaps, the most liberally supplied with subjects; for every man has his soft spot, and nine times out of ten the soft spot is softened by an idiotic desire to overreach the man that is about to overreach us. This is just the spot on which the Confidence-man works. . . . The Confidence man is perfectly aware that he has to deal with a man who expects a result without having worked for it, who gapes, and stands ready to grasp at magnificent returns. The consequence is, that the victim – the confiding man – is always *done*. (20-21; Matsell's emphasis)

As Matsell's tone of grudging admiration suggests, the figure provokes as much admiration as condemnation. Benjamin Baker's play *A Glance at New York*, from 1848, dramatizes a variety of confidence games perpetrated on naïve visitors to the city; the confidence artists are comic rather than threatening villains. Thomas Byrnes's *Professional Criminals of America* surveys a variety of specific confidence men and women, and cannot resist taking a measure of satisfaction in the success of Joseph Lewis, alias Hungry Joe, who made no less an eminence than Oscar Wilde his dupe when Wilde visited the States. In this instance, the guile of the American criminal inspires feelings of national pride. "Sharp as was Oscar Wilde when he reaped a harvest of American dollars with his curls, sun-flowers, and knee-breeches," Byrnes writes, "he could not refrain from investing in a speculation against which he was 'steered' by the notorious Hungry Joe" (42).

[13] In relation to Alger, the most proximate source of this term is Charles Loring Brace's *The Dangerous Classes of New York and Twenty Years' Work Among Them* (1872), which focuses on the "ignorant, destitute, untrained, and abandoned… street-children" of American cities (ii). But the term has a long history in nineteenth-century discourse.

[14] Through this allusion to "Anglo-Saxon nature" Foster conscripts Mose into the politics of race. Alexander Saxton notes of Mose and other vernacular characters on American stages that

they "displayed the ideas and attitudes of *herrenvolk* democracy. Their natural proclivity was to the hard side of racism" (120).

[15] While one cannot readily determine the popularity of the game, it appears in McLoughlin Bros. catalogues as late as 1914 (where it is characterized as a game that "introduces all the familiar characters of city streets, and besides being interesting, points a wholesome moral" (14)).

[16] For a discussion of spousal abuse in nineteenth-century America that briefly mentions this alarming card, see Jerome Nadelhaft's "Wife Torture: A Known Phenomenon in Nineteenth-Century America."

[17] Four characters – the dude, a "street musician," a "fat man," and the "strong-minded woman" – are neither positively nor negatively coded.

[18] Thus the game furnishes no critique of Wall Street heartlessness in the vein of Melville's *Bartleby the Scrivener*. But the capitalist sits in front of screens that, to a literary critic, irresistibly recall the self-satisfied narrator's "high green folding screen, which," he declares, "might entirely isolate Bartleby from my sight, though not remove him from my voice" (10).

[19] But with the awareness, presumably, that one's scrupulous historicizing enterprise will only add a new layer of sediment to the mountain – here Jameson's geological metaphor comes under pressure.

[20] Although Ellington's catalogue of urban women was published in 1869, it is clearly descended from the Flash papers of the 1840s, weekly papers that catered to "sporting men." Ellington divides his book into the following sections: Women of Fashion, Women of Pleasure, Married Women, Wicked Women, Female Artistes, Life in a Female Seminary, Other Women, and Female Institutions (the passages devoted to Strong-Minded Women appear as a subsection in Other Women). The debt to the Flash papers is evident in the animus directed towards the abortionist Madame Restell (Ann Trow Lohman) in the section devoted to Wicked Women: as Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz has noted, the Flash papers characterized abortion as a threat to men: "In this male imagination," Horowitz argues, "fear of pregnancy seemed to act as a chastity belt that birth control threatened to remove" (200).

[21] Other games devoted to city life in the period include *Rival Policemen* (wherein two urban police forces jockey to make arrests), *Lost Heir* (in which police officers from New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and Chicago track down a missing child), *Post Office Game* (involving mail delivery in Lower Manhattan), *The News Boy Game*, *The Popular Game of Broadway*, and various versions of *Peter Coddle's Trip to New York* (about a Yankee greenhorn visiting the city). See the Liman collection at the New York Historical Society (www.nyhistory.org/taxonomy/term/229).

