THE MASS PRODUCTION OF OLD NEW ENGLAND

A dissertation presented

By

Ethan Robert Whittet

to
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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation argues that an idea of “Old New England” developed in American print culture in the nineteenth century as a fantasy that eased New England’s entry into industrial capitalism. At the heart of this is the interplay of labor and leisure. By describing the leisure activities of their writers, readers, and players, print pastimes—such as books, magazines, and games—encourage a performative regionalism, producing leisure as a conceptual realm distinct from industrial labor and positioning an idea of the region within that conceptual space.

Each of the dissertation’s chapters examines a situation in which the lines separating labor and leisure are unclear and a text steps in to clear up that confusion. Chapter One argues that children’s autobiographies establish antebellum New England as a site of childhood fun. Chapter Two argues that mass-produced games downplay labor by representing it as pleasurable. Chapter Three argues that the Lowell Offering, a magazine written by women working in the Lowell, Massachusetts textile mills, describes workers’ time off the clock as ongoing regional leisure. These texts map New England as a fantasy of stability and racial homogeneity in response to industrialism and immigration. Performative regionalism, I argue, effaces industrial labor in nineteenth-century textual constructions of New England.
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INTRODUCTION

In the October 1842 issue of the *Lowell Offering*—a literary magazine written by women working in the textile factories of Lowell, Massachusetts—“Kate,” the narrator of a brief sketch, describes rifling through her Aunt Hatty’s collection of scraps of writing from the past, in search of material to write about.

In our dilemma for materials for our funny article, we bethought ourself — not of our brain — but of Aunt Hatty’s private portfolio, which she keeps hung up in a great green bag. That is the receptacle of the curious and unique; of things not for the prying eye of curiosity; of mementoes of the past. In fact, it is a museum of rare thoughts and productions. (“First Efforts of Genius” 5-6)

For this *Lowell Offering* author, narratives about the New England’s past would provide “amusing” fodder for the magazine’s pages.

Just as Kate turns to Aunt Hatty’s collection for literary inspiration, likewise, in *The Story of a Bad Boy* (1869), Thomas Bailey Aldrich’s narrator turns to the attic of his Uncle Nutter’s house:

I needn’t tell a New England boy what a museum of curiosities is the garret of a well-regulated New England house of fifty or sixty years’ standing. Here meet together, as if by some preconcerted arrangement, all the broken-down chairs of the household, all the spavined tables, all the seedy hats, all the intoxicated-looking boots, all the split walking sticks that have retired from business, ‘weary with the march of life.’ (36-7)

These texts, written twenty-five years apart, take up strikingly similar attitudes towards their subject matter. Both of these texts describe the detritus of New England family members as a
backlog of stories waiting to be read or written about. The narratives produce Old New England as a store of artifacts, a collection of story-bearing objects. Both Kate and Tom go on in their narratives to elaborate on how the items arrived in the museum-like repositories, writing their own pasts into the symbolic museums (as when Aldrich hangs an eye-patch from a boyhood fistfight on a nail in the garret.). The material accumulations gesture towards some sort of just-out-of-reach past that those family members of the prior generation experienced firsthand and which the narrators can only access second hand.

These are also regional experiences. The texts publicize Old New England as a simultaneous memory and yearning. As Kate’s object is to amuse readers (she notes, “we were not asked for a sensible [article]—not for one instructive—not for a scientific dissertation—not for one evincing mere talent, but for an amusing one”(5)), she curates a collection of New England scenes that collectively amuse, including atrocious stabs at spelling in the “real country spelling school.” Kate’s first-hand knowledge of the “real country spelling school,” a setting she describes as amusing and unchanging, sets the scene for her description of Aunt Hatty’s flirtatious exchange of notes with the school teacher. New England here is simultaneously common ground and object of ridicule. Like the objects in a museum, New England is simultaneously at hand yet removed from everyday use. What emerges is an amusing version of the region and its customs: “But first tell me, did you ever go to a real country spelling school? ... As a specimen of what a boy can do, I once heard uniform spelt ‘younefoarme!’ There was a lad, with a natural genius for difficult things—a true Yankee spirit of independence” (6). “But, a spelling school. In the first place, it is much better to have it in an adjoining ‘district,’ some two or three miles off. Then the larger boys will provide sleighs, (for it is a winter amusement, and a New England custom,) and as many as can will get in, well-knowing that, if there is a new and
light snow, they are to be treated with a ‘turnover’ before they return” (6).

Kate and Tom’s attitudes toward Old New England are also attitudes towards objects that family members have accumulated. Curiosity holds together their inquiry in a way that anticipates late-century attitudes. Discussing the 1890s, Brad Evans draws on Steven Conn’s description of the “‘object-based epistemology’ of late-nineteenth-century museums” to assess contemporaneous treatments of folklore: “Recognizing this object-based epistemology provides us with a context for explaining one of the most striking formal characteristics of folklore’s collection in the 1890s, namely the lack of any clear organizing principle to hold the miscellaneous pieces of folklore together — except that of accumulation” (Evans 62-3). Though Conn and Evans write about the object-based system of knowledge taking hold late in the century, Aldrich and Kate show something similar happening much earlier. The combination of distancing and focusing that a museum encourages viewers to take towards the objects on display also underlies attempts at amusement. This object-based epistemology emerges from industrialism. Old New England is constructed as a fantasy object. Like a museum, New England provides a curated version of history; like an object in a museum, Old New England is removed from circulation and put on display. It is made into a site of leisure.

Taking up the question of how New England develops as a political technology across the nineteenth century, my project argues that nineteenth-century texts created a fantasy of “Old New England” in conjunction with industrial mass production. By describing the leisure activities of their writers and/or readers, these texts produce leisure as a conceptual realm distinct from industrial labor, and they position Old New England within that conceptual space. While the late nineteenth century saw a surge of literary attention to regional specificity, a major strain of writing about New England focused specifically on the past and sought to make that past
amusing. This writing mapped New England as a fantasy of stability and racial homogeneity in response to the demographic shifts of industrialism and immigration.

I see these processes underway in a diverse set of nineteenth-century texts: autobiographies of regional childhood, mass-produced games, and a literary magazine written by factory workers. Across contexts of work and play, these publications construct the region by describing and structuring leisure. Joseph Conforti has argued that “Old New England” emerges in the nineteenth century in response to railroads, industrialization, and immigration, and Dona Brown has persuasively shown that the idea of Old New England emerges in concert with a burgeoning tourism industry. Both Conforti and Brown agree that as the century progresses, popular depictions of “authentic” New England move north, away from the region’s cities where industrialization and immigration were most pronounced.

The texts I examine participate in this progression by setting a number of opposites against work: childhood, femininity, the past, play, cheerfulness, amusement, fun, pleasure, home, hearths, ghosts, legends, games, reading, curiosity, and excitement. Through these signifiers of non-work, a version of Old New England emerges in opposition to labor. These opposites draw conceptual boundaries around a fantasy of New England as an exceptional site. The privileged denizen of this conceptual realm is white and native born, standing in opposition to the black enslaved laborer of the US south or the white factory worker of England.

This project views regionalism in New England as a direct extension of industrial capitalism. Regions, in my view, are defined through their modes of economic production, and these modes of economic production require corresponding modes of social reproduction. These areas, economic production and social reproduction, bleed into and inform one another. The modes of social reproduction are not just a superstructure developed on top of the economic
base, but integral to the economic system as a whole. Though literary regionalism is usually considered a late-century phenomenon, I see the fantasy of a stable region emerging from the need to construct collective leisure, which begins with industrial wage labor. I point to the *Lowell Offering* as evidence of regionalism developing in the 1840s. Likewise, the mass-produced card game industry, also established in the 1840s, illustrates a related form of collective leisure. The texts that I examine produce Old New England as a counterpart to industrial capitalism.

Regionalism is the performative imagining of collective difference or specificity, viewed in relation to other regions or time periods, and people perform local regionalism by engaging capitalist market relations that extend beyond any region’s borders. The practice of regionalism therefore evolves over time, along with media and the economy. Mass-produced print objects, by delineating places and practices as sites of leisure and/or labor, made possible the conceptual detachment of the region from industrial economic production.

My understanding of performative regionalism extends Barbara L. Allen’s use of the term in the context of architectural studies to critique postmodern “critical regionalism” architectural theory. Allen uses Judith Butler’s notion of performativity to theorize how social change and political agency might function within Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus*, or field of social practices:

One could argue that regionalism is inherently conservative and thus preservative of norms and conventions, which is most often a positive value. However, regions are living, changing organisms and must also be understood from their margins where the power of normativity, via performativity, is challenged. Thus, the concept of *habitus* helps to explicate the structure and means by which regional
inflection is embedded in local or regional cultures. Butler’s concept of performativity activates that embeddedness and helps account for the inherent dynamism of such cultures….Thus regionalism through the *habitus* lens is a thing or collection of things and is phenomenal or experiential. It is a set of interactive discourses and performances between places and people or material-discursive practices. (Allen 424)

While Allen participates in the important work of shaping space through contemporary architecture so as to perpetuate local practices and cultures, my purposes are different. As my project lies in nineteenth-century literary and cultural studies, my understanding of performative regionalism differs from Allen’s; I am less interested in the mechanisms of changing the twenty-first century and more interested in how the damage was done. The “interactive discourses and performances” that produced regionalism in nineteenth-century New England accommodated industrialism, immigration, and the conscripted labor of enslaved blacks in the US South. The production of “Old New England” normalized racial hierarchies and binary gender roles while also providing provisional gameplay-like spaces where users could temporarily challenge, negotiate, and revise those roles. New England subject-hood proves to be a flexible set of attributes, which people adapt to diverse ends. In the case of the Lowell “mill girls,” whom I examine in Chapter Three, young women claim the shrewd profit-mindedness of stereotypical Yankees as a justification of their going to the factories to work. The factory labor in this narrative provides a natural extension of regional subjectivity; by naturalizing the figure of the Yankee they remove barriers to the spread of industrial mass production.

The texts that I examine do not just describe the region; they provide users practice in the process of fantasy-making that regional construction depends on. The object-quality of those
texts, and the illusion of amusement, add force to the power of that fantasy; as users handle the
texts, the fantasy sticks. Donald Pease’s treatment of “fantasy” in *The New American
Exceptionalism* explains at a national level a process I see underway at the level of the region:
“Unlike laws state fantasies regulate the symbolic order by organizing US citizens’ relationship
to its inherent rifts and contradictions as if they were sources of personal enjoyment rather than
pain or resentment” (6). When a board game like “Happy Days in Old New England”—which I
discuss in Chapter Two—encourages readers to conjure collective memories of a leisured, idyllic
childhood in a bygone “prosperous” home, the fantasy of Old New England translates into
happiness and gameplay any dissonance between players’ current situation and the imagined
idyllic past.

The performative regionalism that my project sees as producing Old New England
revises a tradition of scholarship on literary regionalism more broadly. The idea of “New
England” in the nineteenth century perpetuates the hegemonic status quo in ways that resist the
transformational ethics that many see as the defining work of literary regionalism. New England
is not as one region among many in pluralist equilibrium, but a potential center of cultural
imperialism. This marks a departure from the seminal scholarship of Judith Fetterley and
Marjorie Pryse, who—responding to Amy Kaplan—worked to define literary regionalism as a
critical stance distinct from local-color writing and specifically *not* beholden to New England,
but rooted instead in progressive ethics speaking from and for the margins. My work falls more
in line with recent scholarship that distinguishes New England regionalism from literary
regionalism more generally. Jennifer Ansley, for instance, notes how local economic conditions
that defy easy categorization as “urban” or “rural” shape structures of intimacy in the regionalist
sketches of Mary Wilkins Freeman, and J. Samaine Lockwood in *Archives of Desire* argues that
New England women engaged the colonial-revival movement of the late nineteenth century not as a quiet critique from the economic margins, but loudly and in the mainstream. By leveraging childhood, curiosity, and fun as topics with far-reaching appeal, the texts I gather here make the seemingly minor mainstream.

In this process, the texts encourage a certain way of looking at one’s surroundings, of seeing only the amusing or entertaining aspects. Tom, for example, describes Rivermouth as a site whose heyday is past but whose value in the present lies in the “ghosts” of history: “Rivermouth figures prominently in all the colonial histories. Every other house in the place has its tradition more or less grim and entertaining. If ghosts could flourish anywhere, there are certain streets in Rivermouth that would be full of them. I don’t know of a town with so many old houses” (29). The narrator goes on to describe one of those houses, and the “peculiar interest” that “attaches itself to this house” because of the past occupants (29). By populating Old New England with ghosts at the front end of an autobiographical novel set there, Aldrich writes his own childhood into a fantasy realm. This objectification of the region expands Richard Brodhead’s claim in *Cultures of Letters* that late-century regionalism works to objectify regions from the perspective of a leisured gaze, transforming regions into property for the vacationing class (118). Aldrich’s text certainly encourages a leisured gaze, but by leveraging childhood as a perpetually leisured perspective. By emphasizing the peculiar, quirky, and curious elements of the region, these texts curated a version of the region that was removed from the alienating effects of industrial mass production.

Each of my chapters examines a situation in which the lines separating labor and leisure are unclear, and a text steps in to clear up that confusion. Chapter One focuses on late-century depictions of antebellum childhood in New England. This chapter reads Lucy Larcom’s *A New
England Girlhood (1889) as a revision of Thomas Bailey Aldrich’s The Story of a Bad Boy (1869), whose initial publication Larcom oversaw as an editor of Our Young Folks, An Illustrated Magazine for Boys and Girls. I argue that Larcom creates community by characterizing her regional childhood as representative of a bygone time, a hallowed age of childhood fun that modernity, while giving the author the tools for expression, has nevertheless made inaccessible. The nostalgia is not just for a simpler time, but also for a perspective of wonder. This first chapter positions the ideal of antebellum New England as a site of leisure—an ideal mass-produced through these children’s texts.

Chapter Two argues that children’s games participate in sentimental discourse by training children to perform emotional displays on demand, in the name of fun, thereby giving them the resources for navigating social classes. Drawing childhood into nineteenth-century print and material culture while positioning childhood as a hedge against the industrialized market, anthologies of children’s pastimes structure leisure time for the new middle class. These anthologies put into print—and thereby standardize and civilize—children’s recreation. Mass-produced proprietary board games and card games, such as “Doctor Busby” (1843), “Trades” (1845), “The Mansion of Happiness” (1843), and others structure domestic desire and provide players the illusion of choice or freedom. This chapter argues that games belong in discussions of nineteenth-century print culture, especially in discussions of New England, where games and books circulated in the same markets and addressed similar concerns, namely the shifting role of leisure in an industrializing region.

Chapter Three turns to 1840s Lowell, Massachusetts, to examine the Lowell Offering, a literary journal written by women who worked in the city’s textile factories, where the mills measured labor in wages and leisure in literary output. The Lowell Offering described the
women’s life in communal boarding houses and the rural communities they had moved from to work in the mills, always emphasizing that employment in the mills was temporary and that “authentic” New England was located in their rural homes. By framing the *Lowell Offering* as a mass-produced print pastime akin to the games of Chapter Two, I argue that the *Lowell Offering* enacts a performative regionalism that helps users to draw a conceptual line separating labor from leisure and thereby eases the transition into industrial wage labor in nineteenth-century New England.
CHAPTER ONE

The Youth of Old New England

The nineteenth-century creation of Old New England occurred through texts that established the region as a site of leisure, rather than labor, as the region was reshaped by industrialism. This chapter examines how this occurs in late-century depictions of childhood in Old New England. Autobiographies by Thomas Bailey Aldrich and Lucy Larcom, written for a juvenile audience, depict New England through the eyes of children, highlighting the social reproduction of the region rather than the labor of economic production. While scholars have discussed how tourism shaped New England as a destination of leisure, the role of childhood in this transformation remains under-examined. Late-century texts like Aldrich’s and Larcom’s draw attention away from the ethnic, immigrant region by promoting narratives of white childhood in “Old New England.” These narratives suggest that reading about Old New England can stand in for having come of age there. These texts consider whether Reconstruction-era children can understand antebellum childhood in Old New England. Aldrich suggests yes, they can, through children’s in-born desire for fun, but Larcom revises Aldrich’s claim by suggesting that the means by which children have fun have changed too much since the time of her own childhood. Both texts describe Old New England as simultaneously boring and exciting, the staid background against which the frolics of childhood can be seen and also the product of that child-like perspective. These texts, I argue, probe the distance between childhood and adulthood, Old New England and the time of writing, while also self-consciously commenting on how media produce that distance. In Aldrich’s *The Story of A Bad Boy* and Lucy Larcom’s *A New England Girlhood*, the authors describe Old New England as the site of childhood leisure for a postbellum audience while acknowledging how the structures of children’s leisure have changed. Larcom, I
argue, revises Aldrich’s vision of Old New England, in order to acknowledge the role of industrialism in shaping the conditions under which she writes. These texts use the privileged perspective of childhood to position the region as a site of consumption rather than production.

New England regionalism differs from regionalism in general by attempting to efface the local conditions of industrial production; in arguing this distinction, this chapter intervenes in and extends an emerging body of scholarship that seeks to navigate New England’s relationship to regionalism more generally. In the Reconstruction and post-Reconstruction decades, writing about the particularities of local places had become so vogue as to make the places themselves not matter as much as the distance between any of those rural places and the cosmopolitan centers. In Before Culture (2005) Brad Evans argues that, by the 1890s, “connecting with a region means picking up a book,” which makes audiences “conscious of regional writing as an object of art,” and draws attention to those objects rather than to the places those objects purport to describe: “Locality remains, but, like the origins of a folk-tale, only as a palimpsest over which new associations and meanings can be accreted” (111). The practice of region-making, in other words, can be seen as an ongoing process of objectification that makes regions themselves interchangeable and generic. Regions differ, however, in the local conflicts that their regionalist texts work to efface. This chapter argues that childhood plays a role in this process by serving as a lens that colors regions in terms of local leisure and play. I also note how regional affiliation is represented in and facilitated by textual objects that overlay new associations on the background of Old New England.

By turning my attention to “Old New England,” I highlight a case in which temporal distance between the past and the present compounds the geographical distance between rural and urban spaces. Old New England is not a place of “backwards” people, but rather a bygone
time accessible through textual mediation. Indeed, I argue that one of the key functions of Aldrich’s and Larcom’s New England autobiographies is to collapse the temporal distance, bringing the past to bear on the present by arguing—through narratives, imagery, historical preservation, and cultivated affective experience—that elements of the past still exist in the Reconstruction-era present. The past is still present, in the form of artifacts, which include books.

Larcom writes at the emergence of analytical studies of children’s leisure, which saw structures of children’s play as ethnographic material indicative of the local culture. Bernard Mergen places Larcom at this intersection of folklore and history, claiming, “Children’s play began to have a history in the 1880s, when the folklorist William Wells Newell, the psychologist G. Stanley Hall, and the autobiographer Lucy Larcom published their books” (266). Newell’s 1883 *Games and Songs of American Children* reveals this dynamic more clearly, as Newell describes the play of children as a sort of natural antidote to the sternness in “localities famous for Puritanism”: “Thus, by a natural law of reversion, something of the music, grace, and gayety of an earlier period of unconscious and natural living has been preserved to sweeten the formality, angularity, and tedium of an otherwise beneficial religious movement” (3). The unforgiving aspects of Puritanism, according to Newell, actually promote (or require) a counter-discourse of play. Lucy Larcom, who characterizes herself as one of the “children of the Puritans,” would have been squarely within this context, and acknowledges, “We were not surfeited, in those days, with what is called pleasure; but we grew up happy and healthy, learning unconsciously the useful lesson of doing without. The birds and blossoms hardly won a gladder or more wholesome life from the air of our homely New England than we did” (91). As such, it is unsurprising to find that she describes one of her foremost childhood leisure pastimes—writing and reciting poetry—as it emerged from her understanding of games: “Of course I did
not consider my own foolish little versifying poetry. The child of eight or nine years regarded her rhymes as only one among her many games and pastimes” (133). In contrast to the dour mid-century depictions of New England Puritanism popularized by Nathaniel Hawthorne, Larcom’s text highlights childhood leisure, fun, play, and wonder.

