

WASTEFUL WORDS: VISIONS AND FAILURES OF LITERARY EFFICIENCY IN  
AMERICAN FICTION, 1885-1910

by

BRIAN ALLEN GAZAILLE

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Student: Brian Allen Gazaille

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This dissertation has been accepted and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in the English Department by:

Henry B. Wonham	Chairperson
Mary E. Wood	Core Member
William J. Rossi	Core Member
Ian F. McNeely	Institutional Representative

and

Scott L. Pratt	Dean of the Graduate School
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Original approval signatures are on file with the University of Oregon Graduate School.

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## DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

Brian Allen Gazaille

Doctor of Philosophy

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Title: *Wasteful Words: Visions and Failures of Literary Efficiency in American Fiction, 1885-1910*

This dissertation examines how writers helped scientists and engineers transform “efficiency” from a mathematical tool for assessing machine performance to an organizing principle for society. Historians and literary critics have helpfully sketched this transformation. They have paid particular attention to manifestations of Taylorism and Fordism in modernism, especially in the “kinetic” poetics of Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, and John Dos Passos. But while scholars have illustrated how modernism pushed efficiency into contexts like labor and politics, they have only begun to consider efficiency’s role in Gilded Age fiction, particularly in the works of utopian thinkers—such as Edward Bellamy and Charlotte Perkins Gilman—and technological cynics—including Mark Twain, Edith Wharton, Frank Norris, and María Amparo Ruiz de Burton. I argue that efficiency was a decidedly aesthetic concern in the novels of the Gilded Age, an idea so exciting and anxiety producing that writers felt compelled to scrutinize it in terms of literary form. Indeed, the writers examined in this dissertation developed nuanced rhetorical and narratological programs to explore efficiency’s conceptual possibilities outside the factory, specifically in the domestic sphere, the pastoral places of California, and the writer’s study. Moreover, these writers struggled to make sense of efficiency’s

conceptual expansion. Thus, their novels reflect the difficulties of realizing different kinds of social efficiency. The texts I analyze either try but fail to represent the promises of a machine-made society, or they use self-destructive literary forms that call attention to the wastes of industrial capitalism. By attending to the poetics and competing definitions of efficiency advanced by these writers, my dissertation explores how Americans adapted traditional literary structures to promote or challenge the idea of technological progress.

This dissertation includes previously published material.

## CURRICULUM VITAE

NAME OF AUTHOR: Brian Allen Gazaille

### GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE SCHOOLS ATTENDED:

University of Oregon, Eugene  
University of Arizona, Tucson

### DEGREES AWARDED:

Doctor of Philosophy, English, 2016, University of Oregon  
Bachelor of Arts, English and Philosophy, 2009, University of Arizona

### AREAS OF SPECIAL INTEREST:

Nineteenth-Century American Literature  
History of Science and Technology  
Medical Humanities  
History and Theory of the Novel

### PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

Graduate Teaching Fellow, University of Oregon, 2009-2015

Research Associate, *The Almanacks of Mary Moody Emerson: A Scholarly Digital Edition*, Women Writers Project, 2011-2012

### GRANTS, AWARDS, AND HONORS:

Margaret McBride Lehrman Fellowship, Graduate School, University of Oregon,  
2015-2016

Excellence in Teaching Award, Department of Composition, University of  
Oregon, 2011

### PUBLICATIONS:

Gazaille, Brian. "Making a Mill of a Mouth More Productive: Efficiency and Linguistic Management in Twain's *Connecticut Yankee*." *American Literary Realism* 47.1 (Fall 2014): 55-70. Print.

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This project is dedicated to my little bean.

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## CHAPTER I

### ENGINEERING FICTION: AN INTRODUCTION TO LITERARY (IN)EFFICIENCY

Playing social philosopher as well as mechanical engineer, Frederick Winslow Taylor contended in *The Principles of Scientific Management* (1911) that wasted energy is the greatest challenge facing twentieth-century America. As people generally assume, Taylor writes, ineffectual factory labor consumes precious time, energy, and raw material in America. Indeed, manual laborers underwork, instinctively avoiding overexertion and often colluding to resist work quotas set by managers (19). Moreover, even dedicated workers complete only half of what they can handle because their supervisors promote faulty “rule of thumb methods” that “waste a large part of their effort” (16). But the wastes in American factories are only part of the problem, Taylor insists. Inefficiency occurs “in almost all of our daily acts” (7). Americans begin to understand this dilemma when they consider the material consequences of their wasteful attitudes, for “we can see our forests vanishing, our water-powers going to waste, our soil being carried by floods into the sea; and the end of our coal and our iron is in sight” (5). Nevertheless, “our larger wastes of human effort, which go on every day through such of our acts as are blundering, ill-directed, or inefficient . . . are less visible, less tangible, and are but vaguely appreciated” (5). Bad habits impede every activity “from our simplest individual acts to the work of our great corporations” (7). Thus, Taylor concludes, all citizens must reengineer their behavior, not just factory employees (7). Emulating the nation’s newest and most powerful engines, Americans ought to recalibrate their own bodily machinery, particularly by submitting to a brand of management premised on science and reason. By

assessing and eliminating each person's wastes, the public could ultimately put the American engine back "on the road to national efficiency" (7).

By characterizing the nation as an engine susceptible to recalibration through the correction of its human parts, Taylor crystallized a conceptual development that transformed American culture between the Gilded Age and the Roaring Twenties. He and likeminded engineers and politicians hastened what historian Samuel Haber has called the "efficiency craze," a "secular Great Awakening" propelled by a gospel of mechanical productivity "preached without embarrassment to businessmen, workers, doctors, housewives, and teachers" (ix). Prior to this discursive development, nineteenth-century scientists and political economists had adapted "efficiency"—once an obscure philosophical term signifying an agent's capacity to manipulate matter—to discuss the management of natural resources.<sup>1</sup> At roughly the same time, physicists and engineers gave the term thermodynamic dimensions, using it as a ratio representing how well an engine performed relative to the energy and material supplied to it (Tichi 75). Indeed, Hermann von Helmholtz and other such pioneers of thermodynamics determined that energy propelled all manner of matter and that energy's various manifestations could be converted into mechanical work. As historian Anson Rabinbach observes, they thus characterized the engine as a machine "regulated by internal, dynamic principles" that

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<sup>1</sup> Jennifer Karns Alexander's recent and exciting study, *The Mantra of Efficiency: From Waterwheel to Social Control*, traces the concept back to Antiquity, specifically to Archimedes' mechanics and to Aristotle's "efficient cause," the "active and immediate principle that produced change" in the composition of matter (9). Between Antiquity and the nineteenth century, efficiency "[bore] out the shift from divine to human agency" (8). Medieval theologians like Thomas Aquinas adopted its Aristotelian sense to characterize the Christian God as the prime mover, the efficient cause of creation. Natural philosophers of the Enlightenment then gradually transformed efficiency into a "human attribute rather than a characteristic of the deity," emphasizing humanity's ability to control natural phenomena (8). During this period, the term assumed the connotations of rationality, control, and management that would make it so attractive to the scientists, economists, politicians, and writers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

could be manipulated to increase the mechanism's efficacy (52). Social physicists like Taylor amplified these conceptual transformations at the turn of the century. Having learned, as Rabinbach puts it, that "the body, the steam engine, and the cosmos were . . . connected by a single, unbroken chain of energy" within nature's vast "reservoir of motivating power," they applied the calculus of efficiency to new kinds of engines, including the laboring body, the environment, and the nation-state. Just as important, they asserted that energy, like factory labor, could be managed: studied, controlled, and optimally converted. As a result, these social engineers redefined what it meant for mechanisms like the body to work according to their highest capacities. The idea of efficiency soon conjured visions of what Martha Banta calls a "managed life," an "extended narrative" of factory efficiency that illustrated how the "managerial ethos" would "encompass every aspect of cultural existence" (4-5). Efficiency and its dialectical counterpart, waste, soon revolutionized how Americans characterized labor, leisure, health, domesticity, land management, political effectiveness, and even literature.

"Wasteful Words" examines how American writers of the Gilded Age helped to transform "efficiency" from a mathematical tool for assessing machine performance to an organizing principle for society. In the last thirty years, scholars have done much to illustrate the efficiency metaphor's diffusion through American culture, for while critics traditionally focused on Taylor and the implementation of his much despised labor scheme, recent historical studies have called attention to the ways that other engineers, scientists, economists, and politicians appealed to efficiency to deal with problems like class conflict, economic instability, and natural resource scarcity. Scholars of literature have fruitfully joined those efforts by investigating manifestations of Taylor's program in

the texts of American modernism, especially in the “kinetic” poetics employed by a particular strain of technologically invested writers that includes Ezra Pound, Ernest Hemingway, William Carlos Williams, and John Dos Passos. Indeed, those writers streamlined their compositions to reflect the speed of the factory and the quickening of modern American life. But while scholars have described how these modernists used narrative and poetic form to push efficiency into contexts like politics and home economics, they have only begun to consider the concept’s role in Gilded Age fiction, texts that can shed light on the ways artists struggled to define social productivity during a particularly dysfunctional period in American history. I argue that efficiency was an important aesthetic concern in the novels of the Gilded Age, an idea so exciting and anxiety producing that writers felt compelled to scrutinize it in terms of literary form. Indeed, the writers examined in this dissertation developed compelling rhetorics and poetics to explore efficiency’s conceptual possibilities for domesticity, industrial agriculture, and literary production, three contexts in which the novelists in question perceived deep connections between work and words. Focusing on novels written between 1885 and 1910, works published before Taylor’s landmark *Principles*, “Wasteful Words” investigates the competing notions of labor that American novelists advanced to define social productivity and to debate how people and institutions could best manage the energies supplied to them. To uncover these contending visions, I attend to the poetics that each writer devised, in some cases to embody the promises of efficiency, and in others to critique the energies wasted by industrial modernity. Not only does my approach expand the number of texts that scholars have considered as part of efficiency discourse, but it illustrates that writers who employed conventional narrative structures

engaged with technological progress just as powerfully and artistically as the machine-minded writers of modernism, whose formal innovations are widely recognized as manifestations of efficiency in the realm of literary aesthetics.

It is no surprise that scholars have focused on modernism to study efficiency considering the centrality of Taylorism to the discourse and the popularity that system enjoyed after the First World War. Indeed, Taylor transformed the kind and quality of labor performed in American factories. Between 1881 and 1901, when he conducted a series of time-motion studies of factory labor at the Midvale and Bethlehem steel plants, Taylor applied the logic of the machine to the bodies of his employees, treating them as naturally inefficient machines whose energies could be thermodynamically and economically optimized.<sup>2</sup> Reflecting on those studies in *Principles*, Taylor insists that to increase the prosperity of employers and employees alike, managers must “[develop] each man to his state of maximum efficiency, so that he may be able to do . . . the highest grade of work for which his natural abilities fit him” (9). Employers want more money; manual laborers desire higher wages as well as more comfortable labor. Satisfying all of these demands requires applied science, *Principles* suggests. Just as engineers disassemble and reconstruct machines to improve their efficiency, managers ought to “study the exact series of elementary operations or motions” comprising each of a worker’s tasks (117). Not only should factory bosses use time-motion study to determine a reasonable workload and recalibrate an employee’s labor, “eliminating unnecessary motions and

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<sup>2</sup> See Kanigel 202-210 for a detailed account of how Taylor developed his time-motion experiments. Of particular interest is where Kanigel chronicles Taylor’s realization that “‘it was simpler to time each of the elements’ of a job and establish an overall time for it ‘by summing up the total times of its component parts’” (204). Kanigel argues that this observation revolutionized the rest of Taylor’s work and ultimately distinguished his approach from those of his competitors, for “with this strategy, work was no longer an undifferentiated lump. It consisted of discrete pieces, each of which could be timed and studied” (204).

substituting fast for slow and inefficient motions,” but they should reorganize the factory floor to ensure effortless transfers between workers and materials (24). Such study would ensure that machinists boost their outputs while staving off the debilitating effects of fatigue. Managers could then reinforce best work practices with object-lessons designed to “convince [the worker] of the superiority of the new over the old way of doing the work” (131) as well as “complete written instructions, describing in detail [each] task which [the worker] is to accomplish” and “the exact time allowed for doing it” (39). By subjecting his employees to the scientific gaze, and by prescribing each of their movements in the factory space, Taylor ultimately treated his men and their workspaces as parts of an enormous ergonomic—and economic—engine.<sup>3</sup>

Even during its heyday, this system was not without its problems. Taylor’s workmen complained of exhaustion in spite of receiving better pay. When scruples escalated to an outright strike in 1911 at the Watertown Arsenal in Massachusetts, one of the many sites at which the United States government implemented his brand of scientific management, congressional committees investigated Taylor for exploitation, finding his system “detrimental to the best interests of American workingmen, being in its essential parts a ‘high-speed’ process, where none but the strong survive and they being crowded constantly to the maximum point of physical exertion” (qtd. in Kanigel 448). A Senate special committee subsequently banned Taylorism from federal installations, if only temporarily.<sup>4</sup> In addition to these tangible consequences, Taylorism raised more

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<sup>3</sup> For more on the metaphor of the body as an engine in Taylorist philosophy, see Rabinbach 115-119 and Noble 177-81. The latter excerpt includes telling language from Taylorist disciples such as Arthur Williams, a former President of the New York Edison Company: “Electrical engineers,” Williams once claimed, were “without a peer in running machines [and] in running plants” but were not trained “in running *human machines*” (179, emphasis added).

<sup>4</sup> For more on the Watertown Arsenal Strike and its impact on Taylor’s life, see Kanigel 447-84.



intractable ideological concerns. Extending Marx's theories about reification in the age of industrial capitalism, Georg Lukács points out that Taylorism extended the logic of the efficiency "right into the worker's 'soul'" (88). Once labor was "broken into abstract, rational, specialised operations [such] that the worker loses contact with the finished product and his work is reduced to the mechanical repetition of a specialised set of actions," the time needed to effect a task transformed from a "merely empirical average" to a "fixed and established reality" that workers felt obligated to effect (88). Thus, Taylorism spurred on capitalist changes in "the *total* outer and inner life of society," from the objective conditions of the factory space to the subjective experiences of its personnel (84).<sup>5</sup> People like the machinists at the Watertown Arsenal were well aware of these debilitating, atomizing effects. Factory managers and entrepreneurs found the breakneck labor scheme incredibly profitable, however. Even academics applauded the system. Deans at Harvard and Pennsylvania State often invited Taylor to lecture on the "scientific selection of workers," and they based much of their business curriculum on his methods (Kanigel 489-90). Such people ultimately pushed for the wide-scale implementation of scientific management between the First and Second World Wars. Thus, during the Twenties, Taylorism and its close competitor Fordism became synonymous with efficiency discourse, even in spite of the difficulties that surrounded the "one best way."

Not only did Taylor's system enjoy much success in industry, but *Principles* made explicit efficiency's applications outside the factory. As Haber observes, Taylor

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<sup>5</sup> Harry Braverman elaborates this claim in *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century*, holding scientific management responsible for the deskilling of workers and the disappearance of "craftsmanship" in the age of industrial efficiency. For more on the way that Taylorism separated the "hand and brain" of the individual worker, see Braverman 86-94.

marketed the ideal to engineers, industrialists, business students, and countless others as a “twentieth-century Whiggism” in which the pursuit of “increased productivity” bound “all groups in the American social order” in a system of “industrial betterment” (27). He insisted in *Principles* that increased productivity in every industry will facilitate progress in a country plagued by idleness, financial instability, and class conflict. Workers organize “for war” against their employers “rather than for peace,” Taylor claims, because they deem it impossible “to arrange their mutual relations [such] that their interests become identical” (10). Efficiency would encourage the cooperation of all parties, however. By increasing each worker’s output, factory managers would be able to pay their workers livable wages. Increased efficiency would thus forge bonds of trust between employees and managers, transforming tumultuous companies into humming economic engines. Moreover, because wasted energy hampers every facet of American life, scientific supervision ought to be “applied with equal force to all social activities: to the management of our homes; the management of our farms; the management of the business of our tradesmen, large and small; of our churches, our philanthropic institutions, our universities, and our governmental departments” (8). Eliminating these inefficiencies would optimize every sector of society and thus recalibrate the American engine, effecting “the diminution of poverty, and the alleviation of suffering” more quickly than even the most systematic philanthropic program (14). For Taylor, then, efficiency was a utopian principle that could reform every activity and institution.

By emphasizing efficiency’s utility outside the factory, *Principles* affirmed and augmented the convictions of the machine-minded social reformers who preceded Taylor. In the most recent and comprehensive study of efficiency’s history, Jennifer Karns

Alexander reminds us that Taylor neither initiated efficiency discourse nor originated the idea of empirically managing energy. Several competing notions of efficiency surfaced during the nineteenth century, some preceding and some contemporaneous with the ideological work performed by Taylor and likeminded mechanical engineers. Famed naturalist Charles Darwin and political economist Alfred Marshall laid a groundwork for Taylorist thought during the 1850s by experimenting with “static” and “dynamic” notions of efficiency. While earlier political scientists and naturalists had employed a “static” notion of efficiency to emphasize the balance of inputs and outputs in systems like economies and ecosystems, Darwin and Marshall considered the “dynamic” potential of efficiency, imagining how increased management of resources would facilitate the growth of a particular system (56). This “dynamic” characterization of efficiency undoubtedly informed Taylor’s projects, for he strove not to offset inputs and outputs but to boost the outputs of employees and machines alike. In this sense, Alexander demonstrates, Taylor participated in a larger conversation about how to manage the energy and resources internal to “engines” like the body and the factory space, and he ended up popularizing a particular strain of an already transforming efficiency discourse. As John M. Jordan similarly points out, Taylor began conducting his labor experiments at the same time that social philosophers appealed to mechanical performance to push for “rational reform” in American politics (13). Even during the 1880s, figures as different as botanist and sociologist Lester Frank Ward, economist Thorstein Veblen, and engineer-turned-politician Herbert Hoover encouraged legislators to “flee” the moralism of “social ideology and personal metaphysics” for the “control and existential certainty” of applied science, seeking practical, objective solutions to economic instability (13).

These rational reformers not only increased the cultural capital of the engineer in *fin-de-siècle* America but sparked the conceptual revolution that Taylor would popularize in *Principles*. Thus, as Rabinbach suggests, Taylor did not invent the science of work, especially when considering the efforts of these above figures as well as those of European politicians and physicians who tried to reform work through individual medical interventions and public health programs. Nevertheless, Taylor arguably did the most “to synthesize and promote in a coherent framework the broad changes that were already taking place piecemeal in various industries” (240).<sup>6</sup>

The writers of the modernist *avant garde* undoubtedly grappled with the brand of efficiency promoted in works like *Principles*. In her seminal study *Shifting Gears: Technology, Literature, Culture in Modernist America*, Cecelia Tichi demonstrates convincingly that Taylorism offered machine-minded modernists “new opportunities for style and structure” based on the characteristics of the factory floor, including its “kinetics” and its “ethos of synchronized design” (90). As a result, the works of these “gear-and-girder” modernists developed aesthetics that emblemized efficiency discourse and helped to disseminate it to the American public. Tichi adds that a mechanical poetics first appeared in the critical essays of Ezra Pound, particularly “Vortex” (1914), an artistic manifesto written for the little magazine *Blast*. According to Tichi, Pound sought to capture the speed of a running motor by asserting a

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<sup>6</sup> It is worth noting that scholars sometimes find it problematic to associate Taylor with the “science of work.” Braverman contends that while Taylor marketed himself as an empiricist, he had “little in common with those physiologists or psychologists who have attempted, before or after him, to gather information about human capacities in a spirit of scientific interest” (62). Thus, Braverman considers Taylorism a “*science of the management of others’ work* under capitalist conditions” rather than a “science of work” (62). In spite of this difficulty, I believe it is important to include Taylor alongside Jordan’s “rational reformers” and Rabinbach’s European “scientists of work,” because doing so emphasizes how these figures similarly appealed to “science,” broadly construed, to realize their social ideals. For more information on the differences between Taylorism and the science of work, see Braverman 62-77 and Rabinbach 241-44.

correspondence between the artist and engineer, calling the poet an “artificer in the age of great machine and structural technology” who could appreciate “patterned energy and the beauty which the pattern manifested” (96). “Vortex” contends that writers must avoid the “PLACID, NON-ENERGIZED” effects of contemporary poetry, for “hedonism is the vacant pool of a vortex, without force, deprived of past and future,” while “futurism is the disgorging spray of a vortex with no drive behind it, DISPERSAL” (Pound 153). Art must embody the whirling energy in “THE TURBINE” of culture, for in that machine,

The vortex is the point of maximum energy,

It represents, in mechanics, the greatest efficiency.

We use the words “greatest efficiency” in the precise sense—as they would be used in a textbook of MECHANICS. (153)

Aside from the direct references to thermodynamic efficiency, several aspects of this passage illustrate Pound’s engagement with Taylorism. Like the pioneer of scientific management, for whom the movement of workers and materials was key to the productivity of the workroom, Pound emphasizes the necessity of motion to poetry and cautions against “DISPERSAL,” the loss of artistic energy to canned poetic effects like stilted formal constraints and derivative, merely mimetic imagery. Pound bolsters this theory of a kinetic aesthetic with strict verbal economy reflective of a gyrating “TURBINE.” The terse sentences in his description of the vortex not only reflect the immediacy of energy, but they suggest the possibility of disciplining language according to a Taylorist logic, calling upon poetry to do more philosophical work in a more “precise” way with less time and space. For Pound, then, efficiency promised to give language the force and utility of pulsing factory equipment.

Pound's aesthetic experiments, Tichi contends, offered other modernists a poetics with which to capture the accelerated pace of life in twentieth-century America.

Hemingway streamlined—and, we might add, hyper-masculinized—his fiction with a “syntax of the straight line,” which by “compressing space . . . also collapsed time and so enacted industrial-age speed” (230). Williams, who befriended Pound while studying at the University of Pennsylvania, adopted a similar strategy in his “rapid transit” poems of the 1920s. “The Right of Way” (1923) condenses each line and stanza to reproduce the carefree haste of the automobile age:

In passing with my mind  
on nothing in the world

but the right of way  
I enjoy on the road by

virtue of the law—  
I saw

an elderly man who  
smiled and looked away

to the north past a house—  
a woman in blue

who was laughing and  
leaning forward to look up

into the man's half  
averted face

and a boy of eight who was  
looking at the middle of

the man's belly  
at a watchchain—

The supreme importance  
of this nameless spectacle

sped me by them  
without a word—

Why bother where I went?  
for I went spinning on the

four wheels of my car  
along the wet road until

I saw a girl with one leg  
over the rail of a balcony

Heeding Pound's warning against artistic inertia, Williams keeps readers of "The Right of Way" in perpetual motion. The poem revels in the pleasures afforded by speed, relating quick, discontinuous impressions of mechanical mobility: the "passing" of idle thoughts as the speaker drives the car, the "spinning" of the car's tires, the feeling of having "sped" by the "nameless spectacle," the dangling of the would-be jumper's leg. Effects like the enjambment of the poet's "[seeing] // an elderly man" and the boy's "looking at the middle of // the man's belly" reinforce the sensation of movement by propelling images into subsequent stanzas. The speed of modernity is not without its problems, the poem points out. Careening down the street, the speaker intuits his disconnection from the people he sees outside his car. There is something of "supreme importance" in the old man's gleeful averting of his face and the craning of the laughing woman's neck; but, not caring enough to engage the spectators or to think critically about their reactions—"Why bother where I went?"—the speaker drives past them "without a word." He even races past the jumper. He relishes the chance to gaze upon her single leg, the fragmentary picture he can piece together from the vantage of his moving vehicle, but he startlingly breezes by her after figuring out her precarious position, deciding to keep his wheels "spinning" rather than stopping to learn her fate. Yet, if the

speed of modernity begets a sense of detachment, Williams suggests, it offers new pleasures and aesthetics. One can “enjoy” the leisure of “passing with my mind / on nothing in the world” except the movements of the automobile. Modernity also permits voyeuristic gratification: just as the speaker likes looking at the old man and laughing woman, those spectators gleefully appreciate the jumper’s suspended leg. Verse ought to reflect these equally disturbing and exhilarating possibilities, Williams suggests. Like the automobile, modernist poetry ought to be built for speed, with the poet-engineer condensing and accelerating each line and stanza to effect kinetic sensations.

If Pound’s aesthetic theory raised playful possibilities for writers like Williams, it offered others like John Dos Passos compelling ways to critique industrial ideology. For instance, *The Big Money* (1936) develops a Taylorist poetics to parody the quest for productivity. In the “Tin Lizzie” chapter, a derisive biography of Henry Ford that bears the most discussed case of efficiency in literature, Dos Passos hurries his prose in imitation of the factory process:

At Ford’s production was improving all the time; less waste, more spotters, strawbosses, stool-pigeons (fifteen minutes for lunch, three minutes to go to the toilet, the Taylorized speedup everywhere, reach under, adjust washer, screw down bolt, shove in cotterpin, reachunder adjustwasher, screwdown bolt, reachunderadjustwasherscrewdownreachunderadjust until every ounce of life was sucked off into production and at night the workmen went home grey shaking husks) [...] (55)<sup>7</sup>

Like the brief stanzas and enjambed images of “The Right of Way,” the unconventional syntax and spliced words in “Tin Lizzie” suggest acceleration. Here, however, the

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<sup>7</sup> Both Banta, 4-5, and Copley, 45-46, identify this passage as a representative moment of literary efficiency. While Tichi does not cite this excerpt from the “Tin Lizzie” chapter of *The Big Money*, she identifies similar passages from the “American Plan” chapter, which contains an equally scathing treatment of efficiency embedded within a “biography” of Frederick Winslow Taylor. See Tichi 195-216 for a detailed analysis of Dos Passos’s search for a breakneck poetics.



efficiency evokes the repetitiveness, haste, and fatigue of Fordist factory work. The crammed prose suggests that Ford's breakneck scheme generates "less waste" of energy and raw material but compromises the health of his employees to do it. Indeed, the energy that ought to sustain Ford's workers gets "sucked off into production," rendering them the "waste" products of hard work, "grey shaking husks" rather than living, working-class people. Just as troubling is that the "Taylorized speedup" occurs "everywhere," not just on the factory floor. By allotting only "fifteen minutes for lunch" and "three minutes to go to the toilet," Ford and his cronies regulate all of their employees' inputs and outputs from mouth to bowel.<sup>8</sup> Coincidentally, Charlie Chaplin would spoof masticatory efficiency and the Taylorized toilet in his silent film *Modern Times*, which came out the same year as *The Big Money*. Of course, what Chaplin does with hilarious props and ingenious editing—in one case, factory managers strap the Little Tramp into a machine that haphazardly force-feeds him, and, in another, the plant president surveils the Tramp via video screen during his bathroom break—Dos Passos accomplishes with the compression of literary time and space. For both artists, however, aesthetic efficiency serves to satirize Fordist labor practices and expose productivity as an insidious ideology that has infiltrated every aspect of American life.

Such explicit engagement with Taylorism and Fordism helps to explain why scholars have focused on efficiency's manifestations in high modernism. Given how

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<sup>8</sup> See Armstrong 65-66 for an engrossing discussion of the Taylorized toilet and the modernist impulse to supervise the body's activities externally rather than internally. In spite of its seeming banality, Armstrong considers the commode of the Ford factory the "site of struggle between nature and culture, dirt and order, invisibility and visibility; between labour and capital, and correspondingly between two types of time, the time of the body and the time of the engineer" (65). For Armstrong, the "waste" of digestion ultimately represents "the point at which the body and the machine cannot readily be reconciled" (65). My study will call attention to similar contexts where the image of the body as an efficient machine falls apart.

clearly Pound and his associates responded to the discourse, literary critics have done well to hone in on their works. Nevertheless, efficiency was already animating literary aesthetics during the Gilded Age, and those formal innovations have largely been underappreciated. For instance, Tichi recognizes that Gilded Age American writers spurred on the discourse. *Shifting Gears* demonstrates that numerous novels of the period “fashioned” the engineer into “a new American hero whose actions and qualities of mind reveal the hopes and anxieties of the cultural moment” (117). Moreover, Tichi argues convincingly that Edward Bellamy’s utopian romance *Looking Backward, 2000-1887* (1888) was among the first works, literary or not, to effect the “cunning linguistic change” to thermodynamic efficiency, for it generalized that term and opposed it to social “waste” to characterize class conflict as a “man-made state of affairs” rather than an immutable condition of “cosmic instability” (57). Nevertheless, Tichi reserves aesthetic achievements for the twentieth-century *avant garde*, claiming that it was not until modernism—when literature became “recognizable as designed assemblies of component parts”—that writers developed poetics capable of expressing or satirizing the factory process (16). In the most recent treatment of literary efficiency, Evelyn Cobley similarly elevates British modernism, claiming that “although efficiency became an issue in the nineteenth century, it was during the first three decades of the twentieth that it generated a host of cultural anxieties most dramatically captured in modernist novels” (5). Cobley also implies that British modernism warrants more consideration than American works of the same period because “British culture seemed traumatized by Fordism and Taylorism” (17). Thus, she suggests, works like Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* and Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* (1932) expose the ideological work of Taylorist efficiency

more clearly than the writings of both the American modernists and their Gilded Age predecessors. Perhaps, in this sense, Cobley does not privilege modernist poetics in the same way as Tichi, since her study is “self-consciously *thematic* in its analysis of the terms in which characters in the novels under discussion both object to modern civilization and reinforce its investment in efficiency” (12-13). Still, Cobley assumes that the modernists best understood the pitfalls of efficiency discourse, and she underestimates the anxieties that Americans experienced during what was the most contentious period of efficiency’s conceptual revolution.

Indeed, Americans writing between 1880 and 1910 had just as much to say as the high modernists about efficiency and its possibilities for literary aesthetics—and, as Tichi points out, the “literary response to efficiency was, unsurprisingly, mixed” during the 1880s, brimming with hope but punctuated by dread about living a managed life (87). Thus, my primary goal in this study is to explore the poetics that Edward Bellamy, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Frank Norris, María Amparo Ruiz de Burton, Mark Twain, and Edith Wharton generated to grapple with efficiency in contexts like literary production, women’s liberation, and industrial agriculture. By doing so, I hope to illustrate the complicated and compelling ways that Gilded Age American writers responded to machine culture within traditional narrative forms, ones that are not as overtly experimental as those of the gear-and-girder strain of modernism. For instance, Bellamy and Gilman—the writers in this study who were most optimistic about technological progress—penned conventional fiction in spite of their radical utopian visions. But while Bellamy preceded the experiments of modernism, and while Gilman resisted them, favoring straightforward prose strategies, both found poetics capable of

decrying wasted social energy. *Looking Backward* creates a tension between traditional narrative prolixity and the ideal of literary efficiency to foreground the wastes of nineteenth-century society. On the other hand, Gilman's domestic fiction *What Diantha Did* (1909-10) plays with silence and narration to highlight the inefficiency of domestic ideology. Gilman's strategy, I will argue, makes a case for middle-class women to join the workforce, where their energies and talents would be best employed. The other writers in this study—Norris, Ruiz de Burton, Twain, and Wharton—were more skeptical of efficiency's promises, and their books reflected those anxieties, for the novels self-destruct in ways that call out the ironic inefficiencies of efficiency thinking. For example, Frank Norris's *The Octopus* (1901) uses sentimental rhetoric to garner readers' sympathies for preindustrial agriculture and to expose the problems with a new, intensive agriculture based on factory efficiency. Ultimately, however, *The Octopus* abandons its own position on factory farming, ending its sentimental promotion of preindustrial agriculture and squandering all the work the novel put into lamenting it. Wasted sympathy is Norris's goal, though. By undercutting his sentimental strategy, Norris calls attention to the lives and natural resources wasted in the push for agricultural efficiency.

As these preliminary readings of *Looking Backward*, *Diantha*, and *The Octopus* suggest, "efficiency" was a contested term between 1880 and 1910, the years explored in my study, and the figures involved in these conceptual clashes experienced the very anxieties that scholars like Copley have associated with later generations of artists. Among those who have concentrated on modernism's antecedents, Martha Banta has most systematically assessed the conflicted and conflicting attitudes about efficiency from the *fin de siècle*. Her landmark study *Taylored Lives: Narrative Productions in the*

*Age of Taylor, Veblen, and Ford* identifies several narrative structures—including the corporate fiction and the domestic “melodrama of disorder,” which depicted “good fathers and mothers trained in modern paternalistic principles of family management”—that the rational reformers employed to bring efficiency into “diverse areas of domestic and national activity, such as imperialist projects, the machine process, and the business enterprise; the science of households; and the making of ready-made garments, ready-made houses, and ready-made work environments” (4-5). By sketching those overarching forms, *Taylored Lives* convincingly demonstrates efficiency’s thematic importance to the Gilded Age. While it does not focus on efficiency as such, Mark Seltzer’s seminal *Bodies and Machines* has done just as much to uncover the questions Americans raised about the “uncertain and shifting line between the natural and the technological in machine culture,” particularly where it concerned the production of people (4). But while these studies have helpfully described the range of responses to efficiency, including the doubled discourse that resulted when writers and social philosophers began “[insisting] at once on the artificial and on the natural character of the individual,” they often shirk close readings of texts (Seltzer 95). Thus, these studies offer what Seltzer calls a “cultural logistics,” or a critical map of different discursive articulations and contradictions, rather than sustained examinations of efficiency or waste at work within particular texts (4). I argue that much can be gained by studying the aesthetic strategies and tensions embodied in a select number of novels from the Gilded Age. By attending to poetics and to the histories of particular narrative forms, my study illuminates the hopes and apprehensions that American writers—and, more generally, the American public—experienced while they imagined the possibility of social efficiency.

Close readings will elucidate the complicated calculus that these figures performed to navigate the competing notions of efficiency in their respective contexts. In Chapter 3, for instance, I investigate how Gilman and Wharton responded to the theories of women's efficiency that appeared in the texts of domestic science, particularly in Bertha Terrill's *Household Management* (1905). What "efficiency" meant for women during this period depended on who was studying their labor and whether those social engineers considered domestic work the best use of a woman's energy. Recalling Alexander's distinction between "static" and "dynamic" efficiency, definitions of women's productivity also hinged on whether one sought to preserve a woman's internal economy or increase her output through the systematic management of her body. Terrill and other conservative pioneers of home economics discourse embraced domestic ideology, insisting that women were most useful at home. To make housekeeping palatable to resistant middle-class housewives, and to elevate the economic importance of domestic labor, these theorists promoted a dynamic sense of efficiency. Taylorist science, they contended, would shore up women's work, trim the expenses of the home, and even relieve housewives from their debilitating fatigue. Gilman and Wharton took up the brand of efficiency that Terrill and her followers promoted, yet they argued that women wasted their energy in the domestic sphere, either as household slaves or as commodities reflecting the wealth of their husbands. Gilman and Wharton nevertheless disagreed about whether efficiency discourse would give women new opportunities to assert their agency in a patriarchal society. Wharton felt much less assured than Gilman in this respect, and her novel of manners *The House of Mirth* (1905) reflects that ambivalence. Sustained analysis of *Household Management*, *What Diantha Did*, and *The*

*House of Mirth* will clarify what kinds of work their respective authors considered most valuable for women. This kind of analysis will also shed light on the different forms of wasted energy these writers detected. As Cobley suggests, efficiency is “always a comparative measure” premised on a “desired totality” (9). Grappling with the nuts and bolts of each text will enable us to track the energy exchanges these authors imagined as they applied efficiency calculations to the “engine” of the working woman’s body.

Close reading attuned to poetics and literary forms will also reveal important tensions in each work’s vision of social efficiency. For instance, Gilman was sure that a new definition of women’s productivity would enable housewives to do more and better work—in the public sphere, too. In spite of her confidence, however, *What Diantha Did* struggles to put Gilman’s conviction into artistic practice, for there are episodes where her purportedly feminist efficiency constrains middle-class women rather than increasing their autonomy. Such tensions, instances of what I term “literary inefficiency,” warrant careful scrutiny because they reveal places where a text runs up against its stated aesthetic or polemical goals. In some cases, as with *Diantha*, these inefficiencies manifest where a writer’s ideological commitments conflict. In others, formal inefficiencies call attention to moments when the logic of efficiency fails to offset its cultural costs. Norris, for example, sabotages the form of *The Octopus* and thus renders his novel a defective narrative engine in order to critique the ironic wastes of efficiency logic. By focusing on the forms and artistic “inefficiencies” of the novels in this study, I ultimately treat each text as an engine: a machine that converts its author’s beliefs into critical, aesthetic, and ideological work but, like any thermodynamic system, is always “open to disruption and transformation” (Cobley 9). Unlike the Taylorist engineer,

however, who villainizes waste and seeks to correct it, I refrain from using “inefficiency” pejoratively, and I hope to avoid making claims about whether or not a text succeeds or fails as a work of art. Indeed, with the exception of Wharton’s *Mirth*, scholars have too often labelled the novels in this study aesthetic disappointments. Bellamy’s *Looking Backward* is often accused of subordinating artistic considerations to didactic ones,<sup>9</sup> while *Diantha* has seldom received scholarly attention because its theories about women’s work seem less radical than those of Gilman’s more popular works, *Women and Economics* (1898) and *Herland* (1915).<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, critics have admitted the ambition and complexity of Twain’s *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court* (1889) and Norris’s *The Octopus: A Story of California* (1901), yet these novels are still denigrated for philosophical and narratological inconsistencies.<sup>11</sup> I aim to make sense of the problems thought to beset these fictions by focusing on their treatments of efficiency

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<sup>9</sup> I should clarify that scholars have not questioned *Looking Backward*’s importance to American history. Indeed, there are several excellent studies of Bellamy’s utopianism and Nationalism, including Arthur Lipow’s *Authoritarian Socialism in America: Edward Bellamy and the Nationalist Movement*, Kenneth M. Roemer’s *The Obsolete Necessity: America in Utopian Writings, 1888-1900*, and Howard P. Segal’s seminal *Technological Utopianism in American Culture*. Nevertheless, critics have traditionally taken Bellamy to task for what they have considered bad writing rife with flat characters and moralistic diatribes, thus ignoring the complexity of *Looking Backward*’s poetics. I will address this issue in more detail in Chapter 2, but it is worth noting Thomas 160 as the most scathing assessment of Bellamy’s didactic prose.

<sup>10</sup> Only a handful of scholars have seriously considered *What Diantha Did*. Jill Bergman, Charlotte Rich, and Beth Sutton-Ramspeck have done much to revive interest in the novel’s aesthetics. Nevertheless, studies like Kellen M. Graham’s “‘To Work is to be Socially Alive’: The Failed Promise of Domestic Service in Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *What Diantha Did*” continue to suggest that *Diantha* is worth reading only because it is an anomaly in Gilman’s corpus, a work that contradicts the labor theories she championed in fiction like *Herland* and sociological treatises like *Human Work* (190).

<sup>11</sup> Studies of *Yankee* have long focused on Twain’s ambivalence about industrialization and the ways that ambivalence marred the novel’s form. The most influential figure in this critical tradition is Henry Nash Smith, who contends that Twain inadequately revised the novel, such that his protagonist, Hank Morgan, gets caught between the exploitative and humanitarian impulses of industrialization (105-108). See Camfield 163, Cox 89-102, Kasson 202, Marx 340-41, and Seltzer 7-10 for similar conclusions. Scholars have been even more critical of *The Octopus*, calling attention to perceived flaws in everything from its form, to its philosophical coherence, to its style. See Pizer 159-62 for a critique of Norris’s “artificial and stilted” sentimental impulses and Walcutt 139-51 for the first and most important assessment of the philosophical conflict between free will and determinism that bifurcates *The Octopus*’s form.



and the energies that are wasted or deployed in service to them. This approach will tell us much about literary composition and culture more generally in Gilded Age America.

In this sense, my study combines the approaches of Barri J. Gold's new and incisive *ThermoPoetics: Energy in Victorian Literature and Science* and Cindy Weinstein's seminal *The Literature of Labor and the Labors of Literature*. Illustrating the immense overlap between the methods and conclusions of Victorian artists and scientists, Gold argues convincingly that physicist James Clerk Maxwell "was undoubtedly a poet" and that Charles Dickens was "a damn good engineer" (14). Not only did Dickens imagine that novels functioned like machines, Gold claims, but he keenly understood how energy conversions played out in his fictional worlds, for he designed complex networks of characters and social events that ultimately produced "novelistic order" by "manufacturing what some like to call a happy ending" (188). Some of the writers in this study agreed explicitly with Dickens that novels worked like engines. Norris compared novels to rushing locomotives in his critical essay "The Novel with a Purpose." Twain espoused similar philosophies in his letters, particularly in ones where he compared himself to the Paige compositor, a typesetting machine that promised but failed to revolutionize book production with its startling efficiency. Given these overt, if not technical, engagements with machine efficiency, it is pertinent to investigate Norris's and Twain's works in the same way that Gold explores the oeuvre of Dickens, identifying the narrative mechanisms they constructed and attending to places of mechanical breakdown, moments when the novel does not achieve its stated goals. But this approach is just as fruitful for writers like Ruiz de Burton and Wharton, I argue. Although such writers did not publically consider their fictions machines—Wharton may

have even resisted such a notion—efficiency informed their poetics and narrative structures. They grappled with the definitions of work and productivity that emerged during the Gilded Age, and, as Weinstein suggests, “to talk about labor in this period, whether it be manual, mechanical, or literary, is inevitably to talk about mechanization, machines, and the market economy. To invoke one is to invoke the other” (2). It is equally illuminating, then, to treat their fictions like engines and to examine their poetics, the nuts and bolts that, according to Weinstein, make visible “the author’s work of representation” and the texts’ efforts to do the work of cultural critique (5).

By focusing on the poetics of Gilded Age American novels, I ultimately hope to expand the number of texts that scholars consider important contributors to efficiency discourse and to illustrate the value of literary studies to discussions about its transformation into an ideology. Alexander has recently contended that literary studies of efficiency are “unable adequately to describe its appeal across different contexts, its powerful application outside the engineering fields, or the transcendent rhetoric that portrays it as the wellspring of civilization or a threat to human freedom” (6-7). More specifically, she argues that Tichi, Banta, and Jordan treat efficiency merely “as an engineering metaphor” (6).<sup>12</sup> By doing so, they unduly privilege the term’s uses in the factory, for they presume “a sense in which its use is authentic and one in which it is derivative, in fields, for example, such as aesthetics of politics” (6). This approach, Alexander adds, suggests that “efficiency has no substantial content of its own when used outside the physical, material domain of engines and energy” (6). Metaphorical study

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<sup>12</sup> To clarify, Jordan’s study is historical in orientation, not literary, but his interpretive strategy is similar to those of Tichi and Banta, in that he tracks the “rhetorical aspects of rational reform” that helped to spread the logic of the machine throughout American politics (5).

thus “sidesteps the thorny question of how a technical concept might effectively be applied in nontechnical circumstances” (6). Alexander wisely calls attention to the problem of prioritizing engineering discourse. By doing so, she underscores difficulties with popular theories of scientific knowledge construction, especially Bruno Latour’s “diffusion model,” which presumes that scientists and engineers work in relative isolation from other parts of society, such that natural and technological knowledge begins in specialist contexts and trickles down to the rest of the populace, writers of fiction included.<sup>13</sup> Yet it seems that Alexander associates metaphorical analysis with the Latourian model, concluding that literary studies of efficiency must, by definition, investigate the appropriation and conceptual evacuation of scientific terminology.