[22] See *Adulterous Alliances: Home, State, and History in Early Modern European Drama and Painting*. Discussing "domestic drama[s] concerning the possession of a woman's body," Helgerson notes that "in the symbolic economy of such storytelling, rivalries between men are repeatedly made to center on a woman, with the result that women take on an importance the culture would otherwise have denied them" (4-5).

[23] Or consider the abduction of Dottie in Miller's *The Destruction of Gotham*: a beautiful newcomer to the city, she is at risk while on the street of being abducted by a procuress and forced into sexual slavery, but she is also protected by the presence of police and the interest of a newspaper reporter. She is only forced into prostitution when the procuress successfully removes her from these men's street-level superintendence of her: Dottie's ruin is implied

when she joins the procuress in a cab; when she next appears on the street, two years later, she has fallen, a change betokened by the presence of her infant child. Likewise, in the extraordinary early film *Traffic in Souls or While New York Sleeps: A Photodrama of Today* (1913), prostitution is identified with prison-like rooms in "dens of iniquity." Women in public are at risk: the "Vice-trust" – traffickers in souls – targets young women from the country arriving in New York on the Western Express, and young immigrants arriving at Ellis Island, and young women working in stores. But in each case these women are most in danger when they unwittingly enter houses of assignation: in these instances, they are locked into rooms. The film's central plot involves a woman, a worker in a candy store, who is drugged, brought to a brothel in a working-class section of New York, locked in a room, and threatened with violence if she does not put on one of the gaudy dresses her captors proffer (just as her resistance is waning, the police raid the brothel and she is redeemed from captivity). Eric Olund has noted that one reformer who saw an early cut of the film complained about the lack of realism in this depiction of this locked room:

> as a matter of fact, girls are not really put behind bars in these houses. Girls seem to lose their self respect and slide downhill and become reconciled to their condition. It is this voluntary adjustment to the conditions and the loss of moral responsibility accompanying it that is the greatest pity of this traffic. This picture is not true, in that it does not show the actual result that can [happen] in 8 or 9 cases out of every 10. (Qtd. in Olund 498)

This fiction of the locked room may be attributable to the demands of the film's plot, which requires the woman to resist until the police can rescue her, or it may be attributable to the filmmakers' reluctance to show prostitution itself rather than its signs (the film focuses on the means by which women are ensnared and imprisoned in brothels – the "traffic in souls" – but does not focus on the sexual traffic between johns and prostitutes; johns are singularly absent from the film). But it may also reflect a cultural identification of prostitution with an intensified, coercive domesticity.

[24] And he might readily have noted further examples: the trope is pervasive. Perhaps the best known work of fiction to use it is Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," wherein the mystery hinges on the Babelization of Paris. In his role as investigator Dupin functions much as Matsell pretends to do, deciphering the witnesses' characterization of the Ourang-Outang's incomprehensible "speech" and restoring legibility to the city.

[25] A staged photograph in Byrnes's *Professional Criminals in America* emblematizes (and boasts about) the coercive nature of his project. It shows a prisoner resisting furiously as four men compel him to submit to a photograph. Byrnes himself appears in the photograph standing quietly alongside the fracas, superintending it, haloed by the prison cell's barred window: call him the Angel of Inspection (Figure 53). See John Tagg's discussion of this photograph in the introduction to *The Disciplinary Frame* (xxiii-xxviii).

[26] "How now, *Kinchen,*" the Dead Man says; "Is the cove *cross* or *square* – and what does he want in our *ken*?" (Thompson 134; Thompson's emphasis). Matsell tells us that these italicized terms mean, respectively, "a young child," "dishonest," "honest; upright; good," and "house." A "cove" is slang for "man." (All of these words appear also in Grose.)

[27] In the tragic narrative of the traumatized Prue, Stowe addresses the phenomenon of speculators who "breed" slaves, wresting children away from their mothers and selling them on the market. Prue declares that she lived in Kentucky when speculators forced this nefarious

commoditization of her womb upon her, a remark that echoes Topsy's supposition that she herself was born in Kentucky. See *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Chapter XVIII (221-25).

