

the popular culture of the 'middle class'. The magazines were the key literary form in that cultural universe; its metaphoric centers were the 'self-made' entrepreneur and the 'domestic' household. The dime novels were part of the popular culture of the 'producing classes', a plebian culture whose metaphoric centers of gravity were the 'honest mechanic' and the virtuous 'working-girl'. Indeed, this is how they were seen in that 'middle-class' discourse and practice that sought to reform the culture and reading of the 'lower classes', to which I turn in the next chapter.

4

The Uses of Literacy: Class, Culture, and Dime Novel Controversies

The testimonies of social observers, reformers, labor leaders and workers themselves about the reading of cheap fiction were all to some extent conditioned by an extensive controversy over dime novels and working-class reading. The 'fiction question' — the debates, moral panics, and attempts to regulate cultural production that marked the nineteenth-century reaction to the flood of cheap stories and the marked increase in working-class reading — did not have the material significance of struggles over the eight-hour day, higher wages, workers' control of production processes, or union recognition. Nevertheless, together with struggles over sports and recreations, over drinking and the saloon, over living spaces and public parks, and over the celebration of festivals and public holidays — a set of struggles which historians of working-class leisure and middle-class reform have recently begun to reconstruct and interpret¹ — it marked a social conflict over the relations between the dominant genteel culture, the relatively autonomous and 'foreign' working class cultures, and the new commercial culture, the new 'mass culture'. In this chapter, I want to look briefly at three aspects of the 'fiction question': first, at the debates among librarians and surrounding the public library; second, at the attempts, particularly those of Anthony Comstock, to orchestrate a moral panic about sensational fiction and to use the powers of the state against dime novels; and third, at the attitudes toward cheap stories of leading cultural figures, with particular attention to the mixed attitudes of the *Atlantic Monthly*, a central periodical of the genteel culture. By situating these responses to workers' use of literacy within the larger debates about and changes within working-class culture, I hope to emphasize the separation between genteel and sensational cultures in the nineteenth century, the growing

divide between the cultures of America's classes.

The establishment of public libraries in industrial communities throughout the late nineteenth century made the library a contested terrain, a ground on which issues of class access to information and recreation and of class control of that information and recreation were fought out. Recent library history (see particularly Garrison 1979 and Geller 1984) and working-class history have demonstrated the ways the public library was seen by the capitalists who endowed it and the political leaders who subsidized it as a way of extending genteel culture to workers and particularly to the children of workers. 'Every book that the public library circulates helps to make . . . railroad rioters impossible,' *Library Journal* editorialized after the 1877 railroad strikes (Garrison 1979, 43). Daniel Walkowitz (1978, 187) notes that as part of the paternalistic culture in the company town of Cohoes, New York, 'management built a reading and lecture room with a "well-selected" library for its operatives'; and Leon Fink (1983, 70) points out that in Rutland, Vermont, 'the list of women library commissioners . . . provides as good an index as any to the best families in town.' In Pittsburgh and Homestead, the library was seen as a tool of socialization and social control, shaping habits and values, and regulating reading and recreation. Francis Couvares (1984, 112) cites a characteristic statement of the attitudes of public library boards and library staff: 'If it is proper for the library to furnish books for the people, it is right that they should be good books. If the library has the right to control the character of the reading, it has a right to direct the reader to the desired information.'

This desire to reform and direct working-class reading is a main thread in the discussions of public libraries in the Federal Bureau of Education's 1876 report on public libraries. Arguing for the careful regulation of library selection, J.P. Quincy cites the work of William Kite, a Germantown, Pennsylvania librarian who excluded all fiction. Kite writes, 'As to the question of inducing readers to substitute wholesome reading for fiction, there is no great difficulty about it. It requires a willingness on the part of the caretakers to assume the labor of leading their tastes for a time. A very considerable number of the frequenters of our library are factory girls, the class most disposed to seek amusement in novels and peculiarly liable to be injured by their false pictures of life' (394). William Fletcher, on the other hand, writing on 'public libraries in manufacturing communities', argues that 'in avoiding the Scylla of unlimited trash, the

Charybdis of too high a standard must be equally steered clear of. Those who deprecate the free supply of such fictitious works as the public demands, are generally in favor of the entire exclusion of fiction of a sensational cast, a course which will unavoidably result in alienating from the library the very class most needing its beneficial influence' (410). That class was, of course, factory workers, and like Quincy, Fletcher cites testimony from a factory town librarian, who writes that 'the patrons of the library are mainly operatives, who, after a day of toil, require reading largely of a light character, as a means of relaxation; hence, a large part of our books are of the best class of fiction. The average factory girl takes amazingly to Mary J. Holmes, Marion Harland and the like, while many of the men read Irving, Scott, Dickens and Thackeray' (404n). This struggle between what Dee Garrison has called the 'censorship model' and the 'consumership model' of the library dominates the period, and it is fiction reading that has the most controversial character. I will not go into this fiction debate in any detail; this has been done exhaustively by Esther Jane Carrier (1965). Moreover, all sides of the debate agreed on at least one point: that dime novels, story papers, and the cheap libraries should be excluded from the library. As Samuel Green (1879, 7), the Worcester, Massachusetts librarian who defended the inclusion of popular, that is genteel, fiction in the libraries, said to the American Library Association: 'I presume most of the ladies and gentlemen here present would consider it unnecessary to start the unintelligent reader even, with books of so low a grade. Dime novels be it understood are not immoral. The objection to them is that they are bloody and very exciting.' J.P. Quincy goes further: 'Nobody will deny that an occasional dime novel may be morally harmless to the middle-aged mechanic at the close of his day of honest work. He is amused at the lurid pictures of the every-day world he knows so well, takes care to put the book out of the way of his children, and finds himself none the worse for his laugh over the bloody business of the villain and the impossible amours of the heroine.' However, their effects on young people are demonstrated by Jesse Pomeroy, the boy murderer, who admitted that 'he had always been a great reader of blood and thunder stories, having read probably sixty "dime novels", all treating of scalping and deeds of violence. The boy said that he had no doubt that the reading of those books had a great deal to do with his course, and he would advise all boys to leave them alone.' 'If it is held,' Quincy concludes, 'to be the

duty of the State to supply boys and girls with dime novels, and the business of the schools to tax the people that they may be taught to read them, public education is not quite as defensible as many persons have supposed' (U.S. Bureau of Education 1876, 396).