I argue that literary analyses of efficiency need not presume a one-way interaction between science and fiction. Perhaps scholars like Tichi and Banta have implied that transformations in factory discourse—Taylorism, for instance—generated corresponding changes in literature—in the poetics of high modernism. However, N. Katherine Hayles has demonstrated in her “field theory of culture” that the interactions between disciplines like literature and science are “always mutual” (22), for a broad “cultural matrix” of questions and concepts “guides individual inquiry at the same time that the inquiry helps to form, or transform, the matrix” (22). According to this model, science and literature enjoy a dynamic—though still contentious—relationship, since they transform each other’s methods, ideas, and rhetorical strategies in spite of various moments of disciplinary antagonism and insularity. As Gold points out, metaphor and other seemingly distinctive “literary” devices become even more crucial to historical study

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<sup>13</sup> See Latour 132-44 for a more complete description of the diffusion model of scientific knowledge.

with this model in mind. It becomes clear that even artistic features “influenced science, especially in the delicate, early stages of a scientific development, before a phenomenon has been named or a hypothesis adequately articulated” (15). For instance, Gold argues, Tennyson’s thought that “a web is woven across the sky” added to the cultural milieu in which James Faraday theorized “lines of force”—itself a metaphor—in electromagnetism (16). These “root metaphors” then “[shaped] a variety of narratives” in society at large, spurring on the “development and dissemination of scientific ideas” (17). Following Hayles and Gold, I aim to capture the importance of literary devices—not just metaphor but narrative form and poetics—to the competing visions of efficiency that developed in *fin-de-siècle* America. Doing so need not privilege scientific, literary, or economic permutations of the discourse, nor does this strategy necessarily evacuate “efficiency” of its core concepts: motion, change, power, agency, and planning.<sup>14</sup> At the same time, my study focuses on the thermodynamic manifestations of the discourse and the fictional texts that inspired or complicated them, for attending to these works will shed light on how Americans imagined energy, society, and technological progress. I do not, perhaps, go as far in comparing literature and science as *ThermoPoetics*. Nevertheless, my study emphasizes that stories and the ways they were told mattered to the conversations that Americans had about technology and social reform. Scholars have sketched the

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<sup>14</sup> Alexander identifies these as the key principles of efficiency, though she rightly points out that efficiency has never been a fixed concept. To clarify the history of the discourse, she argues, scholars must pay attention to “mechanisms of change,” “techniques of agency,” and “root distinctions in how efficiency was conceived and measured, between balance or growth as root concepts and between bounded measures, in which efficiency was limited by natural law, and arbitrary ones, in which efficiency was defined as a ratio between arbitrarily chosen quantities” (11). I take these factors into account by identifying *who* performed efficiency calculations and *how* those social engineers intended to optimize a given “engine.”

strategies that scientists and politicians employed in these discussions; my project illuminates other, decidedly aesthetic tactics that Americans used to participate in them.

To this end, each subsequent chapter explores a context—conversations about utopian literature, women’s work in the domestic sphere, and industrial agriculture—where novelists wrestled with efficiency’s conceptual applications. While I hope indirectly to widen the scope of the historiography on efficiency by tracing its movements between technical and popular texts, the goal in each chapter is to historicize novelists’ particular articulations of a larger yet unevenly developing discourse. I then concentrate on how literary aesthetics work within and against the other definitions of efficiency available in the cultural field. To reflect the range of responses to industrial expansion, each chapter juxtaposes a novel that is confident about efficiency discourse with one more critical of its salvific promises, situating both within an array of historical, political, and scientific documents. This strategy balances the need to describe the Gilded Age’s multiple “efficiencies” with the necessity of close reading. It also gives space to compare the often contradictory politics and poetics of the writers in question.

Chapter II demonstrates that writers of the *fin de siècle* experimented with literary form to scrutinize efficiency discourse. Specifically, I explore the poetics that Bellamy and Twain generated in *Looking Backward* and *Connecticut Yankee* to investigate the utopian possibilities that surrounded the ideal of factory efficiency. Both novels imagine worlds where an ideology of mechanical performance has—temporarily, in *Yankee*’s case—optimized society; and, because they sensed profound conceptual connections between labor and literary composition, Bellamy and Twain both speculated about how the word might look and function in a machine-made society. *Looking Backward* ties the

possibility of an efficient poetics to the development of its idle, nineteenth-century protagonist, Julian West. On waking from a centuries-long mesmeric trance, West discovers in twenty-first century America that treating the nation like an enormous engine has enabled social scientists to optimize production and consumption, streamline work, and eliminate economic inequality. To fit into utopia, West must learn to write literature capable of expressing a detestation for wasted energy. But while West eliminates his waste-loving attitudes, *Looking Backward* stops short of enacting efficiency in its prose. The result, I argue, is a tension between the desire for literary efficiency and the prolixity of West's narration, one that Bellamy exploits to foreground the wastefulness of nineteenth-century American literature and culture. Twain, on the other hand, articulates and deconstructs a mechanical poetics in *Connecticut Yankee*. Travelling back in time to the days of Camelot, Twain's Yankee hero, Hank Morgan, builds an industrial republic using the efficiency techniques he learned managing the nineteenth-century Colt Arms Factory. To correct the inefficiencies of sixth-century England, Morgan optimizes not only the Arthurians' work but their words, hoping that well-managed mouths will make them internalize productivity. To reflect Morgan's interest in verbal efficiency, Twain condenses his narration, developing a factory-made poetics. Twain could not believe in the salvific power of literary efficiency, however. As a result, he dismantles his protagonist's republic and challenges efficiency's utopian appeal. While both novels, in their formal prolixity and didacticism, seem to belong to the nineteenth century, I argue that their poetics are actually more complicated, as they grapple with the promises and problems of subjecting the word to machine specifications.

After establishing the importance of efficiency to Gilded Age poetics, and vice versa, the remaining chapters illustrate how writers responded to the concept's movements outside the factory. Chapter III considers efficiency's implications for domestic work and women's agency during the rise of home economics. This chapter reads Gilman's *What Diantha Did* and Wharton's *The House of Mirth* alongside Terrill's *Household Management*, a foundational text of domestic science. Scholars have observed that *Household Management* adapted Taylor-like notions of efficiency to the activities that women performed in the domestic sphere, claiming that middle-class housewives ought to exhibit the efficiency of store managers and factory workers. Doing so, Terrill contended, would give women a better appreciation for their work while reducing its taxing effects on their bodies and minds. I argue that Gilman and Wharton took up Terrill's thinking about women's efficiency but contended that women were forced to squander precious energy in the private sphere. To this end, *What Diantha Did* experiments with narration and silence to make visible the draining effects of domesticity. Confident that women will find new opportunities in the public sphere if they discipline their energy, *Diantha* also suggests through the rise of its plucky protagonist, Diantha Bell, that middle-class women can leave behind lives of silent suffering for fulfilling and energizing work. Wharton agrees with Gilman when it comes to the wastefulness of patriarchal ideology, for *The House of Mirth* likewise calls attention to the depleting effects of the private sphere—though while *Diantha* focuses on housework, *Mirth* centers on the work of landing a rich husband, the only labor that the leisure class deems acceptable for Wharton's heroine, Lily Bart. However, Wharton is less confident than Gilman that women will find opportunities to manage their own

energies in the public sphere. Thus, *Mirth* emphasizes the fatiguing effects of the quest for more efficient labor. To expose the barriers to women's agency and efficiency, Wharton devises an "exhausted fiction," disrupting narrative time and perspective to reflect the dissipation of her heroine's energy as she struggles to manage her affairs outside the domestic sphere. This strategy troubles Terrill's and Gilman's conviction that reason and industrial progress would free women from lives of wasted potential.

Chapter IV turns from the domestic space to the pastoral place, exploring fictional responses to industrial agriculture, farming methods premised on factory efficiency that transformed California ecology at the turn of the century. As farmers transitioned to intensive farming of single crops and introduced better threshing equipment to increase their yields, writers imagined that farmers were abandoning intimate relationships with the land. Ruiz de Burton's *The Squatter and the Don* and Norris's *The Octopus* turn the discourse of efficiency on its head to advance that critique. Ruiz de Burton and Norris insist that the rationalization of the environment squanders more energy and capital than older, less impersonal ways of relating to the land. To make this case, both appeal to sentimental rhetoric, compelling readers' identification with practitioners of preindustrial farming. *Squatter*, a romance set in post-annexation California, calls out the wastes of industrial efficiency by pitting the ranching of native Californios against the wheat farming of Eastern capitalists. The novel aligns readers with the Alamar family, who work with their surroundings to subsist. *Squatter*, in turn, characterizes the squatters' occupation of their lands as heartless intrusions that disrupt the ecology of the region. The Alamars succumb to the tactics of the squatters and the Southern-Pacific Railroad; however, by garnering sympathy for them, *Squatter* calls attention to the lives and raw



materials wasted by capitalist expansion. Ruiz de Burton thus affirms the need for intimate agriculture in the twentieth century. Norris offers a similar critique in *The Octopus*, though he doubts that affectionate agriculture can be salvaged or that sentimental rhetoric can effect Ruiz de Burton's optimistic vision. Norris embeds his case in his poet-protagonist's quest to write a "Song of the West." While doing research among the wheat farmers of the San Joaquin Valley, the poet Presley is implicated in their fight against a railroad monopoly, and he takes up sentimental literature to promote more sympathetic attitudes toward agriculture. His message fails, however. As a result, Presley abandons his critique of the railroad. Ironically, *The Octopus* recapitulates Presley's disavowal of sentimentality, for the novel, too, ends up extolling the logic of efficiency. By sabotaging its own sentimental strategy, *The Octopus*, like *Squatter*, emphasizes the number of lives and resources squandered by the railroad, industrial efficiency's most fervent advocate. Unlike *Squatter*, however, *The Octopus* concludes that sentimentalism will fail in the heartless era of corporate capitalism and that the wastes of industrial agriculture will persist in the twentieth century.

Attending to these texts and their formal strategies ultimately enlarges our sense of how Americans reckoned with industrial progress. In particular, we will see more clearly how these writers—who, excepting Twain, had little first-hand experience with machines or factory work—struggled to make sense of the industrial narratives that were rapidly transforming labor, technology, and culture more generally. What comes through most strikingly when studying their engagements with efficiency is a heightened awareness of waste. Indeed, the authors I examine fretted immensely over squandered energy in America: the talent and potential wasted by tethering women to domesticity,

the natural resources made useless by irresponsible farming, and even the seeming feebleness of the written word. Their aesthetic strategies reflect those anxieties, too. Bellamy and Gilman use form to try to eliminate wasted energy, while Norris, Ruiz de Burton, Twain, and Wharton pen self-destructing fictions that point out the problems of efficiency thinking. Perhaps, in this sense, the poetics of the Gilded Age are characterized as much by aesthetic inefficiency as by efficiency itself. Indeed, this project asserts, the apparent artistic failures of *Connecticut Yankee*, *Mirth*, and *The Octopus* actually make plain in literary form the philosophical contradictions surrounding efficiency's expansion. In this light, attention to waste might also be the aesthetic concern that most distinguishes these writers from the gear-and-girder modernists, who took efficiency discourse as a given and developed semantic economies to represent it.

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## CHAPTER II

### PUTTING IDLE WORDS TO WORK: LANGUAGE, EFFICIENCY, AND UTOPIA IN

#### *LOOKING BACKWARD AND CONNECTICUT YANKEE*

The idea of efficiency permeated countless contexts during the 1880s as machine-minded social activists brought it to bear on discourses as different as leisure, health, domesticity, land management, and political effectiveness.<sup>1</sup> Considering the concept's broad application during this period, one of the best ways to trace its development is to examine the era's changing thoughts about utopia. Early in the nineteenth century, utopian experiments like George and Sophie Ripley's commune at Brook Farm sprang up to combat the competitive, materialistic impulses prompted by capitalist expansion. The Brook Farmers maintained that by equally distributing property, promoting the free exchange of ideas, and reconnecting with nature, Americans would not only invigorate their bodies and minds but effect the ideal society.<sup>2</sup> In spite of the well documented failures of Brook Farm and its close competitor, Fruitlands, utopian thinking enjoyed new life in the 1880s amid the challenges of rapid industrialization and the rise of corporate capitalism, though with a key addition: engagement with the efficiency of engine technology. The American economy proved unstable at best during the Gilded Age,

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<sup>1</sup> Parts of this chapter previously appeared in "Making a Mill of a Mouth More Productive: Efficiency and Linguistic Management in Twain's *Connecticut Yankee*," *American Literary Realism* 47.1 (Fall 2014): 55-70. These parts are reprinted here with permission from the University of Illinois Press.

<sup>2</sup> For a comprehensive account of Brook Farm, see Richard Francis's *Transcendental Utopias: Individual and Community at Brook Farm, Fruitlands, and Walden*. Focusing on the commune's spiritual and philosophical underpinnings, Francis argues that Brook Farm reflected its Transcendentalist founders' search for the "oneness of all phenomena," from the machinations of the mind to the cycles of nature (43). For a study that situates Brook Farm in political history, see Marilyn Michaud's "A Turn to the Past: Republicanism and Brook Farm," which describes the community as a "profoundly traditional . . . reaction to economic and social liberalism of the post-revolutionary era," especially in its commitment to the "transmitted treasure of agrarian virtue" embodied in Jeffersonian republicanism (69).

capable of tremendous growth but prone to prodigious slumps emblemized by banking crises, labor agitations, and vast unemployment. Americans unsurprisingly turned to machines, the ostensible catalysts of industrial expansion, to mitigate that volatility. Many blamed factories and their equipment for the nation's distress, calling again for a return to Jeffersonian agrarianism. Yet just as many—politicians, engineers, entrepreneurs, and even writers—found in machine productivity utopian solutions to America's intractable labor problems. Such reformers considered efficiency not just a calculation of engine performance but an ideal with virtually supernatural potential to transform society. They branded phenomena like ineffectual labor, joblessness, and working-class discontent “waste,” uselessly expended energy that could be made productive if social engineers tuned up society's machinery. Their engine-driven rhetoric ushered in a “New Utilitarianism,” as Cecelia Tichi terms it, a philosophy that rendered economic instability a problem susceptible to almost mechanical correction (57). Indeed, the idea of machine efficiency offered utopian dreamers a compellingly practical model for redesigning society. “No longer was utopia a nowhere” or “an imaginary place whose primary function was critique of an actual society,” Kenneth Roemer writes (16). Utopia was a “condition to be achieved . . . before it was too late” (16). Treating America like an engine with faulty but fixable parts promised not only to alleviate the wasteful and potentially lethal labor problem but to convert the nation into an industrial Eden.

No works of the *fin-de-siècle* crystallized these visions of efficiency more thoughtfully than Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward, 2000-1887* (1888) and Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889). Bellamy's romance—the story of a wealthy Bostonian, Julian West, who falls asleep in the nineteenth century and

awakens in the utopian twentieth—touts the factory process as a social ideal. Tichi even credits the book with effecting the “cunning linguistic change” that made waste and efficiency central themes of the New Utilitarianism, for the novel juxtaposes the uneconomical byproducts of capitalism with the productivity of factory management to expose America’s instability as a “fiction” easily rewritten by rational planning (57). Twain’s novel conveys similar hopes for social efficiency but doubts management or mechanics will instantiate it. *Yankee* depicts the struggles of a nineteenth-century factory boss, Hank Morgan, to engineer progress in waste-ridden Camelot. Morgan endorses the same ideals as Bellamy’s Bostonians, but his efforts to streamline society destroy the kingdom. Thus, the managed life that *Looking Backward* so fervently promotes is one that *Yankee* finds impossible. In spite of Twain’s qualms, however, the novel embraces as much as it mistrusts the engine’s potential as a model for utopian society, finding fault not with machine productivity but with people’s inability to put it into practice.

*Looking Backward* and *Connecticut Yankee* do not simply reflect the interest of other *fin-de-siècle* reformers in mechanical performance. In their efforts to imagine an industrial Eden, in which the machine had optimized every aspect of society, these novels pushed efficiency into the writer’s study, examining its aesthetic as well as its political significance. Attentive to conceptual connections between factory work and writing, both writers believed that efficiency discourse would transform language and literature as much as industrial labor. As a result, their novels scrutinized the utopian promises of efficiency by testing the word’s capacity for representing mechanical productivity. Their works even discipline their characters’ words to see whether linguistic waste could be corrected in service to a poetics of efficiency.

*Looking Backward* is remembered most for its scathing—and often heavy-handed—treatises on industrial, economic, and humanitarian waste. The plot consists primarily of Julian West’s conversations with his twentieth-century tutor, Dr. Leete, sessions that awaken him to how capitalism has squandered the energies of working-class America. But *Looking Backward* also has much to say about waste and efficiency in the aesthetic domain, for Bellamy optimizes his unproductive protagonist and helps him fit into utopia by changing his taste for words about cultural inefficiency. On waking in utopia, West learns that not only was nineteenth-century America’s economy a badly designed engine, but its literature, wastefully produced romances of indolent creeds and deeds, reflected those inefficiencies. The hypothetical romances of the twentieth century, tales that use literary form to exemplify utopian efficiency, finally convince Julian that he and his leisure-class compatriots generated the crippling wastes of the 1880s. Efficiently written tales also persuade West that he cannot remain a useless cog in the social machine. Rather, he must optimize his shiftless impulses. He accomplishes that feat by putting his once-idle words to work: he becomes a writer who describes the wastes of his leisure-class life to educate twentieth-century citizens about the class struggles of the nineteenth. However, while the utopian novels described in *Looking Backward* point to a poetics of efficiency, and while those romances induce West to write and live more productively, *Looking Backward* as a literary product does not embody a mechanical aesthetic. Indeed, if West finally tunes up his narrative engines and performs useful cultural work, Bellamy does not streamline his protagonist’s narration, stopping short of describing how individual words and phrases might look once subjected to factory specifications. The result, I argue, is a tension between narrative efficiency and semantic

proximity that keeps the novel tethered to nineteenth-century poetics. Ultimately, Bellamy uses this tension to emphasize the wasteful attitudes of the *fin de siècle* and to illustrate the difficulties the people of the nineteenth century will face as they develop a culture—and a literature—that embodies the promises of the machine.

*Yankee* exhibits a similar tension, though it grapples more directly than *Looking Backward* with semantic efficiency. Hank Morgan makes linguistic management the lynchpin of industrial reform in Camelot. Not only does he rationalize Arthurian work, but he disciplines their speaking and writing, hoping well-managed mouths will help Camelot to internalize machine productivity. These programs succeed, too, for even the most garrulous Arthurians learn to speak and act economically. Here, *Yankee* realizes the efficiency toward which Bellamy gestures. By streamlining the verbal productions of its characters, the book illustrates how mechanizing language might optimize labor and, in turn, society. Perhaps Twain's experiences with typesetting—particularly with the Paige compositor, a press that promised to reproduce words at superhuman rates—gave him the conceptual tools he needed to translate industrial efficiency into artistic practice. Yet, if printing technologies helped Twain to devise a poetics of efficiency, they made him less confident than Bellamy that people, writers especially, could be efficient. *Yankee* emblemizes this ambivalence, since work and words alike chafe under the policies that Morgan promotes. Not only are the novel's characters incapable of sustaining Yankee productivity, but Morgan's linguistic management proves more destructive than corrective. The Boss even electrocutes 25,000 knights at the end of the novel to hear them utter a single, completely efficient groan. Thus, while the novel explores ways to optimize verbal work, it does not commit to efficiency as a literary ideal.

In this sense, *Looking Backward* and *Connecticut Yankee* both stop short of the literary efficiencies featured more confidently in Ezra Pound's Vorticism and in the works of "gear-and-girder" modernism, during which Ernest Hemingway, William Carlos Williams, and John Dos Passos treated literature as "designed assemblies of component parts" (Tichi 16). Nevertheless, what appear to be aesthetic shortcomings are complicated aesthetic strategies that register Bellamy's and Twain's abounding excitement and dread about the place of language in the factory-managed life. Bellamy upholds literature as a key site of management in utopia, but his novel strategically chains readers to the wasteful, long-winded poetics of the nineteenth century instead of ushering language into modernity. Twain, on the other hand, produces something like the literary efficiency of modernism but cannot believe in its promise. Together, however, *Looking Backward* and *Connecticut Yankee* show that the word is capable of representing efficiency's promises, even if a mechanical literature seems as elusive as utopia itself.

Bellamy's vision of utopia firmly rests on the ideal of machine efficiency. The primary goal of *Looking Backward* is to demonstrate that America can eliminate the wastes of the labor problem by redesigning the nation's sputtering economy, a process the novel figures in terms of engine overhaul. *Looking Backward* insists that the "unscientific manner in which [America] went to work" in the 1880s instigated the "mad wasting of human labor" that left the country in "want" and "squalor" (336). Not only did industrialists—"soulless machines incapable of any motive but insatiable greed" (57)—drain the energies of wage-earning citizens to secure their profits, but they competed with other capitalists, preventing the nation from forming a "tremendous



engine” in which employees acted in “perfect concert . . . under one control” (336). But, just as Bellamy argued in his editorials on “Nationalism,” a populist movement that aimed to make all industry public, *Looking Backward* insists that subsuming commerce under federal control would transform America from a “bungling and misconstructured” machine that “grinds up the bodies and souls of those who work in it, and turns out poverty, prostitution, insanity, and suicide as its finished products,” to a “scientifically constructed” mechanism assembled “with an equal view to the comfort of the workers and the increase of the product” (“Talks” 265).

Servicing America’s economic hardware is easy enough, the novel imagines. Capitalism needs only to stay its course, making it possible for the government to assume management of naturally occurring monopolies. The real challenge is recalibrating the “soulless machines” who mismanage American labor—that is, convincing factory managers, entrepreneurs, and aristocrats that they squandered the energy of the working class powering their own economic engines instead of producing “warmth” by the “combustion” of their own labor (*Looking* 10). Julian West’s conversion from wasteful leisure to utopian productivity demonstrates that such a change is possible. But the way West overhauls his character also reveals much about Bellamy’s thinking concerning the connections between machinery and literature, for *Looking Backward* ties the aristocrat’s transformation to the fate of the word in the age of efficiency.

This claim seems bold considering that scholars call West a mere “registering apparatus” for the dogma of Dr. Leete; Jean Pfaelzer argues, for instance, that “the plot of *Looking Backward* is not a function of Julian’s heroic deeds” because he simply “learns

to tell the difference between good and evil” (*Utopian* 38).<sup>3</sup> West is often a receptacle for utopian wisdom, but his role in *Looking Backward* is more dynamic than scholars presume. More than a mere reflective surface, Julian is a burgeoning writer, and *Looking Backward* documents his maturation into a historian whose literary labors contribute to the enduring efficiency of utopia. Writing to twentieth-century readers, West recalls that he lived idly in nineteenth-century Boston until a mesmeric trance immobilized him in his basement for 113 years. On shaking off the trance, he finds himself in a city modeled after engine efficiency. Boston exhibits incredible urban planning, and not only has America developed wondrous technologies to produce and distribute its goods, but its citizens have abandoned their selfish, competitive impulses for Nationalist cooperation. These changes convince West that he, too, must produce “warmth” by his own “combustion.” He generates that “combustion” by channeling his energy into work that informs Americans about nineteenth-century class struggle: he writes a romance. But before he can write fiction that teaches and delights utopia, West must embrace Nationalist efficiency and find a literary form capable of representing his conversion to it, a feat requiring education in the aesthetics of machinery. *Looking Backward* traces this artistic training as much as West’s moral and economic conversions.

West cannot undertake the quest for aesthetic efficiency in the nineteenth century because he cannot conceive of machine efficiency as a principle for social organization,

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<sup>3</sup> Scholars have often devalued *Looking Backward* on the grounds that it subordinates character development and other artistic concerns to moralism. In the most critical of these studies, John L. Thomas contends that “action and character” in the novel “function chiefly as devices for explicating ethical problems which Bellamy’s village types carry about with them like so many placards” (24). Scholars since the 1980s have done much to dispel this attitude. For instance, Lee Cullen Khanna argues that *Looking Backward* is just as invested in “the fostering of transformation of the self” as it is in didactic criticism (44). But even Khanna claims that “realism and complexity are not pertinent to Bellamy’s purposes, since the aim of his fiction is not ‘fully rounded’ characters” (44). Following critics like Pfaelzer, I argue that Julian West’s “transformation” is more complicated and important than such arguments have suggested.

let alone an ideal to be realized in literary form. His unpreparedness is unsurprising since he distances himself from the worst wastes of the capitalist engine: poverty and class struggle. Unemployment and working-class discontent sometimes draw his attention, he admits. Strikes occurred so frequently that they heralded apocalypse, for the economy oscillated with the cosmic portend of a “comet,” “tending upward and sunward from the aphelion of barbarism . . . only to plunge downward once more to its nether goal in the regions of chaos” (24). Omens of economic collapse even infiltrated his home life: walkouts in the construction industry delayed the assembly of his wedding home, and the “never-ceasing nightly noises” of urban life instigated his debilitating insomnia, keeping him awake for days at a time (30). Yet, if the bachelor believes that cataclysm is imminent, he disavows it instead of confronting it, subscribing to a philosophy that, ironically, “forbade wasting compassion on what was beyond remedy” (15). More telling, West builds a “subterranean room” to shut out the “nightly noises,” the most tangible reminders of urban inefficiency (30). The chamber makes it quiet enough for him to sleep, but, by sealing himself in the “silence of the tomb,” West blocks out the suffering of his compatriots and extinguishes his sense of social responsibility (31). Thus, while the bachelor believes that he is avoiding “wasting compassion,” uselessly expending energy on irresolvable labor troubles, he simply ignores his complicity in America’s socioeconomic inefficiency. His callousness even exacerbates the problem because it dissuades him from abandoning an idle life. The country is indeed an engine with interconnected parts, Bellamy suggests, but because West separates himself from the poor, he refuses to consider how his idleness gums up the works.

Still, if West cannot imagine himself as a broken boiler in a sputtering national engine, his aesthetic sensitivities promise to make him useful in utopia. The aristocrat scrutinizes the wastes of capitalism as would an art critic, judging how well they cohere with the elegant portrait of his leisurely life. This attitude is most apparent in his lamentation for the West family mansion. He refuses to bring Edith there because the manifestations of economic instability in the neighborhood conflict with her elegant aura. Indeed, what West most recalls about Edith is her fashion sense, exquisite taste exemplified by the refined mourning attire she dons for Decoration Day, a well-chosen ensemble that “[sets] off to great advantage the purity of her complexion” (24). Dingy tenement houses, West worries, would not harmonize with that aesthetic and moral “purity.” The brutish sounds of grinding gears from nearby factories would also clash with the “old-fashioned” elegance of the “ancient wooden mansion,” a quiet and quaint relic of preindustrial America (30). To such visual and aural discord it would be impossible to bring home a bride, especially “so dainty a one as Edith Bartlett” (30). Thus, the bachelor devises a tasteful solution to fix what he considers an aesthetic problem: he resolves to build their wedding-home in a richer borough, one in keeping with his fiancée’s gracefulness. Ultimately, West’s rationale for leaving the mansion exhibits as much attention to beauty as his betrothed’s sartorial choices. By weighing the features of his neighborhood against her elegance and “purity of complexion,” West hints that he has discriminating taste, perhaps even the eye of an artist. However, West squanders that aesthetic potential on leisure instead of correcting the wastes of capitalism. If Julian is to fit into utopia, he must learn that America is a socioeconomic engine and that his artistic energies, when diligently applied, can increase its efficiency.

That education begins when West sees how twentieth-century America organizes society around the machine. What impresses him most in his first glimpse of utopia is the clarity of the skyline made possible by the “complete absence of chimneys and their smoke” (56-57). The lack of smog, one of the worst eyesores of the nineteenth century, indicates that engineers have purged the noxious exhaust of coal burning by inventing environmentally friendly heating sources. That they long ago superseded the “crude method of combustion” even hints that utopia has made obsolete the attitude of depending on others’ labor to generate their “warmth without combustion” (57). More important, though, the skyline reveals that the city now looks and functions like a machine. Shabby nineteenth-century structures crammed into “continuous blocks” of unorganized commerce have been replaced by “fine buildings” neatly separated by function into “larger or smaller enclosures” interspersed with “large open squares filled with trees” (52). The layout of the city thus evinces the same planning that goes into the design of utopia’s machines. By centralizing commerce and knocking down superfluous buildings, municipal leaders have streamlined the social engine, ensuring easier transfers of raw materials and goods while making more space usable for housing and recreation. And while factories once crowded nature out of the city, the tree-filled streets suggest that utopian urban planning has worked around and even accentuated the geography of Boston. The view of the Charles River confirms this thought. Now free from pollution and boat-bound commerce, it looks redecorated, like a “blue ribbon” complementing the “green islets” in Boston Harbor (52). The utopians, West realizes, have cultivated an “industrialized garden,” a middle ground between nature and technology that transports the pastoral “out of the wilderness and [relocates] it in the city—a city itself to be

transformed from a lethal chaos into a healthy order” (Segal 95-96).<sup>4</sup> They have not only built better engines but arranged social mechanisms in ways that beautify Boston.

The model of the machine has revolutionized economic administration as much as urban planning, West learns. Rather than letting individual firms manufacture goods without any sense of public demand, the federal government now centralizes production and treats commerce like an engineering problem, calculating what people need and placing appropriate numbers of workers in the corresponding industries. As West discovers at Boston’s central warehouse, managing inputs and outputs in this way optimizes both production and consumption, giving the American economy the efficiency of a well-designed engine—and, as Thomas Peyser observes, the look of the department store, “perfectly systematized, permanently available, unresistingly visible” (43).<sup>5</sup> Because the government has consolidated industry into a network of stores with the same goods, shoppers need only to inspect the samples in the store, write their selections on a card, and deliver that card to a store clerk. Laborsaving technology and coordination take care of the rest. Once an order is placed, a clerk sends it through one of a dozen “pneumatic transmitters . . . each communicating with the corresponding department at

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<sup>4</sup> Segal responds here to Leo Marx’s thinking about the “middle landscape” effected in the pastoral setting. Marx argues that nineteenth-century visions of the pastoral imagine a place that domesticates both technology and nature, trying to create a “middle ground somewhere ‘between,’ yet in a transcendent relation to, the opposing forces of civilization and nature” (23). Marx concludes that the tension between the industrial and agrarian is irresolvable. Segal maintains, on the other hand, that *Looking Backward* indeed imagines an “industrialized garden,” albeit one that departs from Marx’s “agrarian-based yet technologically proficient yeoman republic” (96).

<sup>5</sup> Citing Lew Mumford, who considered it “one of the most vital institutions of the era 1880-1914,” Peyser argues convincingly that Bellamy modelled his utopia after the “department store” (43). For Bellamy, Peyser observes, the department store was a “central expression of modernity,” for it represented “the taming of madness and the advent of the universal homogenous state” facilitated by the globalizing impulses of industrial capitalism (43). While Peyser emphasizes the consumerist underpinnings of the utopian economy in *Looking Backward*, I want here to call attention to the mechanistic imagery that occurs in Bellamy’s descriptions of the central warehouse.

the warehouse,” where another records the order and sends it to yet another who finds the desired prepackaged products and mails them “like lightning” through tubes connected to the home of the customer (113-14). This process saves time and money for consumers, West muses. Selling everything at one store means that customers do not need to rummage through different shops. Governmental control of production and distribution also cuts out the nineteenth-century middleman and the costs he passed onto consumers. More important, though, the chain of clerks at the warehouse shows West that the government has made every citizen “part of a system with a distinct place and function” (186). When each person has a “distinct place” in the American engine, and when technologies like the pneumatic tubes optimize the energy transfer between each “part,” the entire economy produces plenty of everything for everyone at affordable rates and with no wasted capital. Still tethered to nineteenth-century technologies, West can only describe the utopian economy as a “gigantic mill, into the hopper of which goods are being constantly poured by the trainload and shipload, to issue at the other end in packages of pounds and ounces, yards and inches, pints and gallons, corresponding to the infinitely complex personal needs of a half a million people” (189). Yet, by patterning the economy after an efficient engine, utopian legislators have far exceeded the capabilities of the mill; they have created a perpetual motion device, a system that propels its own work and squanders nothing in the process.

None of this efficiency would be possible unless people wanted to be as productive as utopian machines. Much like Frederick Winslow Taylor, who believed employees were inherently lazy, West imagines that indolence is part of human nature. Utopia should have crumbled by now, he muses, because the average worker would “tend

to rest back on his oar, reasoning that it is of no use to make a special effort, since the effort will not increase his income, nor its withholding diminish it” (102-103). Rational planning eliminates sloth, though, Dr. Leete informs him. Now the sole employer, the government tabulates an equal amount of work for each occupation and assign each citizen a particular function in the economy, all but “[applying] the principle of universal military service” to the “labor question” (67). Since “the worker is not a citizen because he works, but works because he is a citizen,” one performs for the rest of society “the best service it is in his power to give” (100). The result is an “industrial army” working with utter control and discipline. As Arthur Lipow points out, West fears that a society premised on the military machine “means the abolition of all democratic public life in which citizens can actively participate” (27). Julian is not wrong, Lipow adds. By adopting the military machine as a model for his imaginary society, Bellamy “stripped Marxism of its revolutionary democratic character and turned it into a kind of technological and organizational fatalism” based on the authoritarian rule of social engineers (84). For Bellamy, however, the idea of an industrial army entailed “the perfection of bureaucratic organization, [the] absence of pecuniary motives, and efficiency,” productivity that redefined the “relationship of the individual to the social organism” (84). People want to participate in an industrial army, Dr. Leete emphasizes to West. That the government has leveled pay incentivizes productivity: all work equally hard to earn the same income. Moreover, while everyone performs a few years of manual labor, one finally chooses his or her profession. “Usefulness is thus enhanced,” Leete explains, because people do what they find most stimulating (133). West admits here that the nineteenth century failed to develop such a “systematic” way to “utilize the



natural aptitudes of men” (144). His age instead squandered energy forcing people to do tasks “for which they were relatively inefficient” (144). Perhaps people are naturally efficient, West learns; they just need a rationally planned economy to nurture their productivity. That accomplished, people would want to be efficient parts of a national machine. They would relish being “part of a system with a distinct place and function,” even if that system necessitated authoritarian administration.

These economic lessons help West to understand social efficiency, but they ultimately fail to initiate him into utopia. Ironically, Dr. Leete’s tutorials alienate West, forcing him to realize that he “never earned a dollar in my life, or did an hour’s work” and that he might be incapable of contributing to America’s productivity (188). Here, aesthetic education becomes essential to West’s conversion. To fit into the managed life, Bellamy suggests, West must change his tastes as much as his politics, embracing the aesthetic possibilities presented by mechanical performance. Indeed, art and architecture prove to be better tutors than Dr. Leete, for they put machine efficiency into cultural practice and convince West, a wealthy man with considerable exposure to literature, to develop an appreciation for managed living. On a walk with Edith Leete—the physician’s daughter and, not coincidentally, the great-granddaughter of Julian’s beloved Edith Bartlett—West observes that utopia’s stunning buildings reflect its passion for utility. Recalling that citizens all earn the same income, the bachelor expects drab blocks of uniformly constructed houses, but the buildings exhibit “great variety in the size and cost” (115). Edith explains that while the government plans the economy, “personal taste” still determines how one will spend his or her money (115). Some prefer fine homes, while others lavish money on fine foods. Nevertheless, all live frugally,

balancing their credits and expenses just as carefully as the American engine regulates its inputs and outputs (115). More often than not, however, people purchase houses that fulfill their needs: “larger houses are usually occupied by larger families,” since more people can contribute to the house’s rent, while “smaller families,” like the Leetes, “find smaller houses more convenient and economical” (115). Thus, as Dr. Leete remarks, the economy is strictly managed yet “elastic enough to give free play to every instinct of human nature which does not aim at dominating others or living on the fruit of others’ labor” (179). Among these instincts, Edith maintains, is the aesthetic sense. People design their own lives; but, invariably, utopian taste lauds economy and functionality, unlike the nineteenth-century proclivity for flash. People of that era too often “kept up establishments and did other things which they could not afford for ostentation, to make people think them richer than they were” (115-16). Utopia’s taste for “convenience” eliminates the nineteenth century’s wasteful obsession with conspicuous consumption.<sup>6</sup>

West marvels not only at twentieth-century art’s functionality but at its refinement and increased accessibility, both made possible by technological advances. West learns shortly after his lesson in the tastefulness of utility that sound engineers have “perfectly adapted acoustically” Boston’s music halls (120). City planners have democratized them, too, using telephone lines to broadcast each performance to anyone willing to pay a paltry price. Wondrous home sound systems then give these performances lifelike clarity. West even mistakes the broadcasted sound for the real thing. When Edith presses a

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<sup>6</sup> While Bellamy does not use the term “conspicuous consumption,” he addresses the phenomenon of purchasing goods to advertise one’s class status, particularly one’s capacity for leisure. In this sense, *Looking Backward* develops an embryonic theory of conspicuous consumption that Thorstein Veblen elaborated and popularized in *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions* (1899). See Veblen 68-101 for a more complete discussion of the term and its place in American culture.

button on her “musical telephone” to play a waltz, West wonders whether “fairies or genii,” rather than machines, have filled her chamber with the “witchery of a summer night” (120). The waltz does more than enchant West, however; it alerts him to the aesthetic possibilities of mechanical and electrical efficiency. Nick Yablon points out that the musical telephone of *Looking Backward*—a technological prospect that was widely discussed during the *fin de siècle*—unites the functional, the aesthetic, and the didactic. By “resisting the entrepreneurial promotion of Bell’s telephone as a ‘practical’ device that would appeal to the businessman’s need to ‘increase efficiency,’” Bellamy reconfigures the machine “for pleasure as well as moral instruction” (637).<sup>7</sup> Indeed, the broadcasted waltz demonstrates that telecommunication can subject artistic performance to machine standards. By transmitting a single act of labor to countless consumers, city planners have effectively “carried the idea of laborsaving by cooperation into . . . music service as into everything else,” using efficient technologies to save as much time, effort, and capital as possible (120). This lesson in efficiency is not lost on West, even if he struggles to act productively in utopia. He ultimately uses the Leetes’ sound system to regulate his mental energies, learning that “by a clockwork combination, a person could arrange to be awakened at any hour by music” (147). The alarm, he learns, could also be adjusted to help him fall asleep. The Leetes’ wondrous sound system thus helps West to manage his insomnia, a necessary step in his path to utopian productivity.

But architecture and music simply signal to West efficiency’s aesthetic possibilities; literature collects these impressions in a way that West can put into practice.

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<sup>7</sup> In this excerpt, Yablon cites Fischer 69 and 66. I should also note that I am reading Yablon against the grain here. While I appeal to Yablon to emphasize the aesthetic possibilities represented to Julian West by the musical telephone, his study also calls attention to the anxieties built into Bellamy’s rendering of the device. See Yablon 636-38 for a more detailed account of that ambivalence.

Here West's lessons move to the writer's study, and Bellamy commences his call for a poetics of efficiency. Part of Bellamy's vision is a revamped literary marketplace that reflects—and adds to—the efficiency of utopia. The nineteenth-century word-market, West recalls, consisted of idle stories written by work-shy men. Because it took the “deep pockets of our private capitalists” to print books and newspapers, writing was primarily a diversion for the leisure-class (174). But even with all that capital, writing was hardly a safe bet. Production costs often “exhausted” printers “before the returns came in,” bankrupting writers and publishers alike while punctuating the progress of the economy at large (174). Nationalizing the press has curbed these intellectual and economic wastes, however. In utopia, the government publishes all the work submitted to it on the condition that an author defrays the costs of leaving the industrial army and printing a first edition, both of which “can be saved out of a year's credit by the practice of economy and some sacrifices” (171). The writer then earns a stipend according to how well the book sells. Projects that flop require a writer to return to industrial service; successful books earn the writer enough income to pay off the production of the first edition and then take on further artistic labor, if he or she so chooses. The efficiency of this system appeals immensely to West—and to Bellamy. By subjecting books to rational planning, utopia eliminates the contingencies of artistic labor. Requiring writers to save their money for publication ensures that they are not ruined and that the economy does not suffer if their projects should fail. Utopia thus turns writing into reliable energy that can only propel the economy forward. The systematic management of literature is nevertheless flexible enough to give burgeoning writers the time and space they need to try their new, creative labors. Since everyone works the same amount and earns the same

income, each has equal opportunity to be an author, if only temporarily. The twentieth century not only rationalizes literary production but allows budding authors to channel their aesthetic energies into intellectual labor that enlightens utopia.

Optimizing the profession of writing, Bellamy suggests, transforms utopia's literary aesthetics, for scientific management snuffs out the idle plots of the nineteenth century. The "moral and material evolution" facilitated by the machine not only ushers in an unprecedented "era of mechanical invention, scientific discovery . . . and literary productiveness," enabling more stories to be written by more people, but it fosters better literature (170). While citizens may temporarily leave their labors to undertake literary projects, "no [able-bodied] man nowadays can evade his share of work and live on the toils of others, whether he calls himself by the fine name of student or confesses to being simply lazy" (178-79). Thus, authors only keep writing if they continue to satisfy public demand, a difficult task indeed considering that the "universally high level of education" gives everyone taste enough to judge "the real merit of [literary] work" (172). The stories that meet these strict standards, Bellamy suggests, still delight readers but also render "higher service" to society, enacting the values of economy and efficiency that drive utopia (173). Indeed, Dr. Leete mentions, America's best writers use their craft to go beyond the "good sense and devotion to duty" of even the President (173). The stories of utopia no longer feature the social wastes that dominated nineteenth-century writing. Instead, they embody Nationalist efficiency in literary form, doing "higher service" that expands utopians' thinking about social cooperation.