[28] The Dead Man keeps his son, the Image, in a cellar in his Anthony Street crib. Thompson describes the child in the following terms:

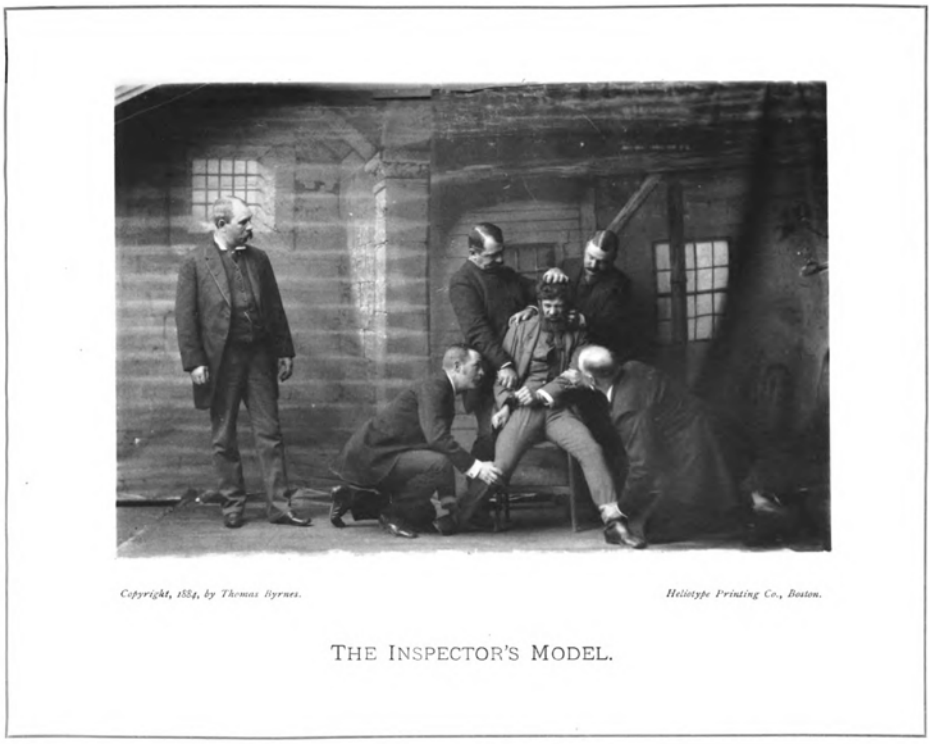

Figure 53. The Angel of Inspection.

http://journals.library.mun.ca/ate/v2/Editorial%20Introduction/Figure%2053.jpg

> [it] was a human creature, but so horribly and unnaturally deformed, that it was a far more dreadful object to behold than the most loathsome of the brute creation. It was of pygmy size, its shrunk limbs distorted and fleshless, and its lank body covered with filthy rags; its head, of enormous size, was entirely devoid of hair; and the unnatural shape as well as the prodigious dimensions of that bald cranium, betokened beastly idiocy. Its features, ghastly and terrible to look upon, bore a strange resemblance of those of the *Dead Man!* and its snake-like eyes were fixed upon Frank with the ferocity of a poisonous reptile about to spring upon its prey. (202-3; Thompson's emphasis)

Reynolds and Gladman link this monstrous creature to the freak shows in P. T. Barnum's American Museum (xxxii-xxxiii). But it is also reminiscent of the tragically grotesque figures that populate Dorothea Dix's memorials on behalf of the insane poor to various state legislatures. Compare Thompson's description of the Image to this account from Dix's 1843 *Memorial. To the Legislature of Massachusetts* of a "*forlorn* maniac" in an almshouse in Danvers, Massachusetts; Dix asserts that the "maniac" was

> a young woman, exhibiting a condition of neglect and misery blotting out the faintest idea of comfort, and outraging every sentiment of decency. . . . [There]

> she stood, clinging to, or beating upon, the bars of her caged apartment, the contracted size of which afforded space only for increasing accumulations of filth, a *foul* spectacle; there she stood with naked arms and dishevelled hair; the unwashed frame invested with fragments of unclean garments, the air so extremely offensive, though ventilation was afforded on all sides save one, that it was not possible to remain beyond a few moments without retreating for recovery to the outward air. Irritation of body, produced by utter filth and exposure, incited her to the horrid process of tearing off her skin by inches; her face, neck, and person, were thus disfigured to hideousness; she held up a fragment just rent off; to my exclamation of horror, the mistress replied, "oh, we can't help it; half the skin is off sometimes; we can do nothing with her; and it makes no difference what she eats, for she consumes her own filth as readily as the food which is brought her." (7; Dix's emphasis)

Thompson's portrait of the Image certainly profits, as the American Museum did, from the American public's fascination with so-called freaks. But Dix's gothic representations of the insane poor also suggest that Thompson is indebted to reform, or rather that reform and gothic literature borrowed from one another in their emphasis on grotesque bodies.