Three points ought to be noted about this controversy. First, as Dee Garrison (1976, 71) has pointed out, the controversy over fiction focused on a moral boundary, not an aesthetic one. No aesthetic ideologies were mobilized against sensational fiction; they were stigmatized either as 'immoral' or as a 'demoralizing' influence. Second, those who favored including fiction in the library were aiming at a reformation of working-class reading, away from sensational fiction and toward the genteel, 'middle-brow' popular reading. And, third, much of the animus directed against dime novels resulted from the fact that they were the direct and successful competitors of the public libraries for the loyalties of workers. As Couvares (1984, 116) notes of Pittsburgh, 'librarians found extension work among mill men frankly discouraging.' Mill workers were suspicious of Carnegie's library, and in 1890, in Allegheny, 'workingmen and their representatives ... raised serious questions about who would control the library which Carnegie had offered the city.' Throughout the period, workers established their own union libraries: an example is the Miner's Union Library established in 1877 in Virginia City, Nevada. It was, according to Richard Lingensfelter (1974, 53), historian of the hardrock miners, 'for many years ... the largest library in the state. The books were selected by a board of five directors elected by the union. They bought only those books that would be widely read — novels, romances, travels, and elementary texts on mechanics and physics.'²

Whereas the library debate represented a conflict within the practices of a semi-official but essentially voluntary and non-coercive ideological apparatus, the second struggle over dime novels and workers' reading, the moral panic associated with the name of Anthony Comstock, represented a more immediate and direct involvement of state apparatuses. Anthony Comstock was a young 'reformer' who, with the financial backing of New York patricians, established a Society for the Suppression of Vice, a quasi-legal organization to campaign against immoral and obscene books and materials. It lobbied for the successful enactment of the 1873 'Comstock law' prohibiting the mailing of obscene, indecent and vulgar material; and Comstock himself became a special agent of the Post Office Department to enforce

the law. Part of his campaign was directed against dime novels and story papers; he arrested the editor of *Fireside Companion*, a family story paper, for publishing obscene matter in 1872, and 'in the mid-1880s he successfully prosecuted book dealers for selling "criminal story papers" and "stories of bloodshed and crime"'.³ In his 1883 account of his struggles, *Traps for the Young*, he writes that 'the editor of the blood-and-thunder story papers, half-dime novels, and cheap stories of crime ... [is] willingly or unwillingly, [among] Satan's efficient agents to advance his kingdom by destroying the young' (Comstock, 1882, 242). His chapter on half-dime novels and story papers is an account of the boys and girls who have turned to crime as a result of their vicious reading; it is, as Robert Bremner (1967, xv) observes, written in much the same style as the half-dime novels themselves. The atmosphere created by Comstock and his supporters was such as to lead to the introduction of a bill into the New York Assembly in 1883 which would have deemed:

Any person who shall sell, loan, or give to any minor under sixteen years of age any dime novel or book of fiction, without first obtaining the written consent of the parent or guardian of such minor, ... guilty of a misdemeanor, punishable by imprisonment or by a fine of not exceeding \$50 (Carrier 1965, 214).

The bill was not passed, but in 1886 the Massachusetts legislature passed a bill that 'forbade the sale to minors of books or magazines featuring "criminal news, police reports, or accounts of criminal deeds, or pictures and stories of lust and crime"' (Boyer 1968, 11).

The importance of such sensational incidents can be easily exaggerated, however. That there was a moral panic in the late 1870s and early 1880s about sensational fiction seems clear: Comstock's name has come to symbolize vice crusading. But the precise meaning of this moral panic is less clear: was it an important and symptomatic cultural struggle, or merely a colorful but idiosyncratic incident? The careers of Anthony Comstock and other vice ideologues can not be taken as fully representative of American culture; nevertheless, one should recall that the members and supporters of the vice societies were bastions of patrician and bourgeois culture, and that the vice society campaigns were part of the larger philanthropic activities of genteel reformers (Boyer 1968, 5-15). And though the vice society campaigns were primarily aimed at pornography and crime

publications like the *Police Gazette*, its effects were felt by the publishers of sensational fiction both directly, as in the case of the dime novels that heroized outlaws (in part two, I will look at the case of the tales of Jesse and Frank James which Frank Tousey published in his Five Cent Wide Awake Library), and indirectly.

The third aspect of this struggle over dime novels and working class reading is the more properly ideological debate, the statements by traditional intellectuals about this emerging culture industry. As an index to these attitudes, I will look at the responses to cheap literature in the *Atlantic Monthly*, perhaps the leading genteel cultural arbiter. Throughout the late nineteenth century, contributors to the *Atlantic Monthly* treated the issues of dime novel reading and 'lower class' reading interchangeably, as they debated its effects, wondering whether dime novel reading was better than no reading at all.

Just as the *North American Review* had noted the publishing innovation of Beadle's dime books,⁴ so the emergence of the cheap libraries in the mid-1870s drew a response from the *Atlantic Monthly*; a correspondent to the 'Contributors' Club' of November 1877 attacked 'this New York literary tramp', Norman Munro, publisher of the *Riverside Library*, for pirating English fiction and inflicting wrongs on English and American authors, reputable American publishers, and the 'general reader' (The Contributors' Club 1877, 619-20). However, in September 1878, another writer for the 'Contributors' Club' defended the libraries for presenting masterpieces of English literature to the 'former habitual readers of the Texas Jack stripe of dime novel'. The writer cited a newsdealer who had noted that 'the oddest thing about the whole business is the number of calls I have for the best novels, in this shape, from men whom I used to think of as wanting only the worst class of publications. ... Such men — women and children, too — can be won from the degrading reading to which they are accustomed only by the substitution for it of good literature, equally attractive and equally cheap.' 'To be sure,' the writer concludes, 'there is still an appalling amount of vicious reading material sold at these same news-stands and periodical stores, but Rome was not built in a day. I am disposed to rejoice over one rift in the clouds, rather than to lament because there are not two' (The Contributors' Club 1878, 370-371). As in the case of the initial reaction to Beadle's dime books, the new format is seen primarily as a possible agent for a change in the content of popular reading.

Within a year of this minor exchange over the format of the cheap libraries, the *Atlantic Monthly* published two more detailed accounts of the cheap stories, both of which I have mentioned in other contexts: W.H. Bishop's article, 'Story-Paper Literature', and Rev. Jonathan Baxter Harrison's reflections in his series of articles later collected as *Certain Dangerous Tendencies in American Life*. Earlier I used these articles for their observations of dime novel readers; now I would like to examine the attitudes of the writers themselves toward this reading. Bishop (1879, 383-393), a novelist, explicitly sets himself against the Comstock hysteria by mocking the tales of boys driven to crime by dime novels. He pays close attention to the situation of the reading, to the stories told, and to the relation of those stories to 'popular movements', the melodramatic stage, and current events. He perceptively notes that there are differences between story papers: some (particularly the *New York Ledger*) publish the same domestic writers who were read in hard covers by the genteel middle class; 'others give away Shakespeare's Sonnets ... for supplements.' 'In general,' he notes, 'in the libraries good literature is beginning to mingle among the bad in a very curious way. Robinson Crusoe, very much mangled, it is true, at half a dime, may be found in the Wide-Awake Library, sandwiched between Bowie Knife Ben and Death Notch the Destroyer.' They are morally unobjectionable and, more importantly, reinforce the genteel domestic code: 'The best of the story papers reward virtue and punish vice. Their dependence upon the family keeps them, as a rule, free of dangerous appeals to the lower passions. ... They encourage a chivalrous devotion to women, though they do not do much towards making her more worthy of it.'