Bellamy comes closest to illustrating efficient literary form in his description of the hypothetical novel *Penthesilia*, the romance that inspires West to write his way into

utopia. Neither Bellamy nor his protagonist gives specific details about the book, but its title tellingly alludes to a story of attraction cut down by war and ethnic tension. In Greek mythology, Penthesilea was an Amazon queen who fought for Priam during the Trojan War. Achilles, famous for his unrelenting wrath, slew her but then was so taken by her beauty that he fell in love with her.<sup>8</sup> Given his experience with nineteenth-century plots about the “contrasts of wealth and poverty, education and ignorance, [and] coarseness and refinement,” and considering the violence of the story to which *Penthesilia* alludes, West expects the twentieth-century novel to discuss thwarted desire (180). The book does depict “love galore,” he learns, but, set in twentieth-century America, it lacks any sense of conflict. *Penthesilia* even excises the “motives drawn from social pride and ambition” typical to romances, leaving only the unfolding of “love unfettered by artificial barriers created by differences of station or possessions, owning no other law but that of the heart” (180). While West likes the story, “what was left out of the book” impresses him more than the tale itself (179). Writing a romance with no social estrangement, he muses, is inexplicable, what “story writers in my day would have deemed the making of bricks without straw” (179). However, *Penthesilia* is less a literary miracle than efficiency put into artistic practice, a single verbal picture that reflects utopia’s many efforts to reduce wasted energy in the social engine. The masterpiece streamlines the conventions of the nineteenth-century romance, for it purges from its plot any mention of economic struggle or class consciousness, the chief

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<sup>8</sup> The primary source for this myth is the Latin poet Sextus Propertius. In *Elegies XI*, he writes: “The Mæotian Penthesilea, in times gone by, boldly dared to fight with arrows, on horseback, against the Grecian crews; after her golden helmet was removed and her face was seen, her beauty overcame her conqueror” (90). While Bellamy left no direct evidence of reading Propertius’s *Elegies*, the story of Penthesilea—probably because of its connection to the legend of Achilles—was commonly known and frequently cited in the nineteenth century. Thus, it is likely that *Looking Backward* is playing off of the theme of fatal attraction central to Penthesilea’s myth.

manifestations of social inefficiency. The novel dispels the tribulations of first-person narration, too, replacing alienated heroes and heroines with protagonists who lack “sordid anxieties of any sort for one’s self or others” (180). In this sense, the writers of the twentieth century have upgraded the mechanics of fiction. They no longer depend on wasteful, obsolete literary devices, the “straw” that constituted the “bricks” of preindustrial storytelling. Rather, they have built literary engines that do the work of utopian ideology within forms that embody the efficiency of machine-made America.

But if *Looking Backward* suggests that literature can embody efficiency, its poetics look much different than the semantic economies of gear-and-girder modernism. As Tichi puts it, neither *Penthesilia* nor *Looking Backward* indicates that individual sentences can be streamlined to represent utopia’s “abhorrence of waste” (75). Stylistically, the hypothetical romance reads more like a Dickensian novel than a masterpiece of gear-and-girder modernism. The machine-minded modernists imagined that stories should use electric prose that distills thought to its quickest, most vital expression. For instance, in “Vortex,” the essay that best articulates the modernist vision of literary efficiency, Ezra Pound describes efficient art as “the picture that means a hundred poems, the music that means a hundred pictures, the most highly energized statement, the statement that has not yet SPENT itself in expression, but which is the most capable of expressing” (153). West is silent about whether *Penthesilia* exhibits a similar sense of verbal compression, a reduction of “a hundred poems” to a single “picture” imbued with kinetic potential. The book is even time-consuming, a feature that calls its stylistic efficiency into question: West sits up with the narrative from bedtime “till it grew gray in the east . . . not [laying] it down till I had finished it” (179). Thus, if

*Penthesilia* frames West's "many separate impressions" of utopia into a single "picture" of Nationalist efficiency, it does not telegraph that information in a style that reproduces the speed of the machine (180). Instead, *Looking Backward* associates literary efficiency with the correction of narrative devices that reinforce inefficient ideologies, a conviction that instigates an apparent conflict between the novel's content and style.

Several factors might explain why *Penthesilia* and thus *Looking Backward* preserve nineteenth-century aesthetics rather than imagining modernist literary efficiency. Perhaps this strategy is best attributed to the contradictions built into Bellamy's artistic vision. Pfaelzer demonstrates that Bellamy sought, "first, to reveal that economic and political configurations of industrialism prefigured a Nationalist future; and, second, to reveal that a socialist impulse lurked in the heart of Gilded Age individualism" ("Immanence" 51). To accomplish these goals, Bellamy brilliantly bends the form of the utopian romance. *Looking Backward* demonstrates that America should not abandon industrialization to effect utopia; the logic of the machine actually needs to be extended. By subverting our negative expectations about industrialism, Pfaelzer concludes, the novel "[negates] the central axiom" of the utopian form: "change itself" (53). As far as efficiency goes, if Bellamy wanted to show that society need not fundamentally change to bring about utopia, then perhaps he wanted to emphasize the continuity between the literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries rather than developing a new aesthetic that would undermine his other novelistic goals.

Accordingly, he would resist describing the exact process by which nineteenth-century America transformed into a national dynamo. Another possibility, one that suggests even more strategy on Bellamy's part, is that he refuses to illustrate linguistic efficiency in



order to underscore his protagonist's ties to the wastefulness of the Gilded Age. That West can only describe the lack of societal waste in *Penthesilia* indicates that he still struggles to understand Nationalist efficiency and thus the poetics generated by it. In either case, it is clear that *Penthesilia* and *Looking Backward* conceive of novelistic efficiency not as the quickest artistic statement, as Pound imagines it, but as the removal of narrative elements that embody the wasteful attitudes of capitalist society: tensions between the rich and impoverished, the alienation of protagonists, and the like.

The tension between literary efficiency and semantic prolixity in *Looking Backward* does not stop Bellamy from playing out his protagonist's conversion to productivity, however. *Penthesilia* teaches West that he must discipline his idle attitudes and that his initiation into utopia is inextricably tied to the way he reads society. Indeed, while the bachelor still struggles to explain artistic efficiency, he begins to lead a more managed life by becoming a literary critic who abhors words that glorify squandered energy. When a dream transports him back to the nineteenth century, the burgeoning utopian finds himself re-reading and condemning his era's cultural wastes. The morning paper, once a pleasant diversion, now disgusts him with headlines about social inefficiency, like Londoners rioting to "demand work," strikes in Belgium, the "misappropriation" of trusts in New York, and speculators' "engineering of a great wheat corner" in Chicago (323). Accounts of destitution, overcrowding in sanitariums, and suicide fill out the features column, too. These wastes make no little impression on West, but the inefficiencies of his local bank push his distaste for socially unproductive stories even further. Watching an "army" of tellers who lack the discipline of utopia's industrial army, West finds the bank's director extoling his "wonderful piece" of economic

“mechanism” (332). The executive even considers his bank an artistic triumph: “It’s a poem, sir,” that represents the “endless flux and reflux” of America’s “life blood,” money (333). Tellingly, the bank manager appreciates the volatility of his “little conceit” (333). He extols the “flux and reflux” of capitalism, a feature, Bellamy suggests, that reflects the uneven coursing of “life blood” through the unpredictable human body rather than the stability of the utopian machine. Prior to living in the twentieth century, West would have shared the enthusiasm of the bank manager. Now, however, he condemns the waste-riddled “conceit” of capitalist exchange and deems the bank an “imperfect device to remedy an unnecessary defect” (334). If utopia has not made Julian an expert in semantic efficiency, it has at least improved his tastes, giving him discernment enough to appreciate the managerial ethos. The socially productive “picture” in *Penthesilia* surely outdoes the erratic “poem” of *fin-de-siècle* finance, and once West has read the literature of utopia, he can recognize the economic and artistic problems of the nineteenth century.

By channeling his energy into productive literary criticism, West learns to put his once- idle words to work in service to Nationalist efficiency. Disgusted with the “poem” of capitalism and haunted by the impoverished people he meets on his walk to Edith Bartlett’s house, West invents a rhetoric of efficiency to teach the Bartletts and his other rich friends about the evils of class stratification. In the middle of a sumptuous meal, he awakens to the “superfluity” of the china and the ladies’ dinner attire; he then scolds them, claiming that the money they “wasted would, otherwise bestowed, relieve much bitter suffering” (341). Recalling Dr. Leete’s lessons on utopian economy, however, Julian adds that “the waste of all the rich, were it saved, would go but a little way to cure the poverty of the world” because “four-fifths of the labor of men was utterly wasted by

the mutual warfare, the lack of organization and concert among the workers” (341).

Here, West finally sees the necessity of treating America like an engine with interrelated parts. His fellow diners, on the other hand, struggle as much as he did in utopia to understand this notion: “Silence followed my words,” West recalls (341). To help them fathom their indolent attitudes, West waxes literary, relating a parable that condemns unregulated capitalism:

The labor of men, I explained, was the fertilizing stream which alone rendered the earth habitable. It was but a scanty stream at best, and its use required to be regulated by a system which expended every drop to the best advantage, if the world were to be supported in abundance. But how far from any system was the actual practice! Every man wasted the precious fluid as he wished, animated only by the equal motives of saving his own crop and spoiling his neighbor’s, that his might sell better. [...] In such a land, though a few by strength or cunning might win the means of luxury, the lot of the great mass must be poverty, and of the weak and ignorant bitter want and perennial famine. Let but the famine-stricken nation assume the function it had neglected, and regulate for the common good the course of the life-giving stream, and the earth would bloom like one garden, and none of its children lack any good thing. (342-43)

As in his fraught account of *Penthesilia*, West’s parable highlights an important tension between the desire to produce efficient literature and the inability to do it. The extended metaphor does not exhibit the lightning-fast semantic economies that Pound extolled in “Vortex.” Nevertheless, the tale demonstrates how completely West has internalized his utopian training and how skillfully he can recapitulate it to others. That the “fertilizing stream” in his tale needs a “system” to manage “every drop to the best advantage”—a phrase that prefigures Frederick Winslow Taylor’s rhetoric of the “one best way”—indicates his newfound appreciation for the scarcity of resources and the necessity of centralized economic planning. The “one garden” in “bloom” also suggests that he recognizes the aesthetic consequences of social efficiency: a nation that regulates the

“fertilizing stream” of its labor force will cultivate a beautiful “industrialized garden” like the one West saw in his first glimpse of the twentieth century. Here, West finally unites efficiency and aesthetics, and producing the parable ultimately makes him a careful enough critic of waste to do valuable ideological work in utopia. The Bartlett family unsurprisingly puts down his tale, calling him a fanatic and threatening to cast him out of their house—at least until the nightmare ends and West awakens back in the twentieth century. Nevertheless, the parable makes it clear that West’s aesthetic training is complete and that he is prepared to become a utopian citizen.

When West’s education is complete, he can effectively write his way into utopia. The Bartletts’ refusal to consider Nationalism suggests that the nineteenth century is unprepared for the managed life because wealthy people will not abandon their selfish, indolent attitudes. Regardless of whether the parable of the “fertilizing stream” appeals to the rich, however, West’s speech adequately prepares him for the “most efficient service” he could render in the twentieth century: telling the story of waste in *fin-de-siècle* America (188). After all, Dr. Leete points out, Julian is “easily the master of all [utopia’s] historians” on nineteenth-century responses to industrial capitalism (188). Leete thus arranges a lectureship for his pupil at Shawmut College. West, in turn, composes *Looking Backward*, a story that documents the sputtering of America’s socioeconomic engine and his conversion from selfish indolence to Nationalist efficiency. Indeed, while West worried early in the novel that he would be an extraneous part of a “system” with conceivably “no way to get in, except to be born in,” writing gives him a distinctive place and function in the American engine (186). By penning a romance that condemns social inefficiency, West contributes to utopian efficiency.

But if West finally embraces the idea of an American engine, the narrative he produces does not bear a machine aesthetic. He does discipline his words so that they perform useful cultural work. Rather than writing a “poem” glorifying the wastes of capitalist exchange, West renders his once-wasteful attitudes in a novel to “assist persons who, while desiring to gain a more definite idea of the social contrasts between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, are daunted by the formal aspect of the histories which treat the subject” (6). For these readers, presumably college students, who represent the next generation of laboring utopians, he couches the details of nineteenth-century labor struggle in a romance to “alleviate the instructive quality of the book” (6). The tale he produces is thus as informative—and useful—as it is entertaining. However, it does not describe how words and phrases might be rationalized to accord with machine efficiency. More important, given the definition of literary efficiency imagined in *Penthesilia*, West’s narrative fails to achieve the aesthetic productivity of utopia’s best books. While those hypothetical novels remove all hints of class struggle, streamlining the formal conventions of nineteenth-century fiction, *Looking Backward* depends on those very “contrasts of wealth and poverty, education and ignorance, coarseness and refinement.” In this sense, Pfaelzer points out, West can only take on a “quest for right thinking” because he is a “familiar figure from romance: a lonely traveler in a strange land” who must acknowledge his moral bankruptcy and his lack of taste in order to end his estrangement from society (*Utopia* 29). This nineteenth-century sense of alienation and reconciliation ultimately concludes the novel. On waking from his nightmare, West can finally write his book, but a “pang of shame, remorse, and wondering self-reproach” still afflicts him, reminding him that he “had been a man of that former time” when waste

ran rampant in the streets of Boston (345). Edith Leete—the new and improved version of the nineteenth-century Edith Bartlett—must absolve him of his former wastes. She proves to be “a judge so merciful” that West can bear to live with his mistakes (346). But, just as West remains a “man of that former time,” his story stays tied to *fin-de-siècle* form and style. The poetics of *Looking Backward* thus foreground the difficulties of eradicating nineteenth-century waste and of realizing utopian efficiency, both in literature and in culture at large. West’s conversion nevertheless insists on the necessity of trying. Moreover, his story makes literature a focal point in effecting a managed life. Not only should novels be efficiently produced, such that they fit into a planned economy, but they should formally reflect the beauty of a machine-made society. West simply cannot—and Bellamy will not—imagine how linguistic management looks on the printed page. Accomplishing that feat would take Yankee ingenuity.

As Bellamy reveled in the popularity of his tale—it sold immensely upon its publication in 1888—Mark Twain struggled to conclude his own utopian ruminations.<sup>9</sup> *Connecticut Yankee* began in 1884 as a burlesque of Thomas Mallory’s *Morte d’Arthur*, particularly of courtly behavior and the awkwardness of armor. Only after several years of exhausting intellectual labor would Twain transform his spoof into the *fin-de-siècle*’s most thoughtful reflection on the utopian enthusiasm surrounding mechanical performance. As Jennifer L. Lieberman observes, critics have traditionally reduced the novel to a “dark fantasy of machinery run amok” (63), focusing on the ways it “reflects

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<sup>9</sup> See Kasson 192 for a discussion of *Looking Backward*’s success as well as a brief description of Twain’s response to reading it in November of 1889, just five months after he published *Yankee*.

the technological anxiety of its cultural moment” (72, note 1).<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, Lieberman writes, the book takes up progressive attitudes toward technology (63). Moreover, I add, the years Twain wrestled with the book and with technology would ultimately produce a vision of literary efficiency more complete, complicated, and prescient than even Bellamy’s. Aside from its typically Twainian humor and skepticism, what distinguishes *Yankee*’s treatment of efficiency from that of *Looking Backward* is its achievement of a mechanical poetics, stylistic choices that show how language could be optimized and how literary aesthetics might be propelled into modernity.

*Connecticut Yankee* enacts and then deconstructs an aesthetic of efficiency.

When a bar-fight head wound sends Hank Morgan from nineteenth-century Hartford to medieval Camelot, he spots problematic inefficiencies in everything from the time knights spend donning armor to the costliness of crafting coins for the treasury of Arthur. To curb such wastes, Morgan designs laborsaving machinery and becomes boss—Sir Boss—of Camelot. Morgan goes further than most managers, however, because he regulates the Arthurians’ activities outside the workplace, especially their comically inefficient speech. He reinvents telegraphs and telephones, and he teaches the Arthurians to rationalize their linguistic production, hoping ultimately to initiate an ideology of productivity. These measures succeed, too, for even the most garrulous characters learn to speak and act economically. Yet these policies so strongly privilege productivity that they threaten to extinguish communication. The Yankee also takes rational planning and

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<sup>10</sup> Lieberman cites Camfield 163, Cox 89-102, Marx 340-41, and Seltzer 7-10 as examples of this trend, though we should add Smith 105-108 and Kasson 202. I should also note Lieberman’s argument that these studies overemphasize *Yankee*’s mechanical figures at the expense of its electrical imagery, particularly by discussing Twain’s vexed relationship with the Paige compositor. My argument takes this observation into account. While I, like earlier critics, focus on the mechanical logic of *Yankee* and Twain’s engagement with the compositor, I aim to discuss electricity and energy as much as Yankee machinery.

linguistic efficiency to illogical extremes at the end of the novel. In this sense, Morgan's management achieves a kind of efficiency, streamlining his subjects' language and, in some cases, realizing the power of the individual word. Through these successes, Twain develops the efficient, telegraphic poetics that Bellamy only imagines in *Looking Backward*. But because Twain could not, like Bellamy, commit to the promises of efficiency, he dissolves his own poetics, plunging his novel into a world of linguistic efficiency undercut by humanitarian waste. In the end, *Connecticut Yankee* applauds the productivity of machinery but casts doubt on whether people and literature could or should reliably reproduce that efficiency.

Perhaps Twain's lifelong fascination with printing technology—experience that Bellamy did not have—illuminates *Connecticut Yankee*'s success with aesthetic efficiency. Bruce Michelson observes that Twain apprenticed with several publishers during his youth, including his brother, Orion, whose newspaper business had “nothing more modern to work with than two serviceable handpresses and no direct or reliable access to the electronically transmitted ‘intelligence’ that filled the St. Louis papers” via telegraph communiqués (21). Because these apprenticeships required him to set type and print each sheet manually, Twain developed a unique, “literally hands on” relationship to the word (21). As a result, he appreciated more than most writers of his period the physical and mechanical labor that went into literary production.

Twain also became uncommonly sensitive to how printing technologies shaped American life and letters, particularly when automated presses revolutionized the publication process during the 1880s, bringing increased efficiency to literary labor. The Paige compositor, the typesetting machine into which Twain sank \$300,000, appealed to



him the most because it signaled the utopian possibility of optimizing linguistic production. Unlike its more successful competitor, the Linotype, the Paige compositor used a mechanical arm to imitate the work of a human typesetter, making the device seem, as Twain once reported, “as elaborate and complex as that machine which it ranks *next* to, by every right—Man” (*Letters* 516). But unlike indolent workers, this compositor purported to space and justify type “*automatically—instantly—perfectly*” (506). Its inventor simply needed to “work the stiffness out of her joints and have her performing as smoothly and softly as human muscles” (507). That accomplished, Michelson adds, Twain believed the machine would be the “ultimate employee, obedient, reliable, tireless, deathless,” for it purported to “replicate the functions of a human typesetter,” but much faster and without the threat of fatigue (12-13). Thus, the machine promised to boost book production and save Twain from the “blundering and recalcitrance of human hirelings” (13). The gadget virtually promoted its operator to the ranks of management. The machinist, Twain wrote, needed only to “strike the keys and set type” for the compliant compositor, “as nicely adjusted and as accurate as a watch,” to execute its assignments with utter efficiency (*Letters* 516).

Not only did the typesetting machine promise to streamline book printing, but it convinced Twain that the work of the wordsmith could be optimized as well. Twain understood that the compositor just reproduced already written words; the writer, on the other hand, undertook the more intensive labor of creating fiction, a task inevitably prone to fits of productivity and idleness. Yet, as James M. Cox explains, the machine’s prodigious output raised for Twain the possibility an “automatic writer capable of working tirelessly with speed and precision” (397). Paige’s mechanical hand indicated

that literary production could be rationalized during its composition or dissemination. Writers simply needed to emulate the flawless work of an indefatigable machine, taking pains to ensure their intellectual inputs translated to useful literary output. Twain grappled with whether or not writers could put a mechanical imperative into practice. Cox reminds us that Twain fancied himself a “machine-driven writer” during the final stages of *Yankee*’s composition, for he subjected his writing to a “frustrating regimen of uncertainty” to finish the book by the time Paige readied his compositor for the sales floor (398). But Twain did not stop at applying the symbol of mechanical performance to artistic effort. The ideology of managed mouths that Hank Morgan promotes in *Connecticut Yankee* demonstrates that Twain searched for aesthetics that represented the efficiency of automated printing. If engineers could redesign factory equipment to realize more work, Twain reasoned, then linguistic engineers—like Morgan or even himself—could optimize the evocative energies of individual words or streamline stories with telegraphic prose that replicated the speedy work of mechanical hands. Ultimately, as *Yankee*’s preoccupation with writing and printing evinces, Twain was captivated by the possibility of literary productivity.

But if Twain considered the merit of managing words, he also had nightmares about literary waste and grave doubts about whether people could write as efficiently as automated printing presses. That Twain struggled to finish *Yankee* is unsurprising considering his trouble ending other works; but, as Henry Nash Smith points out, this novel particularly “assailed” him with “fears that his creative powers were exhausted” (59). The purported productivity of the typesetting machine likely exacerbated these fears. Twain may have imagined himself a “machine-driven writer,” but his inability to

systematize the writing process shook his faith in people's capacity for efficiency. Moreover, setbacks with the construction and the marketing of the Paige compositor compounded his literary inefficiencies. Cox recalls that the device was as prone to breakdown as Twain himself and that Hank Morgan met his end only after "seasons of supreme hope punctuated by periods of depression or anxious alarm about the mechanical marvel" (398). Thus, while the typesetting machine prompted Twain to reflect on literary efficiency, it also troubled that ideal for him. The resulting ambivalence punctuated *Yankee* with "supreme hope" in and "anxious alarm" about Morgan's efficiency measures (398). Indeed, the novel vacillates between industrial promotion and critique as often as Twain wavered about the compositor. This fraught engagement explains why Morgan's utopian vision and Twain's efficient poetics both collapse at the end of the novel: Twain could not commit to the ideal of efficiency as wholeheartedly as his protagonist, for at least at this stage of his career, Twain could not take up Bellamy's conviction that people could be as productive as machines.

Twain nevertheless experiments with machine-made poetics in *Yankee*. His investment in efficiency manifests in his Yankee protagonist's attention to work and waste. To correct the problems he sees in Camelot, the Boss treats every form of human activity like labor, energy that can be studied and optimized. In an especially notorious scene, Morgan goes so far as to rationalize prayer. He meets in the Valley of Holiness an ascetic who prays not by speaking but by "bowing his body ceaselessly and rapidly almost to his feet" (213). The bowing irks Morgan because it is buffoonish and ostentatious rather than sacrosanct. The silly prostrations do little in the way of divine entreaty; rather, they bring crowds of adoring, superstitious spectators to the ascetic's

pillar. In this sense, the bowing parodies the vapidness of Catholic worship, suggesting that the Church and its practitioners have emptied their rituals of sincere religious sentiment. The ascetic thus helps Twain to characterize Catholic Europe as a “pre-modern’ world of universal tyranny” built upon “ignorance, fear, and loathing” (Fulton 23).<sup>11</sup> Yet, if Morgan detests the feigned religiosity of the bowing, and if Twain enjoys lampooning it, both are more interested in its lack of utility. It is neither socially nor spiritually productive, Morgan reasons; it is inefficient. Its “pedal-movement,” on the other hand, generates “one of the most useful motions in mechanics,” and because there is “no use to waste” the energy when one might get “five good years’ service” out of that untapped “motive power,” Morgan reasons, one ought to manage the ritual (214). Here, the Yankee anticipates the Taylorist efficiency experts of the twentieth century, for he concentrates on the mechanics of the bowing instead of its potential for symbolism. He conducts a time-motion experiment to calculate the holy man’s potential for labor productivity: that the hermit completes 1244 revolutions for every 24 minutes and 46 seconds proves that his prayer has kinetic potential; management and prostheses must simply redirect his currently misallocated energies, a simple fix achieved by running cords between his body and a sturdy sewing machine. By reducing the ascetic to “motive power” and transforming him into a motor, the proto-Taylorist Morgan suggests that even the work of everyday living is susceptible to scientific assessment. The Arthurians are

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<sup>11</sup> Twain’s distrust of Catholicism and of organized religion more generally is well documented. See Fulton 23-33 for an especially careful treatment of Twain’s complex engagement with theology. Fulton convincingly argues that Twain depended on the “formal genres of traditional religious belief” to “provide a solid structural framework” for his critiques (28). In many cases, Twain did not detest catechetical form as such but rather its perversions. As far as Catholicism, however, *Yankee* evinces that Twain “held on to some of the more pernicious of his early bigotries” (24).

ultimately faulty mechanisms that need Yankee rational planning to translate their unfocused energies into productive labor.

Importantly, the parody in this episode extends not only to the useless religiosity of the ascetic but to the exploitative impulses of Morgan's interest in efficiency. As critics have observed, Twain's humor often serves to distance him from the more sinister aspects of Yankee labor theory.<sup>12</sup> This strategy is especially apparent in the case of the ascetic, where Yankee supervision proves as abusive as it is ergonomically corrective, and where Twain works hard to underscore its problematic practices. Morgan gets so engrossed in bodily mechanics that he loses sight of the ascetic's deteriorating health. When the human dynamo starts hopping on one leg to say his prayers, the Yankee refuses to fix up his "motive power." He expects the holy man to work as efficiently as the sewing machine to which he is tied, so he lets the hermit exhaust himself to keep shirt production steady. Moreover, the silence of the ascetic guarantees no protest against exploitation. As a result, the work keeps coming—even on Sundays, Morgan laughs—and only when the saint dies does he get a break. After all, Morgan declares with the wit of a stand-up comic and the callousness of a corporate mogul, "he had earned it" with his unremitting toil (214). When the ascetic dies, Morgan still dwells on his productivity rather than his humanity, recalling how the bowing stitched "eighteen thousand first-rate shirts" that "cost me nothing but just the mere trifle for the materials" (214). This aloof reckoning of inputs and outputs casts suspicion on the Boss's mission to optimize Arthurian labor and "prepare the way gradually for a better order of things" (83).

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<sup>12</sup> Henry Nash Smith contends that while Twain increasingly identified with his Yankee protagonist as he revised the novel, with Morgan in some cases becoming a "thin disguise for the author" (54), Twain was always "perceptibly ironic about the Yankee's brash proposal to put the kingdom on a business basis" (50).

Moreover, as Henry Nash Smith points out, the fact that Morgan so frequently vacillates between efficiency-minded humanitarianism and industrial despotism demonstrates that there was a “conflict in Twain’s mind between a conscious endorsement of progress and a latent revulsion against the non-human imperatives of the machine and all it stood for in the way of discipline and organization” (105). This tension between Yankee philanthropy and managerial abuse emblemized in the mistreatment of the holy man ultimately reflects Twain’s ambivalence about mechanizing human behavior.

Yet, if Twain understood the abusive possibilities of industrial management and tried to detach himself from them in *Connecticut Yankee*, he ultimately shares his protagonist’s thought that management can extend to the production of symbols. Writing about religious burlesque, Joe B. Fulton observes that Twain’s parodies “are always double-voiced” because they do not make religious ritual itself the object of critique (25). In the case of the ascetic, for instance, Twain does not condemn the fact that he prays but rather the insincerity of it. The same logic applies to Twain’s treatment of scientific management in the ascetic episode. Twain indeed uses his Yankee protagonist to parody the violent impulses of the factory ethos, but his “double-voiced” critique ultimately reinforces the necessity of management, particularly of symbolic production. Indeed, what dominates Morgan’s critique of Camelot, and what encodes Twain’s ruminations about machine-made literature, is the thought that wasteful words limit social efficiency. Morgan mistreats his “employee,” Twain suggests, but his anxieties about inefficiency are well-founded because the holy man spends precious “motive power” on foolish gesticulations instead of divine entreaty. The sacred work of symbol-making thus goes to waste while the pilgrims who appear before the hermit’s pillar squander their energy

traveling to lavish praise on his inefficacious prayers. In the end, *Yankee* finds the ascetic's idleness as troubling as Morgan's solution to it, and Twain subjects both to his humor, compelling critical reflection on symbolic inefficiency and labor exploitation.

The people of Arthur's court generate as many wastes as the holy man, though Morgan characterizes their inefficiencies as failures of decidedly linguistic labor. When the gentry assemble to celebrate the Yankee's capture at the beginning of the book, they misallocate their verbal energies on tall tales and bad jokes. Merlin interrupts the festivities to get his "exaggeration-mill a-working," but rather than rousing his audience, he bores the court to sleep by churning out "that same old weary tale that he hath told a thousand times in the same words" (24). That Clarence describes Merlin's mouth as a "mill" reveals much to Morgan. Not only does the wizard use inefficient, preindustrial equipment to grind out his joke—by the time Twain published *Connecticut Yankee*, wind and water mills had largely been supplanted by steam-powered technologies—but his linguistic products are obsolete. Sir Kay's "history-mill" needs an upgrade, too (31). Unlike Merlin, Sir Kay, the knight who captures Morgan, weaves a story that engrosses the court; however, his mouth is inefficient as a "history-mill" because its narrative productions are wholly untrue. Sir Kay embellishes the details of the Yankee's detention, calling Morgan a "tushed and taloned man-devouring ogre," while the gentry, in their naiveté, fail to notice "any discrepancy between these watered statistics" and Morgan's actual appearance (31). Perhaps, then, the tale that Sir Kay mills out is paradoxically efficient in its inefficiency. Critic Cindy Weinstein contends, for instance, that Twain believed word-smithing was subject to different notions of productivity than factory labor, "[celebrating] an ideal of inefficient (or is it now efficient?) narrative that is

digressive and, more important, humorous” (131). But the fact that Sir Kay’s words are “watered” down goods worries Morgan and Twain alike. His “mill” ultimately misspends the raw historical material supplied to it, and, worse, the Arthurians cannot tell they are consuming poorly manufactured stories. Merlin and Sir Kay demonstrate that language, even humor, desperately needs scientific management.

The verbal wastes of Arthur’s court might seem trifling, but for Morgan and Twain they prompt grave anxieties about the unbridled expenditure of energy happening throughout society. Morgan especially dreads the word-mill of the Demoiselle Alisande la Carteloise—whom he rechristens “Sandy” so as to teach her the value of quick communication—because it drowns the Arthurians in linguistic excess. Sandy enters the story a damsel in distress, imploring Sir Boss to save captive princesses from ogres. She amply explains the quest, but her descriptions are useless, giving the Yankee no concrete details about the task he is to undertake. For instance, when he asks where they are heading, Sandy spews forth vague, contradictory directions to the castle in a monstrous—and even unfinished—sentence plagued by verbal vacuity:

[I]t hath no direction from here; by reason that the road lieth not straight, but turneth evermore; wherefore the direction of its place abideth not, but is sometime under the one sky and anon under another, whereso if ye be minded that it is in the east, and wend thitherward, ye shall observe that the way of the road doth yet again turn upon itself by the space of half a circle, and this marvel happing again and yet again and still again, it will grieve you that you had thought by vanities of the mind to thwart and to bring to naught the will of Him that giveth not a castle a direction from a place except it pleaseth him, and if it please Him not, will the rather that even all castles and all directions thereunto vanish out of the earth, leaving the places wherein they tarried desolate and vacant, so warning His creatures that where He will He will, and where He will not He— (92)

Perhaps Sandy’s directions, like Sir Kay’s story, exhibit a kind of efficiency. The gears that grind them out work “as steady as a mill” that “never [gets] out of order” (103). Her



word-mill, in this sense, makes abundant use of the material supplied to it.<sup>13</sup> This mechanical efficiency does not offset the ensuing communicative wastes, however. Morgan jokes that Sandy will “[use] up all the domestic air” to weave other circular descriptions about their quest (103). More pressing is that her glut forces others to waste cognitive resources mining it for pertinent information. Neither intensive labor nor industrial equipment can make sense of Sandy: “It may be that girl had a fact in her somewhere,” Morgan laments, but “I don’t believe you could have sluiced it out with a hydraulic; nor got it with the earlier forms of blasting” (93). Not only does Sandy give an account as convoluted as the road that “hath no direction from here” and “doth yet again turn upon itself by the space of half a circle,” but she overconsumes energy to stoke her linguistic fires. Ultimately, Sandy is not efficient; her verbal excess, a poor imitation of factory efficiency, suggests the necessity of managing mouths.

Weinstein argues that Sandy’s mill is both comical and troubling because it “makes for inefficient storytelling” in which “persons are indistinguishable from one another and events all seem alike” (150). Her linguistic waste is even more problematic, however, because it perpetuates the inactivity of the kingdom. Her circuitous narratives prevent Morgan—or any other knight, for that matter—from fulfilling the courtly duty of questing. Sir Boss cannot return to the social machinery he has erected in Camelot until he has saved the hostage princesses, yet Sandy gives no details about where to go, how to proceed, or what to expect. The few facts that Morgan’s intellectual drill “sluices” out of her even distort the nature of the journey, for Sandy mischaracterizes hogs in a sty as

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<sup>13</sup> Weinstein makes a case for this interpretation, holding up Sandy’s “discursive mills” as an example of linguistic efficiency that begets inefficient storytelling (150-51). My reading of Sandy depends greatly on this observation, but I emphasize the wastefulness of Sandy’s output and, in Morgan’s estimation, the necessity of its management.

women held against their will in an ogre-protected fortress. When her “works” threaten to churn for hours about taking the hogs to their respective homes at the ends of the earth, Morgan finally rebukes her, teasing that “we could distribute these people around the earth in less time than it is going to take you to explain that we can’t” and that they “mustn’t talk now” but “must act” to make up the time and energy her linguistic mills have squandered (193). This outburst reveals more than Yankee irritation at inefficacious storytelling. It suggests that wasteful words inhibit meaningful activity. Morgan does not want more linguistic production from Sandy; he wants fewer words put to better use, utterances that take “less time” than the deeds they propose to perform. Until people like Sandy learn to economize their mouthy mills, Morgan worries, nothing will get done around Camelot. The Arthurians will simply drown in verbal waste that reflects the inefficiencies afflicting the rest of the realm.

However, Twain imagines that the logic of the machine can counteract the twinned problems of verbal excess and social disorder, a conviction that surfaces in Morgan’s programs for linguistic discipline. On seeing Sandy’s inefficiency, Sir Boss takes to managing the mouths of Camelot to help the Arthurians internalize productivity. In the Valley of Holiness, his oral reform couples with industrial technology: Morgan invents a water pump. Perhaps the Yankee introduces the pump for a practical reason—to unplug the valley’s sacred fountain—but his mechanism also does the work of linguistic reeducation, reducing the energy the monks and prioresses waste on prayer. The clergy cannot repair the spring because they have mistaken supplication for productive labor. Belief in the kinetic potential of prayer clouds their reason, Morgan finds, for “no innocent of them all would ever have thought to drop a fish-line into the

well or go down in it to find out what was really the matter” (210). Instead, they use words to move mountains, chanting so fervently that they “exhausted” themselves and resorted to hanging up inefficient prayers “writ upon parchment, sith that no strength [was] left in man to lift up voice” (202). Merlin’s spells, merely rhetorical attempts to fix the fountain, squander as much energy as these prayers. They even parody genuine work, for, like Sandy’s mills, they “[pour] out volumes of speech” and compel him to “[saw] the air with his hands,” though they perform no valuable work (216-17). Morgan’s hand-pump revolutionizes the clergy’s conceptions of work and words, however. It forces the Arthurians to contrast the “exceeding effectiveness of its performance” with the inefficacy of their prayers, compelling them, in turn, to accept physical labor as a valuable substitute for symbolic action (224). With continued use, the pump retrains the monks’ docile bodies as well as their linguistic habits, teaching them that they should minimize the effort spent on praying and relegate speech to activities that do not require actual work. In this sense, Yankee discipline begets extraordinary efficiency, eliminating unnecessary communication, protecting Arthurian bodies from mouthy fatigue, and convincing people to do labor that keeps Camelot’s clerical engine humming.

But while the pump simply reduces the number of occasions for the Arthurians to produce idle words, Morgan’s goal is to optimize all social interaction by streamlining language, a goal realized by his secret telegraph and telephone lines. These networks unite distant parts of the realm, allowing information to travel more quickly than by messenger. They even spatially represent Morgan’s productivity policies because they “strike across country” rather than following the circuitous roads running along the margins of the kingdom (84). More important, though, is that the lines abbreviate

Arthurian speech. While untrained mouths like Sandy's spew vacuous words, Morgan's telephone operators speak with telegraphic candor. When Ulfius, a Yankee efficiency expert, phones Camelot to report the Boss's arrival in the Valley of Hellishness, he commences the call not with a medieval harangue but with punchy slang: "*Hello-Central! Is this you, Camelot?*" (229). Ulfius reveals later in the conversation that he has not completely internalized telephonic efficiency, for he slips into comical medieval superfluity, reporting to Clarence, "Behold, thou mayst glad thy heart an thou hast faith to believe the wonderful when that it cometh in unexpected guise and maketh itself manifest in impossible places—here standeth in the flesh his mightiness The Boss" (229). The "jumbling together of extravagant incongruities" in his speech betrays the Arthurians' unpreparedness for efficient living (229). Those inconsistencies even parody Morgan's efforts to graft telegraphic modernity onto the linguistic conventions of an ancient civilization. The verbal "incongruities" nevertheless affirm the possibility of linguistic efficiency. Ulfius may not be ready for total productivity, but Yankee technologies are effectively changing his habits one word at a time.

While these flashes of efficiency are important to Morgan, confirming that machine logic can modernize both mouths and social structures, they mean even more to Twain because they allow him to experiment with aesthetics that embody his protagonist's push for productivity. Considering his experiences with printing, it is fitting that Twain works out his poetics of efficiency in the *Weekly Hosannah and Literary Volcano*, Camelot's first newspaper. Of course, the Arthurians marvel at the material efficiency of the magazine's production. Morgan astonishes them when he reveals that it took "merely a day's work for a man and a boy" to print his copy and a

thousand others, an arduous project that would have taken a “year’s work for many men” during the days of illuminated manuscripts (261). Morgan’s mechanical hands thus increase Arthurian labor efficiency exponentially. But, more importantly, the paper’s telegraphic diction mirrors this increase in material productivity. Clarence, squire of the Boss and editor of the *Hosannah*, packs the paper with pithy prose instead of medieval verbiage. For instance, his “Local Smoke and Cinders” column quickly relates key developments in Camelot, including the search party formed to find Sir Sagamour le Desirous. Unlike Sandy’s mill, which churns out useless facts about her quest, Clarence supplies the most relevant details about the mission, like the names and credentials of the posse’s commanders. Punchy mannerisms reinforce this functional reporting, too, for when Clarence commends the resolve of the crew, writing, “This is no pic-nic, these boys mean busine&s” [*sic*], his sentences get down to “busine&s” as well, making a concise case for the expedition’s success while the rest of the kingdom struggles to contain their verbal excesses (258). In one sense, curt commentaries like this one make plain the ideological power of Morgan’s machinery. Clarence learns to write the like Yankee press prints, for he replaces his waterwheel of a mouth—which once “gushed delight and gratitude” toward his Boss “in a steady discharge” of vacant words—with an efficient linguistic engine (89). For Twain, though, the boy’s newfound productivity illustrates how mechanical performance can optimize the power of the sentence, generating style that evangelizes the gospel of efficiency.

Clarence’s “Court Circular” pushes literary efficiency further, distilling investigative reporting to mere letters and characters. The piece begins with a frank description of Arthur’s gentile activity, stating that he rode his horse around the park on

Monday. From here, however, Clarence puts his linguistic training into practice. Arthur does little more than trot around the realm all week, but rather than repeating himself for Tuesday through Sunday, Clarence abbreviates the rest of the report with ditto marks. The result, Morgan suggests, is the most economical way to tell a story. Not only is the document “direct and business-like” in its style, but its quotation marks condense the facts and save space on the page for ads, the lifeblood of the *Hosannah* (260). The brilliance of the piece transcends this strictly material sense of economy, however. Clarence ultimately uses narrative efficiency to critique the mismanagement of the kingdom. The repetitive rows of ditto marks mimic and thus emphasize the King’s leisurely redundancy: Camelot cannot get anything done, Clarence demonstrates formally, because Arthur refuses to do the labor of leadership. More brilliant is that Morgan’s squire needs no words to condemn kingly inefficiency. Each set of quotations, which does the conceptual work of an entire sentence, sets off Arthur’s habitual inactivity. The “Circular” thus accomplishes something like the labor of a Taylorist tale. In its loaded characters, Twain develops a poetics that telegraphs social satire in the fewest number of characters and in the least amount of space possible. Narrative, he demonstrates, can indeed reflect the power and speed of mechanical performance.

But if Twain successfully manages the narrative energies of the *Hosannah*, instantiating the artistic efficiency of Bellamy’s utopian dreams, he questions the practicality of these laborsaving poetics. Morgan appreciates the verbal and financial economy of the paper but wonders whether the “Circular” takes efficiency to a foolish extreme. Perhaps the report follows the “one best way” illuminated by science and labor theory, but, as far as storytelling goes, Morgan reflects, “it was not the best way” to reach

Arthurian readers (260). “Profound monotonousness” undeniably pervades courtly documents like the “Circular,” a repetition of facts that “baffles and defeats one’s sincerest efforts to make them sparkle and enthuse” (259). But if Clarence’s ditto marks save narrative energy and free up ad space, they violate a key tenet of journalistic rhetoric: that “the best way to manage” an audience “is to disguise repetitiousness of fact under variety of form” (259). Persuasive storytelling requires sleight of hand that can “lay a new cuticle of words” over tired facts. This deceptive strategy sounds inefficient, Morgan admits, for it urges writers to mull over the same idea in as many vacuous words as possible. Some waste is necessary, however; readers must be convinced to enjoy eating a “barrel of soup” that is, in its own curious efficiency, “made out of a single bean” (259). The *Hosannah* fails in this respect. Clarence values concision over vacuity but practices verbal efficiency so intently that he overcorrects his own wastes. The result is the removal of the word from the printed page, writing that, streamlined to the point of silliness, loses readers in its aesthetic imitation of machine efficiency.

These poetics not only make language superfluous for storytelling but threaten to eliminate the “human element” of communication. Rationalizing words has frivolous consequences for Clarence, but verbal discipline cripples Sandy, rendering her speechless at the end of the novel. Marrying Morgan compels Sandy to upgrade her verbal machinery so that she can consult her husband with telegraphic brevity. When their child gets sick, for instance, the Boss’s training forbids her from firing up her word-mill. Instead, she distills her concerns into a single phrase that calls out the name of their baby and an abbreviated command for Morgan to phone for the doctor: “HELLO-CENTRAL!” (400). Like the “Court Circular,” this exclamation demonstrates the possibility of

condensing language into its most informative and evocative form. However, this phrase demonstrates that verbal productivity dehumanizes as much as it corrects. Even to say “HELLO-CENTRAL,” Sandy must fumble uncharacteristically for words, getting “so choked with sobs that for a minute she could not get her voice” (400). And rather than uttering her frustrations, she resigns herself to silence, letting her head fall limp on Morgan’s bosom. This reticence suggests that Sandy has no recourse to a managed life, something that *Yankee* strongly associates with the gendered restrictions of domestic ideology. Indeed, matrimonial management optimizes Sandy’s linguistic output but leaves her without ways to convey her anxieties, forcing her to act less like a person and more like a quiet cog in a domestic machine. Morgan even removes his wife’s voice from the story to ensure that she remains a faithful wife and obedient employee: after the christening of their child, he relegates her to working uncomplainingly in their home, a place that receives little narratorial attention. As a result, Sandy becomes what Weinstein calls a “flattened” character, one whose silent labor resembles the work done by the disciplined and thus feminized factory employee (129-30).