[29] But curiously, given the context of the strips' publication, newspapers rarely if ever feature in this textually rich cityscape.

[30] When the Yellow Kid first appears as a recognizable character in the strip, he has the print of a dirty hand on his nightshirt. In two strips that mark an intermediary stage of his development into a speaking (or writing) character, he wears text written first on a sheet of paper pinned to his shirt and then on a paper hat (April 12, 1896, and April 26, 1896) (Figures 54 and 55). On

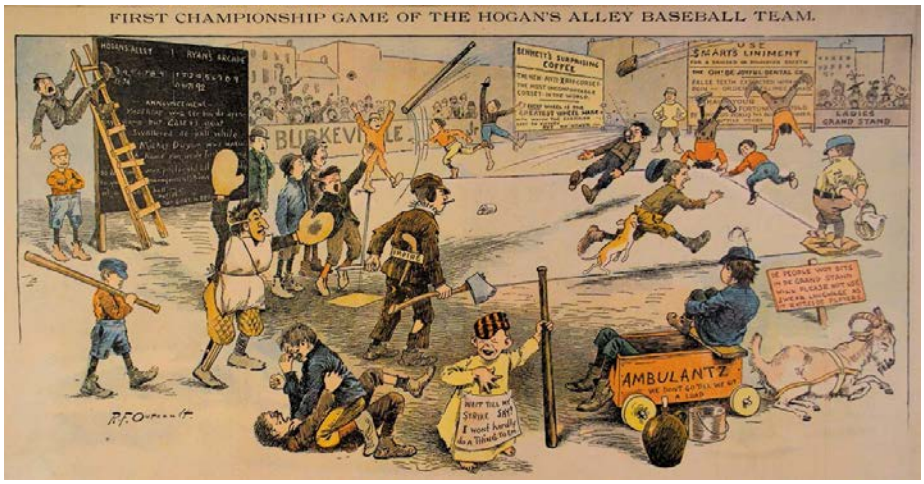

Figure 54. "First Championship of the Hogan's Alley Baseball Team." 12 April 1896. San Francisco Academy of Comic Art Collection, The Ohio State University Billy Ireland Cartoon Library & Museum.
http://journals.library.mun.ca/ate/v2/Editorial%20Introduction/Figure%2054.jpg

May 17, 1896, the text representing words he addresses to readers begins to appear on the nightshirt itself (Figure 56). This last development is a scandal to the strips' many other instances of iconic text, which are all easily understood as instances of text anyone might encounter on late nineteenth-century New York streets, part of the period's flourishing print