Bishop concludes, then, that the story-papers are 'not an unmixed evil'. The central question for Bishop, as for many of his middle-class contemporaries, was: 'Are they better than nothing?'. His reply is a liberal, humanistic one: 'The taste for reading, however perverted, is connected with something noble, with an interest in things outside of the small domain of the self, with a praiseworthy curiosity about the great planet we inhabit. One is almost ready to say that, rather than not have it at all, it had better be nourished on no better food than story papers.'

Cheap stories were not ostensibly the principal subject of Rev. J.B. Harrison's articles in the *Atlantic Monthly* (1880); they dealt with a range of 'dangerous tendencies' in religion and social life brought on by industrialization and the conflict between capital and labor, the 'labor problem'. As a traditional intellectual,

Harrison expresses the loss of confidence by the directing classes, a loss of the hegemony, the cultural leadership and direction, exercised by the 'middle classes', the 'cultivated men'. Harrison writes that 'my observation of the life and thought of workingmen impresses me with the conviction that the cultivated men of the country are not, in a sufficient degree, in communication with the great body of the laboring people; and that a more direct and vital relation between them would be a great gain to both classes. The things which our best and wisest men are saying to each other should be addressed, and in suitable forms of utterance might be addressed, to the workingmen of the nation' (100-101). However, precisely because Harrison formulates the issue in this way, the question of cheap stories and working class reading occupies a pivotal position in his argument. He writes of the story papers read by young factory operatives:

I have read some of these stories. They have usually no very distinct educational quality or tendency, good or bad. They are simply stories, — vapid, silly, turgid, and incoherent. As the robber-heroes are mostly grand-looking fellows, and all the ladies have white hands and splendid attire, it may be that some of the readers find hard work more distasteful because of their acquaintance with the gorgeous idlers and thieves, who, in these fictions are always so much more fortunate than the people who are honest and industrious. But usually, as I am convinced by much observation, the only effect of this kind of reading is that it serves 'to pass away the time', by supplying a kind of entertainment, a stimulus or opiate for the mind, and that these people resort to it and feel a necessity for it in much the same way that others feel they must have whisky or opium. The reading is a narcotic, but it is less pernicious than those just named (167).

Harrison's formulation of the common trope that dime novels were an opiate of the people is the other side of the opposition that structures middle-class perceptions of popular fiction: it is either a narcotic escape from daily life with no genuine symbolic meaning or, with Comstock, a symbolic universe so potent as to erase the real world from the minds of readers, leading them to act out the scenes depicted in dime novels. More threatening to Harrison is the reading of the older operatives, the paper 'devoted to the liberation of the working-people of America' whose 'principal literary attraction at this time was a very long serial story of the overthrow of the republic in 1880. ... The tone and spirit of the paper are indescribably bitter, and expressive of

intense hostility against the possessors of property and culture. ... All its teaching is opposed to the spirit and principle of nationality, and tends, so far as it has any effect, to produce social and political disintegration.' Harrison's response to these tendencies is to suggest, not surprisingly, the restoration of a 'direct and vital relation' between 'cultivated men' and workingmen through the reform and control of working class reading: 'The capitalists, manufacturers, and cultivated people of every town where there are one thousand operatives should unite in the publication of a small, low-priced newspaper for circulation among the working-people' (198). The irony of Harrison's suggestion lies not only in the objection he himself raises and attempts to answer — that workers would avoid a paper bearing the stamp of capital — but also in the fact that the story papers were the products of 'capitalists' and 'manufacturers', though these new entrepreneurs of the culture industry were largely ignoring the agenda of the 'cultivated people'.

This discourse about mass culture among the contributors to the *Atlantic* differs from both the reform efforts of librarians and the censorship crusades of vice societies; nevertheless, these various attempts by 'cultivated people' to reform, regulate and reflect on dime novels and working-class reading were all provoked not only by the emerging culture industry but by changes in class structure and class awareness in nineteenth-century America. Thus to understand the 'fiction question', we must briefly look at the overall balance of class forces that shaped this period, and then at the dominant classes' changing view of America's workers, and the contradictory forces at play within workers' culture.

In an important synthetic work on American labor and capital, Gordon, Edwards and Reich (1982) argue that there have been a series of long swings in American capitalist development, each the product of a particular social structure of accumulation — the set of economic, political and cultural institutions that organize capital accumulation and make it possible. The breakup of a particular social structure of accumulation, or, in Gramscian terms, of the hegemony of a particular historical bloc, results in a crisis of accumulation and in struggles by other groups and classes to reconstruct the social order. Gordon, Edwards and Reich characterize the period between the 1820s and the 1890s as the stage of 'initial proletarianization'. After a moment of exploration and experimentation in the 1820s and 1830s, American capitalism experienced a long boom, and then an extended crisis.

'For a period of some thirty years, say from 1843 to 1873, the US economy and especially the expanding industrial sector in the North showed rapid and more or less continuous growth. . . . The long boom (in the North and the West) came to an end with the hard times of the mid-1870s. Starting with the panic in 1873, continuing for more than twenty years, and ending with the "Great Depression" of the 1890s, the US economy experienced the much weaker accumulation possibilities of the new stagnation' (50, 52). The central struggle and key transformation in this period was the creation of 'free labor', of proletarians, both in the emancipation of Black slaves, and in the creation of wage workers by stripping non-capitalist producers of their means of production, driving them to a dependence on wages. This long and contested process meant that for most of the period the wage system was itself in question. The cultural expectation that working for wages was a stage of life rather than a permanent condition persisted, and, as it became a permanent condition for many workers, it was seen as 'wage slavery' (Montgomery 1967, 30-31; Rodgers 1978, 30-35). A bitter conflict developed between capitalists and craftworkers:

Craft relations underwent continuous change during these years, as the jouts and apprentices became increasingly subject to capitalist relations. What was intended by the jouts to be temporary employment stretched into long years; what was meant to be a necessary compromise in standards during hard times became impossible to escape even in good ones. 'Prices' gave way to 'wages', a term, Norman Ware reminds us, that had previously applied only to day labor. As a result, craft workers no longer organized their own work; capitalists now did. Despite their skills and extensive control over the immediate processes of production, both of which the craft workers had brought with them into the new relations of production, they were now wage workers (Gordon, Edwards and Reich 1982, 67).