Ultimately, the threat of silence shakes Twain’s faith in efficiency, for *Yankee* takes that utopian ideal to apocalyptic extremes after Sandy resigns to reticence. When civil war dismantles Morgan’s ideology, the Boss and his followers work even harder to realize efficiency, but instead of effecting progress, they resolve to destroy the kingdom as quickly and economically as possible. Determined not to waste functional technology, Clarence converts the clandestine telecommunication networks into weapons with startling efficacy. Phone lines that had connected distant parts of the kingdom get converted into wires connecting Camelot’s foundations to dynamite charges; cables soon



power electric fences around the Yankee fortress instead of transmitting telegraph signals. Because the Arthurians have primitive equipment, the electric arsenal virtually guarantees a victory for efficiency: the Battle of the Sand-Belt promises to be “the briefest in history” as well as “the most destructive to life, considered from the standpoint of proportion of casualties to numbers engaged” (433). The Arthurian onslaught fails miserably, of course, leaving 25,000 knights dead in a matter of minutes. Even better, Morgan reasons, the weapons streamline the process of collecting the dead. Combined with the spray of Gatling guns—which, ironically, were marketed in the 1870s and 1880s as the most efficient and thus most humane way to end a war—the fences turn the knights into “alloys of iron and buttons” rather than individual corpses (432).<sup>14</sup> By prepackaging the decedents into a “swelling bulk,” a single “black mass,” the weapons simultaneously slaughter the Arthurians and begin the tedious work of clearing the battlefield (439). In this sense, Morgan’s weapons are the most efficient “characters” in the novel, doing the work of warfare and the heavy lifting of cleanup in far less time than Arthurian soldiers could. This productivity is barbaric rather than salvific, however. Rather than fulfilling the Yankee’s utopian dreams, the cables take efficiency to fatal ends and beget dystopian realities far worse than the wastes of the Dark Ages.

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<sup>14</sup> See John Millis’s “Electricity in Land Warfare,” printed in an 1889 issue of *Scribner’s Magazine*. Millis, a First Lieutenant in the Army Corps of Engineers, writes that the Gatling gun and electric fence “may seem like a perverted application of human knowledge and technical science,” but “from a *humane* point of view, it is a gratifying reflection, and a fact fully established by history, that with the improvements and advancements in military science and art of modern times, warfare now consists of much shorter conflicts in arms than was formerly the case, and though the action is thereby rendered vastly more intense while it continues, it also becomes the more decisive, hostilities are terminated the sooner, and the loss of life is actually less; so that instead of contributing to the ‘abominable end’ of exterminating the human race, the application of the most advanced discoveries and inventions to the art of war has in reality mitigated the distressing results of armed conflict” (424-25). Especially chilling in this argument is Millis’s mathematical logic, his desire to reckon military inputs—like the amount of time spent in conflict—against humanitarian outputs—like the apparent decrease in casualties. That objective assessment, I argue, is a hallmark of efficiency thinking, and *Yankee* viciously satirizes it.

Morgan's detachment proves just as dystopian as his weaponry. The humanitarian costs of techno-warfare ought to concern the Boss, but he occupies himself with the math and mechanics of combat. For instance, he relegates the ethics of electrocution to shop talk just before the Battle of the Sand-Belt. On returning from France, he learns that Clarence has lined the "man-factory" with live wires to stave off Arthurian attacks. Rather than questioning the morality of these preparations, Morgan scolds Clarence for powering the cables independently. That arrangement, he blusters, "is too expensive" and "uses up force for nothing" (421). A single ground connection would have shown more "economy," leaving "lightning" in the wire but "using no energy until it is needed" (421). Clarence could then have trimmed expenses and saved energy—presumably while slaying the same number of foes. This deadly devotion to "economy" intensifies after the battle, particularly when Morgan asks Clarence to calculate a death toll. He knows he has exterminated his foes but demands quantifiable proof of military efficiency in spite of the Arthurians' demise. Ironically, Morgan is even more impressed when he learns that Clarence "could not *count* the dead, because they did not exist as individuals, but merely as homogeneous protoplasm" (432). The piles of corpses evince even more efficiency than Morgan hoped for: his weapons have created so much carnage—and with so little energy—that counting the dead is more a formality than a helpful evaluative tool. The Yankee's attention to numbers is more alarming than the brutality of his arsenal, however. His death count turns the knights into what Mark Seltzer calls "statistical persons," abstract representations of mechanical functionality

(101).<sup>15</sup> By changing the soldiers into quantities, the Boss makes tangible the bloodshed his weapons have produced, but without needing to look too closely at the anguish of his countrymen. Perhaps Yankee arms have reduced the knights to unidentifiable mush, but Morgan treats them like “homogenous protoplasm,” standardized byproducts churned out by his war machinery. Efficiency renders the Arthurians math problems, not people.

To condemn this ruinous attention to economy, Twain sabotages his mechanical poetics, undercutting the utopian dimensions of linguistic efficiency. Ironically, Morgan’s electric fences realize as much linguistic efficiency as his telegraph lines; but instead of revolutionizing how the Arthurians conceive of language, they trim words and sentences by eliminating speakers. The currents running through the fences are so strong that they “killed before the victim could cry out” (438). The cables thus promote as much efficiency as Morgan’s sacred pump or his hidden phone lines. They not only accelerate each knight’s suffering but reduce the number of words cried out during the skirmish, for the men die “without testifying” to their pain (439). The “silent lightning” so effectively shushes the Arthurian assailants that Morgan even begins to dread the “absence of human voices” on the battlefield (439). This anxiety is momentary, though. Pleasure quickly takes its place as Morgan reflects on the number of quieted combatants. As Kasson points out, Morgan aestheticizes the destruction of the Arthurian army, appreciating the efficiency of the knights’ collective whimper: “*There* was a groan you could *hear!* It voiced the death-pang of eleven thousand men. It swelled out on the night with awful pathos” (440).<sup>16</sup> The noise startles the manager because it signals the efficient

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<sup>15</sup> Seltzer’s arguments about statistical persons refer not to *Connecticut Yankee* but to Jacob Riis’s *How the Other Half Lives* (1890) and several works by Stephen Crane. This concept nevertheless helps to explain Morgan’s managerial mindset in the final chapters of the novel, and my analysis depends greatly on it.

<sup>16</sup> For more on the aesthetic appeal of destruction in *Connecticut Yankee*, see Kasson 213.

execution of countless Arthurian men. At the same time, the groan gratifies him because it realizes maximal linguistic productivity, condensing immeasurable anguish into a single perfectly planned and produced exclamation. Any remaining troops are made equally speechless in the final onslaught: when Morgan—the only character who speaks in this episode—barks out orders to fire the Gatling guns, the knights are forced into a noiseless and futile retreat. By reducing so much suffering to mere grunts, the Boss generates verbal efficiency that trumps the telegraphic candor of Clarence. Aesthetic efficiency, Morgan proves, is indeed possible. The music he orchestrates—showers of bullets and crackles of “silent lightning” followed by a groan and countless bars of quietude—nevertheless creates “awful pathos” rather than utopian tunes. Worse still, the Boss’s military productivity produces the gravest wastes of the novel. Morgan obliterates the resistance and forces the men of Camelot to speak economically, but he squanders 25,000 lives to do it. The quest for verbal efficiency ends not with the reclamation of the word but with a deadly quiet more dreadful than even the silence of Sandy.

The “awful pathos” of the “absence of human voices” makes literary efficiency unsustainable. Thus, when Camelot collapses, so does the novel’s efficient aesthetic. The abrupt conclusion to Morgan’s narrative signals this artistic breakdown. Indeed, the Boss stops writing his own story when he realizes how much the Arthurians have suffered. On surveying the battlefield, Morgan finds Sir Meliagraunce gasping for help. He consoles the enemy knight, but, in a move that gets poetic justice for his muted comrades, Meliagraunce stabs the Boss instead of wasting words on a reply. No longer consumed by mechanics or the numerical sublime, the wound awakens Morgan to the pain produced by Yankee management. The ensuing guilt so greatly wracks him that he

falls as silent as the slain knights: with “no heart to write,” he stops penning the manuscript that constitutes *Yankee*, leaving Clarence to compose a postscript that documents the demise of the Yankee camp, including the spell that Merlin casts to put the Boss to sleep for thirteen centuries (440). In this sense, Morgan succumbs to the same silence as the Arthurian knights. But while the single groan of the soldiers marks the achievement of literary efficiency, the Boss’s silence cuts off the utopian energy that drives the plot of the novel. His refusal to write thus prevents an efficient conclusion to the novel; and wasteful words dominate the final chapter. Morgan rouses from Merlin’s spell, but, bedridden by his wound, he is reduced to “muttering incoherently” as Mark Twain, the frame narrator, details his descent into delirium (447). Worse, Morgan’s final gesture is one of inefficiency. Lost in utopian dreams—he believes he is still in Camelot, preparing to defend his man-factory against Arthur himself—the Boss drums up energy enough to “[get] up his last effect” but dies before finishing his battle cry (447). Ironically, by failing to execute his linguistic labors, Twain’s prophet of productivity becomes as unproductive as the Arthurians he meant to manage. It turns out, then, that verbal efficiency is just a dream, one that can quickly devolve into a dystopian nightmare.

The dream sequences that conclude *Looking Backward* and *Connecticut Yankee* tell much about their authors’ anxious enthusiasm for a poetics of efficiency. When West rouses from his sleep, the second such awakening in the novel, he realizes that “my return to the nineteenth century had been the dream, and my presence in the twentieth was the reality” (344). For Bellamy and his protagonist, utopia is not “nowhere,” a place accessible only in dreams, but a tangible possibility for twentieth-century America—

assuming that rich capitalists like West abandon their selfishness for Nationalist cooperation. Yet, if utopia is real enough in *Looking Backward*, an efficient aesthetic is elusive at the end of the novel. While West finally learns to appreciate the literary possibilities afforded by the model of the machine, he does not discipline his narration in a way that formally reflects the efficiency of utopia. This conflict emphasizes the nineteenth century's unpreparedness for utopian efficiency. After all, West converts to productivity but feels unforgettable remorse knowing that he rests comfortably in utopia when he did nothing to bring it about: "Better for you," Julian chides himself, "had this evil dream been the reality, and this fair reality the dream," for then he would not be "eating of trees whose husbandmen [I] stoned" in the 1880s (345-46). These pangs of self-reproach, combined with the conventional form of *Looking Backward*, remind us that West is and always will be Victorian. As a result, West and the readers of Bellamy's novel stay shackled to the *fin-de-siècle*, denied a mechanical, laborsaving aesthetic that would fully initiate them into utopia. Until Americans recognize the wastes of *laissez-faire* capitalism, *Looking Backward* suggests, a style that emblemizes efficiency must remain a dream to be realized by the novelists of the twentieth century.

Twain inverts this dream logic as well as its consequences for a poetics of efficiency. While West finally wakes up in utopia, *Yankee* begins and ends in the nineteenth century, a place still filled with waste and class conflict despite Morgan's—misguided—efforts to optimize the world, both as the Colt Arms factory manager and as Sir Boss of Camelot. Morgan also succumbs to his delusions, dying in a delirious vision of total war rather than waking up in the safety of utopia. *Connecticut Yankee* nevertheless realizes the poetics of Bellamy's dreams, for it illustrates how words and

literary forms could incorporate machine productivity. In the writings of Clarence and the speech of Sandy, Twain distills the labor of storytelling into single words and ditto marks. He thus underscores the creative potential of language efficiently applied, and he initiates literature into a modernity governed by machinery. The violence of Morgan's vision undercuts the utopian promises of *Yankee's* aesthetic, however. America needs an overhaul, Twain admits, but social efficiency is just a dream, an ideal equally capable of enhancing or eradicating the activities that make us human, language included.

If Bellamy and Twain could not agree on the utopian potential of the machine, however, both sensed the ideal of efficiency and the managerial ethos infiltrating American life outside the workplace. Not only did Bellamy and Twain concur that technological innovation would transform literature, but they agreed on the word's importance in the managed life that they rightly predicted would come about during the twentieth century. *Looking Backward* and *Connecticut Yankee* insist that literary form can engage the promises and problems of a society dominated by the imperatives of the factory, particularly its prohibitions against waste and its romantic quests for efficiency. Twain ultimately takes this logic further, optimizing the word—and describing the subsequent collapse of communication. Thus, while these novels stop short of modernist literary economy, they assert narrative's ability to represent efficiency. Moreover, they exhibited different kinds of poetics with which other proto-Taylorist writers could evaluate efficiency's movement into other cultural contexts. Efficiency would no longer be just a mathematical model or a utopian dream but a formal tool for social critique.

### CHAPTER III

#### EXHAUSTED FICTIONS: WOMEN, WORK, AND FATIGUE IN GILMAN'S *WHAT DIANTHA DID* AND WHARTON'S *THE HOUSE OF MIRTH*

While Mark Twain imagined that an ideology of efficiency would incapacitate women, as suggested by the silencing of Sandy at the end of *Connecticut Yankee*, many *fin-de-siècle* writers contended that the model of the machine would vitalize women's labor. The ideal of efficiency especially appealed to the pioneers of domestic science, since it promised to optimize and valorize the energy that women spent maintaining the home. Bertha Terrill's seminal *Home Management* (1905) imagines that the methods of the factory will emancipate middle-class housewives from what they perceived as draining drudgery. Because the domestic sphere enjoys a "close and intimate relationship with the business world," cooking, cleaning, shopping, and rearing children are just as important as industrial professions, Terrill insists (4). Thus, domestic labor ought to reflect the efficiency of the other forms of work that propel the economy at large. As the economic manager of the family machine, a housewife ought to "make a study" of her work habits to "reduce the waste" that occurs in the home (33). By practicing the "self-control" of the factory laborer, systematizing one's tasks and taming one's "nerves," which are the "bane of women's existence" and the driving force behind domestic neurasthenia, the efficient housewife performs better work, decreases the symptoms of nervousness associated with domestic life, and contributes more visibly and effectively to the functioning of the familial engine (73). As scholars have observed, industrial tropes like Terrill's—figures that pervaded the works of other writers interested in gender and labor—challenged the presumed inferiority of women's work, even dissolving the



distinction between the private and public spheres by characterizing domestic activity as genuine labor of national importance.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the ideal of efficiency promised to invigorate women. As Terrill puts it, streamlining household chores would alleviate the homemaker's fatigue and stimulate in her an "exuberance of spirit" that would be "transmitted like an electrical current to all who come into contact with it" (73). Efficiency would spark every woman's inherent capability.

But while works like *Household Management* turned to machine discourse to empower housewives, writers such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman contended that domestic efficiency still undermined the productivity of women. Texts like Terrill's perhaps made women feel more comfortable about housework, but they nevertheless confined women to the private sphere, accommodating rather than reimagining or dismantling patriarchal ideologies. Moreover, the texts of domestic science did not afford women new opportunities for agency. Housewives would not undertake new kinds of work, according to Terrill's brand of efficiency; they would just perform their appointed labors more effectively. Yet, as Gilman stressed in her fiction and her sociology, women were often better suited for traditionally masculine occupations than for housekeeping. The labor of the average housewife or the novice domestic can never "reach high efficiency," she reasons, because "no special training can be applied to every girl and produce good results in all" ("Waste" 92). The instruction offered by a text like *Household Management* would not change a woman's incapacity for housework or increase her

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<sup>1</sup> Beth Sutton-Ramspeck argues convincingly that *fin-de-siècle* discussions about "making the food supply safe, 'cleaning up' society, [and] improving the human race through 'public motherhood'" enabled Terrill and others to characterize housework as having "enormous public impact" (3). Diane Lichtenstein adds that housewives turned to factory methods to explore whether mechanical ideals could "produce more efficient homemaking" and whether "*science* could reform both industry and the home" (67).

adroitness in another, more satisfying kind of work. In a more pressing sense, Gilman points out, the domestic ideal itself depletes women's energy. The "overworked average mother" cannot be efficient, she argues, because the cult of the home holds that single person responsible for "mother-service," "wife-service," and "slave-service," requiring that she overextend her body and mind for everyone else (91). Promoting household efficiency misses the point, Gilman argues. Americans must recalibrate the cultural mechanisms that squander women's potential, since tethering them to domestic service limits how productively they can use precious social energy. It is necessary, then, to reconceive of women's efficiency in ways that promote their independence in contexts besides married life, maternity, and domesticity.

I argue that Gilman and, perhaps more surprisingly, Edith Wharton used their fiction to assess whether efficiency discourse offered more liberating opportunities for women than it did in the works of domestic science. Unlike Terrill's *Household Management*, Gilman's first novel, *What Diantha Did* (1909), and Wharton's first critically acclaimed work, *The House of Mirth* (1905), take up the language of efficiency and waste to expose the fatiguing constraints of institutions like the home and the marriage market. Moreover, these novels examine whether a different, decidedly feminist notion of efficiency could offer women ways to escape lives wasted in the private sphere. Both novels feature protagonists, Diantha Bell and Lily Bart, whose work depletes their energy and squanders their potential, conventional women's work in the former case, and the work of landing a rich husband in the latter. To redefine what it means for women to be productive, each abandons her appointed labors to find more enjoyable and more empowering work. In this sense, *Diantha* and *Mirth* explore the

value and the practicality of what I term “self-management,” a feminist permutation of efficiency discourse that stresses the need for women to regulate their own power according to the kinds of labor they best perform.

As we might expect when considering Gilman’s and Wharton’s vastly different politics concerning the inherent value of labor and the place of women in society, *Diantha* and *Mirth* respond quite differently to the thought of a feminist efficiency. Attending to the way each novel addresses the problem of exhaustion illuminates Gilman’s confidence in and Wharton’s skepticism of that ideal. *Diantha* affirms the possibility of a feminist efficiency, insisting that self-management combined with access to profitable, amenable work will release women from conditions that needlessly deplete their energy. Like much of Gilman’s oeuvre, *Diantha* centers on a self-made woman, relating the transformation of its protagonist from fatigued domestic to “Amazon of Industry” (230). Diantha Bell discovers while cooking, cleaning, and mending for her father that the domestic ideal requires that women perform unfulfilling tasks that lack social utility. Women must also exhaust themselves doing that work, silently and obediently enduring the ensuing fatigue. The novel treats this muted suffering not only as a barrier to the productivity of women—housewives and domestics cannot articulate and thus obviate their nervous inefficiency—but also as a difficulty for the form of the novel. To escape the wastes of domesticity, Diantha must take control of her labor and overcome the narrative of exhaustion to which patriarchal institutions consign all women who work. Indeed, while Diantha leaves home and finds new work to realize a new sense of women’s efficiency, first toiling as a maid and later founding a professional housekeeping cooperative, the men in her life repeatedly interrupt the story of her

success, as they threaten to divert her energy and reassign her to the script of the worn-out housewife. Gilman insists, however, that congenial labor efficiently performed will overcome such obstacles. The system of self-discipline that Diantha devises ultimately liberates her—and all of the novel's other women—from the fatiguing effects of traditional domesticity. Just as important, she learns to manage the trajectory of her own narrative as much as her laboring energy. By resisting the cooptation of her story, Diantha demonstrates that a feminist efficiency will enable women to wrest control of their power from the forces that reduce them to silent cogs in a domestic engine.

But while *Diantha* upholds the importance and efficacy of self-management, it overlooks many of the social structures and recalcitrant attitudes that constrain women in order to give the sense of narrative closure. *The House of Mirth* complicates Gilman's utopian enthusiasm for efficiency because it undermines the entire idea of a self-made woman. Wharton contends that a feminist efficiency is insufficient to reengineer the social machinery that drains women. As a result, pursuing it proves more exhausting than liberating. Like Gilman's novel, *Mirth* focuses on a woman's struggles to escape a life of wasted potential and nervous fatigue. Threatened by financial security but plagued by an insatiable desire for luxury, Lily exhausts herself trying to fit into high society. The only way to secure her leisure is to land a rich husband, but the labor of courtship taxes her already diminished energy stores. Moreover, married life promises just as much fatigue as the nuptials market: if she succeeded, Lily would need to take up the work of reflecting her husband's wealth to the people of their set. To avoid these inefficient exploitations of her energy, Lily devises a program of self-management much like Diantha Bell's, resolving to work outside the machinations of the upper class and

turning to productive labor to stabilize her bodily economy and encourage her self-sufficiency. Still, Lily fails to realize her efficiency, partly because she is incapable of work, and partly because working-class life affords no opportunities for her to alleviate her fatigue. To emphasize the irrevocable inefficiencies to which women are consigned in industrial capitalism, *Mirth* exacerbates the problem of exhaustion that *Diantha* so optimistically settles. Lily's energy wanes as she strives for efficiency, and, by distorting the dialog and narrative time of *Mirth*'s final chapters, Wharton highlights the depleting effects of her heroine's quest for utility. Thus, Wharton develops an aesthetic that reproduces the sensations Lily experiences as her laboring body succumbs to inefficiency. This poetics of fatigue calls into question a feminist efficiency premised on self-management. Wharton concludes that women cannot control the conditions in which they labor; efficiency is just a romantic fantasy that exhausts already overworked women.

In this sense, *The House of Mirth* troubles the feminist ideals that domestic scientists initiated in the 1890s and that Gilman would champion in her fiction and sociology. *Diantha* and *Mirth* both extend the domestic scientists' conceptions of efficiency to expose the masculinist ideologies that mispend the energy of women. While *Diantha* imagines that efficiency and discipline will transform society, starting with the recalibration of the individual woman's bodily engine, *Mirth* challenges the faith in reason, rationalization, and industrial progress exhibited in texts like *Household Management* and *Diantha*. Without glossing over the barriers to a feminist efficiency, Wharton uses the form of her novel to magnify those difficulties, underscoring their intractability. Her critique of women's work thus engages more carefully than Gilman's

the gendered limitations that domestics, housewives, and other working women, broadly construed, faced during their struggles for enfranchisement.

*What Diantha Did* occupies a tenuous place in Gilman's corpus, having garnered little scholarly consideration compared to "The Yellow Wall Paper" (1892) and *Herland* (1915). Charlotte Rich has shed needed light on the novel by bringing it back into print, yet only a handful of critics have examined the work in substantial detail.<sup>2</sup> *Diantha* nevertheless merits further attention, both as a document of feminist history and as an artwork, because it represents Gilman's first attempt to imagine a decidedly feminist efficiency, an ideal prompted and clarified by her interactions with people that scholars now call the "material feminists" of the 1890s. Gilman was particularly enamored with plans for a "kitchenless house" espoused by women like Mary Howland and Martha Bruère, one of the friends to whom Gilman dedicated her autobiography (Rich 11). These women contended that the layout of the home, which feminized the kitchen and masculinized the study, naturalized the presence of women in domestic spaces, further separating them from the public sphere (Gaudelius 118-19). Amplifying the proto-Taylorist discourse of efficiency through self-discipline that featured in the texts of domestic science, the material feminists added that traditional architecture increased household waste because it compelled a single person to expend her energy maintaining an entire home for one family. One solution was to develop communal housing, a project that Gilman witnessed firsthand when she stayed at Jane Addams's Hull House in 1893

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<sup>2</sup> Given the scant criticism on *Diantha*, it is important to note the efforts of Jill Allen and Sharon Rambo in "Reconfiguring Vice: Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Prostitution, and Frontier Sexual Contracts" and "*What Diantha Did*: The Authority of Experience" to revive scholarly discussions about it. These essays do not receive explicit attention in my study but have added considerably to my thinking about Gilman's corpus.

(Allen 85). Another possibility, Gilman learned, was to eliminate feminized spaces from the floorplan, ensuring that “neither women nor men would be required to labor incessantly”—and thus wastefully—“to produce a home” (Gaudelius 112). According to feminist historian David M. Katzman, Bruère “predicted that domestic technology and industrial advances would make it possible to forgo servants”; subsequently, “household chores would be transferred to agencies outside the home” that could do them better and more quickly than could an overworked housewife (256). No longer confined to wasteful work in gendered spaces, once-depleted—white, middle-class—women could then employ their energies more freely and more usefully in the public sphere.

While communal living and kitchenless houses feature more prominently in *Herland* than in Gilman’s other fiction, *Diantha* embodies her earliest researches into the kind of efficiency that would facilitate women’s escape from domestic ideology. In the most recent treatment of the novel, Kellen M. Graham contends that the novel is worth reading if only because it reveals Gilman’s “struggles to reconcile her longstanding socialist views with her early enthusiasm for [the] efficiency science” produced by the proponents of industrial capitalism (190). For Graham, then, *Diantha* serves as a fraught testing ground for Gilman’s more mature explorations of communitarianism. I contend, however, that the vision of efficiency *Diantha* puts forward is even more complex and ambitious than the productivist utopianism of *Herland*, for rather than starting with the premise that women have developed a society founded on the logic of the machine, *Diantha* needs to begin with the problem of inefficiency, investigating how women might extricate themselves from systems that hamper their labor. Moreover, while *Herland*

assumes the disintegration of capitalism, *Diantha* imagines how feminist efficiency might instantiate a more benevolent, proto-socialist formulation of that system.

Cast as a bildungsroman, *Diantha* centers on the transformation of its heroine from depleted daughter to successful entrepreneur. Diantha Bell meticulously cooks and cleans for her family but detests that women are consigned to domestic labor, deeming domesticity a draining and inefficient use of time and energy. Giving voice to Gilman's theories, Diantha imagines that systematizing and professionalizing housekeeping will optimize women everywhere. Doing so would regulate and compensate the labor power of domestics while liberating overburdened, housewives from the mountain of tasks that drives them to nervousness. To test this hypothesis, and to diminish her fatigue, Diantha leaves her home for Orchardina, California, where she works as a maid until she earns enough capital to manage a housekeeping cooperative built on feminist efficiency. In this new setting, Diantha develops the system of self-management that promises to help her and other white, middle-class women to organize their work and increase their agency. However, Diantha must learn to overcome other factors that hinder women's productivity. This resistance comes primarily from her fiancé, the budding scientist Roscoe (Ross) Warden, who relegates her to the same draining constraints that housewives face in the homes of Orchardina. His chauvinism threatens to undermine not only her work but the narrative of her growth and her initiation into industrial capitalist society. But efficiency buoys Diantha. Her program of self-management succors her as well as the other fatigued housewives of Orchardina. Ultimately, the productivity of Diantha's business venture convinces her staunchest critics, Ross included, that domesticity needs an upgrade that would permit women to regulate their energies doing



the work they find most meaningful. Diantha matures into a capable manager of women's energies; her success affirms that a feminist efficiency is possible and that the logic of the factory can reengineer the institutions that sap women's energy.

With the rise of Diantha, Gilman tries to address the problem of fatigue, one that she believes is inherent to domestic ideology. After all, Gilman argues, the cult of the home squanders women's energy on useless tasks. To stress this idea, the novel begins with a glance at the dysfunctional home life Diantha will inherit by marrying Ross. Circumstance has consigned Ross to hard work. The death of his father, an unsuccessful grocer, has forced the man of science to postpone his research—and his impending nuptials—to run the shop and support his family. Ross unsurprisingly struggles to keep up the store since doing so requires managerial work for which he is ill equipped. This inefficiency is forgivable, Gilman suggests, but Ross impairs the rest of his family by perpetuating domesticity in his father's absence. He barely lets his mother and sisters clean their over-commodious estate, itself emblematic of domestic waste, for he keeps the family servant when, the narrator points out, “a family of five women might, between them, do the work of the house” with little effort (11). His mother and sisters settle into pointless work, as a result. Mrs. Warden wastes time knitting afghans, unnecessary commodities in sunny California. Her daughters, meanwhile, take up merely decorative activities, Cora “illuminating a volume of poems, painting flowers on the margins . . . for Roscoe” and Dora “laboring at a task almost beyond her fourteen years, consisting of a negligee shirt . . . upon the breast of which she was embroidering a large, intricate design—for Roscoe” (9). The narrator's insistence that the sisters toil “for Roscoe” hints that domesticity confines the Warden women to ungratifying activities. More to the

point, though, the crafts tax the girls' energies for work that does little to buoy the family through financial hardship. Rather, all that work serves to comfort a single person, a grave waste of time and energy, Gilman laments. None of the Wardens finds this inefficiency problematic, of course. Ross deems it his duty to protect the family from labor. His mother and sisters, on the other hand, relish their wasteful leisure, "[reposing] peacefully under the vines" on their porch with their work while Ross "[struggles] desperately under the mortgages" (3). But while the Bell women have acclimated to lives of "careless waste" (16), this division of labor has "handicapped" the family (3). By restricting his mother and sisters to women's work, Ross has mismanaged—and discouraged—their productive impulses. Their domestic engine sputters, as a result.

The cult of the home prevents women from finding more edifying work, too. Thus, their talents go to waste. Such inefficiency plagues all homes, Gilman points out, even those exhibiting "domestic economy," the sense of order and utility that home science experts lauded as a sign of efficacious work. Diantha and her mother scrupulously keep house. Every room in the Bell estate gleams with "a cleanness that spoke of conscientious labor and unremitting care" (20). However, women's work neither interests them nor optimizes their energy. While one finds "no dust nor smell of dust; no grease spots, no litter anywhere," the home radiates "no atmosphere of contended pride," and places like the dining room testify not to familial communion or "human living" but to work done "under restriction" (20). Mrs. Bell actually enjoys accounting; her husband simply restricts her to cooking, cleaning, and knitting—regrettably, too, considering he has sunk the family's income into blundering businesses, including the one that forced the Bells to move from New England to California. Due to

her husband's conviction that women maintain the home, Mrs. Bell's mathematical prowess goes undeveloped. She executes her responsibilities with "Labor, Economy, and Duty" (20). But, tethered to a misguided philosophy of domestic "Economy," she can neither work according to her abilities nor realize her potential.

These constraints ultimately deplete women's energy stores. In spite of their youth, the Warden sisters all exhibit classic signs of neurasthenia: "Madeline was 'delicate,' and Adeline was 'frail,'; Cora was 'nervous' (11). While other characters in the novel attribute this fragility to women's biological incapacity for work, Gilman, of course, casts doubt upon that diagnosis, suggesting that the Wardens are overwrought because Ross will not let them find more rewarding labor. This conviction is most strikingly illustrated in the case of Diantha's mother. While watching her mend garments, Diantha senses that Mrs. Bell is teetering on the brink of "nervous breakdown" brought on by the "common misery of 'the square man in the round hole'" (23). Diligent but ill-equipped for women's work, Mrs. Bell wracks her nerves housekeeping and ends up compromising her health. Looking into her deadening eyes, Diantha recognizes that "literally a lifetime" of "the conscientious performance of duties she did not love" has started to "chafe" what used to be a "steady will" primed with "active intelligence" (22). Just as troubling, Mrs. Bell suffers chronically from "bad headaches" that make it seem "as if I couldn't sit up" (23). These migraines are so debilitating that she depends on her daughter to finish her chores—after all, Mr. Bell has "got to have his biscuit whether or [not]" one feels up to cooking (23). By subjecting his wife to "literally a lifetime" of intensive labor, Mr. Bell not only squanders his wife's talents—and for selfish reasons—but he disrupts her nervous economy. He even plunges her into entropy, for, as she ages,

her incapacitated body finds less and less energy available to put to work. As Diantha intuits, housewives possess a “nobler power” that, “had [it] ever had the chance to grow,” would have accomplished great things in the private and public spheres (22). But because these women cannot channel their “nobler power” into rewarding work, they, like the Bells’ nervous matriarch, are doomed to breakdown.

Gilman treats exhaustion not only as a distressing byproduct of domesticity but as the crux of the novel: if Diantha is to make personal efficiency work, she needs to overcome the fatigue that punctuates women’s lives, a condition that housewives deal with in silence. The demise of Isabel Porne best illustrates this point. An accomplished architect for whom Diantha will work in Orchardina, Isabel’s energy is best spent designing homes, not keeping house. Simply washing the dishes tires her out since it requires the “labored accuracy of a trained mind doing unfamiliar work” (61). The sheer number of chores drains her, too. Nightmares of dinginess wake her in the night, and, between cooking, cleaning, and raising a child, she finds little time to rest. She pushes aside her commissions, forced to direct her creative impulses into shoddy, unfulfilling work. As Jill Bergman points out, Gilman plays on the “slippage between home making and making homes” here to demonstrate that “housework, for most women, is not loving service” but drudgery and a “waste of valuable labor” (89-90). Isabel finds her work especially insufferable, though, because her husband expects her to do it uncomplainingly. Ironically, Edgar exhibits a “liberal enthusiasm for the general capacity of women in the professions” (63). He nevertheless assumes that his wife is responsible for the housework, and he refuses to consider how much it strains her. He

even ignores her desperate attempts to alleviate her exhaustion. When she rouses him in the middle of the night, panic-stricken by dust, he interrupts her and goes back to sleep:

He awakened instantly. "What is it, Dear?" he asked. "Too tired to sleep, you poor darling? But you do love me a little, don't you?"

"Oh, *yes!*" she answered. "I do. Of *course* I do! I'm just tired, I—"

"Goodnight, Sweetheart." (65)

This exchange emphasizes the voicelessness of housewives and, in effect, the difficulty of mitigating nervous inefficiency. Edgar acknowledges that his wife is overwrought, yet, for all his "liberal" sentiments about working women, he believes that she should manage her anxiety as quietly as she handles the cooking and cleaning. Thus, in a move that affirms domestic imperatives, he cuts her off, leaving her no way to assuage her panic. But if Edgar's rhetorical tactic is striking here, Gilman's is even more remarkable. To describe how damaging this silence is, and to emphasize the problem of exhaustion, Gilman disrupts the flow of the chapter. When Edgar snubs Isabel, the narrator goes quiet, too, and rather than relating Isabel's racing thoughts—she stays up for hours thinking about dinginess, maternity, and exhaustion—Gilman lets a row of asterisks conclude the scene. The story then picks up with Isabel frantically—and silently—preparing Edgar's breakfast. This strategy not only reflects the suppression of Isabel, highlighting the suffering that she cannot speak, but it elevates the problem of fatigue to the level of narrative. The success of Gilman's vision for efficiency hinges on whether her *bildungsheld* can overcome the silent fatigue that hampers women's agency.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> My thinking about silence and narration in *Diantha* is indebted to Elizabeth Ammons's "Writing Silence: 'The Yellow Wallpaper.'" Citing Hélène Cixous, who insists that "woman must write herself: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies" ("Laugh" 244), Ammons argues that Gilman treats writing as a "subversive act" in her short fiction (263). By describing how women write to break their silent confines, Ammons suggests, Gilman

Diantha can achieve this goal because she has pluck enough to speak out against domesticity. Indeed, she gives voice to all the energy that women squander at home. When she informs her parents that she will venture out as a professional housekeeper, her father tries to undermine her plans with appeals to “common gratitude”: “How about what you owe to me—for all the care and pains and cost it’s been to bring you up? A child’s a rather expensive investment these days” (34). As his callous economic vocabulary suggests, Mr. Bell wants simply to retain a smart “investment,” an employee he can exploit under the guise of filial devotion. Diantha points out, though, that she has already worked enough to pay back her debts. Domesticity wastes women’s time and effort doing all matter of work without compensation, she tells him, and to prove it, she hands him an invoice that reckons twenty-one years of expenses incurred under his care—everything from doctor’s visits, to clothing, to trips to the circus—against the work she has done for the home—“all but the washing,” which a servant “would have done for \$5.00 a week” (36-37). Much to his chagrin, Mr. Bell finds that he owes her upwards of five hundred dollars in spite of his parental generosity. Of course, Mr. Bell deems the bill a “shameful piece of calculation,” something that “[counts] up in cold dollars the work that every decent girl does for her family and is glad to” (40). For Diantha, though, the statement is a first step in what Charlotte J. Rich calls a “passionate argument against women’s invisible work” (“Introduction” 20). By “counting up” the labor that “every decent girl does” and assigning monetary value to it, Diantha makes housekeeping economically tangible, even dignifying it with professional status. For housewives like Mrs. Bell, Diantha’s figures also help to quantify the energy that women waste while

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“threatens the system of control constructed to contain women” and imagines how a woman might “own and create one’s self” (263).

trudging through “literally a lifetime” of unfulfilling duties. The statement thus serves not only to break the silence of domesticity but to tally the inefficiencies of that system. That the invoice uses mathematical reasoning to rebut Mr. Bell is important, too. By appealing to assets and liabilities, Diantha makes plain the waste of women’s potential using the very vocabulary denied to her mother, the language of accounting. Gilman’s protagonist promises to subvert the discourses that silence middle-class housewives.

Because she refuses to be silent, Diantha is also poised to wrest control of her labor power and escape the wastes of domesticity. Unlike Isabel or Mrs. Bell, who concede to their husbands, Diantha refuses to be managed, particularly when Ross opposes her business ventures. Ross demands that she work at home until his success arrives; but doing so will compromise everyone’s efficiency, Diantha reasons. Staying home means that she will not be paid for her labor, making it difficult for Ross to save money for their impending nuptials. That strain would exacerbate his inefficient condition—since inheriting the store, Ross has suffered from headaches like those of Mrs. Bell. Restricting Diantha to the domestic sphere would also misspend her managerial talents. Running a business, on the other hand, would give her “something worth while to *do*” (56). Ross cannot imagine a respectable woman doing anything but housework, so he tries to convince her that only one script exists for her life: that of the housewife. To champion that domestic narrative, he ultimately tries “holding her close for a moment,” hoping that seizing her body will prove her desire to work is subordinate to his desire for her (54). Diantha does not acquiesce, though; she speaks out against the restraint of her body and the stifling of her labor power: “Don’t!” she scolds Ross, “I can’t talk straight when you put it that way” (55). Diantha’s demand to “talk straight”

about her business proposal is critical. Appealing to “straight talk” emphasizes what she will “do” with her energy once she escapes domestic life. In this sense, Diantha resists the coercive paternalism of her fiancé and the sexualization of her body with utilitarian logic that reflects her need for productive work. Just as important, thwarting Ross repudiates the script of silent suffering that squelches housewives like Isabel. In place of that narrative Diantha resolves to write a new story for herself and for all middle-class housewives, one that empowers women and extricates them from needless fatigue.

To realize this vision for herself, Diantha appeals to industrial efficiency, devoting her life to productive, well-managed labor. As a maid for the Pornes she delves into her work, doing it “better, quicker, [and] easier” than any of her colleagues (87), so much so that the people of Orchardina believe that this “marvel of efficiency and propriety” has “solved the servant question” (96). Diligence accounts for some of this productivity, but Diantha also reorganizes her working conditions in a way that hones her energy. While she could not dictate how much she worked at home—she did all manner of chores on top of teaching children, frustrating, time-intensive labor for which she made a meagre income—Diantha chooses what services she provides for the Pornes. She even draws up contracts to stipulate what she will do. For instance, she makes clear to Isabel that “I do not do laundry work, of course, and don’t undertake to have any care of the baby” (72). These conditions might seem immaterial, but they further Diantha’s goal of giving voice to women’s invisible labor. Like Diantha’s invoice to her father, the details of her contract acknowledge and quantify the work that presumably comes with the territory of being a housewife. By refusing child care, Diantha also separates housekeeping from the labor of maternity, a crucial distinction that highlights—and



might serve to alleviate—the suffering of overburdened mothers like Isabel. In a more practical sense, though, the contract enables Diantha to regulate her energy more effectively than she could under the inefficient management of her father. Because Diantha is an adroit housekeeper, and because she now specializes in women’s work rather than dividing her energies between keeping house and teaching, she finishes in ten hours what an overwhelmed housekeeper like Isabel completes in twenty (87). Perhaps it is ironic that Diantha escapes the wastes of domesticity by becoming an efficient housekeeper. Gilman insists, however, that her protagonist is efficient as a maid precisely because she can direct her labor power into the work she likes best.

Diantha not only dictates the conditions in which she works, but she treats her body like a machine whose productivity can be enhanced by Taylorist engineering. In something akin to time-motion study, she divides all of her duties into discrete tasks to assess how long each one should take. She reckons, for instance, that one needs only four hours per day for customary maid service. Of these calculations she is so confident that she includes them in her contract with the Pornes to ensure them that she will not soldier, or systematically underwork:

Daily chamber work and dusting, etc., one and one-half hours per day. Weekly cleaning for house of nine rooms, with halls, stairs, closets, porches, steps, walks, etc., sweeping, dusting, washing windows, mopping, scouring, etc., averaging two hours per day. Door service, waiting on tradesmen, and extras one-half hour per day. (87)

Diantha knows how to use her time, but, more than running a tight ship, she optimizes the energy that goes into each of these tasks. Like the Taylorists, she searches tirelessly for the one best way to labor, experimenting with “thorough methods of housework” she finds in books about home management—ironically, materials from the library that Isabel

designed before falling victim to fatigue (99). Diantha further scrutinizes her labor by founding a working girls club, a place where she “studied and observed” the conditions that inhibit women’s productivity (99). This environment not only provides valuable intelligence about how and how not to keep house, but it affords a testing ground for efficiency techniques. To help struggling domestics and to improve her own skills, she gives “interesting lessons in arithmetic” as well as lectures about “easy and thorough methods of housework” (98-99). If one works scientifically, Diantha learns, one not only avoids the pitfalls of undisciplined labor—shoddy toil, dissatisfied mistresses, garnished wages, unemployment, poverty, and worse—but one can increase her productivity while making her work more comfortable and enjoyable.