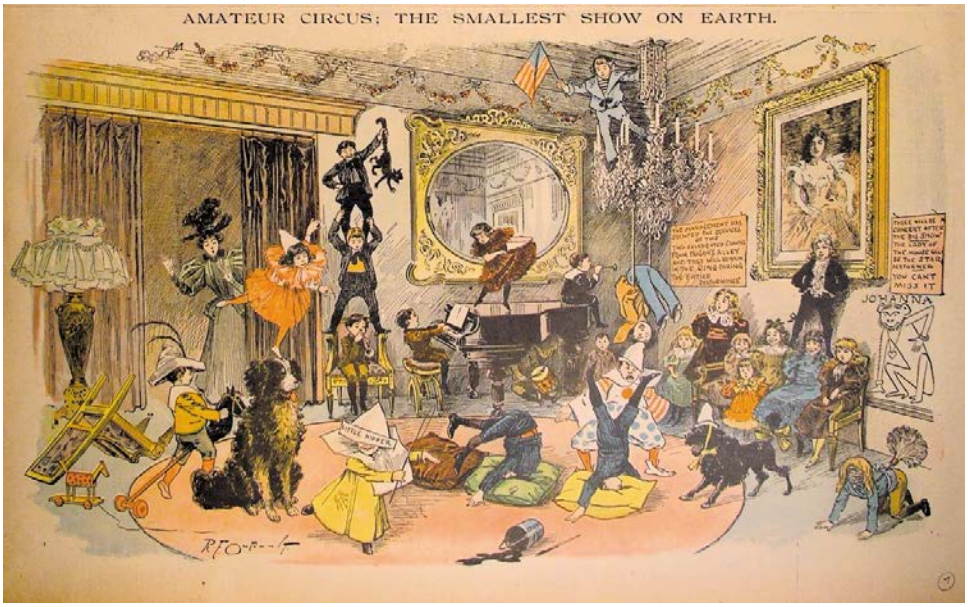

Figure 55. "Amateur Circus: The Smallest Show on Earth." 26 April 1896. San Francisco Academy of Comic Art Collection, The Ohio State University Billy Ireland Cartoon Library & Museum. .http://journals.library.mun.ca/ate/v2/Editorial%20Introduction/Figure%2055.jpg

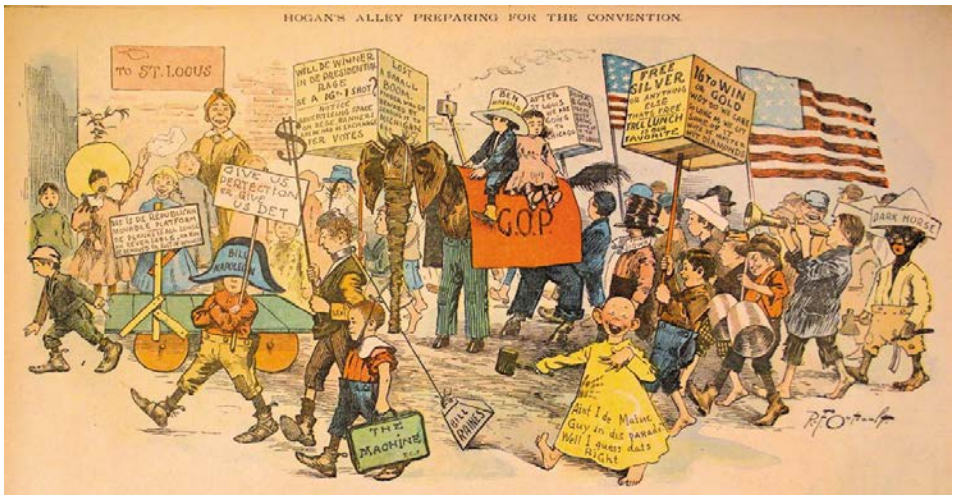

Figure 56. "Hogan's Alley Preparing for the Convention." 17 May 1896. San Francisco Academy of Comic Art Collection,

The Ohio State University Billy Ireland Cartoon Library & Museum.

http://journals.library.mun.ca/ate/v2/Editorial%20Introduction/Figure%2056.jpg

culture (Figure 57). The nightshirt text is categorically different from these instances of iconic text because it represents the Yellow Kid's own words: in cartoons and comics, including ones that antedate the Yellow Kid by a century, characters' speech is typically contained in balloons or in captions, thereby policing the representational boundaries between image and sound. According to the logic governing the other instances of iconic text in the Yellow Kid strips, the nightshirt text is impossible. But the Yellow Kid is scandalous in other ways as well. In early strips, for instance, Outcault preserves the illusion of a fourth wall between the strip and its

Figure 57. "Street Types of New York City: 2 Rag Carts." 1896.

http://journals.library.mun.ca/ate/v2/Editorial%20Introduction/Figure%2057.tif

readers, who are therefore able to conceive of themselves as invisible voyeurs. At a crucial moment in the strip's development, however, the strip begins to break this illusion. The first renegotiation of its contract with its readers occurs on December 15, 1895 – a Christmas strip – when a girl in the lower left quadrant of the image looks out at the viewer and extends her hand in a mute request for charity (Figure 58). (This girl is fascinating for the way her gesture implicates the Gilded Age reader, reminding him or her that the urban poor that are figures of

fun in the Sunday paper have real-life referents.) Beginning on January 5, 1896, the Yellow Kid first becomes an urchin Virgil to the reader's Dante, meeting the reader's gaze and often remarking on the action either by gesture or word (Figure 59). He retains this intermediary position for the duration of the strip.