However, precisely because they brought their skills and control over production into wage work, the craft workers remained central to the new capitalist production which, as Gordon, Edwards and Reich point out, 'was based on proletarianized but largely *untransformed* labor. Capitalists hired labor but relied on traditional techniques of production.' Craft workers retained a large measure of autonomy, controlling their own work and directing helpers and laborers (Montgomery 1979, 9-15). When the crisis of the 1870s came, capitalists increasingly attempted to transform and take control of the work process, against the

resistance of workers, particularly craft workers. There followed the years of the 'Great Upheavals', from the 1877 national railroad strike to the 1894 Pullman strike, from the organizing of the Knights of Labor to the insurgency of the Populists.

The long struggle that established a permanent and dependent class of wage workers, and transferred control over production processes to owners and managers, was a cultural as well as economic conflict. Richard Slotkin (1985) has noted that the years after the Civil War saw a redefinition of the character of the laboring classes:

Instead of refurbishing the Jacksonian mystique of a universalized 'producing class', [postwar elites] acknowledge difference and specialization of function, and assign leading roles to the men of capital and organization as against the masses of the laboring classes. Nor do they assert with Lincoln's comprehensiveness the doctrine that each working hand is a potential capitalist: the existence of a permanent proletariat is acknowledged, and regarded as a good and necessary thing. . . . For the postwar ideology, the vision of the proletarian as contented slave or demented savage became positive doctrine: it justified both the exploitation of the 'dependent' worker and the violent military suppression of the rebellious worker; and it put the blame for exploitation and suppression on the natural 'gifts' of those classes (290-291).

Slotkin shows how the mythologies of the frontier, 'the conception of American history as a heroic-scale Indian war, pitting race against race' (32), entered the rhetoric of class: 'This reversible analogy between workers and savages is the most significant new term in the language of American mythology after the war' (311).

The 'middle class' — another significant new term in the language of American mythology after the war — served both to actively displace the earlier formulation of the 'producing classes', and to distinguish and separate the 'middling interests' of the nation from the worker-savages. From the ranks of this newly-constructed middle class came the efforts to reform and uplift workers and savages alike; from the new picture of a dependent and unruly 'lower class' came the debates over the effects of dime novel reading. Indeed several historians have recently suggested that the organizations and discourses of moral and social reform were a key aspect in the formation of a self-conscious 'middle class' (see Blumin 1985).

Against both the capitalist reorganization of the crafts and

these 'middle-class' representations of the American social order, American workers attempted to maintain the vision of a republic of producers, of a cooperative commonwealth, and of the autonomous, independent mechanic. In doing so, they created a working class culture. This culture, often termed a 'producers', 'populist', or 'plebian' culture, was different from and antagonistic to that dominant culture (which was in the process of naming itself 'middle-class'), but it was neither an internally unified, anthropological whole, nor completely independent of the culture of the dominant classes. Each of these three points is worth stressing.

Working-class culture was different from and antagonistic to the culture of the dominant classes. This is not because there are pure, autonomous cultures linked to particular classes. Rather, it is a result of first, material conditions of life, and second, the boundaries drawn between Culture and non-Culture in the exercise of cultural power. Material conditions cannot be overlooked. All cultural activity, whether symphony orchestras or drinking in saloons, depends upon a surplus; and working-class culture was marked by the very small surpluses of time and money available. Nevertheless, though the material conditions of working-class life suggest that working-class cultural activities will differ from those of the more leisured and monied classes, this is not necessary: as nineteenth-century leisure reformers hoped, 'good' books and music and uplifting recreational activities could be 'given' to those who couldn't afford them. The structuring principle that turns the material limits on cultural activity into class-divided cultural formations is the boundary drawn between Culture and non-Culture. As Stuart Hall (1981, 236, 234) has argued in a key essay on popular culture:

The cultural process — cultural power ... depends, in the first instance, on this drawing of the line, always in each period in a different place, as to what is to be incorporated into the 'great tradition' and what is not. Educational and cultural institutions, along with the many positive things they do, also help to discipline and police this boundary. ... from period to period, the *contents* of each category changes. Popular forms become enhanced in cultural value, go up the cultural escalator — and find themselves on the opposite side. Other things cease to have high cultural value, and are appropriated into the popular, becoming transformed in the process. ... The important fact, then, is not a mere descriptive inventory — which may have the negative effect of freezing popular culture into some timeless descriptive mould — but the relations of power which

are constantly punctuating and dividing the domain of culture into its preferred and its residual categories.

The ideological debates over dime novels and working class reading that I have outlined were precisely such an exercise of cultural power, drawing and policing (literally, in the case of Comstock) a boundary between the *genteel* and the *sensational*. This boundary was a moral as well as aesthetic one, dividing the culture of the 'middle class' from the ways of the 'lower classes', and giving very different inflections to apparently similar stories.⁵ Though in its twentieth-century afterlife the dime novel ascends the cultural escalator, becoming a sign of American middle-class boyhood and used to draw a boundary excluding the cultures of Black migrants and the 'new' immigrants, throughout the nineteenth century it is excluded from Culture and gentility.

If the culture of workers was distinguished from the culture of the dominant classes in nineteenth-century America, it was not however a unified, organic whole. Indeed, most of the recent local community studies of nineteenth-century working class life find neither a common world view nor a common set of beliefs. Rather labor historians identify characteristic antinomies, contradictory alternatives growing out of the material conditions and experiences of working class life: the 'rough' and the 'respectable', the world of the saloon and the world of temperance, the bonds of 'mutualism' and the ideal of 'self-improvement'. In the face of these antinomies, Sean Wilentz (1984, 270) has suggested that 'rather than construct two opposing mutually exclusive ideal types — pleasure-seeking benighted "traditionalists", abstemious enlightened "rebels" — it is more useful to consider the republicanism of the Bowery [the plebian world of rough amusement] and the republicanism of the unions as different but at times overlapping expressions of journeymen's fears and aspirations — one focused on the economic and political sources of inequality and exploitation, the other stressing cultural autonomy and manly independence.' This is particularly helpful when looking at the dime novels: for though particular novels can often be aligned with one or another tendency in working-class culture, their characteristic task — indeed the function and purpose of narrative in general — is to offer symbolic resolutions to the antinomies within the culture.