By examining the intersection of childhood and regionalism, we can begin to see how writing about Old New England makes the region simultaneously accessible and out of reach, bringing tidily packaged fantasies about the past to bear on the present. While regionalism in general and New England regionalism in particular have been examined in terms of commercialized nostalgia, I argue that narratives of childhood intensify this process, reducing the scope of the known world through perspectives of youthful naivety, a process that crystallizes regions’ borders through claims of remembered ignorance.¹ In *Dependent States*, Karen Sánchez-Eppler persuasively argues that childhood studies can productively inform analyses of the politics of subject formation in a way that standard liberalism-rights discourse cannot, a concern of special relevance to the study of regionalism:

> The transitoriness of childhood is part of what gives it such emotional force. For adults, childhood is not only teleological, pointing toward unknown futures, but also archeological and nostalgic, recovering a lost past. As a site of cultural meaning childhood thus fluctuates between past and future, expressing desire. Even for the child, the fact that childhood is lived does not prevent it from being idealized, a thing of imagination and memory. (Sánchez-Eppler xxv-xxvi)

By viewing these reconstruction-era autobiographies as attempts to “fluctuate between past and future, expressing desire,” we see that the construction of regional childhood in Old New Eng

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¹ For scholarship asserting nostalgia’s centrality to regionalism, see Amy Kaplan, Lawrence Buell, Richard Brodhead, John Funchion, and Stephen Olbrys Gencarella.
England polices the borders of regional identity while producing the region as something that can be consumed by a postbellum audience.

Aldrich’s and Larcom’s texts use the regions as sounding boards for their protagonists’ desires. Both texts assign children’s desire a vital role in identity formation and, therefore, perception of the region. Tom’s “badness” is defined by desires that run counter to orthodox Puritanism, as he prefers *Robinson Crusoe* to missionary tracts and spends his money on candy rather than sending it philanthropically “to the natives of Feejee Islands” (2). Likewise, Larcom’s New England-ness, as we shall see, is confirmed by the region’s shaping her desire for poetry. In both cases, the protagonists describe coming into contact with a near-mythical version of the region. They don’t exactly seek to de-mythologize that version; instead, they describe how that version felt as children.

The return to the perspective of childhood comes out of a pragmatic need to communicate with late-century children, in order to determine both what those readers want—what will please them as readers, and what they need—what lessons or advice they would find useful in 1889. *A New England Girlhood* opens by declaring its audience:

The following sketch was written for the young, at the suggestion of friends. … My audience is understood to be composed of girls of all ages, and of women who have not forgotten their girlhood. Such as have a friendly appreciation of girls—and of those who write for them—are also welcome to listen to as much of my narrative as they choose. All others are eavesdroppers, and, of course, have no right to criticize. (5)

Larcom, an established, popular poet and author, was sixty-five years old when *A New England Girlhood* saw publication. As the sixth entry in the Riverside Library for Young People, an
imprint of Houghton Mifflin, *A New England Girlhood* addresses a juvenile audience by appealing to girlhood as common ground between the author and readers.

Twenty years earlier, Larcom had edited Thomas Bailey Aldrich’s *The Story of a Bad Boy*, which took up a similar task of presenting a narrative of historical childhood to a young audience. Aldrich makes *The Story of a Bad Boy* consumable to a postbellum audience by establishing community with his readers through boyhood fun. Aldrich uses themes of racial difference, schoolyard tradition, and humor to reach his audience. In making his text relatable to children, Aldrich describes Old New England as a site of leisure. This move copes with industrial labor and shifting regional demographics by asserting that New England’s culture lies in the region’s patterns of consumption rather than production.

In 1869, Aldrich’s *The Story of A Bad Boy* appeared in twelve installments in *Our Young Folks, an Illustrated Magazine for Boys and Girls*, a Boston periodical edited by Lucy Larcom and John Trowbridge. Rather than presenting children as founts of virtue, Aldrich’s coming-of-age narrative, set in the 1830s, promised readers a realistic, regionally representative protagonist, a “real human boy, such as you may meet anywhere in New England, and no more like the impossible boy in a story-book than a sound orange is like one that has been sucked dry” (2). In representing Tom as simultaneously “bad” and representative, Aldrich’s narrative normalizes childhood—and especially boyhood—as a stage of inevitable rebellion. Though he doesn’t use the phrase “old New England,” Aldrich writes about being young amidst the old folks of New

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2 For an overview of nineteenth-century periodicals, see Kenneth M. Price and Susan Belasco Smith’s *Periodical Literature in Nineteenth-Century America* (1995). Price and Smith argue that a host of factors contributed to the increase in periodicals during the nineteenth century: “In the 1830s technological developments in papermaking, the widespread use of the cylinder press, cheaper postal routes, rising literacy rates, and wide distribution by railroad altered the course of publication” (3). Price and Smith note that “[b]y 1840, some 1,500 ongoing periodicals of various kinds existed in the country” (5).
England, in a town where the local adults are profoundly set in their ways, which the children systematically disrupt. Against this background, the “bad boy” grows up.

*The Story of a Bad Boy* takes the form of a series of vignettes, rather than a single, overarching plot. The vignettes argue in retrospect that Tom leads a life of fun during his youth in New England, though hardships do come to his family. What plot does exist concerns young Tom Bailey’s moving from his parents’ home in New Orleans to spend four years at his grandfather’s house in the seaside New England town of Rivermouth. A financial crisis disrupts Tom’s father’s business and stimulates the move from New Orleans to Rivermouth, where Tom will “be educated” (Aldrich 4). Tom had moved to New Orleans as a baby, and isn’t eager to return to New England, having heard frightening stories of fights between Indians and Pilgrims, which Aunt Chloe, the family’s black southern nanny, had told him. Tom’s retired grandfather, Captain Nutter, lives with Tom’s aunt and an Irish housekeeper named Kitty. In Rivermouth, Tom cares for his pet pony and reads novels and adventure stories. He goes to school and befriends a group of local boys engaged in perpetual mischief and pranks (sometimes as part of their secret society, the “Centipede Club”). They enter into and escape both debt and prison. They light a wooden cart on fire and roll it into the town square on the Fourth of July. They sail and sled and throw snowballs. They fire ancient cannons into the sea, waking the town in the middle of the night. One rainy day, Tom and his friends put on a performance of William Tell and sustain minor injuries from a wooden arrow. The novel’s one lasting repercussion occurs when one of the friends dies when their boat is pulled out to sea during a storm. Tom tries to run away to New Orleans, but cannot. Tom’s father enters deeply into debt and dies of cholera. In the end, Tom goes to work in an uncle’s counting house, and we learn that Grandfather Nutter has become the “Oldest Inhabitant” of Rivermouth, a near-mythical status of regional importance.
Assuming that amusement at racial difference can serve as the grounds for establishing community among characters and readers, the narrator uses humor to try to bridge the temporal and geographic distance separating himself from his childhood friends. Likewise, the novel invites readers into the fold of white, Anglo-American childhood, by assuming a shared view of racial difference as simultaneously scandalous and cartoonish. In the first chapter, the narrator discusses where each of the narrative’s main characters ends up, noting and then undercutting the professional accomplishments of each:

"Ah me! some of those dear fellows are rather elderly boys by this time—lawyers, merchants, sea-captains, soldiers, authors, what not? Phil Adams (a special good name that Adams) is consul at Shanghai, where I picture him to myself with his head closely shaved—he never had too much hair—and a long pigtail hanging down behind. He is married, I hear; and I hope he and she that was Miss Wang Wang are very happy together, sitting cross-legged over their diminutive cups of tea in a sky-blue tower hung with bells. It is so I think of him; to me he is henceforth a jewelled [sic] mandarin, talking nothing but broken China. (2-3)"

The passage imagines Phil Adams as feminized, exoticized, and delicate, through his marriage and work in China. The racism of this depiction conveys anxiety about a multi-cultural society, and, perhaps, about US imperialism. The narrator goes on to acknowledge and then undercut each of their professional accomplishments; for instance: “Whitcomb is a judge, sedate and wise, with spectacles balanced on the bridge of that remarkable nose which, in former days, was so plentifully sprinkled with freckles that the boys christened him Pepper Whitcomb. Just to think of little Pepper Whitcomb being a judge! What would he do to me now, I wonder, if I were to sing out ‘Pepper!’ some day in court” (3). Previous childhood acquaintance leads the narrator to
imagine breaking the rules of the court. The common experience of childhood, having provided the grounds upon which all future accomplishments were established, serves to justify an imaginative upending of those accomplishments.

Aldrich establishes some of this bonhomie with the reader as well, through a tongue-in-cheek mockery of any display of seriousness throughout the novel; in the first chapter, anti-Irish sentiment appears as the common ground upon which that jovial tone rests. The adult narrator describes meeting as children, at school, and then welcomes the reader in the same manner:

Whenever a new scholar came to our school, I used to confront him at recess with the following words: “My name’s Tom Bailey; what’s your name?” If the name struck me favorably, I shook hands with the new pupil cordially; but if it didn’t, I would turn on my heel, for I was particular on this point. Such names as Higgins, Wiggins, and Spriggins were deadly affronts to my ear; while Langdon, Wallace, Blake, and the like, were passwords to my confidence and esteem. (2)

The reader is welcomed into the narrator’s confidence, through implicit acceptance of a racist joke: “With the old school formula I commence these sketches of my boyhood. My name is Tom Bailey; what is yours, gentle reader? I take for granted it is neither Wiggins nor Spriggins, and that we shall get on famously together, and be capital friends forever” (4). Mocking the “old school” convention of addressing a “gentle reader” directly, the first chapter re-establishes the narrator’s youthful prejudice for the postbellum audience. Addressing a postbellum juvenile audience, the narrative assumes that school-rules and racial difference are fair game for mockery at the outset of the novel. Humor and racism underlie the narrator’s descriptions of community between characters and readers, positioning racial and ethnic hierarchies as prerequisites of regional belonging.
This stance of mockery and a set of assumptions regarding fun, I argue, is crucial to Aldrich’s narrative strategy and his characterization of the regionally representative “bad boy,” as his writing about antebellum childhood uses humor to reach a postbellum juvenile audience. Fun serves as the common ground upon which Aldrich builds his imaginary community of readers. In *American Fun*, a study of the uses of fun in American public life, John Beckman argues, “Fun is the active enjoyment of: stunts, pranks, hoaxes, jokes, mock trials, parties, troublemaking, dancing, protests, fights, and ad hoc games and gambling and sports. It’s the discourse-disrupting thrill of slang. It’s the joy of throwing your body into the mix, of raising your voice in the public sphere, and of putting your reputation at risk” (xix). Fun, Beckman argues, is essentially democratic in how it tests and thereby strengthens civil society: “This enduring pursuit, so popular with Americans, can make even the scariest social differences exciting; it can bring even the bitterest adversaries into a state of feverous harmony. For conflict is the active ingredient in fun. Risk, transgression, mockery, rebellion—these are the revving motors of fun” (Beckman xiii). These are also the motors propelling Aldrich’s narrative forward, as conflicts between races, regions, and nations are sublimated into childhood rebellion against boredom, transforming violence into slapstick. This imperative, the perpetual pursuit of novelty, recalibrates the curation of autobiographical details, as in the litany of *of course*’s in Aldrich’s description of winter at Rivermouth:

“A boy’s life in a secluded New England town in winter does not afford many points for illustration. Of course he gets his ears or toes frostbitten; of course he smashes his sled against another boy’s; of course he bangs his head on the ice; and he’s a lad of no enterprise whatever, if he doesn’t manage to skate into an eel-hole, and be brought home half drowned. All these things happened to me; but, as
they lack novelty, I pass them over, to tell you about the famous snow fort which we built on Slatter’s Hill. (137)

This mock world-weariness marks a progression from the chapter’s early pages, which had Tom proclaiming wonder at witnessing his first snowfall: “A boy familiar from his infancy with the rigors of our New England winters can form no idea of the impression made on me by this natural phenomenon” (130-31). Tom’s outsider’s perspective enables him to find delight where others would see nothing. But then we learn that the snowfall is exceptional, even for the quintessential New Englander: “The Oldest Inhabitant (what would become of a New England town or village without its oldest inhabitant?) overhauled his almanacs, and pronounced it the deepest snow we had had for twenty years” (131-32). The region’s normalcy comes up as both the object of ridicule and standard by which new novelties are measured, as Aldrich teasingly describes Tom’s acculturation, providing readers an experience of New England as a setting of pain-free, laughable mishaps and, as we shall see, violence.

By framing Old New England as a setting of fun and play, Aldrich’s 1869 text processes the violence of the US Civil War. Aldrich’s depiction of a legendary snowball fight on Slatter’s Hill provides a framework for contextualizing, diminishing, and displacing the trauma of actual warfare. The narrator argues for the lasting power of the neighborhood children’s exploits in the snowball fight, asserting that the “event passed into a legend, and afterwards, when later instances of pluck and endurance were spoken of, the boys would say, ‘By golly! you ought to have been at the fights on Slatter’s Hill!”’ (149). The children’s war-stories mimic those told by adults, but these children were the generation that did end up fighting in the war, which, presumably, provided several “instances of pluck and endurance” (149). This chapter of Aldrich’s lodges snowy warfare within childhood “legend,” making possible a homesickness for
the good-old-days of combat, the actual cost of war sublimated within the haze of childhood legend and childhood play. By drawing comparisons between a snowball fight and a military battle, this chapter imagines a war without serious cause and whose only consequence was the lasting glory of the participants. The battle, between “The North End and the South End boys of Rivermouth” plays out in what seems at first to be a farcical send-up of the war between the Northern and Southern states. Each group of boys has its generals and rank-and-file soldiers, who engage in a snowball fight for possession of “Slatter’s Hill, or No Man’s Land, as it was generally called…a rise of ground…situated on an imaginary line, marking the boundary between the two districts” (139). This imaginary line sees its physical counterpart in the woodcut image of the hill that Aldrich includes as an illustration. While the US Civil War was primarily a battle over slavery, the local animosity between kids in Rivermouth has no motivation:

The memory of man, even that of the Oldest Inhabitant, runneth not back to the time when there did not exist a feud between the North End and the South End boys of Rivermouth.

The origin of the feud is involved in mystery; it is impossible to say which party was the first aggressor in the far-off ante-revolutionary ages; but the fact remains that the youngsters of those antipodal sections entertained a mortal hatred for each other, and that this hatred had been handed down from generation to generation, like Miles Standish’s punch-bowl. (138)

By sublimating the “origin of the feud” into an ineffable heritage of hatred, Aldrich’s narrative imagines a US Civil War without slavery. The chapter enables readers to reimagine the Civil War as a conflict rooted in a childish—though inevitable and ongoing—cultural feud, rather than

3 Aldrich’s punch-bowl analogy references the poem “On Lending a Punch Bowl,” by Oliver Wendell Holmes.
the dehumanizing system of slavery. To be clear though, the feud between the North End and the South End isn’t a clash of two distinct and pre-existing cultures; the feud is the culture. Rivermouth contains the two sides as the United States contains the North and the South.

The cultural feud sees a symbolic end when the adults of the town catch wind of the days-long snowball fight and attempt to shut it down. The children of the North End and the South End team up to defend the fort against their new common enemy: the city’s grown-ups. Finally overwhelmed by the growing crowd of adults, the generationally allied youth finally decide a retreat is in order: “So, after one grand farewell volley, we fled, sliding, jumping, rolling, tumbling down the quarry at the rear of the fort and escaped without losing a man…. But we lost Fort Slatter forever” (148). The battle passes into local legend, to be remembered fondly, a legend that The Story of a Bad Boy recirculates thirty years after the fact. Lorinda B. Cohoon has argued Aldrich’s narrative frames white boyhood as representative of national boyhood in the wake of the US Civil War: “The Story of A Bad Boy demonstrates that, after the Civil War, serialized texts about pre-war boyhoods defined peacetime boyhood and delineated proper responses to it. The periodical material surrounding Aldrich’s precursor to other bad boy texts illustrates that male writers and the editors who chose to publish their stories use lives of pre-war boys to ‘reconstruct’ (through reading material) post-war boyhoods” (10). Cohoon argues that the text “mixes northern and southern responses to the ‘badness’ of boyhood to narrate compromises between the two regional cultures; these regional compromises prepare boys to become citizens in a reconstructed nation,” and that this symbolic reconstruction occurs through white boyhood’s marginalization of other races and genders (10). By placing this interpretation in the story’s New England context, we see that regional fun enables the narrative’s construction of a pre-war past by laughing off structural and bodily violence.
Though I’ve argued that the snowball fight on Slatter’s Hill stands in for the conflict of the US Civil War, the novel depicts even more straightforward tension between the “North” and the “South” in how the protagonist reacts in violence out of what he explains as a feud of cultures that was handed down to him in much the same way as the historical feud between Rivermouth’s North and South Ends:

When my father proposed to take me North to be educated, I had my own peculiar views on the subject. I instantly kicked over [Sam,] the little negro boy who happened to be standing by me at the moment, and, stamping my foot violently on the floor of the piazza, declared that I would not be taken away to live among a lot of Yankees! (4-5)

…You see I was what is called ‘a Northern man with Southern principles.’ I knew I was born at the North, but hoped nobody would find it out. I looked upon the misfortune as something so shrouded by time and distance that maybe nobody remembered it. I never told my schoolmates I was a Yankee, because they talked about the Yankees in such a scornful way that it made me feel that it was quite a disgrace not to be born in Louisiana, or at least in one of the Border States. And this impression was strengthened by Aunt Chloe, who said, “dar wasn’t no gentl’men in the Norf no way,’ and on one occasion terrified me beyond measure by declaring that, ‘if any of dem mean whites tried to get her away from marster, she was jes’ gwine to knock ‘em on de head wid a gourd!”

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4 A reference to Martin Van Buren.
The way this poor creature’s eyes flashed, and the tragic air with which she struck at an imaginary ‘mean white,’ are among the most vivid things in my memory of those days. (6-7)

Following directly upon the narrator’s actually kicking Sam, Aunt Chloe’s imaginary attack on a “mean white” terrifies Tom, but the way in which Chloe’s acts out the attack registers as “tragic.” The incident hints at the possibility of rebellion on the part of Chloe, and a chance that Sam might strike back. The novel’s racial conflict is sublimated within the imaginary space of childhood, and children’s naivety appears to justify the effects of violence as mere misconception. The successful maintenance of white boyhood, at the expense of other children, stands in for the successful social reproduction of the region and the nation. The violence, structural and otherwise, that this maintenance required disappears into the ether of fun and childhood legend.

The way that Aldrich’s text uses themes of fun and leisure to sublimate trauma foreshadows my idea that depictions of New England as a site of leisure sought to efface nineteenth-century industrialization and immigration. Lucy Larcom describes the New England of her childhood as a site of leisure that readers in a fully industrialized time may find unfamiliar. She makes the text’s subject, Old New England, consumable for her readers nonetheless through nostalgia and references to a shared interest—reading.