Diantha’s pursuit of efficiency does not stop with her work, however; she disciplines her downtime as much as her labor, taking great pains to service her bodily engine in the name of sustainable productivity. With the Pornes she builds recovery time into her breakneck schedule. She toils like a Taylorist for ten hours a day, “[popping] into the kitchen as regularly as a cuckoo clock” and leaving the house “as clean and orderly as if no one was ever in it” (88). She rests for four, though, even getting out of the house for two solid hours to “[ride] in the electric cars” and “take excursions into the country” (88). Edgar often worries that he is paying Diantha to dally about town, but, as even he admits, systematic resting keeps her in top form. The breaks help her to regulate her energy, and having saved up her power rather than losing it to the entropic effects of overwork, the efficiency maven performs “Herculean labors” with industrial speed and consistency (88). To stave off psychic turmoil that would impede her work, Diantha even devises a self-help regimen premised on efficiency. Ross often writes her, imploring her

to abandon her business and come home. These petitions are clearly upsetting, for Diantha weeps on the letters. But she disciplines her nervous energy with something like factory-made prayers, chanting with “dogged repetition” a mantra that defends her decision to labor: “It is right. It is right. It is right” (81). Gilman’s narrator mentions that Diantha is “not ‘gifted in prayer’” (81). Indeed, the litanies sound more like the “monotonous” revolutions of a motor than the strains and swells of a suppliant petition (81). The punchy utilitarian prayers are nevertheless important because they preserve Diantha’s nervous economy. By affirming the value of her labor again and again with the regularity of a factory machine, Diantha relaxes her mind deeply enough to let her body recuperate from her “Herculean” toil. Habitual rest on top of this self-help program then keeps her “mighty fresh and bright-looking” throughout her workday—at least, as we will see, while she works for the Pornes (88). As these forms of nervous discipline suggest, Diantha believes that working hard is not enough to be efficient. Total productivity—and thus the elimination of fatigue—requires the assessment and adjustment of all the body’s activities. Ultimately, Diantha resolves to dispel her exhaustion by emulating the engineer tweaking a machine, hoping that rest and routine maintenance will keep her firing on all cylinders.

Perhaps it is ironic that rest is so crucial to Diantha’s efficiency considering what Gilman suffered at the hands of Weir Mitchell’s infamous “rest cure” in 1887. Gilman openly condemned the procedure and its leading practitioner in her first piece of fiction, “The Yellow Wallpaper” (1891). In the story, a creative young mother and housewife—to whom Gilman and Isabel Porne bear striking resemblance—loses her grip on reality when her husband and physician, John, relegates her to the nursery of their vacation

home to treat her depression. In the same way that Mitchell doctored Gilman, John keeps his wife in bed to calm her nerves, giving her a “schedule prescription for each hour in the day” (5) and forbidding her “to ‘work’ until I am well again” (4). What Gilman resented most about the rest cure—and what her protagonist laments in the story—was how it restricted her agency. In this case, when forced “rest” meant not relaxation but strict management of a woman’s body, neither Gilman nor her protagonist could dictate the conditions of her recovery. More important, the procedure was designed to refit women for domesticity, restricting them to traditional, gendered forms of work. Mitchell reportedly told Gilman to “live as domestic a life as far as possible” and “never to touch pen, brush, or pencil again,” insisting that women were ill-suited for intellectual labor (“Why” 271). John similarly instructs his wife not to write, believing her artistic impulses are “silly fancies” she can overcome with “self-control” and gentle reminders about her role as mother and housewife (11). The “work” to which he expects her to return, then, is the domestic drudgery that exhausts her, not the literary labor that would “relieve the press of ideas” on her mind (7). Of course, Mitchell and John constrain their respective patients in the name of productivity. John believes that the narrator wastes precious energy on her writing, power that would be better spent on keeping house and caring for their infant son. The productivity that Mitchell and John imagine is tragically inefficient, though. By inhibiting the narrator’s literary labor, which she considers “congenial work” rather than childish folly, John not only squanders her potential but drives her mad (4). His rest cure, then, represents the limitation of women’s agency and the waste of their energy in service to the dubious ideal of domestic economy.

The vision of efficiency that Diantha develops inverts the logic of the rest cure, however, advocating management of the body but still prioritizing women's agency. At Union House, her feminist labor cooperative, Diantha gives her employees much the same schedule she followed at the Pornes' house. The girls pull ten-hour shifts, and, while they are on duty, Diantha expects them to work diligently and scientifically—and they do. While visiting Union House, Mrs. Bell even remarks that they “are as quick as—as mill-workers” (186). Their days are not as grueling as those of factory workers, though, because Diantha balances their labor and leisure. The girls take several planned breaks to recoup their energy. Diantha also arranges that they get a block from 2:30 to 5:30 “for their own time,” allowing them to choose how they will recharge their motive power (170). Curiously, what the women do after their shifts is just as systematized as what they do during the day, for Diantha requires their attendance at a “pleasant nine o'clock supper” followed by “an hour to dance and rest before the 10.30 bell for bed time” (170). But even if Union House dictates when the women work and play, a seeming intrusion into their private time, the regulated rest periods let them choose how to unwind: while some enjoy dancing, “some amused themselves with light reading, a few studied, others met and walked outside” (172). In this sense, Diantha supervises her employees in much the same way that John manages the narrator of “The Yellow Wall Paper,” except that she makes space for her employees' wishes. Rather than coercing their work, and rather than stipulating how they should reclaim their nervous energy, Diantha devises a regimen of rest that promotes their agency: they do work at which they excel, they perform it in the best way possible, and then they relax on their own terms. Perhaps this vision of work and leisure prefigures the restful productivity of *Herland*

(1912), in which, Katherine Fusco argues, Gilman “subverted discourses of industrial efficiency originally intended to control bodies in order to grant certain bodies”—that is, white, middle-class women’s bodies—“greater freedom” (420). But while *Herland* focuses on the collective, emphasizing “people as the products of systems” and expressing what Fusco calls a “corresponding distaste for individualism,” *Diantha* explores efficiency’s implications for individual freedom, particularly for its plucky bildungsheld (424). At any rate, the managed life Gilman imagines in both texts combines a Taylorist attention to ergonomics with feminist considerations about self-determination, insisting that efficiency can be empowering.

Indeed, Gilman treats Diantha’s self-discipline with utopian fervor, asserting that her personal efficiency will revolutionize the work of every other woman in Orchardina—and increase their agency to boot. Union House, the commune premised on Diantha’s machine-made philosophy, allows many of Orchardina’s working women to attain their greatest efficiency. Having been “studied personally and tested professionally” by Diantha, each takes up a specific line of work to benefit the cooperative—the one at which she is best, of course (159). Some leave the house for maid service while others stay behind to cook or clean for the rest. Each woman’s efficiency increases because she specializes her labor. Moreover, since Diantha expertly coordinates their efforts, they are “so organized” that they “make one hand wash the other,” giving Union House the efficacy of a perpetual motion device (168). This collective efficiency is both materially and spiritually beneficial, Gilman suggests. Everyone earns higher wages than she would as a maid, receives two weeks paid vacation, and enjoys her own bedroom in the commune—perks that the Knights of Labor

and other such organizations would only have dreamed of at the turn of the century. Just as important, while Diantha clearly runs the business, each woman can take ownership of her labor power through their “House Worker’s Union” (169). Rather than succumbing to silence in the domestic sphere, Diantha’s girls advocate for themselves in this setting. By finding their voices, Gilman’s narrator adds, they then realize their personhood:

“These, previously working out as servants, had received six dollars a week and ‘found.’ They now worked an agreed number of hours, were paid on a basis by the hour or day, and ‘found’ themselves” (169). Simply by doing her part, each woman keeps the collective engine humming and recognizes her capabilities, economically and otherwise.

This system alleviates the exhausting effects of traditional women’s work, too. The “employee” who benefits most from efficiency’s transformative potential is Diantha’s mother. Knowing how Diantha struggles to balance the books at Union House, Mrs. Bell visits the commune—against her managerial husband’s wishes, no less, asserting her “right to visit her own daughter” (183). She then takes up residence and becomes the company accountant. Simply joining the cooperative increases Mrs. Bell’s efficiency, for resisting her husband enables her to trade in cooking and cleaning for the work she does best—the very work denied to her at the beginning of the novel. Supporting a socially productive enterprise gives her renewed purpose, too. She finds it invigorating to know that “there is a big, moving thing to work for” and that she is “adding to the profits,” playing a vital part in her daughter’s project (207). This conviction not only energizes her labor but eliminates her bodily inefficiencies. While housekeeping deadened the spirit in her eyes and noticeably diminished her acuity, “her eyes [grow] bright again” after just a few months of bookkeeping, and she begins to

“[hold] her head as she did in her girlhood,” filled with vigor and free from tension headaches (187). Mrs. Bell is the poster-mother for Diantha’s labor reform, in this sense. Her transformation illustrates that efficiency can help one to reclaim her motive power after years of wasteful drudgery. Just as important, Mrs. Bell’s productivity suggests that the home can be systematized as fruitfully as the factory floor. Diantha set out to correct the debilitating inefficiencies of women’s work; her mother’s success demonstrates not only that the bodily machine can be recalibrated but that efficiency can replace outdated notions of maternity and domestic economy. As Bergman puts it, Diantha’s efficiency regime ends up “bringing technological progress into the home,” offering, in turn, a “revitalized image of the mother” as an independent, industrious woman (86).

The only challenge to this feminist efficiency, Gilman presumes, is masculine interference. Striking out on her own proves no problem for Diantha, and while founding Union House is tiring, her bodily and financial economies flourish. Ross’s reappearance in the story jeopardizes her efficiency, however. Diantha needs “more and more power” as the commune grows because she keeps “busy foreseeing, arranging, providing for emergencies” for each branch of the business—and there are many, since she has taken up laundry service and hot food delivery (203). Already in an entropic state, Diantha’s resources are further taxed by Ross’s dismissive letters. Constant reminders that “he loved her” but “did not love her work” leave her feeling “alone and unusually tired” on her breaks (203), even to the point where she considers letting “the whole thing [slip] away from her” (204). Ross compounds this psychic damage when he visits his fiancée in Orchardina, and he insists that because someone has bought his grocery and left him money enough to buy a fruit ranch—“a big one that would keep us all, and let me go on



with my [scientific] work”—Diantha ought to abandon the commune (214-15). The young Amazon of industry stands her ground, insisting that Union House is “the work I want to do—it is my work” (217). But asserting her agency proves more draining than freeing when Ross treats her resistance as renegeing on their engagement. The ensuing arguments render her “stunned, deadened, exhausted” (219). Even her factory-made prayers—so recuperative in her days with the Pornes—only temporarily buoy her. “Reason” affirms that “I have not refused him; he has refused me,” but logic cannot recover the energy that Ross has taken from her at this stage in the narrative (219). Diantha continues to work, profitably, too, considering that she turns the Union House prototype into a “pleasure palace” of a hotel, “full of gaiety and charm, offering lovely chambers for guests and residents, and every opportunity for healthful amusement” (241). Yet Ross’s adherence to the cult of the home prevents the couple from turning their wedding home into such a “pleasure palace” founded on mutual understanding and collective efficiency. By elevating his work over Diantha’s, Ross threatens to usurp the narrative of her success, hoping to replace it with the script of domestic ideology.

Ross also tries to seize control of the narrative by relegating Diantha to a silent life. The two marry in spite of their differences, but Ross continues for years to detest his wife’s work and privilege his own: comically enough, breeding guinea pigs for evolutionary research. Diantha does not need to keep house in addition to her commercial responsibilities—in one of the novel’s more problematic moments, she contracts a “first-class Oriental gentleman” to do all the work that Ross would have required of her, making it seem to some of Orchardina’s citizens that she ““did not live up to her principles”” as far as ennobling labor is concerned (237). But while Diantha is

permitted to do the work that suits her, she is forbidden from discussing it at home. She gushes with “loving enthusiasm” about Ross’s studies, encouraging him to talk at length about the transmission of acquired traits and humoring his laughable guinea-pig-laden harangues. Ross, on the other hand, can “never bring himself to ask about her labors with any genuine approval” (240). A sense of “quiet” pervades the home, as a result, with the “current of Ross’ unspoken disapproval” always operating “in the background” (243-44). Diantha, too, grows quiet during married life, uncharacteristically deferring to Ross rather than speaking candidly about the value of her work, something she did so forcefully at the beginning of the novel. It would seem, then, that efficiency alone cannot help Diantha to manage her happiness. Silence builds up a “blank wall” between the newlyweds (240), and the bride grows to “envy the most ordinary people who loved and quarreled and made up in the little outlying ranch houses along the road,” for “they had nothing between them, at least” (244). She virtually succumbs to the same fate that plagued Isabel Porne and Mrs. Bell during their days of domestic silence. If Diantha had promised at the beginning of the narrative to speak out against domestic waste and reclaim women’s agency with the gospel of personal efficiency, the quietude of married life and the persistent chauvinism of Ross seem to make that undertaking impossible.

Yet Gilman insists that efficiency will overcome these patriarchal limitations—as well as the ideological constraints of the bildungsroman. While Ross repeatedly undercuts his wife’s work with the silent treatment, her productivity speaks for itself, changing his mind about working women. Gilman sets up this conclusion in the epigram to Chapter XII, which likens what Diantha did to the growth of a banyan, a fig tree that germinates upon another plant but later plunges its roots into the ground:

The Earth-plants spring up from beneath,  
The Air-plants swing down from above,  
But the Banyan trees grow  
Both above and below,  
And one makes a prosperous grove. (199)

While Union House sprouted like an “Air-plant,” stemming from dreams of invigorated, liberated women—visions that precariously “[swung] down from above” because they were not planted as firmly as the institution of domesticity—Diantha’s efficiency works “both above and below” the cooperative, sending out ideological shoots in the form of satisfied customers, contented workers, and scientific publications about her managerial experiences. Years of self-discipline and toil then “spring up from beneath” to propagate a “prosperous grove.” European labor theorists take great interest in her findings, which, they insist, “have established certain truths in the business of living which are of vital importance to the race” (249). They frequently discuss her experiments, cite her figures, and follow her techniques, spreading the gospel of efficiency for her. The testimonies of these scientists accomplish two goals, narratively speaking. First, they affirm the scientific character of her labor and the efficacy of her scheme. Next, and more important, they convince Ross to revalue her business. While lecturing abroad about his beloved guinea pigs, which, ironically, have stirred controversy among biologists, Ross learns from colleagues that his wife is doing “brave, strong, valuable work” that rivals his own in terms of scientific importance and methodological precision (249). Ross then comes to “recognize and appreciate” her studies, first “as a man of science” and next as a husband (249). Diantha is certainly constrained throughout her married life. Taylorist self-discipline pays off, however. The industrial maven effectively works her way out of domesticity, planting her vision of feminist efficiency as quietly and efficaciously as the

banyan tree. A well-managed life gives her exactly what she needs to reclaim the story of her success from her commandeering husband. Gilman, in effect, challenges the conventions of the bildungsroman, asserting that efficiency discourse will offer women opportunities for growth outside the role of the silent domestic.

This conclusion is not without difficulties, of course. Diantha is certainly relieved when Ross applauds her efforts. On learning of his change of heart, she “[gives] way to an overmastering burst of feeling,” kneeling by her bed, weeping, and chanting factory-made prayers of thanks (250). One could read this salvific moment as a pyrrhic victory for feminist efficiency, though, for Diantha’s contentment hinges on the transformation of her husband, not on her productivity as such. Until Ross comes around, Diantha even wastes precious energy chastising herself for feeling a “sense of treason, of neglected [domestic] duty” (239-40). Though she has “schooled herself religiously” (240), turning her worries into work, her mind never rests, and she is never “wholly happy,” always waiting for validation (248). Efficiency is not self-sufficient. Diantha may have “overmastered” her anxiety, but Ross is “master” of her happiness. Worse, his conversion comes only after he has discussed her findings with colleagues, ostensibly other “[men] of science” (249). Ross claims that, as a scientist, he “must accept any truth when it is once clearly seen,” yet he refuses to trust facts and figures from his wife, only recognizing their merit after other men have acknowledged it (249). In effect, Diantha needs approval from two patriarchal figures, her husband and a male-dominated scientific community, before she can rest and reap the fruits of her nervous discipline. Thus, for all its promotion of efficiency as a feminist ideal, and for all of its protagonist’s efforts to

extricate herself from man-made wastes, the novel still tethers the empowerment of women to the desires of men and to the closure of a heterosexual marriage plot.

Still, the conclusion of the novel reveals much about Gilman's twinned commitments to feminism and industrialization. *Diantha* taps into much the same New Utilitarian energy that drives utopian texts like *Looking Backward*. One might even think of the novel as a precursor to *Moving the Mountain* (1912), the first of Gilman's utopian romances and the only one realistic enough to earn the epithet of a "baby Utopia, one that can grow" (6). That Diantha becomes a happy, successful, and ultimately well-rested working mother reflects Gilman's conviction that industrial values and self-discipline will revolutionize the kind and quality of work done by middle-class women. That Ross, her biggest critic, comes to appreciate her labor is just as significant. His conversion emphasizes that people are improvable, a key tenet of Progressive-era thinking, and that rational management can overcome the wastes that hinder social progress. However, the New Utilitarian enthusiasm that Gilman champions in *Diantha* glosses over the problems that other, more cynical feminists, such as Edith Wharton, would find intractable.

Especially when read alongside *Diantha*, *The House of Mirth* seems an unlikely place to encounter a meditation on efficiency discourse. Wharton focuses on the extravagance of leisure-class life, not on the problems of domestics and overburdened middle-class mothers. Moreover, Wharton later condemned the ideology of efficiency in her critical essay "The Great American Novel" (1928), which famously lamented that industrialization had "simplified and Taylorized" an "old social organization which provided for nicely shaded degrees of culture and conduct" (650). Because scientific

management sought to standardize every social activity, Wharton argued, manners had become obsolete, robbing the nation of a rich system of signs. As Wharton hinted in her novel *Twilight Sleep* (1927), popular permutations of Taylorism also privileged quick, trivial work over productive labor and genuine social interaction. This position is most evident in the book's opening scene, where Nona Manford visits her mother, Pauline, at the office but is turned away by the secretary, who points to Pauline's daunting schedule:

“7.30 Mental uplift. 7.45 Breakfast. 8. Psycho-analysis. 8.15 See cook. 8.30 Silent meditation. 8.45 Facial massage. 9. Man with Persian miniatures. 9.15 Correspondence. 9.30 Manicure. 9.45 Eurythmic [sic] exercises. 10. Hair waved. 10.15 Sit for bust. 10:30 Receive Mother's Day deputation. 11. Dancing lesson. 11.30 Birth control committee at Mrs. —” (9-10).

The schedule reeks of scientific management, setting forth a series of tasks and times in which to complete them. The periods for “mental uplift” and “eurythmic exercises,” the latter of which were designed to recalibrate one's bodily energies, even Taylorize Pauline's physical culture.<sup>4</sup> Her efficiency is laughable, though. She takes on too many activities and does them all superficially, devoting as much time to the “birth control committee” as to frivolous “dancing lessons.” The schedule also fails to prioritize Pauline's most important commitments: she makes no time to speak with her daughter, putting off intimate contact in favor of merely cosmetic procedures. In this sense, Diane Lichtenstein demonstrates, efficiency is for Pauline a kind of “twilight sleep”: “The title of the novel describes not only the method of delivering babies while mothers were under the effects of scopolamine but also the characters' great desire to avoid the pains of life”

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<sup>4</sup> See Zak 115-117 for an excellent explanation of the ergonomic logic behind Pauline's “mental uplift” regimen. Zak calls attention, for instance, to her interest in eurhythmy, a style of performance art developed in 1911 by Austrian philosopher and educator Rudolf Steiner. Alternative health professionals, including Steiner himself, later adapted eurhythmy, originally conceived as a dance routine, to teach patients and even school-age children about mental, physiological, and spiritual balance.

(77). Pauline dulls the discomforts of her family life with an assembly line's worth of activity. Far from empowering women, *Twilight Sleep* suggests, efficiency drowns them in inconsequential work and anaesthetizes them to their responsibilities.

But while scholars have focused on *Twilight Sleep* and "The Great American Novel" to gauge Wharton's attitudes toward efficiency, her early fiction offers a different and more ambivalent critique of that discourse. I argue that *The House of Mirth* (1905) works just as hard as *Diantha* to illustrate the necessity of a feminist efficiency, for it, too, takes up machine discourse to illustrate how the social machine squanders women's energy. Yet, unlike Gilman, Wharton doubts that women can achieve a feminist efficiency premised on self-management. *Mirth* insists that there are simply too many other barriers to women's productivity. Thus, the form of *Mirth* inverts that of *Diantha*. Rather than illustrating the possibility of social reform with the rise of a strong, entrepreneurial woman, Wharton foregrounds the decline of her exhausted heroine, Lily Bart, to explore the factors that doom women to lives of inefficiency.

While Lily Bart does not toil like the housewives of *Diantha*, she is equally beset by fatigue. Lily is chronically tired because she strains to affect a sense of leisure to her intended set. As Lawrence Selden, her friend and suitor, notices in the novel's opening scene, Lily projects a "desultory air" (25) to distinguish herself from the "dull tints" of the working-class people around her, making her beauty even "more conspicuous than in a ball-room," a place emblematic of leisure (26). Lily's performance merely masks nervous deterioration, however. Her attire reclaims some of her "girlish smoothness," but "eleven years of late hours and indefatigable dancing" have begun erasing her "purity of tint" (26). Thus, for all her efforts to flaunt her carefree vitality to the world, Lily is

not as “indefatigable” as the unrelenting dance of leisure-class life (26). Rather, she teeters on the brink of entropy. As her “dancing” continues, and as her age advances—she is twenty-nine, quite old by nineteenth-century standards to be looking for a husband—she has less and less energy available for carousing. This nervous decline manifests when we first see her alone, without the “air of irresolution” she feigns in public. Her head is “throbbing with fatigue” as she struggles to balance her checkbook (46). To fit in with the likes of Bertha Dorset and Judy Trenor, the most powerful women in New York, Lily plays cards, and, compelled to wager exorbitant sums to keep up with their ostentatious displays of wealth, she loses hundreds of dollars at a time, even though her dwindling funds are earmarked to pay off mounting debts to her dressmaker and jeweler. For Lily, whose parents died in ruin and could not bequeath her enough money to sustain a lifetime of leisure, these extravagant displays are hardly easy. Away from the pleasures of the card table, Lily drains herself calculating how to pay her bills while still advertising her status to people weary of poor, dingy women. Lily fancies this labor “bondage” akin to domestic drudgery, for “in bitter moods it sometimes struck her that she and her maid were in the same position, except that the latter received her wages more regularly” (46). This attitude is naïve, of course. Wharton affirms the difficulty of domestic labor by calling attention to the struggles of Mrs. Haffen, Lawrence Selden’s charwoman, and Nettie Struther, a young mother whom Lily sponsors through a working girls club. It is also clear that Lily’s income is more stable than that of domestics: she gets modest stipends from her rich aunt; she just spends them profligately. But, despite the hyperbole, Lily highlights a paradox: leisure dooms women in her position to hard



work. To enjoy a life devoid of labor, she toils to meet the decadent expectations of others, even if that means exhausting herself and teetering on the brink of ruin.

To secure a lifetime of leisure, women like Lily must perform a more draining kind of labor, too: the work of landing a rich husband. Lily recognizes that, unless they are independently wealthy, unmarried women have little control of their financial futures. They are nevertheless “expected to be pretty and well-dressed till we drop—and if we can’t keep it up alone, we have to go into partnership” with someone whose assets will ease that labor (33). Selden jokes that marriage seems to be a “vocation,” what women are “all brought up for” (31). Yet, as Lily and Wharton emphasize, marriage is no laughing matter because women must indeed sell themselves as commodities on a marriage market (31). As Wai-Chee Dimock has demonstrated, the financial imagery in Lily’s remark and throughout the novel “attests to the frightening power of the marketplace” to “assimilate everything else into its domain,” giving even “the most private affairs” the “essence of a business transaction” (375-76). More important for our purposes, Lily’s quip calls attention to how much work women undertake for financial stability. Courting requires even more energy than the performance of leisure. Its stakes are higher, too. Failure means “dropping,” succumbing to fatigue without having achieved a comfortable life. Lily treats her own work with almost Taylorist rigor, making a scientific study of what men want. The intensity of this labor is most evident in her unsuccessful pursuit of Percy Gryce, particularly when she meets him by chance on a train. To cater to his bashfulness, she assumes an air of timidity, pretending to “cut the pages of a novel” when she is gearing up for the hunt, “tranquilly studying her prey through downcast eyes while she organized a method of attack” (38). Having trapped her

“prey” in the pleasures of a tea service, she proceeds to “manage him” with the knowledge afforded by a decade of training on the marriage market (39). Lily even fancies herself a “skillful operator,” believing she knows the “one spring that she had only to touch to set his simple machinery in motion,” his beloved collection of Americana (39-40). Managing Percy Gryce proves more arduous than touching a single spring, however. Strategizing demands considerable energy, so much that she feels like a “wayfarer” who “picks up a heavy load and toils on after a brief rest” (47). Lily considers herself an engineer who knows the “machinery” of the marriage market, but her labor has the exhausting character of industrial work. Combined with the nervous energy spent on financial woes, the demands of finding a husband threaten to deplete her.

Wharton considers all this work a grave waste of women’s energy. Of course, what Lily wants is wasteful by definition, at least according to a labor theorist like Thorstein Veblen, a contemporary of Wharton’s. The high life requires ostentatious spending, and that consumption does nothing to benefit society at large, especially when considered alongside the philanthropy of characters like Gerty Farish, who aspires to the upper echelons of society but toils with and for working-class women. Nevertheless, Wharton points out, social convention restricts the unwed to speculating on the marriage market, channeling women’s energy into currents directed by and for the pleasures of men—thus, currents that ensure neither contentment nor self-determination. Lily hopes that marriage will help her “to arrange her life as she pleased, to soar into the empyrean of security where creditors cannot penetrate” and where “she would be free forever from the shifts, the expedients, the humiliations of the relatively poor” (65). Gryce promises to stave off her anxieties, but marrying him will hardly allow her to “manage” her affairs as

scientifically as she has managed him. For this dull man, whose only occupation is reading journals that discuss his Americana, threatens to dissipate her energy on his vapid interests. To keep him, she must “submit to more boredom, must be ready with fresh compliances and adaptabilities, and all on the bare chance that he might ultimately decide to do her the honour of boring her for life” (44). Gryce would leave Lily few opportunities to assert her agency or exercise her talents. As Ruth Bernard Yeazell points out, Lily would simply advertise his status: like the leisure class woman more generally, Lily would “represent the financial strength of her ‘master,’ as Veblen puts it, by being herself ‘the chief ornament’ in his collection and by vicariously ‘perform[ing]’ conspicuous leisure and consumption for him” (715). The labor of leisure is doubly inefficient in this sense, Wharton suggests. Lily indeed desires a life devoid of utility, but choosing such a life means extinguishing her latent power to reflect the wealth of her husband. Equally frightening, the inefficiency of married life feels like the only choice. Giving up leisure seems impossible, but so does becoming independently wealthy. Lily must work hard only to attain a life that squanders her energy and potential.

What is worse, Lily performs her nuptial labors inefficiently since her desire for self-determination sabotages her efforts to secure a husband. Even before she has settled on Gryce, she has failed to marry several suitors. In each case, glimmers of what Selden calls the “republic of the spirit” tantalize her with the prospect of freedom “from everything—from money, from poverty, from ease and anxiety, from all the material accidents” (81). This state of mind, Selden muses, affords its citizens genuine leisure, an “escape from work” rather than the kind of leisure that “becomes the thing worked for” and “distorts all the relations of life” (83). In this sense, the republic romances the

possibility of a self not tethered to the values of the marketplace—or, for Lily, the contingencies of the marriage market. This ideal certainly appeals to Lily, for while she obsesses about her value as a commodity, her desire for agency too frequently wells up in an “ultimate refusal to realize her own ‘asset’” (Dimock 376). She and Selden even indulge this fantasy during their jaunt through the fields at Bellomont. While Lily had intended to catch Gryce at the local church—thoughts of Selden kept her closeted in the Trenors’ library earlier in the day, making her late for the service—a “lazy sense of pleasure” induces her to neglect the work of courtship and spend the afternoon with Selden (78). Their seeming remoteness from the hustle and bustle of economic life gives Lily a chance to remove the façade she has erected for the rest of her set. She smokes her first cigarette in days—Gryce hates the habit—and she succumbs to weeping about her precarious position. This momentary desire for freedom asserts itself at precisely the wrong time, however. Indulging her “lazy sense of pleasure” for but a brief “escape from work” undercuts all of her scientific management of Gryce. She does not meet him at church; he feels snubbed and begins seeing another woman. Even before Selden has accosted her, a “stealing sense of fatigue”—like the one she experiences while balancing her checkbook—alerts her to a “vague sense of failure” (75). Wanting to dwell in the republic of the spirit undercuts all of her previous work, and rather than helping her to reside in the state of leisure, inefficient work keeps her in a state of nervous entropy.

Even when Lily resolves to work efficiently on the marriage market, finally considering to wed the odious Simon Rosedale to escape poverty, she finds that her productivity hinges on that of her suitors. After society has ostracized her for seeming improprieties with Gus Trenor and George Dorset, both married men, the socialite

Rosedale refuses to espouse her. He recognizes the falsehood of the gossip about Lily's philandering, but he cares more about appearances than about truths. Moreover, he knows that the "quickest way to queer yourself with the right people is to be seen with the wrong ones" (242). Ironically, he fancies himself in much the same laborious position as Lily, lamenting that he has "had a pretty steady grind of it these last few years, working up my social position" (242). In some ways, he is just as marginalized as Lily. He must overcome both his diminished rank as a man of the *nouveau riche* and the anti-Semitic attitudes of the New York scene, prejudices made evident even by Wharton's stereotypical rendering of him. Rosedale nevertheless refuses to imagine how the marriage market privileges his labor over Lily's, further compromising her already precarious social status. Knowing that Lily, too, has had a "steady grind of it" and that she will have squandered much energy in her fight for financial stability, he still bemoans to her that going into partnership would mean that "everything I've worked for all these years would be wasted" (242). Both characters, then, dread the same sense of wasted effort, and neither can afford to fail. Rosedale comes out on top, however, because he can dictate how he deploys his social energies, a decision not available to Lily. The marriage market casts him as a consumer of things that reflect his taste. Lily may have toiled to market herself to a detestable suitor, but the buyer, Rosedale, may change his mind at any time, laying waste to her advertisement.

While overwork and inefficiency certainly factor into her decision, what ultimately convinces Lily to pursue her own sense of efficiency is the violent potential of masculine management. The near-rape scene at the Trenor apartment demonstrates that men have controlling interest in the market for women, power that Lily needs all her

intellectual energy to resist. While she believes she can handle all the men in her life, she fails to account for Gus Trenor. She thinks that he is investing her capital, but, as he reveals, he is just giving her money so that she will render him sexual services. When Trenor insists that she has finally “got to pay up” because he is tired of being “thrown in the gutter like an empty purse,” a wasteful investment as far as he is concerned, the resulting confrontation becomes a battle for the management of Lily’s body (148). Trenor does not fight fair, of course. He makes insinuations about her promiscuity that feel like a “physical blow” (148). He finds, however, that words will not suffice. He cannot expect to profit by his venture unless he “[catches] her up with a sneer” that delivers a “shock to her drowning consciousness” (148). Trenor believes that only the seizure and consumption of Lily’s energy will satisfy his twinned desires for economic and sexual power. The only way for him to feel efficient—to avoid being used and discarded like an “empty purse”—is to overpower her, to incapacitate her “throat, her limbs, her helpless useless hands” (149). This strategy nearly disables Lily, though, in the end, she resists physical and economic management by steeling her already fatigued nerves. She “[holds] her footing” even though “every nerve tore at her to retreat as he advanced” (148). In spite of her “drowning consciousness,” she also finds strength to reason through her predicament, determining to “[raise] her head” and give a “clear look” to blow a “cold air” through the “flame” of her assailant’s desire (149). “[Raising] her head” to assert her agency diffuses the situation; the work needed to defy masculine management is too draining to continue, however. At Gerty Farish’s, where Lily wanders after her traumatic encounter, she walks and talks “as if in utter physical weariness,” indicating to Farish that “other nerve-centers were smitten” than the ones usually

disturbed by the labor of leisure (165). Farish cannot intuit what Lily has just endured, but Lily all too clearly recognizes that if she has escaped Trenor's physical threats, she will not evade the ensuing gossip. Masculine management will ruin her reputation and undercut her efforts to manage her own affairs. Ultimately, the shock demonstrates that, to take charge of her own energy, Lily must abandon the work of landing a rich man; she must redefine what it means for a woman to live independently and productively.

This epiphany changes the trajectory of the novel, for while the first book of *Mirth* focuses on Lily's difficulties with the nuptials market, culminating in the trauma at the Trenor mansion, the second, more loosely structured book concentrates on her unsuccessful efforts to find more empowering work. As J. Michael Duvall observes, "being of use" is a key theme throughout *Mirth*, particularly because Lily has "internalized utility in the abstract as the highest value" and because she "has faith in her ability to serve, no matter the task" (160). Duvall demonstrates convincingly that the preoccupation with being of use in *Mirth*—and thus of being consumed and discarded, as suggested by the image of the "empty purse" in the rape scene—points to the novel's uneasy position between a culture of stewardship for material things and the "ethic of disposability" that emerged with the rise of consumer capitalism (160). At the same time, I add, Lily's desire for utility points to *Mirth*'s engagement with the discourse of personal efficiency, particularly in conversations about the independence of women. In the second book, Lily tries new, potentially more productive kinds of work to optimize her latent energies by her own means and for her own edification. Her quest resembles that of Diantha Bell, in this sense. Both protagonists appeal to labor efficiency to increase their agency and extricate themselves from the cultural wastes perpetuated by masculine

desire. But, unlike Diantha, Lily finds neither better working conditions nor opportunities for economic self-sufficiency.

Rendering service to others is just as precarious and wasteful as the marriage market, Lily learns. Her trip to Monte Carlo effectively bankrupts her of cultural capital in spite of the fact that she has stopped pursuing a rich husband. Bertha and George Dorset invite her to stay on their yacht, and while Lily travels with them on the pretense of companionship, it is understood by most of the New York scene that she is to keep George occupied as Bertha dallies with younger men. She executes this underhanded work admirably. She is “‘perfect’ to every one: subservient to Bertha’s anxious predominance, good-naturedly watchful of Dorset’s moods, brightly companionable to Silverton and Dacey” (186). By being “subservient” to the Dorsets, Lily even disciplines her laboring energies, for she forges a “pact with her rebellious impulses, and achieved a uniform system of self-government, under which all vagrant tendencies were either captive or forced into the service of the state” (186). “Self-government” thus affords Lily a new kind of efficiency, productivity that eliminates the “vagrant tendencies” of her desire for agency. However, the “state” of “service” does not afford the true leisure of Selden’s republic of the spirit. Lily still expends her energy for others, and that obedience requires restraint. Moreover, the state of service offers its citizens little job security. Lily labors superbly but is “poised on the brink of a chasm, with one graceful foot advanced to assert her unconsciousness that the ground beneath her was failing” (186). The fantasy of leisure collapses because George learns of Bertha’s carousing and threatens to divorce her; as a countermeasure, Bertha refuses to invite Lily back onto the yacht, insinuating that Lily has broken up their marriage. Bertha’s calculated move



entails ruin for Lily. The New York set is embarrassed by her seeming transgression of social form, and she is forced to flee to her cousins, who ultimately report her gaffe to her wealthy aunt. Virtual disinheritance ensues. Being useful to the Dorsets results in Lily's disposal, not in increased self-determination or financial stability. Bertha casts Lily aside like an "empty purse" after she has snatched its valuable contents: an excuse that downplays her dalliances and emphasizes the faults of a rival. Increased efficiency means little, Wharton suggests, unless Lily can devise a "uniform system of self-government" that is, like the republic of the spirit, separated from the sexual and economic power of high society heavyweights.

Lily's unsuccessful spell as secretary to Norma Hatch confirms this thought. Working for Hatch is to some extent liberating, promoting Lily from unpaid babysitter to social engineer in a job sector far away from the likes of the Trenors and Dorsets: the circle of *nouveau riche* trying to assimilate to high society. Moreover, while Bertha strictly regulates the conduct of her employee, Hatch hires Lily to manage her—to systematize the "blur of confused and retarded engagements" that impedes the efficiency of the wealthy divorcée's social calendar (258). Hatch's life not at all resembles the "working of the great civic machine" that Lily associates with the "inherited obligations" of Old New York (259). With "no definite hours" and "no fixed obligations," Hatch and her crew "float together outside the bounds of time and space" (258). They even refuse to take their leisure seriously, succumbing to "indolence and disorder" as they eschew convention for a "jumble of futile activities" including "manicures, beauty-doctors, hair-dressers, teachers of bridge, of French, [and] of 'physical development'" (258). In this sense, the world that Hatch inhabits—and the one that Lily must subject to Taylorist

discipline—prefigures the breakneck frivolity that Wharton would condemn in her later fiction, especially in *Twilight Sleep*. The task of bringing order to chaos does not discourage Lily, of course. The steady income Hatch provides certainly outweighs her eccentricities and social inexperience. Lily also wields considerably more agency as a secretary than as an expendable minion for the underhanded Bertha. Yet sex and money still imperil Lily. Because Norma disregards the conventions that power the “great civic machine,” she illicitly pursues the young Freddy Van Osburgh. The ensuing affair threatens to ostracize Lily completely, given her complicity in it. Thus, while Lily enjoys more freedom with Mrs. Hatch than with Bertha, her financial security is in both cases tied to the dastardly dealings of the leisure class, not to her own gumption. As Gerty Farish observes, “all Lily’s energies [are] centered in the determined effort to hold fast” to high society, “to keep herself visibly identified with them, as long as the illusion could be maintained” (253). She cannot thrive by and for herself so long as she preserves those connections, however, and every time her newfound efficiency fails, her “wasted personal emotion” dissipates in the “general current of human understanding” (253). The machine of manners persists in spite of what trauma befalls women like Lily.

Lily ultimately substitutes leisure for conventional labor to convert her “wasted personal emotion” into useful, empowering work. Indeed, framing hats at Madame Regina’s millinery shop is, for Lily, a last-ditch effort to redefine what it means for a woman to be productive, not simply “of use” to parasitic peers. She takes the position because Gerty Farish believes such a job will provide “profitable activity” that even Lily’s “charming listless hands could really do” (265). Of course, when Farish suggests millinery work, she hopes that her struggling friend will do easy, merely decorative tasks

like adorning pre-assembled hats. The kind of productivity that Gerty envisions is more like leisurely diversion than genuine labor, then. She fantasizes that “subordinate fingers, blunt, grey, needle-pricked fingers, would prepare the shapes and stitch linings, while [Lily] presided over the charming little store front . . . where her finished creations, hats, wreaths, aigrettes, and the rest, perched on their stands like birds just poising for flight” (265). But, knowing that such occupation would keep her bound to the market for women’s bodies—like the fashionable hats she would sell, she would be “perched” in a display window for others to consume and discard—Lily pushes the idea of “profitable activity” even further than Gerty. Rather than saving her “listless hands” for indolence, she opts for “needle-pricked fingers” that, she believes, will promote her utility and self-sufficiency. Other characters in *Mirth* consider this decision “proof of Lily’s unreason” (266). After all, joining the workroom means eschewing earlier acquaintances for twenty “fagged” faces “sallow with the unwholesomeness of hot air and sedentary toil” (264). Moreover, while Lily longs to oversee her own affairs, enlisting in the homogenous ranks of “subordinate fingers” and unidentifiable, “fagged” faces entails scrupulous management from Miss Haines, Madame Regina’s meticulous and demanding foreperson. Nevertheless, by passing over the storefront for a veritable factory floor, Lily determines where and how she ought to use her energy, a move that, as far as she is concerned, separates her from high society’s definition of women’s work.

In this way, the novel emphasizes that joining the workforce is Lily’s choice, one she makes to control how her energy is spent. Like Farish, Madame Regina insists that Lily is most useful as an advertisement, not as an operative in the shop, for “she had been willing from the first to employ Lily in the show-room: as a displayer of hats, a

fashionable beauty might be a valuable asset” (266). Yet, even in her most vulnerable economic state, Lily refuses to cash in on her beauty. Madame Regina detests “untrained assistance” in the workroom, but Lily still manages to convince her that it is “more useful that she should learn the trade” than it is to place her in the storefront (266-67).

Jockeying for the “useful” shop job is strategic, a move by which Lily appeals to the efficiency of gainful employment to detach herself from the whims of wealthy friends and foes. Her later conversations with Rosedale confirm this reading. Rosedale discovers by chance that Lily has relinquished her fashionable apartment for a boarding house in a neighborhood strewn with the “*disjecta membra* of bygone dinners” and other such refuse (274). Determined not to let Lily become debris—the material wasted after leisure class consumption—he offers financial support, an advance on the small legacy she is to receive from her dead aunt. Lily refuses, however, replying, “I have lived too long on my friends” (274). Like Diantha, she is confident that self-reliance and discipline will reward her, perhaps even grant her citizenship in Selden’s republic of the spirit. The novel casts doubt on this philosophy, of course. *Mirth* abounds with moments that figure Lily as a “screw or cog in the great machine,” and these mechanical images suggest her helplessness rather than the efficacy of individual action (287). Lily nevertheless tries to resist the deterministic machine of manners. By choosing the utility of the factory floor over the conspicuous waste of the storefront, she trusts that genuine labor will increase her efficiency and foster her self-sufficiency.

*Mirth* emphasizes the folly of this fantasy, however. For one, the novel insists that its protagonist is incapable of the efficiency that would realize her feminist vision. In the millinery shop, “untutored fingers” keep her “blundering over the rudiments of the

trade” while her peers exhibit the “special deftness of touch” that comes with years of experience (267). Even additional training is of no avail. Lily’s labor actually deteriorates over two months of toil, partly because she cannot master the fundamentals and partly because the job instigates insomnia that dulls her concentration and impedes her learning. Lily cannot match the dexterity of her colleagues, *Mirth* suggests, because social circumstances did not prepare her for edifying labor. Rather, class conditions robbed her, practically from birth, of the physical and intellectual resources necessary to be efficient in any context besides the marriage market. With a hint of evolutionary determinism, Wharton laments that Lily is an “organism as helpless out of its narrow range as the sea-anemone torn from the rock” (279). Since she “had been fashioned to adorn and delight,” both by ambitions of her bankrupted parents and by her own desire to climb into the upper echelons of New York, she developed into a “highly specialized product” capable only of adhering to the financial support of a rich husband (279). Without that financial “rock,” and outside her “specialized” niche, a seemingly natural role, Lily can neither function—in terms of labor productivity—nor survive—in terms of a Darwinian struggle for existence. Thus, Lily finds herself in a double bind. No environment provides the conditions she needs to redefine herself through congenial labor efficiently performed, a factor that facilitated the success of Diantha Bell in Gilman’s novel. On the other hand, Lily’s skill set is so “specialized” that she cannot be useful in any capacity save as a “product” for rich men. Lily—and, by extension, countless other women whose livelihoods are tied to the success of men—is doomed no matter what trade she undertakes, Wharton suggests, because the only role in which she can be efficient is one that diminishes her ability to manage her energy. Thus, when Lily

cannot fulfill her quotas at Madame Regina's, her failure reveals that personal efficiency is an illusory ideal for women. Society affords women no recourse to wasteful lives.