Moreover, although in terms of class *structure* this is a working-class culture — a culture with its center of gravity among

working-class people, a set of practices, institutions, and symbolic forms used, and sometimes created and shaped, by workers — neither its rhetoric nor its boundaries were strictly of class. David Montgomery (1976, 115-116) writes that 'local shopkeepers and professional men ... shared with the workers elements of a popular culture, in which one never spoke of the "lower classes", but of the "working", "industrious", or "producing" classes. The praise they bestowed on the "honest mechanics" of their communities echoed through the popular songs and dime-novel literature of the day. ... Although this culture was infused with a populist, rather than a strictly class consciousness, it clearly separated the nation into the "producers" and the "exploiters".' When the elite, genteel culture remained at a distance, as in small or provincial mill towns, this popular producers' culture often had a kind of local hegemony. In his study of Pittsburgh, Francis Couvares (1984, 31) calls this a 'plebian culture'; it was 'decidedly vernacular' and 'intensely local', 'putting working people and their social equals in the center stage of life in Pittsburgh' (until the emergence of a local elite culture in Pittsburgh in the late 1880s). The dime novel, like the melodramatic theater that Couvares discusses, was a part of this plebian sensational culture, and if its stories opposed themselves to the genteel elite, they nevertheless often testified to divisions as well as solidarities among the 'people' and the 'producers'.

Finally, this working-class culture is not completely autonomous. Not only is it intertwined with a commercial culture that is not the self-creation of workers, but it is always subject to the influence and power of the dominant culture. As Stuart Hall (1981, 232-233) argues, 'there is *no* whole, authentic, autonomous "popular culture" which lies outside the field of force of the relations of cultural power and domination. ... There is a continuous and necessarily uneven and unequal struggle, by the dominant culture, constantly to disorganise and reorganise popular culture; to enclose and confine its definitions and forms within a more inclusive range of dominant forms.' The controversy over dime novels and working-class reading takes its place in this context. Moreover, this illuminates a key aspect of dime novel production that is often missed in dime novel histories and criticism: that there are two bodies of narratives in this field of fiction, the popular, commercial, sensational stories that captured the reading public, and the genteel, moralistic narratives that attempted to use the dime novel format with varying

degrees of success to recapture and reorganize working-class culture. The stories of Horatio Alger, which were published in the story papers and in dime novel formats, are a good example of the latter, though they are often taken as representative dime novels.

However, the imprint of middle-class culture in the dime novels comes not only in these active interventions; it is also found in the appearance in sensational fiction of the codes of the sentimental and the melodramatic. As any literary handbook will say, both of these modes are characterized by an 'excess of emotion', substituting a manipulative appeal to the audience for consistent motivation of the characters and plot. But their differences reveal a more profound kinship than the somewhat snobbish definition as 'excess of emotion'. For both modes translate their social content into a received ethical code: for sentimental fiction, the opposition good/not good, sunshine and shadow, rules all action and character. The 'not good' are victims — the prostitute with the heart of gold, the orphan turned tramp, the noble but dying Indian. All can be pitied and all can be forgiven in the Grand Reunion, as Mary Noel calls it, at the end. For melodrama, on the other hand, the 'not good' pole becomes a positive evil, day and night, and a villain, thoroughly despicable, appears in order to be driven out — the evil Indian, the evil tramp.

Fredric Jameson (1981, 186) has argued that 'these two paradigms, the sentimental and the melodramatic [the way of Dickens and the way of Eugene Sue], which from the standpoint of ideology can be seen as two distinct (but not mutually exclusive) narrative strategies, may be said to be the carrot and the stick of nineteenth-century middle-class moralizing about the lower classes.' It is this legacy that gives the profound sense of moralism to these stories, so thorough that one wonders how they could ever have been attacked for immortality. But these are also the twin temptations that the dime novel, as a contested terrain, a popular form belonging perhaps to the 'people' but not unequivocally to any single class, faces. In part we can read these narratives as attempts to invert these moral dualisms, and even to displace them and restore their social and collective context. They are caught between seeing the city as a mystery or as a place of work, between seeing a tramps' campsite as a den of iniquity or as a utopian community. If, then, these are tales of escape, it is largely the continual story of capture by and escape from the narrative paradigms of middle-class culture.

9. For the connection between the dime novel and another part of the culture industry, spectator sports, see Messenger, 1981, 100-107.

Chapter 3

1. Since concepts of class are widely debated and have different meanings in different theoretical vocabularies, let me outline my use of the concepts drawn from the Marxist tradition. First, I follow Erik Olin Wright's (1985) discussion of class analysis, where he distinguishes between the analysis of *class structure*, 'the structure of social relations into which individuals (or, in some cases, families) enter which determine their class interests', and of *class formation*, 'the formation of organized collectivities within that class structure on the basis of interests shaped by that class structure' (9-10). 'Classes,' he argues, 'have a structural existence which is irreducible to the kinds of collective organizations which develop historically (class formations), the class ideologies held by individuals and organizations (class consciousness) or the forms of conflict engaged in by individuals as class members or by class organizations (class struggle), and that such class structures impose basic constraints on these other elements in the concept of class' (28).

Second, one must also distinguish between at least two levels of abstraction in class analysis: the analysis of modes of production where classes are seen as 'pure types of social relations of production, each embodying a distinctive mechanism of exploitation' (10), and the analysis of specific social formations, where one rarely finds pure classes but rather fractions of classes, and alliances between classes as the result of specific historical combinations of distinct modes of production, uneven economic development, and the legacy of earlier class struggles. (On levels of abstraction in class analysis, see also Katznelson, 1981, chapter 8.) At the first, 'higher' level of abstraction, my study assumes that the United States between the 1840s and 1890s (particularly the north and mid west, the centers of dime novel production and reception) was fundamentally organized by the capitalist mode of production; its 'basic' or 'fundamental' classes were capitalists and workers; other classes were, in Wright's term, 'contradictory class locations', or, in Wolff and Resnick's (1982; 1986) term, 'subsumed classes'. However, most of my study is pitched at the second, 'lower' level of abstraction. Here I draw particularly on the analysis of the transformation of American class structures in Gordon, Edwards, and Reich, 1982; on the histories of the working classes by the 'new' labor historians — Gutman, Montgomery, Couvares, Ewen, Fink, Kessler-Harris, Laurie, Levine, Peiss, Rosenzweig, Ross, and Wilentz, among others — which focus on the class fractions and class alliances among the popular or subaltern classes; and, for the history of the dominant classes, on the work of Batzell, Bledstein, Haltunen, Pessen, Wallace, Warner. On middle-class formation, see the excellent essay by Blumin, 1985. In general, by the working classes, I include craftworkers, factory operatives, common laborers, domestic servants, and their families; by the capitalist classes, I mean manufacturers, large merchants, bankers and financiers, the patrician elite and their families. The contradictory class locations include small shopkeepers, small professionals, master artisans and clerks: I will examine later their relation to the rhetoric

of the 'producing classes' and the 'middle classes'. David Montgomery's (1967, 29-30) interpretation of the 1870 census concludes that:

Of the 12.9 million people in all occupations, only 1.1 million (8.6 per cent) can be listed as nonagricultural employers, corporate officials, and self-employed producers or professionals. Thus the business and professional elites, old and new, totaled less than one tenth of the nation's economically active population. ... 67 per cent of the productively engaged Americans were dependent for a livelihood upon employment by others. Industrial manual workers, or what would now be called 'blue collar labor' ... numbered just over 3.5 million souls, or 27.4 per cent of the gainfully employed.