Larcom establishes New England, and especially “Old New England,” as a site of leisure through characterizations of her young self. Larcom’s memoir, in characterizing young Lucy, objectifies her and freezes her in a state of perpetual leisure, “at play in a garden” (12). This distinct phase of childhood ends when the leisure does, and an “older girl” takes over; while the youngest Lucy resides in a garden, the 1889 narrator states, “I do not feel so much satisfaction in
the older girl who comes between her and me…. But I have to acknowledge her faults and mistakes as my own, while I sometimes feel like reproving her severely for her carelessly performed tasks, her habit of lapsing into listless reveries, her cowardly shrinking from responsibility and vigorous endeavor, and many other faults that I have inherited from her” (10, 12). The shortcomings of this “older girl” concern the failure to properly conform to the expectations of labor; Larcom thrived in the structure of childhood—exercising her leisure, as is a child’s duty—but came under judgment when measured by the rod of productivity, as she began working as a spinner in the Lowell textile mills at age thirteen. Larcom’s early years in the mill, according to Shirley Marchalonis, represented a painful departure from her time in Beverly: “She seemed to belong nowhere; as tall as a woman, and dressed like one, inside she was a child. Her two favorite occupations were denied her: she could not run free outside, and at the end of the long workday she was too tired to read much” (31). Trapped between childhood and adulthood, this “older girl” makes the leisure of the younger girl stand out in contrast. Faced with this three-part autobiographical subject, Larcom’s narrator seeks to reunite the two versions of her younger self before the narrative of the preface ends: “Every phase of our life belongs to us…. The woman is still both child and girl, in the completeness of womanly character. We have a right to our entire selves, through all the changes of this mortal state” (12-3). Nevertheless, the three-way split is there, cordonning off the leisured child, the laboring older girl, and the present-tense narrator, whose opinions pepper the text despite the assertion that the youngest child has been brought back to tell her own story.

In presenting “Old New England” as its own chapter in the middle of a book about New England’s past, A New England Girlhood sections off and objectifies this version of the region as fully belonging to the first stage of Larcom’s childhood, the time of pure leisure in the garden.
Old New England therefore represents the time before industrialism. Larcom’s narrative arranges its material topically, rather than chronologically, a move that Amy Kort argues subverts the traditional rags-to-riches success story narrative of other American autobiographies in favor of “a collage of childhood sketches of her family members, other individuals whom she found interesting as a child, and the landscape of rural Massachusetts. But the focus remains internal because these details, all told primarily through the lens of childhood, are secondary to the young Larcom’s perspective of them” (32). *A New England Girlhood* is more interested in working through what it is like to be a child than in constructing a detailed historical picture of the author’s past. Larcom had already provided readers a historical overview of her time in the mills in 1881’s “Among the Lowell Mill Girls,” and she had provided a poetic treatment of that period of her life in “An Idyl of Work.” *A New England Girlhood* works to extract an idea of girlhood from a mix of influences, and “New England” serves as part of the organizing principle behind that extraction. “Old New England,” as a subset of “New England,” provides a category through which the region’s influence on the narrator is converted into an inevitable inheritance, an atmosphere that child-narrator passively absorbs.

Larcom establishes Old New England as a site of childhood leisure by describing the process of subject formation and the subjectivity that results from having been raised there. She weighs the local influences against what she describes as the universal, individualizing desires of childhood. Larcom’s text explicitly positions desire as central to subject formation, asserting that children’s desire is a universal, yet individualizing trait: “Rich or poor, every child comes into the world with some imperative need of its own, which shapes its individuality. … My ‘must-
have’ was poetry” (10). Larcom abstracts poetry into an immaterial realm; she emphasizes that poetry is not equivalent to poems on paper:

[F]ortunately, poetry is not purchasable material, but an atmosphere in which every life may expand. … I found it everywhere about me. The children of old New England were always surrounded, it is true, with stubborn matter of fact,— the hand to hand struggle for existence. But that was no hindrance. Poetry must have prose to root itself in; the homelier its earth spot, the lovelier, by contrast, its heaven-breathing flowers. (10)

Larcom is concerned with how material conditions shape those “imperative needs,” thanking her good fortune that poetry isn’t beholden to market forces. As an author and former editor of a literary magazine, who’d spent a lifetime in pursuit of making a living in letters, Larcom knew the literary market. By positioning poetry as a socially instilled “atmosphere”, she highlights her concern with how the market shapes children’s desire, and she addresses young readers directly:

To care for poetry in this way does not make one a poet, but it does make one feel blessedly rich, and quite indifferent to many things that are usually looked upon as desirable possessions. I am sincerely grateful that it was given to me, from childhood, to see life from this point of view. And it seems to me that every young girl would be happier for beginning her earthly journey with the thankful consciousness that her life does not consist in the abundance of things that she possesses. (11)

Larcom’s childhood influences grant her emotional distance from materialist pleasures of acquisition and possession, and girlhood in antebellum New England emerges as a counterpoint to those potentially harmful pleasures of the narrator’s present. Like Kort, James E. Dobson
argues that moving between past and present is crucial to Larcom’s poetics in *A New England Girlhood*, describing this element of the narration as a thwarted attempt at synchronicity:

Larcom interrupts herself many times to suggest that her concerns do not belong solely to her past but also to her present moment. The formal complexity of *A New England Girlhood* results from the autobiographical necessity to posit a radical difference between the ‘then’ and the ‘now’—without this difference there can be no childhood proper—leading to Larcom’s frustrated effort to render these two orders synchronic. Her attempt to yoke together narratives from the past and the present forms the very structure of her autobiographical project. (84)

“Old New England” works as a keystone in the structure of this project, standing in for the “then” of the then/now structure of Larcom’s autobiographical project, which interrogates the possibility that the lessons or feelings of the past cannot be conveyed within the present. By describing Old New England, Larcom can peel away a universalizing sense of children’s agency from the background of cultural influences. The universality of childhood presents hope, but the fluctuating desires through which each child comes to exist are mostly unknowable, subject to the whims of the market and social attitudes regarding it.

The process of writing an autobiography creates a rift in subjectivity for Aldrich’s and Larcom’s narrators, who comment on the process of self-objectification within their narratives. In the same way that the texts color their childhood New England with nostalgia, both narrators describe their child protagonists, the “Bad Boy” and “New England Girl,” with tenderness linked to reading and writing. Larcom writes, “I can see very distinctly the child that I was, and I know how the world looked to her, far off as she is now. She seems to me like my little sister, at play in a garden where I can at any time return and find her. I have enjoyed bringing her back, and
letting her tell her story, almost as if she were somebody else” (12). Putting the child into print grants the child agency but also makes the child knowable in new ways, as characters in tangible books and magazines. A similar movement occurs in The Story of a Bad Boy when, speaking in the present tense, Aldrich’s adult narrator asserts that coming across the books he read as a child evokes warm sentiment towards his younger self, sentiment grounded in the difference that time has made: “I never come across a copy of any of those works without feeling a certain tenderness for the yellow-haired little rascal who used to lean above the magic pages hour after hour, religiously believing every word he read, and no more doubting the reality of Sindbad the Sailor, or the Knight of the Sorrowful Countenance, than he did the existence of his own grandfather” (40). The tenderness of the adult narrator is directed at the naivety of the “yellow-haired little rascal,” the protagonist for whom fiction and fact were co-mingled in magic pages. The self-objectification enables the texts to establish New England as a site of childhood, renewable through the persistence of media. Interestingly, The Story of A Bad Boy asserts that the excitement of reading has persisted into adulthood: “Shall I ever forget the hour when I first overhauled these books? I do not allude especially to Baxter’s ‘Saints’ Rest,’ which is far from being a lively work for the young, but to the ‘Arabian Nights,’ and particularly ‘Robinson Crusoe.’ The thrill that ran into my fingers’ ends then has not run out yet” (40). The books the narrator read during childhood were waiting for him when he arrived at Grandfather Nutter’s house; the books had been pre-selected by the New England household. New England, as a site of curated consumption, determines the narratives that young Tom had access to.

Aldrich’s adult narrator holds childhood writing up for sentimental assessment, through a reproduction of a handwritten theme that the narrator wrote about Gypsy, his horse, recounting a time that Gypsy knocked him into a water pail and he punished her by whipping her six times
(another instance of violence laughed off). The image of the note, some words smeared with ink, and containing many misspellings, objectifies the writing of the young narrator, and the description that follows places the reader in a position of teacher:

It is no small-author vanity that induces me to publish this stray leaf of natural history. I lay it before our young folks, not for their admiration, but for their criticism. Let each reader take his lead-pencil and remorselessly correct the orthography, the capitalization, and the punctuation of the essay. I shall not feel hurt at seeing my treatise cut all to pieces; though I think highly of the production, not on account of its literary excellence, which I candidly admit is not overpowering, but because it was written years and years ago about Gypsy, by a little fellow who, when I strive to recall him, appears to me like a reduced ghost of my present self.

I am convinced that any reader who has ever had pets, birds or animals, will forgive me for this brief digression. (Aldrich 129)

This passage is noteworthy for how it mingles sentimental appeal and reprinting, nostalgia for Gypsy, and for the narrator’s childhood self, who appears as a “reduced ghost.” The chapter is titled “All About Gypsy,” but as we readers encounter “Gypsy” in the pages of a magazine or book, what emerges is a meditation on print’s simultaneous distancing and drawing close of the objects and characters it represents. Aldrich frames the entry as a piece of “natural history,” an artifact from which he is removed through an air of neutral scientific inquiry while asserting the primacy of sentimental attachment.

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6 While Larcom characterizes her childhood self as a “little sister,” Aldrich (maybe because he had no siblings?) finds a “reduced ghost of my present self.”

7 The reproduced image of the handwritten note also recalls the mass-produced representations
symbol of the region (and an important setting in Aldrich’s narrative), is refracted here in the form of students’ writing. By encouraging the readers to “remorselessly correct the orthography, the capitalization, and the punctuation of the essay,” the narrator makes *The Story of a Bad Boy* interactive, drawing readers into the near-mythical past through their participation in the correction.

Larcom and Aldrich describe New England in terms of reading habits while noting that the conditions for reading have changed since the 1830s. The descriptions of the reading habits of the antebellum protagonists in both Aldrich’s and Larcom’s texts use literary interests as common ground with the readers of those autobiographies, though reading is largely a solitary pursuit for Larcom’s and Aldrich’s protagonists. Lucy and Tom find their solitude in their houses’ garrets. Larcom writes, “From our garret window—and the garret was my usual retreat when I wanted to get away by myself with my books or my dreams—we had the distant horizon-line of the bay, across a quarter of a mile of trees and mowing fields” (86). For Tom, the garret is likewise a retreat for solitary reading: “what a place it is to sit of an afternoon with the rain pattering on the roof! what a place in which to read ‘Gulliver’s Travels,’ or the famous adventures of Rinaldo Rinaldini!” (Aldrich 37). Tom’s bedroom serves a similar purpose: “Over the head of the bed were two oak shelves, holding perhaps a dozen books…Many a time did I steal up to this nest of a room, and, taking the dog’s-eared volume from its shelf, glide off into an enchanted realm, where there were no lessons to get and no boys to smash my kite” (39-40). Reading for these narrators is an embodied escape from the social world. But this embodied escape also genders those bodies, an upsetting process for Larcom’s narrator:

_of dead children that circulated throughout the nineteenth century, standing in for grief and putting “domestic affect into commercial circulation” (Sánchez-Eppler 135)._
One result of my infantile novel-reading was that I did not like to look at my own face in a mirror, because it was so unlike that of heroines... I quite envied the little girls who were pale and pensive-looking, as that was the only ladyfied standard in the romances. Of course, the chief pleasure of reading them was that of identifying myself with every new heroine. They began to call me a ‘bookworm’ at home. I did not at all relish the title. (106)

The act of reading registers as gender performance, while the texts that are read limit the horizon of possibility for that performance. Tom’s reading of romances has a surprisingly similar effect to Larcom’s description: “In a lidless trunk in the garret,” writes Aldrich, “I subsequently unearthed another motley collection of novels and romances, embracing the ‘Adventures of Baron Trenck,’ ‘Jack Sheppard,’ ‘Don Quixote,’ ‘Gil Blas,’ and ‘Charlotte Temple,’—all of which I fed upon like a bookworm” (40). Tom applies the title of “bookworm” to himself, while Larcom notes it with some distaste. Larcom’s narrator expresses a concern over how her reading affects her gender performance. Propriety dictates that she police her own actions, that she imagine herself from the point of view of others. An incongruity emerges between the prim, passive female characters in the novels she read and the fact of her own embodied self, sitting and reading. While, for Tom, reading adventures instills a desire for adventure that The Story of A Bad Boy describes as being lived out through pranks and mischief, for Lucy reading novels provides an unrealistic frame of reference and expectations that she cannot fulfill, leading her to feel disappointed. In both cases, the authors describe childhood reading habits to their child-

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8 For a classic overview of how women’s work and domesticity changed in New England during the early nineteenth century, see Nancy F. Cott’s The Bonds of Womanhood: “Woman’s Sphere” in New England, 1780-1835 (1977). (Cott also wrote the introduction to A New England Girlhood).
readers, drawing parallels between the texts’ protagonists and audience and making a version of New England consumable to those readers.

One important way that the oldness of Old New England registered in late-century descriptions was through the relatively small scope of reading materials that the children of Old New England had at their disposal. Looking back at the reading she did as a child, Larcom’s narrator cautions that present-day readers should not emulate the voracious, indiscriminate reading that she engaged in during her youth. She advocates discriminate reading, and notes that her own childhood reading practices were occasionally harmful. These texts describe Old New England for postbellum readers by curating a set of books and a personal reception history of those materials. For late-century readers, therefore, these memoirs and regional studies served to consolidate an informal canon of classics by winnowing down the overwhelming number of options. Part of the nostalgia that Larcom’s regionalist text evokes is for the times when selecting what to read was simpler. Larcom’s comments on reading selection in her childhood versus that of her readers is one marker of her acknowledgement that industrialization has changed the New England she experienced as a child.

Larcom suggests that the break between pre-industrial and industrial household threatens the power of narrative to build imagined communities of childlike wonder. Print culture had changed between the 1830s and the 1880s. In the early nineteenth century, New England print culture strongly overlapped with that of England. The children in Larcom’s narrative struggle to apply British educational materials to their local lives, highlighting New England’s status as a former colonial site. But the lack of a US print culture, combined with the preindustrial home and a pre-scientific childhood, also made some narratives more resonant. This break is mapped onto Larcom’s description of stories around the family hearth:
When supper was finished, and the tea-kettle was pushed back on the crane, and the backlog had been reduced to a heap of fiery embers, then was the time for listening to sailor yarns and ghost and witch legends. The wonder seems somehow to have faded out of those tales of old since the gleam of red-hot coals died away from the hearthstone. The shutting up of the great fireplaces and the introduction of stoves marks an era; the abdication of shaggy Romance and the enthronement of elegant Commonplace—sometimes, alas! the opposite of elegant—at the New England fireside. (23)

With the age of the New England fireside having ended, the “sailor yarns and ghost and witch legends” have to be transmitted through print, rather than orally (as they are in Aldrich’s chapter “Sailor Ben Spins a Yarn”). Larcom’s text theorizes a material ground for her perspective. “If I could only be allowed to blow the bellows—the very old people called them ‘belluses’—when the fire began to get low, I was a happy girl” (22). The hearth also affects literary reception:

9 One branch of historical scholarship argues that the great central fireplaces mark a distinctive “Yankee” “homeland,” in the adaptation of English building-styles to the colder climate of New England, where a central fireplace would (along with a cellar) evenly heat the home (Bowden). Martyn J. Bowden’s argument that distinctive eighteenth-century architecture constitutes Yankee cultural origins in eighteenth century New England establishes a version of regional culture in which dispersion and decline are inevitable. Richard L. Nostrand and Lawrence E. Estaville describe the concept of a “homeland” as consisting of five components: “a people, place, bonding with place, control of place, and time” (xviii.) Martyn J. Bowden asserts that New England Yankees began to achieve bonding with place by constructing large houses in the 1600s with features designed to help inhabitants withstand harsh winters: a central “chimney stack that distanced the heat source from exterior walls” (12). Bowden argues, “These house types and settlement patterns to this day are the icons of Yankee culture and the important symbols of a Yankee’s sense of place. … What challenged and undermined Yankee culture and a Yankee homeland was the spread of a national popular culture—an American culture—after about 1790” (Bowden 23). This architectural approach is troubling in how it essentializes “Yankee” culture, and yet it comes close to describing the nineteenth-century assumptions that guided the colonial revival and historical-preservation projects late in the century.
Have we indeed a fireside any longer in the old sense? It hardly seems as if the young people of to-day can really understand the poetry of English domestic life, reading it, as they must, by a reflected illumination from the past. What would the “Cotter’s Saturday Night” have been, if Burns had written it by the opaque heat of a stove instead of at his “wee bit ingle blinkin’ bonnilie?”

New England as it used to be was so much like Scotland in many of its ways of doing and thinking, that it almost seems as if that tender poem of hearth-and-home life had been written for us too. (24-5)

The New England hearth fostered resonant literary reception through its similarities to the “domestic English life” of preindustrial Scotland. By highlighting how readers’ circumstances affect how they interpret texts from the past, Larcom calls into question whether her own account can resonate with readers. By asserting her nostalgic yearning for the bygone past of open fireplaces and “shaggy romance,” Larcom positions Old New England as an inaccessible entity for modern readers. These readers will, however, recognize the well-trod, sentimental descriptions through which she asserts her nostalgic feeling. Because of the transatlantic nature of the antebellum print culture that these memoirs describe, the literacy of New England childhood entails reading books from England and Scotland. Regional childhood, in other words, involves participation in a transatlantic print culture.

Larcom describes Old New England to create community with her readers, through fun, in the form of sentimental enjoyment. She characterizes her regional childhood as representative of a bygone time, a hallowed age of childhood wonder. Old New England’s sense of fun sets it
apart from England, despite the transatlantic print culture, and the book’s nostalgia is not just for a simpler time, but also for a time of wonder and spectacle:

Most of our every-day reading also came to us over the sea. Miss Edgeworth’s juvenile stories were in general circulation…. But we did not think those English children had so good a time as we did; they had to be so prim and methodical. It seemed to us that the little folks across the water never were allowed to romp and run wild; some of us may have held a vague idea that this freedom of ours was the natural inheritance of republican children only. (104)

Larcom wants her readers to understand the attitude of the 1830s and 1840s, but she cannot just say that it was a time of childlike wonder and innocence because the children reading her book in 1889 differ from the children in her own day.

To recap, *A New England Girlhood* does not ask its readers to collectively remember a shared past but rather to create a community in the present by reading the book in their hands. At the same time, Larcom’s book questions the feasibility of this community, because of how science and mass production have changed children’s perspectives. Having related her wonder at the development of daguerreotypes, Larcom writes, “Things that looked miraculous then are commonplace now. It almost seems as if the children of to-day could not have so good a time as we did, science has left them so little to wonder about” (251). The interest that young readers will take in the book is in the peculiarities of her situation: “Whatever special interest this little narrative of mine may have is due to the social influence under which I was reared, and particularly to the prominent place held by both work and religion in New England half a century ago. The period of my growing-up had peculiarities which our future history can never repeat, although something far better is undoubtedly resulting thence. Those peculiarities were the
natural development of the seed sown by our sturdy Puritan ancestry” (8). Like Aldrich, Larcom seeks to convey to readers the peculiarities of her childhood environment.