Figure 58. "Merry Xmas Morning in Hogan's Alley." 15 Dec. 1895. San Francisco Academy of Comic Art Collection, The Ohio State University Billy Ireland Cartoon Library & Museum.
http://journals.library.mun.ca/ate/v2/Editorial%20Introduction/Figure%2058.jpg

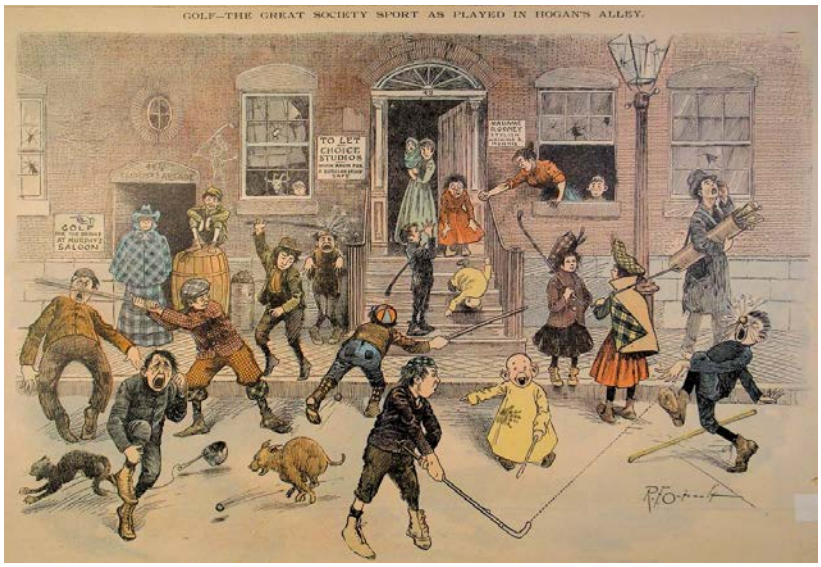

Figure 59. "Golf – The Great Society Sport as Played in Hogan's Alley." 5 Jan. 1896.

San Francisco Academy of Comic Art Collection,

The Ohio State University Billy Ireland Cartoon Library & Museum.

http://journals.library.mun.ca/ate/v2/Editorial%20Introduction/Figure%2059.jpg

Figure 60. "Me and De Prince." 24 Jan. 1897.

San Francisco Academy of Comic Art Collection,

The Ohio State University Billy Ireland Cartoon Library & Museum.

http://journals.library.mun.ca/ate/v2/Editorial%20Introduction/Figure%2060.jpg

[31] Only one Yellow Kid page includes a sandwichman among its crowds, and notably the page represents a scene set outside of America. The January 24, 1897, strip shows the Yellow Kid and his circle strolling through London on their grand tour around the world; to his left, there stands a sandwichman glumly advertising *Punch* (Figure 60).

[32] Consider, for example, the eighteenth-century Boston that Hawthorne's "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" dramatizes. The climactic hazing of the fictional Major Molineux recalls an eighteenth-century urban culture where street festivities could quickly shade into riot. In 1756, the Lieutenant Governor, the Council, and the House of Representatives passed a law making it illegal to "have any Kind of Imagery or Pageantry for a publick Shew." They justified this law on the grounds that

> *many and great Disorders have of late Years been committed by tumultuous Companies of Men, Children and Negroes, carrying about with them Pageants or other Shews, through the Streets and Lanes of the Town of Boston, and other Towns within this Province, abusing and insulting the Inhabitants, and demanding and exacting Money by Menaces and abusive Language, and* [also on the grounds that] *it has been found by Experience that such Practices tend greatly to encourage and cultivate a turbulent Temper and Spirit in many of the Inhabitants, and an Opposition to all Government and Order. . . .* (249)

The rough justice inflicted on Major Molineux, the story's symbol of "all Government and Order," recalls the "publick Shews" that bred such official anxieties; the disorder of the Boston Tea Party was part of this culture of carnivalesque pageantry.