Agriculture accounted for 52.9 per cent of the gainfully employed: 24.2 per cent were farmers, planters and independent operators; 28.7 per cent were agricultural wage earners. Domestic servants made up 8 per cent of the gainfully employed; white collar workers — clerks and salespeople — 3 per cent.

My work is *not* a contribution to the history of 'class structure' in the United States, but rather to the history of 'class formation' in the United States. As Katznelson (1981, 207) writes, 'Class society exists even where it is not signified; but how and why it is signified in particular ways in particular places and times is the study of class formation.' In particular, my study is meant as a contribution to the history of 'class consciousness', or what I would prefer to call the *rhetoric of class*, the words, metaphors, and narratives by which people figure social cleavages. The ideological struggles to define social cleavages are determined by the existing class structure but they also play a part in the formation of class organizations and in class struggles. (Przeworski, 1985 and Therborn, 1980 are perhaps the best theoretical discussions of the ideological constitution of classes.)

2. The evidence of collectors and enthusiasts is even vaguer; they tend to stress the 'respectable' people who read dime novels and Albert Johannsen's list is characteristic: 'bankers and bootblacks ... lawyers and lawbreakers ... working girls and girls of leisure, President Lincoln and President Wilson' (Johannsen, 1950, 1:9). Edward Pearson, in his early book on dime novels, has a chapter devoted to readers' reminiscences; but the correspondents to whom he sent his questionnaire are largely established professionals: editors, librarians, professors. In the middle class homes of their childhood, dime novels were often prohibited and usually read by children on the sly; indeed this image has become part of the commonsense knowledge about dime novels.
3. Quoted in Shove, 1937, 19. This assessment raises the question of the readership of the *New York Ledger*, an issue worth considering. For anyone who wishes to argue for an overlapping rather than discontinuous reading public in nineteenth century America, the *Ledger* is a key journal. It attained the highest circulation of any magazine or story paper by reaching a cross-class, 'popular' audience with stories, poems, and articles by leading writers and intellectuals including Edward Everett, Henry Ward Beecher, George Bancroft, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Fanny Fern. Thus, Mary Noel, focusing primarily on the *Ledger*, concludes that the story papers had a largely middle class audience. And, in her study of antebellum responses to fiction, Nina Baym (1984, 18) includes the *Ledger* in the same discursive universe as the major middle-class magazines, from *Godey's*

to Harper's, Graham's to the Atlantic.

This, I would argue, is misleading. Far from being a representative journal, the *Ledger* achieved its wide circulation by uniquely straddling the boundary between the two worlds of genteel and sensational culture. It was the most respectable story paper, the least respectable magazine. Indeed, when appealing to advertisers, it claimed to be the 'leading high-class illustrated family weekly paper in America' (N.W. Ayer & Sons *American Newspaper Annual*, 1892, 1403.) Its genteel contributors came to it not because they felt it was part of their culture but because Bonner paid so well. When Bonner convinced Edward Everett, the former president of Harvard, to write fifty-two weekly columns in 1858 and 1859 in return for a substantial contribution to the Mt. Vernon fund, which was preserving Washington's home (and with which Everett was involved), E.L. Godkin, then a correspondent for the London *Daily News*, summed up the response of the genteel culture, and marked the gap between it and the *Ledger*:

The great topic of the quidnuncs for the last few days has been Edward Everett's extraordinary undertaking to write for the New York *Ledger*, a two-penny weekly magazine, circulating nearly three hundred thousand copies. ... It is filled with tales of the 'Demon Cabman', the 'Maiden's Revenge', the 'Tyrant's Vault', and a great variety of 'mysteries' and 'revelations'; and, in short, barring its general decency of language, belongs to as low and coarse an order of literature as any publication in the world. The proprietor [Robert Bonner] was four or five years ago a journeyman printer, but by lavish use of puffery in aid of this periodical has amassed a large fortune, *a la* Barnum. ... To the astonishment of the whole Union the ex-ambassador, ex-secretary of state, ex-president of Harvard University, ex-editor of the 'Greek Reader', the scholar, the exquisites, the one aristocrat of the 'universal Yankee nation', has accepted the proposal. ... If you knew the sensation which this incident has caused here amongst genteel people, you would hardly expect me to add a line to my letter after reciting it (Ogden, 1907, 1:179-180).

On the other hand, though Everett (1860) himself accepted Bonner's proposal with 'great misgivings', he concludes his series of articles with a peroration of the *Ledger*, beginning with an awed account of visiting the story paper's production plant, remarking on its circulation of four hundred thousand, and concluding with an invocation of its readers:

It has simply aimed to be an entertaining and instructive Family newspaper, designed; in the first instance, to meet the wants of what is called, in a very sensible and striking paper in Dickens' Household Words, ... the 'Unknown Public'. The New York 'Ledger' is the first attempt in this country, on a large scale, to address *that* public; and the brilliant success, which has attended it thus far, is a strong confirmation of the truth ... that the time is coming when 'the readers, who rank by millions, will be the readers who give the widest reputations, who return the richest rewards, and who will therefore command the services of the best writers of the time' (488).

4. As noted above, William Wells Brown's *Clotel* was published in dime novel format during the Civil War, part of Redpath's abolitionist attempt to reach Union soldiers. There is some evidence that one of Beadle's authors was Black (see entry for Philip S. Warne in Johannsen, 1950, 2:289), and Victoria

Earle Matthews may have written for the story papers (see Penn, 1891, 375-6). However, most fiction by black writers was published in Black newspapers and journals; the Black Periodical Fiction Project, headed by Henry-Louis Gates, has not found a Black equivalent of dime novels. For a discussion of the relation between dime novel conventions and early Afro-American fiction, and of the Afro-American fiction reading public in the late nineteenth century, see Carby, 1987.