Young Lucy in Old New England has no opportunity to travel, but she experiences a sense of the broader world through the people and objects that appear in Beverly and Salem. Her sense of the wider world makes Old New England a site of consumption rather than production, leisure rather than labor. Indeed, Larcom’s Old New England participates in transatlantic trade and slavery. Larcom’s sense of belonging is written into the local history, and the local history’s proximity to the sea establishes her participation in a transatlantic economy. Far from isolated, the region is inseparable from the sea: “The sea was its nearest neighbor, and penetrated to every fireside, claiming close intimacy with every home and heart. … The farmers up and down the shore were as much fishermen as farmers; they were as familiar with the Grand Banks of Newfoundland as they were with their own potato-fields” (93). Encompassing tropes of public and private in “home and heart,” “fishermen” and “farmers,” access to the sea was central to the social reproduction of Larcom’s Old New England.  

That access registers in terms of exoticized consumer commodities: “The women of well-to-do families had Canton crape shawls and Smyrna silks and Turk satins, for Sabbath-day wear…We were accustomed to seeing barrels full

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10 Dona Brown notes that accumulated capital from the eighteenth-century’s triangle trade networks shaped the economic conditions of New England’s coastal towns:

The prosperity of the Piscataqua River towns peaked in the eighteenth century, when even the smallest towns took part in the lucrative West India trade—one leg of the infamous ‘triangle trade,’ supplying the sugar plantations of the West Indies with raw materials in return for slave-produced molasses and rum. The merchants of Dover, Berwick, York, Kittery, Portsmouth, and New Castle shipped local produce—lumber from upriver and salt fish from local fishing fleets—to West Indian planters. Even the most remote places in the region were brought into this international market: The Isles of Shoals, a cluster of small islands outside Portsmouth Harbor, were barely capable of sustaining life, but they were settled as processing plants for vast quantities of fish bound for the West Indies. (178)
of cocoa-nuts rolled about... We had foreign coins mixed in with our large copper cents” (94-95).

Old New England was a place where curiosities were commonplace, and those curiosities come about through connections to the wider world. Though the Puritan Sabbath-day is commonly understood to be one of the distinguishing features of New England, Larcom notes that “Sabbath-day wear” included fabrics from around the world. Old New England in this account is a site that curates the consumption of global commodities.

The curiosities of Old New England included travelers, racialized and made exotic in A New England Girlhood. In a narrative turn that nods at the history of slavery, in which people were enslaved, bought, and sold as commodities, Larcom shifts from discussing “foreign coins” (such as the British half-penny, which prompts her to say “There was a good deal of Old England about us still” (95)), to “living reminders of strange lands across the sea...Green parrots...Java sparrows and canaries...someone’s pet monkey” (95), to the descendants of slaves:

Families of black people were scattered about the place, relics of a time when even New England had not freed her slaves. Some of them had belonged in my great-grandfather’s family, and they hung about the old homestead at ‘The Farms’ long after they were at liberty to go anywhere they pleased. There was a ‘Rose’ and a ‘Phillis’ among them, who came often to our house to bring luscious high blackberries from the Farms woods, or to do the household washing. They seemed pathetically out of place, although they lived among us on equal terms, respectable and respected. (96)

Having addressed the presence of black families and the tragedy of the sea, the “pathos of the sea haunted the town, made audible to every ear when a coming northeaster brought the rote of the waves in from the islands across the harbor-bar, with a moaning like that we heard when we
listened for it in the shell” (97). This “pathos of the sea” comment, by directly following the description of the “pathetically out of place” Rose and Phillis, links the feelings of death at sea by shipwreck to the devastation of slavery. But this pathos, we have seen, is subsumed into fireside legends and lore, and made consumable for children. The scene de-racializes the pathos of slavery by making it similar to general nautical danger, which Larcom establishes as characteristic of New England.

In adopting a child’s perspective, Larcom’s text justifies using Beverly as a synecdoche for all of Old New England, and her childhood experiences in Beverly as representative of regional experience more broadly. Larcom establishes a history: “When I opened my eyes upon my native town, it was already nearly two hundred years old, counting from the time when it was part of the original Salem settlement,—old enough to have gained a character and an individuality of its own, as it certainly had. We children felt at once that we belonged to the town, as we did to our father and mother” (93). In Larcom’s New England, birthplace shapes one’s perceptions of the region: “I received the impression, from [a boarder in her home who hailed from rural Vermont] and others, and from my own imagination, that rural life was far more delightful than the life of towns. But… A town that still has a great deal of the country in it, one that is rich in beautiful scenery and ancestral connections, is almost like a living being, with a body and a soul” (187-88). She attaches her identity to her birthplace of Beverly and access to the sea.

Another way that transatlantic participation characterizes Old New England in these texts lies in how New England’s access to the sea evokes a regionally characteristic desire to leave. New England heritage entails the need to leave New England. This frontier mindset resonates

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11 Robert Milder likewise argues that Nathaniel Hawthorne uses Salem as a synecdoche for New England.
with Daniel Webster’s famous speech at Plymouth Rock, which tied a through-line from seventeenth-century Puritans through the logic of Manifest Destiny. While local-color writing and regionalism have been described as generally depicting isolated locales, cut off from the flows of global trade and thereby charmingly rustic, *A New England Girlhood* depicts Old New England as being notable for its access to wider world. Rather than nostalgia for a time before globalization and easy transportation, Larcom notes that the “rough, breezy type of manliness” that Old New England generated was “now almost extinct” (94). In this narrative, the social reproduction of Old New England entailed the cultivation of wanderlust in the youth, especially the boys. Both Larcom and Aldrich indicate that the children of Old New England, especially the boys, desire to travel overseas. Larcom’s “Old New England” chapter contains more references to the ocean than other sections; the draw of the sea and the diversity of maritime life and trade infuse this section with liveliness. Indeed, “Old New England” generally was a place that people wanted to leave: “It was hard to keep the boys from going off to sea before they were grown. No inland occupation attracted them. ‘Land-lubber’ was one of the most contemptuous epithets heard from boyish lips. The spirit of adventure developed in them a rough, breezy type of manliness, now almost extinct” (93-4). In her narrative, Larcom participates in a broader trend of depicting the desire to travel overseas as being intrinsic to the American ethos. Amy Kaplan (using the term “Yankee” in the sense of “American,” rather than “New Englander”) argues that fiction in this vein worked as an imperialist wish-fulfillment narrative: “Yankees abroad conquering lands remote both in time and in space were not unusual in fiction of the 1880s and 1890s;” writes Kaplan, who has linked late-century popular writing to the United States’ aggressive, expansionist foreign policy. Some of this writing, Kaplan argues, provides wish-fulfillment fantasies in which a dissatisfied American travels overseas, wins spoils, and returns
victorious, with the resources (emotional and material) necessary for a healthy marriage and business (257). By framing international encounters as resolving domestic strife, and positioning supporting characters as disposable "others" whose role is to ensure the success of the protagonist, these adventure narratives bolster braggadocio and sublimate the more complex effects of US foreign policy. *The Story of A Bad Boy* describes the accumulation of wealth by prominent New England families through privateering. It says that those families do not like to discuss their pirate ancestors, even as the novel also glorifies pirates by taking an adventure-loving child’s view of the issue. By taking a child’s perspective on the matter, the novel simultaneously exposes and justifies the primitive consolidation of capital by New England’s leisure class, and foregrounds New England as a site of consumption rather than production.

Even as they attempt to reach younger generations with their stories from the past, the autobiographies describe their own Old New England as different from that of previous generations. They know Old New England as a time of leisure, but they know that earlier generations lived through it as a time of labor. Both narrators comment on the Puritanism of the Old New England before their own, particularly in how it affects the reading habits of the protagonists. For Tom, Sunday in New England registers as a dreary stifling of his childhood desire to read. The dourness of Sunday in Puritan Rivermouth pervades the atmosphere: “It is Sunday morning. I should premise by saying that the deep gloom which has settled over everything set in like a heavy fog early on Saturday evening” (66). The gloomy Sunday sets off by contrast all joys that pervade the rest of the week, specifically, Tom’s reading:

> “Robinson Crusoe” and “Gil Blas” are in close confinement. Baron Trenck, who managed to escape from the fortress of Glatz, can’t for the life of him get out of our sitting-room closet. Even the “Rivermouth Barnacle” is suppressed until
Monday. Genial converse, harmless books, smiles, lightsome hearts, all are banished. If I want to read anything, I can read Baxter’s “Saints’ Rest.” I would die first. So I sit there kicking my heels, thinking about New Orleans, and watching a morbid blue-bottle fly that attempts to commit suicide by butting his head against the window-pane. (67)

Sunday registers as isolation from the world of print culture, a cordoning off and shutting up of the household. Personifying his books as captured people, the narrator further indicates that reading offers social pleasures. Memories of New Orleans are the narrator’s only escape. The inborn sociality of children, however, offers a brief respite: “My grandfather looks up, and inquires in a sepulchral voice if I am ready for Sabbath school. It is time to go. I like the Sabbath school; there are bright young faces there, at all events” (67-8). Aldrich notes that the Sunday gloom was widespread and traditional:

This is the way Sunday was observed in the Nutter House, and pretty generally throughout the town, twenty years ago. People who were prosperous and natural and happy on Saturday became the most rueful of human beings in the brief space of twelve hours. I don’t think there was any hypocrisy in this. It was merely the old Puritan austerity cropping out once a week. Many of these people were pure Christians every day in the seven—excepting the seventh. Then they were decorous and solemn to the verge of moroseness. I should not like to be misunderstood on this point. Sunday is a blessed day, and therefore it should not be made a gloomy one. It is the Lord’s day, and I do believe that cheerful hearts and faces are not unpleasant in his sight. (69)
Just as his status as an outsider makes his first snowfall register as wondrous, Tom finds “The old Puritan austerity” distasteful.

For Larcom, the decades of her childhood provided a middle ground between the dreary Puritan olden times and the mystery-quashing developments of science and industrialization:

Things have happened, and changes have come. The New England that has grown up with the last fifty years is not at all the New England that our fathers knew. We speak of having been reared under Puritanic influences, but the traditionary sternness of these was much modified, even in the childhood of the generation to which I belong. We did not recognize the grim features of the Puritan, as we used sometimes to read about him, in our parents or relatives. And yet we were the children of the Puritans. (251-52)

In this passage, Larcom notes a discontinuity between the stern Puritans of written lore and her memories of her own family. Her first-hand experience contradicts the written record, the characterizations of Puritans that she’s encountered in print. This contradiction both affirms Old New England by writing it into her genealogy, while mediating it through her written memories and personal experience. At the other end of her autobiographical account, industrialization has afforded the narrator a new, labor-bound childhood, presented through the lens of fun and novelty. All the while, by means of industrialization, Larcom’s text is mass-produced and serves to further the reach of the region’s identity as a site of leisure. Larcom uses “Old New England” as leverage for showing how her own experience departs from that narrative. By giving “Old New England” its own chapter, Larcom valorizes this tidy version of regional history while showing that her own childhood—the full *New England Girlhood*—exceeds the scope of Old
New England. She appeases an audience interested in nostalgic narratives while acknowledging the crucial influence of industrialism in her own life.

The fun of Lowell, when it appears in the narrative, appears in terms of novelties and cultural difference, similar to the thrills of Old New England recalled by Aldrich. The childhood leisure of the girl reading in the garret takes a turn in 1835, when Larcom, at age eleven, begins work as a doffer in the Lowell mills—but some elements of girlhood continue, as Larcom points out. In Lowell, first-hand fun came to Larcom. In depicting Lowell during the time of wonder, Larcom asserts that novelties came to Lowell, which was a center of circulation: “Everything that was new or strange came to us at Lowell. And most of the remarkable people of the day came also. How strange it was to see Mar Yohanan, a Nestorian bishop, walking through the factory yard in his Oriental robes with more than a child’s wonder on his face at the stir and rush of everything!” (252). The cross-cultural encounter evokes “more than a child’s wonder,” in the bishop, while his visit to the factory registers as curiosity.

This chapter has argued that postbellum children’s autobiographies by Lucy Larcom and Thomas Bailey Aldrich established antebellum New England as a site of leisure, rather than labor. By framing Old New England as a fantasy setting of exceptional childhood, those texts draw attention away from the industrialized, multi-ethnic postbellum New England where the authors write. Children’s literature participates in the production and perception of the region. Aldrich and Larcom describe Old New England as connected to the wider world of commercial trade yet narrowed by the limited experience of the child-protagonists.
CHAPTER TWO

Playing Doctor

The previous chapter argued that autobiographies by Larcom and Aldrich use childhood and children’s leisure to construct a conceptual “Old New England” for postbellum readers. I further argued that those narratives produce a version of Old New England that accommodates and comments on the integration of childhood into print culture and a mass market for consumer goods. Old New England comes about through a record of children’s desires and a desire for childhood, while contending with the growing integration of childhood into mass media and a mass market. Old New England was created in the nineteenth century for an audience whose leisure was different from that of earlier, preindustrial days, as the new audience was accustomed to performing its leisure by acting as consumers in the mass market. Authors like Larcom and Aldrich put consumable versions of Old New England on the market, in narratives for young readers whose experience of Old New England would come about not through memories of pre-industrial times but rather through the mediation of texts and narratives.

In this chapter, I argue that games contribute to the construction of regionalism in how they facilitate transactional social interactions among players while producing transient, private, social spaces that are supposedly insulated from the wider world. Regions then come to resemble these exceptional, conceptual spaces of pure leisure, where the labor of economic production is either out of sight or neutralized by the “innocent” gaze of childhood. This chapter examines nineteenth-century card games, board games, and literature to argue that these print objects work in concert as important sites of ideological transfer and hegemonic control, structuring childhood leisure in nineteenth-century New England. The board- and card-game industry in New England from the 1830s through the 1880s produced a new type of subjectivity, one that casts players as virtual consumers and merchants in a rapidly expanding mass market.
Games play a role in drawing childhood play within print and commodity culture, as the audience for antebellum games overlapped with the audience for sentimental novels and self-improvement literature. This process contributes to regionalism by acquainting players with shifting modes of economic production, making labor into a game. Games shape leisure in the nineteenth century, and mass-produced games standardize that leisure. And while games play a didactic role, inculcating in players the social norms and assumptions of the dominant culture, this educational value is not as straightforward as it might seem. By situating games within print and commodity culture and analyzing several instances of cross-genre remediation, I show how amusement in antebellum New England is a contested field. As an index of leisure that games claim to guarantee, amusement, standardized in games, becomes an important mode through which people are encouraged to understand and interact with the region and with each other. Games for children normalize domestic labor by teaching girls to enjoy domestic labor and to perform displays of emotion. Further, games draw children into commodity culture by having players rehearse the roles of buyer and seller.

As industrialization sharpened the distinction between labor and leisure, the production of domesticity—or the labor of social reproduction—increasingly incorporated leisure activities. By the 1830s, industrialization and wage labor had begun to take hold in the northeastern United States, producing a newly stratified sense of leisure for the new working and middle classes (Gleason 61, Jensen 815). In The Leisure Ethic, William A. Gleason argues that this segmentation affected laborers’ sense of leisure time: “Where ‘free’ time and ‘work’ time were previously more interfused, workers’ leisure hours were gradually compartmentalized into

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12 Barbara Laslett and Johanna Brenner define social reproduction as part of the gendered division of labor: “feminists use social reproduction to refer to the activities and attitudes, behaviors and emotions, responsibilities and relationships directly involved in the maintenance of life on a daily basis, and intergenerationally” (382).
weeknights, Saturday afternoons, and Sundays” (61). This segmenting of labor and leisure time had a spatial corollary, argues Jennifer Jensen, in shaping connotations of the middle-class home: “The home was removed as the center of work and became primarily associated with leisure activities and education” (815). Home was still the site of work, but this labor of social reproduction was gendered and coded as consumption rather than production.

Along with a heightened sense of leisure time came an increased need, especially in the first half of the nineteenth century, to fill that leisure time, to do something productive. Leisure and labor grew more distinct, yet the line separating them was blurred by the need for productive leisure. Softening Max Weber’s influential argument that Protestant values collaborated with capitalism to form an American work ethic, Gleason argues that “what buttressed this [pre-1850] exaltation of work was a complementary Puritan suspicion of idleness (though the Puritans were not as repressive as our myths would have us believe), the belief that doing nothing was tantamount to doing ill—or that doing nothing would lead to doing ill” (61). Some scholars have argued that the transition from an “ascetic Protestant work ethic” to an “American consumer culture” begins in the 1880s and 1890s, though Lori Merish argues that the transition begins earlier, in the 1830s sentimental discourse of “pious consumption” and “feminine domestic aestheticism,” as “[d]omestic texts…construct class as a sentiment or psychological identification, fashioned in the home through domestic consumption” to create “a commercial structure of cross-class, white racial identification” (91-3). By locating games within this discourse, this chapter argues that games participate in the social reproduction of nineteenth-century New England by making capitalist relations amenable to children. Childhood evolved with American consumer culture, through a growing market for children’s literature and novelties, including games and guides to children’s pastimes. These guides fill childhood leisure
with activities amenable to that culture, by casting players as virtual consumers and merchants. Games filled the need for productive leisure by describing useful pastimes.

For antebellum New England children, games reinforced the gendered division of labor; this is evidenced in anthologies of girlhood play. Anthologies of girls’ pastimes first published between 1829 and 1833 train children to perform middle-class femininity through facility in transactional emotional display. These displays create domestic space by filling “play hours” with activities, a process akin to the region-defining leisure that Chapter One discussed in the writing of Aldrich and Larcom. (Larcom even mentions one of these guides—Lydia Maria Child’s The Girl’s Own Book—in her description of the books of Old New England.) At the outset of industrial mass production in the United States, and the leisure time that resulted, these guides to girlhood structure gender performance while laying the groundwork for New England’s mass-produced board-game and card-game industry, which I discuss in the chapter’s second half.

In 1831, Munroe & Francis of Boston, MA published The American Girl’s Book, Occupation for Play Hours, by Eliza Leslie. In her first publication, Seventy-Five Receipts for Pastry, Cakes and Sweetmeats (1828), Leslie had attempted to bypass the “difficulty in following directions in English and French Cookery Books,” by offering her simple recipes that were, “in every sense of the word, American” (iv). Leslie’s new book, The American Girl’s Book, Occupation for Play Hours (1831), took up a similar approach with a collection of simple childhood recreations that provided, essentially, a recipe for girlhood. The anthology copes with the effects of industrialism and mass production on children’s leisure, namely, the obsolescence of certain forms of play: “I have often regretted that so many of the diversions which formerly enlivened the leisure hours of very young people should long since have become obsolete, or only to be found in circles which are yet untouched with the folly and affectation of what is
called fashion,” Mrs. Morrington, a mother, tells three young girls in the anthology’s script-format preface. “And also that in families where the children are over educated (as is not too often the case) the parents, forgetting that they themselves were once young, allow no recreations but those of so grave a character, that play becomes more difficult and fatiguing than study” (ix-x). Between the poles of frivolity and drudgery, in an environment where “nothing was thought of but playing on the piano and dancing,” Mrs. Morrington proposes that American girls’ play should be useful and fun.