Moreover, while Lily believes that efficiency will liberate her, the pursuit of productivity proves more draining than freeing. She disables herself trying to increase her utility. If her head simply "throbbled with fatigue" at the beginning of the novel, persistent insomnia—brought on by the unrelenting toil of the workroom and the threat of financial insecurity—dismantles her bodily economy. She becomes a defective engine because her energy rushes through conflicting channels. "Empty veins" that signal a desperate "craving for sleep" (271) continually fight against the "legion of insurgent nerves" that emit a "blaze of electric light" across her tired mind and keep her awake, "as though some cruel stimulant had been forced into her veins" (299). Ironically, the only way Lily sustains her entropic motive power is to forge Norma Hatch's prescription for chloral, a sedative that absorbs and dampens the "electric light" of her racing thoughts. Because the drug plunges her "into depths of dream-less annihilation," it offers "a momentary illusion of complete renewal" (275-76). The effects of the chloral dissipate as quickly as her vigor, however. Even brief encounters with Rosedale and Selden leave her "lost in the blank reaction which follows an unwonted expenditure of energy" (289). Thus, as millinery labor demands more of her "electric light" to do the same work—an increasingly inefficient endeavor, Wharton suggests—Lily steadily loses control of her bodily economy. The chloral virtually supplants her as manager of her energy. Her "insurgent nerves" listen not to her rational commands but to the hypnotic suggestions of the chemical mesmerist, an "invisible hand" that "made magic passes over her in the darkness," such that her worries "[dropped] into abeyance, like sentinels falling asleep at

their posts” (299). Curiously, then, Lily cannot regulate her power either when she refuses the drug or when she administers it. She cannot force herself to sleep without it, yet she must abdicate bodily authority when she does, succumbing to the “complete subjugation” of her faculties (299). Choosing the sweatshop is indeed Lily’s attempt to use her energy on her own terms, but the ensuing exhaustion makes that management untenable. Lily winds up inefficient, depleted and constrained by chemical dependence.

Wharton highlights the failed promises of personal efficiency by putting readers in Lily’s compromised position. As Lily immerses herself in factory life, and as her energy diminishes, it increasingly becomes an “effort to put her thoughts together,” both for her and for readers of *Mirth* (268). Continually burdened by the “weight of a sleepless night,” Lily struggles to make sense of the “buzz of talk” in the workroom (267). These conversations take on “the incoherence of a dream” not only because Lily cannot parse them out but because Wharton abandons her conventional storytelling technique for something akin to stream of consciousness narration:

“I *told* her he’d never look at her again; and he didn’t. I wouldn’t have, either—I think she acted real mean to him. He took her to the Arion Ball, and had a hack for her both ways . . . She’s taken ten bottles, and her headaches don’t seem no better—but she’s written a testimonial to say the first bottle cured her, and she got five dollars and her picture in the paper . . . Mrs. Trenor’s hat? The one with the green Paradise? Here, Miss Haines—it’ll be right off . . . That was one of the Trenor girls here yesterday with Mrs. George Dorset. How’d I know? Why, Madam sent for me to alter the flower in that Viroc hat—the blue tulle: she’s tall and slight, with hair fuzzed out—a good deal like Mamie Leach, on’y thinner” (267, ellipses in the original)

Neither Lily nor the reader of *Mirth* is completely unmoored here, particularly because the Dorsets and Trenors resurface amid the banter of Lily’s colleagues. But these flickers of the familiar still disorient Lily, for she sees in the confused dialogue “the fragmentary

and distorted image of the world she had lived in reflected in the mirror of the working girls' minds" (268). Embedded in a conveyor belt's worth of verbal activity, including telling remarks about "headaches" brought on by industrial fatigue, symptoms that reflect Lily's own deterioration, even these more recognizable details drown in a "current of meaningless sound" (267). By reproducing the "buzz of talk" that impresses itself upon Lily's consciousness, Wharton forces consideration of both Lily's depletion and her inability to work as efficiently as the women whose energies generate the "current" of conversation in the assembly line.

The distortion of narrative time in the final few chapters reflects and reinforces Lily's fatigue-driven disorientation. While she merely fancied herself "outside the bounds of time and space" as secretary to the unpredictable Norma Hatch, lack of sleep often leaves her without any idea of where she is or how she got there, a sensation represented primarily by the disorganized account of her employment with Madame Regina. The shop scene begins not with exposition that clarifies Lily's falling out with Norma Hatch but with the unfamiliar, reprimanding voice of Miss Haines: "Look at those spangles, Miss Bart—every one of 'em sewed on crooked" (264). By beginning the chapter with this as yet unnamed and disembodied figure, Wharton offers a sense of temporal disjunction, an abrupt flash forward that momentarily thwarts readers' attempts to track the moral and intellectual development of the efficiency-driven protagonist. Only piecemeal does Wharton explain her desperate situation, focusing first and foremost on her inefficient work, next on the managerial figure of Miss Haines, and then on the twenty "fagged profiles, under exaggerated hair" who sit beside her in the workroom (264). After Wharton has flashed back a few months, reporting in a lengthy digression



the conditions under which Lily has relinquished her leisure-class friends, she finally reorients narrative time, tellingly by returning to Lily's millinery inefficiency: "The forewoman was right: the sewing on the spangles was inexcusably bad. What made her so much more clumsy than usual?" (268). Like the singular moment of stream of consciousness narration, the lack of sequence in the workroom chapter makes it difficult to "put her thoughts together"—to follow her movements, understand her motives, or reckon her moral progress. The scattered narration of the workroom chapter marks a watershed moment in the novel, too, for temporal confusion afflicts the rest of Lily's story. *Mirth* similarly doubles back on story-time when Lily "reencounters" Nettie Struther, a woman she forgot that she had sponsored through Gerty Farish's charity work. Too tired to remember much of anything, Lily needs Nettie to recall her own backstory. As with the episode at the millinery shop, the appearance of Nettie unsettles Lily's perception of time—and thus ours. Moreover, reminiscing with Nettie similarly foregrounds the psychological deterioration of Wharton's heroine. Lily finally remembers the young mother after some prodding but, "sinking under a great wave of physical weariness," cannot indicate that she recalls helping her (291).

The chance meeting with Nettie is doubly important because it taunts Lily with the promises of personal efficiency. Prior to Lily's intervention, Nettie had toiled as a typist for a traveling salesman, who abandoned her after impregnating her. A victim of "overwork and anemic parentage," she then took ill and needed financial assistance to leave for the country, where a doctor could better tend to the pulmonary problems exacerbated by her neurasthenic symptoms (291). Yet, while Lily had considered Nettie a foregone casualty of society's wasteful attitudes toward women, deeming her "one of

the superfluous fragments of life destined to be swept prematurely into [the] social refuse-heap,” pluck and productivity save the young mother from being completely consumed and discarded (291). She resolves to “take heart in spite of myself” in order to discipline her energy and return to work (291). Moreover, she marries a close friend—who, fortunately, does not care about the parentage of her child—to ensure her child’s economic security. With these newfound support systems, Nettie increases her efficiency, both at work and at home. The thought of her child buoys her labor, so much so that she seldom needs time off for sickness, and while the Struther home is inelegant and “extraordinarily small” compared to the wasteful estates to which Lily is accustomed, it is warm, cozy, and “miraculously clean,” a testament to Nettie’s management of the domestic space (292). What facilitates the transformation from fatigued fatality to efficient woman, Wharton suggests, is a new conception of work. During her illness, Nettie discovers that she would “never have had the heart to go on working just for myself” (293). Providing for a child, on the other hand, offers her a renewed sense of purpose and a reason to increase her productivity. In this sense, the efficiency that Nettie realizes is decidedly maternal. Mothering consumes much energy and entails intensive labor, both biological and professional, but being a parent invigorates Nettie’s bodily engine and thus makes possible new and more effective kinds of work. Moreover, Lily recognizes, efficiency requires partnership, a healthy distribution of energy rather than a solitary endeavor: “It had taken two to build the nest,” she muses, and while “all the men and women she knew were like atoms whirling away from each other in some wild centrifugal dance,” the fusion of Nettie and George’s energy enables them to find meaningful work, even if their labors cannot extricate them from lives of squalor (297).

Nettie Struther thus represents the romantic, industrial ideal to which Lily aspires, and her success seems to assert the possibility of a feminist efficiency, a kind of productivity in which a woman can choose to channel her resources into mutually beneficial relationships that convert love and duty into maternal power.

Yet, as Lily's overdose evinces, Wharton distrusts both the productivity of maternity and the promises of efficiency. Nettie Struther perhaps lends credence to the possibility of self-management; at the same time, she emphasizes its inaccessibility to women like Lily, and Wharton dissolves the fantasy of power through productivity by snuffing out her protagonist in a drug-induced dream of motherhood. Nettie's daughter seduces Lily with the prospect of being useful, for after she holds the baby and experiences a "strange sense of weakness, as though the child entered into her and became a part of her," she momentarily taps into Nettie's maternal energy: "With a sudden fever of activity," Lily arranges her belongings and financial affairs, a task she had for weeks been "too listless and indifferent" to undertake (294). To liberate herself from the energy-depleting dread of needing to requite Gus Trenor, she even writes him a check for the full amount of her debt. But, unlike Nettie, who gains stability and efficiency from her maternal and professional labors, Lily cannot sustain her energy because fatigue undermines her efforts. Since her "insurgent nerves" no longer respond to the chloral, and since insomnia has deadened her concentration, she takes too much of the drug. Ironically, as she succumbs, she believes that she has escaped the solitary "centrifugal dance." No longer an aimless atom, she fancies herself a mother, feeling the pressure of Nettie's daughter sleeping beside her (300). Lily even imagines that she is a doting guardian. She comforts the child, "hollowing her arm to pillow the round downy

head,” and she struggles against sleep thinking she “ought to keep awake on account of the baby” (300). Her final sensations are equally parental. Believing that the “tender pressure of [the baby’s] body was still close to her,” she perishes in the “thrill of warmth and pleasure” afforded by the thought of having someone to work for (300). Her maternal work is delusive, however. Lily never steps away from the “centrifugal dance,” and she wastes her remaining energy on the fruitless labor of caring for an illusory child.

The novel underscores the inefficiency of this parenting in a moment akin to “heat death,” a thermodynamic possibility dreaded by nineteenth- and twentieth-century scientists, social philosophers, and writers alike in which the gradual diffusion of energy would reduce the universe to an “icy, lifeless void” (Rabinbach 47).<sup>5</sup> Just before Lily expires, she awakens “cold and trembling with shock: for a moment she seemed to have lost hold of the child” (300). The drug quickly convinces Lily of the child’s proximity, so she returns to slumber, assured that the “the recovered warmth” of the child “flowed through her once more” (300). Because of this comforting image, Elizabeth Ammons takes solace in Lily’s death, arguing that the “union of the leisure and working classes” emblemized by Lily’s embrace of the child represents Wharton’s “hope” for “the New Woman,” a figure she would explore in her subsequent novel, *The Fruit of the Tree* (*Argument* 356-57). The frigid “shock,” the faulty perception of “recovered warmth,” and the illusory nature of the child necessitate a far more sinister interpretation, however.

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<sup>5</sup> Anson Rabinbach traces social anxieties about the “heat death” of the universe to the 1850s, when energy physicists began to develop the Second Law of Thermodynamics. Scientists would not fully articulate the law until the 1860s, particularly after Rudolf Clausius adopted the term “entropy” to describe how energy dissipates during its conversion and conservation (62). But even during the 1850s William Thomson, Lord Kelvin, hypothesized that energy diffusion was steadily decreasing the temperature of the planet. The earth, he imagined, would ultimately succumb to an icy stasis (42). Gilded Age pessimists such as Wharton often appealed to the theory of heat death to confirm their arguments about the lack of social progress and the deterioration of beloved institutions.

Lily's chill suggests that the pursuit of efficiency has robbed her body of the energy needed to do the work of living. Ironically, the deathbed scene concludes with the thought, as Ammons puts it, that the "vitality" of the working-class girl "succors the dying woman" (356). Yet there is no child—and thus no such energy transfer—when Lily passes. Just as telling, Lily dies while emptily emulating Nettie's productivity. She imaginatively tries her hand at maternal work but does not actually perform it. That Lily takes her final breathes while dreaming of maternal labor reveals efficiency to be a fatal vision, not an empowering ideal that could spur on women.

To underscore efficiency's empty promises of liberation and agency, *Mirth* concludes that Lily can manage neither her energy nor her life story. Not only does Lily fail to find work that rescues her from a wasteful life, but male desire retakes her narrative, particularly when Selden gazes upon her corpse and rewrites the chronicle of her decline. Determined to discover the "real Lily," who, he feels, is "still there, close to him" (302), Selden reads her situation in the receipts and checks she has left behind, documents that afford "all he could hope to unravel of the story" (305). He correctly deduces that Lily resolved to repay Trenor, yet he interprets the text of her corpse in a way that assuages his conscience rather than giving voice to Lily's exhaustion. As Cynthia Griffin Wolf points out, her body serves as "the object of his idealistic artistic sensibilities," an interpretation, I add, that is confirmed by his transformation from reader to writer of her narrative (338). After admitting his role in her death, intuiting that his "detachment from the external influences which swayed her" had "made it more difficult for him to live and love uncritically," he downplays his culpability, noting that "at least he *had* loved her" (305). He then pastes a saccharine conclusion onto her tragic account.

With not the least touch of selfish sentimentality, Selden imagines that “in the silence” of her chamber “there passed between them the word which made all clear” (305). Lily had tried but failed to articulate this “word” during her drug-induced stupor, but Selden conveniently pens it in this final scene to insist that the “moment of love” could be “saved whole out of the ruin of their lives” (305). Love does not protect Lily “from atrophy and extinction,” however (305). It is “ruin” and “extinction” that end the story of the “real Lily.” Selden nevertheless needs a sanitized version of Lily’s text to bolster his self-esteem. That *Mirth* ends with his version of the “word” rather than hers demonstrates that, in spite of her efforts to work for herself, Lily controls neither her nervous energy nor the narratives that people tell about it. By letting Selden expurgate the story of her “atrophy and extinction,” as well as the exhausted aesthetic that reflects it, the conclusion of *Mirth* thus reinforces efficiency’s inaccessibility to women. Women in Lily’s position are doomed to inefficiency, Wharton suggests, not because of a biological incapacity for productivity, but because the social machine powered by men and manners refuses women opportunities to write productive chronicles of their lives with new, more congenial labor. Like Lily’s parental labor and Selden’s “word,” the idea of feminist efficiency is a romantic illusion.

By denying Lily the chance to manage her energy and her story, and by making *Mirth* reproduce her increasing fatigue, Wharton thus offers an account of efficiency discourse that complicates the utopian enthusiasm which texts like *What Diantha Did* drum up to advance the New Woman. Indeed, both novels explore whether efficient living would enable women to take control of their labors and narrative trajectories, but, as the fates of their respective protagonists reveal, Wharton and Gilman diverge in their

treatments of progress and the self-made woman. In keeping with its author's steadfast belief in progress, *Diantha* offers ideological closure in its *bildungsroman* plot, assuring that women will enjoy mental health and increased productivity if they find the work to which they are best suited. The development of its protagonist from fatigued fiancée to successful and well-rested entrepreneur confirms that white middle-class housewives can extricate themselves from wasteful lives. That the plot of *Diantha* continues past the marriage of its protagonist—a wedding is the conventional conclusion of domestic fiction—reinforces Gilman's conviction in a feminist efficiency. Like the banyan tree that Gilman uses to symbolize her efficiency maven's work, *Diantha* grows in spite of resistance from her husband; her sustained development, combined with Ross's change of heart, ultimately indicates Gilman's abiding faith that domesticity can be optimized and that women can transcend the inefficient narratives to which they are relegated.

Surprisingly, *Mirth* shares *Diantha*'s interest in a feminist efficiency. The novel similarly takes up the discourse of waste to condemn the powerlessness of women, and in the deterioration of Lily Bart it determines to give voice to the fatigue that women experience as “cogs” and “screws” in the social machine. The exhausted aesthetic of *Mirth* betrays Wharton's doubts about progress and women's agency, however. Rather than imagining how women might escape wasted lives, the demise of Lily Bart and the deterioration of her narrative undercut the conviction that women can reengineer the social machine, particularly if they are striking out on their own to assert a sense of personal efficiency.

## CHAPTER IV

### WASTED SYMPATHY: ENERGY, ECOLOGY, AND THE FATE OF SENTIMENTALISM IN *THE SQUATTER AND THE DON* AND *THE OCTOPUS*

In an episode emblematic of efficiency's applications to agriculture during the 1880s and 1890s, S. Behrman, the infamous railroad backer of Frank Norris's *The Octopus: A Story of California* (1901), supervises a crew of machinists and farmhands as his steam harvester reaps a bonanza crop of San Joaquin Valley wheat. The novel laments with no little degree of nostalgia that, before railroads had streamlined commerce between California and Chicago, "farmers loved their land, caressing it, coaxing it" to produce numerous kinds of crops with seed "sown by hand" and tools that encouraged intimate communion with the soil (59). Behrman's harvester, on the other hand, marks a critical transformation in farmers' relationships with the soil. Rather than "caressing" the fields, Norris suggests, the machine has "bullied" them into yielding hundreds of thousands of bushels of wheat (60). Its productivity even makes handling the wheat unnecessary. The crew simply sews shut the finished sacks of grain or adjusts the sprockets that dictate the speed of the threshers, while Behrman, playing the proto-Taylorist efficiency expert, stands aside to reckon how his harvester winnows, cleans, and prepackages an entire sack of wheat "in half a minute—sometimes in twenty seconds" (617). The way that Behrman focuses on the output of the machine instead of getting his hands dirty emblemizes Norris's impressions of the New Agriculture, farming techniques implemented during the *fin de siècle* that brought the ideal of factory efficiency to the productions of nature. As William Conlogue explains, laborsaving machines, corporate consolidation, and emerging methods like single-crop specialization



and “book farming” called upon agriculturists “to conceive of plants, animals, land, and people through a narrow mechanistic frame that tends not to see them as living things” but as mechanical inputs processed by a finely calibrated transcontinental machine (16). *Fin-de-siècle* farmers came to believe not only that nature’s productions served a grand industrial system but that agriculture could optimize the soil by emulating factory work and the efficiency of machines. Behrman’s attention to numbers and efficiency represents how Norris perceived this new way of relating to nature, one, Conlogue suggests, that was “based on distance and abstraction, rather than the close bonds and concrete experience suggested in Jefferson’s agrarianism” (39). The quest for efficiency, Norris believed, meant that farmers would forsake intimate ties with the soil.

In one sense, Norris’s critique is traditional. Like many writers of the nineteenth century, he associated industrial technology with the disruption of the pastoral, an abundant and idyllic literary landscape that American writers imagined to express their longings for simpler times in which people lived closely and cooperatively with nature.<sup>1</sup> Norris’s condemnation of the machine in the garden is distinctive, though, because it attends not only to the image of the engine but to the logic—or illogic—of efficiency. Indeed, Norris suggests that new forms of inefficiency will compound the problem of farmers’ environmental detachment. At the very moment Behrman gets caught up in the technological sublime, his harvester sounds a “hollow note” through the ground as the wheat stalks “disappear into the bowels of the vast brute that devoured them” (617). The

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<sup>1</sup> This definition of the pastoral comes from Leo Marx’s *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America*, 24-33. According to Marx, nineteenth-century writers criticized industrialization by depicting the machine, often figured by a locomotive, as a “sudden, shocking intruder upon a fantasy of idyllic satisfaction,” a domesticated space associated with the “tender, feminine, and submissive attitudes traditionally attached to the landscape” (29).

harvester, representative of factory farming, is perhaps the most productive employee in the Behrman crew, as it replaces the slow, imprecise work of human hands with the precision of mechanical blades. But, Norris suggests, its efficiency is a “hollow” gesture, for the machine misallocates nature’s energy. Neither Behrman’s farmhands nor the residents of the San Joaquin Valley will eat the garnered wheat; the voracious threshers will. The fruits of nature’s labor will subsequently “disappear” into the “bowels” of industry instead of feeding hungry Californians, people like the Hoovens, characters who starve to death at the end of *The Octopus*. Thus, Norris reasons, while improved farming equipment, faster commercial conveyance, and rationalized production have compelled the land to produce more food in less time and with less human labor, industrial productivity comes at great social costs: unprecedented wastes of environmental and human potential that undermine the push for efficiency in agriculture.

Such anxieties about squandered energy pervade the critiques of industrialization in *The Octopus* and in María Amparo Ruiz de Burton’s *The Squatter and the Don* (1885), a historical romance that decries the displacement of Mexican-American ranchers in the wake of California’s annexation. Of course, scholars have usually argued that these works are more devoted to than critical of industrial agriculture. Citing Ruiz de Burton’s investment in the Texas-Pacific Railroad, Brook Thomas contends that the anti-capitalist rhetoric of *Squatter* is misleading (873) and that Ruiz de Burton’s economics are “developmental and commercial, not agrarian” (875). Thus, critics like Thomas imply, if *Squatter* laments American wheat farmers’ dissolution of Californio farming traditions, it does so disingenuously, for the book upholds the very economic system that it claims to

critique.<sup>2</sup> Scholars have similarly doubted Norris's ecocritical engagement. Many agree with Conlogue that Norris considered industrial agriculture the standard for farming and that *The Octopus* presumes and even valorizes abstract ways of relating to the land (33).<sup>3</sup> Even those who claim that *The Octopus* expresses genuine ecocritical impulses dismiss its overall treatment of the New Agriculture. Ira Wells, perhaps Norris's strongest advocate in this respect, observes that the book has flashes of environmental sensitivity but lacks "sustained critique of the practices of industrialized farming as instantiated in the San Joaquin Valley" (82). Both writers, critics conclude, embraced the capitalist system that undergirded the New Agriculture, and those commitments ultimately undermined their novels' condemnations of machine culture.

I argue, however, that these authors' treatments of factory farming are more consistent and also more complicated than scholars presume. Ruiz de Burton and Norris support industrial philosophies to the extent that they embrace the ideal of efficiency, but they denounce the New Agriculture on the grounds that it is not efficient enough. Indeed, they suggest that factory-style farming is simply not as productive as older ways of relating to the soil. *Squatter* and *The Octopus* thus offer a counter-discourse to the efficiency promoted by industry, one that highlights the new wastes of machine culture and promotes the economy of subsistence-based farming instead. We can appreciate the

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<sup>2</sup> See also González 102. González agrees with Thomas that the novel embraces entrepreneurial capitalism, condemning only "the extent to which corporate proletarianization indiscriminately interpolated whites and nonwhites alike into a wage labor economy in a way that eroded racial distinctions" (102). Thus, González maintains, Ruiz de Burton is less interested in critiquing industrialization than in reasserting the racial and economic privileges that the railroad took away from the white Mexican gentry.

<sup>3</sup> For instance, Stephanie L. Sarver argues that, in *The Octopus*, "the land itself is significant only as the place in which Norris sets the story" (78). The novel otherwise "reveals the ways that farming increasingly dissociates from an awareness of terrestrial nature as it becomes entangled in human dramas" (17).

novels' commitments to both efficiency and preindustrial farming if we look at the ways they deploy—and, in Norris's case, reject—sentimentalism, an evocative rhetoric chosen to rouse readers' sympathies against the unfeeling logic of the machine.

Literary sentimentalism in its most basic sense urges readers to reconsider their moral and political commitments by asking them to identify, if only tenuously and temporarily, with suffering people. As Kristin Boudreau explains, this rhetorical strategy derives primarily from the eighteenth-century conviction that “natural human affections” like sympathy could “provide the fundamental bond of political union,” prompting people to “see beyond themselves as if they were seeing themselves, to bring their own self-interests to bear on the interests of others” (6). By the 1880s, Shirley Samuels observes, sentimentalism operated less as a distinct genre than as “a set of rules for how to ‘feel right,’ privileging compassion in calibrating and adjusting the sensations of the reader” (5). The rhetoric had also acquired gendered associations as well as a sense of affectation. William Dean Howells famously called sentimentalism a stylized and highly effeminate literary posture that produced “*Tears, Idle Tears*”—and, in terms of storytelling, “*Slop, Silly Slop*”—rather than fellow feeling (277). As scholars have traditionally pointed out, Norris echoed Howells's detestation of feminine prose in his critical essays, where he accused both realism and sentimentalism of reducing fiction to “the drama of a broken tea cup, the tragedy of a walk down the block, the excitement of an afternoon call, [and] the adventure of an invitation to dinner” (“Plea” 215).<sup>4</sup> In spite

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<sup>4</sup> Scholars have long assumed that Norris dismissed sentimentalism to focus on masculinizing realism, and, even when they have considered sentimentality in *The Octopus*, they have written it off as melodramatic prose that diminishes the novel's art. See, for instance, Bell 116-21, Habegger 65, Pizer 159-62, and Walcott 116. These entrenched attitudes are problematic, however. As Francesca Sawaya convincingly argues, they construct a “story in which only two serious forms compete at the turn of the century,” realism and naturalism, leaving Norris's consideration of sentimentalism unappreciated (*Modern* 59). Rather than

of popular gendered presumptions about sentimentality, however, Ruiz de Burton and, more surprisingly, Norris found that rhetoric serviceable to their industrial critiques because of its ability to place readers in a state of “discomfort” incited by “being forced to feel what it feels like” to be part of a marginalized group (Samuels 5). Readers of sentimentalism might still sympathize from a place of distance and distinction, Samuels observes; they can feel what it is *like* but need not completely identify with the oppressed. Ultimately, though, the moment of empathetic “discomfort” makes possible the “radical reform” of moral and political attitudes (5). Ruiz de Burton and Norris explore this possibility, I argue, for they take up sentimentalism to compel their readers’ identification with characters who appreciate the efficiency of preindustrial farming.

*Squatter* underscores the wastes of industrial efficiency by pitting the agriculture of Californios against the wheat farming of Eastern capitalists. The novel aligns the Alamar family not only with genuine agricultural efficiency, emphasizing the sustainability of their ranching, but with sympathy, romancing their cooperation with the landscape and the rhetoric of compassion they use to convince the squatters to adopt their pastoral ideology. Indeed, when the wheat farmers and railroad moguls compromise their ties to the land, the Alamares respond with petitions to the heart. The industrial logic of the squatters and moguls incapacitates their sentimental pleas, however. Humanitarian wastes ensue: because the sympathy-driven characters of *Squatter* fail to persuade their “rational” capitalist foes, they are forced into destitution and bereft of their heartfelt connections to nature. These forms of squandered energy power the novel’s sentimental critique, though. The demise of *Squatter*’s sympathetic characters compels our

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perpetuating the idea that Norris disavowed sentimentalism, I follow Sawaya and Donna M. Campbell in taking seriously his engagement with that literary tradition.

identification with them, urging us to stand against the social wastes created by industrial efficiency. Ecological efficiency can be recovered, *Squatter* suggests, but only if readers rekindle the heartfelt bonds with nature dissolved by the wheat farmers and monopolists.

*The Octopus* likewise takes up sentimental rhetoric to call out the deficiencies of the New Agriculture, but, rather than holding out hope that sympathy can be salvaged or that the heart can challenge corporate capitalism, it insists that industrial notions of efficiency will trump compassion and environmental sensitivity. The failures of Presley illustrate this sentimental demise. The romantic poet-protagonist finds that, if he is to protest the abuses of the Pacific and Southwestern Railroad, particularly its displacement of San Joaquin Valley wheat farmers, he must replace his lofty literary ideals with sentimentalism grounded in genuine sympathy for the ranchers, perhaps even for preindustrial farmers. Industrial waste convinces the poet to take up this new, socially responsible aesthetic: the logic of the railroad generates distressing byproducts that undermine its ostensible efficiency. Presley's appeals to compassion fail, however, because he cannot rouse the readers of his poetry to the kind of sympathy that would challenge the power of the corporation. Here, *The Octopus* takes a more cynical turn than *Squatter*, for Norris deforms his novel to reflect sentimentalism's inability to recuperate older, more productive kinds of farming. When Presley's sentimental rhetoric flounders, the poet abandons his advocacy for the ranchers and joins forces with corporate capitalism. The novel then follows suit with Presley, leaving behind its critique of the New Agriculture and calling upon readers to do the same. While this outcome might be attributed to inconsistencies in Norris's thinking about industrialization, I argue that the strategy is deliberate and ironic. By undercutting Presley's literary labors and

squandering the sympathetic energies of its readers, *The Octopus* emphasizes—and, in a decidedly modernist gesture, formally reflects—sentimentalism’s incapacity for social critique in the twentieth century. By the same token, though, the novel suggests that nothing will rectify the inefficiencies of the railroad. Instead, waste will become a constitutive feature of modern American life.

Reading Ruiz de Burton’s hopeful critique alongside Norris’s self-destructive one says much about the shared fates of nature and sentimentalism in the age of industry. *Squatter* was published at the inception of the New Agriculture in California. That Ruiz de Burton maintains her nostalgic, sentimental critique throughout the novel suggests that she wrote it when Americans imagined it was still possible to resist the heartless advance of corporate capitalism and reclaim close ties to the landscape. In this sense, as Donna Campbell says of regionalist fiction and the sentimental romances of the 1880s and 1890s, *Squatter* looks back in time to the days of preindustrial farming to “affirm what is usable about the past and the ordinary,” namely, the sympathy threatened by the industrial age (7). But even sixteen years after *Squatter*’s publication, the widespread implementation of factory farming made impossible any such return to preindustrial husbandry in California. The bifurcated form of *The Octopus* reflects this hopelessness, ending with the exhaustion of its protagonist and the death of sentimentalism as a mode of literary critique. Norris suggests that longing for the days of sentimentality—for a time when literature could rouse readers to effect social change, and a time when farming was preindustrial, intimate with nature, and truly efficient—is but wasted sympathy.

Set in San Diego after the American annexation of Alta California, *The Squatter and the Don* calls attention to the legal conspiracies that divested native Californios of their property, as well as the competing forms of land management that made possible this dispossession. The novel centers on the conflicts among Don Mariano Alamar, an American citizen formerly of the landed Mexican gentry; William Darrell, a self-proclaimed “settler” looking to appropriate parts of the Alamar ranch that, he believes, have been vacated by the Homestead Act of 1862; and Darrell’s squatting associates, who openly defy Alamar’s titles. Not only do the squatters seize the Don’s lands, but they herald industrial agriculture, introducing machines and factory-style productivity policies that work against the natural capacities of the San Diego Valley. Alamar supports Eastern industry and even the construction of a transcontinental railroad through San Diego, yet he stops short of factory farming. Extolling the economy of Californio ranching over the efficiency of industry, he continues to graze cattle and cultivate fruit trees. He even prompts the squatters to take up his pastoral practices; but, motivated by greed and factory-made notions of land management, the squatters violently refuse, destroying his cattle. To counter these deficits, Alamar sinks his wealth into the properties of San Diego, knowing that railroad magnates have promised to build a line through the burgeoning town. These measures fail, too, and for much the same reason that the squatters snub the Don’s pastoral relations to the land: tycoons supporting the railroad in San Francisco block the line to the south, citing the industrial efficiency of running California agriculture through the northern rail. Rather than heeding the needs of the San Diego Valley, the squatters and the railroad moguls alike treat the land as an abstract space in which the production of nature can be rationalized according to the



standards of industry. Ironically, however, this logic lays waste to the Alamar family and to the San Diego Valley. The violent actions of Darrell's associates finally combine with the railroad blockade to ruin the Don. These machinations leave the valley uncultivated, squandering its resources under the guise of optimizing nature's labor.

In this sense, *Squatter* critiques the logic of industrial efficiency to uphold a different notion of agricultural economy, one that elevates Californio agrarianism. Essential to this goal is sentimentalism, for the novel exposes the wastes of efficiency by pitting affectionate attachments to the land against the unfeeling logic of the machine process. Not only does Ruiz de Burton's narrator appeal to sympathy to compel her readers to identify with the disenfranchised Alamares, a strategy that elevates the Californios' cooperative, conservation-minded relationships with the valley, but the characters themselves take up the rhetoric of conscience to preserve their pastoral ideology. The Don and his supporters beseech their opponents to examine their hearts, hoping sympathy will convince their foes to abandon policies that will squander the valley's energies and ruin the citizens of San Diego. The squatters' and monopolists' heartless efficiency undercuts these sentimental entreaties, however. Industrial conceptions of land management prevent the Don's opponents from sympathizing with him or his old-fashioned notions about ranching. The squatters thus continue their violent appropriation of the Alamar estate, while the Southern-Pacific moguls persist in their collusion with politicians to impoverish Californian citizens of all classes. Ironically, then, *Squatter* advances its own sentimental narrative, an affective indictment of greed and graft, by describing the death of sympathy at the hands of industrial efficiency. Indeed, the Alamares are dispossessed not only of their idyllic holdings but of

their sentimental recourses to subjugation. The settlers' unbending adherence to the idea of nature as a manageable space disables the Alamares' petitions to compassion and conscience. That the Don and his advocates suffer heart afflictions at the end of the novel furthers the thought that emotional attachments to the soil cannot endure in a culture devoted to the unfeeling imperatives of the factory. However, these failures of sentimentality in *Squatter* are productive precisely because they call attention to the wastes inherent to industrial efficiency. Underscoring the futile pleas of the Alamar camp reveals the misuse of San Diego's resources and, in turn, calls upon readers to cultivate more emotional—and more frugal—relationships with the land.

The novel romantically associates these fruitful partnerships with the agrarian ethos of the hacienda. Vincent Pérez points out that, unlike the capitalist markets which would replace them, Californio economies were “disaccumulationist,” hanging not on individual wealth creation but on chivalric values like integrity, nobility, and paternalism: “In seigneurial society money in itself was of less importance to landowners than the amount of honor they were able to bring to themselves” (51). Tereza M. Szeghi points out that the honorific elements of the system were, in part, delusive because the economy depended as much on exploited indigenous labor as on chivalry. Hacienda life asserted a “claim to native identity for Mexicana/os” while subjugating and effecting the “erasure of Indians . . . as social and political actors with legitimate rights and just land claims of their own” (90-91). Yet, if the seigneurial system was exploitative, it was also decidedly precapitalist; and factors like the Gold Rush, the construction of railroad networks, and the American annexation of Alta California upended that economy. In the wake of these changes, Mexican American writers like Ruiz de Burton romanced the hacienda—the

estate, the site that embodied the values of Californio life—to emblemize the order and the organic sense of community that capitalism had dissolved. As Pérez explains, hacienda narratives like *Squatter* served not only to “[resist] the discursive annihilation of the Mexican American community” but to idealize, nostalgize, and “reclaim an agrarian Spanish/Mexican patrimony” (48). Before the mid-nineteenth century, landed Mexican Americans had depended on ranching and subsistence farming—often performed by indentured or enslaved peoples. Industrial expansion, the monopolization of American business, and the dawn of factory-inspired cash-crop farming disintegrated both the Californios’ subsistence strategies and their ties to the landscape.

To lament and reaffirm the hacienda ethos displaced by American capitalism, *Squatter* valorizes the Alamares’ emotional investments in the soil. When Darrell arrives at the Don’s estate to stake out his claims, he finds not the vast “grids” of wheat that will typify industrial agriculture but a frontier idyll exemplifying these heartfelt attachments.<sup>5</sup> Adorning the “commodious” mansion, itself emblematic of the valley’s abundance, is a vibrant “flower garden” (75). The plot of land not only titivates the hacienda, but, like other pastoral gardens in the novel, it points to the Alamares’ desire to work with the soil to construct a sense of home in nature. Even in the Darrells’ garden, where Alice and her

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<sup>5</sup> My thought that *Squatter* and *The Octopus* depict “grids” of industrially produced grain comes from Cronon 102-103 and Brown 17-18. Cronon traces the American use of the grid system back to the 1810s, when the United States government began selling “arbitrary” and “apparently uniform” 160-acre plots of land to farmers in the Great Plains (102). That system soon “gave shape to the pastures, meadows, and corn fields of a new agricultural order” that enabled farmers of the American West to “adopt new agricultural machinery than many of their eastern counterparts” (102). Thus, grids of grain facilitated industrial expansion and spread the mechanizing logic that would develop into the New Agriculture of the *fin de siècle*. Focusing on urban rather than agricultural spaces, Brown adds that industrial reorganization in places as different as Post-Soviet Union Karaganda (in Kazakhstan) and twentieth-century Billings, Montana, effected an eerily similar “divisibility and hierarchy of space” (18) premised on the ideal of “assembly-line efficiency” (17). I extend these analyses of the grid to the California frontier to describe how capitalists reimagined natural spaces to reflect industrial efficiency.

mother often “trim the fuchsias and train them up the posts of the porch,” the honeysuckle and roses consort to “[form] an arbor over the front steps,” shading the house in pastoral splendor (223). The Alamar garden, too, emblemizes this harmonious blend of environmental and human activity. Just as the Darrell women must “trim” and “train” to decorate their home, the Alamares—or at least their unnamed indentured servants—must work diligently with the soil to illuminate the estate’s “broad piazza” (75). The orchard at the foot of the hacienda more explicitly signals the Alamares’ love for the land. As the Don admits to Darrell and his associates, the grove may not yield enough produce for the Alamares to participate in national markets, but it recalls the rich history of Californio subsistence farming. Even “in old times,” the Don reminisces, the orchard “raised all the fruits we needed for our use, and there was no market for any more” (93). Darrell and the squatters, of course, cannot appreciate this nostalgia because they want to extract as many crops as possible out of each acre. The Don puts it more bluntly to his interlopers: “You want to make money. Isn’t that the reason? Money! money!” (91). However, that the grove remains suggests that the Don still values the mutually supportive relations forged with the soil during the “old times,” before capitalism infiltrated the garden. Rather than switching to intensive farming of cash crops, Alamar dwells nostalgically on the legacy of Californio subsistence farming.

These attachments compel the Alamares to preserve the economy of nature. Indeed, the Don’s investment in the valley and his intimate knowledge of its capabilities prompt him more than any other character in the novel to conserve natural resources. Thinking like entrepreneurs rather than farmers, the squatters almost exclusively plant wheat, reckoning that grain stands the best chance of succeeding in Eastern markets.

However, years of ranching have taught the Don that “it is a mistake to try to make San Diego County a grain-producing county” when it “has been, and will be always, a good grazing county—one of the best counties for cattle-raising on this coast, and the very best for fruit-raising on the face of the earth” (91). Growing grain alone, he insists, imposes new and imprudent production schemes on the cycles of nature because wheat requires regular rain, and showers are “too uncertain to base upon them any calculations for getting crops” (91). Moreover, as William Cronon explains, the wheat species that farmers actually transplanted to California were so adapted to Old World climates that they “could scarcely survive in a wild setting” unless farmers employed extraordinary measures to turn up native grasses (98). These methods often displaced extant crops, such that “the dozens of species that together defined the prairie ecosystem quickly gave way to the handful of plants that defined the farm,” particularly corn and wheat (99). Having fictionally witnessed the abatement of California’s biodiversity, the Don pronounces the grain-minded settlers “guilty of the folly of making the land useless,” exhausting its energies on invasive crops that might never grow (93). *Squatter* insists that rather than subjecting the land to the abstract “calculations” of commerce and forcing the valley to yield unusual harvests, the Alamares work with the materials that nature has already provided. Because the trees in the family grove are firmly rooted and amenable to semi-arid climates, they “bear quite well, and all without irrigation,” needing only the valley’s erratic precipitation to produce fruit enough for the hacienda (92). The orchard thus puts the rains to more reliable and sustainable ends than the “uncertain” computations of water-intensive wheat production. The Don’s lucrative livestock business demonstrates just as much efficiency. While the rains cannot dependably

sustain grain, they always provide enough water to grow grass for cattle; and unlike the wheat crops, which will deplete the valley's reservoirs for short-term profits, Alamar's livestock will fertilize the fields they browse, making possible future cattle runs. Instead of rendering the soil "useless" for a single, wasteful exploit, Don Mariano judiciously balances the valley's inputs and outputs, making sure that his methods protect the available resources and even improve nature's lot. In this sense, the husbandry of "old times" proves more heartfelt and more efficient than the New Agriculture. Only working closely with the land generates the affection necessary to look after nature's economy.

The novel upholds these bonds not only by calling out their efficiency but by casting the squatters as unsympathetic intruders. The squatters' appropriation of the hacienda amounts to callous disruption of heartfelt ties. When Darrell establishes his claims, he surveys the valley objectively and, as a result, transgresses the boundaries demarcated by the Alamares' affections, not to mention their legal titles. Running a "practiced eye"—"practiced" not only because he has experience appraising farmland but because he has settled on contested acres before—across the valley, he sees not only the pastoral particulars of the estate but "females on the front piazza," presumably Doña Josefa and her daughters (75). But Darrell dismisses their "silent tears of helpless discouragement," as well as the visible but reticent resentment of the Alamar men: "Gabriel was pale and calm. Victoriano was biting his lips, and his face was flushed" (76). Instead, he focuses on the topography of the region, moving seamlessly from the family garden to the crying women, to the highest point on a seemingly "unoccupied" hill, and finally to the "broad slope of the foot-hills," declaring, "I think I'll locate here . . . if no one else has already filed a claim to this land" (75). Darrell's preoccupation with

geography here betrays grave insensitivity based in abstract notions of land management. His “practiced eye” accounts well enough for the physical features of the hacienda, but it fails to acknowledge the emotional claims to the valley confirmed by the Alamares’ “silent tears.” In this sense, Melanie V. Dawson demonstrates, *Squatter* “privileges the heart over the eyes, specifically the hearts of the *Californios* over the rapacious eyes of the squatters, exposing the squatters’ acquisitory vision and refusing to replicate it” (47). Notwithstanding these sentimental entitlements, Darrell’s conscience remains clear because he recognizes only the conceptual rights granted by law, derived from legislation designed to dispossess native Californios. The settler heeds neither “tears” nor “flushed” faces of suppressed antipathy but objective measurements of “corner stakes” and “chain’s length,” which, in spite of natural and emotional borders, chart out arbitrary blocks of “320 acres,—according to law” (75). Contrasting the sentimentality of the Alamares with the squatters’ cold concern with numbers and statutes ultimately validates the family’s connections to the hacienda, even generating what Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita call a “counter-history of the subaltern, the conquered Californio population” (5). Yet if the novel gives voice to the Alamares’ “silent tears” and sentimental investments, it demonstrates that the squatters have implemented a new conception of land management that requires only abstract engagement with the environment. Unlike *Squatter*’s readers, the settlers need not consider the feelings of the people they are dispossessing.