5. The history of readers and the reading public is very undeveloped for the United States; the unsatisfactory typology of the 'brows' dominates most literary and cultural history, and as Henry Nash Smith pointed out, this has not been adequately articulated with social class. Kaser, 1984 is one of the few studies of nineteenth century American reading, and it confirms the importance of dime novel reading by soldiers in the Civil War. However, accounts of the British, French, German, and Russian reading publics offer suggestive parallels. In England, one finds a similar explosion of cheap stories — the 'penny dreadfuls' and weekly newspapers — in the 1830s and 1840s. Richard Altick (1957, 83) argues that 'it was principally from among skilled workers, small shopkeepers, clerks, and the better grade of domestic servants that the new mass audience for printed matter was recruited during the first half of the century.' The staple of this cheap printed matter was sensational fiction, but it is important to note that this was a shift in reading matter. The first cheap reading matter for artisans was radical political journalism, and the desire to read was often connected to working class political activity and self-improvement. The fiction industry picked up a reading public after the failure and abandonment of political aspirations, particularly of Chartism (L. James, 1963, 25). By the end of the century, reading had spread throughout the working class. A recent examination of a U.S. Department of Labor study of British workers in 1889 and 1890 finds:

almost all [families] had family members who were literate. At least 80 percent of those interviewed in every industry bought books and newspapers. These proportions apply to both laborers and the highly skilled in textiles, although in heavy industry the unskilled were less likely to read and spent smaller sums on books. ... This extensive, but limited taste for reading is confirmed by Lady Bell's interviews of Middlesborough workers around 1900. Of 200 families she interviewed, only 15 percent did not care to read or had no reading member. Yet most chose just newspapers and light novels. ... The literary world of most workers therefore mixed sports, crime, and general news with romantic or sensationalist fiction (Lees, 1979, 183).

On the British reading public, see Altick, 1957; L. James, 1963; Leavis, 1932; Mitchell, 1981; Neuberg, 1977; Webb, 1955. On the French popular reading public in the early nineteenth century, see Allen 1981; 1983.

German workers had similar reading tastes. The equivalent of the dime novel in Germany was the 'colporteur novel' of the 1870s and 1880s which was sold in installments and combined cheap prices with sensational fiction (Fullerton, 1977; 1979). See also Steinberg, 1976.

Brooks, 1985 offers an excellent history of both the Russian reading public and sensational fiction, the 'literature of the *lubok*', in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, with suggestive cross-national comparisons.

In the United States, the research that is closest to a history of the

reading public is the sociological studies of reading in the library science of the 1920s to 1940s, work exemplified by that of Douglas Waples. (For a history and overview of this work see Karetzky, 1982; Steinberg, 1972; see also Waples and Tyler, 1931; Waples, Berelson and Bradshaw, 1940.) A small part of this work focused on factory workers (see Gray and Munroe, 1930, 81-91; Ormsbee, 1927, 75-95; Rasche, 1937) and, though the period studied is the 1920s, it is suggestive for our purposes. A number of conclusions were drawn from the surveys carried out. First of all, newspapers were by far the most common reading matter of young workers (all of the surveys were primarily focused on young adult workers), followed by fiction magazines, the 'pulp'. Newspapers were read largely for sports, crime news and fashion, and the fiction magazines carried 'sensational' and 'salacious' stories. There was clear gender division in the reading of pulps, with the striking exception of *True Story*, Macfadden's innovative pulp of the 1920s which carried stories said to be true and written by readers; it was read by men and women alike. The gap between middle class reading and working class reading in the 1920s can be gauged by Hazel Grant Ormsbee's comment on finding that *True Story* was far and away the most read magazine by young working class women: 'Even though it may be found on all the street corner news stands, and indeed at almost every stand where magazines are sold, its name is probably not even known to the many persons who are familiar with most of the magazines in the second class [i.e., the middlebrow magazines like *Saturday Evening Post* and *Ladies' Home Journal*]' (Ormsbee, 1927, 80). There was also a close connection between reading and the movies: movie magazines and the novels that movies were based on were both common reading. The conclusions of these studies are summed up by Gray and Munroe: 'the quality of some of the material read is very good. On the other hand, there is a surprisingly large amount of reading of cheap, sensational material. ... In fact, the need of elevating the reading interests and tastes of young workers presents a very grave problem' (Gray and Munroe, 1930, 89). This desire to 'reform' workers' reading has roots in the era of the dime novel.

A second general conclusion developed out of Douglas Waples' comparisons of people's expressed subject interest with their actual reading. He found that there was 'almost no correlation between the workers' expressed reading interests and what they read in the newspapers and similarly little relation between these interests and their magazine reading.' Waples concluded that the most important determinant of what is read is accessibility, particularly in the case of workers who read mainly newspapers (Karetzky, 1982, 99). This reading research of the 1920s and 1930s does offer some important insights and data, though it is marred by the condescension and moralism of the researchers and by the complete distrust of fiction in general and sensational fiction in particular. Another product of the 1920s sociological imagination, Helen and Robert Lynd's *Middletown*, is particularly interesting because, while confirming the general observations of the reading researchers for the 1920s, finding important cleavages in reading material by class and gender in Middletown, it compares workers' reading of the 1920s with that of the 1890s. The Lynds find three major changes: the general decline of the workers' self-improving reading culture that was manifested in the independent Workingmen's Library, which has disappeared by the 1920s; the increase in public library circulation which has replaced 'buying of cheap paper-covered books in the nineties and the

reading of books from the meager Sunday School libraries'; and the slackening of attentiveness to reading: 'more things are skimmed today but there is less of the satisfaction of "a good evening of reading"'. There appears to be considerably less reading aloud by the entire family' (Lynd and Lynd, 1929, 229-242).

6. Larcom, 1889, 244, 105-106, 190. See for details, 99-106, 226-247. 'Libraries' here refers to the various series of cheap novels that appeared after the *Lakeside Library* of 1875.
7. Neither Beadle & Adams nor Street & Smith seem to have ever used the word 'railroad' or 'railway' in a series or story paper title, and the only instance mentioned in the histories of publishing, Shove, 1937 and Stern, 1980, is the American reprints of the English Routledge *Railway Library*.
8. Indeed there is a struggle over a similar sort of reading at the workplace by Cuban tobacco workers in the 1860s. As Ambrosio Fornet (1975) writes, 'the proletariat found in Reading — in "the enthusiasm to hear things read", as an editorial writer in *El Siglo* put it — the era's most democratic and effective form of cultural diffusion.' It began in 1865 in the large tobacco factory of El Figaro, with each worker contributing time to make up for the working time lost by the reader. 'From there,' Fornet goes on, 'readings sprang up in other workshops in Havana. ... Wherever sedentary group work was carried out, the idea found supporters.' Readings included newspapers, histories and novels. The first struggles over reading had to do with owners wanting to select and approve the material to be read, but the campaign against reading escalated and by May, 1866 the political governor issued a decree that prohibited 'the distraction of workers in tobacco factories, workshops or any other establishment by the reading of books or periodicals, or by discussions unrelated to the work being carried out by these same workers'.
9. For an account of a similar reaction to commercial fiction by the German Social Democrats, see Trommler, 1983, 64-67.
10. Little is known of Weldon Cobb's life. I suspect that his serials written for the *Workingman's Advocate* preceded his success in the commercial story papers and cheap libraries; perhaps they brought him to the attention of the fiction entrepreneurs. For the biographical data that exists, see Johannsen, 1950, 2:56; and Johannsen, 1959, 43. Unfortunately, Johannsen has no record of Cobb's connection to the *Workingman's Advocate*.
11. I am indebted to Joseph DePlasco for calling my attention to Foster and to the fiction in the *Labor Leader*.
12. Another example of this kind of labor fiction is the novel of Knights of Labor organizer T. Fulton Gantt, *Breaking the Chains*, which was found and has been edited and republished by Mary Grimes, 1986.