Leslie’s guide filled children’s free time with gender performance. Munroe & Francis had published numerous texts aimed at children since their outset in 1802, when they published Child’s Assistant in the Art of Reading. But The American Girl’s Book fell more in line with a recent Munroe & Francis offering: 1829’s The Boy’s Own Book, A Complete Encyclopedia of All the Diversions, Athletic, Scientific, and Recreative, of Boyhood, by William Clarke. In its second printing the year that Leslie’s book was first released, The Boy’s Own Book catalogued the rules of games and sports, including marbles, hunting, and fishing, while The American Girl’s Book focused mostly on indoor games. Staking out the terrain of children’s play, the volumes not only separate leisure from labor but also distinguish girls from boys, organizing play so as to reproduce binary gender categories. In “Child’s Play,” Gillian Brown observes the gendering of American children’s play in how the nineteenth century positions boyhood as an ideal time of natural uncivilized expression, of “pleasure and carelessness” looked back upon fondly, while girlhood is seen as a time of preparation for adulthood (89). Evidence of this split appears in the hands-on crafting activities that Leslie includes, such as sewing projects, all activities with “real-life” applications in domestic life.¹³ In suggesting that girls occupy playtime with these activities,

¹³ For a historical analysis of hobby needlework, see Rachel Maines’s Hedonizing Technologies.
Leslie’s book encourages girls to develop an affective attachment to household labor.

Though Clarke’s and Leslie’s books overlap significantly, down to the organization of the chapters, such as “Sports and Pastimes” and “Plays with Toys,” The American Girl’s Book also contains a section devoted to “Amusing Work” that provides instructions on sewing pin-cushions, needle books, and reticules. This part of the book draws the category of “work” into the home by labeling such work as pleasurable. By setting in print a set of rules or procedures that players can follow, Leslie’s book prescribes play.

I don’t want to lose sight of the unscripted moments of sociality that guides and games facilitate, and the object-relations that they place at the center of those social encounters. Print media not only represent but also evoke affective attachment and emotional investment. Part of the attachment is to the process of reading or playing, of engaging the material object, while part of the attachment is to the subject matter and to the frames of reference that the subject matter provides. Jamie Fron and her co-authors address players’ relationships to the rules of a game, highlighting those rules’ flexible nature:

Most card games begin with a determination of what game will be played, and by which rules. Tabletop role-playing and strategy games are often accompanied by a Talmudic discourse of rules interpretation. All of these practices give players the ultimate power in determining how they shall play. It is clear, from the traditional game players’ perspective, that while they may have purchased some specialized implements of play (such as a board with pieces or a deck of cards) the ‘game’ does not come in the box, but is in fact, an emergent experience ‘owned’ in many ways by themselves and their fellow players.
Changing the game, tweaking the rules, is always possible and ‘house rules’ are a common staple. (Fron et al. 2, emphasis mine)

The authors here locate the “game” in the players’ experience, rather than in the “specialized implements of play,” though the two elements are ultimately intertwined. Games draw objects into relationships with players; as those objects are purchased in the mass market, the relationships among players are likewise bound up in market relations.

The power of how games and play-objects hold players’ attention has accordingly been seen as simultaneously dangerous and promising. Brown, for instance, contends that players’ absorption in objects produces the educational potential of toys:

The prominence of objects in educational play signifies a hope that objects can hold and direct attention toward specific ends. Girls’ play thus improves upon boys’ play, supplying a much more direct and immediate example of progress. In this portrait of absorption, toys perform a crucial role, bringing purpose and particularity to the mobile and fantastical objects of children’s absorption.

Through toys, play ideally acquires an immediately manifest purpose. (91-2)

As games and toys are mass-produced, the populations who play those games marshal their energy behind the same purposes. Refusing to cede this control to toy companies, Leslie’s book takes a cautious attitude toward the emergent market for mass-produced games, encouraging players to make their own boards when possible. In the chapter entitled “Plays with Toys,” Leslie acknowledges that some of these toy-based games can be store-bought, but also describes those games in such a way that the reader could fashion a homemade version on her own. The entry on “Fox and Geese,” a traditional Scandinavian board originating in the fourteenth century, provides a diagram of the playing board, indicates that “a thimble, or something similar” can
serve as the “fox” piece, and specifies that “[w]ith a large sheet of paper, a pen and a ruler, it is very easy to make a board for playing this game” (133). Likewise, the entry on “Morrice” states, “A morrice-board is frequently found on the back of the small German chequerboards and it is played with the same men or pieces. But if you have no other board for this game, it is very easy to draw one after the above pattern, on a large sheet of paper, with pen and ink, and a ruler” (134). The author praises the improvisational skills of rural children, noting that a lack of access to mass-produced versions of the game needn’t keep children from playing: “The writer has seen this game played in the country, by children, who, for want of a better apparatus, had made a morrice-board by chalking the lines on the lid of an old box, using dried beans and grains of corn as substitutes for the red and white men” (136). Occupation for Play Hours works to keep children busy and doesn’t want girls to be only passive participants in the play economy. Although it labels leisure time as devoted to play and recreation, and (as we shall see) structures the transactional display of sentiment, the book also erects barriers against children’s reliance on the markets for fun.

The ambiguous attitude that Leslie’s book takes towards the mass production of games and toys can be seen as symptomatic of the fluctuating economic and social structures of the early nineteenth century, a volatility rooted in the industrial revolution. Games, like novels, allowed the working classes to challenge class boundaries, through a democratization of access to middle-class private experience. In The Rise of the Novel, Ian Watt argues that the eighteenth-century English novel fills the leisure time of a new middle class. In “Hegemony of Play,” Janine Fron and her co-authors develop a similar argument regarding card games and board games:

Board games and card games epitomized the industrial revolution in America in a number of significant ways. First, they were a response to the phenomenon of the
middle class in late 19th Century America; they were in a sense the first form of ‘home entertainment.’ Second, they took advantage of emerging mass production methods and personnel. Third, their marketing strategies and content provides unique insight into the cultural concerns of the day. (Fron et al. 2)

Reading novels allowed the working classes to challenge class boundaries, through a democratization of access to middle-class private experience. In the same way that Fron extends Watt’s argument regarding middle-class consumption of the novel, Lori Merish builds on, and critiques, Ann Douglas to argue for the “constitutive ambivalence of consumption”: “Viewed in its historical context,” Merish argues, “domestic consumption constituted a language of subjective expression and identification that facilitated middle-class women’s civic agency, even while it enforced domestic conceptions of womanhood… [L]iberal consumer subjectivity, and the dialectic of agency and subordination characteristic of feminine consent, is constituted by as well as described within sentimental narrative” (18). Leslie’s guide likewise initiates children into a consumer subjectivity and feminine consent.

A similar dialectic is underway in anthologies of girls’ play, as consenting to play grants players individual agency within their group of peers—decision-making power over how their fellow players will redeem forfeits—while the systematized presentation of forfeits, by clearing up the confusion, also limits those actions. Market relations are couched within the structuring of childhood leisure, even as childhood and leisure are set up in opposition to the industrializing workplace and the public marketplace. Games and guides to play produce supposedly private spaces, the conceptual realm of game-play. This conceptual space of leisure mirrors the fantasy of the region as a site of consumption rather than production.
Leslie’s guide was not alone in the market, and a similar guide by Lydia Maria Child suggests that controlled and feigned emotional reactions to social stimuli are useful skills that produce the social conditions of the nineteenth-century United States. Clarke, Austin & Co. of New York published Child’s *The Girl’s Own Book*, in 1833. More similar to *The American Girl’s Book* than to *The Boy’s Own Book*, to which it owes its name, Child’s volume collected sports, pastimes, and songs for girls to play. (An 1847 Edinburgh version of Child’s guide combined work by the two authors by including an addendum of sports and pastimes attributed to Miss Leslie.) In these provisional spaces, games produce middle-class femininity by making agency and emotional performance transactional. This happens through the games’ treatment of forfeits and contractual assent as domestic performance. On forfeits, Child cautions, “It is extremely difficult to find such forfeits as are neither dangerous, nor unladylike” (99); the selections she compiles mostly rely on acting out sentimental or straight-faced displays, such as “To stand in the middle of the room, and first make up a very woful face, then a very merry one,” or “Imitate, without laughing, such animals as your companions name” (101), while Child’s preface, addressed to parents, states, “This little book has been compiled with an earnest desire to make it useful, in all aspects, to its readers” (iii). Child’s preface further proffers a nationalistic rationale: “In this land of precarious fortunes, every girl should know how to be useful … In this country it is peculiarly necessary that daughters should be so educated as to enable them to fulfill the duties of a humble station, or to dignify and adorn the highest” (iii–iv). *The Girl’s Own Book* produces middle-class domesticity by describing and filling children’s leisure with gendered performance suited to the antebellum United States.

This type of contractual assent, engaged in by girls at play, is linked to the making and unmaking of families. Cindy Weinstein, in *Family, Kinship, and Sympathy in Nineteenth-*
Century American Literature, argues that nineteenth-century sentimental novels put forward the possibility of alternatives to the biological family structure, such as families constructed through adoption. A contractual relationship among the group of rights-bearing family members, Weinstein argues, "reflects a republican ideal, where each family member possesses individual rights which are guaranteed, not by one's status in the family, but by the contractual obligations family members have towards one another" (45). I build on Weinstein’s claims in finding that games function like fiction, producing transient domestic communities through contractual agreement.

Reviewing several examples of Leslie’s forfeits further demonstrates the display of emotion being drawn into transactional interactions, and the gendered performance Leslie prescribes. Of the fifty-four activities in the “Sports and Pastimes” section of Leslie’s book, twenty-two rely on the system of pawns or forfeits. In this system, when a player commits an error during a round of a game, she or he must pay a “forfeit,” represented by some small object in the room, which the player must regain at the end of the play by some sort of performance. For example, in the game of “Honey Pots,” a girl is carried around the room, holding her knees to her chest; if her hands slip and her feet touch the floors, she pays a forfeit to whichever player was in charge during that particular round. The type of object doesn’t seem to matter—the rules for “Dressing the Lady,” for instance, indicate that scissors, a chestnut, or a card could work equally well as forfeits (46). The forfeits that a player has collected from others are all are put into a basket and “sold” by whichever player collected them. The seller, blindfolded, reaches into the basket, is told whether the owner of that forfeit is male or female, and then “the seller of the forfeits (still remaining blindfolded) must decide what the owner must do before the pawn can be
restored to her” (100). Leslie includes a lengthy list of fifty ways for players to demand that forfeits be redeemed. Many of these demanded quick thinking, threatened embarrassment, or asked for displays of physical or emotional control. For example, “Laugh in one corner of the room, cry in another, yawn in the third corner, and dance in the fourth,” or “Answer five questions while another chucks you under the chin” (106). Some listings demand relatively straightforward acts of mock-physical affection, such as “Kiss some one through the tongs,” or “kiss yourself in the looking-glass,” while others seem logically impossible, unless one knows the tricks listed in the book (108). For example, “Put yourself through a key-hole. This is done by writing the ‘yourself’ on a small slip of paper, rolling it up, and putting it through the key-hole” (107). Groaners like these seem to be meant to embarrass first-time players as they struggle to fulfill the task. Some raise the prospect of nudity, before the trick reveals a chaste alternative: “Show four bare legs. That is, turn a chair upside down, so as to display its four legs” (107). The role of discipline in the games calls to mind Michel Foucault’s argument that “discipline fixes; it arrests or regulates movements; it clears up confusion” (“Panopticism”). The games and forfeits of *The American Girl’s Book*, by detailing guidelines for redeeming forfeits, clear up the confusion of girlhood play in the 1830s. This economy of performance, in which household objects are traded for the displays of feigned emotion, helps us to see that *The American Girl’s Book* draws gendered play within sentimental discourse.

The games and play put forth by Child and Leslie also normalize racial hierarchies as they educate girls in social reproduction. Leslie’s instructions for sewing linen dolls feature two variants: a “common linen doll” dressed in “calico or gingham,” and a “black doll” who “should

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14 Though, in theory, the blindfolded player knows only the gender and not the name of the forfeit’s owner, the diversity of objects used as forfeits also informs the blindfolded player, who will, perhaps, identify by touch a pair of scissors and remember who used that object as a forfeit during the game.
have a check apron.” The black doll’s apron marks her as a performer of domestic labor. Leslie writes, “You may make a whole family of these linen dolls, representing a mother and several children, among them a baby. A black one may then be added as a servant” (294). The black doll is valued according to the social reproduction of the white family. In separating labor from leisure, the guides produce middle-class femininity that privileges white families.

Scholars have begun to reassess how seemingly trivial objects shape the assumptions and behavior of the people who handle and use those objects, and I extend this to show how games neutralize labor by describing it as leisure. Writing about “ludic racism” in the late-nineteenth-century US culture, Bret L. Rothstein and Karen M. Inouy argue that games and toys can normalize racism:

[A]n object that gives visible form to bigotry does not simply appeal to or depict stereotypes but in fact instantiates them, activating those stereotypes perceptually, intellectually, and even physically. As both a perceptual and a cultural instrument, such an object performs two functions. First, it knits racist ideologies into other, supposedly neutral cultural practices…. Second…the instrumentality of the object also shapes perception, modeling both the range of acceptable topics for viewing and how one should view them. The result, we suggest, is the validation of racist sentiment (but not race itself) as a supposedly trivial concern. (287)

Racist ideology, we see, is woven into the everyday life of a culture, made “trivial” through people’s engaging with mass-produced objects that claim to be humorous. Games and game-like objects, in other words, evoke and define amusement, as supposedly neutral, “trivial”

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15 Robin Bernstein analyzes black dolls in Racial Innocence (2011).
perspectives. Chapter One’s discussion of *The Story of A Bad Boy* (1869) notes a similar
dynamic in how Aldrich’s white narrator uses humor to justify and excuse his former abuse of
Sam. This current chapter’s analysis of games helps to position texts like Aldrich’s within the
constellation of games, as games and guides to fun operate under broad connotations of
harmlessness. Games not only gather people together in the same room and require that they
speak to one another, but specify the purpose of the meeting: to have fun. Unlike other print
genres, games standardize and advertise the affective response they’re designed to evoke, often
claiming in their titles to be “amusing,” “entertaining,” or “laughable.”

In the nineteenth century, the majority of the United States’ major games publishers were
located in New England, and for much of the century, the US games industry was by and large a
Massachusetts industry. Games were able to produce the region because they reached a broad
audience through mass production and sentimental themes that resonated with a wide readership.
The mass production of games in the United States began in earnest in the 1840s, when W. & S.
B. Ives of Salem, MA, began to print card games and board games in substantial quantities.
(Whitehill “Games of America” 67). In 1843, W. & S. B. Ives printed its own version of “The
Mansion of Happiness,” an English board game that had been designed by George Fox and
printed in London in 1800 (Whitehouse 51). In this game, players moved pieces along a path
marked with virtues and vices; the winner was the first to reach “The Mansion of Happiness” in

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16 Though other, smaller companies and publishing houses also published games, the gaming
industry in the nineteenth-century United States came to be dominated by four major companies:
W. & S. B. Ives of Salem, MA; McLoughlin Bros. of New York; Milton Bradley of Springfield,
MA; and, later, Geo. S. Parker Co., of Salem MA. (In 1883, in Salem, George S. Parker founded
the company that would become Parker Brothers, and bought the back-catalogue of the then-
defunct W. & S. B. Ives.)

17 The preface to *Doctor Busby and His Neighbors* (1844) claims that fifteen thousand copies of
the game “Dr. Busby” had been sold in the past eighteen months.
the center of the board. Other 1840s board games published by W. & S. B. Ives include
“Reward of Virtue,” “The National Game of the American Eagle,” and “The Game of Pope or
Pagan, or the Siege of the Stronghold of Satan by the Christian Army.” The company also
published a number of card games, including “Doctor Busby,” “Master Rodbury,” and “The
Yankee Trader; or the Laughable Game of What D’Ye Buy? by Doctor Busby,” all designed by
Anne W. Abbott. The games of W. & S. B. Ives appeared on the market in roughly the same
time and place that Larcom later looked back to as the era of “Old New England,” Salem, MA of
the 1840s.

Games circulated with books, and the audience for antebellum games overlapped with the
audience for sentimental novels and self-improvement literature. W. & S. B. Ives sought to sell
their games to the same audience who had bought Louisa Caroline Tuthill’s books: a
middle/upper-middle class audience who turned to print for advice on how to fill their free time in an era of self-improvement and individual and social reform. Playing games like “Characteristics of Distinguished Persons; Male and Female; An Original and Amusing Game. By a Lady, Author of ‘The Young Lady’s Home,’ etc., etc.” (1843) taught players to think of people in terms of lists of adjectives and to discern moral character according to trivial facts. The “Lady” who wrote “Characteristics of Distinguished Persons” was Louisa Caroline Tuthill, a Connecticut writer of children’s literature and domestic conduct guides who made a career by dictating the appropriate use of leisure time. In her guide to self-education, The Young Lady's Home, Tuthill addresses young women who have finished their formal schooling by offering advice on continued self-education in topics such as “Formation of Character,” “Mental Culture,” “Memory,” “Cultivation of Taste,” “A Daughter’s Duty,” “Employment of Time,” and “Christian Usefulness.” The Young Lady’s Home participates in a broader culture of self-improvement literature. Games served to educate consumers in moral judgment and attentive discernment of the changing world around them, a landscape vastly shifted by industry and new modes of labor and leisure.

Further capitalizing on this audience for sentimental fiction, W. & S. B. Ives published “Doctor Busby,” the first successfully mass-produced dedicated-deck card game in the United States. “Doctor Busby” became a bestseller by exploiting a sentimental theme of family-making and by commenting on how objects construct sentimental discourse. The card game had players try to gather together cards depicting the members of four family groups. The game’s cards depicted men, women, children, servants, and objects. A mode of labor—or the lack thereof—organizes each family, as is demonstrated in the cards’ suits. “Doctor Busby” used a dedicated

20 The price of the games suggests this audience.
deck of twenty hand-painted cards, rather than the standard 52-card deck. The cards depicted four families of five, represented by four suits: Doctor Busby’s, with the mortar and pestle; Doll the dairy maid’s, by the pan of milk; Spade the gardener’s by the spade; and the Ninny-come-twitch family, under the sign of the eye. Players attempt to gather the families that the suits represent, relying on their memory of what cards have been played. “Doctor Busby” relies upon the trope of threats to the family as players attempt to group cards into family units. Each family contains a father, a mother, a child, an object, and—in the same way that The American Girl’s Book suggests that a black doll should appear as a servant in a family of white dolls—a servant. This arrangement has three effects: first, it normalizes the nuclear family by implying that alternative arrangements to that nuclear family are problems that need to be fixed. Second, the arrangement implies that the nuclear family is flexible, as sentimental literature provides the possibility of rearrangements to the biological family structure. Third, the game positions objects within the family structure at a time when people performed domesticity through the consumption of mass-market consumer goods, such as mass-produced decks of cards. The game encourages sentimental attachment to objects, by including an object in each of the four family groups. These objects bear the same level of importance as the human family members themselves, as players need to acquire all of the cards for each family in order to win the game. Without the pan of milk, for example, Doll the dairy-maid’s family remains incomplete.

The game of “Doctor Busby” dramatizes the scandal of social mixing in the hand of jumbled people that each player is dealt, while naturalizing the family structure and normalizing the servant as a component of the family whose labor is accepted as part of the family’s “look.” As the individual cards feature images rather than written labels, players must discern for

21 Later editions had twenty-one.
themselves which card represents which character. Is Doctor Busby’s servant the woman ironing clothes or the young man in an apron standing by a haystack? Is that man Doctor Busby’s son, or is the son the young man wearing a mortarboard cap? Is Doctor Busby’s wife the woman ironing or the woman in a rocking chair at work with embroidery? And which of those characters in the Busby family is Doll the “Dairy Maid’s Black-Eyed Lover”? Though the gameplay is rather simple, sorting through these ambiguities at the outset of playing requires players to assess visual clues and make assumptions based on signs of class, gender, and race that the cards depict. Further, as the Black-Eyed Lover indicates, the cards indicate intimate connections among the four families, even as players work to separate those families into discrete groups. The deck is a network of people and objects in a complex web of relationships, a picture of society in flux, which the players then seek to sort out. Anne W. Abbott, who designed the game, translated these ambiguities into words in the 1844 novel Doctor Busby and His Neighbors, which W. & S. B. Ives published using images from the game cards as illustrations. The novel pegs down the labels that the game cards had left up to players to decide, eliminating, for example, the fantasy that Doll’s black-eyed lover is in fact the woman ironing clothes. Though Doctor Busby and His Neighbors saw just one printing, the game of Doctor Busby proved perennially popular, and continues to be printed today, under the title “Happy Families.”