At the root of this heartless mindset is a decidedly industrial notion of agricultural efficiency. Ignoring the lay of the land and the old ways of farming, the squatters impose the imperatives of the factory on the frontier to optimize its pastoral productions. Rather than planting “some grain fields” alongside orchards and gardens, as the Don has done,

Darrell's associates eschew biodiversity and force the valley to specialize in their cash crop—and not to improve the economy of nature but to make quick commercial gains (75). Californio husbandry is distasteful to the squatters because “it takes a long time to get fruit trees to bearing,” and they cannot bear to waste energy and capital on projects that will not pay up front (91). They can afford labor-saving machinery, however. When the harvest arrives, the squatters do not husk the grain themselves—or for themselves—but let the “whir of threshing machines” process as much wheat as possible so that “wagons loaded with baled hay” can transport their yields to San Francisco (286). These methods and gadgets bring efficiency to the frontier because they help the squatters to reap more grain in less time than landed Californios could gather by the hands of their indentured laborers; yet the efficiency of squatter agriculture bears none of the sentiment the novel associates with the Alamares' conservation-minded pastoralism. The threshers themselves signal the squatters' increasing detachment from nature. The squatters purchase the machines presumably to simplify their work and facilitate bigger harvests, but by diffusing their energies over larger plots of land, the squatters refuse to acquaint themselves with their fields. The laden wagons further this thought. They indicate that the settlers want only to live by the land, not with it, for the squatters will eat little of their own wheat and then sell the rest to eastern consumers. That the wagons traverse the valley “like moving hills” confirms that the wheat-farmers care not about establishing permanent ties to the region but about extracting every resource they can in the short-term, only to keep the fruits of their labor—or even the “hills” themselves—“moving” toward Chicago (286). Ultimately, squatter agriculture churns out more crops than



Californio cultivation, but, rather than promoting the existing economy of nature out of love for the region, it intensifies nature's labors to serve the logic of industry.

Ironically, though, the factory ethos wastes the valley's agricultural labors precisely because it discourages affectionate ties with the landscape. Darrell's associates undoubtedly optimize grain production, but they squander countless resources to boost their profits. This waste is most apparent in their destruction of Californio cattle. The squatters refuse to fence their fields, exploiting an 1872 law designed "*to protect agriculture*"—and to disenfranchise Mexican Americans—that permits "every owner or occupant of land, whether it is enclosed or not," to take possession of the livestock browsing in their fields (80). The squatters exceed these already abusive statutes, however, compelling the Don to pay hefty ransoms for his cows or else "find them shot dead by some invisible hand" in the middle of the night, when no one can see the wheat-shockers "killing his cattle by the hundred head" (80-81). That the narrator indicts an "invisible hand" for massacring the livestock says much about the squatters' coldly commercial attitude toward the land. Mathews and Gasbang, the most notorious squatters, simply dismiss the Don's sympathetic pleas to "pity" his "poor dumb brutes" (93). Rather than commiserating with the Alamares or showing compassion for the cattle, they follow the "invisible hand" guiding capitalist expansion, covertly killing cattle to put the Don out of business. Mathews and Gasbang revel in the economic efficiency of this scheme, but the novel vilifies its wastefulness. Even Darrell, whose appropriation of the hacienda aligns him with the squatters, condemns their violence as waste. Curiously, Darrell objects to exterminating the cattle not because he sympathizes with the environment but because shooting livestock amounts to "useless waste of

valuable property, no matter to whom it might belong” (74). Don Mariano recognizes, however, that the squatters’ murderous waste will disrupt the ecosystem. Ransoming the cows will render the frontier infertile. Alamar cautions his unwelcome tenants that, “For every ten acres of cultivated land (not fenced), there are ten thousand, yes, twenty thousand, entirely idle” because the Californio vaqueros must keep their cattle from the grain (93). Without livestock to manure those protected plains, there will be “no money to be made out of land, for the grazing will be useless,” leaving the land barren and worthless (93). Mathews and Gasbang thus threaten to deplete the frontier in a process akin to what Karl Marx in *Capital* (1867) calls “metabolic rift.” Effecting large-scale industrial agriculture, Marx writes, not only robs farmers of the ability to produce food and clothing, but it “prevents the return to the soil of its constitutive elements” (637). This deprivation hinders the “lasting fertility of the soil” and ends up “undermining the original sources of all wealth—the soil and the worker” (638).<sup>6</sup> For all their occupation with efficiency—with saving labor, rationalizing harvests, and making money—the squatters are surprisingly inefficient because they spur on such a “metabolic rift” between humanity and nature, separating sympathetic ranchers from their lands while virtually guaranteeing soil depletion. Mathews and Gasbang are too detached from the valley to reckon the emotional and agricultural costs of industrial agriculture.

This abstract engagement with the land is doubly destructive, Ruiz de Burton suggests, because the squatters cast it as rational agriculture and sound business. Even

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<sup>6</sup> This reading of Marx is indebted to John Bellamy Foster’s treatment of “metabolic rift” in *Marx’s Ecology*, 155-159. Citing Marx’s engagement with soil chemistry, Foster convincingly argues that the environment factored greatly into Marx’s “entire critique of the alienated character in bourgeois society” (159). Of particular importance to Marx, Foster adds, was the idea of “metabolism,” the thought that energy was exchanged during natural growth and during humanity’s interaction with the land.

catering to the squatters' commercial logic cannot compel them to sympathize with either the land or the Alamares. When the Don lobbies them to plant orchards in addition to grain, he tries to engage their environmental sensibilities by striking a middle ground between Californio conservationism and the capitalist impulse of bonanza farming. At once affirming Mexican Americans' connections to the region and decrying wasted capital, the Don points out that his ranch hides ravines that can nurture fruit trees. He jokes that "the foolishness of letting all of the rainfall go to waste, is an old time folly with us" (93). Until the railroad, however, the Californios had "the good excuse" of never needing to reap more than the hacienda required (93). The settlers can claim no such "excuse" for leaving the rainwater idle; because industrial enterprises ask more of the soil than subsistence farming, they demand more careful management of natural resources. Alamar ultimately proposes that he and the squatters not "let [the rains] go to waste" but, like "sensible, judicious men," "join forces to put up dams across the most convenient of the ravines" (92-93). Intertwined with this appeal to reason are promises of agricultural efficiency and profit. "It would be a great god-send," Alamar exclaims, "to have a thriving, fruit-growing business in our country," with "the cultivated land well fenced, and the remainder left out for grazing" (93). Orchards would let the Don's cattle browse, preserving the biodiversity of the frontier while optimizing unused precipitation. In turn, the county would "be selected for fruit and grape-growing," generating new industries and untold income (92). Planting orchards would even generate in the squatters a sense of collaboration with the Alamares and the environment, for the land would become "our country," a shared space where the soil could serve several needs while maintaining its delicate economy. But the squatters trust not to sensibility or

follow feeling but to economic logic and the support of the California legislature. While the Don guarantees them “more money by following other laws that are more just, more rational” than the no-fence statutes, Miller, Mathews, and Gasbang agree that the law “is rational enough for me” because it permits them to kill off the competition (95). By following the “reason” of capitalism, the squatters commit the gravest of wastes. They repudiate agricultural strategies that would benefit the land and economy, instead securing competitive advantages by siphoning energy from more productive industries. Squatter agriculture, Ruiz de Burton insists, is unreasonably wasteful, not efficient.

Even the settlers who are persuaded by the good sense of the Don’s heartfelt rhetoric perpetuate the wastes of industry. Darrell concurs that the “uncertainty of our seasons” makes rationalizing grain production impractical and that “a good dairy always pays well, also a good orchard and vineyard” (95). But while he agrees to optimize his agriculture, he refuses to relinquish the territory he seized from the Alamares, an appropriation that even the novel’s opening pages figure as waste. What initiates the narrative is unsuccessful squatting in the Napa and Sonoma Valleys: Darrell only looks to settle in San Diego because the state legislature has forced his family off of other contested acres, upholding the titles of landed Californios. Ironically, Darrell describes these evictions in terms of lost time, energy, and labor. Trying to drum up sympathy for himself, he laments to his wife that “I had to abandon our home and lose the earnings of years and years of hard work” (57). He professes that there is “no use in crying over spilt milk,” since he must establish new claims to provide for the family (55). On the other hand, Mary Darrell points out that he has not properly reckoned the consequences of his squatting. Sympathizing with the Californios, particularly with disenfranchised women,

she points out that settlers have “caused much trouble to people who never harmed them” by snatching up their homes and obliging them to waste their income on litigation fees (56). The costs to the Darrell family demand just as much attention. Weary from relocating each time the legislature rejects her husband’s claims, Mary decries how squatting squanders the family’s energies: “We cannot afford to throw away another twenty years of our life” (57). All these expenses ought to count as “spilt milk,” she argues; and while Darrell refuses to cry over those wastes, she believes “it is the ‘*spilt milk*’ that we should lament” because “much wisdom is learnt through tears, but none by forgetting our lessons” (55). Only by acknowledging the “tears” of the Alamares and his own family members can Darrell tally how much energy and capital his squatting has mismanaged. Yet Darrell appropriates the Alamar ranch anyway and coldly casts aside the lamentations of his wife and the Alamar women. The self-proclaimed settler might be willing to plant orchards and raise livestock, retaining some of the efficiency of old time Californio agriculture, but he does not demonstrate the mature reflection that comes from heeding sentimental appeals, the “wisdom” that Mary has gathered by studying the Alamar women’s “tears.” By appropriating the hacienda, he keeps the Alamares tied up in costly legal proceedings, and his improvements to the land increase its value, forcing the Don to pay higher taxes for acres he claims are his. Perhaps Darrell does not spill as much milk—or blood—as Mathews and Gasbang, but the feminine rhetoric of sympathy does little to change the inefficient attitudes that manifest in his squatting. Ultimately, Darrell lies somewhere between the agricultural sensitivity of the Californios and the callousness of Mathews and Gasbang, but his stubbornness suggests that reason and

sentimentality alike are wasted on the settlers, whose colonizing, masculinist impulses discourage them from identifying with others.

Sentimentality stands still less of a chance with the railroad magnates because they take the squatters' rational notions about land management to heartless extremes. When the Southern Pacific monopoly halts Tom Scott's push to extend the Texas Pacific through Alta California, ruining scores of farmers and ranchers including the Don, Alamar tries to persuade one of its key investors, Governor Leland Stanford, to pity those who have invested in San Diego properties. As with the squatters, Alamar appeals to the Governor's heart as well as his commercial impulses, tying the Southern Californians' connections to the soil to the threat of economic inefficiency. He laments that because the settlers have exterminated his cattle, "I have only my land to rely upon for a living . . . My land will be very valuable if we have a railroad and our county becomes more settled; but if not, my land, like everybody else's land in our county, will be unsaleable, worthless" (316). Thus, in one sense, the Texas Pacific's failure means valuable acres will lie idle. Yet, as James Mechlin—the Don's ardent friend and strongest advocate—warns the Governor, "It is not [merely] a matter of inconvenience" to stop the new rail; doing so entails "ruin, it is poverty, suffering, distress; perhaps despair and death" (316). To sympathize with the bankrupted farmers, however, would be a "heroic endeavor, doing acts which require great self-denial for our fellow-beings, for humanity's sake, with no view or expectation of reward in money" (317). The Governor initially sounds amenable to this "fellow" feeling, for he addresses Alamar and Mechlin with a "rich melody of voice which vibrated softly, as if full of sympathy, that overflowed from a heart filled with philanthropy, generosity, and good will" (312). But Stanford's

compassionate words are hollow, just a screen for industrial logic. Fighting off sentimental petitions with objective economic analysis, he reasons that defeating the Texas Pacific is more important than preserving people's attachments to the land, simply because the Southern Pacific's success depends on preventing other companies from securing competitive advantages. "By studying business principles," he coldly adds, Alamar could have anticipated that the Southern Pacific would block Tom Scott's proposals (316). After all, "corporations have no souls" and so refuse to "think of the blessings [they] will bring to so many hearts" by transgressing their commercial doctrines (318). Perhaps the Southern Pacific and Governor Stanford seem just as heartless as the squatters, especially considering the settlers' violent tendencies and their faith in the "rationality" of the no-fence laws. But the monopoly and its stakeholders epitomize the callousness of industrial logic. As Mechlin puts it, the Southern Pacific is a "monster" that "has no heart to feel responsibility, no heart for human pity, no face for manly blush" (320). The corporation is inhuman. Alamar's final recourse to poverty is sympathetic petition, but that rhetoric cannot convince a heartless and faceless entity powered by the cold reasoning and "business principles" of greedy investors.

Worse still, while the Governor insists that mathematical abstraction is realizing efficiency in California, the unfeeling logic of the corporation wastes countless natural resources under the guise of efficiency. Alamar tells Stanford that San Diego can foster lucrative fruit and wheat markets since Southern California gets more precipitation than does the North during dry years. Planting wheat in the North actually squanders precious produce because "in dry years more crops have been lost in the northern counties than in ours" (313). Thus, given the climate, doing business in the South would be a safer, more

ecologically efficient investment than growing grain in the North. The Governor worries little about the environment, though. He trusts to economic formulas instead. It would not pay to run rails through San Diego, he explains, because the northern counties yield enough grain; more wheat would be superfluous. He adds that even if San Diego could sustain a fruit market, and even if orchards would optimize California's erratic precipitation, the Southern Pacific is "not engaged in the fruit-growing business. We build railroads to transport freight and passengers. We do not care what or who makes the freights we carry," so long as they gather enough cargo to turn a profit (314).

Stanford thus exhibits the same abstract relationship to the soil as do the squatters. Not only does he lack emotional investment in the farmers who grow his cargo—he does not care "who" does business with the railroad—but he measures nature's productivity in terms of bulk quantities rather than considering the ecological costs of industrializing the California countryside—that is, he does not concern himself with "what" goes into his trains' freight or how it is produced. By distancing himself from the land and those who work it, the Governor achieves industrial efficiency, but he wastes even more natural resources than the squatters do to accomplish that goal. As Don Mariano's advocates point out, blocking a transcontinental railroad in San Diego would bankrupt Southern Californian farmers, undermining their agricultural labors while discouraging other entrepreneurs from cultivating the "vast countries now lying useless" in the Southwest territories (315). In this sense, while the heartless squatters jeopardize only Alta California, the soulless corporation endangers the entire nation. Wherever the railroad interferes with small-scale farmers, systematic inefficiency will follow.



To emphasize the seriousness of these wastes, and to connect readers even more closely to the Alamares, *Squatter* laments industry's destruction of the heart. When Don Mariano and Mechlin leave the Capitol, both dispossessed, they focus not on their own suffering but on the plight of the other ranchers displaced by the railroad: "In the generosity and kindness of their hearts, they felt added regret, thinking of so many others who . . . were in the same position of impending ruin" (323). They recognize, however, that their compassion will not mitigate the Governor's plans. Stanford's unfeeling logic thus dampens their sympathies. Indeed, while Alamar's sentimental energy surges during his interview with the Governor, the man's objectivity leaves him "frozen through and through . . . as if I had been steeped in ice" (324). The Don then develops the "congestive chill" that kills him (324). In one sense, his sickness emblemizes the coldness of corporate efficiency. More importantly, though, the "chill" portends and cautions against the death of sentimentality. Not coincidentally, the doctors who temporarily save Alamar emphasize that "not only is the condition of [his] lungs very precarious, but also that of his heart," the very seat of his compassion for the land and those who till it (324). Alamar never truly recovers from his literal and figurative afflictions; and, as his heart succumbs, the energy he exerts on sentimental appeals for the land goes increasingly to waste, for he—the most reasonable, sentimental, and efficient character in the novel—is made economically and politically useless, relegated to a sickbed, where he utters idle curses against the railroad. Ultimately, then, Stanford's adherence to economic logic not only incapacitates the Don but threatens the possibility of sentimental reform in the age of the machine. If readers of the novel are to combat the

inefficiencies of the railroad, Ruiz de Burton suggests, they must sympathize with Alamar and ensure that his advocacy for Californio farming does not go to waste.

The death of Mechlin furthers *Squatter's* sentimental case for the importance of sympathy, for it emphasizes the violence begotten by the supposed rationality of the corporation. Mechlin's unflinching support for the Alamar family evidences an abounding capacity for sympathy. Able to identify with the Californios because of their shared love for pastoral living, particularly for "cultivating trees and flowers" and other pastimes that forge cooperative relationships with the soil, Mechlin befriends the Don and advocates for him during each confrontation with the squatters (68-69). He even accompanies Alamar to the Capitol to reason with Stanford and, on being dismissed from the Governor's office, shares the "generosity and kindness" that set Alamar to "thinking of so many others who . . . were in the same position of impending ruin." But, as with Don Mariano, the corporation's coldness instigates in Mechlin an illness that forces his body to waste away with the increasing disenfranchisement of San Diego's citizens. While impending ruin certainly intensifies his bodily decline, the death of Alamar, his best friend and the most sympathetic character in the novel, finally dissolves his confidence in the power of his heart to effect social change. Disturbed by Alamar's passing, Mechlin refuses to eat or sleep. But while the Don dies upon cursing the "sins of our legislators," sticking to his sentimental rhetoric until his heart literally gives out, Mechlin abandons the cause and resigns himself to ruin. Refusing to abide a life "[prostrated] to a sick-bed" because of financial difficulties and the corporate disruption of the pastoral place (327), he shoots himself "through the heart" (330). That he and the Don both suffer heart afflictions tells much about the endangerment of the sympathetic

heart. Indeed, while Alamar dies insisting that sympathy will temper the cold logic of industry, Mechlin believes the heart cannot survive, especially when the Don, its most fervent promoter, has perished. Thus, in a move that forces our identification with the crumbling hearts of Alamar's supporters, Mechlin snuffs out the seat of his sympathy.

Compounding the corporation's waste of human life are ecological inefficiencies, for when Alamar and Mechlin—the novel's sentimental patriarchs—perish, so do the affectionate relationships they cultivated with the soil. Financial woes force Victoriano to abandon his pastoral proclivities for industrialized labors. Because the family cannot pay more than two hands, and because the Don's title remains tied up in litigation, rendering the land unsaleable, Victoriano takes on much of the farming around the hacienda. Unlike tending livestock, which he easily accomplished with his father, plowing, pruning, and ditch-digging are “entirely too hard for someone so unused to labor” (344). As a result, arduous work upsets his pastoral conception of land management, and exhaustion convinces him to renounce the sustainable methods that Californios practiced before capitalism's infiltration of the garden. To streamline his labor and boost profits, he resorts to squatter agriculture, enlisting Everett—a son of Darrell, one who detests squatting but still promotes capitalism—to “help him plow up a fifty-acre piece of land he had intended to put in wheat” (342). This repudiation of Californio husbandry proves disastrous, however, for “before he had plowed two acres, his legs seemed to disappear from under him” (342). Literally, fatigue exacerbates the lameness in Victoriano's legs, a condition resulting from frostbite he sustained during an earlier cattle run. Figuratively, however, Victoriano falls ill at the moment he adopts squatter agriculture, signaling his family's changing relationship to the land: forsaking

the farming techniques of “old times”—and thus his ties to the pastoral and to Californio history—immobilizes him. What is worse, squatter agriculture wastes his capital and energy rather than helping his family to escape poverty. Indeed, he laments, “When we can ill afford to have me lying in a sick-bed,” planting wheat makes his legs “perfectly useless” (342). In effect, trading the New Agriculture for the Old means little but waste. Factory-inspired farming does not achieve efficiency but cripples Victoriano, grows fewer crops than before, and dissolves the family’s once cooperative ties with the soil.

Moreover, the logic of industry prevents the Alamares from rekindling these connections. The disciples of industrial efficiency care little about these lost relations; rather, their lack of sympathy removes the productivity-minded Californios from the landscape altogether. While Victoriano stays close to the land, squatter trouble divorces Gabriel from it. Lawsuits disputing the Alamar title delay his return to San Francisco; in turn, he loses his position at Clarence Darrell’s bank and is forced into menial labor until he can earn enough money to return to the hacienda. Ironically, Gabriel takes up masonry on seeing workers erect the houses of railroad magnates. While his wife would “rather see [him] plowing,” doing “gentlemanly,” pastoral work instead of gritty industrial labor, Gabriel takes pride in his job (343). He nevertheless longs for the hacienda, admitting that he “ought to have stayed at home and worked in our orchard” because remaining there would have kept him “in my own land,” preserving the family’s connections to the *locus amoenus* (343). Callous industrial management thwarts his return to the hacienda, however. Just when he earns enough to leave, the foreman at the construction site orders him to carry bricks and mortar up a tall ladder. Insensitive to Gabriel’s petitions to do other work, “as he had never done such work and was very

awkward about it,” the foreman subjects Gabriel to the same scheme of organized overwork that laborers faced in *fin-de-siècle* factories, coercing the mason to lift load after load at breakneck pace (347). Gabriel begins to “tremble with fatigue” and, too tired to steady his ladder, falls to the ground, crushed by bricks. The exhaustion that causes his injury demonstrates that productivity policies indeed generate more labor in less time from well-managed employees, but they lay waste to workers’ bodies to achieve that efficiency. More to the point, the indifference of the foreman alienates Gabriel from the hacienda and buries him beneath the bricks used to build up corporate capitalism. His impairment subsequently tears the rest of the Alamares from their home, for they must move to San Francisco to care for him. In this sense, industrial efficiency threatens to extinguish the sympathetic heart as well as the pastoral ideal. By making a sentimental case for Gabriel’s intended homecoming, *Squatter* affirms the value of a simpler place and time, when preindustrial agriculture enabled the Alamares to revel in nature. At the same time, his incapacitation suggests the impossibility of returning to the pleasant place.

But if the demise of *Squatter*’s sympathetic characters suggests the impotence of the heart in the age of industrial efficiency, the sentimental rhetoric of the narrator persists, stressing the necessity of compassion. The narratorial intrusions after Gabriel’s fall make plain this investment in sentimentality. In a move akin to Harriet Beecher Stowe’s valorization of Uncle Tom, *Squatter*’s narrator emphasizes the Christ-like suffering of Gabriel. She observes that it was a “crucifixion of spirit” to witness in his “pale face—those superb eyes of his—all his mental suffering,” torment that compels his wife to “implore a merciful heaven to pity and help her beloved, her beautiful archangel” (352). People in the streets refuse to acknowledge this sanctified affliction. One driver

“indifferently” lets carriages filled with elite partygoers pass before Gabriel’s ambulance, “as if,” the narrator interjects, “a hod-carrier more or less was of no consequence” (348).

The narrator, on the other hand, elevates his pain to compel readers’ identification with him—and thus with dispossessed Californios. Arguing that “in that hod full of bricks not only his own sad experience was represented, but the *entire history* of the native Californians of Spanish descent,” the narrator urges readers to sympathy by underscoring how coldly American capitalism has treated its newest citizens:

Unjust laws despoil them, but what of this? Poor they are, but who is to care, or investigate the cause of their poverty? The thriving American says that the native Spaniards are lazy and stupid and thriftless . . . and the Spaniards of California are not only despoiled of all their earthly possessions, but must also be bereft of sympathy, because the world says they do not deserve it. (352)

The questions in this passage call for sentimental action. By asking, “Who is to care,” the narrator prompts readers to identify with the Alamares and “care” enough to “investigate” the social forces that caused their destitution. Just as important, the passage implicates readers in the Alamares’ demise. It indicts not only the legislators responsible for marginalizing Californios but also “thriving American[s],” people like the carriage driver, the foreman, and the squatters who prosper under the indifference fostered by industrial capitalism. That insensitivity deprives the Californios morally and materially, leaving them “bereft” even of “sympathy,” unless, of course, the readers of *Squatter* can respond compassionately. The heart matters more than ever, Ruiz de Burton insists, because American capitalists have withheld their sympathies from the Californios.

To affirm this conviction, *Squatter* offers glimmers of hope for the heart, suggesting that sentimentalism—and perhaps a sentimental capitalism—can persist in the age of industrial efficiency. Clarence, who detests his father’s squatting, sides

unequivocally with the Alamares, and ultimately marries Mercedes, the Don's eldest daughter, embodies this hope. Of course, as Brook Thomas observes, Clarence considers himself a "money-making Yankee," not a subsistence farmer (873). His investments in Southwestern gold mines also betray extractionist attitudes that align him with the squatters and monopolists. The novel nevertheless casts him as a productive intermediary between profit-minded capitalism and agrarian sentimentality. For one, his adoption of Californio agriculture signals his understanding for the dispossessed Alamares and for the environment. Indeed, only after his first conference with the Don do we see him "[working] in the garden, [fencing] and [preparing] ground for planting grapevines and fruit trees," just as Alamar had recommended in his petitions to the squatters (185). More important, his economic success in Mexico does not hamper his sympathy, compassion that manifests in his concern for the injured Gabriel. Not coincidentally, Clarence gets stuck in the same traffic jam that prevents Gabriel from reaching the hospital. Clarence's driver speaks "indifferently" about the day laborer dying in the next wagon (348). The budding capitalist, on the other hand, is roused to action before he recognizes his friend. Once Gabriel has seen a doctor, Clarence even tries to "imagine" what it was like for him to "have become so poor that he had to be a hod carrier," an act of identification that shakes Clarence's faith in capitalists: "The thing is to me so shockingly preposterous and so very heart-rending that it does not seem possible. And to think that if I had not gone away, I might, yes, could have prevented so much suffering! [...] I will never forgive myself nor my bankers either" (349). In moments like this one, critics have found evidence that the novel tries to reclaim class status for landed Californios, decrying how a "proud white genealogy of 'Spanish

descent' becomes transformed [by] the demeaning experience of laboring for a transnational corporation under the racial marker of colonial difference" (González 89). Clarence's surprise at the impoverishment of Gabriel certainly bears some of this attitude. But this statement is more than an acerbic quip meant to re-legitimize gentrified Mexican Americans. Clarence's efforts to "imagine" the suffering of the dispossessed insist that sympathy can endure in spite of soulless capitalist forces. That the Yankee cannot forgive himself or his bankers even suggests the necessity of a heartfelt capitalism—in this case, a system that encourages banks to understand and make accommodation for the trying situations in which downtrodden employees like Gabriel find themselves.

The perseverance of sympathy in characters like Clarence also holds out hope for older, more efficient forms of agriculture. Of course, the "money-making Yankee" cannot rebuild the hacienda system; he can only buy the Alamar family out of bankruptcy. In this sense, Clarence reminds readers that agrarian sensibility dwindles in the age of industrial efficiency. Ruiz de Burton insists, however, that agrarian efficiency can and should live on. She bolsters this claim by appealing to the well-known tragedy at Mussel Slough, a bloody confrontation in 1880 between United States Marshals working for the Southern Pacific and disenfranchised wheat farmers in the San Joaquin Valley. In a move that compels further compassion for dispossessed Californios, the narrator links the Mussel Slough ranchers—ironically, Eastern capitalists who appropriated Californio properties—to the Alamares, emphasizing the "arduous work" those "poor farmers" did to "plant orchards and vineyards and construct irrigating canals," the same activities the Alamares promoted throughout the novel (372). The Mussel Slough farmers also exhibit the ecological sensitivities of the Californios, Ruiz de Burton suggests. Their "great



sacrifices” turned a wild “sandy swamp” into a “garden,” a domesticated space that signals their cooperation with nature rather than exploitation of it (372). The agricultural labors of the Mussel Slough crew, Ruiz de Burton suggests, were truly efficient, optimizing natural resources and beautifying the landscape. But love for the land did not mitigate corporate abuse in this case, she reminds us. The Southern Pacific paid off legislators to force the farmers to buy their lands from the railroad with value added. The result, the narrator claims, was social inefficiency: “The farmers remonstrated and asked that the original agreement should be respected; but all in vain. The arm of the law was called to eject them. They resisted and bloodshed was the consequence” (372). The Southern Pacific not only cheated the ranchers out of their lands, making their work in the garden “all in vain,” but it cut the farmers down, laying waste to human life, much as it did with the Alamares and their advocates. Alluding to Mussel Slough appears on a first reading to contradict *Squatter*’s sentimental goals: the unsuccessful stand of the San Joaquin ranchers seems to suggest the futility of resisting corporate power. However, José F. Aranda, Jr., points out that, for nineteenth-century readers, referring to the fatal conflict raised the “possibility of organizing the masses toward collective ends that were populist and nostalgic at the same time,” impulses that would “reclaim a lost golden age of California” (12). Indeed, Ruiz de Burton argues, insufficient numbers undermined the Mussel Slough crew. Inflaming more hearts is the answer. Addressing readers directly, in accordance with sentimental convention, *Squatter*’s narrator asks, “And what price did the monopoly pay for these lands [in the San Joaquin]? Not one penny, dear reader” (372). To “reimburse the money due *the people*,” she concludes, it is necessary that “*the people of California take the law in their own hands*, and seize the property of those

[corporate] men” (366). Arousing the sympathies of every citizen will garner enough support to systematize resistance and redistribute the land to people whose “arduous work” will again turn unusable “sandy swamps” into productive pastoral “gardens.” That accomplished, preindustrial farming—and agricultural efficiency—can flourish.

*Squatter* warns, however, that if its readers do not take up the sentimental case of the Alamares, the heart and the affectionate forms of agriculture built upon it are doomed. Ruiz de Burton aligns the fates of readers with that of Mary Darrell to compel these compassionate responses. The text clearly elevates Mary’s attitudes. She not only embraces the pastoral vision of the Alamares, tilling her own garden amid the grids of grain surrounding the Darrell property, but she ardently sympathizes with the Californios, considering more clearly than even Clarence what it feels like to be displaced from one’s home. At the same time, Mary’s appearances in the novel illustrate the ways that patriarchal characters marginalize sympathy. Mary addresses this problem explicitly just before the Southern Pacific enters the novel, lamenting her inability—and the prohibition of women, more generally—to make reasonable and heartfelt contributions to important political discussions, like the conferences about squatting. She tells her stubborn husband, “If by being [the Don’s] champion I could save his cattle there would be no danger of giving up my championship. What I regret is that my sympathy should be so useless” (186). At the end of the novel, Ruiz de Burton calls upon readers, as Doña Josefa Alamar does, to “speak the truth” about the heartlessness of industrial capitalism, even at the risk of social exclusion (364). When enough people are prompted to search their consciences, the heart will indeed topple corporate coldness. But if readers do little to give voice to the “silent tears” of landed Californios like the Alamares, they will

ultimately find themselves in the same “useless” position as Mary Darrell: their efforts to identify with the Alamares will be but wasted sympathy.

It is telling that Ruiz de Burton alludes to Mussel Slough to advance her sentimental case for preindustrial farming. *Squatter* depicts the San Joaquin ranchers as cohabitants with nature, people who labored to turn its “swamps” into luscious “gardens.” The novel also casts their bloody confrontation with the Southern Pacific as a rallying point for efficiency-minded Americans. Indeed, Ruiz de Burton published *Squatter* just five years after the standoff occurred, perhaps when it still emblemized in the public imagination the possibility of resisting the Big Four and maintaining intimate ties to the landscape. In reality, however, the Mussel Slough ranchers practiced the industrial agriculture that Ruiz de Burton decried in *Squatter*. Moreover, by 1901, when Norris published *The Octopus*, opposition to industrial agriculture appeared futile. Farmers and writers alike feared that industrial notions of efficiency were so engrained in agricultural rhetoric and practice that intimacy with nature was untenable. In 1899, a reporter for *McClure’s Magazine* even remarked that farmers were “in sympathy” not with the fields they reaped but with their stock market tickers, technologies that kept them tied to abstract representations of their products’ value and to the vacillations of global commerce (Baker 132). The increasing implementation of the New Agriculture in California between 1885 and 1901 thus undercut Ruiz de Burton’s vision for the agricultural efficiency of yesteryear. When Norris visited the San Joaquin Valley to research *The Octopus*, environmental sensitivity seemed, like Don Mariano Alamar, to be on its deathbed, uttering useless complaints against industrial capitalists.

Norris thus needed to take a different course than Ruiz de Burton in his treatment of preindustrial farming. *The Octopus* takes as its starting point the death of sympathy, both as an agronomic attitude and as a literary technique meant to make people feel right about marginalized peoples and places. Like *Squatter*, Norris's novel appeals to sentimentalism to applaud the efficiency of emotionally invested, preindustrial connections with the land. In doing so, he, too, offers a counter-discourse to industrial notions of efficiency, challenging the New Agriculture for its excessively narrow—and thus insufficient—conception of efficiency. Norris refuses to believe that sympathy will restore earlier kinds of farming, though; so heartfelt resistance flops in *The Octopus*.

This attitude shows forth in the unproductive sympathies of the poet Presley. Presley travels to the San Joaquin Valley not only to recuperate from consumption—ironically, an illness spurred on by the pressures of industrial life—but to find material for “some vast, tremendous theme, heroic [and] terrible,” about the West, “that frontier of Romance, where a new race, a new people—hardy, brave, and passionate—were building an empire” (9-10). When he reaches California, however, he finds that the “frontier of Romance” has transformed into grids of grain carefully managed by steam harvesters, stock market tickers, and calculating businessmen. Just as demoralizing is that his wheat-farming friends have gotten into land and grain rate disputes with the Pacific and Southwestern Railroad, which—like the corporation that initiated the extermination of the real Mussel Slough crew—used dubious contracts to compel the San Joaquin farmers to buy their lands at exorbitant rates. One strand of the novel focuses on Presley's efforts to protest the railroad trust, campaigns, I argue, that are propelled by sentimental critique. Indeed, while Norris complained about sentimentality in his critical essay “A Plea for

Romantic Fiction,” calling it “merely a conjurer’s trick-box, full of flimsy quackeries, tinsel and claptraps, meant only to amuse” rather than to probe social forces, his protagonist finds that, to stand up to the ecological and humanitarian wastes of the Pacific and Southwestern, he must identify with the land and the people who till it (214). In this sense, Francesca Sawaya observes, Norris’s naturalism claims to “[distance] itself from any association of femininity, or the genre perceived as feminine—sentimentalism,” yet it adopts the very conventions of that genre (“Sentimental” 261). The result, I argue, is a sympathy-driven condemnation of industrial agriculture.

Presley’s sentimental rebellions falter, however, and his sympathetic energies come to nothing. The poet, in effect, abandons his critique of railroad-run agriculture and embraces the inefficiencies he once found so troubling, squandering his literary and humanitarian potential. Rather than continuing its affective condemnation of factory farming, *The Octopus* acquiesces to Presley, getting torn between his indictments and endorsements of waste. As Zena Meadowsong suggests, the result is an aesthetic of “defect,” or what we might call artistic inefficiency. *The Octopus* ultimately endorses the very system it tries to deconstruct, but its apparent “failures of narrative mastery” are productive, as they illustrate the impossibility of escaping the “monster machine” (34). By recapitulating Presley’s apostasy to the logic of industry, *The Octopus* lays waste to its sentimental critique and emphasizes sympathy’s inefficacy against the callousness of the machine. Because nothing can bring back the efficiency of preindustrial farming, Norris adds, the wastes of the New Agriculture will persist and engulf modern America.

While scholars often dismiss the novel’s treatment of nature, claiming that Norris reduces the environment to a mere “backdrop for dramas enacted by people” (Sarver 78),

particularly the money-minded performances of corporate capitalists, the book does promote an ecocritical attitude: it valorizes preindustrial agriculture and the cooperative ties to the landscape that Norris romantically associated with it. In much the same way that *Squatter* renders the hacienda, *The Octopus* portrays the farms and ranches of old as pastoral idylls, places that exhibit heartfelt husbandry as well as admirable efficiency. This attitude is often neglected, Wells observes, because it is registered in the criticisms of marginalized characters like the centenarian Presley meets at Solotari's restaurant (80). Reminiscing on the mission system, the old Californio fancies that the Mexican clergy who preceded the American farmers preserved a sacred sense of economy in the San Joaquin Valley. Those priests planted wheat, but they did not specialize in it to boost their profits, like Buck Annixter or Magnus Derrick. They took care to maintain regional biodiversity, raising cattle, shoring sheep, and cultivating fruit, all without the help—or need—of laborsaving machines. Devout husbandry, the Californio insists, compelled the friars to identify with the fates of their fields, and that sympathy enabled them to commune with the earth as well as with God, even facilitating the Eucharist: “Wheat, olives, and the vine; the Fathers planted those, to provide the elements of the Holy Sacrament—bread, oil, and wine, you understand” (21). Their labors, in turn, satisfied the spiritual and material needs of the mission without draining the surrounding resources. “If money was scarce,” the man muses to Presley, “there was always plenty to eat, and clothes enough for all, and wine, ah, yes, by the vat, and oil too” (21). The affection-driven agriculture of yesteryear thus encouraged comfortable subsistence rather than requiring farmers to live by bread alone. Moreover, the priests' careful balance of

production and consumption produced “plenty” of the most important goods: those that sated hunger and reminded people of God’s immanence in the soil.

*The Octopus* imagines that the practitioners of industrial agriculture, on the other hand, have eschewed these sympathetic ties as well as the ecological equilibrium they helped to maintain. Dissatisfied with subsistence and hungry for big bucks, these farmers want not to balance the inputs and outputs of a delicate system but to increase nature’s yield exponentially. Annixter, a civil engineer tellingly trained in “scientific agriculture,” avoids planting plots by hand and instead hires others to seed thousands of acres while he plays Taylorist efficiency expert (25). To streamline the plowing and to fertilize as much land as possible, he arranges scores of workers in tight rows, ordering foremen to help in “maintaining the precise interval” so that one laborer could “run his furrows as closely as possible to those already made by the plough in front” (129). This systematic management forces workers to abandon their affection for the soil. Indeed, while Annixter deludes himself into thinking his crews have lovingly “kneaded and furrowed and stroked the brown humid earth,” their “even, regular gait” suggests that they care less about communing with nature than about finishing their rationalized, dispassionate work (129). Moreover, Annixter focuses so intently on how “steadily the hundred iron hands” plow and how neatly he has arranged them—both emblematic of his desire for efficiency—that he disregards the cosmic rape of the earth (130). Norris considers the work of the plows a perversion of preindustrial agriculture, a heartless “embrace” of the landscape “so robust as to be almost an assault” (130). Annixter thus abandons agricultural sympathy for the numerical sublime. By refusing to identify with the assailed soil, the engineer gets to revel in the fact that his hundreds of workers driving

hundreds of horses digging thousands of sheers into the earth stretch “over the curve of the globe . . . multiplying to infinity” (130). Consideration for the land vanishes when the farmer ponders the sheer productivity of his operation. Instead of contenting himself with the balanced plentitude of subsistence, Annixter, like the other San Joaquin entrepreneurs, purports to push his fields’ productivity beyond their capacity.

This factory-inspired attitude does yield more crops, Norris admits, and it realizes unprecedented efficiency, but it also threatens to drain the soil, portending cataclysmic waste. Ironically, the wheat germinates at one of the novel’s sentimental peaks: the midnight vigil during which Annixter realizes he loves Hilma Hooven. When Buck imagines her reluctance to love him, he finally swells with sympathy and commits to “giving himself to her as freely as, as nobly as she had given herself to him” (367). The earth reciprocates this sentimental climax by shooting forth Annixter’s wheat in a comparably affectionate display, one figured in overtly sexualized yet curiously sentimental terms. Norris renders the valley a “loyal,” ever-fecund “mother, who never failed, who never disappointed” (368). He worries, however, that this round of labor pains of nature too strikingly reflects the efficiency of Annixter’s scientific agriculture. “Straining, swelling” to finish its (re)productive work, the earth speckles the horizon with the fruits of its labor “everywhere,” with the same “illimitable, immeasurable” scope as Annixter’s production scheme (369). This staggering output suggests that the valley has yielded to his productivity policies. Meeting these quotas jeopardizes its equilibrium, though. Once the earth is “delivered of the fruits of its loins,” the faithful matriarch is forced into an unnaturally long period of infertility, a “sleep of exhaustion” during which “the natural forces seemed to hang suspended” as the soil recuperates from excessive



fertilization (14). The efficiency of this single harvest ultimately threatens the fertility of the pastoral place, Norris suggests. There might be “no growth, no life” in the valley next year, even when it should still produce enough grass for grazing cattle (14).

Increasing agricultural efficiency thus raises twinned anxieties about infertility and energy depletion. The San Joaquin farmers may have extracted untold numbers from their fields, but they have so seldom replenished its stores that “the very stubble” of previous harvests has “no force even to rot” (14). With the power of nature dwindling, inefficiency feels imminent. Practically speaking, the farmers worry about unfruitful labor—as evidenced by the fear of wheat shortage that looms large over the narrative—and squandered capital—like the disused “broken-down seeder” left “rusting to its ruin” in the Derricks’ equipment shed (14). More catastrophically, though, industrial efficiency endangers the procreativity of nature. What the valley needs, Norris imagines, is something like the self-denying, sympathy-driven relationship of Buck and Hilma. Farmers ought to identify with their suffering fields and plant them, accordingly, but the practitioners of the New Agriculture eschew both sympathy and moderation, forcing nature to teeter between epic abundance and entropic collapse.

For Norris, the fate of this ecological critique hangs on the success of Presley’s poetry because his “song of the West” purports to recover the intimacy of preindustrial farming. Attaching such importance to Presley is bold considering that the rosy-eyed writer is uneducated about agriculture and unsympathetic to ranching. On reaching California, he wants only to make real his preconceptions about the West. His chief priority is to sing a vast, barely cultivated landscape, “the desert, the mountains, all wild, primordial, untamed” (40). These wild, no longer extant places, he believes, exhibited

energy and “Life, the primitive, simple, direct Life,” that urban-industrial modernity lacks; harkening back to the scenes that Homer and Beowulf saw would thus recall ties to nature that afforded genuine vitality (40). Modern people, however, “have been educated away from it all,” Presley complains: “We are out of touch. We are out of tune” with that primitive strength accomplished by noble work done with the soil (41). The agriculture Presley wants to see vaguely resembles the sentimental agriculture of the mission priests. He longs—unrealistically—for an oxymoronically wild pastoral, a picturesque but sublime place of crude but close connections with the environment. But while the poet valorizes proximity with nature, he cannot stomach the realities of ranch life, a difficulty Norris represents as a problem of sympathy. Indeed, if the San Joaquin farmers’ talk of grain rates and freight tariffs irritates Presley, blotting the “picture of that huge romantic West that he saw in his imagination” with the stain of “realism, grim, unlovely, unyielding,” the georgic aspects of ranching more strikingly mar that portrait (12). Presley tells himself that “he loved the people and [sympathized] with their hopes and fears, joys and griefs,” but just the sight of dirt on Hooven provokes classist ire (12). He thinks that “uncouth brutes” like Hooven, “grimmed with the soil they worked upon” (5), simply add to the “harsh colour that refused to enter into the great scheme of harmony” that he wants his verse to capture (12). The uncritical Presley wants to have it both ways: he hopes to recover the intimacy of preindustrial farming, but he refuses to acknowledge the dirty work that comes with it. *The Octopus* suggests, however, that the prudish poet will need to sympathize with working-class people before he can really champion the pastoral; for Norris, the sentimental and the bucolic ideal are inextricably bound.