Chapter 4

1. Herbert Gutman's (1976) pioneering essay on working class culture has been developed and qualified by a number of local community studies in the last decade. The major works on the conflicts within and about working class culture and leisure include those of Paul Boyer, 1978, Francis Couvares, 1984, Elizabeth Ewen, 1985, Kathy Peiss, 1986, Roy Rosenzweig, 1983, and Stephen Ross, 1985.
2. For an account of a library controversy over workers' reading as early as

1828, see Wilentz, 1984, 149. For an account of the Workingman's Library in Muncie, Indiana, see Lynd and Lynd, 1929, 232.

3. Bremner 1967, xx. I am indebted to this introduction to the republication of Comstock's *Traps for the Young* for the details of Comstock's career.
4. The *North American Review* greeted Beadle's early dime novels with a remarkably favorable review in 1864. Individual novels are assessed, a procedure that will not be repeated in later discussions of cheap stories, and they are found to be 'unobjectionable morally, whatever fault be found with their literary style and composition'. The review ends on an optimistic note, envisioning dime novels as a possible public benefactor, and wishing them success in raising the character of cheap literature (W. Everett, 1864).
5. Kent Steckmesser, 1965, and Richard Slotkin, 1985, have shown that the story of Kit Carson was narrated in dramatically different fashions by genteel and sensational fiction and biography: I will discuss this in chapter 8. On the other hand, Nina Baym (1984, 208-209) maintains that a similar plot unites the genteel domestic novel and its 'antithesis', the 'high-wrought fiction' of the story papers: I will take issue with this interpretation in chapter 10.

Chapter 5

1. Indeed, the major microfilm edition of dime novels is entitled *Dime Novels: Popular American Escape Fiction of the Nineteenth Century*.
2. The principal attempts to theorize popular culture in this way are Jameson, 1979 and Hall, 1981. For historians of working class leisure that avoid Stedman Jones' just criticisms, see Rosenzweig, 1983; Couvares, 1984; Ewen, 1985; and Peiss, 1986.
3. Gramsci, 1973, 80, 145. Gramsci's writings on serial fiction have been translated in Gramsci 1929-1935; I have drawn on the excellent editorial notes for the situation of Gramsci's writing.
4. My argument has parallels with Jane Tompkins' (1980) soteriological reading of Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, a novel that moves from domestic realism to national allegory. It is also indebted to Sacvan Bercovitch's (1978) discussions of the persistence of Puritan typology in American culture. My notion of a master plot of republican figures and types parallels Bercovitch's claims for the jeremiad: 'the jeremiad became the official ritual form of continuing revolution. Mediating between religion and ideology, the jeremiad gave contract the sanctity of covenant, free enterprise the halo of grace, progress the assurance of chiliad, and nationalism the grandeur of typology ... a major reason for the triumph of the republic was that the need for a social ideal was filled by the typology of America's mission ... it provided what we might call the figural correlative to the theory of democratic capitalism. It gave the nation a past and future in sacred history, rendered its political and legal outlook a fulfillment of prophecy, elevated its "true inhabitants", the enterprising European Protestants who had immigrated within the past century or so, to the status of God's chosen, and declared the vast territories around them to be their chosen country' (1978, 140-141). However, I would disagree with two major aspects of Bercovitch's argument. First, he sees American culture as characterized by 'an ideological consensus'. The Puritans 'established the central tenets of what was to become (in Raymond Williams's phrase) our "dominant culture". And

because there was no competing order — no alternative set of values except the outmoded Old World order they rapidly discarded — the ideological hegemony that resulted reached virtually all levels of thought and behaviour' (xii-xiv). Though there has been no successful counter-hegemonic challenge to capitalism in the United States, the hegemony of the dominant classes, in the sense of genuine cultural — as well as economic and political — leadership based upon popular consent, has not only been contested but has evaporated at various times in American history. Bercovitch tends to reduce the concepts of 'hegemony' and 'dominant culture' — which connote in Gramsci and Williams unstable and historically conditioned balances of forces between classes and social groups — to the timeless 'consensus' of American exceptionalism. Second, Bercovitch falls into a rhetorical determinism, a 'formalism' in the strict sense, when he sees any use of the form of the jeremiad or the typology of America as 'a mode of cultural cohesion and continuity ... a fundamental force against social change' (204-205). This seems to deduce social meaning from formal analysis; I suggest that the same form or convention may take on quite different meanings and have significantly different effects in different historical and social circumstances. Thus, the typology of America is used by nineteenth-century workers as the figural correlative of the 'cooperative commonwealth' against 'democratic capitalism'.

5. Janice Radway's (1984, 199) ethnographic study of contemporary popular fiction readers makes a similar argument about the way romances are read as myth and as novels: 'The romance-reading experience, in short, appears to provide both the psychological benefits of oral myth-telling and those associated with the reading of a novel.'
6. Habegger's remarks come in the context of a provocative discussion of nineteenth-century American realism; he calls realism 'the literature of writers with some democratic freedom': 'While realism pays close attention to the facts of the contemporary social scene, corrects some of the current stereotypes, and tries to represent the causal flow of events, allegory offers a timeless scene, a universe of static types and symbols rather than causal change, a view of behaviour that sees the actor or hero as the matrix for competing absolutes or abstract types, and facts that require interpretation rather than recognition followed by action. Allegory is the product of mind living under absolutism and hence projects an implacable world of abstract types — precisely the type of world projected by the violated will ... in allegory, unlike realism, the individual is in chains' (1982, 111-112). While agreeing with Habegger's general interpretation, I would qualify his account of nineteenth-century American realism; its emergence, which depends upon the ability to conceive significant individual agency, was a product not only of democratic freedoms but of the class power of the writers and readers of that fiction.
7. The centrality of the study of genre and convention for marxist cultural history and criticism has been argued most powerfully by Fredric Jameson, 1975; 1981; 1982, and Franco Moretti, 1983. (See also Williams, 1977, 173-186). Jameson, 1981, 106; 1975, 157, writes that:

genres are essentially literary *institutions*, or social contracts between a writer and a specific public, whose function is to specify the proper use of a particular cultural artifact. ... Generic criticism may thus be seen as a process which involves the use of three variable terms: the individual