Shortly after releasing “Doctor Busby,” W. & S. B. Ives released “Trades,” which featured eight workers—all men—each assigned a different occupation and marked with a symbol of the trade. These games suggest sentimental attachment between artisans and the tools of their trade, as well as between family members. “Trades” notably does not include any factory workers, despite the growing prevalence of factories in New England, though it does depict several forms of manual labor. Like the suit-symbols in “Doctor Busby,” the suits in the new
game implied that each tradesperson was so intimately connected to the tools of his trade that those tools defined him. The game asked players to gather the tool-bearing cards together with the tradesman card. Further, the game gave girls and boys a virtual experience in the market for consumer goods. It allowed the transactional world of face-to-face gameplay to stand in symbolically for the “real” transactions of the market. As wage labor shifted the economic landscape of New England, the game of “Trades” assigned sentimental bonds between workers and their tools and folded an idea of manual labor into indoor play. This process represented the real industrial labor underlying the region’s economic production in terms of emotional connections between workers and their tools.

The New England context of W. & S. B. Ives influenced the companies’ themes, especially in the character of the “Yankee Trader.” Many early games of W. & S. B. Ives did not explicitly mention New England as a topic, but rather they emphasized patriotism and Puritan-derived morals that were common currency in the region. Anti-Catholic sentiment ran through games like “The Game of Pope and Pagan, or the Siege of the Stronghold of Satan by the Christian Army” (1844), and Christian morals and patriotism merged in “The National Game of the American Eagle” (1844). New Englanders—as distinctive regional subjects—appeared as the explicit subject matter of games before New England as a region did, in The “Yankee” figure in “Yankee Trader, or Laughable Game of What D’Ye Buy, by Doctor Busby” (1848). Designed for three to thirteen players, “The Yankee Trader” places players in economic relationships with one another, assigning some players the role of tradespeople and another the role of “Conductor.” The game relies on players’ paying close attention to the “Conductor” character, who runs the game by reading a script. The game assumes that players are familiar with trades, such as “farmer,” “tinplate worker,” “baker,” or “shoemaker.” The game’s rules teach players about the
rural tradespeople, and the occasional need to ply more than one trade: “If it should happen that there are not enough players for each to take a separate business, each one can unite two or more branches, as is common for traders in the country.”

“The Yankee Trader” finds its fun in reading practices. The game’s fictional narrator (Doctor Busby, who’d become a sort of franchise for W. & S. B.) cites his own local influence as he narrates the game’s instructions, which emphasize the social interactions among players:

The first thing to be done is to choose a Conductor of the Game, and the other players are, each, to select a Trade, receiving a picture for his Sign, together with six cards, with a list of the articles he sells. He is to have his sign before him, holding his six cards in his hand, so that he can examine them readily.

The amusement consists in the Conductor fixing his eyes on the book as he reads the story, and at the end of each sentence looking directly in the face of one of the players, (who must be on the watch,) who must call aloud something he sells, on pain of forfeit, and laying down the card at the same time.

The very opposite and curious nature of the articles which may be named, excites much sport, and the fun is kept up by the eagerness of each to name his article when looked at, to avoid paying a forfeit. (“The Yankee Trader”) On one level, “Yankee Trader” can be said to train young players for economic success in the capitalist market. The players pretend to be tradespeople, and act out market transactions. However, we should note the instructions here do not emphasize success, or even winning. Rather, the instructions locate the game’s value in what makes it a “laughable game”: the players’ interactions with the Conductor of the Game: “The amusement consists in the Conductor fixing

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22 Forfeits, determined by players rather than dictated by the game’s rules, raise the stakes of playing “The Yankee Trader.”
his eyes on the book as he reads the story, and at the end of each sentence looking directly in the face of one of the players.” Like Ichabod Crane walking through Sleepy Hollow with his nose in a book, the Conductor’s aloof reading practices are what mark him or her as amusing. As a print technology of leisure, the game-book makes players laugh, by literally coming between them.

“The Yankee Trader” reflects anxieties regarding New England’s place in the growing mass market for consumer goods. The Yankee figure was well-established as a stereotypical New Englander by 1848, due in part to literary depictions by Harriet Beecher Stowe and Washington Irving.23 Joseph Conforti writes, “like the white village, the Yankee was both a real regional type and a culturally invented figure. Yankee characters…embodied behavioral traits rooted, for example, in the mobility, restlessness, and pursuit of commercial opportunities that comprised the economic order underpinning the compact white village. The famous Yankee peddler served as an agent of this new commercial world” (150-1). By the “mid-nineteenth century Yankee reemerged not only as a patriotic figure but also as a cultural purveyor—an ideological peddler—of newly legitimate, individualistic market order” (163-4). In games, the Yankee character represents and dispels these concerns, by having players pretend to be “agent[s] of this new commercial world,” in a play economy governed by fun and underwritten by forfeits.

The prevalence of the Yankee trader’s representation indicates the prominence of trade and the marketplace in children’s leisure games, and places the merchant identity squarely within the regional depictions of New England in this period. Several companies reprinted “The Yankee Trader” over the nineteenth century, adapting the game to meet contemporary circumstances. Between 1865 and 1870, McLoughlin Bros. put out a version of The Yankee Trader: “The Yankee Pedlar/ or What do You Buy?” The instructions sheet lists the full title as “The Laughable

23 For an extended discussion of the Yankee character, see Conforti 150-71. See also forthcoming work by Elizabeth Dillon on Yankee Jonathan, the Caribbean, and Uncle Sam.
Game of The Yankee Pedler: or, What D’Ye Buy? for Large or Small Parties, by Jack Bunsby.”

The “Jack Bunsby” character appears to be a thinly veiled attempt to capitalize on the success of Doctor Busby. The “Yankee Pedlar” featured on the box’s cover wears a top hat, bowtie, red tailcoat and blue striped pants that would characterize the Brother Jonathan, the “dandy,” and eventually Uncle Sam. He stands in front of a horse-drawn carriage, holding a mantle clock under his arm and raising his finger. The Yankee peddler character becomes associated with the past as the century progresses. Geo. S. Parker & Co. of Salem did not do away with the “Yankee Trader” game it had acquired from the defunct W. & S. B. Ives; the company repackaged the game in 1888 according to late-century views of the Yankee character. By the 1880s, the figure of the Yankee was linked to marketable nostalgia, as the conspicuously antiquated title of “Ye Peculiar Game of Ye Yankee Peddler.”

The 1880s saw a rise in nostalgia for preindustrial modes of leisure, while new technologies increased the speed of board games’ production and circulation. In 1860, Milton Bradley had increased the speed with which color games could be produced, and mechanization then transformed the game-making process in the 1880s. Bruce Whitehill describes this transition as simultaneously drawing adults into the market that had been heretofore aimed at children: “The mechanized printing process [developed by Milton Bradley] resulted in the mass production of games. And in the 1880s, the man credited with promoting games for adults and families, not just children, George Parker, helped develop games into a major American pastime. Games were now ‘manufactured by…’ instead of being ‘published by…’ (“Games of America” 65). In this context, manufactured games, along with other mass-produced publications like A

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24 Images of “The Yankee Pedlar” game are available through the New York Historical Society: http://www.nyhistory.org/exhibit/yankee-peddler-or-what-do-you-buy
25 Elizabeth Dillon’s current research traces the influence of the Caribbean on the trajectory of this imagery.
New England Girlhood, circulated narratives of nostalgia and curiosity towards antebellum and pre-industrial forms of regional play.

We can see evidence of this view in two contemporaneous clippings from Harper’s Young People, which offers an example of children’s leisure occupying the marketplace, and an example of the time period’s nostalgia for certain bygone forms of childhood play. On April 6, 1886, Harper’s Young People ran an article titled “Easter-Egg Novelties,” which noted the growing market for children’s toys:

Long ago, when children’s toys were simpler than they now are, and our young people were less exacting, the colored eggs dyed with logwood were hailed with delight at Easter-tide; but nowadays, however, something more elaborate is required, and novelties are demanded by the young as well as the old. It is to help supply this demand that these Easter novelties made of egg-shells are now introduced. They are simple in their construction, and, as may be seen in the sketches, are comical little creatures when completed. (Beard 361)

The article included paper cutouts that readers could use to dress eggs up as Humpty Dumpty, Miss Rolly-Poly, or an Owl (361-62). A week later, in the same magazine, Henry Carrington of Hartford, Connecticut solicits examples of “Counting-out games” from young readers. These rhymes, Carrington explains, are used to winnow down participants until just one remains. He is especially interested in the rhymes that appear to be sheer nonsense:

We did not trouble ourselves about the meaning of the rhymes, nor with their origin; we learned them and their use from boys and girls a little older than ourselves, as children now continue to do. In New England the following rhyme has been used for a great many years:
“One-ery, two-ery, ickory, Ann,
Phillisy, phollisy, Nicholas John,
Queever, quafer, English knaver,
Stinkelum, stankelum, buck!”

…

These and other rhymes I have learned from children of my acquaintance and by correspondence, and I want to collect a great many more, especially of the kind containing gibberish…

…

[The editor’s reply:] An interesting contribution to this subject will be found in *Games and Songs of American Children*, published by Messrs. Harper and Brothers. Will the little readers pay attention to this letter of their genial friend, and write directly to him, and not to the editor of *Harper’s Young People* or to the Postmistress? (“Our Post-Office Box” 386)

The co-existence of the Easter-egg cutouts and Carrington’s letter shows a split between games and play as market-responsive novelties and games and play as folklore in need of preservation. Carrington’s appeal argues for an ongoing, informal culture of children, who pass lore on from one to the next, over generations. The rhymes connect Carrington’s adult generation to the magazine’s current, youthful readers. Print serves to amuse and surprise, as well as to preserve. Preservation also exists, quietly inherent within the assertion of novelty, as Beard gives the details of the Easter celebrations of the past, when the now quaint “colored eggs dyed with logwood” would have been “hailed with delight at Easter-tide.” This dual function, as I argued in Chapter One, also exists in Larcom’s treatment of New England childhood.
Descriptive-play objects produce versions of New England run through with nostalgia throughout the nineteenth century, while prescriptive-play objects embrace nostalgia as a key to the region only later in the nineteenth century, by which point the population was familiar with mass-produced games. These two versions of play produce different versions of New England. In the first case, the natural games of children are the byproducts of a distinctive, traditional New England culture, the counter-discourse inherent to stern Puritanism. This version of New England is described as being threatened by industrial capitalism and the mass market for domestic goods. These folkways are found in rural settings where the reach of cosmopolitan “fashion” has less sway. In the second case, New England (especially Massachusetts, and especially Salem and Boston) is a metropolitan center from and through which mass-produced games and books circulate. These games and books shape children’s understanding of New England by stereotyping the “Yankee” figure while also emphasizing that the Yankee is a character whom players can step into and out of playing at their will. Patriotic games emphasize nationalism and morality while regional games emphasize market-mindedness.

In *The Games and Songs of American Children* (1884), Newell treats New England culture as threatened and in need of preservation, and he argues that the region’s distinctive characteristics are evident in the games and songs of children. Newell capitalizes on the trope of the child-in-danger as he develops his collection. New England culture is in danger, he implies, and he assigns to children a special role in the processes of social reproduction: Children are embedded in the regional and national culture but also possess a distinct culture of their own, through “formulas of play which children have preserved from generation to generation, without the intervention, often without the knowledge, of older minds” (Newell xix). The games and songs of children unfold without the aid of adults. Newell’s collection hopes to freeze in print a
set of customs that it says are vanishing. By assuming that New England’s culture can stand in as representative of the nation’s at large, Newell’s book participates in a wider set of movements that sought to position the region as a model for the nation.

What was implicit in earlier games becomes explicit near the turn of the century, when the Milton Bradley Company of Springfield, MA printed “Happy Days in Old New England.” Printed the same year as A New England Girldhood, “Happy Days in Old New England” perpetuates a fantasy of pre-industrial play. I’ve included a description from the company’s catalogue:

This unique and captivating game is dedicated to the sons and daughters of New England, particularly those who first drew breath on the “back country” farms, drank from “the old oaken bucket” in the halcyon days of childhood, and have since “gone West” or migrated to the neighboring cities, to them and their children.

…

The one who first reaches “The Old Homestead” wins the game, but he is sure to experience during his journey, even though it be a brief one, a variety of vicissitudes, rapid advancements and unexpected reverses, which makes the trip an interesting one for himself and all his associates. (Milton Bradley Company) Bradley’s game addressed an audience marked by its distance from Old New England, both geographic and temporal. The West and the “neighboring cities” both stand in contrast to the “back country farms.” Players are invited to a virtual experience of childhood in a de-industrialized region marked by leisure and simplicity rather than industry and mass production. The game creates Old New England as a site of childhood leisure.
As many scholars have discussed, the linear-progress race-style board games progressed from a religious theme in the heaven-bound, Pilgrim’s Progress-tinged hit “The Mansion of Happiness” (1800, 1840) to a theme of secular success in the capitalist market in “The Checkered Game of Life” (1860). But the nostalgic “Happy Days in Old New England” (1889) revises the future-oriented formula. In the progression from “The Mansion of Happiness” to “The Checkered Game of Life” to “Happy Days in Old New England,” we see how the “Old Homestead” is made to stand in for a perfect place. But, while the first two examples had imaginatively projected players into the future, “Happy Days in Old New England” imaginatively projected players into the past. By drawing on the tropes of the earlier entries, “Happy Days” positioned the house of a prosperous and happy family as simultaneously existing in the present, past, and future. The old homestead stands in for the sentiment that the game claims players will recognize. Old New England here is a fantasy, mass-produced with industrial technology and consumed by players across generations.

In contrast to the scholarship equating games with success-minded progress, by turning our attention to the presence of “forfeits” in the rules of mass-produced games, anthologies, and card games I have argued how print pastimes provide a training ground not just for capitalistic “success” of financial gain—as games scholars have emphasized—but also for the performance of sentiment. Under the aegis of diversion and amusement comes the requirement that players

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26 For the view that games teach capitalist success, see Jennifer Jensen, Victor Edmonds, and David Wallace Adams. Jennifer Jensen provides this tidy summary and overview of “The Checkered Game of Life”: “Players travel through life, represented by a checkerboard, in the pursuit of happy old age, accumulating points by going to college and getting married while working hard and getting rich, and by avoiding such stumbling blocks as idleness, intemperance, gambling, poverty, ruin, and suicide. However, religion per se only shows up on the altar that represents marriage. This was the first game in which the ideal American life did not depend on salvation or religious involvement, and many games with similar moral thrusts followed. Instead of piety they emphasized secular virtues such as thrift, neatness, and kindness” (Jensen 816).
maintain straight faces under decidedly unserious circumstances, or perform emotional displays on command as part of contractual agreements. This chapter has argued that games belong in discussions of nineteenth-century print culture, especially in discussions of New England, where games and books circulated in the same markets and addressed similar concerns, namely the shifting role of leisure in an industrializing region. Rather than approaching regions as fixed geographical sites within which culture unfolds, we learn to approach regions also as cultural products, being perpetually produced, reproduced, challenged, and revised. Games and sentimentalism emerge from industrialism and comment on industrialism, trying to create imaginary spaces of pure leisure.

Children’s leisure is marked as such because of the children’s age, but adults’ leisure is marked as such because it serves as a counterpoint to work. The next chapter will turn from a setting of play to a setting of work, examining the role of a literary periodical in structuring the leisure of Lowell’s factory workers. From 1840 to 1845, *The Lowell Offering* published the poetry, fiction, and essays by women working in the Lowell textile mills. I argue that the scenes of domesticity that the Lowell Mill Girls sketch resemble the intimate space of gameplay, a respite from the world of work that nonetheless draws on that work as source material. The “New England” that the journal produces is simultaneously industrial and pre-industrial, nostalgic and progressive, a site where memories of childhood leisure are reprocessed to describe the industrial present.
CHAPTER THREE

Writing Home in the *Lowell Offering*

While W. & S. B. Ives of Salem was beginning to structure leisure through the mass production of board games, a different sort of print object, a literary periodical, was testifying to the leisure hours of factory workers in 1840s New England. Chapter Three builds on the previous chapter by examining how a literary magazine, the *Lowell Offering*, produces regional leisure from within the context of industrial labor. Chapter Two examined how games help to produce a fantasy of pure leisure, by occupying users’ time in supposedly harmless, laughable, or amusing scenarios. Games, I argued, facilitate provisional role-play—virtual relations among players—while also training those players to be participants in the mass market for consumer goods, testing out various occupations and performing stereotypes, such as the Yankee peddler. Though games and literature are not synonymous, the *Lowell Offering* should be seen as partaking of similar social influences as games: both are participatory print objects that fill leisure time with socially acceptable activity. Both games and the *Lowell Offering* are pastimes that structure the non-work hours of a population whose leisure is of public interest. Both the games-publishing industry and the textile-processing industry (to the extent that the *Lowell Offering* was an offshoot/promotion/recruiting tool of the textile industry) were run by men while relying on the creative writing of women. In this chapter, I argue that the *Lowell Offering*, by helping users to draw a conceptual line separating labor from leisure, enacts a performative regionalism that eases the transition into industrial wage labor in nineteenth-century New England.

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27 Important differences exist, however. My analysis has been comparing the women who wrote the *Lowell Offering* to the children who played early board games. The analysis would look much different if we compared the readers of the *Lowell Offering* (whom we know little about) to the players of the games, or the readers of the *Lowell Offering* to the writers of the games. Ultimately we know about the writers of *Lowell Offering* because of the biographical interest that people of the era took in them, along with the fact that their literary endeavors were often autobiographical.
Scholars, without reaching consensus, have conjectured as to why so much writing emerged from the New England textile factories of the mid-nineteenth century. The phenomenon seems to be anomalous. Sylvia Jenkins Cook notices the difference in quantity of writing produced by working-class women versus men, particularly as compared with that in Britain during the same time period: “In the United States … despite many eventual grim similarities in the impact of industrialization on workers’ lives, working-class women, particularly factory workers, took a more prominent part as authors into subjects in the literary and intellectual discourse of industrial life” (5). Though I have no easy answers to Cook’s conundrum, I would note that the Lowell Offering participates in a broader movement to pin down in print the leisure activities of a populace transitioning into industrial capitalism and that, in so doing, the magazine responds to industrialism by defining New England as a site of leisure. New England’s print pastimes—the mass-produced children’s literature addressed in Chapter One, the culture-producing games discussed in Chapter Two, and the Lowell Offering magazine—are regional productions meant to preserve the “authentic” New England by idealizing or excluding certain aspects of the region’s experience: the naivety of Old New England; the civilization of children through games which ignored any experience beyond the borders of a civilized New England childhood; and here, in the Lowell Offering, the insistence of the laborer, through a leisure production, that such labor is both impermanent and thus non-threatening to the ideal, and also an ideal and natural product of the region. This last, fervently argued fantasy allows both laborer and reader to maintain the affective attachments to New

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28 Historians who write about the literary ambitions of New England’s factory workers include Caroline F. Ware: *The Early New England Cotton Manufacture* (1931); Thomas Dublin: *Women at Work* (1979) and *Transforming Women’s Work* (1994); and David A. Zonderman: *Aspirations and Anxieties* (1992).
England, while producing a community of readers, of laborers-in-leisure, of a region defined in relation to a fantasy of idealized leisure.