Presley will also need to abandon his industrial conception of nature, which impedes his sentimental energies as much as his distaste for farm work. The poet may detest the San Joaquin farmers' distance from their fields, but his proposed song of the West abstracts nature as much as their productivity policies. Presley treats both nature and poetry like machinery. To celebrate "all the traits and types of every community from the Dakotas to the Mexicos," a goal that harkens back to—but curiously mechanizes—the democratic poetics of Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* (1855), he imagines that he must get those people "welded and riven together in one single, mighty Song" (10). He thus considers the "signs and symbols of the West" "component parts" in a lyrical engine, interchangeable topographies that can be hammered into place as needed (47). To "strike the great iron note," Presley also assumes what Norris later calls the "larger view," the almost cartographic sense of objectivity promoted by industry (40). Presley betrays this distant, unsympathetic thinking when he climbs one of Annixter's hills—tellingly, the moment when he comes closest to realizing his romance. When he assumes this vantage, nature unravels like a "huge scroll," blank parchment ready to be filled with poetic impressions (46). Here, Presley regards the environment no differently than Derrick or Annixter. The "scroll" unfurled by the "larger view" resembles the map of the Los Muertos Ranch hanging in Derrick's office. Magnus learns about his properties only by studying his chart, an elevated, empirical representation of "every water-course, depression, and elevation, together with indications of the varying depths of the clays and loams in the soil" (53). Presley likewise abstracts the features of the valley to make those parts fit into his monstrously "welded" poetic engine. In this sense, Presley not only struggles to sympathize with the unromantic farmers who will be

disenfranchised by the heartless railroad trust, but he strains to identify with the landscape as well. This lack of genuine sympathy, Norris suggests, aligns his artistic vision with the callous interests of industrial capitalists rather than the egalitarian concerns of the romantic writers—the Whitmans—who preceded him. To defy the Southwestern and Pacific and sustain the book’s critique of the New Agriculture, Norris adds, Presley must resist the “larger view,” a philosophy that has already taken hold of San Joaquin farming. Just as important, he must develop the environmental and humanitarian sympathies exhibited by the Alamares in *Squatter*.

Industrial waste arouses this sentimentality. Just when the view from Annixter’s hill shows Presley the point of his poem in a “caress” reminiscent of the Old Agriculture’s intimacy with the soil, the realism of squandered energy interrupts his romantic vision (48). Specifically, the “iron hoofs” of a tardy passenger train gallop past and leave the valley “quivering” in the wake of its wastes (48-49). Presley notices first how the engine’s mechanical excesses pollute the pastoral place. It fills the air with the “reek of hot oil,” the noxious remnant of its combustive work (49). The train’s “vomiting” of “smoke and sparks” is just as distressing because it suggests that the machine is overconsuming resources and then regurgitating the unusable leftovers—and simply to do the work of a “single, unattached” engine (49). In this sense, Presley reckons, the engine needlessly exposes the valley to toxic exhaust, for its labor is aesthetically displeasing and mechanically inefficient. By themselves, these wastes do little to move Presley to ecocritical sympathy, of course. The slaughter of Vanamee’s sheep awakens his dormant sentimental energies, however. Powered by “soulless Force, the iron-hearted Power” of the Southwestern and Pacific, the train runs over the sheep on

its tracks to execute its dispassionate labor (51). This efficiency produces what Presley deems “hideous ruin,” not only in terms of wasted capital—nearly the entire herd succumbs to the train—but in terms of environmental energy—the sheep, with their “brains knocked out” and their corpses “caught in the barbs of the wire” surrounding the tracks, can no longer fecundate the fields with their picturesque grazing (50). If the deadly belching of the engine did not move Presley to sentimentality, the wasted sheep indeed compel him to cast aside his distaste for the georgic. Rather than calling the ranchers blemishes on the portrait of his romance, the sheep force him to reciprocate their “sobbing wails of infinite pain” (49) with a “quick burst of irresistible compassion for this brute agony he could not relieve” (50). Ultimately, Norris suggests, mechanical waste—one of the worst manifestations of “realism, grim, unlovely, unyielding” that Presley will encounter in *The Octopus*—makes his romance untenable, but that byproduct helps him to identify, if only fleetingly, with the victims of the railroad’s callous logic.

The public’s indifference to industrial waste stirs Presley as much as the problem of inefficiency. The creation of the League undoubtedly implicates him in the ranchers’ fight with the Pacific and Southwestern, but Presley does not realize “why he had never grasped the inspiration for his vast, vague, *impersonal* Song of the West” until he attends the exhibition of *A Study of the Contra Costa Foothills* (372). Rather than detailing the grimy minutiae of farm life, the aptly named Hartrath captures the aloof, romantic vision of nature that Presley had conceived for his epic: his picture features a beautiful country maiden working pleasantly in picturesque fields. Hartrath even encloses the canvas in a “frame of natural redwood, the bark still adhering,” to preserve the illusion that his artwork is close to nature and the people who live with it (310). The painter, Presley

learns, lacks genuine compassion for his subject, especially considering the way that the Pacific and Southwestern has threatened to dispossess ranchers and thus dismantle pastoral agriculture. He puts on the appearance of ecological sympathy to increase his clout, claiming to aesthetes that beauty “unmans” him as he artfully “[closes] his sore eyes with a little expression of pain” (316). This false sentimentality, Presley recognizes, is problematic for two reasons. First, it turns art into a celebration of “the eternal, irrepressible Sham” (314). Worse, it renders art lovers apathetic to the wastes of railroad efficiency. The people at the *fete* focus on the technical aspects of the painting, not the fact that the railroad has endangered pastoral living. The false sympathy of romance, in this sense, perpetuates waste because it disengages the critical energies of the public. Here, the words of Cedarquist, the steel magnate who puts on the exhibition, ring true for the now-sympathetic poet: the farmer and the manufacturer alike, he claims, are caught “in the same grist between the two millstones of the lethargy of the Public and the aggression of the Trust” (305). The people “have but to say, ‘No’” to the ecological and economic abuses of the Pacific and Southwestern, but pieces like Hartrath’s *Study* discourage real sympathy and deactivate the engine of political change (304). Wastes like the mechanical massacre of Vanamee’s flock persist because the people have not been incited to empathy for the farmers who can disassemble railroad-run agriculture.

Hatred for unused critical energy induces Presley to sentimental advocacy for the San Joaquin ranchers. On recognizing that romance will not rouse the public against the Pacific and Southwestern, Presley scraps his song for lyrical utility, verses that do the cultural work of sympathy. “The Toilers” is not art for art’s sake but, as the visionary shepherd-poet Vanamee puts it, “an Utterance—a Message” (376). Its “imperfections”

suggest that its literary value is debatable (376). The poem nevertheless succeeds because its defects indicate genuine sympathy rather than saccharine artifice. Presley “had been stirred to his lowest depths” during its composition, enough to fancy that “now he was of the People” (372). Finishing the piece even requires him to abandon his artistic ambitions for the people with whom he has connected. With one line left, Presley dreams about publishing his work in a magazine that “gives me such—a—background; gives me such weight” (377). Vanamee calls out this egotism, however: “You helper of the helpless . . . You preach a doctrine of abnegation, of self-obliteration, and you sign your name to your words as high on the tablets as you can reach, so that all the world may see, not the poem, but the poet” (377). Submitting the poem to a hifalutin press would send it for the wrong reasons to people who would not grasp it. Literary achievement would thus undermine its power and expose Presley’s hypocrisy. A local press, on the other hand, would prove Presley’s sincerity and inscribe his message on “tablets” that ordinary people could read. Herein lies a genuine form of sentimentalism and the conceivable success of Presley’s poem, Norris suggests. Writing the lyrics required Presley to identify with the ranchers; sympathy now calls upon him to reciprocate their call for understanding: as Vanamee insists, the poem “must be read *by* the Toilers. It *must* be common . . . if you are to reach them” (377). Presley only finishes his opus after resolving to send the poem to a daily press for no money. In effect, he practices what he preaches, though not without prodding. Instead of treating his toilers with faux sentimentality for the sake of celebrity, as does Hartrath, Presley tries to sympathize with them, and he chooses a venue for publication that reflects his sincerity. Reducing the

ranchers' cause to mawkish artifice, Presley concludes, would not only do them an injustice but squander his poetry's capacity for legitimate social critique.

The aesthetic Presley realizes even reproduces his compassionate identification with the ranchers. Although "The Toilers" makes its debut in a California newspaper, it quickly gets duplicated in venues across the nation. Its readers call it everything from a "Socialistic" manifesto, to a text indignant enough to excerpt in "revolutionary sermons [and] reactionary speeches," to a poem good only for use in baby food advertisements (394). Vanamee, the "poet by instinct" educated by nature itself, best discerns its aesthetic achievements, however (36). Instead of "trying to make a sounding piece of literature," and rather than prettifying it for gentile audiences, Presley has laid bare the artistic shortcomings that come from the "tremendous stress" of writing sympathetically (376). That poetic strategy, Vanamee suggests, can best sing the "world-old war between Freedom and Tyranny" happening in the San Joaquin because, formally speaking, it can inculcate sentimentality in its readers (307). The poet's struggle to understand and represent the disenfranchised ranchers models for his readers how to take up the same sympathetic battle against the Pacific and Southwestern. In this sense, Presley calls out the injustices done to the ranchers and develops sentimental poetics to do it. The emotional residues that his critics highlight as problems with the poem are actually what make it possible to unite Californians—and perhaps Eastern audiences, too—in sympathetic bonds against the railroad.

Even Norris applauds the aesthetic of "The Toilers." Perhaps this claim is counterintuitive considering that Norris quibbled about sentimentality in his literary criticism. "A Plea for Romantic Fiction," for instance, calls sentimental plots



bastardizations of romance, merely amusing “cut and thrust” plots that delude readers into thinking literature is “an affair of cloaks and daggers” rather than a tool meant to probe social forces (214). Yet, in spite of these remarks, Norris elevates the sentimental project to which Presley resorts. For one, his narrator commends the poet’s sincerity, agreeing with Vanamee that Presley had “been moved to his heart’s foundations” and had written “thoroughly in earnest” (394). Just as important, the aesthetic exhibited in “The Toilers” approaches what Norris deemed the greatest artistic achievement: literature written with purpose. The best stories, he writes, optimize the aesthetic and political energies supplied to them, doing work that “proves something, draws conclusions from a whole congeries of forces, social tendencies, [and] race impulses” (“Novel” 26). A great novel is thus a “preaching novel,” an art object that fires the boilers of social critique to “prove something,” if only something aesthetic (25-26). “The Toilers” accomplishes this didactic function through its sympathetic poetics, a strategy that educates its readers about the suffering of California ranchers. Presley transcends “cut and thrust” literature by eschewing his romantic *Song of the West*. His conversion to moralistic sentimentalism even reflects what Norris set out to do when writing his novels. Perhaps, then, Presley’s development into a poet of purpose indicates some of *The Octopus*’s goals. Like *Squatter*, *The Octopus* tries to carve out a place for sentimentalism in the age of efficiency. Norris attempts that feat with a sentimental *Künstlerroman* subplot, a narrative sequence detailing the growth of Presley as a sympathetic artist.

But unlike Ruiz de Burton, Norris ultimately cannot believe in sentimentalism’s efficacy against the logic of efficiency. As a result, the plot about Presley’s artistic conversion short-circuits. This diversion of narrative current begins when “The Toilers”

fails to generate the sympathetic power needed to combat the inefficiencies of railroad efficiency. Wealthy readers praise the poem and pity the ranchers but still spread the logic of industry. The Cedarquists even make efficiency an international phenomenon, building ships to transport California wheat to Asia. They claim to do this work in the name of sympathy, saying Presley has spurred them to hasten their charity work for famine victims in India. But if “the whole world had been struck with horror at the reports of suffering and mortality in the affected districts,” Mrs. Cedarquist directs her friends’ affections into “social affairs—luncheons, teas, where one discussed the ways and means of assisting the starving Asiatics over teacups and plates of salad” (318). And while she promotes false sympathy, refusing to consider what starving feels like, her husband continues to promote a mindset that dismantles sentimental agriculture. He notes that “rice in China is losing its nutritive quality” and that wheat would be a boon to those emaciated people, but he, like the San Joaquin crew, considers nature a series of inputs and outputs. Because “population in Europe is not increasing fast enough to keep up with the rapidity of our production,” he reasons, excess crops need to be funneled into “*new markets, greater markets*” (305-306). For Cedarquist, Asia is only a release valve ensuring that California farming makes use of its surplus energies. The steel magnate would rather divorce the Chinese from their own agriculture than let the grain of the Los Muertos and Quien Sabe Ranches rot in the fields—or go to hungry Californians, as the starvation of the Hooven family demonstrates in the novel’s final chapters. Thus, the sentimentality of “The Toilers” induces its audiences to do cultural work but certainly not the kind Presley intended. Instead of getting readers like the Cedarquists to sympathize with the San Joaquin crew and change their minds about the logic of industry, it propels a

purportedly benevolent brand of imperialism. This dangerous charity threatens not only to extend efficiency logic across the globe but to extinguish sympathy for the suffering.

What is worse, the poem fails to unite the Leaguers, the very “toilers” Presley meant to address. Having crowned himself “champion of the People in their opposition to the Trust” (395), Presley is confident that his verses will hearten the League members and channel their “blind fury” into productive protest (279). However, their desertion of Derrick shows that the poem instills neither fraternity nor sympathy. When marshals come to dispossess Magnus of Los Muertos, all but ten of the six hundred members retract their union pledges to march against the railroad. After all, the absentees complain, Derrick, their President, “had allowed them to be taken by surprise,” and “they were not going to stand up and be shot at just to save Derrick’s land . . . That was asking a little *too* much” (507). Even crueler, the absconders overlook the waste of human life in the wake of the gunfight, particularly the death of Derrick’s son Harran. On opening a union meeting concerning the bloodshed, the second-in-command Garnett claims to “sympathise, as do we all, in the affliction of our President” but refuses to consider his pain or his reasons for facing the marshals without adequate support (547). In a brilliant but callous public relations move, he instead divorces the League from its President: “A mistake has been made,” and, even though several men gave their lives in the name of the organization, “we of the League must not be held responsible” for the decisions that culminated in the bloody outcome (547). Other members, including a “tall clumsy man, half-rancher, half-politician” (547), echo this heartless reasoning by accusing Derrick of supplanting the union’s collective mission with a program of self-interest: “The idea of a League, the whole reason why it was organized, was to protect *all* the ranches of this

valley . . . and it looks to me as if the lives of our fellow-citizens had been sacrificed, not in defending *all* of our ranches, but just in defence of one of them—Los Muertos—the one that Mr. Derrick owns” (548). Ironically, the Leaguers indict Derrick for the very crimes they have committed: abandoning the union in the name of self-interest. This dereliction of duty, Norris suggests, amounts to the malfunction of a sentimental engine. Even upon its formation the League was but a “vague engine” driven by the “resistless pressure” of selfish anger, “inexorable, knowing no pity” (279). Ultimately, “The Toilers” does little to optimize the erratic energies supplied to the League’s political machinery. Few of the ranchers who read the poem put its sympathetic message into practice: when faced with a crisis requiring sympathy and solidarity, most renounce their responsibilities to their brethren, and the ones who take that call to arms seriously wind up dead or dispossessed. Thus, while Presley’s poem buzzes among the literati and earns him numerous accolades, it fails in its goals: to call out industrial inefficiency and to inculcate sympathy enough to tackle that waste. Even the people who most needed fellow feeling, the ranchers, refuse to stand together to face the railroad.

That “The Toilers” fails to join the Leaguers suggests that Presley’s efforts to sympathize with them were equally fruitless. His sentimentality peaks just after the massacre. Unable to sleep, he keeps a vigil for his fallen friends by scribbling in his journal, critique akin to the lamentation of Gabriel in *The Squatter and the Don*. The entry decries the trust’s ability to grind away its competitors. Ironically, Presley writes, if the railroad wastes everything from natural resources to human life, it snuffs out naysayers with utter efficiency, for the “great iron hand crushes . . . our little struggles,” and “our moment’s convulsion of death agony causes not one jar in the vast, clashing

machinery of the nation's life; a fleck of grit in the wheels, perhaps, and a grain of sand in the cogs" (538). Not only does the trust continue its work with mechanical precision in spite of "flecks" like the standoff at Los Muertos, but its "iron hand," a mockery of the hands that caressed the land during the days of sentimental agriculture, indifferently strangles its opponents. But worst of all, Presley writes, is that the public feels too little compassion to hold back the "iron hand." Even the "the mother's wail of bereavement" and the "wife's cry of anguish," the most heart-rending byproducts of railroad logic, compel sympathy for neither the ranchers nor their families (539). As a result, Presley and Norris alike take sentimental aesthetics to their limit, calling upon a nation of readers to identify with Derrick's crew:

Ask yourselves, you of the Middle West, ask yourselves, you of the North, ask yourselves, you of the East, ask yourselves, you of the South—ask yourselves, every citizen of every State from Maine to Mexico . . . Can you not see how the monsters have plundered your treasures and holding them in the grip of their iron claws, dole them out to you only at the price of your blood, at the price of the lives of your wives and your little children? You give your babies to Moloch for the loaf of bread you have kneaded yourselves. You offer your starved wives to Juggernaut for the iron nail you have yourselves compounded. (540)

While Presley writes to and for himself, the second-person pronouns in his outburst appeal to the readers of *The Octopus*, demanding that we identify with the fallen ranchers because we, too, are caught in the "grip" of corporate America's "iron claws." With this strategy, Norris pushes sentimentalism even further than Presley does in "The Toilers," directly addressing us to achieve prose "with a purpose."

But even that didactic poetics goes to waste on the Leaguers. Presley puts that pathos into practice when he takes the opera hall stage to defend Derrick. Unlike Garnett, who focuses on washing the League's hands of its President's decisions, the poet

begins his sentimental crusade with the names of the deceased, a strategy intended to compel even the most standoffish opponents to imagine the pain of those “killed in the defence of their homes, killed in the defence of their rights” (549). Presley then asks the ranchers to examine their hearts by calling out the insensitivity of the railroad: “Where is the end; where is the end? How long must the iron-hearted monster feed on our life’s blood?” (549). This flourish accomplishes two sentimental goals. First, it distinguishes the Leaguers from the “iron-hearted” railroad: the ranchers differ from the corporation in their fleshly hearts and their capacity for sympathy. The first-person plural “our” also asks the organization to welcome survivors like Derrick back into the fold: the Los Muertos crew shared the Leaguers’ objectives, Presley intimates, so they now deserve their consideration. These sentimental successes are fleeting, though, because Presley overstates his case and regresses to erudite romanticism. While his first few remarks concern his lost friends, he soon abandons talk of compassion for tirades about Tyranny and Freedom rife with references to the Exodus and the French Revolution. If the ranchers were simply unreceptive to “The Toilers,” Norris suggests, Presley has not optimized his sentimental energies at the opera hall. When the poet lapses into romanticism, he loses his audience. The Leaguers applaud him, but, as he and Norris both sense, the men “were not once sympathetic” to his rhetoric, responding “perfunctorily, in order to appear to understand” (552). Presley’s pity for the Derrick crew ultimately generates too little power to convert the League’s anger into agitation against the corporation. Just as troubling, the implosion of the speech alerts Presley to the inefficiency of his other artistic labors. “The Toilers” had “not helped them [or] their

cause in the least,” he realizes (552). All the energies expended writing moralistic verse come to nothing instead of compelling people to challenge railroad logic.

The failure of Presley’s speech signals not only the inefficacy of sympathy but the end of Norris’s engagement with sentimentalism. After the opera hall fiasco, Norris repudiates his *Künstlerroman* plot, for Presley discards his heartfelt poetry for the logic of efficiency, leaving the novel without its sentimental protagonist. The one who convinces the poet to renounce sympathy for mechanical objectivity is Shelgrim, the president of the trust. Presley goes to his office prepared to meet a “terrible man of blood and iron” but finds, ironically, a man “of vast sympathies” (574-575). For one, Shelgrim is a sympathetic employer who forgives the “useless” and “untrustworthy” labor of the intemperate worker Tentell, reasoning that the man “has a family, wife and three children” and that a raise would persuade him to take up the work ethic he exhibited during his sobriety (572-573). Just as striking to Presley, the tycoon is a “sentimentalist and an art critic,” one capable of appreciating Hartrath’s romantic vision and condemning “The Toilers” to the ranks of derivative poetry (574). It is clear, however, that if Shelgrim appears to understand, “with equal intelligence, the human nature in an habitual drunkard, the ethics of a masterpiece of painting, and the financiering and operation of ten thousand miles of track,” his sympathies are dubious (575). His treatment of Tentell stems less from sympathy than from shrewd management. Doubling the man’s pay incentivizes less drinking and thus increased efficiency. Shelgrim’s strategy even resembles the productivity policies that F. W. Taylor and Henry Ford developed to coerce good behavior from unruly factory laborers. That Shelgrim prefers Hartrath’s *Study* to “The Toilers” also casts suspicion on his “vast sympathies.” Like the faddish romantic,

Shelgrim appreciates art that makes no effort to connect with the people represented in it. That divorced, idealized perspective, Shelgrim adds, is even the “one best way to say anything,” a phrase that eerily echoes Taylor’s mantra of doing work in the “one best way” (574). If the entrepreneur knows economics and brush strokes, Norris intimates, he cares little to put himself in the place of impoverished farm folks like the ones he has disenfranchised. His compassion is questionable.

The man’s aesthetic expertise nevertheless persuades Presley to think like an engineer rather than a sympathetic poet. Shelgrim refuses to dwell on the suffering of particular people, like the deaths of the Los Muertos men, events he calls “complications” in an otherwise functional system, “conditions that bear hard on the individual—crush him maybe” (576). Rather, he conceptualizes anguish through the “larger view” of a mechanical schematic, and he describes his callous decision-making in thermodynamic terms. The blame for the Los Muertos tragedy lies not with him, he insists, but with elemental “forces,” energy converted and channeled into various forms of production, like the growth of wheat or the construction of railroads (576). In a bizarre conflation of the natural and economic, Shelgrim even claims that the scientific laws of “supply and demand” govern these unstoppable currents: “Can your Mr. Derrick stop the wheat growing? He can burn his crop or give it away, or sell it for a cent a bushel—just as I could go into bankruptcy—but otherwise his Wheat must grow” (576). This rationale, combined with Shelgrim’s sympathetic façade, sways Presley, for after this explanation the poet considers the universe an enormous contraption. His attitude toward the engine changes as well. While during his midnight vigil Presley lamented the malice of a machine capable of grinding through the wails of bereaved women and children,



Shelgrim's "larger view" now suggests to him that "there was no malevolence in Nature" but "colossal indifference only, a vast trend toward appointed goals" (577). The universe may have a "heart of steel," like the railroad, Presley reasons to himself, but it exhibits the "nirvanic calm," or the smooth, efficient operation, of a "prodigious mechanism of wheels and cogs" (577). When he considers how to abstract the pain of particular people, conceiving of them as trifling, temporary blockages of energy, Presley relinquishes his rhetoric of the heart and acquiesces to Shelgrim's "heart of steel," an attitude that explains away environmental and humanitarian injustice.

Presley confirms his resignation to the larger view during his meal with the Gerards, a family that thrives on the railroad's unequal—and even inefficient—distribution of capital. Ironically, the poet chats with Mrs. Gerard about famine relief in India at the very moment that the Hooven family, bereft of their patriarch at Los Muertos, starves on the streets. Mrs. Hooven and her toddler find no compassion in the city, for the urbanites feel "removed" from them, meeting their pleas for food with "flat and expressionless" faces that replicate the dispassionate behavior of machines (596). Deprived of even sympathy, the women are forced to eat the "refuse of the gutter," rotting fruit, half-eaten bread, and other commodities whose energies are wasted by profligate consumers (606). Ultimately, Mrs. Hooven dies, Hilda gets rescued by a wealthy woman, and Minna prostitutes herself to make ends meet. Presley often wonders about the Hoovens' fates, but when dinner commences and Mrs. Gerard talks of shipping wheat to India—"The Toilers," she gladly reports, succeeded in "making at least one convert" to charity—he betrays his former sympathies (605). He abandons his poetic mission and "[assents] in meaningless words" to vacuous remarks as he "[sips] his wine

mechanically” (603). That Presley behaves “mechanically” tells much about the impact of Shelgrim’s philosophy. Rather than voicing indignation for people like the Hoovens, he reacts automatically and unfeelingly to Mrs. Gerard’s false sympathy. Worse still, he applies Shelgrim’s notion of force to the problem of poverty, downplaying how railroad magnates impoverish people and reducing them to statistical categories: “One never need be afraid of being ‘too late’ in the matter of helping the destitute,” he informs Mrs. Gerard, because starving people “are always a fixed quantity” (605). When this industrial notion of suffering dominates Presley’s thinking, replacing fellow feeling with concerns about inputs, outputs, and “fixed quantities,” Presley becomes as “removed” from the Hoovens as the hardhearted metropolitans. *The Octopus* loses its sentimental hero here. Presley indeed represents sympathy’s last stand in the age of efficiency, but industry’s logic subsumes his sentimental energies. The poet now works for the railroad.

But instead of bemoaning Presley’s indoctrination, *The Octopus* recapitulates it. For one, Vanamee, the novel’s aesthetic and philosophical authority, comes to much the same conclusions as Presley concerning injustice and waste. Just as Presley takes up Shelgrim’s thoughts that “FORCE only existed” and that people are “mere animalculæ” incapable of stopping the “primordial energy” of an “almighty machine” (634), Vanamee discovers—after a bizarre vigil during which he meets his long-lost daughter, a dead ringer for his deceased lover, Angèle—that “there is only life, and the suppression of life, that we, foolishly, say is death . . . Death is only real for all the detritus of the world, for all the sorrow, for all the injustice, for all the grief” (636). Perhaps Vanamee’s theodicy sounds rosier than Shelgrim’s, affirming the potency of life while the industrialist’s creed simply neutralizes suffering and death; but even Vanamee, the one figure besides Presley

who has the poetic power to resist mechanization, comes to embrace the “larger view” of efficiency logic. To uplift the downtrodden Presley, he implores him to “never judge of the whole round of life by the mere segment you can see. The whole is, in the end, perfect” (636). Like Shelgrim, Vanamee willfully neglects the energies wasted by industry: the environmental and humanitarian “detritus” produced by the railroad’s inefficiency. None of the novel’s characters, it seems, is immune to the compassionless reasoning of industry, yet Vanamee’s and Presley’s conversions to the “larger view” are especially disquieting because they trouble *The Octopus*’s critique of waste.

Given the novel’s earlier condemnations of inefficiency, we would expect Norris to deconstruct or qualify Vanamee’s attitude, particularly his comment about “detritus,” which echoes the language of waste from the Hoovens’ starvation scene. But, far from it, the final chapters do not take up the novel’s former critiques; they uphold the optimistic objectivity of Vanamee as well as the logic of Shelgrim. The discussion of Behrman’s death demonstrates this point. Following Vanamee, Norris describes nature as a machine bent on eradicating the greed embodied in the agents of the railroad. With more than a touch of poetic justice, Behrman drowns in his own wheat while admiring how he has streamlined the shunting of grain into the *Swinhilda*, one of the charity boats bound for India. He peers into the cargo hold to appreciate the “great saving of time” effected by his system of elevators and chutes, which enable three men to do the work of seven (641). Nature replicates this efficiency, too, for, “impelled with a force of its own,” the wheat appears to move itself, keeping the engine of industry humming with practically “no human agency” behind it (641). But becoming an engine renders nature unsympathetic to suffering, particularly to that of Behrman. When Behrman, the epitome of corporate

indifference, falls into the hold, the grain “[drowns] out his voice” in the “steady, metallic roar” of efficient mechanical labor (643). The wheat even punishes Behrman for his transgressions. After it has “flagellated” him with pellets resembling the bullets fired at Los Muertos (644), it requites his gluttonous dispossession of Derrick by enveloping his “protuberant stomach” and gorging his “distended, gaping mouth” (646). Efficiency destroys the people most interested in achieving it, Norris suggests. Behrman’s death also confirms Vanamee’s conviction that the engine of the universe snuffs out temporary manifestations of evil. But while it is satisfying to watch Behrman reap what he sows, it is difficult to reckon how the mechanical view of nature described in this episode accords with the novel’s earlier conception of the environment, a sentimental, decidedly anti-industrial vision. The engine that extinguishes Behrman also destroys the Los Muertos men and drowns out the lamentations of their families. Moreover, this manifestation of nature does not reciprocate the “caress” of loving farmers with the maternal sympathy exhibited in Annixter’s fields, but, reduced to “wheels and cogs” propelled by unrelenting “FORCE,” it completes dispassionate work with utter efficiency. If nature was once a nurturing mother, Norris suggests, it is now an unfeeling maternal machine.

By abandoning its condemnation of industrial agriculture, *The Octopus* ultimately wastes its sentimental energy. Rather than affirming its earlier convictions about the wastefulness of the railroad, the novel leaves us with the mechanical vision that has reprogrammed Presley. When the poet departs for India on the *Swinhilda*, ready to promote the half-hearted famine relief he once detested, he adopts the “larger view” of the San Joaquin Valley, focusing on the “great sweep of country” before him and downplaying the “terrible drama” that unfolded there, a conflict that was already “far

distant from him” and his incapacitated sympathies (649). Presley and Norris alike ignore the wastes of industrial capitalism by reckoning the railroad’s short-sighted utilitarian calculus. Asking what has “contributed the greatest good to the greatest numbers” instructs us that the “welter of blood at the irrigation ditch” of Los Muertos will resolve in the “Nirvanic calm” of nature: “Annixter dies,” the two writers reason, “but in a distant corner of the world a thousand lives are saved” (651). This thought reveals much about the novel’s fraught promotion of sentimentalism. Calling on readers to consider the thousand people saved by American wheat looks like an attempt to inculcate sympathy for the victims of famine in India. Yet the novel has unsettled the logic that grounds this counterfeit sympathy. That we are geographically “distant” from these starving people is just as worrisome; the novel has already demonstrated that people like the Cedarquists and Gerards cannot be trusted to deliver on their promises to sympathize with the suffering. Still, for all of its anxiety about reducing people and ecosystems to “distant” inputs and outputs, *The Octopus* ends with the numerical objectivity that sustains railroad-sponsored agriculture. The logic of the machine thus incorporates and redirects the power driving the book’s sentimental case against factory farming. The novel itself becomes an inefficient engine, as a result. Its counter-discourse of industrial efficiency does not effect the work of consistent cultural critique.

The inefficiency of the novel ultimately exemplifies the wastes of industrial modernity. Presley’s final conversation with the widowed Hilma Annixter reveals this strategy. While offering condolences, the poet realizes not only that he loves her but that “adversity had softened her, as well as deepened her,” transforming her into the sentimental ideal: “here, he knew, was sympathy; here, he knew, was an infinite capacity

for love” brought forth by her ardent passion for Buck (629). Presley briefly reciprocates this sympathy when he is beset by “a longing to give the best that was in him to the memory of her, to be strong and noble because of her, to reshape his purposeless, half-wasted life with her nobility and purity and gentleness” (629). Compassion does not transfigure Presley, however. He resolves to stay friends with Hilma but still departs for India, where he will perfunctorily empathize with the suffering of others while propagating the “larger view” of the corporate capitalists. This short sentimental sputter demonstrates that Presley is, as he puts it, “a clock with a broken spring,” a failed poet, an ineffectual social critic, and a faithless human being (565). *The Octopus* is, in the end, as fractured and dysfunctional as Presley. But its “broken” critique of the machine ultimately reflects back on the “wheels and cogs” of industrial ideology, a defective machine propelled by indifferent, unremitting, and poorly distributed “FORCE.” The form of the novel represents what it is like to live in a culture premised on efficiency rather than sympathy. That society, the fractured novel suggests, is one of waste: misallocated capital, social inequality, squandered ambition, and grave insensitivity.

In this sense, *The Squatter and the Don* and *The Octopus* come to surprisingly similar conclusions about the importance of sympathy. Both novels take issue with the inconsistencies of industrial enterprise, particularly with the wastes generated by the New Agriculture. Moreover, Ruiz de Burton and Norris look backward in time to ground their critiques. They romance preindustrial husbandry, associating older forms of farming and ranching with the intimacy and economy they find lacking in modern agriculture; and both appeal to sentimentalism, a literary tradition that preceded the excesses of the Gilded Age, to condemn the destructive byproducts of a mechanical ideology. At the same time,

Ruiz de Burton and Norris espouse radically different views concerning the usability of the past. *Squatter* laments the passing of the hacienda system to affirm the value of farming based on compassion for the land. By sustaining its sentimental critique of the railroad and the Yankee squatters, the book holds out hope for a brand of capitalism that encourages ecological responsibility as well as sympathy for marginalized peoples. The heart can indeed be salvaged in the age of the machine, Ruiz de Burton concludes. *The Octopus*, on the other hand, doubts the power of sentimentality to recover an efficient, affectionate agriculture. When Presley fails to effect his sympathetic reforms for the Mussel Slough ranchers, the novel succumbs to waste: the corporation continues to exploit the land, and it perpetuates the economic inequalities that destroy the book's characters. Moreover, on a formal level, all the pages devoted to Presley's redemptive poetry do nothing to mitigate the problems of industrial expansion. Unlike Ruiz de Burton, then, Norris finds sentiment untenable in the twentieth century. The fraught form of his novel reinforces this conviction. Modernity means inefficiency, Norris muses; the novel should emblemize the potential wasted by the indifferent engine of capitalism.

## CHAPTER V

### THE EFFICIENCIES OF MODERNITY

Considering how intensely and artistically the writers in this study grappled with industrial discourse, it is necessary to reimagine what counts as literary efficiency. For Dos Passos, Hemingway, Pound, and Williams, efficiency implied speed. As a result, those writers developed forms that emphasized the accelerated pace of life in machine-made America. Dos Passos, for instance, associates efficiency with the frenetic monotony of factory work, and his breakneck poetics in *The Big Money*—“reachunderadjustwasherscrewdownreachunderadjust”—serves to parody the “Taylorized speedup” of American labor and culture (55). Based on the examples set by the gear-and-girder strain of modernists, scholars have come to identify literary efficiency with semantic economy: with Dos Passos’s compressed prose, with Hemingway’s terse style, and with Williams’s abbreviation of the poetic line and stanza. Critics have done well to draw attention to these kinetic strategies. Taylorism and Fordism promoted speed as much as productivity and utility, and those labor systems became synonymous with efficiency discourse between the World Wars. Given these factors, and considering how explicitly writers like Dos Passos and Pound engaged with a mechanical poetics, it makes sense for historians and literary critics to have focused on the works of high modernism. However, my dissertation has demonstrated that machine efficiency informed the literary innovations of a different group of artists, and my project calls for further appreciation and investigation of their aesthetics. The writers of the Gilded Age observed—and in some cases initiated—the expansion of efficiency’s logic into contexts outside the factory. They consequently used their fiction to explore the promises and challenges of a



society premised on the model of the machine, an idea that emerged amid rapid industrialization, the rise of corporate capitalism, and the advent of Progressive politics. Ultimately, then, efficiency and waste were more than prevalent themes in Gilded Age novels; they were aesthetic concerns, ideas so crucial to modernity that writers felt compelled to represent and scrutinize them in terms of literary form.

More importantly, Gilded Age treatments of efficiency discourse merit further study because they can help us to uncover a more diverse and more complicated set of responses to industrialization than we have seen in modernism alone. Perhaps because of the influences of Taylor's *Principles* and Ford's assembly line, the high modernists presumed similarly kinetic definitions of literary efficiency. This is not to say that modernist literary efficiency was derivative or superficial. Indeed, its rapid-transit poetics poignantly assessed the cultural implications of the machine age. For Edward Bellamy, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Frank Norris, María Amparo Ruiz de Burton, Mark Twain, and Edith Wharton, however, efficiency did not necessarily connote speed, and aesthetic engagement with that concept did not necessitate motion, concision, or abbreviation. What "efficiency" meant had yet to be codified in the popular imagination, and while a phenomenon akin to the "Taylorized speedup" of American culture worried the writers of the Gilded Age, their often prodigious and slow-going novels exhibit remarkably little interest in speed as such. Instead, they focused on defining social efficiency and designing narratives that represented the many complicated conversions of energy in the national engine. In this sense, the writers of the Gilded Age considered the novel a feat of social engineering, or, as Amy Kaplan puts it, an imaginative "construction" that could "organize, re-form, and control the social world" (10). By

building literary machines that represented the fractious parts of the American engine, the writers of the Gilded Age hoped either to correct what they perceived as wasted energy or to design inefficient stories that magnified the nation's various energy crises.

Some of the writers examined here adapted longstanding literary traditions to diagnose the nation's inefficiencies. The novels of Bellamy and Gilman experiment with plots of development—a conversion narrative about an indolent aristocrat turned writer of romance and a bildungsroman about an enterprising woman bent on escaping domesticity—to eliminate the wasteful labors of *laissez-faire* capitalism and domesticity, respectively. Ruiz de Burton's *Squatter* similarly modifies a preindustrial rhetoric, sentimentalism, to condemn the ironically backward logic of factory-style agriculture. The remaining writers in this study pandered to inefficiency, for they developed aesthetics of waste to magnify the misallocations of energy in the American engine. Twain and Norris sabotage their narrative goals in *Connecticut Yankee* and *The Octopus* to emphasize the dysfunctionality of a society built on mechanical performance, while Wharton deforms *Mirth* to complicate the ideal of an efficient, self-made woman in a machine-made world. These artistic strategies perhaps lack the explicitness of their modernist counterparts, which often manipulated how words looked on the page in order to represent a machine-made life; but, as I have argued, these Gilded Age strategies embody the many competing senses of social efficiency that circulated during a particularly contentious and dysfunctional period in American history. Moreover, the novels examined here offer needed insight into the array of traditional forms that writers employed to participate in important discussions about rapid industrial transformation.

I have tried to call attention to this formal multiplicity by exploring a wide range of texts and literary traditions, including novels that have garnered little scholarly attention. For instance, I have taken seriously the aesthetics of popular literature, specifically the forms of *Looking Backward* and *What Diantha Did*. Neither Bellamy nor Gilman marketed their texts as art objects for erudite readers. In fact, Bellamy revealed in an essay for *The Nationalist* that he had “no idea of attempting a serious contribution” to either literature or social reform, penning his romance as a “mere literary fantasy, a fairy tale of social felicity” (“How” 1). Gilman likewise downplayed the literary features of her works, *Diantha* included, and she famously considered herself a moralist and crusader rather than an artist bent on prettified prose.<sup>1</sup> Scholars have generally taken these writers’ assessments to heart: Bellamy’s work has only recently been appreciated for its aesthetic merits in addition to its sociopolitical importance, and, to this day, few scholars have investigated the aesthetics of *What Diantha Did*. But even the forms of popular literature can be revealing, as they can help us to understand the ethical, political, and ideological assumptions that many Americans embraced. Popular texts can be formally innovative, too. By scrutinizing the aesthetic strategies of *Looking Backward* and *What Diantha Did*, I have tried to illustrate how writers such as Bellamy and Gilman adapted literary conventions to represent the new complications of industrial modernity.

I also hope to have indicated the need to examine writers who are not normally associated with industrial discourse. For instance, women writers undoubtedly responded

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<sup>1</sup> Gilman frequently denied her status as an artist. She contended in the manifesto of her magazine, *The Forerunner*, that her fiction was “not to be regarded as ‘literature,’ but as an attempt to set forth certain views of life which seemed . . . of real importance to human welfare” (“Summary” 286). Gilman made much the same claim about “The Yellow Wallpaper,” perhaps her most critically acclaimed story. In response to Howells’s offer to anthologize the piece, Gilman “assured him that it was no more ‘literature’ than my other stuff, being definitely written ‘with a purpose’” (*Living* 121).

to developments in science and technology, but, as John M. Jordan points out in his analysis of the rational reform movement, turn-of-the-century engineers and politicians—predominantly white men—marketed a machine-made politics as an objective program devoid of the mawkish, sentimental impulses they associated with femininity. Their rhetoric subsequently “[screened] out women, who were not well represented in the academic, engineering, or philanthropic professions where social engineering took hold fastest and most firmly” (4). Such exclusionary techniques, Carolyn de la Peña astutely observes, ended up “rendering invisible” the counter-narratives to technological progress produced by women and people of color during the machine age (921). This invisibility persists, de la Peña adds, because contemporary scholars often promote the “narratives of technological heroism” surrounding Taylor, Ford, and the rational reformers, such that critics cannot identify the material and ideological “systems of national control and internal segregation” produced by new scientific theories and technologies (922). Given their marginalization from cultural discussions about the machine, it is all the more important to explore the various assessments of efficiency discourse that such writers were able to publish. I have tried to address the relative dearth of scholarship on women and efficiency with my close readings of *Diantha*, *The House of Mirth*, and *The Squatter and the Don*. Together, these texts exemplify the different ways that their writers resisted masculinist permutations of efficiency discourse, looking instead for notions of labor productivity that would further women’s agency in industrial society.

But while my study has accounted for factors such as class and gender, I have only started to consider race, ethnicity, religious affiliation, and other important identity categories that influenced the representation of social efficiency. I have begun this work

in my analysis of *The Squatter and the Don*, an investigation that highlighted the racial and ethnic tensions generated by the confluence of industrialization and westward expansion. Yet, as argued by José F. Aranda, Jr., there is still much to do to reposition Mexican-American novelists and other underrepresented writers “at the center of discourses more typically associated with Anglo America,” including discussions about technology and Manifest Destiny (554). For a more complete and illuminating account of Gilded Age literary aesthetics, scholars ought to investigate efficiency’s role in the politics of social reform surrounding other marginalized groups, such as African Americans, Native Americans, and Eastern-European immigrants to the United States. There is much to gain, for instance, by exploring the forms that Booker T. Washington, Charles Chesnutt, and Pauline Hopkins developed to speculate about efficiency’s possibilities in the project of racial uplift in the Reconstruction South. The works of Abraham Cahan, Zitkala-Ša, and Anzia Yeziarska, on the other hand, can shed light on the role that machine metaphors played in the forced assimilation of non-Anglo peoples.

In spite of my dissertation’s limitations, however, I have tried to illustrate the importance of literary aesthetics to the Gilded Age writers’ engagement with efficiency. I also hope to have called attention to the features that distinguish their explorations of machine culture from those of artists like the high modernists. Perhaps it is a fascination with wasteful words, with narrative’s ability to capture and imaginatively correct social inefficiency, that ultimately marks the novels of the Gilded Age. Even *Looking Backward* and *What Diantha Did*—the novels in this study that most fervently championed social reform through greater efficiency—treat waste as an obstacle to be represented and subsequently resolved by literary form. Thus, unlike “Vortex” or *The*

*Big Money*, which take industrial modernity for granted, the literary engines of the Gilded Age enact—and in the cases of Norris, Twain, and Wharton, illustrate the impossibility of—reforming America’s machine-made inefficiencies. Read in this light, I hope that even the most traditional Gilded Age works become more compelling and innovative.

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