Though labor and leisure seemingly stand in contrast to one another, the two are interdependent facets of the ongoing process of social reproduction. Leisure helps us to understand the circumstances of the Lowell mill girls by characterizing the authors’ time spent away from the factory but not spent at home. One of the key functions of the *Lowell Offering* is to testify to the appropriate use of leisure time. This testimony asserts the authors’ participation in a middle-class community of taste and a shared response to the labor that binds them together. Leisure here signifies agency and serves as the political stage upon which class-based divisions can be challenged by recourse to aesthetic communities.

The *Lowell Offering* uses regional identity to theorize the relationship between women’s work and industrial labor, framing industrial labor as domestic labor. As domestic labor is invisible, industrial labor also becomes invisible when it is performed by women. Gender is performative, and the places where those performances play out affect their interpretations.\(^29\) The labor of gender performance plays out differently in the different sites of the local factory system: the factory floor, the communal boarding houses where the female operatives slept and ate, and in the city’s streets, churches, and lecture halls. When the labor of gender performance (the labor of social reproduction) is overlaid with the labor of industrial production (the labor of production), the historical contingencies and interdependence of both systems emerge. The *Lowell Offering* theorizes this interplay in terms of regional identity.

The factory women reveal that gender is the key to this interplay, and that gender is a matter of the systematic erasure of labor, a systematic erasure that entails narrowly defined

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\(^{29}\) See Judith Butler for more on the performative aspects of gender.
notions of what counts as work. Judith Ranta argues that factory literature has been unduly ignored, due to the gender of the authors: “Since nearly half of the factory literature was written by women,” she writes, “it has suffered from the neglect too often associated with women’s writing” (x). Ranta sees the project of recovering writing by factory women as part of the recuperative project of piecing together subjectivities that had been erased by twentieth-century projects of canonization. Extending Ranta’s important work of cataloguing the writing of women who worked in the factories, we should note that the writing by those factory workers presents curated subject positions that are far from transparent. The “mill girls” are the outcome of many forces, and the crafting of that subject relies on its own erasures.

Though the *Lowell Offering* represents an important instance of public womanhood, the gendered division of labor has never been clear-cut. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich’s scholarship on seventeenth- and eighteenth-century New England shows that the gendered division of labor did not in all cases prevent women from participating in the local economy. The division of labor in eighteenth-century New England provides a helpful context for the nineteenth-century events that this chapter examines. Especially salient are instances when that division breaks down. According to Ulrich, in early New England a woman could assume her husband’s duties, acting as his surrogate, a “deputy husband,” in times of necessity. Determining that a given situation is a “time of necessity” therefore is a precondition for deputy husbandry. Ulrich offers a few examples of the times that necessitated women’s assumption of their husbands’ roles. She notes that women might assume some of their husband’s duties if those men’s occupations required that they travel far from home, as in whaling expeditions or in times of war. Ulrich also notes that women act as deputy husbands when illness or disability prevented their husbands from performing their normal duties. This less-than-clearly defined division of labor helps us to
recognize that the display of public womanhood in the *Lowell Offering* was, by comparison, widespread and institutionalized.

The *Lowell Offering* used New England as a frame of common reference among writers and readers, mill workers and the broader public. In a precarious social and economic situation, the journal evokes New England as a stable signifier. The women factory workers had come to Lowell from far-flung, often rural, areas, and “New England” emerged in their writing as a common reference point. It served as an origin story. As “the folkways of the family farm and rural community” seemed to be “receding fast for them into the realm of memory and legend” (Cook 70), a magazine like the *Lowell Offering* served as a hedge against obliteration. The writing would preserve depictions of New England as it had been in the early days of industrialism. The writing would also preserve memories of the women’s time in the factories. The mill girls draw upon pre-existing models of New England while revising those models in accordance with their current circumstances.

These models were set by authors like Lydia Maria Child, whose conduct manuals and other writing played an important role in characterizing Yankee womanhood and domesticity. The mill girls work to adapt and revise these models. Conforti argues, “Child domesticated Yankee character traits; she transported Yankeeness into the household, where it now became the ideological companion and, indeed, rival of Yankeeness in the marketplace (165). The writers of the *Lowell Offering* vacillated between domestic Yankee femininity and the profit-minded Yankee acquisitiveness that preceded Child’s influence. Within this context the mill girls wrote to impress upon readers their identification with they and their region’s conventional, domestic, and rural origins.
Because the space of leisure had heretofore been dominated by the middle class, the *Lowell Offering* draws on tropes of middle-class leisure to draw the line between labor and leisure. In this way, the *Lowell Offering* is similar to other gift books and periodicals, such as *Godey's Lady Book*. The journal puts into writing working-class leisure. So, the leisure of the women stands out because of how wage-labor has measured and defined leisure, setting up a conceptual space of "non-work" that the journal fills. The *Lowell Offering* offers a view of nineteenth-century region formation at work. Mass-produced print pastimes like the *Lowell Offering* served to orient users in relation to a fantasy of the region’s leisure as being detached from the industrial developments that brought it about. The *Lowell Offering* testifies regarding New England leisure. It does this by recording the leisure activities of women who have taken pains to characterize themselves as "Yankee" New Englanders. It also does this because of how starkly leisure stands out against the background of the industrial wage labor of the mills.

The literary narratives of the mill girls construct a regional past that is preindustrial. These writings are not declension narratives bemoaning the effects of industrialism; neither do the texts uncritically hail industrial development. Rather, the *Lowell Offering* finds room for leisure in the context of the authors’ industrial labor and then situates an idealized version of New England within that conceptual realm of leisure. The establishment of New England’s industrial economic base and the fantasy of Old New England that enabled industrialism required that the mill girls be seen as more than industrial laborers. As industrial capitalism remapped nineteenth-century life, people needed to learn how to navigate sites of labor and leisure and how to engage the different modes of sociality that the different sites demanded.\(^30\) The subject position of “worker” was insufficient once the workers left the factory at the end of each day; in

\(^30\) See Sylvia Cook’s *Working Women, Literary Ladies*. 
their time away from the factory floor, the writers of the *Lowell Offering* asserted femininity and intellect, in contrast to their factory work, as regionally representative.

The writing in the *Lowell Offering*, while testifying to the mill girls’ femininity and intellect, needed not to challenge the assumptions of industrial capitalism. As the mill girls produce leisure from within the context of labor, “literature” supposedly does not comment on labor. The editorial policies of the *Lowell Offering* forbade divisive topics and positioned divisive writing in opposition to “Literature.” The editors of the *Lowell Offering* asserted in the inaugural issue that they “bring their Offering to the shrine of Literature; believing that it will be acceptable to those who wait there” (*Lowell Offering*, October 2 1840), while simultaneously stipulating that “Communications of a sectarian character, in either religion or politics, are inadmissible” (*Lowell Offering* 16). By simultaneously appealing to “Literature” and disavowing political and religious sectarianism, the *Lowell Offering* positions literature as a non-sectarian pursuit. Like the “laughable” and “amusing” games of the same era, the magazine contends that non-politically efficacious literature can transcend the context of the mill.

Other writers of the time disagreed. In 1846, at the end of the *Lowell Offering*’s five-year run, labor reformer Sarah Bagley published a post-mortem assessment in *The Voice of Industry*, “Organ of the New England Workingmen’s Association”: “Led on by the fatal error of neutrality, it has neglected the operative as a working being….the very position of the Offering as a factory girls’ magazine, precludes the possibilities of neutrality” (Sarah Bagley, qtd. in Eisler 40). Bagley’s critique does more than comment on a failed business model; it argues that a “factory girls’ magazine” cannot attain neutrality; for factory girls, literary endeavors are political endeavors. To pretend to neutrality, Bagley contends, is both neglectful and delusional.
Though pretending to neutrality might have been the magazine’s “fatal error,” the fantasy of pure leisure nonetheless did real cultural work. The aesthetic subjectivity taken on by the *Lowell Offering* emerges as an attempt at identification and belonging in an industrializing region straining to define itself as a site of idealized leisure. By using the supposedly a-political journal to represent themselves, the mill girls imagine a non-sectarian regional subjectivity, a conflict-free New England.

This chapter’s second half will explore through close readings some specific instances of the *Lowell Offering*’s treatment of regional leisure. First, though, I’d like to step back for a moment to show how this publication came to be. The *Lowell Offering* is described as having emerged from local “improvement circles” attended by factory women. Rev. Abel Charles Thomas (1807-1880) of the First Universalist Church in Lowell is credited as one of the *Lowell Offering*’s founders and editors (Ranta, Morgan): “The Universalist and other ministers were concerned about the educational and spiritual development of these women, living at a great distance from their families,” writes John C. Morgan. “The ‘mill girls’ had themselves begun an ‘Improvement Circle’ in 1837 as a discussion group and to read their own compositions to each other. In 1839 Thomas and Thayer organized groups on this pattern in their churches, encouraged the women to write, and edited and corrected their work” (J. Morgan). From this group, the *Lowell Offering* would emerge.

In its initial conception, the *Lowell Offering* was to feature writing from male and female factory workers; the call for papers in the first issue asks for writing from people of both genders. After the success of the first issue, however, the publication continued on, publishing writing only by women. At first the editors thought that the economic class and profession of the authors would be the selling point, but gender emerged as the key element of the authors’ demographics.
Over time, the gender of the authors was displayed more prominently in the journal. An image of a woman holding a book appeared on the cover, while the factory looms in the background. In time, runs of individual issues were collected into several bound volumes. The gender of the authorship had become a selling point.

The Lowell mills relied on the labor of women for a number of reasons. “Anthropologist Elizabeth Barber argues persuasively that textile making became associated with women at least in part because it is compatible with the historically omnipresent responsibility for child-herding and with the care of the sick” (Maines 20-1). Nancy Zaroulis argues that the demographics of the workforce in the early years of the Lowell mills were the result of pragmatic decisions by the corporations, a matter of finding an available workforce: “The corporations hired women rather than men because labor—manpower—was scarce in New England at that time. But if there were not many men available for hire, there were many ‘solitary’ women, never married, or deserted by their husbands, or widowed, whose presence was tolerated in the home of some relative in return for endless and unpaid domestic service” (105-6). By hiring this workforce of unmarried women, who would in theory rather earn wages than persist uncompensated in their domestic labor, the corporations would pay a lower wage than they would have paid to men.31

Prior to women’s going to work in the mills, corporations would outsource production tasks to local homes, where families—including women and children—would perform work. This phenomenon, which Thomas Dublin names “rural outwork,” shows how women’s work can be ascribed to men, through those men’s roles as heads of household; often performed part-time, this work happened at home but produced products sold in markets: “The fact that fathers or

31 Zaroulis notes the wage disparity: “In the 1824 wage table for the Merrimack Company, women’s pay ranged from $2.25 to $4.00 per week. Men were paid from $4.50 to $12.00 per week. Thus, the lowest-paid man earned more than the highest-paid woman” (106).
husbands of female outworkers typically were credited with the proceeds of their labors meant that outwork meshed well with the power dynamics of patriarchal farming families…. outwork simultaneously propped up the traditional family farm economy while preparing the way for the individual wage economy that would eventually replace it” (Transforming Women’s Work 30).

As New England transitioned into an individual wage economy, both of these economic arrangements maintained some form of traditional gender roles to extract undervalued labor from women. While the Lowell Offering’s writers assert ties to a traditional, rural New England, outwork served as a precursor that gradually integrated factories into the regional economy by using gender difference as a means of devaluing women’s work.

Unlike rural outwork, the Waltham-Lowell factory system required that workers relocate away from home, and those workers’ leisure time therefore became conspicuous. In order to assert the writers’ status as New England women, the Lowell Offering addresses no fewer than four forms of workers’ leisure: the weekend and evening hours, moments of daydreaming during the workday, the future time of retirement from the mills, and the past time of childhood before entering the mills. These descriptions argue for the persistence and propriety of the workers’ leisure activities. Though evening is “the time which she feels to be exclusively her own” the mill girl’s evening hours are filled with obligations:

Thus the day passes on, and evening comes; the time which she feels to be exclusively her own. How much is done in the three short hours from seven to ten o’clock. She has a new dress to finish; a call to make on some distant corporation; a meeting to attend; there is a lecture or a concert at some one of the public halls, and the attendance will be thin if she and her associates are not present; or, if nothing more imperative demands her time, she takes a stroll through the street or
to the river with some of her mates, or sits down at home to peruse a new book. At
ten o’clock all is still for the night.

The clang of the early bell awakes her to another day, very nearly the
counterpart of the one which preceded it. (qtd. in Eisler 76)

The hours after work contain “imperative demands,” and the worker is never idle, always active
in social obligations. Like Leslie’s guide to children’s games, the Lowell Offering attests to
occupations that fill the workers’ play hours.

Another entry in the journal describes a day’s work, but in the midst of that workday,
describes the worker in brief moments of harmless daydreaming, a holdover from the
rejuvenating weekend:

Look at her as she commences her weekly task. The rest of the sabbath has made
her heart and her step light, and she is early at her accustomed place, awaiting the
starting of the machinery. Every thing having been cleaned and neatly arranged on
the Saturday night, she has less to occupy her on Monday than on other days; and
you may see her leaning from the window to watch the glitter of the sunrise on the
water, or looking away at the distant forests and fields, while memory wanders to
her beloved country home; or, it may be that she is conversing with a sister-
laborer near; returning at regular intervals to see that her work is in order.” (qtd. in
Eisler 75)

These moments of leisure provide a lifeline back to memories of the worker’s home in rural New
England. By emphasizing the worker’s view of “water…forests and fields” and the associations
of home that those sights evoke, the article fills urban leisure time—even the flashes of unofficial
leisure that arise during work hours—with imagery of Old New England. These aspects of the
writing promote an identity that remains connected to domestic, rural New England, in spite of the worker’s current position in an urban factory.

In order for that position in the factory to remain secondary to the worker’s “beloved country home,” employment in the mills needs to be temporary. Accordingly, the *Lowell Offering* consistently argues that the worker’s tenure in the factory will be short-term. An 1845 sketch entitled “A Week in the Mill,” for example, points to the duration of factory work as a factor of that work’s tolerability: “Few would wish to spend a whole life in a factory,” writes an operative, “and few are discontented who do thus seek a subsistence for a term of months or years” (qtd. in Eisler 77). By describing the factory work as transient and impermanent, the journal resists grounding the authors’ identities in their industrial labor. Rather, the journal lodges the source of subjectivity in the personalities of the women themselves, and the culture of the New England towns they left but will presumably return to. These personalities, and an attachment to the traditional identification with a preindustrial New England, are expressed through this publication.

The temporary nature of factory work gives it a lasting power. These texts convey the experience of everyday life for operatives working in the mills; their labor there is no different than the work of other unskilled laborers. It is dull, nothing of note. But yet, it is temporary. They know that their time in the mills will come to a close within a couple of years. They are constantly calculating how much money they are earning; the economic ends justify the dreary, everyday means. And yet the mill girls argue for the value of their everyday experiences in the mills; repetitive labor provides a background against which glimmers of beauty may appear. The

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32 Though most of its material argues that the women’s time in the mills is temporary, the *Lowell Offering* also contains evidence of longer stays. One mill-girl character in Josephine Baker’s “A Second Peep at Factory Life” (1845) asserts, “I confess that I never did [hear of wages being raised], so long as I’ve worked in the mill, and that’s been these ten years” (qtd. in Eisler 80).
beauty is sometimes focused on being in the moment, noticing the shimmering water of the river, or the neatness of the quiet machinery. The texts are wistful so readers can be assured these women’s roots are elsewhere: back in their rural villages. But the writing also stresses a lack of idleness, and the peace that comes from being well prepared for a day’s work. The connection to Old New England together with the market value of the girls’ place at the mills affirms and produces a shared regional identity for both reader and author.

The Lowell factory girls present themselves as standard-bearers of a regional culture. As the women wrote to connect themselves and their readers to the preindustrial New England from their past, more arguments for the temporary nature of employment in the mills came in response to criticisms lodged in the press at the time. In an 1840 article in *The Harbinger*, reformer Orestes Brownson published an essay criticizing the New England factory system’s treatment of female workers. In particular, Brownson describes the operatives’ time in the mills as a threat to the women’s health and future marriageability:

> The bills of mortality in these factory villages are not striking, we admit, for the poor girls when they can toil no longer go home to die. The average life, working life we mean, of the girls that come to Lowell, for instance, from Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont, we have been assured, is only about three years. What becomes of them then? Few of them ever marry; fewer still ever return to their native places with reputations unimpaired. ‘She has worked in a Factory,’ is almost enough to damn to infamy the most worthy and virtuous girl. (Brownson)

Brownson’s critique sees the factories as a threat to the social reproduction of the region. In this view, factory labor reduces “home” to a place “to die.” The *Lowell Offering* responded to Brownson in December 1840. The response emphasizes the mill girls’ New England subjectivity:
“Whom has Mr. Brownson slandered?…girls who generally come from quiet country homes, where their minds and manners have been formed under the eyes of the worthy sons of the Pilgrims, and their virtuous partners, and who return again to become the wives of the free intelligent yeomanry of New England and the mothers of quite a proportion of our future republicans. Think, for a moment, how many of the next generation are to spring from mothers doomed to infamy!” (A Factory Girl, “Factory Girls,” Lowell Offering, December 1840).

The author of “Factory Girls” goes on to characterizes New England as “money loving” and argues that, for “Yankee girls,” the potential monetary gains of factory work outweigh toil and prejudice:

We are under restraints, but they are voluntarily assumed; and we are at liberty to withdraw from them, whenever they becoming galling or irksome. Neither have I ever discovered that any restraints were imposed upon us but those which were necessary for the peace and comfort of the whole, and for the promotion of the design for which we are collected, namely, to get money, as much of it and as fast as we can; and it is because our toil is so unremitting, that the wages of factory girls are higher than those of females engaged in most other occupations. It is these wages which, in spite of toil, restraint, discomfort, and prejudice, have drawn so many worthy, virtuous, intelligent, and well-educated girls to Lowell, and other factories; and it is the wages which are in great degree to decide the characters of the factory girls as a class.

Mr. Brownson may rail as much as he pleases against the real injustice of capitalists against operatives, and we will bid him God speed, if he will but keep truth and common sense upon his side. Still, the avails of factory labor are now
greater than those of many domestics, seamstresses, and school-teachers; and strange would it be, if in money-loving New England, one of the most lucrative female employments should be rejected because it is toilsome, or because some people are prejudiced against it. Yankee girls have too much independence for that. (A Factory Girl, “Factory Girls,” Lowell Offering, December 1840)

The author does not cite poverty or economic necessity as the force driving young women to work in the mills. The girls’ love of money—rather than their want for money—inspires them to travel to Lowell to work. Further, the girls’ love of money is not an individual trait, but a regional trait, a characteristic of independent “Yankee girls” who enter into industrial labor from a stance of “independence” rather than conscription. In “money-loving New England,” regional affiliation requires and justifies affective attachment to money.

In her argument against Brownson, the Factory Girl suggests that his problem is that he fails to see that the girls are representative New England subjects. The factory girls are not anomalous outliers, but standard-bearers of a regional culture. To argue against the factory girls’ work in the factory is to blame “Yankee girls” for behaving like Yankees. According to the Factory Girl, Brownson has misunderstood how social reproduction—defined according to genealogy, which the writer maps onto the region—works in New England, by suggesting that young women’s work in the factories renders those women unfit for marriage.

The Factory Girl’s argument hinges on the assumption that Brownson’s claims have slandered a swath of the population, including women who will “return again to become the wives of the free intelligent yeomanry of New England and the mothers of quite a proportion of our future republicans.” She cites the operatives’ upbringing as the source of their attitudes. They are “girls who generally come from quiet country homes, where their minds and manners have
been formed under the eyes of the worthy sons of the Pilgrims, and their virtuous partners,” and who “return again” to that scene of their upbringing in new roles as wives and mothers. While Brownson sees the chain of the matrimonially underwritten social structure being disrupted by the young women’s moving away from home to work in the factories, the Factory Girl argues that the workers’ employment in the factories confirms their New England-ness.33 Who they are guides what they choose to do; what they choose to do does not undermine who they are. The Yankee-girl-as-subject pre-exists her work in the factories, and to become a factory girl is a natural path for Yankee girl.

By defining “money-loving” as a “New England” trait, the Factory Girl justifies factory work as a regionally sanctioned pursuit of profit. By writing mill girls into a narrative of the ongoing successful maintenance of New England-ness, the Factory Girl sketches a moral-historical genealogy of New England ethos. Worthy, virtuous, free, intelligent, republican, well educated, money-loving, and independent: these traits the author traces back to the Pilgrims, by way of the ongoing successful partnering of worthy and virtuous people who bear worthy and virtuous offspring.34 The “independence” of the factory girls puts them in a position to judge the fairness or unfairness of monetary compensation for their labor. The line between virtue and vice is weighed according to regional norms.

The Factory Girl must make this argument because by the region’s traditional norms, authentic, proper, preferred modes of social reproduction occur outside the newly planned factory cities. “Quiet country homes” are the symbolic site where New England’s social

33 For an analysis of this matrimonially underwritten social structure, see Gayle Rubin’s “The Traffic in Women: Notes on the ‘Political Economy’ of Sex.”
34 Defining New England as the home of the descendants of Pilgrims has a racializing effect, which becomes more marked as the century goes on. Chapter One examines how these assumptions flourished during the post-US-Civil-War reconstruction era, when the default New England subject is considered to be a white descendent of English settlers.
reproduction plays out. As labor and leisure become more sharply defined in opposition to one another, the quiet country home appears as a site of leisure, rather than the site of the amorphous labor-leisure of rural outwork and the home-production of textiles. The mill women, physically removed from the site of regional production, place their true selves there and present their purpose as rooted in the region’s affective attachments. Describing regional subjectivity and the rural home as distinct from, yet able to survive because of industrial production, *The Lowell Offering* promoted narratives of time and money well-spent on the social reproduction of the region, allowing both the authors and its users a part in the fantasy-making regional production requires.

In showing that they are subjects suffused with desires—for home, for uninterrupted leisure, for money—, not simply cogs in the industrial machine, the mill girls assert their femininity. In asserting their femininity, they humanize the working class and justify their being in the mills. This assertion perpetuates the bourgeois ideology of separate public and private spheres while also highlighting the performative aspects of gendered labor in a setting that strictly enforced binary gender roles. These binaries emerged in their strong form in the nineteenth century, with the so-called “cult of domesticity.” Though scholars have critiqued the idea of an autonomous “domestic” or private realm, the role of literature in the development of this fiction and the naturalizing of the notion of the bourgeois household remains important. The leisure periodical the Lowell women produced, asserting their aesthetic subjectivity, upholds these binaries, even while their labor in the mills upsets the same binaries. As an extension of this fiction, the *Lowell Offering* girds up the fantasy version of New England I have been exploring. The fantasy gathers force through the uneven distribution of economic and cultural capital across gender lines. The women participate in the region’s desire for bounded, protected
sites of leisure, and the *Lowell Offering* helps to enable the fantasy of a bounded de-industrialized region, the region as a site of consumption rather than production.

The Lowell mill girls distinguish leisure from labor, yet, as the mutually constitutive categories persist in bleeding into one another, participation in the mass-market economy requires wariness and recourse to a performative affective response. The desire for a simple relationship with leisure is evident in the pages of the *Lowell Offering*, as the magazine describes evening leisure time as perpetually under threat of intrusion by evening visitors seeking to sell goods to the women. We see this in an editorial from 1842, where to protect leisure time against intrusions of the market is to also protect one’s moral and sexual virtue.

We now allude to the importunities of evening visitors, such as pedlars, candy and newspaper boys, shoe-dealers, book-sellers, &c., &c., breaking in upon the only hours of leisure we can call our own, and proffering their articles with a pertinacity which will admit of no denial. That these evening salesmen are always unwelcome, we will not assert, but they are too often inclined to remain where they know they are considered a nuisance. And then they often forget, if they ever knew, the rules of politeness which should regulate all transient visitors. They deal about their hints, innuendoes, and low cunning, as though a factory boarding-house was what no boarding-house should ever be.

The remedy is entirely with the girls. Treat all of these comers with a politeness truly lady-like, when they appear as gentlemen, but let your manners change to stern formality when they forget that they are in the company of respectable females. (qtd. in Eisler 74)
The passage warns that “evening salesmen” might use “low cunning” to seek sexual encounters with the mill workers under the guise of selling goods. In this discourse, the unmarried women’s potential for sexuality makes them potential prostitutes. When the roles of buyer and seller are brought into the boarding house, the house becomes a potential brothel, “what no boarding-house should ever be.” There is no conceptual space for women’s sexuality outside of marriage or prostitution, if those women are to be ladies. The editorial demands that the girls draw a line between the world of the market and the world of their leisure. The entry of evening traders into the boarding-house threatens to erode the distinction between labor and leisure. Leisure emerges as a self-determined state, whose boundaries are enforced by recourse to manners; impropriety on the part of the traders is to be met with “stern formality” on the part of the women. Like Leslie’s and Child’s forfeits, the editorial instructs users on how to use affective response to navigate the mass market by staking out leisure as a protected site; becoming a consumer requires the performance of sentiment.

While the mill workers strove to keep leisure time distinct from the labor market, the *Lowell Offering*’s “A Second Peep at Factory Life” blurs the line between labor and leisure by following conventions that were used to describe the scenery of the White Mountains. By employing tourism language, the text re-emphasizes for the mill girls and their readers that theirs is an offering of leisure, in spite of their labor-filled days and the industrialization that created the space for this leisure publication. Dona Brown traces the characteristics of sublime scenery in the emergent tourist experience: “Terror, astonishment, and dizziness were the usual responses called forth by craggy peaks, abysses, and narrow passageways….The ‘beautiful’ referred specifically to scenes of symmetry, serenity, and grace, and was usually encountered only at lake scenes in the mountains. In general, the sublime held sway throughout the White Mountains” (Brown 50).
Despite the precision and efficiency of the mill’s machinery, which suggest, perhaps, the “symmetry” that Brown ascribes to the “beautiful,” the factory was no “lake scene in the mountains.” “A Second Peep at Factory Life” offers, instead, details that gesture at the immensity of the setting: muddy disorder and seemingly interminable sets of stairs that throw off-kilter the viewer’s sense of scale (and all of this, from only a “peep”). Just as scenic writing mass-produced the experience of encountering scenery, establishing New England as a setting where these experiences could happen, “A Second Peep at Factory Life” publicizes the experience of visiting the factory. The narrator of the virtual tour of the factory comes across as savvy and sure-minded. She offers sympathy for the uncomfortable visitor, sympathy rooted in her experience of the setting.

Now if you please we will go up to the next room, where the spinning is done. Here we have spinning jacks or jennies that dance merrily along whizzing and singing, as they spin out their “long yarns,” and it seems but pleasure to watch their movements; but it is hard work, and requires good health and much strength. Do not go too near, as we shall find that they do not understand the established rules of etiquette, and might unceremoniously knock us over. (78)

Here the narrator teases the naivety of the middle-class reader who understands “the established rules of etiquette” but not the danger of working close to the industrial machinery. The passage establishes the narrator’s facility in the rules of etiquette and life in the factory.

The narrative provides a virtual tour through the factory but cannot replicate the physical sensation of performing the labor of spinning. The Lowell Offering offers just a “peep” at factory life, and the pleasure of watching should not be conflated with the experience of doing. The

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35 This factory tour differs starkly from the tour in Melville’s “Maids of Tartarus.” Clearly, the maids in Melville’s story have little control over their circumstances.
passage does not outright dismiss the pleasure of watching the “spinning jacks and jennies,”—indeed, the clause “it seems but pleasure to watch their movements” asserts that the sight should evoke pleasure—but the narrator also asserts that the sensation of working the machines differs from merely watching the machines. The narrator, a mill girl, knows the limits of a leisure- and pleasure-based presentation of the work. Still, describing the factory using the conventions of tourism and travel writing expands on the conception of the Lowell Offering as a print object that affirms the region’s affective investments. Those investments in a fantasy of idealized leisure here produce a community of mill girls who alone know the labor side of what they present in their leisure text. For the women working the machines of the Lowell mills, their shared sense activity serves as the grounds upon which they can articulate their subjectivity.

Because the mill girls write about rural New England from memory, telling tales of the past, childhood becomes, in the Lowell Offering, a privileged perspective for understanding the region. Like the language of scenic tourism, narratives of childhood situated the Lowell Offering in a place of leisure, an ideal the industrializing region needed affirmed. Childhood took on an air of timelessness, as Lowell Offering writers also made use of a long heritage of literary and folkloric tropes, rooting their writing again in traditional, “authentic,” pre-industrial New England.

With some editorial encouragement, the contributors … produced valuable and detailed accounts of rural customs and legends, closely akin to the kind of New England lore that pervades the tales and romances of Nathaniel Hawthorne. … [T]he Offering’s authors produce accounts of their recent heritage that are affectionate, bemused, and often tender, although they are frequently recollections
of childhood rather than explorations of adult working women’s experiences in the two environments. (Cook 71)

In the accounts that Cook notes here, the writers of the *Lowell Offering* produce a particular version of the idea of “New England”: the site of local lore and legend that is mischievous yet ultimately harmless. Like *The Story of a Bad Boy*, these accounts describe New England as the site of childhood, and the leisure of childhood as a lens through which New England can be understood. Seen in light of my previous chapters, the *Lowell Offering* participates in a broader trend toward using the intersection of childhood and Old New England in response to the region’s industrialization. The narratives of regional childhood in the *Lowell Offering* affirm the leisure of childhood as providing region-defining access to folkways that were fading quickly from both individual and regional experience.

When problems prevent the rural home from standing in as an idealized touchstone of regional life, then an idealized childhood can step in to fulfill that function. In “Home,” a sketch from 1842, Mary Anne Spaulding describes her home as a once-blissful scene that had been ruined by “Intemperance.” Spaulding’s sketch divides “home” into two eras: “the days of my childhood, those happy, innocent days,” and the time after, once “the demon of darkness entered our abode of peace” (134). By positioning “Intemperance” as the antagonist to childhood, rather than the transition into the factory system (which forbade the employees from using alcohol), Spaulding’s piece suggests that the factories could potentially preserve childhood rather than threaten it. In “A Factory Girl’s Reverie” (1845), Elizabeth E. Turner likewise characterizes home as inaccessible. “O that I were a child again, and could wander in my little flower garden, and cull its choicest blossoms, and while away the hours in that bower, with cousin Rachel. But alas! that dear cousin has long since ceased to pluck the flowers, and they now bloom over her
grave. That garden is now cultivated by strangers’ hands. I fear they take but little care of those vines I loved to trail so well; and my bower has gone to decay. But what is that to me? I shall never spend the sweet hours there again” (136). Turner’s narrator, like Spaulding’s, stakes out childhood as an idealized and carefree time of leisure that cannot be returned to. In its opening lines, “A Factory Girl’s Reverie” narrates the circumstances under which the text was written. The “Reverie” establishes a framework of immediate leisure, within which a narrative of the idealized leisure of childhood can be lodged: “’Tis evening. The glorious sun has sunk behind the western horizon….The prattle of playful children is hushed. The smith’s hammer is no more heard upon the anvil” (136). This framing device confirms that the leisure-time of the author remains a focus of the text. The sketch narrates not just a childhood home, but the relationship between the factory and that idea of home, a relationship which unfolds within the evening hours, after work in the factory.

While the Lowell Offering creates its version of the region by posing labor in terms of leisure, other observers measure the leisure magazine’s impact in terms of labor output. For all its emphasis on being a leisure publication, its use of leisure-writing conventions, the writers’ appeal on behalf of their leisure (non-market) time, and their need to present themselves as still rooted in rural, domestic, pre-industrial New England, other observers of the Lowell mill girls and the Lowell Offering found value in the magazine for its link to increased labor productivity. Commentary on the Lowell Offering argued that writing the magazine made the women better factory workers, able to survive twelve-hour workdays. In 1844, English social theorist Harriet Martineau urged Charles Knight to publish excerpts from the Lowell Offering in London, in a collection entitled Mind Among the Spindles: A Selection from The Lowell Offering. A
Knight, the editor, describes in the introduction how the effects of authorship seep into the workplace:

They have raised themselves out of the sphere of the partial and the temporary into the broad expanse of the universal and the eternal. During their twelve hours of daily labour, when there were easy but automatic services to perform, waiting upon a machine—with that slight degree of skill which no machine can ever attain—for the repair of the accidents of its unvarying progress, they may, without a neglect of their duty, have been elevating their minds in the scale of being by cheerful lookings-out upon nature, by pleasant recollections of books, by imaginary converse with the just and wise who have lived before them, by consoling reflections upon the infinite goodness and wisdom which regulates this world, so unintelligible without such a dependence. These habits have given them cheerfulness and freedom amidst their uninterrupted toils. We see no repinings against their twelve hours’ labour, for it has had its solace. Even during the low wages of 1842, which they mention without complaint, the same cultivation goes on; ‘The Lowell Offering’ is still produced. To us of England these things ought to be encouraging. (xiv-xv)

Knight, like Orestes Brownson, draws directly from the Lowell Offering’s article “The Pleasures of Factory Life”; but while Brownson undermined those pleasures by citing economic necessity as the force driving women to work in the mills, Knight takes the article at face value, assigning to the workers a cheerfulness rooted in habits of intellectual inquiry. These habits, according to Knight, provide leisure of such high quality that it counterbalances and permeates the workday as defined by wage labor. Arguments like these threaten to erase labor’s effects on workers by
suggesting that the devaluing of women’s domestic labor should be extended into those women’s industrial work, so long as displays of cheerfulness persist.

While the *Lowell Offering* circulated arguments that its employees worked by their own free will, industrialization depended upon an enslaved labor force. The fantasy employed in New England’s region formation also gathers force from a racialized regional identity, and the *Lowell Offering* takes pains to characterize the female operatives as native-born New Englanders. The "real" New England, for the mill girls, it seems, is the territory of white people—though there are exceptions to this rule, as in the writing of Betsey Chamberlain, a mill-worker of native descent who contributed some of the *Lowell Offering*’s liveliest prose. Not many years after the *Lowell Offering*’s final issue in 1845, the labor landscape began changing dramatically. Benita Eisler describes the shift in demographics that occurred during the 1850s:

Whether they left the mills for health or husbands, in protest, or with the certainty of better jobs elsewhere, by the beginning of the Civil War the presence of the Yankee farm girls was mere memory. Of 7,000 women operatives in 1836, less than 4 percent of them had been foreign-born. By 1860, 61.8 percent of Lowell’s work force were immigrants, almost half of whom were Irish. The first generation of Lowell mill girls was also the last WASP labor force in America. (29)

In the time of the *Lowell Offering*’s publication, though, the mill population was still largely comprised of “Yankee farm girls” who processed cotton picked by an enslaved labor force in the US South. Any discussion of nineteenth-century leisure/labor unfolds under the shadow of slavery. Slavery is always the story; some texts tell that story by omission. The *Lowell Offering* tells that story in part by equating “real” New England with whiteness, while ignoring the fact that it exists as a product of the labor of enslaved people of color. Some contemporary critics of
the Lowell factory system equated the mill labor with slavery: “Is this freedom? To our minds it is slavery quite as real as any in Turkey or Carolina. It matters little as to the fact of slavery, whether the slave be compelled to his tasks by the whip of the overseer or the wages of the Lowell Corporations. In either case it is not his own free will, leading him to work, but an outward necessity that puts free will out of the question” (“Review”). The Lowell Offering, contending that the Lowell workers were there voluntarily, in effect omitted the subject of race and slavery from its texts. The Lowell Offering writers contributed to a racialized regional identity, thus continuing the publication’s role in affirming the emotional investments of the culture as distinct from the enslaved labor that produced it. By omitting slavery and race from the magazine’s pages, the Lowell Offering effaced industrialism’s dependence on slavery in much the same way that it effaced industrialism from New England regional identity. New England emerges as a pain-free fantasy, whose messy contingencies are absorbed by the magazine’s users as a matter of taste.

This chapter has argued that the Lowell Offering, a literary magazine written by women working in the Lowell textile mills, constructs regional leisure from the setting of industrial labor. The Waltham-Lowell factory system challenged the traditional division of labor while institutionalizing binary gender categories in terms of wages. Likewise, the Lowell Offering simultaneously upheld and challenged traditional gender roles, using the idea of “New England” for rhetorical leverage in both cases. By structuring the leisure hours of women working in the factories and using New England as the grounds upon which it waged its arguments, the Lowell Offering eased the region’s transition into industrial capitalism.
EPILOGUE

The question of how a region could develop into a sort of fantasy world, a product as much as a place, came to me in Salem Massachusetts, during the year I lived on Derby Street, between the Custom House and the House of Seven Gables. Nathaniel Hawthorne made these places famous, the first in the preface to *The Scarlet Letter* and the second in the eponymous novel. (The house was moved to Derby Street in the twentieth century and renovated). These two buildings had become tourist destinations, cultural landmarks, because of their roles in Nathaniel Hawthorne's books. Visitors wanted the chance to count the gables for themselves, to corroborate the facts of Hawthorne’s fiction, so as to more thoroughly feel themselves a part of his world.

October in Salem was a nightmare. The city's placement on a peninsula left only a narrow corridor in and out of the city, and the road was clogged with traffic the entire month. People drove for hours to see Salem in October. If the city's nineteenth-century legacy is its connection to Nathaniel Hawthorne, that legacy is built on the backs of witches. The city's nickname is the “Witch City,” an allusion to the Salem witch trials of the 1690s. These trials have served as a sort of ongoing economic engine for the city. Salem banks on nostalgia, even the grisly sort that comes from executions. Witch-themed key-chains, t-shirts and tchotchkes line the windows of the city’s shops. The Salem Witch Museum draws in dozens of visitors every day. The city’s value lies in its association with the past, a past that the city continues to reinvent in conversation with the ebb and flow of tourists. The reprocessing of New England’s local history has been cyclical and ongoing, remediating local lore in time for anniversaries of important events, firing up again every fall.

History is made through ignoring and forgetting as much as through noticing and remembering. As I sat in Salem’s evening traffic on my way home from work, I saw a crowd on
the sidewalk, gathered around the guide of a candlelit ghost tour, in a long black dress, who was gesturing toward a brick building. A homeless man lay sprawled across the steps, sleeping at the guide’s feet. The crowd looked past him to imagine the building’s past, narrative ghosts overlaid upon the inconvenient body. The crowd had paid for Old New England, and, accordingly, that’s what they were looking for.
REFERENCES


